

# Painting The Past: A Visual Study of Social Realities in Western India After Independence

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## Abstract

The paper "Painting the Past: A Visual Study of Social Realities in Western India after Independence" delves at the way artists in Western India portrayed socioeconomic realities after independence via paintings. This study explores a wide range of artworks made by artists in the years after India gained its independence in 1947. The goal is to reveal how these artists subtly portrayed the social dynamics that were prominent during this revolutionary time. Examining the selected artworks through the lenses of art history, cultural studies, and social analysis, this research delves into the themes and styles present in each. It explores how artists depicted the intricacies of social changes, including urbanisation, caste relations, economic inequality, and cultural identity.

This study also places the artworks in the larger political, social, and economic framework of post-independence Western India, taking into account the ways in which regional elements, historical events, and socio-cultural movements influenced creative expression. The importance of art as a reflecting medium is shown by the results of this research, which add to our understanding of the social fabric of post-independence Western India. This study sheds light on the changing dynamics of community, identity, and sociopolitical power in the area at a critical era by deciphering the stories told in these paintings.

**Keywords – Painting, Social realities, Western India, Post-independence, Artistic representations**

## Introduction

After India gained its independence in 1947, the region known as Western India went through a period of rapid social, economic, and political transformation. In the middle of all these changes, painters in Western India began to portray the intricate web of post-independence experiences in order to express the truth about society.

"Painting the Past: A Visual Study of Social Realities in Western India after Independence" delves into this creative heritage, providing a delicate analysis of how artists portrayed the socioeconomic situations in the area throughout this revolutionary period. In order to decipher the hidden meanings inside the works of Western Indian painters who worked after independence, this research employs a visual analysis of a wide range of artworks.

The study's introduction provides a springboard for further exploration of the post-independence social and cultural landscape of Western India. It gives a synopsis of the historical background, drawing attention to the political, social, and economic forces that moulded the course of the area during this time. Artistic discovery flourished in Western India at a time of great social and political upheaval, which included the partition of British India, the consolidation of princely kingdoms, and the rise of new ideologies. In addition, the goals and parameters of the research are defined in this preliminary section. It states the overarching goal of the study, which is to examine artists' depictions of societal realities in their works, such as urbanisation, economic inequality, cultural identity, and caste dynamics. The study aims to understand creative expression and how it reflects society changes by placing artworks in the larger historical, political, and socioeconomic context.

The importance of art as a reflection of society reality is also emphasised in the introduction. According to this theory, paintings are visual records of the ups and downs experienced by the people of post-independence Western India, providing insight into their hopes, dreams, and hardships. Essentially, this introductory section sets the stage for a thorough examination of Western India after independence as seen via the medium of painting. This research seeks to shed light on the intricacies of the region's history and provide insights into its continued importance in modern debate by exploring creative depictions of social reality.

## Literature review

To better understand the historical setting, creative currents, and thematic concerns of post-independence Western Indian painting, it is helpful to peruse the literature on the subject.

Numerous aspects of this topic have been investigated by art historians and scholars, who have provided light on the varied viewpoints and creative manifestations that emerged in Western India after independence.

The literature reveals, among other things, that artists were important in observing and interpreting their periods. Partha Mitter ("Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922") and Geeta Kapur ("When Was Modernism in Indian Art?"), among others, have studied the ways in which artists in post-independence India reacted to political and social events and attempted to reimagine Indian identity via their work. Prominent members of the Progressive Artists' Group in Western India were M.F. Husain, F.N. Souza, and Tyeb Mehta; the group's stated goal was to create a new visual language grounded on Indian realities, free from the influences of colonialism.

Western Indian art in the years after independence reflected a wide range of aesthetic practices and philosophical concerns, as discussed in the literature. Artists like Bhupen Khakhar, Atul Dodiya, and Sudhir Patwardhan provide sophisticated viewpoints on migratory patterns, cultural identification, and city life in places like Mumbai. Ranjit Hoskote ("The Complicit Observer: Bhupen Khakhar and the Art of Exile") and Nancy Adajania ("The Indian Highway: Contemporary Indian Art") are among the scholars who have examined these artists' use of art to confront social and political challenges, such as marginalisation, inequality, and globalisation.

The literature also highlights how indigenous traditions and regional identities shaped creative narratives in Western India. Modern artists in India are drawn to the artistic traditions and cultural legacy of states like Gujarat and Rajasthan, which have been highlighted by scholars like K.G. Subramanyan ("The Living Tradition") and Ratan Parimoo ("Indian Art: An Overview").

In sum, the literature study illuminates the societal conditions shown in Western Indian paintings after independence in a thorough and thorough manner. Scholars have shed light on the many viewpoints that come together in the region's creative environment by using ideas from art history, cultural studies, and social analysis. This has allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the region's cultural dynamics and sociopolitical reality.

### **Objectives of the study**

- The primary objective of this study is to examine how artists in post-independence Western India portrayed social realities through their paintings.
- This study seeks to explore the historical context in which these artworks were created, considering the socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that influenced artistic production in post-independence Western India.
- The study aims to analyze the artistic techniques and visual language employed by artists to convey social realities in their paintings.

### **Research methodology**

The first step of the inquiry is to choose a cross-section of works made by Western Indian artists in the years after independence. In making this pick, we will keep in mind things like artistic merit, topicality, and variety of approach. An in-depth creative evaluation will be conducted on every piece of chosen artwork, paying special attention to aspects like visual storytelling, symbolism, colour palette, and composition. This examination will provide light on the creative strategies and depictions of social realities used by artists to communicate their ideas via painting. By considering the cultural, political, and social aspects of Western India in the years after independence, the artworks will be placed in their proper historical perspective. To put the artworks in its proper historical perspective, we will need to go into archives, read up on historical sources, and study related literature to decipher the larger social themes portrayed in the pieces.

### **Painting in Western India**

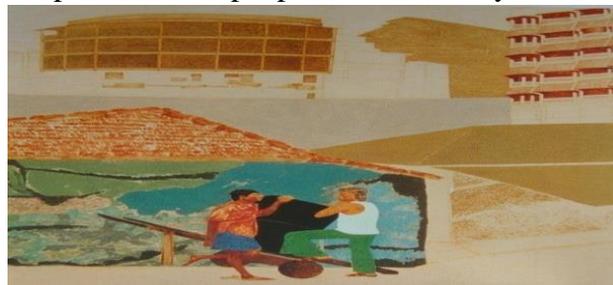
A new generation of artists is building on the work and legacy of their predecessors by using art as a vehicle for socially aware representation of everyday life. Baroda became a major art hub during this time thanks to the contributions of many artists and sculptors, including Naina Dalal, Nilima Sheikh, Rini Dhumal, Rekha Rodwittiya, Jyotsna Bhatt, Kishori Kaul, B.V.

Suresh, Indrapramit Roy, Anita Dube, Dhruva Mistry, Ravindra Reddy, and Pushpamala N., as well as academics like Vasudevan Akkitham and Shashidharan Nair.

Innovative approaches to art education and practice have emerged as a result of the combined efforts of faculty members, students, and administration at Baroda's Faculty of Fine Arts since independence. The expansion of the faculty is indicative of progress in art education as a whole, with an emphasis on the production of new Indian art as opposed to a purely academic approach. With its abundance of art students, professionals, and educators, the Faculty has evolved into a centre for artistic innovation.

Because of the Baroda School's impact, art criticism has progressed to more substantive discussions of modern and contemporary Indian art. Although the art scene in Mumbai had an early impact on Baroda, the two cities have since had a two-way effect that has shaped and enhanced art scenes throughout India.

The Mumbai-based artist and doctor Gieve Patel is well-known for his representations of social stratification and cultural disparities. Reflecting his life as a doctor, poet, and artist, his work focuses on the human form. By centering his work on everyday people and delving into universal topics like life, death, and social violence, Patel shows that he is determined to tackle the problems that plague his community. To help us better comprehend the human condition, Patel uses his painting to depict common people and their daily difficulties and dreams.



**(Image: 1)** Title: "Two Men with Handcart" by Gieve Patel, 1979

Gieve Patel depicts the common guy in his mundane environment on paint. In the 1970s, he painted several scenes of ordinary people going about their lives but somehow managing to keep their dignity intact despite all the obstacles they faced. Artistically, he depicts city dwellers of different socioeconomic backgrounds standing in front of towering apartment buildings that loom over them in the picture "Two Men with Hand Cart" (Image:1).



**(Image: 2)** Title: 'Riot' 1991

Anger over the Mandal Commission Report erupted in the artwork "Riot" (Image: 2), which depicts a little child engulfed in flames. A number of young individuals committed suicide by setting themselves on fire, which Gieve Patel found to be a disturbing echo of his artwork. According to art critic Ranjit Hoskote, "Patel's paintings often feature groups that are the interwoven sum of unspoken privacies." All of his figures are fully engaged in what they're doing.

### **Discussion**

Artistic practice, education, and social involvement are shown in the discussion of how administrators, artists, and educators helped to establish Baroda as an art centre after independence. Gaining insight into the multidimensional nature of creative expression and its influence on society may be achieved by studying the growth of the Faculty of Fine Arts and the artistic trends it nurtured, as well as the individual artistic endeavours of personalities like Gieve Patel.

New Approaches to Art Education and Creative Practice: The Faculty of Fine Arts at Baroda was a radical break with India's long-established art school system. The Faculty encouraged

invention and experimentation among its students and teachers by placing an emphasis on the production of modern Indian art rather than a strict adherence to technical standards. By encouraging a new generation of artists to pay attention to the social issues of their day, this method altered not only the creative scene in Baroda but also the course of Indian art more generally.

Artists such as Gieve Patel demonstrate how social participation and creative practice may be seamlessly integrated. Reflecting his dual identities as a self-taught artist and a skilled medical practitioner, Patel's work delves into the human condition. Paintings by Patel provide a powerful reflection on modern Indian culture by addressing socioeconomic inequality, social brutality, and the difficulties of daily living. The larger social realist ethos in post-independence Indian art finds resonance in his dedication to depicting the realities of the average man. In this era, the Indian art scene benefited from the cross-pollination of ideas and influences, which was evident in the interplay between Baroda and other artistic centres like Mumbai. Although Baroda became known as a centre for creative experimentation and invention, it was also influenced by other places, especially Mumbai's thriving art scene. Fresh methods, subjects, and styles emerged as a result of this lively creative debate that was made possible by the free flow of ideas.

**Persistence and Legacy:** Modern Indian artists are deeply affected by Baroda's long history as an important cultural hub. Success in the arts, in education, and in administrative roles is largely attributable to the trailblazing labour of bygone generations. Contributing to continuing discussions about art, culture, and identity in India, artists such as Gieve Patel uphold the Baroda School's legacy by actively engaging with social issues via their work. The debate emphasises how creative practice, education, and social involvement work hand in hand to establish Baroda as a hub of art after independence. The Faculty of Fine Arts and artists like Gieve Patel have helped create our world via their work, and by studying their impact, we may learn more about art's ability to reflect, criticise, and improve society.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, Baroda's rise to prominence as an art hub after independence is illustrative of the life-altering potential of creativity, learning, and citizenship. Baroda became a melting pot of creative invention because to the combined efforts of artists, teachers, and officials, who encouraged a lively conversation between local traditions and global inspirations, between art making and social activism. The Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda was a watershed moment in Indian art education; it fostered an environment that valued risk-taking and invention while putting an emphasis on producing new forms of modern Indian art. New forms, subjects, and methods of creative practice emerged as a result of this pedagogical innovation, which had an impact on the cultural landscape of Baroda and, by extension, on Indian art as a whole.

In their work, artists like Gieve Patel address socioeconomic inequality, social aggression, and the difficulties of daily living, embodying the spirit of social realism in post-independence Indian art. Enhancing creative discourse and promoting a more profound comprehension of the human condition, their dedication to portraying everyday experiences reveals an ingrained connection with the social realities of modern Indian culture. During this time, the Indian art scene benefited from the exchange of ideas and influences between Baroda and other centres of art, including Mumbai. Fresh methods, subjects, and styles emerged as a result of this lively creative debate that was made possible by the free flow of ideas.

Artists like Gieve Patel are carrying on the tradition of the Baroda School and adding to the continuing discussions about art, society, and identity in India, resonating with the enduring impact of Baroda as an artistic hub. Their work exemplifies how Baroda continues to be a centre for creative innovation and social activism. Finally, the tale of Baroda as an art hub after independence is evidence of how art can change society, encourage innovation, and start conversations. We can learn more about the ways art has changed our lives and the world around us by looking at the ways in which different people and organisations have contributed.

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