



Use of Figure as the Language of Artistic Expression: An Analysis Based on Indian Female Artists' Artworks

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Abstract

Art has long served as a reflection of varied experiences, emotions, and narratives that shape our lives. The artworks of Indian female artists represent the complexities, emotions, and life narratives, presenting distinctive perspectives of their societal, cultural, and personal experiences. The female artists of India use the figures in their artworks as a medium to express themes of body positivity, identity politics, and social issues. They challenge beauty standards, celebrate diversity, and address societal constructs. Advancements in technology have expanded the possibilities for female artists to express their figures in their artworks innovatively. Their diverse perspectives push artistic boundaries, redefine narratives, and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of human experiences. We can see the artworks of pioneers like Amrita Sher-Gil in the early 20th century, who combined Western techniques with Indian sensibility, offering a fresh perspective on the female form in her artwork. The research explores the use of figures in Indian female artists' artworks as a language of artistic expression. Using qualitative analysis, it analyzes how these artists use the figure as a powerful communication tool, social commentary, and personal expression. The study describes the concepts and thoughts of artists like Amrita Sher-Gil, Anupam Sud, and Arpita Singh's artwork and the cultural, societal, and gender-specific influences that shape their artistic language.

Keywords: Figurative representation, Gender, Female, Art, Society, Indian Female artists.



Gender Equality

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Introduction

Historically, female artists have utilized art to highlight societal concerns, frequently blending distinctive styles influenced by Indian and European influences. Early female artists employed conventional means, such as painting, to obtain fame and pave the way for modern artists and work styles. Their distinct styles are still recognizable today. In female artists' artwork, there are so many representations in their artistic language, such as societal representation, self-portraits, figures of self, or other women, particularly for the use of the concept of their artwork, etc. These representations frequently question established gender roles and assumptions, facilitating feminist conversation in the creative world. Female artists have tackled topics of identity, sexuality, and personal experiences, providing distinct viewpoints that have contributed to their artwork's variety of creative expression. Female artists from both the Indian subcontinent and Europe, spanning the classical and early modern eras, have created works that challenge societal norms and blend personal, cultural, and feminist perspectives. Examples include Rukmini Devi Arundale, a pioneer in the revival of Bharatanatyam, and Amrita Sher-Gil, a modern painter known for her mystical and folk-inspired paintings. In Europe, Artemisia Gentileschi, a Baroque painter, is known for her powerful works, such as *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, which depicts female strength and resilience. Sofonisba Anguissola, an Italian Renaissance painter, is known for her portraits, including *The Chess Game*, and *Elisabetta Sirani*, known for religious and mythological themes. Figurative artwork has been discovered in various forms throughout human history, with the earliest discovery reaching over 35,000 years ago (Strickland, 2018). Modern Figurative art gained popularity in the mid-twentieth century alongside the Expressionist movement. Figurative art contains various styles, from abstract and surreal to precisely detailed extreme realism. Artists and individuals generate this style for documentation, representation, and reflection because it allows them to portray their topic and cultural values in the context in which they were developed. Figurative art shows understandable things, usually human or animal shapes taken from real life. It's not the same as abstract art, which focuses on colors, shapes, and forms without showing them clearly. The Renaissance, Baroque, Realism, and Surrealism are some of the most essential art styles in the history of realistic art. Humanism, symmetry, and perspective were essential during the Renaissance, leading to a very lifelike picture of people. The Baroque era was all about action, movement, and intense emotions. It had fast-paced arrangements and significant differences between light and dark. Realism focuses on everyday life and social truth, objectively showing normal people and events. Surrealism, however, mixes real and magical elements to create images that look like a dream. Figurative art has been looked at differently throughout history because of these art trends. They connected people to familiar shapes while also showing different cultural, social, and psychological themes.

Indian women artists have used figures to combine personal, social, and political topics. Some well-known examples are the post-Impressionist figurative realism painting *Three Girls* (1935) by Amrita Sher-Gil, the layered compositions in *My Mother* (1983) by Arpita Singh, the multimedia installations in *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* (1998) by Nalini Malani, the calm, introspective figures in *Yatra* (2006) by Anjolie Ela Menon, and the feminist figurative art in *The Ritual Presence* (1992) by Rekha Rodwittiya. These artists have made significant additions to the art world by telling powerful stories about Indian identity, women, and cultural history. In many of their work, broken human figures show how complicated their lives are. These artists have made important advances in the art world worldwide. Indian female painters frequently draw inspiration from

India's rich cultural legacy, employing individuals dressed in traditional costumes, rituals, dances, or legendary figures. They analyze subjects such as feminine identity, empowerment, and societal obstacles women face, addressing gender stereotypes, societal expectations, and concerns such as patriarchy, women's rights, and empowerment. Figures are often used by Indian female artists to make significant social and political statements, addressing problems such as gender discrimination, conflicts over faith, and environmental concerns. They explore many styles and approaches, fusing traditional Indian art traditions with modern ones.

Objectives of the Research

- To explore cultural heritage, feminine identity, societal challenges, and political activism by identifying and analyzing the artwork of Indian female artists.
- To explore traditional art forms, modern techniques, abstraction, or mixed methods by examining stylistic choices of artwork themes of Indian female artists.
- To analyze how figures express personal emotions and experiences by exploring personal narratives.
- To analyze how personal experiences are involved in the artwork of Indian female artists and how they express that in their artwork.

Literature Review

Figures have been central to Indian art since ancient times, serving as a vehicle for storytelling, religious expression, and social commentary. Their representation has roots in traditional forms like temple carvings, miniature paintings, and folk art. The evolution of figure-based art in India reflects the country's diverse cultural heritage and the changing dynamics of its society. (Guha-Thakurta, 2007)

Indian female artists, despite facing societal norms and gender biases, have made significant contributions to the art world by addressing gender, identity, and power issues. Indian female artists like Amrita Sher-Gil and Arpita Singh explore identity through personal and collective representations, challenging traditional gender roles. Sher-Gil's portrayal of women in everyday settings provides a nuanced perspective on femininity and social roles, challenging traditional representations of women (Dalmia, 2013). Indian female artists use figures to challenge societal norms and address issues like gender violence, inequality, and marginalization. Anjolie Ela Menon's portraits and Nalini Malani's multimedia installations are examples of how figures challenge patriarchal ideologies. Also, Artists like Anjolie Ela Menon and Madhvi Parekh use figures to explore cultural and mythological themes, blending past and present to create symbolic, layered works that comment on contemporary issues.

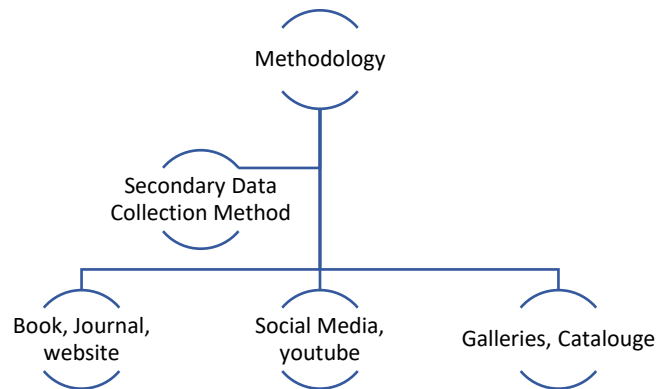
Indian female artists use diverse techniques and mediums to create figure-based artworks, blending traditional methods like oil painting and fresco with contemporary practices like installation, video art, and digital media. Their artistic expressions are influenced by socio-cultural factors such as regional traditions, historical events, and socio-political movements. The intersection of art and activism is evident in their work, as many artists engage with social issues. (Mitter, 1995)

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of Indian female artists' contributions to the global art scene, with exhibitions, academic research, and critical discourse highlighting their work.

The contemporary art market in India and abroad has shown greater appreciation for these artists, leading to broader visibility and influence. (Mago, 2001)

Methodology

This study explores the use of figures as a language of artistic expression among Indian female artists using a mixed-method approach. Artworks are selected through systematic searches through art galleries, online platforms, and exhibitions, with criteria such as relevance to the theme of figurative expression and availability of contextual information. Each artwork is thoroughly documented, including information on the artist's background, medium, dimensions, title, and artistic influences. Photographs or digital reproductions of the artworks are obtained for further analysis. The research article was completed through a qualitative approach where the data was collected by secondary data collection.

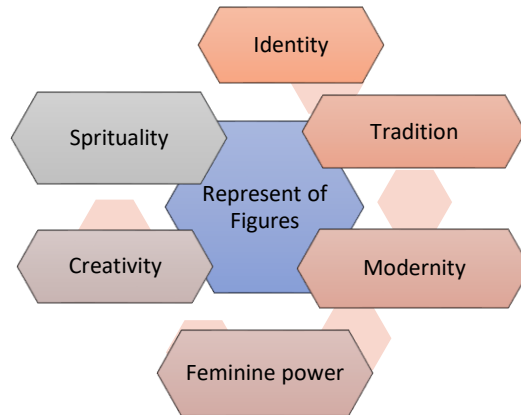


Discussion

Figures as symbols of Indian female artists' artwork

The figure has long been a significant symbol in Indian female artists' artwork, carrying cultural, social, and personal meanings. It serves as a vehicle for exploring identity and representation, particularly for artists grappling with issues of gender, sexuality, caste, and ethnicity. The figure can embody various expressions of femininity, from traditional to contemporary, and can be used to reclaim and redefine notions of womanhood. The figure can also be used to comment on social issues and political realities in India, such as patriarchy, violence against women, discrimination, and marginalization. By incorporating elements from India's rich cultural heritage, artists create a dialogue between the past and present, celebrating resilience and continuity. The figure may also symbolize spiritual themes, embodying concepts of transcendence, inner peace, and divine energy. Drawing upon spiritual traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, or Sufism, female artists explore themes of spirituality, interconnectedness, and the search for meaning.

Indian female artists often use symbolic figures in their artworks to represent their identity, tradition, and modernity. These figures often come from Hindu mythology, symbolizing feminine



Symbol of represent figures in artworks

power, creativity, and spirituality. The motif of the mother and child is a recurring theme, symbolizing nurturing, love, and life continuity. This imagery often reflects maternal bonds, familial relationships, and the role of women as caregivers. Female artists use symbolic figures in their artworks to express diverse narratives, perspectives, and struggles, challenging stereotypes, celebrating diversity, and advocating for social change.

Folk and tribal icons are also used by Indian female artists, representing a connection to indigenous cultures, ancestral knowledge, and the resilience of marginalized communities. These figures challenge dominant narratives of art history by focusing on non-elitist, grassroots practices. Self-portraits are another form of representation, incorporating symbolic elements that reflect the artist's personal experiences and aspirations. Contemporary icons, such as political leaders, social activists, or pop culture icons, are also used by Indian female artists to comment on contemporary issues, challenge power dynamics, and spark conversations about social change. Nature and animal symbolism is also prevalent, reflecting India's rich natural heritage and biodiversity. Animals like elephants, peacocks, and snakes are often imbued with symbolic meanings related to strength, beauty, fertility, and spiritual wisdom.

Female Artist who represents figure as their artistic language

➤ Amrita Sher-Gil

Amrita Sher-Gil, a renowned Indian artist, revolutionized the figurative movement of Indian art by blending European modernism with Indian cultural narratives. Sher-Gil's works, such as *Young Girls* and *Three Girls*, showcased Indian women with emotional depth and realism, rejecting colonial romanticism. Her art also reflected the lived experiences of Indian rural life, addressing themes of poverty, alienation, and cultural identity. Her self-portraits, like *Bride's Toilet* and *Village Scene*, evoked empathy and challenged idealized depictions of India. Sher-Gil's exploration of identity and femininity was introspective, unlike traditional passive representations of women in art. Her work is often compared to Mexican artist Frida Kahlo for their shared introspective and

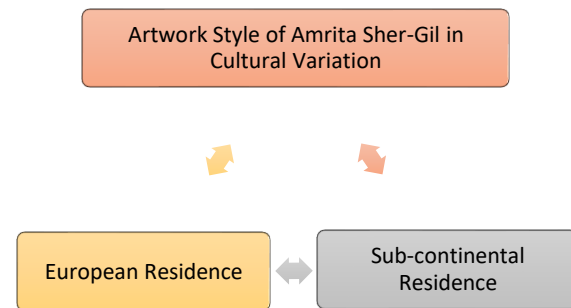
feminist artistic journeys. Her legacy is often compared to the works of other artists, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Jamini Roy.

Artwork Style of Amrita Sher-Gil

Amrita Sher-Gil critiqued the Bengal School, a nationalist art movement that aimed to resist colonial influence by reviving Indian artistic traditions. Sher-Gil believed that the school's idealized depictions of mythological and historical themes lacked realism and emotional complexity, and its works were overly decorative and symbolic. Sher-Gil preferred realism, portraying raw, everyday life with emotional depth and using Western techniques like Post-Impressionist color palettes, vigorous brushstrokes, and anatomical precision. Sher-Gil's work, like *Three Girls* and *Village Scene*, depicted poverty, struggle, and human dignity with boldness, rejecting romanticized portrayals. Sher-Gil's break from the Bengal School's idealism helped establish a modern, self-critical, and socially aware Indian art movement, making her one of the most revolutionary figures in Indian art history. Her work is a testament to the importance of realism in Indian art despite the stagnation of the Bengal School's idealized depictions of mythological and historical themes. (Patil, 2024)¹

Amrita Sher-Gil was an exceptional colorist, using bold and unbridled colors, unlike the pale hues prevalent among her peers. (Amrita Sher-Gil | Indian Modernist Painter, 2024)²

Amrita Sher-Gil's paintings showcase cultural variation between her European residence and her arrival in the subcontinent. Her hybridity allowed her to observe the Indigenous spirit of subcontinental culture, embracing the intimacy of Eastern culture and exploring the diversity of Western culture. This residential switch from the Eastern to the Western world is evident in her paintings, personality, living style, and dressing sense.



Analysis of Amrita Sher-Gil's Figures in Her Artwork

Amrita Sher-Gil, an Indian-Hungarian painter, used Western methods in traditional Indian art subjects. Her art frequently included symbolism, informed by her experiences and cultural heritage. Her amazing use of figures, attitudes, colors, and cultural symbols revealed significant truths about the human condition and the complexity of identity, society, and culture. Some symbols present the figures as a language of Amrita Sher-Gil's artworks are given below-

- Feminine Identity and Social Expectations
- Harmony of Humanity and Nature

¹ Patil, V. (2024, February 2). Genealogies of Modernity — Amrita Sher-Gil and the construction of a Global modernity. *Genealogies of Modernity*. <https://genealogiesofmodernity.org/journal/amrita-sher-gil-and-the-construction-of-a-global-modernity>

² Amrita Sher-Gil | Indian Modernist Painter. (2024, January 26). *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Amrita-Sher-Gil>

- Empowerment and Resilience of Women

➤ **Feminine Identity and Social Expectations**

"Bride's Toilet" by Sher-Gil explores feminine identity and societal expectations, particularly in marriage and domesticity. The artwork features a young Indian woman adorning herself, reflecting on her impending marriage and the expectations it brings. The sparse yet intimate setting, with floral motifs and mirror reflections, adds depth to the scene, symbolizing the transition into married life and the cultural significance of marriage in Indian society.

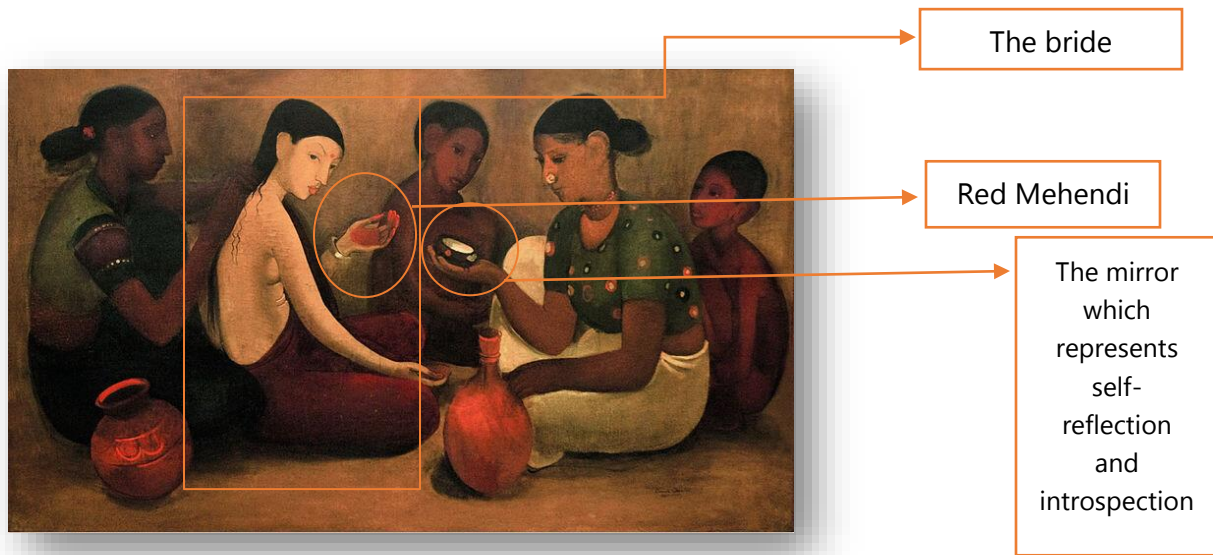


Figure 1. Bride's Toilet, Amrita Sher-Gil, 1937

Source: Art and Analysis | Global Modern Women Artists. (n.d.). <https://sites.smith.edu/global-modern-women-artists/amrita-sher-gil/images/>

"Bride's Toilet" depicts a village bride getting ready for marriage. The painting uses bright colors and a radial arrangement, with the bride at the center. It captures the bride's anxiety and happiness and the lively environment with friends in conversation. Sher-Gil's paintings aim to speak for themselves, showcasing the Indigenous quality of India. The red mehendi of her hand and yellow skin color might signify the laal-peel aspect of Indian marriages.

The term "laal-peel" represents the symbolic use of red and yellow in Indian wedding traditions. Red symbolizes love, passion, fertility, and prosperity, while yellow represents sanctity, renewal, and spiritual well-being. Brides wear red saris or lehengas and red mehendi for beauty and auspiciousness. The use of these colors underscores the emotional and cultural intensity of an Indian wedding, with the bride's yellow-tinted skin symbolizing the haldi ritual and the red in her mehendi and surroundings, highlighting the ceremonial importance and transformative stage of marriage. (Patil, 2024)³

The painting depicts the bride as a fairer Indian woman, reflecting her passion for color and empathy for her subjects, often depicted in poverty and despair. Her portrayal of intimate

³ Patil, V. (2024, February 2). Genealogies of Modernity — Amrita Sher-Gil and the construction of a Global modernity. Genealogies of Modernity. <https://genealogiesofmodernity.org/journal/amrita-sher-gil-and-the-construction-of-a-global-modernity>

moments often blends artistic exploration with autobiographical undertones, focusing on themes of femininity, identity, and desire. Her depictions of women in domestic or ritualistic settings convey layered emotions, such as anticipation, longing, or introspection. Sher-Gil's transformation in her work was complete when she toured South India in 1937, producing famous South Indian trilogy paintings, such as "*Brahmacharis*" and "*The South Indian Villagers*." She took inspiration from indigenous traditions, such as frescoes at Ajanta, Mughal miniatures, and Basohli school paintings. Despite her impressionistic and pointillistic style, Sher-Gil's work combines Indian and European art, blending elements of both Indian and European styles. Her simplicity of depiction of subjects transcends the boundaries of Indian and European art, blending elements of both Indian and European styles. The painting's simplicity and emotional impact make it a powerful representation of the artist's journey through marriage.

➤ **Harmony of Humanity and Nature**

Sher-Gil's artwork represents the harmony between mankind and the natural world, demonstrating a deep appreciation for the environment's significance in creating human experiences. For example, the artwork '*Mother India*'.

"Mother India" by Amrita Sher-Gil is a powerful representation of the symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature, deeply ingrained in India's cultural fabric. The painting features a quintessential Indian mother figure embracing her child, symbolizing unconditional love and care that transcends individuality. The verdant landscape surrounding the central figures evokes a sense of vitality and abundance, suggesting a profound connection between humanity and the natural world. The lush foliage and vibrant hues evoke the fecundity of the Indian countryside, where life thrives in harmony with the rhythms of nature. The painting also symbolizes fertility and abundance, mirroring the cyclical patterns of birth, growth, and renewal inherent in human life and the natural world.

The depiction of India as 'Bharat Mata' or 'Mother India' was a significant shift from the modern understanding of the country as the 'Fatherland.' The iconography of 'Mother India', first visualized by Abanindranath Tagore, was an ascetic in saffron robes, boosting the Indian Freedom Movement and reinforcing the anti-colonial struggle. Sher-Gil's style was heavily influenced by realism, with her depiction of Mother India as a poor Indian woman with a son and daughter, reflecting the prevailing poverty in India. The painting, painted in oils, was a departure from Tagore's wash technique and evoked a sense of patriotism in viewers, encouraging them to participate in the liberation of their motherland. (Amrita Sher-Gil's Vision of Mother India, n.d.)



Figure 2. *'Mother India'*; Amrita Sher-Gil, 1935'

Source: Mother India - Amrita Sher-Gil - Google Arts & Culture. (n.d.). Google Arts & Culture.

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/mother-india/4wEg15tTOJU0-A>

➤ **Empowerment and Resilience of Women**

Sher-Gil's "Hill Women" (1935) is a poignant painting that depicts rural women from the hills of India, demonstrating their strength, dignity, and determination in navigating societal expectations and challenges. The painting serves as a metaphor for the harsh realities of life, yet the women stand tall, embodying a spirit of resilience and fortitude. The rugged landscape serves as a metaphor for the harsh realities of life, yet the women stand tall, embodying a spirit of fortitude. It is a powerful testament to the enduring spirit of womanhood and the importance of acknowledging and celebrating women's contributions to society. The figure, often seen as a personification of India, embodies the hardships faced by Indian women during colonial rule, with a downward gaze expressing humility and contemplation, reflecting the themes of suffering and endurance in Sher-Gil's portrayal.



Expression of strength

Figure 3. *Hill Women*, Amrita Sher-Gill, Oil on Canvas, 1935

Source: *Hill Women*. (n.d.). HandmadePiece.com. <https://www.handmadepiece.com/hill-women-handmade-oil-painting-reproduction-on-canvas-by-artist-amrita-sher-gil.html>

- **Anupam Sud**

Anupam Sud is a renowned Indian artist known for her introspective and thought-provoking artworks, often focusing on themes of identity, memory, and the human condition. Her work is characterized by a deep exploration of the self and human experience, often drawing inspiration from personal memories and emotions. Sud uses surreal and symbolic imagery to evoke emotional responses, often rich in metaphor and allegory. Her layered and textured surfaces add depth and complexity, inviting tactile engagement and sensory exploration. Her subtle color

palette contributes to the contemplative mood and allows viewers to focus on the underlying themes. Sud's artwork often explores themes of memory and nostalgia, reflecting on the fleeting nature of human experience.

Figure as the language of Anupam Sud's Artwork

Anupam Sud is a multidisciplinary artist specializing in printmaking. Her work focuses on revolutionary themes such as male and female sexuality and feminist narratives. Considered radical in the 1960s and 1970s in India, it mirrors societal values, particularly in depicting male and female relationships. Sud's subjects are often exposed to nude bodies, silent figures involved in intimacy, and social norms. Her work also considers spatial relationships through architectural elements.

Anupam Sud believes that people are nude from within and that the nakedness in her work is missing its fundamental message. She chose printmaking as a more democratic and easily transmissible form than painting, though later became proficient in both. Sud began painting after a debilitating accident in 2008, recovering but remaining weak and unable to perform manual labor. With the help of fellow printmaker Rajesh Rana, she has returned to her preferred medium, but painting and sculpture have also become integral to her practice. Sud's evolution as an artist has been an exemplary and singular story, subverting archaic notions of male supremacy and Puritan idioms of modernism. (Khoj International Artists' Association, 2023)⁴

Persona

The print was made in 1988 when the Indian government nominated Sud to represent the country at the Asia Printmaking Workshop at the Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan. During her residency, she encountered Kabuki theater and became intrigued by its use of makeup and masks. The print was made using etching and aquatint techniques, which produce incised lines and tonal effects by using acid to eat into a metal plate to create recessed or sunken areas. The imagery was then transferred onto paper when the plate was placed against it and passed through a printing press. (Collecting for the Future: Anupam Sud's Persona, 2022)⁵

⁴ Khoj International Artists' Association. (2023, May 10). *Anupam Sud - Khoj*. Khoj. <https://khojstudios.org/person/anupam-sud/>

⁵ *Collecting for the Future: Anupam Sud's Persona*. (2022, July 13). Smith College Museum of Art. <https://scma.smith.edu/blog/collecting-future-anupam-suds-persona>

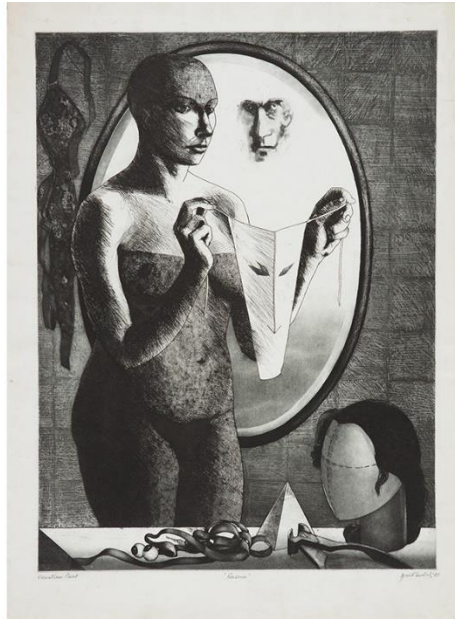


Figure 4. *Persona*, Anupam Sud, (27 x 19.5 in.), 1988

A woman stands in an interior space with bare breasts. A brassiere hangs on the wall, confirming her female identity. A ghostly face in the mirror suggests the opposite gender. Sud gives a nod to Kabuki theater's tradition of cross-dressing. A wig, tape measure, and tools on the table suggest a profession as a tailor or dresser. The background with squared patterns evokes Japanese screens decorated with gold or silver leaves.

This demonstrates her feminine identity exploration. The mirror's ghostly male look suggests gender fluidity and social positions, reflecting Kabuki theater's history of male players performing feminine roles (onnagata). The background's square patterns remind her of Japanese screens, giving her work cultural and metaphorical meaning. These works demonstrate Sud's subtle criticism of identity and self-representation, blending personal experiences with social concerns. (Wikipedia contributors, 2024)⁶

The language of the figure

The painting explores gender identity through a naked woman standing in front of a mirror, revealing societal expectations and norms. The ghostly face in the mirror, possibly representing the opposite gender, adds ambiguity, inviting viewers to contemplate the fluidity of gender identity and the multiplicity of selves within each individual. The mirror in Sud's artwork is a central motif that explores themes of reflection and self-perception. The woman's physical presence and ghostly face in the mirror suggest a tension between external appearances and inner realities, questioning authenticity and societal expectations. The mirror serves as a site of ambiguity and transformation, encouraging viewers to question identity stability and embrace the fluidity of self-expression.

⁶ Wikipedia contributors. (2024, October 12). Theatre of Japan. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_Japan

- **The Rear Window (1992)**

Sud's universe is complex and often overlooked by first-time viewers. Karode, a curator and friend, helps unravel the layers of Sud's work. Her interpretation of *The Rear Window*, inspired by the Mandal Commission protests, uses Bus number 345 as a symbol of violence and sexual harassment faced by regular people. The packed bus symbolizes the daily violence faced by women on public transport, highlighting the depth of meaning in Sud's work.



Figure 5. *The Rear Window*, Anupam Sud, Etching on paper, 1992

"The Rear Window" by Anupam Sud is a powerful commentary on gender-based violence and social injustice in India. The artwork may reflect broader themes of social justice, identity politics, and the struggles faced by marginalized groups. Sud's exploration of this theme highlights the depth of meaning in her artwork, prompting viewers to see the systemic inequalities perpetuating it. The layered composition of "The Rear Window" invites viewers to engage with complex socio-political issues and reflect critically on their roles within broader systems of power and oppression⁷.

- **Arpita Singh**

Arpita Singh, born in 1937 in Kolkata, is a figurative and modernist artist who draws inspiration from traditional Indian art forms and aesthetics. She paints with a range of emotions and connections, providing a topographical view of the ongoing communication she maintains with women⁸.

Artwork style

Arpita Singh is a famous Indian artist known for her unique style that combines figuration, abstraction, and symbolism. Her paintings and drawings often show people, primarily women and

⁷ Analytical study of the artwork by Anupam Sud Free Essay Example. (2022, November 1). StudyMoose. <https://studymoose.com/analytical-study-of-the-artwork-by-anupam-sud-essay>

⁸ Arpita Singh: Six Decades of Painting. (2024, February 15). Frieze. <https://www.frieze.com/article/arpita-singh-six-decades-painting>

children, telling realistic and fantastical stories in private or domestic settings. Singh's work, which is both realistic and bizarre, shows the daily conflicts and triumphs of women in South Asian society. Her writing has a lyrical energy that can be interpreted differently, showing how complex her stories are. Her feminist beliefs are clear, and she writes about choices, individuality, and being strong. Her work, like *My Mother* (1993), shows a mother's strength and tenderness while also showing the roles and demands of women in society. She often breaks social rules and taboos with her bold use of symbols and bright colors.

Figure as the language of Arpita Singh's Artwork

Arpita Singh's figurative artwork blends realism, symbolism, and narrative complexity. Her portrayal of human figures is intimate and empathetic, capturing facial expressions, body language, and gestures with sensitivity. Singh's characters often convey a range of emotions, from introspection to resilience and defiance. Her narratives are rich in depth and complexity, with multiple storylines and vignettes within a single composition.

Each figure contributes to the overarching narrative, allowing viewers to engage with the stories and interpret the imagery on multiple levels. Singh's figurative imagery often carries symbolic significance, serving as visual metaphors for broader themes. Her representational style confronts issues of gender, identity, and societal norms, challenging traditional representations of women and subverting stereotypes. Singh's figurative artwork resonates with viewers emotionally, fostering a sense of human connection and empathy. Her ability to capture the complexities of human experience through figurative imagery creates a bridge between the artist and the audience, inviting contemplation, reflection, and dialogue⁹

- **Devi Pistol Wali**

Arpita Singh's painting *Devi Pistol Wali* (1990) features the goddess Durga holding a black revolver, pointing it at a figure falling backward. Singh replaces traditional symbols with flowers and a mango for the spinning disk. The satire is soft and whimsy, with figures and objects thrown up in the air, causing them to float, twist, and freeze in a moment that could turn violent. Singh's work is not sentimental but full of whimsy

⁹ Arpita Singh's paintings. (2023, February 23). Mysite 1. <https://akashaman601.wixsite.com/mysite-1/post/arpita-singh-s-paintings>

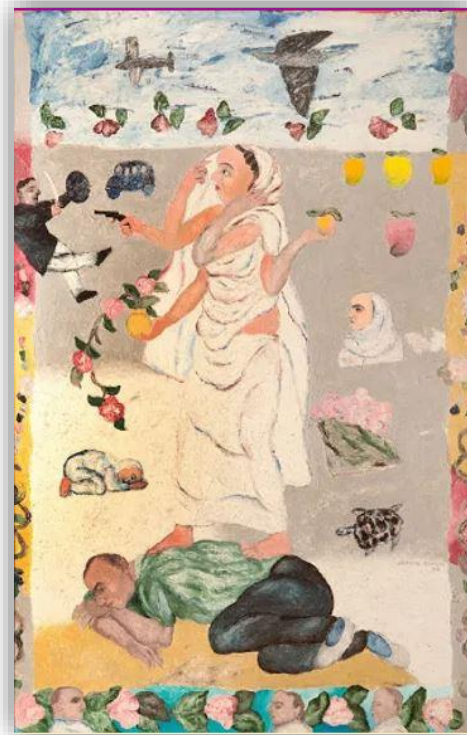


Figure 6. *Devi Pistol Wali*, Arpita Singh, Oil on Canvas, 1990

The painting challenges conventional representations of Durga, presenting a subversion of traditional symbols and a contemporary reinterpretation of religious symbolism. Singh's satire is soft and light-hearted, avoiding heavy-handed moralizing or condemnation. The painting also

transforms traditional symbols into everyday objects, adding an element of surrealism and absurdity. The dynamic composition conveys a sense of anticipation and uncertainty, hinting at the potential for violence or upheaval. The imagery of Durga wielding a revolver and pointing it at a falling figure suggests violence, power, and confrontation themes. Singh's portrayal of Durga as both a protector and a wielder of deadly force prompts viewers to reflect on the complexities of divine authority and the use of violence in asserting control. The painting's temporal ambiguity is further heightened by the suspension of time, creating a tension-filled atmosphere. Overall, "Devi" by Singh is a thought-provoking exploration of religious iconography, power dynamics, and societal norms, challenging viewers to reconsider their perceptions of divinity, violence, and the intersections of tradition and modernity. (Arpita Singh: Six Decades of Painting, 2024)

Conclusion

The study examines the use of figures in Indian female artists' artistic expression, revealing a diverse range of themes, techniques, and narratives. These artists use the figure to convey personal, cultural, and socio-political messages, from identity exploration to societal norms and power structure critiques. The research emphasizes the importance of recognizing and amplifying

the voices of female artists in art history and criticism, challenging conventional narratives, and promoting inclusivity.

The use of the figure as a language of artistic expression among Indian female artists has revealed a rich tapestry of symbolism, narrative complexity, and socio-cultural commentary. These artists navigate diverse themes such as identity, gender, spirituality, social issues, and the human condition, offering nuanced perspectives that challenge conventions and provoke introspection. The figure serves as a powerful vehicle for these artists to convey personal, cultural, and political meanings, allowing them to explore and reinterpret traditional symbols, societal expectations, and historical narratives.

Amrita Sher-Gil, Anupam Sud, and Arpita Singh exemplify the breadth and depth of artistic expression among Indian female artists, each with their unique style, thematic concerns, and creative vision. Their figurative artworks invite viewers to contemplate the intricacies of human experience, challenge prevailing norms, and envision alternative futures.

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