

New Horizons in Indian Printmaking – An Overlook of the Practice in the Last Twenty Years

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Abstract – The word printing or printmaking in India leads us to the history of printing through the mechanical movable type printing press in India, exactly 100 years after the invention of the printing press by the German technician John Guttenberg of Mainz, the printing trade was continued in various places by the French, Portuguese and Britishers in India, also printing in other mediums such as engraving, lithography and etchings have been introduced in India. This is found in extensive manner after the independence or the year 1950, where printmaking explored by the art students in the colleges, print studios and at other private individual studios. The important findings are regarding the exploration of various new printmaking mediums, the conceptualization of a print and use of other alternative materials and methods as to find new ways of expression using printmaking. In this paper I have tried to discuss different aspects and points that how it has spread out and came out as an important expressive creative tool for an artist to voice out using the medium.

Keywords- Printmaking, Creative, Intaglio, Community Art, Alternative, Nontoxic, Graphic Media.

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Art making has been a part of human nature since the prehistoric times. Which is world over known to the society as it has found how the cave man has created impressions, carved images or made use of their day today recreation act, as part of documentation, hobby or fascination to express the inner soul during the time?

As I am concerned with the development of all these artistic creativity and it has many things to do with, the various aspects of the life, happening, development, openness in the human mind and the acceptance of the ideas as well as the understanding and influences of the cross culture with other cultures and society, or the foreign culture.

'Printmaking' does not originated by native Indians and so forth it came to India via some such routes to further fulfillments among the Indian community. The major and the first such attempts have been made by the Jesuit missionaries in the Goa in the year of 1556, as they have first imported the printing technologies to produce the Christian scripture to spread out amongst the Indian people, which was exactly a hundred years after the Guttenberg bible gets printed in his invented metal movable types printing press. The idea behind this was to spread the Christianity in India. Though India has no such background of printing from the matrix or a block of any other materials, still we have found evidences of

such carvings, and marked images on shell, metal, clay or stones during the Indus valley civilization. So in a way the idea of creating a matrix was there much earlier, but there are no evidences of printing on paper or any other surfaces using the matrix. Korean explorations in this trade was much ahead even before Guttenberg, as they began casting metal types for printing using it during the Goryeo dynasty widely known as 'JIKji' as early as 1377, which has now UNESCO has confirmed as the oldest metalloid types seeing this historical evidences and the site where it has started.

The important aspect to see the development of all these printing mediums initially to fulfill the commercial purpose and to express or represent the ideas regarding any religion, social or political situations that came out as a mass medium to be used as various other aspects in the society and for an artist and artisans to create an art form as a self-representation.

In 1816 Indian artists Ramchand Roy could be the earliest person who created and published his own illustrations in the book called 'Annoodha mongol' or 'Aanand mangal' which to publish in the Bengal during the British India.

Bat-Tala has played major roll to popularize the printing activities in Bengal region, with their varied

images of religious and social subjects printed on cheap papers and sold in cheap prices, also Raja Ravi Verma made efforts to popularize the Oleo graphic prints of his own paintings, which earlier he used to get printed in Germany, the idea behind that is to reach out his images to every Indian homes. As seeing the democratic characteristic of printmaking medium it has a potential to fulfill the purpose behind the idea. From the beginning of the 20th century the art colleges, print studios, and lithography studios were flourished extensively, which has played important role to make the community aware of its use and multiplicative importance that has allowed many artists to explore the medium of intaglio, relief and planography printing for their creative expression. As Nandlal Bose made an iconic image of 'Gandhiji' using 1930 which was an important image as the freedom movement was on its height, using this relief image as an icon it could have been encourage the common man to gets courage to fight against the British Rule.

As a community tool Print Making always played a vital role to make people aware of the situation, whether it could be a war representation, as one can see the representations of Francisco-de Goya, during the famous war between the Spain and Germany, or the graphic prints created by Artist Otto Dix during the First World War where these artists have represented the inner soul that is affected by the massacre and the voices which have been mourned by the armies where the sufferers are the people who have nothing to with the politics or the rulers, they are the innocent people. The contribution of Kethe Kollwitz exploration of printmaking of his war and aftermath situation of a war. Like in India many artists have involved their creativity to represent this sort of mass cultural suffering of the poor people, the famine in the Bengal, or riots and so on.

Printmaking actually started growing after the independence. As time grew the regional colleges have came out as by teaching printmaking and many more artist printmakers have came on to the ground, who have made efforts to represent various subject matters and raised their voices in to the society, as a tool they have always either made questions to the society, or to find or suggest the solution or could be by representing the simply beautiful images. Art has many aspects to represent in the society, the aesthetics in art is also very important as the prime factor could be the subject matter, that may have always been changed as and when according the circumstances of social, political and other changes happened that reflected in the art forms.

Somnath Hore was an artist earlier from Delhi and later from Shantiniketan, the Kalabhavan has way out his creativity shifting from the conventional methods of printing, he represented the idea of his 'wounds' series came out as the blind paper casts, where one can see his intense efforts shown through

the paper casts representing the human pain also known as white on white. Artists such as Chittaprasad and Haren Das from the west Bengal also used the tools of printmaking to represent the local, the regional suffering and the hardship of the life in their vibrant black and white and color relief prints, they mainly use the wood cut and the lino cut printmaking techniques.

With the advancement of technology, other than India in the Europe and America the boundaries that defined printmaking began to blur. From the cutting-edge experiments of the 1960s printmaking has developed in many new directions, and over the last 20 years prints have become more visible, accessible and affordable than ever before. No longer merely secondary, supplementary or reproductive, print is now a central part of many artists' activity, the equal of their output in other media, and conceived as integral or complementary to it. In India the history, back ground and to understand the medium, the way to adopting it and to grow with more mature way in the society, has made the printmaking medium little fade, which many times discussed amongst the artist community the reasons looks quite reasonable. Comparing the west Indian market did not grown, as also the materials to pursue the work culture has always lacked, and for everyone it couldn't possible to rely on the foreign material to avail. It is now due to the global marketing it's easy to acquire many foreign artistic materials to fulfill the requirement of one's creativity. Still printmaking using the computers and other advancements started growing quiet slowly.

Also New technologies have been swiftly co-opted in fine art printmaking, and traditional techniques have been supplanted, and sometimes facilitated by the photocopier, the fax, and the inkjet printer attached to a PC. At the same time, some artists have continued to explore the untapped potential of more traditional methods, whether it is by printing on surfaces other than paper, by working on an unprecedented scale or simply by working in a way which expands the definitions of 'print'. The rise of new media, viewed by some as a threat to the future of printmaking, has simply extended the options available. Just as the invention of lithography did not render woodcut and engraving redundant, and photography did not spell the end for traditional graphic media, so digital technologies have not replaced other methods but rather extended choice and capacity.

In recent time the printmakers in India are exploring with many more additions such as to combine the images along with the other print mediums. Somewhere printmakers have also tried to display their prints in three dimensional ways, or shifting the attention from paper to print their images on materials such as silk, plaster casts, cloths, leather and so on. The prime concern here in the

printmakers have been found is how print could be seen other way round.

As in the west and USA the artists have become more aware of the health hazardousness of chemicals and other solvents, found and shifted their attention towards the *non toxic* materials and processes which led them to find new options and alternatives of the mediums such as solar etching, electro etching, water based serigraphy, salt print, cyanotypes, monoprints, silk aquatint, mezzotint and so on where no chemicals used directly or could be less hazardous. In India many artist printmakers have adopted some print techniques where the same feelings have created awareness and brought shift from it to other alternatives of those hazardous materials and methods.

Alternative printmaking has made many artist to grab their attention to find a new way to express their ideas as older photographic medium such as Cyanotype printing is getting very much popularity in India recently as in USA or the Europe. The cyan colored image printing through the two chemicals mixed and spread over evenly on a surface and the image then exposed in the sun light leads to wash away the paper in the water, which turns in to the cyan. Or the alternative materials have been started using in unavailability of the materials such as linoleum, printing press, natural wood, lithographic setup and so on, artist printmakers have found their own alternatives. The scales of prints have also been found experimented as a larger sized wood prints mainly by combining the commercial ply boards. So in a way the horizon of a printmaking possibilities have changed drastically in last 20 years. With all this possibilities and challenges printmaking has found its growth. The younger generations also took printmaking as their life survival source and finding new possibilities to further re grow the medium.

The younger generation of printmakers have many new approaches towards printmaking, new alternatives and challenges regarding the exploration of materials, content, sense of showcasing the end product, and the conventional norms of the medium of printmaking and so on.

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