

## Bhupen Khakhar: An Artist of Common Man

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### Abstract

Bhupen Khakhar was an icon of Indian contemporary artist. despite being a chartered accountant he decided to dedicate his whole life for the sake of art. Through hard work with and a good guidance of Kala Guru Lang hammer he brought his works, up to the standard of Akbar Padamsee, S. H.Raza, Ramkumar and Samant's work. Believer of simplicity even did not believe in pomp and show affairs in the art exhibitions. Bhupen Khakhar was an eccentric genius and an enigmatic painter who had drawn a lot of attention from art critic for embarrassing vulgar subject through which he carved a niche and much appreciated in abroad. Great admirer of Paris based artist Henri Rousseau and English Pop artist David Hockney Bhupen Khakhar contributed lot to the contemporary art of India and would be remembered for his evolved series of paintings on common man in which he expressed genre very brilliantly, and given a new dimensions to the pictorial scenario which will always show a new direction to the coming generations.

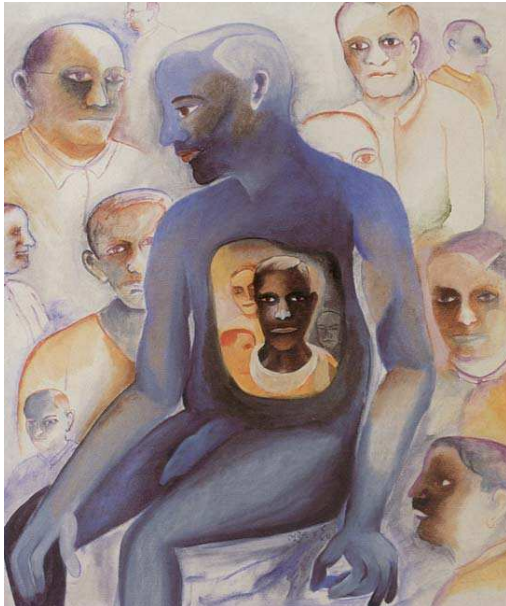


Bhupen Khakhar was born in Bombay in the year 1934. His drunkard father died when he was just four years old. Anyhow the mother brought up the family almost single handed, though the husband of his eldest sister has given the jobs to the elder ones in his small factory, thus the family became financially little strong and gradually increased their living stander until reached up to higher middle class. Though in later life Bhupen Khakhar had disposed of his material craves. He was youngest in the family and grew up docile under the instructions of elders. Before opted art as full time career, he was chartered accounted in a business house at the outskirts of Baroda city where he mixed with every one friendly, no matter whether he is a boss or the

peon of the firm. In fact he always preferred ordinary people in his life and made them the subject-matter of his paintings. During his adolescence he was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and wanted to become a writer, account of this he wrote many short stories on the subject of common people. At the later part of his studies Bhupen Khakhar switched his loyalty from writing to painting, after completing his B. A. in Economics he wanted to join J J School of Art, Mumbai but family has rejected the idea because mother wanted him to become a great scholar. As per mother wish, he topped the B.Com and did

auditing and given more exams, after ten years of practice experience, he became a qualified chartered accountant.

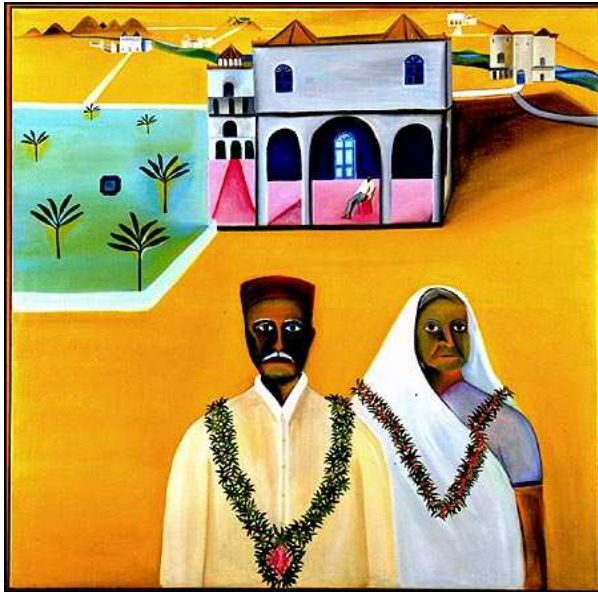
In 1953 he passed the primary Intermediate art examination in III grade from the Nutan Kala Niketan where he studied art as a part time during his college years. Later he joined



the evening classes in J J School of Art and produced many perfect works that brought him a lot of confidence. Through the work of Lang hammer and Pradumna Tana, Bhupen became a secret admirer of Akbar Padamsee, S H Raza, Ramkumar and Samant's work. Despite the purpose was to become full-fledged painter he joined a master degree in art criticism because he did not want to start from the beginning in the painting course. In the year 1963 while in Baroda, he met English Pop artist Jim Dona van who told him how Pop artist had thrown the conventions of the previous generation. Following his words Bhupen started to avoid the Indian version of the school of Paris, to which his seniors were affiliated. On the other hand Bhupen began to roam the streets of Baroda and Bombay in

search of new dimensions so that he could create his own individual style. Within a year he found to create something different, through which it was clear that Bhupen is going to be an important artist in the Indian art milieu. In 1965, he held first solo show for which he painted every day for few hours and, took at least two months to complete a painting. He did not believe in pomp and show affairs in the art exhibitions to sell his work even not preferred to inaugurate the show by the celebrities rather he liked to invite a very common man to inaugurate the show because he thought a common man is more relevant to his paintings as a subject-matter rather than a French Ambassador.

Bhupen Khakhar was an eccentric genius and an enigmatic painter who had drawn a lot of attention from art critic as well as art buyer who used to say him home-made Pop artist. But at the same he started to paint some embarrassing vulgar subject which was no longer palatable in Indian environment, moreover His success continued as he went abroad and was invited to teach at the Royal College of Art were his so called ugly work was much appreciated. In fact his work particularly belongs urban milieu which is hybrid by circumstance and capable of making outlandish visual combinations. Bhupen had introduced a specific forms with Vulgarly, the forms which he used belongs neither to the peasant nor to the cultivated bourgeois, but to the vender *Panwallas*, clerk and shopkeeper, indeed he was the first artist to question about the elitism of modern art in India. Smitten by miniature paintings and the use gold in Raja Ravi Varma's work, he opted against the cultured elite and depicted in favour of the common man of the Indian cities who did not have any claim to the culture, that is why the subject of his paintings has slowly shifted from Pop motifs to the common people with whom he himself associated.



Initially Bhupen executed work in collage form in which he applied cut out of oleograph prints of god, goddesses, architectures etc. and painted it over and around it, sometime drip the paints all over his collage. Regarding these work he proved his sense of design and technical skill. After finishing this kind of a lot, Bhupen concentrated on city site scenes based on Indian miniature and folk paintings that were more imaginative connections rather than pictorial. During this period, he treated genre images as well as sacred scenes on flat two dimensional surfaces depicted in a much arranged manner

but in bright colours showed his maturity in space division. When Bhupen Khakhar had started to take interest perspective painting, he began to look at all its indigenous versions, and cleverly hybridized it with the subjects of his common man. Fit to that the paintings like 'View from the Teashop' and 'Factory strike' are appropriate.

Bhupen Khakhar was great admirer of Paris based artist Henri Rousseau the well known for his exotic pictures had left his job as a customs office clerk for sake of art, Bhupen also on the same path and picked indigenous varieties of naïve art from Rousseau. Apart from Henri Rousseau Bhupen was also very much close to English Pop artist David Hockney who was almost an exact contemporary of Bhupen Khakhar and was very akin in respect of personalized details, humorous tricks, simplicity and draftsmanship, though the draftsmanship in Bhupen's works was not as perfect as in the work of David Hockney. In fact he resorted to popular idioms of expression where colour compensates for the faculty delineation, and where crudeness was part of proposition. The ambience of his pictures was deliberately murky, sometimes even sordid. In the last phase Bhupen has painted a class of people who do not usually appear on the surface. He painted them in a mode as grossly banal as their own life style. His *shaily*, a cross between the exquisite miniatures and the oleographs, he managed to upset not only our taste, but also our nicely ordered feelings. He corners us by making the vulgar appear so vulnerable, and without being consciously political, he shows up our prissy notions of culture for what they worth.

At last to conclude I say that Bhupen Khakhar is well known artist and would be remembered for his evolved series of paintings on common man in which he expressed genre very brilliantly, and given a new dimensions to the pictorial scenario. In fact he represents the nature and feelings in a unique way that no artist has ever depicted, Bhupen has established himself one of the great Indian contemporary painters and contributed a lot in the field of Indian art, which will always show a new direction to the coming generations.

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