DEPICTION OF SOCIAL THEMES IN THE PAINTING OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WOMEN ARTISTS

THESIS
SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy
FINE ARTS
BY
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ALIGARH (INDIA)

2015
Certificate

Certified that Ms. Priyanka Kulshreshtha has completed her Ph.D thesis, entitled ‘Depiction of Social Themes in the Painting of Contemporary Indian Women Artists’ under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge, it is her original work and worthy of submission for the award of Ph.D degree.

Dr. Madhu Rani
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my colleagues and friends of Fine arts Department, Aligarh Muslim University for providing me intellectual, encouraging surroundings to initiate the path of my studies. It is really a great pleasure to express my sense of gratitude to Dr. Madhu Rani, as supervisor and as Chairperson, Department of Fine Arts A.M.U. for motivation, guidance, and advice to finish my work.

I am grateful to all teaching and non teaching staff for their support and special thanks to Seminar Incharge, Department of Fine Arts, Aligarh Muslim University. The Maulana Azad Library A.M.U. has also treasure of books, beneficial for me.

I am also thankful to my parents, sister Ekta and brother Shivam and all my family members for their support.

I am very grateful to the artist Arpana Caur and Gogi Saroj Pal who shared with me their art work, photographs, catalogues and other materials related to my topic. Various government and private institutes and academies like National Gallery of Modern Art New Delhi, National Museum, New Delhi, Lalit Kala Akademy, New Delhi, State Lalit Kala Akademy, Lucknow, Indira Gandhi National Centre of Art, Safdar Hashmi Memorial Art Trust, New Delhi. and various art galleries like Delhi Art Gallery, Art Alive Art Gallery, Vadhera Art gallery, Gallery Espace, Art Positive Gallery, New Delhi, Academy of fine arts and literature, New Delhi, provided me lots of informative material in terms of catalogues and books, monographs of the artists which was very insightful for my studies.

\[\text{Signature}\]

Priyanka Kulshreshtha

\[14.2.15\]
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Introduction
INTRODUCTION

Art is performing any human activity with an aim and purpose, which in turn vitalizes the human life. An artist is the most sensitive person reacting strongly to realities of life thus inspiring him to express his thoughts and feelings in a creative manner. Art is the mirror of contemporary society. An artist cannot avoid the circumstances and situations surrounding him and thus social values are imbibed in his individual perception. Art is like medicine giving relief to the sufferings of society and a person experiences aesthetic pleasure after seeing any art work. Sometimes, these works compel the viewer to rethink about old customs and values which cause a hindrance in the path of development of mankind. The significance of art lies in its capacity to evoke intense emotions in recipients bringing about a catharsis in the mind.

An artist, through his art work, enhances the status of the intellectual development of human being. The artist performs the duty of redirecting any wrong in the society as an active agent and recreate the value with this art. An artist does not simply duplicate the images surrounding him, but, in fact, recreates this as per his perception of things in a distinguished style or indirect manner. According to Pranabranjan Ray ‘Any art which has its genesis in perceived social reality and also by means of sensation, evocation, narration and image-symbology, makes a telling comment upon any aspect of social reality and gives to it human value connotation, is to be regarded a socially responsive art. Socially responsive art usually has a didactic component—it acts as a cognizing agent for the taker. Through it the beholder gets to know reality as perceived by the artist. This art maintains a dialectical and metaphorical relationship with its motivating social reality.’

The Indian subcontinent is famous for its cultural heritage, traditions, values, religions, and ethics. Thus, remarkable features enhanced the glory of Indian art. Over the Century, Indian art has had various social, political and religious influences. The Journey of Indian art embraces many art forms like miniature painting and cave painting, murals, manuscripts and illustration, folk art, decorative arts. It also includes religious narratives, historical and literary content. Social content was not emphasized
at that time because the artists had to depict only the royal splendour, grandeur, religious themes according to their patronage.

Paintings have undergone significant transformation from the time of British Raj to a change in patronage of royal house to new educational institution set up by Britisher. The establishment of four British schools signifies the remarkable shift form karkhana or atelier to schoolroom and the studio during 1850s to the 1870s.²

In the early 20th Century, Bengal school, known as ‘Renaissance’ of Indian art, revived the classical and religious tradition. Indian modernism can be said to have started with the works of Rabindra Nath Tagore, Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher Gil. Amrita Sher Gil was the first woman professional artist who painted the real picture of Indian poor people and their misery. Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938) was one of the artists of the Bengal school, who adopted caricature as an art form to show socio-political reality of that time. Born in Calcutta, Gaganendranath grew up in a family whose exceptional creativity spearheaded Calcutta’s cultural scene. Gaganendranath was the nephew of poet Rabindranath Tagore and brother of Abanindranath Tagore, one of the major artists of the Bengal School of Art. He tried to comment on the Bengali life and caste system, the insincerity, hypocrisy of Hindu priests and the double-standards of the rich western-educated members of society known as the Bhadralok, He commented on Baboo, the Indian people who tried to become modern and western. He also expressed political happenings around that time.³

The decade of 1940’s was more expressive about socio-political reality. The artists of that time expressed their views about the contemporary situation through pictorial presentation. Calcutta group [1943] introduced an art of social change. This period witnessed many social disorders in the nation, deeply affecting the lives of people. According to Laxmi Sihare, ‘social, culture and political events yielded the required stimulus. The devastating famine of Bengal, the horror stories of the second world war, the unleashing of brutal force by the British rulers to suppress the popular struggle, communal riots, partition of the country and problems of refugees, stirred the most tender and at the times, even the most brutal and volatile emotion of the artists, challenging them to render these humanistic and social experiments’.⁴ Bengal
famine was more dreadful than the destruction in war. The response of the artist to incidents that impacted the country was influential. The major problems like famine, grief, poverty, difficulty, struggle for rights and liberty, compelled the artists to render the situation of fragmented society. This was the initial phase of new art form of social expression with meaningful concept. Prodosh Das Gupta was the founder member of this group. Artists were more concerned with actual famine victims rather than models or sitters. Artists like Chitta Prasad, Zainul Abedin, Paritosh Sen, Ram Kinker Vaiz and Somnath Hore painted and sketched the social trauma and misery of that time.\textsuperscript{5}

The national independence from the colonial rule in 1947 spread the individual will with issue of national identity. The development of trade, rapid speed of industrialization after war and a century of education gave a strong foundation to new self consciousness in 1940s. The climatic urgency of emergence of modernism related to the ambition of the individual. The progressive vision of an individual explored reality free from the fetter of academic realism in art and feudalism in Indian society.\textsuperscript{6} These artists tried to define the quest of individual identity through the frame of nationalism. They formed modernism in art by using different methods to explore the personal idiom with national flavour according to the socio – political situation of the country.

In 1947, the progressive art group was formed in Bombay by six bright young artists F.N. Souza [secretary of the group] K.H. Ara, M.F. Husain, H.A. Gade, S.H. Raza, and the sculptor, S.K. Bakre. They rejected the academic realism which was taught in art school. The group had its first exhibition of painting and sculptures in Bombay in 1949. The radical essence behind their body of work is articulated in the manifesto written by Francis Newton Souza decrying the 'insipid imitations of realism in the European school' and at the same time, rejecting the literary and 'sentimental' paintings of the Bengal school, which have no connection to 'the pace and anguish of our times'.\textsuperscript{7} According to them, 'Today we paint with absolute freedom, for contents and techniques, almost anarchic; save that we are governed by one or two sound elemental and eternal laws, of aesthetic orders, plaster co-ordination and colour composition. We have no pretensions of making rapid revivals of any school or
movement in art. We have studied the various schools of painting and sculpture to arrive at a vigorous synthesis.\textsuperscript{18}

F.N. Souza’s paintings are sensitive, inspired by Christianity. In 1946 Souza joined the communist party of India and he has clarified why he was attracted towards Marxism. ‘It was the suffering, poverty and disease, the caste distinctions and illiteracy that impelled me to study the writings of Marx and Engels, so as to find solutions and resources to the problems of India.’\textsuperscript{19} He also painted on the subject of nude, still life, landscape and sexuality. M.F. Husain integrated various Indian art traditions with his personal style, assimilated the symbolic use of colour and spatial divisions of miniature painting, images of classical sculpture like Khajuraho and the simplified form of folk art. He was also inspired by the Hindu mythological theme, gods and goddesses; depicted it with modernist interpretation towards contemporary context.\textsuperscript{10} Portrait of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, Splash Front Page on violent war in the Gulf are some of his works in a social context. S.H. Raza amalgamated geometry with chromatically balanced, elegant abstractions. His move to Paris was instrumental in causing a major transformation in his painting style. Deeply inspired by the Hindu cosmology, Indian poetry and landscapes, the main feature of his art is bindu which is the symbol of the universe and all forms of life interrelated to this. Later, some artists like V. S. Gaitonde, Ram Kumar, Tybe Mehta, Akbar Padamsee, Krishen Khanna’s, Mohant Samant, and Satish Gujral joined the group. Some artists expressed the human dilemma and social reality of that time. Ram Kumar’s early figures depict complete loneliness reflecting grief due to displacement and separation during partition in 1947. He had experienced this during his time spent in old Delhi. Krishna Khanna’s and Tyeb Mehta’s work depict greediness, violence, suffering and fear allegorically painted through distorted images. Satish Gujral later joined this group and his early work shows the tragic partition of Punjab through a sad and mournful face in expressionistic style. Various art groups like Delhi Shilpi Chakra, Cholamandal Artist Village, Group 1890, Neo Tantric Art emerged on the Indian art scene.

The period of 1950s-60s proved to be a revolutionary phase in the context of social realism wherein artists developed a distinctive style of expressionism. The art work by Nikhil Biswas, Shyamal Dutta Roy, Rabin Mondal, Prokash Karmakar, Bijan
Choudhury, Dhiraj Choudhury, Ganesh Pyne, Jogen Chowdhury, Bikash Bhattacharya, Sunil Das, Veena Bhargava and others in the Eastern states, Bhupen Khakhar, Gieve Patel, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, Jeram Patel etc from western states and Baroda; Arpita Singh, Manu Parekh, Anjolie Ela Menon and others in Northern states; A. Ramachandran, K. Laxma Goud, C. Douglas and others in Southern state, made a strong impact in depicting social theme. There was also a social art movement in northern India which was known as Samikshavad, pioneered by Prof. Ram Chandra Shukla in 1974. The artist allegorically commented on social, political and economical issues with powerful pictorial language.

The period of 70’s witnessed the upsurge of many women artists in Indian post colonial era. Soon feminism became the remarkable movement in the West as well as in India. It upheld rights of women for progress and development. In the context of art, contemporary women artists highlighted not only women related issues but also social issues in a wider context.

Present thesis titled ‘Depiction of Social Themes in the Painting of Contemporary Indian Women Artists’ is divided into six chapters to discuss and clarify the concepts in detail and captioned as under:

Chapter 1  Emergence of women artists of India: Ancient to modern period.

Chapter 2  Major social problems of India.

Chapter 3  Social perception in the painting of Contemporary Indian Women Artists.

Chapter 4  Social idioms in Arpita Singh’s painting.

Chapter 5  Social conceptualization of Nilima Sheikh’s painting.

Chapter 6  Social discourse in Aparna Caur’s painting.

The first chapter describes the emergence of women artists in India. It is very important to trace the development of women artists in pre-independence India which gave a strong foothold to upcoming artists in post-independence era. Women artists were not widely acknowledged like their male counterparts in early India. Records show the first woman artist of nineteenth century as Mangalabai Tampuratti, sister of Raja Ravi Varma. Sunayani Devi was another well known women artist, daughter of
Introduction

Gunendranath Tagore, a cousin of Rabindranath Tagore and sister of Abanindranath Tagore and Gaganendranath Tagore. Her work was deeply inspired by folk art and Mughal painting. Amrita Sher Gil was the first professional women artist of India. She gave a new meaning to her art work depicting the Indian village people. Stella Kramrisch, Liza Van, Gauri Devi, Sucheta Kriplani, Jaya Appaswami were earlier art teacher and students in Kalabhavan. Gradually, women artist got training in famous institutions of the country like Delhi College of art in 1940, M.S. University Baroda in 1950, and art schools like Sharda Ukil school and Triveni Kala Sangam in Delhi. In the 1950’s, other artists emerged such as Kishori Kaul, Latika Katt, Anupam Sud and Nalini Malani, Nilima Sheikh, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Gogi Saroj pal and other.

In Chapter 2, there is a discussion of India’s major problems. After independence in 1947, India had to face many fundamental problems like shelter, food, education, health etc. Now, India is one of the fastest growing nations of the world. But there are some major problems which cause hindrance in the progress of our country such as gender based issues in which female infanticide, dowry, child marriage, domestic violence, plight of widows, prostitution, rape, and sexual harassment, etc. are discussed. The second is Socio-economic issues of India. The discussion covers subjects like Poverty, Unemployment, Childlabour, Illiteracy, Overpopulation, Corruption, and Migration. The third is about violence, communalism, communal violence and Terrorism, The fourth part deals with the ecological disaster that directly or indirectly affects any person or group in society.

Chapter 3 is very important because it highlights the meaning of contemporary Indian art, its essence, motifs and characteristics. It includes a major discussion about the famous contemporary Indian women artists and social conceptualization in their painting. The artists are Arpita Singh, Anupam Sud, Nalini Malani, Arpana Caur, Gogi Saroj Pal, Vasudha Thozhur, Rekha Rodwittiya and Nilima Sheikh. All these artists opposed the conventional art forms and representation and have re-told history and myth according to their experiences. Various elements have been intermingled like myth, history, fantasy, human values, allegory and these artists present a wide range of subjects like social asymmetry, gender inequality, dowry, female fetuses, population, communal riots and urban disorder, nuclear explosion. There is also a brief description of the art exhibition and events which explore the experience of artists in a
modern vernacular way. Three famous artists are discussed in detail in the upcoming chapters.

Chapter 4 deals with the work of Arpita Singh, her biography, exhibitions, social interpretation and paintings, stylistic characteristics of her work. Born in Baranagar, Calcutta in 1937, her work is a juxtaposition of sensitive execution of her life experiences, remembrance of everyday life. Her painting is an explanation about gender equality, urban chaos, violence, terrible influence of power, police assault etc. Her interpretation of society and country is superbly explored in her meaningful composition. As a multi narrator, her oil is on an epic scale with sensitive brushstroke, free floating numbers, daily life objects, all vividly depicting a meaningful message. Her important paintings focused upon are Lily pond, Night Cab, Whatever is here, Child bride, Watching, My Mother, Ashvamedha, Durga, Missing Target.

Chapter 5 discusses Nilima Sheikh's multi-layered narrations about feminine issues, partition, Kashmir violence and turbulence and its affect on mankind and the pain expressed after the violence, return of their home through her compositions. She was inspired by Urvashi Butalia's The other side of silence, Agha Shahid Ali's poetry, The country without post office and Each Night put Kashmir in your dream. She eloquently depicts the trauma of partition with pain and loss. Her thought provoking work on bride burning issue When Champa grew up finely depicts various aspects related to the subject. Working on vasli, tempera, casein and natural pigments, she encapsulates various influences of Japanese, Chinese, Persian and Indian miniature.

Chapter 6 explores Arpana Caur, her biography, exhibitions, style, technique, the social relevance of her painting and covers her interview. Born in Delhi in 1954, the artist's struggle in her early life is clearly visible in her art work. The misery of Sikh riots in 1984 inspired Arpana to depict the trauma through her painting 'The world goes on' and she was awarded a gold medal in Triennale. Her flat canvases, sensuous figuration and beautiful division of backdrop like Pahari painting memorize the Indian traditional art with modern flavour. Her important works are Where are all flower gone, Widows of Vrindaban, Women in interiors, Threatened city, Sheltered Woman, Wound, juggler, A Landscape with knives ,Water Weaver, Stepping Out, Heart of Darkness, Soldiers Mother, Green circle and many more.
Conclusion features role of contemporary Indian women artists and their works in art. Their works are a pictorial exploration of their experiences, perceptions and sensation not only about women related issue but also different aspects of the society. Artists experimented to retell the history and myth to comment on social reality in the present day context. Women are also portrayed as a symbol of exploitation and sometimes nayikas are boldly confronting the viewer and voyeur. The conceptualizations by these artists enhance the richness and depth of contemporary Indian art. Their canvases are vivid and resonate with an aura of deep feminine and social sensibilities.
REFERENCES:


5. Ibid. pp. 63-67


Review of Literature
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several books and catalogues have examined the emergence of women artists. One of the most important and influential work on this topic is the book *Expression and Evocation: Contemporary Women Artists of India*, edited by Gayatri Sinha and published by Marg, Mumbai [1996]. There are meaningful insights on each artist and on their work. The introduction written by Gayatri Sinha explores the emergence of women artists since ancient times and then traces the first women artists Mangalabai Tampuratti and Amrita Sher Gil. She describes their major works styles and modern and innovative approaches towards the depiction of Indian life. Then she writes about the participation of women in journalism and creative writing. In Fine Arts section, she also throws light upon various women involved in Shantiniketan. During the 1950s presence of women is visible in various art schools in India. Arpita Singh, Anjolie Ela Menon, Madhavi Parekh, Nilima Sheikh, Gogi Saroj Pal, Anupam Sud, Nalini Malani all made rich contributions to Indian art. Various essays by leading critics enhance the content of the subject. Yashodhara Dalmia wrote on Arpita Singh entitled ‘Arpita Singh: Of Mother Goddess and women’; Geeti Sen wrote on Anupam Sud, called Anupam Sud: The Ceremony of Unmasking’; Uma Nair wrote on Gogi Saroj Pal: ‘Between Myth and Reality’; Mala Marwah wrote about ‘Nilima Sheikh: Human Encounters with the natural world’. There are more essays on other artists. In Arpita Singh’s essay, Dalmia shares her life experiences and her different portrayals of women like girl smoking a cigarette, her depiction of a gun toting Durga and a woman plucking a flower etc. Subtle metaphors of violence sometimes emerge in her art. In the essay on Nilima Sheikh, Mala Marwah describes her inclination towards miniature painting, seventeenth century Japanese woodcut. Writer talks about her natural settings with image of flora and fauna and her depiction of everyday life, legends and ballads. She worked with oil on canvas and tempera on paper and cloth. Her traditional Indian miniaturist style vasli was on hand prepared paste board. Also mentioned were her illustration books for children. In another essay by Gayatri Sinha ‘Confronting the Womanhood’ Sinha points out that Arpana Caur was inspired by the melancholic atmosphere in the works of Amrita Sher Gil. She uses spatial division of miniature painting and sometime recreates it for the airless atmosphere or congested space of women in her early paintings. Several heads, dead bodies, suffering widows,
guns, and sharp tools are all favourite subjects. Sinha also focuses on Arpana Caur’s yearning for greenery. Sinha says that through her painting, the artist elevates her personal and public concerns.

A book *Feminine Fables: Imaging the Indian Woman in Painting, Photography and Cinema* written by Geeti Sen, published by Mapin publication in 2002. Ahmedabad throws light upon the portrayal of Indian Women in different fields like painting, printmaking, installation, cinema and photography. It raises several questions about the women’s identity, its representation and transformation over the span of the 20th century. Writer Geeti Sen starts the conversation with the iconographic representation of Bharat Mata painted by Abanindra Nath Tagore. In another section entitled ‘*Woman Resting On A Charpoy: The Semiotics of Desire*’ Sen also describes India’s first professional woman artist, Amrita Sher Gil’s depiction of women. Other artist like Gogi Saroj Pal, Kanchan Chander and Arpita Singh are also explored in the various forms of women as perceived by them. In this essay, the critic examines Amrita Sher Gil’s biography, her personality, upbringing, her stay in Paris and her innovative approaches towards the rendition of the Indian theme. Traditional Indian art like Mughal and Rajputana paintings and the Ajanta and Ellora caves inspired her a lot in terms of colour and forms and it shows her true understanding of Indian aesthetic. In the particular article which has a subtitle ‘Subverting the Women as an object of desire’ the writer has written about Gogi Saroj Pal’s experience of women as victims. The artist uses the typical icon and mythological characters to comment on different aspects of women’s lives. Painting like *Hatyogini Shakti, Kinnari, Dancing Nayika* and *Conceptual Self-portrait* express the artist deep insight into the theme. Another artist Arpita Singh who is also explored here, displaysher subtle feminine sensibility and childhood memories through familiar objects like toys, maps, aeroplane, bus, car, and flowers. Arpita’s recreation of the child bride expresses subtle metaphors and codes about women’s vulnerability. Singh’s theme of paintings interprets reality through various elements. The Chapter ‘The Home and The World’ focuses on films like Charulata and Sahib Bibiaur Ghulam which reveals the lives of the women and their transformation through rejection of the traditional heroine stereotype and their acquisition of freedom. Later sections deal with photographic representation of women. Indian printmaker Anupam Sud’s influential work is
describes in the section ‘The Ceremony of Unmasking’, in which the author describes
the Sud Approach towards a woman’s multiple identities, which are expressed
through masks. Some of her work is commentary on the sale of women’s bodies, the
preying male gaze, the patriarch system and the relationship between men and
women. For Anupam, the body is beautiful so she does not want to conceal it. The
chapter titled Hatyogini Shakti opens up a new insight into various interpretations of
the Goddess Shakti by different artists.

In another book, Memory, Metaphor, Mutation: Contemporary Art of India
and Pakistan by Yashodhara Dalmia and Salima Hashmi, Oxford University Press,
New Delhi, 2007. The former’s chapters named ‘Home/ Nation’ deals with the
emergence of women artists before independence like Mangalabai Tampuratti,
Sunayani Devi and Kamala Das Gupta. After that comes the active participation of
Meera Mukherjee, Nasreen Mohamedi and Zarina Hashmi on the Indian art stage.
Arpita Singh, Nilima Sheikh, Nalini Malani all had individualistic approaches toward
the rendition of the theme with a subtle, aesthetic pictorial vocabulary. The book also
contains commentaries on Mrinalini Mukherjee’s work on hemp. Anita Dube’s
painting, sculpture and video installation, Anju Dodiya’s autobiographical approach,
N. Pushpamala’s performances shows artistic tastes and styles in exploring the unsaid
experiences of life.

A two volume work Journeys: Four Generations of Indian Artists in Their
Own Words [2001] by Yashodhara Dalmia traces the progress of India through the
profound conversation of 30 Indian artists spanning four generations, which reflect
individual artist’s personal and private experience, styles, approaches and perception
that had a tremendous impact on Indian art. Contemporary artist like J.Swaminathan,
F.N. Souza, Tyeb Mehta, K.G. Subramanyan, Satish Gujral, M.F. Husain, Jatin Das,
Rameshwar Broota, Arpana Caur, Subodh Gupta, Anju Dodiya are also featured on
several aspects related to art. Artist like Arpana Caur, Arpita Singh, Nalini Malani,
Nilima Sheikh lucidly express their artistic views related to inspiration, concepts,
subjects, methods, treatments of themes in various traditional and modern idioms. In
the introduction, Dalmia largely talks about the socio-political concerns of the country
and the artist contribution in putting Indian art on the global map.
A book dedicated to Nilima Sheikh, *Trace Retrace: Painting Nilima Sheikh*, edited by Kumkum Sangari was published by Tulika Books in association with Gallery Espace, New Delhi and Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai in 2013. The first chapter ‘Reptures, Junctures Returns:[Un]lived Histories, Feminist proposition and Nilima Sheikh were written by Sangari herself. In this essay, the editor explores Sheikh’s early paintings, in which daily life scenes like a picnic, images of cooking, sweeping, cleaning, other domestic chores and her children against natural settings are the preferred artistic themes. Sangari shows the various influences of Mughal and Persian art as well as Siyah Kalam in her paintings. Sheikh’s paintings are minutely discussed in terms of image, form, linear expression, compositional arrangement, colour treatment, medium process, inspiration and references. Her painting *When Champa Grew Up*, which was inspired by a Gujarati folk song, was discussed at length with regards to the situation, presentation through household objects and arrangements of image with all their emotional intensity. In Kashmiri paintings, Sangari talks about the pain, grief and mourning and her later part deal with inspirations in terms of the whole artistic configuration like the handling of space, form, colour and other elements. Her major source included early Silk Road, Mughal, Provincial, Pahari folios and European paintings. Stencils play a very big role in Sheikh’s work, which were generally used as a device to extend, relate and create several layers in her paintings. She depicted Kashmir through several historic interpretations to the present day context, in terms of pobyteries, texts, narratives, and other artisanal practices. Figures of diggers, funerals, curfews, demons, etc. are repeatedly depicted for narrative enhancement. In another essay ‘A Counter- Archive of Pain and Loss’, Ananya Jahanara Kabir describes her Kashmiri paintings as a dialogue between different modes of representations and how Sheikh illustrate the beauty, the pain and the loss. Kabir traces Sheikh work between 2002 and 2010 from paper to banners, from horizontal and vertical modes to brocade mounts to different sizes. Sheikh’s smaller work in 2002, her Thangka-like work of 2003 are somber-coloured painting with Sufi quotes. Her larger banners of 2004 like *Valley, Each Night Put Kashmir in Your Dream, Gathering Threads and Farewell* were all revisited. ‘The Drawing Trails’ exhibition explored the artistic philosophy and folklores, quotes, and traditional texts pertaining to art. It was just like a dialogue words and images. Kabir also traces Rushdie’s world of Shalimar Clown in ‘What
Happened that Day1,2,3', and which shows the destruction of Pachigam. After that the focus shifted to Sheikh use of stencils as medium of emotions and visual manifestation. Kaushik Bhaumik's essays, 'Passages in Reverie' maps out the influence of the artisans of Nathdwara, miniature art, theatre, dance and other cultural arts. The last section of the book reveals artist quotes, excerpts of poetry, novels, and songs.

Yashodhara Dalmia’s book Contemporary Art and Other Realities [2002], published by Marg, Mumbai include a chapter ‘Feminism and Women artists in India’, which begins with the decade of 1970s dedicated to feminism and later a discussion on the theme in various titles, 'The Body and Its Parts: Anita Dube and Sheba Chhachhi' examines the work of Anita Dube and Sheba Chhachhi. Another title ‘Body- Procreative, Retributive: Arpita Singh, Navjot Altaf, ‘The Body as Polemic: Nalini Malani, Rummana Hussain’ and ‘Body as Poetic Metaphor –Arpana Caur, Rekha Rodwittiya, Nilima Sheikh, Anju Dodiya’ The article portrays a deep insight into the private and public world of these artists and their creative and innovative endeavors.

Gayatri Sinha also curated the show, The Self and The World: An Exhibition of Indian Women Artists presented by National Gallery of Modern Art with collaboration of Gallery Espace, New Delhi [1997], which significantly portrayed the theme. Fifteen women artists, Amrita Sher Gil, Devyani Krishna, Pillo Pochkhanawala, Meera Mukherjee, Nasreen Mohamedi, Arpita Singh, Anjolie Ela Menon, Madhvi Parekh, Anupam Sud, Nilima Sheikh, Gogi Saroj Pal, Nalini Malani, Latika Katt, Navjot Altaf, Arpana Caur, display an extraordinary vision towards the issue and influential analysis is done in order to show their role in different aspects of life and experiences of society. Their experiences is shard in each section along with images. It begins with a focus on India’s first professional artist, Sinha who wrote about the subversive depiction of female body rather than stereotype presentation of women.

Article 'Five artists from India, Gogi Saroj Pal, Rekha Rodwittiya, Navjot Altaf, Anupam Sud, Rummana Hussain'[2003] written by Mary Ann Mildford – Lutzker in Jstor, deal with artist’s social political and cultural concerns. This essay
focuses on issues ignored until now. Firstly, she deals with Amrita Sher Gil, then explores Gogi Saroj Pal and her work experience. Baroda Based artist Reka Rodwittiya articulates her struggles, depicted through the metaphor and symbols used in the painting. The author sketches the contribution of Anupam Sud's famous printmaker who explored the male and female relationship and commented on male gaze. Mumbai based artist Navjot Altaf's work on art project helped to motivate the artists. The essay ends with Rummana Hussain's installation and performances which depict the issues. The writer emphasis that she was the first artist who used her own body as a site of social transformation.

'Women Artists of India :A Celebration of Independence' [1997] is a major exhibition by Mary Ann Mildford-Lutzker at Mills College celebrating the fifty years of independence. Indian Women Artists have expressed their thoughts on the prevailing social problems after fifty years of independence from the colonial rule. All the artists comment on social and political issues through their own unique interpretation, Participating artists Arpana Caur, Naina Dilal, Rummana Hussain, Nalini Malani, Navjot Altaf, Anupam Sud, Rekha Rodwittiya, Suruchi Chand, Lalitha Lazmi and Nilima Sheikh, Gogi Saroj Pal, Jayashree Chakravarti, Kanchan Chander, Vasundhara Tiwari. Some artists used traditional mode of expression and some used the forms of installation and etchings to explore the various issues.

Exhibition Catalogue Tiger by the Tail: Women Artists of India Transforming Culture [2007], essay written by Roobina Karode, Elinor W. Gadon provided a deep insight into theme. The whole article categorized into different titles and detailed study is provided in the context of the participating artists. The titles are Transgressing the myth, Subverting the icon, Performing the body, issues of identity, Memory –loss trauma and the location of violence, Healing and empowerment, Making a space for healing, strategies for resistance and recovery. The exhibition explores the experiences and expression of three generation of women artists of India. These artists illustrate influential image which show the pain and their brave step towards the social and cultural change.

Nancy Adajania's article in Art Asia Pacific entitled 'India's New Progressive' [2006] investigates the earlier generation artists like Nalini Malani,
Navjot Altaf, Rekha Rodwittiya and Anita Dube and new generation women artists such as Vidya Kamat, Mithu Sen, Tejal Shah and Shilpa Gupta, their experiences, variety of themes, gender issues, social practice in male dominated society. Feministic approach in the west inspired these artists to explore social and political themes. Younger artists express themselves in a newer context and avoid strict feminist beliefs.


*Cobweb: Arpita Singh* [2010], Of Loss & Recovery published by Vadhera Art Gallery. In this essay, Ella Datta traces out Arpita’s beautiful but bizarre work where both good and evil exist in the painting in forms of pink water lilies, cars, paper boats, birds, sky with skeletal, intestine, knives, gun toting soldiers and drowning men. Her art voyage imbibes childhood reminiscences of her loss, dislocation and journey in terms of maps, road and other symbols. Datta also depicts her interesting graphic elements like letters, numbers. Her drawing serves as a fundamental base to every from through strong lines and sometimes, she like to do doodling in her notebooks. Singh wonderfully renders the fabrics, creases, folds and various influences of Indian textiles like can be seen in her art work because she worked as designer for weaver service centre. Her painting like Night Cabs, Welcoming the Guest, Ritual, Egg fry, Evening sky, Ashwamedha, My Lily Pond is widely discussed in this essay.

Catalogue ‘*Signpost journey: Paintings by Arpita Singh*’ written by Ella Datta, published by Vadhera Art Gallery traces out Singh’s memories as a result of interaction with surrounding as human being. Her canvas is teemed with signs,
symbols, maps, letter, flower, and alphabets. Datta talks about oil and water colour which is not on an epic scale. She is also inspired by packaging and graphic materials, especially broke bond red label tea. Night Cab, Welcoming the Guest, Hunter, is also explained in oils. She uses multiple narratives with elements of theatre. Her painting discusses in details various aspects like character, themes, and execution. Through these painting, Datta presents her work which is an amalgamation of different elements like history, myth, and fantasy.

'Arpita Singh: Picture Postcard [2003-2006] Of History, Context, and Location' painting [2006] by Ella Datta and published by Vadhera Art Gallery, Datta points out Singh’s upbringing as a little girl after she left her home in Kolkata and went to Delhi with her mother and brother. Different memories related to displacement and pain is explored through various images. She imbibes the influence of world and shows them in a unique manner with lots of emotions. Painting like Watching, Whatever is Here, Evening Walk, Thirty Six Clouds: Yudhishthir approaching heaven, Lollypop city are discussed widely in terms of character, themes, forms, colour and compositional structure. Through her water and oil colour painting, the artist has provided a deep insight into the world around her with vivid imagination full of vitality.

Article ‘A Tapestry of Guns and Targets’ written by Roobina Karode’ in The Art News Magazine of India Vol. III issue III [2003], in which Karode outlined the fact that Arpita was disturbed by the existing realities of our time. She also renders death in terms of bones, intestines, skeletal parts, several body parts and bleeding wounds. Her works focus on negative aspects related to the games of authority, senseless customs, and gender inequality. Her art imbibes hidden reaction and mysteries related to the event. Karode also focuses attention on her treatment of surface, inclination towards the Kantha embroidery, its weaving, stitching, rhythm and repetition.

The Art of Arpana Caur written by Suneel Chopra, published by Roli books highlights her art journey, her inspiration from the round figure of Gupta Art, fusing it with chola bronzes and Deccan art and Pahari art. She worked with folk artists and explored contemporary themes. She expresses her feeling about the Sikh riots after
Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. Later, the focus is on her early works, painting like Child Goddess and World Goes On, its theme and forms and compositional structure. She used umbrella as a device of protection, especially in her early painting of sheltered women and also painted her experiences related to the partition. She made a tree called Kalpavriksha of Hindu mythology. Her remarkable work on nuclear explosion was commissioned by the Hiroshima museum. Her work throws a significant light on different aspects of life like war, pollution, Injustice, inequality. The later part of this book showcases her painting, images and its description at the back.

Another article Navigation Nation, Signifying Sikhism: The work of Arpana Caur by Manav Ratti [2013] This article throws light upon the life, experiences, her wide range of subjects related to violence, injustice, philosophy, and phenomenon of time. Her Academy of Fine Art and Literature in South Delhi, houses a studio, residence, gallery, museum of folk art and tribal art. Her work is displayed in various cities in India and abroad. She has paint several commercial and non-commercial murals. She boldly speaks about the social and political aspects, problem of present India, Sikh riots of 1984, violence, rape and plight of widows. Manav's deep conversation with Arpana shows the artist's deep connection with India through her paintings, her creative journey which never ended. Her major inspiration is Guru Nanak. Painting on canvas gave her immense pleasure. Then, she widely talks about social and political aspects of her art and was of the belief that art has the power to raise awareness about injustice and inequalities. She also highlights various painting such as World Goes On, Between Dualities, Time, Yogi, Yoginies, Day and Night, Sheltered Woman.

Article 'Tireless Mission' written by Roobina Karode deals with Sud's humanistic concerns apart from women related issues. Her social and political thoughts raised concern on all aspects of humanity. Her deep understanding about Indian artistic tradition, cultural aspects and daily life experiences inspired her to work in the context of contemporary perspective. Her works mainly include etching, lithograph and silk screen. She focused on man- woman relationship and the exploitation of women. Karode also interpreted the meaningful message through her paintings like Succession, The Red Chair, The Game, Dining with Ego, Off Walls, The
Ceremony of Unmasking. Later part of the article addresses the artist's upbringing, her teacher, mentor, and her teaching experiences in Delhi College of Art.

All these above books, article, essays explore and examine deeply the theme of contemporary Indian Women artists and its related aspects.
Chapter 1

EMERGENCE OF WOMEN ARTISTS IN INDIA: ANCIENT TO MODERN PERIOD
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EMERGENCE OF INDIAN WOMEN ARTISTS: ANCIENT TO MODERN PERIOD

The notion of female in Hinduism represents an important duality—she is fertile, generous, the bestower on one hand and on the other she is destructive, potent, dynamic. A famous statement which portrays the goddess in all her manifestations thus, - in prosperity she comes in the form of Laxmi who gives wealth, success and fortune and she also becomes the goddess of misfortune and disaster in adversity. There would be no energy in the universe without female. She is Shakti energy and power and also Prakriti.

She assumes cosmic proportions, destroying evil and addressing herself to the creation and dissolution of the worlds. She presumes cosmic balance, abolishes evil and refers to herself as constructor and destructor of the universe. Devi is the deity of nature and life because she defends against illness. God was not capable of controlling the universe without Shakti who was the strong, religious and divine power. The Goddess has many names and is embodied in many images like Parvati, Lakshmi, Sarasvati and Sakti, she also manifests under the titles of Gauri, Uma, Sati, Tara, Minaksi, Mahadevi, Kundalini, Durga, Kali, Chamunda, Aditi, Maya, Ganga, Prakriti, Gayatri, etc.

Durga and Kali are symbols of feminine ‘Shakti’. These goddesses Durga and Kali are the representations of victory Good over evil. Her birth is the result of the domination & cruelty of demon on earth and God created a Shakti which is known as Durga to defeat the demons or in a symbolic way demolishing several enemies of a person like arrogance, hunger, greediness selfishness and anger. Durga is riding on a tiger or a lion. Maa Durga gave birth to Kali to kill demon Shambhu and Nishumbhu. She is also the representative of birth and death.

The place of women art practitioners in India is uncertain and historically not well documented as in the west in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century. Vatsyayana’s Kamasutra [2nd century A.D.] describes woman’s skill among64 arts like writing and drawing, tattooing, fixing stained glass on floor, creating figure, decoration carpentry and architecture.¹
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An early reference of drawing by women was traced in ancient mythology to a story of Usha and Anirudha. Usha once dreamt about a beautiful prince and wished for him as a life partner. Her friend Chitralekha drew portraits of different gods and famous people of that time. When she drew the portrait of Anirudha, the grandson of lord Krishna, the identity of the dream person of Usha was disclosed. This shows that women proved their skill in art since ancient times.

Women as painters were mentioned in the play, Abhignanshakuntalam, of the famous Sanskrit poet Kalidas, and women in king’s palaces entertained themselves through activities like painting. Nayika and courtesan of Buddhist Jataka, Jain Narratives and Sanskrit Theatre, are mentioned as skilled arts among 64. The famous Ambapali of Vaishali, Madhavi of Shilappadikaram or Vasantasena in Sudraka’s Mrichchakatikam are mentioned as perfect in the field of fine art and decorative art. Women as patrons were not recognized but strongly indicated in history. The giving of alms by women in Mahayana Buddhism was for the spread of Buddhism and architectural splendor. Wealthy benefactresses like Visakha of Sravasti, or the courtesan Ambapali, prepared the donation of building, and money to the Sangha. Again, the Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati had proof of Buddhist monks and other women benefactresses commissioning sculpture and railing.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, women artists became part of custom in Ragmala miniature painting. In Raga dhanasri, there is the depiction of a woman artist making a figure of her lover in which she is using drawing board using several styles. Women artists probably drew using groups from the harem, indicating the presence of the women artist at the mughal court, and now in Banaras Hindu University.

Due to the impact of British art school and academic style, the presence of women as salon and studio artists was revealed. The art school opened by Britishers in the 1850s gave training in photography, lithography, drawing and painting and design. Bengali women, westernized Parsis and British women in major city, studied art for their own pleasure.

During British rule, there was more progress in women’s consciousness. The first opportunity to participate as an artist started in this century at an art exhibition in 1879 at the Calcutta Art Society. Partha Mitter has noticed, ‘the most remarkable
feature of the show was the presence of twenty five women artists, most of them Bengali and married.\textsuperscript{8}

Perhaps the first woman artist recorded in India in the nineteenth century was Mangalabai Tampuratti, sister of Raja Ravi Varma who followed family tradition like her brother. She practiced oil painting. The famous works of Mangalabai Tampurati include one giving donation and the other a portrait of her brother. 'Being a lady, Mangalabai was not allowed the latitude enjoyed by the two brothers but her portrait of Ravi Varma now in Trivandrum is ample proof of her skill'.\textsuperscript{9}

Ravi Varma took her help to complete the famous Gaekwad commission of fourteen paintings which were inspired by Hindu mythology. Ravi Varma settled at Kilimanoor, which was the home of his mother and probably Mangalabai helped her brother here.\textsuperscript{10}

The image of women was idealized by the art work of Raja Ravi Varma and women represented as an icons of nationalism was first started by Abanindra Nath Tagore, one of the major artists of Bengal school.

There was a minor presence of women in artistic activities like music, theatre, and dance and participation in technology based art form; photography. Zenana photographic studios had started in last two decades of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{11} In 1892, Deen Dayal started a Zenana photo studio, managed by an English woman.\textsuperscript{12}

In ancient times, the land of Bharata, India has been compared to the body of the goddess, because of its specialty and richness. Rivers, hills, forests and deserts-all parts of her body-are respected through customs, ceremonies and prayers. It is assumed that the richness of the earth and the happiness of India must be retained through serenity, peace, sacrifice, respect and worship. The great philosopher Sri Aurobindo visualized India as a beautiful goddess being violated by the Britishers. He presented her as a strong religious icon and gave the title Bharat Mata [Mother India]. 'Vande Mataram' became a revolutionary voice and slogan of the independence movement against the British rule. Bharat Mata was the perfect inspiration of liberty and progress of women in India during pre-independence.\textsuperscript{13} Indian people were inspired by the iconic presence of
Bharat Mata and various leaders, poets, journalists, artists, filmmakers portrayed her as an ideal personality in their creative art works.

Abanindra Nath Tagore firstly painted India as Bharata Mata and amalgamated political awareness with Indian artistic sensibility. The woman is the central focus in the painting – as icon or a metaphor which is interpreted as meditation [dhyana] in Indian tradition. She is an ideal representation of India in kesaria dress, a symbol of Indian spirituality with four hands representing four symbols of India – food, clothes, teaching, and moksha and with a calm face emitting divine power articulating the quest of Indian legacy. There is no drama related to her appearance, no battle or dispute, she looks like an ordinary person, and is dignity personified and attentive with the assurance of hope and potential.

There was a strong wave of social reformation and upliftment in the status of women in the nineteenth century in India. There were also some enthusiastic young educated persons who were attempting to abolish evils in the society at that time. The nineteenth century marked the development and change in social, religious, economic, political and cultural field of India. Due to the influence of the British empire, Indian government, law, business, commercial sector, infrastructure, and society was influenced so much that it also helped to change traditional views of people towards life. The social reformers deliberately responded to fresh ideas and tried to promote western concepts of rationalism equivalence, freedom and human values. They wanted not only to abolish the evils in the society but also revitalize the splendor of Indian culture.

The credit goes to Raja Ram Mohan Roy for the foundation of social reforms movement in India which became the vehicle for modernization of the country. The focus of his whole life was to raise the position and place of women in India. He spread his own democratic, logical and human thought about womanhood. It was Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who for the first time explained that ancient Hindu scriptures did not mention Sati. This reinforced Lord William Bentinck to pass an act to abolish Sati in 1789, and declaring this as a crime. In 1820, he was credited with being the first modern Hindu promoter of social reforms. In the first quarter of the 19th century, Ram
Mohan Roy advocated secular education, imparted knowledge about modern literature and modern philosophy and emphasized that positive science is important for the development of the individual as well as the society. The Brahmo Samaj was established by Ram Mohan Roy for the liberty of women and equality of sexes.

On one hand Raja Ram Mohan Roy saved the widow from self-sacrifice or becoming sati on the funeral pyre of her husband and on the other hand, Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar legalized widow remarriage. He wrote a book on widow remarriage which was published in 1853. Through his attempt, the Act of 1856 was passed. He also advocated about the education of girls which was important for their overall development.\textsuperscript{16}

Swami Dayanand Saraswati thought that woman’s position must be raised. According to him, education helped women to perform their duties well at home and outside. He founded the Arya Samaj in 1875 at Bombay where Gurukul was for widows and destitutes.\textsuperscript{17}

Swami Vivekanand (1863-1902) supported freedom of women and equal status on the basis of the Vedantic ideals that ‘one and the same self is present in all beings.’ According to him ‘That country and that nation which did not respect women have never become – great nor will ever in the future.’\textsuperscript{18} He emphasized the role of education in women’s life through which they can solve their problems independently. Indian women gradually began participating in every sphere of their life which became possible due to the various laws passed by the British government for the liberty of women and demolished all evil practices against them.

Gandhiji gave new dimension, power and motivation to the Indian women in the National Movement from 1920 onward.\textsuperscript{19} Mahatma Gandhi also preached against misbehavior towards women in the name of Dharma sastras, law and tradition. He emphasized on equality of human beings and freedom for everyone. He wrote, ‘I passionately desire utmost freedom of our women.’ He stated that woman has the same right of liberty as man.\textsuperscript{20}

At the end of the first half of the 19th century, it became very decisive for Indian Muslim Community to spread the awareness of modern education, especially for women.
The most important movement of social reforms among the Muslims was started by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. He pioneered higher education of muslims in 1875 and founded the Aligarh Muslim University. He believed that western style of education is essential for development of men and women and advocated modern education. He opposed polygamy stating that it was not permissible under Koran. He also eradicated the purdah system. Sheikh Abdullah, one of the disciples of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan made strong efforts for Muslim women and established a school for girls, today known as women’s college and was part of Aligarh Muslim University in 1906 where his sister in law used to teach. This was an important achievement in the field of liberation and upliftment of women.

Also, there were many Indian women leaders whose efforts played an important role in the liberation of women in the nineteenth century. Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi was a renowned figure who motivated everyone regarding the capability of women, by her courage. The other leading women reformers were Pandita Rama Bai, who was a great scholar of Sanskrit. She talked about the social inequality towards women and established the Arya Mahila Samaj, to support and educate women and also started Sharda Sadan and Mukti Sadan. Another woman who worked for upliftment of women was Rama Bai Ranade who initiated the Hindu Ladies club to educate illiterate women and also initiated Poona Seva – Sadan and Nursing Medical association for training of nurses.

Due to these reform movements, a major change was possible in the Indian society. Transformation of views and attitude gradually affected people. People thought logically and it helped to raise not only their mental status but also enhanced the social situation of the country. One important feature of these movements was that the strong voice came to the forefront for independence of women and other related issues which were achievable only due to the efforts of social reformers. Women related issues, gender equality, justice and all aspects related to women are known as feminism. There are three major types of feminism. Liberal feminism based on the principles of women’s justice, freedom and equality to women. Radical feminism is related to prostitution, sexual harassment, rape. Marxist and socialist feminism was against patriarchy and capitalism in society. They believed that sexual division of labor in home, or job or in political life disturbed the progress of human life.
19th and early 20th Century witnessed an emergence of women reformist movement in the country wherein women questioned and challenged the pre established social norms. A will for liberation and change was clearly visible through the participation of women in every sphere of life in the male dominated society.

The Indian society of oriental art was established in Calcutta in 1907, but the work of women artist was noticed in 1915. In this exhibition, presence of two women was important and one of them was Sunayani Devi.

Sunayani Devi [1875-1962] daughter of Gunendranath Tagore, a cousin of Rabindranath Tagore and sister of Abanindranath Tagore and Gaganendranath Tagore was another known woman artist. She was married to Rajani Mohan Chatterjee, a direct successor of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. She started painting at Jorasanku, Tagore's ancestral home and her husband gave her paper and paint to keep herself busy. She was inspired by folk artist Raja Ravi Varma’s Mughal miniature and Japanese art. She was a self-taught artist and created her own different style based on folk art and Mughal miniature.

She showed her paintings to her famous brothers, and then they stated that it was so unique and innovative that it would be appreciated one day by an art critic. Stella Kramrisch called her as the first Indian modern woman artist. The critic, G.Venkatachalam said that her folk style and famous long eyes was inspired by Jamini Roy. Nora Wuttenbruch, the Austrian art critic said that the naiveness and simplification of her art resembled the work of famous artist Giotto. Chintamoni Kar placed her on par to Marc Chagall.

Her simple and candid work was the mark of progression of the Indian village art that was real and straightforward and a modern manifestation of the real India. The modern dialogue of primitive simplification with national culture and its authenticity intermingle with the image of Sunayani Devi as a nationalist artist. Much later in 1927, she displayed her intense connection with the simplicity of folk and popular art, and certainly, there was lot of folk element in her art.

The important element of her art is viewing the two sides of painting. Sunayani painted Saraswati as a general subject. In her own life, she was also inspired by
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Saraswati and was a master of singing, painting, music and much more. The reverse side of the painting has the portrait of Kotwal inspired by Shyama, a character of Tagore’s dance drama. The Kotwal is severe, solid in behavior and executed in profile. Whatever surface she used for painting became characteristic of her art. She showed her non-profitable approach towards art by painting on both sides of the paper. In the last phase of her life she did very few paintings. She actively worked from 1905 to 1938 and after her husband’s death, she stopped painting.  

Stella Kramrisch, in an essay about Sunayani, described her painting process as being an inspiration from Abanindranath’s wash painting. Sunayani first drew a red or black contour with brush on paper and filled it with thin application of water colour prepared by her. Diffused shapes provide the outline for accentuation of the forms. Washes of colours give the delicate touch to forms.  

She was an intellectual person who was nurtured with freedom of thought. She explored various themes with the fusion of Kalighat painting and Indian culture like Rajput painting and water colour paintings of Bengal school. The use of delicate lines and subtle touches of light colour depict the light, ornamentation, sensitivity and emotions again deeply rendered by fine stokes of the brush. The paintings are exceptional for their minimal forms and the subtle, minute, rhythmic lines accentuate the sharp subtle features. Forms are graceful and beautifully handled by her.  

The establishment of Art Colleges in different parts of the country like Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay in the mid 19th Century initiated a path of women’s education. A remarkable presence of Indian women artist was felt in the annual exhibition of Bombay art society. There were some women artists whose father’s were also artists, like Angela Trindade, Ambika Dhurandhar, Sukhlata Rao, Sunayani Devi, Indumati Roopakrishna.  

Some artists adopted painting as a hobby, such as C.S. Foster, Marie Henderson, Pamila Wiles and M.L. Dauban to name a few. They belonged to the family of British officers in India and seemed to show the heritage of company school. All of them had painting talent and explored variety of themes like flora fauna, spiritual, cultural and rendered their surrounding with keen perception.
In India, where male domination affected intellectual and rational during the past decade, it also saw an upsurge of women artists in the last two decades of the 20th Century. It changed their perception and encouraged young or upcoming artists to express themselves in an innovative manner and to liberate themselves from the stereotype presentation of any aspect.

Amrita Sher Gil was the first professional woman artist in India. Sher-Gil bestowed upcoming Indian artists a modernist expression and being the first Indian woman artist of the modern age, raised the issue of female bias and showed the path for women artists in post-independence India.

Amrita Sher Gil was born in Budapest in 1913, Her Hungarian mother Marie Antoinette had met her father Sardar Umrao Singh Sher-Gil of Majithia while on a visit to India in 1911 in Shimla and they were soon married. Amrita and her sister spent their time in and around Budapest. She was very fond of painting and started painting and drawing at the age of five. In 1921, she came to India and her family moved to Shimla where both sisters learned the piano and violin. Amrita also liked drawing and painting very much and she was taken to Florence in Italy. In 1924, she was admitted to the school of Santa Annunziata but was not satisfied there and returned to India.

At the age of fourteen, under the guidance of her uncle, Ervin Baktey she learnt to draw and paint. She took examples of life around her and used domestic servants as her models. In 1929, her family went to live in Paris where she studied Grande Chaumiere, initially under Pierre Vaillant and later at the Ecole Dex Beaux arts under Lucien Simon.

In 1932, she exhibited her painting at the Grand Salon and got the attention of critics. After one year, she exhibited another painting on a large canvas titled 'Young Girls' which was judged as the painting of the year. This painting got elected as Associate of the grand salon. She was the first Asian to get this honour at the age of eighteen. In Paris, her style of painting was totally western. Here, she painted 'Young Girls' in 1932. In this beautiful painting, her younger sister Indira is shown sitting on the left in stylish European clothing and another lady is shown partially dressed.
By the end of 1934 she returned to India and created her own distinct approach of painting which was quite Indian in style as well as in treatment of the subject. She painted child bride, poor village people and depicted their life, misery and pain. Her work is an amalgamation of her inborn artistic talent and her deep perception which created a new pictorial language. Her distinctive narration of poor rural Indian life has never been done before and breaks the colonial impact to create modernity in Indian art.

She was inspired by the uniqueness of Ajanta, Ellora, the rich and intense murals of the Mattancheri Palace in Cochin and the influential kushan sculpture which she observed in Mathura. In Indian miniature, she appreciated vigorous Basohli school of painting and in her later work she embraced some elements of Rajput painting, discarding emotional approach of Abanindra Nath Tagore.

According to Vivan Sundram [her nephew and a well-known artist], the drawing and water colour painted by Amrita at the age of eleven and fourteen [1924-1927] shows intense perception of herself. Although by 1927 Amrita had been in India for six years, the people and landscape in her drawings and water colours was of European style. As Vivan Sundram explains, in her earlier works, Amrita draws with a thin unsteady - line the picture of a thoughtful girl, bared and lost in the forests. In her later works, the face of women looks stressful and melancholic.

Her vision of rural India explored four important elements of art – Hungarian style of neo – impressionism, reminiscent of Gauguin - a post – impressionist ‘flat’ style, impact of ancient Ajanta’s Buddhist paintings and one of the most important factor is ‘colourism’ which was left unfinished after her death. She was deeply inspired by Indian artistic tradition. She said to Karl Khandalavala [probably January 1937] in a letter, ‘you have asked me several times whether I like the Moghul, Rajput, and Kangra schools, perhaps it will surprise you to hear that I simply worship them!...... What superb little painting they are’. Sher-Gil’s art is also a reflection of the new approach of psychological portraiture of Indian people.

Her most important work is Man in White 1935 and second is Hill Men and Hill Woman 1935 massive, silent, simplified and almost monochromatic, set against flat backdrop, reminiscence of Gauguin.
In Amrita’s three south Indian works, _Brides Toilet, Brahmcharis_ and _South Indian Villagers going to Market_, the monumental works were executed in earthy colours and statuette forms were composed like frescoes which were contemporary in theme but inspired by classical art. Amrita’s later painting—_Two girls, The Swing, Women Resting on Charpai_ and _The Bride_ endeavor an approach according to her perception of Basohli, Rajput and Mughal miniature.42

In _Child Wife_ [1939] Sher-Gil successfully depicted the expression of tiredness of the girl. The silent image shows how her future was decided by others and she was helpless in front of her parents. Amrita has rendered the subject in a sensible and striking manner.

In _The Potato Peeler_ 1938 the subject is shown peeling a potato with a knife, dressed in dark blue and her head is bent due to suffering. This is the daily activity of labor class people in Hungary but she also found this in India and emotionally rendered the miserable situation of the peasant house. It also shows their - will to exist in tough situations.

Her important works are _Young man with apples_ 1932, _Woman resting on charpoy_, 1940, _The Swing_ 1940, _Bride’s Toilet_ 1937, and _Brahmcharis_ 1937, _The Ancient Storyteller_ 1940, _Three Girls_ 1935 - this work won the gold medal of the Bombay Art Society, _Two girls_ 1939 and _The Haldi Grinder_ 1940.43

Kari Khandalavala said that Amrita’s art was a response to the Bengal school. Mulk Raj Anand thought her, ‘a genius of the first rank, one of the few Indian painters to give a new direction to the art of our country.’ He appreciated her extra - ordinary skill in arrangement of form and colour with sensibility. P R Ramachandra Rao, thought that the attempt for simplification of forms in her painting had all the ‘vitality of primitive art’. K.G Subramanyan has appreciated the simultaneous amalgamation of sensual joy and her thought for poverty in her work.44 Though there are many opinions about her art work, she was undoubtedly a very sensitive and emotional human being with exceptional imaginative power through which India’s real portraiture was depicted which was never done before. The art work by Amrita extended the vision of Indian art, also fused contradictory elements from internal to external, apparent to spirit and modern to primitivism.
She learned how to remove chiaroscuro from Mughal and Pahari miniature and Basohli artists inspired her to use bright, hot deep colour and helped to create volume and flat surface with colour. Gradually, she reduced contour of the form and focused on the use of colour. Her painting *Haldi Grinder* 1940 is a painting of her real vision of Indian village life which is full of bright and pure colour set against dull green colour.

In 1938 she went to Hungary and married her cousin Dr. Victor Egan against her family’s wishes. She died prematurely in 1941.\(^{45}\)

The role of Amrita in Indian art is remarkable and she was an inspiration to many artists of India who were compelled to change their views without ignoring the tradition. She beautifully amalgamated Indian traditional roots with post-impressionist style and represented unique pictorial vocabulary and built the bridge between tradition and modernism that showed India’s true soul in a mesmerized way.

Contemporary Indian women artists revived the incomplete mission of Amrita by addressing the problem of society in a wider context and trying to uphold the Indian tradition. The depiction of women in history changed due to her efforts and she showed women to be ambitious and celebrated the real meaning of femininity. Gogi Saroj Pal, Nilima Sheikh, Arpana Caur, Arpita Singh and other artists followed her path to enlighten the society as well as the nation.

Rabindranath Tagore brought Nandalal Bose to Shantiniketan to manage Kala Bhavan in 1919. Shortly afterwards many women were engaged in teaching at Kala Bhavan: Stella Kramrisch taught art history, Liza Van Pott sculpture and Gauri Devi, who was the daughter of Nandalal Bose, taught design. The first women art students at Shantiniketan were Sucheta Kriplani and Jaya Appaswami.\(^{46}\) Jaya Appaswami studied at Shantiniketan under the well-known artist Nand Lal Bose. She drew images that recollected Sher-Gil’s human forms but she shortly adopted the landscape and created works in praise of Tagore and artists of the Bengal school. She also created extremely original collection of British India’s art that was showed after her death.\(^{47}\) Jaya searched prints from many parts of India like Punjab, Rajasthan, Mysore, Bengal and others. She created a collection, and through her writing gave a new perspective to Indian art history. In Beijing (1947-50), she studied Chinese art with special reference to the painting techniques of the Sung dynasty and also learned ancient Chinese techniques from
One of the initial art groups which rose with the Bengal school was the Calcutta group of 1940. The group of artists included Kamala Das Gupta, who was the wife of Pradosh Das Gupta. Subsequently, she helped her husband with more vigor. She was basically a sculptor. Women artists started to actively participate in exhibitions, both solo and in groups, like Cummi Dallas and Roma Mukherjee in 1949. Other artists like Reba Hore, Damyanti Chawla, Shanu Lahiri, sister of Nirode Mazumdar, Amina Kar, wife of sculptor Chitamaoni Kar, Kamala Roy Chowdhury, also participated in various exhibitions. When Kamala Roy Chowdhury exhibited her nude drawing in 1950s, the press described her work as a danger for ethics of people. Trained in the Western academic style, she went to Paris for further training and won acclaim as an artist. The art critic of Desh on 17 Agrahayan 1367 (1954) believed that among the artists who had exhibited their works at Artistry House, Kamala was outstanding. Three male artists also participated in the group who went on to achieve recognition much later, but Kamala’s talent was identified by only few people. On 18 December, the same critic particularly appreciated her ‘Sunflower’ shown at the Academy Annual Show.

The presence of women in art colleges became noticeable in the 1950s. The famous institutions of the country like Delhi College of art in 1942, the fine art faculty at the M.S. University Baroda in 1950, and art school like Sharda-ukil school and after this Triveni Kala Sangam in Delhi, provided opportunity for training. That decade witnessed few women artists who got art training at various art institutions like, Meera Mukherjee who trained in Calcutta and Germany, Nasreen Mohamedi trained in St Martin’, London, Veena Bhargava in Calcutta, Anjolie Ela Menon from the J. J. School of Art in Bombay and the Ecole Des Beaux arts Paris and Arpita Singh in Delhi and others.

Artists like Kishori Kaul, Anupam Sud, Latika Katt and Nalini Malani, Nilima Sheikh, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Gogi Saroj Pal created a significant mark on Indian art scene in the 1950s. The period of 70’s and 80’s witnessed the upsurge of women artists in a considerable manner. Post-independence era shows their remarkable approach towards modernity and evolution which was the need of that time and the ability to express in a wider context issues like gender violence, trauma, social bias and many other national issues.
Famous printmaker Devyani Krishna (1918-2000) and her art journey started from Indore city and since childhood she was very interested in art. She was married to artist Kanwal Krishna. In 1942, she travelled Sikkim and Tibet where she observed Tibetan masks and Buddhist masks, Indian folk motifs and toys. For some time she also worked in Batik medium and also in intaglio and collograph. Devyani’s emphasis was to show the inner aspect of anything through presentation of the outer image. Her artistic conflagration blended with imagination gave birth to red hot lava. She extensively worked on innovative approach of calligraphy and her spiritual aspects. She said that ‘My work ‘Allah’ and “What and Where?” Bhom Bhom Bhole’ and Ma series are all infused with a deep religious spirit.’ The principal ‘image’ is a sanctum or an inner sanctuary in which there is an illuminated symbol, a floating script, like an emanation of mantra or a chant, the sound of which has become a symbol, a shape with colours which reverberate in the context. The radiance of light focuses attention on a cryptic symbol as the theme. One of the most noteworthy women sculptors whose place in Indian art is highly esteemed was Meera Mukherji (1923 - 1998) who was born in 1923 in Calcutta. She studied at the Oriental School of Art and at the Delhi College of art she was awarded a scholarship to study in Munich and returned to India in 1957.

She said, ‘To my mind every artist must also be an artisan, who brings to his work a devotion which moves him through the progress of his work. Like an artisan, an artist must learn to work without cease. He must in fact work harder: because while the work of the artisan has its well defined contours, the universe of the artist is without palpable bounds.’ She worked on metal casting technique for sculpture that is ancient in appeal yet modern in spirit. She was inspired by the Dhokra sculptors of Bastar in Madhya Pradesh, working in bronze in an innovative way.

S.V. Vasudev said about famous woman sculptor Pillo Pochchanawala’s (1923-1986) ‘her art remains blessed with the freedom to explore and evaluate the various modern idioms in the context of her own search for expressions reflective of the changing phase of her thought encompassing the wider reaches of the cycle of time and life.’ B. Prabha, another famous artist who maintained the legacy of Amrita to explore social consciousness in her work said, ‘It is my aim to paint the trauma and tragedy of women’. Prabha’s painting deals with a vast number of themes from landscape to social issues like draught, famine and homelessness and pain, suffering of the Bangladesh war,
showing intense feeling and perception of her social atmosphere.\textsuperscript{58} Her imagination of Mumbai’s fisher women, well executed in elongated limbs with rural presence in bold manner, celebrated beauty of Indian women by the presentation of lower class women.

Another famous artist was Nasreen Mohamedi who was born in Karachi in 1937. She went to St. Martin’s school of Art, returned to India in 1958 and worked in Bhulabhai Desai community studios. After that she was awarded the French Government scholarship to study in Paris.\textsuperscript{59} Her work of 1970s was based on different types of lines - vertical, horizontal, diagonal, bold thin, sometime shattered, network of lines wonderfully rendered with pen ink drawing. In an abstract way she expressed subtle notion behind any form and offered continuity, rhythm, calmness, sometime movement and perspective. Her drawing also explores the joy of life and nature in a subtle and impressive way.\textsuperscript{60} She adopted the Far eastern influences in her art through the use of pen which created diversity in tones and symbolized radiance, volume, transformation and organization.

Kishori Kaul called as the first woman painter of Kashmir was born in Kashmir. She was inspired by the beauty of Kashmir valley from an early age. She later joined the Baroda College of fine art in 1958 where she studied under the guidance of N.S. Bendre. She offered a fresh approach and her painting was based on nature and the golden sunlight which was expressed through subtle stroke of golden colour and various vibrant colours.\textsuperscript{61} “My process of conceiving a work is linked with Nature’s inherent structures and their ability to strike a deep resonance within my memory. The downward rush of the crystalline water or a mountain stream, splattered with light streaking through the overhanging branches of trees, determines the structure of a painting...The sudden, swift flight of a bird, the limb of a tree cutting across space, the little world of my garden in the middle of the city—all become starting points for the reconstruction, through colour, of fleeting but profound sensations.”\textsuperscript{62}

During 1960s and 1970s, a large bulk of women’s art come to the forefront with the emergence of art movement in the country like the Calcutta group [1940], Progressive art group[1947], Group of 1890 [1963], Group 8 [printmakers group] Neo tantra.\textsuperscript{63} They made a strong impact and their participation was noteworthy and meaningful although working at periphery. These women explored their dilemma in an
innovative way, for instance, some revived Indian cultural aspect, some adopted philosophical vernacular to comment on any aspect of society. Their art work manifestation was a strong perception about the life and world which allowed them to speak in a wider context.

Over the few decades, Indian women artists presented a range of subjects related to social aspects of the country like gender inequality, dowry, violence, female feticide, socio-economic disparity and other issues which were untouched in past. Western feminist movement in 1970s and 1980s inspired the Indian women artist to work in contemporary context. Social justice, cultural value, myth, history, metaphors are interweaved in their art work.
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Chapter -2

MAJOR SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF INDIA
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MAJOR SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF INDIA

India is one of the fast developing countries in the world. It is a country of different cultures, religions and languages. When India got independence in 1947, the main objective was the development of the sociopolitical situation of the country. Even now India is suffering from some pressing problems which are impediments in the path of the development of the country and freedom is incomplete without giving basic needs to all citizens.

According to Rajendra Kumar Sharma, 'the term social means concerning society, social relationship, social structure social organization etc. On the other hand the term problem means undesirable, conflicting, incongruous, improper and difficult situation, condition or behavior. Therefore, social problems are the undesirable situations, conditions or behavior concerning society, social institutions, social relationships, social structure, social organization etc. It is always disintegrating and disorganizing, it is pathological, it is harmful. It has to be cured'.

Social issues or social problems are those matters which affect a person or group of society directly or indirectly. There are some major social issues of the country.

Gender Based Issues

Gender Equality is a main issue of human rights and social justice. Women symbolize half the source and half the possibility in all the society. The whole development of human society is possible when gender equality efforts are promoted between men and women. Women's empowerment, independence and development of their social, economic and political situation are important for development in all spheres of life. A woman is represented as symbol of kindness, aspiration, renewal and capability of doing any work like men. Her virtues are like roots of power that construct the base of humanity. Women are considered as key contributions in all fields like education, agriculture, health etc.

A woman has been called Devi or goddess, Mata, the ideal and complete teacher for her children. She is the foundation of civilization. Her important role in constructing
the family and the society is remarkable. She is mother of the race and link between generations.

Gandhiji had great respect for his mother; his devotion to truth and his adoration of truth as God was derived from his mother because she always advised him to tell the truth and never speak a lie. He had great respect for womanhood and motherhood and he mentioned the great women of India’s Puraanasin his discourse with his followers: Sita, Draupadi, Damayanti, Gargi, Maitreyi and others.²

In Vedic period, women had an equal status like men in all field of life. They were honored and respected by everyone. According to Vedas, a woman married at mature age of her life and was free to choose her life partner in swayamwara. Education was provided to her. Widow had a right to remarry. Women were independent to go anywhere, and to participate in ceremonies.

In ancient India marriage for male and female was regarded essential from religious as well as social perspective. It was also assumed that an unmarried person cannot take part in Vedic ceremonies the early Dharmastraas permitted divorce. Problem of divorce was addressed by Kautilya in detail. Old Hindu scripture does not state the custom of sati system. According to Vedic hymns, wife and husband had combined partnership in the rights of the property.³

According to Manu a woman must never be liberated. She must be under supervision of her father in childhood, in youth under her husband and in old age under the care of her son. In religion women have also been considered differently. In Muslim religion woman cannot become a priest and lead the prayer, she has to follow the purdah system.⁴

During the medieval period, the status of women declined further with the arrival foreign invaders. Thinkers considered this age as a dark age for the Indian women. At this time many evil practices like, sati, purdah system, female infanticide, child-marriage, prostitution, were practiced. Due to purdah system women were also forced to practice ‘zenana’. Sati practice was common and Rajput women did ‘Jauhar’ to protect themselves from the hands of the enemy. During this time Devadasi system was prevalent in which unmarried and young girls were made devotees and had to work
their whole life in temples. This system was responsible for spreading corruption in temples. Polygamy existed in Hindu Kshatriyas. Women of royal families were allowed to be taught at their houses but other women were not free to take higher education as only primary education was provided. Thus women were unable to find their place which was given to them in ancient times in India.

In the 19 century many scholars in India emerged who advocated against the evil systems and customs structured for the exploitation of women. Thus the struggle against women’s exploitation was initiated in 19th century. Due to the endeavors of Ram Mohan Rai, Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General of India, in 1829 ‘Sati’ was abolished and proclaimed as a crime. The Brahao Samajists, emphasized widow remarriage as well as the liberty of equality of gender. Iswarchandra Vidhyasagar vigorously promoted this and finally was instrumental in creating the widows remarriage Act in 1856. Keshab Chandra Sen achieved the goal to pass the civil marriage act, 1872. The prominent aspect of the act was to compel monogamy.  

In the modern period, freedom of expression was given to Indian women and right of equality for all citizens without considering the caste, race, colour sex, place of birth. Education is a mean for social change in overall development of society. Women’s emancipation, life style, positive approach and their status have increased by the spread of education. Consequently women’s organization forcefully emerged and brought marginalized subjects into the forefront which changed whole scenario of the society.

There was an emergence of several famous women in various fields. There was Pandita Rama Bai who belonged to learned Brahmin family of Karnataka. She advocated against social inequality and injustice done to women. She also started Arya Mahila Samaj with the help of Ranade and Bhandarkar, Rama Bai Ranade worked effectively for the promotion of women and started Poona seva sadan and nursing medical association for training of nurses. Swarna Kumari Devi belonged to Tagore family, wrote historical and social novels in Bengali. Ms Annie Besant started Home rule movement for liberation of women.

Annie Besant played a significant role in the progress of Indian women in early 20th century. The year 1917 was very important for women. In that year Annie Besant
was elected president of the Calcutta session of Indian National Congress and praised the Indian women for their involvement in Home rule Movement in her President address. Her address ‘Wake up India’ spread a fire through newspapers. She also established Women’s Association in Madras with the help of Margaret cousins. She established a weekly journal ‘commonweal’ in 1914. She also initiated a daily newspaper under the title ‘New India’ which awakened the thoughts of Indian women.8

Women studies defined as ‘Studying women with a women’s’ perspective’ or ‘Looking at women in the world from women’s point of view’. It is demand to restore to half humanity its rightful place in human society, to restore to women their humanity.9

‘Feminist means different things to different people, ranging from a wish to change and challenge the whole existing order of things to the desire to bring about a more balanced and saner quality between the sexes and achieve a respectable individual liberty for women with their natural instincts and characteristics intact.’10 First wave of feminism emphasized the women’s right in society and to obtain the position with civil, social, economical and legal right like human beings. And it emphasized the broader study of oppression and investigated how oppression influenced self or personality and agency.11 Third wave focused on thinking differently and discarded the one way of thinking and quest of multiple thinking, writing and living and broke the limitation to putting some persons in centre and some on the periphery.12

Liberal feminism began in 18th century in Europe and on the basis of reason, equality, and personal freedom. The main notion of liberal feminists like Mary Wollestencroft was that ‘women are first and foremost human beings, not sexual beings.’ Johan Stuart Mills wrote that ‘women are not inferior to men in intellectual capability’. They accepted sex role dissimilarity and hoped to look after the home and play a role as a part of society.13

Radical feminism began in 1970s known as a second wave of feminism. Free sex, restraint over one’s body, collective child care are some of its aims.14 It is also concerned with various issues like pornography, prostitution, sexual harassment, rape and women battering. According to them oppression of women is as fundamental and major basic form of oppression. All the oppressions are related to male
dominance. Marxist [socialist] feminism believed that their struggle is not only against the exploitation but also patriarchy and capitalism. It avoids the fact that sexual division, and labour at the home are not the only exploitation against women but also on job and in political life, leading to only narrow development of human being.

Postmodern feminist believed that male orientation generally show singularity in thoughts while feminist emphasize the diversity, multiplicity, plurality, range, and challenge the notion of ‘woman’. According to them sexual difference is socially created not physically based. Postmodernism emphasize the problem of Third World Women’s problem and depicted them as victims.

M. Krishna Raj stated that liberal feminism exist in India because here is demand for rights of women. Actually radical and socialist feminist views may not be appropriate in a country because here are problems like poverty, deprivation and unemployment where family gave security.

The period of sixties and early seventies witnessed the growth of the major movement in India with several events like students rising, workers and peasants revolution, cast related issue and others. In western India anti-alcohol consumer acts and trade union of women, anti-corruption and other events, was started by Gandhian socialism, marked as first Indian women movement after independence. They connect and debate to different organization and campaigned various issue existed in society and spread the awareness of women empowerment and opposed the ill treatment with women. Famous example of women’s participation and involvement is famous Chipko movement of Garhwal. It was a feminist movement to keep environmental balance in Himalayan region. Rural women of Garhwal took the responsibly against the oppressive policies of government.

Women in Contemporary India are benefitted the ‘ladies first’ facility and she performed very well in all spheres of life. Women are now getting jobs in airlines, as parachutists and have taken difficult jobs like mountaineering, police etc. They disapproved the myth of the ‘inferior sex’, existed in male dominated society. Women are posted on prestigious jobs in India and abroad.

But still problems like dowry, female infanticide, sex selective abortions,
health, education domestic violence, are common in our society. Many acts and laws have been passed to eliminate these social issues.

[i] Sati practice - According to the Sanskrit literature meaning of Sat is devoted, trustworthy, respectable woman but there was no clear evidence of this practice in Dharmastra. This custom started when the women felt danger to their honour after the defeat or death of their husband by the enemy, and so they deliberately chose to jump into the fire and this practice was known as ‘Jauhar’. This custom widely used in Rajasthan because mostly people were warrior.\textsuperscript{22} This promotion of sati practice was provided by mahajans, specially, marwaris. They revived, found again and rebuilt old sati temple, and established the Rani Sati Sarva Sangh, which supervise 105 sati temples all over India. Relationship between Rajputs and Mahajans became strong through sati.\textsuperscript{23}

The famous incident of sati practice that played a decisive role for abolishing this evil was 17-year-old Roop Kanwar incident who gave up herself to fire or was burnt alive on the funeral pyre of her husband Maal Singh Shekhawat at Deorala village of Sikar district in Rajasthan on September 4, 1987. Various members of Parliament, Women’s association and the people urged for a strong law to stop sati, its elevation and adoration and considered Roopa Kanwar incident as murder. The media said this incident portray as sati had been practiced by many worshippers, rituals and events for the construction of a temple of sati where incident happened.\textsuperscript{24}

[ii] Female infanticide - The gender of child plays an important role in our society. When a child is born if it is son, the family celebrates this occasion and it is considered the sign of upliftment of economic status of family, while the birth of girl child is considered a burden due to dowry. It is believed that birth of son is symbol of good luck which helps to bring house hold objects and other things to lead a comfortable life in the form of dowry. If girl is born in poor family, parents have to face lot of problems like her marriage, dowry customs etc. When her parents unable to fulfill the demand by in laws, she suffers so much and it became the cause of dowry death.

According to article 7 of the CRC [Convention of rights of children] "the child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared by
for his or her parents. In India large numbers of female children are not born because they are killed either in the womb or after birth.

Amniocentesis is a scientific technique that was used to find out fetal abnormalities. But today in India it is widely used not only for the detection of the sex but to clear out the female foetus. Wish to have son is one of the major reasons for doing this. Son is considered as mean of salvation for parents. Dowry is also one of the reasons to raise this evil. Some mishappenings with girl in future also compel them to take this type of decision. The mother who gives birth to female child is not given respect by the members of the family and forcefully tried to abort the female child. Bringing of the girl child is considered as caring of the others because after marriage girls lighten the other family in spite of her maternal home.

The child sex ratio according to Census 2011 is at its lowest ever with only 914 girls for every 1,000 boys.

The killings of girls are one of the offenses against the development of women and the cause of gender inequality in our country. India, unfortunately, is one of the countries where these customs are gradually increased. The custom of female infanticide has been found in some part of our country during the British time. It is found in region of Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

With the help of greedy doctors and advanced technologies, parents try to get rid of daughters through sex selection. It is believed that the birth of girl child is burden for the family.

[iii]Dowry-Dakshina, originally is a gift by parents and relatives of a bride in a marriage as a mean of love and sentiments for running the household very well. But increasing greed of in laws changed its genuine form and transformed this practice as a deep rooted social evil. Due to this women faced lot of hardships like bride burning, mental and physical torture, suicide.

'Dowry' is considered as a great sin in our society. It has been recognized as one of the most pressing problem of India. A bride, who was unable to bring the money and other luxuries items from her parent's house, is subjected to mental and physical torture.
Mostly dowry cases are not registered and not come in front to police because of embarrassment and shame. It may raise several questions on the prestige of girls family in the society. Sometime unawareness of laws, Present judicial system, stressful investigation, fear of failure and many other reasons depressed the victim to report against in laws.

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) figures state that 8,233 dowry deaths were reported in 2012 from various states. The statistics work out to one death per hour.\(^{27}\)

Some person believed it as birth right. Because son parents say that they did lot of expenses on the education or upbringing of their child and it’s become necessary to fulfill all demand of groom parents for marriage. There is no other option left in front of bride parents to marry her girl with educated, well settled boy along with lots of dowry.

The Dowry Prohibition Act, [1961] presently tries to control dowry offences only on the Metropolitan Magistrate or the Magistrate of the first class. The Act was again amended in 1984 and 1986 to enforce it influentially.\(^{28}\)

Dowry money is considered to make a person rich in short period of time. When these demands are not fulfilled, girl often leaves in laws home and the boy is once again ready to get married and destroy another life. These acts and law are not enough to abolish this deep rooted evil. To save from this worse situation, everyone have to decide to do marriage without dowry and oppose all dowry giver and taker.

\(^{[iv]}\)Child marriage -child marriage is broadly practiced in Rajasthan, not only in communities known as lower caste, deprived or poor but also in higher castes. On the very day of Akha-Teej [Akshaya-tritiya], thousands of child marriage ceremonies are performed every year in different parts of Rajasthan.\(^{29}\)

Due to early age marriage children especially girl child is deprived from the overall development of personality like, self-confidence and maturity, education, health, earning ability. At this age it is very difficult for the young child to live in the in laws home and to fulfill responsibility. The combined family system, where several members of the family live jointly under the same roof, may be the cause of destabilization of child wives. As a child wife, her wish, aspiration, hope is totally
dependent on her husband and in-laws. The first bad effect of the child marriage is on the health of the child wife. They are unaware of maternal complication, malnourishment, and anemia.

[v] Domestic violence - can be defined as when a person mistreats another in a relationship and shows power and control through violent behavior. Husbands usually tortured their wives at physical and mental level. Wife beating is one of the offences among the physical torture violence against the women. Generally men used this method to improving themselves and women agree this as bad luck of their life. Mental torture of the wife is hidden fact. It may be more painful than the physical torture. Insulting the wife in front of relatives, children and visitors, no conversation between them are some phenomenon of mental torture.

According to Hari Swarup in his book, ‘Women in Crises’ writes the relationship men and women and the consequence became so worse when tension, pressure become intolerable to both sides. Then men compel to become violent and harassing the wife. Shaila Lohia writes that Drinking liquor is one of the main reasons of domestic violence. Women in rural areas say that liquor is their enemy. Due to over drinking men become cruel and barbarous, and act unkindly to the wife and give her pain and sufferings. She has to bear these things silently.

In male dominated society, men generally feel that they have their right on women, and hence the women should do whatever they want. Woman learnt from their elders to tolerate any ill behavior of the man because it may become the cause of break of relationship and society accused that woman was not successful in managing her marriage.

[vi] Plight of Widows in India - There are more than 40 million widows in India and for the majority of them, life is what some have described as a ‘living sati’. After the death of husband, women have to face lot of hardship in our country. She felt loneliness and totally financial dependent. Sometimes she is not so educated to earn and fulfill the daily and basic requirement of her children. A widow has no right to look beautiful and there is custom to wear white sari after her husband death. They have to remove sindoor and bindi on their forehead and break the bangles. Widows are insisted to give up all enjoyments of life, avoid social events, religious ceremony, and other
functions of the family.

Gandhiji criticized widowhood of children and emphasized widow remarriage. He wrote ‘...forced widowhood upon little girls is a brutal crime for which we Hindus are daily paying dearly.......widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke.’ Thus he opposed the little girl marriage and advocated the young men to marry the girl widows for removing the widowhood in the society.33

Widows tolerate lot of hardships, emotional and psychological problems in whole life and are compelled to live a life with loneliness, tensed about future, sometime feeling unsafe. They have to face problems in their daily life and have to depend on the relatives, friends and neighbors. The children also become dependent and this becomes the cause of financial crisis. All the requirement of daily life have to be fulfilled by the mother. It becomes so difficult for uneducated widow to run the family very well.

[vii] Prostitution- is famous ancient occupation of the world. Women are generally doing this under difficult circumstances. Sometimes girls are sold for money by parents or the girl or women are kidnapped and made to do this need. This evil becomes the cause of various dangerous health disease like tuberculosis, HIV aids, physical and mental torture, drug abuse and unwanted pregnancy.

The main reason of accepting this occupation by women or young girls is their economic condition and due to some domestic cause like ill treatment by the family members. Widows who are unable to remarry, are often compelled to choose this profession to fulfill their needs. According to the G.R. Madan, ‘Prostitution as a commercialized vice has existed in the world from time immemorial, though its institution has never been recognized by the society as such. As the world’s oldest profession prostitution has undoubtedly existed in some form as long as society has attempted to regulate and control sex relationships through the institution of marriage and the family. Society has not recognized it because it brings in its train not only the personal disorganization of the persons concerned, but also affects the life organization of the family and the community at large.’34

[viii] Rape - Rape is most shocking and disturbing crime against women and moral
values. Society is like barrier for the victim and her family members. Girl’s parents do not complain to save her future. Crimes against women-rape, molestation and eve-teasing-registered a five-fold increase in 2013, compared to 2012.\textsuperscript{35}

According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics, Uttar Pradesh stood third with nearly 23,569 crimes against women reported during 2012 while West Bengal got the position of top in the chart of crime against women.\textsuperscript{36}

The wave of changed started after the gangrape in Delhi, in Dec. 2012, related to the women crime. Justice Verma submitted report in which he gave the suggestion for empowering the women. Some important points are, "The changing nature of labour contracts, from permanent workers to casual or contract daily workers, makes women workers, particularly migrant women, vulnerable to the exploitation of employers, landlords, contractors and supervisors. The privatization of essential services has resulted in a lack of accountability in public transport, lack of electricity, absence of public toilets, all of which are directly related to government policies creating insecurity for women."\textsuperscript{37} He asked the government to focus on these things which are necessary for the liberty and security of women.

[ix] Sexual Harassment - Sexual harassment is one more crime aimed at women. It may be ill treatment, bad behavior, use of abuse or vulgar gesture and assault. Sexual harassment is a common thing at work place which the working women have to confront. Sometimes sexual demands by the chief are fulfilled by working women for the promotion in employment. Students, teachers, professors doctors, nurses, lawyers, all become the victims of sexual harassment by their male colleagues or by their seniors. Male colleagues often suffer the feeling of jealousy and are unable to digest their female colleagues success so they comment and tease them.

The Supreme Court established guidelines in the Vishaka case in 1997 before which there were no strong laws for dealing with sexual harassment of women at the workplace. This guideline is the outcome of rape incident of social worker in Rajasthan in which judgment described sexual harassment and set up duties of workers and employers to deal with the complaints and specific formation of the committee for the complaints of victims of sexual harassment.\textsuperscript{38}
These guidelines demand all employers to set up a ‘Complaint committee’ headed by a woman. Half the members should be women who retain the privacy of the complaint by the victim. Victim should not be discriminated or pressurized. Finally report should be submitted to related government department and action taken against the offender.\textsuperscript{39}

Definition by Supreme Court about sexual harassment includes unwanted physical contact, insist and ask for sexual favours, use of sexual sign in colour, showing of pornography, and other physical, verbal or gestural deeds.\textsuperscript{40}

Parliament passed a bill on 26 February 2013, for protecting the women, in which it is compulsory that all offices, hospitals, institutions, factory and informal place other working place should have redressal procedure for complaints associated to the sexual harassment.\textsuperscript{41}

Poverty, illiteracy, unawareness, hesitation, are some reasons due to which women cannot raise their voice against this maltreatment. But today legislation has become so fruitful against sexual assault and if women are aware of their right and laws related to this, nobody can harm their dignity.

Laws are effective medium to bring about change in society and maintain social harmony. Laws play an important role in shaping society. It can work effectively when the people of the society are aware and take advantage of these laws and make the society evil free. Women related laws have been considered as an essential for their emancipation.

\[1\] British period

\[1\] Prevention of Sati Act - Sati or the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of the husband was the custom practiced in Rajasthan, especially in Rajput family, and also among the Brahmans in Bengal, and in some areas of Madhya Pradesh and other Northern states.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy started the effective campaign against Sati. He studied Dharma Sastra and showed that they did not mention Sati. He said that Manu never mentioned sati. It was barbarous custom. In 1829 Lord William Bentinck,
an enlightened Governor General, passed the Prevention of Sati Act, according to which any one supporting the commission of sati would be guilty and who will take part to force a widow to commit sati will be considered as murderer.

[2] Widows Remarriage Act - Another important revolutionary social legislation of this period is the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. It legalized the marriage of widows. It also declared that the Widows Remarriage is lawful.

[3] Female infanticide prevention Act - This Act was passed in the years 1870. Man Mohan Kaur has given details of this cruel custom of killing the female infant as soon as she was born. Due to the problems of finding the perfect match for their girls, heavy demands of dowry, marriage expenses, parents were generally compelled to do this cruel deed. So in 1870 legislation was passed prohibiting this custom and registration of births and deaths was made compulsory.

[4] The special marriage Act of 1873 - This Act offered marriage irrespective of differences in religion. This act did not give permission for inter caste marriages. This Act was amended in 1923 in order to allow the inter caste marriages. Because of Kashab Chandra Sen polygamy was abolished.

[5] The Age of Consent Bill 1891 - One of the important social legislations in pre-independence India was against child marriage where little children of 5 to 10 years were being married. The leaders of Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj were against this custom. In 1860, at the instance of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar the Indian penal code banned this custom for girls who were less than 10 years old. Keshab Chandra Sen involved on insincerity against child marriage and the marriageable age was fixed at 14 for the girls and 18 for the boys according to the Brahma Act of 1872. In 1891, the Age of consent bill was passed by the government prohibiting cohabitation with a wife under the age of 12. After further protest the child marriage restraint Act was passed in 1929 increasing the marriageable age of girls to 14 and of boys to 18.

[6] The Sharda Act, 1929- The Age of consent Bill was passed in 1891. But the evil existed in the society. In 1927 Harbilas Sharda presented a bill before the legislature to regulate marriage among the Hindus. This Act was finally known
as the Child Marriage Restraint act of 1929 or popularly known as Sharda Act. It set the minimum age of marriage for girls at 14 and for boys at 18 years.

[7] Hindu Women’s right to property [1937] A very significant law to give unbiased place and rights to women related to property was the Hindu women’s right to property act,[1937] passed mainly due to the efforts of Deshmukh. The Act offered an influential tool in the hands of the progressive approach toward the struggle for equality in Hindu society.

Thus, in the pre independence era a series of acts as mentioned above were promulgated for women's upliftment.

[II] Since independence

India has seen the passing of many laws by its Parliament for the emancipation of the status of women. Important laws are the following:

1. Hindu Married Women’s right to separate residence and Maintenance Act, 1946.


[1] Hindu Married Women’s right to separate residence and Maintenance Act,1946- Hindu married women are strengthened by this act. They can claim for maintenance which living separately from their husbands, through this act.

[2] The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955-Classification of Hindu Marriage Age, Determination of Marriageable age: minimum age limit for girls is 18 years and whereas for a boy is 21 years. Provision for Monogamy: Section 5 and clause I of the Act declares monogamy as the form of Hindu Marriages, Mother’s
Guardianship, Provision for Divorce.

[3] The Hindu Succession Act, 1956- This act allows the female children to share the property of their father along with their brothers.

[4] The Hindu Adoptions and maintenance Act, 1956- According to this act, No husband can adopt a child without taking permission from his wife. The right of adoption is available to issueless widows also.


[6] Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961-The evil of dowry has become a deep rooted social problem in the society. Due to the effects of westernization, the demand for dowry has become uncontrolled and epidemic. The dowry system has made poor and middle class families helpless, vulnerable because they cannot fulfill the demands by the groom’s parents. Therefore the Congress government passed this act in 1961 making the giver as well as receiver of the dowry punishable and the demanding of dowry has been prohibited and there is strict punishment for such demands. But it needs awareness to make it worthy.

These laws provided equal status, rights of male and female both and help to dominate the patriarchal system in Indian society, restricted polygamy and child marriage.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{Socio Economic Issues}

[i] Poverty can be defined as social problem in which a group of the society is unable to fulfill the daily requirement of life.

Berstein Henry [1992] has identified the following dimensions of poverty – 'Lack of livelihood strategies, Inaccessibility to recourses [money, land, credit], Feeling of insecurity and frustrations, Inability to maintain and develop social relations with others as a consequence of lack of resources.'\textsuperscript{43}

The poor have a low income and due to this, they are not capable to manage the family needs like food, clothing, medical assistance, education and other things. Such persons become hopeless and are unable to do their work and duties properly. In these
situations it can’t be imagined that healthy persons, educated children, sociable people, especially women are incapable of performing in progressive development of the society. The children are compelled to work at early age to increase the family income. Sometimes women are forced to do some job, even when there is nobody to take care of the children at home. If family members don’t have proper food to eat, they may be suffering from any disease, mental and physical problem affects their life directly or indirectly.

In India, the poor have large families because they think that more children prove as security for their future and helping hand to earn money. The parents do not send their children to school and they are compelled to do hard labour in early childhood which may become cause of various diseases, malnutrition, illiteracy etc.

[ii] Unemployment-

A man has to do many jobs and activities in his life, and it become more difficult for earning members to find the right job and fulfill all requirements of the entire family in a limited salary. If a person is unable to work or fails to get work, he feels that he has not achieved any position in society. He also suffers and faces many emotional and social problems. His condition affects his personality, confidence, attitude, his family, and the society too. That’s why unemployment has been mentioned as the most significant social problem in society.\textsuperscript{44}

Unemployment affects a person individually, his family and society. It may be the cause of disorganization at different levels. An unemployed person becomes pessimist, hopeless and suffers from depression. The creative energy and vigour of the youth is spoilt due to lack of confidence. Sometimes the young take to wrong deeds and this becomes the reason for robbery, stealing, murder and other crimes. Various college students think that they will get a job after completing their education but if they don’t find jobs in market, they are disappointed. It is also one of the reasons of the conflicts between husband and wife and break up in the relationship with other family members. If regular income fails, precious things are sold and jewellery mortgaged. Family suffers from hunger, wife, and children are forced to earn money.

[iii] Child labour-Millions of children of poor families are forced to do labour due to
their economic situation. In India, a large part of our population is living in poor condition. Child labourers are compelled to work in inhuman condition like in dangerous polluted factory and near the furnaces. They deal with dangerous chemicals and black smoke powder which may be lead to harmful diseases like lung disease, tuberculosis, eye disease, asthma, bronchitis and backaches.

The first Act to determine the employment of children and their working hours was the factory Act of 1881. A commission was selected in 1929 to decide the minimum age of child employment. On its advice, the Child Labour act, 1933 was passed prohibiting employment of children below 14 years of age. The Factory Act of 1948 present some precaution to child labourers in 1986 the parliament enacted the child labour Act [regulation and prohibition], prohibiting the employment of children in particular jobs and standardize the circumstances of dangerous work. The Juvenile justice Act, 1986 which superseded the existing children’s Acts in different states and union territories and came in to force from October 2, 1987, provides for the creation of advisory boards and the establishment of state children funds for preventing the ill-treatment of children, for the safety and care of children, for the mobilization of resources and provide facilities for education, training and treatment and therapy of the neglected children. These regulations are only enacted on paper but in practical life many children are compelled to do hard work which is injurious for them.

[iiv] Illiteracy in India is considered one of the major hindrances in the path of progress in society. Literacy helps everybody to enhance overall development and obtain better standard of life. Governments have to make sure that no children are left out of the education system. Today’s educated children are the future of the country who will build the strong and shining nation. Due to illiteracy, a person has little knowledge about his duties and responsibilities and is unaware about the health problems and sanitation system. Education also helps to remove superstition and accomplish the work with perfect means through knowledge. In rural areas, illiteracy is a major problem, as a large part of population is uneducated and has no idea about the various developments related to agriculture and technological aspects. Their superstition is also a hindrance in the path of economic development.

The main causes of illiteracy are high rate of population growth, deficiency of
primary schools, low class people's traditional approach to take help in caring for small children and earning the money, and high level of poverty etc. The literacy rate of India is 73% at present as per the 2011 Census.46

India has launched large scheme of education for all in 2010. The aim of National policy to make ‘an effective instrument for taking the country into the 21 century’ in which high priority is to universalize the elementary education along with compulsory minimum education to all children up to the age of 14 years. The aim of free and compulsory education up to 14 years has been revised. The new program suggests introducing this goal by the turn of the century.47

[v] Overpopulation- Resources of a country are considered as population of that country. Rapid development of the economy can be possible when a country's physical and material resources are consumed properly. Due to imperfect man power, strategy, organization, the country has to face many obstacles in the path of progress which may cause various social problems like poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, malnutrition etc.48 India, with 1,270,272,105 (1.27 billion) people is the second most populous country in the world.49

Population is one of the major socio economic problems of our country which is also responsible for the increase in many problems such as poverty, unemployment, hunger, lack of housing, poor health, crimes, decline in living standard.

[vi] Corruption- It is a complex issue in contemporary society in various forms. It refers to those deals which give unnecessary profits to some persons who are not worthy of them. Corruption has presented a dangerous problem in our country. In India moral values, ideals, principles and honesty have great importance in everyone’s life. But now due to change in socio-economic situation of country, every person has to face this problem in each and every walk of life. Politicians, officers, public servants misuse their authority and influence. For completing the government project, they take bribes. In election, political leaders distribute money, saris, blanket, cycles and other things to get more votes. To improve the living standard, officers and bureaucrats use low quality of material in making the building, street, highway etc.
Violence

Violence can be defined as an action or activity intended to harm or injure a person or create loss of property. According to P.R. Rajgopal, ‘Subjecting an individual or a group to patent acts of injustices is another aspect of violence. Exploitation in any form, social or economic, is yet another angle to violence. Treating people in a manner which is contrary to the accepted norms of human dignity too is a form of violence... Broadly any act, whether overt or covert, that coerces or causes physical hurt, material loss or mental anguish to human rights, dignity and decency should be viewed as an act of violence.’

Violence is manifested due to urban disaster and is confronted directly or indirectly. It affects people who live in society and everyone is worried about security. A major feature of developing crime and violence in society is lack of strategy in growing cities, towns and slums. People living in slums, roadways, on the street, under bridges, their economic hardships and unsure future of their youth, communalism, corruption in administration, social injustice by law, police enforcement and several other causes give rise to various forms of violence in our society.

[1] Communalism and communal violence - According to Ram Ahuja, ‘communalism is an ideology which states that society is divided into religious communities whose interests differ and are at times even opposed to other. The antagonism practiced by the people of one community against the people of other community and religion can be termed ‘communalism’.  

Communal violence disturbs public peace, harmony and creates tension, fear, terror among the life of citizens. There are large scale massacre and injuries, obliteration of homes, religious places, supermarkets, public and private places and vehicles etc. Normal life becomes impossible because everyone has to stay at home for their safety. These things are the hindrance in the path of development of modern society.

India has vast multiple and diverse culture and it is regional, linguistic, ethnic, social, and religious nature interwoven in its cultural diversity. This diversity could be both powerful and sometime becomes trouble for the democratic society. India was
independent on 15 August 1947 and on that day many conflicts occurred between the Hindus and Muslims and violence, killing, murder and several other things inhuman happened during these communal riots, which is a major incident in the world history. Whole villages were set alight, women were dishonored, beaten, tortured. Millions of people were homeless, dispossessed, living rough, deprived, traveling one place to another to settle themselves. Political parties plays a important role to maintain the peace for healthy democracy if they are not able to do this, it can harm the nation as well its people.

Decay and unfaith in religious customs and values, benefited from religion for political profit, indifferences between two communities, foreigner attack, destroying the sacred place, partition sufferings, past quarrels on particular place are some reasons which are responsible for increased communal violence and riots in a country.

[ii]Terrorism- After independence, India faced the fear of terrorism which affects both developed and developing countries. A terrorist creates terror against those organizations, groups, people who are involved in progressive programmes. Terrorism has attracted especially the younger generation of India. Particularly the unemployed, directionless, idle youngsters are often involved in inhuman activity. Their action include murder and kidnapping of famous personality, death or destruction of property, killing people without any reason, bomb blast at crowded place like bus stand, shopping centre, railway station.

Terrorism became a burning issue since the attack of September 11, 2011. Terrorism creates actual threat to progress of human kind and is the main obstacle to peace, safety, and intellectual capacity of people which are main foundation of development of humanity. It is aroused by the blind zeal for religion and uses extremely deceptive arms for guiding youth towards large scale destruction.

There are four types of terrorism in India - Khalistan-oriented terrorism in Punjab, militant terrorism in Kashmir, Naxalite terrorism in Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and the ULFA terrorism in Assam.  

Specially in Kashmir the situation is worse. Common people do not live peacefully, gun combats are common, dead bodied, bloodshed are often found in streets. Silent cities, curfew night, no proper life is spent by them due to the fear of
militancy. Tourists are afraid to come to Kashmir and there is no more rows of shikara, no buyers of famous shawls, carpets and handicraft. People have to face hatred, problems, desperation and fear.

**Ecological Issues**

A fresh environment helps in development, endurance, progress, birth, health of human life and all species. Environment provides raw materials like food, soil, air, water, and light for plants, animals and human beings which are very important things. The balance in the natural resources is very essential for our surroundings. People misuse nature and natural elements for their advantage which is the cause of natural disaster. Environmental problems are the pessimistic features of human behavior on ecosystem. Pollution is one of the major environmental problems which pollute the natural resources such as air, water and soil. Pollution in air, water, food is injurious to human life. Global warming is the main cause for atmospheric change and changing weather systems. Unrestrained release of greenhouse gases and deforestation and desertification of land are main reasons for global warming. Deforestation and cutting of trees is one of the major environmental problems due to rapid urbanization. Trees provide food, fuel, raw material and keep the balance between soil and water. Erosion of soil, heavy rainfall, flood, changing weather, global warming etc., are the causes of deforestation and destruction of trees.

Nuclear explosion is also very harmful for human kind. It is a manmade disaster which is produced to establish the value and importance and intentionally created to show the military power in politics. During the test of nuclear weapons, radiation and radioactive debris are produced. It can lead to inborn malformation, radiation poisoning, and loss of life. Ozone depletion is another disaster for atmosphere. Ozone layer protected life on earth from the ultra violet rays of sun. Depletion of the ozone layer affects the atmosphere, more ultraviolet radiation which may be the cause of various disease like skin cancer, eye infections and injurious for harvest.

There are also some natural disasters like floods, cyclones, earthquakes, droughts and landslides, famines etc, which affect human beings directly or indirectly.

These problems are very well executed by the contemporary Indian women
artists in their own individualistic way. Artists are fully aware of the situation around them and as responsible citizens, they feel the intense emotion to render this with unique and aesthetical approach.

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Chapter -3

SOCIAL PERCEPTION IN THE PAINTING OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WOMEN ARTISTS
Chapter 3

SOCIAL PERCEPTION IN THE PAINTING OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WOMEN ARTISTS

Contemporary Indian Art

Contemporary art is defined as art of present time and it began with the end of modernism during the later phase of 20th century. It rejects the concepts of modernism and has an elastic tendency. Contemporary artists prefer to focus on the idea or concept rather than technique or method used in any art work. Their innovative approach to render any theme and concept shows their eclecticism and dynamism. Their art works are thought provoking and aimed towards a meaningful fulfillment of their creative desire. They are freed from the shackles of traditional art forms and always want to explore any idea on each and every aspect of life like human rights, feminism, global issues and ecological disaster, rapid urbanization etc. It is a reflection of the changing situation of the country especially in social, political, and cultural contexts.

Contemporary Indian art is a result of paradigm shift in our country. It is departure from the conventional art practices and genres. It intertwines modernity with its own idiom that is representation of personal and social issues. Reintroducing our cultural ethos, history, philosophy, beliefs, notions, it also assimilates the modern phenomenon of the west. It gives a newer approach of perception and experiences of daily life happening, which sometimes is shocking to the general public. The innovation in Indian contemporary art lies in its artistic, pictorial and symbolical expression.

According to Rajeev Lochan, ‘In 21st century a new phase in the history of awareness in India has opened up. In the words of theorist Derrida ‘There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference within itself.’ Such is the form of art on the Indian subcontinent a unique amalgam of foreign sensibilities along with a variety of internal cross cultural pollination.’

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Derrida's another theory ‘Deconstruction’ played a very important role in postmodern visual art which challenged the modernist theory of art for art's sake as an idea and emphasized multiple issues behind any art work like social and political context including feminism, Marxism, gay and lesbian studies and postcolonial studies. Artists used wide range of subjects which consist text, objects, and image in any work which have new meaning and undermine the old concepts.²

The concerns of Indian artists in the past were limited only to regional level like culture, values, tradition. They were unaware about the traditions of the West. But now they rethink that it is very essential to absorb the approach of western culture to become progressive and to stand at international level. With the essence of modernity, contemporary Indian artists explore the Indian themes in international flavors.

The main function of art is to bestow aesthetic experience and pleasure to the audience and to provide a means to artist himself to show and explore his deepest desires and ambition, sensation and whole philosophy of his life.

According to Ranjit Hoskote, ‘Indian artists are active participants in defining and constructing the global contemporary. I use the word 'contemporary' to designate the present as a predicament, which must be addressed creatively and innovated around. The contemporary is a series of entanglements among diverse histories of political struggle, cultural vision and artistic exploration. In this context, the Indian art situation offers an extraordinary traversal of choices and temporalities.’³

During 1990s the liberal economic situation, growing international corporate sector, technological advancement, rapid urbanization, changing pattern of society, perfect transmission of cultural approach from one to another inspire the artist to work in new context with fresh ideas.⁴ Two major exhibition in 1980s 'Place for people' and 'Question and Dialogues' marked deep impression on Indian art scene to express the personal and political concerns of the present day.⁵ Artist's departure from the mythological subjects and iconography to the problems of the middle class people and their daily life encounters, survival in urban city. Taking inspiration from the Marxist ideology several artists, depict working class people, disparity, ignoring the romantic and sentimental presentation of work to explore the secular notion of humanity.⁶
The progress of art in the 20th century was somewhat in good form until the starting of the Second World War in 1939. Two world wars shocked preset norms, style, values and beliefs. The large scale destruction affected the minds of the people and their ambitions were spoiled. But after Second World War[1945], artists are creatively participating in art activity and the development of information technology to enhance the arena of education, entertainment, communication as well as artistic exploration.7

The major development of Indian art is the emergence of new modes of art practices like new media art, video art, digital art, installation, public art. There has been a rapid change in art and today it symbolically interprets the idea in diverse and experimental media. Art critic Roobina Karode says, 'the exploration of new media has not suppressed the journey of painting in India, and it has been consistent, in that there has not been an 'either-or' response to image making that cancels the old for the new. Painting has not been declared obsolete or been pushed to the margins, precisely for the reason that it has now become inclusive, more accommodating and therefore fresh. The past is not evacuated for the present, and tradition is not completely erased for modern values. Instead, amalgamations appear and new configurations are arrived at by artists who display two significant positions from which they enter into a contemporary dialogue - one, by attempting to 'modernize the local' and other by 'localising the modern', articulating the interface of the past and present in unprecedented ways'.8

The journey of contemporary Indian art continues from local to global, perfect encounter of both sources to express the voice of Indian ethos. Indian artist captures the image of daily life, customs and practices, satire on any aspect of human life. There is rejection of modernist approach of adopting the narration and returning back to storytelling or creation of image. The notion of Global modernity and national identity has continued to be expressed by artists during twentieth century. These modern artists seek to quest Indianness through the modern approach with social interpretation.9

According to Dr. Ashrafi Bhagat, 'Issues also call into play an activity or a process of marking the artist’s opinion or concepts within the larger social arena.
Within the present globalized milieu art has taken on an avatar of massing of energies, suggesting new ways for artists to connect with the sources of energies in their own experiences. And much of this art is innovative and expansive. Art becomes a way to engage the public.\textsuperscript{10}

The art works of young Indian artists have added new expression and also a dual concept which seems to adapt to evolution and transformation. Modern and progressive notion of culture fades the distinct line between Indian and western ethos.

Art signifies the notion of philosophy, culture, values, beliefs, principles, social language in the form of deep meaningful image, symbol and content. They are interwoven into the fabric of society to harmonize the situation and to advance human life with new energy and vitality. Artist as sensitive person responds towards the happenings around him and his sharp vision captures every nuance of reality and when his vision and imagination blend together it gives birth to any art form which is unique and incredible.

India has a rich heritage to define its lineage in its diverse art forms and style like cave painting, mural, miniature painting, folk and tribal art. Indian artist imbibes all the traditional influences along with acceptance of different art forms and style of the west like cubism, expressionism, surrealism and abstract art and artists like Picasso, Van Gogh, Klee and Kandinsky. That’s why this art is known as ‘eclectic’.\textsuperscript{11} Indian artists translate their visual vocabulary in a balanced way and maintain the essence of Indian art without losing its authentic expression.

**Contemporary Indian Women Artists**

A significant phase in Indian art has been the emergence and participation of women artists in past decades. They started to create an influential position since 70s and 80s on Indian art scene. Women who were considered as weaker sex and who endured the entire job of the family now became more liberal and broke the fetter of private or personal sphere, and began to think beyond it.

The distinctive visual language has deeply affected the aesthetic concepts and creative phenomenon of many contemporary Indian women artists noticeable in
various art forms. These artists pushed the boundaries and challenged the accepted norms of the society.

Indian women artists developed progressively without any solid ground and expressed with great effort their individual voice. In Indian post independence time, various art groups were male centric, like Calcutta, Bombay progressive, Madras. Women artists articulated their ideas beyond these group and explored more personal and public manifestation. Adjusting time between the kitchen and the studio and playing every roles to perfection, these artists managed their time and strength, mostly staying at home but keeping alive the fire in themselves to express.\textsuperscript{12}

Roobina Karode says, \textquoteleft In the practice of art, the institutional dictates of easel painting and the canonized aesthetics of modern were rigid and imposing. Trying hard to break free from the clutches of Greenbergian modernism and its seductive promise of artistic autonomy, Women artist were finding ways to resist the hegemonic structures set up by works of leading male artist.\textsuperscript{13} These female artists take chance - physically mentally and artistically, use their own body as naked and vulnerable, as a symbol of anger against colonization, brutality to women, even to mother earth.\textsuperscript{14}

The period of the 1940s witnessed social upheavals like Bengal famine, peasant unrest, British revolt and violent bloodshed during partition. Various other events like emergency, political turmoil in the 80s and demand for Khalistan, assassination of Indira Gandhi, its after math Sikh massacres, bloodshed in Kashmir, affected the nation.\textsuperscript{15} Gujarat riots 2002, Best Bakery case Babri Masjid demolition in 1992,Bombay riots 1992-93, Kargil war in 1999, also shocked the country.\textsuperscript{16} The other problems like Rapid urbanization, population, pollution, Global warming, deforestation, urban chaos, insecurity, crimes, riots, terrorism, organ trafficking are some problems which are confronted daily by ordinary people and it affects their lives directly or indirectly. Pre and post-independence situations, circumstances, turmoil in the country inspired the artists to work in this context and express personal voice to peace and justice for mankind.

As the art historian Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker observed: \textquoteleft Perhaps, in this recent rise of women’s visibility, we may be witnessing the spirit of Durga manifesting herself in the late twentieth century guise in every woman.\textsuperscript{17} There are
many well-known artists like Anjolie Ela Menon, Arpita Singh, Anupam Sud, Nalini Malani, Arpana Caur, Gogi Saroj Pal, Vasudha Thozhur, Navjot Altaf, Nilima Sheikh, Rekha Rodwittiya. These artists were motivated by the western feminist approach to work in the context of social reality. Although these artists presented a remarkable position on Indian art scene but theirs is not the well-defined feminist movement like west.

The upsurge of political women's art in India started during early 1980s when these artists trying to form an art inspired by the feminist ideology. They were against the orthodox Marxist thought that refused to accept and recognize gender oppression as important as class struggle. The orthodox Marxism for artist was an agenda of social realism that valued the peasants and the workers. There was less importance of the women's empowerment. Thus Indian women artist raise their voice against patriarchy and gender bias in their art work because they feel strongly that as a part of the society, women and its related issues are also important for betterment of society. These artist subverted the stereotype presentation of women and focused on women's related issues in a wider context. Gradually artists turned their gaze towards other social issues and felt free from the strict feminist ideology. Artists have focused with deep intensity not only on the feminist issue but also on the wider issues related to the society. They raised their social voice against environment, social asymmetry, gender inequality, population, communal riots and urban disorder in society. They are active through their vigorous participation in art activity.

Artists introduced deep concern with social base into their work along with their conception and perception of life. Their work shows that now an artist is more concern about certain purpose and concern in art work rather material and experimentation used in any art work. Various national and international socio political events motivate the artist to paint human misery and experience of society in a simplified manner with contemporary context.

Present thesis is an attempt to focus on Social concerns in the paintings of contemporary Indian women artists.

Painting is an exploration of artist’s experience, feelings aspirations, dreams, despairs, and sufferings, he or she chooses a subject or theme for painting at his desire
and modify the truth and reality according the perception and invest the images with emotional and sensitive qualities belonging to his own mind. He feels the subtle impression of reality through the inner vision that enables the brush to capture the perceptions on the canvas. According to Geeti Sen, 'Painting is most significantly, a process of realisation: from that initial point of stimulus, reverie or impassioned response to its transposition into the mind’s eye of the artist and her/his tentative experiments - to a stage when the image is brought ‘to life’ on paper or canvas. This is the final moment of realisation; but the journey remains equally relevant... A painting has its own compulsions, a language and a grammar developed by the artist — which we describe not by that much loaded term of ‘style’ but as an idiom peculiar to the artist -flowing from his temperament, environment and history.'

Contemporary Indian women interpreted their philosophy of life in different style and form in painting and represented it as a dialogue between artist and viewer. Like men, women can and have explored very well the different aspects of reality. A perfect art work is that which directly reaches to the heart of audience and is judged without considering that it is made by men or women artists. The meaningful concerns, understanding and their artistic efforts to convey the issue and matters of the society in pictorial vocabulary manifest his distinctive vision. The main notion behind their art work is ethical change, dealing with a path of defining themselves in newer vistas. Their bold imagery presents the unseen idiom as seen.

Arpita Singh [1937] influential work achieves an intensity of evocation through repetitive forms. As an aware citizen of the country she employed a sense of chaos and insecurity in the society. Through the metaphor, she created a fabrication of various socio-political events which happened around her. Women occupy prominent place and become a means of expressing her emotions like sorrow, pleasure, excitement, strain, helplessness.

Nilima Sheikh [1945] Sheikh's multi narration explores her humanistic and social concern related to every aspect of society. Her painting on bride burning issue, reflect her keen sight into any subject. Inspired by the poetry of Agha Sahid Ali she articulated the untouched aspect related to Kashmir problem. Painting of the partition trauma is also executed by her.
Arpana Caur [1954] Her work is social commentary of her aesthetic view about the new vista of social freedom. She explores the social hues that lead her painting into the endless world. In figurative style, she represented those aspects which are untouched. She easily communicates with the viewer through allegory and indirect manner of her depicting the violence. With minimalism of form and colour, she explores the deep concerns of humanity that interweave into the fabric of society. As a women artist, she understands very well the difficulty of women and their struggle to exist in male dominated society. Her canvases are interpretation of women's attempt to fulfill their financial need and ambition. She is also concerned about the environmental issue like rapid urbanization, industrialization, and especially deforestation around her residential area during the preparation of Delhi commonwealth games.

Above three artists are discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Anupam Sud is known as best printmaker. Born in Hoshiarpur, Punjab [1944], Sud joined College of Art, New Delhi in 1962, though at that time, there was lack of printmaking facility. In 1958 Somnath Hore was brought to revive the college's printmaking department, with Jagmohan Chopra. Important machines and facilities were obtained due to their efforts. On graduating from college of art, she did solo show at Triveni Kala Sangam [1967] and All India Fine Arts Crafts Society [1968]. Sud applied for a scholarship to the Slade School of Art in Printmaking and joined it in 1971. In 1967 when Anupam graduated from the college of art Group 8 professional printmaker group of Delhi, was founded by Jagmohan Chopra. She was a younger member of the Group.

It was after her return from Slade that Anupam Sud began to explore the human figure in etching. In her early phase she made stagnant, mysterious, figures often found in deep shadow. Her figures are bare, head shaven, she says- 'I reject all decorations. That is why I reject clothing on my figures. The decorative element is totally absent in my work. It is the stark truth.' She articulates her voice about the socially relevant subjects with the use of allegory and symbol in realistic manner. Her narratives of 70s and 80s denote the social contemplation and result of her concerns about the feminine questioning. Her nude are depicted as unaware from the sexual act
and explore the various dimensions of spectators or voyeur gaze. The art world of Anupam Sud is intensified by women’s concerns that observe the world around them and explore the power, potential as well vulnerable aspect of the woman’s body.23 She rejects notion of art for art’s sake and articulates the contradictory situation of real world.

Her thematic work is artistically produced in mesmerizing pictorial language. She compartmentalized her composition in doors, windows, frames, architectural settings and various spatial devices, with perspective in deep light and shadow, bold expressive lines that depict form and space relationship. Her nude are firm, bold, fine modeled and define the truth of world around us. She said, ‘The body is beautiful — we don’t need to conceal it. For me it is much more vulgar to highlight certain areas of the body. I remove long hair on the female torso because there should be no distractions. I don’t glamorize....My Bodies are sensual, but they are not sexual.’24 The rough, smooth, shadow, obscurity, texture, all are treated with subtle layers of meanings and visual metaphors. She said that, ‘My prime need was to remove the distinctions between society-because I feel we are one race, with no distinctions in colour and caste. That is why you will see there is no colour in my etchings.’25

_Darling Get me a Baby Made_ [1979] [plate 1] In this print Sud satirically comments on the women and doctors who cover their mouth with masks which seems criminal and above the composition, newspaper advertisement of the Test Tube Baby is placed. There is also an expected row of mothers of test tube babies. There are women who are standing around a telephone, a mysterious link between the telephone wire that looks like the umbilical cord, merge in the body of aspiring candidates.26 Sud’s early prints highlight her interpretation about the mystery of human situation. In _Pick up Girls_ [1980] [plate 2] she placed two girls in the centre of the composition where light falls upon the streets and the figures are in dark shadow, engaged in playing with dice. On the left side, a sensual figure looks down at the road. Her naked body modeled with perfect chiaroscuro, has her hair fluttering across her body. She is trying to get a round object in a basket which symbolizes money. This work shows the greediness and also gaming with money.
Anupam describes a story that related to memory or experience. Medium techniques and effects, all are used to articulate the concern or issue. Title of the print conveys subtle hint of the subject. She explains her concern in presentation of psyche and its various aspects: suitable symbols used to express different psychic situation and transformation in the society.27

*Off Wall* [1982] [plate 3] In this print a widow is sitting against a wall which is reminiscent of sold family home in Hoshiarpur. A playful graffiti is inscribed on the wall and in front of the woman, a dead man is lying down. The woman's face is shown dark, no features, explores hopelessness, sadness, insecurity due to the death of her partner.

*Conference* [1984] [plate 4] This print is a satirical comment on politics and officials. Common man becomes the puppet of them. In this print, puppets are dancing through the hands of anonymous man in upper side of the composition. Mikes are shown in front of puppets for speaking and as a common men puppets have no option but to do what he wants. Sud metaphorically explored the dilemma of common people.

In *Persona* [1988] [plate 5], a naked woman is shown boldly confronting the viewer. Behind her is a vast mirror covering the background in which is a reflection of a mature person, enjoying her nakedness but she is avoiding him and trying to protect herself by the use of hair wig, cosmetics, and undergarments.28

*Preparation for the Next Act* [1989] [plate 6] defines the upper part of naked woman holding up a mask with red thread which covers her whole face. The whole print is black and white except light blue colour of face with red lips and thread, symbolize revolt against the pre established tradition. Through the work she wants to say that women are capable of performing their role very well. She said, ‘I began to see that life is composed of wearing a series of masks. At college I wore the inevitable mask of a devoted teacher; at home shed that mask to become a devoted daughter; and then, to escape that role, I would wear the mask of the artist- I hardly had any time just to be myself.’29 In theatre of Japan men act both male and female roles. Sud is commenting on the domination of men in social system of India and Japan both.30
Rear Window [1992] [plate 7] this print ironically comments on lack of infrastructure facility in urban city. A rear view of a bus where a crowd of people suffocated in the bus, are placed. Below this 'keep distance' is inscribed. Her work The Red chair [1996] [plate 8] and Succession [1996] [plate 9] are the exploration of socio political aspects in which line of chair and two players are composed, while the other has a row of players and a single chair. By the use of opposite feature, she portrays conflicting and mixed feeling of human nature. Here game of musical chair symbolizes that success depends upon chance rather than merit. It is representation through game of chairs where empty chair denotes the lack of leadership.

Between Vows and Words [1996] [plate10] In this print Sud focuses on married relationship projecting male and female figure in centre with deep bond, firmly joined hands showing deep relation between them. But this is overt presentation and there are differences between promises and fulfilling of the responsibility. Several words like love, freedom, desire, vulnerability, tenderness, and duality are written on body of the both figures. Dinning with Ego [1999] [plate11] this print again reveals married relationship. She has centralized a big dining table with a couple who is taking dinner. Whole dining table is adorned with several dishes. Here man is busy eating but woman is thinking something, lost in dreams, worried and sorrowful. Her plate is empty and she is looking towards the viewer. Man does not care about her wish, desire and pain. She comments on man's greed and physical hunger through subtle perception of human behavior. Draupadi's Vow [2006] [plate 12] is highly conceptual work inspired by the incident of great epic of Mahabharat. Pandava brothers bet their wife Draupadi in the game of chaupad, where they are defeated by the kauravas and kauravas disrobe Draupadi. Anupam Sud says — 'Do you remember when Draupadi was dishonoured by the Kauravas? She vowed that she would not tie her hair again until she saw the blood of Duryodhana.'

Through this work she comments on those women who are compelled to sell their body like Draupadi.

The Ceremony of Unmasking [1990] [plate13] in this triptych a muscular naked man having mask is engaged in act of removing the mask of woman to fulfil sexual desire. A dog is symbol of sexual desire that smells the flesh. Both men are
baring the body as well as mind of the woman. Though men trying to hide their feeling and identity through mask.\textsuperscript{32}

Her work is not about the strict feminist norm which is taken outside in streets, campaigning the issue, but reflect subtle shades of women minds, relationships and other aspects of society. She said, 'I was never a feminist, I just depicted what I saw'\textsuperscript{33}

According to the Roobina Karode, 'Disqualifying traditional iconography as unsuitable to her expressive goals, she frequently attempts to divest the human form of all cultural markers -caste, creed, clothing and nationality, to represent a universal symbol.'\textsuperscript{34}

Juxtaposition with connotation feeling, energy, emotion and sentiments, dilemma, sensation, circumstances, she presents a reality of life. She always thinks about the emancipation of women and often shows them as bold persona with subtle feminine sensibility. She reproduces new vista of urban scenario and interprets them in novel effects of human figuration. Her work demonstrates socio political concerns, depicted through symbols and allegories, myth in contemporary context. She is commenting on male gaze and their greed, physical hunger. Through her work she emboldens the women confronting the voyeur confidentially. Human existence and day to day realities expressed through various forms and techniques, stimulates to viewer to rethink the social aspects.

Gogi Saroj Pal, Born in Uttar Pradesh, India in 1945, is well known Indian artist. In 1961 she left home to study art in Vanashthali Art College, Rajasthan then did diploma in painting from college of art in Lucknow. In 1962, She has a diploma in painting from the College of Art in Lucknow, U.P and in 1968-69 did postgraduate from the College of Art, New Delhi.\textsuperscript{35} She has had nearly 30 solo shows and won a number of awards including the National Award of the Lalit Kala Akademy. She also participated in many group shows both in India and abroad: Yugoslavia, Germany, France, Cuba and Japan among others, participated in triennials and biennials. Her family background and schooling gives freedom to her thought and strength to raise her voice against the social issues in society. She has great knowledge of literature
and mythology thus it plays an important role in her art work. She worked on different mediums but in painting she likes to use gouache.

Pal said, ‘My life and my cultural identity carve the directions of my expression. Inspirations for expression emerge around and within me. I want my creative concerns to be relevant to my times, imbibing local, regional and universal consciousness. I want to express these in my own creative visual imagery. I want to evolve and leave behind creative visual symbols as references to our times. I think in colour and achieve consistent factor (Sthai Bhava) to accomplish creativity in my paintings.’

She often deals with feminist issues with mythical icons. Saroj Pal’s approach related to known image of mythology, is used skilfully to metamorphose the old narrations. She comments on conventional notion on the subjugation of women. Her later work concentrates more on the execution of single erotic figure rather than the group figure in a painting. Application of colours is limited to two or three primary colours with boldness.

Gogi takes inspiration from her life experiences which are communicated through her art work. ‘Art to her is not just gossiping over cups of beverages, between spiraling cigarette smoke in coffee house- but she feels that an artist should fearlessly raise issues on all topics and subjects thus posing questions - so that society does not become complacent and thus stagnant.’

She presents the bold character of contemporary women who confront issues rather than escape from the problem. Using the indigenous concept in her art, her creative concerns are always related to contemporary happenings around her. She adopted an erotic visual language which amazed and enthralled the viewer.

Paintings –

*Being a woman* [1986] [plate 14] In this thought provoking series she explored that being a woman, she suffered so many obstacles in society. She paints the woman as Christ allegorically. She crucified women like Christ with extended hands and legs which clearly show the suffering and pain of a woman. She commenting on the society that people are mourning on the pain of the Christ but totally unaware about
the agony, anguish torture of women. Gogi says, 'there is so much celebration of his pain, we are reminded of how much he suffered on our account,' but what of the anguish of women.  

Women have to sacrifice and never think about their own self but always worried about other people. In other paintings of this series, women are depicted as insecure, suffering because of man's thirst and endless greed.

_Halley's Comet_ [1986] [plate 15] is another work of Gogi. This comet is the best-known of the short-period comets which is visible from Earth every 75-76 years. There is lot of blind myth behind this. It is related to fear and fright, and assumed as a symbol of destruction of human life.

In this painting she is trying to capture the false notion of the society which persuades the pregnant women to secure the future of unborn children by doing various blind customs. Gogi depicted it with three women in green colour and a girl child sitting on the lap of fourth woman painted in orange colour. The comet is believed to be bad for pregnant women and artist has observed the remedies done to avoid any misfortune. There is insecure and vulnerable expression on the faces of the figures.

_Swayambaram_ [1991] [plate 16] Gogi's ambitious series is based on Indian wedding practice to choosing her husband among aspirants. The girl and her family select the perfect groom for girl on the basis of quality or task assigned. When girl selects husband for her choice, She garlands him. Gogi allegorically comments on the women who are cheated by their husband. The black image of husband in painting denotes no clear identity, only outward quality, symbolically represent the victory over his wife rather than to develop and fulfill the relationship. Gogi also throws light upon the situation after marriage. The life of woman is changed and depends on the wish of in-laws. The practice of swayambaram draws attention to mythological characters like Yashodhara, Sita, Draupadi where chosen husband did not fulfill their responsibility as a husband and left them in difficult time.

One of Gogi's provoking works _Kamdhenu_ [1995] [plate 17] interrogates the gender bias and reflects the attitude of the society for the women. Gogi has painted woman as kamdhenu a symbol. According the mythology, she originated from churning of the ocean called 'Samudra Manthan', who fulfills the desire of everyone.
Gogi painted Kamdhenu as women. She raises the question that no one is interested to know about the wish of K amdhenu or women. Pal invites comments on biased attitude of the society. Gogi Saroj Pal said, 'People say of K amdhenu, she is good-she can fullfill all your desires! It is interesting that no one has ever asked about what K amdhenu herself may desire -if she desired...How can her own wishes be fulfilled?'

_Aag ka Dariya_ [1998] [plate 18]In this series she takes inspiration from a mythological incident in which Vasudev takes Krishna from Mathura to Gokul to save him from Kansa and substitute the baby boy with baby girl. Pal recreated river of fire instead of storm in traditional incident. Here she adds new element to accepted story and raises a voice against the female infanticide. Gogi points out that while everyone rejoices this event, no one considers the innocent girl child who was sacrificed instead of Krishna. She comments on the rightful place of male child in society and family, questions about female anonymity. According to Gogi ancient stories should be communicated and retold in every village and town of the country.

The title of the painting _Aag ka Dariya_, inspired by the Jigar Moradabadi couplet: ‘Yeh Ishq Nahin Aasan bas Itna Samajh Leeje; Ik Aag Ka Dariya Hai Aur Doob Ke Jaana Hai. (Love is not easy; it's like an ocean of fire and one has to drown in it)’. She depicts a woman crossing a stormy river with a girl child in her arms on a paper boat.

Gogi's mythical approach is clearly visible in the series of _Kinnari_ [2008] [plate9] which is half bird and half woman. In Sanskrit Kinnari means kim-nari, the English translation of which is "what kind of woman is she?" a woman who has the capacity to change one role to another. She who lives neither on earth nor in the heavens. She reminiscences her days in Shantiniketan and said, 'I spent hours awaiting the migratory birds, hoping they would fly in soon and when they did they would enjoy themselves on the surface of the water, skimming its breadth and sometimes dipping in to feel its depth-to finally bring out a tiny fish. I felt they were the only creatures who were really free. Though they were light and delicate to the point of fragility their wings became a symbol of freedom — the forests were their philosophy.' Here women depicted like Migratory birds despite being small and delicate, have lot of capacity to voyage to Indian subcontinent from Siberia. Gogi
indirectly shows the women’s power proficiency and spirit to survive any condition through this mythological bird.

*Food For Thought series [2011] [plate 20]* is related to shortage of food and problems of price rising and difficulty of middle class people to quench the fire of hunger. In this painting, Gogi used minimum image or form, to execute the problem. This series is devoted to potato growers all over world.

Gogi Saroj Pal’s Interview.

Me- *How can an artist contribute in the welfare of the society?*

Gogi- To be a good human being, you can contribute to the society. Be true to yourself when you want to say don’t worry about other people’s opinion, you can contribute to the society.

Me- *Women occupied important place in your painting. Your work is a reflection of women’s position in the society. Please explain.*

Gogi- Women are in every district, women are half of the population of the world. So You can’t say... They can be varying on the basic level earth ground. They can reach on highest position. How you place yourself, that is important. How you want to place other women in that case. Women are going to remain in every sphere of life as the male are, but it should not be contradictory. It should not be exploited. It should not take for granted. They should have their own way whatever they want to do. They should achieve, that is very important. I should not place them where I want them. Nobody should place them anywhere. Let the women choose themselves what they want to do.

Me *Which inspires you to make painting on social issues and tell me about your painting related to it?*

Gogi- Whole my life, I am living like every woman...everything influenced me to paint things. I am not a person who is in the morning going outside and returned. I get influenced where the people are selling potato anything......My domestic helper said to me, ‘Aunty’, I am very worried, things are getting so
costly. In the village, how people buying things these even affect me. That’s why I have done the series Food for thought. That is about the potato and onions.

Me- How do you connect the prevailing social theme with Indian mythological concepts?

Gogi- I live 100%. It gives the possibility to connect the mythology.

Me- You reversed and retell the history and myth and challenged the accepted norms of the society. How?

Gogi- I told you. I think everybody has right to know the past mythology in everything. But you should not submit to it. We have right to understand it and place them historically where are they belong and you should use those values for your advantage for the change in the society. Not to submit, not to glamorize that thing. What so you ever think, this is not right. You should change it.

Me- Do you find any change in your present style from the past?

Gogi- Style is one thing, thinking is another thing, and there is a craft in art. You are mastering the craft, you are growing continuously but thinking get more deep. My understanding gets more deep. Whether they reflected in my work that is can be issue.

Me- Describe your work ‘Being a woman’.

Gogi- I think being a woman you confront a different reality. In the society, because physically you are different. You are born with different features. You have the responsibility of a child. You are giving the new human being. So you have the responsibility to give the right values to them also. Give the right society for them, they can flourish.

Me- Tell about symbols and allegory used by you.
Gogi- I create my things. I don’t wait for things to happen, I don’t use historic thing to happen, and I don’t use historic things. I change according to my need. For me there is no limitation. I can use, I can modify, I can create. For me making a painting is important. Nothing more is important.

Me- Describe your medium.

Gogi- From clay to acrylic, oil to graphic, gouache, water colour, dry pastels, I make soft dolls with cloth also. For me the medium is nothing, for me important is expression.

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Another well-known artist Nalini Malani born in Karachi [Sindh] 1946, during partition her family moved to India, she grew up with stories of social suffering and disintegration of families on both sides of border. These remembrances are often interwoven into her art work to evoke the wounds related to partition. She completed her study at Sir J.J. School of Art [1964-69], she also got a studio where she had an opportunity to interact with artists like Tyeb Mehta and M.F. Hussain, Gaitonde. 

Then she got French govt. scholarship to study fine art in Paris. After that she thought of a travelling exhibition including women artist like Arpita Singh, Nilima Sheikh and herself in 'Through the looking Glass'. In 90s she decided to begin work in unconventional forms instead of conventional painting. She is one of the first artists who worked with wall drawings, theatrical works, and shadow play. She interweaved her personal, historical mythological narratives in her art work. Her themes are religious conflicts, fundamentalism, war, nuclear power, violence, oppression towards women and environmental destruction.

Nalini Malani interrogates with powerful visual intensity the social injustices of contemporary Indian society. Her paintings are exploration about her anger of the exploitation of women, ecological disaster, and colonization, communal tensions. Malani’s early depiction of women in city rendered as prostitute, labour class people in working areas, lower middle class women are often painted by her, struggling to retain their existence in male dominated society. The condition of women is very well executed by Malani in her domestic and outer domain. She also throws light upon the
aspects of overcrowding of metro cities especially in Mumbai where twenty members of a family are compelled to live in a room and suffer from the feeling of claustrophobia.

Malani takes inspiration from Mythology of Indian as well as western culture and reinvents in innovative form to relate it to past time. Her protagonist symbolizes the violence on women's body during partition. The communal violence in India in 1992 and again in 2002 witnessing the brutality against women, number of crimes like rape, torture, abduction, rejection by their family, stimulates Malani to paint the suffering of those women in her own individualistic style. Medea symbolizes the colonized whereas her husband Jason is the symbol of the colonizer. Malani skillfully uses watery medium (reverse painting on Mylar) produces cloudy shapes, image and slippery contours that rejuvenate her narrative.

Curiouser and curiosurer/Alice in Mumbai [2005] [plate 21] This painting of Malani is an amalgamation of India as well as a western literary figure Lewis Carroll's Alice with Mumbai. Malani has found that Alice is a perfect character to showcase the problem of a growing polluted urban centre.

Malani's Alice is encircled with false impression and fantasy like things after the fall into the rabbit hole. In Curiouser and Curiouser, "the rabbit hole" is depicted as Mumbai during dreadful flood of 26th July, 2005. The continuous overflow of Mithi River became the cause of flood. There are important buildings of Mumbai like Queens Necklace and Chowpathy Beach. Above her is a figure holding a tanpura, an Indian musical instrument. It gives the illusion of a toilet cleaner and sometimes the figure is trying to attack the person who is lying beneath her. According to Nancy Adajania, 'Malani deploys the character of Alice to share with her viewers 21st century tale related to ecological disaster that is playful and bizarre.'

Medea I [2006] [plate 22] Malani adopted Greek mythological character Medea, princess of Colchis, who left her family and killed her brother to help her lover Jason in taking the golden Fleece from her father. Finally Jason betrayed beautiful Medea, who was annoyed and shocked and took an oath to take revenge.
She killed Jason’s new birds and ultimately her two sons because of the suffering given by Jason as betrayal to her.\textsuperscript{50}

Malani painted Medea as a naked wounded woman. She is shown in standing posture, raising arms, legs are away from each other. A dirty reddish - black colour leaked from her umbilicus to the lower part of her stomach. Two sensitive red cords come out from her body and, she is raising that cord which connects to two little infants at both side of her, possibly her babies. A polluted cloud like form is floating in the dotted background.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{Sita I} [plate 23]Sita is Indian mythological character, daughter of king of Mithila, mother earth, wife of the Hindu God Rama, regarded as an ideal of womanhood. Dasharath’s wife Kaikeyi insisted that he should exile Rama from Ayodhya to forest for fourteen years. Sita discarded luxurious life of palace to fulfill her responsibility as her consort and happily accepted to go away with Ram. When Ram and Laxman were away hunting, Ravan kidnapped Sita by changing his original form and imprisoned her in Sri Lanka. Ram saved Sita by winning the battle. After returning to Ayodhya Rama rejected Sita and she had to prove her purity, by giving Agni Pariksha[fire trial]. Rama sent Sita away to forest where she gave birth her two children Lava and Kusha. Malani’s depiction of Sita I shows her rage about communal violence. Sita’s naked tortured body in skin colour with unclear face reveals the depth of emotion beneath the surface. Brutality on her body clearly indicates the split parts of her body stomach, blood, lower part of her body, flesh hovering beneath her. Sita’s body extended, merges into the creature below her against the dotted blue backdrop. She is looking sideways and her hand is extending at both sides of painting shows women portrayed in peripheral area. One marginalized woman is pushing an unclear male figure. Both sides of women are bravely confronting the men in spite of being violated.\textsuperscript{52}

Malani’s work shows iconic European and Indian heroines, exiled for their husbands and then betrayed. They are metaphors of gender inequality in both mythologies. Malani has depicted them as sisters in pain to express anger.\textsuperscript{53}
Splitting the other [2007] [plate 24] In fourteen panels Malani painted human figures, devils, cherubs, hovering brains, distorted gazeless bodies, skeleton, umbilical cords, new born babies. The female figures are shown twice in order, one depicted as a youthful mother delivering nutrition around the area through the umbilical cords of her womb even cords are growing from the hand. It turns into the veins in another panel. Other female figure is portrayed as a tired old woman providing nourishment to infants who are hovering behind her innocently and she is also compelled to give diet to devils and demons and other terrible creatures who stop her path. This painting is related to Gujarat riots.

Listening to the shades [2008] [plate 25] Malani painted 42 panels in which two minds are in front of each other painted like kidney, both are waiting to see the development. In another panel one brain is painted darker to another. Next panel title ‘Nurturing Nature’ has the characteristics of earth mother who is powerful and health giver. Natural elements like flower sprout, shrills creature butterflies are painted. The Act is Final is the title of the central panel where everything like demolition, obliteration, harassment, assassination, rape, meet to centre. In one panel a dark figure seems engraved from the un-illuminated area. There is blood path, no one can escape from this and dots of red colour here symbolize the danger and disaster.

Malani portrayed mythical Greek and Indian figure Medea and Sita as symbol of violence on women’s bodies during India Pakistan partition and communal riots in 1992, 2002. Malani’s research into the female gaze was focused and intensified by the sociologist Veena Das’s essay on the construction of pain, which relates intimately to Malani’s own early experience. Modern India Das points out, was born in violence to women; during the partition of 1947-48, it is estimated that about a hundred thousand women were abducted and raped on both sides in the border crossings, as Hindus and Muslims attacked one another through their women. Malani was a one-or two year old child crossing into India with her mother during this terrifying period. She and her mother travelled through the turmoil of nationalism, rape and birth of nations-What Das calls ‘painful inscriptions of nationalist slogans on the bodies of women’. 
Cassandra [2009] [plate 26] Nalini painted thirty panels, related to the story of Cassandra [Greek mythology], she was daughter of the Trojan king, had the boon of prophecy. God Apollo fell love with her but she refused him as a lover, then Apollo cursed her that nobody would believe her predictions. In Troy during the Trojan War she predicted events which were true but was never believed.

Cassandra is here portrayed as young and old protagonist who has a gift of prophecy, explored through a grayish blue umbilical cord that linked to her ear to another person. Forms and figure are executed against three circles of light orange colour over which dirty clouds floating in the space suggesting danger and trauma.

Nalini says, “To make it into a contemporary issue, what I felt very strongly was that both the Cassandra and Apollo elements exist in us and we do have the gift of prophecy. We all have premonitions and common sense. We know it’s wrong to start nuclear projects since they’re doomed to disaster, and yet we continue. We have the gift of common sense and intuitive knowledge that alerts us, but then Apollo appears to thwart this knowledge. Also, it is important to compare similarities between Medea and Sita—both suffered as their husbands betrayed them”.57

Bombs, missiles, violence, distorted lifeless human bodies are executed to show the terror of nuclear explosion and atomic test by India. Nalini often shows undeveloped child and fetuses in her painting, symbol of panic condition in which future generation will have to raise. She wants serene, calm surroundings for upcoming generation.

Vasudha Thozhur was born in Mysore in 1956. She studied painting at the College of Arts and Crafts in Chennai and at the School of Art and Design in Croydon, U.K. She lives and works in Baroda.58 Her narration is unlimited related to her past experiences, contemporary happenings. She used strategy of dividing panels in her narrative in an organized way. Mesmerizing visual codes always resides in her paintings, which is a kind of statement of personal vocabulary. Her powerful and influential gesticulation attracts the viewer to know about hidden meaning behind the painting.
Her painting Untouchable [2001-02] [plate 27] comments on social evil, practice of the sati. She represents her image as a widow who is sitting on the burning pyre comfortably. The painting is a reminiscence of image of RoopaKanwarsel, immolation. The ritual performed in public place where public witness the whole event and woman is declared goddess, the site becomes holy place to build the temple. Here the women’s body becomes the witness of pain and object of sacrifice.59

Vasudha’s ‘untouchable’ denotes her concern about the hierarchy system of Indian society. In the dark colour background, she arranged different hand postures, have bleeding wounds like Christ with some doodling. She placed herself as fearless widow who is sitting in on wooden pile. Another painting under the title of Untouchable, [2002-3][plate 28] is divided in four parts. First section is textured in vermilion and gold colour. In second section, Vasudha took inspiration from a photograph of a newspaper during earthquake in Gujarat city, in which barber is shaving women’s [self image] hair for death ceremony, the image of personal widowhood, symbolizing loss of sexuality. Third part is image of beautiful national bird [Peacock] representing nation’s harm and while previous part symbolizes personal wound. Fourth part is consisting of an image of broken leg. It is the story of girl who was crushed under the wreckage of her house in the earthquake of Gujarat in 2001. She wrote script — ‘Jaane wale ko mat roko’ on her leg. Through this work artist explored that this issue be addressed nationally rather than as a personal loss.60

‘Untouchability is a politically charged word in India. Beyond the obvious focus on those beneath the caste system, Thozhur uses that association to represent other forms of marginalization.61

Her other painting Terminus Erraeus[2007-08] [plate 29]explores the violence in Gujarat by representing the monkey on the house whose tail is burning which shows brutality, bloodshed, aggression during riots. On the right side of canvas playful doodling of Gandhiji’s monkey giving the message of nonviolence, here recreated by Vasudha. It also indicates that birthplace of Gandhiji has been despoiled, assaulted. Gayatri Sinha says, Thozhur’s painting titled ‘Terminus Erraeus’ evokes the monkey common to the streets and roof tops Gujarat: her reference to the
distortion of religious ideologies and the violence against minorities plays into the image of the three monkeys. They serve as a sign of a mute political structure, that in the land of Gandhi's birth, his doctrine of ahimsa or non violence has been violated.'

Baroda based artist Rekha Rodwittiya's painting is a reflection about the social discrimination. Born in Bangalore in 1958, she studied painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda (B.A. fine 1981), and at the Royal College of Art, London (MA 1984, on the Inlaks Scholarship). In 1998 Rodwittiya wrote- 'In the '70s I was part of a political climate in India that had no structured evidence of feminist consciousness ....for me it was painting and defining a code of living that would navigate the feminist philosophy as an ongoing daily challenge to the prescriptive traditions of a conservative gender construct. My art has positioned a 'dialogue' that centres around numerous issues of redressal. In a vast spectrum of work that spans 20 years, I have dealt with a variety of issues such as rape, isolation, degradation, subjugation...yet nowhere has the evocation placed the woman as a victim, it is always the resurrective spirit of the woman which is the central power to the works'.

Her education in Baroda, gave important platform for her exploration and interrogative aptitude, which reflects different metaphors in her work. Her early works of 1980s manifest distorted, raped, female figure to show gender inequality, discrimination and violence. Her women's direct gaze, comments on the voyeuristic participation of male viewer and wish to go beyond the dilemma of women's harassment. Her women occupy centre of the canvas with opened eyes, commenting on fixed male gaze.

Her work after the 80s explores the motifs and symbols of sexual violence and dreadful images of women, objectification, vulnerability in a poignant manner through various male symbols like tree and pillar, fish, chimney, factory or an aeroplane.

In her powerful painting Shedding of innocence [1993] [plate 30] she shows a red reclining nude, resembling Manet's Olympia. On the left side of her arm, Artist has metaphorically arranged a ship, a bridge, a plane to show male domination and
success, accomplishment, but the nude woman is removing all these things. On her 
right are the I-ching symbol of intelligence and telescope and compass, express-
women's proficient tools of progress. This painting depicts women's extreme power 
and comments on male dominated society. In her painting *Scissor, Gun, knife, Cunt* 
[1995] [plate 31] Woman is shown in yogic posture with symbol of violence. In other 
painting *Mappings-Body imprints* [1997] [plate 32] the artist has arranged body parts 
within a frame to objectify them.

**Exhibitions**

**Tiger by the tail! Oct. 2 - Dec. 14, 2007**

This exhibition interprets the voice against the social injustice, violence, and 
feministic issue through their art product and conveys an influential social message to 
the viewer. To address these concepts they did not hesitate to retell the history of 
Indian culture and myth.

The title of this show is taken from the painting of renowned artist Gogi Saroj 
Pal Hat yogini shakti in which a woman is fearlessly sitting on the tiger. In Hindu 
religion Devi Durga riding lion who is powerful, aggressive and violent, symbolizes 
destroying the evils and giving the belief of liberty from fear and terror. These women 
artists are infusing essence of shakti in themselves to produce bold visual language.

Resident scholar Dr. Elinor Gadon said, 'One of the most significant 
developments over the last 30 years has been the emerging prominence of self-
conscious female artists willing to challenge social norms.'

Tiger by the Tail! Exhibition based on themes: Transforming the body: Subverting the icon : Performing the Body: Issue of identity: Memory, loss and Healing and Empowerment.

This exhibition displays 35 art work of 17 Indian women artist including 
painting installation, video and photograph. Arpana Caur, Arpita Singh, Gogi Saroj 
Pal, Nalini Malani, Vasudha Thozhur, Kanchan Chander, Sheela Gowda, Nilima 
Sheikh, Rummana Hussain, Navjot Altaf, Sheba Chhachhi, Anita Dube, create a 
social discourse through their art work.
Women Artists of India: Celebration of Independence 1997

Fifty years after Independence from Great Britain, India is celebrating the anniversary of her freedom from colonialism. Mills College art history professor Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker Ann initiated a show incorporating the works of fifteen women artists of India. In this exhibition women artists articulate their feelings, regarding various issues because India is facing lots of gender, social and economic problems after fifty years of independence. Through visual means, the artists strong raise their voice against these issues. Participating artists were Arpana Caur, Naina Dilal, Rummana Hussain, Talini Malani, Navjot Altaf, Anupam Sud, Rekha Rodwittiya, Suruchi Chand, Lalitha Lajmi and Nilima Sheikh, Gogi Saroj Pal, Jayashree Chakravarty, Kanchan Chander, Vasundhara Tewari.69

The Self & the World 1997

An Exhibition of Indian Women Artists- This Exhibition was held from 5th to 30th April 1997 in The National Gallery of Modern Art [NGMA] New Delhi with Collaboration of Gallery Espace. Participating artists were Amrita Sher Gill, Devyani Krishna, Pillo Pochkhanawala, Meera Mukherjee, Nasreen Mohamedi, Arpita Singh, Anjolie Ela Menon, Madhavi Parekh, Anupam Sud, Nilima Sheikh, Gogi Saroj Pal, Talini Malani, Latika Katt, Navjot Altaf, Arpana Caur. These artists explored various themes including women as subjects and their experiences of life, expressed in pictorial vocabulary.

Inside out: contemporary women artists of India 1995-96

This exhibition was held at Middleborough Art Gallery in Middleborough, United Kingdom in 1995-96, followed by a nationwide tour. The exhibition focuses on the history of women artists of modern to contemporary period. Nine women artists, painters, sculptors used diverse media to investigate issues that influenced contemporary art through country’s politics, urban situation, tradition, myth, violence and gender bias.70

Looking Through The Glass 1987-89
Through the looking Glass, at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, Shridharani gallery, New Delhi, Sista's Gallery, Bangalore, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, CCA, New Delhi, 1987-89. Showing the work of Nilima Sheikh, Arpita Singh, Madhavi Parekh, Nalini Malani. All these women artists showed a new approach to exhibit a body of work that rejects discriminated viewer's gaze.71

All These artists create different layers of meaning and metamorph the old values, traditions, myth, to communicate their idea or concept. Their pictorial language compels the viewer to rethink and presents an unbiased approach related to anything which is perilous to mankind, through their art works.
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Chapter 4

SOCIAL IDIOMS IN ARPITA SINGH’S PAINTING
Chapter - 4

SOCIAL IDIOMS IN ARPITA SINGH’S PAINTING

Introduction

Arpita Singh is one of the most celebrated artists of the country. Deriving experiences from domestic life, she interweaved various subtle impressions like toys, chairs, ducks, flower, birds, aeroplane, flowers, alphabets and cherries in her art work. As a textile designer, her interest was evident in the form of textile, fabrics, embroidery, patterns and motifs. Her kantha embroidery’s dash like strokes interweaved in surface pattern. As a multi narrator, she weaved the story and conceptualized recent issues in a satirical manner. Taking the inspiration from Paul klee, Amrita Sher Gil, Rabindranath Tagore’s doodling, she created her own distinguished style. Working in thick dabs of oil colour and multiple washes of water colour, she created a complex set of forms and figures. Scripts and text played an important role in making a kind of bridge, hinting about the subtle things related to painting.

She explained the intricacies of the journey of her life with the distinctive visual language through colour and brush. She explored the current theme of society with multiple narratives and used its characters to enhance the interest and charm in paintings. As a good citizen, she commented on the present day situation of our nation and her humanistic canvases evoked the unmatched feeling of human situation.

Biography

Arpita Datta was born in 1937 in Baranagar, then in District 24 parganas, [now a suburban municipality in the north of Kolkata]. Singh created a deep relationship with her mother - particularly after her father died. Being a part of the Brahma family [a social and religious reform movement, Brahma-Samaj was practiced in Bengal] her mother, a widow decided to live independently and joined a government job to help her daughter and son. She was then transferred to Delhi where she established herself with her children’. Singh reminiscences, ‘I remember playing with my father all the time. He was my best friend. He was very fond of reading so I
grew up among books. When I was very small there was this world war going on and the Japanese once bombed Calcutta. So I remember those nights, dark, they were supposed to be dangerous but as a child I didn’t feel any danger, because perhaps when you are with parents you feel very secure, but then we had to move to the country because of this war. There everything was different. We had a big tank in the house. I remember the ducks coming in a line to the tank to swim. This seemed so strange to me because in a city you don’t see ducks walking through the street’.²

Arpita studied arts at the Department of Fine Art at the Delhi Polytechnic. The principal of Lady Irwin School insisted her to join Art college. She says, ‘I had no intention of becoming an artist. I was sent to the art college by the principal of my school. In those days, I used to read a lot, especially contemporary Bengali literature and poetry. I did not have any idea of art training — academic or otherwise, and each step at the art school was a wonderful surprise’.³

When she joined the Art college, Shri Bhawesh Sanyal was the Principal of Art college. Her favorite teachers at art college were Sailoz Mukherjee, Biren De, and Avinash Chandra. Her future husband Paramjit Singh was a year senior to her in art college. She said, ‘Actually the ability to see the colours- that is Sailoz Mukherjee’s gift to us. And to some extent, how to handle the colours-all this I have learnt from them, Biren de was very good in portraiture, so from him, I learnt first of all the shifting of light on the model how every moment the light changes the shape of a form’.⁴

In 1960 Singh, along with her husband Paramjit Singh, became the founder member of Unknown. In 1962, Singh married Paramjit Singh. After one year, she joined Weavers service centre, initiated by Handloom Board under the guidance of Shrimati Papul Jayakar.⁵ In 1976, Roshan Alkazi saw her work, found it amazing and offered her a show. After that, she never looked back and participated in many exhibitions in India and abroad.

She lived and worked in New Delhi. Her major solo shows and group shows are as follows-

‘Arpita Singh : Men in Isolation’ , Cleveland Institute of art, 2013; Arpita

Group Exhibitions:


Important participation:


Awards:


Social interpretation of Arpita Singh’s painting

Arpita Singh is known as one of the famous figurative Indian contemporary women artists. Her art is a reflection of everyday life - real, imaginary, growing violence, social injustice and her views about the position of women in contemporary society. Her work is also known for contemporary women’s notion, their personal world and ambition. Her execution of thought in oil and water colour portrays pain, suffering, happiness, expectation, hopelessness of society, country and world.

She comments about her work, ‘My time and the society I live in, have provided me aspects of different tendencies: modern traditional and as well as popular. The life around me is tense with contradictions, hostility and displacement. These appear as signs in my work. These signs represent themselves, and do not stand for something else. Being there, on a specific space, they indicate a new passage to me. This signal is my surprise, my revelation.’9

Arpita Singh’s whimsical composition deals with social and political theme whereas a balance of peaceful elegance emerges with lot of vitality. Singh’s canvases
explore social documentation of life around her. She always liked to express her inner feeling through strong character. Her deep sensibility and experience of life inspired her to reflect on the various aspects of humanity. The brutality of the 1984 Delhi riots had disturbed her, which found expression in her canvases. She explained as to how her husband who was a victim in the Sikh community, had been helpless at the railway station while returning from Amritsar and got delayed for more than a day until someone could save him.10

The sense of violation pervades her painting which is clearly visible in the later phase of her artistic career. She used many symbols like pistol, gun toting people and dead persons, knives, war planes depicting a hint of the turbulence in one’s life. Each of Arpita’s canvases have a different point of view which helps in observing a painting with fresh eyes and a different perspective and hence creates a new meaning.

Arpita Singh, during her life became an observer who absorbed the surroundings, colours and textures of not only her own life but also of others. She remembered the moment when she was a child, saw an aged man getting murdered in the communal riots after Partition in Delhi. About this incident, Arpita says that she silently observed the whole incident but it did not shake her. Element of threats occurred in her paintings from the 1980s.11 Her social comment on violence that we face daily, was explored in several forms like an airplane hovering around the building supposed to blasting and various soldiers who are safeguard for us but actually they are killers and innocent person become the prey of them, are some images often find in her art work.12

She says, ‘My whole business is to record and express what I see. I watched Babri Masjid demolition and couldn’t believe it. I was only 10 when Partition happened. I couldn’t make sense of the whole thing but I guess it remained somewhere in my subconscious. Insecurity, violence are inborn and primitive. From Ashwamedha to Guantanamo Bay, it has been continuous’.13

Death always pervades in her art work. People attending funeral with bouquets are also seen in her painting. Lifeless bodies in the streets indicate about the danger and insecurity of life. She says, ‘I don’t introduce death consciously. But somehow, it comes through, perhaps because death is always, there’.14
The terror and brutality committed during communal riots in different parts of our country shows incredible violence in the name of caste and religion. Citizens are affected directly or indirectly by these social and political incidents. Media delivers the terror of outside world into our home which, ironically, is supposed to be the safest place for everyone. Undoubtedly, Arpita is sensitive and a genuine artist to react to the situation around her and also had a deep feeling of sorrow and danger. She is associated with the suffering and conditions of our time through her several painted images of burnt, broken bodies, bleeding wounds and innocent deaths during the communal riots and carnage created by political parties.

Her figures of men and women drawn on the surreal background of divided and broken landscapes, maps, landmarks, signs invoke a threatening imaginary place, where disturbed persons reside in the world created by the artist. They walk aimlessly, move forward rapidly, bend down and look introverted holding the gun. Their whole anatomy suggest that they are machines or puppet like things who have to complete the mission or any task. They don’t understand why they are doing this.\(^{15}\)

Arpita Singh’s narration is a reflection of her thinking about the social evils related to the dreadful game of authority, needless customs and gender inequality, street battles, terror and police encounters, aggression — possible rape.\(^{16}\) In conversation with Dalmia She says, ‘there are many things happening all the time around you and you naturally don’t ignore them. You are also part of them, so these things start coming in your mind and it is up to you to give importance to them, and elaborate your idea about them.’\(^{17}\) As a narrative painter, she is highly sensitive about her surrounding as well as the city and the country. Her paintings are an exploration of social issues which multiply rapidly to encircle the whole society.

Singh’s bold voyaging enabled her to express a subjective record of individual responses. Her deepest humanity and distinctive working process extract her exploration into strong and universal image. Her works expose subjects with lot of hidden message. As an artist, Arpita always felt the urge to communicate through the medium of painting. ‘For me, the end is the ability to communicate, and for that one needs a voice and a language — both of which I have found in art’, she explains. The language of her canvas has changed over the years. ‘There have been different phases
when I have moved from figurative art to abstract and then back again,’ she says. 18

Gayatri Sinha says about her ‘Arpita Singh has pushed the visual lexicon of the middle-aged woman further than almost any other woman artist. The anomaly between the aging body and the residue of desire, between the ordinary and the divine and the threat of the violent fluxes of the impinging external world gives her work its piquancy and edge. At the same time she critiques the miasma of urban Indian life with suggestive symbols of violence that impinge on the sphere of the private, creating an edgy uncertainty’.19

Women in Arpita Singh’s painting are depicted as victims, war widows, either mourning or grieving on death of relatives. Some of them protect the girl child, whereas some are shown vulnerable like in one painting where a woman is plucking the flower and a man is pointing a gun towards her. In some places she is raising the gun to destroy the evil. She is also yearning to change her gender for freedom. Nilima Sheikh writes, ‘The woman of Arpita’s water colour has grown, to fill the paper sometimes. In some paintings she seems to grow larger than the daily life arena where she had juggled her size and place with other member of the repertory ...Often she is large, caring, frontal mythic, urban and funny stepping across history to belong to other time’.20 She says, ‘I am a painter. To call me a woman painter does not have a special meaning. Whatever I do is as woman because I am a woman. My whole development has been as a woman in a specific society during a specific period. I do not know what it is like to paint as a man. Therefore, it seems strange to even say that I am a woman painter. I would just like to establish myself as a painter.’21

The violent action that shuddered India in past few years compelled Singh to step out of her domestic experiences and look at the world outside and related issues which enabled her to express connection between personal and public tragedy. Many armed soldiers can be seen in Arpita’s canvas. They are in plain clothes or just attackers pointing their gun everywhere.

Paintings and their description

*Child bride* [1985] [plate 33] Arpita Singh recreates the painting child bride after Amrita Sher Gil by arranging forms and figures like ears, aero plane, moon,
flags, duck and birds. Singh has painted a naked body of a child bride and showed her sensitive age. She has wandered out into a world where she is like a stranger lost among cars and airplane and covered women around her yellow ghunghat but not covering her body completely. Her confusion is indicated through violent colors against the dark blues and red color suggests dirty night. Surroundings of painting convey deep emotion in the subject that invokes the traditional approach regarding this issue.

White Chair [1986][plate34]Arpita completed this painting soon after the murder of India Gandhi in 1985. Images of gun hovering in air; a tall plane reminds one of the ceremonial dispersion of Gandhi’s ashes over the Himalayas. A woman wearing a white sari and a man bent over her shoulder with gaze downward at the chair; show the feeling of sorrow and loss. There is a black and blue seated figure in side view whose sight in the direction of two pistols from a curve over the woman’s head, create a sense of threat. A car seems to hang in the air above the chair, between the guns and a plane. Arpita creates the feeling of tension by the use of layers of paint and reapplys it only to scrap it away again.

Singh’s narratives portray not only personal issues but also domestic, urban violence. In Munna apa’s garden [1989] [plate35] she depicts the happy and peaceful scene of society where a man is watering a plant of pale rose and a women feeding her baby. An airplane and car driving over a sleeping figure depict the urban chaos of the society.

My Mother [1993] [plate36] The Bombay riots of 1992–93, after the Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodha, set Mumbai city in a blaze. The fire of violence in which thousands of people were killed, Conflagration, demolition, personal and public harmfulness was found in various areas like apartment building and slums.

‘My mother’ is a large oil painting, portrait of artist mother who is an elderly widow who steps out carefully of her home and completes her everyday jobs. The diagonal representation of road portrays the flames of violence in the form of dead bodies of soldiers and prostitutes, cracked chair, the debris of houses and lots of upturned cars shows the aggression in society. Portrait of her mother is a reminiscence of ancient mother goddess. Through this painting, Arpita comments on communal
riots in Bombay. Nilima Sheikh says about this, “The tapestry is woven on a white warp: white shrouds, white garment for living, white for setting off the beautiful edge of pain, of colour and flesh. There would martyrs and survivors when a city wages war on itself.”

_Durga_ [1993][plate37] This painting portrays sheer image of four-armed Durga positioned in front of the canvas, holding a gun in one hand and flower in the other. Below her a man is lying down while she is standing on him boldly and another man pointing a knife towards her and trying to harm her. In the right side, one seated woman is shown greeting the goddess. She says, ‘The Amrita Bazar Patrika group wanted to produce a calendar with some woman painters’ works and they asked me to do a painting for them, so I called it Devi. And in her hands, there are guns and other things. I think people who are really religious or have their traditional beliefs thought it to very strange because the white sari always represents a widow’s garments. So that was the controversy, but I painted it white because it was easy for me to make that figure stand out against the red and pinkish background. A figure is figure, whether it is a woman, or Man or a widow, it is not important for me.’  This painting was made done after the communal riots.

_Missing target_ [2003] [plate38] In this painting, Singh paints the flower which transforms into the targets. Symbolic depiction of numerous sufferers, begging for mercy is represented by the garlands of targets.

_Security check_ [2003] [plate39] It documents the shameful experience of a vulnerable pregnant woman at airport security stripped naked with raised arm and around her men with guns suggest violence in the society.

_Watching_ [2004] [plate40] On 1st March 2002, a bakery was burst into flames in Hanuman Tekri of Vadodara by a mob. In this, fourteen persons including women and children and three Hindu workers were burnt alive. Looting, killing, murder, burning occurred at that time. In this tragedy, 1200 people were killed and it was a major incident after Godhra riots.

Arpita Singh takes inspiration from everyday life and events. This painting portrays her judgment of the Best Bakery case. This painting draws a group of men
who are dressed in black coats and seated on chairs. They are all in waiting pose looking towards left. Behind them, there are disorganized and meaningless words, letters, numbers, but associated to judgment of Best bakery case.

Ella Datta says, 'Are they waiting for an exciting turn of events, something wondrous perhaps? Anticipation is written on their faces. The weariness of living is marked on their wrinkled skin, creased clothes. And yet they are framed with a border of a carnations. The element of theatre in this painting is striking. But this quality of search, of looking for something, runs through her images.' On a light background, she dispersed various overlapping letters related to the judgment of Best Bakery case like the style of newspaper. For everyone, this riots like bursting confrontation with brutal violence.

Her oil on canvase triptych Whatever is Here...[2006][plate41]is inspired by the Mahabharat story. There is a seated figure of Dhritarashtra in black coat in the centre of the painting. Singh juxtaposes mythical characters which show pride, strength and chaotic violence happening around them through multiple narratives. There is also another mythological figure Sanjay who is a reporter and sees dreadful incidents of war and gives bad news of the death of Dhritarashtra’s son. Here he is shown with a pair of binoculars to narrate the incident.

Arpita uses many codes and symbols with reference to contemporary reality. The theme like 'War widows' and 'women violated' are related to the present situation of the society. There are also white dressed war widows mourning the death of their men killed in war on our borders depicted in the lower side of the painting. During the communal violence, women are shown attempting to hold their garment due to shyness. Arpita portrays raped woman in communal riots as mythical character of Draupadi. Ella Datta says, 'For an artist of Arpita’s stature, the violence is never directly represented. That would be too naturalistic and illustrative. Instead, it is internalised and expressed through a cryptic code of subtle metaphors.'

Another narrative in the painting is shown with the symbols 'The lost river' related to Saraswati River, a legendary river of Hindu civilization. It flows north of the Kurukshetra battlefield. Critics state about its dryness. NDA Government, initiated a plan to save the mythical river of saraswati.
Behind the multiple layers Arpita juxtaposes the mystery of the word ‘Lost River’. Ella Datta says, ‘The blue course of water in the painting could be the magnum project of tracking the fabular Saraswati river or it could be an attempt to map a river of memories buried under strata of everyday experience that nevertheless nurtures a culture ethos with its subterranean flow.’ Painting is expression of anger and its destructive result in which history and myth woven together on a vast scale, create remarkable work in contemporary context.

In Night Cab [2007][plate42]Arpita raised gender issues through her water colour painting. There is seated male figure in the centre of the painting. A scattering graffiti like Booking here, Pre paid taxi, fixed rate, no extra charges, are inscribed in the background of painting, which suggest the view of taxi stand. In the foreground is a naked woman lying down shamefully against the orange colour backdrop of the painting.

She says that this was ‘of an encounter with a woman who wished to be an independent and take a cab even though we had offered her a lift late one night.’ She is dreaming to veil her gender and wants to attain liberty like seated man. On the other side grand image of seated man is dominating the entire painting and the other gender also. The words dreaming, sleeping and presence of blue winged taxi, express the subconscious feeling which is an important aspect of Arpita Singh’s oeuvre.

Ashvamedha [2008][plate43] In this triptych, Arpita connects the primitive violence to contemporary turbulence. Various words like burn, kill, horse, death, assault are dispersed in the entire canvas. In the first part, pink colour dominates where a dead horse is lying down and around him several images of men and running soldiers are depicted to show the violence. The second panel in blue colour, is juxtaposed with various horse riders and third panel suggests green dominance with the presence of various soldiers on motorcycle. In this painting, Singh used large daubs of colours with textures on the surface to intensify the subject. She says, ‘Actually to me, whatever they are doing today, murders and crimes, it has a sort of religion sanction, actually the start is there. In the name of religion, we were doing things like this before, so that’s the: beginning- I mean, the recorded beginning- though even earlier, we were doing these things...you know from that, say religious
sanction, we started invading people, invading other people’s spaces and destroying them. It is going on till now." Singh compares this ritual to today’s violence.

Arpita’s large effective triptych *Lily pond* [2009][plate44] is a mixture of beauty and terrible elements with direct reference to international crises and brutality in society. To create an appealing texture, the artist composed two thirds of painting with a word ‘water’ in blue colour. The blue colour of two panels becomes lighter and pale in third panel. There is yellow painted islands ‘Guantanamo bay’. In this painting, the artist articulates her view related to destroyed sweet home, and lily is symbol of middle class materialistic symbol which has been crushed by unknown invader and attacker. These attackers are allegorically represented to greediness, violence, assault and bloodshed. Through these symbols Arpita conveys bloody atmosphere around us.

The chief feature of the painting is water filled with pink paint as a symbol of water lilies. There are several drowning men with their open mouth, shown in the painting with grief and fear. Uniformed soldiers are running to chase them with their gun. She uses white repeated daubs to reduce the blue and pink and intensify the colour of drowning men, browns of the soldiers and the olive green colour. The whole composition diagonally composed in a striking manner, conveys various interrelated issues.

Ella Datta says, ‘The reference, as is often noticed in Arpita’s work, comes from a literary or textual source, in this case a comment by writer Hari Kunzru, who warned at a literary festival not to turn Kashmir into Guantanamo.’ U.S Administration run a detention camp in Guantanamo bay, an island prison in Central America. Due to the consequences of the Sept. 11, 2001 detainees were captured and tortured by U.S. forces. Many incidents of cruel suffering and torture on the prisoners shocked the artist as a sensitive human being. An image of cloud is set on the top right of the painting with the word ‘Whatever I tell you three times is true’ indicates her comment on print and electronic social media, who delivers only one sided truth. May be the reality is not exposed. Arpita says,‘I found this work to be incomplete till I discovered these lines ‘whatever I tell you, three time is true’.

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In *Boys* [2012][plate45] Two men are running in one direction, and one has a pistol to kill someone. Singh's oeuvre is largely commenting on the rapid crime, terror turbulence in urban city. She indirectly suggests yearning for peace and life in modern times. Words like river, entry and National highway are written around the crisscross lines against light orange colour background.

As a humanistic person, Arpita speaks about her rage, hatred regarding bloodshed, brutality, and trauma through the deep meaningful image which resonates her art work. Devastating truth of the world and blind race of everyone to overcome everyone clearly indicate her hidden feelings through various narratives.

**Stylistic features of Arpita Singh's art**

Arpita’s water, oil colour and drawing are a manifestation of her struggle, existence, displacement, and journey which creates a dialogue of irony. Assimilated with modern technique, she uses decorative textile motifs and graphic treatments.

Her early work in 1969 and onwards made up with small abstract stroke in pen and ink look like a woven fabric. In Arpita’s own words, she begins art with fundamental element of composition, the line, the dot, and basic form. At that stage she did not think about becoming a figurative artist.  

Arpita paints both oil and water colour but in 70’s she preferred to paint in water colour medium than oil because she felt that there was lack of liberty in this medium. Arpita treats water colour with more confidence due to size and ease to store anywhere.

Study of her work in another phase in 1977 leads to finding an ambiance of surrealism and fantasy. The impact of the artist Henri Rousseau and Marc Chagall is felt in her detailing of faces, design work in their dresses, and in the main character. Arpita takes inspiration from the kalighat pata painting in the treatment of the garment, long skirts and drapery. Arpita might have obtained freedom by breaking the western perspective and connecting it to the fantasy in the later phase which facilitated her creation of social oriented image and accentuated the dimension and volume of her figures in painting.
In the 80s, Arpita beautifully fused the figure and fabric with rhythmic deep pattern. In her next phase from 1988 onward, she developed a distinguished style by fusing certain elements like the outline of kalighat pata. She uses the two dimensional technique to enhance volume and create figures influential through diagonal line and clear brush stroke. Another element is the style of scriptural and mythological sequence for narration. She organized the series in two dimensional perspectives on paper surface and gave different symbols to the objects and altered it on same space in different colours. There is also the amalgamation of Marc Chagall and Henri Rousseau in her work.44

The most important phase is 1992 and onward which is significant not only for her personal life but also for her artistic career as she finally became a revolutionary. The development of her approach which was very artistic in the beginning and in later periods gradually became figurative. Object drawing, and monumental element was now used with great balance. The final layer of painting is created by applying the rich impasto and then creating layer after layer, scraping, rubbing, adding something to give weight to the surface. It creates intensity on the surface which depicts numerous wounds of her time. Her deep perception of national incidents of violence like the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the anti Sikh riot in 1984, and international war like gulf war are interwoven in her art work.45

In her present phase the tension becomes stronger. She achieves it through the presentation of various moving shapes and objects which are placed around the central character of the painting.

Art critic Roobina Karode says about her recent water colours, 'Arpita Singh seems more engaged with lamenting the distressing reality of our times, Signs of impending doom and death rendered into compelling details catch my eyes as it shifts over the work—the banging stark bone, the drawn heart of a women resting on her hand, the skeletal armature of the body and innards floating in the fluid painterly space, all make more than iconic appearance. The works are striking for the overwhelming presence of anatomical iconography in them'. She begins to fuse floral patterns with main characters of her composition and it transforms into something else. Sometimes, creeping plants have changed into heavy veins and intestines. By
doing this, she actually liked to accentuate unseen elements or inner parts of body which are hidden like ‘skeletons, veins, spine, heart, bones and also roots of plants. She says, ‘To me, even the flowers look like blobs of blood-soaked raw flesh. Often, in varying context, the same drawn shape connotes roots; creepers, veins and a bony spinal armature’.\(^{46}\) She said, ‘Motifs are negotiable, so circulate easily. I picked up the spine I use in my paintings these days from Nalini’s [Malani] of a few years ago, reminded of it when I saw a film on her recently. But then it may have already in my mind because of Frida Kahlo.’\(^{47}\) Her concern in anatomical details in painting started when her friend, a neurosurgeon, provided a medical manual for her better health. Arpita Singh, inspired by various types of sources and ancient art forms, gave a new dimension to her art. Nostalgia and history produce striking textures.

She has created a distinct process while working on paper, she painted with water colour and gouache on paper. She draws, erases, and scrapes down the surface with sandpaper and creates a surface which appears like damaged wall. Then she draws again with red ochre, made on broken surface. When she does water colour, she fills colour in the background, draws, picks up the outline with brush and leaves the negative outline of white thin line like a wrinkle interweaving the surface.\(^{48}\)

Drawing or sketching—Her line is so bold, there is no monotony in lines. It expresses purpose, struggle, sensation, mood and emotions. There is a rhythm and texture and various lines such as hatched line, vertical, horizontal, diagonal, circles, wavy lines, spray-print, impression of found objects. Before starting any work she draws and sketches to give form to her idea.

Compositional arrangement—The striking aspect of Arpita’s painting are her theatrical stage, where divisions are not preplanned but expressed through her brush strokes. She metamorphoses the subject from the ordinary to eternal by distinguishing style in the treatment of male and female form with deep sensibility.\(^{49}\) First she makes a drawing or exercise based on a visual idea. After that it is done in water or in oil medium. Mostly her work is self referential.

Texture—Texture plays an important role in her art work. In recent conversation with Roobina Karode, she expressed her interest in kitchen works like washing utensils, her feeling towards soft, rough, granular, or hard surface and different kinds
of textures. 'That is why her art has always been process-oriented. It is through the process that she senses, feels, touches, resists, relishes and creates. For Arpita, the surface is an immediate attraction, an irresistible encounter. The working surface is never blank or sterile even at its inception. 'It evokes a response instantly, it speaks to me and I take the clues as I go on,' says She. Roobina says about her, 'The painting process is not just a physical manifestation but, for Arpita, a revelation of the workings of mind, with which she repeats and invents every day.'

Water colour- Her water colour work is a complicated network of lines, especially in Indian red and indigo blue colour. These are reflection of subtle feeling of her personal world. Her painting surface is filled with folk art forms like kantha embroidery of Bengal. These do not have an epic scale. The colours are more soft and simple, she uses orange, yellow, pink, grey, watery green, cerulean blue and brown. She applies colour in layer upon layer on thick paper and rubs them with fine sand paper, rubs the surface with paint and creates desired textural effects. She is more comfortable in doing water colour which is easy to control. She creates fine detail with thin brush and applies and removes the colours which create an interesting texture.

Oil colour- In her oil painting, she handles the whole composition at another level. These have epic proportions where multiple narratives are depicted. She began to explore contemporary reality which changes into mythical background with dramatic possibility of the picture surface and complex web of characters. There are also elements of theatre in her oil painting. There are free floating numbers and objects like tea pots, knives, guns, cars, flowers and planes.

Element of Repetition-The striking aspect of Arpita’s art is repetition of figures and motifs. Her deep passion with popular culture and its important elements encouraged her to draw not only letters and numbers but also cut stencils of forms and images and repeated them. Repetition of soldiers, male and female, forms, words, letters, allegories, birds, flowers, clouds, stairs, grids, airplanes and cars are executed for the enhancement of the narratives.

Maps-Different kinds of maps always resonate her art work and constitute major elements that interweave her art. She likes to use old maps, meandering roads,
important landmarks, blocks, buildings and her specialty is to write some words over them.

Motifs- Pattern and motifs are the striking aspects of her art and are found in abundance for aesthetic purpose. She said, 'Pattern of any kind capture of my imagination—for instance, the beauty of the Bharut and Sanchi medallions intricately carved in stone, saris with elaborately embroidered borders, kantha stitches appliquéd quilts, all demand a visual attentiveness in both physiological and psychological terms. Decoration is never without function or meaning'. Arpita removed all kinds of hierarchy in art like lower and higher art, fine and utility art. All elements are interweaved with repetition to create rhythm.\(^{55}\)

Textile influence- Arpita draws small dash like lines in the background that recall the famous Kantha embroidery of Bengal and shows influence of her profession as textile designer. These kantha like stitches give her painting a unique impression of stitched quilt. Mary Ann Milford says, 'theses designs represent a natural intersection of aesthetic sensibilities and cultural values that go beyond mere surface decoration.'\(^{56}\) During her job she was influenced by Ikat and Leno—cut Benares cotton. Her art work is deeply influenced by textile and design. She uses fabric's folded pleats and creases in a unique manner.\(^{57}\)

Letters and Graphic impact- Arpita preferred to paint the form in outline with perfect shape that resembles children’s book or school chart. She practiced lot of sketching in her early days even on written paper like catalogues, newspapers or journals due to the lack of money. Slowly she used text, space and created stroke which looks like alphabet. She played with this and it became an important and striking part of her painting. Arpita says, 'Sometimes I use lines from some favourite poem which has become identified with a painting. Sometimes the numbers and letters symbolize the quotidian to me. But even more than that I love scripts - especially foreign scripts - scripts that I cannot read. I feel that some magic is going to be there.'\(^{58}\)

Singh is also fascinated by popular Bazaar art and packaging of Brook Bond's red label tea, its colour and enthralled by arrangement of different combinations of colours and letterings which inspired her to take its elements in her art work. All kind
of print media like Billboards, posters, advertisement, books and newspapers deeply impacted on Arpita’s mind. She is deeply inspired by the package material. Different textural material always fascinated her.  

Her paintings echo human emotion, psychology, alarming situations and help create a web of characters, whether they are mythical, ordinary men and women, soldiers, widows and various animate and inanimate things. Gestures, motifs, stances, graph like background creates an influential presence in a playful manner. It is just like magical transformation and sheer vitality of the form which gives the viewer a different experience.
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2 Ibid.


19 http://www.saffronart.com/artists/arpita-singh


Ibid., p.6.


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44 Ibid., pp. 19-20.


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Chapter -5

SOCIAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF NILIMA SHEIKH’S PAINTING
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SOCIAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF NILIMA SHEIKH’S PAINTINGS

Introduction

Nilima Sheikh is one of India’s most renowned artists whose work demonstrates different shades of Indian and Persian miniature painting, Chinese cave painting, Japanese and renaissance paintings. Her vision filtered through her day to day experiences, subtle feminine sensibility, vibrant colours of nature, social and cultural concerns. Her deep narrative depicts bride burning issues, partition trauma and various aspects of violence in the Kashmir region in an influential manner. Contemporary issues always echo in her work that allows her viewers to participate in her world full of human emotions.

Inspired by the writings of Urvashi Butalia’s ‘The other side of silence’ and Agha Shahid Ali’s poetry, The country without post office and Each night put Kashmir in your dream, she presented various dimensions of the subject. Her keen insight into the theme explores reality of human life its dilemma, tragedy and pain. She imbibes various influences like Thangka paintings, Pichwai painting of Nathdwara, Sanjhi art of Mathura in art and presents a unique amalgamation of Indian art.

Biography

Nilima Sheikh 1945 -Born in New Delhi, India. She studied History at the Delhi University, New Delhi [1962-65] and painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara. Her art collection covers a wide range of subjects and formats, size, mediums, like small painting to paper to installations, to large scrolls and screens at an architectural level and traditionally hung painting to book illustrations for children and set design for theatre. She has taught painting at the Faculty between 1977 and 1981. She said, ‘Baroda, in the '60s, was certainly identified with modernism. There was an attempt to clear the deadwood that had accrued around the older Shantiniketan experiment. At the same time, many of the
influential teachers recognized the value of history and of reinventing tradition. Her painting was exhibited nationally and internationally. She married Ghulam Mohammad Sheikh, a famous well known artist of Baroda. She shared her childhood experience and source of inspiration and said, 'My mother had, as child, cherished a desire to be an artist. Even the tedium of drawing apples, half eaten by the time nature drawing class about to begin, did not blunt her ardour for the natural world, nor her keenness for looking, and discovering design in nature... Because of her, I learnt to love travel, to new places or remapping the familiar. Because of her, I knew the pleasure of tuning my sense to nature.' She was married to artist Ghulam Mohammad Sheikh.

Her major solo and group exhibitions are as follows-


**Selected Group Exhibitions** Art Today, II and IV, Kunika Chemould Art Centre, New Delhi, 1969, 71; Rabindra Bhawan, New Delhi, 1974; Exhibitions with Black Partridge Gallery, New Delhi, 1976,77; 'Pictorial Space', Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1977; New Contemporaries, organized by Marg and Indian Society of Art Appreciation at Mumbai, 1978; Contemporary Indian Painting, assisted by ICCR, in Worpswede, Hamburg, Hanover, Braunschweig and Bremen, 1982;

Play [exhibition of six Indian painters], sponsored by ICCR in Belgrade, Titograd, Istanbul and Ankara, 1985; 3rd Asian Biennale, Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1986; Through the Looking Glass, at Bharat Bhawan, Bhopal, Shridharani Gallery, New
Nilima Sheikh has participated in several artist’s camps, workshop and seminars in South Asia, Southeast Asia, China and Europe, and has been a part of Indian artist’s delegations to Bangladesh, China, South Africa and Australia. She has taught at the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University of Baroda, and lectured on Indian art at venues in India and abroad. She visited university of Michigan as Roman J. Witt Resident Artist and Penny W. Stamp Lecturer in 2004, and the Montalvo Artist Studios, California as Artist in Residence in 2005. Her interest in traditional art forms led her to undertake research projects on the pichhavi painting of Nathadwara [supported by the National Handloom and Handicraft Museum], on the pictorial and aesthetic concepts of Indian miniature paintings, and techniques and context of
traditional tempa paintings [supported by government of India fellowship], in the 1980s.

Nilima Sheikh's collaborative work includes visual design and painted sets for theatre production Nayika Bheda, improvisatory workshop and production by vivadi, Kasauli Art centre, Kasauli 1989; Umrao by vivadi, Shri Ram Centre, New Delhi [and tour], 1998; and 'Lao Jiu the ninth born / Navelaka, vivadi with black tent theatre, New National Theatre, Tokyo, 2000. She has also illustrated books for children: Do Mutthi Chawal, adapted from a Japanese tale by Gulammohammed sheikh, published for the Fine Art Faculty Fair, Vadodara, 1986; Saifdar Hashmi, Saare Mausam Achehe, New Delhi: Sahmat, 1989; Gopini Karunakar, Moon in the Pot, Hyderabad: Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, 2008; and Suniti Namjoshi; Blue and other stories, Chennai: Tulika Publishers, 2012.


Social Interpretation of Nilima Sheikh's painting

Sheikh's works resonate with an aura of private and public space; early themes deal with surroundings of her children against natural background. She diminishes distinction between studio and home like other women artist, and interweaves her work with the elements of domesticity, motherhood, and subtle feminine sensibility. Sheikh also attempts to paint the different aspects of partition of 1947 in the last decade. Inspired by the Indian feminist and historian Urvashi Butalia's publication 'The Other Side of Silence' she exhibited her solo titled 'Conversation with Tradition' with the Pakistani artist Shazia Sikander at the Asia Society in 2001. Butalia's 'The Other Side of Silence' explores the dislocation and displacement of millions of people of India and Pakistan. According to Butalia, 'The political partition of India caused one of the great human convulsions of history ... about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own. Thousands of families were divided, homes were destroyed, crops left to rot, villages abandoned... People travelled in buses, in cars, by train, but mostly on foot in great columns called kafilas.'

Her partition based paintings explore the trauma, anguish, suffering, torture especially of women. Nilima retold the partition incident through visual terms and commentary. Many quotes written in some parts of the painting is very touching like in 'After Amnesia' painting dialogue written in Hindi. The main summary of the text is that, many women were missing during partition but people did not report about them and some women committed suicide before they were dishonored by others. Some gestures and poses, killing acts, images of people carrying their luggage, severed head of son held by his father, men shown killing people with sword; are some influential images that witnessed Nilima's deep insight into these type of issues. She wonderfully recreated Thoa Khalsa tragedy through her painting 'Panghat Stories'. She used these incidents and metamorphosis according to the need of the content.
Sheikh's later works are based on violence, brutality, terror and trauma in the Kashmir region. Her exhibition title of Kashmir work has been taken from the famous poetry of the kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali's two volumes of his poetry 'The Country without a Post Office and Room are never finished' (Permanent Black, Delhi), exhibited in 2003. He is a poet of Kashmiri origin who left India and lived in the US until his death. His poetry's theme is political violence in Kashmir and due to this, the country's post offices were closed for seven months. Through this poem, Shahid presents his views about how the heavenly Kashmiri land turned into a place of loss and demolition due to terror in the nineties. Peter Nagy says, 'Many phrases, taken out of context, seems to be exhortation to sheikh to paint: 'smashed golds', petrified reds', a jade rain', and 'black on edges of flame' are just a few of the actual hues which move directly from Ali's sonnets to sheikh's brush. One painting is entirely bathed in a crimson of 'blood sheer rubies,' while in another, sheik literally renders the 'ash filigrees, rose carved in the wood of weeping trees' Ali describes.\textsuperscript{7}

Agha Shahid Ali's poetry is based on Kashmiri conflict in 1990s, and cannot be understood without analysing the political aspects of the region. After independence in 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh was unable to make up his mind about the relationship of the state with either of the two; India and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{8} During that period, the region was attacked by Pakistan. After this, Maharaja Hari Singh accepted the accession by the Governor General of India, Lord Mountbatten.\textsuperscript{9} Kashmir issue, Pakistan occupied part of Kashmir is a result of partition. Over fifty years it has became a major problem of our country. The militancy in that region affected the lives of the people and became the reason of crime, offenses, vulnerability, social turmoil and disastrous conditions. Innocent and common people were killed, tortured and children and youngsters were harmed.

According to the artist Nilima Sheikh, 'My whole understanding of spatiality in art stems from travels in Kashmir; my notion of yearning comes from there'.\textsuperscript{10} The country without post office explores the communication problem during the conflict; the post office was not working properly and people were unable to get news about their relatives and the whole communication process was upset as phones were also disconnected. There are several images in the country without post office which throws light upon the life, circumstances, and conditions which are explored by

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Nilima in an influential manner. The story of a young Kashmiri boy Rizwan, who was killed at the hands of Indian force is often discussed in poetry. Here, Rizwan is depicted as a ghost like shadow and representative of death of youths in that region who was killed by Indian force without the knowledge of his relatives, wandering here and there to discover his body.\(^\text{11}\)

In Nilima's ‘Drawing trails’ exhibition, 16 large works (tempera on sanganer paper) deals with folk stories, fictional fabrication of reminiscences and nostalgia. Inspired by the poem, novel and article of Agha Shahid Ali, Nund Rishi/ Hazrat Nuruddin, Salman Rushdie's ‘Shalimar the Clown’, and M.K. Raina, paintings reveal the extent of conflict rendered through diffused but influential and expressive figures. The upper part of the painting shows demons, monsters and multiple symbolic forms of violence like sharp objects such as knives, swords and trowels which are exquisitely interwoven in the narrative.

Her solo ‘Each night put Kashmir in your dream’ 2010 is again based on the poetry of Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali. According to Geeti Sen, 'Where is paradise on earth? A while ago it was Kashmir, with its crystal lakes, mountains and streams, and undulating valleys, with its chinar tree turning red and golden in autumn. Certainly, the Mughal emperors believed this was paradise! They laid out their gardens at Shalimar and Nishat with chinar, cypress and poplar tree, and built terraced gardens and canals with flowing water to replicate the image of paradise in the Koran.\(^\text{12}\) This series of paintings are also called ‘Firdaus’. Nilima shows the gentle beauty and calmness of the region slowly suffocating due to the bloodshed of innocent people in the valley.

Nilima’s Partition and Kashmir works explore the reminiscence, depiction, interpretation, folk tales, ballads, content, writings, myths, photographs, and important ideal figures related to Kashmiri region. The notion of violence achieved through representation of unburied dead bodies, island grave, burial place, bones, hovering knives and grieving mourning people, and killing acts help to represent the incident. Her powerful works resonate with fusion of literary and visual vocabulary of community grief, enabling us to rethink this trauma as national loss, fabricated within traditional modes of execution. Ananya Kabir said, ‘It is process that interrupts the
official, normalized archive on the Kashmir conflict; the painting emerge as alternative records of pain, beauty and loss. The thematic creations of Nilima present deep manipulation of apparent violence with the natural setting of landscape in the background.

Reflection of the notion of ‘Return’ is clearly visible in her art work. It is like communication or a painful letter and testimony of the fate of Kashmiri victims.

For the accomplishment of her aim, she collaborated different art forms like theatre, dance, calligraphy, traditional stencils, and other cultural. Ordinary life is also explored together with brutality, like women engaged in their work, family cooking the food in ‘What happened that day 2’, enjoyment in the picnic in ‘Son et Lumiere’, man collecting the pashmina wool in ‘Gathering Threads’, scene of kitchen in ‘champa series’, strong expressions are rendered like vulnerable, angry, strong, rebellious etc.

Historic figures like Lai ded, Shah Wali, mythological figures like Hindu goddess Parvati, Ravan kidnapping Sita, Tibetan iconic figure like Yub Yam are painted to support the narration. According to Geeti Sen, Nilima interpreted many issues related to Kashmir. Nilima said to her: ‘I want to introduce many types of stories being told about Kashmir-so there are parallel texts from different sources. This is where history and memory transform into invention, using the imagination.’

Nilima’s vision allows creating a path that is layered and abstracted, imbied with agony, despair and grief. Her work is the result of her keen vision of contemporary context, whether it is related to Gujarat riot or Kashmir violence. As a woman artist, she interweaves threads of the events and fabricates it in the painting with the amalgamation of several elements like myth, folk lore, history, narrative and romance in her composition.

Paintings and their description

When Champa grew up[1984 ][plate 46] This is a very important work on growing dowry issue of India in mid-eighties .Its twelve folios in tempera depict the story of a girl who was burned alive in the kitchen by her in laws after marriage. Nilima sensitively rendered subtle emotions of the young girl whose childhood was
spent happily under the shade of her parents. She depicted this by illustrating Champa on a bicycle, cheerfully playing on the swing, suggesting her carefree days before her marriage. Nilima says that ‘I have planned to work on the real life story that had taken place literally in my backyard, but it was important to find a vehicle for that. I considered using text along with it I realized, with Gulam, help, that were garba songs on bride burning. After I did these paintings, we located some texts that could alternate with the visual images.’ \(^{17}\) Sheikh also says about the series, ‘The way the image would be read was foremost in my mind when I started the series When Champa Grew Up. I did not want to put the painter’s struggle out there framed on the wall, because I didn’t wish to trivialize Champa’s fragile story or the actual issues it threw up – I wanted to keep their autonomy in some ways. So I thought of the form of a book which could contain my personal engagement with the theme and express what could even be seen as sentimental views. I choose a serial form of folio pictures, pages to be turned over, or a pata to be unfolded and read laterally.’ \(^{18}\) Third folio shows Champa’s arrival at her in-laws and departure to the village, executed in thin washes of colour with marriage rituals. Fourth section shows new bride’s arrival in in-laws house and the kitchen and the centre is occupied by several ladies for welcoming the bride. Fifth part expresses the marriage ritual of bride in which relatives look at the bride’s face. Here Champa is sitting in the centre with a shy pose in yellow sari. Sixth folio presents dispute and clashes between mother in law and Champa. Seventh part depicts Champa’s harassment, beaten by her husband with a belt. Eighth folio features the conspiracy to kill Champa by her husband and mother in laws while she is in the kitchen in a tired gesture. The plot of killing Champa is rendered in the ninth section. Tenth folio shows fire and smoke in the kitchen. Next folio illustrates Champa funeral pyre in diffused dull strokes. Twelfth folio shows women in circle in black sari, beating their chest due to suffering and loss.

Carrying Home\(^{[2001][plate 47]}\) is painted in four panels; first part shows a sohni-like figure holding a pot, a man clutching his daughter’s cut off head, crowd carrying their luggage and one person carrying his household things, a nude pregnant women giving birth to a child in a refugee camp. Through her painting Panghat Stories\(^{[2001][plate 48]}\) Sheikh draws the attention to a large number of suicides during riots in March 1947 in Thoa Khalsa, a village in Pakistan.\(^{19}\) Panghat is considered a loving place and at that time all women jumped into the well to save
their honour. The inspiration for this compositional structure is taken from the Mughal and Rajasthani (Kishangarh) painting: Prince at a well and Encounter at a well.

*Kissa Zainab Buta – A Tale of Two Abductions* [2001] [plate 49] is a story of Buta Singh whose village faces the violence caused by the India-Pakistan partition and riots during that time. Zainab, a Pakistani girl, falls in love with Buta because he saved her honour. But due to some political and personal diplomacy, they were separated from each other.

In this painting, Nilima focuses on the romantic love story which did not blossom due to the partition. There is also a painted image of a Hindu mythological figure: ten headed Ravana kidnapping Sita during her stay of fourteen years in a forest. Yashodhara Dalmia said about this painting ‘In a marvel of cross reference, the multi-headed Ravana echoes the kangra style, the state police seems to be straight out of company paintings, and Buta’s suicide derives its psychological intensity from an understanding of Mughal miniature, its interrelationship of style and synchronic understanding of the situation also privileges homelessness and mass migration as one of its most enduring images’.

*Cargo* [2001] [plate 50] is another painting of the partition in which a father kills his daughter from fear of being dishonored by rioters.

In *Dreaming Home* [2001] [plate 51] a woman sits under the shed of a room, cooking food. In the centre of the painting, she is dreaming of a perfect home with a beautiful tree which is now totally ruined due to violence. Faint washes of yellowish brown colour visible in another painting Erased Home, explore the isolated and destroyed home.

*River: Carrying Across, Leaving Behind* [2001] [plate 52] one of the important paintings on the theme of partition, deals with trauma, dejection and sufferings of people on both sides. Nilima says- ‘It is about the transition from one time to another, one land to another.’ The whole painting is remarkably composed in order to get the notion behind each image and form. In the centre, there is a depiction of a nude female carrying her luggage crossing the border and below her, a woman holding her
home and some women around her are grieving. There are also romantic love stories embedded in this narration. Sanjhi artist Vishnu Prasad Soni of Mathura, helped Nilima to embellish the painting. Nilima says—Singer Madan Gopal Singh’s rendition of sixteenth-century songs attributed to sufi poet Shah Husain started my process of visualizing River. I planned with designer-calligrapher Sumant Jaya krishan how to position the text and then I moved to painting other parts of the scroll.24

After Amnesia [2001] [plate 53] consists of three panels, middle panel explores a procession of nude female figures; may be the victims of sexual violence in a refugee camp. In the above panel, a multi armed woman is depicted with her head bent for cutting. In one hand she holds a chopped head which depicts violence by a man, who kills her with a sword. On the upper left hand side of the painting, there is text written in Hindi about those women who were lost during partition, but not reported because their family killed them and some committed suicide.

Papier Mache Inlaid with Gold, then Ash [2002] [plate 54]- Nilima draws attention to the beautiful art and craft of Kashmir, papiermache and decorative objects made by this which is famous all over the world. Nilima symbolically uses this craft to show the grandeur of the region.

Ananaya Jahanara Kabir says, ‘Like the sentiments of that quote from Ali, this diptych moves toward mourning rather than any hopeful recreation through art of destroyed beauty.25 The notion of transformation from creation to destruction is clearly indicated by the use of colours which change dramatically from bright to dull and looks like ash. Stretched horizontally, there are outlined mountains, images of people gradually diminishing. An unclear figure is depicted in maroon colour digging the ground around the various homes.

Each night put Kashmir in your dream I,2 [2003-10][plate 55,56] - Mid Night panoramic view focuses upon the conversation of the poet Ali with the ghost of Kashmiri boy Rizwan. Each night put Kashmir in your dream 2 inspired by Shahid’s poetry, features a friend of the dead Rizwan and who, murmurs, ‘Each night put Kashmir in your dream’.26 Sheikh composes the events with beautiful colours like orange, different shades of green, which leaves the viewers enthralled. The poet searches for Rizwan in the desolated, petrified city. A tall blue figure who has
vanished and below him several sorrowful mothers are mourning, waiting for their arrival. There is an uncovered dead body in the hills, giving a message to his relatives—Don't tell my father I have died. In whole tensed atmosphere, Nilima gives a glimpse of the tradition of Kashmir in which a performance called bhand is given by two people in marron colour against a background of beautiful chinair tree in olive green.

Gathering threads [2004-10][plate 57] This painting is like a patchwork quilt of different aspects related to Kashmir. An image of the Tibetan icon Yab Yum painted above shows the relation of Buddhism to Kashmir. Various elements like history, tradition, folklore, flora and fauna are eloquently intermingled into the main theme. The map of Kashmir occupies the centre with beautiful repeated calligraphy. Tools of violence are unintentionally merged into the abstract pattern of mountains, rivers and valleys. A Muslim weaver is shown collecting the pashmina wool without caring about his surroundings. The whole painting is executed in somber harmonious colour tones expressing the plot of the painting. The phrase—‘dark fossils of paisley’ is written on the painting. Paisley is a term in English for a design using the boteh, a drop like-shape in Persian motif. These designs were very famous in the West in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Paisley designs are generally found in Kashmiri shawls. The phrase indicates the brutality affecting the art and craft of the Kashmir as well as lives of the people living there. The lower middle portion is knotted with repeated Persian calligraphy of famous quotes about Kashmir by Mughal Emperor Jahangir, ‘if there is paradise on earth, it is this, it is this, it is this.

Farewell[2004-10][plate 58] This painting illustrates valediction of two close friends who are shown interconnected, joined together with love, facing the viewers, the main figure baring his chest to reveal the Kashmiri map. There is also a picture of the Hindu God Hanuman, a great devotee of Lord Rama and his wife Sita. He shows his eternal love for them by having an imprint of lord Ram and goddess Sita on his chest. The Kashmiri places are adorned with beautiful valleys, mountains, clouds, pilgrimage, creating a mesmerized backdrop for the painting. Nilima used Shahid's poetry as a conversation between two lovers; this line inscribed in dull purple color presents an emotion of coldness in the relationship: If only somehow you would have been mine, what would have not been possible in this world?
The beautiful village of Pachigam still exist 1 [2006][plate 59]. Painted in a horizontal abstract and stenciled pattern, this painting explores kashmiri beauty by illustrating mountains, trees, flowers, homes and angels. All the flying figures in blue circle are mourning due to the violence. An anonymous person is attacking another, an image of a beheaded person and beside this, one corpse is lying down.

Son et Lumiere [2006-10] [plate 60] depicts a folk tale of origin of Kashmir. The valley was originally a mighty lake, called the Satisars, Lake of Parvati, the consort of lord Shiva. There are many myths related to the aridity of the lake. It was occupied by a demon called Jalodbhava. Gods urged goddess Parvati to destroy the demon and she took the form of a bird and drooped a pebble where demon stayed. The pebble grew larger and transformed into a mountain. The demon was crushed under the heavy mountain which was later known as Hari parbat.

There is another story related to the history of Kashmir intertwined in this work. Mihirkula, a king of huns dynasty, was insensitive and unkind and ordered one hundred elephants to be pushed down from top of the hill as he, liked to hear their cries of pain and suffering. Nilima has painted both the mythological stories depicting Parvati throwing the mountain on the demon and an elephant falling down from a mountain at the upper side of the painting. She eloquently creates different layers of history, myth, folk tales and poetry. Daily activities like picnic, Bhand performances enhance the narrative while, a demon carrying a sword disturbs the peace and serenity of the atmosphere. The image of the picnic scene is inspired by the Persian illustration of Nizami’s Khamsa.

Three headless images in Son et lumiere recalls the painting of Fra Angelico in which blood surges and turns into smoke like powder.30

Drawing Trails- This solo by Nilima sheikh presented the anguish, devastation, experiences of Kashmiri people, youth suffering at the hand of Indian militancy. She uses Kashmir narratives that express beautiful images and then turns slowly into terrifying images. Article, poetry, excerpts of novels by activist, poet, philosophers and saints, are used as golden stencil on a cream background. There are thirteen vertical and five horizontal paintings.
Route 1 [2008][plate61] painting extended more horizontally is divided in different parts through pattern and motifs. This painting demonstrates dual meaning by exploring the personal as well as public trauma. Sheikh takes inspiration from the photographs of a Kashmiri father mourning the loss of his son to militancy. The photographs and diary are evidence to his grief, and also symbolizes a wish to be memorized, to be documented.\textsuperscript{31}

Route 2 [2008][plate 62] executed in pale grey colour, stenciled jaali work [lattice] in maroon colour indicating dried blood, applied on bushes and plant. Glimpses of home, stairs, bridge, and graveyard enhance the plot of the painting. Tyremarks of truck and other heavy motor vehicles are imprinted in blood. Nilima created the subtle marks of violence in the city that are abstract and symbolic.

Tree Planter [2008][plate 63] Nilima, in this painting depicts the Kashmiri tradition of planting trees. The painting is divided into two panels. The upper part indicates a family enjoying picnic during holiday. The bottom part depicts images of a buried body with folded wings in dull colour. Below this, an excerpt from the blessed word by Agha Shahid Ali is written in dull colour in stencil. In the lower part, a man planting a tree, and imagined to be a depiction of Kashmiri Rishi Shah Wali. This man is rendered in red and green stokes. Around him a dog is watching the whole act. Nilima says, ‘Kashmir has a long history of syncretic Rishism from the 14\textsuperscript{th} century. Tree planter is an imaginary portrait of Rishi: Shah wali. A maverick Rishi whose eccentricities did not encourage pupils, he spent his time with animals and planting trees’.\textsuperscript{32}

Return [2008][plate 64] painting shows the frustration of a man who returns to his home and trying to link between past and present. Here, an obscure person is searching his memorable things [shoes and severed head, toy house, broken hand] placed near the ruined house that has now become debris in the hope of recovering something precious. The backdrop of an empty broken house and abandoned houses support the theme of the painting. Through these works, she said about of return of peace to Kashmir and Gujarat, which also shows horrific slaughter. Their return to homes shows the sign of loss and disaster. ‘As an artist, I can only show its pain,’ says the Baroda-based artist.\textsuperscript{33}
What happened that day 1, 2, 3 explores the passage of the novel of Shalimar the Clown by Salman Rushdie. According to Ananya Jahanara Kabir, ‘Kashmiriyat’ here is a lost world of intercultural harmony and symbiosis between man and nature, crystallized in the pastoral village of Pachigam that is razed to the ground in the course of conflict.34

What happened that day 1 [2008][plate 65] In the upper part of painting, stenciled mountain, house, butterfly, golden sunflower, deer, meandering river, explores the beautiful landscape. The centre of the painting is occupied by five flying figures mourning over brutal acts below them. All of them have covered their faces in lamentation. In the lower part, diffused light green coloured river is painted, some images of violence like broken hand, broken arm are drawn in the circle. Stenciled knives are placed near the river. Excerpts from the Salman Rushdie’s Shalimar the clown is written in the painting, which enhances the mood of the painting.

What happened that day 2 [2008][plate 66]- conveys good time during which people of Kashmir lived peacefully and were preparing food for picnic. Seven stenciled swords are hanging over them, depicting danger hovering in their life. Upper and lower part shows Chinese stencilled like dragon.

What happened that day 3 [2009][plate 67] features Kashmiri cultural tradition and its devastation. In the first section, Rushdie’s wordings 'What happened that day in Pachigam need not be set down here in full detail, because brutality is brutality and excess is excess and that’s all there is to it. There are things that must be looked at indirectly because they would blind you if you looked them in face, like the fire of the sun. So to repeat: there was no Pachigam anymore. Pachigam was destroyed. Imagine it for yourself 'are written on the left side of the painting. These lines indicate that the beautiful village does not exist anymore. So, Nilima did not paint any image related to this. In Second attempt – ‘The village of Pachigam still exist on the maps of Kashmir, but that day it ceased to exist anywhere else, except in one’s memory.’ Here Nilima painted blur images, motifs, landscape of temples, rivers, lake and chinar tree in round and square with fused colour. Around this, stenciled pattern resembling khatamband and Jaali work of Sufi place of worship are drawn to explore the rich kashmiri culture.35 Below Rushdie’s words, ‘Third and final attempt: the beautiful village of
Pachigam still exists' is written, one joined flower in stenciled pattern in papermache, Kashmiri shawls, wood carving is painted here. In the third section, stenciled designs of flower, pine and chinat tree are also painted.

*Just a few return from dust, disguised as roses*[2008][plate 68]- painted in vertical, divided into two panels; the upper part consists of diffused trees, graves are painted like agate gemstone, man digging graves for those who have been killed. The lower part of this panel has the painting of a large dead body which seems to rise at surface level, in olive green colour, embellished with stenciled design and golden vark. In the lower panel, two figures with their faces covered are mourning due to suffering and loss.

*Testimony*[2008][plate 69]- This vertical panel indicates the sufferings and loss during Gujarat riots in 2002. Executed in somber golden cream colour, the upper panel depicts a woman in blue dress, firing hearth. The backdrop of swirling and pointed lines of mountains creates an interesting texture to the painting. Below this, three women are sitting against their ruined and destroyed home, lamenting over the annihilation during riots. The bottom of painting is juxtaposed with toy home, knife, broken hands and other household things.

*On two yards he rows me into the sunset*[2009][plate 70] In this painting, a female figure is dragging a small island grave and on this grave, a demon sleeping, which stirs the water, creates waves that sheikh painted in Sino Tibetan style. This explores the aftermath of destruction and the need of Kashmiri people wanting to return to their home for inhabitation and possibility of a future. People return slowly with a hope that one day they will survive from the terror in the region and spend life peacefully.

*Another chronicle of loss*[2009][plate71] represents two men in a mournful gesture. An intense feeling of personal injury is eloquently expressed by sheikh in this painting. The upper panel illustrates some angelic flying figures in the sky which is a specialty of Nilima in exploring these types of themes. The lower part contains unburied bones dispersed in front of the two men.
My Hometown [2009][plate72] The painting’s title was derived from M.K. Raina’s article in community combating magazine. The upper part, juxtaposed with a man raising his hand due to devastation. Behind him homes are burning that are drawn in fine, delicate details reminiscent of conventional landscape of provincial mughal painting. In the bottom part of the painting, a man looking melancholic and frightened is painted in green colour revealing his chest with the imprint of the map of Kashmir.

The Beautiful village of Pachigam still exist 2[2009-10][ plate73] Symphony with bluish green and brown colour, different spellings of ‘Kashmir’ word over the surface, create radiance in the work. Angels flying in the sky, a woman is praying around the house, at the bottom of the painting two cherubs are lamenting on the brutality in the region. Sharp tools, broken hands and legs clearly indicate bloodshed of people. Nilima sheikh clearly emphasizes on how this beautiful [Kashmir] land has been terrorized?

Going Away[2009-10][plate74]- This painting explores the violence, trauma and suffering during nation’s partition, Gujarat riots in 2002 and the sorrowful condition in Kashmir. Through this painting, the artist shows the pain of people living here, the disputed area of the nation took away the very essence of independence. Four female figures are mourning, one of them a winged woman consoling the other. Two figures of women are grieving facing in a different direction, woman in the lower side of painting holding the picture of a lost relative yet to be identified. On the right hand upper side, two girls are flying; one is looking back due to suffering and loss.

A damaged house in Construction Site [2009-10][plate75] shows the re-establishment of the region damaged due to contemporary violence. Workers are repairing the house, loading the burden, carpentering, grave-digging the graves and other construction works are done in the painting. In the centre, a prominent figure of lal Ded painted as kashmiri saint poetess draws the attention of the viewers. Sheikh took inspiration from the Giotto’s The death of the boy of the Boy in Sessa for recreation of broken building in Construction Site that shows a woman mourning over the death of the boy. In the lower section, presence of sharp tools symbolizes how
violence entered in daily lives and disturbed the peace of the region, as common man is trying to survive in these conditions.

Stylistic features of Nilima Sheikh’s art

Nilima is known as contemporary miniaturist of India, who heavily adopted the features of Indian and Persian miniature, but we can find a fresh and innovative interpretation of older techniques in a mesmerized way in her art work. She achieved this by avoiding traditional idioms of miniature painting and amalgamates her artistic imagination with private and public experience in a creative manner. Multi-cultural elements are specialty of her art, she owes this to central Asian painting, Chinese and Japanese emaki, Tibetan thangka, European influences, Figures of early Silk Road, vignettes of Persian, Mughal, provincial and Pahari folios etc. There are various influences in her art which are given below-

[1] Painting format- Nilima adopts various formats for displaying her painting. We can find diversity from Champa folios to Firdaus scrolls, each are used according to narrative and concepts. Each narrative suggests distinctive quality, creating layers of her interpretation. Nilima says, ‘I have been interested in working on hand held manuscript papers, but another part of my interest is large works, in which you can project a more bodily understanding of space than you do in small work. I think the pendulum has swung back and forth for many years. Its actually the middle sized works that I am somewhat uncomfortable with. I see that small sized works have often been not so different from large-sized works in formal ways. But the bodily experience you get is different.’ 39 Peter Nagy says about her, ‘she has preferred the forms of the paper scrolls, the banner and tents stitched from cloth, the folding screen rather than the stretched canvas as her supports’. 40

Here are some important elements related to Nilima’s painting format, given below-

[i] Buddhist Thangka-Thangka is scroll painting by Buddhist artist. It can be seen at homes and monasteries as means of decoration which shows the religious beliefs of Tibetan people. It is done on cloth or paper using bright mineral colours. The four sides of painting are enclosed with multi-coloured brocade and the top and bottom are fixed firmly with wooden rollers. 41 Sheikh used this format in her painting
to depict narrative and it is like journey of image in which viewers feel connected to see what occurs in the next section. Nilima says, 'I enjoy the options that a scroll offers of revealing as much of itself as its spatial situation encourages and viewing depth permits; also its transiency, the option of being a visitor'. Sheikh observes: 'The Gyalsar brocade of the Tangkha was developed in Benares in response to Central Asian, read Tibetan and Kashmiri, patronage.' Through this overlay of meaning, the artist attempts to remind people of the Buddhist past of Kashmir, today eclipsed by the binary of Hinduism versus Islam. Nilima uses a graceful, attractive scroll which shows the religious cultural influence in her art.

[ii] Emaki (painted hands scroll) is a famous art form of the Heian Period. It is usually used to illustrate stories, creatively and with skill - an innovative idea in Chinese pictorial art. In these scrolls, story is written in parts and illustrations are executed next. Narration or story inspired the viewer to participate in the story with great interest. Nilima adopted this innovative art form to execute her experience.

[iii] Pichwai is cloth painting of Rajasthan; a large wall hanging cloth painting shows the different events related to Lord Krishna or Sri Nathji. Pichwai painting explores balanced compositional arrangements in which Krishna occupies the main place with two or three devotees on both sides with same gestures. Important events are executed through compositional serenity which enhances the pictorial narrative without any suffocation. Receding planes are used in flat composition. According to Nilima: 'The painted pichhwai is capable of encyclopedic vision. The form has immense possibilities. It can match the mural in scale, yet exploit the colour and tonalities of miniatures painting. Using the structuring device of both forms of painting, the saturation of the miniature permeates a grand arena.' She was inspired by the traditional scroll painting of Nathdwara. She employs its compositional devises and style to execute the minuteness of miniature painting and vast visualization of her narratives.

[2] Sanjhi art and Stencils - One of the important elements of Nilima's art is her use of Stencils. Nilima employs the stencils technique for compositional arrangement, decoration or embellishment of the space, object to enhance the narrative and visual intensity of the painting. Sometimes, it is used to divide panels, parts, wall creating
one or more layer. Creating meaningful content with form, stencil gives different dimension to the painting. Stencil appears in several places like garments of people, carpets, body of flying angels, monsters, demons, architecture, mosque, and tomb. It also embellishes nature in the form of rivers, valleys, mountains, butterflies, deers, birds, flowers, trees, plants, bushes, grass, chinar leaves and other creatures. Nilima uses this element of stencil not only to depict beauty but also terror and destruction. Various tools of violence like swords, knives and sign of devastation like broken limbs, head etc. are also painted.

Concealing and revealing the stenciling methods are implemented to create the visual harmony. She removes the distinction between high and low art and both are tried to present the structure of composition. Sheikh's sources the stencil from the family of Vishnu Prasad Soni of Mathura who are traditional Sanjhi artisans skilled in the craft of cutting stencil. Working within the vast possibilities that the stencil offer, Sheikh places them in ways that often enhance the meaning and even form of this conventional genre. This is like a blissful language between diverse practices; the extended range of stencil cutting vibrates with Sheikh's multi-layered images and abstract forms. She says about the stencil, 'the repetition that a stencil encourages is very important to me. The context and the way in which it is used can make it as flexible, as much a means of change, as any other artisanal tool open to mutations of form, surface and meaning. Stencils gather memory. I may use and repeat them, thereby bringing in a memory of works I have done before or of the source of the motif.' Use of stencil can be found in several places like 'What happened that day 3', simplified work with no figure, but stencil along with text narrates the whole story and content of work. Here, Sheikh used flower stencil pattern, generally found in Kashmiri shawls, papier-mâché objects and wood carving. 'On two yards he rowed me into the sunset', explores extensive use of Sino Tibetan motifs to give the impression of waves on the island. The diagonal presence of this form enhances the beauty of the painting. In 'Construction Site painting', stencils are used to accentuate certain parts of the composition. The broken wall of home is set as the backdrop of which is adorned with different type of stencils. In the centre, the dress of sufi philosopher adorned with different types of leaves, birds and patterns and around her several ornamental motifs are dispersed like, plants, lion, construction tools etc.
Floral and Geometrical Pattern - Nilima's art takes conception of adornment with flower and geometric pattern from the mughal miniature. Motifs [buta] or Paisley designs are taken from the Kashmiri shawl. Nilima adopted the natural but stylized arrangement in treatment of flower, especially in borders and space decoration in several places like mughal paintings. Chinar tree, and its leaves, cypress tree, iris flower are used in abundance in Nilima's painting. Parrot, hen, hawk, flock of bird, peacock, pigeon, and crocodile, dragon, numerous birds and creatures are painted for supporting the content of the painting. The 'Dying Dreaming' painting, 'Each night put Kashmir' series, are the best examples in this regard.

Art and craft and Folk lore - Kashmiri art and craft demonstrates rich artistic creation, their spirit, symbolizes their cultural aspects, expression and aesthetic sense. Papier-mâché is a popular art and craft of Kashmir. It was introduced by Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin from Samarkand. In papiermache work, paper pulp was used to create different articles and painted upon with various designs like birds, boat, trees, flowers etc. Khatamband [wood carving] is another ancient craft of Kashmiri land. In Kashmir there are lots of forests and grand trees. Walnut tree is very useful for fine carving texture and due to its durability, articles are made from this. The Khatambandi style is small pieces of carved wood fixed into frames in geometrical designs for the decoration of the ceiling of the rooms. Nilima used rich, colourful Banaras Brocade for mounting of the painting which adds another dimension to her art work. Ballads, as the folklore of Kashmir have an important place in India. These folk songs explore different themes, topics and form. It is divided into opera, dancing songs, mystic songs and romantic songs.

In Nilima's art, various influences appear in her compositions which are symbolically rendered. Her painting 'Papiermache inlaid with gold, then ash', explores how beauty of craft is ruined due to violence and gold transforms into ash metaphorically. Her painting 'What happened that day 3' reflects khatamband pattern which are found in kashmiri houses and sufi shrines. Papiermache design, walnut wood carvings with natural things are picked out for supportive elements of storytelling. Through stencil, she gives the impression of kashmiri architectural 'Jaali' which also demonstrates the spiritual aspects. In 'Son et Lumiere', 'Each night put Kashmir in your dream 2', ballad performances showcases the cultural overlay in her.
composition.

[5] Inspiration from the European art: Her familiarity with the paintings of Italian renaissance caused her to engage with them - the works of Giotto, Sasseta, Uccello, among others - investing these works of illusionism with non illusionistic qualities of her own artistic vision. 51 She has drawn inspiration from these paintings, like in Testimony, three figure in centre, inspired by Andre Rublyev's painting 'The Trinity'. In 'Construction Site', broken building seems like Giotto's painting, 'The Death of the Boy in Sessa'. Three headless figures in 'Son et Lumiere' give the impression of Fra Angelico's painting 'Decapitation of Saints Cosmas and Damian'. Nilima also recreated the image in her painting Cargo, by the use of Giotto painting 'The Magdalene's Voyage to Marseilles'. In 'Going Away' painting, two flying female figures shows the effect of the Italian Renaissance artist Sassetta's painting 'Marriage of St. Francis to Lady Poverty'. She also takes reference of flying figures from the Giotto painting 'The mourning of Christ' in her painting 'What happened that day', which shows cupids are crying over the death of Christ. 52

[6] Japanese Influence - Ukiyo-e was a dominant movement of Japanese art from 17th to 19th Century. It refers to subjects from everyday life, mostly theater scene, dancing, love, festivals and pictures of the floating world. The term relates to the art of wood block prints. 53 The characteristics are flat decorative colour and expressive pattern. The artists were skilled in line drawing and used reflection to intensify the narrative which enhances compositional vitality. There is no realistic setting of space, lack of perspective; characters are two dimensional without shading. It captures illusive and fleeting aspects of life.

[7] Chinese Influence - Chinese artists rendered landscape with smooth, hazy contoured mountains. These artists implemented the technique of applying washes, tiny dots and thin brushed line for detailing. Mountains are executed with a distance view with powerful impression. Artists generally prefer multiple perspective for composition and use several focus points placing emphasis especially on landscape painting which allows the audience to see the vast view from one point to another. Nilima adopted Chinese features related to drawing as well as for composition. Dunhuang Cave Mural of China - Important feature of this cave is its perfect
composition which is balanced, proportionate, unified, engendering lyrical decorative beauty. Ceilings of caves are upturned U or V-shaped and sloping pentagons and multiple perspectives are achieved by sloping beams, pillars and flat walls of the cave. Nilima is inspired by this Chinese cave mural and has adopted several elements like linear beauty, sensitive rendition of brushstroke with lively colour for her composition. Flying winged figures, repeated pattern and images, and swirling dress are some features which she uses for the compositional structure.

[8] Miniature format for Narrative Configuration- Miniature means mini sized painting, representing the narration of worldly aspiration, anecdotes of eternal history, calmness of spirit, aspects of human endeavor, sentiments of pain, dejection, joy, desire and other intellectual approaches, This is expressed better in pictorial language whereas other languages take many volumes to express. Picture format, representation of images, anatomy, compositional frame work, placement of text plays a very important role in miniature painting. Illumination, narration, depiction are some major approaches of Indian miniature painting. Indian art has a glorious tradition of Mural paintings and these murals narrate the story of the life of Buddha and Jataka stories. In Miniature, there is just a transformation in medium from wall to palm leaf and tree bark. Hindu artists usually adopted local style of pothi format for illustration while Mughal artists chose vertical format of Islamic tradition and Christian world. As far as format is concerned, Nilima adopted both type of format for execution. She says, 'I like painting pictures on little pieces of paper. I don't think there is a better way of talking about the small pleasure and private pain.' She also says, 'The additive structure of most miniature painting style: their sections, compartments and borders, to me, are ways of opening up the painted world rather than paring it down'.

Mostly, her vertical panel is arranged in two sections; above and below. These horizontal and vertical panels create diversity in concept as well as in visualization. Space is divided into various small and large sections and sometimes executed in free space. There are arrangements with architectural, natural setting like hill, mountain, river, plain, tree and with abstract, geometric and floral pattern. Nilima says, 'interchangeability of text, image and hashiya [margin/ border] is what I deal with most in this painting - to reposition the question of what is central and what is the extension.' Perspective achieved by the use of colours, figuration and with division
of space. Dynamic drama, vigorous figures, appealing movements, subtle moving sentiments, deep sensation, terror, trepidation and concern, are beautifully executed by Nilima. Every blooming flower, growing trees, animals and other creatures are rendered with superb mastery. Here, she is not interested in depicting single aspects of life but her perception and vision help to create the spirit of endurance in all circumstances. Rhythms in lines, colour, harmony, decorative patterns are perfectly juxtaposed in a creative manner. Lines are sharp, subtle, expressive, rhythmic creating movement and different range of emotions. Curved lines are lyrical and poetic creating sensuous effects. Floral pattern and whole configuration within frame, fabricate the perfect visual symmetry in Nilima’s art.

Bird’s eye view is usually found in miniature painting and considered one of its specialties. When an artist sees the object from above, viewers get to witness the view inside the building or architecture where the activities are held. There is a possibility to show vast panorama in small space and the artist is free to depict anything, breaking the natural method to depict a scene. It help to enhance the narration as well as aesthetic interest of composition. Nilima used this method to represent various modes of expression in her painting.

[i] Persian Art - Persian art is famous for its rich and diverse heritage, art style and techniques and miniature painting. In the thirteenth Century, with the attack of Mongol tribes into western Asia, art style which already existed underwent an important change,. Chinese impact became powerful under the Mongol school of art with characteristics of colour, clouds, plants, figures with Chinese features and natural backdrop. The genuine art style was developed under Timur dynasty in the first half of the fifteen Century which came from central Asia. This period was also known as Herat school of art. The major art style of Timurid period was linear fluidity, harmonious colour, spongy mountain, and unity in composition. The growth of Timurid style was based on diverse tradition. After the decline of Mongol rule, local dynasties like Jalairids and Muzzaffarids developed art style in Shiraz and Baghdad, and was a motivation for the new Timurid art style. The first phase of Timurid syle was developed under the patronage of Iskandar Sultan [grand son of Timur] in the beginning of the15th Century. Around 1420, Shiraz artist was also creating the work under Ibrahim Sultan, another son of Shahrulkh Mirza. In 1420, the Herat school of art
took lead in the patronage of Baysunghur [son of Shahrukh Mirza].

Persian historical text shahnama [Book of Kings] written by Firdausi, was famous for beautiful calligraphy, illustration, illumination and binding. Demotte Shahnama was the best work of Ilkhanid during Abu Sa'id period. A copy was made for the Timurid prince Bayasunghur. Another famous Shahnama manuscript was done in Safavid by Shah Tahmasp I. Bihzad was a famous artist of Herat school. He was the head of Herat school and raised under the supervision of artist Mirak. His chief patron was Mir Ali Shir Nevai, and sultan Husayn; later he worked at the court of Shah Ismail who was the founder of Safavid dynasty. Bihzad's style was very different from his contemporaries; placed more emphasis on expressive, realistic depiction of characters and activities of everyday life rather than execute fantasy like things. His famous works are 'Thé seduction of Yusuf' from Sa'idi's Bustan' created for the Husayn Bayqara and two copies of Nizami's Khamsa. Safavid dynasty was founded by Shah Ismail and he established his capital at Tabriz. Consequently, lots of artists settled down at Tabrez from Herat. Shah Ismail designated Bihzad as the head of Royal Library. In 1524, after the death of Shah Ismail, Prince Tahmasp took throne, maintaining the previous art style. Raza Abassi, famous artist of Safavid School, worked under the patronage of the king Shah Abbas I.

Sheikh is inspired by a lot of components from the Persian painting. She is deeply inspired by Bihzad, the renowned artist of Persia who was head of the royal ateliers in Herat and Tabriz during the late Timurid and early Safavid periods. His compositions are concerned with perfect linear quality rather than space arrangement and physical matter. Architecture was created with calligraphy, ornamental and decorative motifs. He juxtaposed his composition in a unique manner in which viewers eyes could easily move on the pictorial surface with a natural rhythm, and this important feature usually appears in Nilmia painting. He usually rendered daily activities of life like, cooking, digging, collecting fire wood and construction work and local funeral. His work fuses Chinese and Islamic elements and Persian metaphors. A naturalism aspect of Persian painting is given by Bihzad. Nilmia is inspired by his painting 'Building of Castle Khawarnaq' [from the Khamsa of Nizami, Heart 1494-95], and takes several elements for her painting 'Construction Site'. Various other construction scenes taken from works like 'Sikander constructs a wall
against Yagug and Magug [in the Falnama of Ja'farul sadiq, Tabriz, c. 1550-60]. are important in this regard. The image of painting 'Cargo' is taken from the painting of Bihzad titled 'Beheading of king'. According to Nilima, 'The great 15th Century Persian painter Bihzad, amazing building scenes from the zafarnama and Khamsa of Nizami alternate with the famous scene of preparing grave for funeral, was my guiding angel. The drawing of men and women cooking food, in her painting is, taken from the Persian illustration of Nizami's Khamsa. It was a famous manuscript Khamsa [Five Poems] of Nizami written by Iranian poet Nizami 1140-1203. Each of the five poems are illustrated separately -treasure house of secrets, romantic story of Sassanian king [Khusraw and Shirin], Laila majnu love story, Half Payker[seven portraits] Iskandarnama [life of Alexander]. Zafarnama is another illustrated manuscript in the history of Timur or Tamerlane [1436], commissioned by his grandson Ibrahim Sultan.

Demonology in Nilima's art is rooted from Muhammad Siyah Qalam, known as Muhammad of the Black Pen, an artist of Turkey and Tabriz. He was famous for depicting the nomadic life of Central Asia. He usually paints demons with black wrinkled skin and partially clothed. His distinctive style of figuration and grotesque subjects inspired Nilima to paint demons, symbolically depicting evil, generally shown in dancing, theiving and kidnapping posture. Sheikh's painting 'Gathering Threads' have images of lion killing the bull, inspired from the famous illustration of Kalia wa Dimna which was Indian animal fable, translated to Persian and after that into Arabic, by Ibn al-Muqaffa. The important features of Persian painting like decorative details, borders, scripts, arabesque, and textile are used by Nilima for embellishment and to create a balanced compositional structure.

[ii] Impact of Mughal Art-Mughal art was court art patronized by mughal ruler, inspired by Persian art and gave birth to new art style which was an amalgamation of Islamic, indigenous tradition and European elements. This art was a perfect blend of artistic poetry, innovative visual approaches, and use of subdued and subtle colours, lively expression, local traditions and balanced composition. Mongols were their ancestors who came from Central Asia. Humayun brought two artists from the court of Shah Tamas, named Mir Sayyed Ali of Tabrez and Kwaja Abdussamad of Shiraz. The painting of Dastan-e-Amir Hamza was executed by both artists, only
some portion was done under Humayun, but it continued in Akbar's reign. Hamzanama is a romantic and legendary story of an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad of his love for the daughter of king of Persia.

Completed in 1582, the Hamzanama series consists of fourteen volumes, each containing a hundred pictures. Hamzanama painting is famous for its dynamic movements, expressive gestures, painted in mural style with broad sweeps of the brush, full round tonality of colours. It presents the influences of Jain and Buddhist art traditions and illustration of Ramayana, Islamic art of Turkey and Iran. Akbar was a great patron of art. Akbar translated Hindu epics and religious text into illustrations. Other noteworthy artists of this period were Daswant, Basawan, Mukund, Miskina, Kesho, Farrukh, Jagan, Mahesh. After the death of Akbar, Jahangir gave vitality and a new aesthetic dimension to Mughal art. Persian effect became diminished now and new invention like adding European elements took place. Elaborated patterns were used with decorative quality.

Sheikh drew inspiration from Mughal Miniature for its stylistic device and renovated it according to the demand of the subject. She compartmentalized the pictorial surface like mughal painting, each section denoting a different tale, sometime rendered with abstract, geometrical, floral motifs and design. Border decoration and calligraphy, carpets design, flora fauna are rendered superbly with deep aesthetic sense. Nilima implemented the reference from the painting 'The hermitage of Sheikh Phool' by Bishen Das, for the painting 'Construction Site'.

[iii] Impact of Deccan Art - Deccan art was developed during 16th - 18th Century in Islamic kingdom of Deccan. Painting flourished at Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, and Golconda, Hyderabad, usually painted by Hindu artists who were masters in Vijaynagar style of Hampi and Lepakshi. The artist of Ahmadnagar, Golkunda and Bijapur courts were migrants from Turkey, Iran and Europe who brought individual skills and qualities of their regions. Therefore, Turkish and Persian influence amalgamated with indigenous and folk art forms that are not actually of Mughal standard but explore sensual, pleasing composition, landscape with beautiful colours.
Nilima sheikh was inspired by Decanni illustration by ‘Gulshan e ishq’ or ‘The Rose Garden of Love’. Nasratii wrote a collection of Dakhini romantic and lyrical poems between 1650 and 1670 A.D. which he dedicated to his patron, the Sultan. Sheik used its multiple skies through the use of horizontal and vertical divisions for the variety of storytelling in her painting - Dying Dreaming, Son et Lumiere, Each night put Kashmir in your dream 2, The beautiful Pachigam still exist 2.

[iiv] Impact of Rajput Painting- The Rajput painting flourished in the sixteenth and early nineteenth Century. It had two schools - Rajasthani and Pahari. The main schools of Rajasthan were Mewar, Bundi, Kishangarh, Jaipur, Bikaner, Malwa. The Pahari school had art centres like Guler, Kangra Basohli, Jammu, Chamba. Rajasthani art started in Mewar and then spread to Bundi. Art of this period explored romantic love, vigor, spirituality, beauty, grace, emotion and much more. Love scenes of Lord Krishna and Radha and several Krishna lilas are major striking aspects. The Nathdwara art style is a result of the assimilation of the cultures of Braj and Mewar. The cultural features of Braj and Mewar are very strong. Shri Nathji was brought from Goverdhan, Mathura and established at Sihar in Mewar finally named Nathdwara. Thus, immense art flourished at Nathdwara. Miniature and pichhwais, large size cloth painting, or wall hangings, were very famous. The important painting of Nathdwara is Shri Nathji lifting Mount Govardhan. These paintings are traditionally executed with bright and deep colors in a balanced way.

Pahari painting refers to painting developed in the Himalayan foot hills of Punjab. Mughal influence was clearly visible because these painters found peaceful shelter here and introduced unique art style with the amalgamation of folk tradition of that region. Pahari painting developed in many places like Nurpur, Chamba, Basohli, Guler, Kangra, Mandi, Kullu, and Jammu. Pahari painting is famous for its softness, sensitive emotion, balanced composition and luminous colour scheme, rhythmic lines and calmness. Major themes are court life, portraits, literary and religious episodes. Guler painting was the early phase of Kangra. Raja Goverdhan Chand was a great patron of art and a genuine art school flourished at Haripur Guler. Govardhan Chand’s son Prakash Chand continued this trend and after this, his son Bhop Chand maintained the art tradition which flourished in that region. The family of Pandit Seu played a
very important role in creating distinctive art style of Guler. Pandit Seu had two sons, Manaku and Nanisukh. Nainsukh played a very important role in Pahari painting, gave new direction to it and adopted a different path from his brother Manaku, hence ignoring the old tradition of his family. There are lots of viewpoints of scholars regarding Nainsukh’s connection with Pahari school but W.G.Archer has pointed out some important similarity between Nainsukh's portrait of Balwant Dev[1748] and portrait of Goverdhan Chand of Guler[1743]. This clearly shows that Nainsukh had worked earlier at Guler or had significant relation with Guler work even before he came to Jammu for a short period. His work was famous for its strong colour, rhythmic lines, balanced composition which was divided in geometric structure with vertical and horizontal planes. He captured the essence of any image, whether it was animate or inanimate. Subtle perception, keen observation in realistic scene shows her mastery of rendering any subject. Guler, Nurpur, and Tira Sujanpur are the centres of Kangra school of painting. Pahari painting is famous for its delicate, rhythmic line, depicting the romantic scene, and lines becoming bold depicting the battle scene. Artists were not interested in giving a lot of detailing but tried to render form as mass. Bright and somber colours are used.

Nilima preferred to look upon at traditional Rajasthani and Pahari miniature painting. Its stylistic devices like compositional arrangement, multiple perspective, and use of vivid and bright colours were recreated by her. Nilima's conceptual approach becomes more sharpened when her medium changed from oil to tempera in the eighties, and form captured through sensitive perception. Her use of miniature like calligraphic forms are dynamic, animated and full of life, easily generating narrative incisiveness. Her rationality vibrates in every symbol and thought, embedded within that form. Nilima infused subtle and appealing subjects executed easily with an innovative manner. Rajput and Pahari paintings provide vast range of themes like scenes from everyday life, religious iconography, Ballads, stories of Hero and Heroine, and all these are aesthetically recreated in the present day context. There is no depiction of courtly life but convey a social message. Her painting ‘Kissa Zainab Buta: A Tale of Two Abduction’ have images of Kangra painting ‘Abduction of Sita’. A Kishangarh painting titled ‘Encounter at a well’ recreated in ‘Panghat Stories’ in contemporary context shows the partition trauma. In Champa series, she takes inspiration from three sketches for a Gita Govinda attributed to Nainsukh. Nilima also says that, ‘If I aspire to draw Nainsukh, it is not because I ever can; it is because
his drawing at least shows me the way...whereas his painting has a way of covering its tracks and may not tempt me to follow him to begin with, which has nothing indeed to do with my admiration for the painting.  

[9] Role of Text- In Mughal art, calligraphy plays a very important role in manuscript. Nastaliq style is noteworthy calligraphic style of Akbar period. Mir Ali Tabrizi was a distinguished Persian calligrapher in the 14th Century who invented the Nastaliq style of calligraphy. It is a combination of two older styles (Naskh and Taliq) comprising of flowing, long horizontal strokes. Some important illustrations of that period include Tuti-nama Hamza Nama, Anwar -i- suheli, romantic tale of Laila Majnu, ancient Persian epic Shahnama, Persian literary classic Khamsa of Nizami, Akbar Nama, Razmanama.  

In Persian art, famous manuscripts were Shahnama, Khamsa Nizami, Zafarnama, Kaliawa Dimna and Bustan of Sa'di. In miniature painting, calligraphy or text was executed on the face or sometimes on the reverse side of the painting. Mostly, calligraphy was written first in manuscript painting and after that space was left for the painted image. Sometimes, texts were executed in the corner, above and below the work for balancing the composition.  

Text plays a very important role in Nilima’s art. She uses text from poetry, novel, articles, famous quotes to give voice to her painting. Text with image opens the different layers of meaning, connotation, and consequence in her art, which creates the perceptive and sensitive vision of the artist. Nilima says, ‘Even as a very young artist, I was interested in the notion of understanding illustration, not as bad word, but as something that much painting of the past is about. Stories and images have always gone together, whether you look at manuscript paintings or old murals...I am specifically interested in illustrating. My working on paper had an antecedent in manuscript painting, which was done on folio with writing and text alongside. In 1984, I did set of painting called ‘when Champa grew up’, I used text along with painting for the first time and exhibited it.’  

Her famous Champa series was inspired by the Gujarati song of bride burning. And later her ‘River’ painting uses the text of Sufi poet Shah Husain. In her solo ‘Conversation with Tradition’[2001] she recreated the agony of partition through the Urvashi Butalia’s publication ‘The Other Side of Silence: Voice from the Partition of India’.  

Her solo show ‘The country without post office’[2003] represents turbulence
in the Kashmiri region. Her major part of work incorporates text from Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali’s poetry on Kashmiri conflict. Nilima says, ‘More than visual clues, it is the Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali’ concern with investing his writing language with the weight and memories of his other languages, Urdu and Kashmiri, with which I find parallels.'  

**The loved one always leaves, we shall meet again in Srinagar, The city from where no news can come, Don’t tell my father I have died, Papier Mache inlaid with Gold, then Ash, Your history gets in the way of my memory,** are some excerpts from Shahid Ali’s poetry. Nilima again explored Shahid's poetry in her solo 'Drawing trails', uses text for the title of painting like *At a certain point, I lost track of you*, *On two yards he rows me into the sunset, Just a few return from dust, disguised as roses.*

According to Nilima ‘The issue was the logistic of translating discursive texts into a visual language. I knew I could only notate some of these by attempting to inscribe them with the stains of other kinds of histories, of painting and lore, while contextualizing them with excerpts of texts.’

**Return** [with an excerpt from the poem of I have loved by Agha Shahid Ali call me Ishmael tonight], *Tree Planter* [with an excerpt from the Blessed word: A prologue by Agha Shahid Ali, The country without post office 1991-95] *Just a few return from dust, disguised as roses* [with an excerpt from Not all, only a few return by Agha Shahid Ali Call me Ismael Tonight], *What happened that day 1* [with excerpt from Shalimar the Clown by Salman Rushdie] *What happened that day 3* [with excerpt from Shalimar the Clown by Salman Rushdie], *Route 1* [with excerpt from I see Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight by Agha Shahid Ali, the country without post office, poems 1991-95] *My Hometown* [With an excerpt from the article by M.K Raina Communalism combat].

[10] Technique- Sheikh’s tempera painting, executed with harmonious colour on handmade vasli paper, evokes a deep intense ambience. Her sweeping broad brush strokes generate ecstasy, mystery and playful fantasy. When material is applied on the pictorial surface, it gives birth to images which breathe to life and communicate with the viewer. The meaningful interpretation is only possible when artists have the knowledge of material and knows the outcome of its application and the effect of creating different layers. All these are primary things which affect a piece of art.
Nilima’s deep understanding of materials helps her to work on traditional methods which give birth to contemporary idioms.

[i] Paper [vasli or canvas] Some of Nilima’s work is executed on vasli paper and some on canvas. Nilima used handmade vasli paper made at Sanganer, Jaipur. The process is painstaking and involves careful lamination of many sheets of handmade paper which are coated and covered with white colour before being painted on with soft or bright cake colour with use of fixer. Vasli is laborious technique of preparing the ground for painting which has fabulous surface to execute any idea. She also worked on canvas cloth. She shares her experience related to painting on canvas and said, ‘Even though I don’t usually stretch it on a frame, I like canvas because you can paint endless lengths on it and then roll it up and take it away under your arm, so to speak.’ Her unstretched canvases explore her liberty to work upon the larger narrative and thoughts, forms and images which breathe freely.

[ii] Colours & Medium - Colour treatment plays a very important role in any art work. The application of colour enables to stir the soul of the viewer internally. Every artist has his own preference regarding choice of colour range. Nilima usually applied opaque colour with the addition of white to show transparent garment over the skin rendered with light colour wash. Her horizontal layering of pigments of various intensity are used according to the mood of painting. To depict natural landscape and beauty of nature, she employs bright colours; while in violence scenes, she generally uses hazy, dull, subdued colours. On one hand, she likes to paint rustic colours of village life and on the other hand; she creates mournful effect with maroon colour. Somber brown colour with bright scarlet, illusionistic indigo blue and blossoming green are used in a mesmerized way. Nilima adopted natural mineral and earth colours for her compositions. Natural pigments are mineral, vegetable or animal in origin. From the ancient time, it was a vehicle to communicate ideas. In mughal miniature, lapis lazuli’s blue colour has been used in abundance. Green colour was prepared from a stone terraverte. Nilima uses earth colours made from stone to give brightness and vividness to her painting. These earthy colours are far more pure than the chemical colours. Most of Sheikh’s work is a fusion of lapis lazuli, terraverte from Jaipur and glowing bright from mercury sulfide called hinglu, generally obtained from the hakim shops. Yellow ochre, with a pinkish touch, creates the sensitive vocabulary of colors. Nilima says, ‘I painted on gesso surface, prepared with Khari
[whiting]dissolved in glue size, upon handmade vasli paper from sanganer with paint tempered by gum-arabic mediums used in traditional Rajasthani and Pahari paintings on paper. Khari is a kind of clay traditionally used by the painters of north west India, but also commonly used to add luminosity to white washed walls. She was inspired by the wash technique of Bengal school. She said, 'I would put on washes of colour, which I would wipe but not to the extent that they did. Their whole technique was built on the washing, whereas mine was not. I built up more layers. That way, I was closer to the techniques of the east, of building up, adding on, additive rather than removing. I think my style was more and more additive than removing. I'd put on a transparent layer of something, and then another transparent layer of something else so that the earlier layer would show through but it would be changed. And this is where I find casein particularly useful because casein has an ability to layer, that's why I have used it lot.' It gives unique radiance, intensity, vibrancy and resonate the form and content; while these effects cannot be achieved by synthetic colours.

Every medium has its own unique quality. She often works in tempera colour on sanganeri vasli paper. Tempera is water-based colour, it dries quickly and is very difficult to blend like oil. Hatching is generally used in this to blend the colour easily. In tempera technique, the advantage is that it enables to give different gradation of colour and tone through the use of thin washes. Because it dries fast, there is possibility to add one layer to another, to create several layers of washes. This is not done in oil medium. Mala Marwah said, 'Nilima's use of the tempera, usually associated with jewel like finish of the miniature, to speak both on social issues and poetic/personal subjects, is an audacious achievement which- certainly in visual arts- proves the fallibility of conventional coordination's of 'form' and 'content'. In Nathdwara of Rajasthan, she used the traditional technique of pulverizing stone colours using gum called 'babul ka gond' or milk extract called casein used in European painting. It needed more effort than acrylic or oil, but did not discourage her. Nilima also liked to use casein in her painting. Acetic acid, vinegar or lemon juice when put into hot milk curdles the milk, separating the cheese from the watery liquid, the whey. Cheese is famous as delicious food and is used a medium. Firstly dried, then fine powder is made and is mixed with water. In India, it has been used in wall painting as binder. Sheikh said, 'I think lots of Germanic paintings are made with casein. But on the other hand, it is also similar to certain Japanese techniques,
where soya milk would have been used in binding, soya milk and casein -Casein is also milk based product- have common properties. Therefore, certain effects of Japanese paintings are very interesting to me because I’ve worked with casein and I know how that colour happens. Gum is also taken by Nilima as a binder in tempera painting. Gums are derived from trees and plants. It has been used in mural, miniature in India.

[11] Inspirational artist - Nilima is married to the famous artist Gulam Mohammed who inspired her the most. She also said, ‘From Ghulam mohammed-who opened the wondrous wide world of art for all of us who were taught by him, unfolding their histories but never undoing their mystery- I learnt to raise the bar of my artistic aspiration.’ He was born in 1937 in the small town of Surendranagar in Kathiawar, Gujarat. He completed his M.A.in painting in 1961 from the M.S. University Baroda. He became the founder member of the Group 1890, with J. Swaminathan and others. Group 1890 was formed by J. Swaminathan with the artists from Delhi and Bombay, its meeting held in Bhavnagar on 25-26 August. It expressed its manifesto at Bhavnagar and was accepted in New Delhi. Twelve members of this group were Jeram Patel, J. Swaminathan, AmbaDas, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, Himmat shah, Eric Browen, Jyoti Bhatt, Rajesh Mehra, M.Reddeppa Naidu, Raghav Kaneria, Balkrishna and S.G.Nigam. From 1963 to 1966 Gulam studied at the Royal College of London where he regularly visited and saw the collection of Indian miniature painting at Victoria Albert Museum. After returning to India, he started working on landscape, exploring the reflection miniature tradition like in his painting ‘Returning Home After Long Absence’ where he portrayed his mother’s image. In 1969, he published the art magazine ‘Vrishchik’ with Bhupan Khakkar. ‘Speechless City’, ‘About Waiting and Wondering’, ‘Revolving Routes’ are some of his major works. ‘City for sale’ explores the strong comment on communal riots in India. In mid 90s Sheikh was best known for his large mural ‘Tree of Life’, commissioned by Vidhan Bhavan of Bhopal. K.G. Subramanyam was Nilima’s teacher in Baroda. From him, she learnt how to diffuse the distinction between art and craft. Inspired by him, she used various kinds of art and craft in her art work. She said, ‘I learnt from my teacher K.G. Subramanyam of the polyvalence and plurality of art practice, of the interdependence of plastic and other arts, of a non hierarchical interweave of craft and folk practice with art, and of the linguistic structures of different system of painting, their surface and form mediated by societal and anthropological contexts.’
According to Nilima, 'The way he broke hierarchy was important for me. Believing in praxis and practice was a major way of dealing with art. In his book, his ideas and his writing -this is not something he personally instructed me about — the differences between craft and art, between major and minor art, the polarity was diffused'.

He is a painter, sculptor and muralist. K G Subramanyan was born in a village in north Kerala in 1924. During his studies in Madras, Subramanyan became involved in the freedom struggle. He was imprisoned and debarred from government colleges. An important phase of his life was when he joined Kala Bhavan at Visva Bharati in Santiniketan in 1944 and studied till 1948. He was a lecturer in painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda during 1951 and 1959. During 1955 and 1956, he went to the Slade School of Art in London. He went back to Baroda as reader in painting during 1961 and 1965. Subramanyam erased the difference between artist and artisan. He adopted weaving and toy-making as an art form. He recreated various early Indian art forms. He gave new dimension to the terracotta mural and glass painting.

She also said, 'Through his reference back to his teachers, to the work of BinodBihari Mukherjee or Abanindranath Tagore, these became for me a way of discovering an identity connected with the Asian tradition.' Binod Bihari Mukherji grew up in rural Bengal. In spite of a weak eyesight, he liked to spend time with nature and painted it using the calligraphic style, inspired by far eastern art. He used several formats like murals and scroll screen painting. He joined Kala Bhavan in its foundation times; Somnath Hore, K.G. Subramanyam were his students. Abanindranath Tagore was the major artist of Bengal school of art. When he met E. B. Havell, he adopted the Mughal miniature style in his art work. His contact with two Japanese artists - Yokoyama Takia and Hishida Shunro inspired him to use Japanese and British water colour technique in a new way called 'wash technique'. He also used Japanese spatial quality and Chinese approach of use of multiple horizons and high skyline in his composition. Nand Lal Bose visited China and Japan during 1924 and brought multi-colour monochromatic Japanese and Chinese wood cut prints, and artist of Shantiniketan introduced far eastern tradition.

The above artists inspired Nilima to adopt the eastern practices like wash painting, scroll painting, Chinese and Japanese pictorial arrangements.
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Chapter 6

SOCIAL DISCOURSE IN ARPANA CAUR’S PAINTING
Chapter –6

SOCIAL DISCOURSE IN ARPANA CAUR’S PAINTINGS

Introduction

Arpana Caur is one of the renowned artists of contemporary Indian art and her art displays strong social, human and feminist concerns. Her artwork portrays the physical, mental and emotional aspects of women, their struggle and experiences. Her pictorial vocabulary plays a significant role in contemporary Indian art. Her individualistic manner of depicting the reality of present society deeply affects the minds of the viewer. Inspired by Indian miniature, folk and traditional art, she amalgamates the old and the new and creates new artistic vistas that are not only aesthetically appealing but also convey a strong social message to the society. She visualizes the truth with forms, colour, space, metaphors, and allegory in the contemporary context.

As member of a doctor's family, her mother gave her the right to choose her profession. She decided to become an artist and explored family experiences and struggles like post partition period and 1984 Sikh massacre. In relief camps of massacre, she and her mother distributed medicine, clothes, food and other necessary items to victims. Since childhood, her attitude and concern for the needy even reflects today in her art works. She likes to begin her day after reading the Granth Sahib every morning that shows her soul embedded with spirituality and which often finds place in her canvas. She also experienced the sorrow of women and presents it in her own distinctive way.

She expresses rage against the cutting of trees in South Delhi during the preparation of commonwealth games which resulted in the death of many peacocks. Rapid urbanization and modernization, the pain for mother earth and wish for greenery, are all communicated through her art works. She has been also doing collaboration work with Mithila artist Sat Narayan Pandey.
Biography

Arpana was born on 4th September, 1954, in an educated Sikh family in Delhi. She was the child of a single mother Ajeet Caur, a well-known award winning writer. A burdened childhood involving her divorced parents was clearly visible in her early work. Her family situation affected the mind of Arpana and was the cause of her shyness, timidness, sadness, but at the same time, a deep thought kept blazing in her mind. It raised the urge in her at all times to become successful. Faced with lots of peril, she kept alive the wish to become an artist.

Arpana lived in the crowded Patel Nagar where both mother and daughter were compelled to wrap themselves up for protection in crowded places. Faced with lots of hardship they shifted to a hostel for working ladies and that unpleasant experience was explored by her mother in the Sahitya Academy award winning work “khanabadash [homelessness]”. Caur also narrates her mother’s struggle for survival, ‘Mother worked hard to keep the house going. She worked late into nights doing translations of literary books to run the household. While on our journey to Mumbai, she slept on the train floor with one of the canvas bundle guarding while I slept beside the other.’ She had not taken any formal training in art. She studied English literature at Delhi University in 1961 but was always inspired by the art world since her childhood. She was awarded a scholarship for studying art at London in St. Martin’s School of Art, but returned to India without completing the course. She was deeply inspired by the writings of her mother, Punjabi Literature, famous Indian artist Amrita Shergil, Indian miniature painting and other traditional art forms. Her mother gave her the freedom of expression and also wanted her to choose her own name free from any religion. She said, ‘My mother did not want to invite consequent bitterness from such a petty issue. She gave me all the freedom to choose a name for myself. Mother’s decision was in itself a great thing in my life. I was called by a small name doll in the house till the age of fifteen. Later my school principal asked me to look for a proper name .I thought of Amrita first, but since it was the name of the famous artist Amrita Sher Gil, how could I have justified for such a big name, the very thought put me off. And I made no match to such a great soul, I finally opted for ‘Arpana’. Though it lay outside our own religion but it stuck to my personality and felt appealing.’ She made a copy of Amrita Shergil’s work which depicts mother and daughter relationship.
Her professional career started when she was selected by M.F. Hussain in 1975 for an exhibition in the Triveni art gallery in Delhi. She said, ‘The year 1980 was a turning point in my painting career. 'The Bombay magazine' did a cover story on me. The same miracle repeated itself in 1982 during my show at the Jahangir. My 1984 riots show becomes quite popular and it was a tragic series titles, ‘The world goes on'. The show was hosted by Ibrahim Alkazi of Art Heritage. People still evince their interest in those paintings and keep asking for it.\(^4\)

Arpana Caur's major solo and group shows are as follows:


**Group Shows-** Executed two large murals for India International Trade Fair, New Delhi, 1981; First Indo-Greek Cultural Symposium and group shows, Athens and Delhi, 1984; 1984, '85 Group shows of Indian painters sent by NGMA (National Gallery of Modern Art), New Delhi, to Japan; First Baghdad Biennele, 1986; Cuba Biennele, 1986; Algiers Biennele, 1986; Curated exhibition of Women Artists Festivals of India, Moscow, 1987; Participated (invited by Max Mueller Bhawan) in 'Encounter',

Social interpretation of Arpana Caur’s painting

Arpana Caur is one of the few artists who was always concerned about the milieu where she lived, affected by the insensitivity of society and her concept and sentiments are influenced by distressing things happening in society. She absorbs all these human values from the society and through visual vocabulary, she tries to convey her social message to common people. Being a woman, she understood the pain and suffering of women very well and expressively rendered the circumstances of a woman. Although she was upset about the situation of women in society, she always objected to depicting women as a weak persona, and stressed on projecting a progressive vision of woman.

As a Sikh woman artist, she is the survivor of a major tragedy of her life: India Pakistan partition and anti Sikh riot have strengthened her oeuvre within a socio-political context. Caur's work of the mid70s is mostly autobiographical,
revolving around her family and the crowded environs of Patel Nagar where she lived in the late fifties and early sixties. Since her childhood she was a conscious and deep thinker, as she says, 'I was bought up to be independent minded, right since childhood. As a child, I recall wanting to soar up into the open sky, discovering the secrets of nature. I always wanted to plumb the depths of water and fathom the infinite height of the sky. I used to be lost in contemplation.'

Her art is a reflection of dualism in society and she explores the hidden results of a capitalist society. In this busy life people have to fulfill their own wishes and no one cares about right or wrong things happening in society. Generally people see things, ignore it and keep silent, but Arpana, being a sensitive person did not take things silently. She responded and dared to present those unseen aspects of the society, which did not get proper attention earlier. Her concerns for greenery which was fast disappearing, was clearly visible in her art work. She was against the cutting of green trees during the preparation of commonwealth games in Delhi and this pain is expressively revealed in many of her paintings. Her paintings are embedded with deep social nuances, injustice, insecurities, evils tribulations, hinting about upcoming danger, and yet they reveal the dream, wish, possibility and trust.

Arpana says, 'The major change that one notices is the beginning of painting as catharsis for the insecurities in ones earlier life, to it developing slowly into a wholly engaging intellectual exercise. Painting stimulates a keen awareness of living in these times combined with a desire to retain an attachment to one's ROOTS.'

Her work during the late 1970sand early 1980s is socially responsive. The cruelty of rape and failure of the police security in the Maya Tyagi rape case [1979]motivated her to create a series of paintings titled 'custodian of law'. Again, after returning from her visit to Mathura and Vrindaban in 1987,she empathized with the suffering of widows. This art work denotes the truthfulness of this social incident to show sympathy to poverty affected women. To depict the anti Sikh massacre following the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, she depicted gun, soldiers and violence in her work. Being a Sikh herself, Arpana's reaction to this tragedy was to depict through her work, the perception of trouble and the concept of personal freedom. She slowly reduced the depiction of violence in a visual manner and developed her own style to depict social suffering at an individual level.
Socio economic disparity theme is poignantly expressed by Caur. She was upset to see the gap between the poor and rich and said, 'I do not think artists can directly change socioeconomic realities, but the affective dimension of art is powerful in raising awareness about injustices and inequalities. I am pained by the injustices around me, and I strive to express and communicate that pain and emotion through my work, inviting viewers to empathize with the subject of my work, perhaps even sympathize with it. Simply put, when you share, it makes you feel better, and for me that sharing is an intimate conjoining of the affective and the political.'

Caur's art encompassed vast range of social issues including gender inequality, gender violence, economical disparity, communal violence, ecology, nuclear disaster, social injustice and women's position in contemporary society. Her response on being labeled as a feminist was, 'While my work does of course represent the experience of women, I want to emphasize that I have never considered myself a feminist, and that my work is not related to women alone. I feel it's very easy to slot women artists as feminists. I feel a lot of people have committed this fallacy because it's very easy just to slot some body, whereas in fact a woman artist today can also be a citizen of the world, not only in herself as a person, but in her painting. Anybody writing about me finds it very easy to slot me in a certain way, but actually my themes have a wide range, including communal tensions and issues.'

Being a woman artist, the major characters in her work are women and she explores the situation of women in society. She shows the struggle of a woman either as widows of Vrindaban or universal mother. Women painted by Caur exist courageously with social disparity. As discussed by art critic, Bharati Chaturvedi, 'Caur articulates both a very personal as well as a global vision of women determining their own lives. Her Indian context, where women bear the brunt of social, environmental and economic pressures, gives her an activist's mantle. Caur often works and reworks a particular theme or composition.' Nayikas of her painting have the quality to get success and tolerate the sufferings. These are not devis but real life women who struggle with pressure and brutality in society. She comments on the patriarchic society where women are worshipped as goddess but are forced to do hard labour.
According to her, "The intoxication of paint is such that it makes each day seem like a new fresh world waiting to be explored. Even 'Old hands' like me feel a sense quivering anticipation for each square inch to be painted. The roller-coaster ride of the process alone has its own rationale- once the ride is over there is just a work finished and the mind is already restless to explore new territories. Hence there is nothing to be 'achieved', the journey is all ...........

Before she starts a painting, she always deeply thinks about the concept which she is going to paint. This contemplation is about the social, political, spiritual, and philosophical scenario leaving a permanent impression on the mind of the viewer. Gayatri Sinha said about her, 'Caur is primarily a pacifist, and through such direct imagery, her art becomes a passionate indictment of our times.' Each of her painting articulates the feeling of human suffering and successfully bestows the right direction to society. Undoubtedly she has also articulated more subtle feelings which are easy to contemplate but difficult to execute in paintings. She is not bothered about the consequences of her painting, they are big, outspoken, candid, transformative and enthusiastic. Her work is a metaphoric dialogue about different realities of present day India, which we confront on a daily basis.

Paintings and their description

In Child goddess [1975][plate76] a naked female figure is seen giving speech to other various naked figures. The entire audience shows no response to her lecture but rather they seem to give more attention to her nudity which shows that Arpana yearned to change this narrow minded attitude towards women. Minimum detailing of features are used for bolder expression.

Maid servant [1978][plate77]-her work in 1970 is about the social differences that she was always concerned her. In this work, the maidservant is painted in dark skin tones and the householder is lying down on the soft bed, overweight than the little thin girl who is the servant. She is shown nude. She is also caring for three crying children painted at the bottom of the painting.

She paints the incident of rape of Maya Tyagi and titles it Custodians of the Law [1979][plate78]. The police who are supposed to be the custodians of law, have raped
the innocent woman because she looks pretty and is sitting in a car after coming from a marriage party. Arpana painted three sheer sized policemen in dull colour whose sordid gaze on the nude female figure indicates terror of the incident. Gayatri Sinha says about this, ‘large, imminent, and threatening- introduce the presence of a venal, violent establishment’. 

Her early work Sheltered Woman [1980][plate79] incorporates her concern for poor people and comments on the dualism of the society where the umbrella is painted as a protector and also as a meaningful device to explore inequality. The Woman who is in the shade of the umbrella, has fair skin but the unsheltered woman’s face seems dark, dull, and full of fatigue.

Women in Interiors [1982][plate 80]-painting shows a very significant feature of her personal life. It is all about the dwelling of her mother and herself in busy areas of Delhi and their transfer to a working women’s hostel. It was the place where covering the body was essential to secure yourself. It denotes the past disturbing memory of her life. This mid 70s work explores women living on suffocated and limited spaces in a crowded city. Here, her work represents a city where physical violation and intrusion occurred.

Arpana takes inspiration from the art style of seventeenth and eighteenth century. Arpana has adopted pahari miniature architectural forms for this series, for its compositional arrangement from the painting The Change of Babes, Guler, 1760 [Bharat Kala Varanasi] on the birth of Krishna and recreated its elevated building to show contemporary women’s restrained, narrow space.

In Juggler [1983][plate81] one can find remarkable sensitivity of handling the theme of ill-treatment of women in society where women are considered as means of amusement. The image of this painting is taken from traditional Nataraja sculpture in which lord Shiva is balancing the small deer on his finger. Arpana metamorphoses the image of deer and paints a rounded female figure. The striking feature of Basohli miniature painting is remarkably used for linear building structure in which fourth wall is eliminated and one can see simultaneously inside and outside the architecture.
World Goes On [1984]plate 82]-The 1984 Anti-Sikh riots known as the 1984 Anti-Sikh Massacres were four days of brutality in northern India, especially in Delhi, after the Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. Indian National Congress's armed mobs killed unarmed Sikh people, women and children, robbed Sikh homes, public places, schools, and attacked Sikh pilgrimage places.

Through this series, Caur painted the unavoidable trauma of life, loneliness of people in suffering, and the impassiveness of the world around them.

'Arpana Caur's series "World goes on" captures the horror of the violence and callous response it evoked', says Somya menon. Caur shares her experience, 'My mother and I would pile up blankets and medicines in our car and go to the riot affected colonies and refugee camps. It was chaos everywhere, but we never thought of our safety.'

Through her series, she wanted to raise some questions about the brutality in the city. She asks, 'who are these wild mobs bursting into homes and dragging out helpless men and alighting them as if they were a heap of straw'. who are these mute spectators watching the gruesome torch of flame once a human being. why are these wailing women and children crying for justice and why are these voice unheard? why are certain people singled out just by appearance and for no crime they have committed hunted down and killed like rats? and who has snatched away their upright pride' who has snatched away the men from their families and left scars of fear in the haunted eyes of their widowed wives and orphaned children? Answer me, Answer me, -my city.

The tragedy of 1984 gave more intensity and life to Caur's œuvre. Her series on the riots, World goes on was an expression of dreadful self observation and unaffectedness of the civil society towards the terror allowed to run riot by mob violence. She got Triennale award in 1986 for the series. 'My paintings are an expression of my pain. It was so inexplicable, so barbaric'. Caur says.

This painting of Arpana Caur is in bright and rich colour. Simplicity always influenced her and is the chief feature of her work. She depicted her painting in three clear parts as water, earth and sky. Water is used as a method to divide the canvas in different sections like vertical, horizontal and diagonal. Another element of her
painting is that the subject of the painting is either death or suffering, a tortured figure and bodies, heaps of corpses and hopeless widows. She paints merciless people like girl on swing, old man smoking pipe, man flying kite, another man playing flute, busy in their work, witnessing all incidents silently. Surreal images like drowning figures are used to explore the brutality of the incident. She takes reference from mythology in which Bhism Pitamah is seen lying down on bed of arrows in war and she reinterpreted this to show conditions of the people at that time.

Gayatri Sinha says about this series, ‘The World Goes On’ series was remarkable for its shift from claustrophobic interiors to the larger landscape, and for the levels of perception afforded by the earth/sky/water configuration. The quest for the elusive sky/water dimension of metaphysical yearning and dematerialized space becomes a recurring philosophic concern.\textsuperscript{21}

Behind the figure, the artist has arranged natural elements like mountain, sky, tree, water in full bloom. ‘Nature always run its course finishing a cycle. God don’t participate in human tragedy, they just watch’, Caur explains.\textsuperscript{22} She takes references from Indian miniature painting as she uses line of horizon and colour in the backdrop of the painting taken from the Basohli painting. Rocky mountains in the backdrop looks like Namaste mudra with finger expansions, reminiscence of early pahari painting for its stylistic hills and its colorings.\textsuperscript{23}

Her painting \textit{Widows of Vrindaban} [1987] [plate 83] Arpana painted widows as gopies of Vrindaban known as place of romance where Krishna danced with them. It was kind of reversal of tradition and myth.

She represented water as symbol of death. She says, ‘Actually, it was a reversal of the traditional, the Christian use of water as redeeming or life giving. And sometimes I have a tendency to reverse the traditional imagery or the myth, like in Widows of Vrindaban, where the traditional imagery, the gopies are replaced.’ \textsuperscript{24} Their families have rejected them and they want to die for liberation in Yamuna. They are unable to fulfill their needs and they are all compelled to cut their hair because it is attractive. All of them are shaved, twisted, dressed in white and waiting for arrival of lord Krishna. Through her series, she shows the human debris of uncaring society in which older women are hanging on the edge of death.
Landscape with Knives [1989][plate 84]-suggests violence after 1984 riots. A painting in deep yellow and scarlet red colour indicates the flames around the world. Sharp knives are hovering in the background of the painting. A musician is sitting on the right side of the canvas trying to cool and calm the flames of violence with his music.

Green Circle [1994][plate 85] deals with environmental concerns, depicting Sita drawing a circle around her in green colour. It is a noteworthy reinterpration of the mythological incident where laxman protected Sita from the demons by drawing a line around her, but in her painting she shows herself as daughter of earth. Through this painting she communicates that a woman wants earth to be protected from the rapid deforestation, traffic and, pollution. The whole painting is rendered in minimal colours, deep red background with urban graffiti.

In her triptych entitled Threatened City [1995][plate 86] she has depicted the overpopulation and violence around us. Blue Yamuna River is painted on the right side of the canvas against the yellow colour which is peaceful and abstract. The other part of the painting is teemed with gun toting men suggesting unbalanced situation and urban chaos in the society.

Where Are all the Flower Gone, triptych [1995][plate 87]-suggests Arpana’s concerns about the global issue and is based on the incident of American nuclear attack on Japan. America dropped the Bomb on 6th August 1945, during world war over the city of Hiroshima in Japan. The blast wiped out 90 percent of the city and at that time 80,000 people were killed and the after effect of the bombing was such that, due to the radiation effect, the percentage of dead people increased.25

On the fiftieth anniversary of the nuclear attack on Japan, Arpana Caur was one of the select artists in the world and the only Indian to be given this valuable commission in Japan. She chose a combination of colour in each section of painting rather than common relation of colour and form.

There are three sections in the painting. The painting has beautiful juxtaposition of blue, earth brown and yellow. The first part of this triptych depicts river, water and lotus which should be horizontal but are positioned vertically, producing visual space
connecting to inner and outer world. Representation of this panel is said to be a perfect world. The stem of the flower continues from the first panel to another panel, converting into the belt of the gun of many soldiers painted in the second part of triptych. There is a graceful link and the visual order of the lotus and stem changes into the belt of gun. In the third panel of triptych, a woman is shown in sitting posture in a black dress against yellow backdrop with a nuclear harmful rain above her, bullet rain falling on to the second part of the triptych. The colour of woman’s dress represents the grief of the widow and adversity of life. According to Gayatri Sinha, “This triptych contains the kind of progressive symbolism that Arpana has developed: of the figure surrounded by large flowers, lush and lifelike, and finally the evanescent blue of release.”

In Soldier’s Mother [1995][plate 88]-she articulates her feeling about a mother whose son left his home for battle and national security. Here she has depicted a mother’s grief and sorrow in a very poignant manner where there are several images of soldiers interwoven in the woman’s body. This is the style of Caur’s painting in which small forms and images are encircled in the main and large image.

“Arpana says she got the inspiration for this from Persian and Indian miniatures where we often find multiple animals drawn within the figure of a horse or an elephant. These figures are also common on the walls of havelis in the Shekhavati region in Rajasthan. But such figures are not seen in western or European art.”

In Wound [1995][plate 89] she has painted the figure of an injured naked old man who is her grand pa, half covered with white cloth. On the left side of the painting various figures are shown peeping from the building in black background and on the right side Arpana is clutching a white blood spotted garb, which seems like a flowing river. Symbolically rendered, it’s a remembrance about the partition.

1947 [1997][plate 90]-is a painting in which Arpana deftly used her past experience about India and Pakistan partition in which her grand pa is shown holding a holy book of Sikh guru granth sahib, put together as a packet of remembrance against the backdrop of godna motifs of lions.
The Diptych Tree of Desire [2000][plate91] about the Hindu mythology's kalpvriksha or tree of desire which originated in samudra manthan, is supposed to fulfill all the yearnings of the devotees. Arpna used this tree for city space and greenery. On the left side of painting, old aged figures are shown bending down towards the inverted tree, a symbol of revitalization, refreshment and youth. On the right side, she has depicted a woman holding a cloth, having green leaves, a symbol of free space to breathe openly.

Water Weaver [2000][plate 92] depicts vision of a seated woman who is busy in spinning water. Arpna said, ‘On 31 Dec ,1999 Ramu Gandhi said to me—‘I have a new millennium gift for you. You made numerous embroiders. Now you paint Water Weaver, the fire is everywhere which shows our violent time and woman has lot of compassion, benevolence, feeling, this quality of woman helps to quench the flames of violence.” Thus, Arpna painted Water Weaver against a black background and where she is trying to control the whole atmosphere by her good deeds.

Heart of Darkness[2001][plate93] is based on attack on Budiha in Bamiyan. The Bamiysan's valuable statues of Great Buddha that survived from the fire of Genghis Khan, are damaged by Taliban's soldiers. In this painting Arpna has painted traditional folk art motifs in contemporary context. There is a dark contour of the image of Buddha in Bamiyan and around this, various threatening advanced machine guns. Ancient weapons are painted in Orissan folk style with attractive colours.

Her painting Stepping Out [2003][plate 94] shows the presence of women in the Indian society. A woman is going away from the region of her home in order to walk outside and towards the green, vibrant and dynamic life. A woman is trying to overcome all the old traditions which seem to her as a barrier in progressive approach towards her life. Caur says, ‘My painting stepping out is dedicated to all the injustices that are pelted out against women.”

Arpna explored her concerns about the deforestation around South Delhi especially for the preparation of the Commonwealth games. In Dharti [2008][plate 95] she depicts a woman in green colour who is lying down against a black background and she is pointing her figure for the betterment of the future. On her arm, she painted growing warli tree and placed several images and forms within the woman’s body that depicts urban chaos.
Stylistic features of Arpana Caur’s art

Arpana’s art is a reflection of important events and happening in people’s lives and she has used simple forms or images in a new perspective. She was neither affected easily nor curtailed or altered her experience of life with what was popular at the current time. Her unconventional features of life supported her wherein she was able to avoid the traditional use of figuration, whereas other artists of her time were attracted to abstraction in art. Her perfect amalgamations of modern and traditional motifs, both in subject as well as method of painting explored her thought provoking composition. All the characters painted by her are not only created to captivate the onlookers but deliberately help to enhance the quality of her work. Asharafi Bhagat says, ‘The works reflect her thoughts on the intricacies of verbal traditions. It is this quality, and not just the sheer size of her canvases that gives potency and dynamism to her paintings.’

Some important features of her art are as follow-

Repetitive motifs- The repetition of the motif as in miniatures or in Buddhist art creates a sense of continuity and visual design. It symbolizes ongoingness and creates greater interest in compositional structure.

Symbols- Arpana deftly used numerous symbols which hinted indirectly at the trauma, injustice, pain, loss, disaster and disorder. She employed metaphors like umbrella for protection, water as means of dividing the space, drowning figures depicted as symbol of death, blue colour expressed serenity and calm situation, flames, various sharp tools like knives and spikes show the violence and chaotic condition. Scissors are used as means of cutting the thread of life and scale as symbol of measurement. People lying down on bed of arrow symbolized their pain. She suggested industrialization, traffic and rapid urbanization through the application of auto rickshaws, scooters, bikes, cars and motors and people carrying luggage.

Arpana says about the symbolism in her art, ‘Whatever is figurative or metaphorical is successful only when it is simultaneously also abstract. The west had a photographic point of view. But the content of Indian folk art is indicative and symbolism in nature. I studied various folk painting styles. After years of deep study, I understood the formless state of art. Beauty has no limits, but I like beauty only up to a
point. Form should not be decorative. Beauty is truth and truth is artist 'sown truth, the very soul of the artist.\textsuperscript{32}

Compositional structure- The art of Arpana Caur is characterized by spontaneity, originality and dynamic architectural quality. She achieves maximum result with minimum simplified form rendered in oil with flat surface. Her bold forms suggests gesticulation and charged with emotion, resilience, philosophy of life. She sought an innovative notion of human situation, a new symbolic connotation-a kind of metamorphosis in powerful, vigorous forms, which were distorted for emotional effect. Art historian Keshav Malik says about her, 'Her momentary exaggerations are in order for her it is deadpan reality but its dramatic inner recall. The distortions in the compositions convey the knowledge of being part of the world, of Kala.'\textsuperscript{33}

Her diptych and triptych show several aspects of reality and sometimes they indicate the order of good to bad situation, sometimes conveyed as an artist's view to depict disorderly situation on one side and peace, calm, serenity on the other side.

Indian visual artists generally avoided leaving free space in the background which was known as a sense of vacuu [a Latin term which means horror of void space]where in the artist tried to fill up the entire space by using different kinds of imagery and decorative elements which evoked profusion and richness. Arpana liked to reverse the notion by the presentation of individual figure with ordered space against monochromatic settings. She said about her style of figure and background correlation. 'My images are very bold and sculpturesque. A lot of negative space surround them Actually western academy call, 'negative space’ I call ‘positive space’ because even a expanse of black, red or some other colours has a life of its own.'\textsuperscript{34}

Vibrant colours- The most striking feature of her art is the artistic use of colour which is somber, rich, vibrant and symbolic, gives meaning and language to form. She beautifully balances the blue, ochre, golden yellow and scarlet colour. She liked to use black colour that accentuated any form or figure which enhanced its grace and beauty. Domination of flat colours on her canvases produces a space where forms can breathe and easily communicate with the audience. Her amazing use of different colour compositions, create a fascinating effect. There is an extraordinary vibrancy of colour shimmer of light in her oil.
Representation of Indian traditional and miniature painting—She organized her composition using some unique characteristics of Pahari miniature, Godna painting, Gupta work of art, Chola bronzes and provincial Mughal styles of Deccan and the Himalayan foothills: the rounded stocky figure, curved horizon, the division of the background into sky, earth and water. The colour scheme was used as a pictorial arrangement for articulating various ideas. Her oeuvre gave a wide range for searching the aesthetic as well as philosophical aspect. Her wide beautiful expressive canvas with acknowledged style is an inspiration taken from Indian miniature and folk tradition and used recurring set of images in their symbolic rendering of a vast variety of subjects. Her use of white colour in paintings is also derived from the miniature painting. Nainsukh, a Pahari artist inspired Caur to reinterpret the various postures and forms painted by him. Various natural elements like water, waves, sky, rain, clouds, and mountains were painted like miniature paintings, recreated by Caur. For depicting violence in her art work, she looked towards the Indian traditional art, as she says, ‘I have always wanted to embody an Indian aesthetic when approaching violence. I find that in the miniatures and other such paintings there is a kind of non-violence in the manner in which violence is portrayed. It is allegorical and never literal. That is what I aim for, in all my work.’

Creative contours of her art—Her portrayal of melancholic facial features, the method in which she paints the physical structures like extended hand postures, distorted body parts, feet, expressive eyes, hair style joodha of women are all her innovative approach towards pictorial explanation. Use of supporting elements such as bricks of the wall, fallen leaves, boxed like buildings, create interest in her paintings. She creatively broke the visual symmetry by placing some forms horizontally or diagonally. Arpana subverts icon by use of widows in place of gopies in ‘Widows of Vrindaban’, and in ‘Juggler’ painting, she placed an ordinary man in place of lord Shiva and on his finger, an image of a woman occupied the place of deer. In ‘Green Circle’, Caur paints a young girl who protects herself from traffic pollution while in Ramayana, Laxman draws Laxman Rekha to protect Sita.

Figurative narration—Her work strength lies in artistic use of figurative narration. She says, ‘I never plan things. I let them happen as they come. The person I am in that phase of life will come out in my paintings. But my intent is always that the
work should never be literal, it should be visual. For instance, some artists have this habit of saying their work is not narrative, as if narrative were a bad thing. On the contrary, I feel that the narrative tradition flows in our veins, in India. And I've inherited that narrative tradition. Gayatri Sinha says about the portrayal of women in her painting, "There is no hint of an expressive sexuality; woman and nature are both symbiotically tied in a circle of perceived threat and uncertain renewal." They are from ordinary life, in early series they were depicted as sufferers and victims but in later series, she explored the woman spirit of survival and strength.

As a social commentator, she recreates the visual perspectives in an Indian context, presenting aesthetical views to energize humanism and Indian tradition.

**Interview with the eminent artist ArpanaCaur**

**Me-** What is the relationship between art and society and role of artist in society?

**Arpana-** Relationship is very deep because art comes from a feeling heart and that is what I believe. Now I am saying that abstract artists are not doing what they want to do because every artist has a right to do what they like to do. Abstract artists are happy playing with colour. I am very happy to see abstract art also. But it depends on individual temperament, that some people may feel so much for society that they want to express an art. But I must tell you one thing that not all my work depicts social related issues, although some do. But some of my works are also about abstract subjects like time, day and night, life and death which are very ordinary subjects, everyday but these are also great interest in spiritualism like I painted Buddha, Kabir, Nanak and so some of my subjects are social and lot of them are not social because I am not just one person who is crying all the time for society. I am also happy seeing nature. I am happy with spirituality, I am aware of life and death in all that which are abstract things. So we cannot slot an artist that artist is only socially conscious that artist is full human being who is going to respond many other thing.

**Me-** Is painting an effective visual art form to convey any kind of social issues like other art form?
Arpana- No, Painting is definitely not the art form. Very few people come to see art exhibition, Very few people come to art galleries. The forms which are film and television which reaches people and, books reach to people. Now in the case of Painting , Painting language is subtle, it's a little sophisticated and it's a little understated. So not many people come to see art in art galleries. It is not the medium but the artist is not painting for the public, If you are feeling bad about 1984 massacre of Sikhs, you want to make yourself lighten by painting. It is like catharsis for you, you painted the theme because you saw 3,000 people dying in front of your eyes in your city. So then that necessity is there. But It's not going to change things.....painting never changes. I think films and television is better mediums for social change but you paint social theme for your necessity .I have seen this and I want to paint it.

Me- Can you tell us about some your painting which is related to social issue and social disparity?

Arpana- Yes, Sheltered Women is about socio-economic disparity that one person has everything and many people have nothing. Then Missing Audience, because there are no audience for art. As I was just telling you. Women in Interior now it is not true, art situation is change but Women in Interior was painted 30 years back when women were in interiors. So then in 1984, Widows of Vrindaban and like Dharti. Dharti is more general because mother earth can be father earth also, but we say Dharti for earth. So I have done a theme on environment also because Dharti is feminine.

Me- Which tragedy and mishapening in your life inspired you to make painting on them?

Arpana- Well I was telling you that 1984, then I visit to Vrindaban in 1987, which was accident because I went to see Mathura museum sculpture gallery which is like 2nd century B.C. Sculptures, yaksh, yakshi in all that, Actually I went to see art, what I suddenly saw because at that time not much had been written about widows of Vrindaban. I saw that is very shocking for me.

Me - What type of symbol you need to show disaster in your painting?
Arpana- In 1984, I could not paint death. How do I paint death, so I thought and thought then I thought if I do drowning figure in water and the other people just looking, they unable to help him or they do not want to help that figure, so I chose that drowning figure. In Widows of Vrindaban, I used water because Vrindaban is by the river and in one painting there are twisted trees because the Radhakunj where raas happened, the trees are totally twisted. I went three times to Vrindaban. They are twisted like the form of widows. They are like widows who are shrunk and twisted and bent. Trees are like that in Radhakunj that it is a inversion of myth like instead of gopis, widows are there, instead of blooming tree in Radhakunj there are twisted trees growing as such that I have chosen these symbols.

Me-  *Your painting ‘World Goes On’ based on anti Sikh riot in Delhi? Please tell me in detail.*

Arpana- Actually It is not riot, its massacre. In riots what happens is this, two sides clash, they come out in the streets, one is carrying sword and other is a carrying a sword and they clashed. But here is not clash between two communities. People were dragged out of their houses, they were dragged out of the trains, they were dragged out of the buses. They were burnt alive. There was no riot. They were mostly poor people. The rich people the house were looted and burnt. People were targeted individually, dragged out of their houses, we can call it massacre.

Me-  *Woman is depicted as vulnerable subject in your painting. Please explain?*

Arpana- No, In some series especially in my early work she is vulnerable but in my Sohni series which is a love story, she is actively taking a plunge in the river for love. She is falling in love and that is why I show her upside down in all these sohni paintings. In my Day and Night also she is also very confident; She is embroidering in the whole of creation. In Prakriti series she is the embroidery in creation, so always she is stepping out of wall of the city or convention, to step out into the nature in stepping out. But in some of very early series like maid servant, the maid servant is not about woman’s vulnerability. It is social disparity rich and poor, which are still. It is society
that after 60 years of freedom, so many people committing suicide because of
hunger, trauma. So one person has everything mall, Mercedes, houses.
Foreign bank accounts, everything and other people have nothing. This is
social disparity.

Me- Your painting Widows of Vrindaban showing the plight of women in Indian
society. What inspired you to make painting on them?

Arpana- I visited two and three time Mathura museum sculpture gallery. I was shocked
because at that time in 1987, 24 years ago, I had not seen anything written or
any film. Later of course lot of film were made in last 15 year and in
writing, but when I went. It was completely shock for me so that inspired me.
There are 10,000 widows in Vrindaban and 1,000s are in Varanasi.

Me- What kind of change do you find now in your painting style from early stage of
your artistic career?

Arpana+ Women become so much more confident like women in interior you have,
Sohni who is actively participating. She is taking the plunge and then Prakriti
who is embroidering the whole of creation, women are stepping out like that is
lot of change even in art scene like in my time when I began to show 36 years
ago there were very few women artists. Now many-many women artists and
that time everybody used to think women artist like hobby. Today we are fully
professionals. There is no difference between male and female artist.

Me- Describe your colour scheme.

Arpana- I like all colours. You will see orange colour, you will find red, biscuit cream
colour. I am also very fond of black because black highlights whatever colour
is used against it. In fact I use yellow against black, if I am using blue against
black, it will jump out. So black is one of my favorite colours.

Me- What is significant aspect of your art?

Arpana- It is exploration from everyday and I feel everyday that I have to do
something better that I had done yesterday. I have to analyze my work and
critically see that I am growing and not repeating myself. My work also becomes simpler as I have grown older because you see all the spaces and in my early work, space was more crowded, there were many elements. Now there are spaces. I always look great interest in our traditional art form like miniatures. [looking towards her painting]. These trees are from miniatures. These weapons are from folk art but theme is contemporary [pointing out her painting 'Heart of Darkness'] which is hanging in her gallery, Academy of Fine Art and Literature, New Delhi.]. I look a lot of our folk art and then I look a lot of our traditional miniature painting that's why I have set up a museum of folk art and for miniature painting. I take a lot from traditional sculpture and I keep getting inspiration from them.

* * * * * * *

Caur is concerned with expressing directly perceptive and inventive element of art, combining the traditional art of India with the quintessence of contemporary art. Her compositions are silently understood and visually articulated in artistic style with pictorial grammar of art. Her paintings demonstrate her versatility in structuring visual forms.

Aesthetic approach to her composition, concept and image are all extractions of her earlier memories and impressions of vivacious life. Her versatile and creative personality exposes itself in various phases of her excellent series. They seem to investigate hidden candor in the soul of the artist. She did not present pain in a direct manner but created a new vision related to cerebral impressions of the artist and her extended imagination - an allegory, a new visual sign for a conscious viewer.
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Conclusion
CONCLUSION

Present thesis is an attempt to define contemporary women Indian artist's quest for unique and innovative style of expression which mesmerizes the viewer in conceptual narratives that they have experienced in their lives and have been metamorphosed into thoughtful art work. Their art works are interwoven with social strokes interpreting the situation of present day. Their perceptions about the local and global context are the manifestation of the concern and emotion about the society. These artists developed a pictorial language that articulated their awareness and placed them as responsive agents of society and compelled them to express their rage not only about women related issues but also about socio-economic disparity, effects of rapid urbanization, environmental issues, communal tension, riots and urban chaos and various social inequalities in society.

Painting is a powerful vehicle of expression of one's thoughts, ideas, emotions and desires. When strong captivating sentiments through pictorial means, come on canvas, it vibrates the heart of the viewer and takes him/her on a delightful journey of emotion. It expresses unsaid aspects through its subtle nuances, every shade and hue of life. All the emotions which come in the mind of the artist, appears in varied and creative art forms, style and technique with their philosophy and conceptual approach. Each stroke conveys the mystery behind the thoughts.

Contemporary art is defined as art of present time. Contemporary artists like to draw attention to ideas or concepts rather than technique or method used in a work. Artists innovative approach to portray any issue and concept explore their eclecticism and dynamism. Their art works are thought provocative and meaningful to accomplish their creative urge. They have rejected the shackles of traditional art forms and have adopted newer way of exploration. Work of the artists reflect the changing situation of the country in social, political, and cultural context. It intertwines modernity with its own idiom through representation of personal and social issues. Recreating cultural ethos, history, philosophy, beliefs, notions, it also assimilates modern concepts of the west. It gives an innovative style of perception, encounters and happening of daily
Conclusion

life, sometimes shocking the viewer. The art work evokes moods, emotions and sentiments of the viewers with artistic, pictorial and symbolical vitality.

The painting created by the artists shows their interest to communicate their feelings which expresses certain context of history and contemporary period. It is like a personal diary of artist in which the artist register their pain, suffering, agony with art forms, colour, metaphor and intensify their personal emotional expression. Individual interpretations of atmosphere around them symbolize unimaginative creation to depicting social satire. Their creative endeavor to intermingle Indian and modern attitude provide the work a powerful uniqueness.

Meaningful Allegory- All the women artists present a social message through the use of symbols, codes and metaphors. They prefer to show the trauma and suffering in indirect manner and are capable of engaging the viewer in their art work. Every symbol has a conceptual meaning, a vehicle for the artist’s self expression and reveals mysterious aspects of their creative art journey. This eloquent visual language conveys the artist’s wishes, sorrow, despair, happiness, anger etc. Arpna Caur, Arpita Singh, Nilima Sheikh, Gogi Saroj Pal, Nalini Malani, Anupam Sud, Rekha Rodwittiya and Vasudha Thozhur delve into various social themes in symbolic ways to strengthen their idea and message.

Renew the myth- Women artists challenge the pre established social norms and never hesitate to reverse the myth and retell it to comment on society. They give the message to the audience that old customs and practices are hindrances in the path of progressive vision of mankind. Mythological characters, Indian sources and themes are very well executed in order to give social message. Artists like Nalini, Gogi, Arpita, Arpna, Anupam use mythical characters to invite the viewer to think differently. Various myth characters, like Sita, Gopies of Vrindavan, Draupadi, Durga, Nataraja, Kinnari, Kamdhenu [Wish fulfillment cow], Tree of Desire and various incidents like, Swayambaram, Ashvamedha, Story of Mahabharata, Birth of Krishna and Greek Mythological characters like Medea, Cassandra and Lewis carroll’s Alice in wonderland are used to visualize these characters differently in order to convey a social message to the viewer.
Subversive depiction of the female character - In ancient art, female characters were often shown engaging in love scenes. The heroines looked pretty, charming and seductive to the viewer. But these modern artists presented the real picture of contemporary and ordinary women. Characters are boldly confronting the viewer/voyeur, often portrayed naked, inspite of being victims. Sometimes they painted vulnerable, sometimes positive and progressive, breaking all senseless shackles of old customs. Widows, middle aged women, young women, girls, all portray the plight of women in Indian society, and they accept the challenges to oppose the old customs. Their heroines comment on various aspects of women's exploitation.

Yearning for peace and equal status in society - Actually these artists attempted to remove all the distinction of class, caste system and also social evils like child marriage, prostitution, dowry and female infanticide. Issues of environmentalism violence, terrorism, riots, danger, trauma, suffering, are eloquently expressed on canvas through means of painting. In a perfect democracy all citizens has a right to live peacefully with their fundamental rights. Every man and woman should get proper opportunity to go ahead. So much violence and insecurity often disrupts the peace of the region and normal life is affected. Various national and global issues like partition trauma, Hiroshima bomb blast, demolition of Babri masjid, Bombay riots and various other themes find place in their canvas.

Artists like Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur, Nilima Shiekh, Gogi Saroj Pal, Nalini Malani,, Anupam Sud, Vasudha Thozhur, Rekha Rodwittiya portray the various issues prevailing in society in their own individualistic style.

Gogi’s work is a synthesis of modern as well as traditional Indian ethos. She boldly explored her unique artistic language in mythological characters. Her metaphorical visual vocabulary expresses the real situation of contemporary society. Her female characters boldly represent her vision about the society and subvert the way and tradition which considered the woman as an object of desire and. She defines through her female characters the yearning for freedom and equal rights in patriarchal society.
Malani painted the surroundings in which she lived and started her artistic career. Her work is a juxtaposition of various elements like autobiographical, socio-political, mythical and inhuman aspects of life. Her Greek and Indian mythical characters Medea, Sita are the symbol of brutality on women’s body during partition and communal riot in India. Her other work shows violence during riots and issue of environmentalism.

Anupam Sud’s work comments on several aspects on society like men women relationship, equal status of women, voyeurs gaze, prostitution and dirty game of politics. Through her black and white etching she removes the difference in the society in all perspective. Her work demonstrates the vulnerable and powerful aspects of a woman. She interweaved several metaphors and myths with unique compositional settings. The deep meaningful content in her work is full of subtle human emotion.

Arpita Singh reacts and conveys her immediate pain through observation of violent times in present day context. She juxtaposes fantasy with a sharp sense of vulnerability on her canvases. The elements that trigger Arpita’s art are striking surface of her oil and water colour painting and there are always hidden clues that she is spreading in every direction of her canvas and it helps to fascinate the viewer to give knowledge about the different aspects of reality. Gender issues, rape, aggression, violence, insecurity, death, disaster all are manifested through allegory, codes and several other pictorial means.

Arpana’s paintings reveal the depth of her creative artistic achievement and illuminate her individuality as a contemporary artist. Her artwork is originates in her immediate encounter of the society and world around her. She does not present the pain and suffering in a direct manner but creates a new vision related to the mental perception of the artist. She extends her imagination through an allegory, a new visual sign for a sensitive audience. She comments on different aspects of society in visual terms, presents her unique concepts, strengthens her approach towards humanity and mankind. The plight of woman in Indian society, pain of Sikh massacre, nuclear threat, violence, pressure of population, pain of mother earth due to cutting of trees and several other themes echoes on her canvas.
Nilima’s painting explores intense fabrication of several emotions related to the bride burning issue, partition trauma, Kashmir and Gujarat violence and bloodshed. Inspired by Urvashi Butalia’s “The other side of silence”, poetry of Agha Shahid Ali’s ‘The country without post office’ and ‘Each night put Kashmir in your dream’, she visualizes the poetry in her own way, amalgamating various traditional influences of miniature painting, history, myth, folk lore and other practices. Her work on bride burning issue in different episodes shows her deep insight into the theme. She demonstrates the ordinary life of Kashmir, people engaged in their work and suddenly tools of violence appear which hover over them, symbolizing the terror on that region. Various signs of return of the people after destruction, their memory of the past are also visible in Nilima’s painting.

The work of these women artists is a manifestation of their vision filtered through deep perception and allegorically presented in newer context. Subtle intervention of life and its related aspects, their indigenous expression with modern flavor seem to reveal all those underlying issues which are hidden and were unexplored earlier. Their work manifests positive response to their milieu. Life, death, disaster, insecurity, danger, trauma, rage, satire, suffering all concepts and aspects are interwoven in their work in an artistic mode of expression in terms of symbolic colors, gestural expression, perfect compositional settings with deep meaning. These artists attempted to contribute towards a more creative conceptual contour of Indian art in contemporary context. The contribution of the Indian contemporary women artists is seminal. Their creative endeavors initiated a space to reinterpret the grounded reality within the postmodernist framework. Their oeuvres convey female and social consciousness brought to life with a vision of their own.
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*Video:*


Appendices
# LIST OF PLATES

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<th>Plate No.</th>
<th>Painting Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Medium</th>
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### GOGI SAROJ PAL

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<td>Untouchable</td>
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**NILIMA SHEIKH**

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<td>73</td>
<td>The beautiful village of Pachigam Still Exist 2</td>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>305 x 183 cm</td>
<td>Casein Tempera on Canvas</td>
<td>Kumkum Sangari, Trace Retrace, Nilima Sheikh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Measurements</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Artist(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Going away</td>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>187 x 59 cm</td>
<td>Casein Tempera on Canvas</td>
<td>Kumkum Sangari, Trace Retrace, Nilima Sheikh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Construction Site</td>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>187 x 59 cm</td>
<td>Casein Tempera on Canvas</td>
<td>Kumkum Sangari, Trace Retrace, Nilima Sheikh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Child Goddess</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>96&quot; x70&quot;</td>
<td>Oil on Canvas</td>
<td>Yasodhara Dalmia and Gayatri Sinha. Arpana Caur: Abstract Figuration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Maidservant</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>30 x 60 inches</td>
<td>Oil on Canvas</td>
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<td>78</td>
<td>Custodians of The Law</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>60 x 70 inches</td>
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<td>Artist Collection</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td>Sheltered Woman</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>50 x 60 inches</td>
<td>Oil on Canvas</td>
<td>Artist Collection</td>
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<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Women in Interiors</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>70&quot; x60&quot;</td>
<td>Oil on Canvas</td>
<td>Yasodhara Dalmia and Gayatri Sinha. Arpana Caur: Abstract Figuration</td>
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<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Juggler</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>108 x 70 inches</td>
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<td>82</td>
<td>World Goes on</td>
<td>1984</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>Widows of Vrindaban</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>50 x 60 inches</td>
<td>Oil on Canvas</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>Landscape with Knives</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>72 x 72 inches</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>Green circle</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>175x120 cm</td>
<td>Oil on Canvas</td>
<td>Gayatri Sinha, Expression and Evocation: Contemporary Women Artists of India.</td>
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<td>86</td>
<td>Threatened City</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>180x300cm</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
<td>Gayatri Sinha, Expression and Evocation: Contemporary Women Artists of India.</td>
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<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Where Are All the Flowers Gone? Triptych</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>12' x 6' inches</td>
<td>Oil on Canvas</td>
<td>Sunet Chopra, The Art of Arpana Caur.</td>
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<td>89</td>
<td>Wound</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<td>Sunet Chopra, The Art of Arpana Caur</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td>Tree of Desire</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>10' x 6'</td>
<td>Oil on Canvas</td>
<td>Yasodhara Dalmia and Gayatri Sinha. Arpana Caur: Abstract Figuration</td>
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<td>48 x 60</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Dharti</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>48 x 72 inches</td>
<td>Oil on Canvas</td>
<td>Artist Collection</td>
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