



G. L. Narayan – The Ganesha man

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Abstract: G. L. Narayan, a gold medallist from Sir J. J. School of Arts is an artist of international prominence. He worked majorly as a sculptor and then later in his life he started to paint and authored a book as well. Narayan is a born artist with a natural feel for forms. His skills grew and developed over a span of 60 years of his experience in this field. He travelled widely for his work, which helped and enabled him to expand his expression with usage of diverse materials. Even as on date Narayan does several solo exhibitions in different parts of country and abroad. This paper focuses on diverting art critics and art lovers gaze on his entire oeuvre of work, granting access to comprehend his multi-talented genius.

Keywords: G. L. Narayan, J. J. School of Arts, artist, Sculptor.

Introduction:

Early life- Born in 1934 at Jeypore, a small town near the borders of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh in Koraput district. **Giduturi Lakshmi Narayan's** father was Giduturi Parvatamma and mother's name was Veerabhadrayya. Since his young days Narayan showed his propensity towards art. As a child, clay always fascinated Narayan. When in school, he used to love to go to the banks of a river, and make figures out of clay. One day when Narayan was playing with fellow boys by the riverside, the local king of Jeypore Sir Vikram Dev Verma was passing by and as he stumbles across little boy's proficiency at moulding clay, he was so flabbergasted that he decided to bequeath his benefaction to the young artist. Narayan was made apprentice under the tutelage of the court artist Simhadri Maharana to learn the essentials of these art forms. Later Narayan was bestowed with Orissa government scholarship, which enabled him to come to Mumbai and pursue his dreams.

Technical Education:

In 1958, at the age of 24 Narayan came to Mumbai and joined one of the country's most prestigious art institution called Sir J.J. School of Arts. After coming here, his life completely transformed. He recalls this phase as turning point of his life. Responsive atmosphere along with devoted work culture of this great institute had an everlasting impact on Narayan's pristine mind. During this phase he had to do a lot of odd jobs at the film studios to fund his stay in Mumbai. Soon his efforts started getting acknowledged in form of rewards. In 1959 he was bestowed with a bronze medal for his work "LIFE STUDY" in modelling. Again in 1961, he was given a gold medal for his work titled "LABOURERS". There was no looking back for Narayan after he completed and obtained his diploma in 1962. By this time, he had mastered bronze casting and even won several prizes for the same. However, Narayan was facing problems with carving that time. Carving is a specialised skill for which one has to go to a professional or hereditary carvers and work under them. Soon Narayan

mastered skills of wood and marble carving too. Later in his life this skill came in very handy to him.

Works and exhibitions:

In 1962, he completed his formal education and training at J. J. School. In the same year he held his first solo show in Delhi, which was inaugurated by Dr. Zakir Husain. This exhibition was greatly acclaimed by art fraternity for his work on variety of mediums. "His mode of expression is the abstraction seeking to interpret the duality and transform it through his own unique sensibility. In fact, he is deeply involved with the principle of duality." (Clerk, 1979)¹

In 1964 he set up his own studio in Bombay. Subsequently he started working in terracotta as well. In next couple of years, he held number of exhibitions in Delhi and Mumbai. This was the phase when his themes began to be based on his religious conviction. This is manifested in almost all of his works. According to him this ageless material called Earth is most appropriate to present indigenous regional themes. In 1966 he had another terracotta sculptures exhibition at Delhi, theme was again indigenous. These art works received lot of appreciation from Dr. M. S. Randhawa, a well-known art connoisseur of this era. Three of Narayan's works were even acquired by Randhawa, for newly built Chandigarh Museum and Art gallery's upcoming sculpture section.² These works were-

1-Shiva Parvathi



2- Goddess of Peace



3-The Bride



MEDIUMS:

When we look back on Narayan's entire oeuvre of work, one thing can be precisely apprehended and that is versatility. The range of materials he can work with is quiet vast. He can cast works in plaster and bronze and can easily make sculptures out of metal and its scrape. In the seventies he majorly worked in scrap metals.

He can intricately carve in wood and marble too. Working with concrete and painting with oils adds another feather in his cap. Succinct idea about his work can be apprehended from images below-³



Technique: Usually Narayan would commence by producing an average sized forms or figures in wood, marble or will cast it in bronze. Subsequently, after finalising the initial form he would give shape to his final full size art work. He masters the skill of colossal dimensional mural executions on the walls of sumptuous houses or factories. Narayan has done several commission works for many eminent industrialists and decorated their magnificent homes and offices with his art works.

Narayan has done many series in marble sculptures, marble being his most trusted medium.

Themes:

Over the years Narayan has worked on number of subjects and themes. "His basic theme is the eternal duality man and women, *purusha* and *prakriti* with Hindu Mythology as the source of inspiration (Shiva and Parvati, Linga and yoni)." (Clerk, 1979)¹

Narayan's entire series on erotic figures needs a special mention. He undertook profound studies on western artists, Hindu mythology and Tantra art. This was articulately manifested in sensuousness of his erotic marble carvings.

E.g. "The Kiss" is based on Rodin's masterpiece



Womanhood is another favourite subject of Narayan and he has extensively worked on it. According to him “The body of the woman presents infinite possibilities for playing with the mass and space, with contours, with analogies related to highs and lows of the earth. But it certainly transcends all these physical revelation”.⁴ The Virgin, mother and child, along with indefinite universe are few the other themes that Narayan has extensively worked on.

He understands the importance of meditation, according to him it’s a step which comes before taking first creative action. Therefore, before initiating his works on religious themes, he steeped in intricate study of Hindu Shastra’s and Tantric cult. As he devoted many years in the study of Indian art and traditional sculptures, he began to drive gratification in study of this prodigious tradition. The use of mythological symbols fascinated him ever since. Hence to understand Narayan’s art completely, one needs to understand his reference to religion first. He particularly studied the various forms of Ganesha (Hindu god of prosperity) with great profoundness. This abets him to intricately carve forms of the idol, in and out in a sophisticated manner. His approach towards his idols is such that he amalgamates art and religion, bestowing on his viewer a unique state of bliss. It is because of this characteristic of his, that he is popularly recognised as “The Ganesha man”⁵.

List of G.L. Narayan’s exhibitions

	YEAR	MEDIUM	PLACE
1.	1961	Variety of mediums	Mumbai
2.	1962	Variety of mediums (1 st one man show, inaugurated by late Dr. Zakir Husain)	New Delhi
3.	1963	Various mediums (2 nd one man show of sculptures)	Mumbai
4.	1965	Terracotta	Jahangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
5.	1966	Terracotta	New Delhi
6.	1969	Metal Scrap (4 th solo show of sculpture)	Mumbai
7.	1971	Wood	Mumbai
8.	1973	Marble	Mumbai
9.	1975	Bronze	Mumbai
10.	1978	Marble	Mumbai
11.	1980	Marble	Mumbai
12.	1982	“Two Decades A Quest in Sculptures” exhibition; Various mediums	Jahangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
13.	1984	Marble	Mumbai
14.	1985	Exhibition of paintings and sculptures in Indian style Terracotta’s	University of Kentucky, Lexington, USA
15.	1986	Terracotta	Jahangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
16.	1987	Marble	Mumbai
17.	1989	Bronze	Mumbai
18.	1991	Marble	Mumbai
19.	1992	1 st Ganesha show in marble	Y.B.Chavan Art Gallery, Mumbai
20.	1993	2 nd Ganesha show in Marble	Y.B.Chavan Art Gallery, Mumbai
21.	1995	Women in marble Marble	Jahangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
22.	1996	Marble	New Delhi
23.	1998	40 Years Retrospective Exhibition of Sculptures, various mediums	Mumbai

Murals are important public monuments that he has created. The memorial of an immortal playback singer Mukesh, made by him was erected at the junction of Cumballa Hill and Nepean sea Road, was especially notable for the facial fidelity in bronze. His portraiture skills are well perceived in the way he executes them. This is clearly visible in the bronze bust of Marlyn Monroe commissioned by one of his Japanese client. The former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, acquired a piece from his works for the Indian Embassy in Cyprus. In 2003 he was even presented with the TANA (Telugu Association of North America) Award for his life-time achievements in sculpture in San Jose, USA. In 2010 he carved a huge marble Ganesha which was almost five feet and eight inches tall, weighing over seven tonnes. This idol has Omkar carved on his stomach, which represents that the lord is the saviour of the earth and its beings. Narayan used to go to Jaipur for carving this idol and it took him around six months for completing this master piece.

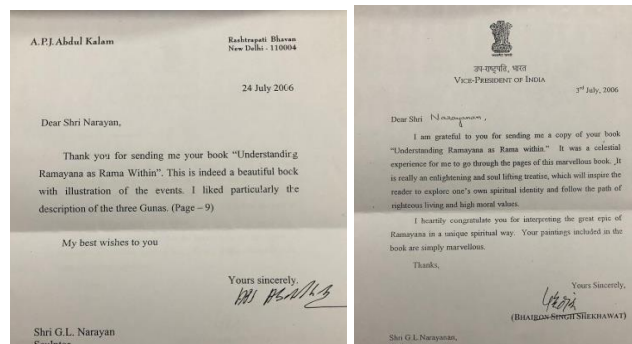
COMMISSIONED WORKS:

	YEAR	ART WORK	PLACE
1.	1964	Bronze statue	Andhra University, Vishakpatnam
2.	1965	Two sets of copper strip murals 18'*6'	Ravinder Bharati, Hyderabad
3.	1968	Concrete statue	New India Assurance co., Mumbai
4.	1970	Iron rods mural 15'*8'	SKF Ball Bearing co., Pune
5.	1971	Refractory products mural 12'*8'	Mahavir refractories, Mumbai
6.	1972	Coloured concrete mural with water falling 16'*8'	P.C. Jain, Mumbai
7.	1973	Mural with wood, metal and sand 8'*4'	Ashok Ruia , Mumbai
8.	1974	Relief work in plaster of Paris	P.D. Aswani, Mumbai
9.	1975	Terracotta and concrete mural 8'*6'	Bajaj Bhavan, Mumbai
10.	1976	Oils on hard board	Union bank of India head office, Mumbai
11.	1978	Concrete mural 8'*4'	Boots Factory, Ahmednagar
12.	1978	Relief in plaster of Paris and paint 20'*6'	Western Naval Command Mess, Mumbai
13.	1980	Black cement mural 14'*7.5'	Boots Factory, Mumbai
14.	1986	Sculpture, 7' Unknown soldier	Navy Memorial, Vishakpatnam
15.	1988	Concrete statue, 16'*10'	Memorial to Mukesh, Mumbai
16.	1989	Bronze statue, 6'	Raj Kapoor, Mumbai
17.	1990	Concrete mural 20'*12'	Boots Factory, Jejuri
18.	1992	Bronze bust, Shreyans Prasad Jain 2.5'	Jain Family
19.	1993	Bronze bust, Marlyn Monroe, Elvis Presley 2.5'*2'	Toman, Japan
20.	1995	Coloured concrete mural for family maternity home	Dr. Faram Irani, Mumbai
21.	1996	Coloured concrete mural 6'*18'	Knoll Factory, Goa
22.	2010	Marble Ganesha 5ft .8"tall; 7 tonnes in weight	Mukesh Ambani, Altamount Road, Mumbai



Author and a Painter:

After bequeathing more than fifty years to sculptures, Narayan had inclination to divulge his perceptive philosophy of religion, human existence as well as cosmos in form of a pictorial presentation in a book titled “**UNDERSTANDING Ramayana as Rama Within**”. This book is an endeavour to ordain The Ramayana using the form – both the physical and the metaphysical ones as the key leitmotif. “With Ravana representing the ego, Laksmana the body, Sita the mind, and Ram the soul, the book traces the spiritual journey from the outward to the inward. It speaks of the divinity that is man. ‘Understanding Ramayana as Rama within’ begins with Rama representing the soul, Sita the mind, Laksmana the body, Hanuman the Prana Vayu and Ravana the procreative energy or the ego. Rama is the soul within that gives meaning to existence. The quest for spirituality means moving from the outward to the inward”⁶. With vibrant paintings and colour plates, the book is as much a visual treat as it is an intellectual delight. Especially his unique explanation of three guans namely Sattva guna, Rajau Guna and Tamau Guna needs separate mention. This book is compiled embracing around twenty-five paintings by Narayana. Published in 2006 this book got highly acclaimed by dignitaries, such as A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat.⁷



His paintings reflect a sense of rhythm combined with delicacy and creative imagination. The significant feature of these paintings is the combination of vibrant and bold colour scheme coalesced with creative expression.

Conclusion:

In the end it could be rightly summed up that art of sculpture came naturally to Narayan. As an artist he is deeply connected to his roots and constantly derives inspiration from them. Yet he loves to persistently work with prevailing modern means. Therefore, his works, can be classified as a synthesis between the two trends, the traditional and the contemporary. Narayan currently lives and works in Pune. He is indeed a complete world in himself and would always be the guiding light for many artists.

References:

1. S.I.Clerk, “*Lalit Kala Contemporary*, No.28, Sept. 1979, pg 47.
2. Images courtesy Chandigarh Museum and Art Gallery.
3. Images courtesy G.L.Narayan.
4. Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni “*Women in Marble*”, Bombay.
5. As told by artist himself.
6. G.L.Narayan, “*UNDERSTANDING Ramayana as Rama Within*”, Vakil Publication, Mumbai,2006.
7. Letters Courtesy by G.L.Narayan.