

## Amrita Sher-Gill and Art: A Critical Overview

Dr. Mandakini Sharma<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Prabha Lama<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor Department of Visual Arts Graphic Era Hill University

<sup>2</sup>Department of Humanities & Social Sciences Graphic Era Deemed to be University, Dehradun

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### ABSTRACT

In paintings from the prehistoric era, the representation of feminine forms coexists with aesthetic pleasure. This exact representation is constantly relevant to different stages of paintings with varying identities and forms. In this regard, from ancient times to more contemporary eras, women have been objectified in order to arouse physical pleasure or to glorify masculine power. Since only female artists are capable of accurately portraying the feminine, this type of objectification has become more noticeable since the entrance of feminist artists. Being female, they are able to sense the absence of women in prominent positions on the painted surfaces, and as a result, they have successfully observed the key elements of the agony and joy of women. Modern Indian paintings by female painters have begun to include key subjects that criticize social injustice, gender inequality, women's unemployment, and other issues. The portrayal of erotic and insignificant behaviour is still present, albeit to a lesser extent. Many art critics always view women's naked or nude bodies as an example of objectification. In modern times, female artists have also painted female nudes, albeit in a totally different way. Naked female figures are also seen as a part of gender politics. This study is a critical examination of the role of women in paintings and contribution of Amrita Sher-Gill towards the development of significant roles of women in paintings.

### Keywords:

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### INTRODUCTION

As long as humans have existed on Earth, women and art have been related. In Indian art and architecture, women have been shown as lovely, majestic beings since very early times. Contrarily, there is scant historical documentation of their involvement with painting or status as painters prior to the American Revolution. Although they had frequently been used as an art object, they had hitherto been mostly ignored as artists.

Sunayani Devi, who portrayed the folk primitive series in her paintings and became an ideal for women empowerment and professionalism through paintings, is regarded as the first female artist in India in the twentieth century (Mitter 2007). When we started to talk about female artists, the sudden urge to overlook feminism takes shape in the discourse of assessment. There are many controversies around the term "feminism," and no single definition can encompass all of its goals. Following that,

numerous critics have used a variety of techniques to describe the idea of feminism in art and the protestation of women. Griselda Pollock, Barbara Kruger, Geeta Kapur, P. Uberoi, Navelli Tuli, and more artists can be included in this group. Feminism has many different radical definitions, but in each one, the improvisation of women has been pursued in order to enhance society and the mind. In this feminism rhetoric, the conventional male control and power structures that oppress women's lives are particularly resistant to women inventing their own identities. Female artists have portrayed this very oppression and weakness of women as well as fought against it. Geeta Kapur expressed her concern about this by saying, "Feminism is a discourse against power; feminist artist, refusing to accept the formal closure of modernist art, translate feminism's deconstructive "genius" along an itinerary of subversions, along such reconstructive hypothesis that addresses the issue of power conceptuality, retroactively." (2009) Geeta Kapur. The ground-breaking article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artist?" by Linda Nochlin, published in 1971. This essay has challenged patriarchal hegemonies, unjust academic methods, biased institutional entities, and other factors for the exclusion of female artists from historical records. (Heartney et al. 2013, Pollock 1988, Thompson 1982). Additionally, she had brought up the inflexible issues of academic credentials and gender hierarchies because of some outstanding male artists.

In contrast to modern times, Indian women used to be primarily relegated to household chores and were not allowed to pursue careers in painting. They typically created decorative arts for their homes, which are now recognized as folk or tribal art. Sher-Gil was one of the female artists of the contemporary era who provided the representation of women a shockingly new perspective. She depicted the tragic circumstances of rural Indian women, which is an extremely unusual but compelling aspect of her works of art. She also used her own body as an artistic subject for herself and as a desirable thing for other people to make caustic comments about. She continued to be in controversy throughout her terrible life.

### **Amrita Sher-Gill and Art**

Amrita Sher-Gil is a mysterious Indian artist who uses made-up people in her paintings to tell the untold tales of middle-class and oppressed women. She was raised in an Indian Sikh household and was born in Budapest, Hungary. Her mother was a Hungarian musician, while her father was a Sikh aristocracy. She received her training in the arts in Florence and at the renowned Ecole Nationale Des Beaux-Arts, which is run by Lucien Simon. She spent time working in Europe before returning to India in 1934, where she began to paint the spirit of rural India. She had a genuine affinity for the Indian miniature paintings and the frescoes of Ajanta and Ellora. She had a complete passion for Indian art and culture. Sher-Gil is likely the first Indian woman to use her own body as a module, but they have occasionally done so. In reality, female painters' depictions of women in the nude are very different from those of male artists. This difference can be seen in their methods of depiction, as male painters have tended to emphasize the sensuous aspect of their subjects through nudity while female artists have focused on other important concerns. After moving to India, Sher-Gil developed more expressiveness in his elaborative title-giving because titles are significant in Indian paintings. Then, after moving to India, she effectively adopted this specific method of providing narrative titles. She has created several works of art with titles that are emblematic, such as "Child Bride," "South Indian Villagers Going to Market," "Story Teller," "The Musicians," "The Swing," "Bride's Toilet," and many others. She was not very profound when it came to giving the titles of

paintings the same spark (which strongly expressed in her works) during her earliest stages of painting, especially in Europe, which embellished in her later phases (Indian). Female artists have changed these themes in order to provoke thought or reexamination. They have transformed these issues into working women, female protagonists, and blatant nudity.

The earlier visual narratives, which dealt with mythical themes, love poetry, waiting for the lover, and scenes of the union of a man and a woman, have been transformed into female fables. Female artists typically used those supporting elements on a very small scale, changing space and background into new dimensions that enhance the sensuous and sensual appeal of the picture. In addition, many female artists have kept the background blank or vacant; for example, Sher-Gil and countless other female artists have mostly ignored other background details.

This avoidance of or disregard for the background in paintings by female artists may be a strategy to focus attention solely on the central subject (a woman). In this approach, it has been demonstrated that the arrangement of colour works better than other supporting components to establish structures in the picture.

Numerous aspects play a part in framing the aesthetic portrayal in the world of art. All art is fundamentally connected to the personal or social interactions of the individuals, therefore social element and the environment of the persons play a significant role in these variables. When someone is inspired by something or wants to capture something, they tend to turn to art or representation. These items may be depicted on the surface for visual communication and come from either the artists' imagination or real-world encounters. Therefore, art is the most prevalent and straightforward means of expressing thoughts and emotions in both symbolic and non-symbolic forms. Up to the pre-colonial period, art was exclusively the property of religious factions to promote their deities and rituals, and it was always steered by patronage or rulers. As a result, the painters had no personal freedom to create what they wanted to; they had to show what their consumers wanted. The representation of women has also been incorporated into this religious and social exhibition as a kind of social discourse. For instance, the initial representation of women was as the Goddess of sexuality or the mother, who was also adored symbolically through her genitalia. Because people were amazed by the reproductive potential and procreative side of the feminine during the period, sexuality and procreation may have been viewed as a universal happiness. In the past, when science was undeveloped, people believed that birth and sexual union were divinely ordained functions. As a result, reproduction and fertility were crucial at the time, and Lajja Gauri's representation as a woman in a sexual manner—her boon-giving aspect—has become a hot topic. According to the many religions, this goddess imagery has been broken down into many different categories, but the painters have always favoured decoration and beauty. The distinction was made when artists began to work independently and grew liberal after the American Revolution. The number of women working as professional artists has increased, and their participation has altered how women are portrayed. With the advancement of society, spectator behaviour has also altered.

Female artists have the right, to a certain extent, to transform such offers into some subjective compositions in order to highlight their successes outside of aesthetic and bodily description. The physical beauty of women is praised and encountered from the very early era of art, thus male

painters who have drawn the female figure in full erotic and stigmatic manner are not entirely at fault. It should be mentioned that although women's social status was not much better in earlier times than it is now, they now have the ability to assert their individuality through the creation of art.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is clear that male artists' representations of women are very different from those of female artists. The objectification of gender has always been a radical phenomenon, but if male artists are showing such sensuality of female bodies, their freedom of expression cannot be disregarded. Numerous aspects, including society perspective, personal psychoanalysis, and internal thought, have been considered in relation to this phenomena. The female painters were inspired by Sher-Gil to explore their identities in two different ways that were more subtly expressed. The first approach focuses on the artistic contributions of women, while the second one deals with the projection and opposition of the sexualized and manipulative images of womanhood that were being regularly portrayed by male artists in her era. Regarding the first strategy, it can be inferred from Sher-works Gil's that she was influenced by numerous strong, independent women, such as Sarojini Naidu, a poet and activist (1879–1949), and that she also had intimate relationships with many women, as she mentions in her letters. Sher-Gil has so developed her persona as a result of the impact of such strong, independent women. She most likely considered these factors when determining her identity as a woman, and after moving to India, she abruptly began focusing on the marginalized and underprivileged women who lacked such privileges in that society. Sher-Gil lived her entire life in an aristocratic, upper-class society before being drawn to the suffering of rural women, which is an astounding demonstration of her artistic intelligence and individuality. Sher-Gil was also experiencing a painful period in her life at the time due to her unhealthful relationships with her husband, so she turned to these topics as amusing stories to help her cope with her trauma and to find some solace. Additionally, she simply wanted to upset the conventional order of how women are shown. These specific elements later served as a guide for India's top female artists as they explored their own identities and took a more sophisticated approach to projecting gender.

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