

Anjolie Ela Menon: An Artist Who Creates Melancholic Forms in her Works

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Abstract—India's one of the leading female contemporary artists, who expend their creative energies outside the mainstream of Indian painting have either "arrived" or have a wrong image of their artistic capabilities. One such artist who definitely belongs to the former category is Anjolie Ela Menon. Her paintings are a reflection of the phases of her political, social and psychological anxieties of life. Her paintings show a deep ethos, sensitive to human sensibility, nature and beauty. She paints ordinary objects to suggest deep emotions, moods, isolation and personal links to people which reflect in their evocative images. Indistinct figures with empty eyes have become her trademark. Using hardboard and burnishing it with a soft, dry brush, the artist achieves a mysterious glow and haunting quality in her works. Initially she focused on to reveal the profound influence of the Church: priests in a manner reminiscent of medieval icons-frontal with averted heads and elongated bodies with melancholic emotions. "Melancholy," a very dynamic word, has grown more abstract with time to the point where many may now find it hard to distinguish from depression or sadness. While it is apparently related to depression, its meaning nowadays can denote any feeling from somberly introspective to nostalgic. Different from the modern day use of "depression," describing the psychological illness, melancholy in both its early days and now is often used to denote a specific personality characteristic. She used this aesthetic emotion mostly in her work interspersed with religious subjects as voluptuous nudes. Her female nudes are shown seated or supine, often in the company of animals like monkeys and cats. The nature of the beast indicates the emotional dependence or sexual desire of the central subject. After that the artist turns to narrative. Memory and nostalgia are foregrounded in paintings of empty chairs or charpoyas.

It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that Anjolie Ela Menon has contributed to the aesthetic vocabulary of Indian art with her distinctive female nude- a melancholic figure whose latent sensuality is matched by a yearning that tugs at the viewer with an empathetic resonance. The artist's forte is her ability in her more painterly work to evoke subterranean emotion and associations that take the subject of her painting and the viewer out of the frame so often that they achieve the status of symbol, as do the small embellishments that are synonymous with her signature.

Keywords: Art, women, women artist, and Melancholic emotions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Art gives us a way to be creative and express ourselves. Art is something that makes us more thoughtful and mature humans.

It is such a large part of our everyday lives that we may hardly even stop to think about it. Art is like a human activity which transforms the objects in nature into new forms and moulds on account of which these objects begin to have a new meaning, significance and innovative thoughts. It also means that art releases inner language for our expressions and deals with various significant situations of life, which show emotions through facial expressions as in acting and dancing; modulating the sound produced by the vocal chords these all are the expressions of art. An artist is a creator who deals with the various situations of life and their changes. It is clear that an artist is a person who exists by his own right while all the other persons mentioned above depend on him for their own activities.

Artists either male or female were free to express and create his own works of art by virtue of his inspirations and inner urge from the past. They were creative, imaginative some life experienced emotions and revelations of deeper truths of life through paintings. Apart from that in our Indian art history the most significant development since the 1970s has been the rise of female artists as a self-conscious group. The aims and issues of women's art, especially in the awakening of the women's movement, were for their identities. Women artists of the subcontinent constitute a group in which certain concerns, anxieties, and aspirations are shared, given that they have not yet achieved anything like equality with men in social and cultural spheres. It is no coincidence that many of the artists included here have been active from the 1970s, the period when feminism made its mark. Some of them, as part of that movement, seek to subvert with irony the common perception of woman's role as either nourishing or destructive and to engage in an examination of sexuality.

On the other hand, some artists of modern India have given cause for reflection on the lives of Indian women. Painting in modern India has tended to be a representational and socially conscious art. The subsistence of society is exclusively depending upon the feminine facet, in which, the imagination of the endurance of all human being is inconceivable. The status and connotation of womanhood can be defined appropriately through the visual art of the particular

time period. In this context, the literature, art, architecture, and religious manuscripts can be included because visual representation is the reflection of society. Hence, paintings can be used as a medium to revisit the role of woman in the society because art is always being related with the socio-cultural tendencies and strongly connected with the taste and demands of the individual.

Feminism made women reassess their lives and aspirations, the word 'feminism' can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests.

2. ANJOLIE ELA MENON

Women artists spoke with different and concerted voice on modernity and social commitment, interweaving personal histories with collective memories. The artist confronted the new consciousness in an autobiographical mode. Such an innovative contemporary Indian female artist, Anjolie Ela Menon, was born in 1940, found her personal expression being a self proclaimed feminist artists, all her works are looked upon in a feminist light, her portrayal of women and phallic symbols that generate a lot of furor due to the sheer sensation, scandal quotient does deserve the attention it gets not because it is sensational but because it for the first time looks upon women not just as desired but desiring as well. This equality in our Indian society is quite a utopia. Her paintings show a deep ethos, sensitive to human sensibility, nature and beauty. They have differently been classified as autobiographical, subjective, and interpretative and impressions.

Her unique style has constantly evolved over the past four decades of her career, as she continually re-envision her role as an artist. In the 60s and 70s, she began exploring the human pathos through haunted modernist forms, then moved to adopt characteristics of Christian medieval art in the 70s and 80s, and eventually worked with found objects in the 90s. This show of recent works comes full circle and is reminiscent of her earlier style as she explores social issues and human anguish through figurative works. Her paintings are a reflection of the phases of her political, social and psychological anxieties of life. Her paintings show a deep ethos, sensitive to human sensibility, nature and beauty. She paints ordinary objects to suggest deep emotions, moods, isolation and personal links to people which reflect in their evocative images. Indistinct figures with empty eyes have become her trademark. Her works are found in various mediums like using hardboard and burnishing it with a soft, dry brush, the artist achieves a mysterious glow and haunting quality in her works.

Initially, Anjolie Ela Menon focused on to reveal the profound influence of the Church: priests in a manner reminiscent of medieval icons – frontal with averted heads and elongated bodies with melancholic emotions. She has contributed to the aesthetic vocabulary of Indian art with her distinctive female nude- a melancholic figure whose latent sensuality is matched by a yearning that tugs at the viewer with an empathetic resonance. The 'Melancholy,' a very dynamic word, has grown more abstract with time to the point where many may now find it hard to distinguish from depression or sadness. While it is apparently related to depression, its meaning nowadays can denote any feeling from somberly introspective to nostalgic. Different from the modern day use of "depression," describing the psychological illness, melancholy in both its early days and now is often used to denote a specific personality characteristic.

We have also seen that melancholy is not a strange emotion in art, or in our aesthetic encounters with nature. It occurs in many forms of art, both in the modern and in the classical. It is in no way an archaic phenomenon, although in the extremities of the present culture, it easily goes unnoticed. Those looking for joy or sadness – not to mention horror – are not satisfied with the subtle mixture of pain and pleasure in melancholy.

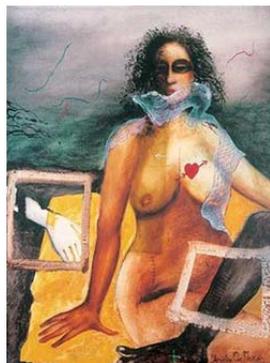
Anjolie Ela Menon says, "My nudes are not subject to the male gaze but are painted with empathy for the great sorority of which I am a part." In her painting "Midday II" series



Fig. 1: "MiddayII"1987 48X36

The presentation was made in the presence of Mumbai's ardent artists and critics. As this diarist toyed with the idea of putting her hand up, Anjolie Ela Menon showed a photo of her 1997 series, titled Mid-day, made after observing a poor woman who hawked this newspaper at a traffic signal. A child in hand, and another by her side, the female figure as the bearer of Mid-day, was a poignant moment for us. Her nostalgic Madonna's and nudes are images of women maternal, sexual, virginal frozen in time and yearning for the unattainable, recalling Russian icons. Their erotic melancholy mirrors their own temperament. Anjolie Ela Menon says, "In the hinterland of this pandemonium her busy, full family life I

live alone, finding secret space from which to touch the sources of creativity.”



**Fig. 2: “Stories of the Sea”1995, Oil on Masonite
47 x 35 in (119.4 x 88.9 cm)**

“**Stories of the Sea**” is part of a series of the same name, which allowed a glimpse into a more introspective nature of Anjolie Ela Menon’s work. This painting has an almost surreal quality due to, the subject and theme, as well as the technique. She has used masonite as a surface, which gives the painting a smooth, finished quality but leaves a slight luminescence. With respect to the theme, Anjolie Ela Menon reminisces, *“I had just shifted to Delhi and had decided to settle here. But I desperately missed the sea, which had played such an important role in my growing up and formative years. As an artist, I have always been attracted by the calm of the sea, and would sit for hours on the shore, sometimes painting; at other times just contemplating.”*

She is a colourist, using bright, intense color palette and gradations of tone and texture very effectively in her works. She is known for her Window series which demonstrates the artist’s use of junk to make art. Wood and masonite are her preferred surfaces to paint on. She works mainly with oils and mixed media and preferring to paint directly rather than draw, her paintings are a reflection of the phases of her life and the

world around her. The artist’s forte is her ability in her more painterly work to evoke subterranean emotion and associations that take the subject of her painting and the viewer out of the frame. It is that which is suggested elliptically and subtly invoked by negation that imbues her work with a very private domain that the artist inhabits with her enigmatic people, animals, and birds and in one phase-the lizard. The images of ordinary objects – the chair, the crow, the open window, the picture within the picture, the chequerboard, the serpent – recur so often that they achieve the status of symbol, as do the small embellishments that are synonymous with her signature.

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