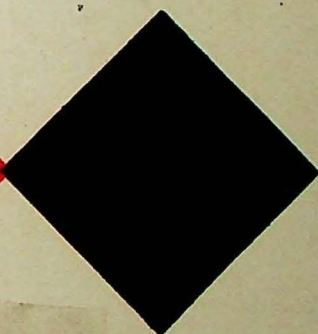
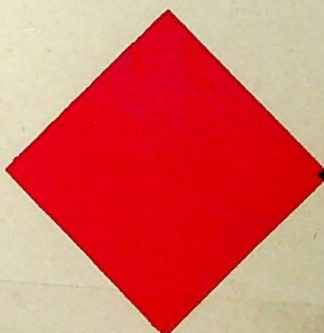


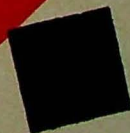
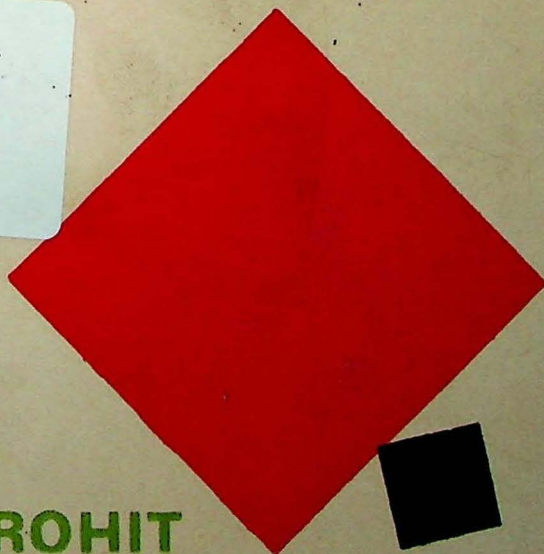
ARTS  
OF  
TRANSITIONAL  
INDIA

20th  
CENTURY

VOL-1



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INAYAK PUROHIT

# ARTS OF TRANSITIONAL INDIA: TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1905-85

Volume One

Vinayak Purohit

Size-wise, content-wise, coverage-wise it is a stupendous doctoral dissertation holding within their covers eight long chapters, charts and tables and a long comprehensive select bibliography. If therefore the physical aspect is all but frightening, the content and coverage is all too breathtaking.

The period formally covered is practically the entire twentieth century to date but frequently referring back to the nineteenth and the arts dealt with include the non-performing arts of painting, sculpture and architecture, the performing arts of music, dance and the theatre, the literary arts of poetry, drama, short stories and novels and finally the composite art of film.

The intellectual disciplines involved in the analysis and interpretation of the huge mass of facts drawn into the discussion include history, history of art, aesthetics, philosophy with special reference to political philosophy, sociology and economics.

Indeed it is a massive dissertation, massive in quantity and comprehensiveness, breathtaking in its sweep and back-breaking in its solid weight.

One cannot but notice that this massive and stupendous dissertation has been built up on a committed ideological base which is frankly Marxist in a general sense; it follows therefore that the methodology which has been followed has also been, by and large, in terms of Marxian dialectics. This is the first

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**ARTS  
OF  
TRANSITIONAL  
INDIA  
TWENTIETH  
CENTURY  
VOL. ONE**

**VINAYAK PUROHIT**

Donated by  
Dr. VINAYAK PUROHIT  
MANKIND, Pune



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to  
Sharayu

## Foreword

*Since Dr. Nihar Ranjan Ray passed away before he could write the promised Foreword to this publication, we are reproducing the adjudication report that he signed in late 1975. It may be noted that certain cosmetic changes have been made in the text because of the change of format from thesis for limited audience to book for general readership. Also the work has been brought up-to-date to the mid-eighties; as far as possible.*

Size-wise, content-wise, coverage-wise it is a stupendous doctoral dissertation which consists of more than 1600 typed pages bound in two heavy volumes and holding within their covers eight long chapters, twenty-six charts and tables and a long, comprehensive select bibliography. If therefore the physical aspect is all but frightening, the content and coverage is all but breath-taking. The period formally covered is practically the entire twentieth century to date but frequently referring back to the whole of the nineteenth, and the arts dealt with include the non-performing arts of painting, sculpture and architecture, the performing arts of music, dance and the theatre, the literary arts of poetry, drama, short stories and novels and finally the composite art of film. The intellectual disciplines involved in the analysis and interpretation of the huge mass of facts drawn into the discussion include history, history of art, aesthetics, philosophy with special reference to political philosophy, sociology and economics. Indeed, it is a massive dissertation, massive in quantity and comprehensiveness, breath-taking in its sweep and back breaking in its solid weight. One must confess that it is not easy to chew, far less to digest, even in two close readings that one may give to it which I did. Even so, I have not been able to comprehend all that the author has put forward, I must admit.

One cannot but notice that this massive and stupendous dissertation has been built up on a committed ideological base which is frankly Marxist in a general sense; it follows therefore that the methodology which has



been followed has also been, by and large, Marxian, in other words, in terms of Marxian dialectics. I believe this is the first comprehensive attempt which I have come across so far, to explain and interpret Indian activities in the field of the creative arts in terms of Marxian *weltanschauung* and Marxian methodology as applicable to the social sciences. The dissertation is thus not merely a study of the creative arts of India in the twentieth century but a study of the entire Indian superstructure of culture, which explains why the author has taken so much trouble to analyse the data relating to the socio-economic base on which the superstructure has been raised.

Even a casual paging through this dissertation would convince anybody of the tremendous, patient, steady and devoted work spread over years, which must have gone into the making of this dissertation nothing to speak of the intellectual exercise involved in the marshalling of facts of diverse nature and arguments of a sophisticated character. That the author has an alert and mature mind there can be no doubt, that he is extraordinarily well read and knowledgeable too, is also equally manifest. Indeed, I cannot but admire the physical and intellectual vitality that could produce a dissertation of this kind.

In regard to a massive intellectual effort of this kind the question of one's acceptance or non-acceptance or validity or otherwise of the findings of the author, does not arise, I believe, especially when an effort is in respect of an academic dissertation. Frankly, the dissertation may prove to be a controversial one, but the controversy would be on a high, complex and sharply sophisticated level of intellectual approach, methodological niceties and ideological inclinations. This, by itself, I should consider is one of the great merits of this dissertation which is a most competent one and worthwhile having.

25 November 1975

NIHAR RANJAN RAY

## *Preface*

In this rather massive work, three strands have been woven together. First, the thread of praxis, an almost life-long effort to practise, master and theorise the ideology and technique of expression in diverse art media. Secondly, the multi-linear endeavour, as a nationalist, to unravel the dynamics of the socio-economic and politico-cultural compulsions of our times. In other words, an attempt to apply creatively the principles of historical and dialectical materialism to the understanding of our history and culture and to intervene in the on-going struggle of the dispossessed, so as to help them realise a social order free from exploitation. Finally, the theme of discovering linkages between the above two—that is to say, an exploration of the almost unploughed (in India) or insufficiently cultivated (elsewhere) area of Marxist aesthetics.

### II

As a craftsman, probably I devoted the longest hours to criticism. Everything was grist to the mill. The visual arts, the performing arts, film and literature. Some of it was overemphatic about technique. There was a deep undercurrent of hedonism and connoisseurship. The high points were possibly three:

I was the first music critic for the *Times of India*, Bombay, whose ownership had passed to Indian hands soon after independence. But such was the hold of utterly slavish compradorism on the colonial mind that no Indian classical music critic had been appointed till I began in 1956. And it was during my tenure that at my initiative an Indian dance critic obtained similar exposure. This is how biographical data gets intertwined with national socio-political trends.

I believe that in the columns of Patwant Singh's *Design* (Bombay and Delhi), it was I who discovered and provided the Baroda group with a

“group” identity. The Baroda trend dominated the Indian art scene from the late fifties to almost the seventies when the Delhi group probably took over. The situation is much more dispersed and complicated now with “free for all” conditions prevailing. Anyway, here too nostalgia merges with larger socio-cultural movements.

Whilst for English journals, I was confined to narrow grooves, for language weeklies and monthlies I had the freedom to range over a wide horizon. That is probably why both in the case of Umashankar Joshi's *Sanskriti* (Gujarati) in the fifties and early sixties, with continuous stimulation provided by the Ahmedabad group of poets (Bhagat, Maniar, Pathak, Rawal *et al*), and for Dharmveer Bharati's *Dharmayug* (Hindi) in the late sixties and early seventies with stimulus provided by the editorial group (Nandan, Mantri, Saral, Kapoor, *et. al.*), I was able to direct the readers' attention simultaneously to many connected facets of our socio-cultural scene.

Next to criticism, I would say designing and architecture absorbed most of my energy. Leaving designing for another occasion and putting aside most of my architectural work, I can find space in this small preface for only a reference to my monumental design of the Gitai Mandir.

Vinoba Bhave, an old Gandhian, the first *Satyagrahi* chosen by Gandhi for the inauguration of the individual satyagraha movement of 1940-2, and leader of the anti-communist Bhoodan Movement of the fifties and sixties, had translated *Bhagvad Gita* in Marathi and called it *Gitai*. This was a *samashloki* translation, i.e. there were exactly 700 stanzas, as in the original, divided into 18 cantos of varying lengths.

My design<sup>1</sup> functioned at two levels. Massive slabs of stones of 18 different colours were to be brought to Wardha from 18 regions of India (e.g. the Jaisalmer yellow marble, the Mathura redstone, the Porbunder graystone, the Cudappa slatestone of greenish hue, black granite from the south, the pinkish gray stone from Kangra Valley in the north, and so on). Each slab was to be approximately ten to twelve feet in height, three or four feet in breadth, and four to eight inches in thickness. Each slab was to be embedded in underground foundations and arranged roughly in the outline shape of a “a cow and a *charkha* and a cloud”. The massive slabs were to be separated from each other by a few inches. Each canto of the *Gita* was to be engraved on each of the 18 different types of stones and the total number of stones were to number 700 plus a few, whose inner surface would carry one stanza each of *Gita*.

The rationale for the design was obvious. The trees at whose roots lay the *asthi* of the Gandhians and their family members were to be encompassed within this outlined form whose shape echoes the cow associated with the Gopuri locale and the *Charkha* associated with Gandhian ideology. There was no roof, no plinth and strictly speaking no walls in my monu-

1. My design was first published in *Dharmayug*, 5-10-1969.

mental design. An underpass or two were to provide ingress and exit, the side walls of these 'tunnels' being recessed to provide storage space for canvas awnings which would be stretched across the stone slabs whenever a prayer meeting or some such gathering was held at this Gitai Mandir. The inner area bound by this free form line of slabs was to be landscaped and an *ashram* type of Indian garden laid out. A small brook would cross and re-cross the free form line. The canopy for the monument was the sky and the wind would move between the inscribed stones freely. As the sun rose and set, the slabs would cast their shadows and create an impact that spoke of simplicity, naturalness, elementality and stark boldness. The stones of India would symbolise the unity of the nation. These stones would no longer be silent, but become vocal and communicate with each other and with the visitors who went round.

At a deeper level of meaning, with the Gitai Mandir, I had created a powerful visible symbol of Gandhian ideology in shambles, in utter ruin, lying desolate under the merciless central Indian sun, the wind raising dust storms around the eroding, feeble, religious mumbo-jumbo, lettered on crude surfaces of menacing ghostly outlines into which anything could be read. It was a true *smashan* or cremation ground of Gandhism, of religion, of Congress culture, of bourgeois rule over contemporary India. In the Gitai Mandir, I had visualised the total collapse of our contemporary hypocritical socio-economic and politico-cultural values. The Gitai Mandir proclaimed without a shadow of a doubt the true inner meaning of our bankrupt neo-colonial society and its comprador values. Once again biography merges into socio-politics.

I would conclude this section on praxis with a reference to my plays. One of them has been performed from 1971 onwards and published (*Steel Frame*), one has been performed (*Byalis*), and two await both performance and publication (*Amina Ane Teno Zamano* and *Tribheto*). All the plays were originally written in Gujarati. Of the plays, *Steel Frame* has been performed all over the country. It is an exposure of our corrupt and heartless bureaucracy and seems to have entered the "national" repertory. since I learnt the other day that recently it won four Gujarat State awards (Best Original Play, second Best Direction and Production, Best Actress for 1985) I do not know how to interpret this recognition of my play *Steel Frame* except to suggest that the Indian bureaucrat has provoked a considerable amount of hostility and that the middle classes welcome, occasionally, satirical exposure of its excesses.

### III

The first volume is the more theoretical one, though concretisations are offered at each stage, just as theorisations have been made at each point in the second volume too. It is really a question of emphasis and of the

kind of questions that have been posed in each part. In the first volume apart from the introduction, I have successively asked myself three logical questions: What is art? What is *Indian* art? and what is *Modern* Indian art?

In the second volume, the areas of painting, music and film have been considered in greater detail, to be followed by a concluding *tour d'horizon*.

The answers are here for the reader to consider and work upon.

The lacunae may be forthwith admitted.

There are no illustrations.

We had to steer a course between Scylla and Charybdis. An adequate or fair number of illustrations would have pushed up costs considerably and, for such a work, a scattered few would have served no purpose. That is why, we propose to bring out a separate volume of illustrations with extensive captions.

Without making excuses, for technical reasons, it is possible that the printer's devil has scored a few goals, to use sporting terminology. Let us hope that there will be a second edition to settle scores.

#### IV

It is impossible to remember and to find space in a small preface to thank all those who have in one way or another helped me to think out and write down all that follows. At the same time, one cannot be ungrateful towards those who have helped. As such, if I have forgotten to acknowledge a name or two it may be attributed to a lapse of memory and not to any deliberate intention.

First of all, there is Sharayu to whom the entire manuscript was dictated and whose comments, interruptions and queries created a better work than it would have been in their absence.

Next naturally comes Nihar Ranjan Ray whose words of commendation are reproduced as Foreword. It is sad that he did not live to see this work in press. Susheela Bhan, together with late J. P. Naik, of the ICSSR have always been sources of encouragement.

Ramdas Bhatkal and the Popular team of Gokarn, Shirali and Fernandes have obviously taken a lot of trouble to see the matter through the press.

Now comes a large group, conversations with whom have probably contributed indirectly and amorphously to this work. I cannot possibly remember all of them, nor have they contributed anything specific, but I should like to mention a few:

(i) Amongst architects and architectural critiques, C. H. S. Jhabvala, Suryakant Patel, Aditya Prakash, late Madhav Achwal, Surjit Singh, Charles Correa, Raynar Banham, Anthony King, Bjorner Torsson, Nordenstrom, John Alpere, Isidro, Brian Richards( Tournon-Branley, Pedro and Sonya Iribarne, Patwant Singh and Gavin Stamp.

(ii) Amongst sculptors, Raghav Kaneria, Mahendra Pandya, V. R. Khajuria, late Ram Kinker, Janakiram, Ramon Orlina and Virginia Navarro.

(iii) Amongst painters, Shanti Dave, Jyoti Bhatt, K. K. Hebbar, N. S. Bendre, late K. H. Ara, Firoz Kaptitia, Vinod Patel, Vinod Ray Patel, Ratan Parimoo, G. R. Santosh, Kishori Kaul, Sunil Das, Prafulla Dahanukar, Balkrishna Patel, Paul Koli, Vasant Parab, V. R. Amberkar, late Bhanu Smart, Otto Staininger, Ursulla Randall, Jerry Navarro, Bagong Kussurdiardja, Choon Yi, Chau Im Kim, Edgar Fernandes, Tsutomu Yoshida, Teng Shih Shu, Chhaganbhai Jadhav, Piraji Sagara and N. Abe.

(iv) Amongst musicians, late Radhika Mohan Moitra, Ali Akbar Khan, Ravi Shankar, Pandit Jasraj, late Bade Gulam Ali Khan, late Kesarbai Kerkar and late Omkarnath Thakur.

(v) Amongst dancers, late Shanti Bardhan, Narendra Sharma, Prabhat Ganguly, Gul Bardhan, Mrinalini Sarabhai, late Nayana Jhaveri and Yogendra Desai.

(vi) Amongst theatre persons, Pratibha Agarwal, Rajendra Nath, Mohan Maharshi, late Pravin Joshi, Markand Bhatt, Pratap Oza, Arvind Thakkar, Gulshan Kapoor, Jayanti Patel and late Farrantz Frei.

(vii) Amongst film-makers and photographers, Mrinal Sen, John Shankarmangalam, Surinder Choudhury and Sunil Janah.

(viii) Amongst litterateurs and journalists, Umashankar Joshi, Priyakant Maniar, Hasmukh Pathak, Niranjana Bhagat, Nalin Rawal, late Jayanti Dalal, Dharmveer Bharati, Suryabhanu Gupta, Ganesh Mantri, Rajaram, Rahul Singh, K. B. Goyal, Yashwant Doshi, Hasmukh Gandhi, late Reinhart Federmann, Alice Guillermo, late Niranjana Mazumdar, Lindsay Emerson, late Verrier Elwin, Pyare Shivpuri, late Ram Singh and C. C. Mehta.

(ix) Amongst academicians Victor D'Souza, Dharam Bir, M. V. Rajadhyaksha, Erland Hofsten and R. C. Mehta.

(x) Amongst persons connected with cultural institutions, Keshav Kothari, Damu Jhaveri, Amar Jariwala, Sushil Jhaveri, P.K. Nair, D.M. Kamla and B.M. Ghia, Laxmilal Pittie, Christina Cory-Smith, Jayavadan Takhtawala, late Kamalanayan Bajaj, Viren Shah, late Sriman Narayan and Madalsa Agarwal, N.K. Firodia, Labhu Ojha, Vishnu Kirpalani, Faizulla Jasdewala, and Mafatlalbai Mehta.

In a class by itself falls the assistance received from the wonderful team of statistical analysts at the centre for Monitoring Indian Economy founded by old departed friend Narottam Shah.

Needless to add, none of the above mentioned is responsible for any view expressed herein, for which I take sole and full responsibility.

Since human beings and their social relations are in continuous motion, sudden changes in the art scene are inevitable. For instance, the number

of television transmitters, both high and low power, made a quantum leap from about 20-odd to 183 between 1983 and 1985, theoretically covering a phenomenal 70 per cent of the Indian populace. The national network programme today in 1986 probably beams to one of the largest TV audiences in world cultural history—some five million sets and an audience of about seven crores. Advertising revenues of the state-owned Doordarshan services have increased from Rs. 80 lakhs in 1976 to Rs. 35 crores in 1984-85 and are probably around Rs. 60 crores at the moment.<sup>2</sup>

Thus an absolutely new art medium of television has finally arrived. It is completely fluid, it does not allow movement backwards, and hypnotises particularly the young the illiterate and the voluntarily idle or passive. All the great editing devices of the film have become commonplace for the video camera and tape. The video cassette has begun to make its impact felt in the Indian market. This of course is reversible and replayable. Naturally, the areas of radio broadcasting, popular music, commercial cinema and pulp literature have been vitally affected.

Fundamentally, of course, nothing has changed. The most popular programmes on the T.V. are those featuring regional and Hindi movies and snippets of cinematic dance and song sequences from hit films popularly called *Chhayageets*, *Chitrahars* or *Chitramalas*. The sudden burst of soap operas on the TV screen really represents a continuation of the vapid and vulgar middle class urban theatre.

Whilst on the subject of mass media especially radio, television and video, there are certain aspects which command immediate attention:

(i) There is intense interaction amongst the mass media *inter se* and between them and the arts. To take a few concrete examples:

(a) The Akashvani or All India Radio network has expanded to 86 stations and 162 transmitters to theoretically cover 89.95 per cent of the population spread over 78.83 per cent of the area of the country. Forty per cent of its programmes consist of music. About two decades ago, it started auditioning classical musicians and grading them. There were protests, demonstrations and boycotts. The bureaucracy withstood the assaults, temporised, blustered, compromised, retreated and prevailed. Ultimately a kind of non-innovative pall has descended upon the middle and lower levels of vocalists and instrumentalists for which the radio is, to a considerable extent, responsible.

(b) Video piracy is hitting the movie mughals very hard these days. They have formed vigilance commissions and piracy suppression bodies and what not. But India is surrounded by petty Gulf Sheikhdoms, hostile or unfriendly neighbours like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangla Desh and outside free ports like Singapore and inside free trade zones like Kandla and SEEPZ (Bombay). It is virtually impossible to prevent video piracy. On the other hand, of the total annual advertising income of all media of about Rs. 400 to 450 crores, approximately Rs. 200

2. *TV & Video World*, February 1986, pp. 49-57.

crores is directly placed by government and public sector undertakings. Of the rest, already the state monopoly television is drawing away Rs. 60 crores and is likely to rapidly increase its share still further. In other words, in a short while, the newspapers are, on the one hand, going to vociferously complain against state duopoly of radio and television, and on the other hand, to try to enter these fields through their own TV and video departments. Already PTI (PTI-TV), UNI (UNI-TV), Anand Bazar group (ATV), Times group (Times-TV), Universal Communications have entered the field.<sup>3</sup> This will become a floodtide and either a channel will have to be granted to them, or different states will get a second channel, or the video cassette market will be transformed, but some big changes very much before twenty-first century are looming large over the horizon.

(c) First the sound tapes destroyed the old disc record market and now the video tape is displacing even the pure audio tape. This is a mere illustration of the rapid technological obsolescence forced upon the newest mass communication media. In other words, far from aiding small-scale assembly industry, the communication revolution is demanding enormous investments in R & D, and superfast amortisation of capital blocks. Thus only giants can survive in the electronic field, and in keeping with this trend, the 20 top MRTP houses are one after another jumping into the fray (Tata, Reliance, JK and so on).

(d) Obviously, there has been intense interaction between film and television media. Upto now, film has called the shots. The weekly film features and the song and dance excerpts (*Chitrahars* or *Chitramalas*) have consistently reached top viewer ratings all through the years. Many other popular programmes on television have been film-oriented, i.e. interviews with film personalities, appearance of film stars in soap operas or sitcoms and serials, direction of episodes by well-known film personalities, and so on. Since last one year, the scene is becoming a little more balanced. There is a rush on the part of noted film-makers to share the growing gigantic television cake, B. R. Chopra and Ramanand Sagar are making serials based on *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Ramesh Sippy has already plunged in with *Buniyaad* and Yash Chopra with *Khazana*. Amitabh Bachchan is going to star very soon on the small screen and literally no one is going to be left out. The third stage is coming soon when television will begin to call the shots which will be three to five years hence. And in about ten years time video will demand its half share from television as has happened in other countries.

(ii) In dealing with the mass media we are again and again confronted by giga numbers. For instance, the *India Reference Annual 1983* states that the Films Division earned a rental of Rs. 4 crores in 1982-83 from cinema houses. This rental is one per cent of the net collections, i.e. excluding entertainment duty and surcharge thereon. Thus the net box-office collections of Indian film industry (foreign imports are these days

3. *Sunday Observer*, Bombay, 29-6-86.



negligible) are about Rs. 400 crores and on the assumption that the all-India average incidence of entertainment duty is about 30 per cent, the gross collections would be around Rs. 575 crores. If this was the position in 1982-83, then by now the gross collections must be in the vicinity of Rs. 700 crores! The number of VCRs, most of them smuggled, is impossible to estimate. But looking at the proliferation of video cassette libraries and video parlours which are becoming as ubiquitous as *paan* shops, it can be surmised that they number hundreds, if not thousands. How is their enormous appetite to be satiated? Considering the size of the Indian market and its potentialities, it is certain that over the next 10 years, scores of specialised outfits will spring up to cater to this pent-up demand. An annual production of 912 feature films in all languages put together is nothing. If tape rentals come down to Rs. 5 and they are already Rs. 7 to Rs. 10, the Indian market will absorb possibly a thousand video tapes in each language!

It is not possible to develop an elaborate sociology of the mass media (the press, the gramophone record, the audio tape, radio, television and the video tape) in this brief preface. We shall do so in a companion volume on a future occasion.

## VI

I do not expect my readers to agree with me at every point. Quite the contrary. There are bound to be differences of viewpoint and expression, as Nihar Ranjan Ray has categorically pronounced.

Many artists and art-trends loom large for a while and then sink out of sight leaving scarcely a trace behind. Baby Doc Duvalier of Haiti and Marcos and Imelda of Philippines have fled their countries just the other day. Just as the Shah of Iran, Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and several other great and powerful rulers have fallen or been uprooted or assassinated or thrown in the dustbin of history one way or another during the last few years, whilst this work was being written and printed. Who will remember the painter of the portraits of Imelda which she invariably donated to every building that she inaugurated during Marcos' infamous and absurd rule. Baby Doc and his father Papa Doc patronised particular forms of voodoo dancing and singing whose practitioners are now cowering in the bushes around Port-Au-Prince. Just before his fall, the Shah of Iran sponsored a magnificent art spectacle celebrating 2500 years of Achaemenid glory. What has happened to the art works and the artists patronised by these American stooges?

My standpoint is simple and categorical. It is not possible to criticise the politics and economics of a society without simultaneously and forthrightly criticising the art expressions of the same society which in their bulk have been created to protect the same politics and economics.

A ceaseless class war rages in society. It may lie hidden or its manifestations may possess high visibility. That depends upon the tide of circumstances. But the war is there, covert or overt. Clausewitz taught us long ago that war is a continuation of politics by other means. Continuing the same chain, we can further say that politics is itself a continuation of business by other means. And finally, art is business through and through, in the world of business which weighs everything with money. Thus art vivifies business, politics, wars and class struggles; projects and protects class interests and positions; and converts economic abstractions into labour-impressed pulsating human expressions of aspirations and despairs.

All that is beautiful on earth has been created by man at labour. And, exploited, oppressed and alienated though he has been, the labouring man shall repossess his creations, courageously, unitedly, lovingly and inevitably.

VINAYAK PUROHIT

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*August 7, 1986.*

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