

## KUMAR GALLERY

THE WEEK

### Sohan Qadri, master of tantric art

Sohan Qadri was initiated into Tantric Buddhism at the young age of 16; he practiced it to the end of his life, seeking answers through painting. In his village in rural Punjab he had come under the influence of a Sufi master, and at that point Sohan Singh changed his name to Sohan Qadri. Both these influences changed his life forever. He travelled for some years in the Himalayas, and then came back to hold his first exhibition in Chandigarh in 1964 when he was encouraged to paint by Dr Mulk Raj Anand. He exhibited his work in Zurich and finally settled in Copenhagen to teach Visual Meditation.

At the Kumar Gallery, a painting from 1973 is perhaps the key to understanding his early work, with a Shiva linga rising with a serpent entwined around within the orbit of a red circle. Equally powerful is the vertical rising of the Kundalini, a fierce red penetrating through deep purple to send out vibrations of energy in a work dated 1975. Worked in thick impasto, the colours are fierce contrasts, relating directly to Tantra. Virendra Kumar first met Qadri in 1963, when writing his book on Tantra.

In 2000 there was a total transformation in Qadri's work, when his images transcend explicit manifestation of sexual energies, and become oceans of colour in purple or sea green, rising vertically or expanding horizontally to awaken our inner consciousness. His mastery of colour tones is unrivaled, and rarely does he use more than the subtle tones of one colour, graduating from light to dark deep purple or blues or yellows. Each colour holds out a different mood, and meanings.

While in Los Angeles in 1971 Sohan Qadri began writing his first poems on the Dot. First published in 1988 by the Writers Workshop in Calcutta, these hold out a key to his philosophy, and indeed to his work.

*I am a dot on the tip of the Creator's pen.  
I am a dot in the sound unstruck.  
I am a dot of awareness in the awakened.*

The Dot and the Dots glean from the elusive wisdom of the Gnostics where the world of meaning is deliberately confounded, and condensed into minimal words with multiple meanings. But why does Qadri call it the Dot when other terms exist such as 'bindu' and 'surya' and 'seed' are used by contemporary artists returning to Tantric symbols?

"I could have used the word Bindu but I wanted to avoid religious connotations; and so I called it the dot. The organised religion of the Sampradaya is a platform creating conflict, which I do not appreciate," he had said.

The dot offers endless possibilities of manifestation. The dot is one and it is the many. It offers the still point of focus for meditation, and also for expansion into the infinity of the universe and Time. As a seed it represents the ova and the sperm; but it also represents the sun and stars in the universe. In its multiple meanings it mirrors the profane and the profound. The dot is the beginning of all existence.