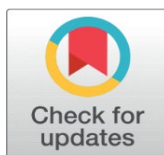


EVOLUTION OF INDIAN VISUAL ARTS WITH FRESH PERSPECTIVES: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Paintings and sculptures are among the most sensitive and expressive forms of art, capturing human thoughts and emotions through the use of line, colour, and form. Long before recorded history—when early humans still lived in caves—they felt a deep need to express their creativity. They painted the walls of their rock shelters, driven by an innate sense of beauty and imagination. In Indian culture, the love for colour, pattern, and artistic expression is deeply rooted. Even during historical periods where we have limited documentation, Indians created vibrant drawings and paintings that reflect this enduring passion.

Keywords: Indian, Visual Arts, Historical Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Paintings and sculptures are among the most sensitive and expressive forms of art, capturing human thoughts and emotions through the use of line, colour, and form. Long before recorded history—when early humans still lived in caves—they felt a deep need to express their creativity. They painted the walls of their rock shelters, driven by an innate sense of beauty and imagination. In Indian culture, the love for colour, pattern, and artistic expression is deeply rooted. Even during historical periods where we have limited documentation, Indians created vibrant drawings and paintings that reflect this enduring passion.

Nandalal Bose (3 December 1882 – 16 April 1966) was a pioneering figure in modern Indian art and played a crucial role in what came to be known as Contextual Modernism. As one of the most celebrated students of Abanindranath Tagore (7 August 1871 – 5 December 1951), who founded the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Bose carried forward a powerful artistic legacy. His influence reached across generations. In his painting of a

woman offering 'Pranam', we see a graceful fusion of simplicity and heartfelt expression. The work reflects not only his refined pictorial style but also the rich energy and vibrancy of Indian folk art that deeply inspired him.

Kshitindranath Majumdar (1891–1975) was a prominent figure of the Bengal School of Art. A devoted student of Abanindranath Tagore and a contemporary of noted artists like Nandalal Bose and Asit Kumar Haldar, Kshitindranath remained deeply committed to the original aesthetics that defined the Bengal School. His work often reflected inspiration drawn from Indian miniature painting, as seen in his evocative painting *Spring*. He was known for his soft, gentle palette and a refined lyrical grace that set his drawings apart. In this particular sensitivity of line and mood, he remains almost unparalleled.

Jamini Roy (11 April 1887 – 24 April 1972), another celebrated student of Abanindranath Tagore, carved out a distinct path that had a profound influence on generations of Indian painters. Honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 1954, Roy distanced himself from the mainstream styles of his contemporaries and turned instead to the vibrant idioms of Bengal's folk art traditions. His works—like the painting of *Pujarinis*—are marked by bold flat colours, simplified forms, and strong, confident lines. Roy's direct and stylized approach gave his art a unique and powerful voice.

Gaganendranath Tagore (17 September 1867 – 14 February 1938), an elder brother of Abanindranath and an equally pioneering figure, was both a painter and cartoonist who helped shape the foundations of modern Indian art. Though he shared much in spirit with the broader Indian Renaissance movement, Gaganendranath, like the poet-painter Rabindranath Tagore, was a remarkable individualist. His artistic vision often veered toward the experimental, as seen in his paintings that echo elements of Cubism, such as in his imaginative and surreal work *The Magician*. His art stands as a testament to creative freedom and the synthesis of Indian sensibility with modernist innovations.

Jamini Roy's paintings are notable for their distinctive and dramatic treatment of light and shadow, lending his work a striking theatricality. His painting *Pujarins* exemplifies this signature style, where traditional subjects are rendered with bold clarity and stylized form.

Abdur Rahman Chughtai (21 September 1897 – 17 January 1975), an iconic painter and intellectual from Pakistan, was deeply influenced by the Bengal School of Art, yet he crafted a visual language uniquely his own. Drawing inspiration from Mughal miniatures, Art Nouveau, and Islamic art traditions, Chughtai's work is romantic and poetic, characterized by flowing lines and a soft, nostalgic palette. His paintings often evoke a sense of gentle lyricism, blending Persian thought with South Asian aesthetics.

Rabindranath Tagore, though best known as a Nobel-winning poet and writer, turned passionately to painting later in life. His artworks—like *Study of a Head*—emerged not from formal training but from a deep, inner compulsion. These creations flowed from the subconscious, giving shape to dream-like images and archetypal figures, infused with a haunting sense of fantasy and introspection.

K. Sreenivasulu (1923–1995), a painter from Madras, was trained at the Government School of Arts & Crafts. Like Jamini Roy, he was deeply moved by folk art and the vitality of rural life. His paintings embraced stylization and decorative effects, drawing heavily from the South Indian mural traditions of Tanjavur and Lepakshi, reflecting a rich regional heritage in both form and content.

With A.A. Almelkar (Abdulrahim Appabhai Almelkar, 10 October 1920 – 12 December 1982), Indian painting entered a new phase. Born in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, Almelkar studied at Sir J.J. School of Art, Mumbai, graduating in 1948. In his formative years, he was influenced by renowned artists like N.S. Bendre and

Langhammer. Almelkar's works signify a shift in contemporary Indian art, as they balance the traditional with the experimental, ushering in a modern sensibility rooted in indigenous expressions.

The work remains deeply rooted in both technique and form within the traditions of Indian miniature and mural painting. Yet, a clear and distinctive shift emerges—one marked by a highly individualistic approach to composition, signaling an ideological departure from tradition. This evolution is vividly illustrated in a painting by K.K. Hebbar (Kattingeri Krishna Hebbar, 15 June 1911 – 26 March 1996), a celebrated artist known for capturing the essence of Indian life in his works.

In Hebbar's depiction of a bride and groom, the symbolic use of form becomes central—the graphic clarity, the dominant presence of white, and the structured placement of a musical ensemble at the base together reveal a new structural vision. This arrangement does not simply replicate tradition but reimagines it, suggesting a broader conceptual leap.

The full expression of this vision, and its immense potential, is seen in Laxman Pai's work *Autumn*. Pai (21 January 1926 – 14 March 2021), a distinguished painter and former principal of the Goa College of Art (1977–1987), harmonizes human experience with the natural world in a seamless, poetic fusion. His imagery, while elemental, resonates deeply—it evokes the inseparability of man and nature, transforming both into a unified, fantastical whole.

This transition is further reflected in the paintings of the 1960s by Jagdish Swaminathan (J. Swaminathan, 21 June 1928 – 1994)—a visionary artist, poet, and writer—whose works carry forward this spirit of experimentation and introspection, laying the groundwork for new modernist trajectories in Indian art.

J. Swaminathan played a vital role in shaping India's modern art scene, particularly through his contribution to the founding of Bharat Bhawan, a renowned multi-arts complex in Bhopal, established in 1982. He served as the director of its Roopankar Art Museum until 1990, where his vision helped shape the trajectory of contemporary Indian art.

Among his most significant contributions was his discovery of Jangarh Singh Shyam (1962–2001), a Gond tribal artist from Madhya Pradesh. Jangarh's groundbreaking work gave rise to a distinct art movement now known as Jangarh Kalam—a unique synthesis of tribal tradition and contemporary expression. His art gained international recognition, with exhibitions held in Bhopal, Delhi, Tokyo, New York, and notably 'Magiciens de la Terre' in Paris (1989), which marked a pivotal moment in placing tribal art on the global map.

A member of the Communist Party of India, Swaminathan's ideology often merged with his aesthetic—his works reflect a deep philosophical inquiry into form and symbolism. His paintings often evoke a surreal sense of space, such as his depiction of Vrindavan, where the serene landscape is framed against two conical, symmetrical rocks—a motif that became central to his artistic vocabulary, rich with meaning and personal resonance.

Similarly, the visual language of Biren De (1926–2011), another seminal modern Indian artist, delves into the metaphysical. Known for his radiant and symmetrical compositions, Biren De's work was deeply influenced by Tantric philosophy. His paintings, with their glowing mandalas, and symbolic representations of masculine (phallus) and feminine (yoni) energies, reflect a spiritual cosmos where geometry and mysticism intersect. His imagery vibrates with energy, inviting contemplation of the universe's inherent dualities and balance.

Biren De was honored with the Padma Shri by the Government of India in 1992, a recognition of his profound contribution to Indian modern art. In his paintings, he achieves a vision of spiritual illumination—a primal, self-emanating concept of light. His work titled "June 70" exemplifies this vision, where a dark central core radiates with concentric brilliance, embodying a meditative stillness and cosmic energy.

The concept of human figures and landscapes has seen a remarkable transformation through the eyes of contemporary Indian artists. One such pioneer was Sailoz Mookherjee (1906–1960), a key figure in the evolution of early modern Indian painting. Known for his simplification of forms, vibrant lines, and a sense of

dynamic movement, Sailoz infused his compositions with life and immediacy. His ability to distill the essence of a subject into bold yet expressive forms marked a new direction in Indian art.

Recognized as one of the "Nine Masters" by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1979, Sailoz Mookherjea remains an important bridge between traditional sensibilities and modernist innovations in Indian painting.

Sailoz Mookherjea's work drew deep inspiration from everyday life—people and the surrounding environment. His sensitivity to the world around him is evident in works like *The Mosque*, featuring a tender portrayal of a mother with children. This early painting, later featured on a stamp released by India Post, reflects his focus on composition over detail, highlighting the overall form and unity of figures rather than their minute characteristics.

S.D. Chavda's painting of Kathakali dancers preparing their makeup stands as a testament to his meticulous draughtsmanship. The powerful anatomy of the dancers, their poised postures, and confident brushwork show his technical command. The distribution of elements in the composition is well-balanced, giving the work a strong visual rhythm.

K.G. Subramanyan (1924–2016), a modernist giant and recipient of the Padma Vibhushan in 2012, pushed figuration toward abstraction in deeply expressive ways. His work *Cock-Seller* depicts prancing roosters, an elongated figure, a cart, and towering houses—all arranged in a deliberately stylized, vertical format. The abstraction gives the piece emotional and narrative intensity while retaining its folk-inspired charm.

In his painting *Two Figures*, M.F. Husain strips the forms down to contrasting patches of color, using minimal detail to evoke human presence. Husain's lifelong engagement with Indian life, especially rural and rustic imagery, gave birth to a personal iconography that became a signature of his artistic language.

Satish Gujral (1925–2020), a contemporary of Husain, was a multifaceted artist—a painter, sculptor, muralist, and writer whose work captured the post-independence ethos of India. His early works from the 1950s reflect the emotional and political turmoil of the times, inflected with a powerful sense of form and expression.

Satish Gujral, recipient of the Padma Vibhushan in 1999—the second-highest civilian award in India—was a deeply expressive artist. His artistic vision often reflected themes of struggle and alienation. Interestingly, he was also the younger brother of Inder Kumar Gujral, India's Prime Minister from 1997 to 1998. In one of his most emotionally stirring works, Gujral conveys a profound sense of desolation using semi-surreal imagery: an eerie background of emptiness, a collapsing figure, and a noose—symbols that speak to emotional collapse and existential dread.

K.G. Subramanyan's *Cock Seller*, on the other hand, presents a lively scene with a layered visual language that blends abstraction and folk narrative, reflecting his distinct style shaped by modernist sensibilities and traditional Indian art forms.

Ganesh Pyne (1937–2013), one of the most significant voices of the Bengal School, is remembered for his deeply introspective works steeped in "poetic surrealism." His painting *Mother and Child* is deceptively simple. While on the surface it shows maternal intimacy, there is an underlying aura of fantasy and mystery. The figures' direct gaze and haunting expressions draw viewers into a world shaped by Bengali folklore and myth, evoking emotions beyond what the eye immediately sees.

Pirani Sagara's collage art represents another unique approach. She brings together fragments of old wood, carved details, metal pieces, and paint, creating compositions that are both modern and rooted in tradition. Her work referencing a legend about the sun becomes a tactile exploration of myth through found objects.

In the realm of modernist landscapes, F.N. Souza's painting of a vast complex of buildings stands out. The structure feels familiar, yet distinctly strange and stylized, shaped to suit his personal sense of composition and form. Souza's work carries his hallmark—bold lines, rebellious energy, and a unique visual vocabulary that defied conventions.

Avinash Chandra, an Indian painter who later settled in the United Kingdom, was born on 28 August 1931 in Shimla and spent much of his early life between Shimla and Delhi. His father managed the Cecil Hotel in Delhi, a notable landmark of its time. Chandra studied at Delhi Polytechnic, where he later returned as a teacher, shaping the minds of young artists before moving abroad.

One of his notable works, *Orchard*, ventures deeply into the realm of fantasy. The painting features sun-like orbs floating in the sky, stylized tree forms, and a vibrant, rhythmic play of patterns, all combining to create a dreamlike atmosphere. His landscapes often include rows of houses—many are unremarkable, yet some stand out with distinct character, subtly echoing the layers of human experience that dwell within them.

Narayan Shridhar Bendre (21 August 1910 – 19 February 1992), one of the founding members of the Baroda Group and a celebrated landscape artist, was born in Indore. His artistic legacy is marked by a sharp eye for detail and a sensitivity to the spirit of his subjects. In one of his works featuring a house, Bendre doesn't just depict a structure—he gives it a soul. Every line and texture is rendered with care, turning the house into a portrait in its own right, full of personality and presence. His ability to highlight the essence of the ordinary is what sets his work apart.

Shanti Dave, for over fifteen years, has explored a deceptively abstract visual language. In paintings like *Snow Shade*, his abstraction is not about randomness—it is a result of deliberate, intense craftsmanship. Dave uses an unconventional blend of materials, including wax, encaustic, and traditional oil paints, to create layered surfaces rich in depth and texture. He further animates his canvases with elements like script, folk figures, and block motifs, giving his work a tactile and symbolic richness that invites both visual and emotional engagement.

What one ultimately experiences is a world where the past and present coexist—where tradition meets innovation in a quiet yet profound dialogue. Vasudeo S. Gaitonde (1924–2001), one of India's most celebrated abstract painters and recipient of the Padma Shri in 1971, captured this balance with extraordinary finesse. In one of his early paintings, we see a composition entirely non-objective—broad, meditative spaces in which strips of red and other hues drift freely, untethered to symbolism or narrative. The expression here is purely plastic and formal, yet in his later works, a metaphysical undertone subtly begins to emerge, suggesting something deeper, more introspective.

In the realm of sculpture, Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury (1899–1975), a pioneer of modern Indian art and the founding chairman of the Lalit Kala Akademi, made a significant mark with works like the monumental "*Triumph of Labour*". Cast in bronze, this sculpture—along with others like the "*Martyr's Memorial*"—is both an artistic and social statement, echoing the spirit of resilience and dignity. Honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 1958, Roy Choudhury is remembered not just for his craftsmanship but for giving form to the collective ethos of a nation in transition.

And then, there is Ram Kumar, whose abstract landscapes—such as one painted in subtle greys and greens—evoke a mood more than a place. In his works, colour and space become instruments of emotion, creating silent, contemplative environments that speak to the soul rather than to the eye alone.

The rhythmic play of tones and intersecting lines in Ram Kumar's work evokes more than a visual experience—it hints at the very essence of flight. Originally a figurative painter, Ram Kumar gradually transitioned into landscapes, and from there, distilled his vision into abstract, uninhabited realms. These compositions now hover in the space of non-objectivity, free of human figures yet full of silent momentum.

In the sculptural domain, D.P. Roy Chowdhury's monumental work "*Triumph of Labour*" stands out as a powerful embodiment of human struggle and dignity. The robust, muscular figures and their dynamic postures give the piece an almost cinematic intensity. His approach is deeply expressionistic, channeling raw human energy through form and motion.

In a completely different but equally poignant tone, Ramkinkar Baij, one of the foremost pioneers of modern Indian sculpture, brings to life the bust of a young woman radiating with vitality. Her bright, uplifted

face and full bosom celebrate the spirit of youthful exuberance. The texture of the sculpture—rich and lively—feels almost animated, capturing an inner vibrancy that Baij was uniquely skilled at expressing.

Then we come to B. Vithal, a master of both sculpture and painting. Born in Maharashtra in 1935 and trained at the Sir J.J. School of Art, Vithal carved a niche with works that ranged from the monumental to the intimate. His sculptural portrait of a philosopher's head focuses intently on facial features—the prominent nose, half-closed eyes, and elongated earlobes—all carefully accentuated to express not just a face, but a profound state of contemplation and insight.

Sankho Chaudhuri (25 February 1916 – 28 August 2006) was a towering presence in modern Indian sculpture, known not just for his art but also for his enduring contribution to the cultural institutions of the country. Though named Naranarain in keeping with family tradition, he was better known by his pet name, Sankho. A student of the legendary Ramkinkar Baij at Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan, Chaudhuri graduated in 1939 with a Diploma in Fine Arts and continued to refine his sculptural vision over the years.

Early in his career, Chaudhuri was influenced by Cubism, but a pivotal moment came when he met István Beöthy in Paris, which expanded his understanding of modernist form and abstraction. His sculptural themes ranged widely—from the elegant rhythms of the female form to the dynamic energy of wildlife. His practice encompassed both large-scale reliefs and delicate mobiles, across a variety of media, demonstrating his adaptability and experimental spirit.

One of his sculptures, depicting a woman in the act of preening, powerfully captures the essence of youth and grace. Her raised arms, the fluid movement of lines, and the rounded contours of her form all work together to create an impression of vitality and timeless femininity.

Chaudhuri's career was distinguished not only by his artistic achievements but also by his institutional contributions. He taught at the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania, represented India at UNESCO conferences in Paris and Venice, and served as Chairman of the Lalit Kala Akademi in the late 1980s. He was honored with several awards, including the Padma Shri (1971), National Award, Fellowship of Lalit Kala Akademi (1956, 1982), and D.Litt. (Honoris Causa) by Centro Escolar University, Philippines.

His legacy continued to be celebrated, notably in a Retrospective at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) in 1997, which showcased the breadth of his vision and mastery of form.

In the world of sculpture, often the material dictates the mood and form, as seen in the powerful bull created by Raghav Kaneria (born 1936), a sculptor trained at M.S. University of Baroda. His bull, captured mid-motion, is full of raw, muscular energy, its tense stance poised to charge—a symbol of primal force sculpted into stillness.

The contours of Adi Davierwala's sculpture "A Man" emphasize a sense of movement and dynamism. Born in 1922 in Mumbai, Davierwala was originally trained as a pharmaceutical chemist, but his passion drew him irresistibly toward the world of sculpture. His elongated figure of a man, with its animated expression and raised arms, carries a surreal, almost otherworldly quality. The sculpture leans into minimalism, distilling the human form to its essence while letting the material properties of metal shine through, highlighting texture and sheen as part of the narrative.

Mahendra Pandya, born in 1926 in the Bharuch district of Gujarat and trained at Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara, brought a contrasting approach. His work focuses on the mass and volume of stone, where the barest hints of two figures emerge from a solid form. Rather than shaping stone to resemble life, he respects its natural weight and density, creating upright sculptures that feel rooted in the earth—quiet, grounded, and monumental.

A more pastoral and gentle vision can be found in Haren Das's early woodcut of a couple fishing by a riverside. Born on 1 February 1921, Haren Das is remembered as one of India's most accomplished printmakers. His woodcuts, engravings, and etchings reflect a deep love for rural life and craft traditions. This

particular work is simple and unambiguous, created with technical precision and narrative clarity, a hallmark of his deeply illustrative style.

Sunirmal Chatterji's "Manali Village" remains a more conventional landscape, relying on the inherent texture and mood of the woodcut medium. Though stylistically restrained, the work explores the material's natural expressiveness.

On the other end of the spectrum, Somnath Hore, born in 1921, creates something dreamlike and symbolic in his etching titled "Birth." The work unfolds like a surreal vision, with the image of a rose rising as the most prominent motif. Hore fully engages with the visual language of etching, blending unusual elements to craft a deeply evocative and personal composition.

Finally, Dipak Banerji's "Study-3" represents an even more non-objective approach to the medium. Through careful control of the etching process, he pushes the technique to produce nuanced, abstract effects, focusing on texture, light, and the emotional resonance of form.

2. CONCLUSION

The formal academic exploration of Indian painting and sculpture began in the 20th century. Since then, the understanding of these art forms has evolved in tandem with the broader interpretation of Indian culture. A critical and comparative analysis of Indian visual arts—through the works and philosophies of painters and sculptors—reveals how these traditions have been interpreted, adapted, and enriched across generations. These interpretations often include descriptions of distinctive features, including symbolic marks considered auspicious or inauspicious, rooted deeply in cultural belief systems. Above all, they underscore the enduring significance of fundamental artistic principles such as measurement, proportion, and the thoughtful use of colour—concepts that continue to shape the identity of Indian art today.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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