WORKS AND STYLE OF ARPANA CAUR AND ANJOLIE ELA MENON: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF THE

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

FINE ARTS

BY

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UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF
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DEPARTMENT OF FINE ARTS
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The history of painting reaches back in time to artifacts from pre-historic humans and spans all cultures that represent a continuous though disrupted tradition from antiquity. Art in India had always been an integral part of Indian life and archeological excavations of Art objects have shown that Indian art had reached very high degrees of sophistication at various times in Indian history. Until the early 20th century it relied primarily on representational, religious and classical motifs following this more purely abstract and conceptual approaches gained favour. Across cultures and spanning continents and millennia, the history of painting is an ongoing river of creativity that continues into the 21st century. Many of the artists in 21st century in India use these historical styles in their art. Similarly there are artists who draw their inspiration from the rich folk traditions of India, the country which had always been closely connected with other countries. Influence of these various cultures can be seen in the art of various times. Even today the trend continues as Indian artists remain connected to the trends outside and openly adapt to the emerging European and Oriental styles. There are two main criteria for differentiating an Indian art. One way is the medium: In this criterion the artists are classified as oil painters, acrylic painters, water colorists, terracotta sculptors, installations artists, etc. This is not a very good criterion as many artists in the 21st century do not use any single medium but multiple media simultaneously. Another way of classifying Indian art is based on the origin of the artist in terms of region which is, by and large, an universally accepted criterion. Various schools have been named after important centers of Art like Bengal School, Madras School of Art, etc. Indian
contemporary Art in 21st century is as varied as it had never been before. From the elitist business houses and royal families it has now entered the drawing rooms of the middle-class buyers and from domestic market it is now traveling offshore to fetch immense, often astronomical prices.

Indian contemporary art has won accolades from whole world. There is incredible diversity, poignancy and creativity found in Indian art. Indian contemporary art has won accolades from whole world. There is incredible diversity, poignancy and creativity found in Indian art that the contemporary art has been made during the last 40 years, usually by an artist who is still alive and actively making art. Contemporary art is exhibited by commercial contemporary art galleries, private collectors, corporations, publicly funded arts organizations, contemporary art museums or by artists themselves in artist-run spaces. Contemporary artists are supported by grants, awards and prizes as well as by direct sales of their work. This form of art is of the post 1960-modernist period. It was this period of the late 1900s which saw major socio-economic, cultural, political and also educational changes the world over, which undoubtedly influenced art, amongst many other productive fields. The rigidity in defining types of art was lost to a large extent during this time and this is what came to define contemporary art. Contemporary art deals with issues directly related to its present day world.

Contemporary artists chose to highlight the idea or impulse behind their work rather than to concentrate on the medium or method used. They unlike earlier artists were not deterred by the thought of using various media and techniques in combination. Open to experimentation, these people pioneered the concept of setting their audience thinking
about the subject as the most important aim of the artwork. Topics like racism, global warming, cloning and biotechnology, international politics, human rights, spirituality and economics are reflected in the work of contemporary artists. The advent of contemporary art marked the breaking of shackles by artists to move from the conventional inclination towards aesthetic beauty and purity to address subjects such as politics, which affect the layman. This is what brought the common man closer to the artist.

Since time immemorial India has been the cradle of a number of veteran artists. Besides the vivid cultural differences, India’s exceptional geographical position has played significant role in evolution and diversification of the Indian art. Contemporary artists have highlighted the various social and political issues. The contemporary Indian art has been evolved by breaking the shackles of the various other types of arts. It is very flexible and has given space to some modern arts as well. It is mainly influenced by our day to day life styles, etc. The contemporary art has contributed a lot in projecting various flaws of the society.

There is a series of veteran female contemporary artist in India. It becomes a tedious job to discuss and compare the work and style of all female contemporary artists. There are some celebrated female artists which have been addressed here because of their famous and published work style of national and international repute. These female artists have contributed significantly in raising the standards of Indian contemporary art to newer heights. No artists can be ranked as number one or two because all are well experienced and highly rated. Indian female contemporary artists are listed below.

1. **Amrita Shergil**
Out of the above listed artists, Arpana Caur and Anjolie Ela Menon are the most eminent and charismatic women contemporary artists who for their immense contributions to Indian art are known globally. In present thesis work and style of these two female contemporary artists have been detailed.

**ARPANA CAUR**

Indian society and culture is so varied that sometimes it becomes unbelievable that we belong to the same country. On the basis of religious background also we are living in a hard social sphere. Our male dominated society is very ignorant towards the status of women which makes the condition more complex. In such harsh conditions, if a woman makes her self identity, is a big thing. Everybody does not have the courage to accomplish such an impossible task. Such a great personality has been mentioned here.
and that great personality is Arpana Caur. Arpana’s paintings show her mystical temperament. Her art always had a radical content. She has got so many awards for the fine arts.

**WORK AND STYLE OF ARPANA CAUR**

While studying creations of an artist the most important question which arises immediately in one’s mind is the theme of paintings. The medium, colour or size of the painting for an artist is not that much important as that of the theme. Theme is the most important part of a painting which points to the fact that what the artist wants to show. Theme gives direction to a painting. Arpana Caur has a diverse theme for her paintings. There seems to be a great influence of folk art in her paintings with the glimpse of modern art. A renowned art critic Shri Valdemer after viewing her solo exhibition in London in 1982 has said that the work style of Arpana Caur is a good combination of modernization with emotional theme.

**ART OF ARPANA CAUR**

**Influence**

Arpana Caur has not imitated the styles and ideology of other painters for her paintings, therefore, what we see in her paintings are the original ideas of her own which are mainly influenced by the various environmental, social and political issues.

**Master pieces**

Her art is a direct reflection of her personal experiences, inspired by local and world events. Over the years, her main focus has centered on Indian women, and capturing the
essence of their day to day activities inspired by social, cultural and spiritual themes. All her paintings in some way or the other have figuratively narrated the story of Indian women—past and present. They are about human tragedies, emotions and traumatic experiences of life. She has always strongly emphasized humanism.

**Techniques in Arpana’s paintings**

Every artist has its own way of medium, technique and ingredients for painting. From the very beginning oil paints and canvas were the medium and source of Arpana’s paintings. She never likes painting on papers because she says the surface of the canvas is flexible which is user friendly. She has also used the acrylic paints because they dry up very quickly whereas the oil paints take enough time. But she never liked acrylic colours. In one of her exhibitions named as ‘World Goes On’ in 1985 in Delhi she has used pencil drawings extensively which were also displayed in Mumbai. She has also painted on glass as well which was displayed in the year 1988. She used to do painting on the glass on its reverse side. She used to paint on imported fibre glass which she purchased from Paharganj Area of New Delhi. The imported fibre glasses were used for painting so as to avoid the problem of fungal spread and dampness. Arpana Ji started etching painting and Zink painting till 15 years and painted mostly black and white paintings along with some coloured paintings. Still all these paintings of her are less important compared to her oil paints. She prefers making man size figures in her paintings.

She starts her painting by coating the canvas with a mixture of Turpentine and linseed oil and after that leaves it for two-three weeks for drying. After air drying the canvas, she starts painting onto them. The entire process is repeated for three times. She
uses more than half of the turpentine and linseed oil in first coat. She works on two three
canvas simultaneously. If she wants to check the effect of first coat on a canvas then she
uses one third of the turpentine oil and one fourth part of the linseed oil. Next coat is
done using linseed oil. Instead of the oil paintings she has done some other paintings as
well like etching and glass paintings etc.

**SYMBOLS IN ARPANA CAUR’S PAINTINGS**

Arpana Caur uses symbols for most of her paintings. Her symbols are quite expressive
and give the life to her paintings. According to her, some symbols are personnel because
they contain our feelings in them. She mostly uses scissors, plug, women, umbrella,
thread and needles as symbols in her paintings. She likes very much some of her symbols
like scissor which she has used in most of her paintings.

**ANJOLIE ELA MENON**

Anjolie Ela Menon was born in 1940 in India of
mixed Bengal and American parentage. She went to
school in Lovedale in the Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu
and thereafter had a brief spell at the J.J. School of
art in Bombay. Subsequently she earned a degree of
english literature from Delhi University. Her
'Western' upbringing particularly stay in Paris
influenced her life greatly. She is a well known
muralist and has represented India at several shows. In fact, she only came into serious contact with Hindu culture after her marriage into a fairly orthodox South Indian family. She has often bitterly regretted these major gaps in her early life.

Between 1970 and 1972, she again began working seriously. Colour had started to assert itself and she was using a lot of blue. She had a series of exhibitions in Calcutta and Delhi and was glad to be painting once more as a professional. In 1974 she moved to Bombay and she was offered a solo show by a major gallery. In addition to paintings in private and corporate collections, her works have been acquired by museums in India and abroad. A book entitled "Anjolie Ela Menon: Paintings in Private Collections" has been published on her life and work.

Eccentric, volatile and outspoken, Anjolie Ela Menon’s personality makes an impression as strong as her art. Menon’s early canvases exhibit the varied influences of van Gogh, the European Expressionists, Modigliani, Amrita Sher-Gil, and M. F. Husain. These paintings were dominated by flat areas of thick bright color, with sharp outlines that were painted with the vigour and brashness of extreme youth. One of the most creative women artists of South Asia, Anjolie Ela Menon has held over 30 solo shows and several group shows.

**Work and Style of Anjolie Ela Menon**

Anjolie Ela Menon, one of the most creative women artists of South Asia has held over 30 solo shows and several group shows. Her work in terms of its content, subjects and themes as well as her choice of medium and treatment is symbolic of the coming age of
women artists in India and was exhibited in the fifty years celebration of Indian art at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and in 2000 the Indian Government has honoured her with a Padma Shree. Few contemporary Indian artists have created a body of work of such beauty and depth as Anjolie Ela Menon over the last four decades. Her paintings reveal an extraordinary sensibility. The early paintings were characterized by moodiness, profoundly influenced by Romanesque art. The brilliance of a Byzantine palette and sensibility illuminated her work of the late 1960s and her subject matter included priests, prophets, Madonna's and brooding nudes. By the 1970's Menon's work began to acquire an allegorical, narrative quality but the myth was of the artist's own making-a strange amalgam of east and west. Goats, dogs, crows and lizards often attended the central protagonists. Diaphanously clad women, animals, birds, reptiles and apocalyptic male figures inhabit and impinge upon a mythical world excavated from the artist's subterranean existence. Later there was a transition in her work from the nude to the window and a concomitant shift in perspective from the very subjective to a more literary and cerebral mode. From painted windows Menon incorporated real windows in her work as 'objects trouves'. The actuality of the window and its irreverent ornate-ness connects the viewer to a grid of fractured spaces and multiple images.

The innovative experiments of the mid 1990s with computer aided images were amongst the first in India. The superimposition of overlapping images using computers, photography and collage painted over with acrylic, oils and inks results in an impressive tour de force entitled Mutations. In these works unexpected juxtapositions intrigue the viewer.
In the next phase, the artist, for the first time, explores the non-figurative-inspired by the Buddhist iconography of Ladakh. The continuous chanting of a 'mantra' is transmuted into image, evoking metonymic reverberations in these meditative paintings of 1998.

**ART OF ANJOLIE ELA MENON**

**Influence**

Anjolie Ela Menon was influenced by the celebrities and institutes such as The Lawrence School, Lovedale (near Ootacamund), Tamil Nadu, well known painter Vincent Van Gogh, Expressionism School of Art, Italian Painter and Sculpture Modigliani, Indian female painter Amrita Shergil, renowned Indian painter M.F. Husain and mostly by Ingmar Bergman and Antonloni. In one of her interviews without blinking an eyelid she replies, "I am really inspired by M.F. Husain. When I was young, I learnt a lot from his way of functioning. He taught me that one could paint anywhere, even sitting on the floor. Even today, I sit on the floor and paint. To create something in the mind, and then to actualize it requires intense energy. It is a very difficult job. Husain has all this and more.

Most of the paintings of Anjolie Ela Menon have the influence of fresco on the technique during her time at the Beaux Arts. In one of her interviews she says she was much inspired by Alain Peskine, a busy architect who was also a great photographer. Both of them became members of the Cinemateque and once saw ninety films in a
month. At that time she thought Ingmar Bergman and Antonioni had a far greater impact on her than any painter, past or present.

In fresco one has to draw because the fresh, wet lime-plaster is applied along the line of the drawing each day, rather like doing one huge piece of a jigsaw puzzle. It also uses a single application of pigment. There is no over-painting, no rubbing out. This technique brought her to use thinner paint and well-designed areas, very different from what she'd been doing. Later on she had her trip back from France to India with a friend, she painted in water-colours for the first time.

**Techniques**

Anjolie is known for the haunting imagery and brilliant enamel-like patina found in her paintings. For Anjolie, who has studied art in Paris and lived and traveled widely in Europe and West Asia. Anjolie Menon's paintings, primarily in oil on masonite board, are known for their transparent quality and haunting imagery. She uses the medieval and renaissance styles of painting to reflect her personal fantasy based on contemporary Indian imagery. She often uses old Sepia-tinted photographs from her family album- where people are all dressed up and sit stiffly on ornamental chairs-as subjects for her paintings. What fascinates her in these photographs is their 'still' or 'static' quality. Anjolie's ability to capture a 'frozen' moment in time and to reflect both

Menon has also resurrected junk and turned it into artifacts—art you can sit on, or keep your jams and pickles in. “Art of retrieval is part of the Indian ethos; we do not belong to a throwaway society,” says Menon, who also enjoyed a stint with kitsch, in a show titled Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai, a name inspired aptly by a Hindi movie hit from the time.

CONCLUSION

Anjolie Ela Menon one of the most creative women artists of South Asia, has held over 30 solo shows and several group shows. Her works were exhibited in the fifty years celebration of Indian art at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and the Indian Government has honoured her with a Padma Shree. Menon's early canvases exhibit the varied influences of van Gogh, the European Expressionists, Modigliani, Amrita Sher-Gil, and M.F. Husain. Mainly portraits, these paintings were dominated by flat areas of thick bright color, with sharp outlines that were painted with the vigour and brashness of extreme youth. Some of her solo shows include the ones held at Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2003, 2002, 1996 and by The Gallery, in New York, 1989. Her works were exhibited in the Paris Biennale, 1980 and International Triennale, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1975, 71 and 68. She has been invited by the British Council, the U.S. State Department and the French Ministry of Culture to confer with leading artists in those countries. Menon has served on the advisory committee and the art purchase-committee of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, where she was co-curator
with Henri Claude Cousseau for an exhibition of French Contemporary Art in 1996. A book entitled "ANJOLIE ELA MENON: Paintings in Private Collections" has been published on her life and work. This review is the testimony of her excellence in fine arts.

On the other hand the work and style of Arpana Caur is not influenced by any artists. The artistic expression of Arpana Caur is the distillate of a long period of struggle. Arpana Caur went through this entire journey herself, unlike other artists who were given readymade solutions at art school. The unconventional nature of the life she has led has helped Arpana keep away from the conventional art and strike out on a path of her own. That is why she remained firmly figurative while most of Delhi’s artists were steeped in abstraction to one degree or another. This is the basis of the authenticity of her art and its continuity. She had never been trained as a painter. She had her first sell out show in Bombay in 1980 and has worked on the murals on environment with German artist Sohnke Nissan. She has had solo shows in London, Berlin and Ottawa and six international museums already house her collections. Arpana seems to be influenced by miniature paintings very much. We can see the glimpse of modern art in her paintings clearly. She is her own master which is drawn from many different sources. The theme of her painting is closely related to our daily life which has illustrated not only to eminent personalities like Lord Budha but to a common man and the Indian women as well. We can see the images of a labourer, nature and environment also in her paintings. She has emphasized the Sufi saints like Kabeer and Guru Nanak. Human figures have a special significance in her paintings and hence most of her paintings contain human figures. She prefers making large size human paintings. Most of her paintings are nearly 4-5ft in length which is not influenced by the idea of some other painter rather she has her own
style to make such figures. Her figures do not follow the strict rules of body ratio. Her art is remarkable in the simplicity with which she presents a radical view of the realities of our lives, using images that we are used to, in a new context.

Since 1986 Arpana Caur has covered a variety of issues related to gender, violence, the inner quest for nirvana and the predicament of the contemporary woman. Some of her recent work feature political incidents, like ‘Heart of Darkness’ which depicts the Bamiyan Budha incident in Afghanistan in 2000. Her canvas relives the legendary love of Soni and Mahiwal. For Arpana the story is essentially about a woman’s courage in love. Over recent years, her works have become more symbolic and certain symbols keep appearing. Colour dominates her work. She is an artist with her own ideas and agenda and neither influenced easily nor does she change her expressions with what is fashionable or to please the market forces.

The work of Anjolie Ela Menon and Arpana Caur, the veteran contemporary women artists, embodies in this thesis truly reflects their passion for the sufferings of the poor people, the life of the Sufi saints, highlighted political and religious issues, corruption in the society and gender violence specifically the sufferings of the women in male dominated society. They have also portrayed the natural beauty of environment and its deterioration caused by human beings. The contemporary art has contributed a lot in projecting various flaws of the society and attracting the attention of the administrators to rectify them.
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2009
Anjolie Ela Menon  Arpana Caur
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled ‘Works and Style of Arpana Caur and Anjolie Ela Menon: A Comparative Study’ has been completed under my supervision by Ms. Rehana Begum. This work is original and worthy of submission for the award of Ph.D degree. It is further certified that this work has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of any degree.

I permit her to submit the thesis for the award of degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Arts of the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

[Signature]

Dr. Zeba Hasan
Reader
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Rehona Begum
DEDICATED TO MY FATHER
LATE MR. MOHD ALI KHAN
&
EX-SUPERVISOR
LATE PROF. SIRTAJ RIZVI
INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF INDIAN PAINTINGS AND CONTEMPORARY ART

The history of painting reaches back in time to artifacts from pre-historic humans and spans all cultures that represent a continuous though disrupted tradition from antiquity. Art in India had always been an integral part of Indian life and archeological excavations of Art objects have shown that Indian art had reached very high degrees of sophistication at various times in Indian History. Until the early 20th century it relied primarily on representational, religious and classical motifs following this time more purely abstract and conceptual approaches gained favour. Across cultures and spanning continents and millennia, the history of painting is an ongoing river of creativity that continues into the 21st century. Many of the artists in 21st century in India use these historical styles in their art. Similarly there are artists who draw their inspiration from the rich folk traditions of India, the country which had always been closely connected with other countries. Influence of these various cultures can be seen in the art of various times. Even today the trend continues as Indian artists remain connected to the trends outside and openly adapt to the emerging European and Oriental styles¹. There are two main criteria for differentiating an Indian art. One way is the medium: In this criterion the artists are classified as oil painters, acrylic painters, water colorists, terracotta sculptors, installations artists, etc. This is not a very good criterion as many artists in the 21st century do not use any single medium but multiple media simultaneously. Another way of classifying Indian art is based on the origin of the artist

¹http://www.21stcenturyindianart.com/archives.htm
. in terms of region which is, by and large, an universally accepted criterion. Various schools have been named after important centres of Art like Bengal School, Madras School of Art etc. Indian contemporary Art in 21st century is as varied as it had never been before. From the elitist business houses and royal families, it has now entered the drawing rooms of the middle-class buyers and from domestic market it is now traveling offshore to fetch immense; often astronomical prices. Contemporary artists in India take inspiration from various sources and styles with distinct Indianness.

**Indian art**

With a 5000 year old culture, Indian Art is rich in its tapestry of ancient heritage, medieval times, Mughal rule, British rule, progressive art and now contemporary art. The earliest recorded art of India originated from a religious Hindu background which was later replaced by a soaring popular Buddhist art. Moreover, from a timeless era art in India has been inspired by spiritualism and mystical relationship between man and god. Art in India has survived in its homeland and spread from time to time all over the world. This was possible because many kings who recognized budding talent patronized art and themselves were great connoisseurs. Each king has left a deep impression of his affinity to the artist community. Until today, art is patronized by the rich and famous in the country. The contemporary Indian art is a perfect blend of Indian cultural history, religions, philosophies and diversities. This form of art is becoming more and more famous world wide so the demand of these great pieces of art is growing day by day².

²http://www.craftsindia.com
Purpose of Art

Indian artists relied heavily on religious scriptures to draw inspiration. Since there was no restriction, they flourished under the patronage of rulers. Their art has survived the ravages of time and have a unique place in historical records. Water colors, charcoal and vegetable dyes were popular methods of painting. Fabric painting was extensive and Indian designers still adapt ancient patterns to modern fabrics. The purpose of art in ancient India was not just to adorn the walls. Each painting had a story to narrate. Visually ancient Indian art was colourful, aesthetic and appealing to naked eye. Mostly kings used to commission the artists to paint from inspiration. Stone and marble were also used to create art. Indian sculpture until today remains a mute testimony of the talent that emerged under many different kings. One of the many purposes of art was to spread the word around about the king and glorify his deeds. Good art symbolized the prosperity of many empires in ancient India. Most of the art was produced to promote religious activities. Most Hindu kings were well-wishers of Brahmin community. Art was an extension of their tribute and respect to the knowledgeable class. It is of no surprise that most of the artwork of Hindu kings depicts scenes from epics like Ramayan and Mahabharata and other mythological stories which continue to inspire artists even now.

History of Indian Art

The earliest Indian paintings were the rock paintings of prehistoric times, the petroglyphs

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as found in places like the Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka, and some of them are older than 5500 BC. Such works continued and after several millennia, in the 7th century, carved the pillars of Ajanta. Maharashtra state presents a fine example of Indian paintings and the colors used in these painting are mostly the shades of red and orange which were derived from minerals.

These magnificent cave paintings are still a big attraction. The famous Ajanta and Ellora caves in the Deccan jungles of Maharastra can be considered the ancient art galleries that have remained unscathed by attackers. Most of the artwork reflects on the growth of Buddhism during the period which also spreads to South East Asia.

Many foreigners have not understood Indian art because they have no background or knowledge of the religion and symbols. Therefore, they tend to get confuse the meaning and misinterpret it. Indian Art represents a mystical outlook of the people and a spiritual connection. With advent of modernism in Indian art as a whole, the use of tradition, as against western adaptations has become a serious issue and contestations.

**Mughal Art Influence**

When the Mughals made India their home, they bought the Persian influence in the Indian artwork. Miniatures of the Mughal period speak of a different art form altogether. It is widely accepted that, art of this period represents the importance of the kings. Muslim kingdoms flourished until the British entered India. Marble was used extensively to produce sculpture and the Taj Mahal is a living example of the glorious era which is now considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world. Along with the Egyptian
pyramids it is the only surviving ancient monument in the world. Religion gave way to other themes like people and animals. Artists during this period mixed different elements and used influence of each other in their works.

**Rajput painting**

Rajput painting, a style of Indian painting, evolved and flourished, during the 18th century, in the royal courts of Rajputana. Each Rajput kingdom evolved a distinct style but with certain common features. Rajput paintings depict a number of themes, events of epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Krishna's life, beautiful landscapes, and humans. Miniatures were the preferred medium of Rajput painting however, several manuscripts also contain Rajput paintings paintings even done on the walls of palaces, inner chambers of the forts and havelies, particularly, the havelis of Shekhawat. The colors extracted from certain minerals, plant sources, molluscan shells, and also by processing precious stones, gold and silver. The preparation of desired colors was a lengthy process, sometimes taking weeks. Brushes used were very fine. Mostly men used to paint during this period (roughly around the 16th Century). The artists worked on the belief that nature is sacred and they painted trees, animals and people all in harmony to one another. Lord Krishna is depicted in many Rajputana paintings. The Vaishnava group in their art stressed the relationship of humans with the Almighty. The miniature paintings from the Rajputanas flourished as long as the kings
were in court. Once the British came to India, the art scene also changed. Most of the artists gave up, as the British could not understand native art. The ones who did understand a little bit got some artists to paint scenes to take back home to England so that they could give their people an idea of the country they were living in. Miniatures today are an inspiration to Indian fashion designers, jewelry designers and artists as they revive some art forms with the hope that they do not die and are consigned to pages of history.

**Madhubani painting**

Madhubani painting is a style of Indian painting, practiced in the Mithila region of Bihar state, India. The origins of Madhubani painting are shrouded in antiquity. ‘Mother-Goddess’ a miniature painting of the Pahari style, dates back to eighteenth century. Pahari and Rajput miniatures share many common features.

**Mughal painting**

Mughal painting is a particular style of Indian painting, generally confined to illustrations on the book and done in miniatures, and emerged, developed, and took shape during the period of the Mughal Empire during 16th-19th centuries. Mughal paintings of India date back to the period between the 16th and 18th century when the Mughals ruled a large part of the country. The art of Mughal painting was introduced by the Mughal emperor
Humayun, when he returned to India after his exile in Persia. He invited two Persian artists, Mir Sayid Ali and Abu-us-Samad to return with him. The Mughal paintings that developed from this influence are a keen blend of Indian, Persian and Islamic styles. Mughal painting reached its acme during the reign of Akbar, and also flourished during Jahangir's rule, as well as Shah Jahan's. Mughal painting was rich in variety and included portraits, events and scenes from court life, wild life and hunting scenes, and illustrations of battles. During the reign of Akbar (1556-1605), the imperial court, apart from being the centre of administrative authority to manage and rule the vast Mughal empire, also emerged as a centre of cultural excellence. Mughal painting thrived and hundreds of painters created innumerable paintings depicting scenes from various Hindu epics including the Ramayana and the Mahabharata; themes with animal fables, individual portraits, and paintings on scores of different themes. Mughal style during this period continued to refine itself with elements of realism and naturalism.

Jahangir also (1605-27) had an artistic inclination and the artistic scenario of Mughal painting excelled during his reign. The paintings emerging during the reign of Jahangir illustrates scenes and events from his life. A biographical portrayal of Jahangir known as the 'Jahangirnama which was written during his lifetime has numerous pictorial idiosyncrasies paintings. The colours used in these paintings were lighter and the brush strokes were more intricate. Human figures, flowers, animals and birds formed the various themes on which the Mughal paintings emerged during Jahangir reign. Jahangir was also deeply influenced by European painting. During his reign he came into direct contact with the English Crown and sent gifts of oil paintings which included portraits of the King and Queen. He encouraged his royal atelier to take up the single point perspective favoured by European artists, unlike the flattened multi-layered style used in
traditional miniatures. He particularly encouraged paintings depicting events of his own life, individual portraits, and studies of birds, flowers and animals. The Jahangirnama, written during his lifetime, which is a biographical account of Jahangir, has several paintings, including some unusual subjects such as the sexual union of a saint with a tigress, and fights between spiders.

Musical events, lovers and ascetics formed the main themes of the Mughal paintings during the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-58). Shah Jahan was most distinguished for his architectural feat, the Taj Mahal took 16 years for its completion. Brushwork became finer and the colors lighter. During the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-58), Mughal paintings continued to develop, but they gradually became cold and rigid. Themes including musical parties; lovers, sometimes in intimate positions, on terraces and gardens; and ascetics gathered around a fire, abound in the Mughal paintings of this period. Govardhan was a noted painter during the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan.

**Tanjore painting**

Tanjore painting is an important form of classical South Indian painting native to the town of Tanjore in Tamil Nadu. Tanjore art dates back to early 9th century, a period dominated by the Chola rulers, who encouraged art and literature. These paintings are known for their elegance, rich colors, and attention to detail. The themes for most of these paintings are Hindu Gods and Goddesses and scenes from Hindu mythology. In modern times, these paintings have become a much sought after souvenir during festive occasions in South India. Tanjore paintings also know as Tanjavur paintings have decorated the walls of temples, palaces and homes since the chola dynasty (17th century).
Deeply rooted in tradition, Tanjore paintings depict divine Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon in rich vibrant colors.

Notable for the adornment of semi-precious stones and 22 karat gold foils, the creation of Tanjore Paintings involves a lot of dedication and several stages of meticulous artwork.

The Making of a Tanjore Painting

Tanjore paintings are made on canvases which is a plank of wood (originally wood of the Jackfruit tree was used, now it's plywood) with a layer of cloth pasted on it using Arabic gum. The cloth is then evenly coated with a paste of limestone (chalk) and a binding medium and then left to dry. The process of making a Tanjore painting involves many stages. The first stage involves the making of the preliminary sketch of the image on the base. The base consists of a cloth pasted over a wooden base. Then chalk powder or zinc oxide is mixed with water-soluble adhesive and applied on the base. To make the base smoother, a mild abrasive is sometimes used. After the drawing is made, decoration of the jewellery and the apparels in the image is done with semi-precious stones. Laces or threads are also used to decorate the jewellery. On top of this, the gold foils are pasted. Finally, dyes are used to add colors to the figures in the paintings. The main steps are summarized here:

**Step 1:** When the canvas is ready, the artist then draws a detailed sketch of the theme of the painting. A paste, made of limestone (chalk) and a binding medium, is used to create a 3D effect in embellishing and ornamenting the theme of the painting.
Step 2: Real Tanjore gems of varied hues are fixed in selected areas like pillars, arches, curtains, thrones, dresses, jewellery etc. 22ct gold leaves are used to cover the embossed areas and then the colors are applied on the canvas. Shading and other intricate colouring work is carried out in this step. Additional gems are fixed in the later stages if required.

Step 3: When it dries the paintings are enclosed in imported Italian flexi-glass and framed using the desired frame pattern.

The Madras School

During British rule in India, it was felt that Madras had some of the most talented and intellectual artistic minds in the world. The British had also established a huge settlement in and around Madras. George town was chosen to establish an institute that would cater to the artistic expectations of the royals in London. This has come to be known as the Madras School. Initially traditional artists were employed to produce exquisite varieties of furniture, metal work, and curios and their work was sent to the royal palaces of the Queen. Unlike the Bengal School where 'copying' is the norm of teaching, the Madras
School flourishes on 'creating' new styles, arguments and trends. It was K.C.S. Paniker (1911-1977) who set the tone and pace for contemporary art in Madras school.

The Bengal School

The Bengal School of Art was an influential style of art that flourished in India during the British Raj in the early 20th century. It was associated with Indian nationalism, but was also promoted and supported by many British arts administrators.

The Bengal School arose as a nationalist movement reacting against the academic art styles previously promoted in India, both by Indian artists such as Ravi Varma and in British art schools.

Following the widespread influence of Indian spiritual ideas in the West, the British art teacher Ernest Binfield Havel attempted to reform the teaching methods at the Calcutta School of Art by encouraging students to imitate Mughal miniatures. This caused immense controversy, leading to a strike by students and complaints from the local press, including from nationalists who considered it to be a retrogressive move. Havel was supported by the artist Abanindranath Tagore, a nephew of the poet Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore painted a number of works influenced by Mughal art, a style that he and Havel believed to be expressive of India's distinct spiritual qualities, as opposed to the "materialism" of the West. Tagore's best-known painting, Bharat Mata (Mother India),

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5 The Madras School Modes of Abstraction by A.S. Raman p.139. In: Indian Art an Overview edited by Gayatri Sinha
6 The Bengal School by Santo Datta p.53. In: Indian Art an Overview edited by Gayatri Sinha
depicted a young woman, portrayed with four arms like Hindu deities, holding objects symbolic of India's national aspirations. Tagore later attempted to develop links with Japanese artists as part of an aspiration to construct a pan-Asianist model of art.

The Bengal School's influence in India declined with the spread of modernist ideas in the 1920s. In the post-independence period, Indian artists showed more adaptability as they borrowed freely from European styles and amalgamated them freely with the Indian motifs to new forms of art. While artists like Francis Newton Souza and Tyeb Mehta were more western in their approach, there were others like Ganesh Pyne and Maqbool Fida Husain who developed thoroughly indigenous styles of work. Today after the process of liberalization of market in India, the artists are experiencing more exposure to the international art-scene which is helping them in emerging with newer forms of art. Jitish Kallat had shot to fame in the late 90s with his paintings which were both modern and beyond the scope of generic definition. In this new century the Indian artists are trying out new styles, themes and metaphors

**Modern Indian Art**

In the beginning of the 20th century, some educated Indians began painting new themes, which were directly inspired by the ancient culture of India. With the arrival of the foreigners in the motherland most artists were pinning to get back to the core of native themes. Some bold new revivalists changed the face of the art world. In the forefront was Abanindranath Tagore from West Bengal. He lit the torch that was kept aflame by his nephews. While the country’s politics was stormy, no artist drew inspiration from its turmoil. During this time the biggest name that emerged was that of Raja Ravi Varma from the kingdom of Tranvancore. His talents took him to Europe where he learnt to
paint in oils. Paintings of God and Goddesses under his signature were fascinating art lovers.

A group of progressive artists decided to express their talents during the turbulent days. Landscapes, nature, and portraits were some of the themes that artists chose during this time. The poster boy of the art world M.F. Husain rocked at the age of 88 years. These artists gave a completely new meaning to Indian art in the following years. As artists started to express themselves, art galleries were needed to display their works. Art galleries appeared in Delhi and Mumbai only in the post sixties and the face of Indian Art changed with times.

**Indian Art Today**

Once the government recognized the need to give the new breed of artists a solid platform the colors on the canvas have inspired and encouraged talent from all over the country. Today many artists are producing great works of art and exhibiting them abroad. Most Indian paintings are finding buyers in other countries. The uniqueness of Indian Art still lies in its rich cultural heritage. The art mart in India has become global and like other sectors it has become an economically a viable proposition for business. Some places in the world, Indian painting are bought and sold at an auction and at an unheard price. The paintbrush has now become as powerful as the pen to express feelings of Indian artists.

Indian paintings historically revolved around the religious deities and kings. Indian art is a collective term for several different schools of art that existed in the Indian subcontinent. The paintings varied from large frescoes of Ellora to the intricate Mughal
miniature paintings to the metal embellished works from the Tanjore school. The paintings from the Gandhar-Taxila are influenced by the Persian works in the west. The eastern style of painting was mostly developed around the Nalanda school of art. The works are mostly inspired by various scenes from Indian mythology.

It was then Jamini Roy who bought into Indian painting an element of vigour, by studying folk art forms and Amrita Sher-Gil who captured the modern western spirit of rebellion against academicism by the use of free composition, simplification, and a faith in the artist's instinctual revolt against mere naturalism. Her discovery of this liberation from "accepted norms" or "styles" led to a great movement among Indian artists to free themselves from all shackles of "models" and of representational painting. Most of them found inspiration in the newly won freedom of western artists, and by 1950 this process of Indian liberation resulted in a bold discarding of "models". Many experimented with original styles of their own.

**Contemporary Art**

Indian contemporary art has won accolades from whole world. There is incredible diversity, poignancy and creativity found in Indian art. Indian contemporary art has won accolades from whole world. There is incredible diversity, poignancy and creativity found in Indian art. That the contemporary art has been made during the last 40 years, usually by an artist who is still alive and actively making art. Contemporary art is exhibited by commercial contemporary art galleries, private collectors, corporations, publicly funded arts organizations, contemporary art museums or by artists themselves in

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[www.craftsindia.com](http://www.craftsindia.com)
artist-run spaces. Contemporary artists are supported by grants, awards and prizes as well as by direct sales of their work. This form of art is of the post 1960-modernist period. It was this period of the late 1900s which saw major socio-economic, cultural, political and also educational changes the world over, which undoubtedly influenced art, amongst many other productive fields. The rigidity in defining types of art was lost to a large extent during this time and this is what came to define contemporary art. Contemporary art deals with issues directly related to its present day world.

Contemporary artists chose to highlight the idea or impulse behind their work rather than to concentrate on the medium or method used. They unlike earlier artists were not deterred by the thought of using various media and techniques in combination. Open to experimentation, these people pioneered the concept of setting their audience thinking about the subject as the most important aim of the artwork. Topics like racism, global warming, cloning and biotechnology, international politics, human rights, spirituality and economics are reflected in the work of contemporary artists. The advent of contemporary art marked the breaking of shackles by artists to move from the conventional inclination towards aesthetic beauty and purity to address subjects such as politics, which affect the layman. This is what brought the common man closer to the artist.

**Contemporary Indian painting**

Thirty years ago there were two main styles of painting in India: (1) the academic-realist manner taught in the Government art schools, and (2) the "Bengali Renaissance" movement, started by Abanindranath Tagore, a nationalist movement in which Mughal miniature painting style, combined with Far Eastern water-colour techniques tried to capture some "oriental" spirit by turning to illustration work.
Indian art has its roots in myriad folk styles and traditions and has also fed on the social and political ethos of not only India but also of the world. The contemporary stream of Indian consciousness is, in fact, a unified expression of the individual creative energies of various Indian artists. In this chapter an attempt has been made to draw vignettes of the contemporary heritage of Indian painting and profile of the personal journey of contemporary Indian artists.

Indian art of the early 17th century comprised of miniature court paintings, which reached its zenith during the Mughal Empire. However, with the advent of the East India Company, European form of art was introduced. This resulted in an art form that was a combination of the European art styles and the folk art of India.

Raja Ravi Verma's art is a reflection of this hybrid style. Ravi Verma was in fact, the first Indian artist to apply the traditions of western academic realism to the representations of Indian literature and mythology. Raja Ravi Verma (1848-1906) was born in Kilimanoor, a small fiefdom in modern Kerala. Although his paintings had a distinct Indianness in terms of costume, his sensual and diaphanously clad women with the delicate brushwork bespoke of European Renaissance style. 'Nair Lady adorning her Hair' and 'The lady with the Lamp' are perhaps his best works.

But artists chafing under foreign dominion took recourse to the creation of an independent entity or 'Swadeshi'. This concept of 'Swadeshi' emerged in the form of a revival of art with its roots in the Indian tradition.

Nand Lal Bose was one such proponent of the traditional art form. Nand Lal Bose (1882-1966) taught at the Indian School of oriental Art and was the principal at Kala
Bhavan, Shantiniketan. Influenced by the Tagore family (Abhanindara Nath Tagore, Rabindra Nath Tagore) and the murals of Ajanta, his classic works include scenes from Indian mythology, life of women and village life.

Since time immemorial India has been the cradle of a number of veteran artists. Besides the vivid cultural differences, India's exceptional geographical position has played significant role in evolution and diversification of the Indian art. Contemporary artists have highlighted the various social and political issues. The contemporary Indian art has been evolved by breaking the shackles of the various other types of arts. It is very flexible and has given space to some modern arts as well. It is mainly influenced by our day to day life styles, etc. The contemporary art has contributed a lot in projecting various flaws of the society. Chapter 1 of the thesis deals with the appraisal of the Indian contemporary women artists in general and rest of the chapters deal with the work and style of Arpana Caur and Anjolie Ela Menon, the most eminent and charismatic women contemporary artists who for their immense contribution to Indian art are known globally.
CONTEMPORARY WOMEN ARTISTS
CHAPTER 1
CHAPTER 1

CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS TO INDIAN ART

There is a series of veteran female contemporary artist in India. It becomes a tedious job to discuss and compare the work and style of all female contemporary artists. There are some celebrated female artists which have been addressed here because of their famous and published work style of national and international repute. These female artists have contributed significantly in raising the standards of Indian contemporary art to newer heights. No artists can be ranked as number one or two because all are well experienced and very famous. Here in this chapter the artists have been categorized as per their seniority.

Amrita Shergil

Amrita Shergil was immensely talented and had created a huge volume of art works by the time she was only 28. Her works show colourful women drawn in realist and impressionist styles sometimes with erotic overtones. She was the daughter of Sardar Umrao Singh Shergil and Antoinette, a Hungarian lady endowed with considerable artistic talent. She was born in Budapest in 1913, and spent

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7Talent, Tragedy and Myth of Amrita Shergil, Rupika Chawla pp. 37-44 In: Indian Art an Overview edited by Gayatri Sinha
the formative years of her life in Europe. She dabbled in paint from her early childhood. Her intelligent mother detected the talent latent in her, and encouraged her to paint. She took her to Italy and Paris, the hotbeds of artistic activity and the birthplace of many historic art movements in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Amrita had the good fortune of studying at the best art school at Paris, the Ecole des Beaux Arts, under the competent guidance of great masters. Besides, living in Paris, she had the added advantage of visiting art galleries, museums, salons, etc. She studied the works of contemporary and ancient master painters in the original.

Amrita's work done during her stay in Europe till 1934 was largely academic, consisting of still-life, nude studies and portraits. Her genius was to flower only after her return to her fatherland, India. She came here not as a foreigner attracted by the 'picturesque' India and the exotic sights, she came here as an Indian with feelings and spirit, and with a mind to make this land her home. Despite her training in western art, she had complete awareness of the India's artistic traditions and had a deep respect for this. She has painted the dark side of the mankind. In such paintings she has portrayed gloomy faces on her canvas. When she set foot on Indian soil for the first time in November 1934, she was haunted by the faces of the unhappy and dejected, poor and starving Indians whom she saw first around Simla, then in the South and finally in Punjab, where she was to spend the last days of her life. After settling down in Simla in early 1935, she took an important decision of interpreting "the life of Indians, particularly the poor, pictorially." This, she did with her own new technique which was not technically Indian, in the traditional sense of the word. These words indicate that she had

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a clear idea of what she has to accomplish in the near future. She has laid the foundation of modern Indian art. Then began the second and last phase of her artistic career (in 1938) that ended with her death in 1941.

Leela Mukherjee

Leela Mukherjee was born in 1916 in Hyderabad. She studied the Fine Arts in 'Kala Bhawan' at Shantiniketan. She carved wood and copper for her paintings. She has carved the structure of women in a very artistic manner on wood for most of her paintings. From 1957, 58, 70, 76 and 82, she participated in a number of solo exhibitions. In the year 1979, she participated in Silver Jubilee Exhibition at Lalit Kala Academy and Graphic Academy in Garhi in 1983.

Jaya Appaswamy

Without remembering the contributions of Jaya Appaswamy as contemporary women artist of India, our study on Indian Contemporary Arts not only remains incomplete but will be lifeless. She is known as an artist and a writer as well. She was born in 1818 in Madras. She got her primary education from Vidyodaya Girls High School. She earned her Bachelors in Natural Science and secured first position. During 1945, she joined Kala Bhawan at Shnatiniketan, in Viswabharati and got a Diploma in Lalit Kala under the guidance of Nand Lal Bose. She was honoured to fly for Beijing, China as a Research Scholar by the Government of India. Initially her work style was oil painting which later changed to landscape paintings. She participated in approximately 30 solo exhibitions at National and International level. She played an important role in uplifting the status of Arts. She was an Editor of Lalit Kala Academy. Appaswamy was one of the founder
members of Shilpi Chakra and secretary of the Lalit Kala Akademi. Her paintings are to be found in the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art and at the Lalit Kala Akademi. Therefore, her contribution as an Indian contemporary Artist will always remain exemplary.

**Damyanti Chawla**

Damyanti was born in 1920. She was the daughter of a leading surgeon and the cousin of the trade-unionist and leftist, Ramesh Chandra. But her mentor was none other than the grand old man of Indian art, Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal. She became her student after graduating in 1938. In 1942, she got her diploma from the Lahore School of Fine Arts and launched a series of figurative works in which the influence of both Sanyal and the Oriental traditions of painting is evident. Typically she was a landscape artist. This was the art of the national movement, looking East to China and Japan, as well as to Europe. Damyanti emerged as a powerful water-colourist and oil painter. In 1960, widowed and as a mother of two children she went to the State School at London and successfully completed a four-year diploma course and took to mural painting at the Hammersmith College of Art and the Central school of Arts and Crafts, London, between 1969-71. She worked in Paris. From the late 1960, she painted her best. With the passing away of Damyanti Chawla, we find an important era of our art coming to a close. She died at her home in Delhi painting till the very end. Her dedication to art was exemplary. A student of Bhabhesh Sanyal in Lahore, she was a neighbour of Amrita Shergil. And indeed, Lahore of the 1930s and 1940s had an ambience like few other places in India. Damyanti was a true representative of it. Lahore of her time was a curious blend of horsey and
hunting types with modern and even avant-garde professionals sharing the limelight with strong-willed nationalist and lefties revolutionaries.

**Pilloo R. Pochkhanawala**

She was born in 1923 in Mumbai. She studied the art of sculpturing the kernel under the guidance of N.G. Pansore. She had firm belief that the time of traditional paintings has faded. She gave a new world to personal imaginations. She has secured an eminent place as a sculpture painter. She made the exhibition of her sculptures in Bolegrade, Bangkok and Tokyo in 1967. Her work has been placed in various National as well as International museums.

**Arpita Sing**

 Born in 1937 in West Bengal, Arpita Singh studied at School of Art, Delhi, and the Delhi Polytechnic, 1954-59. Since the beginning of her career Arpita has been assiduously learning the craft of painting Her native paintings are unlabored particularly piquant in their comments on the 'space' of women and the girl child in the society, and on the atrophied sensibilities of modern man vis-à-vis the growing violence and social injustice. Arpita Singh's paintings should be viewed from a woman's perspective. In her paintings the inner world of a woman, her home and life around her, looms large, using a thick textured surface, especially for her oil on canvas paintings, Arpita creates an element of tension, which she says, is a reflection of life around her and creates a world which is partly naive and partly real. She uses simple objects like telephones, aeroplanes, guns, bunches of flowers as icons of contemporary
life. She has shown her work in India and abroad several times. Her works are in permanent collections in Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, Chandigarh Museum, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal and Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Kishori Kaul

Kishori Kaul was born in Srinagar in 1939. Her father was a Kashmiri Pundit of unorthodox views serving in the Government. She studied in Annie Besant School, Srinagar. The year 1953 was a year of great significance for her. She fell ill with tuberculosis and while she lay tossing between hope and disappointment, her grandfather, Narayan Muratgar, a celebrated painter of the late 19th century, placed before her brush, colours and paper and thereby set the ball of aesthetic sensibility rolling in her mind. No doubt, Kishori already had a penchant for painting but now she got so engrossed in artistic work that she forgot about her surroundings full of sorrows and sufferings with the result that she got cured of her dreaded disease and at the same time, emerged as a great painter. It was a marvelous occupational therapy for her which brought a cataclysmic change in her life and character.

Her first teacher was Som Nath Bhat and then she joined the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Baroda in 1959. Soon her artistic excellence was recognised and she got awards and prizes galore. She received 'Bombay Art Society Award' and 'Bombay State Award' (Poona). She also received 'Gujarat State Exhibition' (Surat) Award. in 1963 she received Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree with distinction and then in 1966 she earned her

There are three main characteristics in Kishori's paintings. One, the pictures of her childhood in Srinagar are etched in her mind and then by a magical trick she associates the present with the past images. She appears to have a mental camera in which are reflected and kept secure the images of her earlier life. She lived her earlier life in Srinagar, Her house was situated on the bank of the river Jhelum and she loved to watch the boats floating on the surface of the water. She also enjoys the quarrels of the families of the boatmen. She had her deaf aunt who was quite eloquent in narrating tales of wonder.

The fountainhead of her art lies in her childhood experiences and the images she preserved in her mind. Her mother's guidance and criticism in the beginning also helped
her to fashion her work. Above all, Nature was her great teacher. In her painting Kishori stands like a rock refusing to be carried away by the tides of cheap commercial art.

If we see her another painting, "Still Life with Blue Vase, 1993" we find that her painting reveals a whole gamut of colours in many nuances and shades. This also confirms that Nature is the vast reservoir of colour and beauty which provides her the inspiration. Her quest has been to capture the evasive mystery of colour that she finds in the play of light on the natural objects. Her landscapes, though instinctively belong to Kashmir, yet they go beyond the topography of Kashmir and the contemplation of the varying moods of nature. When we see Kishori's other paintings like, 'Lotus Lake' 'Green Fields', 'Sunset', 'Autumn' 'Still Life with Samovar', we find that she is a product of the social milieu and the environs of Kashmir determine her basic consciousness. The evolution of varieties of landscape form created out of soft line and delightful colour constitutes the essence of her art. She has an extraordinary talent for colouring. It may safely be insisted that her imagination had its roots in the observation of Nature and her creations belong to a world never completely divorced from reality. Recently she has tried her hand on portraiture, which is free from any semblance of imitations.

Anjolie Ela Menon

In contemporary India, there are many women painters who are drawing a lot of attention. The most well known among them is Anjolie Ela Menon. Her style infuses realistic elements with the surrealist and abstract. She was born in 1940 in West Bengal. In a very age of 17 years, she entered in the field of
arts. She is a triumphant painter of the old generation, yet she does not like to be acknowledged as a senior artist. She believes that some male artists are envious of the success of female artists. During her 80 decades she painted various nude paintings for which she says that: I paint the female body as I am most familiar with it. It is my territory. It is not as glamorous for me as it is for men. For women it is a source of pleasure and pain. Men can not understand the fear associated with body. For them night can be beautiful but for a woman it is scary if she is alone and if somebody approaches her in the darkness, she feels insecure.

Anjolie is the first artist who used the computer aided paintings. Glass painting was a separate phase of her life. Now it has been popularized as a revolution and everybody wants to be the part of this revolution.

**Shobha Brutta**

Shobha Brutta is an important artist among the celebrated contemporary female artists. She was born in New Delhi in 1943. She earned the Diploma in Lalit Kala from Delhi School of Arts in 1964. She started her solo exhibition since 1965 and participated in national exhibitions. Ministry of Education awarded her the Sahitya Kala Award. Her paintings have been kept as an important collection at private and national levels. She has worked for more than a decade in association with various young female artists which is professionally related to the Triveni Kala Sangam. She worked in black and white, therefore, her contribution in contemporary Indian art would remain immemorial.

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**Anupam Sood**

She has a separate place among the contemporary women artists of India. She was born in 1944 in Hoshiarpur. She was a National Awardee of the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi. She has a complete technical know how of the work. Her contribution for the upliftment of Arts can never be ignored. She will always be given great respect for her valuable contribution. She got trained as a professional painter from the Banasthali Art Institute, Rajasthan and College of Art, Lucknow. Her work reflects women as a subject. She has chosen hues of red, orange and light green in her paintings to express the purpose. She participated in various group exhibitions at Lucknow, New Delhi, Kolkata, London and Yugoslavia in the year 1965. She had her solo exhibitions at Delhi in 1969. She participated in Third Beenale World Graphic, London in 1980. She was awarded for Sanskriti Puruskar, at New Delhi. She participated in an International Print Beenale, Yugoslavia in 1981.

**Prabha Shah**

Prabha Shah was born in 1947 in Jodhpur city of Rajasthan. Being a child she was given all the comfort and luxury one could think off. She doesn’t have anything to do at all and this made her close to depression. So, her father thought that her energies need to be chanalized in a proper direction and that was the time when people thought that painting would be a right medium for her to express her feelings and convey her notion to the entire world.
Prabha Shah does not prefer the dearth of figuration which is so evident in most of the Indian paintings. She makes such an incredible impact on the canvas that it sure leaves a mark on the viewer’s heart. Her masterful tactic of painting evokes the unmatched feelings of hope in humans. The thick conceptualization in her paintings often seems like a prism through which figures can be distinguished. She relocates her observations onto the canvas with such naturalness and high spirit that it enhances her subject matter. Her works are facsimiles of scenes that have imprinted themselves on her mind during her living in Rajasthan.

In 1962, she was awarded “Common Wealth Society Award”. At the age of 15, getting such a prestigious award made her parents realize that she should take painting as her profession and not just a hobby. Her eyes were her foremost inspiration because that has empowered her with the strength to establish her existence among the rest. Apart from that whatever she sees becomes her inspiration. “She says that Our Earth itself has so much in stock to inspire us that we don’t require any further variant”.

Though her paintings depict tradition but also have an element of modernity in it. Her paintings are a reflection of herself. She basically uses oil colors and natural images to reveal her emotions on canvas. Few artworks of Krishan Khanna and R. Broota have influenced her a lot. Her very new creation is a river of hope. It is an oil painting on a 34” x 46” canvas. She is already associated with an art gallery, “Triveni Kala Sangam”, but for this one she has not yet decided any specific name and place for its display. She has won so many Awards like “Yuva ratna award”1985,” International women’s year award”1975 and has also been honored by “Aaj”. She got her first recognition and
appraisal when she was awarded from the “Common Wealth Society” which is the most prestigious award of her lifetime.

**Latika Katt**

Latika Katt is not in dearth of recognition in the Art Academy. She occupies a prestigious place in the field of arts. She was born in 1948 in Varanasi. She acquired her primary education from Dehradoon and got expertise in Fine arts from Banaras Hindu University. She had her solo exhibition of sculpture in Bombay in 1975 and at Kolkata in 1977. From 1967 to 1977 she has participated in numerous group exhibitions. Lalita currently heads the Department of Fine Arts & Art Education at Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi. She had solo and joint exhibitions in India and abroad and is recognized as one of India’s leading artists. Latika studied art in India and abroad and has also exhibited in India and many other countries. Honoured and awarded by the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1980 and the Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, Katt has travelled across the world on account of her art camps, talks and symposia. Not only has she been a part of the administration of premier art and culture institutes, she also has a long teaching career. Her work features in collections in the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai and the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, among others. She has deeply studied the carved painting in metal. She received a National Award from Lalit Kala Academy and was elected as a General Council of Lalit Kala Academy in 1980. She also participated in the ‘Modern Art Museum’ in Paris and ‘Kakoora Art Museum’ in Japan. She was appointed as a lecturer of Model Art at Banaras Hindu University and participated in Trenal India at New Delhi in 1982. She practiced her art on copper. She has expressed the imaginary art mostly. She lives and works in Delhi. The sculpture strategy in the 'Decay and Growth' series of her
works deals with mainly with the decay of mass correlating the paradoxical position. Abstraction from matter leads into matter. Latika's mode of reaching out to touching and modeling involves the pushing, digging, stretching scribbling and anything through which she can leave a mark of her identity. The intention of the artist is to create a multidimensional, imaginative world that goes far beyond the obvious. Her contribution in the field of Fine Arts deserves big appreciation.

Arpana Caur

Arpana Caur was born in Delhi in 1954. She grew up in an environment that was rich in art and music. Her mother was an award winning novelist, whose influence resonates in Arpana's very essence. As a self-taught painter, Arpana has drawn inspiration from her mother's writings, Punjabi folk literature, the Pahari miniature tradition and Indian folk-art motifs. Arpana attended Delhi University and graduated in 1961 with MA in Literature. Her art is a direct reflection of her personal experiences, inspired by local and world events. Over the years, her main focus has centered on Indian women, and capturing the essence of their day to day activities inspired by social, cultural and spiritual themes. Now, at the age of 51, she has become a well known and much celebrated artist around the world. For the last three decades her exhibitions have been shown in Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, London, Cardiff, Amsterdam, New York, Berlin and Munich. She has participated in group shows in Japan, USA,

\textsuperscript{10}\textit{Folk and Travel Arts based on Collection of Arpana Fine Arts Museum. The Magic Makers. P.C. Jain forwarded by Ajeet Caur. Published by Academy of Fine Arts and Literature.}
Algiers', Singapore, Australia, Austria, Iraq, Cuba, USSR and Germany. Reviews of her work have appeared in Time and again in Indian Press and TV and in the Guardian, New York Times, International Herald Tribune, Svanska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Die Welt etc., BBC and Star TV have made documentary films on her in the 1980's apart from a documentary by Sidharth Tagore. For the past 5 years, three of her works including 'Nanak' and '1984' have been on display at the Sikh Art Gallery in the Smithsonian, Washington DC. She had done murals from 1981 to 2005 in India and in Hamburg, all of them are noncommercial and have been made as a commitment to Public Art.

CHAPTER 2
Indian society and culture is so varied that sometimes it becomes unbelievable that we belong to the same country. On the basis of religious background also we are living in a hard social sphere. Our male dominated society is very ignorant towards the status of women which makes the condition more complex\(^{12}\). In such harsh conditions, if a woman makes her self identity, is a big thing. Everybody does not have the courage to accomplish such an impossible task. Such a great personality has been mentioned here and that great personality is Mrs. Arpana Caur. Here in this chapter her life sketch has been described.

Arpana Caur was born in 1954 in Delhi in a cultured Sikh family who hails from Lahore and got established in Patel Nagar at Delhi after the partition. Her father Late Shri Rajendra Sing Jee passed away when she was just three years old. Arpana grew up in an environment that was rich in art and music. Arpana's mother is an award winning novelist, whose influence resonates in Arpana's very essence. Her mother didn't give her

the name. She gave her all freedom, even the freedom to choose her name and religion since the very beginning. Till the age of fifteen Arpana Caur had no name because her mother wanted her to choose the name and religion for her. At the time of admission for her high school when she had to fill her name and religion she named herself as Arpana and embraced Sikhism as the religion of her mother. Whatever she is today is because of her mother. Arpana Caur had the inclination towards painting since the age of three years. She used to paint on the wall using the coal pencils but her mother never scolded her for defacing the wall rather she encouraged her and brought some papers, colours and pencils for drawing so that her artistic nature could come out. She showed her the way of success and always encouraged her. Because of encouragement from her mother Arpana Caur became a famous artist. When her father died in her very childhood she took the colours and brush in order to get rid of the loneliness and started painting on the canvas and making her own world which not only overcame her emptiness but also helped the art lovers all over the world. Her goal was not to become an artist rather she wanted to become a teacher of literature like her mother. For providing her the quality education her mother used to work hard for the earning. Her mother was a school teacher and used to teach Punjabi literature. As a Punjabi literature writer she was getting the fame rapidly and in this field she was not in dearth of the popularity. Inspite of her very busy schedule and the hardships, she was very keen towards the work of Arpana Caur. Although she was not very strong financially, yet she never let it to be felt by Arpana. She always purchased quality paints and canvas for Arpana. A self-taught painter, Arpana has drawn inspiration from her mother's writings, Punjabi folk literature, the Pahari miniature

tradition and Indian folk-art motifs. Arpana attended Delhi University and graduated in 1961 with MA in Literature. For this reason she did not prefer to get educate in the field of fine arts. Later she decided to pursue her education in fine arts and hence went to London to join St. Mortin School to pursue one year advance course in Fine Arts but she could not concentrate in the course and came back to her country within one month.

There is a very interesting story she narrates about her entry in the world of fine arts.

“She says that I still remember the days when I participated in an exhibition organized by M.F. Hussain for the young artists. I sent my six painting for that show and was quite surprised to know that M.F. Hussain has accepted all the six paintings for the exhibition. I got stunned by viewing the paintings of that exhibition. I also got appreciation for my paintings in that exhibition and four of my paintings were sold immediately and in this way I entered in the world of fine arts.”

Although her entry as an artist was unintentional, she didn’t become the artist in a flick of a second. There is long phase of struggle in her life. Her husband Harinder Singh also has an inclination towards paintings and is a good cartoonist as well. He gives full support to Arpana Caur. Arpana Caur likes Kabeer, Sufi songs, love myth of Soni Mahiwal and the Arawali mountains. Above all being an artist she has the appreciation for the paintings done by other artists. This indicates the quality of her character that she has an immense respect for the struggle and work of others also. Struggle is not a new word for Arpana Caur. She is quite familiar with this. She has seen her mother’s struggling for her existence in this male dominated society. Her art is a direct reflection of her personal experiences, inspired by local and world events. Over the years,

Limesh Verma, Dainik Bhasker, January 10, 1999;
Based on an interview with Arpana Caur.
her main focus has centered on Indian women, and capturing the essence of their day to day activities influenced by social, cultural and spiritual themes. Arpana Caur knows the demand of the market for paintings of women.

She never has used women on her canvas for the customers because for them woman is just a material of entertainment. She has painted woman on her canvas in some special reference. Her canvas includes mountains, flower valley, nature's scene and the dancing men not because of the reasons that these things are alluring to the eyes of the viewer's but because of the fact that she has seen the human nature with her eyes and has tried to identify the reality of the society.\textsuperscript{12}

During the year 1980-81 her painting series 'Sheltered Women' (Fig. 139) 'Starlet Room' and 'Bazaar' etc. have depicted several aspects of a common Indian woman. Her artistic talent was recognized in the year 1983. The Hindu-Sikh riots of 1984 become a big torment for her and she painted the pains and sufferings of these riot victims on her canvas (Fig. 21) in such a way that the people realized this pain in their heart. Whosoever viewed her art galleries 'World Goes On' (Fig. 142), 'After the Massacre' (Fig. 117), 'Where All Flowers Gone' (Fig. 107) and 'Resilient Green' (Fig. 146) has understood that she has given a special corner for the sufferings of a common man in her paintings. She herself says: "I want my paintings to be dedicated for common man and the common man should have the access for these paintings which are dedicated to him.\textsuperscript{5} She feels disheartened that her paintings have been limited to the metropolitan cities only but also feels that an artist has certain limitations as well. It is not possible to organize the exhibition in small cities without any financial assistance. Moreover, it is not possible

\textsuperscript{12} Umesh Verma, Dainik Bhasker, January 10, 1999
with the security point of view also. Some people say that the paintings of Arpana Caur are beyond understanding. We can see an eccentric use of colours in her paintings. On observing her paintings keenly, it makes a clear picture of the society in our mind. These figures not only talk about the present, they also tell us where we have gone astray. They also remind us of our lacking in the social sphere.

She agrees that women occupy the prominent place in her work. The women shown in her paintings seem to be strong and, homely and social. There is no hint of sexuality. Women and nature are both symbiotically tied up in a circle. She believes women represent the latent force which has not been explored properly even today. They can counter the challenges of industrialization and extreme urbanization. Inherently, they have a power to renew and regenerate. Arpana’s source of inspiration is different things at different times. She has been greatly influenced by her mother, who nurtured her talent. She brought her up as a single parent, and she still shelters her whenever she needs her. Arpana Caur has also been influenced by Punjabi literature: that of Krishna Sobti, Amrita Pritam and her own mother's works. In some of her work, she has tried to capture contemporary Indian society. Like 'In Vrindavan' series which had paintings of the Vrindavan widows and the 'World Goes On' series which she did after the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi. She tries to see that her work is rooted in contemporary India. But she has also used folk art motifs in some of her work like Warli (folk art form of Maharashtra) motifs of harvest and the Godhana paintings of tribals from Madhubani in Bihar.

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to her heart i.e. the plight of women in India. All her paintings in some way or the other have figuratively narrated the story of Indian women—past and present. They are about human tragedies, emotions and traumatic experiences of life. She has always strongly emphasized humanism. Her humanistic depiction of Sikh Riots earned her much critical acclaim. She is such a good artist who unhesitantly expresses her feelings and views on canvas, and has not even an iota of the fear in choosing the themes of her paintings. She freely expresses her views on canvas. Her various paintings give stability to her expressions. For example the Rape of Maya Tyagi in police custody at Meerut, the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in which a woman was murdered by torture and the bald headed widows of Vrindavan etc. All these paintings can be easily seen in various Indian museums and in drawing rooms which indicates that with the developing lifestyle the reality of life have also sneaked into our mind easily.

Arpana Caur's art has evolved along the path that emerged out of the nationalist movement: a blend of modern and folk art. We have the examples like, the Haripura panels of Nandalal Bose, the folk-inspired works of Jamini Roy, and works of M.F. Husain that take up the strong narrative tradition of our folk-scrolls and compress it into a single image or a series. In one of her paintings we can see collaboration between a folk artist, Lakshmi Narayan Pandey, and the modern painter, Arpana Caur, both of whose signatures appear on works they have jointly created.

Arpana Caur's art always had a radical content. Starting with images of the loneliness of the creative person and that of a musician playing around the empty chair, she really came into her own works portraying the indifference of a consumerist society to what goes on around it, with kite-flying figures watching others drown (Fig. 21). These
were done after the Delhi riots of 1984. The trauma of 1984 which was inexplicable and barbaric, gave greater depth to Arpana’s creativity. After that she painted the 'Threat' series, of trigger-happy policemen aiming guns at innocent women. Women again are the subject of the series on the 'Widows of Vrindavan', (Fig. 5, 144) in which we get serial images influenced by Pahari miniatures. These develop an optical character in later works of the 'Body is Just a Garment' (Fig. 124, 139) series, often evolving into graffiti in works with industrial and street imagery.

It is this evolution that has allowed Caur to collaborate with the repetitive and graffiti-like images of the traditional tattooists of Bihar, Godhna art, naturally (Fig. 141). It is something that was emerging in her expression anyway. So the collaboration between the folk artist and the modern is something that has been evolved by the modern that integrates the traditional. But the traditional is not just appropriated. Pandey actually began to evolve images, like the tree-woman, from Caur's imagery. Also, the need to keep certain spaces empty allows the traditional artist to evolve an understanding of negative space as part of a whole composition, something folk art does not apply itself to today, when it is mostly design-oriented.

At the same time, like the Worli tribal people Godavari Parulekar writes of the folk artists in the exhibition are integrated not only with historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagat Singh but also with global events like the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima by the United States. At the same time, they confront their own humanity as the subject of artistic expression, which was essentially reduced to reproducing motifs of gods, plants and animals.
For Arpana Caur, the collaboration represents reforging links with the traditional base of our artistic expression, the folk art of the peasantry, who formed the backbone of the resistance to colonial rule. This base has become increasingly tenuous with a consumerist society emerging in India's urban areas, looking increasingly towards Western Europe and the U.S. This would have created a serious break with the existing artistic tradition and would have resulted in totally isolating those benefiting from economic and social progress from those who only pay for it. With even this tenuous link gone, India of the nationalist movement, of Five-Year Plans, of concern for mass education and rural development would effectively be overtaken by two India's unconcerned with each other. So, contemporary Indian art, particularly the art of Arpana Caur, reminds us that "Two India's" are a dangerous mental construct in a situation where a small minority siphons off the wealth of the vast majority and squanders it on conspicuous consumption, something the "Two India's" model hides effectively.

There is only one India, where the industrial and the agrarian coexist, where both Bhagat Singh and Mahatma Gandhi have their relevance, where women are worshipped as Goddess/devis but are put to the hardest labour in a male-dominated society. The artist brings these dualities together to remind us that they are part of one reality and it is that reality that requires mending.

Like various other celebrated painters, Arpana Caur neither became stagnant nor did she opt to earn money from her paintings. She never remained workless. Her paintings like a musician playing around an empty chair, young woman looking towards her burning house, mother and daughter, bald musician, heavy bearded tailor etc. all these themes have set new examples. In her painting of 1994-95, she has sketched Bombay on
her canvas. In the decades of 90 Arpana has used some metallic instrument, magnifying glass, wood, metal rods and plastic toys etc. and proved that an artist can use anything to express his art. Her emergence in the field of fine arts is nearly 25-30 years old for Delhi and become an important part of the Delhites. She has got so many awards for the fine arts. In 1985 she was awarded an Annual IFAX award. In 1984-85 she was awarded a Garhi Research Grant of Lalit Kala Academy, Commendation certificates, and was awarded a Gold Medal for the exhibition in Sixth Triannual India (1986). Recently, she has made a detailed study of social harassment, particularly for women and has made these as a theme of her paintings. Embroidery is an inner art of women. A beautiful bed sheet is being embroidered from one side and being cut with a scissor on another side (Fig 129).

In such paintings she has presented scissor in different themes and women as a nature. In these pictures Arpana Caur wants to spread the message that nature makes us and devastates us as well (Fig. 143). This way the life cycle goes on. Her painter soul is well familiar with the empty side of the culture which is now exposing the inhuman activities of the Bihar city. In the opening ceremony of a famous exhibition Documenta in Staff Weshale, Cassale, Germany, Arpana painted her painting ‘Tears of Hiroshima’ (Fig. 146) on a 20 ft wall. The painting depicts the horror of Hiroshima and has been painted using charcaol and acrylic colours. This is showing the inhumane use of the Atomic Power. In her painting ‘Tree of suffering, Tree of life and Tree of enlightment’ (Fig. 148) she has shown three pine trees in turmeric colour. In the southern end of the painting, Budha is lying in a posture of dead. She has illustrated three forms of the

humanity; one is the 'Tree of suffering' other one is 'Tree of Life' and the third one is 'Tree of Enlightenment'. The painting depicts the hurdles in the way of our success and appears to be a silent warning. She also has a good sense of humour which generally does not appear. This can be exemplified with an electric plug in her paintings. In some of her paintings she has showed the connection of this electric plug to the God (Fig. 114, 115). Artistically too, this process creates an environment with many possibilities. The narrative, motif and intelligibility enter our contemporary artistic expression, while the easy-to-carry scroll or fold-up folio forms also become part of it. As for folk art, it relearns its capacity to narrate historical events and express an opinion on them.

More than that, with the emergence of installation art with a folk element in it, its visual expression is expanded considerably, being freed of the ritual significance of shrine assemblages, like those at the foot of banyan trees. It has entered a new world in which art is art and gets aesthetic appreciation that is quite different from the reverence attached to ritual constructions. Art is to be felt, not valued.

This is very important to note as various forms of post-modernism have pushed back the origins of modernism deeper and deeper into our past. A similarity of forms does not indicate that their content and function are the same. Very often, their evolution is from diametrically opposed poles. If modern art appropriates a folk motif or elements of design from our rural artistic expression, it retains its significance as an original way of putting across an artist's view of life, the world and events. For folk art, on the other hand, the same process represents a radical break from a past of ritual standardization of imagery and its present relegation to the decorative. If modern art gains motifs, folk art

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gains much more in terms of breaking the traditional and commercial boundaries that have held it down so long. Arpana Caur, in her recent exhibition, 'Between Dualities' which has been displayed at Delhi's Academy of Literature and Fine Art and the Cymroza Gallery in Mumbai, serves as a link between the growth figures and actual poverty, progress and backwardness, innovation and stagnation that characterize two faces of the same reality. Her art highlights their inter-connectedness and forces one to assess them as two sides of the same coin and to question them. That, indeed, is one function of art in the contemporary context that is bound to grow in importance in the next century.

Arpana Caur's paintings seem to be a study of colours. Her frequent use of vibrant and bright colors to depict melancholic scenes shows her maturity in handling colors. The other characteristic feature of her paintings is the "hollow eye"; the sufferings of her subjects are wonderfully projected through their eyes. Their hollowness says more than what words could ever express.

Arpana's paintings show her mystical temperament. Most of her paintings have a spiritual theme and draw inspirations from indigenous cult movements like the Bhakti culture. The songs of the mystic poet, Kabir and the Baul minstrels of Bengal find echo in Arpana's brilliantly colored canvases. Her paintings indeed preach the foremost philosophy of the bhakti leader's tolerance. Between 1975 and 1996, Arpana had 18 solo shows of her paintings, and participated in nine national and international exhibitions and

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15 'You' The Asian Age' 2000
art festivals, including the First Baghdad Biennale (1986), Algiers Biennale (1987), group shows at Saytama Museum and Glenbarra Museum, Japan, the exhibition 'Imagined City', Museum of Modern Art, Brasilia, Sao Paolo and Rio de Janeiro (1994-95). In 1995, she attended the 'Nature and Environment' workshop jointly organized by the Lalit Kala Akademi, Max Mueller Bhavan and Japan Foundation. In the same year, Arpana executed the commission for doing a large painting for the Hiroshima Museum's permanent collection, on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Nuclear Holocaust. Arpana Caur received the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society Award in 1985, Commendation Certificate at the Algiers Biennale, and Gold Medal at the Sixth Triennale-India'(1986), and was nominated by the Lalit Kala Akademi as the Eminent Artist (1990, '91, '92). Her works are in many private and public collections in India and abroad including National Gallery of Modern Art New Delhi, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Bradford Museum, U.K. Kunst Museum, Dusseldorf, Singapore Museum of Modern Art and the Ethnographic Museum, Stockholm.

2.2 WORK STYLE OF ARPANA CAUR

While studying creations of an artist the most important question which arises immediately in ones mind is the theme of paintings. The medium, colour or size of the painting for an artist is not that much important as that of the theme. Theme is the most important part of a painting which points to the fact that what the artist wants to show. Theme gives direction to a painting. Arpana Caur’s has a diverse theme for her paintings. There seems to be a great influence of folk art in her paintings. Still one can
see a clear picture of modern art in her paintings. A renowned art critic Shri Valdemer after viewing her solo exhibition in London in 1982 has said that the work style of Arpana Caur is a good combination of modernization with emotional theme. Another critic Suneel Chopra has mentioned in last year in Roli Publishers Pocket Book that Arpana always tries to make dual influence in her paintings. Men and women, day and night, land and water, in all these she has always tried to picturise two sides of the object.\(^7\)

She has highlighted the future in her paintings where the humanity faces the inhumanity, peace with war and pollution with the environment. Nowadays her themes also include the political issues.\(^8,9\) One of her paintings indicates to the demolition of Bamiyan Budha in Afghanistan. Arpana Caur’s painting deals with every aspect of the life.\(^10\) It gives place to the Lord Budha, Soni Mahiwal and the Indian Women. In her paintings we can frequently see a labourer, nature’s scene and the Sufism which mainly depicts Kabeer and Guru Nanak.\(^20\)

**Tree of Suffering, Tree of Life, Tree of Enlightenment**

Arpana Caur has made various paintings on the lifestyle of Gautum Budh. She has more emphasized the incidence of salvation of Gautum Budh. Budh Ji’s path was full of sufferings. In his old age he realized the actual form of dead and ailing people. Arpana Caur is painting Lord Budh and the Tree since the last one decade in her paintings. She

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\(^7\) Naam Roop A Tribute to the Divine pp. 68-69.
\(^8\) Vinita Faridi A Prayer to Guru Nanak on Canvas, Friday December 19, 2003, Hindustan Times.
has used an electric plug as an indicator to show the relation of Lord Budha with God to make this important event a bit humorous.

This is also among one of the best painting series of Arpana Caur. Arpana Ji is very much influenced by the Punjabi love stories. There are numerous love myths in Punjab e.g. Heer-Ranjha, Shashi-Punno and Soni-Mahiwal. In 1984 Arpana Caur started the series of paintings like ‘World Goes on’, since then she has more emphasized on water in her paintings because she loves painting water. Since water plays an important role in the love myth of Soni-Mahiwal, she decided to paint this love myth. The reason is that she compares Soni with every woman. She represents all of us because to get something, we have to sacrifice something. We cannot achieve anything without struggle and sacrifice. Arpana Caur considers Soni as a symbol of ‘Human Spirit’ because Soni doesn’t prefer to lie down near the shoe rather she jumps in the sea.\(^\text{11}\)

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\(^{11}\)Naam Roop A Tribute to the Divine by Arpana Caur and Shailendra Gulhati. Pp. 1-83
Another painting of Arpana Caur is based on the life of Guru Nanak in which he has seen in water. Once upon his life Nanak submerged him in water and then came out after sometime and spread the message that we all are single human beings and none of us are Hindu or Muslim\textsuperscript{21}.

\textbf{Fig. 3}

\textbf{Body is just a Garment}

She has painted 33 painting series on Kabeer Das which was displayed in Tagore Bhawan in 1993. This painting is named as ‘Body is just a Garment’. Kabeer Das Ji used to say that our body is like a cloth which is changed every time once we die. The soul remains the same. In this painting a different thing is that this has been painted by the folk artist Satyanarayan Pandey and Arpana Ji jointly.

\textbf{Fig. 139}

\textsuperscript{21}‘Nanak’ Arpana Caur The Passion with Time. Ernst W. Koelnspirger 2004 Translated by Dr. Ernst E. Fuchs.
This was the first report in Indian history that a single painting had the signature of two individual painters. The background for these paintings was made by Satyanarayan Pandey that was washed using cowdung. Since he is a Tattoo artist, he does so in order to match the colour of the background to our skin. After this he does the black and white tattoos. Lastly Arpana Caur made painted the sketch with varied colours and made traffic light or Budha on the paintings. These paintings were named as the ‘Between Dualities’ because of the reason that Budh Ji was also confused while making a decision. Arpana Ji has symbolized the traffic lights as trees in Delhi because the trees are being cut and frequently being replaced by the traffic lights.

**Widows of Vrindavan**

In Vrindavan, Arpana visited most of the religious places. In this painting an old lady with a vacant look dominating her face has been depicted. The paintings show the expression of helplessness.

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21 Arpana Caur The Passion with Time. Ernst W. Koelsperger 2004 Translated by Dr. Ernst E. Fuchs.
**Subjects of Arpana Caur’s Paintings**

Here a detailed analysis of the presence of human figures in Arpana Caur’s paintings has been done. Expression of the figures in these paintings has a determinant role. Most of her paintings contain these figures, particularly female figures. Arpana likes to make huge human figures. Most of her paintings are more than 4-5 ft in length. Some of them are 9-10 ft also. She has a unique style for her paintings and never copies others style in her paintings. Her figures in paintings are free of the body ratio. The reason for this is that she has not learned paintings professionally nor she joined some fine arts college. The figures in Arpana’s paintings symbolize her thoughts. All these figures look much beautiful. These human figures have been categorized as follows:

I. Paintings resembling the human figures

II. Figures depicting the real expressions

III. Figures depicting the formlessness

**I. Paintings resembling the human figures:** Such figures have very close resemblance with the human body. The facial structures for these figures are very similar to human figures. Here the description has been started with the women figures.

1. This female figure has a close resemblance to a woman. The body ratio of this figure is appropriate. The facial structures such as eyes, nose and ear of this figure seem to be very realistic. Eyes in this painting are big and look like a piscine eye. This facial expression shows that she is creator
of the world. With the exception of a hand, the ratio of rest of the body is quite appropriate. The right hand of this figure appears to be one and a half times larger than its real size. The extended length of this hand depicts the objective of the painting which is serving the purpose effectively. The fingers and toes of this female figure have been made as soft and flexible as rubber.

2. This figure was made in the year 1998 and has a close resemblance to the human body which can also be seen at the lower corner of a painting named 'Between Dualities'. The facial expressions for this painting are also very strong and clear. The toes of this figure are wavy giving the expression of flow of water. This is strongly depicting the expression power of the artist. In a number of Caur's paintings the woman's exaggeratedly extended hand, whether she is lifting, carrying or, particularly, embroidering that immediately strikes the onlooker.

3. This figure of Lord Budha also has a close resemblance to the human body. This figure is present in the painting of Tree of suffering, Tree of Enlightenment. The body ratio of this figure is very close to the body ratio of human body. In this figure two faces of Lord Budha have been shown. One face is looking like a face of common man before becoming saint and another face has been painted in blue once the knowledge is acquired. The previous face has been given a normal facial structure with a
melancholic expression on the face whereas the next face is showing an angelic expression. The hands have been made like a flowing wax. One hand is clear in painting but the other hand is in the back.

4. This figure is of Lord Budha which has been taken from the ‘Great Departure’ The body structure of this figure is very close to the human structure. Eyes are semi-lunar with an elongated nose and clear lips. The ears are comparatively larger than the actual size. The figure has a calm expression on its face. The waving hands symbolize departure from home. The body structure resembles to free flowing water on the earth.

![Fig. 9](image)

5. This horizontal figure shows Lord Budha which closely resembles to a human body. The body ratio is also appropriate. This figure has been depicted in the painting ‘Connection’ The facial expression of this figure shows that the figure is in concentration. Eyes look like as if the eyes are closed but they are open downwardly. Nose is straight with a large lip size. Ears are two times bigger in size.

![Fig. 10](image)

6. This figure is cited in the painting ‘Yogi’. This
also has a close resemblance to human figure. Its body ratio is also quite appropriate. This figure shows a saint standing with its one leg. Well shaped mustaches and the lips bear a calm expression. His body is lean and legs are flexible. One leg is bent backwardly and the other one is not straight rather slightly bent in the middle and does not show toes.\footnote{Arpana Caur The Passion with Time. Ernst W. Koechsperger 2004 Translated by Dr. Ernst E. Fuchs.}

![Fig. 11](image)

7. This figure has been quoted in ‘Time Image’. This is a figure of a lean old man. Arms, legs and neck are cylindrical. There seems to be a clear cut expression of sorrows on his face. The nostrils are equal to the length of the nose. He is holding a book in his hand. Fingers are straight. This human figure is shown to be standing with the support of a tree. Bright colours are used in painting this human figure and the figure depicts the old age.

![Fig. 12](image)
8. This is the figure of Guru Nanak. This figure is present in the 'Foot Step of Guru 2002'. The colour of this figure is like a beam of light in the dark. The facial expressions of this figure are quite impressive. The shape of the leg in this figure is showing the expression of journey. Fingers of leg are flexible as a rubber.

Fig. 13

9. The figure of a musician. The facial expressions in the figure are perfectly illustrating the objective. The figure of playing musician here seems to be giving a message of serenity to the rioters.

10. This figure is showing the old stage and has been taken from the figure '1947'. The figure is carrying some load and Guru Granth Saheb on its shoulder. The facial expression of this figure is very prominent. Facial expression is sad. The bent structure is indicating as the figure is carrying some load on its waist.

Fig. 14

21 Arpana Caur The Passion with Time. Ernst W. Koehnsporger 2004 Translated by Dr. Ernst E. Fuchs.
II. Figures depicting the real expressions

Another type of paintings of Arpana Caur contains the figure depicting real expressions. In such figures anatomy is not as prevalent as in other. These figures look like as if we are in a dreamland. Either the figures are big or small in size. The body ratio is quite opposite to the human body. Still these figures are quite expressive. Some of such figures are explained as under:

1. This female figure has a close resemblance to a woman and has been taken from the painting ‘Day and Night’ The body ratio of this figure is appropriate. The facial structure for this figure seems to be very realistic. Eyes in this painting are big and look like a piscine eye. This facial expression of female figures shows that she is creator of the world. With the exception of a hand, the ratio of rest of the body is quite appropriate. The right hand of this figure is one and a half times larger than its real size. The extended length of this hand depicts something and this is serving the very purpose
satisfactorily. The fingers and toes of this female figure have been made as soft and flexible as a rubber. For this reason the women in this figure looks like a dream women. However, the expressions are very clear.

2. In her ‘Day’ painting a figure has been mentioned. The figure represents the night mode. The black coloured figure is incomplete. Forehead is protruded. The figure has an exclamatory expression on its face. In spite of the absence of eyes, the figure is quite expressive. The body ratio of the figure is quite disproportional and seems as if the figure is made up of the mixture of cowdung and the clay. The whole body has some type of roughness.

3. This figure has been taken from the ‘Day and Night’ painting of Arpana Caur. A giant woman has been made in this figure. In this figure the body size is somewhat big as if some devil in a nightmare. The hands and feet are somewhat big in size compared to the face. The fingers are made of wood. Legs are also giving the expression of stagnant water. The leafy eyes are white in colour. The black hairs of this lady are giving the expression of a flowing river as like the Ganga emerging from the head of Lord Shiva.

![Fig. 17](image)

21 Arpana Caur The Passion with Time. Ernst W. Koeln sperger 2004 Translated by Dr. Ernst E. Fuchs.
4. This figure is depicted in between dualities of Arpana Caur's painting. Eyes are like a diving fish. Only the hands of this figure have been made properly. Rest of the body is somewhat immobile. One leg is large whereas the heal of the other leg is thick and toes are flexible.

Fig. 18

5. In her 'Juggler' painting, Arpana Caur has painted a figure in which face is shown to be hidden by hands. Body structure is like semi-kneaded dough. The fingers are soft and small. Legs are rounded and as flexible as a rubber. Although the facial structures have not been made, still it is clearly depicting the expression.

6. The figure represents the drowning of Soni which is present in Arpana's painting 'Plunge'. In this figure of Soni there is complete lack of body ratio. It is like a dream figure. The figure has no expression on its face. The facial structures which give the expression are looking like that of a dead. Hands are long and thin. In this figure the part of the body extending till knee are somewhat disproportional. The entire figure shows the expression of turbulent water.²¹

Fig. 19

²¹ Arpana Caur The Passion with Time. Ernst W. Koehnperger 2004 Translated by Dr. Ernst E. Fuchs.
7. This figure of Soni has been taken from the ‘Connection’ painting of Arpana Caur. The figure lacks the common body ratio. Facial expressions are more realistic in this figure. Nose and lips are sharp with a piscine eye. Although the figure is erroneous, still is depicting the expressions clearly.

![Fig. 20](image)

8. This figure is from ‘Widows of Vrindavan’ The extended length of hand is giving the impression of a flowing wax. The facial expressions are gloomy. The upward looking eyes are giving the expression for the want of help. The skin is wrinkled and the neck is made like a dried stem. The nude figure is covered with black shawl on its shoulder. The figure is clearly depicting the objective (Fig. 5).

9. This has been taken from a painting ‘River of Time’. This figure completely looks like a dream figure. The entire figure is made with combining different human figures. In between the hands and legs men and women are lying in various postures\(^\text{21}\).

![Fig. 21](image)

\(^\text{21}\) Arpana Caur The Passion with Time. Ernst W. Koelnisperger 2004 Translated by Dr. Ernst E. Fuchs.
III. Figures depicting the formlessness

The third type of figure in Arpana’s paintings has formlessness. Though these figures are formless, still they clearly fulfill the objective. The forms of these figures are quite unclear. In some figure the eyes are missing whereas in some hands and legs are missing. She has not much emphasized on such paintings.

Fig. 22

1. This formless figure has been taken from Arpana’s ‘Body is just a Garment’. Different human figures are made in a single figure with a traditional Indian art. Some faces do not bear the eyes. Some are in standing posture and some are sitting on the various parts of this giant human figure. All these human figures are based on the legs of a giant human figure.

Fig. 139

21 Arpana Caur The Passion with Time. Ernst W. Koelnsperger 2004 Translated by Dr. Ernst E. Fuchs.
2. In her painting 'Great Time' figure of Lord Budha has been depicted which is also
towards the formlessness. In this figure the body of Budha contains numerous other
human figures. The expression has not given to the body of Budha. Face looks like a
shadow. To give the impression of hand, a thread like structure has been placed on the
shoulders. The portion extending from the neck upto the waist is thin. The figures which
are inside this figure are quite expressive.

3. This figure has been taken from 'Compassion' painting. This figure shows only the
facial structure of Lord Budha. This face is formless. Face is a
bit long. The ears are extremely large. The figure bears
numerous piscine shaped eyes on its face which gives an
impression of the swimming fish. There are some black eyes
also along with the white eyes. A big tear is coming out
continuously from one of the white piscine eye.

![Fig. 23](image)

4. The figure is shown at the lower extreme of one of the Arpana's painting namely
'Between Dualities'. Only the facial part has been depicted in this figure. The facial
structures are clearly portraying the objective of the figure. The figure in itself is quite
expressive.

## 2.3 Exhibitions

**Exhibitions**

1975  Solo exhibition, Shridharani Gallery, New Delhi.
1979  Solo exhibition, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.
1979  Solo exhibition, Gallery Arts 38, London.
1980, 82, 84  Solo exhibition, Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay.
1982  Solo exhibition, Chapter Gallery, Cardiff.
1984  Solo exhibition, National Museum, Copenhagen. 1984 Group exhibition in Athens and Delphi
1985, 88  Solo exhibition, Art Heritage, New Delhi
1985, 89  Solo exhibition, Cymroza Gallery, Bombay
1986  1st Baghdad Biennale, Baghdad
1987  Participated in the Algiers Biennale, Algeria and Cuba Biennale, Cuba
1987  Exhibition of Woman Artists, Festival of India, USSR. 1987 Solo exhibition. Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta
1990  Solo exhibition, Collins Gallery, Glasgow
1993  Solo exhibition, LKA, New Delhi
1994  Participated in Osaka Print Triennale, Osaka
1994  Asian Art Show, Hiroshima Museum, Hiroshima
1994-95  Imagined City

**Selected Solo Exhibitions**

- **2006** Indigo Blue Art, Singapore
- **2005** Mahua Gallery, Bangalore
- **2004** Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata
2003 Academy of Fine Arts and Literature, New Delhi

2002 Cymroza Gallery, Mumbai

2001 Academy of Fine Arts and Literature, New Delhi

1999 ‘Rites of Time’, Bose Pacia Modern, New York

1999 Centre for International Modern Art (CIMA), Kolkata

1998 Foundation for Indian Artists Gallery, Amsterdam

1998 Fine Arts Resources, Berlin

1997 Arks Gallery, London

1996 Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai, Bangalore

1994 Cymroza Gallery, Mumbai

1993 Rabindra Bhavan Gallery, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi

1991 Collins Gallery, Glasgow, Scotland

1987 Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata

1985, 89, 94, 98 Cymroza Gallery, Mumbai

1985, 88 Art Heritage, New Delhi

1984 National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen
1984 Ethnographic Museum, Stockholm, Sweden

1982 Chapter Gallery, Cardiff, Wales, UK

1981 City Hall Gallery, Ottawa, Canada

1980, 82, 84 Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai

1982, 87 October Gallery, London

1979 Gallery Arts 38, London

1979 Rabindra Bhavan Gallery, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.

1975 Shridharani Gallery, New Delhi

Selected Group Exhibitions

2008 'Dus Mahavidyas: Ten Creative Forces', presented by Gallerie Nvya at Visual Art Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

2008 'Baisakh 08', Polka Art Gallery, New Delhi

2007-08 ‘Polyphonies’, Gallery Hosp, Tirol-Österreich, Austria

2007 'First Person Narrative', Hasta Gallery, Hyderabad

2005 Preview in Tate Berlin

2005 Indigo Blue Art, Singapore

2004 Smithsonian Museum, Washington
2001 ‘Indian Contemporary Art’, Los Angeles; Singapore; San Francisco

2000 Art Forum Gallery, Singapore; Australia

1998 ‘Indo-Austrian Group Show’, Austria

1998 National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi and Mumbai

1998 Rotunda Gallery, Hong Kong

1998 Centre for International Modern Art (CIMA), Kolkata


1997 Bradford Museum Exhibition, Bradford

1997 ‘Indian Women Artists’, National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi

1995 ‘Indian Women Artists’, UK

1995 Noma Book Exhibition, Tokyo

1994-95 Satyam Museum, Japan

1994-95 Glenbarra Museum, Japan

1994-95 ‘Imagined City’, Museum of Modern Art, Brazil; Sao Paulo; Rio de Janeiro

1984 ‘Group show of Indian Artists from National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi to Fukuoka Museum, Japan
1984 First Indo-Greek Cultural Symposium, Athens; Delphi

Participations

2008 'Harvest 2008', organized by Arushi Arts at The Stainless Gallery, New Delhi

2007-08 'From Everyday To The Imagined: Modern Indian Art', Singapore Art Museum, Singapore and at Museum of Art, Seoul National University, Seoul

2007 ‘Tiger by the Tail’. Women Artists of India Transforming Culture, Part 1’, organized by Women’s Studies Research Centre (WSRC), Brandeis University, USA in partnership with Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), New Delhi

1994 Asian Art Show, Hiroshima Museum, Hiroshima

1994 Osaka Print Triennale, Osaka

1987 Exhibition of Woman Artists, Festival of India, USSR

1987 Algiers Biennale, Algeria

1987 Cuba Biennale, Cuba

1986 1st Baghdad Biennale, Baghdad

Collections

National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

Chandigarh Museum, Chandigarh.

Ethnographic Museum, Stockholm.


Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Deutsche Bank, Mumbai and Chandigarh.

Rockefeller collection, New York.

Kampany Collection, San Francisco.

Mohinder Tak collection, Washington.

Peter and Erica Mueller collection, Munich.


2.4 Awards and Honours

1984-85 Research Grant from Lalit Kala Academy for painting in Garhi Studio

1985 All Indian Fine Arts Society Award

1986 Gold Medal in VI Triennele (International)

1986 Curated Women Artist Exhibition for Festival of India, USSR

1991-92 On the purchase Committee of National Gallery of Modern Arts

- On jury of Republic Day Committee, Govt. of India for 2 days and on
  Selection Committee for Republic Day Tableaux for 4 years

- Founder Member and Secretary General of Academic of Fine Art and
  Literature

- Only Indian artist commissioned by Hiroshima Museum of Modern Art to

- do a work for the 50th Anniversary of the Holocaust

1989 Jury of National Exhibition


Collaborated with Godna tribal artist Sat Narain Pande and for the first time in India.
co-signed works with him.


1992 Invited by USIS as international visitor of the year, USA.


1995 Commissioned by Hiroshima Museum to execute a large work for its permanent collection on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Holocaust.

1995-98 **Selection Committee**, Republic Day Pageants for Ministry of Defense, Govt. of India, New Delhi.


**Founder Member and Secretary General**, Academy of Fine Arts and Literature.

1984 **AIFACS Award**, New Delhi.

**Commemoration Certificate**, Algiers Biennale.


1989 **Eminent Artist**, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.

CHAPTER 3
CHAPTER 3

ART OF ARPANA CAUR

3.1 Influence

Arpana Caur has not imitated the styles and ideology of other painters for her paintings, therefore, what we see in her paintings are the original ideas of her own which are mainly influenced by the various environmental, social and political issues.

3.2 Master pieces

Her art is a direct reflection of her personal experiences, inspired by local and world events. Over the years, her main focus has centered on Indian women, and capturing the essence of their day to day activities inspired by social, cultural and spiritual themes. All her paintings in some way or the other have figuratively narrated the story of Indian women-past and present. They are about human tragedies, emotions and traumatic experiences of life. She has always strongly emphasized humanism. Arpana Caur knows the demand of the market for paintings of women but she never has used women on her canvas. Her canvas includes mountains, flower valley, nature’s scene and the dancing men. Her painting series ‘Sheltered Women’ ‘Starlet Room’ and ‘Bazaar’, ‘World Goes On’, ‘After the Massacre’, 'In Vrindavan' series, ‘Warli’, ‘Godhana paintings’ etc. have depicted several aspects of a common Indian woman. There is an eccentric use of colours in her paintings. These figures not only talk about the present, they also tell us where we have gone astray.

\(^{22}\)Hindustan Ravi Utsaw 2003.
They also remind us of our lacking in the social sphere. Some of her masterpieces are as follows:

Fig. 24

Fig. 25

Fig. 26

Fig. 27
3.3 Techniques in Arpana’s paintings

Every artist has its own way of medium, technique and ingredients for painting. From the very beginning oil paints and canvas were the medium and source of Arpana’s paintings. She never likes painting on papers because she says the surface of the canvas is flexible
which is user friendly. She has also used the acrylic paints because they dry up very quickly whereas the oil paints take enough time. But she never liked acrylic colours. She very cleverly describes the reason with a nice example for this. She says when we put the paste on a toothbrush there is a certain weight of the paste that we feel. If the paste liquefies and we repeat the process we would not be able to enjoy it. Likewise the acrylic colours apply no weight on the brush and, therefore, Arpana doesn’t like this. This doesn’t mean that she has never used paper for painting. In one of her exhibitions named as ‘World Goes On’ in 1985 in Delhi she has used pencil drawings extensively which were also displayed in Mumbai. She has also painted on glass as well which was displayed in the year 1988. She used to do painting on the glass on the reverse side. She used to paint on imported fibre glass which she purchased from Paharganj Area of New Delhi. The imported fibre glasses were used for painting so as to avoid the problem of fungal spread and dampness. Arpana Ji started etching painting and Zink painting till 15 years and painted mostly black and white paintings along with some coloured paintings. Still all these paintings of her are less important compared to her oil paints. She prefers making man size figures in her paintings.\(^{22}\)

She starts her painting by coating the canvas with a mixture of Turpentine and linseed oil and after that leaves it for two-three weeks for drying. After air drying the canvas, she starts painting onto them. The entire process is repeated for three times. She uses more than half of the turpentine and linseed oil in first coat. She works on two three canvas simultaneously. If she wants to check the effect of first coat on a canvas then she uses one third of the turpentine oil and one fourth part of the linseed oil. Next coat is

\(^{22}\)Hindustan Ravi Utsaw 2003.
done using linseed oil. Instead of the oil paintings she has done some other paintings as well like etching and glass paintings etc.

**Etching**

In the art of etching is began with the black coat on a zinc plate when the plate becomes black the lower surface of the plate is brushed with a specific resin.

After the solution of resin gets dried this dark surface is embossed after etching using some pointed thing like nails etc. After that a solution of water with nitric acid is prepared. The zinc plate is dipped in this solution. After that the part in which etching was done starts bubbling. These bubbles are removed using a soft feather. For this pigeon feather is used because it is resistant to acid and also because of being soft it doesn’t harm the figure. When the embossed figure gets cleaned with acid, the plate is simply washed using the normal tap water and then the black varnish is removed using a sprit. Now these dark lines on the plate are filled with the black ink and the plate is cleaned using a newspaper. This is done so that the ink may not get wiped. After cleaning the plate the lines are filled up with the ink. Lastly, this damped paper is used for printing using the etching press. The process is repeated for several times to get the best result\(^{22}\).

\(^{22}\)Hindustan Ravi Utsaw 2003.
**Techniques for doing glass paintings**

Arpana Caur says that Flexed glass should be used for Glass paintings. Initially it was drawn on a paper and the paper is kept beneath the glass and the sketch is drawn. The black lines after drying fulfill the colour of other paintings. Initially Arpana Caur did a sketch for their art. Since the very beginning she uses the artist quality Camlin paint. She prepared the canvas by herself. Since all these took much of her time therefore, she uses canvas only.

In the beginning her paintings were not in a big demand still she did not compromise with the quality of the ingredients. Her mother always encouraged her to use quality paints. Until about fifteen years ago she used paints of Winsor and Newton company. In her paintings first coat she use to apply with Indian Camlin colour and the final coating using colours of Winsor and Newton company. Later she used colours of Michael Harding company which were better than that of the Winsor and Newton company. The cost of these colours is 2 to 3 times the cost of Winsor and Newton colours.

**Geometry in Arpana’s paintings**

Arpana Caur uses various geometrical designs for her paintings:

1. Wavy
2. Square shaped
3. Wavy and square shaped division
4. Vertical division
5. Horizontal divisions
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\(^{22}\)Hindustan Ravi Utsaw 2003.
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Geometry in Arpana’s paintings

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1. Wavy
2. Square shaped
3. Wavy and square shaped division
4. Vertical division
5. Horizontal divisions
6. Multiple divisions

7. Mixed divisions

**Wavy division:** This is the main style of Arpana Caur which makes her paintings lively.

In one of her paintings 'Fire' there is a wavy expression of her flame. This gives the indication of an intense fire. In most of her paintings Arpana has used the wavy figures.

In her painting **'River of Time'** these wavy figures are clearly be seen. The waves in this figure are showing the fiercely flowing water. All the figures are equally mobile as river.

In this figure the oscillating plug is indicative of the mobility of wire. In her wavy creations the theme is being fulfilled completely.

**Square shaped division:** This style is also very prominent in Arpana’s paintings.

Since 1986 Arpana Caur has covered a variety of issues related to gender, violence, the inner quest for nirvana and the predicament of the contemporary woman. Some of her recent work feature political incidents like 'Heart of Darkness' which depicts the Bamiyan Buddha incidence in Afghanistan in 2000. For Arpana the love myth of Soni and Mahiwal is about a woman's courage
in love and the legends contemporary relevance that is important. Her art is remarkable in the simplicity with which she presents a radical view of the realities of our lives, using images that we are used to in a new context. In recent years her works have become more symbolic and certain symbols keep appearing. Colour still dominates her work but she has started to use more black in her works which beautifully offsets the blues, browns and the gold she uses.

SYMBOLS IN ARPANA CAUR'S PAINTINGS

To understand the meaning of symbol some example is necessary. Once upon a time a saint presented a fruit of Banyan tree to his son and given him to break open and asked him what did he see into it? The son broken it and said that he could see small seeds into it and nothing more than that. The learned saint said listen son that this seed is the progenitor of the vast Banyan tree. This indicates that this seed contains the vast tree into it.

Arpana Caur uses symbols for most of her paintings. Her symbols are quite expressive and give the life to her paintings. In this chapter an efforts have been made to understand the meanings of the symbols. According to her, some symbols are personnel because they contain our feelings in them. She mostly uses scissors, plug, thread and needles as symbols in her paintings. She likes very much some of her symbols like scissor which she has used in most of her paintings

21Hindustan Ravi Utsaw 2003, 21Vadhera Art Gallery, New Delhi
Mostly we see scissors for Arpana’s paintings which she emphasizes in her paintings. Since the past 10-15 years Arpana Ji is using this as a symbol in her paintings. She has given dual meaning for the scissors. One is the constructive and the other part is destructive. In the same manner as the nature makes us and then destroys us. From the philosophical point of view we can say that the men born and die when the time comes and the thread of life gets broken. Similarly in one of her paintings Arpana has been shown.

In one of her paintings Arpana has shown an old lady cutting the moon. This also is a form of time. She has depicted the same in her painting ‘Day and Night’. Here time cycle has been shown. Lady is cutting the moon with scissors which is indicative of the emergence of day after the night. Arpana has a tenacious belief in the life and death.

Medium Oil on Canvas, Size 84” x 60”
Water

The anti Sikh riots in 1984 hit Arpana badly. She expressed the realized sorrow on her canvas. Never before this had she painted the death on her canvas. In these pictures Arpana used water as a symbol of death. Whosoever is drowning is going to meet death. Her painting series ‘World Goes On’ is solely based on melancholy of anti Sikh riots.

Plug

Arpana has used plug to symbolize the spiritual connection. When some electrical appliances get connected with some connection using a plug, it gets energized. Likewise, she depicted the use of plug to connect mankind with the Almighty.

Traffic Light. She has signified the traffic light as the trees of Delhi. Most of her symbols are personal which she has designated herself and is meant for daily life. None of her symbols are traditional. This symbolizes the ideology of the artist.

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24Suneet Chopra: Arpana Caur 1975-95, Catalog.
Women

In most of her paintings we can see the women. The heroin of her paintings is usually of simple and generous nature. She has never painted an aggressive woman and the women of her paintings bear large rounded eyes24.

Love beyond Measure Oil on Canvas 40” x 72”

Umbrella

She has given special significance to umbrella in her paintings. In her initial paintings she mostly has used umbrella as a symbol of security.

24Suneet Chopra: Arpana Caur 1975-95, Catalog.
Women on Embroidery

In most of her paintings she has shown women on embroidery. She has shown this woman as a creator. In other way she has been symbolized as nature. This woman does embroidery from its one end and cuts it through its other end. In first part this is depicted as a creator and in the other as a destroyer. In 1996, in a ‘Brand Fold Museum’ Arpana has shown Arpana has illustrated nature as a lush green woman. 21,22

21Vadhera Art Gallery, New Delhi, 22Suneet Chopra: Arpana Caur 1975-95, Catalog.
CHAPTER 4
CHAPTER 4

ANJOLIE ELA MENON: A Legend

"The connection between the mind, eye and hand guided by emotion and imagination results in the ultimate creation of a work of art."

Anjolie Ela Menon

4.1 LIFE SCATH OF ANJOLIE ELA MENON

Anjolie Ela Menon was born in 1940 in India of mixed Bengal and American parentage. She went to school in Lovedale in the Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu and thereafter had a brief spell at the J.J. School of art in Bombay. Subsequently she earned a degree of English Literature from Delhi University. After holding solo Exhibitions in Bombay and Delhi in the late 1950s as a teenager, Menon worked and studied in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1961-62 on a French Government scholarship. Before returning home, she travelled extensively in Europe and West Asia studying Romanesque and Byzantine art. She had over thirty solo shows including at Black heath Gallery-London, Gallery Radicke-Bonn, Winston Gallery-Washington, Doma Khudozhinkov-USSR, Rabindra Bhavanand Shridharani Gallery-New Delhi, Academy of Fine Arts-Calcutta, the Gallery-Madras, Gallery-

25 Anjolie Ela Menon, Catalogue of Exhibition held at Shridham Gallery, February 20th to March 2nd 2003, presented by Vadhera Art Gallery.
Washington, Doma Khudozhinkov-USSR, Rabindra Bhavanand Shridharani Gallery-
New Delhi, Academy of Fine Arts-Calcutta, the Gallery-Madras, Jehangir Gallery,
Chemould Gallery, Taj Gallery, Bombay and Maya Gallery at the Museum Annexe,
Hong Kong. A retrospective exhibition was held in 1988 in Bombay, Menon has
participated in several international shows in France, Japan, Russia and U.S.A

Her 'Western' upbringing particularly stay in Paris influenced her life greatly. Her
mother having died young, therefore, she was brought up by an American grandmother
for the better part of her adolescence. By the time she reached Paris she already had a
firm grounding in Western culture. The other part of her family was Brahma Samajist
and like many such Bengali families, it was extremely westernized. She got married to
her childhood love, Raja Menon, an Indian Naval Officer who later retired as an Admiral.
After her marriage she lived and worked in India, U.S.A., several countries in Europe,
Japan and the erstwhile USSR, and had over thirty solo shows in these countries. She is
also a well known muralist and has represented India at several shows. In fact, she only
came into serious contact with Hindu culture after her marriage into a fairly orthodox
South Indian family. She has often bitterly regretted these major gaps in her early life.

In one of her interviews she says that the last of her winter break during her
student life she had was in Florence. She spent days in the Uffizi Galleries completely
influenced by the Botticellis and Giovanni Cimabue, and the works of other great Italian
Renaissance painters. That quality of subdued brilliance emerging from layers of glazes
and the hard gloss of the surface, the landscapes bathed in the greenish light of Sienna,

Isana Murti, Anjolie Ela Menon Mutations Exhibition Catalogue, Apparao Galleries.
were to influence her techniques permanently. She wanted to achieve that place in life which shines like a pristine surface where there was never any muddiness or opacity or even the whites glowing brilliantly. During her motherhood she produced a number of paintings which were broadly defined and lacking in details, but with often supplicating elongated hands of Byzantine art. In many, the Virgin wears a crown of thorns that merged with flowing hair, signifying that her suffering was no less than that of her son. Soon after her return from England in 1966, she was pregnant with her second child and was too ill to paint for nearly a year. The next two years were spent in Russia in the very bleak, bitterly cold and sharply impersonal city of Vladivostok. Many people mistook the icon-like paintings she did on her return to be the result of her Russian experience. However, she had only one brief, wonderful week in Moscow where she was able to see the extraordinary religious art at the Kremlin, the Tretyakov Museum and in Vladimir, a town near Moscow.

Between 1970 and 1972, she again began working seriously. She was often in her father's home in Calcutta while the Navy sent her husband Raja back to the USSR for long time. This was a period where the influences of her European experience began to unfold. There were nudes set amidst a great deal of flora and fauna. Critics frequently referred to the pre-Raphaelite influence in these paintings. Colour had started to assert itself and she was using a lot of blue. She had a series of exhibitions in Calcutta and Delhi and was glad to be painting once more as a professional. This is a struggle many women go through in coming back into their own after a period of intense domesticity which usually covers the child-bearing years. In 1974 she moved to Bombay and she was offered a solo show by a major gallery. In a small corner of the flat, spilling over into one

of the balconies, she made a makeshift studio and set out to create a large enough body of work to do justice to such an opportunity. The exhibition was a turning point in her career and was extremely European in flavour. It drew very favourable reviews and most of her paintings were sold out\textsuperscript{29}. This gave her a great courage and confidence. Her children were in school now and, therefore, needing little of her attention now and hence the days holding ladle in one hand and a brush in the other came to an end as she was able to afford a cook for her kitchen.

From 1974 to 1980 there were a spate of exhibitions and several commissions to paint murals for public spaces, hotel lobbies and offices. She planned to do a real fresco for which she had enough training. In the years that followed, she painted several mock frescoes. A real fresco requires wall preparation using slaked lime which is a lengthy process.

In 1979 she along with her husband started building a house in Bangalore and from a junk shop she brought two old windows for painting which served the purpose completely. In an exhibition in 1978 in Delhi she had started using the window as an idiom, looking in on secret interiors and looking out onto mysterious landscapes. She then started using new windows which also became a convenient grid for dividing a painting, often fragmenting an image and re-assembling it in a different order, thus creating juxtapositions. Basically, an aesthetic choice has determined the hues and nuances of her technique, the 'look' of her paintings. Content of course was another matter altogether. Her nature is somewhat melancholic. She thinks this is a very Bengali

trait where introspection and the dream-state inevitably result in the creation of music, painting and poetry which is deeply somber.

At once she says, she is an Indian woman. Sometimes she thinks she is only crypto-Indian and having had the best opportunities-freedom, and indeed, success. Her world is far more immediate-many of the women she paint are her sisters and aunts, close friends, people who have worked with her, brought her up. And, of course, there are women whom she respects and has great sympathy for. She is neither a didactic nor narrative painter. She is hardly concerned with events, though she likes to lay her people bare\textsuperscript{30}. She likes to make them bare a bit beyond what is decent, sometimes ripping open a chest to reveal the heart beating within. Of course, there are many who have identified with the women she paints, especially those who are trapped or sitting alone on a chair, or those innocent ones with a newly-awakened sensuality, and those who are waiting. She lives in an extremely peopled world, her days and weeks are replete with events-journeys, happenings, children, food and all the preoccupations and trivia that fill a large household. Added to this, are the complex rituals of Indian life from which she seems unable to abdicate. In the hinterland of this pandemonium she lives alone, finding a secret space from which to touch the sources of creativity. She inhabits a place which she can share with no one for any length of time. This place is subterranean, remote and inaccessible. It is a lonely moonscape of her own making; trespassed upon by the occasional bird or animal, and the protagonist is often the person she yearns to touch, the person she long to be, or just screaming to be let out.

She thinks her paintings in particular provide much grist for the mills of such

\textsuperscript{30}Website www.redhotcurry.com.
speculation. Preoccupation with the human condition has always informed her canvases. Even when there is an empty chair dominating the picture, it speaks of the person who is absent. Whereas the loneliness that asserts itself is essentially her, it speaks as eloquently for the solitary state of the viewer. The browned-out eyes of her subjects are hard to answer. She thinks her earlier work was far more autobiographical or subjective, and the manifestations of this introspection often stopped short of revelation, keeping the final secrets unrevealed, behind hooded eyes. She would describe the treatment of some of her later figurative work as interpretative impressions where she views her subjects a little more objectively, reserving to herself the right to add, eliminate or exaggerate certain qualities. She does this particularly with portraits. If in her later work the eyes begin to open or reveal something, it is not because she was being consciously secretive earlier on. When she views her subjects it becomes far easier to be open, to respond to the brilliant colour and light that is ubiquitous if one lives in this country. She always had a theory that colours are born from the bleak wastes of the desert. She thinks of Rajasthan or of Ladakh, or the driest parts of Marathwada and Andhra. This also seems to be true of her work when she look back on it. It was in her moments of greatest despair that the hooded eyes of her subjects opened to let in the light, and vivid colours invaded her canvases totally against her better judgment.

She says that she hardly draws. She thinks she colours and paints lines in reverse. Colour is everything. Its depth or density, translucence or opacity forms the nuances of one's whole creative output. It is with colour that one sings, with colour that one plummets to the depths of sorrow and pain. When she dreams she sees colour, some of it obliterated, some overlaid with yet more pigment, causing harmonies, discords, syncopation. Slowly it gets peopled, the emerging shapes still defined by colour as
recognition dawns. She finds herself, in the 1990s, in a more mature and cosmopolitan
cultural milieu, in an age where the globe has inevitably shrunk. During the 1960s or 70s,
she was often made to feel like a freak for being so European in her approach, though it
baffled her at the time that all the abstract painters in India escaped this particular
criticism.

As we approach the turn of the century, we are closer than ever to a global art
where the barriers separating East, West, ethnic and avant-garde are crashing rapidly. As
the dogma and ideologies of the mid-twentieth century begin to crumble and regional
identities are less clear, emergent art forms become ingredients of a vast multi-cultural
mosaic. As part of this flux, distinctions dissolve but artists still strive towards new
horizons, new ideologies, annihilating the past constantly in search of an unknown future.

She felt a very early affinity, indeed adulation, for Amrita Shergil. She may have grown
out of that obsession but she often speculates as to what further heights she would have
soared had she lived. Coming from a comparatively secure background, in economic
terms, is perhaps considered a disadvantage by many of those who entertain romantic
notions of the artist as starving in a garret. Perhaps it is true that suffering is often the
well-spring of creativity, but people suffer in many ways as she says that she is sure,
Shergil did, despite her background. She has done time in the garret too and it did inspire
and temper her work with a certain sobriety. She doesn't, however, make a virtue of
physical hardship as do many of her crypto-communist peers. She thinks it would be a
handicap to be 'privileged' only if it cut one off from the rest of humanity, and that has

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3Isana Murti, Anjolie Ela Menon, Paintings in Private Collection, Ravi Dayal, New Delhi 1995
not happened. What she finds hardest to shed from the conditioning of her background is 'good taste'. Beauty has become a dirty word in contemporary art. She finds it impossible to divorce herself from beauty and, in the context of the 1990s, this could be a serious shortcoming. The current iconoclasm has led to the worship of a genre that is essentially in favour of the ugly, the obscure, and against the qualities of harmony and balance that were once revered. On the Indian scene there has been an unparalleled visual vulgarization in all spheres of life. With sudden modernization, the twin deities of consumerism and the box-office hit have led to an unmitigated explosion of hideous kitsch which manifests itself in clothes, architecture and life styles and is epitomized by huge film posters of extraordinary vulgarity. Living for many years in the concrete jungle of Bombay in the mid-1970s, her sole companion during the long days of painting alone in her flat was a crow which was her regular visitor and grew friendlier each day till he stepped into the paintings, insinuating itself into nearly every frame during that period. Ultimately, the crow, who is one of the most friendly creatures, became a sort of alter-ego, an observer demanding to be let in and he has been there ever since, though with diminishing frequency. She thinks 'symbol' is perhaps too big a word for the small things that insinuate themselves into her canvases. 'Symbol' is a critic's word, surely, the threads, the necklaces, the kites, the little animals or draped cloth, transparent or opaque - these are the accoutrements and trappings that accompany the figure in her work. These are no conscious attempts at symbolism, though much has been written about the optimism of the kites or the sadness of sailing boats and so on. Sometimes it is mere ornamentation, the essentially feminine need to embellish or embroider, at other times it is the need to accent or to focus on the colour for purely painterly reasons.
In addition to paintings in private and corporate collections, her works have been acquired by museums in India and abroad. She is also a well-known muralist and has represented India at the Algiers Biennale, the Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil and three triennials in New Delhi. She has been invited by the British Council, the U.S. State Department and the French Ministry of Culture to confer with leading artists in those countries. Menon has served on the advisory committee and the art purchase-committee of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, where she was co-curator with Henri Claude Cousseau for a major exhibition of French Contemporary Art in 1996. Her work recently went under the hammer at the Christie's and Sotheby's auctions of Contemporary Indian Art in London. A book titled "Anjolie Ela Menon: Paintings in Private Collections" has been published on her life and work.

Menon lives and works in Delhi. She has artistically furnished residence in Nizammudin area. She displays an interest and zest for life, often relating incidents unconnected with her work. She also displays a surprising knowledge of the position of the artist in society, whether capitalist or Marxist. Many of her new works are still in the experimental stage. She reveals, "she is very lethargic basically. She has to be driven to do something. She admits, that she has been really driven to paint, in fact it is the only thing that she is driven to do."

Driven, she certainly has been. After a brief spell at the J.J. School of Art, Bombay, she earned a degree in English literature and held her first solo exhibition when she was just 18. As she recalls, "Work metamorphoses slowly. There are no quantum jumps as such. No sudden successes. Just small milestones at a time.

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Anjolie has always believed in being focused. "She remembers her first exhibition very fondly. But she also realizes that when one is young, there is a certain arrogance of age. She had put up all of her 53 paintings in that exhibition. Today she wouldn't dream of putting up more than 20 pieces, and she'd be very selective. Despite that her exhibition was immensely popular.

In the early fifties she won a French Government scholarship to study at the Ecole Nationale Superieur Des Beaux Arts in Paris. Before returning home, she travelled extensively in Europe and West Asia, studying Romanesque and Byzantine art. Her husband's career in the navy also took her to interesting and often exotic destinations. However, she shrugs off any illusions that travelling with her husband gave her the much-desired international exposure.

Apart from travelling, she believes that her family has been immensely supportive of her work. Reflecting not just on her own issue, but an issue that poses a challenge to every working woman, she says, "I think it is very important for a woman to have a supportive family. It is important for a woman's work to be taken seriously. And I think our generation tried to balance both things out. We did our work well too, and still cared for our families, irrespective of our profession." Anjolie feels that the present generation has not been that successful in juggling office and home. "She thinks young women now spend a lot of energy fighting those feminist battles. In a way it is easier to give in and play your various roles simultaneously." Indeed that is something she has done very well.

Eccentric, volatile and outspoken, Anjolie Ela Menon's personality makes an impression as strong as her art. Menon's early canvases exhibit the varied influences of van Gogh, the European Expressionists, Modigliani, Amrita Sher-Gil, and M. F. Husain.
Mainly portraits, these paintings were dominated by flat areas of thick bright color, with sharp outlines that were painted with the vigour and brashness of extreme youth. Some of her solo shows include the ones held at Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2003, 2002, 1996 and by The Gallery, in New York, 1989. Her works were exhibited in the Paris Biennale, 1980 and International Triennale, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1975, 71 and 68. A retrospective of her works was held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai in 2002. Some of her group exhibitions include, Saffron art and Apparao Galleries in Los Angeles 2001 and Saffron art, Hong Kong 2001. She has been an invitee of the British Council, the U.S. Department of Culture and the French Ministry of Culture.

One of the most creative women artists of South Asia, Anjolie Ela Menon has held over 30 solo shows and several group shows. Her works were exhibited in the fifty years celebration of Indian art at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and in 2000 the Indian Government has honoured her with a Padma Shree.

Nothing seems to dampen Anjolie Ela Menon’s intense desire to create. One of India’s most celebrated artists, she remains down to earth and retains a keen interest in people and happenings all around her which are reflected in her works. She is capable of painting for 15 hours a day. A punishing schedule for a person even half her age. But for her, it is a part of her creative life.

Speaking of inspiration, one sees a constant recurrence in her work of human figure. Has she generated a special empathy for the people she has put on her canvas? She thinks, and then replies, "Sometimes, not always. But, a figure as a recurring motif in

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her work tends to point to certain phases of life, or her thinking at that point of time. It is autobiographical. It could refer to a romantic phase, or motherhood." Then her face breaks into a smile as she adds, "she is painting babies again, because of her grandchildren. So you see, it doesn't refer to anyone specifically." Her work in terms of its content, subjects and themes as well as her choice of medium and treatment is symbolic of the coming age of women artists in India

People who know her well tell that besides babies she has a special fondness for her old school, Lawrence, Lovedale. She admits, "Yes, she certainly does miss her old school a lot. She often goes there. She thinks it is the most beautiful school in India. She has visited Doon and Rishi Valley schools and they are not a patch on Lawrence. It has such beautiful old buildings, a lovely environment and lush lawns, forests and the bluest skies you ever saw. She has had her grandchild registered there, though at the moment he is barely two years old. She loves spending time with her family and friends. She spends quite a lot of time looking after the house, and now that she has a small grandchild, she also spends a lot of time with him.

She goes to her studio, around 10.30 a.m. every day, but this also depends on the amount of work she has to do there. When she is in Delhi, she goes out quite often in the evenings. As she says, "She is lucky for her work that her day doesn't have to be structured in any way." "She thinks the younger artists have become very greedy. They don't wait to define a medium of their own or struggle to find a niche or style of their own. Youngsters who have just come out of college are already charging Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 75,000 for their work which she thinks is both foolish and very presumptuous.

"Lalit Kala Contemporary, Lalit Kala Academy, December 2003"
She doesn't think the 'market', is that big, that it can sustain so many people at that price. She doesn't think any of us ever thought of money until it really started to happen to us despite ourselves."

Yet, Anjolie also hastens to add, She feels that these auctions have added credibility to the purchase of contemporary Indian art. Their catalogues provide an excellent reference point both for individual buyers and for galleries and museums. They establish not only prices but the provenance of Indian contemporary art.

It is perhaps best to sum up with Anjolie's own conception of the passion to paint that has driven her life. She says, Creative confidence is the hallmark of the great artist. The connection between the mind, eye and hand guided by emotion and imagination results in the ultimate creation of a work of art. Sometimes she feels that the people she paints will come out and talk to her. There is perhaps nothing more left to say beyond that. Art speaks for itself when in the hands of Anjolie Ela Menon.

4.2 Work and Style of Anjolie Ela Menon

Anjolie Ela Menon, one of the most creative women artists of South Asia has held over 30 solo shows and several group shows. Her works were exhibited in the fifty years celebration of Indian art at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and the Indian Government has honoured her with a Padma Shree.

Anjolie Ela Menon has worked for a six month solo at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco from 20th of May 2006 featuring her large triptych entitled “Yatra” (Fig. 1). This large work is inspired by the annual march of the Kavadiyas to the holy sites on
the Ganga, where they gather in their millions each year during Shravan to collect water in pots to carry back to their village shrines for the worship of Shiva, sometimes walking barefoot 500 miles\textsuperscript{35}.

\textbf{Style}

When she was about eighteen she was drawn to the romantic, elongated forms of Modigliani, and to the lyricism of that great Indian painter, Amrita Shergil. Shergil epitomized perfect aesthetics, distilling into her very still pictures all that was most beautiful in rural India. In France she shared a studio with a young Mexican painter called Francesco Toledo now much celebrated, and they shared the same problem, even though they had no common language initially. They influenced each other greatly; his sensitive, colorful paintings were replete with mythological creatures from Mexican lore, strange images floating in coloured spaces garnered from the bright hues of her Indian garments-pinks, oranges and purples.

Few contemporary Indian artists have created a body of work of such beauty and depth as Anjolie Ela Menon over the last four decades. Her paintings reveal an extraordinary sensibility. The early paintings were characterized by a moodiness, profoundly influenced by Romanesque art. The brilliance of a Byzantine palette and sensibility illuminated her work of the late 1960s and her subject matter included priests, prophets, Madonna's and brooding nudes\textsuperscript{27}. By the 1970's Menon's work began to acquire an allegorical, narrative quality but the myth was of the artist's own making-a strange amalgam of east and west. Goats, dogs, crows and lizards often attended the

\textsuperscript{35}Celebration painting by Anjolie Ela Menon, Text by Gayatri Sinha, May 19-June 11, 2006. An Arts India publication.
central protagonists. Diaphanously clad women, animals, birds, reptiles and apocalyptic male figures inhabit and impinge upon a mythical world excavated from the artist's subterranean existence. Later there was a transition in her work from the nude to the window and a concomitant shift in perspective from the very subjective to a more literary and cerebral mode. From painted windows Menon incorporated real windows in her work as 'objects trouves'. The actuality of the window and its irreverent ornateness connects the viewer to a grid of fractured spaces and multiple images. In the most realized works of this genre, Anjolie evokes that which is hinted at the unsung song that wafts across disturbing landscape—the unrealized dream that beckons through the window that serves as both metaphor and visual device⁴⁷.

The windows persisted through the 80's but now allegory gave way to an engagement with subjects from Kerala inspired by early photographs—seated figures, poised against fake backdrops, empty chairs and ascetic poojaris emerging from dark interiors. Throughout the 80's Menon painted in America every summer in the house of Aditya her eldest son. Many of those paintings are being seen for the first time in India. The 90's were marked by diverse explorations and innovations in a bold departure from her earlier work. In 1992 Menon turned towards an astounding source—the kabadiwallah. Entitled ‘Follies in Fantastical Furniture’, this tongue-in-cheek resurrection of abandoned junk was both audacious and innovatively amusing. As the noted art critic, the late Krishna Chaitanya noted, it was rewarding to share the mood in which she has created them, a mood of venturing into new directions, inspired by the modern, post-modern,

post-everything spirit of restless enquiry that probes fresh perspectives without any prior fanatical commitment. Chairs, tables, cupboards, boxes off junk heaps—little seemed to escape the artist in imparting these objects with an aesthetic autonomy. In an inimitably impish way, Menon broke fresh ground with irreverent panache.

The innovative experiments of the mid 1990s with computer aided images were amongst the first in India. The superimposition of overlapping images using computers, photography and collage painted over with acrylic, oils and inks results in an impressive tour de force entitled Mutations. In these works unexpected juxtapositions intrigue the viewer. While the complexity of the structure heightens the element of surprise, the elements of chance liberates the image from its familiar moorings. Nude, serpent, boy and crocodile remake themselves repeatedly, giving birth to unrecognized mutants, which claim a life of their own. Underlying the slick surface of the totally new picture are echoes the artist's earlier work, reinforcing those elements that have been associated with the Menon idiom while achieving a new sense of scale.

In the next phase, the artist, for the first time, explores the non-figurative—inspired by the Buddhist iconography of Ladakh. The continuous chanting of a 'mantra' is transmuted into image, evoking metonymic reverberations in these meditative paintings of 1998. The late 1990 saw Menon doing a volte face in terms of the choice of medium. The long standing ‘Riyaz’ with paint was put on hold. A completely different medium—glass—challenged the artist's creativity. Working in Murano with local Venetian mastery, Menon has created a body of exquisite crystal sculptures—entitled ‘Sacred Prism’ where

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38 Anjolie Ela Menon Lalit Kala Akademy, New Delhi, 2006
the austere precision of the finished object is sensuously beautiful. In her latest work Menon navigates the world of kitsch with empathy and engages with the familiar image from the calendar in the local riwailali's shop or the cinema hoarding that dot the urban landscape. As Gayatri Siriha perceptively observes of this new genre: "Menon emerges in the vanguard with investigation of the subversion of myth. She introduces the extremely recognizable figures from her own painting with the appurtenances of kitsch, thereby forcing a confrontation: between notions of elite 'high' and popular 'low' art."

All the new experimentation is still characterized by the old masterish technique, reminiscent of Renaissance paintings, for which she is best known but endures as a parody of itself. Self-mockery and sly satire, tranquility and disturbance imbue her work with an aura of paradox that transcends the melancholic romanticism that appears to be an integral part of her persona.

4.3: Exhibitions

Exhibitions

1959  First solo exh, Gallery 59, Bhulabhai Institute, Bombay. 1963 Solo exh., Alliance Française, Bombay.


1976  Solo exh, Gallery Chemould, Bombay.

1978  Exhb, New Delhi.


Bombay.

1989  Solo exhb, New York.


1996  Exhb, organised by Vadehra Art Gallery, Hong Kong.


2002  Solo exhb, organized by Vadehra Art Gallery, National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai.

2003  Solo exhb, organised by Vadehra Art Gallery, Shridharani Gallery, New Delhi.

Collections

National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.

Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi.

Apparao Gallery, Chennai.

4.4 AWARDS AND HONOURS CONFERRED ON ANJOLIE ELA MENON

Menon who has been awarded the Padmashree is amongst the most important artists in the current scene in contemporary Indian art. Indian artist Anjolie Ela Menon has been honoured from different luminaries worldwide. Isana Murti writes in the portfolio published by Lalit Kala Academy in 2006 ‘Anjolie Ela Menon, one of India’s best known artists’ that she had her first solo exhibition in 1958.38

38Anjolie Ela Menon: Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 2006
Richard Barthlomew, a renowned critic, wrote, 'I have no doubt that before long this
gifted young woman will be joining the ranks of our very best painters'. These words
have been truly prophetic and Menon’s trajectory over the last five decades is testimony
to the evolution of an artist who has defied easy classification and who has broken fresh
ground with confident panache.

Ranjit Hoskote writes ‘Menon has always prized what she terms the ‘aura’ of the
paintings. This aura has been achieved in her finest works.’ Gayatri Sinha writes ‘Her
panoply of figures, as they appear, signify non-space and non-time...like a wanton
fabulist, Menon brings accretion, division, conjunction to play upon the conventional
image. Nothing seems to dampen Anjolie Ela Menon's intense desire to create. One of
India's most celebrated artists, she remains down to earth and retains a keen interest in
people and happenings all around her which are reflected in her works'\(^{35}\).

**Awards**

**1959-61** Received French Govt. Scholarship for higher studies in Paris.

**1980-81** Invited to study art by the Govt. of France, UK and USA.

**2000** Awarded Padmashri, one of the highest civilian honours in India.

Anjolie Ela Menon has been nominated on the board of trustees of the Indira Gandhi
National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), the only visual artist to have been. Here's what
she has to say about her objective in accepting this new responsibility:

"My aim in serving on this trust is to build upon the great work that's already been done
specially in terms of scholarship and the collection of material which is of national

\(^{35}\)Celebration painting by Anjolie Ela Menon, Text by Gayatri Sinha, May 19-June 11, 2006. An Arts India
publication.
importance culturally". She says that she would like to help in whichever way she can in the speedy implementation of the building plans. It would also be her humble endeavour to add to the credibility of this institution by ensuring a greater interface with the public and the contemporary practitioners in the field of the arts, so that the activities associated with the IGNCA are more participatory in nature.\(^{38}\)
CHAPTER 5

ART OF ANJOLIE ELA MENON

5.1 Influence

Anjolie Ela Menon was influenced by the celebrities and institutes such as The Lawrence School, Lovedale (near Ootacamund), Tamil Nadu, well known painter Vincent Van Gogh, Expressionism School of Art, Italian Painter and Sculpture Modigliani, Indian female painter Amrita Shergil, renowned Indian painter M.F. Husain and mostly by Ingmar Bergman and Antonloni. Menon had her education from various institutions like J.J. School of Art. She got her Bachelor Degree in Literature from Delhi University, New Delhi, Atelier Fresque, Ecole Nationale des Beaux Art, Paris in 1959-61 and had several study tours to France, UK and USA in 1980-81.

In one of her interviews without blinking an eyelid she replies, "I am really inspired by M.F. Husain. When I was young, I learnt a lot from his way of functioning. He taught me that one could paint anywhere, even sitting on the floor. Even today, I sit on the floor and paint. To create something in the mind, and then to actualize it requires intense energy. It is a very difficult job. Husain has all this and more. Every painter has to ultimately face a blank canvas. To carry an idea to its fruition, you require all your resources, knowledge, skills and inspiration."

Most of the paintings of Anjolie Ela Menon have the influence of fresco on the technique during her time at the Beaux Arts. In one of her interviews she says she was
much inspired by Alain Peskine, a busy architecture student who was also a great photographer. Both of them became members of the Cinemateque and once saw ninety films in a month. At that time she thought Ingmar Bergman and Antonioni had a far greater impact on her than any painter, past or present. All this was leading her inexorably to discover in herself an affinity with the surrealist vision. It was the fifteenth-century Dutch painter Hieronymous Bosch who led her backwards through history to find the thread she was seeking so desperately. Here, surely, centuries before the word was invented, was the first Surrealist. Here at last was the mode, the way that one's consciousness could overlap at so many varying levels—the present, the past—every kind of diverse image from both conscious and subconscious states could find its place on a simple canvas, dream and reality coalescing with ease and humour. For the first time, she was also sensing that 'the bizarre' constituted such a great part of the creative genius of the French. She was riveted by Jean Genet's plays which were quite the rage in the 1960s. Dubuffet's mustachioed Mona Lisa had enchanted her. Two years later, in 1960, she went to Paris and studied in the Atelier Fresque at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. In fresco one has to draw because the fresh, wet lime-plaster is applied along the line of the drawing each day, rather like doing one huge piece of a jigsaw puzzle. It also uses a single application of pigment. There is no over-painting, no rubbing out. This technique brought her to use thinner paint and well-designed areas, very different from what she'd been doing. She had been to New York for the first time the year before and was very moved by visits to Harlem mainly in pursuit of a passion for jazz, and painted a series of Harlem pictures which were subsequently sold in Paris. Later on she had her trip back from France to India with a friend, she painted in water-colours for the first time. It is not her medium really, but there were hundreds of small, dense paintings, a sort of emotional diary of
travels through Turkey and Greece, weeks spent on an archaeological dig in Syria, journeying through the desert to Baalbek, Jericho and Jerusalem, spending nights in the sandy caves of Petra and ending up for two months in Iran consolidating the visual experiences of that amazing journey. Those years were full of vigour and abandon, with thick pigment and great swirls and swipes. By the time she left school she had painted at least forty canvases; by the age of fifteen she had sold quite a few. She had a rude shock when she joined the Sir J.J. School of Arts Bombay, at sixteen. Here, there were nothing but rows and rows of Greek and Roman statuary which we were compelled to draw from endlessly and the effort to rein us in and steep us in British academia led me into fits of sullen despair. No swirls and flourishes and no influences here. But outside school, impressions came thick and fast. There were a lot of exhibitions in Bombay. The Indian paintings which were what she call 'School of Maharashtra', a sort of half-way house between academic painting and miniatures; and, of course, she saw the first time the paintings of M.F. Husain and Mohan Samant, both of whom had influence me greatly. Samanta's early work was the first abstract expressionist painting she had seen and she much admired his handling of huge, empty spaces. She left art school in disgust after about six months and then came heavily under the influence of Husain, who was and continues to be a most charismatic figure. For a while she was influenced by the strong black outlines and flat surfaces of his style, but never his subject matter.

When she was about eighteen she was drawn to the romantic, elongated forms of Modigliani, and to the lyricism of that great Indian painter, Amrita Shergil. Shergil epitomized perfect aesthetics, distilling into her very still pictures all that was most beautiful in rural India. She strongly rejected the Bengal School of painters that, to her mind, had sentimentalized the poverty of the Bengali countryside to a level of such
sickly-sweet pathos that it palls to this day. At this time she painted prolifically and was not particularly concerned about finding a style of her own. In her first exhibition there were fifty-three paintings in a variety of styles. At that innocent age one acknowledged influences quite unabashedly. When she found her self at the Ecole des Beaux Art in Paris, she was totally bewildered by a vast array of new ideas and visions.

In one of her interviews she says my mentor was an elderly French lady who marched her to Versailles the very first weekend. The excesses of this ghastly place, coupled with the almost hostile chauvinism of French culture, put my back up at once. I was, for the first time in my life, on the defensive, searching, examining almost everything I saw for some thread that would connect me to my roots. I shared a studio with a young Mexican painter called Francesco Toledo (now much celebrated, and we shared the same problem, even though we had no common language initially. I think we influenced each other greatly; his sensitive, colourful paintings were replete with mythological creatures from Mexican lore, strange images floating in coloured spaces garnered from the bright hues of my Indian garments-pinks, oranges and purples.

Anjolies’s friend Shama Zaidi from Delhi joined her in Paris. On the very first day, she rushed her off to see St Chappelle, where they sat transfixed in a womb of glowing light in the centre of that exquisite, shimmering vault that contains the world's most beautiful stained-glass windows. Their journeying began. They were on a Romanesque and Gothic kick, hitch-hiking to every cathedral in France and to remote villages where they’d heard of a Romanesque church. She got influenced by those stark wooden Christs, the Madonnas so basic in their power and strength, stoically feeding or holding an infant Jesus who, most often, would look like a miniature adult. The somber browns and reds,
the whites stark against chequered robes, ornamentation an artifice contrasting with archaic faces, all these had a powerful hold over her visual consciousness that was to last nearly twenty years. With the above discussed influences it seems that Anjolie Ela Menon, based on her international exposure and many different kinds of influences, is a veteran women artist of the contemporary era.
5.2 Master pieces of Anjolie Ela Menon
The Sacred Prism II

The Sacred Prism II collection is a closed number series of 56 individual works in Murano Art Glass by Anjolie Ela Menon in collaboration with Antonio Da Ros, produced in Murano, Italy at Gino Cenedese. These are one-off signed glass sculptures created between 1998 and 1999.

"Gods and Others"

An exhibition, featuring Menon's much awaited new works, titled 'Gods and Others' is scheduled to begin from October 12, at the Admit One Gallery, New York, with an Opening reception with Artist. It will stay on till November the 6th. Welcome to an exclusive insight and a rare glimpse of the collection on display.

"The Current Exhibition makes a departure from the usual emotional tenor of her work. She uses elements of kitsch together with the imagery that is identifiable with her usual and recognizable signature, sometimes as ironical counterpoint and occasionally as sheer embellishment. In the present series these have come together as an eccentric pastiche in what may appear to be a creative imperative. For years she has been collecting kitsch—the shiny aluminium and plastic brightly painted images of Gods and Goddesses of the Indian pantheon which are ubiquitous in every local bazaar. The manner in which she draws from these garish and often naive pictures is jackdaw-like in its resourcefulness. The bright images redeemed from cards and calenders provide stark contrasts: between so called High and Low art, between gaudiness and the sombre gravitas which is usually
earlier artists plunged backwards in history in the post-Independence quest for Indian roots, this is an engagement with the prevailing visual matrix of our own times, bringing the vivid culture of the street and bazaar to the exclusive confines of gallery walls. Reinforced by the artist's formidable technique and creativity, each of these pictures is imbued with satire and the result is both intriguing and thought provoking."

5.3 Techniques

She is known for the haunting imagery and brilliant enamel-like patina found in her paintings. For Anjolie, who has studied art in Paris and lived and traveled widely in Europe and West Asia. However, instead of contemporary western art, she chose the archaic Byzantine art and the Romanesque art of medieval Europe as her source of inspiration. To Anjolie medieval art of Europe seemed closer to the spirit of India than modern art.

Anjolie Menon's paintings, primarily in oil on masonite board, are known for their transparent quality and haunting imagery. She uses the medieval and renaissance styles of painting to reflect her personal fantasy based on contemporary Indian imagery. She often uses old Sepia-tinted photographs from her family album - where people are all dressed up and sit stiffly on ornamental chairs - as subjects for her paintings. What fascinates her in these photographs is their 'still' or 'static' quality. Anjolie's ability to capture a 'frozen' moment in time and to reflect both the outer reality and the

Menon’s reality is her style which is also evident in her home next to Humayun’s Tomb in Nizamuddin East. Two flights of stairs bring you in conversation with a wall of paintings, some autographed by Menon. Who needs a nameplate? Once inside, one can’t escape the mischief in design. Pillars inside rooms stop prying eyes from seeing too much; corridors lead not to rooms, but walls of paintings like art galleries; and, of course, there are windows that offer no view as they are works of art. As soon as one settles down on the drawing room sofa, notices the eyes. Facing is a canvas of an eye peeping through a worn fabric. Across the room another eye watches from a kitschy cupboard. And four melancholic faces stare from a painted trunk-cum-coffee table by the couch.

It’s a reflection of a five-decade career interspersed with experimentation that paved way for trends. “Back in 1960, as a student in Atelier Fresque, Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris, when everyone was embracing modernism she did the maverick thing of being inspired by 15th century Christian art.” In 2000, she was the first Indian artist to work with computers. While the Indian preview was received with scepticism, it was a hit in New York. For this she took help from her software engineer son Aditya—his son Veer is a computer geek. “He persuaded her to enjoy technology and not get frightened by it. She is still bad at gadgets and can’t even use her mobile properly, but she thinks the computer is a great tool. It can help you change colours in a flash and make a crow sitting on a chair fly off.”

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28 Based on interview with Isana Murty.
Menon has also resurrected junk and turned it into artifacts—art you can sit on, or keep your jams and pickles in. “Art of retrieval is part of the Indian ethos; we do not belong to a throwaway society,” says Menon, who also enjoyed a stint with kitsch, in a show titled *Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai*, a name inspired aptly by a Hindi movie hit from the time.

“Anjolie is savvy, has great imagination, has done bold experiments in the early 1990s with old Chettinad furniture and digital art,” says Madhu Jain, art critic and curator of *Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai*. “Of late, however, she hasn’t done much soul searching or pushed the envelope of creativity and taken new risks. She needs to go by her gut feeling more often. Her initial work had melancholy in it, but now it seems to come from her palette and not her heart.” Mumbai-based Ranjit Hoskote, poet, author, art critic and curator of contemporary Indian art, feels few portray the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie as Menon does. Within the terms she sets for herself she’s quite credible, in his view. “She is honest and there’s no gulf between her stated intent and her work. However, her work makes no claims on the viewer beyond the painterly and she does not invoke rhetoric to justify her work,” says the critic who last year wrote a book on Jehangir Sabavala. Hoskote adds that most criticism that comes Menon’s way pertains less to aesthetics, more to avarice about her price.

Typically, Menon is unperturbed. What matters to her currently, she says, is that she can effortlessly transform from grandmother to painter with a ladle in one hand and a brush in the other. Her day begins at 7 am, followed by *pranayama* and yoga and cooking lunch for her family. She works in the studio from 9 am to 2 pm, returning home to take charge of her grandchildren. Together, they draw, play fish, walk in the park, practice long jump and athletics. Though her diabetic foot restricts some of her prime-time
activities with the kids, she likes her life peopled. “My life is forever hectic,” she says. Galleries call to enquire about her next painting, artists invite her to their shows, her students to their weddings, relatives come to stay over, and then there’s shopping. “She says that she never learned to say ‘no’ to people,” she says helplessly scanning her appointment diary. A couple of years ago, she even attended a three-day course to learn to say ‘no’ than being Shanghaied into doing things by other people all the time. It hasn’t helped, though. Every other weekend, Menon along with family retire to their farmhouse in Haryana. But she never paints here. “Idyllic places like mountains paralyse her. She needs the urban stimulus to work.” Her muse is Mumbai’s Mohammad Ali Road, the rows of windows lining the street and the life behind them. Even in Delhi, Menon looks forward to her weekly trips to raucous INA market seeking fresh crab and fish for her kitchen and ideas for her canvas.

Eccentric, volatile and outspoken, Anjolie Ela Menon’s personality makes an impression as strong as her art. In the past 10 years, P Chidambaram has been the only person to visit Anjolie Ela Menon’s studio in Nizamuddin Basti, Delhi. In November last year, the finance minister painted a canvas with Menon for a fund-raising event for unprivileged children. He was caught off-guard by a tattered curtain at the entrance, and Menon told him, “This is where the other half [of Anjolie] lives.”

A tiny workspace with used and unused canvases and crushed colour tubes, it is her hideaway. No phones, no visiting friends or family. Harmony, though, was allowed in for her cover shoot. The degree of anonymity it enjoys is accentuated by the absence of guards. “Friends in this basti are her best protectors and they allow her a possibility of solitude,” says Menon. For now, though, security is not an issue—the studio is fairly empty.
apart from two canvases she painted when she was 15 and some palm-sized faces for her next show.

She says "She gets 10 to 15 calls a day from galleries and auction houses for paintings, but she has nothing to give them. It's impossible to do a solo show," says Menon whose last big work was a triptych, titled Yatra, which explores religious themes—
the Asian Art Museum, New York, acquired it in May 2006. Her recent exhibition at Dhoomimal Art Gallery in Delhi was a group show—with a difference—with her architect son Raja Menon and two young granddaughters (Raja's daughters), Indeera and Madhavi. Titled Menon-Ji-Tis (pronounced 'meningitis'; Menon quips art is spreading like a disease in the family), Uma Ravi Jain of Dhoomimal thought of the idea three years ago when she first saw Indeera's and Madhavi's work—the girls were then 5 and 7. It reminded Menon of her own introduction to art. The artist discovered her passion for paint in the art room of Lawrence School, Asansol. Her guru Susheel Mukherjee initiated her into oils when she was 11. By 12, she was sure about her talent—she had won the Shankar's national art competition held for schoolchildren every year, and one of her paintings, Sailing Boats, had been bought for Rs 100 by Dr Zakir Hussain. Over the years, she saw several artists' works. M F Husain's bold lines and flat surfaces—but not his subject matter—influenced her. And he saw in her a promising artist.

By 17, she had her first solo show, organised by Husain for her in the capital's Lodhi Estate. "Without Susheel (her teacher) and Husain (her mentor), she would have been just another burnt-out child prodigy." Thankfully, she says, she is there to train Indeera and Madhavi, recycling every loose sheet and painting old greeting cards or using them in collage. For Menon-Ji-Tis, the girls' simple, happy acrylic sketches nestled close
to their father Raja Raja’s structural drawings and their Dadu’s (Anjolie) melancholic figures.

While Indeera and Madhavi may ride easy on their grandmother’s fame, Menon herself didn’t have it easy. From lack of time to lack of space (once she even painted in a broom closet) and patronage, she laboured like every new artist must. Early in her marriage to Raja Menon, a naval officer, the artist decided not to let household chores deter her. “One just has to husband the day in a way that one can paint,” she says. And there was Husain. “He taught her to paint like a nomad, with the canvas leaning against any wall or bag of paints.”

Today, all her works sell out on the first day of a new show, including Menon-Ji-Tis. At Christie’s and Sotheby’s auctions, her work fetches anything between Rs 15 lakh and Rs 70 lakh—right now, there’s not a single new painting in her studio. And when there is, she is selective about where to show and whom to sell it to. Menon’s biggest collector Dinesh Javeri, who bought 35 of her paintings, passed away recently. He began to buy her work when she was unknown and paid her Rs 3,000 for the first painting he bought. His daughter Amrita inherited his collection. Industrialists Harsh Goenka and Yash Birla and friend Lalita Ramdas are her other collectors. While Birla wants to build on his collection, Menon’s family is also planning to set up a gallery-cum-art centre of her works. It will be tough, she says, as most of her works are part of private collections. Menon never believed in preserving for posterity. So she veered from one event to the other, her style as unique as her mentor’s. She says, “She never smiles while painting. She is not a middle-class housewife smiling at the camera.” The only two emotions she guards herself against are envy and anger.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Anjolie Ela Menon one of the most creative women artists of South Asia, has held over 30 solo shows and several group shows. Her works were exhibited in the fifty years celebration of Indian art at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and the Indian Government has honoured her with a Padma Shree. She is influenced by the work styles of the great Indian painter, Amrita Shergil. Shergil epitomized perfect aesthetics, distilling into her very still pictures all that was most beautiful in rural India. In France she shared a studio with a young Mexican painter called Francesco Toledo, and they shared the same problem, even though they had no common language initially. They influenced each other greatly, his sensitive, colorful paintings were replete with mythological creatures from Mexican lore. Few contemporary Indian artists have created a body of work of such beauty and depth as Anjolie Ela Menon over the last four decades. Her paintings reveal an extraordinary sensibility. Menon’s early canvases exhibit the varied influences of van Gogh, the European Expressionists, Modigliani, Amrita Sher-Gil, and M.F. Husain. Mainly portraits, these paintings were dominated by flat areas of thick bright color, with sharp outlines that were painted with the vigour and brashness of extreme youth. Some of her solo shows include the ones held at Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2003, 2002, 1996 and by The Gallery, in New York, 1989. Her works were exhibited in the Paris Biennale, 1980 and International Triennale, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1975, 71 and 68. A retrospective of her works was held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai in 2002. Some of her group exhibitions include, Saffron
art and Apparao Galleries in Los Angeles 2001 and Saffron art, Hong Kong 2001. She has been an invitee of the British Council, the U.S. Department of Culture and the French Ministry of Culture.

The early paintings were characterized by moodiness, profoundly influenced by Romanesque art. The brilliance of a Byzantine palette and sensibility illuminated her work of the late 1960s and her subject matter included priests, prophets, Madonna’s and brooding nudes. The innovative experiments of the mid 1990s with computer aided images were amongst the first in India. The superimposition of overlapping images using computers, photography and collage painted over with acrylic, oils and inks results in an impressive tour de force entitled Mutations. In these works unexpected juxtapositions intrigue the viewer. While the complexity of the structure heightens the element of surprise, the elements of chance liberate the image from its familiar moorings. Nude, serpent, boy and crocodile remake themselves repeatedly, giving birth to unrecognized mutants, which claim a life of their own. Menon has created a body of exquisite crystal sculptures-entitled the Sacred Prism-where the austere precision he finished object is sensuously beautiful. She is also a well-known muralist and has represented India at the Algiers Biennale, the Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil and three triennials in New Delhi. She has been invited by the British Council, the U.S. State Department and the French Ministry of Culture to confer with leading artists in those countries. Menon has served on the advisory committee and the art purchase-committee of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, where she was co-curator with Henri Claude Cousseau for an exhibition of French Contemporary Art in 1996. She says that she hardly draws. She thinks she colours and paints lines in reverse. Colour is everything. Its depth or density, translucence or opacity forms the nuances of one's whole creative output. Her work
recently went under the hammer at the Christie's and Sotheby's auctions of Contemporary Indian Art in London. A book entitled "ANJOLIE ELA MENON: Paintings in Private Collections" has been published on her life and work. The above review of the work and style of Anjolie Ela Menon indicates about a number of influences on her work and style and also is the testimony of her excellence in fine arts.

On the other hand the work and style of Arpana Caur is not influenced by any artists. The artistic expression of Arpana Caur is the distillate of a long period of struggle. Arpana Caur went through this entire journey herself, unlike other artists who were given readymade solutions at art school. Having made a practical survey as it were, she chose definite options in her work from 1974 onwards. Her early figures remind one of the stocky, rounded treatments of Gupta aesthetics, which she later blended with influences from Chola bronzes and provincial Mughal styles of the Deccan and the Himalayan foothills. She then went the whole hog into collaborative works with folk artists and ended up evolving a visual expression that draws on folk motifs but expresses concrete present-day concerns as a sort of 'magical reality'.

At every stage, she had to make her own choice of visual language in relation to her own experiences, which differ from the ordinary in many ways. All the environmental, political and social events affected her life and art profoundly. The unconventional nature of the life she has led has helped Arpana keep away from the conventional art and strike out on a path of her own. That is why she remained firmly figurative while most of Delhi' artists were steeped in abstraction to one degree or another. The incorporation of abstract and textured spaces in her compositions was a much later development in keeping with her slow and steady progress based on her own
perception and experience. This is the basis of the authenticity of her art and its continuity. She had never been trained as a painter, her works were selected by M.F. Hussain in 1974 for an exhibition at the capital’s premier launching pad, Triveni. Following this success she joined St. Martin’s in London to study art but dropped out early and started displaying her various paintings in the exhibitions. She had her first sell out show in Bombay in 1980 and has worked on the murals on environment with German artist Sohnke Nissan. She has had solo shows in London, Berlin and Ottawa and six international museums already house her collections. Arpana seems to be influenced by miniature paintings very much. We can see the glimpse of modern art in her paintings clearly. She is her own master which is drawn from many different sources. The theme of her painting is closely related to our daily life which has illustrated not only to eminent personalities like Lord Budha but to a common man and the Indian women as well. We can see the images of a labourer, nature and environment also in her paintings. She has emphasized the Sufi saints like Kabeer and Guru Nanak. She never felt easy with the acrylic paints and, therefore, mainly works with oil paints. In addition to oil paints she also uses various other mediums like glass paintings, pencil drawing etc. She started the Etching painting in 1981 on a zinc plate and continued it for nearly 15 years. She painted enormous glass paintings which were displayed for the exhibition in the year 1988. She never compromised with the quality of the painting ingredients and has always used the artist quality paints. Human figures have a special significance in her paintings and hence most of her paintings contain human figures. She prefers making large size human paintings. Most of her paintings are nearly 4-5ft in length which is not influenced by the idea of some other painter rather she has her own style to make such figures. Her figures do not follow the strict rules of body ratio because she has not been trained as an artist.
On the basis of theme of the paintings, these figures decide their ratio by themselves. Her human figures have three main categories: (a) figures closely resembling to human figures (b) very realistic figures and (c) figures depicting formlessness. There is also the global image of a bombed-out public building of Hiroshima that the nuclear threat posed by imperialism has given worldwide significance to, in a work commissioned by the Hiroshima Museum for the fiftieth anniversary of the holocaust. Lately, she has added images from the folk-art of the Warlis and of tattoo artists of the Godna tradition to her repertoire. Later, she shifted the focus of these to her personal contemporary view of things as one can see from the figures of saints plugging in to the Tree of Enlightenment. What really makes them stand out is her unselfconscious way of expressing these realities as she does in her goddesses of the past and present, contrasting the devi figure with that of a female building-labourer carrying bricks. Her art is remarkable in the simplicity with which she presents a radical view of the realities of our lives, using images that we are used to, in a new context.

Since 1986 Arpana Caur has covered a variety of issues related to gender, violence, the inner quest for nirvana and the predicament of the contemporary woman. Some of her recent work feature political incidents, like ‘Heart of Darkness’ which depicts the Bamiyan Budha incident in Afghanistan in 2000. She is highly energetic and wit is never ruled out which makes her heart enjoyable. Her canvas relives the legendary love of Soni and Mahiwal. Soni continues a series on the immortal lovers. Soni and Mahiwal whose story is now a part of collective myth that is celebrated beyond the boundaries of Punjab but for Arpana the story is essentially about a woman’s courage in love. Elements like water, pots, scissors and umbrella feature regularly on her canvas. She is obsessed with water. She first used water in her 1984 riots series as a symbol of
death. Over recent years her works have become more symbolic and certain symbols keep appearing. Colour still dominates her work. She is an artist with her own ideas and agenda and neither influenced easily nor does she changes her expressions with what is fashionable or just to please the market forces. Her ability to always present us with a powerful humanism makes her an acute explorer of the paradoxes and passions of life. Her paintings aware us of her persona and how she sees the world.

The work of Anjolie Ela Menon and Arpana Caur, the veteran contemporary women artists, embodies in this thesis truly reflects their passion for the sufferings of the poor people, the life of the Sufi saints, highlighted political and religious issues, corruption in the society and gender violence specifically the sufferings of the women in male dominated society. They have also portrayed the natural beauty of environment and its deterioration caused by human beings. The contemporary art has contributed a lot in projecting various flaws of the society and attracting the attention of the administrators to rectify them.

\[\text{Based on interview with Isana Murti.}\]
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Fig. 65  Nature, category: painting, Medium: oil on canvas.
Fig. 66  Tree of suffering, Tree of Life and Tree of Enlightenment, category: painting, Medium: oil on canvas.
Fig. 67  ICAI opening show-2007 Title: Ram Rahim two faces of India, category: painting, style: figurative, Medium: oil on canvas, size: 36 x 53in
Fig. 68  Master 2, category: painting, style: figurative, Medium: oil on Masamite board, size: 13 x 10in
Fig. 69  Master class online group show category: painting, style: figurative, Medium Oil on Masamite board
Fig. 70  Art for God’s sake 2006, category: painting, medium: mixed media on paper size: 22 x 30in
Fig. 71  RPG Art camp-2006, category: painting, style: landscape, Medium: oil on Masamite board
Fig. 72  Portrait of Raja 1974, category: painting
Fig. 73  Mohan as a young boy, 1960, category: painting
Fig. 74  Aswan, category: painting, oil on Masamite, size: 16x12in
Fig. 75  Anou 1950, category: painting
Fig. 76  Dead Sea 1962, category: painting
Fig. 77  Refugee 1957, category: painting
Fig. 78  Martha 1957, category: painting
Fig. 79  Family 1967, category: painting
Fig. 80  Eliamma 1959
Fig. 81  Giza, category: painting, oil on Masonite 16x12in
Fig. 82  Fisher women 1956, category: painting
Fig. 83  Portrait 1958, category, painting
Fig. 84  Zara, category: painting, medium: oil on canvas, size: 12x10in
Fig. 85  Kartik oil on Masonite, category: painting, size: 48x24.
Fig. 86  November oil on Masonite, category: painting, size: 36x24in
Fig. 87  Chair oil on canvas, category: painting, size: 48x36.
Fig. 88  Luxor, oil on Masonite, category: painting, size: 36x24in
Fig. 89  After the Party, category: painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 16x12in.
Fig. 90  Kartik, category: painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 12x10in.
Fig. 91  Blue Nude, category painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 24x48in

Fig. 92  Gestation, category painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 36x24in

Fig. 93  Goatherd, category painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 48x24in

Fig. 94  Rajaraja, category painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 16x12in

Fig. 95  Pastoral I, category painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 72x24in

Fig. 96  Pastoral II, category painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 72x24in

Fig. 97  Madurai, category painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 48x24in

Fig. 98  Visarjan, category painting, Medium: oil on Masonite

Fig. 99  Haveli, category painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 36x24in

Fig. 100  Yatra, category painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 72x96in

Fig. 101  Purusha, category painting, height 38cm

Fig. 102  Trinetra lingam, category painting, height 44cm

Fig. 103  Mahatejasvi, category painting, height 38cm

Fig. 104  Gajavandana, category painting, height 39cm

Fig. 105  Xenobia Plate, diam. 33cm

Fig. 106  Madhavi plate, diam. 33cm
Fig. 107  Panchami Sculpture in vetro Massiccio Melone e Corallo. Segna e Filamenti da Nero Iride con base Ambra Corrosso, height 61.5cm

Fig. 108  Sada Shiva lingam, ht. 36cm

Fig. 109  Shakti lingam, Scuplture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Ambra e Indaco con spechhio, ht. 41cm.

Fig. 110  Vakratunda sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Blu Sotto e Aquamare Sopra in Scavo Foglie d’oro, ht. 28.5 cm

Fig. 111  Karyamangalam, sculpture in vetro Massiccio Sommerso Cristallo verde petrolio e oro tutto, ht. 32cm.

Fig. 112  Vinayaka, scuptura in vetro Massicio Sommerso Cristallo Melone, Giallo e corallo sfumato e lattimo con decorato di filamenti Nero e Murrina, ht. 36cm

Fig. 113  Gajanana, category painting, height 51cm

Fig. 114  Balgopala, Scupture in vetro Blu sfumato con Iride e decorato d’oro, accros 32cm

Fig. 115  Gajanana, category painting, height 49cm

Fig. 116  Kabeer, sculpture in vetro Massicio e Sommerso Cristallo in Blu Sotto e Aquamare Sopra in Scavo Foglie d’oro, ht. 28.5cm
**Fig. 117** Purushottam sculpture a forma de ‘Testa’ in vetro Topo Sotto e Rosso Sopra con specchio, ht 28cm

**Fig. 118** Purushottam sculpture a forma de ‘Testa’ in vetro Rosso Sotto e Ametista Sopra con Specchio, ht 29cm

**Fig. 119** Aditya sculpture Purushottam sculpture a forma de ‘Testa’ in vetro Latimo Opaline Sotto e Foglie Argento, ht 29cm

**Fig. 120** The Pain, category: painting, Medium: Oil on canvas, size 35x55in.

**Fig. 121** Shabnam 1996, category: painting, Medium: oil on Masonite, size: 24 x 32in

**Fig. 122** Neel Kantham, sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Blu mare e Grigio sfumato con illuisione di Lignia Nero ht. 39cm

**Fig. 123** Lingam, category: Murano glass creations, Lingams, ht. 39 cm

**Fig. 124** Amarnath, sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo con vari Strati Sommersi Blu e e aquamare e inclusione di Scrittura Nero ht. 38.5cm.

**Fig. 125** Ananda Lingam, sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Latimo Opaline e Nero de Segno Bianco e Rubino ht. 40cm.

**Fig. 126** Siddhi Lingam Neel Kantham, sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Grigio sfumato con inclusione di Lignia Giallo ht. 39cm.
Fig. 127  Vishwadhar, Neel Kantham, sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Topo e Ambra sfumato con illusione di Segno Nero ht. 39cm.

Fig. 128  Agni Lingam, Neel Kantham, sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Ambra sfumato con Rosso e Corallo applicator ht. 33.5cm.

Fig. 129  Lingam, Neel Kantham, sculpture ht. 34.5cm.

Fig. 130  Bramha, Vishnu, Mahesh Neel Kantham, sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Blu mare e Grigio sfumato con illusione di Lignia Nero ht. 39cm

Fig. 131  Sindhu Lingam, Neel Kantham, sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Nero e Aquamarine con grande Oro Murrina ht. 41cm

Fig. 132  Atman, sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Ametista sfumato con inclusione di lignia Opace Bianco e Murrina Grande Ametista e Bianco ht. 39cm

Fig. 133  Bhakti Lingam, sculpture in vetro Massiccio e Sommerso Cristallo in Cristallo e Rubino sfumato con inclusione Sommerso Ditto Rosso ht. 28cm

Fig. 134  November 2000, 24x48in.

Fig. 135  Legend of Seafarer’s wife 1995, category: painting, medium: oil on masonite, size: 48 x 36in.
Fig. 136  The Magician Story 1995, category: painting, medium: oil on Masonite, size: 48x36in.

Fig. 137  Alchi 1998, category: painting, size: 60x36in.

Fig. 138  Journey to Journey of Leh 1998, category: painting, size 14x18in.

Fig. 139  Kamraj 1960, category: painting, 36x24in

Fig. 140  Lets be Friends? Category: painting, size: 23x34x23in.

Fig. 141  Lets be Friends? Category: painting, size: 23x34x23in.

Fig. 142  Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai,

Fig. 143  Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai,

Fig. 144  Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai,

Fig. 145  Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai,

Fig. 146  Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai

Fig. 147  Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai,

Fig. 148  Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai,