

The SPL Journal of Literary Hermeneutics

A Biannual International Journal of Independent Critical Thinking
Double-blind Peer-reviewed and Open Access Journal in English



Vol. 5 Issue 1 Winter Edition 2025 e-ISSN 2583-1674 Page no. 32-50

www.literaryhrm.org
www.cavemarkpublications.com



Mapping the History, Different Dimensions and Interpretation of Art in India with Special Reference to Painting

Mukesh Kumar
Riddhima Yadav

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9770-8068>

Mukesh Kumar, Research Scholar, The English and Foreign Languages University, India, ms0039462@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Riddhima Yadav, Research Scholar, The English and Foreign Languages University, India, riddhimayadava@gmail.com

Research Article

Keywords:

Indian Painting,
Cultural Identity,
Spirituality,
Traditional Art,
Colonial Influence,
Feminist Art,
Globalization, Art
Interpretation.

Article History

Received:

December 25, 2024

Revised:

December 28, 2024

Accepted:

January 20, 2025



ISSN 2583-1674 (SPLJLH)



Abstract

Aims: To explore the history, dimensions, and interpretations of Indian art, with a focus on painting, analyzing its evolution, spiritual essence, and cultural significance. The study aims to highlight Indian art's historical and symbolic aspects and its impact on identity and society.

Methodology and Approaches: The research examines Indian painting through its spiritual, emotional, and aesthetic aspects, incorporating historical contexts and artistic philosophy. The study explores various painting styles, such as Mithila, Rajasthani, and Himachal, tracing their origins, themes, and symbolic representations.

Outcome: Indian art is found to reflect spirituality, ritualistic traditions, and socio-cultural narratives. It retains its relevance by blending ancient motifs with contemporary themes. Paintings such as Mithila and Rajasthani embody deep cultural symbolism, while post-independence art reveals political, feminist, and autobiographical dimensions. The study also identifies commercialization's dual impact, fostering global recognition but risking the erosion of indigenous identity.

Conclusion and Suggestions: Indian art is a repository of tradition, spirituality, and socio-political expression. Misinterpretations arise from applying Western frameworks to indigenous art, emphasizing the need for contextual understanding. Suggestions include fostering authentic interpretations, preserving traditional forms, and promoting artists' voices to sustain the rich cultural heritage. Encouraging cross-cultural dialogue while safeguarding uniqueness is crucial for its continued relevance.

*Correspondence: Mukesh Kumar, Riddhima Yadav, riddhimayadava@gmail.com © (2025) All rights are reserved with the author (s) published by CaveMark Publications. This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any form or medium, provided that the original work is properly cited or acknowledged. This paper is available online on www.literaryhrm.org and it was published by CaveMark Publications, India.

Art is a conscious human activity using which certain feelings and experiences of the artist get expressed or represented in a work of art so that others can experience the same by seeing that art. The exactness of feelings experienced by the audience with the artist refers to the validity of any work of art. The creation of an artwork is the discovery or recall by the artist of a particular feeling, and before expressing it, the artist explores or elucidates his emotions for better representation. Any artwork is valuable when it enriches human experiences with pleasure, cognitive, emotional, and other visionary elements. According to Tolstoy, good art or valuable art considers portraying or transmitting the simplest feelings of common life, has public attention and social value, and must be addressed in comprehensible terms to understand humanity.

Indian art is an aesthetic creation that portrays the spirituality, religiosity, and rituals of Indian creative minds and is the best way to know the Indian soul. It helps preserve the thoughts and narrative of previous ages and is one among many reasons that have led people to get connected to their traditions and roots. From time immemorial, Indian art has been more connected to the spiritual than the intellectual, and through the art, Indian artists portray the divine social reality and how the ordinary people understand it.

In some parts of India, artists also perform these arts as an offering to God for their well-being. Indian art is like Indian religion and cannot be understood just by sticking to its surface; in order to understand it, one has to delve deep into its secret chambers where its real symbolic meaning lies. According to Agrawal, to understand Indian art, three things are essential:

1. The divine or spiritual reality (abstract power that lies beyond the material life) plays a vital role in Indian art, and one must know its essence and real meaning to understand Indian art completely. For example, symbols representing Shiva, Chakra of Vishnu, or various forms of Goddess Durga and many others have profound meaning and can be understood only by relating these icons to the historical context in which these images were created.
2. Indian artists also portray the conflict between light and dark or Devas and Asuras, also known as 'daivasuram.' The artist shows these

struggles as a commentary where evil is overpowered by good and peace is restored.

3. The centrality of man in Indian art and his relation with the divine is a key theme in every Indian art. (8)

All these elements and the aesthetic elements of each artist are present in Indian art, and to understand these arts, one must be aware of the aesthetic and functional approaches of these arts. Indian paintings, in general, are a repository of the religious and emotional sentiments of the Indian people, and their history is over thousands of years old. Its longevity can be known from the fact that Mithila Painting one of the subgroups of Indian Painting has been mentioned in Ram Charit Manas and Vidyapati's songs. The subjects of the Indian paintings are mainly related to aesthetic decoration, figure portrayal, and story narration. The decoration includes mythical figures like *garudas*, *apsaras*, *yakshas*, *gandharvas*, and *suparnas*, along with flora and fauna taken from everyday life. Until the eighth century, wall paintings were very prominent in the Indian subcontinent; miniature paintings done on paper became very famous after the eighth century. These miniature paintings were famous in the *Pala School* and the eastern part of Gujrat, where artists mainly drew themes related to Buddhism.

An equivalent to this school, also famous for miniature Painting, was the Apabhramsa school having two phases, one belonging to the palm-leaf phase and the other phase on the paper. Images of these paintings are carefully decorated with many accessory details and have pointed noses with angular faces that go beyond the facial line. The content of these paintings is three-fold: in the initial stage, it was Jainism; later, it became Vaishnava subjects like secular love, Krishna Leela, Gita Govinda, and others. In Indian art history, some regional paintings also became very famous, like Rajsthani Painting, Himachal Painting, and Madhubani Painting.

Rajsthani Paintings are filled with the theme of love and devotion, and the painter's inspiration generally lies in their heart, making the paintings close to their other indigenous folk arts. The woman image in this painting is beautifully drawn and is very close to the true feminine beauty represented by pinkish hands, large curvy eyes, firm breasts, thin waist, and long hair. The artist uses bright

colours to display the religious love sentiments between the heavenly characters like Krishna and Radha, Shiva and Parvati, and also some from the Ramayan and Mahabharata characters like Hammirahatha and Nala Damayanti. This painting is famous for attaching music to painting, for example, the painting of *ragamalas*, an aesthetically decorated picture characterized by different lyrical imaginations. The Ragas in these paintings are associated with different geographical locations and represent the emotional state of the artist's mind. For example, Todi *Ragini* is a southern name representing a beautiful woman playing Vina for calling the deer, and Bhairavi *Ragini* is a northern name representing an unmarried girl who loves to worship her lover. Different Ragas also represent different seasons like Malava, Bhairava, Hindola or Vasanta, Sriraga, Dipaka, and Megha.

Himachal Painting is an extended version of the Rajsthani Painting and Mughal miniature. It, along with the portrayal of the divine love of Radha and Krishna, also shows the *leela* of little Krishna with the help of bright colors, delicate and animated lines, and animated expressions. The name, also known as Pahari Paintings, is done in some sub-Himalayan states like Nurpur, Kangra, Mandi, Jammu, Basholi, Chamba, and Suket.

Mithila Painting, also known as Madhubani Painting, is a two-dimensional art form practiced mainly by the women of the Mithila region. These paintings are the reservoir of intense feelings, joy, sorrow, blessings, devotions, and mysteries of Mithila men and women. Thakur states that 'Mithila Painting still forms an integral part of Mithila's social life in which the individuals move like planets within the orbits of home activities, ceremonies, and rituals. It discloses the sensibility and attachment of the Mithila people towards nature and culture. This painting is enamored with bright colors, symbols, and well-defined contours and deals with the themes of gods, goddesses, flora, fauna, and other aspects of day-to-day life.

Mithila Painting is the art of simple, unsophisticated people that springs from the people's love for simplicity and simple life. As Malhotra says that 'Mithila Painting has haunting and direct beauty, bold colors and childlike simplicity.' These paintings are full of symbolic images and colors, having a

specific meaning in a given context, and not even a single space is left within the painting area, as according to these painters, emptiness emphasizes infertility and barrenness. The bodies of the images in the paintings are usually foreshortened, and their nose is pointed and merged into their foreheads, whereas their eyes are almost presented frontally in the face. Painters do not try to imitate the real object entirely but create something more aesthetic and gratifying with their imagination and creativity, which will be sufficient to captivate the audience.

In short, Indian Painting is a storehouse of spirituality, sensuality, and cultural beliefs, where every people represents their traditions and rituals in a different aesthetic way. Indian Paintings are not confined to the regions mentioned above; other famous regional paintings of India are Warli Painting of Nasik, Kalighat Painting of Bengal, Kalamkari Painting of Andhra Pradesh, Gondi Painting of central India, and many others. These Paintings show the cultural diversity of India, each representing traditions, rituals, and ideologies of different people.

The primary function of any artwork is to be appreciated or evaluated by the audience or the spectator, thus, making 'interpretation' an essential aspect of the art world. According to Feldman, critical evaluation of any artwork should be backed by reason and should increase our understanding of the artwork (15). The reasons and values in support of assessment should enrich the human experience along the various other dimensions. While looking at some particular work of art, audiences do not simply copy the artist's emotions but respond to it with their own emotions. For many art historians, artworks act as an agent in social, political, and ideological change, and their function in any culture is essential for interpretation.

According to another art critic Carney, representational or expressive features of artwork (also known as primary aesthetic features) can only be understood by the receiver having appropriate background knowledge of the art and its style (17). Determining the primary aesthetic features of any artwork based on the visible content matter is termed 'low-level interpretation' by Carney, and adding the artist's oeuvre, his aims and goals along with the significance of artwork in the historical context led to the 'high-level interpretations (22).'

Moreover, for evaluation, Carney also talked about the Value Features of an artwork. It is associated with form, content, aims, and goals of styles and the artist, and determining the Value Feature, totally depends on the historical background of any artwork. In most cases, to evaluate artwork, art historians look at the artist's aim, goal, and style and the relation of artwork to the culture in which it has been produced. Carney writes, "Spectators do not experience the object randomly but as an artist-created structure relative to its historical context." (14). However, in most cases, either it is an interpretation done on some regional painting or on some religious painting, Western critics, instead of relating it with indigenous culture, relate it with their own western culture. As Ruskin says, Art of India "either forms its composition out of meaningless fragments of colour and flowings of line; or if it represents any living creature, it represents that creature under some distorted and monstrous form. To all facts and forms of nature it wilfully and resolutely opposes itself; it will not draw a man, but an eight-armed monster; it will not draw a flower, but only a spiral or a zigzag (265)."

These interpretations happen only when an outsider tries to fit unfamiliar idolatry like these Indian icons into the familiar mould of their own culture, literature, or religion. Furthermore, our way of seeing and interpreting anything depends significantly on our knowledge. Sometimes our knowledge makes us prejudiced and debarred us from seeing any artwork in the historical context of the artist or the art in which it was created. As Berger says, "The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe (8)." Seeing artwork based on some perspective is generally associated with the western way of seeing art. According to Westerners, everything lies in the eyes of the beholder, appearance backed by perspective is the only way of approaching reality, and other things like the historical context of the artist or the art are less significant in evaluating any artwork. Mitter writes, "Whenever we attempt to understand something unfamiliar, we go from the known to the unknown (5)." People generally start with their pre-existing notions to interpret any artwork, but if that notion is contradictory to the motif of the art or artist, then that interpretation gets alienated from reality. For example, many misinterpretations were made of the Mithila Painting by foreigners.

W G Archer, the first foreigner who tried to make out the meaning of these paintings, had never consulted women, the originator of this painting. During his survey, instead of consulting women and looking for proper iconography and contextual meaning of these paintings, Archer turned to the west and some upper caste male Brahmins to interpret paintings, which eclipsed women's perspective and motive behind creating these paintings. As Linda Nochlin says, "Visual Text which have been more available to men than to women," and despite women's interpretation, "what is being described is the male fantasy of the enigmatic nature of the feminine" (Showalter, 191). In other words, Archer has created a 'citational graft' about the meaning of painting that is through his interpretation, those artists get denied from their own meaning. According to Archer, 'Kohbar motifs' of Lotus and Bamboos represent the male and female sexual organ, and 'Naina-Jogin' becomes 'Veiled bride.' However, it is subject to debate because critics like Brown, David Szanton, Neel Rekha, and others have said that Lotus and bamboo signify fertility and patrilineage, and 'Naina-jogin' is the deity who protects the whole marriage ceremony from an evil force, thus have more of spiritual meaning than materialistic meaning. In the Maithil region, Lotus means *Kamal*, and the Goddess of fortune and abundance is known by the name of *Kamla*. She dwells in Lotus, and people pray to the Goddess for good crops, health, long life, and prosperity. According to Singh, 'The Hindu bride is believed to be an incarnation of the goddess Kamla or Lakshmi. Instead of locating these icons in the context of Mithila, Archer was looking for the equivalent of these iconographies in the west, and the problem is that India and Europe are two different cultures representing two different experiences. Therefore, both these discourses about Mithila Painting create lots of misunderstanding, which according to Hall, "arises because lack of equivalence between the two sides in the communicative exchange."

In short, art beholds individual awareness and signifies the richness of people's history, culture, and tradition. As Berger says, "Creating any artwork generally painting shows an act of increasing consciousness of individuality and awareness regarding history (10)." Art, bereft of historical context or artist's aims and goals, leads to misunderstandings and confusion or forces the art away from

reality. Visual arts from time immemorial had always been associated with sacredness, rituals, or magic and were preserved in monuments, caves, buildings, houses, temples, churches, etc. Preserving the art from the general masses gives authority to the artists and art. As an art, preservation leads to safeguarding the meaning given by the artist, and as an artist, it provides free space and authority to exercise power over their art. For example, the women of Mithila safeguarded their art from the rest of the masses (mainly the male members) to create a counter-narrative to the existing social one, where they are in the centre or mainstream, and the patriarchy is on the periphery. Later, preserving the art became social and entered into the ruling class spheres, giving more stiffness and rigidity to the art over its meaning and styles.

However, some kinds of stiffness are also required to preserve the individuality of these arts. In the age of technological reproduction and Universalism, many misinterpretations occur. These arts are losing their significance and uniqueness and ultimately comes in a position of getting digested into some other canonical or mainstream art.

Apart from many sub-categories, Visual arts are divided into two main parts: Decorative and Fine arts. Fine arts are usually sophisticated and complex aesthetic art, containing high-quality acrylic colors and canvases, and are generally made for large masses. In contrast, Decorative arts are simple, functional aesthetic art, using cheaper materials than fine arts, and are intended for local groups rather than large gatherings. Many Indian arts are closer to Decorative art; Indian art is characterized by rhythm, stylization, structure, and symmetry and, along with the creativity of an individual artist, forms an essential part of the whole order.

If we talk about Ancient Indian art, we will find that it mainly contains some tribal arts, women's arts, or other regional paintings which have always been side-lined in the art history. In Indian art history, the art and craft of the tribal or regional people have always been considered aside from mainstream art. According to art historians, the tribal or regional arts are mainly associated with their rituals and thus have a more functional rather than an aesthetic approach. Despite these hierarchies, these artists have created an incredible variety of art

filled with rich mines of indigenous cultures, rituals, and religions, which needs to be addressed.

Tribal people have been there in India from prehistoric times. Within these years, their life and arts have been threatened by forces and events like Brahminism, British raj, and modernity. The anthropologist Verrier Elwin was the first person to bring these vanishing tribal arts out of the closet and darkness of ignorance and anonymity and talked at length about the richness of their arts. Tribal people use their body as a site or canvass for decoration and presentation; they furnish themselves with bangles, bracelets, and armlets and decorate their hair with beads. Their art is closely linked with their everyday lifestyle. For example, Purulia people on the Bihar-Bengal border use ceremonial masks during their dance dramas, and some Santhal tribes show their artistic skill by drawing some paintings during the marriage rituals, while the tribes of Chhota Nagpur decorate the dead body with pictures made up from rice paste. Usually, women of these tribes actively participate in performing or doing the arts in comparison to the men, and for several reasons, they are one of them who have contributed to the continuity of these arts. For the continuity of this art, the women tribal painters have carried on the ancient ritual-based art in the face of many social and political adversities and natural disasters.

Moreover, through these paintings, women have reclaimed their long-lost respect and identity by showing their prudence, knowledge, and imagination to the world. Women of the Warli tribes paint the inner wall of the marriage chamber with bright color and rice paste for performing some symbolic rites and invoking the goddess of fertility, *Palaghata*. Warli women and men also do some secular paintings known as *Caukat*- a geometric painting where other geometric figures and landscapes enclose a square.

Indian art lost its age-old patronage with the advent of the Britishers, which led to the taste and technique change among Indian artists. Britishers commissioned only those artists who were experts in western techniques such as chiaroscuro and the picturesque idiom popularised by western artists such as Thomas and William Daniel. Apart from western techniques, the Britishers appointed only those painters who drew the glories, architecture, and British way

of life like Shaikh Mohammad Amir, and the rest of the artists, like various village scroll painters, were sidelined. Mitter writes, "By the middle of the nineteenth century, the taste of the elites, and to some extent of the underclass, had become thoroughly Victorian." Under the garb of westernization of Indian art, the Britishers initiated various academic art schools that would train the Indian artisan according to the western syllabus, for the enhancement of the Indian taste in art.

The most renowned artist of the colonial time was Raja Ravi Verma, an Indian artist well skilled in European art techniques. Verma, a royal elite, very fond of History painting, brought a revolution to Indian art. To revitalize the interest in Indian Classic or Indian epic, Verma innovated a new kind of art by mixing Victorian salon art styles with the subject from the Indian epic and literary classics. However, Verma's style was criticized shortly after his death because of the rise of Nationalist sentiments in India. According to Nationalist art thinkers, Verma's art brought alienation to Indians about their cultural roots rather than attaching them with it and thereby criticized them for being unspiritual and undignified. Mitter writes, " Verma's imagining of the past was spurned by Havell and the nationalist precisely because it was 'tainted' with academic naturalism (177)." The rise of cultural nationalism of Indian art took place in Bengal, which led to the establishment of the first art movement commonly known as the Bengal School, and its chief proponents were Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, and Ernest Binfield Havell. They aimed to make Indian youth aware of the cultural heritage of India and aspired for the indigenous style in accord with the Nationalist sentiments of India, which will help form a resistance to European colonialism. This nationalist art thematizes a sense of loss and oppression by the foreign force, longing for deep spirituality, and the glories of a rich past. These Indian thinkers, along with some Japanese thinkers like Kakuzo Okakura Tenshin, Yokoyama Taikan, and Hishida Shunso, formed a pan-Asian alliance and tried to create an Oriental art by assimilating different cultures of Asia. This Oriental art became successful and famous in India and was recognized abroad through many exhibitions in Paris, Berlin, and London in 1913, 1923, and 1924, respectively.

However, under the garb of the Indian nation, art dealing with only Hindu culture protruded, whereas other communities' art, like Muslim art, was almost renounced. As a result, against Hindu cultural nationalism, many Muslim artists came to the forefront for the representation of their community's art, like Abdur Rehman Chughtai, Hemen Mazumder, and Atul Bose. The contradiction between these two different communities of art led to the weakening of a whole pan-Asian alliance; thus, the Unitarian force of the Indian nationalist sentiments got diffused. Moreover, the remaining arts of the Bengal school were influenced by cubism and other European Arts Avant-garde movements which began to creep into the Indian cultures through art, books, and journals.

Global modernity, which germinated in pre-independence India, became more dominant in post-independence India, causing more awareness among the artist about their indigenous identity, ultimately resulting in the conflict and tension between the artists about these two themes. Because of various post-colonial writings and significant women's movements in India, post-independence art is filled with the themes of satire and politics. At the end of the pre-independence era, artists from the nationalist approach mainly leaned toward a progressive approach, following a cubist manner of semi-geometrical shapes to portray the contemporary scenario of India. For many of these progressive artists, Andre Lochte became their mentor, and Europe, mainly Paris, New York, and London, became their classrooms. With the help of cubism and other European exposure, these Indian artists develop a new artistic style that, focused more on the aesthetic and pleasure aspects of colors and texture while neglecting the meaning and narratives that were prevalent in early India. Some of the painters following this painting technique are; Ram Kumar, Jehangir Sabavala, Krishen Khanna, R.B Kitaj, and Satish Gujral; all these artists were the promoter of progressive or expressionist art in post-independence India. Along with these artists, M.F. Hussain, F.N. Souza, K.H. Ara, and S.H. Raza were the most successful progressive artists of post-Independence India.

After 1970, the capitalist market influenced almost every sector of India, including arts and crafts. Artists become market-oriented, and to compete in the market, every artist tries to innovate their personal touch so as to make their art

unique. Instead of focusing on their indigenous cultures and their representations, artists try to make their arts universal, which leads to cultural amalgamation, and as a result, the mark of their own indigenous culture is lost.

However, before commodification, the painting was integrated into indigenous specific rituals, but after it, painters got freedom from the constraints of painting traditional motives and tried something new. For example, due to commodification and globalization, painters get acquainted with different cultures of other states and nations and try to inculcate all those things into their paintings, thereby making them cross-cultural and embedded with new themes. However, there is also a threat in the inculcation of cross-cultural and new themes as, according to some critics like Upendra Thakur, Kailash Kumar Mishra, David Szanton, and others, these innovations are leading to the gradual loss of its inherent cultural essence. Moreover, it also challenges its continuing authenticity, shifting the interest of painters more towards consumerism rather than culture. Thakur writes, ‘Due to commercialization of this art, there has been a dangerous shift from the traditional motifs and themes which tends to erode its pristine qualities and values.’

Moreover, commercialization and globalization have broadly led to both positive and negative impacts on Painting. On the positive side, it has provided a source of income to the common masses, raised a cultural product of rural people to national and international esteem, and turned a handful of women artists into international celebrities. Nevertheless, on the negative side, these paintings have started losing their aesthetic uniqueness, and painters are becoming more consumer-centric rather than art-centric. ‘The buyer-centric approach has caused serious threat to the originality of color, design, motif, and sensitivity of this great art form’ (Mishra, 2003).

Moreover, post the 1970s, Indian narrative art with too much expressionism and super-real description of reality became the preference for most artists like Ganesh Pyne, BikashBhattacharjee, JogenChowdhary, SudhirPatwardhan, and many others. In his initial days, Ganesh Pyne was a watercolorist and generally performed most of his painting in old Bengal school mode. Later on, like various other artists, he also shifted towards modern

fragmented and ambiguous images; however, his inspiration for becoming a modernist artist was Klee, an inventive German artist. Like, Pyne Bikash Bhattacharjee was also an Indian painter, famous for his modern painting technique. But unlike Pyne, his paintings are marked by a surrealist way of mixing light and shadows rather than Pyne's cubism style. Most of Bhattacharjee's paintings have tinges of violence, appearing as bad dreams to most viewers. He generally likes to portray the lower-class slum women in a threatening alien manner by mixing different shades of colors, light, and shadows, which has never been used before. Jogen Chowdhary is another Indian modern painter whose uniqueness lies in eroticism and an ugly way of presenting the full wrinkled flesh of the human body. The use of wrinkled flesh is a sign of aging, decaying, and over-ripeness, and its often use in his painting justifies his being a modernist painter.

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda was another school after the Bengal School that came into prominence in Indian art history. This school is known for innovating new pictorial forms by using old Bengal school conventions that contextualize art with culture, society, and other contemporary issues. According to new pictorial principles, artists like Sudhir Patwardhan, Vivan Sundaram, Bhupen Khakhar, and others rejected non-figurative modern art and gave importance to rural or tribal art. Through their art, they not only tried to diminish the difference between artisan and contemporary modern art but also between fine and folk art. Baroda University was established in 1949, but it came into prominence by the teaching principles of K.G. Subrahmanyam, who fabricated a new painting style by assimilating the Rajsthani painting technique and the murals technique of Shantiniketan.

Subhramaniyam equated non-illusionist art with tribal art. For him, the formalist view of art has declined in post-independence India and is somehow inter-related with the Indian tribal art. Subhramaniyam was influenced by the post-colonial theory of art criticism, which emphasized art as the indigenous cultural discourse and served as a medium to question the dominant canonical discourse. These teaching principles and the theoretical aspects instigated by Subhramaniyam energize the Indian artist to start challenging the hegemony of

western art history and its dominance in the international art market. Among various artists from the Baroda school, two artists, Bhupen Khakhar and Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, gained much popularity through their narrative art inducted with various meanings.

Sheikh was the first Indian artist from Baroda school to get an education from the Royal College of Art, London. His multi-layered paintings show his personal experience and deep understanding of the socio-political issues of post-independence India. His paintings on various themes like childhood memories, sexual symbolism, Koranic Imagery, and many others show his comprehensive knowledge and polymathic nature. He once writes: " Living in India signifies living simultaneously in several times and cultures ... The past is a living entity that exists in parallel with the present, each illuminating and sustaining the other ... with the convergence of periods and cultures, the citadels of purism explode. Tradition and Modernity, private and public, interior and exterior incessantly separate and reunite." (Mitter, 118)

Bhupen Khakhar, another narrative artist, uses 'kitschy' imagery "connected with art, decorative objects, or design considered by many people to be ugly, without style, or false, but enjoyed by other people, often because they are funny," to portray the awkward gestures of ordinary, insignificant people. Khakhar's unacceptability in society due to his homosexual nature leads to the portrayal of various themes like alienation, melancholy, and a sense of both loss and fear, in his painting. He uses miniature colors and interior paints to draw his melancholic protagonist, who is detached from the scene by looking at a distance.

In India, women have been performing the artwork from time immemorial but are never acknowledged. For example, the credit for doing the Rajasthani cloth painting that hung behind the temple images is usually given to the male painters, but the wives of those men equally participate in doing those paintings but are never acknowledged. However, these women are acknowledged and considered valuable in the religious sphere of society, like doing ceremonies and rituals. In India, Rituals are of paramount importance and are generally associated with women; this activity allows women to gain a central spot in society. While performing many rituals, women associate themselves with art like domestic art

of floor painting, known by different names across the country, such as Alpana in West Bengal, Aripan in Bihar, Rangoli in Maharashtra, and Kolam in South India.

According to Mitter, the most significant development in post-independence India is the rise of women artists as self-assertive groups (226). Inequality, misrepresentation, and various other subjugations of women for a long time have provoked these women artists to innovate a language that would be capable of questioning the Patriarchy and helping in their actual representation in society. Moreover, through these paintings, women have reclaimed their long-lost respect and identity by showing their prudence, knowledge, and imagination to the world. Women have lived with repressed desires for centuries, and these arts and crafts serve as a medium to channel their repressed thoughts and desires. As Showalter says, “in certain cultures, women have evolved a private form of communication out of their need to resist the silence imposed upon them in public life (192).”

Similarly, this Painting has evolved as a language for women to express their suppressed sentiments to the world. Women are bounded by tradition, Patriarchy, and customs and have always been considered an object or commodities by Patriarchy. They would have painted much more if they had been exposed to the world rather than confined to society’s convention. As Woolf says, “since freedom and fullness of expression are of the essence of the art (70).”

Women artists start speaking through their art about modernity and their societal experience by mixing their personal histories and memories. These all voices of different women add a new dimension to Indian art history, that is, Autobiographical Painting, where every artist uniquely narrates their own story. Some of the women artists of this genre from the 1970s are Nalini Malani, Anjolie Ela Menon, Arpana Caur, and from the 1980s onwards, Madhavi Parekh, Nilima Sheikh, Rekha Rodwittiya, and others. Anjolie Ela Menon and Nalini Malani love to add mystery to their artwork by borrowing subjects from different times and spaces like Ravi Verma, Binod Bihari Mukherjee, Frida Kahlo, and other Persian miniatures. Their paintings satirize society’s socio-political conditions and highlight the role and conditions of women in the family

determined by Patriarchy. However, apart from these issues, NaliniMalani also condemns the rise of commercialism through her art.

Arpana Caur is another woman artist who draws solely on the theme of feminism in her painting. She represents a lot of women characters in her artwork, taken from almost every sphere of life like young girl child, old age, widows, helpless mothers, and several others. For painting on these themes, she gets inspiration from her mother's novel 'Homeless' and her experience. Caur also loves doing a reinterpretation of various other paintings like Madhubani Paintings and Basholi Paintings and tries to redraw them from a feminist perspective by highlighting the dualities, contradictions, and tensions.

Among the famous 1980s-woman artists, Nilima Sheikh and Madhavi Parekh are prevalent artists who relied on village art for their inspiration. In contrast, Rekha Rodwittiya is among the privileged artists who got a chance to study at Baroda school and the Royal College of Art, London. Rodwittiya's popularity can be known from the fact that the United Nations invited her in 1988 to participate in the declaration of human rights exhibition. She fills every canvas space with bold colors in her painting to make a feminist impact. In contrast with Rodwittiya's western technique, Nilima sheikh uses indigenous style and is also known for reviving the Mughal technique of making hardboard by mixing Mughal composition with Japanese 'Ukiyo-e' to narrate everyday events. Sheikh, famous for horror paintings, uses her lyrical style and evocative power of colors to highlight the miseries, sorrow, and tragic deaths of Indian women.

In short, the rise of Indian art and its popularity in the global market led to questioning the long hegemony of western canonical art and its dominance in evaluating any art through a western lens. However, this has been done by the various art schools such as Bengal School and Baroda School, and several artists from Abanindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher- Gill to Bhupen Khakhar and Nilima Sheikh, all these artists painted in different styles but always glorifying the richness and sacredness of Indian Art. Painting as a medium of expression has always been a platform for artists to show their skill and portray the reality of society. Although the earlier paintings were confined to spiritual, religious, and

rituals, but the development of arts in the Modern period brought about many changes and made them more inclusive.

Thereby, apart from drawing abstract things in their painting, painters also started depicting contemporary social realities. Indian painting is spread throughout the regions and comprises several native, local, tribal, and indigenous paintings. For instance, Rajasthani Painting, Himachal Painting, Maithili Painting, Tribal Painting, Warli Painting, Kalighat Painting, Kalamkari Painting etc. are some of the components of Indian Painting. Interpretation of art has always been a matter of debate. Some critics believe that art should be interpreted according to the audience and give complete freedom to the audience to interpret it. Although it is good to free art from the clutches of artists, there is a danger of misinterpretation in this case. Audiences start interpreting the art without knowing and going to the historical context in which it was produced as the Western art critics have done, particularly with Indian art. They have interpreted the art using the western framework; in this process, art's authenticity, reliability, and originality get affected. The other critics (mostly native and local) say that art should be interpreted only after knowing the historical context and, most notably, the culture in which the art is produced. However, the development of Indian art, particularly painting, has never been smooth. It has been changed, modified, reformed, and repeatedly. For example, we can clearly see the difference in the Ancient, Pre-independence, colonial, and post-colonial paintings. Indian artists have adapted the new styles and drawn things as per the need of time, and that is why Indian Paintings have lasted for so many years.

Works Cited and Consulted

- Agrawala, Vasudeva S. *The Heritage of Indian Art*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1964.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972.
- Carney, James D. "A Historical Theory of Art Criticism." *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1994, pp. 13–29. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3333153>. Accessed 23 July 2022.
- Diffey, Terry. "Tolstoy's 'What is Art?'" *Routledge Library Editions: Tolstoy and Dostoevsky*, 2014.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding, Decoding." 1973. <https://blog.richmond.edu/watchingthewire/files/2015/08/Encoding-Decoding.pdf>.
- Malhotra, Anita Ghei. "Critical Interconnections Mithila and Tantric Art from Northern India." 80 Haven Avenue, Apt. 2E, New York, NY, 2007.
- Mishra, Kailash K. "Mithila Paintings: Past, Present and Future." 2003.
- Mitter, Partha. "Ernst Gombrich and Western Representations of the Sacred Art of India." *The Journal of Art Historiography*, 2012.
- . *Indian Art*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Monroe, C. Beardsley. "The Generality of Critical Reasons." In *The Aesthetic Point of View*, edited by Michael J. Wreen and Donald M. Callen, Cornell University Press, 1982, pp. 208–18.
- Nochlin, Linda. "Women, Art, and Power." *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, 1991.
- Ruskin, John. *The Two Paths*. Merrill, 1891, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7291/7291-h/7291-h.htm>.
- Sen, Geeti, and S.H. Raza. *Bindu: Space and Time in Raza's Vision*. Media Transasia, 1997.
- Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1981, pp. 179–205. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343159>. Accessed 24 June 2021.

Singh, Santosh Kumar. "Folk Culture Rootedness in the Paintings of Mithila."

International Journal of English: Literature, Language & Skills, vol. 8, no. 3, Oct. 2019, pp. 1–5. ISSN 2278-0742, www.ijells.com.

Sheikh, G.M. "Returning Home." *Centre Georges Pompidou - Musée National d'Art Moderne (France)*. 1985.

Thakur, Upendra. *Madhubani Painting*. Shakti Malik Abhinav Publications, 1981.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Maple Press Pvt. Ltd., 1929.

Mukesh Kumar

Mukesh Kumar (B.A., M.A., UGC-NET-JRF) is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in English Literature at The English and Foreign Languages University, Regional Campus, Lucknow. He holds an M.A. in English from Banaras Hindu University and a B.A. (Honours) in English from C.M. College, LNMU, Darbhanga. His areas of interest include Visual Culture and Cultural Studies.

Riddhima Yadav

Riddhima Yadav, who holds qualifications in B.A., M.A., B.Ed., and UGC-NET, is pursuing a Ph.D. in English Literature at The English and Foreign Languages University. She completed her B.A. (Honours) in English at Gargi College, University of Delhi, and her M.A. in English at Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi. Her research interests include Dalit Feminism, Black Feminism, Subaltern Studies, and Cultural Studies.