1950s is a convenient starting point for a comprehensive discussion about the modern art-practice in Kashmir. Right after India’s independence, while the political space of the Valley was fraught with apprehensions of war, the ever severing relationships between India and Pakistan, the after-effects of the bloody partition, and the issue of Kashmir, artists on the other hand were busy negotiating the forward-looking ideas of Progressive movements. A few aspiring artists, mostly the ones who had done their elementary course in painting from the Amar Singh Technical Institutes, were seen showing up in the early encounters with some famous artists of India who were sojourning in Kashmir. These special encounters with the modern Indian artists, especially S H Raza and his Progressive outlook, and modern art in general are the earliest evidences of local participation.

In the broader context of modern art in India the role of Progressives, as self-confessed modernists, came as a rescue from the traditionalist or historicist/nationalist captivity of the early decades. Patronizing individualism, eclecticism and a celebrative mode of freedom the Indian modern art assumed a militant stance. Progressives unapologetically broadened their artistic horizon by their extravagant opening up to the western influences, however, the yearning to return to rural roots, still being a potent artistic element, was
considerably different from the traditional confines of the early decades. These are the times when every ambitious Indian artist wanted to have a firsthand experience of the western art world, preferably, Paris the hub of international modern art pregnant with all the great stories about the great artists. The spirit of the 50s, the phrase used by Ratan Parimoo, a well known art historian and academician who interestingly happens to be a Kashmiri, launches a radical shift from the early development of modernism in India. The Progressive forces of late 40s, as it were, came of age only by 50s when Baroda came into the picture.

The similar zeitgeist found its impact even in a relatively remote place like Kashmir. In the wake of Sheikh Abdullah led National Conference, which launched a sustained campaign against subjugation, poverty and social imbalances, the cultural life of Kashmir, especially in the field of poetry, was imbued with a sense of revolt and political satire. It is during this time of national awakening which coincided with the direct encounter with some of the influential Progressive artists present in Kashmir that a few local self-conscious artists identified with the mainstream impulses of the 50s and ventured upon their individual journeys.

The Progressive Artists Association in Kashmir aimed at modeling itself on the pattern of Bombay progressives. The awareness of the modern art came largely by their interaction with the artist who were sojourning in Kashmir. There is
mention of other sources like films, journals and books, which possibly was brought by the similar artists who happened to be travelling in Kashmir. In a conversation with Triloke Kaul he recounts his first encounter with Raza who besides encouraging their artistic talent also shared with them his books, pamphlets and various written material about modern art. On one account he gifted Butt and Triloke an illustrated book about Van Gough, which particularly had a deep and lasting influence on Butt. The most cathartic influence came by way of an initiative described as UNESCO Travelling Print Exhibition held in a local Hotel around early fifties, which showcased the life-size reproductions of the works of almost all the great masters of western modern art from Impressionism to Picasso. However, the most convenient and discernibly immediate source of early inspiration was the considerate involvement of S H Raza during his frequent visits in the Valley. The reason that the earliest experimentation was largely dominated by impressionist/fauvist or cubist/expressionist vocabulary of modern art was largely due to Raza’s influence. The relatively open-ended paradigm of Progressive aesthetic ideology attracted many young local artists. The more ambitious artists started planning to leave the valley and prove their worth in the mainstream of Indian modernism. While others brushed shoulders with the local intelligentsia and absorbed themselves in various art-administrative governmental jobs.
After the establishment of Institute of Music and Fine Arts (1965) and the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art Culture and Languages (1963), in both Jammu and Srinagar, the modern art activities became more organized. Modelled on the pattern of Baroda curriculum of 50s/60s, the Institute of Music & Fine Arts became the only discernible platform to practice, promote and more specifically to encourage new artists and thus anticipate the future prospects of modern art in Kashmir. One can easily trace the Baroda orientation that engaged the students and still finds its resonance in the present generation. We can trace the conceptual and stylistic influences of Baroda, which interestingly bears its stamp more in the sculpture medium. For obvious reasons that Santosh or Triloke Kaul, the first Kashmiri students to pass out from Baroda, never chose to teach. But among the second batch of students like Gayoor Hassan and V R Khajuria, who specialized in sculpture under the supervision of Shanko Chaudhuri and both subsequently headed the first sculpture departments in Srinagar and Jammu art Institute respectively, had more immediate followers.

The late 60s brought in a new dynamism in the Kashmir’s modern art scene. All India Painters/Sculptors Camp launched by J&K Academy of Art Culture and Languages in 1968 transformed the provincial art atmosphere of the valley, assuming a relatively greater importance from Kashmir’s identity as an
idyllic/picturesque resort to one of the most desired venues for modern Indian artists to work and interact with each other. The art camps attracted almost all the artist of repute like Bendre, Shanko Chaudhuri, Hussain, Raza, Laxman Pai, Swaminathan, Manu Parekh, Tyeb Mehta, Ramachandran, Jatin Das and so on. The works done in these camps became a property of the Academy. The Academy is proud to represent as one of the richest collection of modern Indian art. The Art Camp provided a unique opportunity to the local artist to have a firsthand experience of some of the great Indian artists at work. In fact the idea of art camps was initiated by G R Santosh with the aim that such an initiative will create a great opportunity for the local artists to witness some of the best examples of Indian modern art. With the passage of time many local artists, beside Santosh, were also invited to participate in camps.

The other significant feature of the Academy was to create an alternative art gallery space for showcasing the works of the local artists. The idea of Annual Art exhibitions was launched in 1960 when the first All India Art Exhibition was held in the State. Ever since the Academy is organizing the State level art exhibitions and to boost local artists they also incorporated the programs like art competitions, subsidy to painters to hold solo or group shows outside the State, fellowships and State Academy Awards on the life-time achievements of local artists and organized painting competitions in the remote villages and towns of Kashmir.
The other significant development of late 60s was the establishment of Institute of Music and Fine Art in 1965, which offered a systematic training in the two major disciplines like visual/plastic arts and the classical Indian music. Initially the Institute offered a diploma in its evening hobby class program under the supervision of Ram Mohan Sarkar until it was taken over by the local artists who were returning with professional degrees from the M S University Baroda. Except the oral accounts of some of the senior artists not much information is available about Sarkar’s teaching methods. Possibly from Agra he may have brought with him a relatively refined knowledge of British academic naturalism, which may be the possible reason for Mehboob’s conspicuously figurative body of work, who among the first batch of students showed a lifelong commitment as an artist. In a recent conversation with Gayoor Hassan, who remains to be the senior most artist still working in Kashmir, we get the impression that the nature of so-called Evening Hobby Classes in fine arts was rather too provincial to develop any significant practice in the modern art idiom. However, as soon as the Baroda trained artists joined as teachers in the Institute, established both in Jammu and Kashmir provinces at the same time, a comprehensive and organized academic infrastructure was gradually developed to impart training in various stylistic and conceptual modes of modern art. It is important to state that the curriculum of these Institutions was designed on the pattern of Fine Arts Faculty of M. S. University Baroda. In Baroda the major stylistic tendencies that guided the studio practice or formed the curriculum
followed the traditional conventions of European or British art schools; studies after miniatures or murals to learn the techniques and stylistic disposition of traditional Indian painting; the visual perception of Bauhaus; the atmospheric color or textured surface quality of impressionist/post-impressionist; the emotive and the gestural painterly content of expressionism and above all the Cubistic stylization and formalistic abstraction. The similar concerns can be traced in the local artists of the Valley who studied in the Institute.

The mention of the artist may not always be based on the analytical approach or aesthetic validation, however, the artists who have shown sustained and sustainable aesthetic/artistic concerns will occupy the better half of the present study. In the first chapter, a Capsule History of Modern Art in India, a brief outline of the history of modern art in India will serve as a backdrop to delineate a concise historical account of modern art-practice in Kashmir. The recent upsurge in art practice, the free market, and the scholarship has widened the scope of debate around modernism in India – pushing it towards the more complex and open-ended interpretations. The 1950s, being a starting point of the present research, is an offshoot directly linked to the tensions between global modernity and national specificity which characterizes the post Independent India.
The second, fourth and the fifth chapter are structured on a generational pattern comprising three generations since 1950, while the third chapter is entirely devoted to G R Santosh for the sheer scale of his work. However, apart from the age factor, the classification based on generations does not always reflect any stylistic development or conceptual difference. Neither does it always amount to the death or a certain retirement from the art practice. There are, for instance, some artists who virtually belonged to the first generation but are still actively participating. Each generation is marked by a difference of two decades, which does not necessarily suggest a significant shift in the art practice or any radical change in the socio-political space but is largely based on the participation of new artists to provide a sense of vitality to the tradition of working with the modern vocabulary. It is hoped that this somewhat arbitrary structure may be helpful in terms of delineating a comprehensive, and perhaps indiscriminate, historical documentation of the modern artists of Kashmir.

The second chapter, **Inception of Modern Art in Kashmir**, represents the first generation of Kashmiri artists whose work, partially or uncompromisingly, embodies the modern art idioms, comprising of artists such as S.N. Butt, Triloke Kaul, P.N. Kachru, Kishori Kaul, Nisar Aziz, M.Sadiq, Suraj Tikoo, Bansi Parimo, Ratan Parimoo and Manohar Kaul. The chapter narrates the
historical account beginning with the event when some local artists engaged themselves on the ideology of the avant-gardism of the Indian/International modernism and thus anticipating the inception of modern art in Kashmir. It is in this context the cultural front makes its relevance to the first modern art initiatives in the Valley.

In 1948 the first self-consciously modern art group called Trio was formed by the three active members of the Front P N Kachru, S N Butt and Triloke Kaul, which eventually was renamed as progressive Artists’ Association in October 1948. In May 1949, the association held its first show in Srinagar. Among some of the influential people who witnessed the show was Percy Brown who declared: “the movement aptly represents the progressive trend by bridging the abysmal gulf of five hundred years, thus linking the tradition with present.” In the same year Raza organized a two-man show of S N Butt and Triloke Kaul in Bombay, which remains to be the first ever exhibition of modern local artists outside Kashmir. Synchronizing with the Progressives spirit as foregrounded by groups like Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi Silpi Chakra in 40s and Madras Cholamandal in 50s the Progressive Artists’ Association of Kashmir was founded roughly in the same time with the experienced patronage of S H Raza.

The most important factor that defines the course of the future development and participation of local artists is mainly due to two reasons. Firstly because of Raza’s active presence in the Valley which anticipated a certain space where
many aspiring individuals could share their dreams of artistic ambitions and secondly artists like Triloke Kaul, the first local artist to study in M S University Baroda, followed by Ghulam Rasool Santosh and Kishori Kaul brought with them a lucid and academically articulate vocabulary of Indian modern art in Kashmir. And thus, it is important to note, the Kashmir’s modern art scene follows the evolutionary link between the outward avant-gardism of Progressives and the inward, more self-conscious, alternative modernism of Baroda.

However, not all the artists mentioned are widely discussed, primarily because, while some of them did not show a sustained development in terms of their relevance to the spirit of modern art and other remained somewhat provincial in their aesthetic aims. In spite of the fact that the artists like Triloke Kaul, Kishori Kaul, Ratan Parimoo and Bansi Parimu, who have shown an active engagement as artists, the scale of G. R. Santosh’s contribution is unthinkable in proportion to any other artist of the Valley. Santosh remains to be the only Kashmiri artist who is internationally celebrated for his outstanding contribution to Indian modern art. The third chapter, **G R Santosh the Vanguard of Neotantric Art**, attempts a comprehensive analysis of Santosh’s profoundly complex and distinctively individualistic neotantric body of work, the paradigm that has placed him in the forefront of Indian modernism, especially, during its most crucial and crisis-ridden phase.
The Fourth Chapter comprises of the artists of the second generation who joined the tribe of modern art around late 60s and early 70s. Mostly as teachers of the newly launched Institute of Music and Fine Arts in Srinagar, the chapter focuses on each artist’s body of work and analyses their individual contribution to keep alive the modern art initiatives in particular and their artistic contribution in general. Due to the availability of a proper art institute and the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture & Languages provided an official platform for local modern artists to participate in art competitions and art camps. This period is also characteristic of a gradual increase in the number of artists. The chapter may look somewhat disproportionate in terms of the text written on each individual artist where some are discussed at length while others find a relatively little space. The variation and the economy of text is largely based on the inverse relationship with the body of work, the element of sustained engagement of the artist and also due to the difficulties to locate the primary sources. The artists who find a relatively elaborate discussion are Gayoor Hassan, Bhushen Koul and M. A. Mehboob. The other artists include K.Khosa, A.K.Raina, A.R.John, V R Khajuria, Shiban Kaw and Gokul Dembi.

In order to arrive at a maximum comprehensive understanding of their works and to position their artistic individuality each artist in the chapter is discussed under a separate subheading. The similar pattern is followed in the fifth chapter, which is also the final chapter, comprising mostly of the artists who
were taught by the second generation. However, in the fifth chapter, In the Wake of Insurgency - The Present generation - 1985 to the Present, the attempt to analyze the impact of the dramatic changes caused by the insurgency in 1990s also surfaces while addressing the work of an individual artist working in the midst of turmoil. The chapter mainly focuses on the work of Shuja Sultan, Masood Hussain, Rajinder Tiku, Shabir Mirza and Shafi Chaman. However, the other artists such as Shaiqa Mohi, Zahoor Zargar, Aftab Ahmad, Shora Bashir, Iftikhar Jaffar, Veer Munshi and Inder Salim find a brief mention. The chapter concludes with a brief monograph on the first truly international event in Kashmir organized by Khoj Delhi in 2007.

It is important to state that the nature of the present study may have been very different had it taken place before the insurgency of 1989 when Kashmiri Pandits, forming a considerable participation in the modern art scene of Kashmir, were, unfortunately, forced by militant uprising to migrate. Now scattered in different parts of the country, confronted with different dimensions of despair and dilemma, it would require a very special project to negotiate as how they address the notion of history, culture and their existential and political condition, anticipating a considerable degree of specificity and transformed artistic concerns.

Devoid of any communal specificity or religious identity, the characteristic which is as much a significant an element in the classical psyche of Kashmir as
it is a universal attribute of art, the selection of living artists is mainly based on three major factors. Firstly only those artists find a relatively elaborate discussion who have shown a sustained engagement by active participation. The second reason is largely based on the availability and accessibility of the artist as a primary source, which gives enough space to explore the intimate and the complex nuances of their work. And the third, virtually to foreground certain regional specificity, more preference is given to those artists who never left Kashmir in spite of various difficulties caused by the violent phase of insurgency. In a certain sense the active presence of a working artist was indispensible for the future prospects of modern art-practice in Kashmir.

The recent history of visual art has witnessed a great upsurge as a cultural industry accommodating experts from diverse disciplines to launch collaborative projects of global concerns. The old elitist or exclusivist position of an artist is replaced by a new eclectic paradigm. At the academic level the emergence of ambitious cultural theorists has triggered a professional seriousness in art criticism and scholarship, in whose crucible the meaning of art is subject to a persistently rigorous trial. Confronted with the ever challenging socio-political world order the aesthetic engagement of an artist was transformed into an intellectual responsibility. The revolution in information technology, while making the dissemination of knowledge incredibly easy, questioned the very language on which the ego of modernism was established. The traditional methods and means of artistic expression, which for quite a long time were held as absolute, seemed suddenly redundant and obsolete. The influx of new media like photography, text, video,
performance, installation transformed the nature of visual art; the relationship between artist and art, art and society. The present study, in its concluding remark to refer to the event such as Khoj Kasheer, sets forth a certain aesthetic urgency to negotiate the political and the personal in radically new and more effective mediums.

The six decades of sustained development since 1950 reveal, at the least, three major aesthetic directions. Firstly the abstract-expressionist or the cubist-expressionist treatment to landscape motifs of artists like Triloke Kaul, Kishori Kaul, S N Butt or Kachru is by and large informed by the western standards. The second, in fact the most significant dimension, comes by way of revisiting the indigenous traditions specifically the Tantra and the Sufi, explored by the artists such as Santosh, Gayoor, Shuja. and Masood. The third approach incorporates aesthetic variables such the juxtaposition of ritual and actual to address the immediate and experiential in works of Tiku and Masood; the imagist/narrative mode of Bansi Parimu, Ratan Parimoo and more rigorously by Bhushen Koul, Mehboob and later Chaman and Veer Munshi resonate a sense of nostalgia and a certain negotiation with the recent agony of Kashmirs. But above all the main thrust of the thesis is to provide a comprehensive historical account of modern art-practice in Kashmir since 1950s. The body of the present text also aims to foreground an aesthetic paradigm where from the future prospects of cultural practice can draw its inspiration.