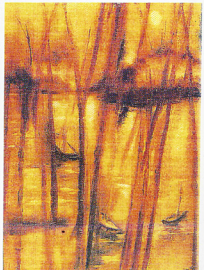


An ethnic stroke

■ India, the oldest civilization in the world, enjoys an art culture that dates back to the Indus Valley civilization. According to Pratima Seth, artist and author of *Dictionary of Indian Art and Artists*, Indian contemporary art is a form of painting that had no details, which was natural in its form, one that used *tempera* style of technique and was radically in contrast to its western counterpart.

Tempera technique of painting was mainly used for miniature paintings and cave paintings, for e.g., Ajanta and Ellora paintings. Artists who worked on this technique were such renowned painters as Tagore and Ganesh Pyre. Contemporary art pertained to the present time where art is referred to the art scene, graphic art, painters and sculptors of the past decade. This art form went through cultural conflict which India experienced through the 250 years of British rule and influence in all aspects of political and social life, making a distinctive dividing line between traditional Indian art and sculpture. The period of Company painting and introduction of the western isms, during which period the artists began experimenting with art, led to the current phase of personal expression.

Cultural ethos and traditional thoughts still maintain their important position in Indian



contemporary style of art. Interestingly, people from international art circuit always perceived and related Indian art to its miniature painting tradition. And Seth has always passionately brought the fact home to the westerners to whom she stated that, "Indian civilization was the one that introduced art to the western world which they conveniently labelled as their own." Most of the contemporary artists from the previous generation were from prestigious institutions like the Bengal school of Art, Shantiniketan, Bombay school of Art, Madras School of Art, Calcutta School of Art, and Bansthal Vidyapeeth amongst others. Says Seth, "Tantra Art is one amongst many forms of contemporary art that finds its base firmly rooted in spiritual values."

An artist is always in constant process of discovery of the origins and the roots of the cosmos because art was never considered a profession but a path towards truth and self-realization. Certain neo-tantric artists of the 20th century practising *Tantra* have taken the geometric configurations of the *Yantra* as their basic image and have worked around certain specific diagrams. Yet, others have taken the sexual energy from *Tantra*, using specific objects with sexual undertones as *leitmotifs* in their paintings.

In the 60s, the Indian painters who worked on colourful compositions symbolic of *Tantra* were Ghulam Rasool Santosh, Biren De, Mahirwan Mamtani, Sayed Haider Raza, Sultan Ali J, Prafulla Mohanti, K V Haridasan, Om Prakash Sharma, Sohan Qadri, K C S Paniker, and Shankar Palsikar, all stalwarts in their own right. ■

VIJAYA DAS PANICKER