ABSTRACT

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 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 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.