

**A STUDY ON MODERN WOMEN ARTISTS OF
DELHI:AN AESTHETIC ANALYSIS**

Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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By

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PUNJAB**

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DECLARATION

I, Shilpa, hereby declare that the thesis titled “**A study on modern women artists of Delhi: An aesthetic analysis**” has been prepared by me under the guidance of the Dr.Rohita Sharma, Assistance Professor, Department of Fine Arts, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. No part of this thesis has formed previously the basis for the award of any degree, Diploma and fellowship.

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DECLARATION

I, hereby declared that the presented work in the thesis entitled "A study on modern women artists of Delhi: An aesthetic analysis"

” in fulfilment of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.)** is outcome of research work carried out by me under the supervision Dr. Rohita Sharma, working as Associate Professor, in the Fine Arts Department of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgements have been made whenever work described here has been based on findings of other investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.

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Abstract

The core research aspect of this thesis is to aesthetically analyse the selected works of modern women artists of Delhi that have been widely appreciated for highlighting the issues that are socially relevant and significant. Though many artistic works of social relevance have been created by various women artists based in Delhi, this qualitative research would focus on a selected number of three women artists whose works are closely related to upholding the essence of art that portrays the existence of the female gender. Art has always been a medium to express the concerns and plights of women as it was notably artistic in expressing the hidden faces of the minority and the marginalized. Beyond the qualities of imagination, creativity and technique used in producing the aesthetics of art, it reflects the thoughts and intended feelings of the artist, the ideologies and perspectives wherein the essence of social reality and concerns are hidden. The aesthetic brilliance and criticism propounded by their artistic narrative of the feminine and the use of the female gender as a major subject of their artistic work have qualified them to be included in research to explore more about their works by combining the aesthetic and feminist perspectives. Feminism is generally defined as the involvement of social movements, political movements, and ideas that express the need for personal and societal equality of genders, despite the fact that it has a wide range of interpretations that alter with time and space. It is based on the belief that males have dominated existences through patriarchal rules, preventing women from having equal rights and positions. Feminists use their voices to speak out against gender stereotypes that exist in many areas of life. From a feminist perspective, women's numerous difficulties and challenges are identified, leading to their protests against gender discrimination and oppression. Feminists place a high value on issues like as voting rights, equal pay, workplace discrimination, property rights, education rights, social and political rights, marital rapes, maternity leaves, rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, lack of equal opportunity, and social standing. The evolution of feminism and feminist thought can be tracked through the several waves that have been linked with it. In their respective times, these waves formed as a result of feminist marches and disputes. Though feminists in each wave advocated for rights

that they lacked at the time, they are intertwined because they serve as cornerstones in the world's slow evolution and progress of feminism.

The area of this research under the broad field of Fine Arts is Visual Arts where painting, sculpture, and printmaking are carefully considered. Research in visual arts focus on exploring different techniques, materials, and styles, as well as analyzing the ideological and social contexts in which artworks are created and received. The research utilises the selected artistic works of Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur, and Anupam Sud to explore the aesthetic and feminist aspects and perspectives to provide a general framework of their works that focus mainly on upholding the situations and issues affecting the lives of women in society. As the peak point of the artistic career of these women, artists belong to the latter half of the twentieth century and extend to the present, the works selected for analysis are mainly the products of the different decades. The methodological pattern followed in the research is maintained throughout the chapters that focus on the analysis of the selected works of the three women artists. With the help of interviews and secondary sources, a combination of critical analysis, interpretation, and comparison is used as the primary methods to develop the findings of the research.

The major objective and argument are substantiated using five interconnected objectives that introduce background details, go into the specific points, highlight the application of insights from feminist aesthetics and also trace the presence of related theoretical concepts in the selected artistic works. It also compares the works, contexts and perspectives of the selected modern women artists to find how similar and dissimilar the representations and ideological variations of feminism in their art are.

The first research goal is to determine the evolution of a feminist perspective in India, as well as the engagement of Indian women artists in the arts. This goal is to investigate and sketch an overall picture of art in India from antiquity to the present when there have been significant and dramatic developments in the field of art in India. Brief reports of information about well-known Indian painters are traced, with a special emphasis on women artists. There was so little art by women and very few celebrated women artists in India existed before the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, the development of art through the works of women artists is gathered

from the information available on women artists who were given a prominent position from the end of the nineteenth century. The social and political changes in India are also briefly discussed, as they had a significant impact on encouraging women to pursue careers as professional artists rather than being confined to their homes and personal life.

The second goal of the research is to follow the emergence and development of feminist aesthetics. The evolution of feminism via the three waves is explained in order to describe the evolution of the specific field in feminism. It aids in comprehending the second wave of feminism, which is separated again into liberal and radical feminism. An overall notion of feminism is presented through these background discussions based on feminism and the insights from many feminist theorists, which will aid in the debate on feminist aesthetics. Articles, essays, and specialised books on the issue authored by well-known academicians, thinkers, feminist writers, and artists from the Western world are used to analyse feminist aesthetics. This in-depth information will be applied in the main chapters to analyse the selected artistic works of three modern women artists from Delhi.

The third aim is to bring attention to the aesthetic and feminist perspectives in the important artistic works of selected Delhi-based contemporary women artists. The artistic works of the three artists chosen as part of the research are analysed through the perspicacity acquired through the second objective under the broad scope of this aim. The works of Arpita Singh, Anupam Sud, and Aparna Caur are examined and interpreted in order to determine the feminist aesthetic perspective of the artists' work. The fourth objective of the research is intertwined with the preceding one in that it performs a feminist analysis of the works of three selected Delhi-based modern women artists for their representation and usage of women as a subject. Only notable works by specific artists from the list are chosen if they feature women as a subject of artistic depiction.

The fifth and final goal is for the selected women artists to be involved in addressing social or cultural concerns such as women's struggles, discrimination, sexual harassment, male gaze, patriarchal dominance, livelihood issues, and so on. This goal aids in understanding women's perspectives on societal concerns such as community issues, racism, and casteism, among others. These objectives, which are

separated into five parts, attempt to bring together ideas in order to substantiate feminist aesthetics in the works of selected modern women artists. The structure used in the study objectives aids in the division of the chapters by allocating specific space to the interconnected descriptions, analyses, and interpretations.

Though the chapter design does not follow the same pattern as the objectives, it does serve to provide a structure in which the descriptions are interconnected and each chapter is linked. The chapter plan of the research gradually progresses from background details to the major emphasis of the research, and then to the concluding chapter, which gives a discussion on overall results through a comparison of the selected women artists' objective numbers three, four, and five.

The analysis conducted in the thesis reveals certain interpretive findings that add knowledge to the existing research on the artistic works of the three women artists. It provides the understanding of the artistic way followed by the Delhi-based women artists to focus on the feminist perspectives which is crucial and significant even in the present scenario in India. Their works project the notion of women that is bound by the restrictions of patriarchy. The liberation from the exhibition and exertion of power over body and life is mostly presented through the artistic works. Based on the fourth chapter that discusses the works of Arpita Singh, the findings reveal that her woman art represents the vulnerability experienced by women in society and the resilience that is wished to occur in them to overcome the challenges. The plight and restrictions for women in the male-dominated society are portrayed in the various artworks of Arpita Singh that depict the reality of life experienced by women in society. In short, though Arpita Singh herself does not consider a feminist, her paintings with significance to aesthetic beauty depict and highlight the ideologies propagated by feminism. In the fifth chapter that discusses the works of Aparna Caur and Anupam Sud, the works analysed for the research express womanhood and depiction of the female body that points to several aesthetic and political dimensions. While Arpana Caur utilises the female gender in her artistic works as a container to which she tries to represent the different issues in the world that surrounds and disturbs women, Anupam Sud utilises the body of women to highlight vulnerability and victimisation. The nudity and nude figures in Anupam Sud's artistic works equally project the unfortunate conditions as well as the desire

for the female gender to exhibit their hidden desires and emotions. Feminist perspectives, especially regarding the freedom for expression and equality are depicted in the artworks of Anupam Sud. Male gaze and dehumanisation effects on women are projected through the works of Anupam Sud. The helplessness, voicelessness and vulnerability is contrasted with the boldness and courage of women to overcome the unfortunate male gaze.

The importance of selecting the Delhi women artists Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur and Anupam Sud lies in the relatability of their artistic works to the life and situations of the female gender in India. From the analysis and findings, it can be found that the artistic works of Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur, and Anupam Sud share similarities in representing women-oriented paintings. They try to highlight the challenges against the female gender through the representation of the female body, the threats against it in society and the resilience required for women to overcome it.

Based on the objectives and findings of the research, certain outcomes are significant in understanding the aesthetic and feminist aspects of the artistic works of Delhi based women artists. The gradual development of women's participation and the influence of the feminist perspective of art in India is traced in the research and the influence of aesthetic and feminist perspectives are identified in the works of the selected Delhi based women artists. The women artists profiled in this research have attempted to depict women's roles and relationships with society from a variety of perspectives, ranging from domestic settings to societal exposure. To project the feminist aspects of women artists' artistic works, the aesthetic value of the works is described, which indicates how it has expanded and enhanced feminist conceptions related to the theme and concept of the artistic work. Though the idea of using the victimised subject as a tool against the opposition was followed in the artistic work of the West, the use of the female body as a tool against the patriarchal ideology is well exercised in the works of the Delhi based women artists. The artworks of the artists highlighted the fundamental issue of materialising the female form. It did not place as much emphasis on the erotic and sexual components as other artists did, with just minor depiction of the anatomical features. Beyond the aesthetics of the painting, she wanted to communicate the idea that the nude audience

was more interested in seeing the nudity of the female figure than in listening to and absorbing the core of the conversation. Thereby, the outcome of the research states that the Delhi based women artists have successfully represented the complexities of female existence in the patriarchal society that is adhered to the dominance exercised by masculinity. Thus, the outcomes of the research points point to the convergence of the analysis and findings to state that the artistic works of Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur and Anupam Sud express a strong inclination towards a feminist approach. Feminism's uprising against patriarchal rule has gained widespread acceptance, resulting in the expansion of feminism beyond activism and movement into the realms of education and lifestyle. The existence of a gender that is typically regarded as marginalised is weighed against the existence of the other gender that coexists with it. The distance between them in terms of freedom and equality determines how vigorous feminism's operations should be in order to achieve the ultimate aim of equality.

The scope of the study is to figure out how Delhi-based female artists have communicated their concerns about women's positions in society. They have attempted to explain the undesired existence of women who are governed by patriarchal rules in society by depicting real and figurative pictures. Not only have their works depicted the resilience required for the female gender to act against the masculinity and sexist views of society, but they have also portrayed the resilience required for the female gender to act against the masculinity and sexist attitudes of society. Though many other studies deal with the feminist components of artistic works, this study concentrates on three Delhi-based female artists and their chosen works, which are generally related to the female gender.

The findings of this study can be used to supplement existing work in the fields of fine arts and feminist art studies. Despite the fact that the situation for women artists has significantly improved in the country and abroad, this study aids in understanding the gradual development and evolution of feminism and feminist art movements, which have helped to improve the political and social conditions for artists to express their views on freedom and equality. The study's restriction is that it is limited to the works of three Delhi-based female artists, Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur, and Anupam Sud. Because of the relevance and significance of their works in

the modern age, they were chosen. However, there are many more female artists who have made significant contributions to highlighting the plight of women in society. Future research should concentrate on the aesthetic and feminist aspects of the work of other Delhi-based women artists as well as artists from other parts of India. As the number of channels for showcasing abilities grows, particularly in the modern digital spheres of art, novel modes of representation and advocacy for women's equality and freedom are being tested to produce fascinating study results. This research will assist them in developing a strong basis in the aesthetic and feminist aspects of art.

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Place:
Name

CONTENTS

CHAPTERS	PageNo.
➤ CHAPTER-1: Introduction	13-25
➤ CHAPTER2: Review of Literature:Existing BackgroundResearch	26-49
➤ CHAPTER3: Evolution of Women Artists in India: AncientTo Modern Period	50-64
➤ CHAPTER 4: FeminismAndFeminist Aesthetic:Influence And Impact	65 - 111
➤ CHAPTER5: Vulnerability AndResilience: The Women Art Of Arpita Singh	66 - 178
➤ CHAPTER6 : WomenandWomanhood: The Selected Works of ArpanaCaur	179-210
➤ Chapter 7: Aesthetics of Female Body: Feminist Perspectives in Anupam Sud's Selected Works	211-241
➤ CHAPTER 8: Conclusion	242-258
➤ Bibliography	259-275

Figure No.	Name	Page No.
1	<i>Head and the Duck</i> (1985)	122
2	<i>Untitled</i> (1976)	130
3	<i>The Red Car in Rose Garden</i> (1985)	134
4	<i>Whatever is Here</i> (2006)	140
5	<i>Man with a Black Jacket</i>	142
6	<i>Figures and Flowers</i> (1971-1972)	143
7	<i>My Mother</i> (1993)	146
8	<i>Wish Dream</i> (2001)	158
9	<i>Cancer: Receptive</i> (1999)	159
10	<i>Durga</i> (1994)	161
11	<i>Woman with a Girl Child IV</i> (1995)	162
12	<i>Feminine Fable</i> (1996)	163
13	<i>Thirty Six Clouds: Yudhishtira Approaching Heaven</i> (2005)	164
14	<i>Security Check</i> (2003)	165
15	<i>Man on White Tiger with Clay Bids</i> (1991)	166
16	<i>Virgo: Flowering</i> (1990)	168
17	<i>Sky</i> (2012)	169
18	<i>Evening Walk</i> (2004)	171
19	<i>Child Bride</i> (1985)	173
20	<i>Girl on a Lotus Leaf</i> (1995)	174
21	<i>Where Have all the Flowers Gone?</i> (1995)	184
22	<i>The Embroiderer</i> (1996)	184
23	<i>The Embroiderers</i> (1999)	184
24	<i>Body is Just a Garment</i> (1993)	190
25	<i>Day and Night</i> (2011)	191
26	<i>Day and Night</i> (2011)	192
27	<i>Harvest</i> (1999)	193
28	<i>Widows of Vrindavan</i> (1987)	194
29	<i>Soldier's Mother</i> (1995)	195
30	<i>Water Weaver</i> (2000)	197
31	<i>Dharti</i> (2008)	198
32	<i>Green Circle</i> (1994)	200
33	<i>Sheltered Woman</i> (2000)	202
34	<i>Yogini</i> (1993)	204

35	<i>Persona</i> (1988)	214
36	<i>The Ceremony of Unmasking</i> (1990)	216
37	<i>Wee Hour</i> (1988)	219
38	<i>Dialogue I</i> (1984)	219
39	<i>Dialogue IV</i> (1984)	220
40	<i>Dialogue VIII</i> (1992)	220
41	<i>Laundry</i> (1994)	221
42	<i>Game Series</i> (1999)	223
43	<i>Reflection</i> (2001)	226
44	<i>Draupati's Vow</i> (2006)	227
45	<i>My Feminine Side</i> (2007)	229
46	<i>Voyage I</i> (2007)	230
47	<i>Voyage II</i> (2007)	231
48	<i>Olympia</i> (2007)	232
49	<i>Black Conch</i> (2007)	233

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Art has always been a medium to express the concerns and plights of women as it was notably artistic in expressing the hidden faces of the minority and the marginalized. In a country where the utterly anti-humanist rituals and customs such as Sati, dowry system and marital rapes were high, the voice of a majority group of women remained silent. Thus was the contribution of culture and tradition towards the empowerment of women who were already rejected to get educated or skilled in any field of work.

Though the paintings, sculptures and installations were a part of the richness of tradition in the country, the least importance was given to the symbolization to which it wanted the community to treat their women. At this point, the significance of contemporary artists who give prominence to the paintings, sculptures and installations of the suppressed gender in the country is high and celebrated. They try to take out the essence of womanhood from the restrictions of the patriarchal society through their artistic works. Sometimes, it shoots several questions on why the characters in their portraits were not treated well by society. Though the vast cultural diversity of India records to have several talented artists concerned about the gender issues in the country, represent their voice through artistic excellence and speak for the cause, this research focuses on women artists from Delhi who are the artistic voices of many women in the country. A brief description of the selected Delhi based women artists who base their artistic works are listed below:

Arpita Singh (1937 – till date): She is an artist with a strong focus on women based issues in the country. She showcases hatred, social injustice, and vulnerability of women in her works. Her paintings based in oil and watercolours are popular among the academic groups, research community and common people in and out of the country. Though she has her paintings

done in a variety of themes, she has given prominence to concentrate on the female perspective. Her narrative art pronounces unheard stories and hidden discussions for which she was awarded the second-highest civilian award in India – the Padma Bhushan in 2011. She is a highlighted figure in the second generation of the modernist artists as she was born just before or during the period of the Second World War. From the title of being the modernist group, she stepped into the progressive artists' group lead by M. F. Hussain and contemporaries. She glides through the surrealist landscapes to abstraction in her career as an artist with the use of exuberant colours, menacing symbols and strange environment to her paintings. With involvement in the mainstream artistic groups for more than fifty years, she continues to inspire young artists and scholars with the growing market of her artistic works.

Anupam Sud (1944 – till date): She is an artist based in Delhi whose works depict themes of masking, moody depictions and socially relevant themes. Though she came from a conservative family atmosphere, she managed to go forward in her academic career and could also achieve heights in her artistic pursuits. Her printmaking explored the artistic expressions of both clothed and nude versions of human figures. Unlike others, she did not confine her possibility to only female figures. She also drew male figures that helped aesthetic viewers to experience the sexual identities of both the genders. They were not confined to the limited experience of aesthetics but were also connected with themes that dealt with socially relevant subjects that related both the sexes together. Anupam Sud expresses the concern that aesthetics in art limits the possibility for a higher representation of what has to be expressed through the medium. There is a limitation that is provided by cultural, social and political situation of the space in which the artist is located and with respect to the audience that the artistic work reaches. She says,

“Our India likes aesthetics. It is almost upto a higher level and different from other nations. In music and dance there was devotion but, in my works, there is no feeling of devotion. It is a kind of devotion. Today there is aesthetic in everything like in music and dance. My works are

not god or idles or anything. I'm almost devotional to the aspect."

(Sud, personal communication, 2022)

According to her, Indian women artists in the field of art as well as outside the limits of the artistic world progresses through their hardw work. She connects it to the situation of women in sports. She says, "Why only to take about Art only we can thinkof even sports also. There are women. Recently in Tokyo women also equally participated and won the medal. They surpassed their limits. Similarly, it in art also there is plenty of thinking mind for the present and in ahead of time also. And it is going on well."

(Sud, personal communication, 2022).

She suggests more platforms and opportunities for women artists to showcase their unique talents to the world. She usedzinc plates for etching that required great patience and concentration from the side of the artist.

Aparna Caur (1954 – till date): She is a leading Indian painter and graphic artistwho symbolizes strength and power of women in her works. Her artistic thoughts wereformed along with her experiences with events and situations around her. She focuses on the figure of women as her core theme in her paintings which is also inspired by regional literature and folk art. Paintings of Aparna Caur highlight the portraits of women in the contemporary urban context than the rural scenarios. Most of the works tend to be erotic in nature in its expression of sexuality and the theme of depicting women as central figures. She has also dealt with themes such as life, death, environment and violence around the world.

Beyond the qualities of imagination, creativity and technique used in producing the aesthetics of art, it reflects the thoughts and intended feelings of the artist, the ideologiesand perspectives wherein the essence of social reality and concerns are hidden. To analyse art aesthetically, it has to be decoded on the basis of its content, concept and has to be viewed from the point of view of the society in which it was created intending what factors and features projected in and around it. Thoughts and imaginations basedon an art for an

art may be different from the above said notions. But, the women paintings that subject women as its base and core would gesture its connection with the society.

Feminism, though has broad range of interpretations that change according to the change in time and space, is generally identified as the involvement of social movements, political movements and ideologies that present the need for personal and social equality of genders. It arises from the thought that there have been dominating existences by male through their patriarchal norms where the rights and equal status of women are hindered. Feminists raise their voice and fight against the gender stereotypes that are prevalent in various sectors of life. The various problems and struggles of women are identified in feminist perspectives and it leads to their protest against the discrimination and subjugation of the women gender. Various issues such as voting rights, equal pay, discrimination in work areas, property rights, education rights, social and political rights, marital rapes, maternity leaves, rape, sexual harassments, domestic violence, lack of equal opportunities and social status are considered with great importance by the feminists. Women who think alike in such matters come together to protest and fight for their rights and the immoralities prevalent in their society. The development of feminism and feminist theory can be traced through different waves associated with it. These waves were the result of the protests and fights conducted by feminists in respective periods. Though feminists in each wave voiced for the rights that they lacked at their period of existence, they are interlinked with each other as they form cornerstones of the gradual development and progress of feminism in the world.

Feminist aesthetics is a part of the second wave of feminism that advocated for the equal rights and status of women in the society and other platforms. Emerged in the 1970s, it points to the concerns of gender role stereotypes and gender issues in art and aesthetics (Korsmeyer, 2004). In the core feature of the feminist aesthetics, it considers the view that people tend to think according to the influence of their gender. Through gender issues, feminist

aesthetics analyses art. For example, consider a male and a female whose perception of a nude female. The perception of the male and female differs with the difference in their gender. It is influenced by their subject position, power and experience. Through such a perspective, feminist aesthetics challenges the perception of philosophies of beauty in art. The categorization of the universal aesthetics according to beauty and sublimity was a chance to differentiate it based on gender. Beauty had the feminine aspects which was attributed to as small and delicate whereas sublimity was seen as large and higher to beauty, thus representing masculine (Korsmeyer, 2004). The aesthetics related to feminine perspectives infers on this point. According to the view of Hilde Hein, a feminist intellectualizes aesthetic pleasure whereas non-feminist concentrates only on the enjoyment aspect. To bring out the relation between feminist aesthetics, feminist art and feminist theory, Hilde Hein says while referring to the word feminist aesthetics as,

Whether confined to the post-seventeenth century discipline for which the term was coined or inclusive of the value theory that precedes it, aesthetics has a place in the matrix of western philosophy that is consistent with its fundamental logic, metaphysics and epistemology and with its value commitments.

(Hein, 1990, p. 283)

Feminist aesthetics is considered as a tool to analyse the representation of art regarding social issues. In such a context, the area of feminist aesthetics in feminism is connected with the social reality through the analysis of the representations of art.

As a recent movement, the Guerrilla Girls are popular as contemporary activist group focusing their perspectives on how feminism plays a role in public art. They try to expose gender and ethnic bias, the corruption in art and other artistic and creative fields with the base in feminist aesthetics. They fight for the equal representation and value to women in areas of art.

Moreover, the literature on feminist aesthetics narrows down the elaborate sphere of feminism to specifically understand the women perspective to Indian art. Critical analysis, interpretation and comparison are used as the primary methods to develop the findings of the research. Along with the interpretative and comparative analysis of the primary sources, analysis of secondary data would also be conducted with the help of sources such as journals, records, newspapers, magazines, books etc. which would provide further information about the different perspective on the selected works. On site and offline readings of articles, theses and books from universities such as Aligarh Muslim University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Mahatma Gandhi University, Punjab University and Delhi University are also conducted. The interpretation and analysis of the primary sources would be conducted on the basis of the insights from the various reliable sources, feminist thinkers based in feminist theories, movements and especially feminist aesthetics. Through a detailed analysis, the artistic works with the aesthetic and feminist aspect of these Delhi based women artists are compared. The typesetting of the research would be conducted with the help of the sixth edition of American Psychological Association (APA).

The major objective of this research is to analyse the selected artistic works of three Delhi based modern women artists in the light of feminist aesthetics. The previous researches on these women artists and their feminist perspectives would help to lay foundation to fill the gap of knowledge in the discipline of fine arts. For the purpose of interpreting the art produced by these women artists, insights from various writers, intellectuals and artists are gathered together, particularly based on their views on feminism, aesthetics and art. Thus, the research put forward the argument that feminist aesthetics can be interpretatively explored in the specific artistic works of selected Delhi based modern women. The major objective and argument is substantiated using five interconnected objectives that introduces background details, goes into the specific points, highlights the application of insights from feminist aesthetics and also traces the presence of related theoretical concepts in the

selected artistic works. It also compares the works, contexts and perspectives of the selected modern women artists to find how similar and dissimilar the representations and ideological variations of feminism in their art are.

The first research objective pointed out is to identify the development of feminist perspective in India and the participation of Indian women artists in art. This objective is framed to explore and draw an overall sketch of art in India from the ancient to the contemporary period where there have been acute and tremendous changes in the field of art in India. Brief accounts of the information about the popularly known artists in India are traced by providing much importance to women artists. As there were very less art from the side of women and also very rarely celebrated women artists before the end of the nineteenth century in India, the major focus of the development of art through the works of women artists are collected from the information available on the women artists who were given a prominent position from the end of the nineteenth century. The social and political changes in India are also briefly described as it had enormous influence in encouraging women to become professional artists rather than being confined to their limited spaces and personal lives.

The second objective of the research is to trace the evolution and development of feminist aesthetics. For describing the evolution of the specific field in feminism, the evolution of feminism through the three different waves is explained. It helps to understand about the second wave of feminism in detail which is again divided to liberal and radical feminism. Through these background discussions based on feminism and the insights from various feminist theorists, an overall idea of feminism is provided that would help in the discussion of feminist aesthetics. The discussion about feminist aesthetics is conducted with the help of articles, essays and specific books on the topic written by popular academicians, thinkers, feminist writers and artists from the western world. This comprehensive knowledge provided would be utilized in the core chapters to analyse the selected artistic works of the three Delhi based modern women.

The third objective is to highlight the aesthetic and feminist perspective in the relevant artistic works of the selected Delhi based modern women artists. Under the broad spectrum of this objective, the artistic works of the three artists selected as part of the research are analysed through the perspicacity acquired through the second objective. Works of (1) Arpita Singh, (2) Arpita Caur, and (3) Anupam Sud are described with the help of the previous researches about them and are interpreted through the feminist perspective to identify the feminist aesthetic perspective of the works by the artists.

The fourth objective of the research is closely related with the previous objective as it also conducts a feminist analysis of the specific works of the three selected Delhi based modern women artists for their representation and use of women as their subject. The major works of specific artists from the list are selected only if they highlight women as their subject for artistic representation. The final objective deals with the involvement of the selected women artists in addressing social or cultural issues related with women struggles, discrimination, sexual harassment, male gaze, patriarchal dominance, livelihood problems etc. This objective helps to understand the women perspective to social issues such as communal problems, racism, casteism, and so on.

Though divided into five parts, these objectives aim to converge the ideas to substantiate the feminist aesthetics in the works of the selected modern women artists. The framework followed in the research objectives helps to divide the chapters accordingly by providing allotting specific space to the interconnected descriptions, analysis and interpretations. Though the chapter scheme does not follow the same pattern followed by the objectives, it helps to give a structure in which the descriptions are interconnected with each other forming a link between each chapter. The pattern of chapter scheme provided in the thesis gradually develops through its background details into the main focus of the research and then to the conclusion chapter that provides a discussion on overall results through comparison of the objective

number three, four and five in the selected women artists.

Present thesis titled *A Study on Modern Women Artists of Delhi: An Aesthetic Analysis* is divided in to six chapters to discuss and clarify the concept in detail and titled as under:

Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

Chapter 3 Evolution of women artists in India: Ancient to Modern Period

Chapter 4 Feminism and feminist aesthetic: Influence and Impact

Chapter 5 Vulnerability and Resilience: The woman art of Arpita Singh

Chapter 6 Women and Womanhood: The Selected Works of Arpana Caur

Chapter 7 The Aesthetic Female Body: Feminist Perspectives in Anupam Sud's Selected Works

Chapter 8 Conclusion

According to the chapter scheme followed in the thesis, **chapter one** deals with the basic introduction to the research. Apart from the introductory details, it also gives a foundational base to the feminist perspective in India and also involvement and participation of women artists in Indian art. As described in objective number one, the details of women artists from ancient to the contemporary period are explored. It focuses on the women artists during the end of the first half of the twentieth century till the end of the same century. For providing a base to the details of women participation in Indian art, the information on other women artists apart from the selected are also described briefly.

An elaborated literature review in **the second chapter** based on both the Indian artists and feminist aesthetics is conducted and described so as to provide a foundational base for the research. With the insight from the information in the literature review, the research gap in the previous literature-based knowledge in the field is identified. A small description about the research methodology adapted in conducting the research is explained along with the details of gathering primary and secondary information required for the research.

Chapter three traces the evolution of feminist movements in Indian art. After the description about the women artist in India and also the feminist movements in art in the different phases of Indian art, the research takes a turn to introduce feminism in brief. The western notion and development through theories and movements are briefly described to reach the pivot area of describing the feminist aesthetics in feminism. As the topic is to be elaborated in the second chapter, it limits the information of feminist aesthetics by providing only the essential points to introduce it. The selected Delhi based modern artists: (1) Arpita Singh, (2) Arpana Caur, and (3) Anupam Sud are also introduced with brief detail about their place and style of work. The five research objectives that help to understand the nature and focus of the research are provided with specific mention about what is intended through the particular objectives. These five- division objectives are interconnected to have a major research objective and arguments supporting the essence of the research. Towards the conclusive part, the chapter scheme and division are mentioned to provide information about how the pattern and flow of the research would be handled throughout the thesis.

The fourth chapter of the research titled “Feminism and Feminist Aesthetics: Influence and Impact” primarily focuses on the theoretical aspects related to feminism. It deals with the development of feminism by explaining the three phases of it that influenced many disciplines as well as related to the social, political, economic and cultural facet in general. The historical aspects, major features in the three waves and its impact in the world are discussed. Analysing closer, the second wave of feminism is considered more relatable to the purpose of the research based on art. Therefore, the period from which the second wave of feminism begins is identified along with its major proponents and theoretical concepts.

On the basis of the specific analysis of the second phase, the research comes to the identification of an emerging movement and tool in feminism which is related to feminist theory, aestheticism and art. Therefore, the theoretical aspect of feminism is specifically converged to feminist aesthetics

in dealing with the critical and interpretative analysis of the art produced by the selected women artists. The thoughts behind “feminist aesthetics relies upon a notion of aesthetics that has been randomly aggregated within the historic tradition of philosophies of beauty, the arts and sensory experience” (Hein, 1990, p. 283). Being an emerging field in the theory of feminism, the thoughts and discussions on feminist aesthetics are scattered in many journals and books by academicians, intellectuals, feminist thinkers and artists. These are combined to develop a framework that is suitable for the purpose of the research.

The fifth chapter titled “Vulnerability and Resilience: The Woman Art of Arpita Singh” is an enquiry into the artistic works of Arpita Singh. The chapter provides detailed description on the biography, ideology, feminist inclinations, artistic works, themes, colours, portraits related to these two women artists. Their social, political and cultural involvements in issues related with women and in common are also discussed. Interpretation of the works of the artists are conducted with the insights and viewpoints based on feminist aesthetics that relies on the female perspectives on the works. The discussion on the two women artists is conducted separately which would provide space for comparing their works towards the conclusion.

The sixth chapter titled “Women and Womanhood: The Selected Works of Arpana Caur” focuses on the artistic works of Arpana Caur with the help of perceptions in the feminist aesthetics described by various feminist writers. The creative art of the two women artists is interpreted by highlighting the women specific art. As how feminist aesthetics describe, it gives importance to the perspective of women and considers everything created by them as art. From such a point of view, the aesthetic aspect of the art by the two women artists are critically analysed and interpreted. Women as subject in the art of the two artists are explored and also the social, political and cultural engagements in the issues concerning women and in general by the artists through their art are described.

The seventh chapter titled “The Aesthetic Female Body: Feminist Perspectives in Anupam Sud’s Selected Works” provides a hint to the selected art works of Anupam Sud that has an aesthetic touch focusing on the use of female body. Though the art works highlights the body and nudity, she tries to express it as criticism towards the male gaze that is prominent in society.

The eighth chapter provides the conclusion to the research. It compares the feminist perspectives and artistic works of the three selected Delhi based modern women artists to analyse the similarities and dissimilarities in them. The outcome of the research based on the objectives and findings of the discussion and interpretation done in the previous chapters help in the process of comparison which also helps in providing a conclusion to the research by substantiating the research objectives and arguments.

The research is inspired from the socially and culturally relevant art produced by the three selected Delhi based modern women artists. They have balanced their art in providing importance to their feminist perspective as well as in addressing other socially significant issues in the country. Being feministic in aspect, the art produced by these women artists had timely intrusion into the perspective of the common man and also the patriarchal dominance in art and society. These intrusions were accompanied with indirect messages that appreciate the hidden strength of the female community in the country amidst of the incessant struggles from the traditional, cultural, social and religious norms. The scope of the research lies in understanding the art and artists in the light of feminist aesthetics which provide the realisation that aesthetics of art is different from a patriarchal perspective and a feminist perspective. Though they have been discussed previously, the aspect of feminist aesthetics in viewing the art from the angle of women who have experienced the struggles faced by the women community in general, is different and adds knowledge to the existing field of feminism, aesthetics and art. The limitation of the research

is that it confines the interpretation and discussions to the three selected Delhi based modern women artists. Due to the specificity required to conduct the research, the limitation into the particular region and period was essential.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature: Existing Background Research

Regarding the literature review based on the three selected Delhi based women artists, it is broad and gives wider scope to understand about their contributions to the discipline of fine arts. Many researches have been conducted to explore the different aspects of the artistic nature, social and political involvement, and the ideological inclination of the artists. Doctoral thesis on these women artists have been spread out in focusing on the artistic works, its interpretation of a larger canvas based on their involvement in the important and relevant events in the national and international platforms. The expression of the artist's intention, social responsibility, overview on the cultural and traditional aspects of India's richness in diversity, ideological stands regarding political and gender-based issues etc. are discussed widely in the various literature available from various depositories, databases, books and journals. From the perspective of feminism in art, there have been various researches based on the artists from India in general. But, an attempt to explore the feminist aspect of the artistic works of the three selected artists based in Delhi is new to the discipline of Fine Arts. Combining the feminist viewpoints from the popular theorists who have base in the second-wave of feminism, the exploration of aesthetic and feminist attributes in the works of these women artists from Delhi hasn't been conducted previously in its fullness. Moreover, the uniqueness of the research is also structured in the comparative analysis conducted to understand the similarities and dissimilarities in the perspectives of portraying feminist thought through canvas' and other means of artistic works by these women artists.

The literature review for this research is divided into two sections to analyse the previous researches related to the present work. These previous literatures would help to provide a strong base in understanding the various perspectives through which other researchers have dealt with the works of the three women artists and also related to the development of feminist thoughts.

The first section of literature review would gather details based on the very relevant researches on the three Delhi based women artists and their contributions.

Thompson, Frank (1982) discusses about the emergence of social awareness and social concerns in the Indian painting that covered the issues of poverty, alienation and social violence. The late sixties and seventies marked the rejection of abstract art for a focus into socially relevant matters of the country. Such turn in the art resulted into discussion of the condition of women in the patriarchal structures of Indian society. The issues of restricted freedom, oppression, the marriage of girl children, the seclusion of women, educational restrictions and refusal to allow widow remarriage etc. became hot topics in the works of artists of the time. Artists such as Maqbul Fida Husain, Krishna Hebbar, Amrita Sher-Gil, Nalini Malini, Bikash Bhattacharjee, Veena Bhargava and Meera Mukharjee have contributed to the feminist perspectives in painting. The fruitful futures of women in India are hopefully indicated by these artists in their works. The article describes how important was their contribution to Indian art in representing the social situations prevalent at the modern period.

Dalmia, Yashodha (2011) provides an account of thirty selected Indian artists who have witnessed the ups and downs of art in India. She compiled *Journeys: Four Generations of Indian Artists in Their Own Words* which was unique in its representation of information unlike from the usual type of books with bulk loaded information on art and artists. It includes artists from four generations with a detailed description to their contributions. Biographies, experiences, artistic contributions, approaches to art and social issues based on Arpita Singh and Aparna Caur have also been mentioned along with other popular artists from India such as M. F Hussain, Jatin Das, Nalini Malani and Rameshwar Broota. Being represented from the perspective of the artists themselves, the book is more authentic and reliable on its information

Dalmis, Yashodha (2002) has also written another book titled *Contemporary Art and Other Realities* to describe the influence of feminism in Indian art, especially in the works of Arpita Singh, Aparna Caur, Anita Dube, Nilima Sheik etc. She has dedicated a chapter titled “Feminism and Woman Artists in India” in which she discusses the various aspects of feminism that has been adapted to the Indian Art by popular women artists in the country. Beyond the descriptions based on feminism, the personal and professional life of selected artists is carried out by giving importance to their perspectives to art and society.

Damia and Hashmi (2007) introduced *Memory, Metaphor, Mutation: Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan* that dealt with the art and artists from India and Pakistan. In one of the chapters, they have included details about the artistic works of Mangalabhai Thampurati, Kamala Das Gupta, Meera Mukherjee, Arpita Singh, Nilima Sheikh, Nalini Malini, and also has commented about Mrinalini Mukherjee’s work on hemp. It identifies the changes and transitions in the art that has happened in both the countries where the contribution of these artists are highly valued.

Sen (2002) explores art based on painting, printmaking, installation, cinema and photography that has given more importance to concerns of women representation and identity especially during the twentieth century. She traces the concept of Bharat Mata through the different artistic works and the National politics. The book discusses about Sher-Gil’s concepts of colour and form, commenting that Sher-Gil’s work had a transformation from personal to universal sentiments. She also discusses Gogi Saroj Pal, Kanchan Chander, and Arpita Singh from the perspective of their artistic works related to social issues. The various forms of representation provided to women identity by artists such as Arpita Singh and Gogi Saroj Pal are highlighted in the essays listed in the book titled *Feminine Fables: Imaging the Indian Woman in Painting, Photography and Cinema*. In the article “Woman Resting On A Charpoy: The Semiotics of Desire”, she discusses about Gogi Saroj Pal’s depiction of women as victims with reliable base on her

experiences. She projects the importance of the artistic works such as *Hatyogini Shakti*, *Kinnari*, *Dancing Nayika* and *Conceptual Self portraits* as evidence to Gogi's representation of women as victims. In addition to it, she also gives description about Arpita Singh. The paintings of Arpita Singh such as toys and flowers are detailed to represent her subtle feminine sensibility evoking childhood memories. Vulnerability of women in reality of the Indian context is thus described through the artistic works and depictions of the popular artist. Discussing about Arpita Singh, she connects her to Sher-Gil by saying that "narratives are built up through juxtaposing images – not to simulate reality but rather to recall the emotional intensity of an experience – through form and color" (94). Other than the two artists, in the section titled 'The Ceremony of Unmasking', Sen discusses about Anupam Sud and her masked expression of multiple identities through her printmaking. Feministic discussion of Anupam Sud's works based on male gaze, patriarchal dominance, vulnerability of women bodies, and the relation between the genders are appreciated and identified as unique among the popular art in India. Sen explains the works of Anupam Sud through the selected works such as *Pick Up Girls* (1980), *Persona* (1988), *In Preparation for the Next Act* (1989) and *Between Vows and Words* (1995).

Expression and Evocation: Contemporary Women Artists of India published in 1996 is a collection of essays written by various writers and edited by Gayatri Sinha. Each essay concentrates on one artist in detail, providing the most meaningful insight about their contributions. Details about Indian women artists such as Arpita Singh, Nalini Malani, Madhavi Parekh, Anjolie Ela Menon, Gogi Saroj Pal, Nilima Sheikh and Anupam Sud are mainly discussed in various essays. "Arpita Singh: Of Mother Goddess and women" is written by Yashodhara Dalmia to describe the details about the popular artist Arpita Singh. Yashodhara details about the artistic style used by Arpita Singh in her works shares views on her artistic works such as girl smoking a cigarette, her depiction of a gun toting Durga and a woman plucking a flower etc. In "Anupam Sud: The Ceremony of Unmasking", Geeta Sen

provides her perspective on the life and works of Anupand Sud. Gogi Saroj Pal was discussed by Uma Nair in her essay “Gogi Saroj Pal: Between Myth and Reality”. Gayatri Sinha in her essay “Confronting the Womanhood” gives her view that Arpana Caur was influenced by the works of Amrita Sher Gil who gave importance to melancholic tone in her works. As there are several depiction of dead bodies, suffering windows, sharp tools and guns, Sinha takes the opportunity to point it to the representation of the congested and airless atmosphere of women life.

Aftab, Mohsina (2017) focuses on the representation of women in contemporary art during the two decades through his article titled “Reflection of Women in Contemporary Indian Art Context”. The Ajanta paintings, Khajuraho sculptures, paintings of Raja Ravi Varma and M. F Hussain and the trends in Mauryanand Buddhist period are described in the article. The changing role of women is depicted through the paintings of contemporary artists. Artistic works of Arpana Caur, Gogi Saroj Pal, and Anjolie Ela Menon are selected for the purpose of explaining the depiction of women in the paintings.

Gandhi, Poonam (2016) in the article titled “Women Fine Artists in Contemporary India: An Empirical Study” examines the status of women as artists in the field of fine arts in contemporary India with reference to the gender disparity in earnings, recognition and fame. The article states that contemporary women artists are more concerned about subservience, exploitation and discrimination against women as part of the patriarchal system followed by the society. The women artists are proud to express these concerns through their art as it projects the unique experiences as women through their feminine existence. The article comments that the women who have managed to be recognised and awarded in the male dominated world of art have to be appreciated and applauded for their dedication and excellence.

In *A Companion to Feminist Art* edited by Hilary Robinson and Maria Elena Buszek in 2019, Gayathri Sinha wrote a chapter titled “Women Artists:

Making a Subject Space in India". It discussed about the 'other feminisms' that was prevalent in the south or the Third World during the 1980s and 90s. Issues of male domination in Indian art exhibitions were also discussed along with a letter from Nalini Malani to Arpita Singh. It criticised the newer generation of artists in conducting a conceptual mode of response where at the same time artists like Arpita Singh, Nalini Malani and Nilima Sheikh widened the scope of their practices.

Sinha, Gayathri (1997) also contributed her curatorial project *The Self and The World :An Exhibition of Indian Women Artists* included various Indian artists such as Arpita Singh, Gogi Saroj Pal, Anjolie Ela Menon, Nilima Sheikh, Nalini Malani, Anupam Sud, Madhvi Parekh etc. Different aspects of life and society were discussed in the exhibition by the artists.

Mary Ann Mildford – Lutzker's *Five artists from India, Gogi Saroj Pal, Rekha Rodwittiya, Navjot Altaf, Anupam Sud, Rummana Hussain* writes about the cultural and social concerns and perspectives of the artists. She includes comments about Gogi Saroj Pal and Anupam Sud in her writings. Mary Ann discusses about Anupam Sud's contribution in printmaking that explores the feminist aspects of male gaze and patriarchy. She has also written *Women Artists of India :A Celebration of Independence* which was published in 1997. In it, the popular artists have discussed their viewpoints on the prevailing and relevant social issues in India. It was based on the fifty years of independence achieved by the country. There were perspectives from artists on the political aspects too. The comments and suggestions from artists such as Arpana Caur, Gogi Saroj Pal and Anupam Sud were also involved in the group consisted of Rummana Hussain, Nalini Malani Anupam Sud, Lalitha Lazmi, Gogi Saroj Pal, Jayashree Chakravarti etc.

Dutta, Ella (2010) wrote *Cobweb: Arpita Singh* that explored the artistic brilliance of Arpita Singh. She comments about the intermixed presence of the good and bad in the paintings of Arpita. The representation of pink lillies, guns, intestines, knives, birds etc. gives it a bizarre feel. Her symbolic depictions related to childhood memories and in developing the

themes of loss and dislocation which she had to face in life are also described. Her paintings such as *Night Cabs*, *Egg fry*, *Welcoming the Guest*, *Evening sky*, *Ritual*, *Ashwamedha* and *My Lily Pond* are widely appreciated.

Dutta, Ella (2006) writes about Arpita Singh's biography and has tried to absorb the essence portrayed through the paintings. The various aspects such as themes, usage of colours, structural forms, and contexts are recorded by the writer to conceive the vibrancy delivered through the artistic works of Arpita Singh. Moreover, the influencing factors that lead Arpita to portray different paintings are also discussed in the essay. *Arpita Singh: Picture Postcard (2003-2006) of History, Context and Location* is more than a mere record on the popular artist of Indian art.

Murthy, Isana (2010) writes about Anjolie Ela Menon's journey in the field of art from her initial phases to the career onwards. In the book, *Anjolie Ela Menon Through the Patina*, details about the style and methods of art done by Anjolie. The glass sculptures, Masonite board, graphic pictures were on discussion with details of her national and international journey's that helped her to be popular in the field.

Grewal, Jagtej K. (2017) writes about communal violence, feminism, environmental exploitation and issues through the utilisation of the meanings and perceptions derived from the history, myth and social realities concerned with the modern Indian art. He enquires into the artistic works of Arpita Singh, M. F Hussain, Nalini Malani, Tyeb Mehta and Shebba Chhachhi in his article titled "Modern Indian Painting: The Presence of the Past".

Apart from the books and journals related to the selected women artists in Delhi, there have also been doctoral thesis that has included the details, interviews and comments of these artists. Though not on the basis of aesthetic and feminist aspects, many have been discussed for their extraordinary approach to art and their contribution to Indian art are appreciated for its timely relevance and significance.

Huma, Khan (2018) discusses about the modern trends that were prevalent in Indian art due to the participation and contributions from selected Delhi based artists such as Arpita Singh, Devayani Krishna, Anjolie Ela Menon, Madhvi Parekh, Shobha Broota, Anupam Sud, Gogi Saroj Pal, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Arpana Caur. It highlights the involvement of these artists in the Triennial Events India. The study included details about the women artists in the field of art, their participation from the period 1968 – 2000 and the contemporary art practices in India with reference to these artists who have been introduced to new platforms and opportunities in art. It gives the notion that the artists, whether they belong to a particular period or not, continues to raise their voices through their artistic works and practices. Through the new platforms and mediums, they continue to narrate their ideas of present India in the personal, political and communal aspects.

Guneeta, Makkar (2011) give importance to ten contemporary women artists of India and their approach to the image of women in art. The researcher conducts his study based on the works of Arpita Singh, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Arpana Caur, Madhvi Parekh, Nilima Sheikh, Kavita Nayar, Anjolie Ela Menon, Anupam Sud, Gogi Saroj Pal, and Kanchan Chander. The research analyses the visual representation of woman in traditional Indian Art, the social economic aspects that decide the role and status of Indian women from the Vedic to the twentieth century, the emergence of women painters in traditional Indian art, analysis of the ten contemporary artists from India based on the post-independence era. The study interprets and analyses the representation of woman in the selected works of these ten artists.

Kulshreshtha, Priyanka (2015) writes about the depiction of social themes in the paintings and art works of contemporary artists in India. She selects artists such as Nalini Malani, Vasudha Thozhur, Arpana Caur, Anupam Sud, Gogi Saroj Pal, Arpita Singh and Nilima Sheikh. The different aspects and interpretations of their artistic works are selected to identify the relevance and significance to the social issues in the country. Rather than focusing on the feminist aspect, it takes the issues in general such as providing

shelter, food, education etc. It also includes issues related to gender and discrimination, violence and ecological issues. The idioms in Arpita Singh's paintings, conceptualization in Nilima Sheikh's paintings and social discourse in Aparna Caur's paintings are discussed in detail with their contributions to Indian art. She discusses the gender based issues, socio-economic issues, violence and ecological problems in India and their portrayal in the artistic works of Arpita Singh, Nilima Sheikh and Aparna Caur. Social interpretation of the paintings of Arpita Singh and Aparna Caur, its description and stylistic features of the artist's art are explained in the sections describing the paintings of Arpita Singh and Aparna Caur. The research comments that the

“subtle intervention of life and its related aspects, their indigenous expression with modern flavor seem to reveal all those underlying issues which are hidden and were unexplored earlier. Life, death, disaster, insecurity, danger, trauma, rage, satire, suffering all concepts and aspects are interwoven in their work in an artistic mode of expression in terms of symbolic colours, gestural expression, perfect compositional settings with deep meaning.”

(Kulshreshtha, 2015, p. 196)

Khanam, Shagufta (2006) conducts a critical study on the portraiture of Indian women in the paintings of Arpana Caur. The researcher focuses on the evolution of her career as an artist through the explanation of elements and styles used in her paintings that confront womanhood, the female forms, modernity and creativity in her talent. It appreciates the vision and uniqueness in her works that represents the everyday life of people in the real world. The thesis highlights that “her paintings might portray a girl, a young woman on the threshold of life, a window, a post-menopausal woman, a mother figure, or mother earth” (196). Aparna Caur describes the feminine figures in detail whereas the male figures find less space in her works compared to that of the female. The portrayals of women in her paintings are naturalistic and resonates strong emotions about the unexplored phases of women life. The study identifies Arpana Caur as a socially reactive person who absorbs the emotion

of society to her paintings.

Begum, Rehana (2009) explores the works and style of Aparna Caur and Anjolie Ela Menon through a comparative study of both the artists' selected works. She finds that the two artists reflect the actual problems of the poor people in their society. Their works highlight the political and religious issues, the corruption in the society. The most important aspect of their work that is highlighted in the thesis is the gender violence that the women suffer under the patriarchal dominance of the male society. Their contributions to Indian art are traced in the research that explores the life, work style, exhibitions, major influences, awards and other honours.

Ratti, Manav (2013) writes an article titled "Navigating Nation, Signifying Sikhism: The Work of Arpana Caur" to present the artist's views on topics such as Sikhism, Buddhism, Kabir, feminism, human rights and environmentalism. The contemporary issues related to communal violence are represented giving importance on how an artist can represent nation both aesthetically and politically. The article gives introduction to the artist and the second part of it titled as "Representing India" is a conversation with the artist in which she explains how her works are related with the issues related to the people in the nation.

Lynn, Victoria (2015) writes an article titled "India Inside Out: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Mrinalini Mukherjee" that examines the critical responses from both United Kingdom and India on the works of Mrinalini Mukherjee. The researcher explores the artists' association with religious issues during the 1990s and also finds Rabindranath Tagore and K. G. Subramanyan and Ram Kinkar Baij as the major influences to her works. The article suggests that her works "does not participate in the religious narratives of fundamentalism, nor is it a wholehearted embracement of "indigenism"" (155). The strong figurative, narrative, and realist inclination of Indian modernism which is different from the modernisms in Europe, the United States or Australia are closely connected with the influence on

Mukherjee's modernist views.

Davis, Richard (2020) discusses about Mrinalini Mukherjee's sculptural works along with Y. G. Srimati's artistic styles in his article "Two Female Artists of Post-colonial India: Y.G Srimati and Mrinalini Mukherjee". Richard Davis provides a comparison between the artists where Srimati's artistic excellence flourished in the 1950s and Mrinalini Mukherjee's in the 1970s and 1980s. The post-independence situation of India is expressed through the works of both the artists where one portrays the early beginning after the independence and the other towards the end of century.

Terracciano, Emilia (2020) considers Mrinalini Mukherjee's dedication to fibre sculpture in post-independent India. The changing status of third world fibre art, the notions of marginality and liminality are explained through the depiction of the artist's working method using Indian Rope Trick. The article also points to the figuration and abstraction that creates sensuous, futuristic and grotesque forms of artistic works.

Milford-Lutzker, Mary-Ann (2003) writes about Anupam Sud in the article titled "Five Artists From India" where the contributions of Gogi Saroj Pal, Rekha Rodwittiya, Navjot and Rummana Hussain are also discussed. It traces the patriarchal dominance that hindered the excellence of women artists in the country by analysing the evolution of women art through the wings of certain movements and activisms. These five artists' art is highlighted for the way they critique contemporary conflicts and values in the society to question the issues that are mostly ignored. The gender related problems that discriminate women from being independent are projected by pointing to the lack of freedom of choice and status of the vulnerable group. The article concludes with the finding that "all have used the female body, sometimes their cultural, social and political criticisms of contemporary Indian society. The female body functions in this art as both a gendered critique of women's status and as a metaphor for India" (27).

Myers, Kathryn (2017) conducts interview with Gogi Saroj Pal to

explore her connection with Punjab and the influence of Punjabi art in her work. The article that published the interview also depicts artistic works of Gogi Saroj Pal where women become the major subject with vibrant colors, fluid line, decorative borders, sensuous bodies and large staring eyes of women portraying their self-determination and self-protection. Her most popular works such as Kinnari representing half-woman and half-bird, Kamandenu representing wish-fulfilling cow and the Hatyogini which is the representation of a female yogi are discussed in the conversation. The article also lists Anjolie Ela Menon for her expression of feminine emotions in the artistic works. Her women subjects are produced with blank eyes and mute expressions on their faces that trap the situations experienced by the gender in real life situations. Apart from the two, the style and contributions of artists like Arpana Caur, Bharati Kher, Vasudha Thozhur, Kanchan Chander and Navjot Altaf are also mentioned in the article.

Parveen, Atiya (2018) conducts an interview with Gogi Saroj Pal in relation with the study of grotesque in ancient and contemporary trends in Indian art. In the conversation, the artist explains about the intermingling done with two or more things that make it grotesque. She admits that the notion behind the presentation changes from subject to subject matter and with time also. The examples based on Naika, Kinneri, Dancing Horse, Hat Yogini and Kamadhenu are provided to substantiate her viewpoints. While talking about the eroticism in her works, she says, "My women look quintessential. The drawings are bovine and curvaceous, sometimes oppressed and suppressed, sometimes sensitive and sensual, sometimes embattled and empowered" (170).

Praveen, Atiya (2018) writes about the grotesque outlooks in the works of Nalini Malini, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Arpita Singh, Gieve Patel, Kai Zharotia and Madhvi Parekh. The article highlights the selected contemporary artworks of these artists for the elements like phantasm, erotica, burlesque, distortion, and exaggeration. The intermingled use of bodies representing metamorphosis, anthropomorphizes, and hybrids are

explored in the works of these artists to highlight the grotesque as the main aspect of their works. Mrinalini Mukherjee's works such as *Water Fall* (1975), *Sitting Deity* (1981), *Devi* (1982), *Pakhi* (1985), *Adi Pushp* (1991), *Pushp* (1993), *Vanshree* (1994), *Palm Scapes* (2013), and *Shivling* (2014). In the case of Arpita Singh, the works are *The Egg Fry* (2007), *Buy Two, Get Two Free* (2007), *Alone and a Narangi Tree* (2008), and *Evening Sky* (2010). These artists express their ideas related to social concepts and political issues through such unique and grotesque ways.

Singh, Kavitha (2015) mentions about Gogi Saroj Pal and her touch of reality to feminism by mentioning her paintings. The article states that her female subjects are "shamelessly nude, rejoicing in their nakedness and sexuality, reveling in the full sensuality of their curvaceous bodies" (4). The peculiarity of her artistic works with female as subjects is mixed with other forms to be seen as hybrid versions such as bird-woman, cow-woman, horse-woman with mostly unclothed, sensual and immodest.

Shafiq, Zoya (2009) conducts a critical study of M. F. Husain and Anjolie Ela Menon regarding the figurative composition in contemporary Indian paintings. The research finds Anjolie Ela Menon's works as magical, enigmatic or mysterious that produces extraordinary mystical empathy in the viewers. Along with the analysis of the contributions of M. F. Husain, the research also evaluates the art of Anjolie Ela Menon. Also, the themes used for the artistic works, the subject matter, style of representation and techniques of Anjolie Ela Menon's works are explained.

The second section of the literature review is based upon the perspective of feminism applied on the artistic works of the selected Delhi based modern women artists in Indian art. As described earlier, the major part of focus on the feminist aspects in their artistic works began after the 1970s due to the less available opportunities in the country to get expressed in such contexts. Though feminism, in different waves had influenced the western world and the art forms there, the effect and influence of feminist ideologies in

Indian art began only after a few decades. The different waves of feminism are about the different needs raised connected with the need of the time and space. There have been various concerns put forth by feminist thinkers in relation with the respective disciplines. In art, the second-wave feminism gave rise to concerns regarding the domination of males and the less participation of women. Therefore, the literature based on feminist ideology which will be discussed below focuses on feminist aesthetics which have not been researched to analyse the artistic works of the selected Delhi based modern artists in Indian art. Thus, the application of aesthetic attributes with feminist perspectives would help to interpret and describe the artistic works in a way different from the previous studies based on the same.

Nochlin, Linda (1971) began the onset to the introduction of feminist aesthetics in the western world with her essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” which was later popular among the feminist groups. Through the essay, she considers both the feminist art history and feminist art theory. She opens up the debate on problems of women in representing the forefront of art in the west. Through different sub-divisions such as “The Question of the Nude”, “The Lady's Accomplishment”, “Successes”, and “Rosa Bonheur”, she develops her points to validate her argument. Being in the crucial phase of the second-wave of feminism, this essay provides strong base to the rise of female consciousness in the discipline of art. The title of the essay was catchy as it followed the trend displayed in various disciplines to express the equal rights and concerns of female community.

Devereaux, Mary (2005) writes “Feminist Aesthetics” in the collection *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* edited by Jerrold Levinson. In the essay, she conducts a reading of feminist works in aesthetics from 1970s onward through an enquiry onto the historical domain of art and philosophical aspects in the analytic tradition. The dominance of patriarchy in art traditions that gave less value through demotions of female identity and status are criticized by the author.

Battersby, Christine (1989) focuses on the criticism that she provides for the celebrated notion of genius, which she calls as a production of male gender. She conducts historical analysis rooted in Roman antiquity in European and Anglo- American thought of the twentieth century. The major part of the writing is based on the use of the word genius and its progress from the eighteenth century through romanticism. She believes that the role of feminist aesthetics is to gather the oeuvres of female artists to enhance and project their creativity to oppose and counter the traditional exclusion from the realms of genius. Therefore, through the essay, she calls for a new perspective to identify the female geniuses rather than rejecting the traditional aspects of genius.

Hein, Hilde (1990) writes about the connection between feminist aesthetics and feminist theory through his article titled “The Role of Feminist Aesthetics in Feminist Theory”. In the article, he tries to relate the ideas of feminist aesthetics, feminist art and feminist theory. In his perspective, feminist art merges with the attributes of feminist aesthetics. Feminist art gives concentration to project the female oppression, thus feminist aesthetics deals with the idea of bringing female artists to forefront where the male dominated the space. He has the point that “feminist theory is in its infancy and feminist aesthetic theory is only beginning to find itself” (Hein, 1990, p. 288).

Brand, Peg (2007) writes a chapter titled “Feminism and Aesthetics” in the collection *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy* edited by Linda Martin Alcoff and Eva Feder Kittay. She puts light onto distinguishing aesthetics and philosophy of art in her first section of the essay. Also, she tries to provide a short description to the developing challenges to feminists in the philosophy of aesthetics. She has the viewpoint that the feminist writing in American academic aesthetics began with the essay “Feminism and Aesthetics” written by Linda Nochlin in 1990. She gives account of different writings and attempts by feminist thinkers to develop the notion of feminist aesthetics in art.

Through the essay, she tries to bring feminist theory and aesthetics in a close relation with providing suggestion to the role of women artists of the time in the development of feminist aesthetics. Detailed descriptions of the two aspects of feminist philosophers in art are highlighted: (1) the self-portraiture and (2) portrayal of women as objects of beauty. She disqualifies the idea of the male perspective of representing women and gives importance to the self-portraiture of artists. She finds it as a counter act against the traditional concept of the male point of view of representing the aesthetics of women. She also comments on the future developments in feminist aesthetics by informing about Carolyn Korsmeyer's *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction* as the first comprehensive writing to the field.

Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics gives a detailed account about the discussions on feminist theory and philosophy of aesthetics. It was edited by the popular thinkers Peggy Z. Brand and Carolyn Korsmeyer in 1995 and has several contributions from various writers in the field. Majority of the contributions have their academic roots in philosophy and in critical disciplines of art, music, and literature. These multidisciplinary approaches give a strong base for feminism in aesthetics and notes down the various challenges and concerns in the area. The book dedicates a separate section for feminism and aesthetics under the sub-title *Feminism and Aesthetics: Directions for the Future*. In the section, there are four essays contributed by four different writers such as Joanne B Waugh, Joseph Margolis, Rita Felski and Hilde Hein. Joanne B. Waugh writes about the "Analytic Aesthetics and Feminist Aesthetics: Neither/Nor?" whereas Joseph Margolis gives account to the "Reconciling Analytic and Feminist Philosophy and Aesthetics. Rita Felski's essay is based on "What Feminism Doesn't Need an Aesthetic (And Why It Can't Ignore Aesthetics)". The last essay of the book is of Hilde Hein's "The Role of Feminist Aesthetics in Feminist Theory". Through these essays, the book tries to deliver a general aspect of the ideas related to feminism and aesthetics in different disciplines.

Cahill, Ann (2009) explores the feminine beautification in feminist

practice through her essay “Feminist Pleasure and Feminine Beautification”. She has the viewpoint that through the act of distinguishing between the process and product of beautification, the aesthetic, interpose, subjective and embodies elements can be isolated which will in turn help to empower women. Beautifying is expressed as a positive experience for women being beautified has a notion in western community as it gets opposed to women’s equality and autonomy.

A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft describes the need for equal rights and freedom from the feminist point of view. It shaped the suffragette movement that dismantled political and social hindrances to participation of women in the society. Mary Wollstonecraft’s seminal work became the founding stone to the first wave feminism that most importantly focused on the equality for women. The book was a response to the educational policies and the attitude of political theorists of the eighteenth century who did not support the rational education for women.

Ziarek, Ewa (2012) highlights the struggle for freedom and the fight against racist violence and sexism through feminist aesthetics in her book *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism*. The exclusion and destruction of women in the fields of politics and literary production are the major concerns noted in the book. She quotes Theodor W. Adorno, Virginia Woolf and Nella Larsen for her in-depth discussion of philosophical aesthetics. The apolitical and gender-neutral debates about modernism in the light of violence and destruction are discussed by Ziarek.

In the article “Feminist Philosophy of Art”, A. W. Eaton surveys the major developments in the field to explain the direction of the movement of the field. The article states that feminist philosophy of art is not based on single methodological commitment, but is united with different methodological approaches to explaining art and aesthetic experience for ending the subordination of women in the art and discourses about the arts. It is interdisciplinary and is connected with art criticism, art history,

psychoanalysis, visual culture and other sub-fields within feminist philosophy. The article checks whether there is any difference in the production and reception with respect to women and men in their attitude towards art. The list of questions extends to the frameworks in the philosophy of art, the gender influence in artistic practice, aesthetic experience and judgment, and the traditional bias by androcentric perspectives. As a result of the analysis of the questions, the article explains the problems of canon formation in art that leads to two approaches – the humanism and gynocentrism. It is said to be the major approaches to oppression in feminist philosophy and politics that has a major influence in the production, appreciation and evaluation of art.

Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective is an edited book of collection of various essays by renowned writers. The book was edited by Hilden Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer in 1993. Hein Hilde includes his essay titled “Refining Feminist Theory: Lessons from Aesthetics” in the section Aesthetics, Feminism and Methodology. The essay by Marilyn French is debatable as it puts forth the question of “Is there a Feminist Aesthetics?”. Ismay Barwell’s essay “Feminine Perspectives and Narrative Points of View” gives idea to the different angles in which feminism is dealt to identify and explore art works. Jenefer Robinson’s and Stephanie Ross’ “Women, Morality and Fiction” gives suggestions about the contemporary morality and its issues in limiting the aesthetic exploration of women art. In “Aestheticism, Feminism, and the Dynamics of Reversal”, Amy Newman writes about the relation between Aesthetics and Feminism.

Janet, Wolff (2006) in her article “Groundless Beauty: Feminism and the Aesthetics of Uncertainty”, defends the return of beauty and aesthetics is not the enemy of feminist politics or art practice. The article traces the complex intersections of the aesthetic and the political on the basis of a principled aesthetic as they relate to the questions of gender and mechanisms of representation. She states that “If aesthetics can be re-thought as the debate about value after the loss of certainty – a ‘groundless’ aesthetic – then the

return to beauty has a different look” (154).

Korsmeyer, C (2004) writes her essay for Stanford Encyclopaedia about “Feminist Aesthetics” which provides a brief account to the field of feminist aesthetics. It describes the various aspects of aesthetics and feminism and also relates it with the philosophical interpretations. The theoretical traditions and feminist interventions are discussed by disseminating feminist perspectives in the area of traditional aesthetics. She writes about the most important topics in feminist aesthetics such as the historical background through the survey of artists and their art, notion of creativity and genius, aesthetic categories and feminist critiques, the practice of feminism and the concept in art, and also gives idea to the body of art and philosophy with relation to the aesthetics in everyday life. This essay is considered to be very informative in the field, especially in the area of feminist aesthetics for philosophers and scholars

Misra, Kalpana (2008) investigates about the role of second wave feminist perspectives and its effectiveness in removing gender-based inequality in Indian society. In the article “Indian Feminism and the Post-Colonial State”, the major argument is that feminist rethinking has informed about the maturity of the Indian women’s movement and its recognition. The interconnection between gender, state, religion and community is traced through the article.

Millner, Jacqueline et. al. (2015) suggests that the tools of feminist critique try to acquire insights from the historical and contemporary art to combat the effects of the present social and institutional misogyny. It uses the term ‘culture of practices’ proposed by Martinis Roe to analyse feminist aesthetics in the diverse forms that also includes the documentation and evaluation of feminist political associations. The article examines that feminist critique has suffused the thinking and has influenced various disciplines including art practices. It estimates that “feminism is neither a prior political identity, nor a prescribed set of cultural practise, nor indeed is

it's a space of uncritical, neo-liberal choice" (148).

"Feminist Inquiry in Art History, Art Criticism, and Aesthetics: An Overview of Art Education" explores the major directions of feminist inquiry in the disciplines of art history, art criticism and aesthetics. In each disciplinary area, the feminist scholars have tried to claim their space and to uncover hidden biases in the representation of women within the discipline. Hagaman elaborates the disciplines of art history, art criticism and aesthetics in the light of feminist perspectives and the role of women in art. The article describes the perspectives of different generations of feminist art historians on how they viewed art from the female point of view. It concludes by saying, "The work of feminist scholars in art history, art criticism, and aesthetics has made clear some of the epistemological inequalities in those disciplines. In adapting those disciplines for art education, we are obliged to consider such inequalities and their effects upon understanding of the nature of art itself" (34).

Klinger, Cornelia (1998) explains about aesthetics in detail connecting it with the social situation of the exclusion of women from different spheres of life, denial of education and marginalisation from professional platforms. Despite the obstacles, feminist engagements with art and aesthetics have achieved reasonable heights even though it has not been appreciated well. The involvement of feminism in art, literary and music history has helped to reinstate the efforts of women in the development of such fields.

Manresa, Gemma (2019) discusses about feminist aesthetics through the track of defining it quoting the works of Nancy Nochlin's *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (1971) and Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). The exclusion of women from the history of visual artists is traced through the article with criticism to male gaze as a masculine and heterosexual point of view. The article also examines how Western aesthetics assumed a gender-neutral approach to aesthetic value

and finds that the male and female sexual distinction of the 18th and 19th century did not only affect many moral and political categories, but also the universal standard of taste and aesthetic judgment. The article also describes the relation between feminist philosophy and the theory of the arts. It explained that feminist philosophy and theory of the arts relates with the social and political implications of the evaluation, interpretation and reception in the arts. Even though feminist aesthetics is proposed to reduce gender bias and discrimination against women, the article says that it homogenizes women irrespective of their different social, racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds.

Worth, Sarah (2001) writes about feminist aesthetics in the edited book titled *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* by Berys Gaut and Dominic Lopes. She suggests that feminist aesthetics is a relatively young discipline as compared to other disciplines such as literary criticism, film theory or art history as it began in the early 1990s. She also gives the idea that feminist aesthetics is progressing in its applicability, contestations and new formulations.

Deepwell, Katy (2020) explains how a gendered analysis measures the “state” of art and art criticism as a feminist intervention and also discusses the neo-liberal misleadings of Linda Nochlin and Laura Mulvey in the art world. The plurality of feminisms in transnational, transgenerational and progressive alliances are also detailed in the article titled “Art Criticism and the State of Feminist Art Criticism”. It never considers feminist art criticism as a mirror to an art-world politics on women artists and states that it is simply a reaction to an art world trend. It focused for transforming the situations of women artists, the treatment of women as subjects and also for changing the attitude and agenda for social and political concerns in art criticism. Identifying that though the state of feminist art criticism has considerable creativity, art criticism is stuck in the marginal, ex-centric and exceptions in the works of women artists.

Beauvir, Simon (1989) in her *The Second Sex* gives a broad

description about the discrimination in gender roles and rights. She finds female gender is treated as subjugated and in a subordinate position in society. The book is about the oppression that women suffer under the patriarchal dominance of male gender which tries to imprison her by defining roles and limits. She says that man occupies the self, subject by providing the position or attribute of object to women. Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is considered as an important record in the second wave of feminism. It is inevitable in the discussions of feminism even in the twentieth century as most of the details that she describes in her book are still relevant and significant. She finds ample evidences of female subjugation in various mythical representations of women and writes it as the imprints of human consciousness about the disservice of women. The portrayal of women by Beauvoir in her book was later on taken to give strength to the feminist movements all around the world.

Hooks, Bell (1984) in her *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* writes about radical feminism with relation to the black women who are often considered as margin in the American society. She critiques Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) for her one dimensional and biased perspective on the reality of women. The book also explores the movements in feminism, the role of men in the struggles for woman rights, and topics related to radical feminism.

Evans, Judith (1998) writes *Feminist Theory Today: An Introduction to Second Wave Feminism* to explore the feminist political thought through the survey of several articles and books related to the second wave of feminism. It gives idea about the intellectual history and political aspect of the contemporary feminism in United States and the United Kingdom.

Bulanova-Duvalko L.F (2015) devotes her article to trace the theoretical and methodological principles of feminist aesthetics. She considers it as a section in aesthetic science which has been very less researched. Her article is titled as "Philosophical Aspects of Understanding

Directions of Feminist Aesthetics". She gives information about the approaches by Christina Bettersby, Rita Felsky and Sarah Worth. In the article, she outlines the emergence of feminist aesthetics by providing reasons and conditions. Also, the article highlights three most relevant approaches to define the goals and characteristics of feminist aesthetics.

In *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, the writer Rita Felski critically analyses American and European feminist literary theory and gives account to contemporary fiction by women. She argues that feminist aesthetics is a non-issue that the feminists have needlessly pursued and has the opinion that it does not speak of masculine and feminine or subversive and reactionary forms. She tries for an interdisciplinary approach to analyse literature through the integration and combination of literary and social theory. It lights insight on two questions of theory and practice. The first is related with the connection between feminist aesthetics and feminist politics and the second between feminist literary theory and feminist literature. Felski retrieves from the dominant literary feminist paradigms to express its rootedness in social and historical conditions. The complexity between feminist literary theory and practice are demonstrated through the book.

From the overall analysis of the literature review provided above on the research done regarding the Indian art based on women as subject by women artist and also on the various viewpoints elaborating the evolving practice of feminist aesthetics, it can be concluded that there have not been any specific work applying the perspective of feminist aesthetics in the broad division of the second wave of feminism on the artistic works of three selected Delhi based Modern women artists.

In the following chapter of the thesis, the theoretical aspects of feminism and feminist aesthetics which derives from it are described with essential details about the evolution and development of feminist theory through the different waves and feminist intellectuals.

CHAPTER THREE

Evolution of Women Artists In India- Ancient To Modern

The philosophical study of beauty and taste in the art would be equally simple and complex as art's aesthetics is within it and beyond the boundaries of its limited area. Whether it is any kind of canvas or surface, art is produced with the convergence of limitless thoughts and emotions in the artist who converts it to a tactile form for the viewers of art who complete the process of making the art. Without the presence and essence of the right group of audience, the art would stay unfinished forever. The aesthetics of art is a combination of these three subjects into it for a better expression of its beauty and taste. Art establishes its strength and power when the artist and the viewer join together. The art, the artist and the viewer fulfils the production of art. Art is meaningful only when the viewer values to provide a context and interpretation to it. If there is no viewer to art, the creative piece of work become unnoticed and an aesthetic failure. Even if someone is present and would not mind having a look at it, the same happens as an ultimate result. For the art of any kind, to be aesthetically rich and significant, there must be the participation of viewer who would find the hidden aesthetics in the art, express viewpoint, criticise, provide context and interpretation to it, the work of art has found a new ground from its initial stage of existence. To be aesthetically valued, the viewer has to understand the context, meaning and intention of the art produced by the artist. It is also usual for viewers to provide new contexts, interpretations and critical analysis to the art. Such interpretations and perspectives from different viewers help to highlight the importance and objective of the art in its politico-social and cultural atmosphere. Art should be relatable to something that would define the meaning and sense of producing such art and presenting it to the world. Amy Lowell, an American poet writes it right that, "Art is the desire of a man to express himself, to record the reactions of his personality to the world he

lives in”.

The good and the bad of the world becomes context to the production of art. When art discusses matters related to the concern of the world, it increases its reachability and acceptance. As every responsible person responds to matters in and around through the available means of communication, artists convey their reaction or criticism to such matters through the utilisation of their talent to depict it through the means of art. In the contemporary situation of the world, it is very much essential for artists and writers to involve in matters affecting the world, especially the common man who struggles to live amid the increasing tensions that have the power to squeeze him/her to void. Like any other person or even more than them, an artist has the responsibility and plays a crucial role in defining the track and race of the world. Through such interaction with the world, art becomes both personal and at the same time universal. The aesthetics of art deals with emotions and feelings of the viewer and has tremendous influence in handling individuals and even large groups.

Popular and renowned artists around the world have created their space both in the field of art and also among the people through the powerful impact of their art. Art helps to explore the deep-rooted social problems through their interpretations and responses of people towards it. Several such active participation of the artist, the art and the viewers have created wonders around the world. It is the unique attribute of an artist to have access to creating powerful imagery, colours and hues that can represent several issues in the society and can invite the attention of the world to it. Issues related to women, refugees, poverty, unemployment, racism, political violence, environmental concerns, farmer suicides, working-class struggles etc. have been into the forefront with the equal participation of the artist and the viewer. It would be the responsibility of the artist to create relevant and exciting art, but it is the visibility and reaction to the art that determines the success of art in representing the society. When art strives for and becomes a tool for a social change, it is said to have vision and intention rather than confining to the

space allotted to it by the artist during the stage of its production.

Art is defined as the expression of human creativity and imagination through means of different forms such as painting, sculpture, music, literature, dance etc. that lead to the appreciation of beauty or emotional power (“art”, *OED*). The meaning of art is shaped by the materials, techniques, and forms it makes use of, even the ideas and feelings that it produces in its viewers. In analysing an artistic work, the involvement of aesthetics is essential as it helps to explore the art into its meaningful levels. The word art derives from the Latin term *ars* which means skill or craft. It also points to the meaningful use of the word ‘artefact’ that gives the idea of a thing created with the help of human skill and effort. An ‘artisan’ refers to the artist or the person who is skilled at making such things. If the artists had focused on the formal beauty of the art which was created, with time and introduction of new knowledge, they shifted to interpret its cultural meaning from the classical traditions derived from the Greek and the Roman art.

In the modern context of analysing art, it has to be understood in terms of its subjective beauty rather than objective characteristics. It is thus because of the cultural context of the art that changes with time and space. Though the discipline of art was developed in Europe during the 15th and mid-20th century, the modern art was divided into Western and the other art where the other represents the marginalised art forms through the colonialist perspective (Glass, “What is art history and where is it going?”). The gradual change in the socio-cultural characteristics in different parts of the world helped to revise the subjects from white males to colourful depictions of women. There occurred an expansion of the dimension to the forms of art from painting, sculpture, and architecture in the traditional context to contemporary media and non-conventional means of representing art. With the development of globalisation, possibilities to get connected increased in the field of art. It helped to improve the visibility and scope of interpreting art and art forms in a broader context. It is now largely open to interpretations and discussions on topics related to regional, national and international importance. The authority

to interpret the meaning of artistic work was taken away from the artist to the viewer who relates it to more contexts that the artist might not even have thought about.

India has a diverse range of influencing factors such as its cultural heritage, traditions, values, religions, and ethics. It has also been through different socio-political and religious aspects that had an enormous impact in changing the nature of production and reception of art. It had been through miniature painting, cave art, murals, manuscripts and illustrations, folk art, decorative arts etc. that provided narratives based on the cultural, traditional and religious living of people in the land which is now called India. With the changing scenarios during the British Raj in India, art, artists and the perception towards the depiction of art changed. There were contributions from Rabindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy, Amrita Sher Gil, Gaganendranath Tagore during the early twentieth century. It moved on to the contributions of Prodosh Das Gupta, Chitta Prasad, Zainul Abedin, Somnath Hore, Ram Kinker Vaiz and Paritosh Sen during the 1940s. It was the time of riots, violence, famines, poverty and disturbance throughout the nation.

The influential involvements of these artists were bliss to the situation of the nation at the time. They represented the emotional situation of people who are subject to the incidents and events causing social trauma and misery. With independence, a progressive group of artists arose in the country with a base to new self-consciousness and nationalism. The artists of the time immediately after the independence were K. H. Ara, M. F. Hussain, S. K. Bakre, S. H. Raza and H. A. Gade. The 1950s-60s were a revolutionary phase through Nikhil Biswas, Shyamal Dutta Roy, Rabin Mondal, Prokash Karmakar, Bijan Choudhury, Arpita Singh, Anjolie Ela Menon, A. Ramachandran, C. Douglas, Gieve Patel, Bhupen Khakhar etc.

The 1970s contributed a great shift in the field of Indian Art with the upsurge of many women artists who showcased their voice through their artistic works. The waves of feminism were highly influential in India as it

did in the West. The women participation in art introduced women related issues and women-oriented contexts along with other socially relevant matters in the country. Though the mythologies and stories depict ancient women as painters and subjects to paintings, it was the British rule in India which gave training in arts to women. During those times, Bengali women, Parsis and British women in cities came to learn for their leisure and pleasure. It was the British who imbibed the consciousness of progress and opportunity for participation to women.

Even if there were several women artists in India, the first notable woman artist is from the Travancore region towards the southernmost end of the country. Mangalabai Tampuratti, of the nineteenth century, was the sister of Raja Ravi Varma. She practised oil painting from his brother who himself was a renowned artist. Even though she was from the privileged class, being a woman, she had no enjoyments like his brother. The talent in her artistic work is visible in her portrait of her brother which is preserved and showcased in Trivandrum. Sunayani Devi, who was the cousin of Rabindranath Tagore, was also an artist who was inspired by the folk artist Raja Ravi Varma's paintings. She was called by Stella Kramrisch as the first Indian modern woman artist. Amrita Sher Gil who was born in 1913 was also fond of painting. She had the exposure of being outside India. After returning to India, she created a unique identity in art through her depictions of child bride, village people representing the misery and pain in their life. She was the one who tried to address the societal problems through her artistic works. Rabindranath Tagore opened the door to the involvement of women in art through his Kala Bhavan in 1919. He participated Stella Kramrisch, Liza Van Pott, Gauri Devi, Sucheta Kriplani and Jaya Appaswami in being attached to Shantiniketan for improving their artistic skills and talents. There were a group of artists who were encouraged with the Bengal school in Calcutta during the 1940s. They were Kamala Das Gupta, Cummi Dallas, Roma Mukherjee, Amina Kar, Nirode Mazumdar and Kamala Roy Chowdhury.

From the onset of 1950s, various art institutions such as Delhi College of

Art,

M. S University Baroda, Sharda-ukil school, Triveni Kala Sangam Delhi etc. were opened in which women went to learn the art and improve their artistic skills. Women such as Meera Mukherjee, Nasreen Mohamedi, Veena Bhargava, Anjolie Ela Menon, Arpita Singh etc. are the alumni of these eminent institutions of those times.

Those who selected art as their passion during the 1950s and 1960s did not consider it as their hobby, but was involved into its depths and were serious professional artists like how men considered art in their life. The confidence shown by these women of the post-independence India exhibited professionalism and enjoyed the nuances of freedom than their predecessors in art. With the quick and unsettled development of perspectives and contributions to the discipline of art, these women too could widen their dimension and perspective. This period was the beginning of a new group of women who could express issues concerning women in general. Artists like Kishori Kaul, Anupam Sud, Latika Katt, Nalini Malani, Nilima Sheikh, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Gogi Saroj Pal were highly talented to create their unique presence in the Indian space for art.

The post-independence era discussed many serious issues concerning women such as gender violence, discrimination, trauma etc. on wider contexts that would lead to interpretations and discussions in public platforms. Artists such as Devyani Krishna, S. V Vasudev, Nasreen Mohamedi, Kishori Kaul were also prominent in discussing various themes of social relevance. With exposure and acceptance to artistic works, the Indian women artists began to discuss more significant and controversial topics like inequality, violence, female feticide, dowry, socio-economic disparity and many more issues related to the disturbed living conditions of women in India. The feminist movements that were influenced by the Western world provided the guidance and strength to the Indian women artists in uniting thoughts and art. Chaman Nahal, a renowned writer from India gives his definition about feminism as:

“a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is dependence syndrome whether it is husband, father, the community or a religious group. When women will free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes.”

(“Feminism in English fiction-forms and Variants”, 1991, p. 17)

Feminist movements in India have given rise to opposing views on the established notions of patriarchy and following institutions such as family, values, structures, hierarchy and in areas of violence against women. In the context of Indian feminism, it defends equality, security and economic rights. Same as how the Western ideological frontier of feminism argues, the Indian feminists raise their voice for their equal wages, health and education and political rights. Due to the inclination towards a cultural, traditional and religious polarisation of a male dominant society, the feminist groups in India had also to fight against the unshaken vows of the country's belief's and ritually followed patriarchal sacredness. The historical evolution of feminism in India developed through three different stages.

The nineteenth century witnessed reformists who showed concern towards the pathetic struggle of women in the country compared to that of the privileged men. It leads to reforms in education, breaking of traditional and religious rules, and participation of women in the customs. This phase can be called as the first phase of feminism in India. Introduction of British Raj ideologies into India lead to colonial venture of the concepts of democracy, equality and individual rights.

gave rise to reformations in social systems, caste and gender relations. One of the highlight of the first phase of feminism in India is voice against the social The first phase of

feminism in India begins from the mid of nineteenth century to around 1915. It was the period of the rising concept of nationalism which also evils of sati. Raja Ram Mohan Roy became the strong voice for such social reforms and movements in the country. His efforts and struggles became the beginning of perspective changes to the foundational establishments prevalent in the country. His dedicated life argued for a better position and place for women and womanhood in the country. The democratic and logical view put forth by Raja Ram Mohan Roy forced Lord William Bentinck to abolish Sati in 1789 by declaring it as a crime.

According to the perspective of Suma Chitnis, the involvement of women in the struggle for their equality and rights were not started by them, rather it was initiated by men. Women came to the forefront only by the end of the eighteenth century after the incessant struggles and efforts made by people like Ishwarachandra Vidhya Sagar, Matahari Phule, Agarkar, Keshav Chandra Sen and Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Social reforms on widow remarriage, to stop child marriage and to increase literacy level among the women happened during these initial phases of feminism in India. Legal interventions were also conducted to endure property rights for women. The colonial interventions to social reforms in India were thwarted with the shift in the focus towards the nationalist movements.

The second phase of Indian feminism began in 1915 and lasted till the year of independence. The inclusion of women to freedom movement by Mahatma Gandhi helped to change the dimension on which society viewed the strength of women groups in the country. Gandhi expanded the public activities of women through non-violent civil disobedience movement against the British Raj in India. The raise of organisations such as All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and the National Federation of Indian Women (NIFW) increased the possibility of the participation of women in the political and social platforms. It directed the concentration of women towards the issues that they face in their society. Education of women, livelihood of working-

class women and mass mobilization were possible through such organised level of participation of women. In short, the development of feminism in the second phase was through the increase in the participation and association of women for Independence movement.

The third phase of feminism was seen post-1947 or in the post-colonial India. Though the country enjoyed the rights of independence, the condition of women was still unresolved. There were issues of unequal wages, free service and inequality that suffocated Indian women under the patriarchal domains of the country. During the 1970s, the inequality issues were seriously debated for its power structures such as caste, language, religion, class and tribal societies.

In the 1970s, the rise of liberal and radical feminism in the west meant that the focus of the international decade of women (1975–1985) was around demands for equal opportunities in education and employment and focus on ending violence against women. In India, the newly emerging feminist movement based its appeal to these varied values and concepts, while examining the ways in which women in India had not benefited from international ‘development’

(Gangoli, 2007, p. 6)

Acts such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 which enacted to protect women from domestic violence and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 that ensured protection of women from sexual harassment at their work place were milestones to the women community in India. Though there have been several attempts and verdicts in favour of the rights and opportunities of women in India, in reality, the situation of women still remains inhibited due to the patriarchal establishments in the country. The system of hierarchical divisions, cultural and traditional rules in favour to the male dominance over the female gender, superstitions and religious exuberance in different levels of the societies have resulted in a slow and

unsatisfactory development in the living conditions of women in India.

With change in time and situations, new prospects opened for women in India. The social, political and economic change in the country invited participation of more women into art. Women gradually entered into the fields of dominance which were held protected for the male. It was not only in the political and social spheres, but also in literature, art, film, and connected fields and disciplines. With the introduction of accessible education to women, they were encouraged to handle different platforms that were thought unsuitable to them. As discussed earlier, the schools and associations helped women to get proper training and encouragement to step towards professional art. More and more participation came from different parts of the country like a chain that inspired many others who also wished to prosper in their field of interest.

The Art Exhibition in Calcutta where 25 women artists of India came forward with their exhibits was news in 1879, which is still regarded as the first authentic report about a public exhibition conducted by women of those times. It was known because of the advertisement provided in the newspapers. The discrimination to a gender in the field of art is well visible through such an incident. It has to be understood that, before the date of the specific exhibition in Calcutta, there were rarely any historic attempts from the part of women. Individual contributions from selected privileged women like Mangalabai Tampuratti or Lucy Sultan Ahmed can be found in the history. With such an introduction of a single artist, it cannot be said that there was a prominent involvement of women in Indian art.

Amrita Sher Gil is often recognised as the Indian Frida Kahlo for her colourful paintings self-portraits and unorthodox bohemian life. She focused on cultural roots. She had a bicultural identity as her mother was Hungarian and her father was a Sikh. Though she was trained in Paris, her interest was in the Mughal and Pahari schools of painting which made her to depict the unglamorous lives of people who belonged to the ordinary class. She was born

in 1913 in Hungary. She is recognised as one of the greatest avant-garde women artists of the early twentieth century and also the pioneer in modern Indian art. Her paintings followed the post-impressionism style of depicting art. The traditional focus of the beauty and imagery of women were questioned by the bold attempts of women like Amrita Sher-Gil who unlike her ancestors in art had the opportunity to mark her unique identity in the history of Indian art.

This research would focus on only a selected works of three Delhi based women artists who has attempted to present their unique artistic skills in national and international platforms. Through the perspective of the three phases of the development of feminism in India, they were part of the third phase which was prominent and powerful after the achievement of the independence. The most important contributions of these women artists came towards the end of the twentieth century. Their narrative of the feminine and use of female as major subject of their artistic works are considered. Before discussing them in brief in this introductory chapter, it would be relevant to discuss about their contemporaries who are from different parts of the country.

One among the contemporary artists in Indian art along with the selected group of Delhi based artists such as Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur, and Anupam Sud is Madhvi Parekh. She was born in Ahmedabad in Gujarat and was married to Manu Parekh who inspired her being passionate in art. Though she had no plans to become a professional artist as how she became, the encouragement from her husband made her continue her artistic works. In the 1960s, she began painting and exhibited her work in 1968 at the Birla Academy in Kolkata. She painted with the influence from her memories about her childhood and fantasy. Her paintings were both vivid and surreal in nature. The use of oil and acrylic on canvas and watercolour on paper, she was able to depict her imaginations and fantasies about women and children in the urban and rural premises. She was inspired by narratives and folk stories to which she was familiar during her childhood. The folk depictions in her art

were connected with the protective nature of mother towards her children (Ray, 1996, p. 98). She received the National Award from Lalit Kala Akademi in 1979, several national and international fellowships and also recently the Kailash Lalit Kala Award in 2017 for her innumerable contributions to the field of art.

Unlike many other artists of her time, she did not concentrate to depict women in her sensuous images, rather provided a placid and de-sexed tone to her paintings. She personified women to nature and the amalgamations of both were present in her paintings. Women paintings were not a part of her concern during her initial phases of career. "... the paintings of Madhvi Parekh are a strong reminiscent of folk applique and embroidery effects with common use of cut-out motifs, dots and dashes ..." (Mago, 2001, p. 101).

Recent works of Madhvi Parekh shows her interest in sculpture using bamboo baskets, winnowers and rope. She creates experiments with mixed use of different media in providing three-dimensional view of sculpture. Through the use of different medias and methods, she has developed a unique style and narrative to her works that helps the viewers to interpret the themes in her art in different possible ways. The internalised backgrounds of rural culture in her memories have helped her to externalise the images into her artistic works. She thus moves in and out of the two distinct spheres of representing her views which is evident in the narrative and language of her art (Jain, 1999).

The next important figure to Madhvi Parekh is Nilima Sheikh who also comes under the category of modern woman artist in Indian art. She is a visual artist who was born in New Delhi, but based in Baroda in India. The themes dealt by Nilima Sheikh were displacement, longing, tradition, communal violence and also various ideas of female depiction in art. She works based on paper, painting, installations, theatre designs and also illustrations for children's books. She raised issues of gender and femininity through her artistic works. With time and experience in painting, she oriented her works towards depicting women centred pictures. She incorporated texts

along with narration in her art. Her artistic brilliance was based in blending the traditional methods in art with the contemporary styles. It led her to produce a unique touch in her artistic styles of creating portraits.

She did not confine herself to the world of paintings, but also widened her artistic talents to the medium of installations by 1990s. *Shamiana*, which was done in 1994 became widely noticed and appreciated for her monumentality and thematic narrative. In the 2000s, she diverted her concentration from female bodies and projected the trauma and oppression that was faced by women in violence and war. This shift was due to the trauma that she had faced during and after the Gujarat riots in 2002. She had to forcefully move from her home in Gujarat to Delhi due to the intensity of the riots during the time. Her depiction of women in her artistic works showed the world on how women had their viewpoints about the world around them.

Kavita Nayar, born in 1957, has proved her excellence in art in various mediums such as lithography, etching, serigraphy, oil painting and acrylic painting on canvas. Through her works, she tries to capture the emotions that relate to experience, individual and holistic production of senses. Her works have been exhibited at various international and national exhibitions and has been awarded various recognitions and mentions. Her works are in the collections of museums in different countries like Paris, Germany, Sweden, United States Poland and India. Being settled in Delhi, she has dedicated herself to be available for students in developing and encouraging their talents.

Kanchan Chander was also born in 1957, whose works are mostly autobiographical in nature. Through her art, she depicts the strong portrayal of the self. Her influencing figures in art are Frida Kahlo and Amrita Sher-Gil. The major focus of her artistic work is based in the representations of torsos and figures. Applying the different tones and layers of colour, she transforms the classical to the contemporary forms. She studies art in New Delhi, Berlin and Chile. The art of beliefs and mythical figures of power is a focus of her art. She had been awarded the Sahitya Kala Parishad Award in 1988.

Nalini Malani, who was born in Karachi before the independence and partition of India, moved to India following the partition. She highlights feminist issues and her works during the 1980s are mostly dealt with issues related to women in the country. Apart from the paintings, she also does creative and artistic videos, theatre and installation in various parts of the world. Her most focused issues are about race, class and gender which had been ignored in the social and cultural streams in India by a majority group of artists. Her experience as a refugee during the partition has made her inspire to deal with socially relevant issues and politically charged artworks. While, during the period of the domination of males in Indian art, the name of Nalini Malani was popular and represented the repressed and the subjugated class.

Nasreen Mohamedi was born in 1937 who had been working on line-based drawings. As she had been settled outside India, she had her way to international circles in which she got appreciations and criticism. Her works have been showcased at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Talwar Gallery in New Delhi, the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in New Delhi and documenta in Germany. She had been exposed to Islamic architecture, Sufism, and Zen Buddhism which provided new insights to her art representation based in aesthetic and spiritual terms.

Hema Upadhyay works in the field of photography and sculptural installations that explore personal identity, gender and nostalgia. Her works were highlighted during the beginning of the twenty first century, one among them being *The Nymph and the Adult*. She focuses to point thoughts to make the world rethink about their acts that cause harm to the existence of at least a few or the whole.

Bharti Kher is a popular name in the contemporary Indian art dealing with sculptures. Though she was born in London, she moved to New Delhi in the beginning of 1990s. She combines the use of painting, sculptures and installation in her artistic works. She gives prominence to the Indian tradition in her art. The use of Bindi in her art is an evident factor that highlights her

passion to the indigenous culture.

In the list of contemporary artists in Indian art, the name of Zarina Hashmi is popular. She creates abstract models with the use of papers and colours expressing her life experiences of exile from her homeland. She also uses woodcuts, drawings, and etchings in her work.

Shilpa Gupta has been trained in different artistic platforms such as videos, photography, performance art and installation. She tries to cover the themes of consumer culture, desire, nationalism, human rights, religion and security in her works. Her *100 Hand-drawn Maps of India (2007-2008)* depicted her interest in showcasing geo-political boundaries.

CHAPTER FOUR

Feminism and Feminist Aesthetics: Influence and Impact

Women's rights and freedom on the ground of equality of gender have been the most sensitive and crucial discussions around the world in the contemporary scenario of the possibilities of expressing the forcefully hidden emotions and feelings behind the unscrupulous discrimination. The insecurity and inequality faced by the female community, irrespective of lands and time, is unimaginable for a society that advocates for the rights and freedom of every individual. In the past centuries, even though there had been voices that spoke against the discriminated attitude and exploitation on the base of blindfold beliefs and rituals in various communities, those were heard nowhere beyond the restricted walls of their informal prisons where they had to spend their whole life similar to a slave. Attempts were scattered and weren't united to form strong grounds against the patriarchal subjugations. Women those who could speak against the widely accepted system were very rare and they were not well appreciated even by people of the same gender. The process of breaking the traditionally followed rules and baseless concepts weren't easy for the victims of patriarchy who could not even find a way out of their insecure family life.

The under-representation in the areas of social, political and economic spheres of life have gradually transformed to devaluation of the female gender leading it to discriminations and gender-based violence in the various sectors of social and familial life. These discriminations and exploitation are irrespective of the ethnicity, class, disability, geography or cultural and traditional differences. Gender equality is not only a matter of justice and rights, but also the issue that had been silently waved inside the heart of millions who were not satisfied with what they were facing for their whole lives. The ideology and activism which is prevalent in research, studies and action are a result of the long lived silence and failures of many victims of the history. The disrespect and unrightfully practiced laws that hinder the

expression of views, rights and freedom of women are continuously been attacked through several means of protests under the wings of feminism. Such bold and brave attempts have a history of only a few decades or to the extent, a span of one century. Though it had been started from the nineteenth century onwards, the presence of the movement is widespread in the twenty-first century when it received support and affiliation from different sectors of the society. The new technologies that help to connect people to share their experiences and views from far off distances have contributed highly to increase the reach of feminist ideas, thereby form groups that support the empowerment of women in various sectors.

Feminist perspectives in art has been through a short pathway that has the age of not more than five to six decades. Only a few women were into the field of art and they too were not completely into highlighting women-oriented works. Like other disciplines, the academics too had the domination of men and their ideological standpoints towards representing the world. The active participation of women in art began from the end of 1950s which gradually had participation and contributions from a very few women artists. The notion of women, art and feminism almost happened since the 1970s where some began to address themselves as feminists in the field of art. The increase in the number of women artists began through exhibitions that focused on women painting and art works. It was an inspiration for others to focus their talents into exploring new grounds in art that had a touch of feminist ideologies. Mostly, the paintings of such genre were an inspiration of what had been happening around them. Paintings that were a part of feminism was seen to be as a protest against the existing notions of patriarchy – both direct and indirect. While referring to history, it can be noticed that the most important issues of women in society that had to be addressed was highlighted by the women artists. Rather than confining to the limits of the canvas, many feminist artists were into protest movements and activism which helped them to create more meaningful space in society so as to find solutions to the problems. The paintings and other forms of art by women were a liberation

from the 'male-defined' world and pre-defined rules of art. This sense of liberation experienced by women artists was a reflection of the changing social conditions where the voice of women had a crucial role in designing and deciding the track of their existence. Though some had the privilege to get out of the box defined by the male society, in reality, the majority of women outside the limits of this freedom had no opportunity to express themselves.

The important question that arises while discussing feminism in art and women contributions is – “what is feminist art?”. Is it the holistic idea of rejecting whatever defined by the male society that dominated, controlled the field of art, and even influenced the existence of women in society? Is it considering the life and living conditions of women alone? Is it the protest at the existing notions developed by the patriarchal society on how a woman should live in a society and what she must hide from expressing to the society? There are even more questions that may arise in a person who thinks about feminist art. This was the same condition that was faced by the emerging feminist women artists of the 1960s and 70s. The society around them was unaware about the power of art that had the voice to speak against the atrocities, repressions and exploitations enforced on the women community. But the gradual development of such art through a handful of women artists in India began to produce fruitful changes in the concept of art that dealt by the women artists. Some of the conventional definitions about women and women body were overruled with the works produced by the women artists. The paintings and other art works of such women artists included the essence of their life, the life of people whom they knew, the social situations of women, the struggles in daily life, the dreams about freedom and rights and so on. It was an expression of what had been thought to have hidden within women and an exploration of the world through the female perspective.

During the 1970s, the major orientation of feminist art was to describe and demand. The women's point of view was highlighted in the works and it expressed their struggles, despair, anger, and unfortunate conditions of exploitation. These works of women artists informed the society about the

pathetic conditions of women making a way to open the forcefully closed eyes of the world. This track followed by the majority women artists began to take a shift in the 1980s that had a focus into the role of women in the political and spiritual spheres of life. The decade focused on women's power, unity, exchange of ideas beyond the limits of boundaries and race, introduction of newer feminist perspectives and theories, and the interest to highlight the struggles, obstacles and misrepresentations of feminist art (Roth, 1991, p. 102). The developments in the 1990s and 2000s led the pathway to its elaborate concepts and applications in connection with the societal issues on a wider perspective. This led to other platforms of spreading the idea of feminism – especially through magazines, illustrations and digital platforms.

The onset of feminist art in the 1960s and 70s has its base in the feminist movements that voiced for their equality and freedom. The space of feminist art does not confine to the limits of painting alone, by also includes conceptual art, body art, digital means, performance art and fashion exhibitions. The challenge that feminist art raised against the previous notions in society was equally the strength and way for opposition from the patriarchal society. The questions that were expressed through artistic works resulted in the gradually shifting viewpoints of society with a separation from the previously accepted ideology to the newly formed perspectives of equality, freedom and rights of women. The works of women artists that constantly resembled the existence, life and experiences of women had the power to impress the viewers to find meaning and relevance in it.

Though there still prevails the conventional concept of difference between men and women, the inequality that is injected on the female gender and the intolerance to freedom experienced and expressed by women as feminists, the contributions that feminist art has provided to reform the immoral and illogical thoughts defined and nurtured by the patriarchal system is immense. The heroism that had been shown by women in history to exercise liberty in society is either unaware to the present generation or has become memories that is less wished to be remembered. It is important

to recognise the efforts taken by the pioneers to establish the roots of feminism through sincere dedication and involvement in social issues that mattered women and their lives. There was time when women were marginalised as the other who were given no value than mere bodies. In the perception of society, it was imposed that women were “bodies subordinated to masculine power, control, desire and pleasure” (Faris, 2020, p. xiii). Along with movements and different waves of feminism having gradual developments in its objectives, the art that highlighted feminist consciousness has been a crucial factor in making awareness among women about the need to question the injustices against them. This result of social transformation is an effect of collective effort of women from various fields, race, class, sexual orientation and viewpoints. The idea of feminism cannot be limited to one single centralised voice.

Though it is considered as a product of the white, middle class and privileged community of women from the west, the spread and elaboration of the ideology has been shaped through a collective effort of women from different spheres of life. The evolution of feminism has close connections with art, literature, movements, activism, politics and cultural establishments. Unlike other theories, feminism has a wide range of approaches and methodologies which even engages with the historical, psychological, cultural and sociological perspectives. The third world experiences – especially that of the conditions caused by colonialism - had been rejected in the theories of feminism that were developed in the first and second waves nurtured by the ideas and actions of women from the Eurocentric perspectives.

“Feminism is readily identifiable in arguments about inequality or sex discrimination raised as a problem of numbers in surveys looking at proportions of male versus female artists, or types of artworks, differences between the amount of writing of male and female art critics, or numbers of works in exhibitions or published reviews. Most of this analysis has come from feminist perspectives arguing for social change towards equality by calculating the current “state” in numerical

terms as biased against women.”

(Deepwell, 2020, p. 4)

The concept of feminism originated from the strong notion that the society mistreats women through the denial of rights and freedom. To a particular period, the unawareness and restrictions for voicing the atrocities made it less important to consider women and women issues to the limelight. The definition that can be attributed to feminism changes constantly with the change in the dimensions and perspectives influenced by the political, social, cultural and economic existence of women. Hoffman(2001) argues that there exists both one feminism and many feminisms. Feminism can be identified through multiple forms as it has several types such as liberal, radical and socialist feminisms. All these versions of feminism unify with the commitment to empower women and their social existence (p. 193). The different waves that strongly had drastic influence on the notion of feminism is an example to the changing viewpoints and demands of feminism with regard to the situations of the particular period. Due to the difference in the social, economic, cultural and political contexts, feminism and feminist theory cannot be learned as a representation of one uniform viewpoint. It is a combination of various feminist perspectives that combine to provide a progressive standpoint to the goal of feminists.

It is believed and commonly accepted that a theory has to be ‘feminist’ only if there exists the notion that the situations in life differ for men and women. The opportunities for women aren’t the same for men who are more privileged to be the part of the dominant section of the gender division. It offers a subversion of the existing subordination of women dealing with the issues that arise in their life from the side of the female gender and their essential requirements (Jaggar, 1992). With the increase in sensitivity and awareness towards issues that limited the progress of women and narrowed their scope of existence, the concerns were addressed through various methods wherein art became a powerful tool of representing women and womanhood amidst the patriarchal exploitations. The term can be understood

as a collection of ideologies and movements from different corners of society that had the aim to define, defend and establish equality for women in the same form exercised by men in society. It holistically includes the requirement for the rights that had not been allowed for women by the male-dominated society. It also demanded protection from any form of torture, domestic violence, sexual harassment and bias based on gender. The term comes from the Latin word *femina* which means woman. It originally has the broad idea that confined to mentioning 'female qualities'. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the womanism that preceded feminism was replaced to include a more broad and challenging ideology. From the historical records, the term 'feminism' was first used in a book review published in *The Athenaeum* (1895) by Alice Rossi. From then, various activists, intellectuals and writers began to define, redefine and add their perspectives to develop the ideology. Though, in short, it advocates for women rights based on equality of gender, the meanings and interpretations change from time to time with suitable additions and deletions. Such interpretations and additions to define feminism have helped in changing the perspectives towards women who think beyond the restrictions made by society. Earlier, if a woman spoke against the system that tortures or restricts her rights, it was considered without much importance as it was seen as usual and acceptable for the public conscience of the society. But, the voice of women in the twenty-first century is backed up powerful tools of government machinery, programmes and schemes for empowerment. It is true that there are faults in the system that denies rights to women in the practical sense. But, the situations have been far better than the previous as there are collective approaches to give support to raise voice against the system that make them insecure.

Feminism's revolt against patriarchal hegemony has been accepted widely and this has resulted in the growth of feminism beyond the limits of activism or movement to the spheres of academia and lifestyle. The existence of a particular gender that is often considered to be as marginalised is evaluated with comparison to the other gender that co-exists with it. The gap

of freedom and equality that is felt between the two defines how powerful should be the activities of feminism to reach the ultimate goal of equality. The assumption that is created in women who support feminist ideology is that women are not treated equal to that of men and are seen as disadvantaged to be mere objects. The situation of getting marginalised by the dominant gender has been reduced due to the increasing number of women being aware about their freedom and rights. The superiority maintained by the male gender has always been addressed with dissatisfaction and threat to the peaceful existence of women. Similar to the women artists who highlight feminist concerns in their work, there is an increase in women getting into their interested fields to advocate feminist notions. There is a misunderstanding among people in society that feminism is all about the rejection of the male gender. But, ideologically it does not aim at opposing the male existence but is about mutual respect and understanding of genders for equal freedom, opportunities and rights.

There are certain common factors that bind feminists to admire the ideology and react against the injustices towards them. These notions on society and the understanding derived out of close observation and analysis of the changing situations has contributed to the development of feminism with a specific intention and orientation. Such orientation has helped the ideology to have wide coverage, followers and practitioners around the world. Irrespective of the academic field, these premises have been followed in the advocacy of the feminist ideology.

1. Feminists believe that patriarchy has enforced its dominating power over them to exercise oppression in terms of economic, political, social and psychological aspects. This has become a common notion irrespective of land, race, culture and society as the suffering of women could be linked to the same thread in one or the other way. Even though intersectionality is a question in certain situations that provide extra privilege to women in some sections, as a whole, the cornerstone of feminist ideology can be understood as originated from this particular

experience.

2. The Othering that is casted by the male-dominated society on women has been a question that led to feminist perspectives. As discussed earlier, the lack of value that is subjected to women has led to marginalisation, discrimination and subjugation of the gender. The imposition of patriarchal norms on women have made them feel valueless in society. The casting of women as other evolves out of the restrictions that is practiced on her by the male society which begins from household existence and denial of education to the lack of voting rights which was questioned in the initial stages of feminism. The life of women as marginalised and discriminated often tends to be unsatisfactory
3. The centralised system that highlighted the views of the Western world was considered to be rooted in patriarchal ideology that tried all possible ways to repress the voice of women from all corners of life. This notion extends to have disturbances in the feminist spheres where there were new thoughts or realisations of intersectional feminism. It began with the understanding that the feminism presented by the Western world did not consider the problems faced by the African women due to racial issues and women of the Third World countries due to colonial effects. There are different modes of discrimination that differ with privilege. It depends on a person's social and political situations. It has substantial effects put forth by the categorisation involved as a result of the difference in race, class and gender which often tend to overlap and stay as interdependent systems causing discrimination.
4. Equality, rights and freedom has been a common goal identified through feminist theory and practice. It has its importance in the individual level and from the perspective of a large community. As gender plays key role in every sphere of life, it is important to highlight the requirement for equal representation, opportunities and exercise of freedom. This premise has been widely misrepresented as the right to overrule male

existence in society. As culture defines and determines gender – masculine or feminine, a redefining process on the conventional beliefs that women are mere bodies to live under the order and control of men requires a change. It is this wrong perception that is maintained by society that leads to unjustifiable tortures, exploitations and oppression over the female gender. (Tyson, 2006, p. 42).

It is often seen that women itself are hinderance for the practice of feminism. It occurs mainly because of the social and cultural peculiarities that have injected the notion of subjugation and repression of women as pre-defined and unchangeable characteristic. Some believe that women always as the liability to behave in the way men decide and wish them to be. This creation of ideological standpoint is the result of long-term subjugation under the influence of patriarchy. They do not prefer a balanced society where there exists equal rights and freedom for both the genders. The lifestyle and culture followed by such people has tuned them to be voiceless against any form of power-practice by the male society. In the case of feminist art that portraits the problems and issues of women, the opposing voices having inclination towards patriarchal ideology also raises from these women. Certain privileges enjoyed by higher class societies often consider it as not affecting them, for which they ignore activisms that openly express the protest against the male domination. In such circumstances, most of the patriarchal ideologies aren't imposed on women through force. Women consider themselves as subject and become object of the victimisation process of the patriarchal ideology. This is attained through establishing control over women's psyche where it becomes a hectic process to unlearn and oppose such imprinted beliefs and practices made to be followed by the influence of society and culture. It is similar to the act of hegemony where women become the unseen enemy of their own gender.

In the patriarchal sense, women are taught to see the world through the eyes of male. It thus establishes the male needs beliefs and desires without the objection from the female gender. This objection of the female gender to

see through the patriarchal sense is subjugated through exploitation and oppression. The strategies exercised by the male society to control the actions and behaviour of the female gender leads to unharmonious situations and conflicts with the feminist ideology of acquiring freedom and rights. This resembles the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed where the oppressive nature of women makes her learn her identity through the subjectivity of the men which thereafter turns out to be an object of men's desire (Devereaux, 1990, p. 340).

Contrary to this, there are men who support feminism and wish them to enjoy equality and freedom. The common notion that there are only women who support feminism is countered with the active involvement of men in activism and protests for women rights. The trend of feminism that had been high towards the end of the second half of twentieth century challenged the patriarchal-father domination in society. The roots of feminism can also be traced with the inspiration from the revolt against the Bourgeois by the ideology of Marxism introduced by Karl Marx. He was concerned about the struggling situations of proletariats in the same way feminists are concerned about the unfortunate conditions of struggle against the patriarchal dominance.

Lillian Robinson traces for the turning point of the feminist theory by adding her point that

I am not terribly interested in whether feminism becomes a respectable part of academic criticism; I am very much concerned that feminist critics become a useful part of the women's movement ... In our struggle for liberation, Marx's note about philosophers may apply to critics as well: that up to now they have only interpreted the world and the real point is to change it.

(Robinson, 1971, p. 889)

The theoretical notions of feminism were based on the need to provide

proper recognition and consideration to the female gender which otherwise would be repressed under the dominance of male patriarchy. Andrea Dworkin (1976) made an opinion that the major goal of feminism is to reject and bring conclusion to the existing male domination over the female gender. The requirement to act against the social structures and cultures that considered and defined women as worthless and invisible victims were highlighted in the perception about feminism (p. 61-62).

This viewpoint of attributing women oppression to the capitalist system and oppression of the working class have given rise to the Marxist and Socialist feminism. The proponents of this feminism believed that the oppression from the male society on the female gender can only be solved with the overthrow of the capitalist system. The research that have conducted in this aspect have given the idea that social feminism developed as a result of the meeting of both Marxist views and radical feminism. This interconnectivity of patriarchy and capitalism was opposed by the socialist feminists of the 1960s and 70s. It is from this focus that the material feminism evolved that highlighted the involvement of capitalism and patriarchy as the central forces of women's oppression. It aimed at a complete social change rather than focusing on the transformation that has to happen in the capitalist system. Material feminists argue that conditions of materialisation leads to the social production of gender constructs and also includes women to participate in these productions (Margaret, 1994).

Women who suffer from the dominance of men are considered to be caged under the gender construct of the patriarchal society. In the words of Simone de Beauvoir (1989), "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being" (p. 8). She makes it clear that women are always humans first and then comes the identity of gender. Stereotypes on the concept of gender in societies often turn out to be disturbing when newer notions on the existence of women are explored through education and involvement in programmes that boost women empowerment through feminist ideology. Movements and protests

get support through art and other means of expressing thoughts. In such situation, the prevailing stereotypes of women that they are unworthy, passive, weak, burden to the family etc. are challenged to provide economic, social, cultural and psychological independence and support. This emancipation and empowerment that is aimed to enhance the social situations of women – to exist as humans of value, pride and self- esteem – is often supported by the women artists through representation of both the struggling and courageous characteristic of women.

Feminist theory and practice includes ideas that frustrate the existing patriarchal ideologies. It often tends to get aggressive towards the ideological standpoints of feminism that is expressed through the different forms of representation. The moral aspect of human life is put under question in such situations of oppression conducted by patriarchy over the women who protest against the injustices. It continues to have its effort and struggle in achieving justice and equality for women and thus the feminist theory has to be seen as proposals for social change (Nussbaum, 1999).

Feminism comes under the conflict theory that varies from the patriarchal norms and the conventional gender concepts. The mainstream thinking of society that only considered the opinion of men is questioned to get involved into the mainstream areas of contribution from the feminist perspective. The contemporary issues in society that has immense influence in deciding the existence of women are dealt in feminist theory where mostly the intersectionality of women's experiences become the topic of discussion. The origins of feminism can be traced in the 1830s in connection with the abolitionist movement and the term as noted earlier came into use in the 1890s in English. The development of the feminist ideology was contributed from different spheres and sections all over the world. During the 1960s, the feminist notions became more highlighted in society when there were more number of divorce cases due to domestic violence, marital rapes and uncomfortable living situations. The changes came as a result of the involvement of education that led to higher level employment that made

women feel self-sufficient in living their life without depending on the male counterpart. This changes in society gradually transformed women to look outside the walls of their home to see a world that was restricted for them by the patriarchal society. While tracing the background of the evolution of feminist movement, it can be understood that the age of enlightenment had a pioneer role in kickstarting the ever first thoughts of egalitarian concept in society where it was recommended to include the participation of the female gender. The liberalist and reformist ideas shared by enlightenment period was also extended to raise the status of women from that of the marginalised and discriminated. The modern concepts of feminism was contributed through *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) written by Mary Wollstonecraft. The importance of this book that had wide and violent response in society cannot be rejected while discussing feminism and evolution of feminist ideology. The denial of equal status to women that was enjoyed by men was highlighted in the book which itself was inspired from her family. The struggles and tortures experienced by her mother and sister had influenced her to write the book which was her protest against the institution that rejected humane values to the female gender. Though she had argued for equality in life for the female gender, she was not a modern feminist who considered that both the genders were equal. Wollstonecraft's arguments in the book was mainly focused on rational education, feminism, sensibility, republicanism and class. It is true that the word feminism was into usage after the publication of the book. But, as the ideas that was shared in the book had the sparks of feminism, this can be considered under the same category. Though many of the ideas shared by Wollstonecraft seems to feel not revolutionary to the modern feminism, the questions and arguments raised by her through the book in her period of total exclusion and rejection of the female gender makes it valuable and a suitable beginning text that reacted against the sexual double standards and denial of formal education to women. Another important work of the period that supported female views was *The Subjection of Women* (1869) written by John Stuart Mill which also had great controversial impact in the patriarchal society. He rejected the notion that women are not good at some

things than men with the argument that the society have never let them try anything of their own to come to such conclusions. He had the view that formal education and emancipation of women would also benefit men in many ways due to enhancement of intellectual thinking. He had the idea of the greater happiness for everyone through the enactment of equality and equal rights for education and voting.

These books and contributions of the writers can be included in the first wave of feminism that was strong during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century mainly in the United States and United Kingdom. It aimed at providing political equality, equal contract, property rights and particularly the right of women's suffrage. They required representation in society and was in need for women's sexual, reproductive and economic rights. They believed that the women suffrage would bring drastic changes in the existing situation of women in society where they will be able to raise voice in the formal spaces of government to attain the rights that are denied by the male society. Patriarchy was considered and understood from the point of the first wave feminism as non-rational, non-profitable and illegitimate. The protest against patriarchy of the time was mainly due to the attitude of marginalising women through their domination that rejected equal status and humane behaviour. The problem of not being recognised as valuable in society caused the movements to get stronger to make themselves visible as against the social and cultural emblem of deficiency provided to them. These arguments and requirements of the first wave resulted in the claim to treat women and men as equal and also to acknowledge the contributions and competency of women. This gave rise to the concepts of 'equity feminism' that aimed at no distinction between the two genders (Kroløkke and Sørensen, 2012, p. 5-6).

Though majority of the first wave feminism was a contribution of the middle class and white women, the involvement of racial issues that invoked the abolitionist movement also had substantial contributions in the evolution of feminist ideology. The end of slavery through abolitionist movement was considered as an entry into the thoughts of opposing the culture that

considered women as wife having the status of only a household slave under the mastery of patriarchy. This analogy between the situations of slavery and marriage gave rise to the discussions regarding the oppression through similar acts of slavery that was suffered by women in their households. The anti-slavery campaigns of the time initiated by women – especially the Black activists was powerful in highlighting the unnoticed repression experienced by women.

The formation of feminism during the first wave was termed to be as liberal feminism that originated at the time when the economic and social position of the women in Europe was in gradual decline. In the beginning of liberal feminism, one would notice the contribution of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* which was discussed earlier. It had the structural mainstream root and was from the recognition that women required personhood. It had the same notions of the bourgeois feminism that asserted equality through political and legal reform. The idea of individualist feminism among the activists were high during the period that wanted to show the ability of women to maintain their equality and thus transform the society. The theory of liberal feminism strongly believes that gender inequality is the product of the reduced opportunity of women to access civil rights and social resources. This realisation made them rethink to give prominence to the protests for opportunities to get formal education and employment (Giddens, 2001, p. 692). The questions against the intellectuality and physical capability of women were considered as the forms of discrimination that the patriarchal society exerts on the female gender to exclude them from the mainstream opportunities. In the viewpoint of the liberal feminists, there are certain customary and legal constraints that hinder women's successful entrance to the public world (Rosemarie, 1992). This is considered to be rooted in the female subordination that is developed by the male society or as forms of hegemony.

The period that extended till the early second half of the twentieth century also witnessed the thoughts shared by Virginia Woolf in her *A Room*

of One's Own (1929). It was a seminal work from the author who defined the unsatisfactory existence of women within the four walls of a room. She argued that a woman requires her own space and financial backups to express herself to the world through her contributions. The book projects the theme of women's access to education advocated by Woolf where she opines that women face lack of opportunity that makes them incompetent in society. Her works and viewpoints can be seen as metaphors to explore the societal injustices towards women and their lack of free expression due to the distinct hinderances from society that makes them feel untalented and useless. In her words, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf, 1935, p. 5). The first wave had its influence until the 1920s.

The second wave feminism is marked from the early 1960s to the 1980s. It was actually a continuation of the previous wave of feminism that argued for social rights and suffrage. It gets distinguished from the first wave due to the difference in the goal that is highlighted by the activists and proponents. While the first wave had concentrated on rights and suffrage, the second wave's concern was on issues that hindered the equality of women with that of men and also the discriminations that the female gender had to suffer from various spheres of life as part of the attitudes of the male society that considered women as mere objects. This shift in the ideology was out of the realisation that the rights for voting would never make them equal to the male gender. They realised that it was education, opportunities and employment that makes women empowered to speak for their rights. Women's oppression and notions on contemporary feminism was discussed in detail by Simon de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* (1949). The contribution of Beauvoir through this book cannot be excluded when discussing about the second wave feminism as this exists to be a seminal text even today as an ideological pioneer to feminism. The title of the book itself denotes that women were considered as the second gender when compared to that of the male. She discusses various issues of oppression, the causes in society and family atmosphere that leads to such subjugations and the importance to get out of

the myths and conventionalities of such oppressed living. Same as that of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Betty Friedan's text *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) also had substantial influence in framing the thoughts and track of feminism in the second wave. She criticised the mindset of the society that women are only useful and can only find satisfaction through childrearing and homemaking. The movements of the time conducted by women had strong influence of this criticism raised by Friedan. In a survey that she conducted for the book, it was revealed that the women who had a job in addition to that of the work at home was seen to be more satisfied than the women who were confined to the walls of their home. Though they had ambitions, dreams and wishes to be, she had the view that women are forced to find their identity through the male gender around her including her husband and children. This results in the self-oppression and loss of identity for women. The criticism that she raised through the book also included the stereotyping provided by advertising industry and education system that inject the idea that women are supposed to do the household works and menial tasks. The identity and individuality of women is thus manipulated from different corners of society

The second wave of feminism was much broader than the first wave in its impact and ideological goals to be achieved. Women who were forced to confine to their home looking after their children and becoming slaves to husbands were empowered through the second wave of feminism. Issues related to rape, domestic violence, workplace problems and reproductive rights were highlighted in the movement to form popular culture through feminist films, writings, art and music. Different from that of the first wave feminism, the second wave feminism went to the level of theoretical discussions on women's oppression, the gender status of women and about various institutions in the system that controls the behaviour and existence of women. There were problems associated with workplace discrimination and othering which too had to be addressed through the second wave of feminism. The onset of the wave is considered to be in 1963 with the report on the inequality in workplaces for women presented by the Committee on the Status

of Women (CSW). One of the pioneer in feminist thinking, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt had chaired the committee till her death and some of the crucial findings on the conditions of women in their work place was made public by the committee. The intention of the committee was to focus on reforming legal barriers to make the track suitable for women participation and create new local reforms in the particular matter. It was part of the Women's Liberation Movement that began to empower women. It was because of this agenda of the feminist practitioners that madeway to local campaigns as part of the feminist activism. Even though there were voices against the discrimination, justice was far away from women who fought for their rights and freedom. Direct and indirect marginalisation continued in the different sectors where women managed to find their job. It was mainly connected with the pay scale mismatches, harassments, humiliations and lack of workplace protection.

Bell Hook's *Ain't I A Woman? Black Woman and Feminism* (1981) and Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989) marked the introduction of identity second wave feminism that included the criticism raised by Black feminists, working class and lesbian feminists. It is said that,

The need to address the differences among women simultaneously promoted the theory of different standpoints and the divergences between them. As a consequence, difference feminism gradually grew into what is now often referred to as 'identity politics'.... Identity politics, in turn, inspired a new interest in women's lives and voices, which was at once more empirical and historical, and more mythical and spiritual.

(Kroløkke and Sørensen, 2012, p. 12-13)

While gender discrimination was the major cause for the White feminists to get excluded from the mainstream, the Black women who mostly represented Africa and African American women had much more challenges related to racism and sexism. It was raised by Bell Hooks, Mary Ann

Weathers, Alice Walker, Michele Wallace and Bettina Aptheker. Though feminism was universally followed by women who termed themselves as feminists, the Black women had problems to consider the White women as feminists solely because they believed that White women are same as the White men with the mindset of the oppressor. This same has been the conflict within feminism that existed with the regional, racial and cultural differences. Toni Cade Bambara in her book *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970) raises this concern having the opinion that the White feminists are incapable of addressing the concerns of women from different races and the third world countries. There were parallel writings from the Latin American, Asian, African and Native American members who felt as excluded from the feminism propagated by the middle-class women based on their own experiences. The major criticism that had for second wave feminism was about its failure to acknowledge the struggles of the poor as well as women of colour. It is at this point where Black feminism and Africana Womanism got popularity. It contrasted the White women's experiences and was more influenced by their social, cultural, economic and political circumstances. The most important works during the second wave also includes Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975), Catherine A. MacKinnon's *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination* (1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979).

While discussing feminism and associated movements, it is very important to discuss Black feminism because it was a major diversion from the mainstream feminist ideologies proposed by the White women with Eurocentric perspectives. Tracing back to the formation of the concept of Black feminism, it can be understood that slavery that was popular in the United States was the seedbed of the specificity behind Black feminism. It was out of the difference between the black women and other women who were outside the Black or African Diaspora. As discussed earlier, Black feminism evolved out of the realisation that feminism during the second wave

did not consider the layers of oppression that was suffered by women from African countries and the African Americans. The core idea of Black feminism resides in the perception that sexism, oppression caused by class, gender identity and racism are interlinked with each other. The relationship between these factors were termed to as intersectionality which was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality got its prominent space in the 1980s. It was connected to Black feminism as it gave insights to aggravated forms of inequality through intersecting identities such as Black and being female. In the perspective of Heidi Hein stated in “Refining Feminist Theory: Lessons From Aesthetics” she says,

Feminist theorists have been struggling with similar dilemmas of diversity and singularity. Lately come to the discovery of plurality and difference among themselves and to an appreciation of its significance, many feminists now repudiate as a relic of an ideology of oppression the belief in a single feminine nature or essence that is transcendent of class, race, history, or culture.

(Hein, 1993, p. 5)

The second and third waves of feminism gave rise to radical feminism which existed as a breeding ground for many novel ideas related to feminism. It was considered as an extremist form of feminism which was undesirable for many. It was termed as radical as it evolved from the civil rights and peace movements during the period 1967-1968. Opposing views against the oppression of women that was focused through the second wave was considered as the most fundamental form that gathered feminist perspective irrespective of any differences. It aimed for a restructuring of society that was under the male supremacy. The challenge against the social norms and conventional ideas also included opposing views on sexual objectification, rape culture and violence against women. It proclaimed the belief that the ultimate aim of feminist revolution to have no genital differences between male and female in the cultural context (Firestone, 1970, p. 11). Works such as Denise Thompson’s *Radical Feminism Today* (2001), Kate Millet’s *Sexual*

Politics (1970) and Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) were influential in developing radical feminism.

In the perspective of the radical feminists, it is the body of a woman that opens the door for her own oppression. The deprivation of a person is focused on the power of controlling their body. Therefore, it was considered and largely advocated that women have to free themselves from this situation and should understand their own sexuality. The stereotypical attitude of the patriarchal society that the main role of women and the life is to become wives and mothers was rejected by the radical feminists believing that women invite oppression when they are confined to the limits of their gender that is defined by the male society. Adrienne Rich, a radical feminist poet has the opinion that motherhood should not exist as a burden for women that limits the freedom and horizons in life. She suggested that women have to reject such narrow spaces in life to free themselves from the confinement set by the patriarchal society. It becomes true to consider that sexuality is the major point of the expression of male power where the suppression of women rooted in the institution of heterosexuality where gender plays a major role as constructs of male domination (Mackinnon, 1983, p. 570).

Another important social change that took place during the second wave of feminism was the use of birth control. The baby boom that occurred after the end of the Second World War was controlled by the activities such as creating panels and conducting workshops for women about birth control, sexual diseases and the safe methods of abortion. This movement can be related as a counter to what the patriarchy had conceived about the women – considering them as machines to give birth. Also, this encouraged the awareness on sexual harassments and domestic violence against women. To an extent, the National Organization for Women (NOW), which was established in 1966 was a supporting factor for the second wave of feminism, especially from the political perspective. The organization pressurised the US government for many amendments in the legal framework to make it accessible and supportive to women. To mention another important

personality in the second wave of feminism is Gloria Steinem who gained attention for highlighting the issues of sexism and low wage. Towards the end of 1980s, the second wave of feminism began to have its conclusive end. Feminism grew during the second wave but also went divided into many groups that projected and valued their interests. Also, the continuous attack from men and women against the requirements for drastic change in the conventional matters made it challenging to follow a smooth track.

Feminist artists share a political sense of the historic social subordination of women and an awareness of how art practices have perpetuated that subordination—which is why the history of aesthetics illuminates their work. The more politically-minded artists, especially those who participated in the feminist movement of the 1970s, often turned their art to the goals of freeing women from the oppressions of male-dominated culture.

(Korsmeyer,
2021)

The third wave feminism began in the United States during the early 1990s and continued to last till the 2010s. The troubles that the second wave had faced due to diverse views on feminism was brought to track during the third wave of feminism. It was much broader in its perception about what has to be feminism and who has to be a feminist. Emergence of newer theories enhanced the academic interest towards linking disciplines and related subjects to the ideology of feminism. The practitioners of third wave feminism were those who were born during the 1960s and 70s. It had its own benefits as the perception was progressive in many ways without having to break in the middle way of reformations. The advantage that the third wave of feminism had in comparison with the previous waves of feminism was the massive expansion of opportunities and information revolution that happened towards the end of the twentieth century and the developments it has since the beginning of the twenty first century. The most significant issues that had to be handled by the third wave feminist were related to violence against women,

reproductive rights, sexual harassments through the use of derogatory terms, sexual liberation from the constructs of patriarchy and issues related to race, transgender rights, third gender and social class. When there were positive outcomes due to the protests for rights and freedom by the second wave feminists, the third wave had to handle the consequences that it brought. Therefore, feminists of the time wanted to alter the social mentality regarding sexuality and also to explore women's feelings about the same. The contributions of the Third Wave Foundation founded by Rebecca Walker in 1997 were appreciable. It supported individuals and groups that worked for the establishment of gender, economic, racial and social justice. It was the period of the postmodernist movement. The third wave feminists could redefine the ideas of womanhood, sexuality, gender, beauty, femininity and related concepts through the point of view of feminism. The notion of seeing through the male eyes was redefined and restructured through such an attempt. There were several such attempts expressed through literature, art, academics and intellectual contributions from the side of the feminists to counter the ideological base established by the male patriarchy. The consciousness about the formation of gender identity in society led to the process of sexual liberation.

In the view of Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards said in *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (2000), there occurs changes in the concept of feminism with every generation. This can be in the individual perspective too where one would not completely agree with all the viewpoints propagated by feminism. It changes with many factors, of which the contribution of time and space are more important and highly influential. They say,

The fact that feminism is no longer limited to arenas where we expect to see it ... We're not doing feminism the same way that the seventies feminists did it; being liberated doesn't mean copying what came before but finding one's own way—a way that is genuine to one's own generation.

(Baumgardner and Richards, 2000, p. 77)

This change can be seen in the work of Eve Ensler's play *The Vagina Monologues* – which explores the feelings of women about sexuality. This context of the play also includes vagina-centred topics that are mostly into birth, orgasm and rape. It is from this point the subversion of the Guerrilla Girls is significant. Guerrilla Girls is a group of women artists who fight against the discrimination towards female artists and expose the female stereotypes.

Apart from the previously discussed first and second waves of feminism, the thirdwave is considered to be as more inclusive in nature due to the importance of intersectionality that makes it more flexible against the stereotype images of women such as weak, virginal and passive. They tried to redefine those notions accepting the different layers of discrimination affected to women from different races, region, culture and social conditions. The major writings of the period included topics from different spheres of society. Among them, the most popular are Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Naomi Woolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1991), Kimberlé Crenshaw's *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* (1991), Kathleen Hanna's *The Riot GRRRL Manifesto* (1991), Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991), and Bell Hook's *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000).

Judith Butler says about his book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) from the context of it's actual aim and the reception that,

It was meant to be a critique of heterosexual assumptions within feminism, but it turned out to be more about gender categories. Or instance, what it means to be a woman does not remain the same from decade to decade. The category of woman can and does change, and we need it to be that way. Politically, securing gender freedoms for women

requires that we rethink the category of “women” to include those new possibilities. The historical meaning of gender can change as its norms are re-enacted, refused or recreated.

(Gleeson, 2021)

The fourth wave of feminism is considered to have begun from 2012 concentrating on the issues of sexual harassment, marital rape and rape culture, and body shaming. It also protests against the inflammatory remarks about women that even extend to death and rape threats. Unlike the other waves of feminism, the fourth wave is much stronger and popular due to the involvement of internet connectivity. The presence of social media and its communication through various means of spreading the ideology beyond borders has enabled greater visibility to the fourth wave feminism. #MeToo movements around the world where women expressed themselves and openly said about the sexual harassments and rape that they had to suffer from men was powerful that boosted the presence and activities of the fourth wave of feminism. This movement had spread around the world even to the regional spaces through the wide space of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs. The hashtag culture that is prevalent today has been helpful in making it easily visible to a large group of people. Many and majority of such sharing of experiences in social media were discussed, debated and it led to further legal proceedings. It was an open space for anyone from anywhere the world to openly express their views, struggles and experiences of being the victim of assaults. Thus, social media activism has encouraged the progress and development of feminism. This notion and popularity that is available for the fourth wave feminism has made to think and dream for greater gender equality through opposing the male viewpoints on gender norms and beliefs. It includes the protests for equal opportunities and equal pay for equal work.

Feminism and feminist movements that took place for more than two centuries has its importance solely because nothing else could present the views, struggles and protests of women who suffered inequality, oppression and repression under the direct and indirect patriarchal norms exhibited by the

male society. It wasn't discovered and pointed out as a major problem because of the lack of realisation that the act of suppression conducted by the male society on the female gender was inhumane and unjustifiable. As it was unconventional to protest against the existing norms created by the male society and followed by majority women, the evolution of feminism through distinct and separated voices was challenging and threatful. In the cases of the first and the second wave feminism, they had less means to communicate each other beyond the limits of the borders. Unlike today, the activities of feminists did not receive much popularity and support from the general public. Although there were oppression, harassments and violence against women in the households and workplaces, it was believed that there would not be any change in the condition. The vulnerability of the female gender was exploited by the patriarchal society through discrimination, marginalisation and providing no social status equal to that of men. Patriarchy forces women and genders to rely on them by making them feel they are vulnerable, weak and powerless. The standards for the female gender were usually designed and designated by the male society – from that of what she should wear to what she should learn and react.

Feminism has evolved to the level of producing pseudo-feminist notions in society where some present the ideology of feminism as a tool to attack the existence of men. Feminism is sometimes interpreted according to the wishes and convenience of people – mostly in the subjective terms. When people began to reinterpret feminism as that rejects the whole of male community, it diverted from the initial and standardised format of achieving equality. As far as equality is not attained in a complete sense from all sections and sectors of life, the importance of feminism would exist in society.

The feminist art began as a movement that had its origin in its 1960s which also was the peak time of various deconstructive and postmodern movements that gave strength to protests, struggles and riots. The male dominated perspective in art was a challenge to the feminist art proponents to alter its form and intervene in the act of producing women-oriented works

that portrayed the struggles, tensions and discrimination that is suffered by the female community in the field of art and also beyond it. The previously established notions of patriarchy were extensively advocated through art and other forms which made the entry of women difficult to the field. The major agenda of the feminists in the field of art of 1960s was to get their space among the well reserved dominant male section. Moreover, the cultural attitudes and stereotypes regarding women, women rights and existence were also to be addressed to resolve the misrepresentations about the female identity and their role in society. It was quite believed that women had no special role other than to be housewives and look after the children of men. It was from that particular position, the art and creativity in women began to prosper amidst all the extreme oppositions from society.

Assumptions about women's weakness and passivity; her sexual availability for men's needs; her defining domestic and nurturing function; her identity with the realm of nature; her existence as object rather than creator of art; the patent ridiculousness of her attempts to insert herself actively into the realm of history by means of work or engagement in political struggle—all of these notions, themselves premised on an even more general, more all-pervasive certainty about gender difference itself—all of these notions were shared, if not uncontestedly, to a greater or lesser degree by most people of our period, and as such constitute an ongoing subtext underlying almost all individual images involving women.

(Nochlin, 1988, p. 2)

Women's perspective in art is the highlight of what the feminist artists has to communicate between the canvas and the viewer. Unlike the past, the inclusion of women and the portrayal of the existence of women in society was a major agenda and idea behind feminist art. It is because art is not considered only from the angle of its aesthetic aspect, but also is looked through the perspective of its impact in society. The political grounds, cultural

diversity, social significance and economic existence of women makes it clear that women were not in a stage that invited recognition and appraisal for her hard works and efforts.

Before the onset of feminism, it cannot be said that women enjoyed an elevation in their status before the society in which they lived. As discussed above, they could not express their voice, enjoy their freedom and experience what men could achieve from the social sphere. This discrimination made history to forget the involvement of many women who might have been talented and had the potential to contribute much to society. Due to this discrimination that had been continued, the art societies were mostly men's clubs that was not adaptable for the female gender. The visibility, promotions and engaging capacity of women artists were restricted by the society itself. Therefore, in most of the countries that pioneered in feminist art, they had separate venues that often worked against the traditional patriarchal formats.

The importance of the feminist idea in art had to be conveyed to the viewers for gradually changing the existing perceptions and misperceptions about the identity, role and potentiality of women artists. There were often protests from the side of the feminists and feminist artists who had strongly opposed the dominance of patriarchy. If we consider the female gender as a whole, though there were differences among them, the feminist movements at specific regions and sections of society had been trying to take their own grounds from the onset of 1960s. Though there had been several waves in feminism and it also reflected many other disciplines and fields, the art had witnessed a major change from the 1960s which can be considered as a stage of the second wave feminism. The definition and meaning of feminism were tried to be established through the efforts of women artists. It had a political aspect and also a personal sphere in highlighting the meanings of feminist art. As discussed before, it wasn't mere aesthetic identity of the paintings that were tried to be analysed in such creative artistic works. It had much more that wanted the world to recognise through the medium of art. Only the privileged class among the women could enter to the mainstreams of art in India and

abroad. During the time that did not give much opportunity or can be said as the onset of a change, the entry of women from the lower sectors of life was much difficult.

Linda Nochlin criticised the view of society in considering feminism as only a resistance. She added that women artists are accused for deconstructing the existing notions of society so as to bring their versions and identity. She clearly states the significance of feminism and the challenging role it has to proceed with the help of art by writing.

All of this is to the good: feminist art history is there to make trouble, to call into question, to ruffle feathers in the patriarchal dovecotes. It should not be mistaken for just another variant of or supplement to mainstream art history. At its strongest, a feminist art history is a transgressive and anti-establishment practice, meant to call many of the major precepts of the discipline into question.

(Nochlin, 1988p. xii)

Inequality was still a major concern of the women artists against which they protested using art and movements. If the first wave had its protests for equal voting rights, the change in the area of art was initiated in the 1960s. Like every movement would inspire the participants and associated members to bring out new ideas, the feminist movements that had close relation with the field of art made noticing works from their side. Earlier, though they had been to art works, the works of women artists who supported feminist art did not concentrate more on the conditions that women had suffered and continued to suffer under the patriarchal overdominance on their freedom and rights. But the onset of feminist movements that also had substantiating effect on the artists made them deviate from the normal tone of art that they had been conducting. The lack of female content in their works prior to the feminist movements can be regarded as their unawareness about the importance and relevance of considering the themes related to women. They did not highlight it till then because it was not considered to be a major issue from the perspective of the society. When there were protests and movements, the

identity of women had to have a representation through various means in which art carried out a major role. The tendency of representing female body as a focus of desire had existed which was supported for the pleasure and men in the name of aesthetic sense. The most important change that took place as a result of the movements was that women artists who depicted women as subjects of art in their works considered to provide a much higher notion of protest, struggle and identity to it. The nudity of women in the works of feminist artists made it clear that the body of women is not an object that has to be considered as for the pleasure of men, rather the paintings and sculptures instructed them that such artistic works have an essence in them which highlights the identity of women. Male gaze, which was considered to as the tool of patriarchy, was directly criticised through various artistic works. The peculiarity of those works was that it did not refrain from exposing the true identity of the female body, rather it used them as a tool against the male gaze as a strong criticism and warning.

Male gaze was one among the major concepts that was developed at the time from Laura Mulvey. Though it was mistakenly understood as the way of perception practices of individuals, it actually focused on highlighting and criticizing the portrayal of women as mere passive objects for the sexual pleasure and desire of men. The concept originated in the work of John Berger named *Ways of Seeing* (1972) which later was conceived by the feminists including the film critic Laura Mulvey. While analysing some of the works of the selected artists in this research, there is a major space for the criticism that they have made against the male gaze in society. The concept and its importance still has its importance in society due to the unending exercise of power that is enjoyed by the patriarchal society to consider female body as submissive, weak and sensual. For the development of such a significant concept, the involvement of Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories were crucial. The pleasure aspect in such male gaze was explained through the former theories. Here, the subject of gaze becomes the women and the action is conducted by male which turns out to be the

traditional objectification. An idealised representation of identity is missing in such contexts where women are perceived as different from their true identity. It is interesting to note the concept of the gaze in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) published by Jean-Paul Sartre. He says that the process gives rise to a subjective power difference in which both the gazer and the gazed experiences it wherein the person being gazed is considered only as an object rather than a human being (Stack and Plant, 1982, p. 359).

Gendering and de-gendering was another important challenge faced by the women artists who highlighted the significance of feminist art. The dominant male art world was much established with the strong base of centuries in which the role of women was little. The essence of patriarchy itself was grounded in the dominant gender ideology that differentiated male and female believing that men and women are unequal existences having dichotomous status. It also reflected in the social roles where the male gender was considered to have more status than the female gender thinking that they could perform the duties well than women. This notion that was projected and advocated till the onsets of feminism was based on the hypocrisy which did not provide noticeable role to women in the mainstreams of society. The power, money, positions, privilege and recognitions that encouraged one's self-confidence were deviated to only the male gender which created a subconscious belief that the male gender is dominant and comparatively efficient than the female gender.

Though there were differences in the approaches and objectives of several feminist movements during different periods, the most common factor that tied them together was the central focus to gender and gender equity. The social inequalities that prevailed in society, the struggles due to it, and the challenges in opposing the dominance of men over women were also closely related to the gender relations which were viewed as problematic. Though there have been several transformations that has occurred to feminism with the change in time and spatial differences, gender issues have always been the base.

Feminists believe that gender, like social class, race or religion, is a significant social cleavage. Indeed, radical feminists argue that gender is the deepest and most politically important of social divisions. Feminists have therefore advanced a theory of 'sexual politics'. They also refer to 'sexism' as a form of oppression, drawing a conscious parallel with racism or racial oppression.

(Heywood, 2017, Ch. 8)

This criticism was raised when progressive ideas pointed at the lack of neutrality in the mainstream ideology. It was the birth of a new identity for women that was framed by women. As discussed earlier, the body which was earlier seen as a pleasure object for the male gaze, became a tool against the gender discriminations, inequalities and ideologies that hindered free expression of the female identity.

The feminist art of the 1970s also had to concentrate on the issue of gender equality aiming a state of equilibrium with the male gender which had themselves proclaimed as the hierarchically dominant gender. A major opposition to such an ideology of patriarchy was Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1979). It aimed to produce female empowerment by representing an equilateral triangle. The importance of the work was that it broke the idea of the subjugated identity of women in society by depicting equal number of plates to specific women in history. This decade began to provide slight differences in the situations of women. The legalization of abortion, workforce entry, legalization of birth control, protests against equal pay and rights etc. happened during the period which was also continued to its elaborated and extended forms in the next decades.

The decorative art which was common among women during the 1960s and 70s came to accept a change with the presence of women as nude subjects in the artistic works of women who believed in the feminist perspectives in art. Traditionally, the portrait of a man who draws the nude body of a woman was considered as an elite piece of art as it was believed to be a great achievement. Unlike men, women were not allowed to invite models who expose their nudity to them for the purpose of creating paintings or sculptures out of their privilege. Women artists were not allowed to view the nude of another person and it resulted in concentrating only on landscapes and traditional art works which rarely got noticed for its excellence in conveying ideas. The 1970s saw a change from this commonality in the women artists. They shifted their focus from such traditionally well accepted artistic works to the much conflicting and challenging depictions of women as subjects, that too naked subjects with the sole objective of opposing the traditional notions advocated and exerted by the patriarchal society. The canons were broken, the restrictions were rejected and the conventionality was overthrown to replace it with new forms of art from the women artists. These changes in the existing conventionality of the patriarchal society in the 1970s and beyond was a result

of the impact that the feminist movements, the participation and the reactions it could achieve. The works produced by the women artists therefore was a stepping stone that gradually had its influence in society that began to rethink about the struggles, oppression and discrimination that was suffered by the female gender.

Art, though late, could gather support from a large group of people and could also gather women who had no focus on what to do and where to start. The representation of women as subjects for art enhanced and widened the scope of women's voice to be heard in the mainstream. It was actually an invasion into the established arenas of patriarchy with the potential of challenging the conventional norms of the ideology with suggesting a better one that is adhered in social equality, justice, freedom and rights.

Another significant work was *Some Living American Women Artists/ Last Supper* (1972) by Mary Beth Edelson that resembled the painting *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci. The painting collaged the heads of Christ and his apostles with the heads of a few notable women artists of the time. It was an important work in the feminist art movement as it criticised the subordination of women that was directly and indirectly supported by religion.

The constantly changing meanings and objectives of feminism had also its reflection in the 1980s that had substantial improvements from the situation of women and women artists. Feminist art opened space and opportunities for women artists, especially the artists who could not come to the mainstream, to express their views on feminist perspectives that led the path to the Identity art and Activist art. It was prominent during the 1980s where exhibitions and gallery of paintings were arranged by women to showcase their art to the world. The major turn was the alternative venues that were arranged to give hints to the changing situations in the social and cultural spaces that has been opened to the female gender. A major trend of the time was that the women artists focused more on their own concerns rather than a common feminist notion. It was through individuality that the feminism of 1980s grew to

express the concerns of the general. Individual stories, portrayals and expressions of female body presented opposition towards the existing stereotypes in society. The protest against male gaze was clearly communicated by Barbara Kruger through her work *Your Gaze Hits the Side of my Face* in which she depicts a marble bust of a woman turned to its side. It was a strong protest because it did not hide the emotions that was about to be expressed. It directly spoke through the words “your gaze hits the side of my face” which was written in the left side of the work. Clearly and unambiguously, the artist wanted to convey that the patriarchal tool of male gaze is not welcomed by the female gender, especially in the area of art.

It was during the 1980s the Guerrilla Girls argued for equal representation of women by questioning the proliferation of female nude art. It criticised the situation in the field of art raising concerns for the less representation of women. They made the argument that less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female. It was during the 1980s in which the feminist art criticism of Laura Mulvey began to trace that feminist art focused on the body of female subject with the wrong idea of understanding that the female essence resides in the body of women. This can be closely read with the male gaze that was discussed earlier. Also, the feminists of the time believed that the spectator has to have self-conscious awareness of experiencing an art work as a text rather than finding it through the lens of aesthetic aspect or merely exploring its message.

By the 1980s, the orthodox position for postmodern feminism rested on three incredibly negative tenets:

- (1) the notion of Woman is not real; woman exists only as a cipher of male dominance;
- (2) no possibility exists within a patriarchal social structure of a positive or empowered image of woman in art; and
- (3) the only possible move for women artists is to resist visual pleasure and expose the patriarchal system through deconstruction.

(Garrad, 1995, p. 473)

The 1990s and beyond opened new platforms to express feminist perspectives in art which included the use of digital media, internet, social media and other modern technologies. This art movements in feminism can be connected to the third and fourth waves as it came out of the traditional formats of expressing the viewpoint and exhibiting art. Moreover, the space that is experienced by the contemporary artists is the result of the fights and struggles that the artists and feminists of the previous decades undertook.

More than a movement, the feminist art focused on elaborating its possibility as a value system as how Lucy R. Lippard argued in 1980. It wanted change from the previous situations that the women had to suffer from the patriarchal systems in society which also reflected in the field of art as dominance of men. The space and opportunity were required for women artists to express their concerns about the female identity and gender which was continuously been narrowed and made suffocated through unethical and unjustifiable rules and regulations. These regulations had made the life of women to get oppressed and their voices were repressed by the system that wanted them to obey the instructions and restrictions of the dominant category.

If feminist criticism is taken for consideration, it is related to “the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women” (Tyson, 2006, p. 83).

The exclusion of women from art was strongly criticised and also noted by Linda Nochlin in her early work “Why Are There No Great Women Artists?” (1971). According to her famous quote, she has the opinion that “the fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education” (p. 483). The limiting factor for her are the education that is provided to women and also the definitions that is provided to women by society. She suggests not to consider

feminist criticism as only the approach of interpreting art, but also as a set of goals to achieve the requirements of the female gender such as equal opportunity, voice and space.

The aesthetic analysis conducted in this thesis would merge the aspects of aestheticism and feminist inclinations of the selected art works to explore and interpret the feminist perspectives of the artists. It mainly would depend on the beauty, technical aspects of the art work, and the feminist aesthetic sense delineated from them. In order to explore the aesthetic beauty of the selected works that would be discussed in the following chapters, it is necessary to detail about the meaning of aestheticism. It deals with beauty, taste, and the philosophy of art through exploring the values that are expressed via judgements of taste (Nick, 2007). In the late nineteenth century, it began as an art movement that considered only the beauty of the art work that is directly or indirectly imbibed by the artist. The movement had no intention to explore the political, didactic, or any other purpose related to the art work which provided a free space for the critics, scholars, and viewers to enjoy the art work without other restrictions and limitations. Though the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in the 1840s were the pioneers in developing the thoughts related to aestheticism, it was taken forward through the contributions of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Edward Burne-Jones. The famous quote that became the focal point of the movement – ‘Art for art’s sake’ – was proposed and practiced against the traditional values that restricted freedom for the artists in the Victorian age. It foregrounded sensuality, promoted artistic, sexual, and political experimentation through unconventional techniques (Burdett, 2014). This thought was an outcome of the principles led by the notion that art does not have the liability to serve as a moral tool, didactic component, or advocator or political ideologies. Aestheticism was an ideological reaction against the impacts of industrialization and mass manufacturing, as well as the materialism of Victorian middle-class society. In an effort to escape what they perceived as the ugly aspects of middle-class Victorian society, aesthetes

withdrew into the realm of art. But at the same time, aesthetes aspired to enhance their own environment and live in an artistic manner. As a result, aestheticism had an impact on different diverse fields such as fashion, furniture design, decorative arts, and architecture in addition to literature and the visual arts.

The question based on the definition of art, the aspects of art, and the nature of art are answered through the philosophy of aestheticism. It not only provides an analysis of the beauty and taste, but also helps to explore the hidden meanings of the art work and its connected implications. As per the study conducted by Denis Dutton, there are six universal signatures in human aesthetics. They are: expertise or virtuosity, nonutilitarian pleasure, style, criticism, imitation, and special focus. These signatures of aesthetics provide assistance to explore an art work based on its various aspects.

1. Expertise or virtuosity. People develop, value, and respect technical artistic abilities.
2. Nonutilitarian pleasure. People appreciate art for its own sake and do not expect that it provide them with warmth or nourishment.
3. Style. The compositional requirements of artistic products and performances place them in a certain style.
4. Criticism. It's common practise for people to evaluate, appreciate, and understand works of art.
5. Imitation. Works of art mimic experiences of the world, with a few notable deviations, such as abstract painting.
6. Special focus. The centre of experience is dramatically shifted to art and away from everyday life.

Art is also considered as an open concept where

new art forms come into existence from time to time, new sorts of artifacts are made which are held out to be works of art or claim to be

appraised as such, and these may not be repudiated in advance by an a priori definition.

(Osborne, 1973, p. 15)

From the perspective of the research undertaken in this thesis, it is important to discuss Feminist Aesthetics from its theoretical aspects. Feminist aesthetics does not involve a specific methodology in its functioning and application, rather it gathers variety of feminist perspectives aiming at highlighting the goal of opposing and ending the subordination of women in the arts and connected discourses. The major reason behind feminist aesthetics in art is the gender bias that the field had towards the initiatives of women artists. The challenges that develop in the field as new keeps on making it unresolved. The imagination, expression and experience of women are different from that of the traditional ones developed and established by the patriarchal society. It is here the importance of feminist aesthetics is high to make sure women enjoy their separate canons in art. The different approaches in feminist aesthetics help to trace, define and overcome the masculine biases in art by suggesting the revaluation of the canonical identity of the patriarchal dominance in art. It is from the identification of this bias and discrimination in art that made the women artists to propagate feminist notions. The difference that they noticed is that the men were portrayed to be able, heroic and strong compared to the vulnerable, weak and inert identity that was subjected to the female gender. As discussed earlier, the subordination that is demanded by patriarchy was able to be questioned through the exercise of feminist art. If considered from the idea of aesthetics, the practice of feminist aesthetics can be understood as not mere means of knowledge sharing, but an attempt to create change in society. This change is focused on the feminist requirement to retain the repressed voice which can be used to criticise the injustices in society against women. Like the development of feminist art, the feminist aesthetics is relatively novel and had only a small number of practitioners. In the words of Jutta Bruckner,

A feminist aesthetic is the expression of the difficulty of combining

seeing with feeling at a time when sight, the most abstract of all the senses, has taken false objectification to extremes. But it is also the expression of a process, the goal of which is the force which first sets it in motion – a feminist aesthetic.

(Bruckner, 1985, p. 121-122)

The traditional discipline of aesthetics and its theory have neglected the gender identity and its associations. Feminist aesthetics conducts a detailed enquiry into the influences produced by gender in art, artists and aesthetic values (Korsmeyer, 2004). While utilising the perspectives of feminist aesthetics, it is important to search for how a aesthetic sense of the viewer would define the value of the art. A person's gender identity can be a major factor in analysing an art work and it can be problematic if the perception is strongly inclined to the traditional patriarchal values of society. The struggle against the dominance of masculinity and patriarchy conducted through feminist art gets into trouble when such aesthetic concepts take control of deciding the mainstreams of art. The challenge faced by feminist aesthetics is to clearly categorise the gender-neutral claims exposed by the patriarchy. It is challenging because of the difficulty to break the existing stereotypical notions presented by the ideology advocated through gender bias, discrimination and subjugation. Feminist theory and aesthetic art gives rise to the exploration of unexplored areas that have been less occupied and recognised as sources and influences of gender discrimination. It helps to give rise to new identifications, realisations and discoveries regarding how women are treated in society. The marginalisation of the female gender therefore becomes a question mark that is asked by the feminist artists with the help of the feminist aesthetics.

Many a times, the feminist artists face trouble in getting recognised amidst the male centred artworld that follow the traditions, norms and values of the male society rather than both the male and the female. The female identity is thus taught to be seen from the perception of the male eyes which

often cause major crisis in the viewpoints put forward by the women supporting feminist art. The undermining statements, representations and expression of female identity have been criticised by the opposing attitudes towards the fancies that repressed the true expression of the gender.

Along with loving and caressive exploration of women in intimate detail, they have been used to represent considerable violence toward and abuse of women. The grand tradition is full of rapes, abductions, mutilations, and hateful degradation of women. But these have not been authentic from a woman's perspective. By and large, they have been viewed through the lascivious, sentimental or punitive eye of a man.

(Hein, 1990, p. 284)

One among the pioneers of feminist aesthetics is Carolyn Korsmeyer. She is active since 1990 in providing philosophical notions to feminist aesthetics. According to her, artistic creativity relies on superior mind rather than the superior abilities of men. She says,

The gender of genius is founded on special capacities of these few extraordinary persons, capacities that are grounded in overall differences in the abilities of men and women. While artistic creativity is not merely a function of superior reason, it is a feature of a superior mind; and the model superior mind is a male mind: one that is strong and capable of independence from tradition and social norms, and that rises above the quotidian concerns that shape ordinary activities.

(Detels,
2005)

She explains the meaning of feminist aesthetics as the combination of concepts such as beauty, genius, aesthetic perception and fine art that presume gender relation (Korsmeyer, 2012). It is interesting to note that most of her works such as *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics* (1993) *Gender and*

Aesthetics: An Introduction (2004), and “Feminist Aesthetics” (2012) highlights the importance and influence of feminism in art, music and literature.

The presence or application of feminist aesthetics does not provide a quick relief from the patriarchal entanglements suffered by women and women artists. It never has been easy for women to come out of their shells to which they were mentally and physically normalised. The dismantling of the existing philosophy and perception on women is equally or more complicated than to establish a new ideological value system in society. Historical records of such movements and initiatives have shown that women too resist changes in society equal to that of men. It is because of the lack of education and inability to accept the formation of new ideologies. The question asked by Hilde Hein – Why were there no great women artists? is important from this perspective. A society that provides equal status to both the genders would have included women in participating and competing in all fields including art. As long as it did not happen, the importance of feminist art and feminist aesthetics became significant in trying to find their own space – sometimes received as part of protests and otherwise made parallel platforms to exhibit their talent. In the earlier decades it was sure to say that women’s representation in the arts was a rarity.

The new motto - 'Women are not really different from men' - overlooks the thousands of years of patriarchal-history and the disparate socialisation processes. And coming at a time when women have begun to discover their own capabilities and needs, to set their own goals, and to reappropriate their uniqueness, it comes as a strategy to undermine these efforts.

(Bovenschen, 1985, p. 29)

It is the realisation that women can also do what the men can do in the world that makes the empowerment to begin right from the basics. The slow and gradual progress in the realisation attained by women about their situation

and the reason behind being marginalised from the mainstream society brought changes to their situation. Though not completely different from the previous situations, there are substantial improvements in society for the acceptance that women receive, the opportunities for the female gender and the achievements that are appreciated. Unlike the past, there are platforms that are open in the advanced era that makes it possible for women to showcase their talent to the world. If it was the situation of the 1980s or 1990s, they could not have achieved such benefits from the society that took least care for their empowerment. It is same in the case of art where women artists are promoted equally as the male artists.

The transformation of a woman into a feminist identity is not that occurs all of a sudden or is not by natural means by birth. It is the realisation of not becoming biased to one gender and not considering one above the other. It can also be considered as a value system or wisdom that is achieved by people who find the truth behind the requirement for such protests and movements. The ideology of feminism rooted in society only because of the dual social constituents projected by gender. It was not merely projected, but was also practiced in all spheres of life – both personal and social. This exercise of gender led to bias and discrimination that gradually made women to be seen as mere objects of pleasure by men. The process of othering has occurred in such conditions where women are excluded from what is considered to be the only space for men. The credibility of feminism and feminist practices are linked to the experiences of women that is highlighted as strong proofs of being subjected to discrimination and exploitation. The same is represented in the works of women artists

who advocate feminist art. Again, in “The Role of Feminist Aesthetics in Feminist Theory”, Hilde Hein links feminism to the aesthetic by adding,

I have suggested that feminism is linked to the aesthetic because of its inherent pluralism and inseparability from experience. Feminist theory cannot arise de novo or out of abstract definition. It cannot have the axiomatic purity to which much of classical theorising aspires. Since feminism presupposes the acknowledgement of gender as socially constituted, the theory that it articulates must be contextualised even as it struggles to overcome the actual context that produces it.

(Hein, 1990, p. 283)

The statement that gender is socially constructed might be confusing. It is because of the opposing ideas that argue that particular social construction has not involved the participation of women, but only the involvement of the patriarchy that rejected and excluded the participation of women. She makes the purpose of feminism and feminist theory further clear by stating that,

Necessarily encountered in context, feminism as doctrine is often challenged as antitheoretical and as polemical, but this begs the very issue that feminists meant to hold up to question – the presumption that theory must be singular, totalising and comprehensive.

(Hein, 1990, p. 283)

Hence, the theoretical perspectives on feminist aesthetics and feminist art provides a strong base to the development of feminist theory focusing on the art and artists involved. The change that was essential in the field of art, for promoting the possibilities of women artists to showcase their contribution in the same way as that of the male artists, has to be equally conceived by the society to promote associated activities in the field. In the same way as feminist art promotes the empowerment of women through their canvases and other platforms, it is equally important to provide assistance to such initiatives and movements associated with it. Equality cannot be

confined to just one gender where the other suffers and becomes the tool within the jurisdiction of the former. The idea of equality highlighted by feminism and feminist art relies on the basic realisation that everyone in the world has the right to enjoy and live as same as the other enjoys their freedom. For a feminist artist, it may not be a major concern to showcase everything that seems to be important to project through art. Even if it is, the artist would incorporate it into the flexible notion of how women are associated with the particular theme. It is how some of the women artists such as Arpita Singh and Anupam Sud who project the issues of women includes themes and issues related to violence, riots, partition as a few among their many other themes. They are concerned on how women at those situations horned by men get victimised. These victimisations can lead to unexpected trauma conditions where the vulnerability that is associated with their identity are utilised by the patriarchy to get marginalised and rejected. If we check the records of the violence, war, riots and situations that alter the peaceful existence of a society, it is evident from majority of the situations that it is women and children who are getting suffered as the aftereffect. Even if they do not initiate the troubles, the loss of beloved ones, home and existence gets them get classified as weaker and more dependent.

The women artists discussed in this thesis have tried to portray the role and relationship of women with society from several angles ranging from the household situations to that of their social exposure. In order to project the feminist aspects of the artistic works of the women artists, the aesthetic importance of the works is too described which provides a hint to how it has enriched and enhanced the feminist notions related to the theme and concept of the artistic work. Feminist aesthetics that gives prominence to the feminist aspects can be well seen in the analysis to extract the hidden idea behind the artistic works produced by the women artists.

The following chapter enters into the in-depth analysis of the works of the first artist in the list of women artists based in Delhi. In the list, the details about Arpita Singh and her works are discussed by giving focus to the

feminist approach in the works. Though many works have been produced from the side of the artist, only the artistic works that is connected to the aesthetic and feminist aspect is selected for analysis. The chapter would provide an opening to how the artistic works have given rise to significant discussions, debates and realisations on the real identity that is possessed by women and the identity that is enforced on them by the patriarchal society. The portraits of women in various situations makes it clear about the struggling phases of transition of women from how she was treated and to how she has reached so far through constant protests and movements for rights.

CHAPTER FIVE

Vulnerability and Resilience: The Woman Art of Arpita Singh

The aesthetic lexicon of artistic excellence in India, after the narrative trajectories carved by the pioneer artists like Amrita Sher-Gil on female forms and expressions of their personal day-to-day world, have been encouraged through exuberant contributions by a hand full of creative participants. The conflicting asseveration of unique thoughts that often disturbed the conventional set-beliefs of the society was too a part of the dynamicity of the creative process in India. Among such cacophonous and tranquil pronouncements, certain articulations in the society create their own space as they portray emotions to the need of the time within and beyond the limits of their canvas. The aesthetic image of women has been rediscovered through the tremendous influence of art conveyed by such unique personalities who have established their way of addressing the societal problems through the means of art exclusively with the support of individualistic tone of language and narratives. This chapter would deal with the exemplary style of Arpita Singh's contributions to fine arts, in specific to the influence exerted in redefining woman-centred thoughts and perspectives that were once within the control of traditional and conventional norms.

Being one among the most celebrated artists in India, the discussion about the modern period of art in the country provides foremost importance to Arpita Singh's viewpoints as part of her artistic works. The virtuosity of the distinctive visual language with the proportional mixture of the adequate tone of colours in her paintings provides a personalised view of relevant topics of the time. Singh's paintings often extend its trajectories to the social, political and also domestic spheres of life. The intensity of her paintings proportionally represents the real and the imaginary with the consolidated involvement of the representation of both memory and fantasy. She says,

“First you have to be able to make, say, a hand, and only after you have

learned to master it, can you think of distorting it, turning it into something unfamiliar. As an artist, I believe only if I am able to make what I can see will I then be able to make what I cannot see.” (Ghoshal, 2015)

Her paintings equally influence the modern and the contemporary occupations of fine arts in the country with immense significance to the image of female gender that gives transformative encouragement to various women’s art movement in India. Arpita Singh’s works are mainly based on the belief that art has the answers to complex unsolved issues in society. But she points to the effectiveness in the interpretation that is provided to the art seen by the viewer. Though many would see the works, only a few may explore the core idea that is intended through the work. The in-depth understanding and interpretation of women’s physical and psychological existence in society helps to relate her art with real-life situations. Arpita Singh agrees with the point that there are interpretative spaces that are available in her painting that could lead to interesting explanations of the situation depicted in the paintings. She says that though the perspectives change according to the change of space, time and person, “what is most important is that whether you are satisfied with that or not, whether you feel orderliness in life or not. In my opinion what the visual art (act) means is whether this brings some changes in viewer or not. Therefore, we can’t say beforehand that it is made and it can bring such changes in society or individual. Whatever is made is made and by seeing it changes come automatically” (Singh, personal communication, 2022).

When viewed from a women perspective, the artistic works of Arpita Singh tend to be more impressed with the inclusion of traditional culture as well as the modernity of the respective period. This amalgamation of elements for art is visible from the incorporation of Kantha stitch designs in the rural Bengal that represents Indian folk culture and also in the selective inclusion of elements from her urban surroundings. She uses graffiti, alphabets, automobiles, crowded streets, traffic points, guns, aeroplanes and so on that

thumps the essence of city life. Roobina Karode commented on the images produced by Arpita Singh in her paintings that is surprisingly unusual to find such uses in the painting of that time. She says, “I was struck by this work since it’s made in the 1980s, a time when we did not see too many of that imagery, of men with guns” (Maddox, 2019). The narratives of her paintings have been inspired by these common objects that become the effective subjects of her pictorial space. The detailing of art, especially in paintings occurs through the variation of colour schemes used at the very conscious level. The emotional interaction of the artistic portrait and the aestheticism of the audience merge at the brink of the effective execution of the variation of colours used to represent the different sensations and feelings. It helps the audience to experience the thematic content of the world depicted in the canvas accommodating the exactness of the emotion conveyed by the artist.

Arpita Singh, the figurative artist and modernist who presents her canvas with curious subversive attempts having narrative storylines was born in 1937 in Baranagar which is in the north of Kolkata in West Bengal. After nine years of her stay in the city, she had to move to Delhi along with her mother and brother. Due to the sudden demise of her father, her mother had to independently take care of her two children. The childhood days of Arpita Singh were also her mild experience with the then-ongoing Second World War. She equates the inspiration for her works to her life and experiences. It includes her viewpoint about the changing situations of the world, the way people interact, the manner in which society behaves to individuals and vice versa, and the attitude of people towards their life (Singh, personal communication, 2022). The intermingling of simplicity and complexity in the works of Arpita Singh is substantial evidence to such representation of society. In 1962, she was married to Paramjeet Singh who was also an artist. After her marriage, she changed herself from the title of Arpita Dutta to Arpita Singh which became her official name in the academia of Fine arts. Her course in Fine arts was at the Delhi Polytechnic from 1954 through 1959. During the

time, there was significant cultural renaissance through the effective intervention of establishments related to art groups, publications, galleries and theatre societies. The involvement and influence created by Sailoja Mukherjee, Kanawal Krishna, Ram Chandra Jain and B. C. Samyal were highly appreciable, especially related to the foundation of the 'Delhi Shilpo Chakra' in 1949. The transformation occurred to the Dhoomimal Gallery at Connaught Place also was encouraging to the young artists in the field of visual art. The influence of weaving and artistic models came into the creativeness of Arpita Singh during her work for the Indian Government's Cottage Industries Restoration Programme wherein she had the opportunity to meet and mingle with the traditional weavers and artists in the country. Due to the less influence of art among the women of those times, Arpita Singh was too unaware of her talents in art and painting until she joined the art college. The life at the college campus transformed her viewpoints and intentions as she could get access to the possibilities of being an artist, especially a woman artist which was a rare phenomenon during such times of the excessive involvement of patriarchal dominance over the likes and dislikes of women. She is the founding member of the artists' group 'The Unknown', established in 1960 along with her husband Paramjit Singh and other alumni of the Department of Fine Arts at Delhi Polytechnic. The artworks of artists from the previous three decades were inspiring to the emerging talents in Fine arts as they could get direct access to it through the new establishments such as the National Gallery of Modern Art (MGMA) and the Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA) in New Delhi. In those times, specifically from the 1950s onwards, the opportunity for acquiring knowledge by being part of organisations, academies, artist groups and exhibition galleries increased. The academic and professional career of Arpita Singh was blessed with the changes that occurred in the political, economic and social spheres of life after the second half of the twentieth century. Understanding the contemporary art scenario, the interest in Indian tradition, art and culture was inspired by the Art College and continuous interaction and exposure to the field of Fine arts in the capital city. But, she does not point out any changes or developments to art of the

present compared with the fifties and sixties. She says,

“There is not much development in it. It is we to see the difference between what is painted today and the art of the years back. There may be difference in art but the Aesthetic of art does not change. The aesthetic of any work or art remains same it does not change”

(Singh, personal communication, 2022)

In 1962, as part of the artist group *The Unknown*, Arpita was involved in its first group show at IENS building. She also participated in several shows held in different parts of the country including the show titled ‘In Memory of Sailoz Mulkerjee’ which was held at Kunika Chemould Art Centre in 1963. The preparatory phase of her professional career grew from the 1960s where the artist in her was in search of her space in the field. She conducted several experimentations in art by being influenced by the different dynamics of life. Art of the time was in a pace of shift from the conventional forms and thus the crucial progressive stage of a young artist had to be in the waiting list for the opportunity to appreciate the talent. Imitations and borrowing of images from Western Art as well as from images around the artist became common at those times. Arpita was influenced by the works of Marc Chagall whenever she tried to move out of the Indian heritage, tradition and culture. In the 1960s, Arpita Singh could have been influenced by the Western style of art mainly due to the influence of two exhibitions conducted by Lalit Kala Akademi. They were ‘The Two Decades of American Art Exhibition (1967-68)’ and ‘The First Triennial’ that imbibed the idea and thoughts shared in a global perspective. The search for uniqueness by Arpita Singh embraced these thoughts in bringing her individual creative identity. Kapur (2000) notes that “Since the 1960's she has been among the committed modernists in Indian art understanding the terms of reference down to the details: impasto brushwork, irradiating hues, informal design, chance encounters, erased dreams.” (p. 39).

The experiences of being exposed to International and National

exhibitions redefined Arpita Singh's notions about art and its influence on society. She decided to closely connect her art with tradition, modernity and popular themes related to social consciousness. Many a time, the social documentation of life for Arpita Singh was the expression of her inner emotions through the character in the portrait. The discussion about her paintings and other artistic works provides a parallel understanding of her conscious mind that reverberates against social illegalities and injustice. The everyday moments and people have always been the important subjects of her paintings. It mainly revolves around the close acquaintance circle including members of the family, friends, colleagues and even the neighbours. The artificiality in portraits is minimalised with the extensive use of images in and around a common man's eyesight which also goes deep into the heart of audience to make them remember instances, people or objects that they might have been through at some point of their life. Contrasting images such as flowers-guns, knives-teapots, aeroplanes-pillows have been a combined subject in the paintings of Arpita Singh which shows her interest in intermixing objects of opposing identities within the thematic framework of her artistic brilliance. From the black and white abstract painting which she followed during the 1970s, the shift to folk paintings, specifically on the culture of West Bengal leads to tremendous progress in the visibility of her works. She incorporated simplicity and elegance in most of the paintings related to such thematic contributions.

The second half of the 1970s was challenging to the artist in Arpita Singh as she tried experiments with black and white portraits – the Calligraphic Drawing. A minimalist vision, mostly seen during the 1960s in the West and America, was the core of such experimental abstraction. It aimed at the reductive process with textural representations where undercoating and overcoating of ground and pigmentations described the essence of the surface. The dual tones of contrasting colours, when seen as primitive lines and dots, represented some script fallen into oblivion (Dutta, 2006, p. 101). Such experimentation using oil painting was developed in 1975 during a workshop

conducted by Vivan Sundaram at Haushani in Himanchal Pradesh.

Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker (2002) in *Women Artists of India* comments on the works of Arpita Singh that she paints the common life that is seen around her as she has inculcated the perspectives witnessed from the tragic ironies of urban life (p. 17). The images of the ordinariness of life portrayed by Arpita Singh gradually developed to dramatic narratives that sometimes provided hints to prevailing uncertainties and resultant exit from the world. As said previously in this chapter itself, the contrasting themes and images were highly a part of her paintings. Her rejoicing celebration of life and unexplainable instances of death were equally displayed on the portraits that equally produced gestures of happiness and grief on the audience.

“Arpita's work always displayed flowers that shroud and embellish. They set stage for the quiet gesture of grief, funeral postures with the offering of a bouquet...There is always, again and again, the gesture of collapse, the prone figure, someone felled, and someone in an epileptic faint, someone mimicking death.”

(Kapur, 2000, p. 40-41)

Arpita's works, as said earlier, highlights personal images and narratives. It is rich in the use of symbols that is extracted from the ordinary life of people. In a much-simplified format, she uses them to discuss complex topics of high social relevance. While discussing the complex nature of modern work that becomes not easy for the public to delineate, she says,

“Nothing is meant for the general public, for this little hard work is needed. It is not the natural thing and the new thing which is not natural therefore to understand it you need to have some basic or general knowledge about it. Likewise, the contemporary Art has advanced so much that to understand it, to be critical is required. You can't react any work just by seeing because to understand it you need to understand the

language of it. You need to understand for what and why such thing is there. If you look at it according to your view, then you can know the value of it and there is also the value of looking at it.”

(Singh, personal communication, 2022)

The metaphoric tones of the symbols intend to reduce the intellectual gap between the aesthetic and thematic sense imagined by the painter and the ordinariness expected by the audience. It helps to discover the expression of Arpita's paintings with different connotations. Such descriptive interpretations of her paintings represented by various metaphors produce an ornamental approach which is more advantageously connected with different feminist discourses. The ornamental identity gives a modernist inclination to her works which are mostly enriched by the use of signifiers. Regarding the technological advancements and connection with scientific research, she mentions the interrelation to as it depends upon the society that the specific people live in. Quoting an example, she says that art, especially the modern and contemporary art are less used and appreciated. The negligence and enthusiasm to fine arts is depends on the people and their attitude towards art.

The aesthetic tone of Arpita Singh's drawings and paintings express specific moods, emotions and meanings. They are closely related to the realities seen in society. The unrelated colours present themselves as related and highly meaningful.



Figure: Head and the Duck (1985)Source-: web

For example, in the painting *Head and the Duck* (1985), various heads combine to form the outer layer of the blue water. It shows the outlines of ducks that are mushy in appearance along with the image of a yellow plane. Same as that of alliteration of sounds in the stanzas of poems, this image of several images produce definite echo on the canvas. The line-up of heads beneath a top pyramid surface in *Figures and Pyramid* (1984) makes it to the shape of a triangle. Another painting, *Figure by Water* represents a clash of two heads that looks at the spectator that is covered in an enigma. The artist also portrays a row of inclined white water lilies. She tries to express the pulse of emotion and worry into her images. *The Woman in Red* (1985) is covered in mystery to represent the loneliness of a woman is an attempt with the beat of little white flowers. This continues in the art of Arpita Singh such as *Ducks on the Table* and *Red Car in the Rose Garden* that were also produced during the 1985-86 period. *Ducks on the Table* is tightly packed which gives the sense that the images in the portrait are interconnected and entangled with one another by experiencing the same situations.

The gradual refinement of Arpita Singh's professional career as an

artist began during the 1970s and 1980s when she shifted to oil painting on canvas. The continuity of her painting regarding the thematic topics related with women was at a hike when she subjected the essence of emotions to her paintings depicting women in various situations and troubles. The existing condition of women in the country facing serious discrimination and injustice are showcased by taking the standpoint of the victimised gender in society. The vulnerability of women in several conditions inside and outside their externally controlled borders is exposed that has been used by organisations for representing the insignia faced by the particular gender in different contexts.

“In a world that loves labels, it is difficult to find one that can contain her. Her concern for women is clear, yet she can manipulate lust and desire, tainting it with avarice and politics instead of the merely decadent; she abjures violence, but makes no apology for its intrusion into the middle class household.”

(Singh, 2013)

There were only a few movements or efforts in art before the 1940s that highlighted the issues of women in Indian society. Along with the interpretations and contributions of Rameshwar Broota and Jogen Chowdury, the name of Arpita Singh reverberates in the field of Indian art as they were together in their showcase of narrative painting that pointed much on the situation of women in the country. These narrative arts of Arpita Singh have been a standardised form of reference to her followers in art. According to the perspective of the cultural theorist Nancy Adajania on Arpita Singh, “Hers is a complex, visionary body of work, which lays bare the structural violence of society at a national and global level, creating both collision and collusion between word and image” (Bhuyan, 2019). The vulnerable nature of gender in paintings, while showcased, helps in effective communication that parallels the women empowerment movements in the country. As every academic discipline and artistic field is expected to provide their perspectives

on social issues, the significance of women's issues are given prior importance in the field of art and it continues to be provided in the country following the paths of artists like Arpita Singh. In comparison, the acceptance of progressive thoughts concerning feminist perspectives and women empowerment in India is higher in the twenty-first century than the period in the latter half of the twentieth century. Feminist works are criticised for projecting women and bodies from sensual angle. It can either be for highlighting the unfortunate condition or boldness of the female gender. Arpita Singh says, "when I was painting I did know that I was painting feminism or female body. Whatever the form came to my mind I painted and whatever is combined with that painting comes automatically. To whatever surface (process) you are familiar with thus the process is not complicated but simple. But when you try to explain it then it may become a bit complicated" (Singh, personal communication, 2022). She equates her work to the necessity of the time rather than a pre-planned feminist approach to art. Because of this attitude to painting, she welcomes criticisms and protests from anyone who feels it as awkward or uncomfortable.

Along with the other themes in the works of Arpita Singh, certain incidents in history have been echoed through her works. It includes the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the anti-Sikh riots that took place in 1984, the communal riots and the Gulf War in the 1990s. The negativity deciphered through aggression, hostility and death were reflected through her portraits that included images of guns, soldiers, corpses and aeroplanes used for representing war and riots. The brutal effect of increasing hatred in the world is considered as affecting women at the receiving end. Her canvas with paintings of such themes depicts the uncertainty and anxiety experienced by women as they either get widowed or lose their loved ones in serious conflicts leading to death and murder. In "Materialising Dream: Body and Fabric", an essay written by Nilima Sheikh, she opines,

"Or if it is not offered life through touch or sign, even die. Yet more often than not the motifs offered are funerary, about mourning the dead

and celebrating dying. About living inspite of dying. About enacting death. In Arpita's painting is that different from enacting living?"

(Sheikh, 1994)

As the social, political and economic situations are directly and indirectly connected with the progressing levels of violence and brutality. The increasing number of violence in the name of caste, religion and politics invoked the sensitive consciousness of Arpita Singh to react against such atrocities in the country that ultimately affects the peaceful living of women. The suffering of women in the country due to related incidents and events were showcased through her paintings depicting burned and broken bodies of human beings. Connected to the theme of violence in the society, the issues of gender inequality, authoritarian rules, dissemination of terror and illegal encounters are keys to her artworks. Roobina Karode, on the first solo exhibition of Arpita Singh in 1972 claims that,

“The exhibition presents clusters or groupings that focus on the domestic setting of her paintings amidst familiar objects and spaces, where the dining table is a recurrent feature, or the neurotic landscapes of the city, where everything feels out of place. And then we have paintings mapping new forms of social terrorism with police encounters, racial profiling, violent mobs, gang rapes and murders where budding flowers turn into bleeding bullet shots, with victims hiding and culprits lunging free.”

(Sharma, 2019)

The sensitivity to what happens around an individual makes the person a social being that cares for others and the society in which he/she lives. For an artist to be connected with the society, it is essential to have close relation with the pulse of the common human being wherein the problems and issues that affect them can be understood. The voice of an artist, unlike politicians or social workers, is heard through what is tried to be conveyed through their

means of art. For a painter like Arpita Singh, her interest in depicting the issue of the society in which she is also a partner makes it clear about the respect and position that has to be given to her for her immense contributions.

“She can be called a dialectician. She is well known for handling the inside and outside logic in her work and managing the space between the pictures. She knows how to introduce the painting, wondering the climate of violence which especially belong to the life incidents of her childhood memory, her psychological tendency of traveling down the colonial discourse with those who are seen in the period of partition, so, she gives expression in her paintings at the same situation of colonial biases aggression.”

(Praveen, 2018, p. 67)

The use of the identity of a victim for women is prominently visible in the works that deal with women-oriented subjects. The vulnerability of women is mostly pointed towards the self-centred ideologies propagated and exercised by the patriarchal dominance in the society at various levels of social existence. A simple example would be helpful to understand how she makes use of her images for a variety of possible interpretations in connection with contemporary situations of people who are represented through the characters. In a painting, the situation is of a woman plucking a flower where a man points his gun towards her. Though simple and expressed in a canvas with the use of certain colour combinations, the meanings that can be deciphered from the single situation, direct and indirect, describes the broad scope of art in recreating many such instances within a single canvas. The contrasting image of flower and gun describes the attitude of the two characters in the painting. With the flower, the character of the woman is commonly interpreted as innocent and soft. Whereas, the gun that even has the power to kill a person, when pointed at a woman, definitely shares the character of the man as cruel. The cruelty of man against a woman can be the thematic subject in such an interpretative option. It can head towards gender injustice, rape, or

any other direct or indirect cruelty suffered by a woman under the patriarchal or authoritarian mentality of a man. The applicability of the feminist perspective is significantly useful in providing a narrative description to the painting. This effective introduction of debatable topics, many of which leading to controversies and conflicts of ideas, is a highlight to Arpita Singh's artistic works.

“Yet, it's inexplicable, the feeling that something eerily magical is going on. The very ordinariness of the objects and images in her painterly repertoire: ducks, planes, guns, numbers, boats, dots, alphabets, child-blue skies, bloated, amorphous figures is unsettling. And as she talks, it is clear nothing is what it seems: memory, the subconscious and women increasingly people her works.”

(Jain, 1997)

After graduation from the School of Art, she constantly faced difficult situations to afford the cost of basic painting materials. The method of painting that she adapted due to such technical issues was the works based on black and white. She says, “I was having technical problems and needed to understand a few things before I did any more figurative works, so I turned to drawings. I wanted to concentrate on the structure and did not need colour for that – therefore black and white” (Kalra, 2015). She continued attempting the drawings with the models of dots and lines for about eight years during the mid-seventies of the twentieth century.

From it, she moved to paper ink and pastel and also tried certain objects like a rusted nail, screwdriver and scraps of metal. The abstractions of her works were displayed through such inexpensive methods based on her experimentations. From it, the transformation was to oil paintings which were much expensive compared to other forms of paintings. The advantage of oil painting was that it stays as thick forms in the canvas, unlike others. Oil paintings provided more elegance and attractiveness to the portrait. It is controlled with the pressure exerted by the brush and does not irregularly

displace from the required positions. The watercolours of her time had no compactness and multilayer colour variation. When the required material is used for the purpose of colouring, the canvas ensures exactness in its output that boosts the confidence of the artist. For an artist in painting, the use of tools like pen, pencil, brush, and ink of various colours are crucial in communicating their thoughts at the most possible manner to the audience. The experience and easiness in the use of painting tools or the list of equipment required for sculpturing (in case of model art) are equal to the command over language and vocabulary for a writer. When a writer effectively uses the exact vocabulary required to express a situation or instance in his story or essay, it is best conveyed to the reader with the maximum effect that it can deliver. Suppose, if a word that does not completely merge with the situation in a story is used by the writer, even though some readers can guess out what the author has intended at the particular situation, there will be a lack of preciseness and a gap between the creative work and the reader. The word may go along with the other set of words on the flow, but for an enthusiast in the art of reading and who enjoys the beauty of the language used in a piece of writing, such an irregularity would be disturbing. From the eyes of an academic who wish to interpret the meaning of the creative work, it would be difficult for the person to extract or produce the required meaning out of the situation expressed in the story. It may even lead to misinterpretations that highly occur in such cases. Likewise, the case of fine art can even be more sensitive to such lack of command over the medium used by the artist. For an enthusiast in the field of art, the importance of each mixture of colour used in the canvas gives particular sense about the content tried to be conveyed through the medium by the artist. It may not be emphatic delivery for a common man who is not directly connected with the details of the art. Even though the majority of the audiences are not vehement experts in the field of art, it becomes a serious mistake from the inexperience of the artist. Arpita Singh's passionate interest for art makes her conscious about the importance of the use of tools and the methods to deliver the vivacity of meanings from the use of the most perfectly matching tone of colour and other detailing to her paintings.

The exactness and accuracy in the use of the required tools to deliver the most apt detailing cannot be acquired by an artist without proper dedication and patience to art. Arpita Singh excels in her selection of themes and contexts for her painting because of her experience in the field – equally by getting inspired from other artists around the world and also by continuous experimentation with the subjects and tools of painting. The progress in her professional career as an artist did not happen all of a sudden. It was gradual and challenging for a person like Arpita Singh who chose to opt the field of fine arts during the time when women were not encouraged to pursue even the basic education in India. Situations have been widely changed in the country in the twenty-first century even though there are unnecessary struggles and negative approach against opting arts as a major course, there aren't many problems compared to previous decades as scholarships and encouragement from the side of governments and organisations are appreciably significant in encouraging the field.

The gradual improvement in Arpita Singh's painting, as mentioned earlier, was also immersed in the difficulties and challenges to establish herself and to find a space of her own in the field. The beginning of her career also encountered the issues related to finding adequate money for buying painting materials which forced her to work with the available and affordable tools required to complete her works. Adapting to the black and white paintings due to the challenge of affording the cost of the materials led her to conceive it in the beginnings of the 1970s. The black and white balancing of colours in the canvas was much similar to the balancing that had to be done between personal and professional life in terms of maintaining financial stability. In the later years, she recollects saying, "I found that nothing was coming easily to me and I was unable to paint figures at that time. I began working with dots and lines in black and white, going back to the basic elements as an exercise to free up my hands and my mind" (Maddox, 2019). Though those paintings were overfilled with dots, lines and dashes, she approached it with the same excitement for figurative work.

“Arpita’s work shifted from the figurative to the abstract in the 1960s, and then back to the former in the 1980s. At first it seemed like an enchanted world where objects, humans, and vegetation were imbued with a magical life. Fruits, flowers, boats, figures, all achieved an equal significance in animated manifestation. By the 1980s, her paintings became even more lucid, bringing to the fore the many contradictions existing in India.”

(Dalmia and Hashmi, 2006)



Figure: *Untitled* (1976)

Source:- web

An example of a black and white drawing of Arpita Singh using only dots and lines is the *Untitled* (1976) which contains horizontal rows of x’s covering the most of the canvas where a vertical column interrupts. The inspirations for Arpita Singh to do such drawings were acquired from her experience with stitching, embroidery and weaving. The dense black strokes in the drawing evoke some kind of architectural design, a representation of crowded urban street plans, maybe grids, or even sculpture. *Untitled* (1975), which was created in ink, pastel, and poster paint denote a rushing river and the unseen currents below it (Yau, 2017). It exposes the undercurrent feelings and emotions in a woman who is subject to subjugation by the dominant patriarchal society. The likes and dislikes of a woman, the hatred, the struggle, lack of freedom and rights can be associated with the drawing that points to

the abstract tone of the image. Different intended meanings were discussed through the drawings under the title – Untitled series.

“In these works, Singh shows impulsiveness and openness to explore what different lines can do, but at the same time there is a kind of dark energy and force of intent that comes through along with her child-like inventiveness. To simply shrug these off as studio experiments and not artworks in their own right would be ill-considered. Instead the drawings allow us the opportunity to understand Singh’s oeuvre as a whole.”

(Nooreydzan, n.d)

Many artists and intellectuals around the world present themselves within the limits of their art. They do not openly place themselves with the society and wish to escape the chances to get involved with the problems, struggles and issues significant to the society in which they live. The art that they put forward is the art that is represented for the sake of representing art rather than finding a scope in the art to communicate with the society by representing and reflecting their thoughts through the canvas and portraits. There might be some connection for such artworks with the interest of the mass majority, but may not be absorbing the essence of the people involved in struggles and conflicts. The works of Arpita Singh differs from such an approach as she was brought up witnessing the problems of the society around her. She has opened her canvas to the reality of the larger world wherein she dedicates the pictorial space for reflecting the common issues of the society. With the use of such effective representation of life outside the borders of the canvas, she incorporates the imagined times of the past and the future. Unlike being narrowed to the aesthetic representations, she inclines her paintings to represent the uncertainties, anxieties and absurd characteristics of life amidst the political, social, cultural and economic disturbances prevalent in the country. The uncompromising mixture of traditional elements, ordinary objects, and peculiar instances of daily life defines the interactive

communication of her paintings with the past and the present.

“In the very textures of her paintings, Arpita Singh introduced a multilayered, dense surface, which was ornamental and at the same time spoke of subterranean tensions. This was also apparent in the buoyant forms that floated in the air, humans traversing the upper layers, ducks walking over the table, objects in the room with a life of their own, creating an incessantly animated day-to-day world. It is these daily encounters with ordinary people with which Arpita engages and archives a language for an ironic existence, which is suffocatingly humdrum and at the same time suffused with an intensely imaginative ‘other’.”

(Dalmia and Hashmi, 2006)

For an intensive representation and reflection of the unsatisfactory life situations of people in the society, the basic interest that an artist or writer has to possess is his/her close relation with the society as well as the knowledge about the changing trends in the society. Artists and writers with a basic instinct to know about the significant details around them would possess the advantage of depicting reality without losing the spirit of people who experience it first-handedly.

For such a depiction of reality, a mere knowledge about the factual data would not be sufficient for an artist. Through the medium of painting, an artist like Arpita Singh tries to mediate between art and society. In such processes of placing artequivalent to the realities in the society, a detailed study of the characteristic features of the incidents and also the situational experience of the people are necessary. When it is required to situate a thematic topic concerning any cultural support, the historic, cultural and traditional identities of people in the society are also to be scrutinised for a perfect and authentic representation. In short, an artist is expected to research beyond the factual or physical expression of subjects that are supposed to be included in the canvas. Such ‘moving out of the limits’ help in understanding not only the physical

but also the psychological identity and variations of the people in the society. The exhibition of a painting does not confine to the fruitful depiction of the required objects in the canvas, but also the creative effort is taken to showcase the exactness of the minute details in the expression produced by the art subject. If the subject of a painting is related to the loneliness experienced by a woman, the artist has to be conscious about the essential facial and gestural expressions that the character in the painting has to produce, without which the true sense of the artwork would be lost without being able to convey the need of the artist to the audience. It is through these means she balances the extremities of her artwork – from traditional to western notions and from expressionism to ornamental detailing of art.

The passionate approach to conduct experimentation in art with the interest in extremely different topics made her distinctly important in the discipline of art. Her experiment with art in including domesticity as a major theme of the painting is a prominent example of boldness in adapting to new techniques and tastes. Inclusion of the domestic world into art from the side of a woman artist was new to the conventional mindset followed by the artists in the Indian scenario. She says about her experimenting with techniques with the extremities of art and cultures that “We had much freedom, there was nothing to lose. There was no money in art, we had to do other jobs. Women were not expected to earn a living in those days” (Kalra, 2015). She has the opinion that artists of her time had much freedom than the artists of the present day. Arpita’s paintings with a touch of ordinary things of life had the capability to explore the inner feelings of the people in the society, especially the female figures that suffered more discrimination and injustices inside and within the boundaries of their home or their limited jurisdiction in the society. She constructed a different perspective about women issues through the depiction of women subjects from the angle of ordinary settings in society. Images of gun, soldiers, corpses, streets etc. are the similar representations of the society that she saw as part of reality outside the canvas. Roobina Karode, the curator of the first solo exhibition of Arpita Singh that took place in 1972

commented on her style of painting as,

“Her paintings are extremely sophisticated despite their apparent naivety...they compel you to look deeper with an alertness, as there is much that lies beneath the surface. I was drawn to this predominant idea of ‘submergence’ in Arpita’s works, with the woman protagonist in the midst of things happening around her, the ground fragmented with things surfacing here and there. It's a woman’s world revealed through the girl child, the young and the middle aged older woman in Arpita Singh’s paintings.”

(Sharma, 2019)

The powerful immersion of thoughts while being an audience to Arpita Singh’s painting marks the excellence of the art presented by the artist, often revealing secrets that she hides in the canvas.

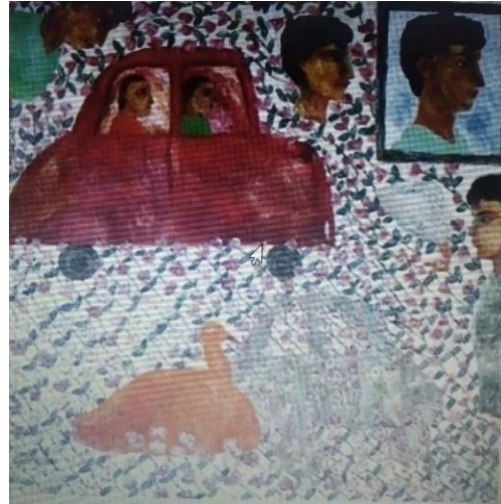


Figure: The Red Car in Rose Garden (1985)

Source:- web

The association of form and colour in her paintings, where she experiments with a new style of intermixing objects is seen in *Duck on the Ceiling* (1986) and *The Red Car in Rose Garden* (1985). The collaged incorporation of familiar objects, but distinct in its individual standpoints are

utilised to represent new meanings. Representation of the image of an aeroplane similar to a duck dives into blue waters is equally abrupt and distinctly unique in the eyes of the audience. Intermixing of images also happens in presenting a duck that squats among the bed of red roses and showing a young girl nextdoor. Same as the existence of fictional and non-fictional works in literature, the field of art also sticks onto the ideas of fantasy and reality. For Arpita Singh, the gap between the two – fantasy and reality are very less as she constantly delivers the absence of the borderline that separates fantasy from reality. These intermixing of images give the idea that inanimate objects also vibrate with human emotions. The non-living objects are equated with the living objects as symbols to present the message or make them understand about a particular topic dealt in the painting.

In an interview with Radhika Iyengar, Arpita Singh says that she likes human bodies in her canvas. She says,

“It’s not because I set out to want convey something, but towards the end, the forms always come together to become something meaningful. But while I am making the painting, I am just focusing on making the body. Whether they are draped or undraped, is according to the colour scheme I choose.”

(Iyengar, 2019)

In the representation of male characters in the canvas, she seems to represent it in well-draped manner with due sophistication. The importance is given not to men, but to women in most of the artistic works of Arpita Singh. While representing men in draped manner, she depicts women images as almost nude. The inspirations from Indian folk tradition is incorporated to the paintings of Arpita Singh where she uses colours that are bright with relative temperature and hue to clearly present the figure of women that symbolises femininity.

Silence works in the paintings of Arpita Singh as it has the power to

bring the attention of the audience through the notions of beauty. She conveys the feelings and emotions of such silenced women in the painting with the help of immolating images of women and their exposed gestures. The silence exhibited in such paintings represents the dominance of patriarchy that silences the freedom and rights of women. Though Claude Monet, the French Impressionist wrote “What keeps my heart awake is colourful silence”, the silences in Arpita Singh’s paintings are more whimsical. The silences are evident in the situation depicted in the painting as well as from the angle of the character. The theme of silence in Arpita Singh’s paintings often tend to be floating figures, human bodies that wear a dress or are naked, corpses etc. which does not have the ability to speak. It represents the voiceless condition that is prevalent in the society where the distinguishable discrimination between the dominant and the repressed are huge. The oppression of patriarchy that has not been settled even in the twenty-first century makes women vulnerable to behaviours and attitudes that hinder their freedom and rights. The body of women is considered to be highly resistant through their unclothed body that represents the politics of patriarchy. The exposed body of women, for Arpita Singh and followers, is a symbol of resistance. The major tool of men being the body of women are formed as a threat to gender through the works of the artist. Arpita considers the naked body of women as a powerful tool that can question the heroic gesture of man. The insecurity affected by women in society is turned out to be the key tool of power against the patriarchal gaze and discrimination. Arpita Singh considers human body as a very interesting form and tool. She identifies it as the most important and known form to her as well as others which makes her do her experimental art using it as a tool. She clearly says, “I don’t have any sentiment with human form, it is like the bed, chair or curtain in the room.” (Singh, personal communication, 2022).

In the representation of nude figures of women, the portrayal is not of the vulgarity or a sexual intention, but it is shown to present the peak position of vulnerability suffered by the female gender under the gaze and thought of

considering such bodies as just objects for pleasure. “Singh regularly delineates the female forms as strong, vigorous and brazen. While she depicts female sexuality with clearness, her representation of the male figure is also intriguing. Her works uncover an interchange of an enquiring mind” (Pande, 2019).

From the point of view of a woman, the body – the nudity is the showcase of how much she is exposed to society in terms of struggles and sufferings. Her paintings openly expose the genital organs of a woman body which posits the aesthetic values unlike the image of conventional nude women. Such representations point at the innocence of the character and also the protest of the character against the mentality of the society towards a gender that is mostly marginalised. These aesthetic representations of art through the application of vivid forms of colours are distinctive free-floating compositions possessing allegorical style with personal and mythical narratives.

“The look of the audience is denied an intrinsic force: as soon as fetishistic representation of the female image threatens to break the spell of illusion, and the erotic image on the screen appears directly (without meditation) to the spectator, the fact of fetishization, concealing as it does castration fear, freezes the look, fixates the spectator and prevents him from achieving any distance from the image in front of him.”

(Mulvey, 1975, p. 68)

The images exhibited in her paintings can be regarded as her perspective or voice against the increasing tortures, inequalities, discriminations and marginalisations in the society wherein the life of women are spoiled and brutally broken into useless pieces. The rage and hatred of Arpita Singh are present in the paintings that too spread an emotional touch to the existing norms of humanity.

Though Arpita Singh tried using both oil painting and water colouring

in her canvas, due to the ease of storage, confidence gained through the exercise of liberty in the medium of watercolour, she prefers it more than the oil painting. For a young artist in the 1970s, the use of oil paints was much costly and not affordable. As mentioned in the earlier discussions, being not able to get enough amounts required for the materials, reliability on water colouring was comparatively economical. The gradual shift and advancement from the abstract representation using dots and lines occurred towards the latter half of the 1970s.

“The aged paper in *Untitled* (1976) is filled with stark, thick black lines that converge at a point a little lower than the center of the page. Making do without any curves, Singh allows the lines to extend and cross over each other, creating denser and lighter patches, pyramid-like formations that lead to the central point, which is so crowded with lines that are it almost completely black.”

(Nooreydam
, n.d)

The use of dots and lines during the period when she created her art with the help of drawing was conducted through the input of high concentration and consciously attended mind. The length, direction and the thickness of the lines used for the representation of the concept in the paper were taken seriously as it created a different impact in its variation.

“Another piece from the same year, *Untitled* (1976) has shorter, thicker lines slanting across the page like rain, the broken lines not unlike Kantha embroidery, while *Untitled* (1981) consists of a flurry of dots, like a snowstorm or an animal print. In that particular piece, Singh’s fingerprints are visible, smudging paint across the paper.”

(Nooreydam
, n.d)

The influence from Marc Chagall and Henri Rousseau impacted in the interest in surrealism which leads to adapting artistic methods from their

works. It reflected in her characters' costumes and other detailing, especially the decoration and gestures on the face. A two dimensional perspective on the paper surface by providing different symbols to the objects were also carried out towards the latter half of the 1980s as a mixture of the influence from Marc Chagall and Henri Rousseau. The concept of following the Western tradition with the blank mind was rejected with the decision to stick on to presenting social-oriented images and the perspectives of the people around in the surrounding situations which is more related to the reality of life.

Nilima Sheikh summarises the artist in Arpita Singh during the 1970s and 1980s by saying that,

“If one were to look back upon Arpita's paintings of the last ten to twelve years one would find the strategy for subversion worked carefully into almost all their manifest attributes. It follows fastidiously posited ‘because of’ ‘in spite of’ codes. There is in her paintings the substance of wakeful dream materializing image and mirage, body and fabric. It is made by teasing paint and pigment layered on, impacted and pushed around, but equally by removing, scraping, mottling and limning as in her water colours. The making of beauty obsesses Arpita.”

(Sheikh, 1994)

The devices used by Arpita during the same period of her professional life as an artist is also recollected by Nilima Sheikh. She details the mindset of the artist in Arpita Singhby watching closely to the work she has done for the two busy decades. She continues saying,

“For her the pleasure and play of ornamentation is both celebration and disguise. Along with modernist techniques of painting she foregrounds other devices to celebrate the surface: the use of decorative motifs, patterning and what I would like to call illuminating, inexorably bringing to life, tending a surface she fears might dull.”

(Sheikh, 1994)



Figure: *Whatever is Here*, (2006)

source-:Book

Her involvement into women-oriented subjects began at its intense stage from the 1990s where she tried placing herself as a revolutionary with concrete ideological beliefs that became useful for promoting women empowerment in the country through the rightful representation of art. Her interests in the depiction of violence related to the assassination of Indira

Gandhi, the anti-Sikh riot in 1984, the Gujarat riots and the gulfwar etc. are examples about how she tried to be against brutalities and massacres. The representation of the distressing reality of her times by understanding the essence of the issues made her art close to the living truths of the society.

Roobina Karode, the chief curator of a show conducted by Arpita Singh commented on her works that,

“It gives glimpses of stories not told, secrets not revealed. I am fascinated by her composition. One can enter it or exit from any point. Various sub-plots, sub-themes create tension. What is also very important is that Singh has remained a painterly painter. Her use of impasto [a technique where paint is placed on a surface in very thick layers] gives a remarkable quality to the surface and texture of her paintings. Much of these have come from her abstract phase in the 1970s.”

(Dutta, 2019)

It is important to note what she considers when she sees a canvas. She says the idea about what has to be painted on the canvas gradually evolves in her mind which takes time to get completely presented in the right form. She finds the first moment as always scary compared to the other as she sees the blank space on the canvas which has to be filled with the required colours to produce the intended image on the canvas. She says that the link gets established between form, content, brushwork and colour in the gradual process (Dutta, 2019).

There would be a resemblance between paintings or sculptures when artists make it while having the same idea in mind. Sometimes, some details of a painting done before would repeat in the latter paintings if the artist feels it matching to the situation portrayed in the canvas. Similar moments happened with Arpita Singh when she painted a seated male figure in *Man with a Black Jacket*. When she was fond of the posture that she depicted for the man

in the painting, she utilised the image of the posture to place it for Dhritarashtra in *Whatever is here*. It is not an imitation, but an influence of the past painting works of the same artist that makes the same artist produce it again for a similar or better situation. Such type of repetitions continuously happens with the paintings of Arpita Singh. She is of the opinion that there should be no hesitation for repetitiveness between one with the other. She says, “Encountering the blank surface of a canvas or paper fills me with anxiety. It represents a challenge and the first mark I make on it is always exciting” (Dutta, 2017).



Figure: *Man with a Black Jacket*

Source-: *web*

It seems to be true as the theme, content and emotions expressed by each painting would be different where the repetition of some details of the painting would not be a serious issue.

Even though there would be a repetitive use of objects in the painting

of Arpita Singh, the impact that is produced by the paintings is different in the audience. The arranging of images by the artist becomes unique. She says,

I am not concerned about the change, whatever is taking place in general. I am only concerned about my work. I am not very mechanical, in terms of the use of mechanical things. Whatever I do, I do with my hands. But anyway you are living in a society and all the changes are bound to influence you.

(Arora, 2019)

In a systematic and positive aspect of viewing art, repetitions are necessary as it is the expression of the refined understanding and creativity of the artist. As it is essential to improve the methods and techniques used in the process of producing art, repetition of certain images, gestures or postures used along with the main subject of the artwork may happen. It does not point to the carelessness or inefficiency of an artist, but it refers to the necessity of the repetition due to similarity in the theme or subject used and also as a part of continuous refinement conducted in the work from the side of the artist. Many artists use repetitive models of art as their signature



Figure: *Figures and Flowers* (1971-1972)

Source:- web

piece with slight or major modifications from past artworks. For example, in Arpita Singh's paintings, there is repetitive use of the object 'chair'. She gives equal or more importance to certain detailing regarding unanimous objects that serve as inevitable components in the creation of art. The use of chairs was included in the series named Figures and Flowers (1971-1972) where a combination of flowers, chairs, and carpets increased the beauty of the art. "She uses chairs and stairs and billowing curtains as metaphors, the disjointed quality of what art critic Ella Datta calls "fractured reality" building towards a seemingly hallucinatory experience" (Singh, 2013). These intermixing and combining of various objects in Arpita Singh's paintings give the notion that the lifeless side of human beings and objects become colourful, eminent and lively in the process of communication with each other. The combination of living and non-living objects in painting takes the perspective that the world is created of both extremes and intermediaries. If one object can make a substantial impact on the other when combined together, the idea of togetherness is proclaimed at the highest through the art. The colourless become colourful, inanimate become animate and the darkness of the world hopes to alter with brightness with such art forms. She maintains the same thought in the use of colours too. She says, "I mix my own colours. For example, I make grey by mixing Indian red and ultramarine. If the red is a little more, you get a very happy grey. If the ultramarine is more, you feel like weeping when you look at it" (Khurana, 2015).

The critical point about the repetition of art objects in the painting of Arpita Singh can also be assigned to the process of imitation. Like the chairs and tables that become a subject to her paintings, which is also seen in the surroundings of the artist, certain objects or faces used in the paintings occur familiar to the artist at some point of evaluating the artwork. Such similarities occur when the painting is completed and when the artist recognises the similarity between the character and the person in real. It can be a person on the next door or someone whom she had met but remains as a stranger. Nilima Sherikh comments about repetition in Arpita Singh's paintings. She writes,

“I would say it is important for her to invent, every day. And still it would not be a contradiction to say that for Arpita our tapestry weaver, repetition is the warp of invention. She uses it to lay the ground field of her world. The rhythms of repetition form structure and continuity within her paintings and between them. She now puts no premium on originality, realising in her wisdom that it would be an irrelevant straitjacket, redundant when she needs all her resources to garner new means to cope with the world at her doorstep : to invent strategies of survival-terms of acceptance and or resistance in the grim, funny and beautiful business of day-to-day living.”

(Sheikh, 1994)

The quest for new subjects and the patience for conducting experiments in Fine arts have always been an important characteristic of Arpita Singh. She entertains the presentation of new combinations and amalgamations in art forms which gives way to the creation of intermixed topics that provides exceptional confidence to the artist. These combinations serve in the same way how different individual colours combine or intermix with each other to bring out new colour schemes with new meanings. When the colours continue to be in the individual identities that are innate to them, a newly intended combination does not occur in the canvas that causes the inexpression of the required theme or subject of the art form. Rather than continuing in the original form, when they are intermixed or combined with each other, they provide the right expression of the subject and increase the possibilities of interpretation of meanings. The same occurs when combining traditional Indian folk culture with Western influences.

The imprints of the style of incorporating combinations reflected in her tendency to encounter with the increasingly hostile social environment that she witnessed around her. Being in the decades of economic imbalance, social and cultural instabilities, and at the brinks of conflicts and wars, her focus moved onto the different forms of subjugations and repressions in the society. Her

word *My Mother* (1993) takes the



Figure: *My Mother* (1993)
Source-: *Book*

experience of her own mother who was under the chaos of street violence during the days when she was struggling to settle with her two children. The emotion of a mother, from the perspective of a woman who is very close to her life, was a response to the riots in Mumbai.

Arpita Singh's paintings are a biting social commentary on the violence we face on a daily basis, when planes buzzing around her skies threaten to crash into buildings, when it's hard to tell whether soldiers are protectors or killers, and when the seemingly innocent is a trap into which the guileless are routinely ensnared. She builds up her canvas in layers, a technique she learned from the country's miniature culture, and treats each one as if it were a storyteller. Her paintings may appear bucolic at first glance, or to the unwary, but hidden beyond the manicured hedges is a prophecy of evil so profound that it makes you flinch. She brings the violence chillingly close to home by placing the demonic in her lived suburbia (Singh, 2013).

Another work, *Child Bride with Swan* (1985) portrays a sexually vulnerable girl-child with a middle-aged female body. The contrast that she

gives to the central character in the painting points to the dissolution of rights which becomes the prior consent of the girl-child. She represents the character as a natural inheritor of rights whose youthful reproductive body seems strangely absent. It gives the notion of a missed generation. The feeling of desire, which is connected with youth and beauty, exists in the body with its caesarean section and receding hairline. More than the indulgence of a fruitful youth, the girl-child character of the portrait represents the desire to escape from the violence to a safe zone. The meaning of desire is connected with a refuge from the violence that affects the girl-child from all sides. Arpita Singh depicts a row of ageing mothers in the portrait making an arc-shaped half ring around the girl-child. The resistance of the female body is projected through these mother characters with shaven heads and widow sarees. They form the focus of the frame illuminating wisdom acquired from the blessings of tradition.

“She transforms the solitude of mature desire to a state of magnificence. Yet, as if in desperate remembrance, this mother holds her child in the manner of a phallic substitute. This double image sublimates the envy and cruelty and grace and confusion of being a woman. Her continuing series since 1994 are variations on the theme of a woman with a girl-child.”

(Kapur, 2000, p. 39)

The bold approach to social evils and issues sustained by Arpita Singh in her perception of art shows her urge to communicate through the medium of art. Her art forms are distinctively expressive and also have several hidden messages that are connected with humanity and kindness. She tries to present the idea of respecting each other for their individuality and existence in the world with equal rights and freedom. She opines that one has to take their own freedom by themselves. She considers art as a weapon that can be effectively used by people who wish to make changes in society. It is important while considering how art is used and for what purpose rather than

using it without having proper idea on why and what it is used for. She supports the argument that if one works with awareness, the diversion, evolution and substantial development comes in the process of work. The work influences the person as well as the person also influences the work mutually that results in fruitful changes in society, the issues in society and also the different sections in society. She says, “whether you planned for it or not, and how you interpret freedom, it depends on how you take it and use it in the meaningful or provocative way” (Singh, personal communication, 2022). The problem or borders of gender does not mingle with the idea as it is seen regardless of caste, gender and religion. The exploration of this universal image is throughout visible in the artistic works of Arpita Singh which she doesn't deny. The importance of getting involved against the social evils that hinder the basic rights of human beings, especially the female gender has been a part of the recognition that formed with continuous alteration and equipment with the reality of life.

During the 1950s and 1960s, when Arpita Singh began her efforts to establish herself in the field of art, there were fewer women artists in the country that could be completely recognised as professional women artists. Those days, as mentioned earlier, though there were options and opportunities, the social and cultural situation was not supportive of the female gender to find a space for them in the area of art. Therefore, women who showed interest to painting and other art forms conducted their artistic creativity as hobbies. It did not bring them to the forefront of high art which was almost entirely exclusive for the male gender. The importance of Arpita Singh as a woman artist in India is mainly because connected with this particular aspect of the situations that she faced at her time of emergence. She walked through the challenging obstacles with her contemporaries like Nilima Sheikh, Nalini Malani, Nasreen Mohamedi, and Madhvi Parikh. They tried to define their distinctive style and approaches with the introduction of new representations and combinations of art.

“When artists like Arpita Singh, Nilima Sheikh, Nalini Malani and

Mrinalini Mukherjee made bold and individualistic works, which drew from a whole range of aesthetic traditions, they impacted the Indian art scene with a space for reverie and reflection. Right from the start, their concerns were with their own lives as well as with the larger social situation. The seamless reality which was their arena, transgressing borders and conventions, gained momentum in the ensuing years.”

(Dalmia and Hashmi, 2006)

When discussing the women-oriented paintings of Arpita Singh, it has to be noted that the artist was not only concentrated on the particular topic. A common technicality that the critics keep up is to place only a specific orientation to an artist, especially when it comes to the ideology of feminism. Though many other works of social importance have been in their list of works, the political and social situations in the country give more prominence to a single theme that they have adapted to their work. Some would also like to be known in a single frame as it gives more mileage to their professional life. Unlike them, Arpita Singh does not consider herself and also do not wish to be addressed only in terms of the feminist- inclined thoughts in her painting. As she has also dealt with several other themes related to the social, cultural and political aspects of the country and the common life of people around her, it would be apt to present her identity as an artist beyond the limits of a single ideological stand. In a solo exhibition in 1996, curated by Barun Bhattacharjee, Arpita Singh writes in the catalogue as,

“I am a woman, I think as a woman, I see as a woman, my references are always feminine – this is the starting point. This does not mean that I am always referring to the female form or femininity. I know what then the work grows the starting point melts, references become signals to lead anybody or everybody to the desired place. I don’t remember myself, the frame breaks and I, the woman, stand there as anybody, as everybody.”

(Singh, 2019)

Looking into the professional career as an artist, the gradual development of Arpita Singh was a continuous shift from one identity to the other. The feminist aspects of her works were most visible during the 1990s at the period when she moved back from the abstract to the figurative style of painting. Krishna Chaitanya, who is an author and art critic – the author of four-volume of Indian painting identifies Arpita Singh's art through three different evolutionary and developmental phases. According to her, these three phases of development defines the artist in Arpita Singh. In brief, the first phase is referred to as innocent and child-like, the second phase as the phase of drawing and abstraction, and the third phase as the phase of figurative painting.

The first phase during the beginning of her career – the 1960s, uses delightful images and mystifying juxtapositions. The phase has resembled with the happy walk in a child's garden of verses.

“Fresh, innocent and child-like though these evocations are, their genetic heredity may be complex. Here Arpita used a popular pictorial idiom but not with a populist intention which would have led her into the culdesac of pop art that has been conquered by the spirit of the blind alleys of a culture where bill boards present the parades of consumer goods with as much absorption as murals of the past painted the Passion or the Ras Leela.”

(Chaitanya, 1985)

Krishna Chaitanya comments that Arpita Singh resembles Bhupen Khaker in her figurative style and colour palette. She also notes the difference in Arpita's painting as it forms interpenetrate with annulled gravitation and the use of levitating objects and figures (Chaitanya, 1985).

The second phase of Arpita Singh's professional career as an artist, much dedicated to drawing and abstraction, from painting and representationalism, was followed by the adaptability to the variations in the

intensity of the strokes, their width and length, the closeness of their lattice spacing. The 1970s was the period when she was exposed to the different forms and themes of art which made a substantial influence in her style and use of imagery in painting.

“Large textures surfaces were created with miniscule strokes, a procedure that demanded patience and dedication, but one which certainly could not be called innovative on the Indian scene. For, after a rather libertine phase when all sorts of gimmicks were tried in the fond hope of fortuitously fumbling upon stinking effects, there is now a chastened recognition of the importance of basics and exceptionally fine drawings are being produced.”

(Chaitanya, 1985)

The two phases of Arpita Singh converged to get integrated in terms of expressive intentions and manners. It retraced the path to the figurative style of representation. Mostly, she used watercolours with a few being oil paintings. From colours to black and white drawing and then to the world of colours allowed her to be completely satisfied with the absolute reticence about the marvellous variety of creation.

“I responded to the change in Arpita’s drawing in the third phase because they pointed to the world out there less ambiguously even if still only suggestively. They evoked spiny creepers tracing arabesques on stretches of sand, ground covered with wisps of straw or needles of casuarina or pine.”

(Chaitanya, 1985)

While considering Arpita Singh’s women-oriented paintings which were attention during the 1990s, it can also be seen that she depicts the problems faced by society through the perspective of women. A wide canvas of reality beyond the boundaries of her canvas, which directly or indirectly affects a group of people or a large community, has been made

available through the limitations of art from the perception of the female gender. It does not imply that she narrowed the importance and seriousness of the issue that affected the society, but it shows how she viewed it from a different angle that was excluded from the mainframe of art by the other artists. Her representation of violence, war and conflicts through the perception of the female gender gave rise to the thoughts and discussions about the effect of such problems in the society on women who also are a major population that receives the negative impacts of the issues. Through such wonderful depicts of the major issues in the society, she incorporated her woman-oriented views to address the wider range of problems that affected not only one gender but the other too.

During the time of her works that dealt with women-oriented subjects, Arpita Singh has pointed her art towards the marginalisation suffered by women as it was a truth that they were cornered and surfaced. The vulnerability of women was exposed through the works of a woman like Arpita Singh.

“Her biggest artistic preoccupation is the study of the human form, which she explores in multiple avatars— primitive, urbane, decaying, spiritual, funereal, and most significantly the feminine. These are materialised through phantasmagorical depictions, often taking the shape of numerous women who are melancholic, vulnerable, bald, or in the nude.”

(Arora, 2019)

In describing herself with the themes and style used in her paintings, Arpita Singh consciously delimits her identity from being a feminist even though she creates artwork based on women related issues or from the perspective of women. Her paintings on women turn out to be more seriously addressing the problems faced by gender, even though she does not intend to make it women-oriented.

“Are we then talking about womanpower? Singh herself has never consciously made a statement about this in her paintings. As she says, “I begin by painting a figure and it turns out to be a woman.” So the term “feminist painter” doesn’t mean much to her. According to her she paints her experiences and since they are of a woman they are a woman’s painting.”

(Dalmia, 2002, p. 64)

The rules and cultural aspects of the society constructed by the embodiment of patriarchal beliefs are questioned through the paintings. The freedom that was denied or was believed to be denied for the female gender was provided through the paintings which helped the gender to present themselves in their own way. The continuous representation of the contrasting identity to the preference of society creates a space of protest through the means of art. These protests have to be seen as a part of the society, from a gender that has been marginalised and considered to be lower than the male gender. The resistance to such intolerance exhibited by the society is addressed through the paintings.

Arpita Singh’s paintings also depict images of women as naked or with partial cloths. It is a strong stand taken by the artist against the taboos related to the body of women. Though sacredly considered as part of culture, tradition and religion, it is mostly expressed in a negative connotation at different sections of the society. It is equally holy and impure at the same time. The problems of the male gaze are high in such contexts. The bodies of women represented by Arpita Singh in her paintings are used as a tool against these concepts followed by the male patriarchal ideologies in the society. Women, especially their body have been used for satisfying sexual frustrations of the male gender that are mostly lead by the concept of patriarchal ideology. This false concept in the society is boldly opposed by the artist through such representation of naked female bodies. It is not the symbol of subjugation and repression of the gender but is a strong move to proclaim that the body of a

woman is more than what has been thought and believed by society. They have invited several patriarchal gazes that account to gender discrimination

The whole system of patriarchy is been criticised through the representation of struggling and resilient forms of images depicted through the women characters in the painting of Arpita Singh. Due to the unaccountable dominance exercised by the patriarchy in various forms, inside and outside the homes, the female gender suffers from insecurity and restrictive forms of life which are more prominent to endanger the growing sense of feminist perspectives.

“The body of the central woman in her iconic form is enhanced by the dark limb of the man entwining her from behind, thus providing her with four arms. The woman is not in the prime of her life but middle-aged and vulnerable and the man’s arms protect her from any violation. The middle-aged woman in her authenticity and allure defies notions of the seductive woman who remains central to the male gaze.”

(Dalmia, 2002, p. 64)

It was in 1982 that Arpita Singh diverted into introducing middle-aged nude in her paintings that portrayed the mismatch with the dominance of patriarchy that subjugated and undermined the female gender. The violent situations of patriarchy and subsequent social situations were highlighted through the very real female figures that she represented as archetypes. These showcasing of nude women in her canvas were a contrast to the well-suited male gender in various paintings. The courage of a woman is openly proclaimed through the nude representations to the male patriarchal system in society. The postures and figures used in such paintings symbolise the superiority that has been acquired by the woman in the painting. It is also represented as a threat to the patriarchy as the painting uses characters with nude bodies which are considered as exploitive tools for the other gender. Through the exhibition of nude bodies of women, it focuses to showcase a wide range of emotions that include hope, suffering, content, dissatisfaction

etc. Therefore, the painting of Arpita Singh not only wonders audience in the colours and sketches but also deeply understands the emotions of the society which is reflected to them through the characters and settings represented in the paintings. Arpita anticipates a feminine situation in which her female characters share an ambiguous imagined universe with things like jars, bottles, tablecloths, chairs, apples, a paper boat, picture frames, and flowers, based mostly on a woman's day-to-day home space. The Chagallesque flying figures, invading items, and moving inanimate objects are all balanced off by the feminine figure, who is usually still or absentminded. (Mushtaq, 2019, p. 4)

In analysing Arpita Singh's portrayal of female characters, there may be a misrepresentation that it confines only to the domestic indoors within the four walls in which the woman is expected to spend their whole life as a life form that respects and obeys the rules highlighted by the patriarchal community. This system follows in many family cultures as most women would be illiterate to find a better job for them. Arpita Singh's representation of women and related issues does not imitate the conventional form of depiction in the way other artists do. She tries to describe the world outside the boundaries of the restricted area of a woman character. Problems that are equally disturbing for both genders and also issues of social concern that affects a wide range of people are discussed through the paintings. Arpita's work isn't existentially grim, but it is notable for its delicate use of wit and comedy to highlight the complicated and befuddling. Her responses to feminine concerns aren't limited to the home. The storey of the Kidwai family and the aftermath of the Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984, which foreshadowed the potentially protective image of the woman in acts of nurturing the girl child, are noteworthy examples. Arpita is addressing the aged woman's sexual self, a distinctively feminine condition, in a recent series of pieces called *Feminine Fable* (1997) (Mushtaq, 2019, p. 4).

The urge to express oneself to the utmost freedom, without the restrictions of anyone else has always been a theme of her painting as she

focuses more on women who, in one or the other way, try to break the laws of the society to be what they are at any cost. This reflects the internal conflict hidden for a lifetime by a common human being belonging to the female gender. The issues and happenings around her aren't taken seriously by anyone – not even considering its physical and psychological impact on women who are directly or indirectly part of the issues. The perspective taken to depict the impact of violence through women was appreciable as the angle preferred by Arpita Singh during the time was not seriously discussed in the mainstream. The naked woman stands exposed in frontal view in Singh's *Unveiling* (2002) and *Security Check* (2003), her innards on display revealing her delicate condition. Communal rioting and brutality are now commonplace global atrocities delivered to our doorsteps through television and newspapers, entering the private sphere of the home (Karode, 2007).

Through an effective display of the surrounding situations wherein the women are suffocating, Arpita Singh widens the possibility of extending the jurisdiction of female perspective from the indoors to the outdoor situations and further to the issues concerning a larger section in society. As each woman is a part of their society, whether it be a large or small community, the significance of the impact produced by whatever violence or disturbance in the societal balance would definitely reflect in the life of women. Moreover, the endpoint of each consequence would be a woman as it is a conventional thought that she would continue to accept the struggles without opposing the injustices done to them. In the representations of brutality and violence in the paintings where women also become a part, they are directly or indirectly being vulnerable to the situations. Therefore, the depiction of nude images of women at a time shows the struggling situation of the women characters and also showcases the resilience and boldness of women characters that represent the society wished by the artist. The women-oriented paintings of Arpita Singh, thus, becomes an inspiration to many women who were unaware of their power and right to expression.

“Since the 1990s, many women artists have openly engaged the

predicament of women in a predominantly patriarchal society where violence, sexual abuse and social discrimination continue to surface in different guises. This certainly marks a shift from personal preoccupation to a greater concern with the world at large by way of empathy and activism.”

(Karode,
2007)

Among the most significant artworks of Arpita Singh, the sixteen panel of work titled *Wish Dream* (2001) is a mural of vibrant colours and textures. She was inspired to create it after she read a Tibetan play. The painting showcases the characters of two women and two men as the pivot figures where the central woman wears a saree with four hands symbolizing a modern-day goddess and a man's hand holding her from behind. The suited man in blue colour portrays the posture of Vishnu of Ananthasayanam and the other holds a little boy on his chest. The personification of male conception is projected through the second male character. The innateness of heritage in miniature painting is expressed through the narrative tool. The colour codes of pink, yellow and blue are used in *Wish Dream*. The folk traditions are recollected through the representation of the characters in such detailing. The tranquillity of the art is preserved through the influence of Buddhist traditions without missing out the contemporariness of the painting (Nair, 2010).



Figure: *Wish Dream* (2001)

Wish Dream is enormous – 24 x 13 ft consisting of 16 mural panels. The power of the feminine form is expressed through the central figure character of the woman in the painting which uses familiar motifs and vivid colours. Arpita Singh explains the symbolism of the work as,

“The mural shows the wishes and dreams of a woman within our society and how it progresses and how it’s related to other women through ritual. The most important ritual is wedding, so you’ll find a woman standing and from behind, two hands of a man holding her. I don’t like to keep space empty, so I fill it up with objects I see everyday. When I gather everything together, the whole pattern is meaningful. Individual forms are not very important to me.”

(“Arpita Singh’s ‘Wish Dream’ may come True”, 2010)

The central character that is surrounded by many other objects and characters is the strength of the painting as the cacophony of images fills the space giving the notion that each individual image shares a close connection with the other making it a cumulative effect. Arpita Singh provides a hint about her art and individuals in life by saying that “Somehow, I have always had the belief that a primitive force exists within us. As individuals, we have to satisfy this instinct; we cannot escape it. As an artist, I try to distill into each of my lines my own stories of darkness” (Nair, 2017).

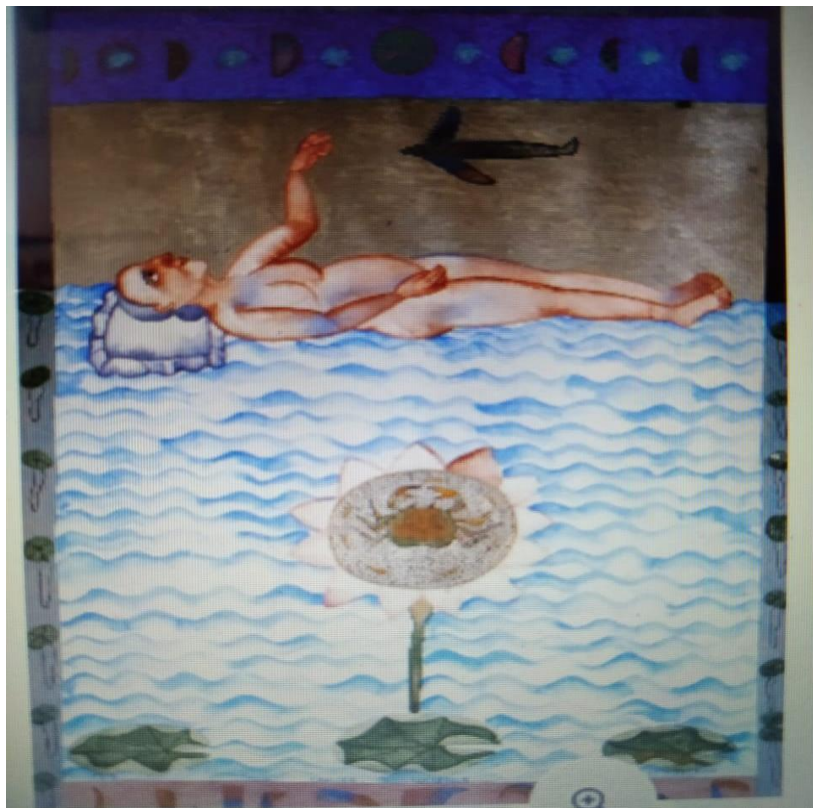


Figure: Cancer: Receptive (1999)

Source -: web

Arpita Singh’s *Cancer: Receptive* (1999) is another notable work where she depicts the image of a nude woman. The character of a woman lies on a sea bed (on the top layer of the water) looking at the changing shapes of the moon from the crescent to the full moon. The physical dimensions of the

painting that used watercolour on paper as a medium is 50.3 cm x 35.3 cm. Like in many paintings, she has incorporated the image of aeroplanes. A lotus-shaped flower is also shown in the painting which contains a large-sized crab inside its core. The woman without any dress rests her head on a pillow making the sea as her bed. The leaves of the flower are shown towards the bottom of the sea where the flower plant originates. *A Tired Woman and Men Against the Wall* (1992) is a watercolour and acrylic painting on paper. It represents a woman who rests her head on six rotating arms of hers where the men line up having the hope that they can climb over the wall where they will get shot (Kapur, 2000, p. 50). She also includes cars, trees with branches and other people.

While analysing this particular painting of Arpita Singh with that of her *Durga* (1994), both resemble in some aspects. The woman representation in *A Tired Woman and Men Against the Wall* also has multiple arms that are rotating around her. The representation of the female gender in it is of the helpless and exhausted kind where the *Durga* painting contrasts to it. There, the woman character representing the goddess, in one hand holds a flower representing innocence and blessing and holds a revolver on the other. The third hand has the tool that sirens for action and the fourth remains calm.

The arm that has the revolver aims at a man in a suit who holds a knife to attach the woman. The arm having the flower is pointed to a beloved worshiper woman who prays to the goddess to help her. "Framing the feminine with goddesses and these stubborn little marionettes, Arpita makes an even more reclusive space for the female body. A body for sustaining trauma and some rare moments of effulgent grace" (Kapur, 2000, p. 51). The figure representing the calm, but aggressive nature of the goddess stands on the body of a man who lies on the floor. The whole painting is set in the background of thick red colour which symbolises violence and bloodshed. Mithu Sen says: "Durga has been a reference point in my work and has also figured in her extension as Kali. However, the direct representation does not excite me. If a present-day artist has to paint Durga, it has to be as a concept

or a re-interpretation” (Dutt, 2010).

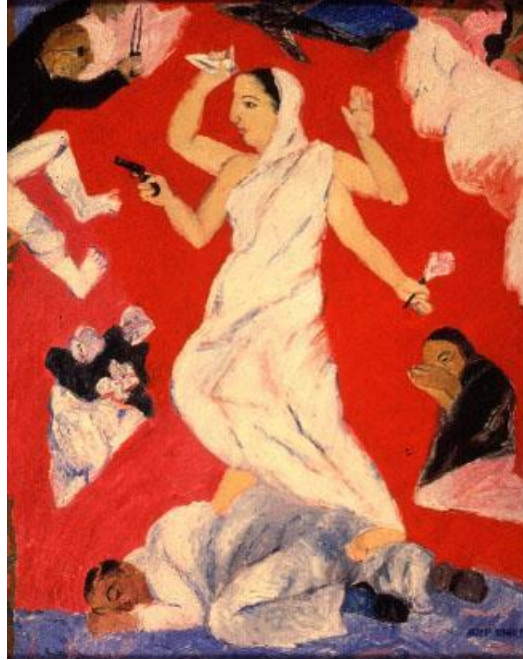


Figure: *Durga* (1994)

Source-: *Web*

Arpita Singh's *Durga* is of dual identity. The identity of a strong woman is expressed at one hand and the identity of a caretaker at the other. She tries to protect the woman praying to her from the male character with the knife. The painting depicts that though women are calm and peaceful (as symbolised through the white colour dress of the goddess figure), there can be situations in which she can become strong and violent for her own resistance and for taking care of the subjugated and the repressed community. The painting showcases harsh colours like red, black and dark blue and also goes in tone with the colours such as light blue, white and pink shades. As discussed earlier, the woman representations of Arpita Singh isn't always projecting their helpless condition, but also highlights the resistance and fight against the patriarchal system of violence and domination. Regarding the broken lines the art works, Arpita Singh says that it represents symbolization where symbols occur in art after it attains its final stage. The symbolical

representations used in Singh's art, though she says "in my art nothing is used symbolically" (Singh, personal communication, 2022), the interpretations provide meanings to her art.

On the contrary, the painting titled *A Tired Woman and Men Against the Wall* is an amalgamation of many images that even have contrary meanings. The nude representation of woman in the painting is exhausted due to the situation and setting in which she lives. The aeroplanes, wall, and the men who try to escape it traces the interest in them to support violence which indirectly affects the life of the woman. The female figure doesn't have the voice to make them get away from such activities. Therefore, she doesn't find the situations good for a peaceful living.

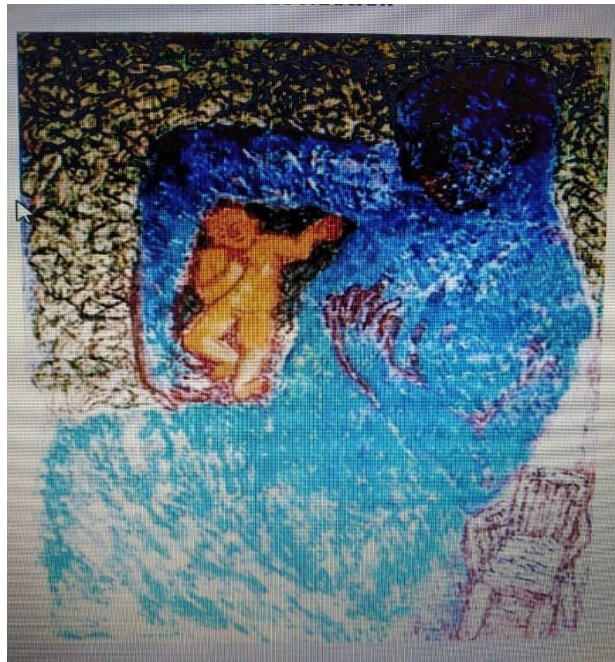


Figure: *Woman with a Girl Child IV (1995)*

Arpita Singh's *Woman with a Girl Child IV (1995)* depicts a mature woman holding a girl-child whom herself seems to be a woman. The reality of life is acquired from the mother who is fierce and benign in her character. The nurturing attitude of women who shows the qualities of a perfect mother is showcased through the representation of the two female characters. She

deliberately shows the images of men who are well dressed in suits and also represents that they pass time by being in their freedom zones. The female character in the painting is naked and her girl child is also naked. This nakedness of the female gender in the painting shows their vulnerability and helplessness to express them by enjoying the freedom of that is exercised by the men of their time. As in many paintings, Arpita has also included the image of a chair where the mother character sits along with her girl-child. Depiction of female gender in nude and semi-nude images in the *Feminine Fable* (1996) gives the idea of innocence. The message is clinched by the recent appearance of a nutlike feminine body. Her reverse acrylic paintings and small water colours, dating from 1996, offer a pop-out parody of a series of kitsch icons that would be charming if they weren't a little crazy: half-clothed girls seem to revert to a nursery-rhyme world with, finally, a hard note of mockery about innocence, modesty, and the world's claimed verity (Kapur, 2000, p. 50-51).

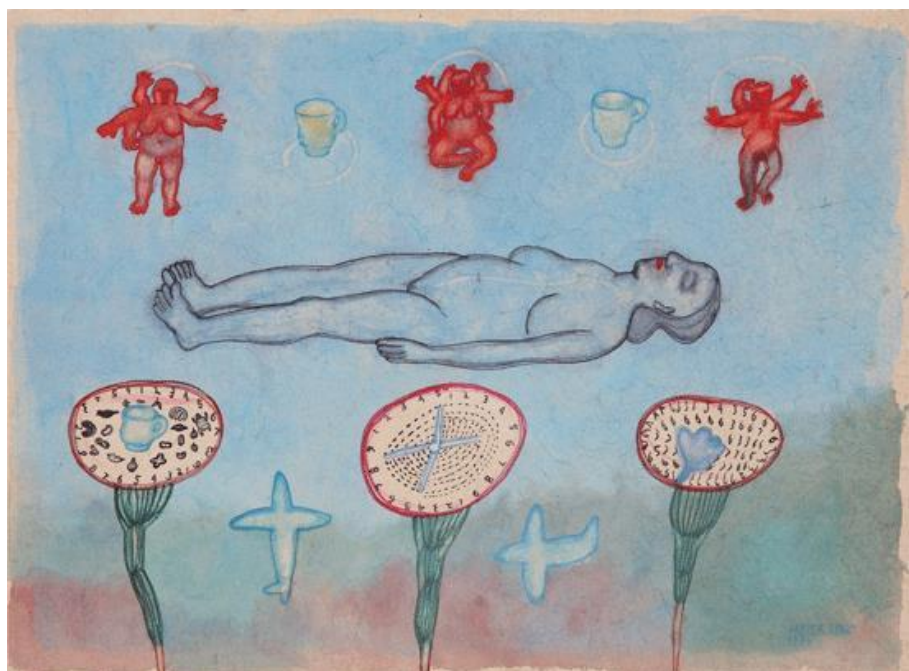


Figure: *Feminine Fable* (1996)

Similar identity is given to the painting titled *A Woman and a Woman* (1995) which was done in oil on canvas and presented at CIMA art gallery. It

represented two women, one sitting on a chair and the other placed on the lap of the other woman who is shown as a huge figure. She incorporates an aeroplane motif which denotes the flight from the ground level. The painting is hued in blue tint and the chair shown where the woman sits is placed at the centre. The continuity of images when transiting from one canvas to the other is maintained in the same way the link between the two female figures is preserved. The bigger sized woman transfers her valuable thoughts and experiences to the other who tries to acquire it from her. More than the relationship between a mother and a child-girl, the link between the two female figures represent the continuity of experiences of the female gender.

The only time a woman is really free from the sexual gaze of men is when she takes on an identity larger than her sexuality – such as that of an expecting mother. Society unanimously deems pregnant women as sexually unavailable and treats them with reverence instead. In most situations, however, women continue to face the burden of their bodies.

(Bothra, 2020)



Figure: *Thirty Six Clouds: Yudhishtira Approaching Heaven* (2005)

The man-centred heroism is criticised through *Thirty Six Clouds: Yudhishtira Approaching Heaven* (2005) which points at Yudhishtira's leisure trip. There are five figures including Kunti and the four younger brothers. The contemporary image representing a corporate man is symbolised through the depiction of epic heroes. She blends traditional beliefs with the contemporary situations of the country.

Night Cab (2007) is about a woman who wished to be independent and liked to enjoy her freedom while hiring a cab. Arpita Singh projects a male figure in the painting who is seated. She also depicts a nude woman lying down against the orange colour backdrop of the painting, shamefully. It raises the gender issues of the society where a woman is not expected to be independent of her own, even in the matter of hiring a cab at night. Freedom and the basic right of the female gender which is questioned, harassed and exploited by the male gaze and torturing attitude is represented in the

painting.



Figure: Security Check (2003)

The bare body of a woman is shown in *Security Check* (2003) for criticising the term. The rules of the dominant powers of the society are considered in the context of a security check. In the painting, the lady wearing a white sari and red blouse shows that there is a queue followed for the procedure. The women figure raises her hand in the painting which usually is a procedure during the process of security check. Arpita shows that women are made to be surrendered before the power and money as the other gender possessed the dominant patriarchal structures in society. The privacy of a woman is hindered during a security check which denotes that the life and decisions of women are scrutinised to make them live like the subjugated and the powerless group. The unclothed posture of the female figure in the painting is a victim of the cruel and brutal processes of the system.

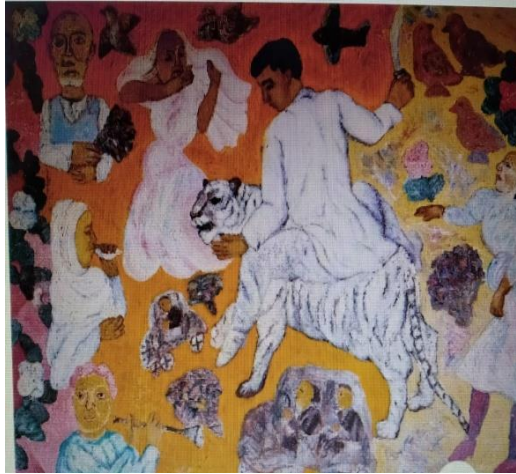


Figure: *Man on White Tiger with Clay Birds* (1991)

Source-: Web

Man on White Tiger with Clay Birds (1991) included human figures, birds, plants and a white tiger. The physical dimensions of the painting are 59 cm x 79 cm and are done with oil on canvas. A male is showcased as the central figure that rides the white tiger and holds a knife against a woman who wears a white sari. There are images of aeroplanes, plants and flowers which is usual imagery in the artworks of Arpita Singh. The woman fears the man with the knife and she tries to move away from being attacked. The image of the white tiger is symbolised as an aggressive and ferocious creature that is afraid by people. The symbolism in general even extends to the obstacles in life which would be faced by a person. Therefore, the white tiger and the man in the figure can be seen as the obstacles that the woman (female gender) has to overcome in their life to live peacefully and with freedom. These representations through art in Arpita Singh's paintings highlight the gender issues prevalent in society. The patriarchy symbolised by the man on the white tiger tries to attack the female gender with his knife to inherit a sense of fear in them. This is directly criticised by Arpita Singh through such a wonderful representation using mixed colours and images.

The art that comprises of the use of motifs such as aeroplanes, cars, birds, human beings etc. denotes the setting to be a part of the society in which the characters live. The use of several such images in one canvas converges

at a particular point in which it joins together to provide meaningful interpretation to the painting.

“The rich assortment of motifs and metaphors which Singh uses in her paintings is mined not just from her own experiences, but also her thoughts and ideas on larger issues like female identity, civilisational history, displacement of people, exercise of hegemonic power leading to conflict and violence and the enduring presence of myths in our lives.”

(Dutta, 2017)

Arpita Singh’s painting not only presents a group of images together but also provides meaning to the amalgamation of the images. The canvas is bordered with the display of flowers and aeroplane which “stage for the quiet gesture of grief, funeral postures with the offering of a bouquet” (Kapur, 2000, p. 48).

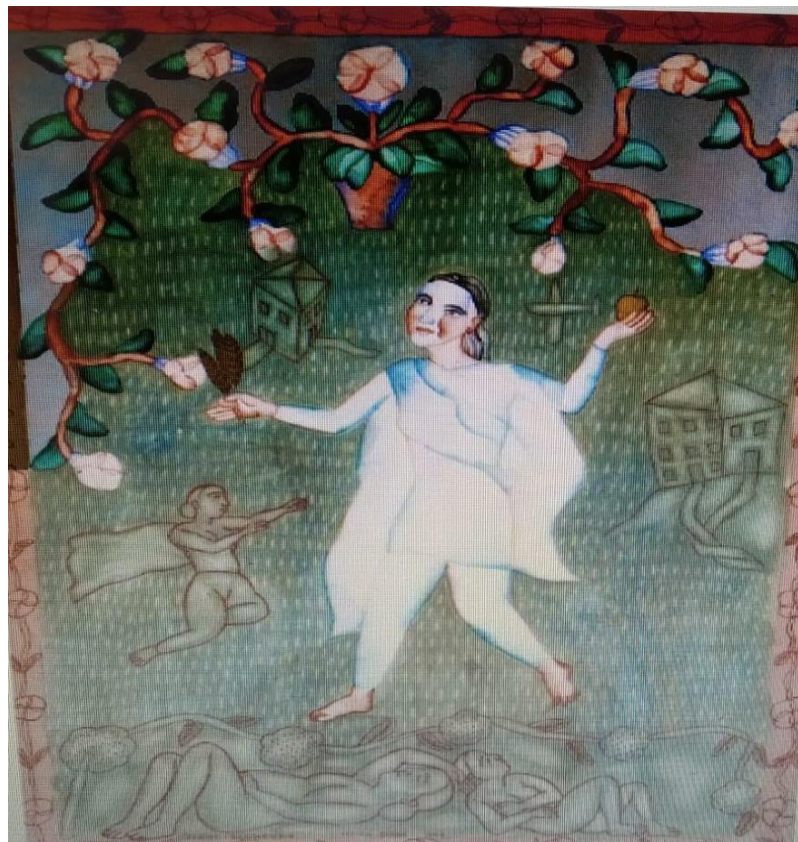


Figure: *Virgo: Flowering* (1990)

Virgo: Flowering (1999) is a painting that shows a dressed woman holding a butterfly that sits on one among the several flowers spread around through the branches of a tree. She wears a white dress denoting a modern woman. It is a watercolour with dimensions 50.3 cm x 35.3 cm. The painting is closely connected with the Zodiac sign of Virgo. It was presented on 30 June 2019 at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in New Delhi. The background textures in light green colour with border colour as light brown where the flowers of the tree are spread around to decorate the canvas. Though the white-dressed woman who has an oval-shaped face enjoys her time with nature, there are two women in nude shown towards the bottom of the canvas who rests under the soil. The contrasting face of the same gender is shown in a single canvas. The white-dressed middle-aged woman is the focus of the painting whereas the other two women in the nude are merged with the major colour of the canvas. Resilience from a subjugated life is shown by Arpita Singh where the white-dressed woman showcases the freedom that is expected to be enjoyed by the gender and the other two women in the nude as the opposite representation of it. Virgo flowers are organised, neat and enjoy their blending with the situations. Arpita chose the Zodiac sign of Virgo to match with the characteristics of women showcased in the art. The characters seem to be loyal, kind, shy in their attitude. They are fond of animals, nature and cleanliness. They dislike the rude attitude of others. She gives these characteristics to the characters in the painting to show that women prefer to enjoy their rights and freedom than being repressed for a lifetime. Arpita Singh says,

“the effect of the work is equally on the painter and the people who delineate the meaning of the artistic work. Here the important thing is the relationship between the worker and the work. It depends upon person that how deeply he/she reflects on it. How much he/she owns it. There for in reality there is no any difference between creator and the creation. He/she can't say that I saw such thing and made (painted) this but he/she

can think that I am capable of doing such thing”.

(Singh, personal communication, 2022)

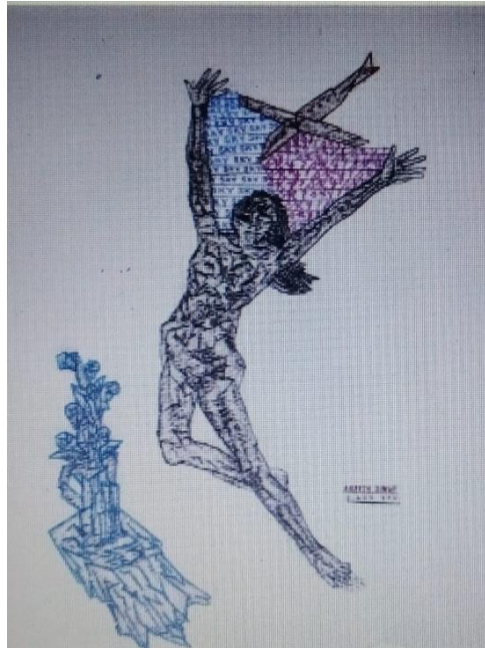


Figure: *Sky* (2012)

Sky (2012) also shows similar views of the artist. The 16 x 12 in. charcoal and watercolour painting on paper shows a woman jumping towards the sky where an aeroplane image is placed above her head. The space between her raised arms, head and the aeroplane is divided into two. The left side of the vertically divided area has the word ‘sky’ with a question mark along with it. It is written denoting a single lines notebook page where the words are in pink colour. The right side of the vertically divided area has the same word without the question mark in blue colour. The painting also includes a plant-like structure in the paper. The woman is shown as nude and is drawn with the help of charcoal material with many shades on her body. The image of the woman and the word ‘sky’ above her shows the basic instinct of the woman under the pressure of restricted life to enjoy the freedom with the opportunity of the limited sky. The dreams, hopes and wishes of the female gender are tried to be expressed through the painting by the artist. The right sides with pink colour words are cursive and the left sides with blue colour are capital and straight. These two sides do not go in with each other as it contradicts in

such details. It can be the mixed thoughts – one with the dilemma and the other having a decision in mind. These two versions of the same word point to the emotion and situational dilemma experienced by the female gender that struggles by being silent part of the patriarchal society.

Blue Cherries (1995) which was showcased at the exhibition held in CIMA gallery depicted a similar woman figure as the main image showing resistance. The seated posture of the woman who keeps her hand on the table covered with blue cherries where a man stands behind the woman with a pistol gives a haunting image to the audience. The resistance of the woman figure is depicted through her ignorance of the conventional forms of patriarchy and its threat on the female gender. She is silent but bold in her attitude. The innocence and purity of women are challenged by the man who points the pistol at her.

A perfect example of the male gaze on a woman is explained through the painting *Watching*. She shows seated men looking at their right on something that is blurring in their vision. They are excited at their look as if indicating that they are doing a male gaze.

“In literal terms, the gaze is male when men do the looking. Men look both as spectators and as characters within works. In figurative terms, to say that the gaze is male refers to a way of seeing which takes women as its object. In this broad sense, the gaze is male whenever it directs itself at, and takes pleasure in, women, where women function as erotic objects.”

(Devereaux, 1990, p. 337)

The pseudo intellect characters of these men are shown through the wrinkled skins, crashed cloths and with scribbles of letters. The corporate representative of patriarchy is shown with the hint to the systematic order of patriarchy. Arpita indicates the power, demand and interest of patriarchy that undermines the female gender as only objects to satisfy their pleasure.



Figure: Evening Walk (2004)

The same type of theme is dealt with in *Evening Walk* (2004) where she shows images of nine men walking and riding motorcycles. The men walk in the same direction and are representing a stereotyped attitude that they acquired from the society that allows them to conduct male gaze as their right. She depicts a map towards the bottom – under the feet of the men who walk in the same direction to indicate that the power is on their side and they rule the country of their own. This representation of men and the map allows the audience to understand that she points on the biased rules and patriarchal system in the society that is considered to be the right of men. The viewpoint of men about women does not provide women with their rights and freedom. “The male gaze essentially hypersexualises women by reducing them to objects of aesthetic value only – for the benefit of the heterosexual male” (Bothra, 2020).

Moving to the socially sensitive issues dealt in the paintings of Arpita Singh, the *Whatever is Here* (2006) would make the top list. She adopts the theme from catastrophic incidents that are formed in the society with the conflicts created by people for power and money. The 7 feet x 9 feet painting on canvas depicts the brutal violence of Gujarat riot that shattered the sense of kindness and compassion in many who got involved in it. The colour tone of the painting is cacophonous with several images coming together. It gives the idea that the situations represented in the painting represent a ‘not so good’ scene as the images seem to be ready for violent activity. The use of specific

colours like pinkish red, black shades, blue and white mixtures give the idea of an intolerant situation. Arpita gets into the psychological aspects of the violence more than a passive citizen of the country. In the painting, she uses several individual images to explain the situation. The use of war machinery, pistols, aeroplanes, river, human beings etc. add the seriousness of the issue. In addition to the use of images, she incorporates certain vocabularies related to catastrophic art. She uses words such as epic heroes, mercenaries, courtiers, holy men, tank, war widows, women violated, aeroplane, gun, lost river and Arabian sea. These words are numbered in order and are also overlapped by the images of horses. The indication of these words along with the use of selected images denotes the catastrophic effect of the violence that took place in those days. The words 'war widows', 'women violated', 'holy men' etc. tries to mention about the power politics of man where the female gender becomes vulnerable victims. They are treated holy if they are killed in these violent activities. The painting throws the question about the status of women in such cases when they lose their beloved acquaintances. They are rejected from the concept of war, riot or any other violent activities in which men take part. Arpita makes it clear that it is the women who suffer for the rest of the life without the presence of their partner, son or someone beloved to them if the person gets killed in the violent activity.

The patriarchy has left the female gender to suffer for their loss for a whole lifetime. When the men are projected as holy and epic heroes, the women are left with the title 'widow'. She opposes this concept of society through her painting. The masculine representation of male gender is seen as heroic whereas the feminine gender is expected to be the vulnerable victims.



Figure: *Child Bride* (1985)

The painting of *Child Bride* (1985) points to the marriage of a girl child at their teenage. It showcases the silent violence and the resultant vulnerability and victimisation of the female gender due to the religious and cultural believes that are influenced by the ideology of patriarchy. It is also seen as the subjugation of female gender by the powerful and dominant male gender who always wants to repress the other. The watercolour painting is of the dimensions 36 x 48 cm. Arpita Singh depicts this image of the female gender to show that the subjugation process starts from an early life of a woman who begins to lose their innate identity and rights due to such injustices done to them in the name of tradition, culture and religious beliefs.



Figure: *Girl on a Lotus Leaf* (1995)

The famous painting *Girl on a Lotus Leaf* (1995) also highlights the urge for resistance in women. It is a typical example of stylistic imagery and the well-organised space balance on the canvas that the artist always tries to produce without failure. A strong negation of the male perspective on the female body is expressed through the painting when the major character opens up her vagina while holding a fruit. She is placed on a lotus leaf to provide divineness and traditional touch to the image. The genital organs of a female body that are seen only on the basis of a sexual perspective is as a tool of resistance against the patriarchal norms. She uses such representations using female body as she is familiar to it. The figures of mother and goddess in her works is developed according to the situation in the painting (Singh, personal communication, 2022). The conventional forms of representing women figure in its high aesthetic sense are rejected in the painting that aims at showcasing the resistant power of the female gender. The painting also comprises of motifs such as pressure cooker, coffee ugs, vase, jug etc. shown in silhouetted colours. The red colour of the background is not used to show these motifs. The aeroplane which is a usual image in the works of Arpita Singh is also used in this painting. These aeroplanes suggest the freedom from

the struggles and repressions faced by the women in the society. As most of her paintings are focused on the purpose of projecting the female gender with her fullness in freedom to live like a human being, the use of such motifs gives support to the thought. The cultural constructions of the society about how a woman has to behave and what she has to perform is overturned through the depiction of such bold attempts by the artist. She overly proclaims that women are not a slave to the patriarchy and it is not her burden to please the male dominance in the society. The open expression of the vagina and private parts in the paintings is a kind of protest to the ongoing discrimination, vulnerability and repression suffered by the female gender. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir writes about the condition of a female body that is seen disadvantageous by the patriarchal society. She writes that “The young girl feels that her body is getting away from her ... on the street men follow her with their eyes and comment on her anatomy. She would like to be invisible; it frightens her to become flesh and to show flesh” (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 333).

Therefore, the analysis can be converged to the signs, symbols, and metaphors used by the artist to creatively incorporate the criticism towards exploitation against women in society. Arpita Singh's works, as discussed in the selected artistic works above, unique artistic style that is characterized by the use of human figures, especially women figures, as signs in her paintings. Her works are known to reflect the complexities of contemporary Indian society, and she often depicts women in her paintings as a symbol of strength, resilience, and vulnerability. In her paintings, Arpita Singh often employs a combination of both abstract and figurative elements, using a range of materials including acrylics, watercolors, and oils. However, the human figure remains a central component of her art, and she often uses it as a sign to explore themes related to women's roles in society, cultural identity, and the complexities of contemporary India.

One of the most notable features of Arpita Singh's paintings is the way in which she uses the female figure to convey a sense of vulnerability and strength. Her women figures are often depicted as powerful and resilient, yet

at the same time, they are portrayed as fragile and vulnerable. This duality is a reflection of the complex and contradictory nature of women's roles in Indian society.

In many of her paintings, Arpita Singh also explores themes related to cultural identity, particularly as it relates to the experience of women in India. Her works often depict women in traditional Indian attire, such as saris, and she uses these garments as a sign of the cultural and social expectations placed upon women in Indian society. The use of these traditional garments also serves to highlight the ongoing struggle of women in India to balance their cultural heritage with their aspirations for modernity and equality. Another prominent feature of Arpita Singh's paintings is the use of color to convey emotion and mood. Her works often feature bright, vibrant colors that create a sense of joy and celebration, yet at the same time, there is a sense of sadness and longing that pervades many of her paintings. This tension between joy and sadness is a reflection of the complex and often conflicting emotions that women in India experience as they navigate the challenges of contemporary society. The use of human figures, particularly women figures, as signs in Arpita Singh's artistic works has become a defining characteristic of her style. Her paintings explore a range of themes related to women's roles in Indian society, cultural identity, and the complexities of contemporary India. Through her use of color, form, and composition, Arpita Singh creates works of art that are both beautiful and thought-provoking, inviting viewers to reflect on the challenges and joys of the human experience.

Animals and birds are another common motif in Arpita Singh's works. She often uses birds to symbolize freedom and liberation, while animals like cats and dogs represent companionship and loyalty. These creatures are often depicted in close proximity to the human figures in her paintings, suggesting a deep connection between the natural world and humanity. Domestic objects such as furniture, utensils, and household items are also prominent in Arpita Singh's paintings. These objects often serve as symbols of domesticity and femininity, but they are also imbued with a sense of nostalgia and memory. The objects are depicted in a simplified, almost abstract manner, suggesting

a sense of transience and impermanence. Also, her paintings frequently feature landscapes, often depicted in a dream-like, fantastical manner. These landscapes are characterized by bright, bold colors and flattened perspectives, suggesting a sense of otherworldliness and unreality.

On discussing the symbols used in the selected works, it is evident that her paintings often explore the complexities of contemporary Indian society and the role of women within it. Throughout her career, she has used a range of symbols to convey various ideas and themes related to women's experiences. One of the most prominent symbols used by Arpita Singh in her paintings is the traditional Indian sari. The sari is a symbol of femininity and traditional Indian culture. In many of her works, the women figures are depicted wearing saris, which serves as a visual representation of their cultural identity. However, the sari is also used as a symbol of the societal expectations placed upon women in India. It highlights the ongoing struggle of women to balance their cultural heritage with their aspirations for modernity and equality.

Another symbol frequently used by Arpita Singh is the bird. In many of her paintings, birds are used to represent freedom and escape. This is particularly relevant in the context of women's experiences in India, where social and cultural norms can often be restrictive. The use of birds as symbols of freedom reflects the desire for women to break free from these constraints and achieve their full potential. She also frequently uses the flower as a symbol in her works. Flowers are often associated with femininity and beauty, and in her paintings, they serve as a visual representation of the inner strength and resilience of women. This is particularly relevant given the challenges faced by women in India, such as gender-based violence, discrimination, and limited opportunities.

The use of water is another prominent symbol in Arpita Singh's paintings. Water is often used as a symbol of life and renewal, representing the potential for growth and change. In many of her works, water serves as a metaphor for the transformative power of women, who have the potential to change themselves and their society.

Discussing the metaphors used in her works, there are certain focus points that has to be considered because it gets highlighted and influenced in interpreting and providing meaning to the artistic works. In many of her paintings, Arpita Singh uses the cage as a metaphor for the social and cultural constraints placed upon women in India. The cage represents the limited opportunities and freedoms available to women and highlights the ongoing struggle for gender equality. The mirror is also a recurring metaphor in Arpita Singh's works, often used to represent self-reflection and introspection. In many of her paintings, women figures are depicted looking into mirrors, suggesting a desire for self-understanding and a search for identity. Another metaphor to be considered is the tree image that is a powerful metaphor used by Arpita Singh to represent growth and strength. In many of her paintings, women figures are depicted standing or sitting beneath trees, symbolizing their resilience and ability to thrive even in challenging circumstances. Associated with it is flower that is a symbol of beauty and femininity, but in Arpita Singh's paintings, it is also used as a metaphor for inner strength and resilience. The flower represents the potential for growth and change, suggesting that women have the ability to transform themselves and their society. The bird is a common metaphor used by Arpita Singh to represent freedom and escape. Women figures are often depicted alongside birds, suggesting a desire to break free from the constraints of society and to achieve their full potential.

Conclusion

There are several more representations of the life of women in the society that has been highlighted in the paintings of Arpita Singh. She created women based portraits to put the life of women at different situations in the society to the forefront so that people would realise what the unsatisfactory situation of women in the society and the repression suffered by them. Paintings such as *Women in Red* (1985), which is a watercolour on paper of the dimensions 29 x 49 cm, *Seated Women in Floral Dress* (1986) painted with oil on a canvas having the dimensions 54 x 90 cm, *My Lollipop City: Gemini Rising* (2005),

oil on canvas of the dimensions 60 x 84 cm, and *My Mother*(1993) which is an oil on a canvas having dimensions 135 x 180 cm are created to discuss various angles of women-situations and the real essence of the female gender that gets distorted at the attack of patriarchy and male- dominated existence of the society.

Therefore, from the above analysis of the style, techniques, representations, symbolisation and explanations of Arpita Singh's paintings and drawings, it can be concluded that the artist, though she did not admit that she is completely a feminist, has incorporated women in her work had the aim to revive the thoughts and attitudes on them for the society. The general appearance of female identity is thrashed in her paintings where she depicts her style of women figures. "Not only did she acquire a distinctive language in the way she used rich layerings of colour, strong brushwork, simplification of form, but also through the changing imagery over the decades" (Dutta, 2017). Same as the high price of her paintings, her work is priceless while considering the representation of reality in the past decades, the progressively developing present situations and the hopeful future.

CHAPTER SIX

Women and Womanhood: The Selected Works of Arpana Caur

An artist, through the means of his/her art always is open to get influenced by the changing scenarios and also tries to influence society through art. Living in a society, one cannot avoid the gradually forming circumstances that influence the social values and perception of people. This compelling factor of art on society and vice-versa is significant in developing the relationship between the both so as to create mutual cooperation in their development. The reason why art is mostly valued by people is because of its direct and indirect attachment with the society in which they live. This chapter delineates the selected artistic works of Arpana Caur and Anupam Sud for their depiction of women and womanhood. The representation of the reality faced by the female gender through their body has been a highlight of both the artists. If there is a fault in the system or issue that needs a solution in society, the role of an artist to guide in the right track by pointing out the mistakes that need rectification is crucial in social living. The power of art is high in criticising and re-tracking societal activities and ideologies. The recreation of this reality through art points to questions that is relevant and often discussed through platforms that speaks for the equality, freedom and rights of the female gender. The female space in art in India cannot be defined without discussing the valuable contributions of Arpana Caur and Anupam Sud as their influence in society does not only remain limited to the field of art, but it extends to what is beyond through the means of art.

The importance of art and an artist increases when his/her work aims to highlight the everyday life of people in society. It requires in-depth knowledge about what happens around and what does such events result in. It would not be much tough for a person to fix a specific situation that imitates the themes closely related to feminism. But extracting the essence of the incidents and authentic situations from the daily life of common people to find

critical perspectives through art makes it more interesting and artistic. The peculiarity of the artists to be discussed in this chapter is the effort that they invest to research about what happens around them in the common spaces of people in society to trace the very specific moments of not only women but also men who go through various tense situations. The agony and angst of people, who suffer from personal and common problems in life, when depicted through the powerful colours in the canvas, becomes a discussion topic that may give rise to solutions through responsible interventions from the authorities.

Arpana Caur

Born in a traditional Sikh family on September 4, 1954, in Delhi, she had the opportunity to develop her talents even amidst the unfortunate struggles of the community. It was her mother who recognised and encouraged her talents in painting for which she had the innate interest from her childhood itself. Even though being a single parent, Ajeet Caur who also was a creative writer and the author of the novel *Khanabadosh* gave support to her daughter in concentrating on her artistic career. She paved the ground for Arpana Caur to excel as an artist by providing the essential emotional and familial support. She studied literature in her college and was diverted to the world of art with the intense passion that made her acquire the techniques of art on her own. She supports the multidisciplinary in art that can welcome new insights from various other disciplines to art. The trend of multidisciplinary is appreciated by Arpana Caur saying that painting is not just an act done using brush on canvas but it is a philosophy (Caur, personal communication, 2022). The works of Arpana Caur showcase a feminist perspective placing the portraits of women in the contemporary urban context. She provides no overt emphasis on their sexuality but is used as a symbol to represent different themes. She has admitted that the pillar of strength behind the depiction of women on a canvas having real-life resemblance is because of the background of being brought up by her working mother. She considers women's body as more than an object of beauty and thus the erotic aspect is downplayed by a practical approach

(Dasgupta, 2011). Her artistic works cannot be separated from the society as it has directly been influenced by the various political and social situations around the world and India. The incidents such as the Hiroshima, Partition of India and 1984 massacre of the Sikhs have been addressed through her works that projected and criticised the political violence that disturbed the peaceful and harmonious living of the ordinary people. Her artistic thoughts were formed along with her experiences with events and situations around her. The selection of the topics for her artistic work denotes the importance that she gives to the social causes that haunt the safe living of people. She explains about her viewpoint on the importance and relevance of her artistic works on contemporary political and social situation in India. She says that her works have two dimensions: one, the politico-social and the second, the spiritual aspect focusing on the teachings and morals of Guru Nanak, Buddha and Kabir. She says the respect for Guru Nanak is mainly because his gracious presence as a reformer who considered women and men as equal, who began Langar system that demolished the traditional concept of caste system and taxation. The reformer identity of Guru Nanak attracted her to embrace the spiritual ideologies that often provided women their rights equal to men. She points to the works of Yogi-Yogini and Soni Mahiwal under the category of her spiritual artistic works. On the political realms, her works related to the 1984 massacre of the Sikhs is highlighted. She says,

“Some of my work is social political, some of it is spiritual and abstract. Like this day and night series I have never seen anybody painting day and night, so I thought if I do a whole day, embroidering creation and night is cutting it, like life and death and day and night and time. I have never seen any artist painting day and night so this is my favourite”

(Caur, personal communication, Jan 17 2022)

The influence of her mother in her paintings is well reflected in the series of paintings titled *Mother*. She incorporated the beauty of a woman's daily life activities into the canvas thus bringing closeness in the relationship

between the maternal existence and its reflection through art. Her paintings holistically express the distressing milieu of individuals and society, and also enhance the sentiments of life to provide a didactic tone. The feminist aspect of her paintings that depict women as central characters is originated from her strong belief that women shouldn't be considered weak and dependent. These might have been the resultant factor of what she had learned from her mother. The separation of her father Dr Rajendra Singh made her dependent only on the ideas and ideologies of her mother which itself had immense influence in nurturing the artistic talent within her. This influence led her to complete her Masters in Literature from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi and also to divert from the field of humanities to art. Having roots in Punjab and Sikh community, she has been deeply influenced by Punjabi literature, especially the works of Shiv Batalvi, Krishna Sobti and Amrita Pritam. She has the opinion that art, poetry, music, and theatre film are interrelated because painting is not about rubbing a brush on canvas. According to her, it is a whole experience of one's life time (Caur, personal communication, 2022). It helped her to understand the undertones of melancholy and pathos that has to be included to influence the audience. Caur herself has agreed that her mother and Indian miniature painting are the main source of inspiration along with the literature from Punjab based on mysticism and spiritual themes (Madhukar, 2016). The struggles that she had to face in living a small urban family life amid the trauma of the Delhi riots in 1984 made herself know about the realities of life that had no connection with the boosted beauty in the canvases. This unconventionality that she follows throughout her life has also influenced in framing the topic of selection, the colour combinations and the intention behind the depiction of figures in her paintings. When many of her contemporaries shifted to the style of abstract painting, she remained in portraying the hidden perspectives in the figures that she painted out of her harsh realities. It doesn't mean that she didn't experiment with abstract and texture-based artistic skills. The process of incorporation happened late in her career. Her activist intervention against the cutting down of trees for the commonwealth games in New Delhi can be related to the pain that she

experienced in being tortured and rooted out of the innate culture. She believed in the interconnectedness of life which made her react against the decision of the government that indirectly affected the existence of peacocks. The tragic series *The World Goes On* (1984) depicting the torturous and violent situation during the Delhi riot in connection with the Sikh massacre is a continuation of this ideological belief that she maintains in her life. Her involvement in the issue led green enthusiasts to replant more than nine thousand trees and also won the court case against the government. It was a milestone for Arpana Caur for bringing out the real essence of art beyond the limits of the canvases and galleries. She attempted to make an impact through art like how the performing arts and other forms of art and literature have an impact on society (Dasgupta, 2011).

The exhibition coordinated by M. F. Hussain in 1975 at the Triveni Art Gallery where she was selected to present her paintings can be regarded as a major turning point in her career. She recollects the event that made her confident saying,

“I was studying literature in lady Shri ram college in Delhi and I saw an ad that Hussain was selecting the work of young artists in tri venue, so I sent three canvases so they were luckily selected but I never had the courage to go and tell Hussain that these are my paintings. Then those paintings were seen by a German cultural counselor called Tukamer. So here they found our house and came in a big car and then they said that we are having a very big group show with artists like Swaminathan, Ravichandran, Pramjeet Singh and we want six of your work, that was 1974”

(Caur, personal communication, 2022)

She could showcase her talent to art lovers and that made her get qualified for the 1982 show hosted by the Ibrahim Alkazi of Art Heritage, Jahangir. From that point onwards, she was able to find her space in the world of art through several important solo and group exhibitions at several galleries and exhibitions such as the First Baghdad Biennale (1986), Curated Exhibition of Women Artists Festivals of India, Moscow (1987), the Collins Gallery,

Glasgow (1991), Foundation for Indian Artists Galerie, Amsterdam (1998), Fine Art Resources, Berlin (1998), Indo-Austrian Group Shows, Austria (1998), Bose Pacia Gallery, New York (1999), Smithsonian Museum, Washington (2001), October Gallery, London (2003), Indian Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2004) and Indigo Blue Gallery, Singapore (2007).

The trajectory of her artistic career in the canvas can be briefly described as a gradual evolution from being mostly autobiographical by representing what she was familiar with such as the urban chaos, riots, tortures and muscular women. The period of 1970s showcases her paintings within a socio-political context. It then changed in the next decade to exhibiting the beauty of natural landscapes extending to showcasing mountains, sky and water. It had the influence of the Indian miniature painting inspired by the Basohli painting. This transformation was based on the correlation between human existence and nature that she even tried to focus on her social activism. While assessing her works, it can be said that the period from 1975 to 1995 has been more dedicated for the structure similar to Pahari Miniatures where diptychs and triptychs of the canvas represented the flat colours and pictorial elements. “The Pahari miniatures captivated her also for their “unusual composition – their strange, linear architecture and vibrant colours” (Nair, 2015). Her involvement in such issues came from the realisation that equal to the vulnerability faced by women in society, the mother nature treated by the dominance of man is also undergoing a similar critical situation. She focused on the women-oriented painting during the 1990s where it highlighted the importance of maternal living, issues and difficulties. If her works are analysed for the themes discussed in it, it extends from gender inequality, violence on various phases, environmental exploitation, injustices to discrimination between human beings. The social disparity experienced by women in society can be termed as the distinguishing peculiarity in the themes showcased by Arpana Caur through her paintings. The struggling factor and pressure experienced by women from the patriarchal society in her paintings have been directly extracted from the realities of life experienced by women who were at the

same time termed as goddesses and also forced to work beyond their limits like a slave. The viewer emotionally gets attached to the women figures presented by Caur as they are mostly related to autobiographical to her life and also easily relatable to the life of each woman in society. In an interview with Manav Ratti, Arpana Caur has said, “I do not think artists can directly change socio-economic realities, but the affective dimension of art is powerful in raising awareness about injustices and inequalities” (Ratti, 2013, p. 394). Thinking from both personal and societal, her artistic works tries to explain something beyond the aesthetic level to a more rough and strong identity of life. Her artistic excellence spreads over various genres like mural painting, oil painting, sculptures, paper works and book illustrations. While Amrita Sher-Gil’s works have inspired Arpana Caur in framing her melancholic figures, B. K. Gure helped her to get into the world of sculptures. The isolation that she had suffered from her childhood has been reflected in some of the paintings where she represented the tragic portraits of women. The personal graph in the paintings of the 1970s was high as she could relate such themes to the best with the situations around her. The interest for art and paintings that was innate in her gave rise to an artist in her that was self-taught mostly through the experiences provided by her situations.

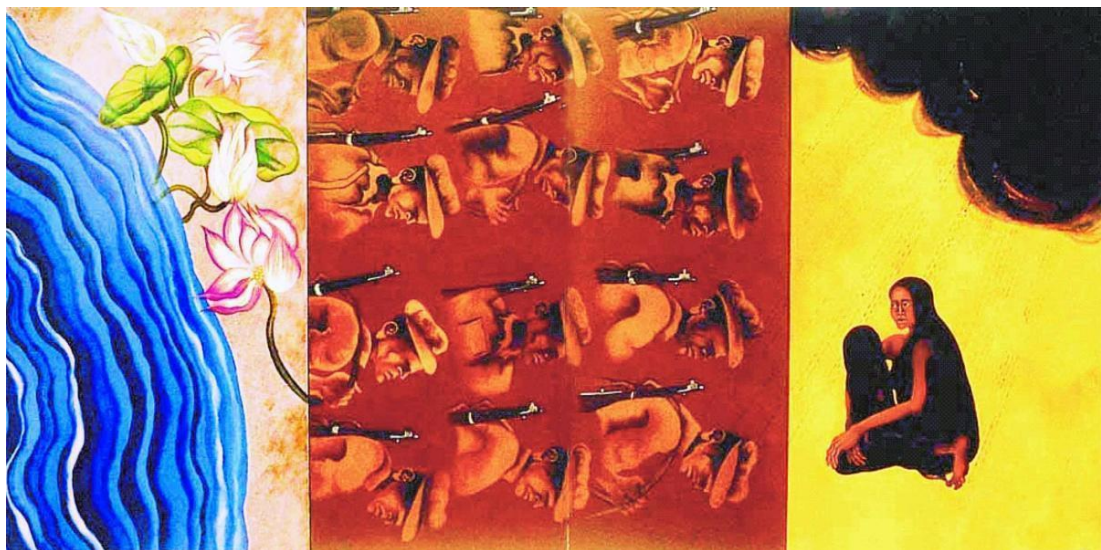


Figure 1: *Where Have all the Flowers Gone?* (1995)

Source Personal

She never has looked onto the European styles and themes to enrich her paintings. Though it was followed by her contemporaries, she focused more on depicting the realities of life that she saw around her and also gave more importance to provide critical perspectives on such issues that haunted India the most. The paintings of Arpana Caur have the touch of aesthetic quality that overwrites the social aspect of the work. On pointing to the work of Soni Mahiwal, she says that it has been inspired from Indian miniatures and the story of Soni Mahiwal. “You have to have an element of kick because you want surprise, and scissors because Soni’s life was cut short and the scale is, you can’t measure love. Love is beyond measure; The painting is more about India and Pakistan. You know that you can overcome violence with love. So, that’s why there was Sufi dancer who overcomes the violence with love” (Caur, personal communication, 2022). She speaks about love in contrast with the snowballing culture of violence in society. From being broader in perspective, her work titled *Where Are All the Flowers Gone* (1995) have been installed at the Hiroshima Museum along with other painters whose works on the same theme had been selected. It depicted lotuses, blue sky, deep blue water, and also images of guns, soldiers and a forlorn woman wearing a black veil. Each image symbolised ideas such as life, death and violence respectively where the depiction relied on the themes of violence and peace. Though many of the paintings that she drew had depicted such symbolic meanings, the work that she did base on the Hiroshima attack became her favourite. The symbolic representation in her paintings has immense importance in its analysis beyond the outline that is provided to it.

She also works on incorporating the Madhubani works in her paintings where the traditional patterns of trees and animals are portrayed beautifully. The improvements and gradual learning about the changing situations reflect in her artistic works which points out the urge for looking onto perfection in her works. Uma Nair comments about the works of Arpana Caur saying that she gradually weaves surrealism through the form of realism

depicted in her paintings. She also appreciates her as a post-modernist artist who is moulded and defined by traditionalist notions (Singh, 2016).

The works of Arpana Caur does not seem to be mere figures for the common public because of the ability of such paintings and sculptures to express their emotion through their gestures and facial expressions. Arpana Caur gives more importance to the commonality that her works possess. It is also because of the selection of daily life instances from the lives of people in society. The significance of her oil and mural paintings, sculptures and paper works point to the simplicity that it maintains at the same time when it handles many meanings inside it. Thus, the aesthetic essence of her works also gives an opportunity for critics and viewers to analyse, interpret and discuss from many perspectives other than that of the artist. Unlike some of the imaginative styles and applications followed in art and paintings, Arpana Caur strongly adheres to the depiction of reality. It cannot be merely reduced to the term reality as her works help to rethink the situation experienced by the subject in the portrayal so as to make an analysis of the severity of the situation.

Upon discussing the women-oriented paintings, she had once made a clear statement saying that women dominate her work. She also added saying that the women in her paintings are the women that are seen at homes and neighbourhoods where there isn't any form of unnecessary sexuality included. She believed in the power of women to renew and regenerate the same as that of nature which can counter the challenges of the world including that of extreme industrialisation and urbanisation (Nair, 2015). It is true that her images, especially that of the women which she uses to resemble the female lives that are seen around at home or neighbourhood. Those paintings of Arpana Caur maintain the simplicity and elegance that it requires. She makes it clear through her paintings that rather than focusing on the sexual expression of the figures, her works ties women and nature to a single thread where the enlightenment about the concept of life and death has equal importance in controlling the violence between human beings. The placement of women onto the outdoors in her paintings has been a political statement showing that women have the immense power and potential for productivity beyond the

limits to which she is confined by the patriarchal dominance. Gayatri Sinha reacts to such painting as a “political comment on women’s productivity” (Nair, 2015). This chapter does not make elaborate discussion on every painting of Arpana Caur, but confines to the paintings in which she uses women as a major subject. Analysis of those selected paintings of Caur would help to delineate the aesthetic and feminist aspects of her artistic works.

Though she says that her figures do not focus on the sexual aspect of the body, her earlier work *Child Goddess* (1975) showcases the nudity of a female figure speaking to several naked statues. This cannot be seen as an expression of the aesthetics that are furnished in the painting but can only be considered as a protest against the attitude of society towards women. Like how Arpita Singh showcased her criticism against such attitudes of people in considering women and female body as mere objects, Arpana Caur too made bold expressions through artistic means to react to the issue which still has the same relevance in society. Though the painting was completed four decades back, there has not been much change in the attitude of people in seeing women. This uncultured attitude of society has led to issues such as discrimination, denial of freedom and rights, marital rapes, exploitation and domestic violence. The basic problem of materialising the female body was pointed out through the painting. It did not focus on the erotic and sexual aspects like other artists as it made only minimal detailing of the bodily features. The concept that she intended to convey beyond the aesthetics of the painting was that the naked audience had an interest in watching the nudity of the female figure rather than trying to listen and absorb the essence of the talk. Therefore, the painting can be considered as a strong expression of the feminist ideologies against the male gaze and the patriarchal materialisation of the female body.

The deafness of the statues represented in the painting also points to the intolerance to accept changing ideologies and beliefs. Arpana Caur presents the symbol of naked statues to show that they themselves are nude but gazes at the nudity of the other person without correcting themselves. The root cause behind violence, riots and conflicts in society can be understood

as the lack of interest to listen to the other person and thinking from their perspective. If such an attempt is initiated from the side of the people to whom the statues represent, there would be solutions for the majority of the problems faced by people in the society. From the feminist aspect of the painting, it can be said that there has to be an open and liberal mindset to consider the female gender as equal to that of the male. It helps to overcome the unnecessary discriminations and exploitations in the name of gender.

The disinterest of the society to listen to the issues of individual people can also be interpreted from the painting if the technicality of the statues is explored. Being statues, they are not able to respond to whatever is said to them. The irresponsibility, cunningness and selfishness of the generation against the issues faced by women can also be delineated here when the essence of the painting is connected to the 1981 work titled *The Missing Audience*. At the time when she was engaged with the painting, there was less audience for art and art exhibitions. It was not popular and also wasn't easier for the public to understand the real essence of the paintings. The isolation that she experienced during her childhood is well reflected in most of the paintings in which she represented the lives of many women who were forced to be within the interiors. The social and professional environment for women at the time was not safeguarding their freedom, choice and rights. Though it is said that many of the situations have been changed, similar situations still prevail in many communities and societies that give prominence to their narrow-minded cultures and religious beliefs. Thus, it can only be said that the relevance of these paintings has not yet been lost.

Discussing her series of paintings, the most significant and popular are the paintings under the title *Women in Interiors* (1970). It portrays the body of women as a city that is physically polluted and encroached. She highlighted the claustrophobic violence of the city that became a threat to peaceful living. The painting that depicted the figures of women had an immense connection with her personal life. The suffocating and limited living spaces for women in the busy city of Delhi where there were threats of physical violation and intrusion are showcased through the painting. It was

the condition of independent women who lived in the urban areas. This idea of the painting can also be extended to the exclusion and marginalisation of the female gender from the mainstreams of the society where they had to struggle to find their space. The dominance of the male gender in every field at those times narrowed the opportunities of women to find suitable living means.

The *Embroiderer* (1996) is purely based on Arpana Caur's mother who was an inspiration for her paintings. It depicts a woman in the posture of sitting and engaged in the process of sewing. Caur utilises the ruined ramparts of history as the background having images of the terracotta tinge hawks and various vehicles to showcase the modern age immersed in pollution. The creation of the myth painting that includes hallowed circle having folk style bird images and marching scissors combines images of serenity and threat at the same time. The dual expression of tones in one painting where the main subject becomes the sewing woman gives the notion that though peacefulness is experienced by the female figure in continuing in her work with great interest and concentration, it may have surrounding traps and threats from society. The encroachment of violence to peaceful environments is depicted here where it threatens the safe and free expression of interests of a woman. The hardships that women have to conquer to express themselves in the way they need to live is showcased through this painting.



Figure 2: *The Embroiderer* (1996)
Source Personal

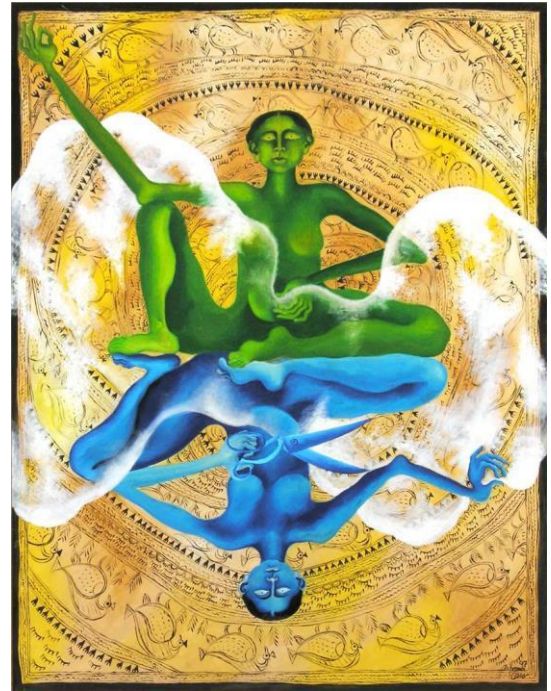


Figure 3: *The Embroiderers* (1999)
Source Personal

This duality is continued in the painting titled *Embroiderers* (1999) where she depicts the unending cycle of the thread of life that is being stitched by two women. It exhibits the equal presence and expression of peacefulness and violence, life and death, and creation and destruction in life. The life that is weaved by women midst of the unsolved problems around them is equally encouraged with the creation and is threatened by destruction. The action of embroidering is seen in several paintings of Arpana Caur where the woman's hand is shown as extended beyond normal limits. This exaggerated approach is presented to symbolise "the strength and the power of the women who appear in Arpana's paintings" (Poovaya-Smith, 1997, p. 41).

The spiritual and literary influence that Caur had acquired from her childhood has been reflected in her triptych painting series titled *Body is Just a Garment* (1993). It originates from the weaver Sant Kabir and also the words of Krishna spoken to Arjuna which is written in the Bhagavad Gita. When

Arjuna was hesitant to fight with his relatives, it was Krishna who advised him not to have such hesitation. He says to consider the body as just a garment. This painting series also informs the viewers not to get attached to worldly matters which resemble the essence of mere garments that the soul has to leave in the world. From the feminist perspective, these paintings can be understood as against the male gaze towards the female body which is given more importance than the purity of the soul.



Figure 4: *Body is Just a Garment* (1993)

Source Personal

Connecting the painting titled *Child Goddess* (1975), this has a didactic that instructs to provide more importance to the spiritual aspects of living than to the less important physical appearances which do not survive beyond the limits of this world. Arpana Caur says, “the Creator makes beautiful bodies for the embodiment of the soul and then we get trapped in the physicality of these bodies, forgetting the soul. However, in the end, when we are able to shed the clothes or break free of them, we find that we are able to liberate ourselves” (Kalsi, 2011).

This painting goes in a match with the series of the painting titled *Day and Night* (2011) 4.5 ft × 4 ft, 6 ft × 9 ft and 7 ft × 6 ft where the depiction of weaving women who are confident points to her favourite theme that includes the ephemerality of things and time can be captured and defeated (Ratti, 2013,

p. 383). It focuses on the vitality and endurance of painting in the life of the artist whom she represents as the subject that weaves to create a world through her canvas. These paintings express the interest of the artist towards the depiction of dualities and multiplicities to convey a larger plot. In one of the paintings (7 ft x 6 ft) in the series exhibited in 2012, there are images of the shadows of the female figures that weave. Also, the inclusion of the scissors as a negative symbol depicts the binary counter to the positivity of the picture. It has the dual aspect mainly because of the female figure and also the black shaded shadow figure on its opposite. She has maintained consistency throughout all the paintings in the series through the inclusion of circles near the female figure.



Figure 5: *Day and Night* (2011)

Source Personal



Figure 6: *Day and Night* (2011)

Source -: Personal

The painting titled *Harvest* (1999) oil on canvas, 167 x 137 cm can also be analysed under the same category of painting theme. In the painting, there are two women figures where one is painted in green and the other in blue. The female figure with a completely green colour holds a weaving thread on her both hands and the blue coloured female figure holds scissors in her left hand and used the right hand to cover the eyes of the green coloured woman. The background is having an orange shade and the overall painting is colourful due to the usage of different colour schemes. While the green that depicts the greenery of the world is trying to create more life through her incessant process of weaving, the blue hinders the process. The image of 'scissors' that has been used as a symbol in the painting points at the destruction it waits to cause to the process of weaving. It makes the viewer remember about "the fates, antique goddesses of destiny who cut the thread of life when time is due" (Koelnspenger, 2010, p. 48). She beautifully uses the image of the female figures that evoke the feeling that they are completely dipped in their respective colours. The exploiting mindset of the humans in the world is shown where the green

coloured woman is equated to the environment that is most affected and victimised.



Figure 7: *Harvest* (1999)

Source -: Personal

Her strong belief in the correlation between the female gender and environment has made her produce many more paintings where women have been a central subject. The Prakrathi Series is the most important among them. The power of women to create life has been equated to the importance of the environment that has the potential to renew and regenerate. But, she has also given a different ideology in her paintings where nature is depicted both as a creator and destroyer at the same time. The continuity of the process of creation and destruction by the nature is depicted through the use of the image of scissors that helps to identify that it makes a hindrance to the thread of life. If Arpana Caur had depicted the representation of maidservants to denote the social disparity affecting women in her earlier paintings, the Prakrithi series showcases creative embroidery where the figures of women are shown as stepping out of their limited premises to the vastness of nature. Prakrithi, which is included in the later paintings depicts the changed situations of society and the approach towards art.



Figure 8: *Widows of Vrindavan* (1987)

Source -: Book

The pain of widowed women in society and the isolation that they suffer is depicted through the painting titled *Widows of Vrindavan* (1987). It has a close connection with the beliefs and myths where the major subject is the romance of Krishna and gopis. This plot has been selected by the artist as it is popular among the people so that it enables to easily relate to the situations around them. The condition of being a widow at the time of the exhibition of the painting was different from the present scenario as it was immersed in the wrong beliefs such as shaving heads, discarding from the society to devote to prayers for morsel and deliverance. The struggling side of the enforced silence and self-alienation that was required to be followed by the widows was highlighted through the depiction of the gopis yearning for union with Krishna. The pathetic aspect of women is depicted through the painting which also criticises the social disparity towards them. The peculiarity of the image is that it discusses the lives of women from the individual and social perspective. The traditional belief that women have to suffer and tolerate all the brutality in society is broken through these paintings. In short, the painting *Widows of Vrindavan* was a reversal of tradition and myth.

While analysing these selected paintings of Arpana Caur, it gradually becomes clear that she gives more importance to the emotions that are transferred through the paintings. In the previously discussed pictures, the

specificity of the themes and tones of the images are highlighted. Unlike the other contemporary artists, Arpana Caur has given prominence to explore the brave side of the women in India who are at work and their readiness to move beyond the so-called limits designed by the patriarchal ideology.

The painting titled *Soldier's Mother* (1995) 172 x 130 cm in the Swaraj Art Achieve, Mumbai explores the emotions of a mother whose son had been to the battleground for the purpose of national security. The



Figure 9: *Soldier's Mother* (1995)

Source -: Book

isolation and alienation experienced by that mother figure are exhibited through the miniature forms of soldiers interweaved in her body. Through such a depiction of the woman character in the painting, she denotes the grief and sorrow experienced by the mother in her.

It gives the idea that she thinks all about her son and the battlefield where he is with fellow soldiers. This painting becomes different from the other paintings of Arpana Caur as it has the essence of motherhood hidden within the body of the female figure. Though this can be misinterpreted through the angle of erotic perspective, the figure also expresses the hidden calamity that is hidden within her even when she lives as peaceful. The black shade

provided to the central figure denotes the negativity that boils within her as a result of her thoughts. The fear within a woman that is developed through the tensions regarding insecurity, violence, riots and conflicts around her is visible through the painting of the woman subject that contains several miniature soldier figures.

The painting of Arpana Caur titled *Water Weaver* (2000), 60 inches × 66 inches denotes the duality of the themes. It is inspired by the weaving water by Kabir where the weaving process is considered as the creation of “harmony, love and coolness in an atmosphere which is polluted by hatred” (Ratti, 2013, p. 390). The black background and clothes of the woman weaving the thread show how restrictions make constraints to her work. The duality of creation and destruction, life and death are imaged through the contrasting colours. It is the burning flame that is shown next to her that makes her survive in the middle of the problems that restrict her from progress in life. It is regarded that “the art of Arpana Caur confesses to the dualities of life” (Sejekan, 2016). It is a sincere rumination of her personal trials and experiences, incorporating local and worldly circumstances. The act of producing harmony and peace in society or an individual is a tiresome process that needs patience and tolerance.



Figure 10: *Water Weaver* (2000)

Source -: Book

This notion is expressed by the artist through the painting of a woman as the central figure. As described earlier, the paintings of Arpana Caur makes it visible that the women figures symbolise creation, renewal and regeneration amidst the surrounding problems that trouble her to achieve her destiny. These figures of women in her paintings thus provide a courageous image of the female gender rather than always being depicted as victims due to powerlessness and voiceless situations caused by the patriarchal dominance that tend to rule over the freedom, rights and choices of the female gender.

In Arpana Caur's *Dharti* (2008), a similar theme is pictured showing a woman in green colour against a black background. This contrasting use of colour and images highlights the dual nature of life and death that is represented within a single woman figure. The colour green is opposed to that of the black background. The posture of the lying woman with a hand that is raised beyond her level shows two halves of a single subject. While the right side of the woman is merged with several other smaller images like knife, yogi,

darkness, structures of women, violence, redness etc., the left part of the woman's body is coloured as purely green that depicts nature and its productivity. It is specified with the image of a warli tree that is grown from the left arm of the woman.



Figure 11: *Dharti* (2008)

Source -: Book

The mixture of images on the right side of the woman and the single image of the tree on the left side highly contrasts the opposite meanings that exist within the woman and society. The left side and the arm where the tree grows denote the betterment of the future representing productivity, creation and prosperity of nature whereas the other part shows the destructive, unproductive and chaotic aspect of life and existence. The symbols used by Arpana Caur mainly focus on the trauma, injustices, chaotic settings, loss and disasters. The knives and spikes used in the painting deliberately point at the inhumane aspects of behaviour and existence of humans leading to violence and unhealthy situations. The lying woman symbolises the pain that she suffers to balance both the aspects within her. This painting of Arpana Caur showcases the mixture of both aesthetic and feminist roots. The peculiarity of her paintings lies in the more negative space that she provides in which she depicts the positive image of the painting. She has said in an interview that "I have realised an element of abstraction is important; the negative space is actually a positive one. Now, my canvases are less crowded and

the figures minimal” (Kalra, 2016).

The effective use of contrasting and dominant colours highlights the artistic brilliance of Arpana Caur. She uses colours according to the importance of the images that serve as symbols to represent specific meanings to the holistic idea of the painting. The beautiful balancing of colours that is usually contrasted to the black background of the figure enhances the attention towards the major subjects rather than other accessory images. The viewer never sees a filled up and tightly packed canvas of Arpana Caur as she takes immense care in not engaging the whole canvas with symbolic images. The fascinating effect produced by these colours expresses the emotions and feelings of the subjects in the painting.

It was a common tendency among the Indian artists to engage the complete canvas with images and colours so as to utilise the space available. In such a style followed by the artists, there would be a sense of intermixing of identities as the major subject would be surrounded or engulfed by the other imageries. This conventionality in painting was reversed by Arpana Caur in leaving enough and more space for the background. It usually was filled with the black colour that helped to project the main subject and other colours. It is in this context she explained the positivity that the negative space in her paintings provided to the viewers. The monochromatic setting expressed through such paintings focused on one single subject to which the whole of the theme of the painting converged to produce the intended meaning. The distinguishing factor of the art that she believes in and produces from that of the others is the simplicity and spontaneity amalgamates with the traditional and modern forms of art. Rather than the engagement of imageries filled in the canvas, Arpana Caur gives prominence to the effect that each imagery and colour can produce in the viewers. From the reviews about her paintings, it can be understood that she has been successful in transferring the effect and emotion of the subjects that she exhibits on the canvas.

The painting titled *Green Circle* (1994), oil in canvas; 133.8 x 173.7 cm is an intermixing of the environmental concerns and feminist aspects. In the painting, she represents a woman character denoting Sita from Ramayana

where she is within the circle drawn around her. The colour of the circle is shown as green that denotes the limit to which she is safe. She says about painting that “It’s little curl painting a green circle... there is lot of traffic around her like this traffic you came through and green circle is Sita circle so she is Sita. Sita was daughter of the dharti, that’s why she went into dharti at the end. so this green series I have done since 1988, at least I have done ten works green circle so I take from my theology also like green circle, it is Sita circle, But it is prakriti” (Caur, personal communication, 2022).

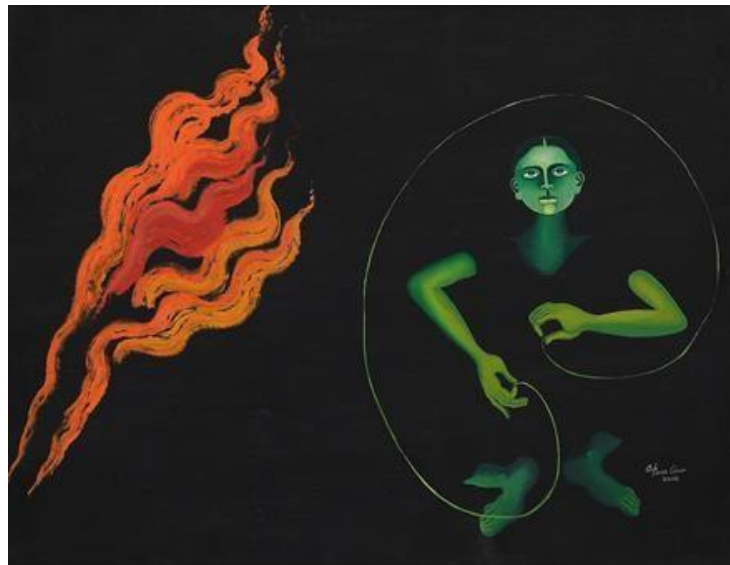


Figure 12: *Green Circle* (1994)

Source -: Book

The intention of the painting was to highlight the environmental pollution and consequences that are hidden and also projected by the cause. In the painting, it can be seen that the woman weaves the green thread that itself becomes the circle that covers her from the rest of the space shown in the painting. The mythological and spiritual connection of the painting is to the protection that Lakshmana, the brother of Lord Rama had painted for Sita’s protection. The weaving of the green protection by the woman is the protection from the violence, destruction and degradation of the environment. This method of representing women and the environment had been used in other paintings by the artist which also has been analysed as the intermixing of the identities that fall into one category of vulnerability and at the same time potentiality to renew and regenerate. In this

painting, similar to that of the previous one, the background colour that is used to depict the negative space is black where red flame- like imagery is also provided. This can be seen as the destruction that is waiting beyond the protection of the circle.

From the feminist perspective, the painting can be viewed as the effort taken by the female gender in getting them equipped and protected against the atrocities, humiliations, and violence against their gender. The denial of freedom, choices and rights of women that hinders the progress of the female gender can be interpreted from the space that is beyond the green circle. The artist has effectively painted the woman's body in green colour to represent the productivity and urge for creation that resides in her. Here, the earlier discussed notion of duality is applicable as the painting denotes two distinct and opposite ideas in the same canvas.

A painting that presents the inequality experienced by people in society is the *Sheltered Woman* (1980) where the resources are converged to one single person than to everyone in society. She uses the representation of female figures to represent this social and economic disparity that is prevalent in society. Though the painting was exhibited in 1980, the importance of the theme that was dealt with in the painting is still relevant as the poor becomes poorer and the rich becomes richer. The umbrella depicted in the painting is considered similar to the circle in the previous painting. It denotes the protection and privilege that the single woman under it receives whereas others are not advantaged by the umbrella. Here too, the dualism that is evident in the society is expressed. This can be interpreted with the help of the concept of intersectionality where the privileges distinguish women in society. There are women from underdeveloped countries, economically weaker societies, those who are discriminated against on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, culture and education. Though there are discussions and debates going on about the situation of women, there also arises the question – ‘which women are they discussing about?’. The notion of intersectionality described through this painting explains about the division at the social level and labels one woman on how oppressed they are.

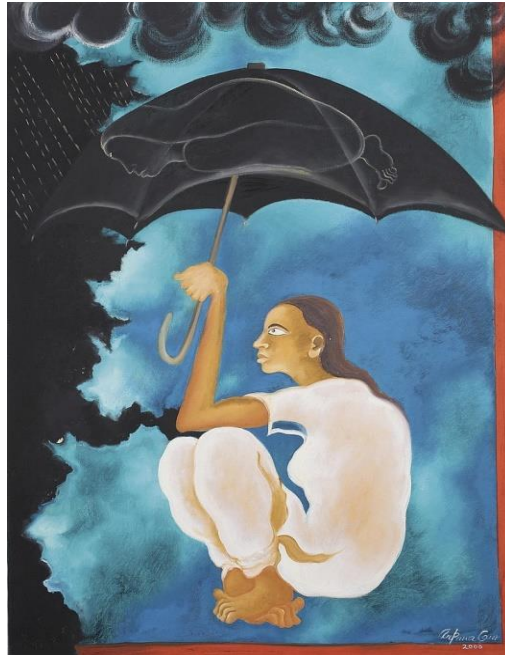


Figure 13: *Sheltered Woman* (2000)

Source -: Book

The victimisation effect of the woman can be thus understood by focusing on how these divisions themselves make her discriminated against from enjoying the freedom that is important for development. This notion of intersectionality in women is explained as

The lived experiences — and experiences of discrimination — of a black woman will be different from those of a white woman, or a black man, for example. They object to its implications, uses, and, most importantly, its consequences, what some conservatives view as the upending of racial and cultural hierarchies to create a new one.

(Coaston, 2019)

Although Arpana Caur has most of her themes connected with the criticism against violence and discrimination, she has also used the icons such as Kabir, GuruNanak and Buddha as representations of peace, harmony and spirituality. Her paintings involve the rumination of personal experiences and societal problems that are intertwined with the mixture of traditional and modern elements and techniques in art. While closely analysing the paintings of Arpana Caur, it reveals that the central figure mostly occupies either the

courageous attempts of women or the symbolisation of their survival. The development of modern art in India cannot be expressed without discussing the significant works produced by Arpana Caur. Her position is high among the other contemporary artists of her time because of the uniqueness that she has tried to incorporate in her artistic works by either sticking onto the traditional formats or by diverting from the conventional formats of art that invoked the cultural and traditional essence of Indian art rather than the influences from the western world. Most importantly, the quality of her works rests in the philosophical, social and spiritual tones of meanings that are expressed through it. The works of Arpana Caur cannot be confined to the limits of art for art's sake as the significance of her artistic works focuses on the simplicity, originality and reliability to the life of the common people in society. In the perspective of Arpana Caur, it is the wish of the artists to decide upon the form of art that they represent. She says, "Some believe Like, abstract painters believe they are happy with non-liberative art. I have been always a federative person because I am deeply inspired by our cultures and miniatures and also we are in densely populated country. So there are people everywhere so another of my theme is on environment, paryavaran , so because it deviated the first environment in painting" (Caur, personal communication, 2022).

The painting titled *Yogini* (1993) is different from other paintings in the depiction of the female figure.

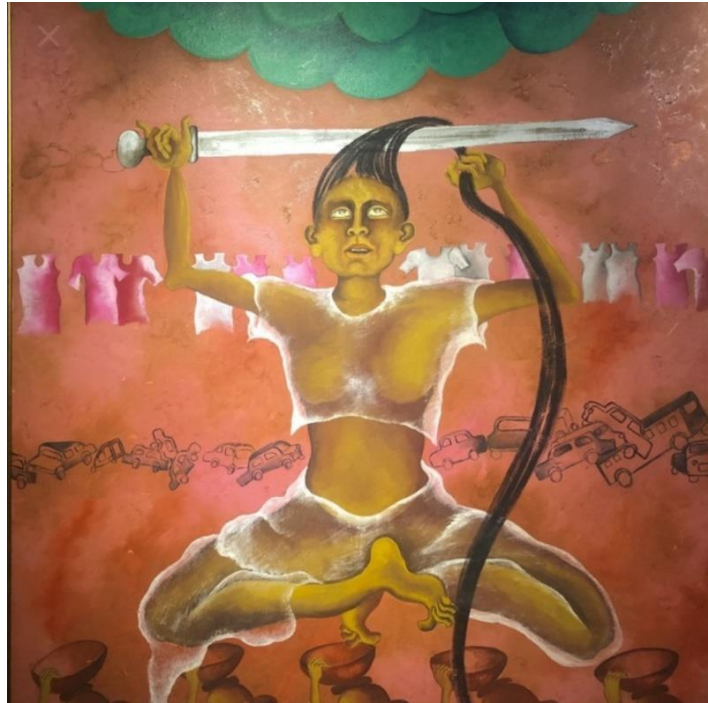


Figure 14: *Yogini* (1993)

Source -: Personal

Unlike the other paintings, this depicts the figure of a seated woman who cuts her longhair with a sword. She is seen to have surrounded by holy men that produce a spiritualaura around her. The dress that is shown worn is a white transparent fabric denoting theinsignificance of the need for clothes in the world.

The importance of the materialistic essence of the body is reduced through suchan illustration where it connects to the same ideology of the painting *Body is Just a Garment* (1993). The woman in the painting sets herself apart from worldly matters to be equated to the spiritual and enlightened existence. This is evident from the posture that she maintains in her seating where she balances herself on her toes showing her astral form. The material possessions of the woman are imaged through the serpentinehair which bleeds when cut with the white coloured sword. This position and gesture of the woman character in the painting denote the detachment from the discriminations based on body and gender (Kalsi, 2012). Also, it symbolises cutting off the limitationsof the body that cannot be equated to an

enlightened existence of women. The process of detaching from worldly matters, bodily restrictions and confined existence can be interpreted as the desire of women to be considered beyond the limitations of the dominant ideologies that restrict and deny their freedom and rights in the world. As the soul does not possess any kind of gender restrictions, the enlightenment and transformation from the limitations of the worldly existence provides the woman in the painting to experience and enjoy the limitless expression of joy and freedom. The expression on the face of the woman in the painting can be seen as a depiction of very careful artistic skill as it alone makes it clear about the readiness of the woman character to transform her to the level of enlightenment. The use of the images of Kabir, two Baulsingers, a row of pandits and a group of seekers reading spiritual texts enhances the identity of the painting denoting a transformation from materialistic matters to an enlightened existence.

The discussion on the signs, symbols, and metaphors of the selected works of Arpana Caur is significant as it provides more meaningful interpretation of the same. Her works often depict the complexities and contradictions of human nature, as well as issues related to gender, religion, and social justice. Caur's use of signs is significant as it allows her to convey complex ideas and emotions in a simple and effective manner. Considering her selected works, as mentioned earlier, woman figures are a common sign and symbol as she tries to equate it with the several situations and settings of the female gender in society. The female figure is often portrayed as strong and resilient, and it is used to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Caur's female figures are often depicted in bold and vibrant colors, which symbolize strength and vitality. One of the most prominent signs used in Caur's artwork is the bindi. The bindi is a dot worn on the forehead by women in India, and it has strong cultural and religious significance. In Caur's works, the bindi is often used to represent femininity and female identity, and it is used as a symbol of empowerment for women. Caur also uses animals as symbols in her artwork. For example, the peacock is a common symbol used in her paintings. The peacock is a national bird of

India and is often associated with beauty, grace, and pride. In Caur's works, the peacock is used as a symbol of freedom and independence. In addition to these signs, Caur also uses religious symbols in her artwork. For example, she often incorporates the Om symbol, which is considered one of the most sacred symbols in Hinduism. The position on how the women figures sit represents the unity of all things and is used to signify the divine. Caur's use of this symbol in her artwork reflects her interest in exploring innocence, spirituality and the interconnectedness of all things. Caur uses text as a sign in her artwork. She often incorporates poetry and literature into her paintings, which adds another layer of meaning to her work. The text is often used to reflect on issues related to social justice, such as gender equality and human rights.

As explained in the discussion of the selected paintings, there are many symbols and metaphors used by the artist to provide direct and indirect meanings to the art. While converging the discussion, there are several symbols such as birds, trees, fish, gods and goddesses, and hands that are used repeatedly as symbols. Birds represent freedom and hope, trees point to the beauty of life and growth and are often used to represent the interconnectedness of living beings. Birds in her paintings are usually shown in motion, as if soaring through the sky or taking flight from a perch. Fish is a symbol used to represent abundance and prosperity in Indian culture, and they are often used by the artist to represent fertility. It is often used to symbolize the fragility of life and the constant struggle for survival. In her paintings, fish are depicted swimming in turbulent waters or trapped in a net, conveying a sense of helplessness and vulnerability. Some artistic works resemble the Gods and Goddesses such as Shiva, Durga, and Kali. These figures explore themes of spirituality, mythology, and tradition. Tree as a metaphor is often used to represent the interconnectedness of all living things and the importance of preserving nature. Trees in her paintings are often depicted with intricate roots and branches, conveying a sense of strength and resilience. The various objects such as the sword, weaving thread, and umbrella suggest the the actions that the women figures conduct amidst the

several challenges and problems faced by them. These point to the attitude of women towards the insecurities that they feel.

Conclusion

In short, Arpana Caur has incorporated the significance and essence of duality in most of her paintings where women become a major subject. Though she have dealt with oil painting, murals, book illustrations, paper works and sculptures, her favourite mode of artistic works is old fashioned oil painting that gives her immense satisfaction. It is same in the case of the paintings where the major theme revolves around women as a subject. Therefore, the analysis of the selected paintings of Arpana Caur reveals the exploration of the hidden quality of courage, urge for destiny and strength of women to survive midst of the violent atmosphere around them. Among the four selected women artists from Delhi, the artistic works of Arpana Caur have the strong expression of her ideology and beliefs about women which she absorbed from the inspiration from her mother and others whom she has met in her life. Arpana Caur believes in the museum culture in art and shares the sad situation in the country that there are only a few museums for art. She mentions that the modern art has hardly not even six museums. She compares the museum culture in Tokyo with India. She says, "If you think of Tokyo, how many museums are of contemporary art so I think India is such a big country why don't we have museums, not even six museums of contemporary art. I believe in museum culture and we don't have museums of contemporary art" (Caur, personal communication, 2022).

She also comments on the limited audience that art and art works has in the country. She says, "That is a very big problem. I think that unlike film, theatre and popular music art has a limited audience. For a good painting to be successful it has to have element of mystery" (Caur, personal communication, 2022). The complexity that is evolving in the modern art forms can confuse general public and may develop a gap between art and its general audience. For such art that gives more importance to the philosophical

ideas behind the colours and patterns, the complex aesthetic mode projects more than the direct form of aesthetic experience of the art. She also appreciates the recent trends of digital art that has taken great impact in society through various social media platforms. She says that the new platforms can bring more opportunities for artists, especially the women artists from India and abroad as the field of digital art has no limitations like the traditional oil painting and other forms.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Aesthetics of Female Body: Feminist Perspectives in Anupam Sud's Selected Works

Different from the approaches followed by Arpana Caur, the artists of her period have adapted both western and traditional coagulation in their works. One among the artist who explored the aesthetics in the clothed and unclothed human figures is Anupam Sud. Born in Hoshiarpur, Punjab in 1944, she was engaged with her childhood and youth in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh. Later, she studied at the College of Art, Delhi during the period from 1962 to 1967. It was a period that moulded the artist in her that gave her the strength and courage to divert to an academic career and artistic pursuits. She was a part of the printmaking department in the college and was a member of 'Group 8' formed by Jagmohan Chopra. She headed the department and was a part of it from 1978 to 2003. The time when she got into the field of printmaking was the period in which it was totally controlled by men. The field of printmaking was considered only for men as it required a labour-intensive approach. For successfully creating a printmaking art, there needs to be knowledge in the specialised techniques that are unique for the art. Though it is often done on paper, the changes in the art form and techniques have adapted the use of plastic, fabric and parchments. With the changes in technology, the techniques used for printmaking also changed from one mode of materials to the other. The characteristic change of artwork when translated from drawing to engraving on selected materials provides distinctive style and tools. In the process of printmaking followed by Anupam Sud, there are four techniques such as engraving, drypoint, aquatint and etching. Out of these four, the most focused were the engraving and etching. The engraving process in printmaking uses steel tools to carve a plate made of copper or brass. The

image that appears through deeper cuts and thicker lines formed as a result of it. In the case of the etching technique, the ground is made of materials such as beeswax, rosin, asphaltum and solvent. The etching needle is used to sharpen the areas so as to scratch an image out of it. The use of acid on the plate and ground provides clear lines through the scratched portions. The quality of the printmaking increases with the duration that the plate is immersed in the acid thus forming clearly distinguished and visible lines and prints. The intaglio printing process that is used by Anupam Sud is contrasting to the relief printing as the printing is made from the ink which is under the surface of the plate. It is mainly done under the surface where embossing of the paper is conducted into the incised lines which require great effort and pressure.

A major shift in her career took place when she got the opportunity to move to Slade School of Fine Art in University College, London in 1971. The western ideological influence might have created an interest in her to experiment on the styles of human figures that are both clothed and unclothed. If Arpana Caur had not intended to explore the erotic and sexual aspect of the human body, Anupam Sud diverts from such a notion with her international exposure from the University College, London. She was more fascinated to explore the male and female identities that are attached to their sexual characteristics. Although she discusses various themes through her artistic works, the importance is provided to individual anxieties and societal instabilities due to unfortunate events. Though she was brought up in conservative family situations, the artistic talents in her were strong enough to break the restrictive taboos of the society that kept sexuality aside from creative works. They were not confined to the limited experience of aesthetics but were also connected with themes that dealt with socially relevant subjects that related both the sexes together. Unlike other artists of her time, she expressed the courage to go in-depth into the restrictions by exploring the anatomy of the human body – both the male and female. Anupam Sud “peculiarly fuses colour in the achromatic palette. Pushing the conventional outlook towards sexuality, Sud’s figures seemingly appear contemplative and

brooding, underplaying a tacit discussion.”(Chheda, 2021). In the second half of the past century, it was not easier for a woman to discuss about such perspectives that uncovered and explored the human body. It was an inspiration for the artist from her memories of watching the exercise of her father and the memories of massaging his body with oil. As every artist has influence from their perception, Anupam Sud had much of the invoking creative ideas from her family and surroundings. She considers her own body and the soft skin of her mother while she begins to create wonders on the canvas. She says about the freedom that she experienced from her family regarding her works on art as

“I have all freedom at home. My parents never cut short my freedom. But I felt that when I am sitting with somebody formally the language and words were like guarded. As when you sit with best friend then sometimes the language changes then you may speak anything. Thus, I felt, at many times in schools or colleges a student has to speak in a certain level. My family had something different situation. Thus, according to situation, we put different mask”

(Sud, personal communication, 2022)

This also points to the use of ‘mask’ that is showcased in her certain works such as *Persona* (1998). Though her works seem to be complex, it is realistic and attached to the urban situations. She has been awarded by Lalit Kala Academy, Kala Ratna, Egyptian International Print Biennale, Sahitya Kala Parishad and have received the President’s Gold Medal.

Apart from the exhibitions that had been conducted in India, she has also been to the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Italy, Canada and Japan to exhibit and conduct workshops about the distinct possibilities of printmaking. Her works have merged the use of lithography and screen printing focusing on the Intaglio prints. The etchings of the artist use zinc plates which requires much effort and patience. When there was a time for the shortage of metal plates that were used for printmaking, she created collographs on cardboard plates. She overcame the limitations and constraints that hindered her from achieving her destiny. Though the 1970s

were a time with many social, political and cultural disturbances that restricted the growth and development of art in the country, a group of artists including Anupam Sud strongly believed in the power of art and artists who could bring miracles. It was true when looking back after five decades after the struggles they had made for the enrichment of art and participation of women in art. The emergence of Anupam Sud as a prominent printmaker in the country was at the time when men dominated the exhibitions and women were consciously marginalised from the front rows. As every artist in the field, she had to fix her styles to the conventionality followed in art, especially graphic art. Later, she could come out of the shell to explore and exhibit the world through various figures that symbolise the realistic and authentic social existence of human beings.

It was from the 1970s that she began to bring changes to the works that she does. Many of her works from then challenged the social rules and traditional identity followed in printmaking. In the perspective of Paula Sengupta, the former student of Anupam Sud, her artistic works often “moved increasingly to fluid spaces, spaces of androgyny, gender ambiguity, and alongside heterosexual relationships, she’s explored homo-social behaviour, alternative spaces, of which, from an early stage in her career, there have been glimpses” (Parakala, 2020). The importance of her visualization of men and women who interact with each other represented neoclassical perfection. As a body can at a time be a space of vulnerability and expression of potentiality, Anupam Sud’s works often take advantage of either the extremities of the identity of a woman’s body to express it has her work’s central figure. The surrealism and sensuality that is expressed to represent the narratives in her work provide an attractive natural effect to the works. It is often regarded that “a homosocial intimacy brackets her art, which is also underlined by an acute understanding of gender roles within heterosexual relationships” (Choudhary, 2020). While analysing the works of Anupam Sud that portraits women as central figures and their body as the main focus, the universality of womanhood is reflected as an essence. Though women-centric, it does not mean that she avoids other social contexts in her artistic works. The

representation of the body of women points to many connected contexts and themes which are even relevant. It might feel that Anupam Sud's artistic works are contrasting to that of Arpana Caur's ideology in representing female figures. They stand in extreme positions. While Arpana Caur finds a relationship between female figure and nature – their co-existence, the essence of renewal and regeneration, Anupam Sud gives prominence to the human relationships and how they are handled in the various changing contexts. Her works are the holistic expressions of the hidden social emotions that people go through in their daily life.

The experimental methods in graphic art and her efforts in attracting women to the world of art have made changes in the attitude of people towards exploring and analysing art. The misperceptions towards the field of art have changed with the involvement of more and more participants and interested women artists. The etchings of Anupam Sud do not possess any specific colour and is completely designed in black and white shades. This attempt by the artist does not come out of negligence but is focused on the conscious making of an ideology through her paintings. She believes in breaking the boundaries that have been designated by the society which is a tiresome process in communities, especially in India. Still, the belief possessed by Anupam Sud made her not distinguish societies based on their race, creed, colour and caste. The different colours made a separation between imageries and subjects used in a painting. This is consciously avoided by the artist based on her ideology that people do not need such a differentiation. Here, the universality of painting is applied throughout the paintings so as to make it accessible and appreciable for anyone from any section of society. The exposure of figures in her paintings also points to this identity and characteristic of her thoughts. The openness does not hide them from expressing the freedom and thoughts of the subjects in the paintings that denote the expressional quality of people without the hindrance of any separations and masks.

Same as the artistic works of Arpana Caur, the works of Anupam Sud constantly explore the nuances and complexities of the duality of being with representations of the human body and its anatomical specificities. The

sensuality, emancipation and expressional accuracy maintained in the works of Anupam Sud drives the emotions described by the artist on the selected imageries and subjects on the artistic work to overflow into the viewer to produce sensitive instabilities about their thoughts about the realities of the world.

From the feminist perspective, the body of a female is highly misrepresented in society as it is often considered by the patriarchal community equal to a material. The torturing male gaze that dehumanises the values of an ethical and mannered community is cruel to the female gender. Under many circumstances, the emotions of the female gender are concealed within them as the morale of society is against the free expression of it. Anupam Sud comments on the issue that

“every woman undergoes through male gaze. When you are standing by the road and the rain drops are falling on you, so they almost see you naked. Males always look at certain place that you feel uncomfortable. Actually, all female gaze is to desire to have beautiful body, beautiful thing. When I see someone more beautiful either you see and appreciate or compare with yourself.”

(Sud, personal communication, 2022)

While the previous decades and the contemporary scenario in India ideologically supports and practically hinders the attempts of free expression by the female gender, the relevance of Anupam Sud’s artistic works is significant. Like the feminist activists and intellectuals in society, the expression of thoughts that support feminist ideology through artworks has also been a factor for substantial changes to highlight the existing discomforts and exclusions faced by women in society. While writers, intellectuals and academicians raise their concerns and protests through their means of communication, artists in India – especially the women artists – provided their viewpoints and suggestions for a better condition for women in the country through direct and indirect artistic expressions. While some of the paintings had an indirect expression of the struggles faced by the female gender, other paintings directly pointed at the situations without many

interpretive and analytic requirements. The expression of the female body in the artistic works of Anupam Sud does not only invoke the idea of sensuality, but it also goes in-depth to the insecure living conditions of the female gender in the country where they are exploited, tortured and unwelcomed to express their opinions and concerns. The works of Anupam Sud gives priority to the body of men and women. It often considers the nude representations to be the natural beauty of human beings for which they are blamed or gazed. She says about the use and representation of 'body' and 'figures' in her artistic works that,

“the world for me is my vulnerability, my achievement and all are through my body. So for me it is very pious, I revere it, my body is like a god for me. Thus, I do from my experience. For me, the body is not sensual pleasure as most of the men take a woman's body as an object in their mind. For me a woman is not an object, it is a body, it is a person with its all vulnerability. This is because of this body, I become vulnerable and weak also. But whatever I can achieve, it is through this body. For me in my religion also it is said that if you want to find something then at this time through this body you can find it.”

(Sud, personal communication, 2022)

Anupam Sud's selected artistic works have been selected in the second section of this chapter to explore the details that have been used to present its aesthetic and feministic aspects. The intended meanings of such paintings are explored through interpretation so as to analyse the significance of her works while connecting it to the issues and concerns of society. Though based in Delhi, her works cannot be confined to the limited spaces as it intends to express a wider perspective. In spite of defocusing the study to all the themes expressed in the paintings of Anupam Sud, this chapter analyses only from the point of aesthetic expression of the paintings that help to define the feminine perspectives.

The transitional existence of women is well portrayed in the etching on paper artwork titled *Persona* (1988) 27 x 19.5 in. From the realisation that the process of life is the pattern in which one changes various masks with

respect to the altering situations in life. The paused figure of a woman who changes or wears her mask is the highlight of the etching work. The mask is shown as it has an opening for the eyes of the person wearing the mask. The other detailing is the image of a wig, her cloth hanging on the wall, a mirror and a pair of sandals. Though the mirror is shown in the background, the woman does not show interest in looking at it rather she is seen as getting ready to face the viewers.



Figure 15: *Persona* (1988)

Source:- Book

The woman is depicted as naked who gives more importance to her mask than inspecting what herself is. The mask is shown as a relief for her to hide from the world and to see only through the holes in the mask. The changing roles of women are represented through the depiction of the woman subject in the etching. The face of the woman, the face seen in the mirror and the face that can be identified from the structure of the mask is shown as different. Various interpretive meanings can be provided to the etching based on the sequence that is followed in it. The feminine aspect of the etching comes to get projected if the spectators consider the motion of the woman as

unmasking to face the spectators. It shows the bold and courageous aspect of the female gender to express themselves as what they are rather than hiding their real persona to act like someone else. Often, the prevailing situations show that society does not provide enough space for women to express themselves. It continues in the intellectual, social and familial situations of women. This discrimination of gender where one controls the other forced women to hide their identity to exist in such a society. The patriarchal enforcement of silencing the women emotions and concerns are criticised through the etching by Anupam Sud. The existing notion believed by the patriarchal system that women are not expected to express their emotions, feeling and thoughts to the world is inverted through the depiction of the woman who unmask her mask. On the other hand, if the spectators wish to see from their perspective that the woman masks herself, the etching can provide an idea to the spectators that she does not dare to come out of the restrictions imposed on her by the dominant patriarchal system that controls her. The artist leaves this freedom to decide the track of the ideology possessed by the etching to the spectators according to their perspectives on the woman in the etching.

This technique of creating the tone and ideology of the etching through the spectators brings more interpretive space rather than fixing and imposing a particular ideology to the spectators. Here, the analysis of the etching depends on the perspective in which the spectator wishes to conceive the artwork.

The marginalisation suffered by the female gender in a male-dominated world constituting patriarchal rules and imposition of restrictions is captured in the etching titled *The Ceremony of Unmasking* (1990) that depicts the image of a muscular man, a dog and two masked men removing/making a woman wear a mask. This has been done in a triptych pattern of one after the other.



Figure 16: *The Ceremony of Unmasking* (1990)

Source-: Book

This three in one work of Anupam Sud tries to convey a similar idea as discussed in the previous etching. In the first portion, there is a muscular man who stands in the position of arms akimbo denoting extreme manliness overpowered by the boldness of dominance and urges to subjugate the other gender. The middle portion shows a dog and a blue coloured mask representing complete loyalty of the subject to the surrounding situations and trueness. The intermediary portion serves as what does not occupy the other two extreme identities. The final portion depicts that the two masked men as the custodians of the identity possessed by the woman to whose face the mask is worn. The enforced action of masking the woman represents the masking of the true emotions, feelings and thoughts of the woman. The vulnerable condition of the female gender that is under the control of male dominance is highlighted through the third portion of the artistic work. The role that is designated to the woman to play in the world is designed by the two male subjects in the etching. The aesthetic character of the work relies on the emphasis on the black and white colour tone where the masks alone are provided with their respective colours. In certain situations, the masks that are worn temporarily pretend to have more brightness than the originality and trueness possessed by real-life situations. This is reflected through the condition of the woman depicted in the etching where her realities are hidden. The bare mind and body of the woman are exposed to the world for gaze where her feelings and the

true essence of her identity is hidden from being expressed. The duality possessed by the female gender due to the coerciveness of the domination by the patriarchal system is criticised by the artist in her work. Upon describing the future of art, she comments on the positive aspect of Western countries that considers art better than India. She criticises saying, “In the world, everything moves together and art also move with the parallel. Even philosophy also but the tragedy is we go behind. What I see in India is we make the same thing which someone has done it before. At least we should do little change. Western countries have different values than us Indians. At present, what is in the west is superior to our work” (Sud, personal communication, 2022). This perspective of Anupam Sud comes from the reluctance of audiences in India to accept new perspectives to art. The incorporation of nude figures in art has welcomed great criticism towards the works of many artists in India which makes them follow the usual routine of mimicking what has already been done and experimented. Anupam Sud comments that it is usual for people to think of nudity in the contemporary world. She says,

“I was asked questions many times about nude or naked. In answering such questions, it looks like funny. I believe that human body is very beautiful, the way light falls on the body and the modification and everything that inspire me to draw. So I draw it. It is something challenging because the presentation goes towards realism. I want to bring about what is in my aesthetic value about body. Everybody has different view or criteria of looking at something. So what is in my mind I try to bring that”

(Sud, personal communication, 2022)

Anupam Sud comments on the use of ‘mask’ and ‘masking’ in the artistic works such as *Persona* (1988), *The Ceremony of Unmasking* (1990), and *Laundry* (1994) saying that people change themselves according to situations and use the different forms of masks. She elaborates her viewpoint on the use of masks as,

“What we are from inside we speak and want to give some message to society, thus, we speak with certain limitations. Thus I think that we are always trying to wear mask. I was fond of collecting masks so I

had plenty of masks. This mask gives us to understand the reality and present it. This mask opened the different doors to understand the society and make life convenient. As we change mask sometimes in our inconvenience and you want to know, you are different than what you are. Since I had freedom therefore in my work there is plenty of masks.”

(Sud, personal communication, 2022) *Wee Hour* (1988), 24. 2 x 24 in. is an etching/Intaglio on paper is an image of a woman sitting in the form of a shell symbolising protection. While analysing the two sections - one that of the woman and the other that of the boxes giving hint to material possessions, the crouched position of the female figure represents the unsettled desires and dreams in her. Though women too have an equal desire for recognition, expression of thoughts and freedom to showcase their talents to the world, the regulations that are direct and indirect on controlling her makes her restrict from doing so. The dualities expressed through these two parts of the etching shadows the needful desires and unsatisfied controlling of the emotions.

Though every material possession to enjoy the world is surrounded, she is not allowed by the forces that dominate over her desires.

This feminist perspective of the etching can be related to the lives that are sacrificed within the four walls of homes without being able to express their fruitful voice against the atrocities of patriarchal dominance and oppression. The inability to protest against such suppression of true identity is projected through the art depicted by Anupam Sud.

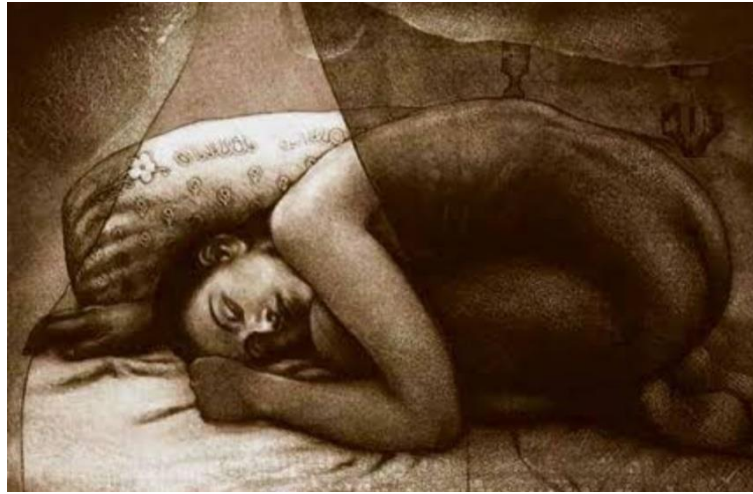


Figure 17: *Wee Hour* (1988)

Source-: Book

Contrary to the above noted artistic excellence portrayed by the artist, the *Dialogue Series* starting with *Dialogue I* (1984) which was made using etching and aquatint printed in black and cream.



Figure 18: *Dialogue I* (1984)

Source-: Book

It depicts the silence between two matured male and female subjects in the background of a city atmosphere. The expressions on their face are highlighted as sad, gloomy and unsatisfied. Rather than focusing on the body of the male and female subjects, the painting projects the disturbance in their living conditions that is a result of the altering situations around them.

The couple does not express any intimacy towards each other giving

hints to the tensions between their relationships. It gives the idea that many a time there is no need for verbal techniques to express feelings and emotions. There occurs communication between the couple which is created through the interpretive methods used by the spectators. Like how she opens space for the spectators to interpret the works from their perspective, this artistic work also follows a similar track. Same as that of *Dialogue I*, she continues the series with *Dialogue – IV* (1984) where the subject becomes two men taking looking at each other. This represents the world of men where the non-verbal means of communication also increases the bond between them. The background shown is a landscape with a river and trees on the other bank.

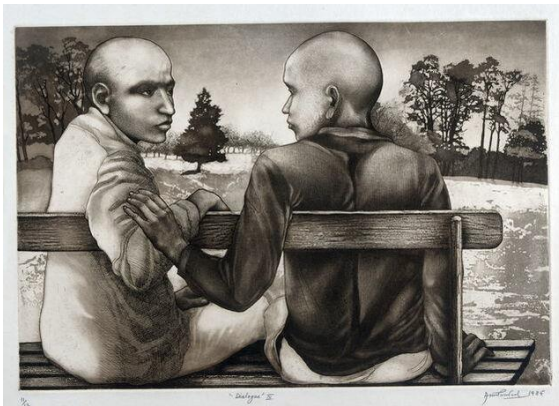


Figure 19: *Dialogue IV* (1984)



Figure 20: *Dialogue VIII* (1992)

Similarly, *Dialogue VIII* (1992), 49.5 cm x 97 cm, is an etching on paper in which two women are the subjects. It represents a setting that resembles a domestic atmosphere where the two relaxed women in their nude and semi-nude figures are trying to communicate with each other. The nude women look at each other's body denoting a strong bond between them that has formed out of their comfort zone. The duality here is the diptych where one woman is completely naked and the other semi-nude. The bonding between human beings is shown through all the artistic works under the title *Dialogue* where the multiple sides of life and communication are represented through their facial, gestural and background details. Same as clothed and unclothed human figures represent varied identities and characteristics in the

works of Anupam Sud, the diverse levels of communication that is even conducted through eyes and facial expressions are depicted in these portraits. There have been several criticisms towards the nude images and its representation. It is interesting to note the comment of Anupam Sud that,

“Many time people may say it is not good do it in this or that way but I don’t need to answer such people. you must do it what is analytically correct than drawing. Many may say about body and its limitation, I don’t take it seriously but give respect to them also. My drawing gave me more pleasure and aesthetic value to me thus I continued painting. My subject matter is universal therefore I thought if I make nude it will give more meaning of my work. Our Indian model were not shown nude Before but today it is possible.”

(Sud, personal communication, 2022)

Another work that showcases the nudity of female figures is the etching work titled *Laundry* (1994), 30.5 x 48.50 cm. Clothes can be seen as an extra embodiment of the human body that is seen attached to it.

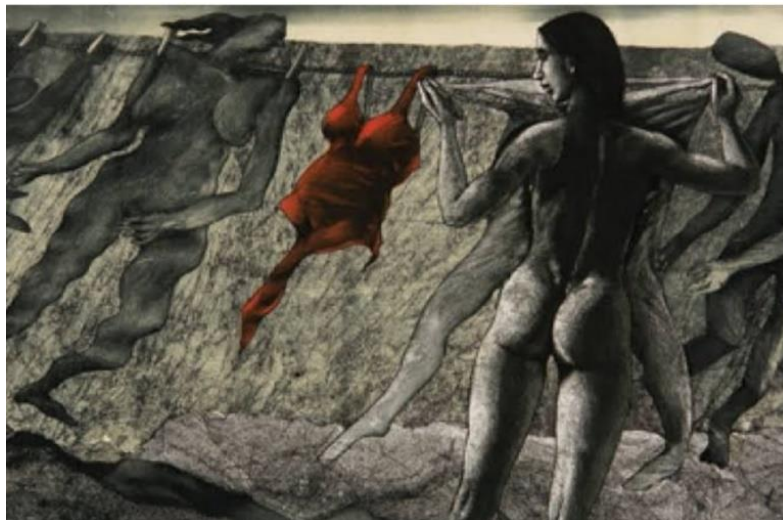


Figure 21: *Laundry* (1994)

Source-: Book

As clothes do not belong permanently to the existence of the body, it can be considered as a different entity that is separated from the original essence of a

human being. The artificiality that is possessed by wearing the materialistic tool equates to the use of masks to hide the true expression of human living.

Here, Anupam Sud expresses clothes as masks that hide the originality of living and restrict the freedom to express the true essence and reality of life in the world. The clothes and masks that act as a second skin to the human body are subject to temporariness as they are changed frequently. The multiple identities that are possessed by human figures on a temporary basis are narrated through this symbolisation. As seen in the etching, the nude woman showing her back is engaged in hanging dresses and masks. The clothes including the masks do not present the originality possessed by the woman in her nakedness. She is able to express it only at the time she hangs the clothes to dry them. This particular moment when the female gender is able to express their natural essence, emotions and feelings to the world is presented by the artist.

There are multiple masks worn by people to hide their true selves. It provides a different identity to a person where the wishes and dreams can be sacrificed and not expressed. Though from the aesthetic sense of the etching it seems to be a sensuous representation of the female body, the significance of such a representation lies in the meaning that it intends to produce and share with the spectators. The different shades of clothes and masks hung to get dried highlight the different masks that are forced to be worn for a woman for hiding their selfness. Women are not able to live in the way they are as the patriarchal society has insisted on certain rules and regulations for their living. These rules are not particularly imposed on the male gender as they are treated free and dominated. The subjugation that the female gender suffers from the exertion of power, dominance and exploitative attitudes of the society that is based on the wishes and dreams of the male community is criticised through the dresses and masks. The woman in her nakedness is seen as expressive without the covering of dress and feels comfortable without them. The dress denotes the fake masks allotted by society to the female gender to hide themselves from the mainstream. It is true about the review comment that “shown taut and devoid of an overly decorative approach, the figures in

Sud's print represent the interior mind as much as they do exterior realities" (Mishra, 2013, p. 35). It gradually makes them confined to the restricted space allotted to them. The confinement prescribed by the patriarchal society is criticised through feminism and the feminist perspectives expressed through art forms.

The expressive form of art followed by Anupam Sud is depicted in the series of works titled *Game Series* (1999). In the different portraits such as *Game I, II, III* and *IV*, the artist has utilised the images of dice, cards, reptiles, ladders and snakes along with the many faces and figures of both men and women. While analysing the holistic idea of the *Game Series*, it is clear she has represented the struggling side of people irrespective of their gender. Still, the figures of women are highlighted where they are depicted as naked.

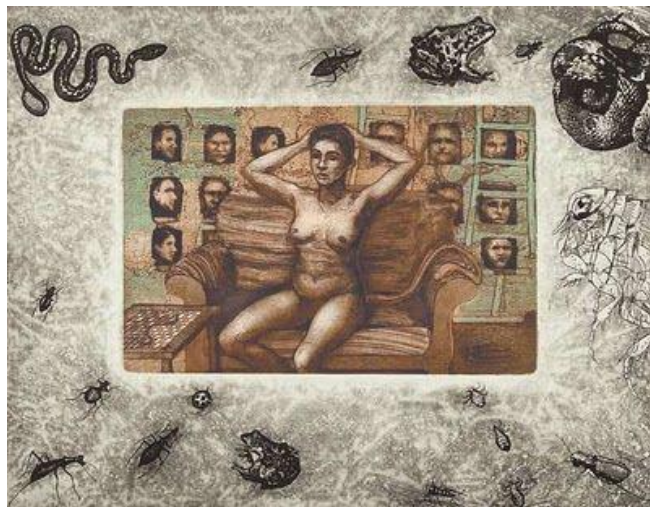


Figure 22: *Game Series* (1999)

Source:- Book

The continuity of exploitative situations under manipulative conditions is illustrated through the hunting scenes. Hunting was conducted by both humans and animals for their survival in the pre-historic age which was a usual part of their life. The artwork makes it clear that the roles have been changed with time and it has reached the stage where humans hunt other humans for exploitative purposes. The superiority that is exercised over others shows that the fittest among all will survive under uncomfortable and insecure situations. This idea is depicted in the portraits showing the reptiles and animals one after the other aiming to capture their prey. It denotes the food chain process where when one strives to survive by feeding

the other, it itself gets attacked and defeated by some other predator. The process is defined in the artistic work as an unending process that was a major component of human as well as an animal living in the past and also in the present. Time and subjects changed but the process of conquering and subjugating does not end. The etching in the series titled *The Game Eternal* (1999), 33 x 41.5 cm portraits a woman in her nakedness sitting on a sofa. The background of the subject has several portraits of men hung on a wall. The use of reptiles and animals denoting the food chain is shown as a border layout to the main focus of the etching. The posture of the woman faces the spectators as if she does not wish to hide herself from the world. The image of a dead snake on the sofa symbolises the dead feelings and emotions possessed by the female subject in the etching. She does not have any love for anyone other than for sexual purposes and becomes an object as well as a conqueror at the same time. The changing role of the female gender – one as subjugator and the other as subjugated is expressed on a single frame through the depiction of the nude woman and the portraits of the men she had conquered. The particular posture of the woman denotes her success over others and satisfaction with her desires. In the portrait, Anupam Sud criticises the desire of the woman who has manipulated her body for her desires thus surviving in the game that is played by the world around her. It shows the courageous and manipulative side of women who are made to behave as emotionless by the society that wants sexual desires to be accomplished.

Distinct from the portrayal of young and sensual figures of women in her works, Anupam Sud has also given prominence to the depiction of the aged figures focusing on the transitions of life as well as the structural difference that happens in the body of a woman. The issue of the male gaze is mostly towards the young female body that has an idealised shape compared to the flabby figure of an aged woman. She represents two women – one aged and the other young in her etching. While the young woman is shown nude with a remarkable outlook, the overweighed body is comparatively shown with sagging breasts and unattractive shape. She regards life as a magic mirror where time plays a great role. Also, the portrait depicts the desire of the woman to be beautiful and young before the world rather than being aged. It shows

the reality of life as it moves forward due to the influence of time. This is emphasised through the portrayal of *Meditation* (2000), 58 x 58 in. which has been done using oil on canvas. Here too, the major subject is an aged woman who is no longer sensuous and structurally ideal for society to be called beautiful. The meditative posture of the woman where a man stands behind her shows the spiritual identity that is interested to be followed by the aged woman – different from the materialistic beliefs and desires. The man behind the woman does not look at her and it shows that the female figure is free from the male gaze at this particular condition of her physical existence. Though this perception of the artist would have been right at the time when she exhibited the portrait, the several incidents in different parts of the country and the world shows that the male gaze has been exploitive beyond the limits of the age of women.

In the two portraits represented by Anupam Sud, she didactically suggests the world to explore more about a woman's inner conflicts and passions rather than gazing onto her physical identity. The world and the social conditioning of society have given more interest in detailing the physical characteristics of an individual rather than giving importance to understand the limitations suffered and struggled by the person. The portrait has directly criticised the mentality of a society that values the external features of a female gender rather than giving importance to the qualities, talents and potentiality. The societal issue of the male gaze cannot be limited to its sensual aspect of viewing the female body. It has a wider perspective in which the patriarchal society neglects the skills and talents of the female gender so as to confine her to the limited space allotted by the male-dominated system. Same as how Anupam Sud criticises the masks that are imposed on the innate and true identity of women, the negligence of society to understand the emotions, feelings and thoughts of women are exposed here. This attitude of society comes out as a result of the continuous attempt to picture women as mere sexual objects. The exertion of power by the male patriarchal system on the female gender which is subject to continuous oppression and exploitation is seen as a privilege to neglect the basic rights

and freedom of women. Anupam Sud presents her female figures that are aged to point to this manipulative attempt of society.

The portrait *Reflection* (2001) 29 x 28 in. depicted through oil on canvas makes the spectators explore more from the portrait through the aesthetic showcasing. The act of subjugation conducted by exploitive and powerful groups in society is expressed through the nude figure of a woman who sits near a mirror that reflects her image.

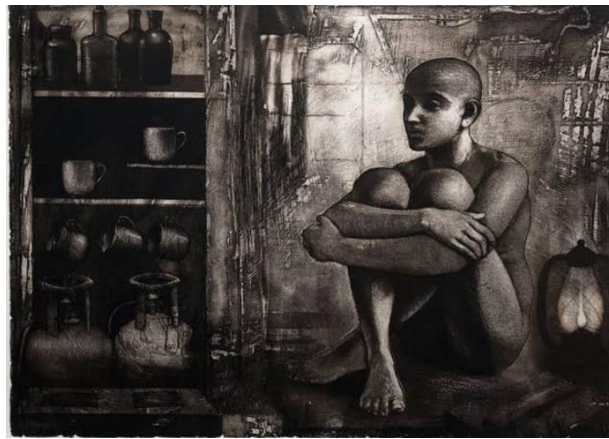


Figure 23: *Reflection* (2001)

Source:- Book

The lamp that is kept on the ground lightens the background that helps the spectators to understand the uncertain and anxious state of life that the woman leads. She is naked and the expression on her face denotes the deep sorrows that are reflected. The feminist perspective of the portrait has to be explored from the expression of the woman where her inner feelings and emotions are reflected on her face. The artist makes the spectators see what is disturbing the woman in the portrait by making her physical features visible to them. The helplessness, voiceless situation and the unfortunate condition through which she goes through represents the whole of the female gender that has been exploited and made silent through the exertion of power.

The powerful portrait that challenges the rules and autonomy of patriarchy over the female body and gender is showcased in *Draupati's Vow* (2006) 49.5 x 39 cm. which is done as an etching.

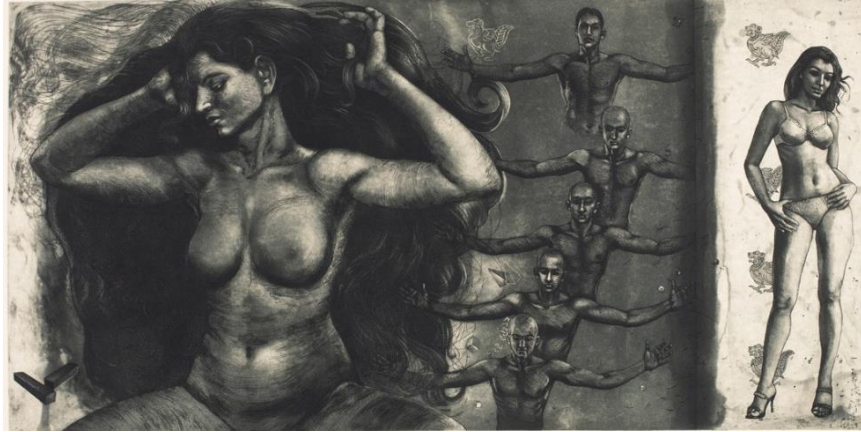


Figure 24: *Draupati's Vow* (2006)

Source:- Book

In it, the artist incorporates the mythological reference of Draupati's pathetic situation of being material for the incapability of her husband. The first image in the etching shows the untying of the hair of a woman similar to the vow that was taken by Draupati when she was dishonoured before others.

Five men are shown next to the image of the naked woman whose body is opened towards the spectators. It reflects the helpless situation of the five Pandava brothers who had to witness the dishonour that is done to Draupati. The dilemma experienced by the woman for being a material for sale is projected through the triptych portrait of Anupam Sud. Draupati is showcased through the depiction of her vow that she will not tie her hair until this act of dishonour is revenged. Analysing the first, second and third images shown in the etching, it is clear that the women have taken charge of their own body, thus giving no chance for further exploitation and subjugation. The third image represents the modern Draupati who is shown as more courageous, bold and strong in her decisions unlike the conventionality preferred by the patriarchal system. The expression of the female figures gives hint not to their suppressive attitude, but that of the strength that they have acquired against the existing norms formulated by the male dominant society. The works similar to that of *Draupati's Vow* and *Being a Woman* represents the identity of women as staunchly feminist and humanist (Bhuyan, 2021).

The confidence of the modern woman in the portrait to live without

depending on others makes her bold and stern in her decisions. From the identity of the vulnerability that was presented on the female body, the artist expresses the ability of the female gender to take control of their body, passion and thoughts rather than depending on others who tend to exploit and manipulate situations in favourable to the interests of the patriarchal society. The new-age woman represented by Anupam Sud in her portrait thus becomes an identity of the female gender that has undergone tremendous change due to the incessant discriminations, materialisation and exploitation in life.

From the previous portraits where women became the central focus, it can be understood that the artist has given prominence in projecting the inner conflicts and perceptions of women. It has been made effective through the equal participation of the spectators who has various perspectives. The outer physical characteristics of the female body are mainly exposed with the intention to open space to explore what goes inside their mind. The criticism against the male gaze that avoids its perception to the thoughts that is unstable inside the female gender has been a major highlighted point of analysis about these portraits. This act of exposing the inner mindset of women through the depiction of outer features is substantiated through the etching on paper titled *My Feminine Side* (2007) that represents the soft and sensual outlook of a woman's face where her hairs are spread in different directions. The complexity of her mind is emphasised by showing different images that come out of her hair. This



Figure 25: *My Feminine Side* (2007)

Source:- Book

etching has depicted the various phases of life that progress through communication and actions where the role of women is equal to that of men. The changing perception of women of the modern period is explained through the portrait and it intends to bring a connection between the male- female roles and relationships in society. The positive meaning that is attached to the analysis of the portrait expresses the attainment of freedom, rights and equality which otherwise was restricted and hindered by the autonomy exercised by the patriarchal system.

This changing mentality towards what happens around and what affects individuals is generalised through the diptych portrait titled *Voyage I* (2007), 44 x 30.2 in and *Voyage II* (2007), 91 x 50 cm, both in intaglio etching on paper. *Voyage I* depicts the image of a naked woman holding a paper boat on her arms as the central focus and three men engaged in their activities such as jumping, walking using hands and looking beyond the limits through binoculars. There is an image of an autorickshaw shown on top of the portrait. These different images incorporated in a single frame can be found as placed in a circle where the woman holding the paper boat is projected as the major focus.

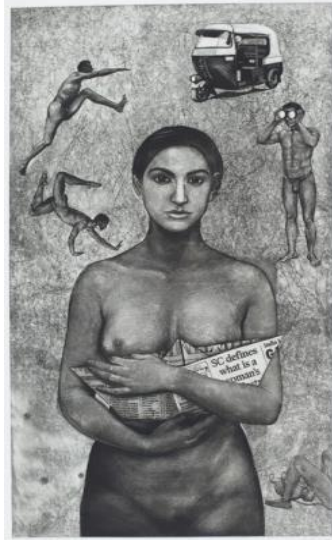


Figure 26: *Voyage I* (2007)

The analysis of the etching makes it reveal that the representation of the images points as a continuity to that of the themes and changing ideologies discussed in the previous portraits. The idea of the portrait is that both male and female are conducting their journey coping with the altering times which bring changes to their thought processes, ideological beliefs and social living aiming at a more systematic and inclusive manner. As always interested to project the interaction between human beings, Anupam Sud has emphasised the importance of thinking beyond the restricted view of life that is seen through bare eyes. The paper boat, actions of men and the binocular describes the journey that is in progress which has made a tremendous change in the mentality of human beings. The new-age woman depicted in the portrait is shown as secure to look at the viewer with confidence. The psychological aspects of the subjects shown in the portrait are discovered through the effective use of the images such as the paper boat, autorickshaw and binoculars. The varied intension and expectations of the two genders are depicted through the single frame. Still, she gives importance to the expression of the female gender by making the woman the central figure of the portrait.

Voyage II also depicts a similar idea with changes in the images used to describe the intention of the portrait. Here, a paper plane on the hands of a

nude male is shown as the central figure. On the backdrop, there are images of an aeroplane, a girl jumping, the images of two people together and a woman lying on the ground looking up at the sky.

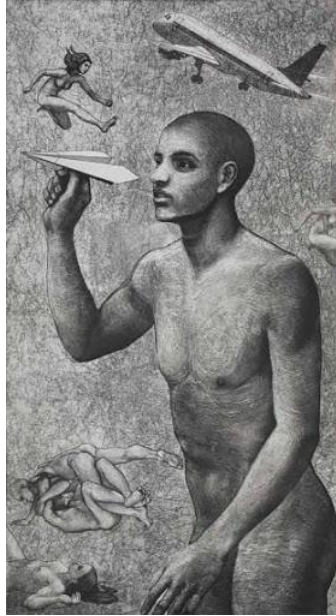


Figure 27: *Voyage II* (2007)

These images, though it is different from the previous one, equally exhibits the same idea. If the previous portrait had projected the image of a woman as the central figure, *Voyage II* exhibits a naked man as the major highlighted image. This contrast in the selection of images makes it easier for the spectators to relate to the difference in the attitudes, desires and identity of the genders.

The use of paper boats has been repeated in other artistic works of Anupam Sud. In *Woman with a Boat* (2002), she uses the metaphor of paper boats to express the idea of freedom that is required for the female gender.

The materialisation of the female body is criticised through *Olympia* (2007) 49.5 x 40 cm. which is an etching depicting the naked body of a woman to a man. The unsettled problem of objectification is discussed through the portrait where the male gaze of women body is problematised. The perception imaged by the patriarchal male society influences the females to look at them through other's eyes. It thus affects the self-esteem possessed by women as they are most prone to such gaze that causes sensitive

psychological issues.

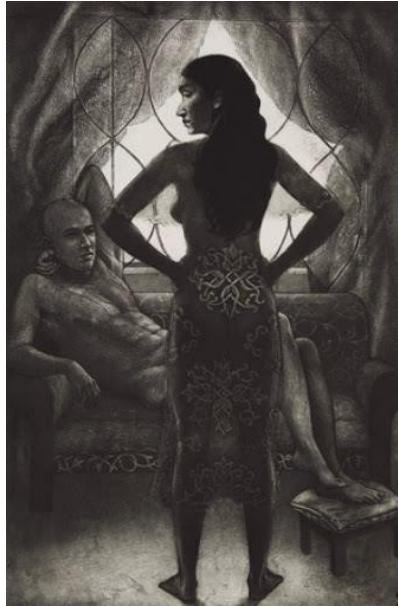


Figure 28: *Olympia* (2007)

Source-: Book

The etching by Anupam Sud shows other material details such as the window grill, curtains, cushioned sofa and the footrest chair. The superiority possessed by the male subject in the portrait is shown in the posture in which he sits to look at the female body shown by the woman in front of him. Similar to enjoying a fascinating material of no emotions and feelings, the male gaze possessed out of the domination and oppressive attitude of the male subject objectifies the woman. Voyeurism is projected by the artist through the smile of the male subject indicating his win over the woman's body.

Anupam Sud has been successful in emphasising the disturbing effects of voyeurism through the etchings and oil paintings where she uses women body itself as a powerful tool. The narrative that can be discovered from many of her artistic works resembles this characteristic feature.

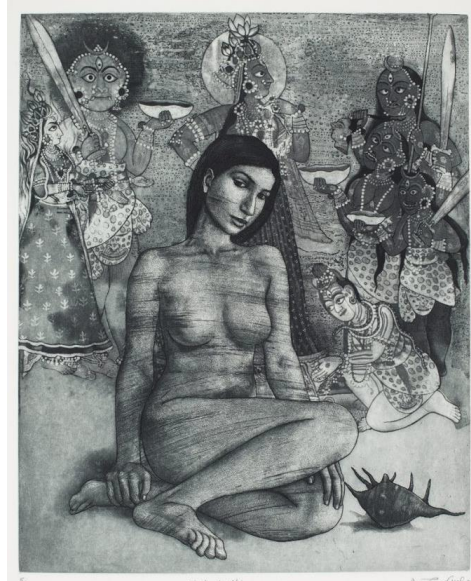


Figure 29: *Black Conch* (2007)

It is often heard that women are equated to goddesses for the purity and essence that they shower on society. The duality practised behind such a comment is explored and questioned through *Black Conch* (2007) 49.5 x 40 cm. The identity that is showered by the society on a female gender is that resembles the existing essence of goddesses.

Anupam Sud questions this paradoxical statement by contrasting the idols of goddesses and a naked figure of a woman sitting on a floor. The idol images of Bhadrakali, Vahinipriya and Bhima goddess are placed behind the female figure whereas a black conch is placed near to her. The contrasting idea that she exposes through the etching is that people consider women as a goddess and at the same time subjugates, oppresses and exploits them by representing them as the weaker sex. The goddesses are considered as courageous and acceptable for worshipping in society but the pseudo-culture possessed by the patriarchal society deviates from the track in the case of women. In practice, the same ideology does not imply treating women as human beings with the same emotions, feelings and desires. The juxtaposing of the images of the idols and the female body directly criticises this inhumane

attitude of society. If the patriarchal society considers and behaves as if women are goddesses, there would not be issues of marital rapes, domestic violence, male gaze, tortures, exploitations and so on against the female gender. Therefore, Anupam Sud easily plots the dual attitude possessed by society in the case of women.

In *Game Series* (1999), *My Feminine Side* (2006), and *Voyage Series* (2007), Anupam Sud has incorporated different images to express the idea of women. The representation of many images in one canvas portrays the many challenges faced by women in life. The symbolism that has been made through such a manner shows the importance in the utilisation of space by the artist. She expresses satisfaction in the work that she has done in her career as artist mainly because it has influenced and evoked certain discussions on women situations in the country. Though there have been criticisms to her works, she finds to enjoy her freedom to explore the art that she tries to convey to the world. She says that “I have aesthetic pleasure in my works. I have to reach certain level to explore such pleasure, the kind of joy in the process that I do. I have right to see and enjoy my work and have taken that pleasure” (Sud, personal communication, 2022).

Conclusion

While considering the artistic expressions of Arpana Caur and Anupam Sud in various forms, they differ in their way to present unique identities to their works. The major difference is in the tools and techniques used by the artists where Arpana Caur relies on oil painting, illustrations, paper works and murals and Anupam Sud focuses on printmaking through etching and oil painting. From the aesthetic aspect of the works, Anupam Sud’s works expose the nakedness of the female figures that are shown bold and expressive. On the other hand, the female figures represented by Arpana Caur do not give priority to such an expression of the body of the female figures. The analysis could find that the works of Arpana Caur had given prominence to the daily life situations of women who can be related to the females in and around the

surroundings of the viewers. She depicts the clear sketch of their livelihood – mainly through figures that weave nature through the regenerative power. The expression of female figures in Anupam Sud’s artistic works is bold and it criticises the male gaze as a major intention behind the exposed body. The anatomy of the body is a sharp and strong warning to the patriarchal society about their indecent attempts to capture and impose an only a sensual and erotic identity on women. Anupam Sud compares the situation of women and men regarding the perspective of the society towards their body. She says,

“I have experienced this world through a human body. You see that when a man goes out at midnight he has of psychosis, but when a woman goes she has the danger of her body, chastity, dignity, respect, possession, and also danger of body and life. I can never deny that in my work I do it deliberately but it is my life experience therefore it has to be seen clearly. If someone sees it analytically he/she may say something and it can be debatable. In my view in writing you can write anything and in may not agree with I tbut I don’t want to make things debatable. It’s the freedom of the writer. But I will be definitely nice because I have experienced this world through human body.”

(Sud, personal communication, 2022)

Quoting the words of Aparna Caur on the opportunities and art platforms available for women, she points out that the situations have improved comparing the exposure and outreach that women have received during the 1970s and 1990s. She says,

“I personally have not provided opportunities to women artists, because my mother started a school in 1977 for girls from slums in my late sister’s memory. We lost her when she was 17. We were only two sisters so now we have hundred girls coming and we have four teachers one is annex occasion, because they can earn their living, like one is beauty, manicure, pedicure, vexing, threading, mehendi, hair styling and cutting, ant the stitching classes are going on down stairs and then computers and all these are all free”

(Caur, personal communication, 2022)

It is identified that the aesthetic expression in the works of both the artists – through the effective use of woman subjects as central figures and sign, symbol and metaphor – provides substantiating support to the feminist ideology hidden in them. Every artwork would have a strong intention behind it. Sometimes an incident or unforgettable moment in life that makes the artist to create it as an art form. Anupam Sud has the opinion that mostly very successful people in life consider their unforgettable moments as pleasure and recreate them into art forms as they can enjoy it at their very present moment that gives them joy, position and value in society. She comments on the criticisms towards her works saying that one's experiences cannot be interpreted by a different person who haven't gone through similar situation. Unless and until one goes through situations represented in the artistic works, they cannot grasp the core idea and intention behind the creative art. The interpretations from public that differ from the artist can be considered as their own perspective from the gathered ideas and experiences from their life. It cannot be equated to the meaning that is provided by the artist or intended to convey to the society. India has seen several intolerances to art and artists. When it comes to the artistic themes of nudity provided to figures, the criticism and intolerance exceeds the limits. Examples of M. F. Hussain who was treated intolerant for his art and exiled from the country due to the protests and threats from certain groups were seen. There would be many opposing voices from different sections of society for art that is live and pointing to the culture, social values and religious morality. Anupam Sud has the opinion that contemporary art requires continuous change that is inevitable. She finds no use to art if there isn't any change that occurs in the field. It shows the progressiveness of a society. She says, "In my own practice I will not tolerate if someone says you do this or that way. But if someone is doing something which is different than what I am doing, it may not be my cup of tea but it is his/her and he/she has right to do what he/she wants to do" (Sud, personal communication, 2022).

The following chapter concludes the analysis and findings of the

research. It also mentions the outcomes of the research that is derived out of analysing the objectives of the research through the interpretation of the selected artistic works of the Delhi based women artists.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

The feminist aspect of art dealt in this thesis utilising the selected artistic works of three women artists based in Delhi has opened up new insights on the power and potential of art. Though the research and analysis of art cannot be restricted to one such approach, the appropriate approach of feminist perspective on the art that fit to the category provides suitable ways to extract the symbolic meanings that the art works try to express. The importance and relevance of an art does not lie within the canvas or background on which it is produced, but it develops to have significance when it is extracted, discussed and debated by people who are interested in the field of arts. It also points at the impact that the art creates in the society, either by appreciating or criticising the ideologies and activities of the society. Every good art that is appreciated by intellectuals and is a subject of talk in the public, has something that excites or connects itself with the society. More than the aesthetic quality of an artistic work, the effect that the work has on the society decides the significance and relevance of the work. Art presents what the artist wishes to speak to the world. Most of the works from women artists having affiliation towards feminist ideology represented the proponents of feminist perspectives in art. They utilised the space to present what had been restricted for them to express due to the discrimination, marginality and repression attributed to them as part of gender bias. The strong and courageous attitude of women who protested against the patriarchal behaviour of society and the situations in the field of arts opened doors to the world that was earlier restricted for them beyond a limit.

Let it be the international figures in feminist art like Judy Chicago, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Kiki Smith, Frida Kahlo, Lorna Simpson, Georgia O'Keefe, The Guerilla Girls, Sarah Lucas, Susan Hiller, Louise Bourgeois, Kara Walker etc. or Indian women artists like Amrita Sher-Gil, B.

Prabha, Nasreen Mohamedi, Arpita Singh, Nilima Sheikh, Nalini Malani, Madhvi Parekh, Mrinalini Mukerjee, Arpana Caur, Anupam Sud, Gogi Saroj Pal etc., feminism in art around the world has been developed as a result of the convergence of their efforts, protests and criticism towards the existing system that hindered the freedom and rights of women in society. The list does not confine to the above stated women artists, but the perspective and field has been enriched through the incorporation of feminism in art that gave the opportunity for many more contemporary artists to exist in the mainstream of arts. Earlier, due to the excess inclusion of men and exclusion of women from a discipline and field of arts, women were not able to prosper in it even if they had the talent to become notable figures. Feminism in art thus has made it possible to the women artists to have their space to showcase their art, emotions and perspectives.

It is interesting to note that the feminist perspectives in art such as feminist art, feminist aesthetics and feminist women artists began to make their presence towards the second half of the twentieth century. While comparing with the advent of feminism in art, the ideology had already been established in other fields such as literature through the intervention of many female writers such as Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath and Simone de Beauvoir. Likewise, other disciplines also had the gradual inclusion of women practitioners. Though late, the significant approaches, links with social existence of women and their problems, support of the feminist movements in background etc. gave a sudden encouragement for the feminist art to prosper inviting more participation, discussion and debate about the ideology and its application in the field of art. It tried to explore the unexplored aspects of women that were not revealed or were restricted for the women to showcase to the world in the right sense. The male gaze, patriarchal intolerance and gender bias discussed in the various chapters of this thesis gives hint to the many developing and developed themes, ideological interpretations and aesthetic excellence utilised by the feminist art. The development of feminist art in the world and also in India was through the constant movements, protests

and supports to women empowerment conducted through art and art exhibitions that showcased the real-world struggles of the female gender in a male-oriented and patriarchal society. Before the beginning stages of the feminist art, feminist aesthetics and the involvement of feminist women artists, art for women was considered as something to depict natural beauty and landscapes. The introduction of the strong perspectives that supported women interests made the change from the traditional concepts to new ways and approaches to art. Women became the central figures of feminist women artists who tried to portray the pain, struggles and anxieties of women in society who are often subjugated, repressed and exploited by the dominant male gender. This realisation through art influenced and supported further movements and protests led by feminist intellectuals, thinkers and activists around the world. Art and art themes related to women became a strong tool for the activists to protest against the atrocities towards women and their safe living.

The question – “Why such a discussion from the perspective of feminist art in this thesis?” has its potential to recap the most significant points dealt in this research. The highlight of this research is the selection of women artists based in Delhi, feminist perspective of their art and the interpretation through the lens of feminism and associated concepts. The incorporation of these three aspects: one from the practical side of art, the other from the theoretical aspect of art, and the third from a general theoretical perspective gives a holistic sketch of why art, women artists and their feminist art works have relevance in the contemporary scenario. For a study that concentrates more on the art works that has a relation to women and female gender, this theoretical framework would be the most appropriate one to bring the developmental changes, disciplinary peculiarities and academic-research orientation. The theoretical insights shared in the thesis substantiates the findings in the chapters by providing a background to establish the interpretations.

Though there has been several discussions, debates and practices for

the empowerment of women, while considering the term in its real essence, it is a contextual term. This statement is because of the contextual alterity that it has in its operation. It changes with the different situations that influence the social, cultural, political, economic and legal aspects. The schemes and criteria for empowerment of women in a developing would not be equal to that of the empowerment plans initiated and followed in a developed country. It also differs while considering the situation in an under-developed country. The resources, establishments, funding and other associated requirements influence the impact of empowerment. It is important for a society to focus on the empowerment plans and schemes of women as it leads to positive changes allowing women to gather, interact and express themselves. The art of these women artists selected for research, through the means of exhibitions, talks and public meetings has reached to many women, thus influencing them to come out of their shells that are controlled by the patriarchal norms. It is the reluctance to initiate, become part of and adjust with the changes that makes the process slower and ineffective to reach the common women. Art has played crucial role in gathering similar minded people, both men and women to associate with each other to share their thoughts on the contemporary situation of life and living of women. Several exhibitions, artist- interactions and news reports on arts that represents women and womanhood have helped to invite women who wish to share their thoughts, ideas, insights and solutions to the existing problems that hinder the safe living of women. Such art creates an invoke in the mind of women to rethink about the potentiality that they possess even in the midst of all the exploitive situations in life.

It is unfortunate to note that the living condition of most of the women in India is pitiable and requires substantial improvement. The basic aspects such as education, sanitary requirements, peaceful living, rights and freedom etc. have to be ensured to empower them. Inequality in the society, living conditions and work atmospheres that discriminate and marginalise the female gender is a great challenge that is faced by women in the country. It slows down the empowerment programmes and schemes introduced by the

government and non-governmental organisations. The constitution of India, through its Article 15 (3) provides and grants the right to make special provisions to the particular gender group to the State. Equality is a major agenda that is set by the government with the base of Article (39) that instructs the State to consider and ensure equality of gender. It is noted that “The Indian Constitution grants not only equality to women but also empowers the state to take special measures to raise the status of women” (Shivaraj, 2016, p. 191).

The customs and conventional rules of the society act as a barrier in most of the situations to provide equality, rights and freedom to the female gender. From a general perspective on the traditional mindset of the people in any society, they do not appreciate the expression of women beyond a limit that provokes their patriarchal attitudes. It can be connected with their cultural peculiarities, religious mindsets and social situations. Women in such conditions are often voiceless and repressed. Though social activism and law of the country contribute substantial steps forward towards emancipating women, the challenges attached to them drag them back to the initial steps of empowerment. When some incidents against women happen, or there are discussions based on gender equality, there is a motivation that is acquired by women to speak against the atrocities, violence and discrimination where they get victimised.

After the peak days of such discussions, the society becomes silent or must have been behind another news. This to and fro oscillation makes initiatives in vain and lessens the momentum towards parity of both the sexes.

Gender discrimination has always been an unsettled challenge to women as it restricts equal opportunities, exercise of constitutional rights, social freedom and financial stability. The process of educating women can be a powerful measure to liberate them from all forms of ignorance and repression. The ability to take right decisions, to say NO to certain situations and to fight for what is a fundamental right will only be known through proper education. Education and literacy help to enhance the sense of views, outlook and power to take the right decisions. Women are valuable for a nation to

navigate to progress. The importance of education is connected with the significance of art as a curriculum in the syllabuses. Through providing access to visit exhibitions and artist interactions, it helps women to get themselves liberated from the four walls at their home. Such an initiative inculcates new thoughts that brings awareness about the importance of becoming independent and bold.

The question – “Are you a feminist?” is even today considered not appropriate because of the misconceptions around the term. A large group of people, mostly traditional societies, have intolerant attitudes to feminism, feminist perspectives and feminists. The answer that “Yes, I am” would invite hatred in such communities. This occurs even within and beyond the limits of art. The field of art, which is one among the several fields that contribute much to feminist perspective, if it has a touch of feminism, is considered to as different from that of the other artistic works. If this was the condition even now in some sections that are not educated about the importance of feminism and feminist art, one could easily guess the situation of who supported feminism and feminist movements in its initial stages of development.

The history of feminism is filled with radicals and progressives and liberals and centrists. It's filled with splinter movements and reactionary counter- movements. That's part of what it means to be both an intellectual tradition and a social movement, and right now feminism is functioning as both with a gorgeous and monumental vitality.

(Grady, 2018)

The feminist movement that are connected with political campaigns also go in association with the feminist art. Feminism in art incorporates issues that affect the reproductive rights of women, domestic violence against the female gender, sexual harassment, women's suffrage, equal opportunity, equal pay, maternity leave and sexual violence towards the female gender. The issue of what is called as ideal woman is challenging as the term denotes the desire of the patriarchal society to see women always subjugated to them. As per the ideology of patriarchy, women are considered only as a cloned version of men without having their own desires, expression of feelings or emotions, and existence of their own. The patriarchy and such social system expect women to be submissive, patient, docile, motherly and sacrificing. These ideal woman images that bring struggle and sacrifice to female gender alone are criticised through art which seeks to explore more areas that provide a wider scope for the expression of womanhood. Women who are forced to be within their home express a feeling of loneliness, rejection and alienation from the society that is outside. The artists discussed in this thesis represents the desire of women to explore more than what is permitted by the patriarchal society. It is the fate of female gender to walk, talk and behave accordingly to the desire of male dominance. This pre-notion and requirement to live according to the rules of the male society brings insecurity and feel of being second-grade in the society they live in. There have been several initiatives to provide equal awareness to men and women in society as women alone cannot wipe out the traditional notions that has already been imprinted through culture, practices and believes.

While comparing the selected works of Arpita Singh, Aparna Caur, and Anupam Sud, it can be delineated that the three Delhi-based women artists, directly or indirectly, expresses their artistic inclination towards the ideology of feminism. The importance of selecting the Delhi women artists Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur and Anupam Sud lies in the relatability of their artistic works to the life and situations of the female gender in India. From the analysis and findings, it can be found that the artistic works of Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur, and Anupam Sud share similarities in representing

women-oriented paintings. They try to focus on the challenges against the female gender through the representation of the female body, the threats against it in society and the resilience required for women to overcome it. They try to highlight the female body to connect to the various social issues in society caused by the domination and exploitation conducted by patriarchy and associated elements in society. Though the selected works can be considered as an expression of the aesthetic beauty in art that directs the study to explore the feminist perspectives of the artists, the other works of the artists also points to several other issues in society.

When comparing them, Arpita Singh should be given the top priority since she is an artist who places a heavy emphasis on issues affecting women in the nation. In her writings, she emphasises women's vulnerability, societal injustice, and hatred. Her oil and watercolour works are well-liked by academic communities, the research community, and regular citizens both inside and outside of the nation. Despite using a range of topics in her paintings, she has placed a strong emphasis on the viewpoint of women. She transitions from surrealist landscapes to abstraction in her artistic career by using vibrant colours, ominous symbols, and bizarre settings into her works.

Whereas, Aparna Caur's creative ideas evolved as a result of her observations of the people, events, and circumstances in her environment. She draws inspiration from local literature and traditional art and employs the female form as her primary motif in her paintings. Aparna Caur's paintings place more emphasis on female portraiture in modern metropolitan settings than in rural ones. In terms of sexual expression and the idea of including women as the main characters, the majority of works have a tendency toward the erotic. She has also addressed issues including life, death, the environment, and violence in various parts of the world.

When it comes to Anupama Sud, her printing addressed the aesthetic manifestations of both dressed-up and bare-chested human beings. She, unlike others, did not limit her potential to simply feminine characters. She also sketched men, which allowed viewers to feel the sexual identities of both sexes. They were also linked to themes that dealt with socially significant

issues that related both sexes together, expanding beyond the narrow experience of aesthetics. She employed zinc plates for her etching, which required the artist to have considerable patience and focus.

The major analytical and interpretative findings from chapter four and five are noted below. It provides the understanding of the artistic way followed by the Delhi- based women artists to focus on the feminist perspectives which is crucial and significant even at the present scenario in India. Their works projects the notion of women that is bound within the restrictions of patriarchy. The liberation from the exhibition and exertion of power over body and life are mostly presented through the artistic works.

Chapter five:

1. Arpita Singh's woman art represents the vulnerability experienced by women in society and the resilience that is wished to occur in them to overcome the challenges.
2. The mother and goddess representations in artistic works of Arpita Singh highlights the power of women to survive amidst all the various nuances of life.
3. The plight and restrictions for women in the male-dominated society is portrayed in the various art works of Arpita Singh.
4. Arpita Singh's portrayal of women showcases the reality of life.
5. Though the artist herself does not consider as feminist, her paintings with significance to aesthetic beauty depict and highlights the ideologies propagated by the feminism.

Chapter six and seven:

1. Women and womanhood are represented in the works of Arpana Caur and Anupam Sud.
2. Arpana Caur projects the real life and living condition of women in India.
3. Arpana Caur exhibits the different tones of the life of women by giving different dimensions to the role of women in her art works.

4. Arpana Caur utilises the aesthetic and political dimensions of female body as a tool to express her views.
5. The duality and contrasting forms of representing women in Arpana Caur's art represents the different identities through which women has to go through that depicts the opposite shades of their life.
6. Arpana Caur utilises the female gender in her artistic works as a container to which she tries to represent the different issues in the world that surrounds and disturbs women.
7. Arpana Caur's artistic works that projects the body and life of women portray the feminist ideology backgrounded with aesthetic brilliance.
8. Anupam Sud utilises the body of women to highlight vulnerability and victimisation.
9. The nudity and nude figures in Anupam Sud's artistic works equally project the unfortunate conditions as well as the desire for the female gender to exhibit their hidden desires and emotions.
10. Nudity and aesthetic sense of body is celebrated in the works of Anupam Sud.
11. Masks, clothes and masked female figures represent the plight of women who are forced to accept altering identities in life.
12. The various images associated with the female body showcases the various emotions and experiences of women in society.
13. Feminist perspectives, especially regarding the freedom for expression and equality are depicted in the art works of Anupam Sud.
14. Male gaze and dehumanisation effects on women are projected through the works of Anupam Sud. The helplessness, voicelessness and vulnerability are contrasted with the boldness and courage of women to overcome the unfortunate male gaze.

The importance of selecting the Delhi women artists Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur and Anupam Sud lies in the relatability of their artistic works to the life and situations of the female gender in India. The findings from the chapters mentioned above are from a collective perspective of their artistic works that are analysed in the specific chapters. From the analysis and

findings, it can be found that the artistic works of Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur, and Anupam Sud shares similarities in representing women-oriented paintings. They try to highlight the challenges against female gender through the representation of female body, the threats against it in society and the resilience required for women to overcome it.

Based on the objectives and findings of the research, there are certain outcomes that is significant in understanding the aesthetic and feminist aspect in the artistic works of Delhi based women artists.

1. The gradual development of women participation and the influence of feminist perspective of art in India is traced.

The introduction of the research provided certain historical and contemporary developments in the field of fine arts in India. Though there were very less involvement of women who participated in art and exhibitions, later the scenario changed with more opportunities that were open for them. With the progress of each decade and the political and societal attitude towards art and women artists, there is now a better participation of the female gender. The continuous rise of such art in India by a few women artists began to bring fruitful alterations in the notion of art that the women artists dealt with. With the works created by women artists, some of the traditional notions of women and women's bodies were overturned. The substance of their lives, the lives of individuals they knew, the social situations of women, everyday battles, hopes of freedom and rights, and so on were depicted in the paintings and other creative works of such women artists. It was an expression of what was supposed to be concealed within women, as well as a look at the world through the eyes of a woman. Though there are supportive situations compared with the previous century, it does not mean that it has attained a satisfactory level in including women to the mainstreams. Only the mainstream and celebrated artists among women are only able to express their views through creative platforms to its fullest. There continues to be discrimination and sexist attitudes of society towards female gender even in the case of accepting the unique and talented works of women artists.

2. Influence of feminist perspectives is identified in the works of the selected Delhi based women artists.

Through the analysis and interpretation of the saesthetic and feminist perspectives of the selected artistic works of Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur, and Anupam Sud, the research focused to highlight how the woman artists utilised art to highlight the problems affecting female gender, the effects of patriarchy and the resilience suggested through the works. Utilising broad research through the theoretical framework of feminist notions in art, the artistic works were delineated that gave equal importance to the aesthetic and feminist perspectives. For providing a theoretical background, the evolution, relevance, and significance of the feminist theory, feminist aesthetics and art have been employed in the research, explaining its various dimensions in the third chapter. Theoretical viewpoints on feminist aesthetics and feminist art serve as a solid foundation for the development of feminist theory that focuses on the art and artists involved. The necessary shift in the field of art, in order to promote the opportunities for women artists to present their work in the same way as male artists, must be similarly envisioned by society in order to support related activities in the field. In the same way that feminist art supports women's empowerment through their canvases and other venues, it's critical to support the projects and movements that are affiliated with it. To present the feminist aspects of women artists' artistic works, the aesthetic value of the works is described, which gives an indication of how it has expanded and enhanced feminist conceptions related to the theme and concept of the artistic work. The analysis to extract the hidden thought behind the artistic works produced by women artists exemplifies feminist aesthetics, which emphasises feminist characteristics.

3. The aesthetic and feminist perspective in the selected works of the Delhi based women artists are explored.

The women artists profiled in this thesis have attempted to depict women's roles and relationships with society from a variety of perspectives, ranging from domestic settings to societal exposure. To project the feminist aspects of

women artists' artistic works, the aesthetic value of the works is described, which gives an indication of how it has expanded and enhanced feminist conceptions related to the theme and concept of the artistic work. The analysis to extract the hidden thought behind the artistic works produced by women artists exemplifies feminist aesthetics, which emphasises feminist characteristics. The trend of portraying the female body as the object of desire existed, and it was encouraged by both men and women in the name of aesthetics. The most significant change that occurred as a result of the movements was that women artists who showed women as subjects of art in their works were thought to convey a far higher sense of protest, struggle, and identification. The nudity of women in feminist artists' works made it obvious that a woman's body is not an object to be considered for the pleasure of men; rather, the paintings and sculptures taught them that such artistic works have an essence in them that underlines a woman's identity. The male gaze, which was viewed as a patriarchal instrument, was specifically criticised in a number of artistic works. The novelty of those works was that they did not shy away from revealing the genuine nature of the female body, but rather used it as a weapon against the male gaze as a strong criticism and warning. By referring to the analysis of the aesthetic and feminist perspectives in the research, it does not confine to mere explanation of the selected artistic works, rather it is an analytical and interpretative study conducted focusing on the role of female identity and figures – both its influence and affect.

4. It is identified that the Delhi based women artists have used female body as a tool in their artistic works.

Though the idea of using the victimised subject as a tool against the opposition was followed in the artistic work from the West, the use of female body as a tool against the patriarchal ideology is well exercised in the works of the Delhi based women artists. The art works of the artists highlighted the fundamental issue of materialising the female form. It did not place as much emphasis on the erotic and sexual components as other artists did, with just minor depiction of the anatomical features. Beyond the aesthetics of the

painting, she wanted to communicate the idea that the nude audience was more interested in seeing the nudity of the female figure than in listening to and absorbing the core of the conversation. As a result, the painting can be seen as a powerful manifestation of feminist beliefs in opposition to the masculine gaze and patriarchal materialisation of the female form. With the exploration and exhibition of female bodies by the artists, they intend to overcome the patriarchal norm of highlighting women as mere objects for sexual pleasure. The experiences of women that are connected with trauma and depression in being marginalised in society is projected through the representation of female body by the artists.

5. The Delhi based women artists have successfully represented the complexities of female existence in the patriarchal society that is adhered in the dominance exercised by the masculinity.

Mostly, art is a reflection of the society where it equally influences the society through its criticism or appreciation. Here, the artistic works of the Delhi based women artists present the plight of the female gender that suffocates under the patriarchal dominance in society. Arpita Singh's paintings have an equal influence on the country's modern and current fine arts vocations, with enormous significance to the image of the female gender, which provides transforming encouragement to India's numerous women's art movements. Arpita Singh's work is primarily focused on the concept that art holds the answers to society's most complicated unsolved problems. However, she emphasises the value of the interpretation supplied to the spectator of the painting. Whereas, Arpana Caur merged the beauty of a woman's daily life activities into the painting, bringing the maternal existence and its reflection via art closer together. Her paintings portray the unpleasant environment of individuals and society in a holistic way, while also enhancing life's sentiments to offer a didactic tone. Her feminist paintings, which feature women as key characters, stem from her firm opinion that women should not be viewed as weak and dependent. Discussing the works of Anupam Sud, she portrays the situation of women in the male-dominated society through the

utilisation of female body. Women are unable to live their lives as they like since patriarchal society has imposed certain norms and regulations on them. The male gender is not particularly subjected to these laws, as they are considered as free and dominant. The gowns and masks criticise the female gender's subordination as a result of the exertion of power, dominance, and exploitative attitudes of a society founded on the aspirations and dreams of the male community.

Thus, the outcomes of the research points point to the convergence of the analysis and findings to state that the artistic works of Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur and Anupam Sud express strong inclination towards a feminist approach. Feminism's uprising against patriarchal rule has gained widespread acceptance, resulting in the expansion of feminism beyond activism and movement into the realms of education and lifestyle. The existence of a gender that is typically regarded as marginalised is weighed against the existence of the other gender that coexists with it. The distance between them in terms of freedom and equality determines how vigorous feminism's operations should be in order to achieve the ultimate aim of equality. Women who follow feminist ideology assume that women are not treated equally to men and that they are viewed as disadvantaged to be simply objects. This is reflected in the case of the women artists also. But, the situation from 1990s have provided space for women to express their thoughts through the platforms that were earlier reserved for men. As the soul of female gender in the country is more easily understood by women artists, it is always essential to have women artists who highlight the issues of women in society.

The scope of this research lies in the understanding of how the Delhi based woman artists have expressed their concern on the situations of women in society. Through the depiction of real and representational images, they have tried to explain the unwelcomed existence of women who are controlled by the patriarchal norms in society. Not limiting to the criticisms, their works have also portrayed the resilience required for the female gender to act against the masculinity and sexist attitudes of society. Though there are many other

researches dealing with the feminist aspects of artistic works, this research focuses primarily on the three Delhi based woman artists and their selected works that mostly affiliates to the discussion on the female gender. The findings of this research can be utilised to enrich the existing scholarship in the area of fine arts and feminist studies related to art. Notwithstanding the situations for women artists have improved in the country and abroad substantially, this research also helps to understand the gradual development and evolution of feminism and feminist art movements that helped to improve the political and social situations for artists to express their views on freedom and equality. The limitation of the research is that it limits to the selected works of three Delhi based woman artists such as Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur and Anupam Sud. The selection has been done because of the relevance and significance of their works in the contemporary period. However, there are more woman artists who have contributed much to highlight the situations of women in society. Future researchers can focus on the aesthetic and feminist aspect in the works of more Delhi based women artists or artists from other parts of India. As there is an increase in the platforms to showcase talents, especially through the modern digital spheres of art, newer models of representation and advocacy for the equality and freedom of women are effective in exploring to bring out exciting research outcomes. This research would help them to build a strong background on the area of aesthetic side and feminist side of art.

It is unfortunate to understand the fact that women are educated to see the world through the eyes of men in patriarchal societies. It thereby establishes male demands, attitudes, and aspirations without the female gender objecting. Through exploitation and oppression, the feminine gender's aversion to seeing through the patriarchal sense is suppressed. The masculine society's techniques for controlling the acts and behaviour of the female gender result in discordant situations and clashes with the feminist philosophy of obtaining freedom and rights. Therefore, the importance of feminist theory, feminist art and aesthetics is highly relevant. Art, thus can be an effective

space to criticise, protest and express opinions against the wrong attitudes of society, especially the unfortunate discrimination and exploitation of women by the patriarchal norms based in masculinity.

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