

**NALINI MALINI, MRINALINI MUKHERJEE, ARPITA SINGH, GIEVE PATEL, JAI
ZHAROTIA AND MADHVI PAREKH: GROTESQUE OUTLOOKS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the Indian contemporary artworks on various dimensions of grotesque. Grotesque is a term which originated a strange element, construe several branches like phantasm, erotica, burlesque, distortion, exaggeration, absurd, unique, and eerie like strange things. Most of the Indian artists have work on the same path, their artworks on various elements of grotesque. Aesthetic and psychological perception cannot be easily understood, because of their life hurdle, they have drawn on their canvases to make uniqueness in their self. They tried to develop the idea of grotesque on several stages of strangeness by using the intermingling bodies of different species into one, by using multi-limbs to look metamorphosis, anthropomorphizes, by using the absurd and strange materials, and by mystical, hybrids, sarcastic caricaturing, exaggerating, frightening, and absurd appearance. I am trying to convey all of them in the works of Nalini Malini, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Arpita Singh, Gieve Patel, Jai Zharotia and Madhvi Parekh, which represented a mystical stance to the people and an outlook of grotesque connection, familiar from the world of strange and perceives a unique gratification, but grotesque is the main aspect of their works.

KEYWORDS: *Contemporary Indian Artist, Grotesque, Multi-Limbs, Anthropomorphic, Strange and Absurd*

INTRODUCTION

We have a very long and rich heritage of Indian art in which most of the artist have to float on the concept of grotesque, by the used of the various type of mythology, traditional theme, tribal and folk art, social and political art, economical libration, feministic concepts, and caste discrimination. Grotesque, it is not treated as decorative elements of the various cultures but it is on strange which is not common to others. They tried to develop the idea of grotesque on several stages of strangeness by using the intermingling bodies of different species into one, by using multi-limbs to look metamorphosis, anthropomorphizes, by using the absurd and strange materials, and by mystical, hybrids, sarcastic caricaturing, exaggerating, frightening, and absurd appearance. From the 1980s onwards, Indian artists began their identity with a new style and introduced the new concept of grotesque elements in which some are famous as *Nalini Malini, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Arpita Singh, Gieve Patel, Jai Zharotia* and *Madhvi Parekh* have numerous contributions in art.

Nalini Malini (b. 1946), was considered the first feminist artists, who took the issues of women, especially about the times when she grew from her childhood to her puberty, which is developed by a quick brush stroke on her canvas by applying with the whitened wash, that had brought a documentary effect alongside dream fantasies. The grotesque elements can be noticed in her figures, which are joined to gather tubes like placenta of the Philippians tubes and can be seen in the works through her use of children literature like, Lewis Carrol's *Alice in Wonderland* and the characters like,

Cassandra, Sita, Medea myth etc., on the other hand, it is seen from the epic of the East and the West. According to Hadap Nitin, “*Nalini Malini has the path of self-discovery and the therio-morphic, therio-anthropic, therio-pteromorphic images appearing frequently in their works with deep complex significance*”.¹

The marvelous imagination in her works entitled: ‘*Medea Books and Paintings*’ (1991-1996), (Figure 1) ‘*Stories Retold*’ (2004) (Figure 2) is a reversed painting on Mylar, including Sita, Medea, Varaha, Mohini, Putana and other Goddesses mentioned in, ‘*Living in Alice Time*’ (2005-2006), (Figure 3) ‘*Splitting to the Other*’ (Figure 4), is a polyptych of fourteen-panel installation (2007), ‘*Listening to the Shades*’ (2008), (Figure 5) made of acrylic, ink and enamel reverse painting on acrylic sheet, ‘*Cassandra*’ (2009) (Figure 6) is a polyptych of thirty-panels work, and other works, including videos, installations, and theatre are her innumerable works. In her paintings, she portrayed bizarre things like intermingled bodies, which are scattered on the whole canvas, sometimes depicting distorted and sometimes exaggerated. She represented her sketches turned into figures from disparate mythological literacy and other traditions, in various postures like walking, sitting, jumping, floating and flying across a flat monochromatic background. Sometimes, she uses a grid structure or dots in her paintings which are represented as a Pop appeal. But this is an outset by the sense of the grotesque, in her paintings the human figures are depicted repulsive and sometimes bruised and battered as they agree their way, through what seems to be entailed, semen and various types of evil- looking creatures. On the other hand, the archetypal Hindu deities were portrayed with parts of the female body and were introduced by a quote from the sociologist *Veena Das*, discussed on the topic of women, violence and modern India. Sarcastically, *Veena Das* said that *Malini’s* installations are involved in many directions, which is stylistically united through her fundamental concern with paintings and drawings. In her project, work of shadow plays an important role, the movement of the shadow creates a feeling of carnivalesque that is marked often by sarcasm and satirical challenges to authority and the traditional social hierarchy and a sense of hybrid quality.² All these works illustrate the duality and depict the scene of war, destruction, and anxieties between man and woman, the scene of rape is shown sarcastically. She used dusty colors from a deep yellowish orange to dark red, which dominates the scene of both Indian soil and Mars terror, that is the combination of factors including soil, climate, and sunlight that gives were grapes them distinctive characters. In these panels, she described the different stages of creation and destruction, the examples are, babies floating through this wilderness, out of the womb, but still attached by umbilical cords to their mother. Even, someone attached to the floating brain, this is the grotesque creation that surrounded them and spread the dangers of separation.³

Mrinalini Mukherjee (1949- 2015), masterfully transformed her work into something strange and awful. Her sculptures are profoundly biomorphic, anthropomorphic, unabashedly organic and unpleasant, especially a knotted hemp rope as like she fashioned out these totemic creatures, epitomized as grotesque, yet powerful imaginary, yet benign and voluptuous.⁴ There are several examples of her works like: ‘*Water Fall*’ (1975), ‘*Sitting Deity*’ (1981), ‘*Devi*’ (1982), ‘*Pakhi*’ (1985), ‘*Adi Pushp*’ (1991), ‘*Pushp*’ (1993), ‘*Vanshree*’ (1994), *Palm Scapes* (2013), *Shivling* (2014), and others. All these imaginative sculptures are made of bronze, fiber, and hemp, reminiscent of the inspiration from the art of Indian temples and yakshas,⁵ and drawings on the organic. Her forms evoke association of lush herbage and dark, green forests, of a landscape that is both fruitful and fertile. These are the references of eroticism depicted in her phallic forms, that stand for the mysterious recesses and orifices in her sculptures embodied a highly sensuous grade. Her works on the sprouting genital organs in her celestial being represent the voluptuousness on an overdose of hormones.⁶

In the beginning of 1969, for the past two decades, Mukherjee started to do something new and different that usually involves risk, and used other materials for her anthropomorphic forms that were first made of clay and was later made of bronze, and then after bronzes and combined the terrible and the decorative, 'Earth Carriers' (Figure 7). In this, she presented a hacked torso depicting with blossoming breasts. In another, she used the recent bronze work, entitled: 'Palmscape', a series of 1, to 9' (2013- 2015) (Figure 8), made of wax cast and plant, that offer creature to move in one direction and then back again many times between the plant and the animal kingdom. Similarly, like an 'Amaltash', 'Sunflower', 'Date Palm' and 'Cactus', all portrayed the sensuous and the biomorphic transformation of the feminine features, but was covered with heated metal and offered a bursting efflorescence.⁷ According to Mrinalini Mukherjee, 'plants have their own sexuality', this effect can be ambiguous.⁸

Arpita Singh (b. 1937) the depiction of beauty in her work is described a sense of transformation of emotions of her childhood memories and the bizarre forms are pictured by the used of different things, such as toys, flowers, paper boats, airplanes, drowning men, clouds, newspapers, plump oranges, birds, animals, and other things are scattered on her canvases.⁹ Her drawings show how something can be made of an urban experiential map record of metaphors, myths, fantasies, realities, conscious stances, and subconscious utterances. Here, is a world where the beautiful has forged a truce with the ugly; this is a playground where the beauty and the bizarre go about participating in their games. This is a mirror, where the happiness of youth has metamorphosed into the melancholy of age. Her painting figures are like the personal journals, that her pages are filled with visual illustrations instead of the phrase, which is reflected in her heart-rending.¹⁰

Arpita Singh has a unique style of giving something her characters within the pictorial spaces which are often supported against a collage-like a background that breaks up by events, time graphs, emotions, generic patterns of dislocation, and struggled into existence. They are served on a palette of the subtle shade of oils, watercolor or sometimes a combination of different things, which stimulate a dreamlike atmosphere, giving an experience of hallucinating that is not really there.¹¹

She can be called a dialectician. She is well known for handling the inside and outside logic in her work and managing the space between the pictures. She knows how to introduce the painting, wondering the climate of violence which especially belong to the life incidents of her childhood memory, her psychological tendency of traveling down the colonial discourse with those who are seen in the period of partition, so, she gives expression in her paintings at the same situation of colonial biases aggression, depicted in such works are: 'The Egg Fry' (2007) (Figure 9), 'Buy Two, Get Two Free' (2007) (Figure 10), 'Alone and a Narangi Tree' (2008) (Figure 11), 'Evening Sky' (2010) (Figure 12), and others. These are excellent examples of her experiences by capturing the moments from her garden. She described the quality of dualism of grotesque in a very fantastical and bizarre manner, sometimes extravagant and sometimes the macabre, rarely divine and often demonic, indulging on the canvas.¹²

Artists are daring enough to show their skills in their works of visual language. They are great at analyzing their surroundings; the corrupted social system, and the politicians. These imaginations found in the work of **Gieve Patel** (1940). The important motifs in his works are grotesque.¹³ He used his violent imagination, carcasses, corpses, chopped hands and dead mammals. He is one, who belongs to the postcolonial period of the mid-1960s. He changed the route significantly and he would be carefully constructed the appearance in view of the street and also show the sad unreality of the rituals, recently he has practiced of several subaltern figures in his series work, 'Four Meditations on Old Age', (Figure

13-a, b, c, and d).¹⁴ Through his strange images, he portrays the deformed, mutilated and wound gesture, which explores lost the importance of social, humanitarian, and spiritual identity.

In a review of the works of Gieve Patel, *Ranjit Hoskote*, writes about, '*Images of Survival and Transcendence*', that Gieve Patel has organized the ironic autobiography dramatically in his work. He observed the life of every day, and molded it in a ludicrous composition of Fantasia, that is abounding the realities of the grotesque, in which gender inequality, labor, and alternative sexual preference, all these are depicted in a new spectrum of possibilities of an entire range of light. While, Geive Patel chosen to focus on the work, which is depicting a view of the streetscapes of daily life, as occupied by the important part of our society in various *avatars*, whether proletarian, as he showed in his 1970s series of railway posters. In another work he is depicting the vulnerable, wounded figures entitled, "*Gallery of Man*" series of 1980s, as he has shown the immensurable and destitution in a picture puzzle, as his dedication to victim age, featuring among others, a eunuch, a drowned woman, beggars, urban workers and a leper.¹⁵ (Cf. also. Hoskote, Ranjit. *In Gieve Patel's new exhibition, you can see the vulnerable figure on the sidelines of society*. Mar 11, 2017, 03: 30 PM).

In a journey of **Jai Zharotia** (b. 1945), appears painting depicting the fantastic features of the grotesque. His mystery is such an unusual depiction that his figures are distorted from the metaphysical world and bodies are intermingled with other species. His works can be summed up in terms of the communication between the speaking world and the non-speaking one. Jai Zharotia's works can be aptly described to be highly metaphorical. Dreamlike images with realistic looking figures having additional imagery figures that seem to appear talking to plants, animals, wall, moon, flowers, vases, puppet horses and checkered dresses etc., suggest narratives beyond the visible, (see Figure 14-a and b). His drawings have some folk and decorative elements, but they are very powerful in communicating with the viewer's mind to arise the curiosity about what communication might be going on between the various objects in his composition. Thus, his art celebrates mystery artfulness and the quality of being subtle; little signs at the corners of the canvas, throw open a window on the content of the painting.¹⁶ *A woman in red beckons the viewer away from a fantastic creature with a centaur's head and a chrysanthemum held in a human hand. Is she a voice of sanity in an unreal world? Or does she tempt only to deceive.*¹⁷

Jai Zharotia's paintings reveal a continuous flow of twin images; a male head in a silhouette and a vase like vegetative visage, a paper boat with a feminine face for a mast and a distorted puppet horse, a chequered dress with the moon hidden in its drapery and a flower on a stem. There is a suggestion of duality in all of Jai Zharotia's latest work. According to Professor of Thapar University, Punjab, Seema Bawa, "*the background of the Jai Zharotia's work are based on two principals, his work firstly appeared as animate or inanimate forms, and secondly as an anthropomorphic appearance. The distortion of the horse and the mask, are these leitmotifs in his paintings, which impose metaphors of man's search for truth, and the answer of the eternal query, which is raised by nature's mysteries. Contrastingly, the flowers and leaves are reflected the wisdom emanating from humankind and his painting's journey becomes a fantastical world, which is beyond the perceptible*".¹⁸ In his paintings, the figuration of the fantasy is more dominating than the idea. This is why the fanciful forms are placed sometimes in the air and sometimes on the edge of a rock which is often seen in his bizarre world. Yet his observations of the real world often transform into the unreal. These effects of transformation have been seen in most of his series work like, '*Mystery Series*' (1997),¹⁹ '*The Magic Lantern Series*' (1998), '*Dream Series*', '*Flights of Fantasy Series*', '*Gymnast Series*' and even the '*Luqman Ali 9*, (1982), all these are biomorphic and beastly forms, which are located in the realms of the imaginary.²⁰ His power of ability is to leave the commonplace

behind and find the unusual which is seen in the technique he employs, as well.

A Program of 'Artist in Residency' in 2009, which fortunately happened in the Department of Fine Arts of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, I had the opportunity to have a firsthand experience to see Zharotia at work. At that time I had discussed with him about the intermingled bodies in his painting, to which he said, "*I am eagerly devoted of Brahma the creator, seen in three-headed body while I am influenced by his supremacy which was not bound by any physical norms. Thus, I distort the form and blend together two or three bodies into one to transform into fantasy*".

Madhvi Parekh (b. 1942), the style of the grotesque in her paintings are like a childish figuration representing the hilarious and is disturbing in itself.²¹ She lends it a surreal, dreamlike quality of floating characters, her fantastical images and ultimate anthropomorphism, such as, building sprout heads, multi-arms, multi-legs and multi-faces of man and woman, two and three species entwined together, multi-heads birds and snakes, smiling face snakes, transparent bodies, heads, torso, and trees,²² represent the ambiguousness and bizarreness in figuration, such as, 'Christ', 'Goddess', 'Leh', 'Kalia Daman', 'Sun God in My Village'. These are the examples of development, which frequently penetrate from several other traditions, myths and cultures, and the process for further increments like, multiculturalism, globalization, and others occur.

There are several intermingling bodies of different species in her Gods and Goddesses like Kali, Durga, Nagas and others, but after that, she became more concerned about biblical themes, Christ as her leitmotif. The Seagull Foundation for the Arts organized an exhibition of Madhvi Parekh in which a series of reverse paintings on acrylic were displayed titled, *The Last Supper* (Figure 15), in which she depicted Christ in her painting that did not have any majesty and was the Sustainer of the World. Christ was depicted with his twelve apostles which gave the impression of overwhelming at first. Her figures are so thin and weird; bold lines are well defined and are her inspired from Indianness. In her Christ's series works, she refers to the parables, which was narrated by Christian missionaries in her childhood, and from then she influenced by it. She represented the story of Christ even in this very ordinary setting and depicted in her work their spirit, and created a village with fields full of flowers, scarecrows, skies with songbirds with anthropomorphic beasts of burden. She knows the distinction between the real and unreal life, which is sometimes dissolved enough as the imagination of celestial bodies appeared with the stars, suns, and flowers and fluttering angels.²³

CONCLUSIONS

Nalini Malini, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Arpita Singh, Gieve Patel, Jai Zharotia and Madhvi Parekh, all have their own unique identity. Most of the artists in India, as well as other countries of the world, have wanted his and her work will be appreciated extremely more and more, they all wanted to create new, unique and strange work by using different ideas, concepts and thought, this uniqueness inspired with the different mythology, or the thought of social concepts, or political ideas, whether they used of various mediums or techniques or not, they create more and more grotesque.

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APPENDIX



Figure 1: Nalini Malini, Medea Books, MedeaProjekt: Paintings, Installation, Books, Theater, Video, 1991-1996

Source: <http://www.nalinimalani.com/painting.htm>



Figure2: Nalini Malini, Stories Retold: Varaha, Reverse Paintings on Mylar. Water Colour, Acrylic, Enamel, 2004

Source: <http://www.nalinimalani.com/painting.htm>



Figure 3: Nalini Malini, Living in Alicetime, Reverse Paintings on Mylar, Watercolour, Acrylic, Enamel, 2005-06

Source: <http://www.nalinimalani.com/painting.htm>



Figure 4: Nalini Malini, *Splitting the Other*, Polytech of Fourteen Panels, Acrylic, Ink and Enamel Reverse Painting on Acrylic Sheet, 200 x 1400 cm, 2007

Source: <http://www.nalinimalani.com/painting.htm>

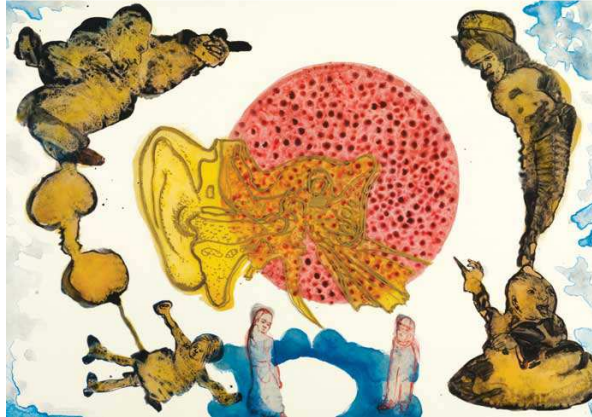


Figure 5: Nalini Malini, *Listening to the Shade*, 7, Acrylic, Ink and Enamel Reverse Painting on Acrylic Sheet, 2008

Source: <http://www.nalinimalani.com/painting.htm>



Figure 6: Nalini Malini, *Cassandra*, 30 Panel Polytych, Acrylic, Ink and Enamel Reverse Painting on Acrylic Sheet, 227.5 x 396cm, 2009

Source: <http://www.nalinimalani.com/painting.htm>



Figure 7: Mrinalini Mukherjee, Untitled (Earth Carriers) Bronze,
7½ x 5¼ x 2 in. and 6 7/8 x 2 x 2 in. Two Bronze Sculptures

Source: <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/meera-mukherjee-1923-1998-untitled-5693708-details.aspx>



Figure 8: Mrinalini Mukherjee, Palm Scape 1 to 9 Series, Bronze,
2013-2015 Courtesy Nature Morte, New Delhi



Figure 9: Arpita Singh, the Egg Fry, Water Colour on Canvas, 11 x 14.5 Inches, 2007

Source: <http://www.artnewsviews.com/view-article.php?article=beautiful-and-bizarre-art-of-arpita-singh&iid=17&articleid=382>



Figure 10: Arpita Singh, Buy One Get Two Free, Water Colour on Canvas, 30 x 22 Inches, 2007

Source:<http://www.artnewsnviews.com/view-article.php?article=beautiful-and-bizarre-art-of-arpita-singh&iid=17&articleid=382>

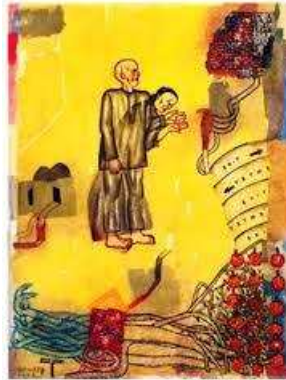


Figure 11: Arpita Singh, Alone and a Narangi Tree, Water Colour on Paper, 15 x 11 in, 2008

Source:<http://www.artnewsnviews.com/view-article.php?article=beautiful-and-bizarre-art-of-arpita-singh&iid=17&articleid=382>



Figure 12: Arpita Singh, Evening Sky, Oil on Canvas, 47 x 35 Inches, 2010

Source:<http://www.artnewsnviews.com/view-article.php?article=beautiful-and-bizarre-art-of-arpita-singh&iid=17&articleid=382>



Figure 13 a, b, c and d: Gieve Paatel, Four Meditations on Old Age, 24 x 18 inches, Oil on Canvas Board, 2014

Source: http://www.gallerychemould.com/artfairs/Art-Fairs-Miami-Beach-Basel-Chemould-Prescott-Road-2014/artfair_works/Four_Meditations_on_Old_Age291/



Figure 14 a and b: Jai Zharotia, Untitled, Oil on Canvas Pasted on Board, Each Measuring 51 x 39 in, Diptych, these are Two Individual Panels, Each Panel Consists of 12 Smaller Panels Individually Measuring 11.5 x 11.5 in. (29 x 29 cm); a) 1995 b) 1994

Source: <https://www.saffronart.com/auctions/PostWork.aspx?l=9254>



Figure 15: Madhvi Parekh, the Last Supper, Reverse Painting on Acrylic Sheet, 72 x 240 in., 2011

Source: <https://www.saffronart.com/ItemDetails.aspx?iid=38684&a=Madhvi%20%20Parekh&pt=2&eid=3647>

