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The life and work of the artist Har Gopal Jhamb

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Abstract: Har Gopal Jhamb born in undivided Punjab came to Bombay in 1931, his initial education and training was in the academic tradition. It was only in late 1960's when he came to Chandigarh that his formal edification as an artist in fine arts started. This paper examines how he dedicated his entire life to art, and worked as a painter, sculptor, teacher, art historian, archeologist and museologist, and his contribution to the upcoming museum in the new capital city of Chandigarh. The paper focuses on how after consistently working and experimenting for years he achieved something new - he discovered the creative potential of metal plates.

Keywords: Sculptures, Har Gopal Jhamb, Chandigarh Museum and Art Gallery, metal plate paintings.

Introduction:

Geographically strategic location of Punjab (including today's Pakistan) has constantly exposed this land to foreign invasions and influences coming from the West. Though the biggest turmoil came to this region with the dawn of India's Independence. When millions of Hindu's and Muslim's were forced to leave their native lands and travelled to India and newly created Pakistan respectively. This catastrophic event is regarded as largest mass migration of humans in recorded history of mankind. Majority of people coming from Pakistan area of Punjab or west Punjab settled in and around present day state of Punjab which was called east Punjab at that time. With the loss of Lahore as its capital in 1947, Shimla was made temporary capital of PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab State Union). Meanwhile Chandigarh was being developed as a new capital of Punjab epitomizing Pandit Nehru's vision of modern India. Then in 1953 Chandigarh became the permanent capital of Punjab.

Early Education

Among many people who got displaced and settled in India later and went on to become the building blocks of this new capital city is an unspoken artist Har Gopal Jhamb who was born on 28th February in 1931, at Kaluchi district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of North West Frontier Province(N.W.F.P.) in British India. Before partition in 1947 the entire had family shifted to Bombay as his uncle who was a C.A. use to work as Zonal manager in LIC. Therefore, his initial education was done in Bombay. Har Gopal Jhamb, a child prodigy, wanted to join J. J. School of Arts, but his father an engineer himself wanted him to join army or to be an engineer or doctor, so for his further studies Hargopal was sent to an army school "Shivaji Military School" Pune and later to "Bhonsala Military School" Nasik.

After partition his family shifted to the small hilly town of Dharamshala in Punjab (It was in 1966 that in further reorganization the states of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh were carved out of Punjab). In 1952 one of his friend who had a printing press in Delhi came to visit him and requested Jhamb to accompany him to Palampur, as he

was going to meet the artist Shobha Singh. After walking for more than 10kms they reached Andretta village where Shobha Singh had an art gallery. Singh, who was an artist par excellence, and his works had an everlasting impact on the young mind of Hargopal Jhamb. It was further given a boost when the senior artist himself visited the home of HarGgopal Jhamb in Palampur and saw his paintings, which the latter used to paint in his free time. Soon Jhamb came to Chandigarh and completed his graduation and did a Diploma (with fine arts as a subject) in Panjab University under the able guidance of the litterateur and art historian Mulk Raj Anand. After this for three years he was teaching Fine arts in Ramgarhia Training College of Phagwara. Along with this he began exhibiting his works with other local artists at that time such as Sohan Qadri and Sukhdev Singh (both of whom went on to become internationally acclaimed artists).

Baroda Phase

In 1963 on advise of M. S. Randhawa and Mulk Raj Anand, he went to Baroda for a specialization in Museology. As Chandigarh Museum was almost in final stages of construction and Randhawa wanted Jhamb to be trained to handle the museum. He studied for a diploma in Museology at the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Barod. In the evenings he used to spend time studying paintings and sculptures from his friend the eminent artist Narayana Kulkarni, Jhamb also worked closely with artists such as Sankho Chaudhury, a Padam Shri awardee of 1971 and N.S. Bendre, a Padam Shree awardee in 1969. After seeing Jhambs zeal to paint and sculpt, N.S. Bendre even advised him to discontinue Museology and practice as a full time artist, which he somehow could not do. While studying at Baroda Jhamb also got U.G.C scholarship. Jhamb also wrote a thesis on the “Organization of Art and Archaeological Section of Chandigarh Museum.” After completing his course in Baroda he came back to Chandigarh in 1966.

Chandigarh Museum Phase

As the Chandigarh Museum and Art Gallery was under construction at that time Jhamb started to collect sculptures, fossils, pottery, stone tools etc. which now decorate the museum. Jhamb worked round the clock very meticulously with Ratna Fabri in setting up the museum. Fabri was a noted museologist and was awarded Padma Shri in 1970 in the field of Arts for her achievements.

The Ganesha sculpture of Pratihara period which is placed near the entrance of the museum and the Nandi sculpture which is in the lawns besides other materials in the reserve collection were collected by him from Chandigarh and surrounding areas like Pinjore and Nalagarh. He recalls that the Ganesha sculpture was lying upside down in the fields near a river bed and people use to walk over it and use it for bathing and washing their clothes etc. On seeing this big stone block from the backside he sensed something and he got it turned over only to discover this priceless piece of sculpture. According to old legends, also supported by archeological findings, it is believed that Pinjore region was a site of an ancient temple complex in around 10th to 12th century, belonging to Gurjar Pratihara period. The remnants can also be seen in Bhīma Devi Temple of this region. However, Muslim invasions from 13th century and onwards are held responsible for the destruction of these temples.

The Pinjore land where he conducted his research was allotted to his family by the Government of India in lieu of their ancestral land left behind in Pakistan. This area was covered with virgin forests and surrounding Shiwaliks were unexplored at that time. He spent a lot of time there researching and all his efforts paid off as he was able to collect many pre-historic tools of different shapes and sizes from there. One of the Paleolithic period stone tools he discovered were termed as a 'monumental discovery'¹ which proved the migration theory of man by Dr. Sankalia an eminent Archeologist from Deccan college Pune University. It established and pushed earliest habitation by man to 1.5 million years ago in Shivalik region. This discovery was broadcasted on All India Radio at that time, and is now part of the archeological collection of museum. His efforts were highly appreciated and recognized by the administration and M.S. Randhawa.

Jhamb served in Museum and Art Gallery of Chandigarh for more than ten years, initially as curatorial assistant from 1967 to 1972 and then as assistant curator from 1972 till 1975. During this time, he was in charge of the miniature paintings and Gandhara Sculptures section. He even worked on his Doctorate on Sikh Miniatures in the museum collection under M.S. Randhawa and Prof. Preetam Singh of GNDU (Guru Nanak Dev University). During this period, he authored and co-authored various research articles along with M.S. Randhawa and B.N.Goswamy which were published in various National and International Art Magazines and Journals.

Nigeria Phase

In 1975 before he could complete his Doctorate he was sent to Nigeria on deputation by Federal Ministry of Education and External Affairs. There he was promoted twice to the rank of Senior Education Officer and Assistant Chief Education Officer (ARTS) and served for around twelve years till 1986. This was the time when he got an opportunity to travel extensively all across the globe and visit different museums in London, Paris, USA, the Middle East, South East Asia, besides various countries in Africa and India which gave him exposure to international art and help him grow as an artist.

Return to India

After coming back to India in 1986 Har Gopal Jhamb set up a studio at his residence in Panchkula and started experimenting with different art forms and techniques. He worked in different mediums like clay, iron, bronze, mix media, stone, wood, metal plates and junk material with contentedness of expression. His work has been referred to as, "... constructed assemblages by combining incongruous objects and scraps of metal. These evocative works are mainly figurative in intent".³ His oeuvre of work consists of diverse themes and subjects with equivalent felicity in both painting and sculpture. But over time his experimentation with materials and techniques has led him to a technical expression that is uniquely his, that is, the painted metal plates.

Work on Metal plates

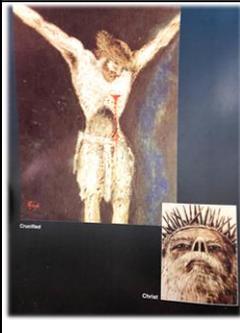
"In the realization of sculptural form material used by the sculptor plays a very significant role as the choice of a medium is generally determined by the content and its suitability for expressing that particular theme is of prime importance for the sculptor".⁴ Jhamb's unswerving experimentation with different mediums and techniques made him encounter and create awfully stunning works of art on a metal

plate. Since last fifteen years he has been endeavoring on this new medium of metal plates, which now has become his favourite medium as it offers ample scope for the play of imagination and colour. These metal plates have become his canvas on which he creates images with different types of glazes and powders. Jhamb virtually creates such exuberant images without using any brushes or paints. He prepares a plate by applying a coat of glaze as base and then paints it white or black as the background, he then organizes assorted metallic powders to give different hues and forms on metal plate. These prepared images are then very carefully baked in a furnace in different stages. These metallic colors during the process of baking react and result in some chemical fusion leading to formation of marvelous images on metal plate. Jhamb always takes extra caution while handling these plates before baking as he believes that even slight shaking can ruin all his efforts. Jhamb even used to practice breathing exercises of Yoga to gain control over his breath which in return facilitated him to handle these plates.

Works

Jhamb has covered wide range of themes on these plates, taking inspiration and projecting almost anything and everything under the sun – with subjects drawn from history, religion and nature among others.

	<p>1-<u>Hari Singh Nalwa</u>- This work is done on a metal plate and is based on a historic figure. It shows the Sikh warrior Hari Singh Nalwa in action. He is shown in an equestrian pose with flowing drapery which add to the dramatic effect of the figure. Selection of colours is also very subtle yet bright enough to impart lively mood to this work. Highlighted by intricately carved facial expressions, the body language also adds to the dignity to the rider.</p>
	<p>2- <u>Mother Nature</u>- Done on metal plate, in this work artist's love for nature is reflected. He draws his inspiration from majestic mountains and flowing water of waterfall.</p>

	<p>3- <u>Anger</u>- This work was done by the artist as a reaction to the 9/11 incident. It marks the sensitivity of the artist towards international events. Red colour of eyes expresses the rage and resentment in people.</p>
	<p>4- <u>Mother India</u>- This sculpture is part of the series which the artist has done on Indian women. In this particular sculpture bust a lady is shown with an iron on her head and chain with a golden lock rests around her neck. The iron symbolizes that even in this post-independence modern era, when we talk so much about women empowerment, in India the woman is bound with her domestic duties and lives a life of a slave represented by a chain which is strangling her throat. This chain is tied with a golden lock which highlights the plight of Indian women.⁵</p>
	<p>5-<u>Crucified</u> –A Christian subject this work is again done on metal sheet and “is undoubtedly Mr. Jhamb’s most evocative masterpiece. The Christ figure is in grey-brown pastel shades. Only the blood that drips from his heart is red: a subtle metaphor for his power to rise from the dead into Life Eternal”.⁶</p>

According to Keshav Malik, a Padam Shree awardee and a renowned art critic “There are many creative possibilities in this novel metal medium, and thus more splendid results are likely to forth come, when the artist etches on them his highest aspirations and visions. Going plain, as he does with the complete simplicity of idioms, in the end he helps touch our hearts. Jhamb should persist in his present venture till, that is, the mine of his treasures is exhausted- and which of course is the lot of all explorations. Finally, but till such time, the metal medium shall surely add genuine luster to the arts scene.”⁷

Jhamb has also participated very actively in various group shows. His works have been exhibited in various art galleries and museums such as the Chandigarh Museum and Art Gallery, Panjab Lalit Kala Academy, Chandigarh, Lalit Kala Academy, AIFACS annuals, National and State level exhibitions since 1967. Other than these, he had many solo exhibitions in USA, Australia, Delhi and Chandigarh.

Collection

Many of his paintings and sculptures are a part of the collections of different

museums such as the Chandigarh Museum and Art Gallery, Fine Arts Museum, Panjab University, Chandigarh, New York, USA, Australia & Various individual collections in India and abroad.

Conclusion:

Har Gopal Jhamb has had a long association with the city of Chandigarh and has immensely contributed to its cultural scene both through his involvement with the Chandigarh museum and his practice as an artist. Jhamb has worked in his individualistic style carving a niche for himself in the art scene at the national as well as international level. In a distinctive style he has experimented and developed an unconventional medium such as metal plate creating lively expressionistic works of art.

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