

Original Article

## AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF INDIAN SOCIETY REFLECTED IN THE PAINTINGS OF M.F. HUSAIN

Dr. Vinod Singh <sup>1\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor and Head, Drawing and Painting, Dr. P.D.B.H. Government (P.G.) College, Kotdwar, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India



### ABSTRACT

This research paper examines and emphasizes on the creations of Maqbool Fida Husain (popularly known as M.F. Husain) on Indian society. M.F. Husain is one of the veteran Indian artist painted diverse themes which includes Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Horse series and lives of rural and urban India. The study depicts that through his artworks M.F. Husain honestly captured the colors and spirit of Indian festivals and decorative elements of the Indian's soul. The researcher also finds during the study that M.F. Husain is one of India's greatest artists, whose life and works are as celebrated as they are controversial. It was found that M.F. Husain was showered with Padma Shri and Padma Vibhushan awards during his lifetime.

**Keywords:** Indian Art, Modern Indian Artists, Indian Society, Controversial Paintings

### INTRODUCTION

In the galaxy of modern masters in art and painting, one name that is synonymous with twentieth century Indian art the depiction and development of modern Indian art was one of the main regards of iconic Indian artist is M.F. Husain. The rich mosaic of colours and canvas, the world was simultaneously real, mythical and symbolic in the paintings of M.F. Husain. His language translated India's mixed culture into a rich variety of colours.

M.F. Husain's life was mesmerizing as born in Pandharpur, Maharashtra, on September 17, 1913. After spending initial days of his career painting cinema posters in Mumbai he further went on to design children's nursery furniture. In 1947, he became a member of the Progressive Artist's Group. To connect with the people of India M.F. Husain began to paint the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. His grandfather Mr. Abdul Husain played an important role in his life. As symbols like lamps and umbrellas in his works are representative of his grandfather. In his life the lack of a maternal figure often haunted him and his work. After portraying Mother Teresa, who represented kindness and universal motherhood in his life. Some arts and works of M.F. Husain shown in the following [Table 1](#).

#### \*Corresponding Author:

Email address: Dr. Vinod Singh ([drvshbandari@gmail.com](mailto:drvshbandari@gmail.com))

Received: 21 December 2025; Accepted: 19 January 2026; Published 28 February 2026

DOI: [10.29121/granthaalayah.v14.i2SCE.2026.6750](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v14.i2SCE.2026.6750)

Page Number: 171-175

Journal Title: International Journal of Research -GRANTHAALAYAH

Journal Abbreviation: Int. J. Res. Granthaalayah

Online ISSN: 2350-0530, Print ISSN: 2394-3629

Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.

Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

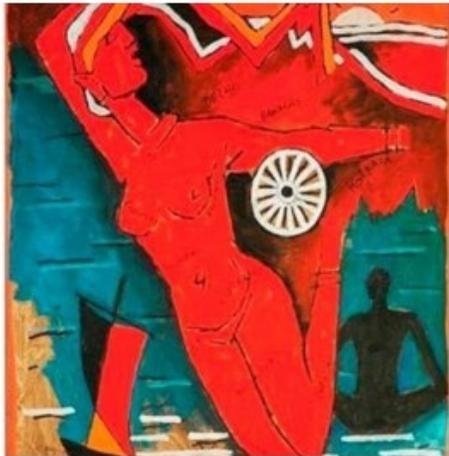
**Table 1**

Table 1 Showing Arts and Works of M.F. Husain	
YEAR	ARTS AND WORKS
1940	The toys he designed from when he worked at the Fantasy Furniture Shop also made occasional appearances in paintings such as Mridang and an untitled work with ‘Tiger and Woman’.
1950	M.F.Husain comes in contact with a large number of artistic influences Indian miniatures, Chinese calligraphy and Western artists.
1954	Husain’s landmark painting Passage of Time marked the use of horses on his canvas, influenced by his meeting with Chinese nonagenarian artist Chi Pai-Shih.
1967	His film, “Through the Eyes of a Painter” won the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1967. In the same year M.F. Husain started work on his Kerala series, by his keen artistic interest in the highly rigid and orthodox Namboothiri Brahmin caste of Kerala.
1968	The Ramayana series, which was painted by M.F. Husain was taken around the country and shown to those who otherwise would have been unable to visit faraway art galleries and museums.

**Source:** Researcher compiled from various websites and Wikipedia.

M.F. Husain was blessed with Padma Shri and Padma Vibhushan awards during his lifetime. In June 9, 2011 the legendary artist died in London. He had been in self-isolation after receiving death threats from Hindu nationalists. Over the course of his career journey M.F. Husain constantly sought to portray not just India’s culture but also, farmers, musicians, dancers, thinkers and philosophers. Throughout his career the paintings depicted India and her people believing that the country was a ‘museum without walls’.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1**

**Source:** M.F. Husain, Bharat Mata, 2006. Image courtesy of Ohio State University

M.F. Husain’s debated painting “Bharat Mata” is a most not without criticism 2005-2006 acrylic painting depicting Mother India as a nude figure, surrounded by symbols of the nation. The arts and works aimed to portray the struggles of the nation using dark reds, blues, and yellows, but caused significant storm of criticism due to the depiction of a national figure as nude, leading to attributions of wrong doing and living abroad for the artist. Bharat Mata or Mother India is a symbolic embodiment of a woman as country of India. Many times Bharat Mata is depicted as an Indian Goddess, most likely Goddess Durga holding the national flag and clad in white or orange saree. Bharat Mata came into being and metaphorically expressed the freedom struggle during the late nineteenth century. It has been controversial that this image of Bharat Mata is unfair towards Hinduism and does not meet the requirement to the multi-religious and multi-cultural population of India.

Disputed about its title and depiction of Bharat Mata, she is shown nude and coloured in a chromatic tone of matte red. The painting uses radiant colors and shades of red, blue and yellow earth tone contrasting with black and white. The posture and facial

expressions of the woman figured is very uneasy, muted and forced. It feels like she has been tied by her hands and legs to something which is not defined. However, pointing towards the bordering countries though, one can see black lines on wrists and ankle.

From her head surface mountains like strokes denoted the himalayas and a white sun shining alongside. On her right fore-arm is white colored wheel signified the invention of a wheel by the stone-age man. It may embodied the Ashoka-chakra on the national flag and the spiritual teachings of Gautama Buddha, but the wheel in the painting has fourteen spokes and that in the Ashoka- chakra has twenty four.

Metropolises and states of India like Mumbai, Srinagar, Kerala, Chennai, Bangalore, Kochin, Delhi, Kolkata, Gujarat, Banaras and Goa are portrayed on the body of the woman.

- **Definition and Style:** The artwork features a central, unclothed woman representing the motherland, depicted in an uncomfortable, subdued, and occasionally obscured manner. It utilizes bold, suggestive painting style and a palette of dark reds, blues, and unheroic ochre.
- **Symbolism:** The artwork incorporates colorful symbols, including a wheel (representing the Ashok Chakra, however with fourteen spokes rather of Twenty-four), chart-such like features, and mountainous, rugged strokes.
- **Contestation:** The artwork entered violent counter reaction from one religious group, leading to legal challenges and demurrers. Despite this, the Supreme Court of India ultimately rejected desires against it, admitting it as a “work of art”.
- **Context:** Painting created by M.F. Husain often referred to as the “Picasso of India”, created this work as part of his broader and frequently controversial engagement with Indian culture and tradition. While the painting was highly debated, it was intended to represent the nations turbulent state rather than depict a traditional, philanthropic deity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

[Shanker \(2018\)](#) MF Husain’s Modern India, the study addresses the central questions surrounding M.F. Husain’s practice, focusing on how he offered a vision of what ultra-modern Indian art could be. Establishing his practice in 1947-48, M.F. Husain inevitably had to grapple with questions of identity, as the conception of India as a nation had only just been formulated. Drawing inspiration from an abundance of sources ranging from medieval Indian bronze sculptures to modern Indian influences- M.F. Husain developed a modern Indian visual vocabulary. The study explores how he developed this and examines the resources available to him as an ultra-modern artist. The researcher also examines the artists position as a Muslim and how, later in his life, certain themes and visual vocabularies became inaccessible to him as India’s socio political landscape changed. By exploring socio-political agents and actors, this social anthropology of art examines a turning point in Indian history and how Husain engaged with and illustrated these changes, eventually becoming one of most notorious artists.

[Golchhaand Haridas \(2023\)](#), GLOBAL INSPIRATION, LOCAL IMPACT: PROGRESSIVE ART MOVEMENT ACROSS STATES. This study demonstrates that cross disciplinary collaboration is a defining feature of contemporary creative practice and a necessity for specialists who will shape the future of innovative movement. By blurring the boundaries between multiple fields, integrative art practices are being employed by both artists and institutions to address socio-political and other significant concerns. The exhibition and conservation of art still have become increasingly complex as a result of the expanding diversity of cultural contexts. This specialized tools required to present new art that employs digital technologies are generally lacking among exhibitors. Whether museums and galleries are fully developing the capacity to present multidisciplinary, workshop-based, ultra-modern Indian art remains a question that must be assessed in relation to cross-cultural collaboration, multiplicity, and its negotiation between durability and rupture with tradition. Therefore, defining shared and divergent creative conditions could encourage their structured, targeted, and productive development.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research paper adopts a qualitative and analytical methodology to study the artistic works done by M.F. Husain, focusing on his visual language, thematic concerns, stylistic evolution and cultural significance within modern Indian art. The study follows a descriptive and interpretative research design, aiming to analyze M.F. Husain’s artworks in their historical, social and cultural contexts and its impact on Indian society. The study is based on secondary data which includes books, journals, thesis, and research papers, selected paintings, sketches, murals and series created by M.F. Husain. The present study relies largely on available visual reproductions and secondary literature. A purposive sampling method is used to significant artworks from different phases of M.F. Husain career.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To study the paintings of M.F. Husain and its controversial impact on Indian society.
- To study the Arts and works done by M.F. Husain throughout his career journey.

## IMPACT OF M.F. HUSAIN PAINTINGS ON INDIAN SOCIETY

M.F. Husain is one of the most influential Indian modern artists, had a intense impact on Indian society through his arts, public presence and cultural mediation. His arts and works extended beyond creative, engaging deeply with Indian history, mythology, politics and everyday life. As a result of that shaping public exchange of ideas on art, identity, and freedom of expression.

- **Liberalization of Art:** M.F. Husain played a vital role in making modern art reachable to common people. Different traditional superior art practices, his bold forms, simplified figures, and vibrant colors resonated with ordinary people. Husain's background as a cinema hoarding painter helped him bridge the gap between "high art" and popular visual culture, bringing modern art into public awareness.
- **Rejuvenation of Indian culture:** M. F. Hussain reevaluated Indian mythology, history, and folk traditions through an avant-gardist lens. By portraying Hindu deities' epics and national symbols in atypical ways, he challenged rigid and conventional interpretations of culture. This uplifted society to view tradition as dynamic and evolving rather than fixed.
- **Contribution to Indian variation:** M.F. Husain as a founding member of the 'Progressive Artists Group' helped shape a new visual language for post-independence India. The art and work of Husain's reflected the ambitions, apprehension and transformations of a newly independent nation, persuading generations of artists and reassessing Indian modern art.
- **Art as Social and Political analysis:** Maqbool Fida Husain used his art skills to comment on social realities such as metropolitan expansion, assault, gender, revolution. His paintings have themes like national leader, partition of India, Mother Teresa, which highlighted collective trauma, compassion and identity. These works of M.F. Husain encouraged viewers to engage critically with India's social and political history.
- **Controversy and Freedom of Expression:** One of M.F. Husain's most significant societal impacts lie in the debates kindled by his debatable works. Allegations of hurting religious emotions led to protests, legal cases and eventually his self-imposed isolation.
- **Representation of Women and the oppressed:** M.F. Husain frequently shows women as powerful, meaningful and central figures rather than passive subjects. His renderings questioned traditional gender roles and emphasized female agency influencing wider conversations around representation and identity in Indian art and society.
- **Global Identification of Indian Art:** Through Indian and International exhibitions and collaborations, the veteran artist brought global attention to Indian modern art. M.F. Husain's success helped position Indian artists on the world stage, promoting national pride and fostering cultural exchange.
- **Motivation for future generations:** M.F. Husain's fearless experimentation, fruitful output and lifelong engagement with art inspired numberless artists, writers and thinkers. His life illustrated that art could be both deeply Indian and worldwide modern, personal yet political.

## CONCLUSION

Summing up it is found that M.F. Husain impact on Indian society extends far beyond his paintings. The artists transformed visual culture, challenged social norms, aggravated critical debate, and reshaped the relationship between art and society. Whether esteemed or blamed, his inheritance remains central to understanding modern India's cultural and democratic fabric. The study depicts that in 2008, India's Supreme Court suppressed cases against the Bharat Mata painting, appreciating it as art. Despite this, the controversy continued, with galleries still facing legal challenges over his works even after his death.

## REFERENCES

- Asia Society. (n.d.). M. F. Husain: Art and the Nation.
- deSouza, P. R. (2022). The Case of M. F. Husain in Democratic India. In *Public Space Democracy: Performative, Visual and Normative Dimensions of Politics in a Global Age*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003193753-11>
- Dhavan, R. (2007). Harassing Husain: Uses and Abuses of the Law of Hate Speech. *Social Scientist*, 35(1/2), 16–60.
- Golchha, R. L., and Haridas, R. (2021). *Global Inspiration, Local Impact: Progressive Art Movement Across States*.
- Herwitz, D. (2006). Maqbool Fida Husain: The Artist as India's National Hero. *Third Text*, 20(1), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820500472811>
- Husain, M. F. (1987). *M. F. Husain*.
- Husain, M. F. (2004). *M. F. Husain*. Lalit Kala Akademi.
- Malviya, S. (2024). *Censorship and Obscenity: An Analysis* (SSRN No. 4756620). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4756620>
- Pal, I. (2011). *M. F. Husain: A Life in Art*. Roli Books.
- Saddiqa, A., and Ijaz, N. (2025). Art as Diplomacy: M. F. Husain's Contributions to Peace Dialogue Through Visual Design. *Journal for Current Sign*, 3(4), 1–15.

Shanker, T. S. (2018). M. F. Husain's Modern India.

Sodhi, H. (2020). Master Minds: Creativity in Picasso's and Husain's paintings, part 5: Similarities, Differences and Contribution (Vol. 5). Harpal Sodhi.

The Times of India. (2023, September 17). Celebrating M. F. Husain, the Legacy of India's Modernist Master. The Times of India.

Wikipedia Contributors. (n.d.). M. F. Husain. Wikipedia.

Wyma, K. L. (2000). Bodies at Play in the Field of the Nation: M. F. Husain and the Trace of Modernity (Doctoral Dissertation, University of British Columbia).