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Art As Resistance In India: Cultural Expression And Political Dissent

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Abstract

Art in India has historically functioned as a dynamic instrument of political resistance, social critique and identity formation. From anti-colonial theatre movements to feminist street performances, indigenous visual traditions and contemporary protest art, artistic practices have enabled communities to contest power structures and articulate dissent. The present paper studies how art functions as resistance in India through postcolonial, subaltern, performance and cultural resistance contexts. Using examples of few case studies; including the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), marginalised group's graphic narratives like Bhimayana, the street theatre activism of Safdar Hashmi, the visual protest culture of Shaheen Bagh, feminist mobilization by Pinjra Tod and indigenous expressions such as Gond art; this study argues that resistance art reshapes public consciousness and democratizes political discourse. While artistic resistance does not always produce immediate policy change, it sustains dissent, constructs counter-publics and reimagines mutual futures.

Key Words: Art, Resistance, Public consciousness, Political discourse

Introduction

Art in India is profoundly embedded in political and social life. Transversely historical moments, from colonial rule to contemporary debates over citizenship, caste, gender and development, creative expression have assisted as a motivation for dissent. Unlike institutional political channels, art often reaches broader audiences through affect, symbolism and embodied performance. Resistance art in India emerges from diverse contexts: nationalist struggles, caste emancipation movements, feminist activism, indigenous land rights campaigns and urban youth protests. These expressions challenge hegemonic power structures by reclaiming narrative authority and transforming cultural spaces into political arenas. Understanding art as resistance, therefore, is not only a matter of cultural curiosity but of political urgency. This paper tries to explore how art functions as resistance in India by addressing the following questions:

1. How the art has historically functioned as political dissent?
2. What is the broader socio-political impact of resistance art?

Understanding Art as Resistance in India

Understanding art as resistance in India necessitates engagement with broader perspectives. Scholars across aesthetic philosophy, cultural studies and critical notion have conceptualized art as emotional transmission, experiential practice, expressive imagination, formal structure and socio-political critique. In *What Is Art?* Leo Tolstoy (1897/1995) defines art as the communication of feeling from the artist to the audience. For Tolstoy, art creates emotional relationship that binds individuals into moral societies. This understanding is predominantly significant in contexts of political mobilization, where protest songs, poetry and performance foster shared resentment and solidarity. However Rabindranath Tagore viewed art as a manifestation of universal human creativity and spiritual freedom. In works such as *The Religion of Man* (1931) and *Sadhana* (1913), Tagore argued that art exceeds narrow nationalism simultaneously nurturing ethical community. For Tagore, artistic expression develops from the “surplus” of human consciousness, beyond mere survival, and affirms dignity and interconnectedness. Tagore’s perspective is vital for understanding anti-colonial cultural resistance in India. His songs (Rabindra Sangeet), poetry and educational experiments at Santiniketan framed art as a medium of liberation. For example, his song, “Aami chini go chini tomare, ogo bideshini” which means, I know you o foreign lady. Again he wrote, “Tumi thako sindhu pare, ogo bideshini” which means you should be fine not to cross sindhu. (Visit <https://www.geetabitan.com/lyrics/A/aami-chini-go-chini-tomare-lyric.html>) Hence, art for Tagore, cultivated freedom that resisted colonial domination. In this manner Indian anti-colonial movement, nationalist songs and theatre fostered emotional unity against imperial rule, illustrates that art functions as a force of collective affect.

Alternatively, John Dewey (1934) reconceptualised art as experience rather than object. Art as an experience, he argues that, emerges through interaction amid creator, artwork and audience within specific social environments. Dewey’s pragmatist approach democratizes art, locating it in everyday life rather than elite institutions. This framework illuminates the role of street theatre movements in India, where performances in public spaces transform spectators into participants and convert aesthetic engagement into civic interaction. For R. G. Collingwood (1938), art is the imaginative expression of emotion. He argues that art elucidates previously unarticulated feelings, rendering them conscious and communicable. This perspective is significant to understand marginalised group’s literature and graphic narratives such as *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability*, which transform lived experiences of caste subjugation into expressive political testimony. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) also inspired writers and artists to reclaim narrative authority. Dalit literature and visual art often centre Ambedkar as an icon of dignity and resistance. In this sense, Dalit artistic production aligns with Adorno’s critical function of art, while grounding them in caste realities where critical theorist Theodor W. Adorno (1970/1997) conceptualized art as retaining a negative, critical function within capitalist modernity. For Adorno, art’s autonomy enables it to resist commodification and ideological domination. Thus, artistic expression, in consequence, becomes a mode of articulating marginalized subjectivities.

In contrast to expressive theories, Clive Bell (1914) emphasized “significant form” as the central characteristic of art. According to Bell, combinations of line, colour and composition evoke aesthetic emotion independent of representational content. While resistance art is politically charged, its formal elements symbolism, spatial arrangement and visual iconography contribute considerably to its impact. Protest murals and installations rely on visual form to intensify meaning and sustain engagement. Shaheen Bagh protest in India can be an example for this which is further explained in this paper.

There are more observations to understand as a resistance where Jacques Rancière (2004) argues that art reshapes the “distribution of the sensible,” shifting from what can be perceived, spoken and imagined in political life and within cultural studies, Stuart Hall (1996) views cultural production as a landscape of ideological struggle where meaning is constructed and contested. Art, in this sense, is not

neutral but embedded within power relations. Correspondingly, Ananda Coomaraswamy offered an influential interpretation of Indian art in the early twentieth century. In *The Dance of Shiva* (1918), he argued that traditional Indian art was not individualistic but metaphysical and symbolic. Art, he argued, expressed cosmic principles and was inseparable from religion, craft and social order. Coomaraswamy rejected colonial hierarchies that labelled Indian art as “primitive” and instead reasserted its philosophical depth. His work contributed to cultural nationalism by reclaiming indigenous aesthetic traditions as intellectually sophisticated when he says, “Not my way of salvation, to surrender the world! Rather for me the taste of Infinite Freedom While yet I am bound by a thousand bonds to the wheel . . . In each glory of sound and sight and scent I shall find Thy infinite joy abiding: My passion shall burn as the flame of salvation, The flower of my love shall become the ripe fruit of devotion.” (Visit <https://archive.org/details/danceofshivafourt00coomiala>) In this context of resistance, this reclamation of artistic heritage challenged colonial epistemology and affirmed cultural sovereignty.

Along these lines, whereas Western aesthetic theory delivers conceptual tools for understanding art as emotion, experience and critique, Indian intellectual traditions offer equally significant insights into the ethical, spiritual and political dimensions of art. Abanindranath Tagore, founder of the Bengal School of Art, sought to resist colonial academic realism by reviving indigenous artistic techniques and miniatures. His work redefined visual art as a vehicle of nationalist identity. By rejecting European aesthetic dominance, the Bengal School embodied cultural resistance through form and style. These perspectives are crucial for analyzing how resistance art in India reconfigures public discourse whether through anti-colonial theatre, counter-histories, feminist performance or constitutional imagery in protest spaces. Incorporating all these thinkers deepens the conceptual foundation of this research that resistance art in India is not merely aesthetic production; it is:

- A spiritual affirmation of freedom
- A reclamation of civilizational knowledge
- A tool of caste emancipation
- A nationalist literary intervention
- A critical restructuring of perception

This synthesis allows the study to position resistance art in India as historically rooted, philosophically grounded and politically transformative. Drawing on these traditions, this study conceptualizes art as a practice of expression that produces affect, meaning and counter-hegemonic knowledge.

Art and Political Discourse

Scholars argue that anti-colonial nationalism in India relied heavily on cultural production. Partha Chatterjee (1993) establishes how nationalist discourse distinguished between the “material” and “spiritual” domains, locating sovereignty in cultural identity. Similarly, Ashis Nandy (1983) highlights psychological and cultural resistance undermined colonial authority. Poetry, theatre and music mobilized collective consciousness and circumvented censorship. Cultural nationalism thus preceded and supported political mobilization. Postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha (1994) and Gayatri Spivak (1988) beheld cultural production as a site of contestation where colonized subjects reclaim agency. Art subverts imposed identities and reconstructs indigenous epistemologies.

The Subaltern Studies collective foregrounded marginalized voices excluded from elite history (Guha & Spivak, 1988) and Stuart Hall (1996) emphasized culture is a terrain of ideological struggle. Artistic production generates counter-hegemonic narratives that challenge dominant power structures. Cultural production became a site where subaltern groups narrated their histories. Gail Omvedt (1995) and

Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd (1996) argued that marginalised group's literature and cultural expression disrupt ongoing hegemony by centering lived experiences of caste oppression. Their autobiographies, songs and graphic narratives reframe social hierarchies and assert dignity. Subaltern theory interprets resistance art as counter-memory. By narrating histories, marginalized communities challenge elite knowledge systems.

Richard Schechner (1988) conceptualizes performance as transformative social action. In this view, resistance art does not merely represent dissent; it enacts it whereas Feminist scholars emphasize how art contests patriarchal structures. Cultural activism reclaims public spaces and challenges normative gender expectations. Artistic protest—through poetry, street theatre and visual symbolism enables embodied feminist resistance. Social media amplifies resistance art as visual culture, memes, graffiti and protest installations circulate rapidly, creating networked counter-publics. Thus resistance art in India merges aesthetics with constitutional and democratic discourse.

Some Case Studies: When Art Challenges the Status Quo

The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA): Theatre as Anti-Colonial and Class Resistance

The 1940s in India was marked by famine, economic exploitation and intensifying nationalist struggle. The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), founded in 1943, emerged as a cultural wing aligned with progressive movements during late colonial India. IPTA sought after to bring political awareness to the masses through theatre, music and dance performances. IPTA artists used performance to critique colonial economic policies and to uncover class inequalities. IPTA's performances such as Nabanna (based on the Bengal famine of 1943) sensationalised rural suffering caused by economic mismanagement. Songs like Hum Dilli Jayenge became anthems of protest. Rather than performing in elite auditoriums, IPTA bands travelled to villages and industrial areas, democratizing access to political art. IPTA illustrated theatre as anti-colonial resistance. It dramatized famine, labour exploitation and colonial injustice. Performances occurred in villages and industrial zones, democratizing access to political critique. Thus Art during colonial rule functioned as secret political mobilization, embedding dissent within cultural expression. IPTA's work demonstrates how theatre functioned as a mobilizing force, transforming spectators into politically conscious participants. It embodied what Schechner (1988) conceptualizes as performance-as-intervention art not merely representing reality but also modifying it.

Marginalised Group's Graphic Narrative and Counter-Historiography: Bhimayana

Mainstream Indian history side-lines to explain caste violence and marginalised group's perspectives in texts. Visual representation of caste trauma has historically been limited. The graphic biography *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability*, published in 2011 by Navayana, narrates the life of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar through indigenous Gond art styles. Instead of conventional panels and frames, *Bhimayana* uses symbolic visual forms for instance birds representing speech and broken lines symbolizing discrimination to communicate experiences of untouchability. It subverts Western comic aesthetics by employing Gond motifs, thus reclaiming indigenous artistic vocabulary. It does not merely recount Ambedkar's life; it reclaims narrative authority and challenges ongoing history. By merging tribal art with political biography, it disrupts aesthetic hierarchies and asserts marginalised group's subjectivity. Autobiographies like *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki (2003) similarly transform personal narrative into political indictment.

Street Theatre: Performance as Immediate Political Resistance

Street theatre emerged in post-independence India as a form of protest against labor exploitation, communal violence and state repression. Plays, such as Halla Bol were performed in public spaces factory gates, marketplace and slums directly addressing workers and marginalized communities. The assassination of theatre activist Safdar Hashmi in 1989 marked a pivotal moment in Indian protest art history. He was associated with Jana Natya Manch (JANAM), a street theatre collective. After his murder during a performance, artists across India staged Halla Bol in solidarity, transforming grief into collective resistance. This case explains the exposure and power of performance art. The juxtaposition of street theatre collapsed the distance between art and politics. It became embodied resistance, reclaiming public space from political intimidation. Street theatres break down the boundary between spectator and participant making dissent immediate and participatory.

Visual Protest Art during the Anti-CAA Movement

The CAA and proposed NRC policies sparked nationwide protests. The anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests (2019–2020) witnessed the emergence of Shaheen Bagh in Delhi as a symbolic site of artistic resistance. At Shaheen Bagh, protestors created murals, poetry walls, installations of the Constitution's Preamble and portraits of figures like Ambedkar and Gandhi. Art was central to the protest's identity and it was not supplementary but constitutive. Public readings of the Constitution and performance poetry transformed the protest site into a living cultural archive of dissent. Protestors utilized murals, graffiti, posters and banners. A number of scale models were installed and a miniature replica of India Gate. They built a 12-metre-high (40 ft.) iron welded structure in the shape of India, painted with the message Hum Bharat ke log CAA-NPR-NRC nahi maante (We the people of India reject CAA-NPR-NRC). Hundreds of paper boats with the words of Hum Dekhenge (We will witness) and a poem of resistance were arranged. (Visit https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shahen_Bagh_protest) In this way, Shaheen Bagh illustrates how art creates an inclusive political space. It merged aesthetics with constitutionalism and turned visual culture into a defence of democratic values. Social media amplified these artworks, demonstrating how digital circulation enhances the reach of resistance art.

Feminist Resistance through Public Art

The student-led united Pinjra Tod emerged in 2015 to protest discriminatory hostel regulations imposed on women students. Universities across India imposed stricter mobility restrictions on women compared to men, justified in the name of safety. Pinjra Tod organized night marches, street performances, poetry readings and poster campaigns. Visual slogans like Break the Cage reframed protective narratives as patriarchal control. Artistic protest enabled young women to reclaim public spaces and articulate human autonomy. Their performances exemplified feminist resistance, elucidating how art can express everyday gender norms. Feminist art reclaims public space and challenges everyday standardization of gender control.

Gond Art and Indigenous Resistance to Displacement

The Gond community's artistic traditions have increasingly been interpreted as elusive forms of resistance against environmental degradation and displacement. Adivasi communities face displacement due to mining, dams and industrial expansion. Contemporary Gond artists incorporate themes of forests, animals and spiritual cosmologies into their paintings. While aesthetically celebrated in global art arcades, these works also subliminally critique ecological destruction and assert indigenous land rights. (Visit https://www.memeraki.com/blogs/posts/in-living-colour-the-palette-of-gond-painting?srsId=AfmBOorEC_Kxw-kr0tMK-5D7f-NpM-X92aFgxxaldqi4DgqFF54RGIAC#:~:text=Listening%20to%20Colour-Introduction:%20The%20Forest%20as%20Canvas,the%20forest%20speaks%20in%20pigments)

Gond art challenges the dominant developmental paradigm by presenting alternative ecological worldviews. It resists expurgation by maintaining cultural continuity amid displacement pressures. Gond artists integrate forest cosmologies into visual narratives, subtly critiquing environmental degradation and displacement. Indigenous art thus asserts alternative ecological epistemologies against extractive development models.

Synthesis and Critical Analysis

Art as resistance in India must be understood not as a collection of isolated episodes but as a continuous, evolving mode of political practice that operates across colonial, postcolonial and contemporary contexts. When the trajectories of the Indian People's Theatre Association, the martyrdom of Safdar Hashmi, the marginalised groups counter-history of Bhimayana, the feminist interventions of Pinjra Tod, the visual-constitutional aesthetics of Shaheen Bagh and the ecological-cultural assertions embedded in Gond art are read together, they relate a deeper structural phenomenon that art in India repeatedly emerges as a counter-hegemonic infrastructure that produces political subjectivity, reorganizes space, reclaims knowledge and sustains democratic imagination under conditions of discrimination and contestation.

Across historical epochs, resistance art in India has functioned less as decorative dissent and more as a mode of political cognition. The anti-colonial theatre of IPTA did not merely dramatize suffering; it reorganized perception and by staging famine, exploitation and peasant struggle in accessible, vernacular forms, it shrunken the distance between political abstraction and lived experience. Art here became pedagogy. It translated structural critique into embodied narrative, transforming spectators into historically conscious actors. That pedagogical function reappears decades later in Shaheen Bagh, where murals of the Constitution's Preamble and portraits of Ambedkar turned protest sites into open classrooms of citizenship. In both moments, art served as a medium through which political principles were not only represented but collectively rehearsed. This rehearsal dimension is crucial.

Resistance art in India constantly produces provisional democratic spaces. Street theatre performances, feminist night marches, protest music gatherings and mural-covered highways temporarily suspend the ordinary hierarchies of everyday life. Participants become co-creators of meaning rather than passive recipients of authority. These aesthetic gatherings constitute as democratic laboratories where alternative political relationships are practiced before they are entrenched. The significance of all forms of resistance art lies not only in its content but in its form: performance enacted egalitarian dialogue in public space, challenging both state power and bourgeois cultural enclosure. It accentuates that the art's political force lies precisely in its capacity to reorganize collective experience.

If spatial revolution is one dimension of resistance art, epistemic disruption is another. Works like Bhimayana do more than narrate caste oppression; they undermine the authority of dominant historical narratives. By using Gond visual grammar to tell Ambedkar's story, the text rejects both Eurocentric comic aesthetics and ongoing history. Form becomes argument. The choice of indigenous visual language asserts that marginalized communities possess their own epistemologies and capable of describing modernity on their own terms. This epistemic shift resonates with broader marginalised and Adivasi artistic practices that focus lived experience as knowledge. Resistance art thus functions as counter-archive where official antiquities marginalize caste violence or sanitize social conflict; artistic production preserves retention and asserts interpretive authority.

However this epistemic recuperation describes within a political economy of culture that complicates its radical potential. Once marginalised group's or tribal art enters conventional publishing houses, galleries or global exhibitions, it becomes intertwined with commodification. Market recognition provides visibility and livelihood, but it can also aestheticize suffering and soften critique. The tension between political urgency and cultural capital is persistent. Resistance art needs to navigate the paradox

of seeking strengthening without losing autonomy. This tension does not invalidate its political role; rather, it places resistance within the contradictions of late capitalist cultural circulation.

Another unifying thread across these cases is the uniqueness of affect. Resistance art mobilizes emotion not as spectacle but as structure. Songs at farmers' protests, feminist slogans challenging curfew restrictions, poetic expressions of grief in militarized regions and constitutional recitations at protest sites convert individual frustration into collective solidarity. Emotion becomes a binding force that sustains movements beyond episodic outrage. Unlike policy discourse, which operates through abstraction, art engages the sensorium like sound, image, rhythm and embodiment. This affective intensity allows resistance movements to endure in contexts where institutional change is slow or blocked. However, affect also carries ambivalence. Emotional mobilization can deepen solidarity but also intensify polarization. Artistic representations of injustice may be dismissed by opponents as propaganda or spectacle. The very intensity that galvanizes supporters can alienate critics.

Thus, resistance art exists within a contested communicative field, where its meanings are continually reinterpreted and challenged. Its democratic contribution depends partly on its capacity to invite reflection rather than merely consolidate identity. Gendered and intersectional dimensions further complicate the landscape of resistance aesthetics. The protests organized by Pinjra Tod reframed hostel curfews not as protective measures but as mechanisms of patriarchal control. Through posters, slogans, and performative marches, young women exposed the gendered regulation of mobility embedded in everyday institutional practices. This intervention illustrates how art can illuminate forms of domination that are normalized rather than spectacular. These examples reveal that resistance art often operates at the intersection of caste, class, religion and gender, articulating layered identities rather than singular grievances. Indigenous Gond art, particularly when it incorporates themes of forest life, displacement and ecological continuity, introduces yet another dimension: resistance to developmental paradigms. While not always overtly confrontational, such artworks assert cosmologies that challenge extractives models of progress. By foregrounding relational understandings of land and community, they contest the epistemic foundations of industrial modernity. In this sense, resistance art need not always be loud or urban; it may operate through quiet persistence, preserving alternative worldviews under pressure from state and market forces.

When viewed collectively, these diverse practices reveal that art as resistance in India functions through recursive interaction between culture and politics. Artistic production generates counterpublics; counterpublics cultivate new political subjectivities; these subjectivities challenge hegemonic narratives; hegemonic contestation reshapes public discourse; discourse influences institutional politics. The process is neither linear nor guaranteed. Resistance art does not automatically produce policy change. Many movements face repression, fragmentation or co-optation. Murals are erased, performances are censored, and digital content is surveilled. Yet even when materially dismantled, the symbolic and affective traces of resistance persist. The fragility of resistance art is inseparable from its strength. Because it operates in open space—streets, campuses, digital platforms—it remains vulnerable to state control. But that openness also enables accessibility. They democratize entry into political conversation. A mural can be read without specialized knowledge; a song can be sung without institutional permission. This accessibility expands the democratic field beyond formal representation. However, art alone cannot substitute for structural political organization. The transformative potential of resistance aesthetics depends on its articulation with movements, legal strategies, and institutional reform. Where art remains isolated from broader mobilization, it risks symbolic containment. Where it intersects with sustained political action, it amplifies and humanizes structural critique.

Ultimately, the synthesis of these case studies suggests that art in India functions as a democratic sensorium. It registers injustice before policy shifts occur. It preserves memory when institutions forget. It imagines futures when political discourse narrows. It transforms grief into solidarity and space into stage. Yet it also navigates contradiction—between visibility and vulnerability, recognition and commodification, affect and polarization.

Moreover, the limitations of art must be acknowledged. Artistic expression alone does not dismantle structural inequality, repeal discriminatory laws or transform entrenched institutional practices. It can catalyse consciousness, inspire mobilization and reframe debate, but it requires intersection with organized political action to effect structural change. Contemporary protest aesthetics reveal that art's transformative potential is magnified when embedded within sustained collective action. Yet to measure the significance of resistance art solely by immediate policy outcomes would be to misunderstand its democratic function. Democracy is not only a system of representation and legislation; it is a lived culture of participation, critique and imagination. Resistance art nourishes this culture. It preserves memories that official archives marginalize. It keeps constitutional principles visible during periods of contestation. It enables marginalized communities to see themselves as agents rather than objects of governance. It rehearses alternative futures before they become institutionally conceivable.

Socio-Political Impact of Resistance Art

The above discussion suggests that art as resistance in India represents a continuous dialogue between culture and power. From anti-colonial theatre to graphic narratives, feminist performance and digital protest art, creative expression has shaped political consciousness and sustained social movements. This paper has argued that art as resistance in India is neither episodic nor ornamental; it is structurally embedded in the reshaping of political community. Across colonial, postcolonial and contemporary contexts, artistic practices have functioned as counter-hegemonic interventions, epistemic disruptions, affective mobilizations and democratic rehearsals. At its most fundamental level, art as resistance in India performs an epistemological function. It contests who has the authority to narrate the nation, define citizenship, interpret history and represent suffering. Marginalised group's graphic narratives challenge caste-sanitized historiography; indigenous aesthetics assert cosmologies side-lined by developmentalism; feminist protest art exposes the normalization of patriarchal regulation; constitutional murals re-centre foundational democratic commitments during moments of perceived institutional strain. In each instance, art becomes a site of knowledge production. It does not merely illustrate political arguments—it formulates them in alternative grammars. By doing so, it disrupts hegemonic common sense and widens the field of intelligible political speech.

Simultaneously, resistance art operates spatially. It reclaims and signifies public space. The village squares of IPTA performances, the factory gates of street theatre, the university streets reclaimed by feminist collectives and the protest encampments transformed into aesthetic galleries all demonstrate that space is not simply a backdrop to politics but an arena produced through cultural practice. Artistic intervention interrupts the ordinary assembling of space and temporarily reorganizes power relations within it. These interventions create counterpublics and arenas where marginalized voices articulate oppositional interpretations. Even when such spaces are dismantled, their symbolic reconfiguration lingers, altering how citizens imagine the relationship between public space and democratic participation.

A third central impact of resistance art lies in its affective capacity. Political institutions often operate through abstraction, procedure and technocratic language. Art, by contrast, mobilizes emotion—anger at injustice, grief for loss, pride in identity and hope for transformation. These affective registers convert individual experience into collective solidarity. Songs, murals, performances and graphic narratives transform dispersed grievances into shared sensibilities. This emotional infrastructure sustains movements beyond immediate policy debates. Yet this same affective power demands critical vigilance. Emotional intensity can consolidate solidarity but also deepen polarization. The democratic value of resistance art depends partly on its ability to foster critical engagement rather than reactive antagonism.

This study has also highlighted the dialectical relationship between resistance and institutionalization. As resistance art gains visibility, through publication, exhibition, academic analysis or media circulation, it enters circuits of recognition shaped by market forces and state structures. Such recognition may preserve and amplify dissenting voices, but it may also neutralize their radical edge. The incorporation of indigenous aesthetics into elite cultural markets raises questions about commodification, appropriation and depoliticization. Similarly, the canonization of past resistance movements can render them historical rather than contemporary challenges. These tensions underscore that resistance art is never outside power; it constantly negotiates with it.

Thus the art as resistance in India is a practice of making dissent visible and a process of continually renegotiating the meaning of citizenship, equality and belonging. Its impact cannot be measured solely by immediate legislative outcomes. Its deeper contribution lies in sustaining the imaginative and affective foundations of democratic life. Through theatre, mural, song, graphic narrative and performance, resistance art keeps open the possibility that political community can be re-envisioned. In doing so, it reveals that democracy is not secured by institutions alone but by the cultural labor of those who refuse silence and transform expression into collective agency.

Conclusion

The accumulative exploration therefore suggests a broader theoretical proposition: art as resistance in India constitutes a form of democratic infrastructure. Like legal systems or electoral processes, it sustains the conditions under which political disagreement can be articulated and negotiated. Unlike formal institutions, however, it operates through symbol, embodiment and affect. It inhabits streets, pages, stages, walls and digital screens. It is ephemeral yet enduring, vulnerable yet resilient. It survives repression by adapting form—shifting from theatre to mural, from mural to digital meme, from song to graphic narrative. In contemporary contexts marked by rapid technological change, intensified media circulation, and heightened political polarization, the role of resistance aesthetics becomes even more significant. Digital platforms amplify artistic dissent but also subject it to surveillance and algorithmic filtering. The struggle over narrative authority increasingly unfolds in visual and performative registers.

Eventually, this paper supports the idea that art in India has repeatedly functioned as a medium through which marginalized voices assert presence, challenge exclusion and imagine alternative political arrangements. It has exposed the fractures within the nation while simultaneously articulating aspirations for justice and equality. The continuity of resistance aesthetics—from anti-colonial theatre to contemporary protest art—demonstrates that dissent is not an aberration within Indian democracy but one of its constitutive energies. Art as resistance does not promise utopia. It does not eliminate contradiction. But it sustains the possibility of critique. It ensures that power is not naturalized beyond question. It keeps alive the capacity to envision community otherwise. In that sense, resistance art is not simply opposition to authority; it is participation in the ongoing, unfinished project of democracy itself. While artistic resistance does not guarantee immediate structural transformation, it fosters critical

awareness, collective solidarity and alternative imaginaries. In a diverse and contested democracy like India, art remains indispensable to the practice of dissent and the imagination of justice.

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