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Exploring the Impact of Colonialism on Indian Art

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Abstract: *In the wake of European art and architecture, India's traditional and indigenous art almost vanished. The struggle which the art forms have suffered in different parts of India has been presented. Some particular art forms, such as traditional weaving, Mughal miniatures, and Mysore murals, lost their glory, and the British looked down on Indian handcraftsmanship. The nationalistic movement and contributions of Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Raja Ravi Varma and Abdur Rahman Chughtai has been shown in the research. A descriptive analysis of the modernisation of India, which took place in the post-colonial period, have also been presented within the research.*

Key Words: Colonialism, Indian Art, European Art, Swadeshi Art, Indo-Saracenic Revival, Victorian Art.

In the almost 100 years of colonisation, India's social and economic structure wholly transformed, and with it, the art of the sub-continent has also changed. The impact of European colonial presence has led to many Indian art styles becoming obsolete while new ones have emerged. The presented research has shown how the early colonial period completely dismantled Indian art. However, as more years went by, a revival in Indian art occurred due to the Swadeshi movement, which discarded British and other European art in favour of more traditional art native to India. Art and culture are considered the window through which society is represented. The damage in specific sectors which the British have conducted is almost irreversible. Still, the present research has also highlighted some different art forms that have stood the test of time and are a part of Indian culture. Different art forms such as weaving, Mughal art, and Mysore murals have been well presented within the research. All these art forms suffered during the British Era; however, they have acquired government support and become popular again. With the long 89 years of colonial history, the impact of colonisation has always been a common theme. The present research has highlighted some of the essential aspects of India and how they have transformed and adapted under colonial rule.

METHODOLOGY- Identifying the right methodological tools has been an essential part of the research since the entirety of the study has been conducted in India's past; the study has used secondary sources for carrying out the research. Using secondary qualitative forms of data for the research has helped define the investigation's different research variables (Eyisi, 2016). The information for the research has been acquired from various authentic sources such as peer-reviewed articles, journals, and official websites that have collected and presented the historical journey of India. The collected data has been presented with the help of themes in the findings section of the study; a descriptive discussion has also been provided to go over all of the essential aspects of the research.

FINDINGS- 3.1 Challenges faced by Indian Artists during the Colonial Period

Art is an integral part of the existence of civilisation and culture; during the colonial period, many Indian artists had to cater to the British tastes, and as a result, many traditional art forms suffered while some got lost in time. The traditional art forms in India continued to survive in the country's rural communities while the cities fell victim to urbanisation. Indian artists had to migrate to other professions as their popularity deteriorated. Art had existed in India for many millennia before the British arrived. Every region and state had its unique and intricate art form that was diverse and depicted the rich culture of India. However, during the beginning of the 18th century, the British Raj started changing India and its people to make them more civilised. Traditional weaving has been a significant art form in India; the beauty and texture of the clothes produced by Indian artisans have been famous in many parts of the ancient world. However, as Roy (1999) states, when the British arrived in India, the domestic textile industry faced steep competition from the British alternative products, which were much cheaper.

The British government further imposed heavy taxes on Indian products to promote British goods and reduce the demand for local products. In the initial days, the Indian artists continued to export their products to the Middle East and other parts of Asia, where Indian products continue to have high demand. However, the British prohibited the sale of the textile industry with the help of the Calico Act cut off ties with the outside world. While the bans protected the British interests, they demolished the strong textile industry of India, which has been one of the country's most vital focuses. Another art form that suffered during this era was the Mughal Miniatures; these paintings emerged during the Mughal Era

and depicted day-to-day chores and activities within the subcontinent (Malecka, 1999). The decline of the Mughal Empire also led to a diminished demand for this art. The artists had to abandon the traditional art techniques (Sivasundaram, 2005). They were eventually forced to leave the art form for the time being, but it has recently emerged as a revival of ancient Indian practices.

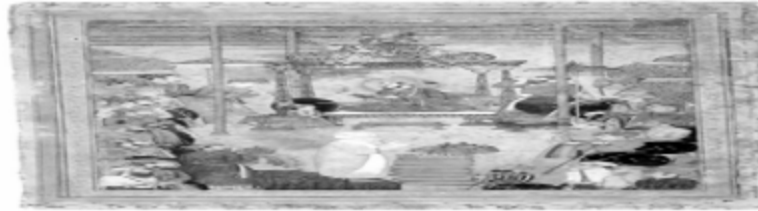


Figure 1: Mughal Miniature of Shah Jahan

(Source: Malecka, 1999)

Mysore Murals were another traditional Indian art form that suffered severely during this period; these murals were famous due to their bright colouring and depictions of historical events (Nair, 2006). During the reign of Tipu Sultan, these art forms were used to decorate the palace walls. After the death of Tipu Sultan, Mysore came under direct control of the British Raj, and the art form suffered greatly (Caleidoscope, 2022). The British hated the murals as they thought they depicted India's resistance against the British and propaganda to enrage the masses, leading to a sharp decline. Overall it can therefore be seen that the sculptures, paintings and pottery native to India started to lose prominence among the people of India. This generally happened because the buying power of people began to reduce under British rule and also due to the availability of cheaper necessary art and textiles from the British production houses.



Figure 2: Mysore Murals depicting Gods from Hindu Mythology

(Source: Caleidoscope, 2022)

3.2 Art and Nationalism during the Colonial Period- After over 100 years of colonialism, the artists of India started to develop a new form of art known as Nationalistic or Swadeshi art. Many indigenous art forms within India emerged as part of the Swadeshi movement. These art forms survived and flourished to show a steep intolerance for the products the British were producing. The Swadeshi art form of India drew inspiration from India's past and the art practised in the Ajanta caves and Mughal courts (Mr and Anzi, 2017). The people started to reject the oil painting introduced by the British in favour of watercolours and inks. In order to carry out the resistance, many art schools emerged in different significant cities of India, such as Madras, Calcutta and Bombay. The Bengal School of Arts, or The Bengal School, was one of the first places where nationalistic art emerged within India. This school was led by Abanindranath Tagore and focused on painting styles that were truly unique and belonged to India (Banerji, 2010). The painting of the Bharat Mata stands as an archetypal example of how art changed and prospered during this period. The image depicts a young woman dressed in Indian attire, with four arms, symbolic of Hindu deities.



Figure 3: Bharat Mata Painting by Abanindranath Tagore

(Source: The Heritage Lab, 2023)

The Swadeshi art's purpose was to represent and evoke the Indian pride of the culture and the rich history. The impact of colonialism on people's lives has been immense; how people dress, talk and act in public had to transform to keep up with the modern era. The influence of it on Indian music and art cannot be overemphasised. For the fight against independence, it was essential to raise awareness about the history and tradition of India. While Abanindranath Tagore is credited for the nationalistic revival of Indian art. Raja Ravi Varma initially started it; his depictions showed Hindu divinities. *Galaxy of Musicians* is one of his most important works, which shows the diversity of Indian women (Dinkar, 2014). The paintings of Raja showed different mythological scenes through calendars and posters. *Haripura Posters* by Nandalal Bose also captures the essence of nationalistic art. Nandalal embodied a Swadeshi temperament and incorporated it within his art form, the art depicted indigenous people of the country and rural life scenes. Similar to the art of Abanindranath Tagore, the art form of Nandalal rejected British oil paint and used Japanese calligraphy for illustration. Even after independence, the art of Nandalal inspired every page of the Indian constitution.

Kalighat Paintings were another form of Indian folk painting that emerged during this era; this form of art emerged during the mid-19th century. Kalighat paintings showed mythological art and a slice of Bengal's everyday life events (Zahraa and Abdullah, 2020). Calcutta was the centre of the British era during the early ages, and this art form was used for caricatures and social commentary on real-life events. The art form was seen to be subversive by the British authorities, but its popularity among the masses helped this art form to survive and thrive. An increase in censorship eventually led to a decline in Kalighat art, but they continued to encapsulate relevant colonial events and struggles that the people faced. This new art form has also inspired several British artists and continues to be prominent in Calcutta. *Muraqqa-i-Chughtai* is another colonial piece of art produced by Swadeshi artist Abdur Rahman Chughtai under the patronage of Abanindranath Tagore (The Heritage Lab, 2023). The 1943 famine is an important historical event that showed the British government's incompetence in protecting the people from famines. *Famine*, by Zainul Abedin, depicted the horrific conditions of the people; his sketches raised storms in India and accelerated the movement to make the British quit India.



Figure 4: Kalighat Painting
(Source: The Heritage Lab, 2023)

3.3 Influence of Modernism in Indian Art during and after the Colonial Period- The British colonial rule significantly impacted Indian art; these influences can be observed during and after the mid-19th century. The older patrons of art in India started to become less popular to make way for British art and architecture. The paintings produced during the British rule were created according to their taste. The British generally preferred images that showed their wins against the wins; therefore, this kind of art became common in India. The pictures transformed from leading mythological figures and events to losses the Indians suffered in battle. Self-portraits became common during this era and were readily adopted by the different Nawabs and kings who performed under the British government (PRIYANKA, 2022). The British introduction of oil colours changed the art scene in India. Raja Ravi Varma was one of the first to adopt oil paintings in his works.



Figure 5: Oil Painting by Raja Ravi Varma
(Source: The Heritage Lab, 2023)



Near the end of the 19th century, many different institutions opened in India, showing British influence in art and photography. The most significant impact of British art was observed in the architecture; the arrival of the British gave rise to Gothic, Imperial, Christian, Palladian and Victorian art styles in colonial India (Porter, 2010). Unlike traditional Indian architecture, the British generally used red sandstone and coarse limestones as their main ingredients towards buildings. The Palladian art style can be observed in Constantia, which is located in Lucknow. The Indian artisans started to appreciate British architecture's royal and sophisticated look and combine that with Indian architecture to produce a hybrid art. The Museum at Jaipur and the Moor Market also showcase the rich mixture of Indian art with British art styles. Similar inspirations of Victorian art styles can be observed in the Victoria Terminus Station in Mumbai and Victoria Memorial in Calcutta; the Gothic style of buildings was fused with British art styles to create Indo-Gothic architecture (Sheeba and Dhas, 2018). Examples of this art style can still be observed in North Calcutta and Mumbai, further paving the way for Indo-Saracenic architecture.

Many houses that were constructed during this time show the inspiration. However, after 1911, a new form of architecture evolved, known as Neo-Roman architecture. The art and architecture which emerged during these years were known for their extraordinary structures. The arches of these buildings were pointed, and the angles were curved, similar to many architecture erected during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Era. The Victorian-style buildings drew inspiration from Western, Persian and Indian art (Wescoat Jr, 2011). The designs used were more sophisticated than before: steel and iron started to be used more prominently. The Neo-Roman designs, which were previously discussed, emerged following World War 1, and the art and building styles used in New Delhi highlighted these factors. The most observant feature of this new art style was the circular structure of the buildings that focused on the Western architectural styles. The Supreme Court of India and the Rashtrapati Bhavan show the influence of this art style (Hunt, 2016). However, the art styles again changed in the post-independence era, leading to revivalist and modernistic building approaches. At this point, however, it was impossible to shed the colonialistic influence from the buildings, and the ancient Indian architecture continued to fade.

DISCUSSION- The thematic analysis in the present research has shown how the establishment of the British Empire in India during the 18th century led to radical changes in art and architecture. The newly imposed British government started applying heavy taxes on the native art forms which led to many Indian artisans losing their jobs due to lack of job opportunities (Dutt, 2013). On the other hand, British manufactured products were available for cheap to people which resulted in many people falling for those over the expensive Indian products. However, the findings also highlight that after years of colonisation, the people rose and revolved against the British Raj through Swadeshi products. Bengal School of Art led this movement under the instructions and guidance of Abanindranath Tagore, who spread awareness about the need to support the local economy to bring India back on her feet.

The research has portrayed in detail how the traditional Indian art forms did not appeal to the British and as a result, the Indian art forms faded to existence in favour of oil colours, which the British preferred for their products. The Swadeshi revival movement was essentially done to bring back the traditional Indian forms to life (Sarkar et al. 1973); inspirations started to be drawn from the Ajanta Cave and Mughal Courts. The study has defined the huge impact which European art had on Indian artists. During the prime of the British Raj, Western art and Indian art were combined. The architectural changes during this era gave rise to Gothic, imperial, Christian and Victorian art styles in many parts of India. These art forms however later transformed into Indo-Saracenic Revival, the trace of which can still be observed in different government buildings in India today.

CONCLUSION- As concluding remarks for the present research, it can be seen that under British rule, the Indian traditions started to lose their importance in India. Indian social and political arenas were undergoing drastic changes as the British started gaining more control over the day-to-day lives of India. Years of suffering and domination resulted in the people's revolt against the British through their art. The study has therefore shown the grand impact which Abanindranath Tagore had in the revival of ancient Indian artform practices alongside other significant historical figures from the era that supported this movement. A brief account of architectural changes has also been shown within the research to show the positive impacts that the British had on India. Combining European art with the Indian styles gave rise to unique buildings and monuments which still stand today.

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