

Contemporary Elements in Indian Art-19th Century Onwards

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Abstract – Modern Art is essentially an attempt to perceive and express reality in a subjective and reflective manner. 19th century is an important period representing the discovery of the glorious Indian Heritage through the study of History, literature and Art.

It is common knowledge that the modern Indian artists might be a heterogeneous group, but modern Indian art is sharply distinguishable from the tradition or classical Indian art by way of forms, color, composition and treatment of contextual themes. We should be educated enough to understand the implications of larger culture and practices. Trends and traditions in modern & contemporary Indian Art can be interpreted here as attempts at sustaining and diversifying the modernistic approach, rather than completely shift modernity itself. This could definitely be read as attempts at fostering and perpetuating the already established modes of economic and cultural roles of art in its capitalist dimensions. The influence of British rule was in all sectors including art & culture. Around 1870 traditional Rajasthani & Pahari miniature style started to decline. In 19th century miniature artists started accepting English influence in their subject matter. Slowly new art schools started in British rule and after independence. Since then elements in Indian art has seen significant change.

Keywords: Subjective, Diverse Culture, British Influence, Pre-& Post Independence, 19th Century.

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POST-INDEPENDENCE JOURNEY

A picture is indeed worth thousand words. Visual art forms are also 'languages' with their own symbolic systems that people easily identify. The disciplinary configuration of Visual Arts, possibilities and trends in research and experimentation, the challenges and difficulties encountered in understanding the identity of Visual Art and Design in contemporary art are intricate aspects of some of the highly nuanced trajectories of Art educations. Visual Art is subjective and not standardized; thereby affording a greater opportunity for interpretations and appealing to those who might not find their voice in other settings. The complexities of our contemporary visual landscape unleash a plethora of perspectives, world views and reflections. They open up the greatest number of horizons, colored by socio-cultural imaginary. In this context, it is imperative that we take cognizance of our rich, multi-layered cultural heritage, the edifice on which our visual art community blossom and flourish. Our contemporary and modern views on artistic experimentations must derive inspirations from the lifespring of past history.

There are numerous Indian artists worthy of mention in the study of 20th Cent art, for example, B.C. Sanyal, N.S. Bendre, Hebbler, Vivan Sundaram,

Akbar Padamsea, Tyeb Mehta, F.N. Souza, G.R. Santosh, Raza, Ara, Angolei Ela Menon, M.F. Husain, Satish Gujral, Jatin Das, the list just goes on. Then there is the entire Bengal School, which is also considered contemporary' having artists like Nandlal Bose, Abanindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, Gagendranath Tagore, Benode Behari, Amrita Sher Gil and Raja Ravi Verma. There's no doubt that contemporary Indian art is at the new height the quality, depth and diversity in terms of utilization of elements.

Although major western artists like Picasso, Matisse, Gaugin have admitted and shown influences of elements of Japanese and folk-art forms in their work. The influences have been at times not even acknowledged and thus minimized. Picasso was said to inspired by African artifacts, he had his own private collection of African totems and other craft, but he never tried to understand their cultural context or what they stood for. He merely learned from their conventional context and the imagery. Same way Indian contemporary artists explored various elements in their artwork.

The 19th century is an important period representing glorious Indian Heritage through the study of history, literature and art. During this

period, the visual art could boast of few achievements and the prospects for future development appeared back. The spirit of art seemed to be flickering out as traditional forms gradually. Ever since Aurangzeb's discouragement of the humanities, and subsequent bankruptcy of war-torn Mughal empire, Imperial patronage had declined steadily. The unsettled conditions of the times were not well-disposed to the humanities. The placement of the arts failed to improve with new Empire. The new rules found Indian Art, to say the least, strange; their cultural background did not equip them with any understanding of its physical body, spirit or subject. The painters were brought down to the level of artisans, often underpaid and working in bazaars. Those artists who succeeded in obtaining employment with Indian rulers, continued to work in older traditions and their paintings were often imbued with uncommon sensitivity and beauty.

Towards nineteenth century, however, artistic expression began to stir again but in another fabric. The admiration for European culture and learning found expression in the work of a group of creative people who sought to develop a new idiom to convey a visual image that was in keeping with the times. They painted Indian subjects and themes using European techniques, western principals of composition and perspective drawing, and a new medium-oil paint. They strove to achieve in Indian Painting what was being accomplished contemporary in Indian Literature and Indian Philosophy. All these trends were a part of the wider phenomenon of cultural osmosis. Among the early attempts in this direction were paintings of Raja Ravi Varma who painted subjects from Indian myths and life. His attempts received much attention and some fame. His paintings became extremely popular and reproductions decorated many Indian households.

The style of painting associated with the Bengal school originated with Abanindranath Tagore. He began his study of artistic creation with English traditions. His works were laced with literary overtones and suffused with mystery and lyricism. Abanindranath and his followers, including Nandlal Bose formed the nucleus of the Bengal school of painting. The fashion spread from Bengal to the rest of India.

Artist and esthetician Jagdish Swaminathan, in New Delhi, opposed the modernist aesthetics brought by the colonial powers. Prof. K. G. Subramanyan, trained at Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan, for his part, played a seminal role in spreading the Santiniketan philosophy. He gave a new direction to visual language.

In Madras, KCS Panikar established the Cholamandalam artists' community. Artists looked anew at traditional sources of imagery. Elsewhere, artists like Ganesh Pyne in Calcutta whose personal sensibilities made him delve into his heritage. The

creative ferment in Baroda urged experiments with the narrative mode and figuration. Gulammohammed Sheikh, Bhupen Khakhar, Jyoti Bhatt, Neelima Sheikh, Laxma God, Jayant Parikh and others charted a new course.

These painters used the past practices and lasting traditions. In the early 70s, artists have used narrative devices in many ways to transform the mundane into the magical. They dig up the mythic into a world of memory. They use fantasy to express personal concerns and anxieties, often giving them a dreamlike intensity. On another level, A Ramachandran endows the temporal with a sense of timelessness. In the Incarnation, the beautiful tribal woman, framed by the blossoming flame of the forest tree, stands on a turtle, also a self-portrait of the artist. Another artist who brought a new dimension to his images was Barwe and Madhvi Parekh.

A personal mythology also informs the shadowy image world of Ganesh Pyne. The experience of angst pervading the layers of existence harks to an imperial presence. In the late 60s and early 70s, Jogen Chowdhury brought into the public domain personal erotic fantasies that burgeoned with a life of their own in a nocturnal ambience.

The strong mythical or fantasy content in art of artists of the 70s and the 80s continued to be explored by the artists in the next decade to dedicate a new thrust to Indian art scene.

By the middle of 1980s, contemporary Indian art began to chart a new direction. They experimented with new media, material and techniques, they rethought the scale of the work attempting site-specific three-dimensional installations and they were prepared to negotiate with both global and local stimuli.

CONCLUSIONS:

There is no doubt that use of contemporary elements is source of inspiration is for Indian artists. The influence of various contemporary elements has given rise in India to a new concept of art. This attitude has enlarged our concepts of art. A rapid change of attitude is noticeable in Indian Contemporary Art, but more diverse individual attitude is traceable in later parts. Younger generations took greater interests in working with global elements and technique in artistic creation, rendering more variations of form, concept and style.

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