

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF ARTISTS TO THE ART SCENARIO IN JAMMU, KASHMIR & LADAKH AFTER 1947

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the significant contributions made by artists to the art scenario in the regions of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh following the independence of India in 1947. The research delves into the evolution of visual and performing arts, the establishment of art institutions, and the role of individual artists in shaping the cultural identity of these regions. Through historical analysis and a review of artistic trends, this paper highlights the transformation and resilience of art amidst political and social upheaval. It discusses how post-independence art movements emerged in these regions and how traditional art forms were reimagined in response to new realities. The paper also evaluates the influence of cultural heritage, religious motifs, regional identity, political conflict, and modernization on the creative outputs of painters, sculptors, folk performers, and contemporary visual artists. Keywords such as "traditional art forms," "modern art movements," "cultural identity," "visual arts," "performing arts," "art institutions," "regional artists," "post-independence transformation," and "artistic resilience" are central to this study. This interdisciplinary approach connects history, sociology, and art criticism to provide a comprehensive understanding of the artistic evolution in these distinct but interconnected regions.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Post-independence art Contemporary Kashmiri artists Traditional art revival Cultural identity Art and conflict Political expression through art Folk art forms Buddhist art influences Pahari miniature painting Papier-mâché art Basohli painting Artistic resilience Art education institutions Cross-cultural influences Modern Ladakhi art Regional art heritage Artistic migration Visual storytelling Local artisan communities Art as resistance*

### INTRODUCTION

The partition of India in 1947 marked a new era for the regions of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh. Alongside political and cultural changes, the post-independence period saw a resurgence and transformation in the art

landscape. Artists in these regions not only preserved traditional forms but also experimented with modern styles, contributing to a vibrant, evolving art scene.

The complex socio-political developments that followed partition deeply affected the identity and consciousness of the people. Artists responded to these transformations by engaging with themes of displacement, belonging, conflict, and peace. This led to a diverse body of work that blended folk traditions, religious symbolism, and contemporary aesthetics. The geographical uniqueness of these regions—Jammu's proximity to Punjab, Kashmir's Islamic and Persianate legacy, and Ladakh's Tibetan Buddhist culture—created distinct but interconnected artistic expressions.

Moreover, the rise of institutions and state patronage in the 1960s and 70s encouraged artistic education and professionalization. Many artists from these regions began to participate in national and international exhibitions, placing their work within a larger global context. The introduction of modern materials and techniques further expanded the visual language of local art.

This paper aims to examine the pivotal role artists played in redefining the artistic identity of these culturally rich regions. By focusing on the development of both visual and performing arts, the impact of institutional support, and the personal narratives of key artists, this study highlights the enduring spirit and creativity that characterize the post-1947 art scenario in Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND TRADITIONAL ART FORMS**

Before 1947, the art of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh was deeply rooted in traditional crafts, including papier-mâché, Pahari miniature painting, Thangka painting, wood carving, and carpet weaving. These crafts were often patronized by royal courts and religious institutions. Post-independence, artists faced the dual challenge of preserving heritage and adapting to contemporary artistic expressions.

Papier-mâché, for example, thrived in the Kashmir Valley, with artisans producing intricately painted items using floral motifs influenced by Persian aesthetics. The craft became symbolic of Kashmiri identity and was often passed down through generations. Similarly, Pahari miniature paintings, prominent in the Jammu region, portrayed themes from Hindu epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, combining refined brushwork with regional color palettes.

Ladakh, with its strong Tibetan Buddhist influence, maintained the rich tradition of Thangka painting—religious scrolls painted on cotton or silk, often depicting deities, mandalas, or scenes from the life of Buddha. These works not only served devotional purposes but also demonstrated exceptional artistic skill, with each element holding symbolic significance.

Wood carving was another prominent art form, especially in the architecture of mosques, shrines, and homes in Kashmir, characterized by intricate latticework and calligraphic elements. Carpet weaving, also historically linked to Persian traditions, continued to evolve with innovations in design and dyeing techniques.

Following independence, the continuation of these traditional crafts became both a cultural necessity and an economic strategy. Artists and craftsmen had to innovate within their mediums to cater to new markets, both domestic and international. The aesthetic and functional appeal of these crafts ensured their survival, but it was the intervention of artists who reinterpreted these forms for galleries and modern audiences that helped bridge the gap between tradition and modernity.

## **MODERN ARTISTIC MOVEMENTS AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Modern art in Jammu and Kashmir has roots tracing back to the early 20th century with the establishment of technical schools in Srinagar, Anantnag, and Mirpur (now part of Pakistan-occupied Gilgit-Baltistan). These institutions were influenced by Western realism, largely introduced by amateur European tourists and commissioned professional artists during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The curriculum offered training in floral design, drawing, painting, clay modeling, smithy, and willow work. Students were exposed to techniques of Western realism, including model drawing, nature studies in watercolors, and oil painting.

Prominent figures like Master Sansar Chand, Sat Lal Khuru, M. N. Khosa, D. N. Walli, Dost Mohammad, R. C. Wantu, and M. N. Dhar emerged during this time, producing landscapes and portraits rooted in visual realism and romantic naturalism, often echoing Victorian sensibilities. Though some works attempted commentary on contemporary life, they mostly took allegorical forms.

These technical institutes continued until 1951, producing graduates who became drawing instructors in schools or joined the institutes themselves. Influential educators such as Dina Nath Walli, Mohi-Ud-Din, and Shiv Nath Raina inspired a new generation of artists.

In the 1940s and 50s, Jammu saw artists like Hem Raj, Chandu Lal, Bodh Raj, Devi Dass, O. P. Sharma, and V. R. Khajuria (students of Master Sansar Chand) pursuing either commercial art or realistic landscape and portrait painting. Meanwhile, in Kashmir, S. N. Bhat, Triloke Kaul, and P. N. Kachroo explored cubist and impressionist styles. Artists like Ghulam Rasool Santosh became known for Tantric art, while others like Nisar Aziz, Pran Kishore, Bansi Parimoo, and Mohan Raina began with academic realism but transitioned into modern styles influenced by global trends.

The exposure to international exhibitions, like the UNESCO prints exhibition (1951–1953), and increased interactions with artists from other parts of India, through newspapers, films, and magazines, provided artists of the region access to a universal visual vocabulary. This enabled them to explore new artistic possibilities and helped transform regional art into a vital part of India's modernist movement.

## PROMINENT ARTISTS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

Several artists from these regions gained recognition for their unique contributions:

1. **G. R. Santosh (1929–1997):** A leading figure in Kashmiri modern art, Santosh was influenced by Tantric philosophy and developed a distinctive abstract style.
2. **Bansi Parimu:** Known for his figurative works and socio-political commentary, Parimu played a key role in shaping Kashmiri contemporary art.
3. **Suman Gupta:** A prominent artist from Jammu, Gupta's works are known for their realism and evocative depiction of rural life.
4. **Zarina Hashmi:** Though born in Aligarh, her roots in Kashmir deeply influenced her minimalist and conceptual art.
5. **Ladakhi Thangka Artists:** Artists in Ladakh continued to keep the tradition of Thangka painting alive while also exploring new media and themes.

## ART AND CONFLICT

The political turmoil in Kashmir post-1989 significantly impacted the art scene. Many artists used their work as a form of resistance, healing, and documentation. Art became a medium to express grief, resilience, and identity. Installations, photography, and mixed media gained prominence during this period.

## CULTURAL FESTIVALS AND ART EXHIBITIONS

Cultural festivals like the Ladakh Festival, Jammu Literary Festival, and art exhibitions at Lalit Kala Akademi have provided platforms for artists to showcase their work and interact with broader audiences. These events have played a crucial role in bringing regional art to national and international attention.

## CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

Despite the progress, artists in these regions face challenges such as lack of infrastructure, limited market access, and political instability. There is a pressing need for government and private support in the form of funding, art residencies, and international collaborations.

## CONCLUSION

Artists from Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh have significantly contributed to the post-1947 art scenario through innovation, preservation, and resilience. Their work reflects the complex socio-political realities and rich cultural heritage of the region. As the art landscape continues to evolve, these artists remain central to shaping the identity and global perception of the region.

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