

Printmaking History, A Survey Techniques and Artists



Kaumudi Prajapati

Research Scholar Panjab University, Chandigarh.

Accepted 2017-05-12; Published 2017-06-05

Abstract: In this paper, the brief survey of the history of printmaking -beginning of printing in India and its further development as an artistic medium is discussed. The printmaking is the term used for the process of creating prints, in fact printed pictures by the artists. Relatively a new medium compared to painting or sculpture, printmaking has gone through many changes in the course of time. Including various techniques, processes, materials and equipment it is mainly divided in three types- Relief prints, Intaglio and planography depending on the way the matrix or the surface is prepared and prints are taken from it.

Key Words: Print, Woodcut, Etching, Intaglio, Lithography, Screen Printing, Printmaker, Indian Art, Technique.

Introduction

In India it was only by the late 19th and beginning of the 20th century that printmaking as distinct from printing begins to emerge. In India, the history of printing is quite long, but printmaking's history as a fine art is not more than a century old. In India, what we know as artists, prints is in fact a recent phenomenon. What we call as modern printmaking began in India just about four decades ago. Printing reached in India in 1556. Two Jesuit missionaries set up two presses in Goa for religious propaganda. This was almost hundred years after the moveable type face die and matrix invented and Bible was

printed by Johann Gutenberg in Germany in 1450. Portuguese missionaries of Goa used blocks made in wood engraving and use relief printing technique. The block printed in the year 1561 serves as the first or earliest evidence of printing in India.¹

Contemporary Indian printmaking

Firstly, artists like Nandlal Bose and Gaganendranath Tagore started using printmaking for its own sake, and not as a means to reproduce. This can be considered as beginning of modern Indian printmaking.²The renowned printmaker,

¹ Das, Nirmalendu: The Early Indian Printmakers. An Approach to Social Science Ethnical and Technical Study, Lalit Kala Contemporary No. 39, Delhi.

² Guha Thakurta, Tapati, The Making of New Indian Art, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

Mukul Dey became Principal of Art School in 1928. From here, the graphic arts began to get attention. Ramendranath Chakravarty, a reputed printmaker joined the school after him.³

In 1915, Bichitra Club was formalized by Tagores, reproduction prints of paintings, magazines, sets of reprints were sold here.

Gaganendranath Tagore had realized the potential of the medium as an instrument to protest and exploited it within the limited technological scope. His first cartoon album of colour lithographs "Adbhut Lok" came in 1917. Mukul Chandra Dey published album of his etchings and drypoints comprising portraits and landscapes. He can be considered as India's first printmaker who revealed that it is possible to use graphic medium for artistic expression. He was among the first to use printmaking as a mean to creatively express and his efforts prove to be a milestone in the history of Indian printmaking.

In Kalabhavan, in 1923-24, graphic arts were included in the curriculum. Nandlal Bose and his students, Ramendranath Chakravarty, Manindra Gupta, Bisvarup Bose showed intense interest in Creative printmaking which developed in Kalabhavan in the early years.

But the emergence of printmaking came in 1950s when nation, after independence, was struggling to create a modern identity. At the top were the artists such as Somanth Hore, Jagmohan Chopra and Kanwal Krishna.

Somnath Hore consciously decided to adopt printmaking as his medium of choice. He wanted to use the medium to achieve an end. He used burin and acid as his tools, his weapons against destruction, socially incorrect things. His concept of wounds took him to the height of expression in the medium. The sense of purpose and his passion to explore was new in Indian printmaking. For the first time this medium was chosen to fulfill aesthetic goals, this was a new, revolutionary way to use the medium. Hore left Delhi in 1966 and joined Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan in 1969. Here he kept experimenting and finally created his white-on-white pulp prints, showing culmination of his journey as a printmaker. He took printmaking to its limits. He created cement matrixes to pour rag pulp into its contours, pressed and dried, later it served as a print. This technical innovation, experimentation with medium and materials created wounds directly on the paper. Before him, imagery was not used in printmaking. His new approach liberated printmaking from the prevailing technological limitations. He can be truly called as the artist printmaker.

Kanwal Krishna, after completing his studies in Calcutta, went to Paris to learn techniques of etching, engraving, and viscosity printing at S.W. Hayter's Atelier 17. He stayed for three months there in 1953. After coming back to India, he bought an etching press and began with experimenting in collography medium at Delhi. In

³ Sengupta, Paula, *The Printed Picture, Four Centuries of Indian Printmaking*, Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2012.

this technique, many colours were printed from a single plate. Members of Delhi Shilpi Chakra and many other artists learnt this process from him. His works reflect peace and tranquility. His contribution in the development of printmaking in India is notable though he discontinued with the medium by 1960. He played a major role in the establishment of Garhi printmaking studios.⁴

Famous printmaker, Krishna Reddy pursued his studies from Santiniketan, than he settled abroad but frequently visits India. He exhibits, runs workshops, interacts with teachers and students and is active as a printmaker. He developed viscosity technique alongwith S.W. Hayter at Atteliar 17 where he worked for many years. He taught this technique to many Indian artists in 1960s and 70s and this remains as a popular technique in India.⁵ He has a kind of spiritual approach to the process which he uses to execute his works. Inks, rollers of different types, relief sculptural surface all show his view where nature, art and life all come together and create a world. His technical knowledge, his abstract imagery as well as his philosophy about his work – all have attracted Indian printmakers. In 1950s and 60s, when most of Indian art showed narrative trends, Krishna Reddy's work was very much different. He opened up the avenues in technology which were not explored till than and showed

various possibilities in the area of colour printmaking. He showed the way to Indian printmakers to look at printmaking s the means to achieve an end, a tool to reach towards a goal aesthetic and not only technical.⁶

Renowned printmaker, Jagmohan Chopra is well known for improving and making printmaking popular in India. He is best known as a dedicated teacher who was always open to experiments and new techniques. He came after Somnath Hore at the college of Art, New Delhi and improved and modernized the printmaking studio there. Later, he went to Chandigarh as Principal of Government College of Arts where he created printmaking department equipped with materials, machinery, infrastructure and facilities.⁷

He introduced collograph medium as a substitute and searched for new possibilities. His work dealt with form and composition – abstract imagery with some forms and play with medium and materials.⁸

Graphic art was included in curriculum at JJ School of Art Bombay in 1952. Unfortunately, there was no common studio for printmaking in the city and even today, the situation has not changed. NB Joglekar shifted from Bombay to Baroda and played a major role in setting up the graphics section at the Faculty of Fine Arts at MS University in 1950. Joglekar, Jyoti Bhatt and others were

⁴ Art India – The Art News Magazine of India, Printmaking, VXI, Issue I, Quarter 1, Art India Publishing Co. Mumbai, 2006.

⁵ Krishna Reddy – A View from India, Krishna Reddy – A Retrospective, The Widener Gallery, 1998.

⁶ Krishna Reddy – A View from India, Krishna Reddy – A Retrospective, The Widener Gallery, 1998.

⁷ Jagmohan Chopra, Catalogue of retrospective exhibition in 2002 by AIFACS Art Gallery.

⁸ Jagmohan Chopra, Catalogue of retrospective exhibition in 2002 by AIFACS Art Gallery.

actively engaged in printmaking activities in 1960s and 70s. Faculty came up with annual art fair where students and teachers actively made prints and published them. Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan also started with annual fair, named 'Nandan Mela' in late 1960s where graphics department contributes with the books, portfolios of prints, calendars, cards by teachers and students printed and published annually.⁹

Jyoti Bhatt, Vinod Ray Patel, VS Patel, PD Dhumal, Rini Dhumal, Jayanti Rabadia, Vijay Bagodi, Naina Dalal, Jayant Parikh were active printmakers in Baroda, from the 1970s. They payed attention to innovative processes, including serigraph and photo processes. For most of them, medium was more phocused while Jyoti Bhatt combined his pictorial sensibility with rich visual vocabulary and used printmaking as a means. The forms and compositions he created comment on life, society.¹⁰

Jyoti Bhatt, along with Shanti Dave, studied first at Baroda before going to Naples, Italy and New York in 1961-66. He learn Intaglio and colour printing there. He learnt serigraphy in 1972 and incorporated it in his works. His keen interest in photography and use of this technique in his art added a new flavor to printmaking. He created unique and different avenues and gave way to open up to upcoming printmakers. He started with painterly style and then developed an indigenous

style where he combined decorative with figurative, images with words. He explored the medium to create a new multicultural language. PD Dhumal developed the printmaking department in Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda with others. Many printmakers came out from here who developed post modernist languages in printmaking. Rini Dhumal is considered as a printmaker with a painterly approach. She explored lithography and viscosity mediums, multicoloured prints Outside the institution, Chhap, founded by Kavita Shah, Jyoti Bhatt, Vijay Bagodi and others in 1999 is active with their printmaking initiatives. Kanoria centre for Arts in Ahmedabad has a printmaking studio which gives scholarships and studio facilities to young artists since 1987. Walter D'Souza was instrumental in its development who himself is reputed printmaker working in Ahmedabad.¹¹

Printmakers like Siddhartha Ghosh emerged in Kalabhavana, Santiniketan, initiative taken up by Somnath Hore were continued enthusiastically by Sanat Kar and Lalu Prasad Shaw who had joined there as faculty in Graphic arts. Sanat Kar is known as an innovative printmaker.

Lalu Prasad Shaw practiced intaglio printing and lithography and had developed semi abstract language. In Santiniketan, 'The Realists' group actively worked from 1985 and had some

⁹ Indian printmaking Today – Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, 1985.

¹⁰ Sheikh, Gulam Mohammed, ed. Contemporary Art in Baroda, Tulika Art Gallery, New Delhi, 1997.

¹¹ Sheikh, Gulam Mohammed , ed. Contemporary Art in Baroda, Tulika Art Gallery, New Delhi, 1997.

serious printmakers such as Nirmalendu Das, Pinaki Barua, Suranjan Basu, and Sushanta Guha. Among them, Pinaki Barua and Suranjan Basu came up as promising printmakers. Pinaki Barua developed monochromatic, detailed language showing his concern for victims and poor people. His preferred medium is etching. Suranjan Basu used the relief process, figurative compositions with fury.¹²

Jagmohan Chopra with Anupam Sud, Jagdish Dey, Prashant Vichitra, Paramjit Singh, Kishan Ahuja, Lakshmi Dutta and others formed 'Group 8' in New Delhi in 1968. This group set up a studio at Shankar market and organized national print exhibitions in 1990s. From here, Anupam Sud came up as a significant printmaker in 1980s. She learnt photo process in Intaglio printing at the Slade School of Art, London in 1969. Her work is mainly figurative men and women, urban situations depicted with graphic application, technical effects used to show developed thought process. She is one of the pioneers and her tenure as a faculty at printmaking department at college of Art, Delhi has proved beneficial to generations of students.¹³

Anupam Sud, Jai Zharotta and Jagdish Dey contributed to College of Art, New Delhi. Zharotta was the one focused on serigraphy medium. He had a painterly approach to the medium. The college of Art, New Delhi produced many printmakers at the turn of the century. Most of them worked at the

Garhi Studios, regional centre of Lalit Kala Akademi. This printmaking proved to be an active place and important factor in the development of printmaking in India, in the early 90s. Some of the artists who worked have formed the 'Indian Printmakers Guild' to spread awareness about printmaking medium. Members were Anandmoy Banerjee, Bula Bhattacharaya, Dattatreya Apte, Jayant Gajera, Kavita Nayar, K.R. Subanna, Kanchan Chander, Moti Zharotia, Sukla Sawant, Sushanta Guha, Sukhwinder Singh and Subba Ghosh. Many of them continue as printmaker individually now.¹⁴

In the Government School of Arts and Crafts, Madras, printmaking was included in the curriculum in 1960s. Pareer Selvanm, R.B. Bhaskaran, Dakshinamoorthy were active printmakers through 60s and 70s. Paneer Selvam had studied printmaking under Somnath Hore first and that at Ateliar 17 in Paris. In 1970, he came back to Madras and practiced there. R.B. Bhaskaran learnt printmaking in Israel and London. He became incharge of regional centre of Lalit kala Akademi in Madras in 1982. With R. Palaniappan, he established graphic studio. He used images of cats, couple and abstract concepts too are incorporated in his prints. In 1970s, abstract printmaking emerged with Thota Tharani, Akkitham Naryana, and V.Viswanadhan. R. Palaniappan is a reputed printmaker; he came up as

¹² As seen from his works and talks with him when I was a student at Kalabhavana, Visvabharti University in 1997-98.

¹³ Anupam Sud, A Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue, AIFACS, New Delhi.

¹⁴ Malik Keshav, Four Women Artists, Art Heritage, New Delhi, 1988, 89.

a craftsman who used the medium for desired effects. Architecture, flight, movements, numbers are depicted in his prints with flawless understanding and intense involvement. 1970s saw P. Gauri Shankar, Devraj Dakaji, K. Laxma Goud and DLN Reddy as practicing prominent printmakers in Hyderabad. The latter three set up a press there. Gaurishankar used viscosity technique for his etchings and collographs. Landscape forms are used in his prints. Devraj Dakaji came to Delhi and was incharge of printmaking department from 1977 at Garhi studios. A significant printmaker, he practised mezzotint technique. DLN Reddy and K. Laxma Goud used figures in their prints. Delicately executed aquatints and etchings with erotic imagery by Laxma Goud place him among the modernist printmakers. He depicts nature in detail alongwith human figures and his use of positive and negative space is superb.

Conclusion:

In the beginning of the 20th century, printmaking emerged as an independent art form, which has its own aesthetic possibilities. Before this, the distinction between painting and printmaking was not clear. Almost a century passed to see printmaking as a separate medium. Than it took another fifty years to spot or hear about printmakers separate from the painters or sculptors.

Transition in printmaking medium can be seen from colonial times from book illustration,

single sheet display prints to a means of individual expression by artists for aesthetic purpose and also its use as a mass medium. As seen, in the years following Indian Independence, contemporary printmaking evolved.

Acknowledgement: Department of Art History and Visual Arts, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

References

1. Das, Nirmalendu: The Early Indian Printmakers. An Approach to Social Science Ethnical and Technical Study, *Lalit Kala Contemporary No. 39*, Delhi.
2. Guha Thakurta, Tapati, *The Making of New Indian Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.
3. Sengupta, Paula, *The Printed Picture, Four Centuries of Indian Printmaking*, Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2012.
4. *Art India – The Art News Magazine of India*, Printmaking, VXXI, Issue I, Quarter 1, Art India Publishing Co. Mumbai, 2006.
5. Krishna Reddy – *A View from India*, Krishna Reddy – *A Retrospective*, The Widener Gallery, 1998.
6. Jagmohan Chopra, *Catalogue of retrospective exhibition in 2002* by AIFACS Art Gallery.
7. *Indian printmaking Today* – Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, 1985.
8. Sheikh, Gulam Mohammed, ed. *Contemporary Art in Baroda*, Tulika Art Gallery, New Delhi, 1997.
9. As seen from his works and talks with him when I was a student at Kalabhavana, Visvabharti University in 1997-98.
10. Anupam Sud, *Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue*, AIFACS, New Delhi.
11. Malik Keshav, *Four Women Artists*, Art Heritage, New Delhi, 1988, 89.