Political Ideas Conveyed Through Art During Nineteenth Century

Art criticism was developed in the early nineteenth century. Many artists during that period use their artworks to convey profound political messages. The great well renowned leaders of that period were described through this kind of art. Whether their ways were harsh, selfish or kind to run the kingdom, everything was conveyed in the form of art through great well known artists like Jacques Louis David, Gustave Courbet and Honore Daumier.

Jacques Louis David was born during the period which coincide with many profound political, social and aesthetic changes in France. That could be one of the reason for his deep message conveyed through his artworks. In similar manner, Honore Daumier initialized by sketching cartoons of political leaders which shows the cruel sarcasm tone and an intense message of political ideas during that period (Chu 239). The arts which I will be discussing are by Jacques Louis David, The oath of the Horatii and The Lictors Returning to Brutus the bodies of his sons for burial and by Honore Daumier, Gargantua and Rue Transnonain. All these four arts includes a political message of that particular period.

David's efforts in his The Oath of the Horatii not only made him known in his field but he also received his first royal commission for this painting depicting a subject of roman history (Chu, 55). This painting established a turning point in his life through which he gained lasting and international fame. The story of the huge sacrifice for one's country proved the patriotism among the Romans. Famous criticists provide positive feedback and some said that "in the history of art we read of no painting that might have awakened more uproar upon its appearance than this one" (Chu, 56).

It was inspired by an event in which the rigid roman brothers have made a way to prove their love for the state (Chua 110). The story told behind this was that during the seventeenth century a border dispute occurred among Rome and Alba. Instead going to a war, these two kingdoms agreed to solve the dispute by a sword fight between three chosen warriors from each kingdom. The Romans selected three brothers so called Horatii as shown in Figure 1, and Albans chose three brothers called Curatii. As shown in the figure the two mourning women depicts love and fear because of the consequences of this fight. It is told that one of this woman known as Sabina was married to one of Horatii brother, and other one known as Camilla was engaged with one of Curatii brother. So, no matter who wins one of them was going to face a huge loss.

In the end, only one of the Horatii brother Horatius, survived, and killed Camilla on his return. The oath taken on the swords and swearing shows that they are ready to die for their kingdom; proves that family love is not more important than country love. On the other hand in Figure 2, a similar intense message is conveyed by David. This also depicts love for the country by sacrificing the sons. As Brutus discovered that his sons were involved in a plot to re-establish the monarchy, they were decapitated. The subject of the painting was not to depict the meaning of the struggle between private or civic duties rather it was the terrible consequences of the decision took by patriotic Brutus (Germer, Kohle 172)

To compare and contrast, both the paintings were huge subject of Neoclassicism. Neoclassism

proved to be a turning point after Rococo, a need for the new art was felt by many artists, hence Neoclassicism was practiced among them. Neoclassicism means style and motif to convey the feel of the painting toward the viewer or critic (Rosenblum 30). These iconic dramas done by David had precisely a huge effect in the new era of neoclassicism, as it showed the heroic potential between the main characters of the painting towards their country. The superb new acquisition of the idea of Neoclassicism includes features like verticals and horizontals, figures are very polished, no irregularities, warm colors, smooth brush strokes, calm and slow behaviour. It was a call for a new anti-rococo art.

The next artist followed by David was Honore Daumier who emerged well-known as a cutting political caricaturist. The exaggeration against the leaders with sarcastic tone was illustrated through wood engraving which further took a way towards lithograph famously known as Gargantua. It shows Louis Philippe disguised as a huge Gargantua seated on a chair with a hole underneath. The army of carriers are bringing up baskets of gold to his mouth, and after digesting those a mound of documents were expelled. The inscriptions on the letters tells us the nominations and appointments only to special government court honors. The memorandum behind it was that the tax gone from the pockets of common people is not returned to them for their welfare instead those taxes are fattening up the officials sitting at the top (Chu 240).

Most of Daumier's political work was in sarcastic tone but not all; Rue Transnonain was one of the iconic and dramatic lithographic image. The story told behind this illustration was that the government troops were sent in by the orders of officials of Paris to end the riots which aroused in the poorer sections. One of those troop member was shot killed by a rioter on transnonain Street; to avenge them his fellow troops went from house to house to kill everyone. This massacre results in killing of innocent women, children and men. It was known as "Transnonain Massacre".

Both the works done by Daumier were similar in a way that they are showing the political perspective of that era, but considered there are many differences between the tone and the style of the painting in which the feel was shown. The political caricature work done by Daumier was the victim of the most repressive acts of censorship. The political landscape happening around nineteenth century was a turning point for the leaders and for the artists; whenever artists like Daumier gave their efforts by attacking the leaders with the tools of their talent of art, the target replied them by protecting themselves by defending their territory.

The art attacks proved to change the perspective of the Kings like King Louis-Philippe who after the loud noise created by the artist, promised that the censorship of the restoration would never be repeated (Childs 26). This was considered as a revolutionary period, resulting in changing of the laws and regulations which were in the favour of the common people. New powers were given to the caricatures at that time to develop more lithographic images which includes the taste of political humour, this opportunity of new freedoms and new powers given to the artists was not resisted by them at all.

Gargantua was considered as the first opening chapter for the artistic political expressions conveyed about the government about the censorship and regulations. The hate and aggression which the image depicted was not beard by the king itself (Childs 28). Casting of the king as gargantua was an act of a Rabelaisian. Moreover, it is also believed that the political satire which was initialized by Daumier was followed by several artists to attack the leaders of that specific period (Childs 29). This particular time was considered as a big trouble by many

critiques who were giving the feedback to the artists. Daumier's work was much appreciated and supported by the middle and lower class, because of whom he never stopped and keep on putting more effort in his work to present and warn the evil political perspective of the evil leaders.

However, if we are indulged in comparing all of these four arts, both the artists did a great job to present the profound message behind the paintings. A viewer can feel the sense of the political or psychological agendas which they were going through. But, both the artists put upfront the message in a total different way; Jacques Louis David used the new style of art named as "Neoclassicism" but Honore Daumier used the way of "Caricature" meaning drawing cartoons or sketches to depict the present situation.

In a French journal during that particular era when the caricature was practiced by several artists to manifest the anger towards the officials, it was declared in that caricature French journal that 'One day in future one could convey the exact historic message that how the artists were enjoying the liberty during that era of caricatures" (Goldstein 14).

Further explaining the Neoclassicism style of David, his paintings evolved in tandem with unfolding political events in Revolutionary-period happening in France during that period, have been the subject of a number of insightful studies. David described the subject of his nearly complete canvas depicting the wrenching domestic aftermath of Brutus's act as his own 'pure invention.' The way he had put up the position of the mother's right arm and farther down on the same sheet the twisting pose of the daughter expresses fear and morbid curiosity (Stein 223). Moreover, the viewer can feel and realize that the pose of the mother seemingly fleeing away from her son's corpses was emotionally implausible.

In a nutshell, the iconic work which these artists have done in conveying the profound message about the political ideologies not only depicts the way how a kingdom was owned by the rulers but also that how the work done by these legends impacted the present situation of politics and psychology during that period. The work and the names of these artists are going to stay alive in the hearts of people till the last day of the earth.

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