INTRODUCTION

The history of Indian art, since Indus valley civilization to the glorious Vedic spiritual culture to the secular medieval upsurge to the Victorian aristocracy to the post colonial revival is a treasure of enormous genetic, linguistic and cultural diversity of several distinctively unique civilizations.

Indian art truly reflects the deep relationship between idea and life and natural observation and inner substances. Starting from the town planning of Indus valley civilization evident in Harappa and Mohenjodaro, to the rock-cut cave temples, architecture and murals of Ajanta, Badami, Ellora, Elephanta, Aurangabad, Mahabalipuram etc. we have enormous examples of religious and cultural diversity of Buddhists, Hindus and Jains. Thereafter during the medieval period we have strong reflection of secular, religious and social change in art. A scientific and naturalistic approach of colonial revolution challenged with the wake of the national consciousness was also seen at the beginning of the 20th century.

The study of these records tells us that the evolution of art in India no matter how diverse it has been in its structure, the philosophical content is essentially secular, and spiritual ideas emerge from debate and speculation and not from immortal revelations that cannot be challenged or modified with time. This rich tradition of philosophy - both rational and spiritual - found its way later into the medieval, colonial and contemporary Indian art.

A general perception is that religion remained the strongest influence upon art until the nineteenth century throughout the world. A gradual shift or replacement of religion with science in man’s imagination occurred with the
quest for its purer form. It was a concentration on form rather than representation in art. The immergence of new concept influenced as much as Indian Art as any other art of the world. The uniqueness about these modern thoughts in the modernity of Indian art is that it rereads the ancient with the intervention of modern, resulting in a blend of both rational and spiritual. The best example in this direction is the upsurge of Bengal Art School. If we want to understand the reviver movement and the ideology of the progressive art movements of Bengal it is prerequisite to understand our roots, the roots of Indian Art, as the whole fundamental structure was constructed on the theory of ancient and classical Indian art.

Chapter – I: The Saga of Indian Art

The first chapter comprises of the examination of some of the traditional theoretical definitions and parameters of art decided in ancient Indian texts. These examinations are essential, of course, for the foundational investigation of the revival and progressive art movements of the 20th century Bengal art in the light of the structural values of these movements which are said to be formulated on those traditional theories. This however will help to identify several issues and questions to be readied for later discussion and change that happened during modern and post modern era. Several questions regarding art, beauty and the aesthetic would be answered and understood in this study. The references of art practices in several Vedic, Upnishad and epic texts are strengthened with the theories such as – Saundrya Shasta, Shilpa Sashtra and theory of rasa. Ancient books like Shukra Niti, Kamasutra, Natya Shastra, Vishnudharmotara Purana, Samaranganasutradhara, and
Sukranitisara have been mentioned for various discussions on Art and Aesthetics. The art fundamentals as Shadanga have also been discussed.

The history of Indian art right from the mauryan period has also been discussed in the second half of this chapter. The purpose of this study is to connect the threads one by one to formulate the essence of Bengal School of Art.

**Chapter-II: Traditional Art of Bengal and the later European influence**

The folk arts are perceived as the identity of the Indian culture, tradition, religion, rituals, festivals and house hold. Folk art is pure, simple, bold, and is handed down by generation to generation which shows no sign of evolution and influences. The Patta painting of Orissa and Kalighat, Madhubani painting of Bihar, provincial arts of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Bengal etc. are the living examples of a continued tradition of folk art. The terracotta's, wooden and clay toys, puppets, pith and cane utensils, rug, metal objects and embroidered cloths are full of images, geometrical designs, motifs, vegetations and animal forms. A large number of these patterns and also abstract forms are drawn on the wall, floor and at the entrance door of the house by the women for the magical or ritual purposes and for the welfare of the family. Swastikas have been used largely for such positive results. Rangoli, the art of patterning with prepared local colors are used in almost every state with a different name as a part of some festival. The simple colourful designs patterns and forms became the object of thematic or compositional values to the contemporary artists.
This chapter deals with the basic characteristics and the techniques of the folk art of Bengal. The traditional art of Bengal is highly rich according to the critics. It is fully classical in characteristics and truly Indian in spirit. Bengal had been the home of naïve and simple folk tradition in painting. Records are available of manuscript paintings from the 16th-17th C. The traditional art of Bengal had produced terracotta works, Alipana, Pat Painting, wall alipana, masks etc.

The second part of the chapter traces the influences conceived from Europe at the initial level of change. These influences and some adoption of western technique of painting in 19th-20th C. and with the growth of western education in the latter half of the 19th C. British established centres of art institution in India in all the metropolitan cities. The courses of instruction in these schools were to copy the western form of art, this however, deteriorated the originality individuality and scope for further growth of indigenous art of India. The disapproval and dissatisfaction started mooting an upsurge - a need for a revolt.

Chapter-III: Revival of 19th Century Bengal Art

The term revival, rebirth or renaissance is used for the 20th century Bengal Art, as a pre conception of a revival of Indian Ancient and Classical art. The situation was quite similar to the revival or renaissance of Italian art, as witnessed in India - a long dark period, after the fall of Classical Art and Culture. This vacuum was tried to be filled by a similar phenomena to restart these traditions of art and culture again. In Indian the phenomenon was activated in the form of the repercussion towards the Victorian art education,
which was disseminated with some pre notions and misconceptions against Indian art. The term revival generally understood as a cultural revival; a renaissance, to bring back to life or consciousness; resuscitate, to restore the validity or effectiveness of or to return to validity, effectiveness, or operative condition. Generally the term Revivalism in art is identified with the Revival of Italian Renaissance the most popular and major upsurge of a classical art and culture.

There have been many such revivals at different point of time and at different perspective throughout the world, these upsurges could be political, social, cultural and so on in the context of different countries etc.

This chapter would look in the depths of the rift of the Victorian art inception and the upsurge of the new ethos particularly in the context of Bengal art movements occurred in retaliation, which helped to create a generalized notion of a ‘national’ traditional culture belonging to Indians. These traditions initially used as ‘copying’ material. Till the mid of the 20th century, the processes appeared to be still in force.

The first widespread nationalist protest in India was precipitated by the viceroy of India. The ensuing Nehanga movement in Japan and the Swadeshi movement in India thrived on a mythical division between the spiritual east and materialist west.

While on one side, the Irish republic movement and the Indo-Japanese nationalist movement jogged the society, on the other side the European cultural movement nurtured the whole world artistic society at the same time. Therefore the artist and leaders formed international networks. These Irish,
Japanese and European movements had tremendous impact on Indian nationalism and revolutionary movement of art which will be studied thoroughly in this chapter with the emphases of some individual art reformers such as Ernest Binfield Havell, Sister Nivedita, Ananda Coomarswamy and Okakura Kakuza who gave a sharp edge to swadeshi ideology, elaborating the spirituality of Indian art as an antithesis of Renaissance naturalism. Their mission for Progress and Improvement is analyzed in this chapter.

**Chapter IV: Progressive Art Movements in Bengal**

The art movements of 20th century Bengal, outside Bengal, generally known, as progressive art movements, is understood differently inside the Bengal artist’s community. The term Progressive sometimes is abrasive in the artist’s community in Bengal. This chapter trough light on different point of views such as why this term is not welcomed in the present setup of progress in art which was taking place at the moment. Simultaneously the study will also identify the much preferred term “Neo-Bengal School” and the causes of this preference. And the meaning and understanding of the term as well as different related movements of the moment which comes under the purview of the term “Progressive”.

Linguists classify *progressive* as an aspect of the verb, rather than as part of tense. It expresses activity in progress, and therefore often of limited duration, rather than merely temporal meaning. A general understanding of the term progressive is that which is Ahead of current trends or customs, not narrow or conservative in thought, expression, or conduct, proceeding in steps; continuing steadily by increments, while being progressive means Promoting or favoring progress toward better conditions or new policies, ideas, or methods.
The trigger which integrated these issues and created a ‘movement’ gathered around E.B. Havell, Abanindranath and A.K. Coomarswamy among others. The beginning of the modern movement in India are tangled and complex, which eased its complexities later when tracked to pioneers like the Tagore team- Gagendranath Tagore, Rabinranath Tagore and Abanindranath Tagore and then Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy, Asit Kr. Haldar and so on. They gave a significant shape and direction to the art of Bengal. At this time when there was a feeling prevailing among artist could be identified as “identity crisis”, they tried to gave a sense of direction to the art movement of the country and tried to boost up confidence in the form of Nationalism and traditional values. This awakening in the beginning called, ‘Progressive art movement’ in Bengal which was somehow created confusion with breaking with the past, as the artist of Bengal school started experimenting with new style and technique which was termed as a fusion of Indian western culture.

Indian classical and traditional art at this point of time was being treated as an ideal in the West with a growing appreciation and interest of Eastern value of life and aesthetic. Though with the interaction of the European influences in 1940s onwards, the artists filed with enthusiasm called themselves a “Progressive group” but people address them a ‘Calcutta group’. The Marxist of Bengal used this word as a ‘power’ and ‘achievement’. The term progressive was used to get a political mileage. So this group had eight band of artist which defines as an anti-traditional advancement in painting and depicting a new concept of life. In this way these movement had faced the amalgamate situation and problem which confused the critic of that period.
Chapter V: The Growth and the Conflicts in between the Bengal Revival

If we go through the historical reference regarding art development in India Bengal will be placed at the top of the list. Not only in Art development but also in education and inception of education policies and Institutions Bengal holds the top seat. A leader of young Bengal group, Dr. Frederick Corbyn and Tarachand Chakraborty founded a mechanics institution in 1839. This initiative is identified perhaps as the beginning of a change and growth in the field of art. Several Indian and non Indian intellectuals and art promoters took part in this direction at different point of time.

Many institution and incidents at that time played an important role in history of art movement in Bengal. Government School of Art and craft and Jubilee Art academy was the prominent names among the other institutions. Jubilee Art Academy at Calcutta worked in the direction to protect British academic art from negligence, which was established by Ranada P. Gupta who retaliated against Havell’s effort in introducing the concept of neo-Bengal art. These parallel forces gave a unique vitality to two different artistic directions and created the atmosphere of a conflict in the field of creativity. Therefore, these conflicts gave way to another movement called national movement which was slowly growing up in Calcutta on the ideology of “by Bengalis for Bengalis” lead by a group of artists. But the communication gap was again marked in this national art movement and the lack of unity and arguments diffused this revolution.

In this chapter the initiation in the direction of art promotion, in terms of publications and art journals, exhibitions several gatherings, exchange programs policies, and in the process various hurdles and obstacles and conflicts of ideologies and concepts are focused for discussion.