INTRODUCTION
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HISTORY OF INDIAN PAINTINGS AND CONTEMPORARY ART

The history of painting reaches back in time to artifacts from prehistoric 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 time 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

1http://www.21stcenturyindianart.com/archives.htm
in terms of region which is, by and large, an universally accepted criterion. Various schools have been named after important centres 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. Contemporary artists in India take inspiration from various sources and styles with distinct Indianness.

Indian art

With a 5000 year old culture, Indian Art is rich in its tapestry of ancient heritage, medieval times, Mughal rule, British rule, progressive art and now contemporary art. The earliest recorded art of India originated from a religious Hindu background which was later replaced by a soaring popular Buddhist art. Moreover, from a timeless era art in India has been inspired by spiritualism and mystical relationship between man and god.

Art in India has survived in its homeland and spread from time to time all over the world. This was possible because many kings who recognized budding talent patronized art and themselves were great connoisseurs. Each king has left a deep impression of his affinity to the artist community. Until today, art is patronized by the rich and famous in the country. The contemporary Indian art is a perfect blend of Indian cultural history, religions, philosophies and diversities. This form of art is becoming more and more famous world wide so the demand of these great pieces of art is growing day by day2.

^http://www.craftsindia.com
Purpose of Art

Indian artists relied heavily on religious scriptures to draw inspiration. Since there was no restriction, they flourished under the patronage of rulers. Their art has survived the ravages of time and have a unique place in historical records. Water colors, charcoal and vegetable dyes were popular methods of painting. Fabric painting was extensive and Indian designers still adapt ancient patterns to modern fabrics. The purpose of art in ancient India was not just to adorn the walls. Each painting had a story to narrate. Visually ancient Indian art was colourful, aesthetic and appealing to naked eye. Mostly kings used to commission the artists to paint from inspiration.

Stone and marble were also used to create art. Indian sculpture until today remains a mute testimony of the talent that emerged under many different kings. One of the many purposes of art was to spread the word around about the king and glorify his deeds. Good art symbolized the prosperity of many empires in ancient India. Most of the art was produced to promote religious activities. Most Hindu kings were well-wishers of Brahmin community. Art was an extension of their tribute and respect to the knowledgeable class. It is of no surprise that most of the artwork of Hindu kings depicts scenes from epics like Ramayan and Mahabharata and other mythological stories which continue to inspire artists even now.

History of Indian Art

The earliest Indian paintings were the rock paintings of prehistoric times, the petroglyphs

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as found in places like the Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka, and some of them are older than 5500 BC. Such works continued and after several millennia, in the 7th century, carved the pillars of Ajanta. Maharashtra state presents a fine example of Indian paintings and the colors used in these painting are mostly the shades of red and orange which were derived from minerals.

These magnificent cave paintings are still a big attraction. The famous Ajanta and Ellora caves in the Deccan jungles of Maharashtra can be considered the ancient art galleries that have remained unscathed by attackers. Most of the artwork reflects on the growth of Buddhism during the period which also spreads to South East Asia.

Many foreigners have not understood Indian art because they have no background or knowledge of the religion and symbols. Therefore, they tend to get confuse the meaning and misinterpret it. Indian Art represents a mystical outlook of the people and a spiritual connection. With advent of modernism in Indian art as a whole, the use of tradition, as against western adaptations has become a serious issue and contestations.

Mughal Art Influence

When the Mughals made India their home, they bought the Persian influence in the Indian artwork. Miniatures of the Mughal period speak of a different art form altogether. It is widely accepted that, art of this period represents the importance of the kings. Muslim kingdoms flourished until the British entered India. Marble was used extensively to produce sculpture and the Taj Mahal is a living example of the glorious era which is now considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world. Along with the Egyptian

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pyramids it is the only surviving ancient monument in the world. Religion gave way to other themes like people and animals. Artists during this period mixed different elements and used influence of each other in their works.

Rajput painting

Rajput painting, a style of Indian painting, evolved and flourished, during the 18th century, in the royal courts of Rajputana. Each Rajput kingdom evolved a distinct style but with certain common features. Rajput paintings depict a number of themes, events of epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Krishna's life, beautiful landscapes, and humans. Miniatures were the preferred medium of Rajput painting however, several manuscripts also contain Rajput paintings paintings even done on the walls of palaces, inner chambers of the forts and havelies, particularly, the havelis of Shekhawat. The colors extracted from certain minerals, plant sources, molluscan shells, and also by processing precious stones, gold and silver. The preparation of desired colors was a lengthy process, sometimes taking weeks. Brushes used were very fine. Mostly men used to paint during this period (roughly around the 16th Century). The artists worked on the belief that nature is sacred and they painted trees, animals and people all in harmony to one another. Lord Krishna is depicted in many Rajputana paintings. The Vaishnava group in their art stressed the relationship of humans with the Almighty. The miniature paintings from the Rajputanas flourished as long as the kings
were in court. Once the British came to India, the art scene also changed. Most of the artists gave up, as the British could not understand native art. The ones who did understand a little bit got some artists to paint scenes to take back home to England so that they could give their people an idea of the country they were living in. Miniatures today are an inspiration to Indian fashion designers, jewelry designers and artists as they revive some art forms with the hope that they do not die and are consigned to pages of history.

**Madhubani painting**

Madhubani painting is a style of Indian painting, practiced in the Mithila region of Bihar state, India. The origins of Madhubani painting are shrouded in antiquity. ‘Mother-Goddess’ a miniature painting of the Pahari style, dates back to eighteenth century. Pahari and Rajput miniatures share many common features.

**Mughal painting**

Mughal painting is a particular style of Indian painting, generally confined to illustrations on the book and done in miniatures, and emerged, developed, and took shape during the period of the Mughal Empire during 16th-19th centuries. Mughal paintings of India date back to the period between the 16th and 18th century when the Mughals ruled a large part of the country. The art of Mughal painting was introduced by the Mughal emperor
Humayun, when he returned to India after his exile in Persia. He invited two Persian artists, Mir Sayid Ali and Abu-us-Samad to return with him. The Mughal paintings that developed from this influence are a keen blend of Indian, Persian and Islamic styles. Mughal painting reached its acme during the reign of Akbar, and also flourished during Jahangir's rule, as well as Shah Jahan's. Mughal painting was rich in variety and included portraits, events and scenes from court life, wild life and hunting scenes, and illustrations of battles. During the reign of Akbar (1556-1605), the imperial court, apart from being the centre of administrative authority to manage and rule the vast Mughal empire, also emerged as a centre of cultural excellence. Mughal painting thrived and hundreds of painters created innumerable paintings depicting scenes from various Hindu epics including the Ramayana and the Mahabharata; themes with animal fables, individual portraits, and paintings on scores of different themes. Mughal style during this period continued to refine itself with elements of realism and naturalism.

Jahangir also (1605-27) had an artistic inclination and the artistic scenario of Mughal painting excelled during his reign. The paintings emerging during the reign of Jahangir illustrates scenes and events from his life. A biographical portrayal of Jahangir known as the ‘Jahangirnama which was written during his lifetime has numerous pictorial idiosyncrasies paintings. The colours used in these paintings were lighter and the brush strokes were more intricate. Human figures, flowers, animals and birds formed the various themes on which the Mughal paintings emerged during Jahangir reign. Jahangir was also deeply influenced by European painting. During his reign he came into direct contact with the English Crown and sent gifts of oil paintings which included portraits of the King and Queen. He encouraged his royal atelier to take up the single point perspective favoured by European artists, unlike the flattened multi-layered style used in
traditional miniatures. He particularly encouraged paintings depicting events of his own life, individual portraits, and studies of birds, flowers and animals. The Jahangirnama, written during his lifetime, which is a biographical account of Jahangir, has several paintings, including some unusual subjects such as the sexual union of a saint with a tigress, and fights between spiders.

Musical events, lovers and ascetics formed the main themes of the Mughal paintings during the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-58). Shah Jahan was most distinguished for his architectural feat, the Taj Mahal took 16 years for its completion. Brushwork became finer and the colors lighter. During the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-58), Mughal paintings continued to develop, but they gradually became cold and rigid. Themes including musical parties; lovers, sometimes in intimate positions, on terraces and gardens; and ascetics gathered around a fire, abound in the Mughal paintings of this period. Govardhan was a noted painter during the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan.

**Tanjore painting**

Tanjore painting is an important form of classical South Indian painting native to the town of Tanjore in Tamil Nadu. Tanjore art dates back to early 9th century, a period dominated by the Chola rulers, who encouraged art and literature. These paintings are known for their elegance, rich colors, and attention to detail. The themes for most of these paintings are Hindu Gods and Goddesses and scenes from Hindu mythology. In modern times, these paintings have become a much sought after souvenir during festive occasions in South India. Tanjore paintings also know as Tanjavur paintings have decorated the walls of temples, palaces and homes since the chola dynasty (17th century).
Deeply rooted in tradition, Tanjore paintings depict divine Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon in rich vibrant colors.

Notable for the adornment of semi-precious stones and 22 karat gold foils, the creation of Tanjore Paintings involves a lot of dedication and several stages of meticulous artwork.

**The Making of a Tanjore Painting**

Tanjore paintings are made on canvases which is a plank of wood (originally wood of the Jackfruit tree was used, now it's plywood) with a layer of cloth pasted on it using Arabic gum. The cloth is then evenly coated with a paste of limestone (chalk) and a binding medium and then left to dry. The process of making a Tanjore painting involves many stages. The first stage involves the making of the preliminary sketch of the image on the base. The base consists of a cloth pasted over a wooden base. Then chalk powder or zinc oxide is mixed with water-soluble adhesive and applied on the base. To make the base smoother, a mild abrasive is sometimes used. After the drawing is made, decoration of the jewellery and the apparels in the image is done with semi-precious stones. Laces or threads are also used to decorate the jewellery. On top of this, the gold foils are pasted. Finally, dyes are used to add colors to the figures in the paintings. The main steps are summarized here:

**Step 1:** When the canvas is ready, the artist then draws a detailed sketch of the theme of the painting. A paste, made of limestone (chalk) and a binding medium, is used to create a 3D effect in embellishing and ornamenting the theme of the painting.
Step 2: Real Tanjore gems of varied hues are fixed in selected areas like pillars, arches, curtains, thrones, dresses, jewellery etc. 22ct gold leaves are used to cover the embossed areas and then the colors are applied on the canvas. Shading and other intricate colouring work is carried out in this step. Additional gems are fixed in the later stages if required.

Step 3: When it dries the paintings are enclosed in imported Italian flexi-glass and framed using the desired frame pattern.

The Madras School

During British rule in India, it was felt that Madras had some of the most talented and intellectual artistic minds in the world. The British had also established a huge settlement in and around Madras. George town was chosen to establish an institute that would cater to the artistic expectations of the royals in London. This has come to be known as the Madras School. Initially traditional artists were employed to produce exquisite varieties of furniture, metal work, and curios and their work was sent to the royal palaces of the Queen. Unlike the Bengal School where ‘copying’ is the norm of teaching, the Madras
School flourishes on 'creating' new styles, arguments and trends. It was K.C.S. Paniker (1911-1977) who set the tone and pace for contemporary art in Madras school\(^5\).

**The Bengal School**

The Bengal School of Art was an influential style of art that flourished in India during the British Raj in the early 20th century. It was associated with Indian nationalism, but was also promoted and supported by many British arts administrators.

The Bengal School arose as a nationalist movement reacting against the academic art styles previously promoted in India, both by Indian artists such as Ravi Varma and in British art schools\(^6\). Following the widespread influence of Indian spiritual ideas in the West, the British art teacher Ernest Binfield Havel attempted to reform the teaching methods at the Calcutta School of Art by encouraging students to imitate Mughal miniatures. This caused immense controversy, leading to a strike by students and complaints from the local press, including from nationalists who considered it to be a retrogressive move. Havel was supported by the artist Abanindranath Tagore, a nephew of the poet Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore painted a number of works influenced by Mughal art, a style that he and Havel believed to be expressive of India's distinct spiritual qualities, as opposed to the "materialism" of the West. Tagore's best-known painting, *Bharat Mata* (Mother India),

\(^5\)The Madras School Modes of Abstraction by A.S. Raman p.139. In: Indian Art an Overview edited by Gayatri Sinha

\(^6\)The Bengal School by Santo Datta p.53. In: Indian Art an Overview edited by Gayatri Sinha
depicted a young woman, portrayed with four arms like Hindu deities, holding objects symbolic of India's national aspirations. Tagore later attempted to develop links with Japanese artists as part of an aspiration to construct a pan-Asianist model of art.

The Bengal School's influence in India declined with the spread of modernist ideas in the 1920s. In the post-independence period, Indian artists showed more adaptability as they borrowed freely from European styles and amalgamated them freely with the Indian motifs to new forms of art. While artists like Francis Newton Souza and Tyeb Mehta were more western in their approach, there were others like Ganesh Pyne and Maqbool Fida Husain who developed thoroughly indigenous styles of work. Today after the process of liberalization of market in India, the artists are experiencing more exposure to the international art-scene which is helping them in emerging with newer forms of art. Jitish Kallat had shot to fame in the late 90s with his paintings which were both modern and beyond the scope of generic definition. In this new century the Indian artists are trying out new styles, themes and metaphors

**Modern Indian Art**

In the beginning of the 20th century, some educated Indians began painting new themes, which were directly inspired by the ancient culture of India. With the arrival of the foreigners in the motherland most artists were pinning to get back to the core of native themes. Some bold new revivalists changed the face of the art world. In the forefront was Abanindranath Tagore from West Bengal. He lit the torch that was kept aflame by his nephews. While the country's politics was stormy, no artist drew inspiration from its turmoil. During this time the biggest name that emerged was that of Raja Ravi Varma from the kingdom of Tranvancore. His talents took him to Europe where he learnt to
paint in oils. Paintings of God and Goddesses under his signature were fascinating art lovers.

A group of progressive artist decided to express their talents during the turbulent days. Landscapes, nature and portraits were some of the themes that artists chose during this time. The poster boy of the art world M.F. Husain rocked at the age of 88 years. These artists gave a completely new meaning to Indian art in the following years. As artists started to express themselves, art galleries were needed to display their works. Art galleries appeared in Delhi and Mumbai only in the post sixties and the face of Indian Art changed with times.

**Indian Art Today**

Once the government recognized the need to give the new breed of artists a solid platform the colors on the canvas have inspired and encouraged talent from all over the country. Today many artists are producing great works of art and exhibiting them abroad. Most Indian paintings are finding buyers in other countries. The uniqueness of Indian Art still lies in its rich cultural heritage. The art mart in India has become global and like other sectors it has become an economically a viable proposition for business. Some places in the world, Indian painting are bought and sold at an auction and at an unheard price. The paintbrush has now become as powerful as the pen to express feelings of Indian artists.

Indian paintings historically revolved around the religious deities and kings. Indian art is a collective term for several different schools of art that existed in the Indian subcontinent. The paintings varied from large frescoes of Ellora to the intricate Mughal
miniature paintings to the metal embellished works from the Tanjore school. The paintings from the Gandhar-Taxila are influenced by the Persian works in the west. The eastern style of painting was mostly developed around the Nalanda school of art. The works are mostly inspired by various scenes from Indian mythology.

It was then Jamini Roy who bought into Indian painting an element of vigour, by studying folk art forms and Amrita Sher-Gil who captured the modern western spirit of rebellion against academicism by the use of free composition, simplification, and a faith in the artist's instinctual revolt against mere naturalism. Her discovery of this liberation from "accepted norms" or "styles" led to a great movement among Indian artists to free themselves from all shackles of "models" and of representational painting. Most of them found inspiration in the newly won freedom of western artists, and by 1950 this process of Indian liberation resulted in a bold discarding of "models". Many experimented with original styles of their own.

**Contemporary Art**

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

³www.craftsindia.com
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.

**Contemporary Indian painting**

Thirty years ago there were two main styles of painting in India: (1) the academic-realist manner taught in the Government art schools, and (2) the "Bengali Renaissance" movement, started by Abanindranath Tagore, a nationalist movement in which Mughal miniature painting style, combined with far Eastern water-colour techniques tried to capture some "oriental" spirit by turning to illustration work.
Indian art has its roots in myriad folk styles and traditions and has also fed on the social and political ethos of not only India but also of the world. The contemporary stream of Indian consciousness is, in fact, a unified expression of the individual creative energies of various Indian artists. In this chapter an attempt has been made to draw vignettes of the contemporary heritage of Indian painting and profile of the personal journey of contemporary Indian artists.

Indian art of the early 17th century comprised of miniature court paintings, which reached its zenith during the Mughal Empire. However, with the advent of the East India Company, European form of art was introduced. This resulted in an art form that was a combination of the European art styles and the folk art of India.

Raja Ravi Verma's art is a reflection of this hybrid style. Ravi Verma was in fact, the first Indian artist to apply the traditions of western academic realism to the representations of Indian literature and mythology. Raja Ravi Verma (1848-1906) was born in Kilimanoor, a small fiefdom in modern Kerala. Although his paintings had a distinct Indianness in terms of costume, his sensual and diaphanously clad women with the delicate brushwork bespoke of European Renaissance style. 'Nair Lady adorning her Hair' and 'The lady with the Lamp' are perhaps his best works.

But artists chafing under foreign dominion took recourse to the creation of an independent entity or 'Swadeshi'. This concept of 'Swadeshi' emerged in the form of a revival of art with its roots in the Indian tradition.

Nand Lal Bose was one such proponent of the traditional art form. Nand Lal Bose (1882-1966) taught at the Indian School of oriental Art and was the principal at Kala
Bhavan, Shantiniketan. Influenced by the Tagore family (Abhanindara Nath Tagore, Rabindra Nath Tagore) and the murals of Ajanta, his classic works include scenes from Indian mythology, life of women and village life.

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. Chapter I of the thesis deals with the appraisal of the Indian contemporary women artists in general and rest of the chapters deal with the work and style of Arpana Caur and Anjolie Ela Menon, the most eminent and charismatic women contemporary artists who for their immense contribution to Indian art are known globally.
CONTEMPORARY WOMEN ARTISTS