

Realism in Indian Art

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Reference to this paper
should be made as follows:

Received: 25-11-25

Approved: 08-12-25

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Artistic Narration 2025,
Vol. XVI, No. 2,
Article No.22 Pg.141-145

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2025-vol-xvi-no2](https://anubooks.com/journal-volume/artistic-narration-dec-2025-vol-xvi-no2)

Referred by:

DOI:[https://doi.org/10.31995/
an.2025.v16i02.022](https://doi.org/10.31995/an.2025.v16i02.022)

Abstract

Realism in Indian art is a movement that combines the faithful, truthful, and detailed representation of life and society. As opposed to Indian art of the earlier periods, which mainly centred on the idealized, religious, mythological or hyperbolic themes, Realism aimed at portraying the common man, depicting quotidian life, and addressing social issues. Coming to India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Indian Realism drew inspiration from European Realist movements as well as the social and political changes in India in the colonial period.

Indian Realist artists sought to authentically represent rural and urban life, showcasing landscapes, labourers, and celebrating festivals. Alongside this, the movement provided soft critiques on social and political issues, including poverty, oppression due to colonialism, and questions of national identity. This report discusses the foundation, main characteristics, techniques and materials, and significant figures of Indian Realism. It examines the themes and societal impact of Indian Realism and its legacy in contemporary and modern art in India.

Overall, Indian Realism demonstrates how artists adapted global artistic trends to local conditions, creating a style that emphasizes observation, detail, and social consciousness.

Introduction

Indian art has evolved and adopted new forms. It has changed from depicting idealized and religious artworks to showing true life. Artists depicting Realism in India showed a focus on the daily people and their routines, including middle-class and lower-class people. They painted urban and rural life and important changes in social conditions.

This The history, traits, methods, major artists, themes, and ongoing impact of Indian Realism on modern Indian art are all examined in this report. We can appreciate how artists authentically and meaningfully depict society, culture, and the human experience by comprehending Indian Realism.

This movement started in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century in India. India was then more receptive to rapid changes in their social, political and cultural landscapes. European Realism was brought to India through colonization and art education but Indian Realism was able to contextualize Europe's imported ideas.

Historical Background

During the colonial period, the influence of European academic art traditions and Realism on Indian artists led to the emergence of Realism in Indian art. The Government College of Art, Kolkata, and other such institutions introduced Western styles of drawing, painting, and perspective. Indian artists started to fuse Western methods with Indian themes and cultural settings. Prior to this period, Indian art was primarily centred on the religious, the mythological, or the courtly. The shift to Realism was a significant departure from the predominant styles, as it focused on observing daily life, work, and the social order.

Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906) was one of the first important figures to integrate Western methods and styles with Indian content and Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951) was also, albeit bearing the Bengal School in his primary influences, realistic Indian life in some of his works. Later, Jamini Roy and Nandalal Bose also introduced rural and folk life in their compositions with realism. Indian Realism articulated social awareness as much as it did artistic awareness. It documented and celebrated Indian society, highlighting poverty, colonial oppression, and cultural traditions.

Main Characteristics of Indian Realism

- 1. Focus in on the everyday** - Paintings present rural labour, markets, festivals, and domestic life.
- 2. Common folk are the subject matter** - Villagers, workers and urban citizens are featured which is done with dignity and respect.
- 3. In attention to detail** — Indian Realist artists paid great care to textures, clothing and facial expressions for verisimilitude.
- 4. Naturalistic Representation**-Naturalistic in approach Landscapes, interiors and human figures are true to what they are, no over the top artifice.

5. **Social Awareness** –Social issues brought forward Art that which also present cultural identity and the results of colonialism.
6. **A mix of the local and the foreign** — Artists took up European realist techniques (perspective, shading) but put them into Indian settings and traditions.

Major Artists and Their Works

1. Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906) – Raja Ravi Varma is remembered as the first modern Indian artist. He did a great job of combining Indian and European styles. His realistic paintings and lithographic prints made Indian mythology and culture available to everyone. His work still inspires artists today and has an impact on the look of Indian art.



Shakuntala

2. S. M. Pandit (1916–1993) – The artistic legacy of S. M. Pandit is rooted in his capacity to unite contemporary artist understanding with traditional Indian themes. He captured not only likeness but also inner character and peace in his portraits, especially of gods, goddesses, and prominent Indian figures. He contributed to the preservation and advancement of Indian portraiture during a period of significant cultural change with his accurate craftsmanship, delicate use of colour, and spiritual depth. He is regarded as a timeless figure in Indian art of the 20th century because of his work’s realism, refinement, and respect for Indian heritage.



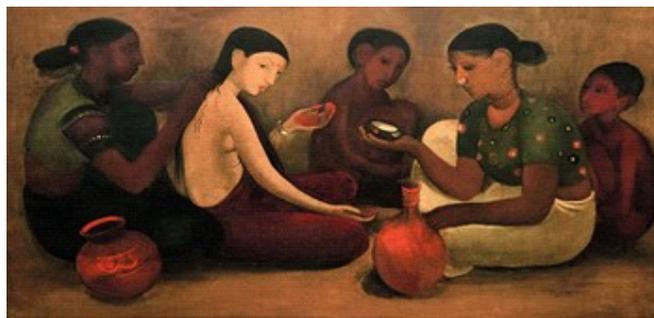
Krishna & Bhishma

3. Bikash Bhattacharjee (1940-2006) – In contemporary Indian art, Bikash Bhattacharjee is still regarded as a titan due to his accurate realism and potent depictions of Kolkata daily life. His writings highlight the emotional weaknesses, social conflicts, and psychological complexity of common people. Beneath well-known scenes, he revealed hidden truths through bold themes and skilful technique. He is an enduring and vital voice in Indian visual culture because his legacy still has an impact on modern artists.



The Lady with the Gas Cylinder

4. Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–1941) – One of the forerunners of contemporary Indian art, Amrita Sher-Gil combined Western methods with Indian themes and feelings. Her paintings sensitively and deeply depicted Indian people's lives and hardships. Her daring expression, uniqueness, and enduring contribution to Indian art continue to inspire people.



Bride's Toilet, 1937

Techniques and Materials

- 1. Oil and Watercolour Painting** – Used for detailed representation and color accuracy.
- 2. Drawing and Sketching** – Artists often made careful observational studies before final paintings.
- 3. Attention to Light and Shadow** – Realistic portrayal of natural lighting and shading.

4. **Blend of Local Materials** – Use of Indian pigments and traditional papers alongside European canvas and paint.

Themes and Social Impact

1. **Rural and Urban Life** – Documenting villages, towns, and city life.
2. **Labor and Daily Work** – Highlighting the dignity and challenges of ordinary people.
3. **Festivals and Cultural Practices** – Capturing Indian traditions with accuracy.
4. **Colonial and Social Commentary** – Depicting poverty, social inequalities, and cultural identity.

Transition to Modern and Contemporary Realism in India

1. **Early Modernism:** Realism was introduced into contemporary Indian painting by artists such as Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher-Gil.
2. **Post-Independence Realism:** Realist techniques were occasionally employed in social or urban commentary by artists such as M. F. Husain and F. N. Souza.
3. **Contemporary Indian Realism:** Using both traditional and digital media, artists today continue to investigate realism in rural traditions, social issues, and urban life.

Conclusion

In Indian art, realism signifies a significant departure from conventional religious or mythological art and a move toward realistic life observation. During the colonial and post-colonial eras, Indian Realist artists documented society and culture by portraying common people, labour, rural and urban environments, and social conditions.

Indian Realism created a distinctive style that impacted modern and contemporary art by fusing European methods with regional customs. It still motivates artists to celebrate cultural identity, show social realities, and accurately depict life.

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