STUDY OF LIFE AND ART OF PUNJABI ARTIST: PHULAN RANI

Shubhani
Student, Department of Art History and Visual Arts
Panjab University, Chandigarh, India
Email:shubhani199328@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
This research paper is about the Punjabi artist Phulan Rani. Phulan Rani is considered as the master of water color paintings as her paintings are often described as the poetry of the sight. She was born in a Punjabi family and one of the important 20th century woman artist from Punjab. She is essentially a poet who, instead of words, used the medium of line and color to portray the emotional impact on mind of beauty of nature and of human form.

.Keywords: Contemporary, Water color, Poetry, Imagery, Medium, Nature, Human form, Emotions

INTRODUCTION

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION
Phulan Rani was born in 1928 in Amritsar. She belonged to a well to do Sikh family. Her mother died when she was an infant. Her father Ram Singh was a doctor. She showed a great interest in fine arts, particularly for painting and dancing. Dr. Ram Singh encouraged and nourished his daughter with deep and discerning paternal care and pride. In her biography she writes, “My life really began when I started painting at thirteen. I have wonderful memories of that period making pencil drawings on the margins of the school books, attempting to draw sketches of persons and things that interested me.” (Phulan Rani - Biography n.d.) She did not receive any formal training in art, but her education is in Liberal Arts and Psychology. She sought to quintessence and watched other painters at work and slowly trained herself often working late into night. She followed the dictates of their inner urge even when in conflict with external necessity. She devoted most of her time to creative pursuits sometimes even at the expense of pressing her academic demands.

PERSONAL LIFE
Phulan Rani got married to S. Shamsher Singh in 1944. Her husband was also a person of great literary taste and had special love for fine arts. Together they raised a family and participated in the worlds of arts and letters in Punjab. They ran the New Modern High School in Amritsar, and Phulan taught art as well. Her Father-in-law Kartar Singh Bumra too had a interest in painting. After her marriage when Phulan Rani made a painting, Kartar Singh Bumra was much impressed with it and he encouraged her with a cash prize of Rs. 100 and also presented her a book. She was happily married and in the new atmosphere to which great Kerala poet, Maha Kavi Sankara G.Kurup, referred in one of his letters addressed to her as “your happy home where poetry and art lead a blissful wedded life.”

CAREER
Phulan Rani started to paint at the age of thirteen. She had wonderful memories of that period making pencil drawings on the margins of school books. Phulan Rani genius received an encouragement in the Simla Fine Art Exhibition held in 1948, her water color painting "The Dancer", done in wash style, bagged the first prize. Again in 1953, in the Silver Jubilee Fine Arts Exhibition of the Indian Academy
of Fine Arts, Amritsar, presided over by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, her well known work, "Twin Sisters Day and Night", received a gold medal and her two other exhibits "Memory and Moonlight" and "Wayside Rest" were widely acclaimed and celebrated. (Tampy 1981). These paintings express the Punjabi spirit in its tender purity.

Her activities associated with her position as the head of High School and as member of numerous social and literary organizations, she began to work day in, day out to relieve her teeming brain of its images which she translated on paper or on canvas with all her brilliance and child like freshness and vision, imagination and technical virtuosity and providing onlooker the visual delight and aesthetic satisfaction. Her works are so many lyrics in color revealing beneath the physical aspect of things the creative spirit that animates them. She is a painter of varied rich spiritual experiences and even in her maturity she has retained the freshness of vision which is the special property of children and poets.

In 1955 she visited Kangra Valley and that brought her into the close contact with the beauty of nature in its pristine splendor-its lush green terraced rice fields, its turbulent mountain streams, its dashing waterfalls and the endless ranges of the distant hills fading into the blue mist had a great impact on her mind of riotous carnival of beauty turned her overnight into a landscape painter of exquisite sensibility and she started painting the eternally varying moods of this wonderful valley and its subtly evasive colors. Her landscapes are categorized by a keen eye for beauty and deep understanding of the intricacies of color and composition. (K.Singh 1962) In later years Phulan Rani in Amritsar and Sanat Kumar Chatterjee in Simla continued to paint in wash technique. Phulan Rani used the "wash" technique for melting colors to provide a romantic, poetic and emotional content to her works. (Parimoo 2009) Within the course of next five years she painted hundreds of landscapes depicting the charm of the valley and an exhibition of these impressive works were organised at Amritsar in 1962 and it was inaugurated by the Speaker of Lok Sabha. Her paintings "Waterfall at Bhavarna", "Macchial Kund in the Evening," "Nohra Richard's Cottage" and "The sunset at Tatehal" are outstanding for their lyrical appeal and mastery over medium of water color. Her love for nature is her love of flowers and her flower studies are among the finest.

During her cultural trip to Europe in 1970 in connection with concerts entitled "Indian Ragas through Music and Painting" at the universities and cultural organizations, she organized exhibitions of her flower paintings; and to the British, a nation of flower lovers, her exhibits made a direct appeal and many of her flower studies were acquired by private collectors and art connoisseurs. Her flower studies " A wild Rose Bush" and "Flowers in conch shell", which, though as subject seem very modest reveal her attitude to the world of nature.

Rani also held solo exhibitions in different cities if India like Poona, Bombay, Kanpur, Ranchi, Calcutta and Chandigarh and won acclaim on account of artistic excellence of her works, their graceful and tender purity of color of which "Strength and Grace" and "Wayside Rest" are admirable examples.

SUBJECT MATTER

Rani did a series of flower studies, landscape scenes and life drawings. She also did works on domestic genre, she devoted herself entirely to such lyrically themes as "The Bride", "The Heart Broken" and "The Afflicted." The Afflicted being one of her greatest paintings and on which she worked for four years.

During the birthday celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh she was commissioned by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Patiala, to paint the whole life of Master in thirty paintings which she did in record time. Again during the Birth-day celebrations of Guru Nanak, in 1969, her pictorial biography of the great Guru won her an award of Rs. 1000/ from President Shri V.V.Giri. This book has been translated into English Braille for the benefit of the visually handicapped and has since been distributed among such centers all over the world. Her pictorial biography of Guru Tegh Bahadur, painted in the same strain, was selected for award by Punjab Govt. for being the best book of the year 1976-77. Major episodes of
Sikh Guru's life have been rendered with stately tenderness and compositional skill. (Singh.Nikky-Guninder 2011)

She also painted a series of love legends like "The desert of Manju", Sassi of the Sorrows", "Mirza Sahibian", "The Lure of His Flute". Her nobly conceived and admirably rendered paintings like "The Poet", "Time and Beauty", "The Poet and the Muses", "Megh doot" and "The Great Singers" are filled with the spirit of high romance and together with her Raga paintings.港

Portraiture also received a considerable share of her attention and in the extensive gallery of portraits. She go into the inner world of her subject and brings out all that is best and beautiful in it. Portraits of "Saint Ravidas", "Rishi Valmik" located at the Municipal Corporation Hall, Amritsar, "Guru Nanak" in Air India Office, San Francisco; "Guru Gobind Singh" in Sikh Temple, Manchester and "Galib" in the collection of N.S. Virdi. Her technical skills in modifying tone in subtlest gradations from light to dark distinguish her portraits from work of other artists.

Besides her contribution to the art of painting, her work in juvenile literature is no less substantial, having authored about a score books on a wide variety of themes, ranging from art, science, classics, morals and biographies. Two of her books, namely "Paudayan-jiwan(Life of Plants)" , " Germ-ate-Asin (Germ and We)" have received state awards. (Tampy 1981)

WORKS

TWO SISTERS DAY AND NIGHT- WATER COLOR

In this painting two sisters are shown together as Day and Night and forming a unit with which one can measure the length of our mundane existence. Here she is allegorically representing the twin sisters joined in eternal union. Artist views life as a poet and this painting is clear example of underlying poetry of her thought and vision. Artist beautifully uses metaphors. Day with its activity and struggle and night with its dreamy stillness and calmness, both fused into a harmonious union, like the two different aspects of self-same reality. The two colors representing Day and Night equally share their victory over life, and merging beautifully into each other. Day infused with beautiful golden light, brightly attired holding flowers in her hand which is symbolic of liveliness, beauty and growth and Night on the other hand is depicted with mysteriously enchanting, scattering its wealth of starry pearls and silver of moonlight and inducing dreams and visions of beauty into the life patterns. Her mastery over watercolors and linear element is clearly visible in her work. Picture was painted beautifully with brilliancy of color.

This painting was awarded gold medal for being one of the best exhibits in Silver Jubilee exhibit of the Indian Academy of Fine Arts at Amritsar, in 1953 presided by President Dr. Rajendra Prasad.
This is from her Raga Ragini series. A woman in her early twenties is shown delicately seated in the walled serenity of her barely furnished room. She is shown writing letter to her lover. Her posture is meditatively inclined and is busy gathering her thoughts and views before putting them in ink. Expression of sadness is beautifully conveyed. Her sadness proceeds from the long absence of her lover. She is shown wearing a golden robe like that of a Yogini. Figure is characterized with purest transparency of complexion, intensity and expression. There is some strong force in the application of color. Only source of light is the night lamp. Artist used very rich harmonious hues and figure is used as a vehicle to express mood and depth of emotions.

**HIS LAST SOLACE – WATER COLOR**

Shah Jahan, ruler of mighty Mughal empire remains the central figure of this painting. This theme has been painted by many artists. Shah Jahan is shown in his old age and shown gazing towards Taj. Shah Jahan looks out from the place of his captivity in the Red Fort, Agra, shown very sad and pathetic and gazing towards the monument that he had raised for the Glory of Love and Loveliness. The princess and her daughter Jahan Ara, the only solace of his declining years looks sad and helpless at the unveiling sorrow of her royal father, while Taj almost lost hidden in the haze of dim distance, seems equally helpless. The artist beautifully portrayed the theme with wonderful realism.
FLOWERS IN A CONCH SHELL: FLOWER SERIES– WATER COLOR

This is her one of the most well-known painting from flower series. In this subject seems simple and modest but portrayed beyond superficial simplicity. Deep poetic content is present in this painting and also lyrically warm attitude to the world. The composition, the choice of angle, dynamic rhythm provokes the feeling of liveliness and the connection of picture with life. The painting suggests spring and of eternal revival of life and it is beautifully symbolized in yellows and blues. It speaks of joy that artist feels and gives vivid feeling of life and its purpose.

EXHIBITIONS

1946: First prize for “The Dancer” at exhibition in Shimla.
1953: Received gold medal at the Silver Jubilee exhibit of the Indian Academy of Fine Arts at Amritsar, for her painting “Twin Sisters: Day and Night.”
1960-65: Exhibition of landscapes at Amritsar. Exhibitions at Poona, Bombay and Kolkata. The Poona exhibit included 150 Kangra Valley paintings. These include “Waterfall near Bharvana,” “Waterfall at Andretta,” and “Road Through Rice Fields.”

CONCLUSION

In contemporary Indian art various artists used watercolour as medium of their works. Artists of India have successfully incorporated this medium in the works of art. Phulan Rani is the most important Punjabi women artist of 20th century and give full justice to the medium incorporated. Phulan Rani beautifully incorporated this medium in her work and used them to convey the poetic charm in her work. That is why her work were often described as the poetic charm and poetry of sight. By studying her work giving hope for the brighter future of art in India.

REFERENCES