

by Madan Gopal Singh

Libido and The Elemental Sign

The earth in observance of the nymphs buried them all, preserving in them still their music, and they by an everlasting sentence and decree of the muses breathe out a voice.

–Longus, Daphnis and Chloe

It is the narrative of a libido that encounters, beyond he recognized law and the recognizable meaning., the sensation without sense of the free elements, light that does not elucidate or clarify, wind-intoned musicality without a text, sun that fecundates an inhuman progeny in an orphan libido.

–Alphonso Lingis, Deleuze on a Deserted Island

I wonder if, in some way, it would be possible to trace the shifts in Ranbir Kaleka's work within the veiled image of his own 'going away'. One could perhaps begin with a real biographical map. In the last twenty years of his life, a lot of movement has occurred: from his early days as an art student at Chandigarh and Patiala, to his brief stint as an art teacher at Delhi, to his finally real and imagined cities appear as the sites of a faded memory, however eschews a simple rhetoric of journeys.

These sites disengage themselves from the sites of dialogic consumption where the nomadic drive reportedly takes off; likewise, they seem to serve bonds of monologic interiority with an onadic drive. These dismantle the certitude of 'home'. Here, the top distends as a grand imaginary even as a 'homeless' breath fills the tent with a magical image... The map, thus, defies the line of its own movement and disappears beneath the veil of suffusion. This map can only be overseen - as perhaps in an act of oversight.

The image of 'going away' begins to appear more and more like a balladic turning, a poetic shift, a caesura as it were. This is not a visible, continuous image of transference. Here the stories finally separate from the figures in which they could have hoped to find a home. The figures are over-valourised in their fluidity and pose, and deny themselves the privilege of subjectivity even as they become suffused as raw, pre-narrative instincts. One walks through the liminal threshold of the libidinal being. The erotica, here, is non-definitive, even non-descriptive. One can think of very few, hardly any, examples in our tradition where the erotica aspires towards an elemental sign as it does here. Against the narrative-argument, against its orality and logic, the space of the carnivalesque opens up like a spell, like so many simultaneities. It is as if a tap has been laid to lead us astray. One stumbles upon a centre which is held in place, paradoxically, by the arrangement around it. The arrangement itself is disquietingly dispersed by the dance of the libido caught in the middle. The biographical map now unfolds as the very line of the erogenous being. Never was the image mounted on the mystical pad with such mercurial suffusion.



Family-II 1993
91.5 x 122 cm
36 x 48 inches
oil on canvas

The suffused sign is thus rewritten as the elemental/ecological sign. Space is no longer territory, time no longer a phase. This image, having once risen from a cavernous, sub-terranean instinct and having meandered its way through the slow and staggered rhythm of under water movements, has now recovered a pre-narrative affinity within the libidinal memory.