Art and culture that we see in India today was neither the creation of a single race, nor had it taken place in a particular space and time. If we examine Indian culture, we would see that in the long period of several thousand years, of different communities came to live in this subcontinent with their own art and culture and finally all became unified in this wonderland. On the other hand, the age-old rich culture of India is the product of these incoming influences. Archaeologists and historians had discovered evidences of such cultural fusion.

In India, thus, Western ideas encountered strong and vibrant cultural and artistic heritage stretching back thousands of years that diverged significantly from western experience. The interaction of Western and Indian ideas in art generates a fascinating tension that makes Indian art so compelling. It is the contrasts between these two cultures, more than the many similarities, that have drawn Indian and Western artists towards one another. Indians have been attracted by the spirit of newness and innovations and the unconstrained freedom of art of Western countries especially European and American. At the same time European and American artists breaking away from their predominantly European heritage and finding themselves rootless especially the Americans, who went searching for a past for new input to open new artistic pathways found both in the ancient and radically different traditions of Indian art.

It is interesting to observe that the Indian artists, who have settled abroad in prominent cities of Europe, are now turning for reference to one or other element of Indian art and philosophy. There are very few artists in whose artworks such indigenous feeling comes spontaneously because they live their life as Indians and have no inhibitions about it. Those who use it with a superficial success lack that genuine feeling because in their pictures, the Indian motives far from gaining significance as a symbol remain only as a sign.

It is also interesting to observe that immediately after independence, a large number of Indian artists made a mass exit to Europe. Those Indian artists believed that one could partake of history simply by switching one’s sensibilities to modern universals and accepting one’s counterparts in the art field.
Back to India, we observe that among Indian artists, the first to respond in unison to international modernists' values was the Calcutta Group. It urged that art ought to be used for cultural regeneration to effect meaningful changes in their society. However, its efforts were drowned by the onslaught of catastrophe - World War II, the Bengal famine, which destroyed over three million lives, and the exhausting physical and psychological dislocation resulting from continuous political and social schizophrenia that emerged from perennial freedom struggles.

Far from the search of identity or indigenous beliefs, the Calcutta Group declared "Paris of Sartre, Stravinsky and Picasso is the centre of our day." However, by the end of World War II, Bombay was encountering the phenomenon of European refugees, who gave a new fillip to modernism and helped Bombay to become the theatre of cosmopolitan activity. The progressive modernist ideology and its aesthetic definition had its roots mainly in German Expressionism, which the Calcutta Group failed to co-opt.

Modern Indian politics led to sectarian violence of epic proportions in 1947 and many artists fled across the newly formed borders, leaving their art and livelihood out of fear. In these days also we find many artists who traveled to the capital seeking the peaceful and the adequate haven for their new life. Sailoz Mookherjea, who was earlier influenced by Sher-gil’s paintings decided to branch off from the contemporary style and adopted an idiosyncratic style. Later K.S. Kulkarni and Bimal Das Gupta arrived and began to work in Delhi.

The tragedy of partition forcibly shifted some of prominent artists from Lahore to Delhi. The refugee artists formed the Delhi Silpi Chakra, which proclaimed the motto of “art is life.” It is a matter of fact that Delhi Silpi Chakra’s endeavour generated an awareness of art in times of need. It was a movement against Bengal School. Some of these artists became art teachers and thereby also played a dynamic role for art education. Indian art in the last four decades has passed through phases of experimentation, innovations, mannerisms and eclecticism.

Taking in our consideration, the significant role of Kanwal Krishna and Somnath Hore, we can frankly say that subsequently the graphic art movement began when ‘Group 8’ became the focus of printmaking activities and when exhibitions were organized by the Delhi based printmakers Jagmohan Chopra and Anupam Sud. Graphic art being a
flexible language capable of expressing remarkable originality came to flowering in the
sixties and became more fruitful and expanded in the following decades.

The presence of foreign diplomats in Delhi increased since the 1960s who also
began purchasing works of contemporary Indian artists. In the recent decades, more
Indian buyers and art collectors have come forward. The mushrooming of galleries
indicates that art became a consumer industry. However, at the same time, the traditional
pattern of personal relationship between artist and patron has been fainted away.

The Triennale Indian Exhibitions since around 1968 have also contributed
towards internationalization of modern Indian art. However, it was in 1989 when the first
Bharat Bhavan International Biennial of Prints was held at Bhopal. Such significant
shows will be one of the landmarks in the process of internationalization. From now on,
we can say that Indian printmaking carved its niche in the world map. However, we
should draw attention that, in India, there are also some centres similar to the above
mentioned one, in Ahmedabad, Madras, Lucknow, Jaipur and Chandigarh. Lalit Kala
Akademi also has some other adequate centres for art activities in some of the
cosmopolitan cities, headed by some prominent artists of the country.

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Now we are close to the fields of printmaking techniques. In the former pages, we
tried to highlight the influences and trends in contemporary Indian art through some
historical events and we have approached some ideas and attitudes; such factors were the
major intentions of some groups of artists in Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi. In fact, we
have not highlighted the influence of the communist China and the Far East in the field of
Indian woodcuts and also colour woodcuts, which was practiced only in some few cases.
However, I think the bold black and white German expressionist woodcuts and linocuts
had created the strongest influences on the work of some Indian printmakers.

Now, we need to get more involved in the process of printmaking and we ought to
enter this field through the beautiful title, 'The art of prints.' The prints as an exclusive
artistic creation arise because in a print both the possibilities and limitations are tightly
interlocked and its duplication quality colonizes the best of the sane minds. What are
important in printmaking, as some noted art critics say, are not the technique, not even
the image, but its response to aggregate of aptitudes. The deeper our understanding of
everything that participates in our expression of the image the more dynamic and powerful the image becomes. This experience gained by a mind open to experiment and free from fixed ideas and formulas can not be replaced by intellectual substitutes or through knowledge acquired from books and other materials.

The modern printmaking introduces a completely new belief system attaching aesthetic-artistic connotation to it. There is harmony between the ideas and the medium in the work of some earlier printmakers, but the main problem faced by Indian artists is how to use Western printmaking techniques and remain essentially Indian in feeling and imagery. The technical preoccupation of many Western printmakers and the inherently procedural, analytical and sequential nature of most print processes would appear to be somewhat alien to the holistic, integrative and symbolic nature of Indian temperament. One can say such influences are like the lump of sugar melted in a large pot; the lump will be no more but the whole water will be sugared. Indian culture and Western culture combined with a great deal of experience and the perfect know-how meet in a mutually beneficial symbiosis, but where each can retain its unique properties.

However, Western comprehension of image making is also quite different from those of Indians, and Indian artists live in a symbiotic world in which many gestures, forms and objects carry multiple meanings. Even common themes are often infused with spiritual significance. Indian expertise in printmaking has proved that they have a capacity to absorb and incorporate foreign influences and use them to enrich their own traditions without fundamentally changing them.

Indian artists tend toward imagery and subjects from the imagination they often come to create their own images by using different kinds of rooted sources and comprehension. Indian printmakers, in general, avoid drawing directly from life and even when they do so, they do not try to replicate what they see. However, their subject matter has been influenced by the expressionists and surrealists in European Art and of course, there are some influences in the Indian culture especially in tribal and literary influences and also in the village theatre.

Since independence, Indian artists have struggled to be both Indian and modern; a state, which often seemed at times contradictory and not easy to be obtained. In
printmaking it has meant adopting a foreign technique and adapting it to indigenous sensibilities. Printmaking is a technology that is highly procedural, sequential. In the West, printmaking has a long history, while in India, printmaking has a relatively short history and the medium is approached differently than in the West.

Fortunately for India, the earliest of the modern Indian individual artist to take to printmaking was Gaganendranath Tagore. The lithographs he did between 1917 and 1923 prove beyond any doubt that he was fully aware about the nature, potential and history of the arts-in-print. Until Gaganendranath appeared with these modern caricatures, the print was an object carrying symbolic value and an appealing power to the imagination of the people. He revealed himself to be critic of the society and polity of his time.

Nandalal Bose, Benode B. Mukherjee, Mukul Dey and his colleague experimented with various media-like woodcut, linocut, etching, dry point and lithograph. Some artists of the following generation took to printmaking in a larger way. But to all these artists, printmaking was still an accessory medium to regale themselves with; they did not choose it as a main medium of expression. Although didacticism did not remain the prime concern of the printmaking activity that followed in Santiniketan of the thirties and forties, easy communicability of message and feeling continued to be a much sought after value.

Linocut is the most interesting medium used for self-expression in Calcutta and Santiniketan. The following names are the leading graphic artists in this field: Chittaprasad, B. Mukhopadhyay, along with the exceptional expert of linocut prints Haren Das, the intellectual artist and writer K.G. Subramanyan, and the exceptional graphic artist Safiuddin Ahmed. We should also mention some other younger printmakers like Jagdish and Kamala Mittal, Shanti Dave, Jyoti Bhatt and V.R. Patel.

I think both linocut and woodcut techniques are deeply rooted in the soil of Indian heritage and sensibility and also we find these techniques were practiced and are still in practice for the commercial purposes, especially, those that were used in the field of textile design and handmade garment. However, we will not discuss such branches but going to mention some exceptional names of the younger generation, viz., Zarina, 1937, B.A. Reddy, 1939: he is a good printmaker, especially in linocut, Shyam Sharma, 1941,

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Now, we will bring lithography to the focus in order to point out some specific viewpoints and also to approach some of the major aspects through some prominent names and have some hints here or there to draw the outline of the picture. So, let us move to follow the movement of lithograph, which, in fact, has less glittering and was not used widely as a medium for self-expression. Gaganendranath brought lithograph to the limelight during 1919 and 1923. The prominent artists in Kala Bhawan and Calcutta did some few prints. Kala Bhavan artists have tried their hands in this technique; N.B. Joglekar, Somnath Hore, Subramanyan and Lalu Prasad Shaw also did some interesting lithoprints. The above mentioned names are pioneering lithographers.

Delhi and Baroda started teaching litho print technique around the late 50s. By that time Somnath Hore took charge of the department of graphics at Delhi and N.B. Joglekar took charge of the graphics department at Baroda. Lithograph was an important process in this department. Subramanyan, G.M. Sheikh, V.R. Patel and later on in the mid-80s. P.D. Dhumal and Rini Dhumal along with some other younger artists of the 90s, viz., Avijit Roy, K. Prabhakaran, and Surendran Nair did some expressive lithos. Naina Dalal of Baroda did some significant expressionistic lithographs in London during the early 1960s. In ‘90s, we also see some significant names from Delhi Printmaker’s Guild, viz., K.R. Subbanna, Kavita Nayar, Sushanta Guha, Jayant Gajera and Shukla Sawant. All the mentioned names did very interesting colour lithoprints; they also achieved forward creations, which may be considered as giving a new lease of life and reborn quality to the art of lithography. The new generation of printmakers from Santiniketan work in a variety of media, for lithoprints we select two names as experts in lithograph techniques, viz., Lalu Prasad Shaw, b.1937 and Nirmalendu Das, b.1951; there are also, some other talented and active students.

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Etching has been familiar in Europe more than four hundred years ago. It was practiced widely in Germany, Holland, Italy, France and England. The images were in black and white; many etchings were devoted to represent some famous paintings of the great master. Colour etching was discovered later and widely practiced in this century.

Generally speaking, one can see that the 19th century saw the birth of printmaking in India, but, the media was used only as a means for graphic reproductions and not as an end in itself. Even in Europe, though printmaking had gained certain respectability through the work of Durer, Rembrandt, Goya, Lutrec, the media was not fully explored as a means for creative expression. It was only in this century that printmaking graduated itself into autonomous art form and was accepted as a medium of total pursuit for creative expression.

Here in India, the serious interest in this technique comes in the early years of the 1920, when Kala Bhavan started its programme to include printmaking in its art teaching programmes. Around the same time etching caught the attention of Kala Bhavan artists. They saw Pearson’s collection of Muirhead Bone’s etchings at Santiniketan and this inspired them to explore new pastures. They had already seen Chanchal Banerjee’s etchings. In 1922, came Madame Andre Karpeles who demonstrated printmaking techniques at Santiniketan. Karpeles was very active and inspired instructor.

Mukul Dey, 1895-1989, was the ‘first Indian etcher,’ who also played an important role in popularizing the art of printmaking among the Indian artists. He was perhaps the first in India to take up printmaking as a highly individuated means of artistic expression, instead of a technique of reproduction.

The other artists of the earlier generation who practiced etching were Surendranath Kar (1894-1970), Samarendra Nath Gupta (1887-1964) and A.R. Chughtai (1897-1975). All of them did a number of interesting etchings. Prominent etchers among Bengal School followers were Benode B. Mukherjee (1904-80) and Ramkinkar Bajaj (1906-80). Unlike their contemporaries, they did some beautiful and innovative etchings far from the mere academic renderings. We can consider their work as a bridge between East and West.

We should mention some other etchers of the 30s and the 40s such as L.M. Sen (1898-1954) Y.K. Shukla (1907-1986) and N.S. Bendre - they all did some nice etchings.
around 1947. Haren Das (1921-1993), who was teaching at Calcutta till the late 80s, but his main forte was linocut. Das and many of his contemporaries indulged in exact depiction of landscapes and genre themes, embellishing them with texture and details.

The etchers, who were active during the 50s are Kanwal and his wife Devyani Krishna, Y.K. Shukla, Krishna Reddy, Somnath Hore, Laxman Pai, B.R. Panesar and P.T. Reddy. Majority of artists of the earlier generation had failed to produce any striking etchings. However, the whole picture come to be changed around the early sixties, when Arun Bose had returned from Paris – Hayter’s Atelier 17, The Society of Contemporary Artists, Calcutta set up an etching press. Artists such as Sanat Kar, Amitabha Benerji, Shyamal Dutta Ray and Lalu Prasad Shaw started printmaking – especially etching – under the mantle of their senior Arun Bose. These four artists are among the best Indian printmakers today.

Atelier 17 emerged in the midst of the extraordinary environment after the World War I, founded and directed by S.W. Hayter in Paris in 1926. This workshop brought together a group of adventurous and committed artists. It included some surrealists, such as Joan Miro, Max Ernst, Andre Masson and other important artists along with S.W. Hayter, who brought the same spirit of innovation and experimentation to colour printmaking.

The most important medium for our research is the viscosity process which is superimposing or juxtaposition of colours of different viscosity using rollers of varying density on an intaglio plate, having several degrees of relief and textures. This process will achieve the freedom and spontaneity that were essential to the artist’s expression. Krishna Reddy co-directed the Atelier 17 during the years 1965 and 1976. He points out, “I approached printmaking as a sculptor and brought about significant changes both in plate preparation and colour printing, opening up new possibilities for experimentation during the course of 30 years. I have tried to find ways to work in colour printing with a maximum of simplicity and directness while increasing the expressiveness and intensity of my images.”

From around 1958 onwards, Krishna Reddy organized a good number of fascinating and inspiring exhibitions in Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and some other cosmopolitan cities. His viscosity technique inspired many Indian printmakers after they
had seen his wonderful exhibitions and got familiar with his magic-like viscosity process
during the several short sojourns he spent in India to hold exhibitions. These exhibitions
took place between 1958 and 1994, with the last at Bombay in 1994.

Reaching the end of the sixties, we find Baroda has had produced some of fine
etchers such as Gauri Shanker, Laxma Goud and D. Devraj. They are all from
Hyderabad. By this time, Baroda became a very active centre for printmaking. The
painter-printmakers who based in Baroda also did a good number of interesting prints,
viz., K.G. Subramanyan, Jeram Patel, G.M. Sheikh, Naina Dalal, Jayant Parikh, and some
other prominent artists also tried their hands in this medium. However, this kind of
imperative atmosphere served as the main source of inspiration for the trainees and their
teachers in the department of graphics. Exponents of printmaking trained at Baroda are
able to impart style and substance to their work.

When the American Prof. Paul Lingren organized his first well-equipped
printmaking workshop in Delhi in the year 1970, P.D. Dhumal was one of the excellent
participants. By the early 70s, one can observe that the art scene became full of a good
number of prominent printmakers. Some of them are still active as leading printmakers
and as masters of etching prints, such as Jyoti Bhatt, Jagmohan Chopra, Amitabha
Benerji, Shyamla Datta Ray, Arun Bose (now abroad), Dipak Benerji, Paneer Selvam,
Vilas Shinde, Bhaskaran, Shail Choyal, R.M. Palaniappan and Lalitha Lajme. Few years
later, we began to see some other names start to emerge such as Prayag Jha, Subba
Ghosh, Jayasri Burman, Siddhartha Ghosh, Nirmalendu Das and of course Baroda’s
second and younger generation of printmakers.

Collograph prints were the forte of some artists such as Devyani Krishna, Gouri
Shanker, Jayant Parikh, Naina Dalal, and with a little difference, Jagmohan Chopra. It is
relevant to mention here that Kanwal Krishna is, in fact, the real pioneer of this
innovative technique. Sanat Kar has developed some other technique depending on the
Sun mica, which needs more careful handling and expert knowledge to achieve such kind
of etching. However, it was the mid-50s, when Kanwal Krishna had executed a good
number of experimental prints. By then, a large number of Indian artists had traveled to
Europe and America, where Abstract Expressionism was in vogue. This trend soon began
to percolate into the works of Indian artists, who discovered in it a springboard of greater

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artistic freedom. Kanwal rode on this wave using his trial and error process. He created a surface of multiple layers with great textural richness and a wide range of iridescent effects. Here, in Baroda, Naina Dalal and Jayant Parikh have seriously involved themselves in this technique from around the early 70s. They quite differently explored the medium according to their needs and their individual way of expression. This process is comparatively cheaper than zinc plate etching. There is no need for the nitric acid and the time required is also shorter. There is more freedom and innovative opportunities for those who are experts in image making and printmaking techniques.

Indian etchers achieved very significant and also striking prints. They are willing to match the universal standards; hence they acquired the real language of graphic art being also familiar with the processes of the image making through the medium of printmaking. Their etchings are sensitive, bearing a great deal of genuine expressions and exceptional characteristics, which often come to be rooted to the motherland India.

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Screen prints also have the same history and characteristics like other reproductions or multiple processes, but however, it has a shorter history in this country. This medium is widely used now for self expression and all the departments of graphic art in India have already taken up this branch of graphic art. In Baroda, there are several good artists that took to this medium like Jyoti Bhatt, V.S. Patel, P.D. Dhumal, and recently Rini Dhumal to name a few.

In Delhi screen-printing has achieved progressive position and acquired prosperous and striking motivation, as well. Jai Zharotia and his younger brother Moti Zharotia did their best to adopt this medium and explore it to achieve their advanced technical aspects. They also reformed this medium to serve their own intentions and their printmaking projections. However, Delhi based printmakers achieved amazing results.

Kavita Nayar, trained in Santiniketan under Sanat Kar, Somnath Hore and Dinkar Kashtik, was completely attracted by the medium. After her graduation in 1979, she joined the graphics studio at the Garhi Lalit Kala Studios. Dattatraya Apte, another figure of this medium, is the product of Baroda, in 1978. He was trained under K.G. Subramanyan, Jeram Patel and Jyoti Bhatt and obtained immense experience in various mediums of printmaking. Apte was able to explore this medium to further progress; he
achieved innovative screen prints, which indicate his powerful hand and the deep knowledge of the language of such medium.

Manjit Bawa, the Delhi based artist, also did some beautiful screen prints, of which we can quote 'Hedamba' 1983. There is also interesting screen print by the Bombay based artist Navjot Altarf titled 'Pavement-3' 1983. Paramjeet Singh also did some lovely semi-abstract screenprints, such as 'Passage to Hermitage’ 1983. In short, we can say Indian printmakers come to know much about all these techniques. They penetrated its sensibility and then went forward to improve and develop all about its special quality.

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From its beginning, about 160 years ago, photography was not accepted as equivalent to other forms of fine arts by a large number of artists and connoisseurs for quite a long period. But gradually, we see painters such as Salvador Dali, Max Ernest, Moholy Nagy, David Hockney and many others worked with photographic images early during this century, considering it as form of fine arts. Almost all the contemporary artists in the West are using cameras. Moholy Nagy already predicted this during Bauhaus days: “The illiterates tomorrow will be those, who can not use cameras.”

All autograph processes, other than woodcut and its kind, incorporating chemical properties of the materials used, need some special technical processes and also proper knowledge about the photography as an art and as a facility as well. The images they transferred by such processes were autographs only. Somnath Hore, was perhaps the first printmaker in India, who utilized photographic images in his lithographic prints, to project his own socio-political ideology.

There are many prominent printmakers, who often use photographic processes to achieve their interesting and expressive prints, such as Anupam Sud, Jai Krishna, Jai Zharotia and of course Jyoti Bhatt, V.R. Patel, V. S. Patel, to name a few. All the above-mentioned artists approached the photographic process and the ready-made photographic images in their different types of prints.

Using such facilities of photographic reproductions, the photography in the field of printmaking is quite fruitful, it is an advanced way to present some of the new attitudes, which may create further dimensions to the art of prints. In this regard, we can
mention Jyoti Bhatt, who has managed a very intellectual and enlightened handling of this amazing facility. His writing in this field is also of a great significance. Bhatt, however, presented a new concept and an advanced comprehension of the art of photography and he was able to bring this great medium to the field of printmaking. Let us listen to him; “I consider photographs as a print, because photos can also - similar to prints - be printed in multiples. In fact, it is a form of graphic print.”

I think, there is no harm to go back to the days of Ravi Varma, remembering his oleographs of the late years of 19th century. This kind of lithographic process, reproducing a multi-coloured painting or design is carried out by preparing its image photographically on stone. To get a multi-colour effect, a stone or plate is prepared for each primary colour and then printed one over other in oil based pigments to simulate oil painting. This process helped Varma immensely to popularize his paintings.

It is difficult to approach all the branches of the art of prints and its different mediums and processes. But still we have a brief space to mention only some of those outstanding discoveries in this field that recently took place in the global art scene, such as the advanced facilities of the new generation of computer, scanner, Internet and some other amazing image-creating gadgets. For instance, colour prints now, are entirely executed by computers using digital graphics. Competitions and exhibitions in this new kind of graphic art have become a familiar feature of the cosmopolitan cities of India. Baroda, with its attitude of ‘nothing is new under the sun,’ has always been a forerunner in the practice of graphic digital art.

As I have acknowledged, during the period of my research spread over six years, I got personally acquainted with individual artists and critics. Among other things, I was able to collect catalogue introductions to artists’ exhibitions, brought out by leading Indian art critics, and newspaper reviews again by leading art critics as well as journalists. This critical coverage has been only a recent phenomenon and I was fortunate to have carried out my research during these years. Thus, I have benefited by the critical perceptions of some of the leading art critics through their writings that helped me understand better those printmakers studied by me. I was also able to understand the Indian points of view, both regarding interpretation as well as assessment of the total
oeuvre of the printmaker. To these writings by art critics, I would like to add the perusal I made of writings of some distinguished painters and printmakers and their well-thought out conclusions about art in general and Indian art in particular. These writings have revealed to me the method of writing on artists' creative work including printmaking, but also the high level in-depth treatment of art objects and creativity by Indian artists and critics.

I have extensively utilized these writings and at times quoted, step by step, from various critics' writings regarding several stages in the development of certain printmakers. To some extent, my thesis is also a compendium of art criticism of the last decade and the critical scene, although I have at times differed from them and have taken a divergent standpoint. This is an additional quality of my thesis because the thesis also assumes the role of a record and critical comments on contemporary art criticism. Thus, as my research effort is salutary to the rich creativity of contemporary Indian printmaking, it also simultaneously pays tribute to the perceptive quality of the Indian art critics.