CHAPTER 1
CHAPTER 1

CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS TO INDIAN ART

There is a series of veteran female contemporary artists 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 very famous. Here in this chapter the artists have been categorized as per their seniority.

Amrita Shergil

Amrita Shergil was immensely talented and had created a huge volume of art works by the time she was only 28. Her works show colourful women drawn in realist and impressionist styles sometimes with erotic overtones. She was the daughter of Sardar Umrao Singh Shergil and Antoinette, a Hungarian lady endowed with considerable artistic talent⁷. She was born in Budapest in 1913, and spent

⁷Talent, Tragedy and Myth of Amrita Shergil, Rupika Chawla pp. 37-44 In: Indian Art an Overview edited by Gayatri Sinha
the formative years of her life in Europe. She dabbled in paint from her early childhood. Her intelligent mother detected the talent latent in her, and encouraged her to paint. She took her to Italy and Paris, the hotbeds of artistic activity and the birthplace of many historic art movements in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Amrita had the good fortune of studying at the best art school at Paris, the Ecole des Beaux Arts, under the competent guidance of great masters. Besides, living in Paris, she had the added advantage of visiting art galleries, museums, salons, etc. She studied the works of contemporary and ancient master painters in the original.

Amrita's work done during her stay in Europe till 1934 was largely academic, consisting of still-life, nude studies and portraits. Her genius was to flower only after her return to her fatherland, India. She came here not as a foreigner attracted by the 'picturesque' India and the exotic sights, she came here as an Indian with feelings and spirit, and with a mind to make this land her home. Despite her training in western art, she had complete awareness of the India's artistic traditions and had a deep respect for this. She has painted the dark side of the mankind. In such paintings she has portrayed gloomy faces on her canvas. When she set foot on Indian soil for the first time in November 1934, she was haunted by the faces of the unhappy and dejected, poor and starving Indians whom she saw first around Simla, then in the South and finally in Punjab, where she was to spend the last days of her life. After settling down in Simla in early 1935, she took an important decision of interpreting "the life of Indians, particularly the poor, pictorially." This, she did with her own new technique which was not technically Indian, in the traditional sense of the word. These words indicate that she had

---

a clear idea of what she has to accomplish in the near future. She has laid the foundation of modern Indian art. Then began the second and last phase of her artistic career (in 1938) that ended with her death in 1941.

**Leela Mukherjee**

Leela Mukherjee was born in 1916 in Hyderabad. She studied the Fine Arts in ‘Kala Bhawan’ at Shantiniketan. She carved wood and copper for her paintings. She has carved the structure of women in a very artistic manner on wood for most of her paintings. From 1957, 58, 70, 76 and 82, she participated in a number of solo exhibitions. In the year 1979, she participated in Silver Jubilee Exhibition at Lalit Kala Academy and Graphic Academy in Garhi in 1983.

**Jaya Appaswamy**

Without remembering the contributions of Jaya Appaswamy as contemporary women artist of India, our study on Indian Contemporary Arts not only remains incomplete but will be lifeless. She is known as an artist and a writer as well. She was born in 1818 in Madras. She got her primary education from Vidyodaya Girls High School. She earned her Bachelors in Natural Science and secured first position. During 1945, she joined Kala Bhawan at Shnatiniketan, in Viswabharati and got a Diploma in Lalit Kala under the guidance of Nand Lal Bose. She was honoured to fly for Beijing, China as a Research Scholar by the Government of India. Initially her work style was oil painting which later changed to landscape paintings. She participated in approximately 30 solo exhibitions at National and International level. She played an important role in uplifting the status of Arts. She was an Editor of Lalit Kala Academy. Appaswamy was one of the founder
members of Shilpi Chakra and secretary of the Lalit Kala Akademi. Her paintings are to
be found in the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art and at the Lalit Kala
Akademi. Therefore, her contribution as an Indian contemporary Artist will always
remain exemplary.

**Damyanti Chawla**

Damyanti was born in 1920. She was the daughter of a leading surgeon and the cousin
of the trade-unionist and leftist, Ramesh Chandra. But her mentor was none other than the
grand old man of Indian art, Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal. She became her student after
graduating in 1938. In 1942, she got her diploma from the Lahore School of Fine Arts
and launched a series of figurative works in which the influence of both Sanyal and the
Oriental traditions of painting is evident. Typically she was a landscape artist. This was
the art of the national movement, looking East to China and Japan, as well as to Europe.
Damyanti emerged as a powerful water-colourist and oil painter. In 1960, widowed and
as a mother of two childrenshe went to the State School at London and successfully
completed a four-year diploma course and took to mural painting at the Hammersmith
College of Art and the Central school of Arts and Crafts, London, between 1969-71. She
worked in Paris. From the late 1960, she painted her best. With the passing away of
Damyanti Chawla, we find an important era of our art coming to a close. She died at her
home in Delhi painting till the very end. Her dedication to art was exemplary. A student
of Bhabhesh Sanyal in Lahore, she was a neighbour of Amrita Shergil. And indeed,
Lahore of the 1930s and 1940s had an ambience like few other places in India. Damyanti
was a true representative of it. Lahore of her time was a curious blend of horsey and
hunting types with modern and even avant-garde professionals sharing the limelight with strong-willed nationalist and lefties revolutionaries.

**Pilloo R. Pochkhanawala**

She was born in 1923 in Mumbai. She studied the art of sculpturing the kernel under the guidance of N.G. Pansore. She had firm belief that the time of traditional paintings has faded. She gave a new world to personal imaginations. She has secured an eminent place as a sculpture painter. She made the exhibition of her sculptures in Belgrade, Bangkok and Tokyo in 1967. Her work has been placed in various National as well as International museums.

**Arpita Sing**

Born in 1937 in West Bengal, Arpita Singh studied at School of Art, Delhi, and the Delhi Polytechnic, 1954-59. Since the beginning of her career Arpita has been assiduously learning the craft of painting Her native paintings are unlabored particularly piquant in their comments on the 'space' of women and the girl child in the society, and on the atrophied sensibilities of modern man vis-à-vis the growing violence and social injustice. Arpita Singh’s paintings should be viewed from a woman’s perspective. In her paintings the inner world of a woman, her home and life around her, looms large, using a thick textured surface, especially for her oil on canvas paintings, Arpita creates an element of tension, which she says, is a reflection of life around her and creates a world which is partly naive and partly real. She uses simple objects like telephones, aeroplanes, guns, bunches of flowers as icons of contemporary
life. She has shown her work in India and abroad several times. Her works are in permanent collections in Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, Chandigarh Museum, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal and Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

**Kishori Kaul**

Kishori Kaul was born in Srinagar in 1939. Her father was a Kashmiri Pundit of unorthodox views serving in the Government. She studied in Annie Besant School, Srinagar. The year 1953 was a year of great significance for her. She fell ill with tuberculosis and while she lay tossing between hope and disappointment, her grandfather, Narayan Muratgar, a celebrated painter of the late 19th century, placed before her brush, colours and paper and thereby set the ball of aesthetic sensibility rolling in her mind. No doubt, Kishori already had a penchant for painting but now she got so engrossed in artistic work that she forgot about her surroundings full of sorrows and sufferings with the result that she got cured of her dreaded disease and at the same time, emerged as a great painter. It was a marvelous occupational therapy for her which brought a cataclysmic change in her life and character.

Her first teacher was Som Nath Bhat and then she joined the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Baroda in 1959. Soon her artistic excellence was recognised and she got awards and prizes galore. She received 'Bombay Art Society Award' and 'Bombay State Award' (Poona). She also received 'Gujarat State Exhibition' (Surat) Award. In 1963 she received Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree with distinction and then in 1966 she earned her
Master in Fine Arts with distinction from Baroda University. In the same year her father died.


There are three main characteristics in Kishori's paintings. One, the pictures of her childhood in Srinagar are etched in her mind and then by a magical trick she associates the present with the past images. She appears to have a mental camera in which are reflected and kept secure the images of her earlier life. She lived her earlier life in Srinagar, Her house was situated on the bank of the river Jhelum and she loved to watch the boats floating on the surface of the water. She also enjoys the quarrels of the families of the boatmen. She had her deaf aunt who was quite eloquent in narrating tales of wonder.

The fountainhead of her art lies in her childhood experiences and the images she preserved in her mind. Her mother's guidance and criticism in the beginning also helped
her to fashion her work. Above all, Nature was her great teacher. In her painting Kishori stands like a rock refusing to be carried away by the tides of cheap commercial art.

If we see her another painting, "Still Life with Blue Vase, 1993" we find that her painting reveals a whole gamut of colours in many nuances and shades. This also confirms that Nature is the vast reservoir of colour and beauty which provides her the inspiration. Her quest has been to capture the evasive mystery of colour that she finds in the play of light on the natural objects. Her landscapes, though instinctively belong to Kashmir, yet they go beyond the topography of Kashmir and the contemplation of the varying moods of nature. When we see Kishori's other paintings like, 'Lotus Lake' 'Green Fields', 'Sunset', 'Autumn' 'Still Life with Samovar', we find that she is a product of the social milieu and the environs of Kashmir determine her basic consciousness. The evolution of varieties of landscape form created out of soft line and delightful colour constitutes the essence of her art. She has an extraordinary talent for colouring. It may safely be insisted that her imagination had its roots in the observation of Nature and her creations belong to a world never completely divorced from reality. Recently she has tried her hand on portraiture, which is free from any semblance of imitations.

**Anjolie Ela Menon**

In contemporary India, there are many women painters who are drawing a lot of attention. The most well known among them is Anjolie Ela Menon. Her style infuses realistic elements with the surrealist and abstract. She was born in 1940 in West Bengal. In a very age of 17 years, she entered in the field of
arts. She is a triumphant painter of the old generation, yet she does not like to be acknowledged as a senior artist. She believes that some male artists are envious of the success of female artists. During her 80 decades she painted various nude paintings for which she says that: I paint the female body as I am most familiar with it. It is my territory. It is not as glamorous for me as it is for men. For women it is a source of pleasure and pain. Men can not understand the fear associated with body. For them night can be beautiful but for a woman it is scary if she is alone and if somebody approaches her in the darkness, she feels insecure.

Anjolie is the first artist who used the computer aided paintings. Glass painting was a separate phase of her life⁹. Now it has been popularized as a revolution and everybody wants to be the part of this revolution.

**Shobha Brutta**

Shobha Brutta is an important artist among the celebrated contemporary female artists. She was born in New Delhi in 1943. She earned the Diploma in Lalit Kala from Delhi School of Arts in 1964. She started her solo exhibition since 1965 and participated in national exhibitions. Ministry of Education awarded her the Sahitya Kala Award. Her paintings have been kept as an important collection at private and national levels. She has worked for more than a decade in association with various young female artists which is professionally related to the Triveni Kala Sangam. She worked in black and white, therefore, her contribution in contemporary Indian art would remain immemorial.

---

Anupam Sood

She has a separate place among the contemporary women artists of India. She was born in 1944 in Hoshiarpur. She was a National Awardee of the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi. She has a complete technical know how of the work. Her contribution for the upliftment of Arts can never be ignored. She will always be given great respect for her valuable contribution. She got trained as a professional painter from the Banasthali Art Institute, Rajasthan and College of Art, Lucknow. Her work reflects women as a subject. She has chosen hues of red, orange and light green in her paintings to express the purpose. She participated in various group exhibitions at Lucknow, New Delhi, Kolkata, London and Yugoslavia in the year 1965. She had her solo exhibitions at Delhi in 1969. She participated in Third Beenale World Graphic, London in 1980. She was awarded for Sanskriti Puruskar, at New Delhi. She participated in an International Print Beenale, Yugoslavia in 1981.

Prabha Shah

Prabha Shah was born in 1947 in Jodhpur city of Rajasthan. Being a child she was given all the comfort and luxury one could think off. She doesn’t have anything to do at all and this made her close to depression. So, her father thought that her energies need to be chanalized in a proper direction and that was the time when people thought that painting would be a right medium for her to express her feelings and convey her notion to the entire world.
Prabha Shah does not prefer the dearth of figuration which is so evident in most of the Indian paintings. She makes such an incredible impact on the canvas that it sure leaves a mark on the viewer’s heart. Her masterful tactic of painting evokes the unmatched feelings of hope in humans. The thick conceptualization in her paintings often seems like a prism through which figures can be distinguished. She relocates her observations onto the canvas with such naturalness and high spirit that it enhances her subject matter. Her works are facsimiles of scenes that have imprinted themselves on her mind during her living in Rajasthan.

In 1962, she was awarded “Common Wealth Society Award”. At the age of 15, getting such a prestigious award made her parents realize that she should take painting as her profession and not just a hobby. Her eyes were her foremost inspiration because that has empowered her with the strength to establish her existence among the rest. Apart from that whatever she sees becomes her inspiration. “She says that Our Earth itself has so much in stock to inspire us that we don’t require any further variant”.

Though her paintings depict tradition but also have an element of modernity in it. Her paintings are a reflection of herself. She basically uses oil colors and natural images to reveal her emotions on canvas. Few artworks of Krishan Khanna and R. Broota have influenced her a lot.. Her very new creation is a river of hope. It is an oil painting on a 34” x 46” canvas. She is already associated with an art gallery, “Triveni Kala Sangam”, but for this one she has not yet decided any specific name and place for its display. She has won so many Awards like “Yuva ratna award”1985,” International women’s year award”1975 and has also been honored by “Aaj”, She got her first recognition and
appraisal when she was awarded from the "Common Wealth Society" which is the most prestigious award of her lifetime.

**Latika Katt**

Latika katt is not in dearth of recognition in the Art Academy. She occupies a prestigious place in the field of arts. She was born in 1948 in Varanasi. She acquired her primary education from Dehradoon and got expertise in Fine arts from Banaras Hindu University. She had her solo exhibition of sculpture in Bombay in 1975 and at Kolkata in 1977. From 1967 to 1977 she has participated in numerous group exhibitions. Lalita currently heads the Department of Fine Arts & Art Education at Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi. She had solo and joint exhibitions in India and abroad and is recognized as one of India's leading artists. Latika studied art in India and abroad and has also exhibited in India and many other countries. Honoured and awarded by the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1980 and the Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, Katt has travelled across the world on account of her art camps, talks and symposia. Not only has she been a part of the administration of premier art and culture institutes, she also has a long teaching career. Her work features in collections in the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai and the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, among others. She has deeply studied the carved painting in metal. She received a National Award from Lalit Kala Academy and was elected as a General Council of Lalit Kala Academy in 1980. She also participated in the 'Modern Art Museum' in Paris and 'Kakoora Art Museum' in Japan. She was appointed as a lecturer of Model Art at Banaras Hindu University and participated in Trenal India at New Delhi in 1982. She practiced her art on copper. She has expressed the imaginary art mostly. She lives and works in Delhi. The sculpture strategy in the 'Decay and Growth' series of her
works deals with mainly with the decay of mass correlating the paradoxical position. Abstraction from matter leads into matter. Latika's mode of reaching out to touching and modeling involves the pushing, digging, stretching scribbling and anything through which she can leave a mark of her identity. The intention of the artist is to create a multi-dimensional, imaginative world that goes far beyond the obvious. Her contribution in the field of Fine Arts deserves big appreciation.

**Arpana Caur**

Arpana Caur was born in Delhi in 1954. She grew up in an environment that was rich in art and music. Her mother was an award winning novelist, whose influence resonates in Arpana's very essence. As a self-taught painter, Arpana has drawn inspiration from her mother's writings, Punjabi folk literature, the Pahari miniature tradition and Indian folk-art motifs. Arpana attended Delhi University and graduated in 1961 with MA in Literature. 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. Now, at the age of 51, she has become a well known and much celebrated artist around the world. For the last three decades her exhibitions have been shown in Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, London, Cardiff, Amsterdam, New York, Berlin and Munich. She has participated in group shows in Japan, USA,

---

10Folk and Travel Arts based on Collection of Arpana Fine Arts Museum. The Magic Makers. P.C. Jain forwarded by Ajeet Caur. Published by Academy of Fine Arts and Literature.
Algiers', Singapore, Australia, Austria, Iraq, Cuba, USSR and Germany. Reviews of her work have appeared in Time and again in Indian Press and TV and in the Guardian, New York Times, International Herald Tribune, Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyhter, Die Welt etc., BBC and Star TV have made documentary films on her in the 1980's apart from a documentary by Sidharth Tagore. For the past 5 years, three of her works including 'Nanak' and '1984' have been on display at the Sikh Art Gallery in the Smithsonian, Washington DC. She had done murals from 1981 to 2005 in India and in Hamburg, all of them are noncommercial and have been made as a commitment to Public Art

---