



THE INFLUENCE OF PRINTMAKING ON THE EVOLUTION OF INDIAN ART

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Abstract:

Printmaking made a profound impact on the growth and evolution of Indian art, providing a unique platform for artistic expression and cultural discovery. Printmaking has played a varied role in the development and diversity of Indian art traditions. In the context of Indian art history, printmaking has risen as a transformational medium throughout the colonial period, bringing new methods and aesthetic influences. The introduction of printmaking techniques from the West has enabled Indian artists to combine ancient artistic traditions with contemporary methods, expanding their creative potential. This combination has fostered cross-cultural interactions and has aided the development of a distinct Indian printmaking culture. Printmaking has helped the evolution of Indian art by encouraging artistic innovation, promoting cultural interactions, and democratising access to art. India is evolving as a worldwide artistic hub and printmaking is rising as an important medium for artists to investigate, express, and reinvent the subcontinent's rich cultural past. This paper emphasises printmaking's continuous and dynamic history in Indian creative practice by highlighting the works of pioneering printmakers and their effects on following generations of artists. In conclusion, this abstract presents a thorough review of how printmaking has influenced the history and diversity of Indian art, reflecting greater changes in society, aesthetics, and cultural identity.

Keywords: Printmaking, Indian Art, Cultural Identity, Innovation, Artistic Experimentation

Introduction

Printmaking holds a special place in the world of Visual Arts as a form of expression. It stands as a remarkable art form that intricately weaves creativity, technique and historical significance, providing artists with a distinctive medium for expression. Originating from ancient practices, printmaking entails the transfer of images from a prepared surface to various materials, enabling the production of multiple original artworks. This multifaceted discipline encompasses a range of techniques such as woodcut, etching, lithography, and screen printing, each presenting unique characteristics and challenges. Over the centuries, printmaking has transitioned from its utilitarian roots in communication and documentation to revered artistic practice, significantly influencing cultural narratives and preserving traditions.

Printmaking in India has a long history, with artifacts and texts containing traces of early methods such as woodcut prints. During the Colonial period, European artists and missionaries have introduced printmaking methods to India on a wider scale. This exchange of artistic ideas and techniques have resulted in the merger of traditional Indian artistic traditions with Western influences, ushering in a new era of artistic expression. The introduction of printmaking to India also has a profound influence on the evolution of creative forms. Printmaking techniques have enabled more exact and detailed image reproduction, resulting in a change towards a more realistic and naturalistic artistic approach which was more stylised as well as symbolic. The use of printmaking methods has a tremendous influence on the subject matter of Indian art. With the advancement of technology, and expansion of printmaking as an art form, the capacity utilises numerous colors to produce several copies of an artwork has grown manifolds. This

has also enabled the printmakers experiment with new topics and subjects. This has also resulted in the birth of new genres in Indian art giving way to political and social criticism which has not been explored before. Printmaking has not only revolutionised creative processes, but it has also contributed significantly to the development of new art forms. The introduction of printmaking techniques has enabled Indian artists to break away from conventional approaches and pursue new areas of creativity. Printmaking has also made art more accessible and inexpensive to the general populace, helping to democratise art in India. Printmaking's effect on Indian art is still felt today, with artists incorporating these methods and styles into their work.

Printmaking has made significant contributions to Indian art by conveying religious and cultural ideals. This medium has made religious writings and imagery more accessible to the general public, by spreading knowledge and fostering cultural values. This has proven to be crucial in a country like India, which has a large and diverse population, it has also helped greatly to bridge the gap between various socio-economic and cultural groups. Printmaking has also made its mark in the Indian independence struggle. The British colonial authorities strictly restricted the production of books and periodicals, making it impossible for anti-colonial sentiments to reach the general population. In this setting, printmaking evolved as an effective weapon for political and social critique. Artists have created prints to illustrate the battle for Independence, and these pictures have also helped to mobilize and inspire people to support the cause.

Printmaking has risen in popularity throughout the Medieval period as a way of communicating religious and political themes. The Mughal kings, who are well-known for their encouragement of the artistic creations, have employed printing to propagate their political and religious ideas. The Mughal miniature paintings that are a type of printing that have also represented the lives of the kings and their courts as well as images from Hindu and Islamic mythology. These prints have not only impacted the social conceptions of the ruling class, but have also assisted in the dissemination of their cultural narratives to the general public. Printmaking has been important in shaping India's identity during British colonial administration as well. The British have employed printing as a propaganda tool to advance their colonial objectives and to depict India and its people as inferior. On the other hand, Indian artists have employed printing to combat colonialism and proclaim their cultural identity. The Bengal School of Art, which has been established in the early twentieth century has also employed printmaking to promote Indian art and culture. Printmaking has also contested the prevailing British narrative. In India's contemporary art landscape, printmaking has grown into a diverse and dynamic medium, with artists experimenting with different methods and styles to create thought-provoking pieces. Many modern artists have utilized printmaking to address social and political concerns, questioning widely held societal assumptions and cultural narratives. For example, artist Vivan Sundaram's print series 'Gagawaka: Making Strange' addresses the influence of globalization and materialism on Indian culture. Printmaking has helped to preserve and promote traditional Indian art forms, as well as shape societal attitudes and cultural identities. Many printmakers have restored historical methods and incorporated them into their current works, to keep these art forms alive and relevant. The Kalakriti Art Gallery in Hyderabad, features a section that is dedicated to ancient printmaking methods including woodcut, etching, and lithography, highlighting their significance in the Indian art scene.

Furthermore, printmaking has been an important tool for maintaining and disseminating indigenous Indian art forms. Traditional art forms of India have declined in the nineteenth century; however, printmaking has evolved as a means of reviving and documenting these historic traditions. Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) is a pioneering figure in Indian art, as he has been the first to utilise printmaking as a means of publicising his artwork to a wider audience. His contributions revolutionised Indian art by making it more accessible to the masses through oleographs and lithographs. Ravi Varma's artistic journey has begun with oil painting, where he has blended Indian themes with European academic realism. His depictions of Hindu Gods, Goddesses, and mythological characters gained immense popularity. Recognising the demand for his works beyond the elite circles, Ravi Varma has sought ways to reproduce his paintings for a larger audience.

In 1894, Raja Ravi Varma has established the Ravi Varma Fine Art Lithograph Press in Mumbai, which is known to be one of the first such presses in India. His prints have become household icons and have transform religious and mythological imagery is perceived and consumed. Varma's prints have also influenced visual culture, shaping early Indian cinema, calendar art, and poster design. His artistic choices, including European-inspired drapery and life-like expression, set new standards for religious and mythological representation in India. Raja Ravi Varma's legacy in printmaking endures. His have efforts democratized art, making it widely available alongwith influencing generations of artists and printmakers. Today, his oleographs remain collectible and continue to inspire modern printmaking practices in India.



Figure 1. Raja Ravi Verma, Goddess Sarawati, 1930, Oleograph print

Figure 2. Raja Ravi Verma, Lakshmi, 1930, Chromolithograph

Established in 1878, Calcutta art studio plays an important role in Indian printmaking. It has emerged during a period when lithography and oleography has been gaining popularity as effective mediums for mass-producing artworks. This studio has significantly influenced the dissemination of visual culture in colonial and post-colonial India. One of the major contributions of Calcutta Art Studio has been able to make art accessible to the masses. Through lithographic prints, Calcutta Art Studio has reproduced religious imagery, mythological themes, and scenes from Indian epics like Ramayana and Mahabharat, allowing common people to own and display artistic representations of their deities and heroes. This has also helped in creating a strong visual identity and fostering national sentiments in Indian households and religious spaces. The depiction of historical events, freedom fighters, and nationalistic themes, has contributed to the growing resistance against colonial rule. In addition, they also captured social and cultural aspects of India, while reflecting the changing dynamics of human society. These prints have served as historical recodes of Indian custom and traditions. The Calcutta Art Studio significantly contributed to the evolution of Indian printmaking by democratising art, promoting nationalist ideals, preserving cultural heritage and advancing technical expertise in lithographic printmaking. Its legacy continues to be recognised as a foundational force in the history of Indian visual arts.

The Bengal School of Art, has emerged in early 20th century under the leadership of Abanindranath Tagore. It has played a significant role in reviving indigenous artistic traditions and shaping Indian printmaking. Although mostly associated with paintings, the Bengal School artists have also contributed to the evolution of printmaking as a powerful medium of artistic expression. Mukul Dey (1895-1989), a pioneering Indian printmaker who has trained in Santiniketan and London. Dey has mastered etching and dry point techniques. He has also introduced printmaking techniques to other Indian artists. His works have often depicted rural Bengal and Indian mythology, and combines traditional techniques with western printmaking techniques.



Figure 3. Mukul Dey, Gopala Milking the Cow, Hand Colored Etching



Figure 4. Mukul Dey, Untitled, 1922, Dry Point

Nandalal Bose (1882-1966), is also another prominent figure of the Bengal School of Arts. He has encouraged printmaking at Santiniketan while highlighting woodcuts and linocuts. His prints have been inspired by Ajanta murals, reflecting nationalist principles and Indian aesthetic. Under his guidance, printmaking has become an

important part of Kala Bhavan, Department of Arts, Visva-Bharti University. The Bengal School artists have used printmaking to disseminate their art more widely and create affordable and reproducible images. Their key contribution helped greatly during India's struggle for independence as well. Chittaprosad Bhattacharya (1915-1978) and Somnath Hore (1921-2006) are also two of the most significant printmakers in India, whose works have reflected the socio-political struggles of their time. Both artists have used printmaking as a medium to show their concerns about social injustices, famine, topics of world peace, caste, racism and the adversities that have been endured by Indians during the time of British rule. Their artworks speak volumes about unfettered freedom.



Figure 5. Nandlal Bose, *Bapuji and The Crawling Krishna*, 1930, Linocut



Figure 6. Chittaprasad, *Untitled*, Linocut on Paper



Figure 7. Somnath Hore, *Santhal Dancers*, 1940, Woodcut on Paper

Modern Indian artists have redefined the country's creative identity by blending tradition with innovation. Printmaking in India has been significantly shaped by the pioneering efforts of artists who explored diverse techniques and have redefined the boundaries of visual expression. Among them, K. G. Subramanyan, Krishna Reddy, and Jyoti Bhatt have made immense contributions to Indian art. Each of these artists brought unique approaches to printmaking, combining indigenous themes with international influences and modernist aesthetics. This has resulted in the evolution of contemporary Indian art.

K. G. Subramanyan (1924–2016) has been a versatile artist known for his engagement with a wide range of artistic mediums, including painting, murals, and printmaking. A key figure of the post-independence Indian modernist movement, Subramanyan has been deeply influenced by the traditions of Indian folk and classical art. His prints unite elements of storytelling, mythology, and contemporary socio-political themes. A professor at Santiniketan's Kala Bhavana, he has mentored generations of Indian artists while pushing the boundaries of printmaking through his linocuts, etchings, and serigraphs. Subramanyan's experiments with form and composition have introduced a distinct visual language in Indian printmaking, blending indigenous techniques with a modernist sensibility.

Krishna Reddy (1925–2018) is celebrated for revolutionising printmaking through his unique printing techniques and global engagement with the medium. Reddy has first trained in India and later in Europe under artists like Stanley William Hayter at Atelier 17 in Paris. Therefore, Reddy has gained a specialisation in the color viscosity process, the technique that consolidates both the principles of relief and intaglio printmaking. His works have been often inspired by nature and human forms, reflecting a deep sense of movement and texture. Reddy's commitment

to experimentation has made him a significant bridge between Indian and Western art practices. He has also played a crucial role in elevating Indian printmaking on an international platform. His contributions to teaching and mentorship, both in India and abroad, have further solidified his legacy as a printmaking pioneer.

Jyoti Bhatt (b.1934) has played a crucial role in the documentation and preservation of Indian folk-art and traditions while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of printmaking as an artistic medium. One of the founding members of the Baroda Group of Artists, Bhatt has initially trained as a painter before turning towards printmaking and photography. His works are known for being a colorful amalgamation of graphic awareness and traditional Indian folk design. His use of screen printing, etching, and lithography has contributed to the expansion of Indian printmaking while making it accessible and relevant in modern artistic discourse. Bhatt's engagement with rural art forms and his efforts to document the folk and tribal traditions of India have enriched the art landscape and has also preserved the cultural heritage while fostered innovation.

The collective contributions of K. G. Subramanyan, Krishna Reddy, and Jyoti Bhatt have left a profound impact on Indian art. By experimenting with materials, techniques, and themes, they have shaped the trajectory of printmaking in India by bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. Their works continue to inspire new generations of artists, ensuring that Indian printmaking remains a dynamic and evolving field.



Figure 8. Krishna Reddy, Spider Web, 1964, Viscosity



Figure 9. K.G Subramanyan, Untitled 1, Serigraph



Figure 10. Jyoti Bhatt, Dilli Ki Billi, 2019, intaglio on paper

The introduction of printmaking studios in art institutions has played a play an important role in shaping the path of Indian printmaking. These spaces have provided artists with the necessary infrastructure, tools and exposure to explore and refine their skills. By bridging the gap between traditional and modern techniques, printmaking studios have become impactful for artistic experimentation and spreading knowledge, shaping the broader landscape of Indian art.

Prominent Art institutions such as the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Kala Bhavan at Santiniketan, Delhi College of Art, and J.J. College of Arts have significantly contributed to the development of printmaking in India. These institutions have established dedicated printmaking studios which are equipped with specialised tools and presses for techniques such as woodcut, etching, lithography, and screen printing. The establishment of such studios has facilitated in training and knowledge development of emerging artists while ensuring the continuity and evolution of printmaking traditions.

One of the most noteworthy contributions of printmaking studios has been their role in preserving and revitalising traditional printmaking techniques. Through institutional support the ancient Indian printmaking methods, such as block printing and woodcut techniques, printmaking has been modernized and incorporated into

contemporary art practices. For instance, Santiniketan's printmaking studio has been at the forefront of reviving and integrating woodcut and linocut prints into fine arts, inspired by Ajanta cave paintings and folk traditions (Sharma, 2018).

The Rajasthan School of Art (1886) has contributed to sustaining the indigenous artforms. Their printmaking studios have contributed to the rich traditions of India, by encouraging artists to experiment with historical motifs and adapt them to contemporary narratives. Printmaking studios serve as hubs for artistic collaboration, which facilitates cross-cultural interactions. International printmaking workshops, artist-in-residence programs, and academic exchanges have enabled Indian artists to engage with global trends in printmaking. Events such as the International Print Exchange Programme (IPEP) and the Print Biennale India, organized by Lalit Kala Akademi, have fostered knowledge sharing between Indian and international printmakers (Mehta, 2021). Through international exhibitions, art fairs, and online platforms, Indian printmakers have been able to showcase their work to a wide audience and attract potential buyers from around the world. This has not only increased their visibility, but also allowed them to establish valuable connections within the international art community. Many art institutions have collaborated with European and Japanese printmaking institutes, for their traditional techniques like Mokuhanga (Japanese woodblock printing) and collagraphy. These global collaborations have enriched the artistic vocabulary of Indian printmakers.

Printmaking has been an important medium of artistic expression and style in Indian art and culture. It has long been an important component of the country's creative legacy, representing a varied and ever-changing society, by capturing the essence of Indian civilization and cultural identity. With topics ranging from religious and mythical to political and social commentary. Printmaking remains a potent instrument for artists to convey their ideas, thoughts, and feelings, making it a necessary component of Indian art and culture. It has been a major influence on Indian art and culture, causing considerable changes in subject matter, representation, and visual language. It has not only enhanced India's creative scene, but it has also had a significant impact on the country's socio-cultural and political fabric. The combination of ancient Indian art forms with European methods has resulted in a distinct visual language that continues to expand and thrive in the current Indian art scene. Printmaking will surely continue to play an important part in the growth and evolution of Indian art and culture in the coming years.

Printmaking has a tremendous impact on Indian art's visual language. Woodblock printing, lithography, and etching allowed artists to make elaborate and detailed prints that were not achievable with older processes. This resulted in a more bright and dynamic visual language in Indian prints by increasing the use of colors, patterns, and textures. Printmaking also enabled mass production of art, making it more accessible to a larger audience. Furthermore, printmaking in Indian art has played an important part in the late nineteenth-century nationalism struggle, artists and activists utilized prints to disseminate political messages and rally the public behind the struggle of independence. This resulted in a synthesis of art and politics, giving rise to a new visual language that was both strong and compelling.

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