near extinction unleashed by this voyage upon cultures and peoples in the vast continents beyond Europe, has acquired a more salient recognition than ever before during the last five hundred years. But this recognition has barely touched the grand premise of modern legitimacy.

The belief persists that the true significance of Columbus' voyage is to be grasped in its assertion of the urge to overcome narrow confines of space and consciousness. Human life untouched by the modern impulse is seen as forever stagnant in endless repetition: a world of dark fears and mean imagination in which human effort and awareness can never reach out beyond the immediate requirements of bare survival.

Eternal voyage is a metaphor that speaks in a very different language. Repetition subsists in this metaphor as the ineliminable and eternal return in the never still, ever unfolding cosmic rhythm. It posits a sense of the human presence that seeks to know limits that inhere in the human condition. Affirmation of such limits is not an expression of fatal resignation to a life which neither knows nor seeks to know anything of the world beyond its severely confined locale. Recognition of such limits arises in fact from a sense of worth and meaning that seeks in each fleeting moment, elements of a cosmic play of infinite reach. The uniquely human urge to explore and overcome is voiced in this metaphor as a profound and never concluded inward quest.

In sharp contrast, modern universality is premised upon the effectiveness of technological unification. The modern belief has been that mankind in progressively consolidating sovereign mastery over Nature, would create conditions for genuine universality. Perhaps the gravest irony of our times has been that the actual reality that this quest has brought forth is marked by not only the near extinction of immemorial cultures and diverse modes of living, but an ever more fragile ecology. And that constitutes the irreplaceable basis for human, as indeed, all other forms of life.

Modes of living and the sensibility towards which the metaphor of eternal voyage directs our attention, affirm universality upon a ground that abides far deeper than the reach of mere technological unification. Our belief is that the vision that lies at the heart of what could be termed adivasi, tribal and analogous cultures, has a profound relevance for the future of the entire human species. We would like to invoke that vision not merely as an acknowledgement of remorse for brutal inflictions by a callous modernity. We wish to affirm and celebrate in what has survived of that vision, the most precious and truly universal ground for mankind.

We invite you to participate in a search for ways to reinvoke and restore for mankind and all life, that abiding irreducible universality of which, modern technological unification is a flawed expression. We would like Eternal Voyage to become a celebrative meet and an affirmation of solidarity with the marginalised peoples and cultures all over the world. Our hope is that the meet would help to enlarge and deepen spaces of sensitivity for what survives of the timeless human link with life upon our earth.

REVIEW

Form and Meaning

B K Roy Burman


This remarkable book, in addition to providing 12 colour plates and 336 black and white plates includes an extremely perceptive text on the historical ecology and cultural milieu of tribal art of Madhya Pradesh. It also speaks of several myths and legends: the whispers of the simple souls which express themselves in various art forms.

The catalogue includes paintings, craft specimens in bronze, aluminium, iron, other metals, cotton textile, terracotta, stone and decorative relief. Birds, animals and stylised human motifs predominate. Plant motifs and geometric designs occur to a comparatively lesser extent. It is interesting that while a good number of paintings and craft objects relate to ritual purposes, the overwhelming majority of them have other utilitarian or decorative value.

Tribal man in this collection is not overwhelmed by the supernatural. What the collection reveals is the creative elan of communities to which
the artists and craftsmen belong, bursting through the corridor of time and bringing in sharp focus unsuspected spaces. Tribals are not a submerged archipelago. As mentioned by Swaminathan, in the very beginning of the century Picasso 'questioned' the European legacy, and the result was as shattering as spectacular. Tribal art from Africa and Oceania invaded the modern scene and the confrontation led to remarkable and lasting changes in the outlook of the 'modern' artist. Far from being 'curio objects, tribal art works became powerful presences, and in a sense shook the very foundations of the Western art movement'.

In India, analysts of Rabindra Nath Tagore's creative genius point out the contrast between the harmonious melody of his poems and the quest for transcendence as manifested in his paintings of the later period through sharp confrontations with his surroundings. Many ascribe this to the influence of Inca and other indigenous art forms he came across during his visit to Latin America.

Turning back to the text under review, an anthropologist would feel thankful that Swaminathan has thoughtfully provided relevant quotations from William Robin, Boas and Verrier Elwin. William Robin in his essay "Modernist Primitivism" says, "The vestiges of a discredited evolutionary myth still live in the recesses of our psyche. The vanguard modernists told us decades ago that the tribal people produced an art that often distilled great complexity into seemingly simple solutions. We should not therefore be surprised that anthropology has revealed a comparable complexity in their cultures. I hope that at least in so far as it pertains to works of the human spirit, the evolutionary prejudice is clearly absurd".

Franz Boas pointed out in 1927 that there was no such thing as a 'primitive mind' or a 'magical' or 'prelogical' way of thinking. "We have seen that in the arts of primitive people two elements may be distinguished, a purely formal one in which engagement is based on form alone, and another one in which the form is filled with meaning. In the latter case the significance creates an enhanced aesthetic value, on account of the associative connections of the art product or of the artistic act. Since these forms are significant they must be representative, not necessarily representative of tangible objects, but sometimes of more or less abstract idea'. Swaminathan however, differs with Boas about the last part of his statement.

As Swaminathan puts it "a work of art, if treated as a means of communication, either of ideas or of experiences other than those generated by itself, ceases to be and in fact should cease to be a work of art". "The face of art is somewhat like that of the sun. It does not communicate but gives." The cave-dwellers made "drawings of the hunt for magical purposes" and a "successful hunt suggesting the drawing" and the drawing in its turn "presaging a successful hunt". Swaminathan's reading of the meaning and function of such drawings is: "the meaning being the hunt and the function being magical". But what about the magic of the drawing itself, the drawing 'as such'? Here is a point worth in-depth examination, not only by art-critics but more so, by students of culture. Swaminathan however does not foreclose the possibility of an authentic work of art embodying other meanings and significances apart from the purely formal, as long as the relevance of the latter is not made contingent on the former. He rightly observes that the keys to their understanding have to be found in the culture and environments in which they are created. But then according to Levi-Stauss, as quoted in the text, the question which ought to plague us is: can knowledge of social structure provide a reading that can lead to an anticipation and visualisation of such marvels as the kwakiute masks?

It is needless to say that most of the anthropologists of the present generation have not addressed themselves to this scintillating question. But in the present volume, an artist-thinker has ventured in this field through extremely imaginative presentations: "Time: The Mythological Redemption", "Time: The Wings of Art" and "Art and the Adivasi". Here Swaminathan has not treated time only as a chronological cognitive frame. Unlike Evans Pritchard, he has also not displayed ethnocentric valuation of rationality in terms of perception of Time as an absolute quantifiable unit. What Swaminathan has tried to do is to plunge into the springs of luminous universals. And he has tried to do it by lovingly unravelling the transcended surplus in the specific myths and specific material forms of specific peoples. The key to the knowing the locus of Perceiving Fingers lies in the restless pursuit of the universals inherent in the human species. This is what anthropology is after, and this is what the illustrations and the text here remind us about.