

## **Tara Sabharwal**

### **An emotional look at radical feminism**

The artist's images function a feminine context and undercut the hollow ideals of home and marriage a patriarchal society, writes Suneet Chopra from Delhi.

TARA SABHARWAL, WHO recently exhibited her works at the Art Heritage Gallery in the Capital, is an artist who deserves more attention than she has received so far. This powerful artist graduated from Baroda, went on to do her masters at the Royal College of Art in London and is now working in New York.

What stands out about her paintings is that they are relatively untouched by the nostalgia that is reflected in much of the work of our NRI artists. Neither the idealistic vision of a lost home, nor a blind integrationist attitude dominate her work.

This does not mean that she is immune to the influence of India or of the West but it is a point in her favour that she is overwhelmed by neither. One can see the figurative imagery in her work that has been used quite often by a number of our contemporary artists. These are the conical shapes one comes across in the works of certain artists from Kerala, like Abhimanue. Tara also uses the bird-woman and the man beast association and forms, like the boat and the mask. But all these images are executed in a sophisticated manner that lends them a universal appeal.

These familiar images also function in a feminine context far removed from that of a strongly patriarchal society. This is evident in the dry-point etching titled Companions, where the shy sari-clad figure seems to be entering a world of make-believe, with a defeated patriarchal ghost-like figure in the background. This is perhaps her most strident feminist work.

She also uses familiar imagery in Puppets where she evokes the ambience of domestic drudgery. In another lithograph, Escape, we see a juxtaposition of the image of a woman and a doll.

It is remarkable how Tara keeps pace with India and its art despite living abroad. Her NRI status has not affected her work which may be safely seen as part of our mainstream contemporary expression. And it is interesting how she is able to see through the hollow ideals of home and marriage in a patriarchal society and how she undercuts the innocent manner in which the nesting instinct is inculcated in the young girls through the toys they are made to play with. Today we have a number of conscious women who are developing a radical expression in art and Tara is one of them.

However, what is important about her work, and especially her etchings, is that it is extremely well executed. Etchings can be smudgy and often stiff, but Tara manages to; steer clear of both these extremes, using her capacity to draw as the basis of a supple and original imagery. The ease with which her work is executed

shows her control over the technique without which no amount of radical posturing would have been successful.

Also, she does not fall into the; trap of using her technical skills to create decorative works. The sincerity of her approach is evident in the powerful expressions and emotions her figures have. It is through the nuances of feeling on the visages of her figures that she is able to communicate the reality of her message.

Here she is very different from the contemporary school of art where the feline gaze of predatory ritual figures is used to catch attention in an extremely conventional manner.

Her works are based on a far more complex network of expressions that communicates the emotions she hopes to evoke. However, while her work is evocative, it is a far cry from our traditional rasa based an. The palette of emotions in each work is very subtle and her originality lies in defying easy classification. Her evolution will be something to look forward to.