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Indian Art Education and Contemporary Art Practices

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ABSTRACT

Arts education is a distinct academic discipline in India, with governmental and private institutions offering specialised training in the arts. Religious paradigms such as the Hindu Ashram and Muslim madrasas, Buddhist monastery etc., were used to build ancient Indian educational systems until the British instituted schools following their system of preparatory schools under the Cambridge system to promote service to the British Empire. As a result, Indian perceptions of literacy and education, as well as the culture of learning, have shifted including, in the context of the arts, the concepts of differences between art and craft, the social relationship between master craftsman and artisan, public art and individual art, religious art and secular art, and so on.

Art in India, as in the rest of the world, has undergone numerous changes that have resulted in what we see today, a unique amalgamation of sensibilities from the west as well as from across Asia. In the twenty-first century, a new era in India begun. The country's cultural diversity adds to the multi-dimensional approach, which is a direct approach and a direct contribution of various religious beliefs, languages, and the still prevalent rural culture congregating with the rapidly growing urban culture. The country's diversity, like its art, is an experience in and of itself that is difficult to comprehend. This is the core and crux of the new modern India and its emerging art.

The paper will discuss about the contemporary art practices in India with reference to its practising artists.

Key Words: Education, Contemporary Art, Contemporary Art Practices, Artists

INTRODUCTION

Arts education is a distinct academic discipline in India, with options for specialised training in the arts provided by both governmental and private institutions. Since independence, Indian

education has emphasised science and math as more important than the humanities for national and individual success. This understanding is reflected in the arts' undermining across the complex

and multiple networks of formal education in urban India, where dialogues about the inclusion of art as a well-developed subject in school and college curricula have been largely marginalised. It is critical to recognise the complexities of Indian educational systems when attempting to analyse art education in India.

Institutionalised education in independent India is focused on job-based learning, with a focus on science and math. (Altbach, 2009). During the 1990s, the Indian nation opened up to the west on a larger scale and with greater transparency than was evident in the political climate of the 1970s and 1980s. This resulted in a greater awareness of the state of globalisation and its socio-cultural consequences (Bauman, 1998). Globalization can be defined as a state of contemporary cultural, economic, and political global interaction. Many scholars in the field of art and culture education have discussed these socio-cultural impacts in depth in other national contexts, as evidenced by Delacruz (Arnold, Delacruz, Kuo, & Parsons, 2009) and in the context of India by Ganesh & Thakkar (Ganesh & Thakkar, 2005) Shakti Maira (Maira 2006) and other contemporary scholars contributions to a recent anthology. Current curriculum research trends aim to integrate traditional educational models with more contemporary models, which could lead to the realisation of a vision of India as an economically developed nation (A. Gupta, 2007; Ramachandra & Ramkumar, 2005; Vatsyayan, 1999).

In fields such as cultural studies, anthropology, and art, there is a thriving

and exciting multidisciplinary dialogue on the transformations in Indian cultural landscapes (Appadurai, 2003; A. Mehta, 2008) about how educational curriculum and policy might address these changes and how art making is addressing these issues. However, aside from reports from within the institutions themselves, research on how teaching of art is developing within cultural and educational institutions is rare in curriculum development publishing. The magazines and publications about and by institutes like the Lalitkala Academy, Chitrakala Parishath, Indira Gandhi National Central for the Arts (IGNCA), JNAFAU, NIAS are examples of this.

Contemporary Indian art, cultural education, and visual culture studies address issues such as critical discourse on visual media, art in social work/activism, classroom-based art making, and multicultural art education (Bode & Nieto, 2007; Hiriyanna, 1997; Vatsyayan, 1999).

There are also numerous university-level initiatives that have expanded training opportunities for those interested in a career in the arts. Certificate programmes in a variety of disciplines are available. Institutions and academies such as Lalitkala Academy, ICHR, IGNCA to name a few have been holding seminars, workshops, live demonstrations, and artist talks where one can learn about the nuances of Indian art and gain hands-on experience with it. There are art residency programmes catching on in India that allow artists to explore their practise in other communities. Student exchange programmes are also being initiated in few universities across India. Government and

private institutions have provided research grants for documentation and research. Many such initiatives must be undertaken by universities and institutions in order to situate Indian art within the larger contexts of history, sociology, politics, and cultural studies.

After 1980, the art scene exploded, with a significant increase in the number of artists, dealers, collectors, publications, and exhibition spaces. The establishment of new institutions, as well as the construction of new or renovated facilities at existing institutions, increased the number, size, and quality of locations where the latest in visual art could be seen as a growing public space.

Art in India, as in the rest of the world, has undergone numerous changes that have resulted in what we see today, a unique amalgamation of sensibilities from the west as well as from across Asia. What exactly is modernity in art? A question that vexes the majority of people and keeps them at bay. Modernity does not imply mere abstraction or abstract forms arbitrarily arranged on a surface and painted in alluring colours with no meaning. Artists governed by their inner self, true calling, insecurities, and prevalent social and personal issues define modernity in art. These artists have chosen to break away from the mould of the existing art practices and have given birth to new approaches and genres in art previously not experienced and contrary to popular belief contributing greatly to the value of 'shock' and the unconventional. As a result, when art redefined itself, creating new paradigms for itself, so did people and society, and this has been an

ongoing process since the advent of art practises and will continue until art is no longer present.

Art has been proven time and again to be a vehicle for telling us where we are, where we fit in the grand scheme of things, and it plays an important role in telling us who we are. Art has always had an advantage over all other media and modes of communication, ensuring that it has withstood the test of time. In the twenty-first century, a new era in the history of awareness in India has begun. According to philosopher Jacques Derrida, "there is no culture or cultural identity without this difference within itself." Such is the form of art found on the Indian subcontinent, a unique amalgamation of foreign sensibilities as well as a variety of internal cross-cultural pollination. Today's India is a very different world for artists than it was even 50 years ago. One of the world's fastest growing economies, the new is being replaced by the newer at breakneck speed, archetypes changing in the blink of an eye are a result of the convergence of modernity and traditional values. The country's cultural diversity adds to the multidimensional approach, which is a direct approach and direct contribution of various religious beliefs, languages, and the still prevalent rural culture mingling with the rapidly growing urban culture. The country's diversity, like its art, is an experience in and of itself that cannot be understood by a bystander. This is the essence and crux of the new modern India and its emerging art.

'To bring (new media) fragments together as part of a work of art, the artist must devise a structure of even greater

openness,' says artist Sudhir Patwardhan. The elements of art are being pushed to their limits in the twenty-first century, and artists are achieving greater; previously incomprehensible and inconceivable heights. Painting, sculpture, printmaking, and so on are no longer separate categories of art. Art has now broken down all prior borders and has spread over a wide range of media including installation art, video art, performance art, conceptual art, and the new buzz of media art. These, too, have evolved and developed over time.

'Installation Art' arose from the concept of the environment and, in its early stages, was site specific. The early stages of art were more experimental than the more refined experiments we see today, with a variety of objects strewn around the exhibition space, complimented by music, lights, and on occasion, performances, all aimed at interaction with the audience. However, the experiments in this form of art took a rather potent and extreme position, as evidenced by the works of artists such as Damien Hirst, whose first major animal installation, 'A Thousand Years,' consisted of a large glass case containing maggots and flies feeding off a rotting cow's head and later 'The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living,' became Hirst's most interdisciplinary work consisting of a 14-foot tiger shark immersed in a glass tank filled with formaldehyde. Such works frequently blur the distinctions between installation and performance. With the introduction and use of video as part of the work, installation art took a further turn and eventually became the dominant form in the field of contemporary art.

Installation art has been exemplified in India by artists such as Sheela Gowda, whose work cannot be classified as painting, drawing, sculpture, or installation, but has carved a niche in between all of these mediums. Sheela, turned to installation after an intense revelation during the Mumbai riots in 1992. Her work underwent a massive transformation in terms of both material and subject matter at that point. She delineates the symbolic space that exists in rural women and rural life by using materials and processes that represent the traditional Indian ethos, such as cow dung and Kumkum. Her work is an ephemeral confluence of violence, nationalism, religion, and femininity that calls each of these positions into question in contemporary India.

Hema Upadhyay, another artist who has worked extensively with installations, investigates personal issues through her sculptural installations. She draws on topics that are personal to her and have had a lasting impact on her throughout her life's journey. In her work, she has investigated the concepts of personal identity. Her work is cathartic and reminiscent, delving into her concerns about location, relocation, and, most importantly, dislocation. Her installations are an allegory for her body, which bears the brunt of the various emotions and traumas that one must go through and confront, such as the realities of space, religion, gender, and other related concerns. She is fascinated by space; the physicality of space, which includes all the objects that are strewn across the length and breadth of the cities,

filling them up in turnmaking them vivacious and vigorous.

Reena Kallats's anguish over the country's and the world's political and social issues shines through in her work. In an attempt to change society, she expresses her political and religious beliefs clearly through her work.

Tallur, too, makes statements about India's rural community through his installation works. Using indigenous signs and symbols, he emphasises the pulverising poverty and its effects on the minds of the rural folk. Tallur's installations make subtle statements about the vulnerability of the country and its people by using symbols that are well-known and easily recognisable in both popular and traditional Indian culture.

G. R Iranna is an artist who has effectively borrowed from society as well as his own personal experience. Keeping in touch with his roots, his works have a sombre quality, enunciating affliction as gashes on the canvas surface, which serve as an analogy for the human body.

New media is all the rage, and many artists are experimenting with it. With the invention of videos and computers, the new media art movement gained traction in the Western world. The genre frequently deals with society, culture, and related events and objects, deviating from traditional art media such as painting, sculpture, printmaking, and so on. New media is a mash-up of various media juxtaposed with appealing concepts. With the advent of globalisation, new media gained traction in India, as computers, the

internet, and digital aids infiltrated the country, spreading its wings to art schools and institutions, allowing artists greater creative freedom and malleability.

Shilpa Gupta, for example, has successfully captured, employed, and incorporated this new medium into her work, which is often centred on interactivity with the viewer and exists mostly in the moment. Her work brings people's beliefs, practises, and experiences to life. Though her work makes extensive use of technology, it is not intended to isolate or highlight the significance of technology, but rather to serve as a means to an end, shedding light on the 'experience.' Another important message conveyed by her work is how technology has permeated our lives and made us increasingly reliant on it.

Sheeba Chhachhi, another artist in the genre, has a deep interest in philosophy, literature, flight, and the liberation of the spirit and has been a voice in the Indian women's movement as an artist as well as an activist. She has worked actively in media such as photography and installation. Her lifelong fascination with photography has led to the use of photographic materials in her installations. Her works provide an immersive experience by combining various media such as sound, light, and video in a space that is usually centred on a sculpted object.

With such works at the forefront and representing Indian contemporary art on a global platform, it is clear that Indian artists are breaking new ground by utilising the fertile fusion of tradition, culture, history, spirituality, and foreign

influences keenly mixed with personal experiences to form a palatable new Indian art. An Indian art form defined by the rich amalgamation of a vast and multi-cultural country like India's historical and cultural past with Western sensibilities, expressed in a rather unique, personalised, and transformed art form.

This is evident in the work of artists such as Bharti Kher, whose work is heavily centred on the bindi. The bindi adds texture to the surface of both painting and sculpture, metamorphosing the image by adding another dimension to the work. She employs the bindi as a mass product to make powerful statements that are articulately infused by her individual style and symbolic undercurrents. The bindi is used to make a clear but firm statement about the shifting and changing role of women in society, as well as about femininity.

Artists such as Sonia Khurana, who has worked extensively in the field of video art, are among those who have approached the sensitive issue of femininity, also known as feminism, in their own chosen medium. Her work is defined by embracing and placing a high value on experience; social and personal experiences of people and how they affect the mind, body, and soul. She incorporates video, performance, text, drawing, photography, and installation, and her work is interactive and engaging, compelling the viewer to delve deeper into their encounters with naive experience that they might not ordinarily think about.

The concept of moving visuals is being used by many artists in both the West and India. Video art is a popular media in

contemporary art, where it is used to enhance other kinds of art or to stand alone as part of an installation. According to contemporary sensibilities, video art shares the same platform as painting, sculpture, or photography. However, despite sharing more ground with television presentations and films, it has been able to carve out a separate niche and is also an art form in its own right. Video art frequently employs only images and is devoid of dialogue or actors, but it may also employ both. Another technique used extensively by video artists is the repetition of an image or motion to convey the essence of the work. One major distinction between video art and film is entertainment; films and movies are frequently produced to elicit emotions, whereas video art employs characteristics that vary depending on the artist's goal. In today's world, video art has streamlined itself into a plethora of formats such as visual music, interactive film, and real-time computer graphics, which employ the entire spectrum of technology and new media. When all of the technological advancements are combined, the viewer is treated to an entirely unique and, on most occasions, fulfilling experience.

Aside from the widespread use of video in art today, Still Photography holds a unique and significant place because moving images are only derived from still images. Still Photography paved way to a variety of different visual experiences, and an artist such as Dayanita Singh has amply explored the medium and is likely one of those who has largely contributed to photography's acceptance as a separate entity in the field of art. In articulately

framed portraits, she has captured the entire range of emotions of Indian middle and upper class families. Her works outline and are a series of photographs that are true to their existence and serve to tell a story rather than just detailing a single moment in time. Images of people at work, resting in their homes, or leisurely partying depict Indian life in its purest form.

Aside from the traditional uses of photography, there are a few artists who are experimenting with the medium's multidimensionality. This is evident in the works of artists such as Pushpamala N., who is primarily a photo and video performance artist and the subject of the majority of her photographic endeavours. Her work reimagines and re-contextualizes photography as we know it. She encourages a different way of seeing and making art through animated performances.

Quite apart from using photography as an unadulterated medium and multi-layering the photographic image in painting and as a reworked photograph, there is a group of artists who juxtapose different media such as photographs, video, and the painted image to form an enthralling fusion. Such a blend can be seen in Ranbir Kaleka's work. The ethereal quality of an image projected and imposed onto a painted surface captivates. The spectator is whisked away into a surreal sequence of flowing pictures that seem to entice them into the moving picture frame. The artist's work of art is a multi-layered procedure that results in an aura that is a synthesis of photographic, video, and painted images.

Artists throughout history, and even today, are inspired from their surroundings to depict simple relevant concepts that lead to great revelation. Art has remained a constant, assisting people in their daily lives, raising awareness about current events across the country for the inception of change. Even today, artists use their art to make social statements, and their works are frequently satires on the evils of society and modern living.

The difference between today's artists and those in the past is that they are working on a wide range of subjects, evolving relevant artistic approaches as a result of discontent produced by global inequalities and divides between cultural and economic deprivation in a consumerist world. A vast array of such concepts are available to artists who use them to articulate the complex sociopolitical circumstances that surround them or to engage their sensibilities.

Art has evolved into the complex matrix of contemporaneity that we see today, evolving slowly and gradually with subtle modifications in the pattern of art that have eventually led to the new "organism" that we see today. However, when confronted with this new sensibility, i.e. the new media that the artists are employing to convey relevant issues, some people are intimidated. People feel as if they are being stared down by something they don't understand, and thus don't like or believe. More than the sensation that they are being denied access to an important aspect of life, such as technology and cultural growth, there is a sector of the public that is continually attracted to art. and its new

sensibilities as it inspires awe and amazement.

Contemporary Indian art is a treasure mine of the strange and unexpected; it makes the observer feel like a toddler with a doll. A large doll with similar dolls one inside the other, and a child who is constantly discovering multiple layers of dolls revealed only by opening the other. Similarly, art is analogous to a doll that must be opened and discovered in order to know what it holds and what it has to offer.

The spectator faces a massive challenge when it comes to contemporary art. The concept is represented by the visual format, which poses a question to those who understand it and provides an answer to those who do not. Contemporary art generally explores ideas that invite the audience to come and read them. It is a difficult line to walk between being overly apparent and leaving it open to interpretation. Experiencing contemporary art requires time and a desire to connect the head and the heart. In order to present a larger perspective on reality, contemporary art forces artists to work on the edges of moral ethics. And, as Socrates said, "a life unexamined is not worth living," which is entirely appropriate for contemporary art.

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