

CHAPTER- II

Art Form and its Practices in India

ART FORM AND ITS PRACTICES IN INDIA

INTRODUCTION

Indian art and its myriad form has a fascinating history and brings to the fore a range of viewpoints, issues, debates and methods. This chapter is an attempt to discuss in-depth the different art form and its practices in its historical, cultural, developmental and professional context. Keeping in view of the objectives of the study, the researcher took note of systematic and truly longitudinal observational studies offered by veteran artists, historians and litterateurs that carefully tracked changes in the field of art in India over time.

ART FORM AND ITS PRACTICES IN INDIA

Art in India interlaces with the cultural history, religions and philosophies with their origin from the deepest roots in the history of civilization. It is marked by different periods in the Indian history each pertaining to particular religion and culture and is a treasure house of ancient contemporary life, its faiths and beliefs, customs and manners. It is considered by some to be the function or purpose of art of any age to mirror contemporary society, its customs, manners, habits, modes of dress and ornamentation etc. Indian Art may well be said to bear in itself the amalgamation of spirituality and sensuality, symbolism and reality from pre-historic to the present era.

Indian art is a wholesome, youthful and delicate art, a blend of symbolism and reality, spirituality and sensuality. The artefacts that have been discovered by archaeologists and historians reveal valuable facts about the lifestyle and mental patterns of that age. During ancient India various art forms developed at great pace. It is evident from the surviving art forms and literature that the ancient Indian art forms have great detailing and unique realistic style of their own. According to the evidence found, it looks like people in ancient India were great admirers of different art forms. They loved fine arts and indulged in dancing, sculpting and painting. A very interesting aspect of ancient art in India is that it is highly realistic. Though bit crude, the anatomical detailing in their sculptures is worth applauding for. Animal and human figures have been carefully carved and chiselled to get a refined effect and portray the physical details in a very fine way. The fine artistic sensibilities of the people are pretty much evident in their terracotta and bronze sculptures.

From the artefacts another interesting aspect that has come to light is the fact that musical instruments were used at that point of time. Certain seals and sculptures have inscriptions marked like instrument that looks somewhat like the harp. The paintings and inscriptions basically reveal the mental patterns of the people. As time progressed, the cruder forms were refined and a new kind of art form developed. This was the art form of rock cut caves and temple art. Rock cut art and architecture was a very important step taken towards the progress of ancient Indian art. The rock cut architecture was first initiated by the Buddhists and this inspired Hindus and the Jains who built similar structures at sites like Ajanta, Ellora, Badami, Elephanta, etc. The patterns varied according to different regions they were built in. The expression of mental attitudes in the form of

ancient art is truly fascinating and helps us analyze the journey travelled from then to now.

Indian Art can be broadly classified into Performing Arts and Visual Arts where the former comprises of Dance, Drama and Music while Visual Art can be further classified into Architectures, Sculptures and Paintings. In order to limit the course of our discussions, we will focus here mainly on Indian visual arts— its different form, styles, mode of expression and practices in India.

INDIAN PAINTINGS

Painting is one of the most delicate forms of art giving expression to human thoughts and feelings through the media of line and colour. Many thousands of years before the dawn of history, when man was only a cave dweller, he painted his rock shelters to satisfy his aesthetic sensitivity and creative urge. The earliest examples of Indian art works are on the walls of some of the caves in the Kaimur Range⁵ of Central India, Vindhya Hills⁶ and some places in Uttar Pradesh.

Indian paintings reflect the diverse culture and heritage of the country. Ideas and expressions of artists are articulated through paintings which depict very much the time they were created in. There are several forms of Indian paintings and each form is different and unique having a very time specific message. While the artist carefully chooses the material and methodology based on the geographical condition of the region, the theme was highly influenced by the prevailing political and social scenario. For example, Mughal paintings speak of

the royal life during Mughal rule, while Madhubani paintings describe the rural life with the help of natural colours and dyes.

There is a broad array of Indian paintings. Different forms were introduced in different regions. Each form of Indian painting is beautiful in its own way, unique and novel when compared to the other form. We need to analyze each form and its practices with the artist's perception of life and its grandeur.

CAVE PAINTINGS

These are the earliest evidences of Indian paintings made on cave walls and palaces whereas miniature paintings are small-sized vibrant, sophisticated handmade artworks. Paintings on caves' and temples' walls mostly describe numerous characteristics of Hinduism and Buddhism. Various forms of Indian painting developed in various time periods.

The Vinayapithak, a Buddhist text of circa Third - Fourth century BC refers in many places to the pleasure houses containing picture halls which were adorned with painted figures and decorative patterns. Painted halls are also described in the Mahabharata⁷ and Ramayana⁸, the composition of which in their original form is acknowledged to be of great antiquity. These early mural paintings may be assumed to be the prototypes of the carved and painted picture galleries of the subsequent periods of the Buddhist art, such as in the painted cave temples of Ajanta situated in Maharashtra State near Aurangabad. There are thirty caves chiselled out of the rock in a semicircular fashion. Their execution covers a period of about eight centuries. The earliest of them is probably out in the second century BC and the latest is sometime in the seventh century AD.

The immense variety of cave paintings begins from prehistoric cave paintings of Bhimbetka,^{See plate 2.1} Madhya Pradesh and flourishes through paintings of Ajanta caves, Ellora caves, Maharashtra and Bagh caves, Madhya Pradesh.

Bhimbetka reflects a long interaction between people and the landscape. It is closely associated with a hunting and gathering economy, as demonstrated in the rock art and in the relicts of this tradition in the local adivasi⁹ villages on the periphery of the site. Overall the landscape has a strong appealing aesthetic quality, which gives the place a 'timeless' quality. The earliest human activities are known from the numerous stone tools including hand axes, cleavers and also the pebble tools. The Bhimbetka art works spanning from the Mesolithic to the Mediaeval include those of a Mesolithic boar painted in dark red, animals like: elephant, rhinoceros, boar, barasingha, spotted deer and cattle and snake, etc. Later paintings include battle scenes painted in red and an elephant painted in white. What is more pertinent to observe in the paintings of Bhimbetka is its semblance to the present day, genre of Graffiti known as Graffiti art.

The contours of Ajanta figures are superb and reveal a keen perception of beauty and form. There is no undue striving after anatomical exactitude, for the drawing is spontaneous and unrestrained. The painters of Ajanta had realised the true glory of the Buddha, the story of whose life was employed here by them as a motif to explain the eternal pattern of human life. Ajanta paintings are the best examples of Tempera technique (Mural), executed after elaborated preparation of rock surface^{See plate 2.2 & 2.3}. After chiselling rock surface, different layers of clay mixed with ferruginous earth, sand, fibrous material of organic origin was applied

very carefully. Then the surface was finally finished with a thin coat of lime wash. Over this surface, outlines are drawn boldly, then the spaces are filled with requisite colours in different shades and tones to achieve the three dimensional effect of rounded and plastic volumes. The colours and shades utilized also vary from red and yellow ochre, terraverte, to lime, kaolin, gypsum, lamp black and lapis lazuli. The chief binding material used here was glue.

In Ellora caves, however mostly Hindu deities are painted. Ellora painting is a departure from the classical norm of Ajanta paintings. Of course the classical tradition of modelling of the mass and rounded soft outline as well as the illusion of the coming forward from the depth is not altogether ignored. But the most important characteristic features of Ellora painting ^{See plate 2.4} are the sharp twist of the head, painted angular bents of the arms, the concave curve of the close limbs, the sharp projected nose and the long drawn open eyes, which can very well be considered as the medieval character of Indian paintings.

MINIATURE PAINTINGS

The miniature paintings of medieval period comprise Mughal and Rajasthani paintings. Mughal miniature painting ^{See plate 2.5} originated during the sixteenth century in the Mughal Empire which spanned what are now India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. This art form is marked by careful attention of small detail, lush jewel tones, epic subject matter, and miniature scale. The biggest Empire of the period was of Mughal dynasty that ruled from Delhi. These emperors were Muslims.

But after Akbar had tried peaceful co-existence of the people of all the religions, the subjects of the art were not limited to one religion. The Rajput kings ruling the rest of India had also sponsored many artists. These artists were free to choose the themes and subjects of their choices. But the Rajput kings were following Hindu religion, so they preferred depiction of the incidents from scriptures of India. The artists painted scenes from epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana. Their preferred choice was painting Lord Krishna and Radha. During this period some of the artists have experimented non-traditional subjects like putting landscape details in painting. So we can see the inclusion of birds, animals and trees in these miniatures ^{See plate 2.6}. There emerged numerous schools of painting during this period. Some of these schools are still functioning in India. Here are names of some of these schools of paintings as Kangra Painting, Phad Painting, Deccan Miniature, Tanjore Painting, Mughal Miniature, Rajasthan Paintings and much more.

TRADITIONAL PAINTING FORMS

Folk paintings are an illustrative expression of village painters is articulated by these paintings. *Madhubani Paintings*, also known as Mithila Paintings are mostly done by local women. Earlier they were made on mud walls of hut but today, you can find them on clothes and paper as well. Natural objects like sun and moon, Hindu deities and sacred plants were amongst the painting themes. Vegetable colours were the specialty. *Lepakshi Paintings* are wall paintings executed on temple walls of Lepakshi (a small village in Anantpur district), Andhra Pradesh. *Patachitra Painting* evolved in Orissa and is made on cloth having a theme based on mythology. *Kalamkari* belongs to Andhra Pradesh

where a pointed bamboo known as 'kalam'¹⁰ paints cloth while *Phad Painting* is a primeval scroll painting which exists survives in Rajasthan. *Pichhwais* are cloth paintings revealing scenes from Lord Krishna's life having origin in Rajasthan. *Tangkhas* are silk painted scrolls. After being painted on canvas they are framed by silk brocade woven especially in close appearance of the traditional Chinese brocades. Tibetan monks paint them. *Warli Paintings* are exclusive art form of tribal Warli tribes of Maharashtra.

OTHER PAINTING FORMS

Some other painting forms include, *Marble Painting* which is executed on exquisite marbles. *Glass Painting* is among the most recent form of painting comparatively is the Glass Painting. Its crispness and colour richness delights the aficionado's eyes. *Palm Leaf Etching* is a very ancient art form, known as *Talapatrachitra* with its home in Orissa. *Batik Painting* or wax writing techniques involves waxing and de-waxing with using delicate colours. Wall hangings, dress materials and scarves demand this art. It is famous in Orissa, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. Oil Paintings are unique art technique and are timeless art pieces. Silk Paintings however brings charismatic sense to silk when it is used to paint on instead of canvas.

ART PRACTICES IN INDIA

The important change that occurred in between the Mughal and the Company School was that, imported foreign artists replaced the Indian artists and the subject and style also got replaced so was paintings materials. As the British East India Company expanded its purview in South Asia during the late eighteenth

century, great numbers of its employees moved from England to carve out new lives for themselves in India. As they travelled through the country and encountered unusual flora and fauna, stunning ancient monuments, and exotic new people, they wanted to capture these images to send or take home. Whereas the modern tourist would rely on his camera for such a task, eighteenth and nineteenth century travellers had to hire Indian painters to do the job. The works produced by these artists, undertaken in a European style and palette, are known collectively as 'Company' paintings. They are characterized in medium by the use of watercolours instead of European gouache¹¹, and in technique by the appearance of linear perspective and shading.

Raja Ravi Varma (April 29, 1848 - October 2, 1906) was a remarkable self-taught Indian painter from the princely state of Travancore whose paintings are considered to be among the best examples of the fusion of Indian traditions with the techniques of European academic art, in the colonial-nationalistic framework of the nineteenth century. He is most remembered for his paintings of beautiful sari-clad women, who were portrayed as shapely and graceful. He is considered the first of the modernists, and along with Amrita Shergil, the principle exponent of Western techniques to develop a new aesthetic in the subjective interpretation of Indian culture with 'the promise of materiality in the medium of oils and the reality-paradigm of the mirror/window format of easel painting'.

Next development is the Kalighat School¹², which was an agreeable and unique blend of two different styles of painting – the Oriental and the Occidental – and steadily gained popularity. Among the deities that the Kalighat artists painted, the goddess Kali was a favourite. An important achievement of the Kalighat artists

was that they made simple paintings and drawings, which could easily be reproduced by lithography ^{see plate 2.7}. Such prints were then manually coloured. This trend continued up to the early part of the twentieth century and these paintings ended up in museums and private collections. The charm of the Kalighat paintings lies in the fact that they captured the essence of daily life and they influenced modern artistes like late Jamini Roy. Later there were modifications in this school of painting. The subjects were expanded and the style had achieved new heights of rhythmical expression and during this period there was disgust with the modern life. The orthodox practitioners blamed European influence for undermining the old Hindu attitudes to religion and ethics. They were against the new changes in paintings, which to them appeared as *Kali Yug*¹³. Respecting the orthodox sentiments the Kalighat painters responded and gradually new subjects entered their paintings. Besides painting courtesans, the painters drew the pictures of married women and enraged husbands beating their wives. They painted satirical pictures. For example in one picture, musk-rats were painted holding a party in the house at night, while the master, like a night-moth, spends his nights away with courtesans. The painters of this school portrayed day to day themes in their paintings. They tried to capture moralizing bitterness in their paintings. It was a time when the religious institutions were becoming lax and corrupt ^{see plate 2.8}.

Kalighat pata paintings are highly stylised which do not use perspective, and are usually pen and ink line drawings filled in with flat bright colours and normally use paper as a substrate, though some may be found with cloth backing or on cloth. The artists were rarely educated, and usually came from a lineage of artisans. Kalighat *patas* are still in practice today although genuine work is hard to

come by. By contrast, the Orissa tradition of *pata*-painting^{see plate 2.9} centering Puri is consciously devotional. Kalighat *pata* has been credited with influencing the Bengal School of Art associated with Jamini Roy.

The proto-modern visuo-linguistics of the Kalighat *pata*, impressed the modern Bengali individualist artists like Jamini Roy, Sunayani Devi in the thirties and forties, Nandalal Bose of the Haripura Congress Posters, Abanindranath of his Chandimangal¹⁴ and Krishnamangal¹⁵ series, Nirode Mazumdar and Paritosh Sen that they appropriated and adapted elements from the Kalighat *pata* tradition and saved this art form, from being derivative of Euro-genetic Modernist art and/or revivalist Indian art.

The influence of modern art was felt long before Independence in cities like Mumbai, Calcutta, and Madras, where school of art was established by the British. Other agencies which promoted contemporary art were the art societies in these cities. The Bombay Art Society (established in 1888) , All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS) at Delhi (established in 1928), The Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta (established in 1933) and similar institutions in Madras, Lucknow, Lahore, Delhi.

Abhinindranath Tagore questioned the validity of adopting the Western stylistic norm as the only viable one. Highly gifted, he quickly mastered the fundamental techniques of painting and adapted them in water colours to create a fusion of English academic realism with Mughal refinement and Japanese wash technique.

Rabindranath Tagore, who started his brush work and pen drawings ^{see plate}
^{2.10} at a very ripe age which was around 1927, exhibited his works in international platforms. He reinforced that he was no fellow traveller with the Bengal School which was palpably infused with national bias. His contemporaries – Gaganendranath Tagore, Jamini Roy & Amrita Shergil were equally vehement in their outlook of the Bengal School. Though not vocal, they chose to work silently within the spirit of Indianness. Three of the four giants of the period did not live long to see the turnaround in the art scene of 1940's, leaving behind Jamini Roy to revive the gloomy art scene post the decline of the Bengal School. During this period few art collectors came into the picture and started to build up their private collection. Basant Kumar and Sarala Birla, Founders of The Birla Academy of Art and Culture at Calcutta are the best example. What began in the 1940s as a humble hobby gained momentum over ten years to become a gigantic collection that eventually needed to be housed in its own building.

Gaganendranath Tagore was a leading figure in contemporary Indian painters. His important works from 1910-1921 were the sketches of the Himalayas, the life of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu through art in a sequence and the wonderful drawings depicting the Indian life. On one hand he supported his brother Abanindranath and on the other hand he showed his inclination towards Cubist School in Europe. Later in his career he developed a distinct style of his own and his own brand of cubism, which we may term as *Gagacubirrorism*¹⁶. The core of European cubism was to expose abstract geometric structures. He developed his technique after a long period of experimentation. He overlapped the flattened geometrical shadow shapes of colour to create a mystery world. He was definitely a master of beautiful composition. He painted images with a dramatic

play of light and shade using geometrical forms and simplified figures. He never blindly imitated the western art style. He was also a great critic of his time and his social cartoons were very popular. His cartoons reflected his treatment of the scenes of Kolkata and the funny side of the life of its citizens. He is best known for his political cartoons and social satires on Westernised Bengalis ^{see plate 2.11}. One of his paintings *The Atrium* ^{see plate 2.12} is a remarkable work and a fine example of Cubist influence on his work. This painting particularly shows a fine blend of light and created a dramatic effect with colours. Though in most of his earlier works he used multitude of colours but in this one he has used various shades and tints. The whole composition looks like a combination of various geometrical shapes put together. This work could easily be understood though there is abstraction in the shapes. There was not any artist at that time to experiment with this western concept. He is still regarded as an artist who made several experiments. He passed away in 1938. But his memory lives on in his paintings and sketches.

Coming back to point these four artists worked in creating new possibilities to help the revival of the new movement. It should be noted that three of the four artists however did not accept the foreign medium of oils. It was only Amrita Sher-gil who took to paint in oil. However, each of them had their own medium for expression – ink, water and earth colours. This was a vital contribution in a new medium for expression. The four great masters from the early 1940 have created no followers but by mark of their sheer individual greatness continue to be seen as the founders of the new age modern art in India. As clearly stated by Pradosh Dasgupta in his article published in *Marg*¹⁷, Supplement to Vol.XXI, No.1, “The renaissance movement which began at the turn of the century was a spent force by the 1940’s.” The zenith of the Bengal School was over and a new beginning of

artistic impulse was felt with the dawn of a new era. The impact of the Second World War, while changing social environment, economic scenario and political thinking had its influence in the Indian Art scene. Contemporary artists inspired a new line creating a synthesis between the east and the west. The early 40's were dark days for Bengal. The important feature is the art market has gradually shifted from Bengal to Mumbai and Mumbai to Delhi.

Modern Indian Art is very much related to the history of the country and social conditions in which the artists developed their styles. We see the growth of different schools after the decline of British Raj. The British Period produced significant works under the Company School. The Indian artists followed the European techniques in their paintings. The 'modern' of Indian art wove itself around some very potent and receptive expositions. Tracing a veritable path that leads to such learning inevitably opens up a virtual Pandora's Box, considering the innumerable speculations and subjective interpretations of 'what' and 'who' really constitutes the 'Indian Modern'. Ensign feels a modest need to permeate into the evolutionary pattern of the Indian art practices from the 1900 to around 1950s, as a token of reverence to the Indian Art, which has continued to be a source of ceaseless inspiration and awe for the art connoisseurs all over the world. The credit coronation ritual as to who heralded modernity in Indian art often sways from the head of Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906), Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) to Amrita Shergil (1913-1941). A decisive framework accompanied this marking exercise, a keen association with the western art practices and a persistent need to establish a distinct identity for the artist in the society and formulate an independent aesthetic idiom for Indian art. Raja Ravi Varma eulogized a visual vocabulary essentially Victorian which he subtly configured

into the Indian mythological and literary escapades, establishing himself as an invincible popular cult. A. Shergil infused European sensibility into her topical choice of Indian themes, and appropriated unusual attention to 'downtrodden' and 'poor' in the society, affirming herself as 'modern'. In the simultaneous Pre-independence background, there was a coterie of Indian artists in Bengal, often known as 'revivalist' who were making a first concerted move attempting to create the idiom of 'new Indian art' by the name of Bengal school. In this inspired search for 'Indianness', the set of artist leveraging the momentum, studied the techniques, style, pictorial space, material and anatomical details of the Ajanta 'frescos', Rajput and Mughal 'miniatures', Kalighat *patas*, Chinese and Japanese paintings and their theories of art, the lyricism and romance of the pre Raphaelites and the free-wheeling linearity of Art Nouveau. The artists who showed consummation in their artistic style and vocabulary adhering to these influences were Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, D.P. Roy Choudhury, A.K. Haldar, Kshitindranath Mazumdar, Sarada Ukil and M.A.R. Chugtai. Sustaining their spirit in this environment were some like Rabindranath Tagore and Gaganendranath Tagore, who were quintessential individualistic and experimental in their artistic endeavors fathoming a singular modern visual idiom. In the 1920s, the emergence of the 'Santiniketan' favoured a bend towards the rural cum folk aesthetics the most prominent exponents of this trend being Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Baij, Benode Behari Mukherjee and Jamini Roy. The immediate post-independence Indian art surprisingly vocalized its tenets in a very apolitical and unhistorical rhetoric which has led to the idea of many different notions of the 'Modern' in the preceding century.

However, soon after India gained independence from the British, in 1947, local artists started to return to their original traditions, renouncing the Company Art style. As with all cultural and artistic currents that are formed around a distinct political event, the post-Indian art contained a heavy dose of political consciousness and social marks. This was the time of birth of Indian Contemporary Art and besides the political issues of that period, it had a lot to do with the founding of a new art school in Bombay, called the 'Progressive Artists Group'. The emergence of the Progressive Artists Group (PAG) founded in 1947 was synonymous with legendary names like F. N. Souza, S. H. Raza, K. H. Ara, M.F. Husain, S. H. Gade and S. Bakre affirmed this with its palpable absorption with European modernism as a way to shun away from the fruitless pursuit of naturalism or revivalism. Indeed this shifting movement of the art hub from Bengal to Bombay signified an urgent call of an advancing nation that needed to strike the potent arrow to the direction ripe with modernizing possibilities identical with technological transformation and political vitality. The group was joined briefly, in the fifties, by others like Mohan Samant, V. S. Gaitonde and Krishen Khanna. This era is marked by the spread of different art movements across the nation which endeavoured to delineate a western-oriented modernistic sensibility in their art practices led by Pradosh Das Gupta (Calcutta), K.C.S. Paniker (Madras) and their associates and followers. Through the 1950s, a cumulative reaction towards the validity of internationalism in the Indian context started appearing. In the south, influenced by K.C.S. Paniker the painters and sculptors started placing their aesthetic speculations within the sensible indigenous realm. The stylistic mode of figuration and abstract in painting became more unique and distinct and the sculptures started displaying iconicity and

frontality besides combined with the use of traditional technique of metal repose (Kavacha tradition). *Dhanapal, Kanai Kunai Kunhiraman, Janakiraman, Nandagopal* and *Nambiar* emerged as significant sculptors on the scene from mid-1960s onwards. Borrowing meditative themes from primitivism, sculptors like *Meera Mukherjee, Nagji Patel, Himmat Shah* and *Mrinalini Mukherjee* have attempted to blur boundaries between art and crafts and asserted the minority cultural affinity. Delhi Shilpi Chakra (DSC) had stalwarts like *B C Sanyal, S Gujral, Ram Kumar, Dhanraj Bhagat, K S Kulkarni, Kawal Krishna, Debjani Krishna, K C Aryan, Shankho Choudhury* and *Ajit Gupta*.

In the late fifties and intermittently over the next two decades, the centre of artistic evolution shifted to Baroda, where the Fine Arts Department of Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda became springboard for varied aesthetic ideologies and innovations. This credited effort was brainchild of a collective artistic energy of practitioners, the Baroda Group which includes artists like *Sankho Choudhury, N.S. Bendre, Nasreen Mohamedi, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh* and later *Bhupen Khakhar, Ratan Parimoo, Jeram Patel* and *K.G. Subramanyan*, whose experiments in abstraction, Pop Art¹⁸ and Neo-Dada¹⁹ considerably deepened Indian art's engagement with modernism. This art school also brought to fore printmakers like *Jyoti Bhatt, KG Subramanyan, Rini Dhumal, Laxma Goud*. Other prominent printmakers of period immediately following Indian independence include *Sanat Kar, Lalu Prasad Shaw, Amitava Banerjee, Somnath Hore* and *Krishna Reddy*.

Francis Newton Souza, founder of the Progressive Artists Group encouraged two types of art, which are mostly visible in contemporary Indian

paintings. At one end, the recent political and social changes had artists painting bold and furious scenes related to these events, expressing their frustration of not being able to communicate their true artistic ideas and motives for the long period of British occupation. At the other end, the Bombay Art School encouraged painters to return to Indian traditions and motives, creating magical and fantastic pieces of art. Sometimes both ends met and some famous Indian painters really stood out with their work, both because of their strong political message and their marvellous touch of the brush. Such names include the Progressive Artists Group's founder, *Francis Newton Souza*, *Maqbool Fida Hussain*, *Gulam Muhammed Sheikh or Sundaram*, to name just a few. Following these simple, yet outstanding leads, contemporary artists managed to bring Indian paintings, sculptures and other forms of visual arts to their original roots and traditions, while keeping a distinctly modern touch to them. Expressing Indian realities and social or political issues was not exactly an original form of art, but the way Indian artists managed to transcend it is truly innovative. This is why contemporary Indian art is so valued and appreciated today and it holds the first line of almost all Major American and European auction houses.

There was one painter though who showed the tragedies of Indian partition through his paintings. He was called *Satish Gujral*. His works were a turning point in Indian art landscape as the painters subsequent to him evolved their own style casting aside the colonial prejudices. This further led to flourishing of fresh ideas any Indian art gallery that exhibited these refreshing new art works. The art galleries and art collections all over the world followed suit. Any Contemporary art gallery of India now-a-days displays traditional art specimen, but so too the latest form of vigorous and audacious paintings that have sophistication and grace

that is unique. They are an expression of the synthesis between the myriad art forms that has brought out the current contemporary art.

One of the most important facts about Contemporary Indian Art is that it cannot be confined to a single style or cultural and artistic current. If we are to say that Contemporary Indian art has a style, the only style that would truly fit would be called 'diversity'. Contemporary Indian artists use a variety of modern and traditional styles in their paintings, including Expressionism, Surrealism, Mannerism, Classicism, Romanticism, Avant-gardism and so forth. Each major contemporary Indian artist took his or her reference from a different artistic movement and while most of them combined it with a heavy local and traditional touch, some used these styles to express social problems, religious content or erotic scenes. For example, *Francis Newton Souza*, who is considered one of the forefathers of contemporary Indian art, used a lot of religious and erotic themes in his paintings, sometimes including shocking scenes bringing him international recognition. We can notice traits of Expressionism, Cubism and Primitivism in his paintings and they rarely hold social or national motives, but rather concentrate on the individual, on the human being. Some say that the lack of 'social wideness' in his paintings was a response to the other great rival art school formed in post-independence India, called the Bengal School. This school was created by a group of nationalists and the paintings that were created by its artists all bare a strong political, social and national touch. Although the styles that contemporary Indian artists use are extremely diverse, some general traits can be observed on most of their paintings. Human bodies follow the dynamic and silhouette-like models used in ancient and traditional Indian art, while for the more extravagant artists, humans are almost two-dimensional, which represents the emptiness of the human

being. Another fact that can be found with most of the contemporary Indian artists is the use of contrasting colour schemes, especially nuances of orange and red, combined with black or gray. This contrasting combination also has its roots in traditional Indian paintings. The use of fervent reds and oranges could either show that contemporary Indian artists are extremely passionate, or they could be interpreted as balancing elements to a painting's dark touches. In lots of cases, the background is either red or orange, while individuals are darkened out, as to express the wild, passionate World in which the human being is contrastingly sombre.

Contemporary Indian Painting was initiated in the early twentieth century. This resurgence of sorts for Indian art was lead by Tagore family. Famous contemporary artists in that period were by and large inclined by the great Indian heritage expressed in painting themes based on the great Indian Epics, Mughal and Rajput Miniature painting, murals of Ajanta and Ellora and many more. After India got Independence, an unapologetic European painting style emerged in India. The Indian art gallery in those times was comprised mostly of works from the painters group who wanted to focus on the horrors and pains of the first and second World Wars and the disillusion that resulted from them. Contemporary Indian paintings are unique entities that reflect the intuitive and emotional concepts in Indian culture. This has been implemented with a feel of soft magic that is a distinct quality of the elegant Indian art works. Famous contemporary artists well-known throughout the world for the splendid paintings that they have worked on are *Laxman Shreshtha, Deepak Shinde, S.H. Raza, Sanjay Bhattacharya, N.S. Bendre, Prabhakar Barwe* and *Anjolie Ela Menon*. Contemporary Indian art became more and more popular, constantly scoring

prestige points with international art collectors and art lovers. This worldwide boom is related to the fact that India, one of the most powerful, exotic and amazing cultures in the World, always had a passion for beautiful and artistic things. During the ascendance of the Indian culture, the country's art was defined by the specific period it was developed in and the regional and religious presets that influenced it. Thus we can find forms of Hindi and Buddhist art, Islamic ascendancy art, art from the colonial period, modern art and contemporary art.

The post 1980 contour accounts for some of the most dramatic changes witnessed in the Post-Colonial India. The rampaging germs of phenomena's like liberalization, globalization, consumerism opened up multitude of options-experiences produced never before, aided by elevating levels of mind, media, opportunities and mobility. The boom era of international art auctions has lately dawned upon the Indian art with *Subodh Gupta's* sculptural installations fetching record price. Artists also received required impetus courtesy transnational projects, grants, fellowships, international curatorial collaborations and residencies. Artists like *Atul Dodiya, Baiju Parthan, Jitish Kallat, Natraj Sharma* and *Sudarshan Shetty* have embarked on conceptual experiments by the means of deploying devices and icons drawn from the realm of mass and popular culture, sign-systems ubiquitous in the society. A trend towards 'Internationalism' has percolated the Indian art scene as the artist's concerns have become more global and the expressional mode more universal. The notion of art has come to be defined in terms of accelerated interface shaped by technological acceleration giving competing versions of reality and redefining the existing conventional means of aesthetic contemplation. Most of the artists tried to situate themselves in such conflicting 'post-modern' and 'post-colonial' space/time by multi-layering

their existing engagements with experimental apparatus and producing virtual, ephemeral spaces through installations, digital imagery and videos as *Vivan Sundaram*, *Nalini Malani*, *L.N. Tallur* to name a few. There are others, who in a sensitive vein, weave aesthetic narrative around ‘the identity of self’ as an image of wholeness as well as a victim bend on the forces of aggression and consumerism giving rise to performance based body art. These new ‘art situation’ falls beyond the preview of the established studio-gallery-museum system, gesticulating new forms of response, including baffling the conditioned viewer.

In Bangalore, a different experimentation was parallely going on based on underlying the city’s physical appearance, the multiple layers of accumulated history of human life. Three new media artists express this fluctuating urban phenomenon through their work in different media. From Bangalore to Bengaluru, the in between twenty years have meant a huge transition for the city, physically, socially, and culturally. Engaging with this changing history, and sifting through it for stories to document are *Clare Arni* (b. 1962) and *Smriti Mehra* (b. 1980) – the former working with still photography, and the latter using moving images, that is, digital video and a third, *Krishnaraj Chonat* (b. 1973).

Clare Arni has built up a wide repertoire in documentary photography, concentrating on architecture – modern and archaeological – and travel photography. Her ongoing body of work documents ‘Disappearing Professions’ in Indian metropolises, her sister and collaborator Oriole Henry assists in the background research. In Bengaluru, she located and photographed members of communities whose jobs have been made obsolete by technological development, from knife-grinding, to *dhobi-ghat*²⁰ work, from traditional silk-dying, to film-

cutout painting. For example, earlier the city did a roaring business in painted film posters. Convenient and quick, digital printing has now taken its place. Arni says, “I have recently been involved in exhibitions that document India’s fast changing urban landscape ... I realized that many of the professions that I had earlier photographed had disappeared from the streets of my hometown.” She adds, “The subjects would often spend hours with us over tea, as they were passionate about their profession and its history. They would share information on other professions that they felt we should document.”

Smriti Mehra’s work is located at the intersection of art, design and research. She currently teaches at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology where she studied as an undergraduate, and is an artist-in-residence at the Centre for Experimental Media Art. Recently she developed ‘The Flower Project’ that involved the exploration and documentation of Bengaluru’s crowded City Market. The project included her video-essays, as well as the multi-media work of those she had invited into the project, experimenting with the methodology of the ‘expanded documentary’. Smriti says, ‘I have had to become a mapmaker of sorts. Mapping the desires, hopes, needs, dreams and disparities of this city from my particular vantage point has been born out of a desire to establish reference points for my own personal memories.’ One of Mehra’s videos recorded in rich details the sights, sounds, and textures of the flower market, and the persons who participate in the endless cycle of distribution and consumption of flowers. Having grown up in Bengaluru, her experience of its changing facets and her interactions with its inhabitants from varied cultures, religions, and economic strata have inspired much of her work, and resulted in video documentaries, radio projects, writing and performances. “With a background in

both Visual Art and Communication Design, I have a strong interest in seeing my practice as not merely portraying the human condition but being involved with it, harkening back to the mapmakers as actively exploring various terrains and substrata. I am always challenging my perspective, confronting my partiality as ‘observer’ and seeing my role as participant in these dialogues,” states the artist.

Krishnaraj Chonat, uses diverse media to create art objects that are descriptive of condensed personal memory and experience. In an attempt to grapple with and express instances of social and environmental conflict in a rapidly urbanizing society like Bengaluru, Chonat has devised a visual language that uses a combination of opposites, both in material and concept. The work ‘Private Sky’ of 2007 comprises a picture-perfect ‘villa’ house on a platform atop a visibly dead potted tree. A theatrical full moon and an oversized mosquito complete the installation. The whole is painted a ghostly white, and is reflected an infinite number of times in surrounding mirrors, rather like the effect of identical dwellings in a gated community. This is part of a series on the city’s mad rush for real estate, and the desires and tastes of the new rich. Integral to his work is also a conscious use of material to narrate and extend satire (for example, the moon made out of fur) and to promote individual responses based on the memory of each viewer. About this work, he says, ‘the development of infrastructural facilities in form of some institutions providing basic studio and technical facilities has given much-needed impetus to the printmaking activity all over the country.’ Garhi Studio (started in 1974) and Lalit Kala Regional Centres at Delhi (1955), Chennai (1978), Lucknow (1983), Calcutta (1984), graphic department at Delhi College of Art, Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal, the Print Studio and Academy of Fine Arts in Mumbai and the Kanoria Centre for Arts in Ahmedabad are some

amongst them. Besides under the guidance of Jagmohan Chopra of Delhi Shilpi Chakra and banner of Group-8, the first all-Indian show was held in New Delhi in 1969, followed by many others. Similarly the Indian Printmakers Guild, formed by capital's young printmakers in 1990 has been active in producing diverse prints by its members like *Ananda Moy Banerji, Dattatraya Apte, Jayant Gajera, K.R. Subbanna, Kanchan Chander, Moti Zharotia, Sushanta Guha, Sukhvinder Singh, Subba Ghosh, and Shukla Sawant* besides *Anupam Sud, Jai Zharotia*. (Goethe-Institute 2011)

THE INFLUENCE OF THE INTERNET IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART PRACTICES

Indians are well-known for their prowess in IT knowledge and they used this knowledge to its fullest potential to promote their contemporary art and developed an entire network of profitable art businesses over the Internet. In recent years, when contemporary Indian art bloomed, many Indian Internet gurus saw this as an excellent opportunity to develop online businesses revolving around art. A lot of popular online auctioning sites emerged and great pieces of contemporary Indian art can be found effortlessly, at the click of a button. Not only did the Internet make contemporary Indian art famous throughout the World, but it also managed to distinguish it as a unique cultural phenomenon of the Asian continent. As one of the most important contemporary Indian art critics, Anuradha Mazumdar who works for the 'Sotheby's' auction house in New York stated, 'Indian contemporary art is emerging as the fastest growing category in Asian art'. Actually, this 'Indian trend' had a great effect on the cultural and artistic fields in all of Asia, as auction houses are now turning their heads to other business

opportunities on the Asian continent, towards the contemporary art of Japan, Indonesia or Korea. Another great influence that the Internet had over Contemporary Indian art was the quick development of online Digital Art. Combining their excellent technical skills with their artistic nature, Indians are now regarded as some of the best digital artists around, their work being well sought after by the western entertainment industry and by the fans of this art genre, which has achieved new high standards of popularity in recent years.

ART PRACTICES IN NEW MEDIA

New media, first of all, is a readymade. And it does not out rightly defy conventionally familiar media as much as it defies the manual labour attested to a medium. Thus trying to ascribe or decipher new media in the same mode in which we identify a conventional media would be a desire to drive motors with a pre-supposed determined training in bullock-cart driving. Thus new media art, equipped with the 'readymade-ness', different from that attested to Professor Duchamp, defies the definitive possibility of media. *In a way*, defying the idea of a media is new media. The new media not only (i) rejects the clear-cut outline of a media and (ii) falsify the interactive ability between two media, but also (iii) refuses to wear the mantle of any semblance to any artistic media known till date. In other words, new media in art contests the institutionalization of media. By doing this, human expression has found a literally virtual premise to 'realise its creative expression, beyond the *real*'. There is a third angle in which the new media refuses mediaisation²¹. Portions of the conventional elements of a known media is translated from real to the virtual, using virtual documentation of actual work as ingredients of an artwork; for instance the photograph extracted from a

documentary video and proved as a creative work of art, by commixing it with or without its virtual avatar. For instance, a photograph or a video as part of a new media art shifts not only its essence from domestic usage to a creative premise, but also alters its very existence, by becoming a medium-of-expression, by agreeing to being a medium to transport something real into virtual; and also accommodates the co-existence of these two together in any which way possible.

(a) The infinity of the universe is replaced not only by the possible existence of multi-universe, but also the co-existence of infinity of universe with impossibility of interaction between multi-verses is being permitted. Interestingly, the widespread reception of new media and the scientific imagination of multi-verse occurred at the same time, perhaps with the aid of the very the same technical apparatus that triggered both of them.

A quick look at the way the media-suave art in last one century has traversed, indicates the attack of the media over ‘an’ idea (collage upon realism), idea over ‘the’-ness of media (conceptual art), but the distinguished premise of ‘idea’ and ‘media’ refuse to dissolve or collide, like, say, just a multi-verse. Photography or/and video is thus definitively indefinable as part of the project called New Media, but it is not to be considered as a failed project. The very nature of new media, from the perspective of the convention to which both the artist, audience and the media is conditioned, is hence understood only conditionally. And the condition is that the new media can be grasped only in comparison with another familiar one and along with the baggage of perceptive strands that this has implanted within us. There is a media which is new, just because there are/were many older ones, agreeing to co-exist or even submerge within the new, so as to renew the latter.

To define thus is the history of expressive media in visual culture, since Renaissance, indicates that a self-definition followed a media or a definition was allocated to a creative media after and based on the latter's birth and evolution, and never the other way round. New media, seeming to gel with this what seems to be in line with the millennium's definition of media, both endorses and refutes it both at the same. The difference is that the norms of history of media dealing with representational realism from past five hundred years are integral matter to the documenting apparatus called as photography and video. Alternatively, the 'complexity' becomes much more 'sophisticated' when the outline of very documentary apparatus juxtaposes with the outline of a media of expression when video and photography is engaged. This can be simplified as 'the frame itself is framed and the documentary apparatus itself deserves to be documented.' This is the achievement of the new media works, in general, no matter be it the videos of Nam June Paik or the photo-sculptures of Boyd Webb or Bruce Nauman irritating by saying 'thank you' innumerable times in his sound installation or a photographic still from a video being claimed as a self-complete creative entity. The new media in art, owing to its virtual-as-real characterization, had to face its challenge from a premise which the new media (outside art) had nothing to do with. The technical 'gadgetisation'²², as Jean Baudrillard famously said ('Simulations') removed that power one gets by owning a car and everyone is empowered to own a mobile. However, that was not to be and the way new media art in India has been inculcated is testimony to this.

The practice of video-art in Indian context is widespread. Owing to the assurance that new media guarantees aspects like uniformity and globalization, an art critic was once instructing a video artist that the edges of the video frame

should be blurred. An artist-photographer, after practicing for a while, which seemed like a while, was enquiring with one of her friend about the details of the practice of ‘artist proof’ and the like. And the simplest questions always asked by never articulated is ‘does photography and video make new media art?’ as if to ignore the fact that the virtual essence of the sum total of the real and artistic world was the beginning of the simulated, cutting edge and similarly named art attitudes. Making a new media work might sound absurd, for, it is absurd. You can paint, sculpt but not ‘make’ a ‘new media work’. For, there is no clear cut division between the known media and the unaccounted material consumed within the premise of new media. At the same, most new media Indian artists are also those whose past was engaged in creating media-specific artworks.

Artists making photographic-art, video-art and video-installations in India began to place their physical-self in front of the camera, Umesh Madanahalli, Surekha, Pushpamala, Anita Dube, Archana Hande, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Sonia Khurana, Smitha Cariappa, Bharatesh Yadav and the like. On the other hand, there was no reference of these artists’ self-portrayal in their own pre-techno-suave artistic expressions. Also the way, in which they pose themselves in front of the camera—with exceptions though, particularly when they perform in natural or orchestrated settings are to deal with fragmentation of the notion of manual labour of sort. Most of these artists are not professional performers. So, with the absence of an earlier tendency to self-portrayal, and with a current ambition for self-referentiality, such preoccupation of the artists behind technological device and within the camera-aesthetics re-attributes the ‘cultural definition of manual labour in a nationalistic premise’, with artists themselves serving as live testimony to such a social practice. Just like the popularity of new media in art and that of

multi-verse coincide, the re-allocation of manual labour and cultural effect in Indian context unites. The boom in the outsourcing of this manual labour through Indian Information Technology sector and the new media artist pushing his/her self in front of the camera have something in similar.

In other words, photography and videography, as engaged in artistic expression in India, are technically unsound in relation to the way in which these very media are engaged in, say, the new media. It could be the last nail not in the coffin of Indian nationalist art but into the general acceptance that virtual media of art is universal throughout the Earth but may pave the way for institutionalization of Graffiti. (Kumar, 2011)

It seems clear that the modernism of the preceding decades prefigured the tone of Indian artistic practice in the late eighties and nineties leading to post-modernism and post-colonial ideas to seep in. However, during this time, the preoccupations of the earlier part of the century were considerably attenuated and, with some younger artists, even become a non-issue. The hard facts of disappearing borders and a globalised economy made post-modernism the preferred artistic mode. In keeping with the tenor of the times, photo and hyperrealism, installation art, new media creations, and digital representations found their way into Indian artistic and public awareness. The 'hybrid mannerisms' excoriated by Jagdish Swaminathan became 'hybrid signs', and ironically, began to seem normal and familiar. However, even as many of the earlier divides blurred, and the borders between imported and indigenous seemed to suture, some rough edges continued to show. During the 1990s, a pluralist and fragmentative mood dominated the creation of contemporary art, highlighting the

difficulties associated with the dawn of an age of information and instant gratification, and with the emergence and novel concerns of ‘the global Indian’. Dually charged by the excessive information they received and their personal responses to this environment, the work of artists like Shibu Natesan, Surendran Nair, Jayashree Chakravarty, Rekha Rodwittiya and G Ravinder Reddy responded to newer and greater numbers of stimuli than any of their predecessors could have imagined.

With the old, outmoded dualities loosened, artist Atul Dodiya’s metaphoric montage took cognizance of the space in which Indians found themselves face to face with other citizens of the world, while Subodh Gupta used his paintings and installations to filter and magnify the everyday experiences of rural and middle-class Indians for a global audience. In the work of Baiju Parthan, the past and the present cohered without dissonance in a new, digitized realm, and Anju Dodiya’s personal struggles with the violence of the creative process were spelled out for viewers in her water colours. Like painting, contemporary sculpture evolved in accordance with new shifts in ideology and paradigm. Sculptors found that the only limits imposed on the techniques and materials they could use were those of their own imaginations. Traditional media like stone and metal were subjected to new treatments and unusual combinations, and inventive techniques like site-specific installations and kinetic sculpture gained popularity. In addition, boundaries between traditional disciplines like painting and sculpture were dissolved, with artists like Sudarshan Shetty, Anandajit Ray, Jagannath Panda and G R Iranna hybridizing the two through their practices.

With this contemporary wave came the opening up of the market for Indian art abroad, as also the profusion of art galleries within the country, meaning that the Indian artist now had no choice but to address a more diffuse audience, through themes that resonated with the local as well as the global. Today, the work of artists from the Indian *Diaspora*²³, the blurring of design and art, and the videos, installations and digital spaces of an even younger generation of artists have all added new dimensions to Indian contemporary art, a seemingly nebulous concept ever-receptive to growth and change. Through the trials and tribulations of its practitioners, Indian art has yielded a picture of a vital and vigorous creative practice over the last century. It is this frequently bewildering heterogeneity, this multiple and plural nature of Indian art which, perhaps, will eventually deliver up the insights its practitioners continue to pursue so dedicatedly. (Saffronart, 2012)

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Each form of Indian paintings differs not only in terms of material used, and style but also the mode of expression. As a result India has paintings in the form of paper, cloth, stone, and wood, walls of caves, temples, and palaces. Indian artists have been vocal through paint and brush and chosen the best possible mediums available in that scenario. Since religion has always played a very important role in Indian art, most of the old and historical paintings in India exhibit strong religious strains. Each form of Indian painting has in some or the other way depicted presence of God and importance of sacred ideas. Unlike Western Countries where we can trace the development of different forms of paintings in a chronological manner, Indian paintings cannot be charted out in a

chronological manner. Different forms of Indian paintings developed parallelly in different regions of India. While artists of Mithila created Madhubani paintings, the painters of Rajputana state like Mewar, and Madwad created another form known as Rajputana paintings. So we can conclude that Indian paintings differ in form according to the region rather than the age or time they were created. Going through the various forms of Indian paintings is like taking a cultural tour of India.

With the 'post-modern' idiom in Indian art is relatively in its developmental stage, gathering earth to firmly establish its feet and multiple '-isms' as Graffiti of 'post-colonial' flavour has already entered the fray. But as Friedrich Hegel (Hegel, 1993) states 'art to belong to the spirit it is made in', the new set of alternate art genre too recognizes and interprets the post-haste socio-political-cultural renewal process of an equally mutating nation today vis-à-vis its sensibilities.



Plate 2.1 Wall painting of a dancer, Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh. Retrieved from URL: <http://crtindia.gov.in/wall%20paintings.html>



Plate 2.2 Mural Painting, Ajanta cave, Maharashtra. Retrieved from URL: www.vimlapatil.com



Plate 2.3 Mural Painting, Design on the Ceiling, Ajanta caves, Maharashtra.
Retrieved from URL: vibrancyoflife.tumblr.com



Plate 2.4 Mural Painting, Ellora cave, Maharashtra. Retrieved from URL:
www.wondermondo.com



Plate 2.5, Mughal Miniature Painting. Retrieved from URL: www.artnindia.com



Plate 2.6, Raj Put Miniature Painting, Retrieved from URL: resources.archedu.org

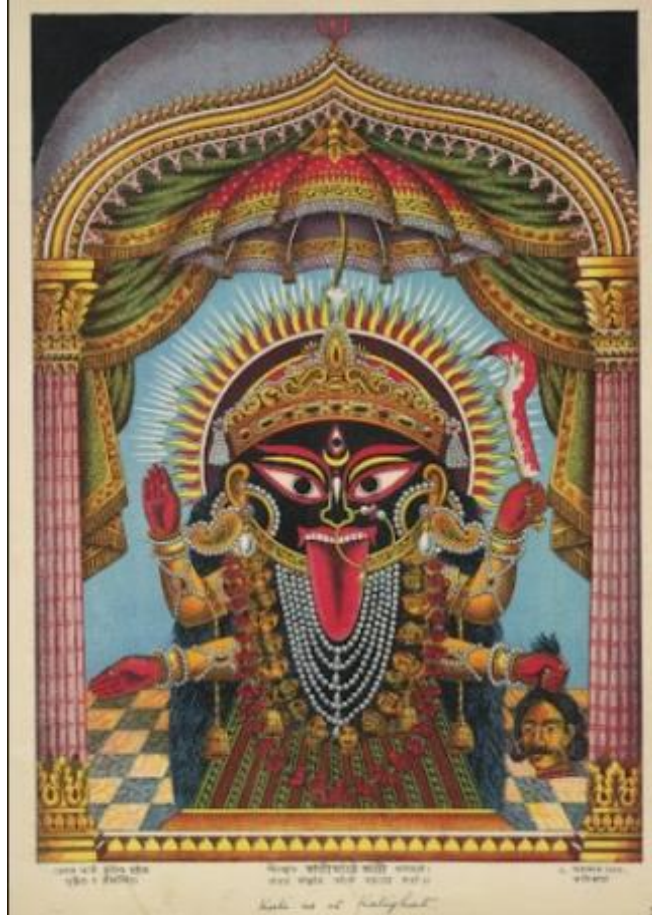


Plate 2.7, Kalighat Kali, Lithograph, 1890, Retrieved from URL:
<http://vedicgoddess.weebly.com/2/post/2012/08/kalighat-kali-lithograph-1890s>



Plate 2.8, Kali Ghat Patua Artists Painting, Retrieved from URL:
<http://www.sunday-guardian.com/artbeat/patua-art-comments-on-babu-culture>



Plate 2.9, 'A BRIGHT DAY', Odisha Pata Painting, Retrieved from URL:
<http://www.rareindianart.com/resx.php?id=383&s=x1&n=right>



Plate 2.10, Doodles Rabindranath Tagore, Retrieved from URL:
<http://www.thehindu.com/>



Plate 2.11, Satirical Drawing, Gaganendranath Tagore, Retrieved from URL:
www.indianartcircle.com



Plate 2.12, The Atrium, 1920, Gaganendranath Tagore, Retrieved from URL:
<http://artsalesindex.artinfo.com/asi/lots/2578490>