

Modern and Contemporary Art in India

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Abstract

Indian culture has shown a great capacity to absorb from other cultures. The absorption was a natural consequence of the social, political, religious and cultural contacts with foreign civilizations. The period 1946-50 was a period of significance in the history of Indian Art. It was the period of transition from one way of life to another, from colonial ethos to the ethos of free and independent people looking retrospectively; it was the period of significant developments. After independence, Lalit Kala Akademi was formed to promote and propagate understanding of Indian Art and art activity developed very rapidly. It made artists of India to move to contemporary directions. Different styles were evolved. It attracted Indian painters and sculptors.

Keywords: Art Forms in India, Development of Indian Art, Indian Art Traditions, Trends in Indian Art

The history of Indian art depicts the creative strength of the realizations and achievements of the ancient Indian mind. It is, in fact, the actualization of the spiritual ideals and values of people. The artist attempted to present a coherent world of vital images out of his heightened awareness. His images made visible what was not directly visible to the senses and through a combination of symbolic forms and proportion, some fundamental aspects of the universe and its supreme consciousness were revealed. In the early 1850s, the British felt that given proper guidance, the artistically inclined people of India could attain a degree of proficiency in art, pursuits which could enable India to once more take up a leading position among the manufacturing countries of the world. The three schools of art, at Madras, Calcutta and Bombay were started on experimental scale. The school in Madras [1850] and Calcutta [1854] set the pattern of art education. The school in Madras was a production centre in its early stages. The school in Calcutta was also organized as a school of industrial art. Similarly, the Bombay school also started as the school of Art and Industry [1857], later named Sir J. J. School of Art. All three schools—Madras, Calcutta and Bombay and later the schools of art in Lahore [1875] and Lughnow [1913], though originally started by private agencies for almost identical aims, were taken over by provincial British governments, who shaped them more to suit their own requirements than to fulfil the aims and desires of their founders. The newly-emerged English-educated class in India tended to measure success by European standards. It is a historical fact that Indian culture, has, from the earliest times, shown a great capacity to absorb from other cultures. The absorption was a natural consequence of the social, political, religious and cultural contacts with foreign civilizations. The British, on the other hand, tried to impose their supremacy over the Indians in every walk of life. The imposition resulted in Indian artists getting caught between two value systems, the traditional and the western, neither of which could be rejected totally.

In the early years of 20th century, the active struggle for Independence adopted ‘Swadeshi’ as its motto. In this period, Shantiniketan became the centre of the so called revivalist style [or the Bengal

School] under the leadership of Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose, it was Gaganendranath Tagore, eldest brother of Abanindranath Tagore who for the first time, made serious attempts to come to terms with modern European art while simultaneously striving for a personal style. Where as Abanindranath Tagore collected around him a brilliant band of gifted artists, Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar, Samrendranath Gupta, Venkatappa, Sailendranath Day, Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhry, who in time went forth like apostles to transmit the light of the master across the length and breadth of India, Gaganendranath's eclectic genius functioned entirely outside the ambit of the revivalist movement around him. He depended on his visual perceptions and not on any narrative or allegorical content. His images were neither abstract nor archaic, but were intensely real, quivering with vitality. He experimented with cubism and studied the pictorial possibilities of life in interior scenes and coalescence of forms

Of much greater significance to modern painting were the radicals- Rabindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy and Amrita Shergill. Rabindranath Tagore [1861-1941] did not lean on myths or legends for inspiration and his designs are marked by extreme simplicity. Many of his head studies have a brooding subjectivity, changed with meaning, carried up from the depth of the subconscious. He can rightly be acclaimed as a leader of modern art in India. Like his poetry, his paintings are images of man and nature. The addition of an element of strangeness to there, however, infuses a touch of romanticism and wonder to his works. Jamini Roy [1887-1972] is among those artists who painted independently and introduced a new and modern style in India. He attempted to create a distinct indigenous style in seeking inspiration from folk art traditions as against the elitist approach of the Bengal School. He found a quality of freshness, directness and robustness in the artistic spirit that still survived in the scrolls, the bazaar paintings of Kalighat, in the Puja images, in toys and dolls and the hordes of artifacts created for rituals- all synthesized with the visual effects of kanthas and alpanas. In his search for finding an identity, he styled his artistic activities as a 'Patua'- the Bengal folk painter. After Jamini Roy, comes the name of Amrita Shergill [1913-1941] in the history of modern art. She was born of a Hungarian mother and a Sikh father. She started drawing and painting in water colors from the age of five, mainly illustrating Hungarian fairy tales. It was around 1930 that Amrita first started working in oils. She produced over sixty paintings-basically studies of models in the nude, besides a few still life studies and self portraits. Amrita came to India in 1934. She was greatly impressed and inspired by the traditional schools of Indian paintings, such as Ajanta, Rajput and Mughal miniatures. She, however, developed her own style, which, though not necessarily Indian in the traditional sense, of the world, was 'fundamentally Indian in the spirit'. In all her compositions, Amrita shows her great ability in ordering spaces with an absolutely clear vision. Infusing the traditional and modern, she became a milestone in the history of modern Indian painting.

The influence of modern art was felt long before independence in cities like Bombay, Lahore, Lughnow and later in Jaipur, where Schools of Art were established by British. Other agencies which promoted contemporary art were the art societies in these cities: The Bombay Art Society [established in 1888], All India Fine Art and Crafts Society {AIFACS} at Delhi [established in 1928], The Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta [established in 1933], Punjab Fine Arts Society, Lahore and similar institutions in Madras and Lughnow. It was during the 1940's when the national struggle came into its optimum force, that art turned toward people and people turned toward art. As the national consciousness grew, proliferated and percolated to the various sections and layers of society, the artist was the first to note its emergence, sense its advancing step. Great movements arose in various parts of the country. The Progressive Artists' Movement played real role in the introduction of modern art in our country. In the

early 40's, a small number of artists consisting of Majid, Bhole and Reddy formed a group with a view to introduce creativity in art. But this group failed because of lack of sympathy and understanding from the general public. The Calcutta Group was formed in 1942. A large number of important artists joined this movement and they issued their own manifesto. Most of the members of this group had expressionistic tendency which they derived from German Expressionism and partly from French Fauvism. The other important groups- Bombay Progressive Group and Madras Group were established after independence and these artists tried to achieve individual styles by means of exaggeration and distortion of line and color.

The period 1946-50 was a period of significance in the history of Indian Art, even as much as it was in the history of the country politically. It was the period of transition from one way of life to another, from colonial ethos to the ethos of free and independent people looking retrospectively; it was the period of significant developments. After independence, Lalit Kala Akademi was formed to promote and propagate understanding of Indian Art in New Delhi on 5 August, 1954 and art activity developed very rapidly. It made artists of India to move to contemporary directions. Different styles were evolved. The 1950's, indeed, were an important and significant decade for the development of contemporary concerns in the field of visual arts. In the 1960's there was a good deal of interest in Cubism. It attracted Indian painters and sculptors. The simplest constituent forms of the objects in two geometric compositions of flat, interrelated planes, depicted different aspects or views of the objects simultaneously and enumerated its features.

From the 1990s onwards, Indian artists began to increase the forms they used in their work. Painting and sculpture remained important, though in the work of leading artists such as Nalini Malani, Subodh Gupta, Narayanan Ramachandran, Vivan Sundaram, Jitish Kallat, they often found radical new directions. Bharti Dayal has chosen to handle the traditional Mithila painting in most contemporary way and created her own style through the exercises of her own imagination, they appear fresh and unusual. The increase in discourse about Indian art, in English as well as vernacular Indian languages, changed the way art was perceived in the art schools. Critical approach became rigorous; critics like Geeta Kapur, R. Siva Kumar, Shivaji K. Panikkar, Ranjit Hoskote, amongst others, contributed to re-thinking contemporary art practice in India. The last decade or so has also witnessed an increase in art magazines like Art India, Art & Deal, Indian Contemporary Art Journal and Art Etc. complementing the catalogues produces by the respective galleries.

Many of Indian artists followed the norms of pure and near abstraction. The abstractionists reiterated their belief that the artist is neither a commentator nor a social reformer. The visual effect, thus created, no longer seemed to depend on the underlying realism but called attention to the abstract pattern of light/dark and colour and the peculiar combination of decorative figuration and abstraction. While abstractionism was undergoing a process of experimentation, some painters tended to explore realm of Surrealism. It was movement in art and literature started in Paris in 1924 and artists portrayed unconscious or dream images as it was based on Psychoanalysis Theory of human mind. So, the artists of India followed the directions of contemporary movements and started to practice Realism, Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism and Surrealism in their art work.

Industrial development and technological progress led to the growth of urban centres and new relationships between individuals and groups. The resultant new and unique approaches to art led to many innovations. The significant among these is the rejection of representational imagery. The artist is

pursuing his search for expression to the characteristics of his materials. The actual depiction of objects is no longer an important artistic consideration-it has become an obsolete idea. With growing psychological awareness, the creation of artist mirrored the contemporary world but gave it diverse forms. Pictorial action became closer to contemporary life. The art of the contemporary artists of India have rediscovered the sources of intuition. Now, the pictorial activity in India has created a new artistic significance. The visual art on Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism are becoming prominent enough. The visual language of art, fusion of form and content are revealing the truth of the self and soul of the artist. The artists have fashioned their approaches upon the trends that are current and the 'isms' that have been rising and falling in the art of modern world. The creations of artists are showing their Psyche, the laboratory of their experiences, their personality, and the compelling influence on their styles. The contemporary art in India, by and large has been conditioned by these attitudes.

The situation at present has yielded a unique contemporary art which should be seen in its own context. It is rather difficult to make judgments based on already existing principles. Some artists believe that their art is an expression of their inner feelings, a kind of contemplation that includes meditation. In their opinion, freedom of art means the freedom to explore spiritual feelings. It is not an attempt to seek truth, or to reflect idealism, nor does it become a medium for opinions that might lead art to a position, where it destroys ethical norms, a something happens in a work of so called personal expression.

In 1990's computer has become the new tool for artists. The computer aided mixed media paintings on canvas have been exhibited by many Indian artists. The personal computer has been entered into the artists' studio-a tool which today has become an inherent feature in every modern work place. Modern Science has brought new opportunities to the artists' door steps. The artist is giving meaningful creative visual expression through versatile electronic palette to his computer images.

The art forms are usually shaped by the forces of the time. The resultant new and unique approaches to art led to many innovations. The significant among these was the rejection of representational imagery. The artist in pursuing his search for expression gave a great deal of importance to the characteristics of his materials. The painter reaffirmed the flatness of the pictorial surface and insisted on a basic commitment to the color and textural qualities of the pigments. With the freedom to utilize the experience and understanding of the range of artistic expression, the artist developed the next step. He turned his understanding inward. The entire range of human emotion and psychological functioning became a source for his creative ideas. He became his own model; his psyche, the laboratory of his experiences, his personality, and the compelling influence on his style.

Conclusion: The influence of modern art was felt long before independence in India and influenced by multiple global modernistic trends. The artists have fashioned their approaches upon the trends that are current in the art of modern world. The resultant new and unique approaches to art led to many innovations. The artist of India is experimenting with new form, new tools and depicting new sensations and his art has not so far been able to become part of the life of the people as art did in the society in its glorious past, where it had definite function. Now, artist has become more individualistic and is in the position to 'invent-everyday'.

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