



Studying Portrayal of Women's Representation in Indian Art: from Prehistoric Depictions of Gendered Artistic Expressions to Contemporary Female Visual Narratives

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Abstract: This study explores the evolution of gender stereotypes in the portrayal of women's representation through artistic canvases, drawing on feminist theory as its theoretical framework in Indian art. The research highlights the shift in perspectives and representations of femininity by examining how women's roles have been depicted across historical and contemporary artistic periods in India. Employing a qualitative methodology, specifically thematic analysis of select artworks, the study uncovers how artists have transitioned from typifying women as symbols of sexuality or domesticity to celebrating their multifaceted identities. Contemporary artists, through their intuitive styles, delve into women's suppressed emotions and resilience, portraying their triumph over societal prejudices. The paper argues that such contemporary female visual narratives challenge traditional stereotypes, and redefine women's roles across social, economic, and cultural dimensions. This analysis enhances the discourse on gender representation in art, highlighting its capacity to foster equity and empower society.

Keywords: Indian art, Visual art, Female Visual Narratives, Diaspora art, Women artists

Introduction

Art reflects the artist's emotive stimulations, ideas, and sensibilities portrayed on his canvas. Art evolves with time, and its meaning must adapt. Art must persist, and its value must be appreciated (Szymanski et al., 2011). For centuries, it was a widely spread medium to express the tribulations faced by the women in the society. In a constant attempt over the ages against stigmatisation by society, women are now regarded as a powerful paradigm (Bartky, 1990). For centuries, art has served as a powerful medium for expressing the struggles faced by women in society, often reflecting deeply rooted gender stereotypes (Cookson et al., 2023). These portrayals reinforced societal perceptions of women as passive figures, limiting their identities to the domestic sphere and denying them agency in broader social roles.

In India, women have traditionally been cast into dormant roles, primarily defined by their duties within the household (Patil, 2021). They were seen as caretakers of their families, expected to embody qualities of delicacy and submission. This narrow representation perpetuated patriarchal norms, with women facing constant oppression and marginalisation in various aspects of life (Cahn, 1999). The societal expectations placed on them curtailed their individuality and autonomy, reinforcing the notion that their contributions

were secondary. These silent struggles were symbolically captured through art, offering a medium to challenge stereotypes and reimagine women's roles beyond domestic confines.

Pre-independence Indian art saw women primarily depicted through idealised, mythological forms. Nationalist movements utilised the female figure to symbolise the motherland, often portraying women as nurturing yet resilient icons, such as Bharat Mata. Artists like Raja Ravi Varma revolutionised this portrayal by combining traditional themes with European realism, presenting women with grace and dignity. However, their depiction remained confined to divine or domestic roles, reinforcing patriarchal ideals. The focus on mythological narratives sidelined the lived experiences of real women and their social struggles.

In contrast, post-independence Indian art shifted towards more realistic and diverse portrayals of women, influenced by changing social and political landscapes. Women were no longer depicted as passive subjects but as active participants in shaping society. Modern artists like Amrita Sher-Gil depicted the raw emotions, hardships, and inner worlds of women, breaking away from idealised imagery. Contemporary art continues this evolution by addressing issues like gender equality, identity, and empowerment, making space for more authentic narratives of women's lives.

Objectives of the Study:

To analyse the evolution of gender representation in Indian art from prehistoric to contemporary times, focusing on how women have been depicted across various artistic mediums and cultural narratives.

To examine the role of women artists in shaping visual narratives that challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote themes of empowerment, resilience, and identity in Indian artistic traditions.

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore gender representation in Indian art across historical periods. It applies thematic analysis to examine select paintings, sculptures, and miniatures, focusing on recurring themes of femininity, sexuality, and empowerment. The study incorporates feminist theory as a critical lens to investigate how gender stereotypes evolved over time. The research also involves content analysis of visual narratives, identifying how artists, from ancient to contemporary times, portrayed women's roles in society. By analysing iconography, composition, and symbolism, the study reveals a gradual transition from stereotypical portrayals to empowered depictions, promoting gender equity through artistic expressions.

Imaging Women in Pre-historic and Proto-historic times:

Across ages, Indian art has focused on the feminine curves in delicate lines, communicating voluptuous emotions through nonverbal forms of expression (Sharma et al., 2016). The stone carvings of mother goddesses convey a lofty message that women were regarded as symbols of fertility and prosperity. The dichotomy was actually well perceived by the artists of those times when constructing such imagery. The terracotta figurines of mother goddesses from the Indus Valley Civilization reflect the deep-rooted reverence for women as life-givers and nurturers. These ancient artefacts symbolise fertility, prosperity, and the sustaining power of nature, emphasising the essential role of women in society (Hooda et al., 2018).

The initial recorded attempt made by man to express his thoughts was through pictorial representations on rock surfaces. With time, the structure of art slowly modified and widened its horizons. It aimed mostly to store them for their posterity. The prehistoric art reflects humanity's artistic, cognitive, and cultural beginnings. According to scholars, the dancing figures, communal gatherings, and religious practices at various rock sites reflect cosmic significance (Gillette et al., 2014). The free-standing feminine sculptures of Neolithic art were schematic and stylised life-like forms that depict prehistoric artists' relationship with nature. The most important artistic expressions were the statuary of universally worshipped mother goddesses and stone monuments that manifest special prominence given to women as divine quintessence of high cosmic significance.

Artists mastered skilful modelling techniques, as evident to us in the form of the mother goddess of the Indus Valley civilization. The medium then used was stone terracotta or metal for sculpting feminine goddesses with large captivating eyes adorned with heavy jewellery hanging over to cover their shoulders. Their arms are embellished with bangles made of ivory or bone and their huge widened hips contemplate them as symbols of fertility and prosperity. Women were depicted in patterned textured attire, heavy-hipped, embellished with flower-wearing crowns, and holding pottery during the Harappa times, which also reflected artists' exploration of art. With the advent of civilization, their unique artistry in representing female idols in various mediums was evident.

Depictions of Mythological and Religious Women in Indian Art:

Depictions of mythological and religious women in Indian art have played a pivotal role in shaping societal perceptions of femininity and womanhood. Indian mythology is rich with female figures, ranging from goddesses embodying power and protection, such as Durga and Kali, to figures symbolising compassion and fertility, like Lakshmi and Parvati. These portrayals are not merely divine representations but also cultural constructs reflecting the ideals and aspirations of their respective periods.

In temple architecture and sculptures, goddesses are often depicted as embodying shakti (divine feminine energy), signifying strength and empowerment. For instance, the Khajuraho temples and the Chola bronzes intricately celebrate the grace and divinity of figures like Saraswati and Meenakshi. Similarly, in Mughal and Rajput miniature paintings, heroines from epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, such as Draupadi and Sita, are illustrated as paragons of virtue and endurance. Contemporary interpretations of these mythological women have evolved, with modern artists using them to critique societal norms or reclaim agency for women. Through these evolving representations, mythological and religious women transcend their traditional roles, offering a lens to explore themes of gender equality, resilience, and cultural identity in Indian art.

Women in Buddhist Art:

This erotic representation found its fervour in Jain temples and also that connected to Digambaras ideology. Unlike Jain art, Buddhist art had its origin in a female deity, Tara who is regarded as the goddess of universal compassion (Kaur, 2022). She was interpreted as a divine, highly principled, and enlightened being. The artist focussed on portraying peace and serenity and emphasised on teachings of Buddha leading to nirvana. This unique style of artistic representation of half-closed magnificent eyes and lotus-shaped lips with long noses highlights peace and solidarity. With the onset of the historic period, the 6th century Ajanta paintings are concrete examples of the artist's mastery in displaying aesthetic expression, deeply influenced by the use of natural colours and emotions. Even 7th century AD, the Ellora Caves capture colourful female imagery in detail with beauty and versatility of lines form, and choice of colour composed by the artist in a subtle manner influence one's mind. The women are also represented as an expression of beauty and as nurturers. The earliest sculptures of ancient times, based on epics, represented women as *Yakshis*, *kinnaras*, *yoginis*, and *apsaras*. Their beauty was represented at a metaphysical level as youthful, elegant, and intangible or ethereal beings (Rao, 2023). Divinity along with sensual frescoes and sensory depictions on the other shows the brilliance of artist in capturing their dichotomy in various contexts and cultures. Magadha and Mauryan art were significantly influenced by Buddhism, alongside Jainism and Hinduism. During the Magadhan period, early symbolic art such as the Bodhi tree and footprints represented Buddha's presence, while Mauryan art, under Emperor Ashoka, saw the creation of iconic pillars and stupas, notably the Lion Capital of Sarnath. This early portrayal of women often aligned with spiritual ideals and was less focused on their personal identities, instead reflecting their roles within religious narratives and practices. Sculptures during these periods also began to depict women, particularly in the form of female attendants, devotees, or goddesses, reflecting the importance of women in religious and societal contexts. This era's art embodied the fusion of spirituality, culture, and gender representation.

Rendering Fertility in Khajuraho:

The woman is the central theme in most of the artworks. They were considered heroines and regarded for their voluminous beauty. The feminine curvatures and chisel-cut outlook superbly bold in their sexuality were portrayed by the artists then. So, it is evident from the historic artistic renderings that women are regarded as the embodiment of beauty. The emergence of a distinctive style of art in Khajuraho temples revolves around females as *maithunas* pointing their roots to tantric cults. The distinctive art form of the Kamasutra also illustrates the divine indulgence in physical pleasures through various artistic poses (Shining). Similarly, sculptures at the Ranakpur Jain temples depict elegance and love-making scenes, with the queen often positioned at the centre of the throne in these amorous portrayals. This focus on the feminine form reflects the cultural and spiritual recognition of desire, a theme that is notably embraced in the Khajuraho temples, where erotic art is prominently displayed. These representations not only highlight the sensual but also celebrate desire as an essential part of the human experience, deeply rooted in both artistic expression and religious practice.

These depictions, embedded in the temple premises, highlight how the Hindu tradition views kama (desire) as an essential and celebrated aspect of human life, blending sensuality with spirituality and reflecting the integral role of feminine energy in both artistic and religious contexts. Their strong inherent emotions were captured and portrayed symbolically by the artist, rejuvenating his mind. This focus on emotional expression aligns with the extraordinary sensual work on human sensual behaviour, as depicted in the Kamasutra by Vatsyayana (Somasundaram, 1986). Written in Sanskrit, the Kamasutra discusses pleasure as a central aspect of human life, emphasising the importance of sensory experiences. In a similar vein, the artist regards these sculptures as the epitome of pleasurable and sensual delight, where the intricate depiction of the human form serves as a visual manifestation of the ideas in the Kamasutra, connecting the symbolic and physical aspects of pleasure through art (Dahiya & Kumar, 2023).

Medieval Women in Art:

The portraits of Mughal women inside the *harem*, hunting scenes, and visiting holy places were depicted with clothes and jewellery explicating their brilliance and charm (Lavanya, 2019). Elaborate 3D architectural castle renderings and richness of royal Mughal inheritance were prominently featured in miniature styles (Abbasi, 2013). The painting might have been assigned to women artists, or established descriptions from the third person due to the existing *pardah* system then. The male courtiers and commoners were not allowed to get a glimpse of royal princesses (Zaidi, 2023). The painting 'Women with veena' suggested communal harmony and amalgamation of cultures in those times. Likewise, the Rajput supremacy of women was illustrated with a veil covering their heads and a part of their faces. Designed in poetic beauty, the adorable faces were finely designed by the artists using the tempera medium. The female Royals smoking hookah, playing Holi, dancing, and romance were explored through artistry. The most famous stylistic features are highly exaggerated long neck diamond-shaped eyes and long fingers of Kishangarh artworks that reflect Banithani stylistic depictions of Radha and Krishna in various moods and gestures. Phadvachno art form portrayed the stories of Lord Srinath, Pabuji, and Devnarayan. The women folk were central to the narrative structure and their depiction with lucid colours and body posture that accentuated confidence and sensuality (Shukla, 2022). The paintings are essentially flat as the colour is primary. The subjects are placed on a planar surface, rendering the paintings as 2D imageries with no axonometric projections.

Women in Colonial Indian Art:

The colonial period in India brought significant shifts in artistic representations of women, influenced by the encounter between Indian traditions and Western aesthetics. During this era, women were often depicted as symbols of cultural identity, resistance, or colonial modernity, reflecting the complexities of the socio-political climate. British artists portrayed Indian women in eroticized and romanticized ways, catering to European audiences. These works, often seen in Company paintings, highlighted women in traditional attire, engaging in domestic or leisure activities, presenting an idealized image of the 'Oriental woman'. Such depictions were rooted in colonial stereotypes and served to reinforce Western narratives of India as a land of beauty and mystique.

In contrast, Indian artists of the time began to adapt Western techniques such as realism, blending them with indigenous themes. Raja Ravi Varma, for instance, painted women from Indian mythology and epics with a lifelike quality, presenting them as dignified and relatable figures. His work bridged traditional iconography and colonial influences, making these portrayals accessible to a modern audience. This period also saw emerging nationalist art movements where women symbolised Bharat Mata (Mother India), embodying resilience and unity. These representations not only celebrated femininity but also became powerful visual tools in India's freedom struggle.

Modern Indian art emerged in the 19th century with the beginning of various art schools during the pre-independence period. Much later, Indian art was revived by the Bengal School of Art founded by Abanindranath Tagore. He tried to redefine the Mughal and Rajput art styles through his vision, as the stream of the swadeshi movement and tried to affirm the country's visual identities. Rabindranath Tagore and Abanindranath reworked the Asian style with fragile woman depictions and emphasised Indian nationalism (Saini & Pratibha, 2022). Though technical changes took place during the reign of the British, there was an amalgamation of Indian tradition with European style as exemplified in the artwork of sari-clad woman of Raja Ravi Varma, a highly romanticised work of that time. Abanindranath Tagore's allegorical representation in 1905 has been characterised as an attempt at humanisation of *Bharatmata* or Mother India with sheaves of paddy, a garland, a book and a piece of white cloth personifying evocative Hindu imagery where the mother is seeking liberation through her sons. Fine art education during the colonial period was designed to satisfy their fondness in terms of themes and mediums. The impact of the British art school, motivated many talented artists of that time, of which Raja Ravi Varma was the first Indian artist to foster oil technique in his artworks.

The representations of Raja Ravi Varma's subject on the divinity of women, his aspects remain deeply rooted in the traditional representation of Indian women. Ravi Varma's artwork was deeply influenced by Sanskrit myth and drama like *Shakuntala Damayanti*, idols of goddesses. His artistic expressions remained grossly rooted in Indian culture and tradition. His artistic motive in depicting fair-skinned bejewelled dignified women in simplified beautification reflects his unique perception of portraying supremacy of women and reflects a profound respect for them. Similarly, the documentation of Ajanta art from 1909 to 1929 by Asit Haldar glorifies Indian tradition, retaining his style unaffected and providing special status to Indian women. Art has emerged and evolved across all these eras with thematic and symbolic expression engrossed in women. Asit Haldar is best known for his mythological subject matter depicted in art and literature in a narrative style with lyrical fluidity, beauty and grace. Among Haldar's masterpieces, Krishna and Yashoda, the awakening of Mother India, Rai-raj, lotus, Veena, Kunala and Ashoka, etc. were the most popular.

Regional Diversity in Representations of Women:

Regional diversity in Indian art is vividly reflected in the varied representations of women, shaped by cultural, social, and geographic contexts. Each region in India has its own artistic traditions, which portray women through unique styles, themes, and symbolisms, offering a glimpse into local perceptions of femininity and societal roles. For instance, Madhubani art from Bihar often depicts women in vibrant, intricate patterns, celebrating their roles in rituals, festivals, and daily life. The figures often symbolise fertility, nature, and divinity, with motifs like fish, lotus, and peacocks. Similarly, Pattachitra art from Odisha and West Bengal focuses on mythological narratives, showcasing women as goddesses and heroines, often emphasising their grace and strength.

In central India, Gond art portrays tribal women as integral to nature, emphasising their harmony with the environment and their community-centric roles. Meanwhile, Kalamkari art from Andhra Pradesh illustrates women in mythological tales with a balance of elegance and power, reflecting themes of devotion and resilience. These regional depictions not only highlight the aesthetic diversity of Indian art but also offer insights into how women's roles, identities, and stories are perceived and celebrated across the country. Together, they form a mosaic of cultural richness and evolving narratives about femininity. Women have long been significant patrons and contributors to art in India, though their roles

have often been overlooked in mainstream historical narratives. As patrons, they have played a crucial role in commissioning and supporting artistic endeavours that reflect cultural, religious, and societal values.

Women as Patrons and Contributors to Art:

In ancient and medieval India, royal women such as Queen Nagamallika and the Chola queen Sembiyan Mahadevi were instrumental in fostering temple architecture and sculpture. Sembiyan Mahadevi, in particular, commissioned numerous bronze sculptures of deities, leaving a lasting legacy in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, Mughal empresses like NoorJahan were notable patrons of miniature painting and architecture, influencing styles that combined Persian and Indian aesthetics. As contributors, women have actively participated in creating traditional art forms such as Madhubani, Warli, and Gond paintings, which often carry themes of nature, mythology, and social life. These art forms, primarily practised by women, serve as vital records of community histories and cultural practices. In modern times, women artists like Amrita Sher-Gil have redefined Indian art by challenging societal norms and exploring themes of identity, gender, and modernity. Their contributions underscore the evolving role of women as both creators and visionaries in the artistic domain.

India is home to a growing number of influential contemporary women art patrons who are shaping the country's artistic landscape. Contemporary women art patrons in India, such as Kiran Nadar and Nita Ambani, have significantly influenced the art landscape through their visionary contributions. Kiran Nadar, founder of the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, has championed the preservation and promotion of Indian art by supporting both modern and contemporary artists. Nita Ambani, through the Reliance Foundation, has played a pivotal role in showcasing Indian art on global platforms, including collaborations with international institutions. Their efforts extend to fostering artistic education and accessibility, creating spaces where art can thrive. These patrons exemplify how women continue to shape and sustain India's cultural heritage today. Kiran Nadar, through the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, has been a trailblazer in preserving and promoting Indian art, supporting modern and contemporary artists while making art accessible to the public. Similarly, Nita Ambani, via the Reliance Foundation, has brought Indian art to global platforms, fostering international collaborations and cultural exchange.

Radhika Chopra, founder of Art for Concern, blends art promotion with philanthropy by connecting artists with collectors while raising funds for social causes. Aparajita Jain, co-director of Nature Morte Gallery, champions contemporary art that challenges conventional narratives, creating space for bold and experimental works. Feroze Gujral, through the Gujral Foundation, focuses on preserving cultural heritage and supporting cutting-edge artistic practices through exhibitions and public art projects. Another notable figure is Pooja Sood, who established the Khoj International Artists' Association. Her initiative provides a collaborative platform for artists to explore experimental and interdisciplinary art forms, often engaging with pressing social issues. These women are redefining the role of patrons by fostering innovation, inclusivity, and global recognition for Indian art, ensuring its sustained growth and relevance.

Contemporary Indian Art Depiction of Female Body:

The first professional women artist who brought India to the global platform was Amrita Shergill, inspired by the European artist Goya, her artwork had Indian subject matter with a Western impact. She represented unfulfilled desires of female sexuality and nudity reflected unabashed representation of the human condition. Perhaps an unsettling understanding of sexuality might have originated from the male-dominant field of art. Raja Ravi Varma and Amrita Shergill were catalysts for Indian art, who established sensibility and aesthetic expression in their art. M.F. Husain the founder member of Bombay Progressive group emphasised on, avant-garde painting and made a movie *Gajagamini* based on Kalidasaliterature. *Gajagamini* is the story of a woman, all that she has been to man through time directed by the renowned artist M.F. Husain. The woman portrayed indistinctly as a mother, the tease, the coquette, the oppressed, the beauty, the intellectual, etc. was strongly rooted in the principles of Hindutva.

The artists of the 70s and 80s were bold enough to reflect their realities, interpretation, and new language in art. The female artists of contemporary times tried to highlight gender-based differences in their works. Some of them include Anjolie Ela Menon, Mahadev Parekh, Nalini Malini, Saroj Pal, Rekha

Rodwittiya to name a few. Arpita Kaur's representation of women as a symbol of potency and vigour manifests them as agents of women empowerment. The trauma of 1984 gave greater depth and life to her creativity. Series on riots, the world goes on to capture terrible self-absorption and resistance of society to the horrors unleashed by mob violence. She won the Trinealle Award in 1986 for the images of tortured bodies, heaps of corpses, and inconsolable widows, in an exhausted state. This was the expression of her pain.

Gogisaraj's dichotomy in expressing women based on gender perception is fantastic in 1989 mythic fantasies. Artworks with women in the representation of Kamdhenu, Kinneri mythical bird woman are exemplary that reflect her fulfilment making themes connected to the subject. Her innovative series Kinneri, Divine Bird Woman evokes a yearning for release from either domestic drudgery or familial obedience, as a bird takes a few soars through a landscape. The depressed woman faces whose hidden sensuality is matched by a longing that tugs at the viewer with empathetic resonance. Her painting was thought-provoking, evoked deep emotions, and took the viewers out of the frame into the real world. Nilima Sheik, a proponent of gender equality reveals discrimination and revolt faced by women in her works. In 1984, the 'When Champa grew up' series of tempera works showed precise pictures of women tortured, and humiliated at the hands of husband's families with poetic vibrancy. Even the artwork of Jayasri is a vivid amalgam of strong feminine themes and mythical elements. She had the inherent folk art nature and transcended the limits of genre blending female figures with nature with an overlay of fantasy.

Art is a reflection of thought process. The creative instincts inherent in the minds of the above artists cast their sense of humanity. The sensibilities of women at every stage of their lives were well portrayed by the artists of contemporary times. The woman was typified not just as a symbol of fertility, sensuality, or homemakers but, had distinct roles to play unleashing prejudices and thriving in every walk of their life. The world highlights these women artists who constantly strive to empower women through their visual representations and have proven successful on the global platform.

Intersectionality in Contemporary Art:

Intersectionality in contemporary art highlights the interconnectedness of various social identities—such as gender, caste, class, ethnicity, and sexuality—and their influence on the experiences of marginalisation and privilege. In India, this approach has gained prominence as artist's address layered issues of identity, challenging traditional narratives and power structures. For instance, female artists like Mithu Sen and Shilpa Gupta explore themes of gender and identity while engaging with broader socio-political concerns. Mithu Sen's works often examine the intersection of femininity and societal expectations, blending the personal and political. Similarly, artists from marginalised communities, such as Sudarshan Shetty and Bharti Kher, navigate intersections of caste, class, and cultural hybridity through innovative mediums.

Intersectionality also finds expression in art addressing LGBTQIA+ themes. Artists like Priyanka Paul use digital media to depict stories of queer individuals, blending vibrant imagery with potent social commentary. Moreover, regional and tribal art forms, such as Gond and Warli, have become platforms for exploring the intersections of tradition and modernity, revealing how contemporary struggles shape ancient practices. This growing focus on intersectionality enriches Indian art by offering nuanced perspectives, fostering inclusivity, and giving voice to diverse experiences that challenge monolithic representations of identity.

Feminist Art Movements in India:

Feminist art movements in India have played a transformative role in challenging patriarchal norms and reshaping representations of women in the visual arts. Emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, these movements were deeply influenced by broader feminist struggles and sought to critique traditional depictions of women as passive subjects, instead emphasising their agency, resilience, and multifaceted identities. Artists such as Nilima Sheikh, Arpita Singh, and Navjot Altaf became central figures in this movement, addressing themes of domesticity, gender-based violence, and societal expectations through their evocative works. Nilima Sheikh's series "When Champa Grew Up" highlights the lived experiences

of women, blending poetic narratives with visual artistry. Similarly, Navjot Altaf's installations often provoke critical discussions on gender and caste oppression.

Feminist art in India also explores intersectionality, with artists like Sheba Chhahi addressing issues of environmental degradation alongside gender dynamics. Her works, including photographic and multimedia installations, examine the socio-political challenges faced by women in marginalised communities. Today, the feminist art movement continues to thrive, with younger artists such as Mithu Sen and Prajakta Potnis exploring themes of sexuality, identity, and resistance. By challenging societal norms, feminist art in India fosters dialogue, advocacy, and greater inclusivity within cultural and artistic spaces.

Digital and New Media Art:

Digital and new media art have revolutionised the creative landscape in India, offering artists innovative tools to explore themes and engage with audiences in unprecedented ways. These art forms incorporate technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), video installations, and digital painting, enabling creators to push boundaries and redefine artistic practices. Artists like Raghava KK and Thukral & Tagra have been pioneers in this domain, blending traditional aesthetics with digital experimentation. Raghava KK's interactive works often explore identity, cultural memory, and human emotion, leveraging the power of technology to create immersive experiences. Similarly, Thukral & Tagra use digital platforms to address societal concerns such as migration, environmental sustainability, and urbanisation, making their art both thought-provoking and accessible. Social media platforms have further democratised art, allowing emerging artists to share their work with global audiences. Through vibrant digital illustrations, they engage with contemporary issues, including gender, mental health, and social justice, fostering meaningful dialogue. Additionally, NFT (Non-Fungible Token) art has gained traction in India, enabling artists to monetise their work while ensuring authenticity and ownership. This growing intersection of technology and art has redefined creative possibilities, making digital and new media art a vital force in contemporary Indian culture.

Role of Women Artists in Diaspora:

Women artists in the diaspora play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage while addressing themes of identity, migration, and belonging. Their work often reflects a fusion of their roots and the influences of their adopted countries, creating a rich tapestry of cross-cultural dialogue. In the Indian diaspora art, women artists such as Annu Palakunnathu Matthew and Chitra Ganesh explore themes of displacement and cultural hybridity. Annu's photographic works blend historical archives with personal narratives, questioning notions of memory and migration. Chitra Ganesh, on the other hand, incorporates mythology and pop culture to examine issues of gender, sexuality, and identity. These artists also challenge stereotypes about Indian women, presenting them as dynamic and multifaceted individuals rather than confined to traditional roles. For example, Rina Banerjee's installations delve into post-colonialism and globalisation, using vibrant materials to symbolise the intersections of culture and identity. Similarly, artists like Nalini Malani use multimedia to critique patriarchy and advocate for women's resilience across borders. By engaging with the complexities of diaspora experiences, these women contribute to a global artistic discourse. Their works not only highlight the struggles of navigating dual identities but also celebrate the strength and adaptability inherent in diasporic communities.

Results and Discussions:

Compendium (Table 1) showcases how the artistic lenses have evolved over the ages and the salient features that have created a lasting impact and paved the way for the future of artistic themes and trends. The compendium highlights the evolution of female representation in Indian art across historical periods, reflecting shifts in narrative themes and artistic materials. Prehistoric art focused on standalone female figurines, emphasising anthropomorphic traits, while proto-historic art introduced women as deities and mother goddesses through pottery and seals. Buddhist art integrated religious narratives, portraying women in divine and human forms. Khajuraho sculptures depicted Hindu mythological themes with explicit feminine imagery. Medieval art, influenced by both Hindu and Islamic traditions, expanded

narrative diversity. Pre-independence art depicted freedom struggles and indigenous traditions, shifting from religious to socio-political narratives. Post-independence art introduced feminine-centric themes, addressing issues of identity and diaspora. Contemporary art reflects inclusivity, focusing on human experiences and diverse identities through both narrative and non-narrative expressions. The consistent portrayal of women, from symbolic figures to powerful agents of change, illustrates a gradual break from traditional stereotypes, influencing modern art forms.

| Period | Materials Used | Narrative Theme / Non-Narrative Theme |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Pre-historic | Organic and mineral-based pigments on rock. | Non-narrative standalone female figurines. Narratives were engraved, chiselled, and painted female were identified. Anthropomorphism was found to be prevalent. Flat two-dimensional and three-dimensional figures were depicted for narrative showcasing. |
| Proto-historic | Clay, stone, and metal | Female figurines as deities and mother goddesses have been identified. Pottery designs and Seals depicting women. |
| Buddhist Art | Clay, stone, and metal. Organic and mineral-based pigments on rock. | Female figures are shown in various humans, demigods, and godly forms. Anthropomorphism was found to be prevalent. Engraved, sculpted, and painted female figurines were identified. Narratives based on religion were essential for representations of female figures. |
| Khajuraho | Clay and Stone | Hindu religious narratives were prominently featured. |
| Medieval Art | Pigment and mineral based, stone, paper, and cloth. | Hindu and Islamic religious narratives were prominently featured. |
| Pre-Independence Art | Pigment and mineral based, stone, paper, and cloth. | Hindu narrative art, Company art, and art based on freedom moment and Indigenous traditions. Non-narrative artefacts were created in a utilitarian capacity. |
| Post-Independence Art | Pigment and mineral based, stone, paper, and cloth. | Narrative art based on the Indian Diaspora, post- |

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| | | partition tales, feminine-centric art, and Hindu narrative art. Non-narrative artefacts were created in a utilitarian capacity. |
| Contemporary representations | Art Digital, pigment, and mineral-based, stone, paper, and cloth. | Narrative art is based on human experiences and represented in traditional and digital methods using economiccentric approach, and gender inclusiveness. Non-narrative artefacts were created in utilitarian and non-utilitarian capacities. |

Table 1: An Indian-specific composition of materials and themes used to depict the female body across ages.

Conclusion:

This study reveals the evolving portrayal of women in Indian art, highlighting their transition from passive figures to empowered agents across historical periods. The findings underscore how artistic expressions have moved from rigid societal roles to multifaceted representations, reflecting the changing status of women in Indian culture. Notably, the thematic shift from religious and domestic depictions to contemporary feminist narratives marks a pivotal change in gender portrayal. A key insight is the recognition of art as a dynamic platform for dialogue on gender, reflecting both societal progress and persistent challenges. The study uniquely offers a cross-temporal analysis, identifying shifts in materials, techniques, and themes that have influenced artistic representations of women. This study's unique contribution lies in its comprehensive timeline, mapping female representation across prehistoric, medieval, and contemporary art forms. It also emphasises the symbolic use of art in challenging patriarchal norms and reclaiming female identity. The research meets its objectives by examining artistic forms as visual records of women's roles across time, challenging traditional depictions, and promoting cultural understanding through visual storytelling.

Future research can explore how digital art continues to redefine gender narratives in modern Indian society. Further study into regional folk art traditions and their depiction of women could offer nuanced perspectives on cultural diversity. The study's peculiarity lies in its thematic categorisation across distinct periods, showcasing art as a dynamic medium for social change.

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