

Traditions Reimagined by K. G. Subramanyan for Modern Indian Art and Cultural Expression

Chauhan Vidya Girishchandra & Ujjvala M. Tiwari

Abstract

K. G. Subramanyan is India's most influential artist and thinker, whose contributions spanned painting, sculpture, mural-making, writing, and teaching. Unlike the common perception of tradition as unchanging and rigid, Subramanyan saw it as a living, breathing entity that thrives through reinterpretation and reinvention. His perception of living tradition in modern Indian art shows his concern towards the continuity of culture, artists belonging and their individuality, traditional art practices, craftsmen's needs, liveliness, and progress of living traditions. Subramanyan's influence was not limited to his own work but extended to his students and contemporaries, who absorbed his philosophy and developed artistic languages that celebrated both tradition and modernity. By reinterpreting traditional motifs, materials, and techniques, these artists created works that reflected the vibrancy and adaptability of living traditions. This paper explores Subramanyan's deep concern for tradition in Indian art, analysing how his philosophy and practice redefined the relationship between tradition and modernity. His efforts to preserve, innovate, and integrate traditional art forms highlight his enduring legacy as a thinker, teacher, and artist who ensured that tradition remained a vital and evolving force in Indian cultural expression.

Keywords: Art education; Cultural expression; K. G. Subramanyan's concept; Modern Indian art; Revive; Reinterpretation; Traditions.

Introduction

The notion of living tradition has been a widely discussed subject in Indian art, representing identity, belonging, and culture. Living traditions sustain indigenism and embody the essence of cultural continuity, yet their deeper aesthetics and progress often remain underexplored despite frequent dis-

course. This raises critical questions about the artistic language and practices of both artists and artisans. In a multicultural country like India, rich with diverse arts, crafts, and traditions, these practices play a vital role in fostering awareness of cultural identity. However, modern influences, driven by globalization, increasingly pull focus away from these traditions, making it challenging to balance their relevance with the allure of modernity, which is often equated with progress. This tension complicates the justification of traditions that have been followed and valued for centuries in the face of rapid modernization. Since independence, the intelligentsia of India has recognized the importance of preserving living traditions and has consistently worked toward keeping them alive. However, this ongoing effort often intersects with larger debates in the art world, such as the hierarchies between high and low art, the distinction between artists and artisans, and the conflict between traditional and modern practices. K. G. Subramanyan, a pioneering artist and art educator, engaged deeply with these concerns. His work and philosophy addressed the complexities of living traditions in modern Indian art, bridging the gap between the past and the present. By embracing tradition as a dynamic and evolving entity, Subramanyan sought to integrate its richness into contemporary art practices, offering a nuanced perspective on the role of tradition in shaping cultural and artistic identities in a rapidly changing world.

“Traditions is not an out-worn topic; its reading will differ from individual to individual, certainly from generation to generation, and it calls for fresh exposition from time to time.”

-K. G. Subramanyan

K. G. Subramanyan, one of India's most influential modern artists and thinkers, extensively explored the concept of living traditions in his writings. For Subramanyan, tradition was not a static relic of the past but a dynamic and evolving entity that adapted to contemporary contexts while retaining its essence. His essays, lectures, and artworks reflect his belief in the vitality of cultural traditions and their ability to inspire and shape modern artistic practices. Subramanyan argued that living traditions thrive because they are fluid and open to reinterpretation. Unlike rigid, museum-bound artefacts, living traditions grow through engagement with current realities, incorporating new ideas, materials, and techniques. He believed that traditions in art should not be viewed as a constraint but as a fertile ground for innovation and creative expression. According to him, artists could draw from traditional forms, motifs, and philosophies, transforming them to address modern sensibilities and social concerns.

His perspective on living traditions was deeply influenced by his experiences in Santiniketan, where he studied under the guidance of luminaries like Nandalal Bose, Benode Behari Mukherjee, and Ramkinkar Baij. Santiniketan's pedagogical emphasis on integrating traditional Indian art forms with contemporary practices aligned with Subramanyan's views. He also drew inspiration from folk and craft traditions, particularly from rural India, which he saw as rich repositories of cultural knowledge and artistic ingenuity. Subramanyan's artistic practice exemplified his philosophy. His works often blended diverse elements: the visual vocabulary of Indian folk and tribal art, the narrative depth of mythological stories, and the experimental techniques of modernism. His murals, paintings, and terracotta reliefs combined bold stylization, intricate patterns, and vivid storytelling, creating a language that was uniquely his own yet deeply rooted in Indian artistic heritage.



Fig.1: Untitled, Water colour on Ramie paper by KG Subramanyan

In his writings, Subramanyan emphasized the role of the artist as a mediator between tradition and modernity. He believed that artists had a responsibility to engage critically with their cultural heritage, preserving its

relevance while ensuring it resonated with contemporary audiences. He also highlighted how living traditions represented collective memory and identity, functioning as a bridge between the past and the present. Subramanyan's views on living traditions remain highly relevant in discussions on Indian art and culture. His ability to see tradition as a dynamic and adaptive force offers a powerful framework for understanding how cultural practices can evolve without losing their essence. Through his writings and artistic legacy, Subramanyan demonstrated that living traditions are not just about preserving the past but about actively shaping the present and the future.

The Image of Traditions

In the Indian context, living traditions encompass a vast array of practices, including classical and folk art, craft traditions, performance arts, and storytelling. These traditions are not isolated phenomena; they interact with and influence one another, creating a dynamic cultural tapestry. Subramanyan highlighted the importance of this interconnectedness, arguing that the vitality of Indian art lies in its ability to integrate diverse influences while retaining its distinctive character. He says Tradition is not static; it evolves based on reinterpretations and contemporary needs and Each generation's perspective reshapes tradition, creating a "reverse reading" from present branches to historical roots.

"The image of tradition is the image of this interpretation, from where he stands, within the needs and postulates, in a sort; of reverse reading of the genealogical tree, leading, as it were, from the branches to the roots."
(Subramanyan)

Subramanyan uses the metaphor of a genealogical tree to describe the dynamic relationship between tradition and interpretation. Typically, a genealogical tree starts at the roots (the origin) and branches out to represent growth and progression. However, in this statement, he flips the perspective, suggesting a "reverse reading" – moving from the branches (the present, or where the individual stands) back to the roots (the origin or source). For Subramanyan, tradition is not a fixed or unchanging entity; rather, it is shaped and reshaped by the individual's perspective and context. The "image of tradition" that one forms depends on their present circumstances ("from where he stands"). In other words, how one interprets and engages with tradition is influenced by their contemporary needs, challenges, and postulates.

By starting at the “branches” – the diverse expressions and practices of tradition visible today – Subramanyan encourages exploring how these practices emerged, what influenced them, and how they remain connected to their origins (“roots”). This reverse exploration allows for a deeper understanding of the continuity and adaptability of tradition, recognizing it as a living, evolving entity rather than a static framework. In the realm of art, this philosophy implies that an artist does not merely replicate traditional forms but reinterprets them in light of present-day realities. For instance, an artist might look at the contemporary manifestations of folk art or mythology (the branches) and delve into their historical and cultural origins (the roots). Through this process, the artist can create something that is both authentic and innovative, blending the essence of tradition with modern sensibilities.



Fig.2: Anatomy Lessons, 2006 by K. G. Subramanyan

This artwork, crafted entirely in terracotta, in Response to conflict and war, reflects the consequences of violence and the chaos it brings. It portrays fragmented human limbs and heads arranged in unsettling juxtapositions. The figures appear to express a shared sense of suffering, as if their faces carry the weight of collective pain caused by relentless struggles and alienation. (htt)

In *Anatomy Lessons*, K. G. Subramanyan draws on a variety of Indian traditional art forms – Bengal terracotta sculpture, Kalighat paintings, folk and tribal art, Indian mural traditions, and puppetry – to create a work that is both deeply rooted in heritage and strikingly modern. By incorporating these influences, he reinterprets traditional techniques and aesthetics, infusing them with contemporary ideas and abstraction. This synthesis of tradition and modernity is central to Subramanyan’s philosophy of living traditions an, ensuring that cultural practices remain relevant and dynamic in the modern world.

For Subramanyan, the vitality of a tradition lay in its ability to evolve. He observed that traditions are not meant to be frozen in time but should respond to changing social, cultural, and technological contexts. This adaptability ensures that traditions remain meaningful and engaging for

successive generations. The advent of British colonial rule marked a significant disruption in the socio-cultural fabric of India, including its art traditions. British colonial rule forced Indian art to adapt in response to external pressures, leading to a blend of resistance, reinterpretation, and innovation. The colonial strategy of cultural domination was critiqued for its ignorance and condescension, which ironically spurred a stronger cultural resurgence among Indians. While the colonial era disrupted traditional practices, it also catalysed a re-examination of Indian art, inspiring efforts to preserve and evolve cultural traditions in the face of modern challenges.

The Impact of Traditions on Artists

Subramanyan emphasizes the unparalleled cultural continuity in India, where traditions in thought, literature, and art have persisted, evolving unbroken for over 3,000 years. This extensive legacy is both a privilege and a challenge for any artist born into such a rich cultural milieu. Artists, regardless of the time they live in, cannot escape the pervasive influence of this history. To engage with their cultural environment meaningfully, they must grapple with this heritage, whether consciously or unconsciously. Tradition is not a monolithic entity but an evolving image shaped by individual interpretation. The artist's engagement with tradition reflects their "needs and postulates" – their unique circumstances, ideas, and aspirations. This personalized interaction ensures that tradition remains a living, dynamic force, rather than a static relic of the past.

Artists are shaped by the cultural context into which they are born, inheriting tools, techniques, motifs, and philosophies from their predecessors. This inheritance provides a foundation for their work, offering a sense of identity and continuity. Living traditions offer artists a rich repository of forms, techniques, and philosophies. The living traditions provide artists with a sense of belonging and cultural identity. By engaging with these traditions, artists affirm their place within a broader historical and cultural continuum. This rootedness does not stifle creativity; instead, it offers a secure platform from which to explore individual expression. The artist's survival and relevance within the realm of living traditions depend on their ability to navigate this interplay between collective belonging and personal vision.

At the same time, artists must carve out their individuality, which often involves challenging, questioning, or reinterpreting the very traditions they inherit. The "burden" of tradition can feel constraining, as it may create ex-

expectations or limit experimentation. Artists in the realm of living traditions face the challenge of balancing their role as inheritors of a cultural legacy with the need to assert their individuality. Living traditions demand an internalized effort to engage with the past critically and creatively. Artists must resist both the temptation to replicate tradition uncritically and the urge to abandon it in favour of fleeting modern trends. Living traditions provide artists with a sense of belonging and cultural identity. By engaging with these traditions, artists affirm their place within a broader historical and cultural continuum. This rootedness does not stifle creativity; instead, it offers a secure platform from which to explore individual expression. While tradition offers a starting point, it does not constrain individuality. Subramanyan advocates for an artist's right to reinterpret and reshape tradition to suit their unique vision. He believes that tradition thrives when it is treated as a dialogue rather than a monologue, where each artist contributes their voice to an evolving conversation.

In traditional art systems, artists often worked as part of a collective, prioritizing community values over individual recognition. Subramanyan points out that modern artists, while still influenced by collective traditions, often assert their individuality more prominently. This shift reflects broader changes in the social and economic conditions of art production, where artists must balance their roles as cultural custodians and independent creators. The status of an artist within living traditions is linked to their ability to make tradition relevant. Subramanyan argues that artists who merely imitate traditional forms risk becoming irrelevant, as their work lacks the vitality that comes from true engagement. Conversely, those who reinterpret tradition with authenticity and innovation earn recognition as contributors to the ongoing evolution of culture.

In Subramanyan's view, artists within living traditions act as custodians of cultural memory and innovators of its future. Their individuality lies not in rejecting tradition but in engaging with it critically, drawing from its depths to create something new. This dual role ensures the survival and vibrancy of living traditions. Artists within living traditions act as mediators between the past and present. Their survival depends on their ability to keep tradition alive through reinterpretation. Unlike craftsmen working within rigid frameworks, artists in living traditions are active participants in the process of cultural renewal. Their work must resonate with contemporary audiences while staying true to the core principles of the tradition.

K. G. Subramanyan's Views on Living Traditions in Art Education

Education is the vehicle for the passage of one generation's knowledge and skills for the next and it is an instrument to heighten the quality of human existence. (Subramanyan, *Art Education in India*) has been a fundamental aspect of human organization since ancient times. Initially, it wasn't a separate activity but was integrated into daily life. Parents, families, and society collectively introduced younger generations to traditions, technology, and values during normal interactions and activities. With time education transitioned from informal societal learning to specialized formal systems, driven by advancements in writing and the need for organized knowledge. However, certain practical skills continued to be learned outside these formal structures.

Indian art education has undergone significant transformations across three distinct periods: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence. Before colonization, art education was deeply intertwined with daily life and cultural traditions, transmitted informally through the guru-shishya system and artisan guilds. Temples and royal courts played pivotal roles in fostering arts such as sculpture, miniature painting, and crafts, ensuring their continuity across generations. During colonial rule, traditional systems were disrupted with the establishment of Western-style art institutions like the Government School of Art in Kolkata, which prioritized European techniques over indigenous practices. This led to the marginalization of traditional crafts and artisans, though revivalist movements such as the Bengal School of Art emerged to reclaim Indian artistic identity. Post-independence, efforts were made to integrate tradition with modernity through institutions like Santiniketan and government initiatives, such as the establishment of the Lalit Kala Akademi and the National Institute of Design. These efforts aimed to preserve India's rich artistic heritage while fostering contemporary practices, although challenges in balancing tradition and modernity persist. (Mitter) (Sheik)

Subramanyan stresses the need to teach tradition as a dynamic and evolving process. Subramanyan critiqued the colonial foundations of Indian art education, which introduced rigid Western frameworks that marginalized traditional art practices. He argued that colonial institutions emphasized academic realism and industrial design over the indigenous arts, and crafts, and their deeper cultural meanings. Subramanyan stressed that art education in India often failed to engage with the country's diverse cultural and artistic traditions. He advocated for an education system that celebrated regional variations and rooted art practices within their social, cultural,

and historical contexts. He critiqued the dominance of Western pedagogical models in Indian art institutions, which often prioritized techniques like oil painting and perspective at the expense of exploring indigenous styles and methodologies. Subramanyan called for an education system that integrated traditional Indian methods with contemporary practices. Subramanyan believed in breaking down barriers between disciplines and encouraging students to explore art alongside literature, philosophy, history, and science. He saw art as a tool for critical thinking and self-expression rather than just a technical skill. Subramanyan advocated for fostering creativity and individual expression in art education. He opposed rigid, exam-oriented teaching methods, which stifled imagination and the development of personal artistic languages.

Additionally, Subramanyan actively participated in the founding of the Fine Arts Fairs at the Faculty of Fine Arts, which he saw as a chance to combine performance and art and to harmonize artisan traditions with modern art practice. (Academy)

At Baroda, the indigenism argument underwent some crucial, in many ways still under-researched, transformations. Firstly, it shifted away from a polemical category-for Swamhathan, unwaveringly, this was the Indian tribal-and into a linguistic category. Primarily responsible for this was K.G. Subramanyan, who shifted the Group 1890's political emphases into those of artisanal improvisation. This shift-from political concerns to those of language is of course full of current resonances. In the Faculty's institutional framework, however, it led to the emphasis of a combination of ethnography and formal analysis. In the 1970s and 1980s, students were constantly exposed to traditional practices in their actual working." (Sheik, Contemporary art in Baroda)

K.G. Subramanyan's contributions to the Baroda School of Art were instrumental in integrating India's "living traditions" into contemporary art education. He emphasized the inclusion of folk and traditional art forms, viewing them as vibrant, evolving practices rather than static relics. Subramanyan encouraged students to engage with traditional artists through workshops and field visits, promoting a deeper understanding of indigenous techniques, motifs, and their cultural contexts. By challenging the colonial distinction between fine art and craft, he brought traditional crafts like pottery, weaving, and mural-making into the academic space, inspiring students to experiment and reinterpret these forms in modern contexts. His teaching philosophy prioritized creativity while respecting tradition,

encouraging the fusion of modernist aesthetics with Indian motifs. Subramanyan's own art reflected this ethos, as he seamlessly blended traditional techniques with contemporary narratives. Under his influence, the Baroda School became a hub for reimagining Indian traditions within modern art, fostering a uniquely Indian modernism that bridged the past and present. (Sheikh)

Efforts and Application

The Department of Fine Arts at M.S. University, Vadodara, became a pioneering institution in modern Indian art under the influence of K. G. Subramanyan, who seamlessly integrated "living traditions" into its curriculum. Joining the university in the 1950s, Subramanyan emphasized the dynamic nature of Indian artistic traditions, encouraging students to draw inspiration from folk art, miniature painting, tribal art, and handicrafts while critically engaging with global modernism. He redefined art education by introducing workshops that fostered collaboration with artisans, promoting hands-on learning in mediums like terracotta, weaving, and murals. Subramanyan's philosophy of continuity and change—where tradition evolves and adapts—shaped generations of artists, including Bhupen Khakhar, Ghulam Mohammad Sheikh, Jyoti Bhatt, and Jeram Patel, who reinterpreted traditional forms in contemporary contexts. His interdisciplinary approach, public art initiatives, and theoretical writings further enriched the department, ensuring art education remained rooted in Indian cultural heritage while fostering innovation. Subramanyan's enduring legacy at the university continues to inspire artists to engage with living traditions, bridging the gap between the past and the present.

The Fine Arts Fair at the Baroda School of Art (M.S. University, Vadodara) marked a significant cultural event that reflected the dynamic and inclusive spirit of the institution. These fairs were initiated to bring together artists, students, craftspeople, and the local community, creating a vibrant space for artistic exchange and experimentation. The fairs embodied the philosophy of integrating "living traditions" with modern artistic practices, a vision championed by influential figure K. G. Subramanyan. During this period, the fairs showcased a variety of artistic expressions, including paintings, sculptures, terracotta, murals, and printmaking, alongside traditional crafts such as textiles and folk art. This approach broke the boundaries between fine art and craft, celebrating both as interconnected forms of creative expression. The fairs also encouraged students to actively engage with artisans, fostering an appreciation for indigenous art forms and techniques while innovating within those traditions. Under the influence of mentors

like K. G. Subramanyan, the fairs became a space where the idea of art as a “living tradition” thrived, encouraging a dialogue between contemporary art practices and India’s rich cultural heritage.



Fig.3: Ramesh Pandya with Performers of ‘Live Puppet Show’, by Rajnikant Panchal-terracotta.



Fig. 4: Toy designed for the Fine-Arts fair Fine Arts Fair, Baroda, 1968.



Fig. 5: Govardhan Singh Pawar at work, Fine Arts Fair, 1972.

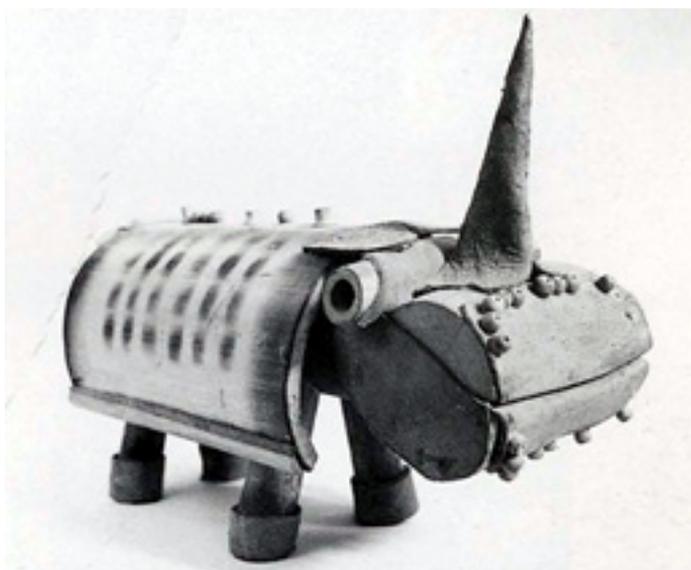


Fig. 6: Toy designed for the Fine-Arts fair by

K. G. Subramanian-bamboo, leather, beads.

The collaboration between the Weaver's Service Centre (WSC) and modern Indian artists marked a pivotal moment in the post-independence cultural and artistic revival of India. This initiative, started in the late 1950s and early 1960s, emerged at a time when India was grappling with the effects of industrialization and colonial exploitation, which had significantly weakened its traditional crafts and handloom sector. Weaving, once a vibrant and essential part of India's cultural identity, was in decline. There was an urgent need to revive and sustain these practices, both for their cultural significance and for the livelihoods of millions of weavers.

Additionally, the boundaries between "fine art" and "craft" were deeply entrenched, often marginalizing the contributions of artisans. The collaboration aimed to challenge these hierarchies by bringing artists and craftspeople together, recognizing the artistry of handloom weaving, and encouraging innovation within traditional practices. By engaging with artists, the Weaver's Service Centre aimed to modernize design and make handloom products more appealing to contemporary tastes, ensuring their relevance in a changing world.



Fig. 7: Untitled, 1959-1961, Ink on Paper by K. G. Subramanian for Weavers' Service Centre

Subramanyan's teaching philosophy encouraged his students to engage with indigenous practices, materials, and motifs while exploring modernist ideas, creating a synthesis between tradition and contemporary expression. His belief that art is not confined to galleries but is deeply rooted in daily life inspired a generation of artists to develop a unique artistic language that celebrated both heritage and innovation. Subramanyan taught his students to view tradition as a living, evolving

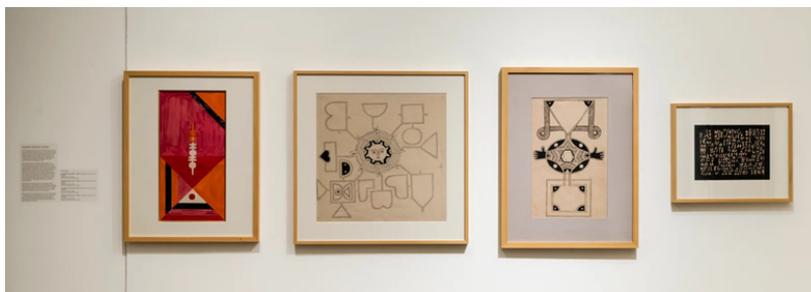


Fig.8: L-R, Untitled, Mixed media on paper; Untitled, Brush and ink on paper; Untitled, Brush and ink on paper; Untitled, Brush and ink on paper (by Prabhakkar Barwe for Weavers' Service Centre (1936-1995))

practice. He encouraged them to draw from folk art, mythology, miniature painting, and crafts while reinterpreting these elements in a modern idiom. His deep interest in handicrafts like terracotta, weaving, and mural-making, passed on the importance of using indigenous materials and techniques to his students. This grounded their work in local cultural contexts while allowing for personal innovation. His students absorbed this philosophy, incorporating craft traditions into their artistic practices and giving them contemporary relevance. Many of Subramanyan's students adopted his love for storytelling, symbolism, and humour in their works, often addressing themes of everyday life, mythology, and social concerns.

Bhupen Khakhar, one of Subramanyan's most prominent students, embraced the idea of living tradition by integrating elements of folk and popular art with modernist techniques. He created a distinct visual language that blended narrative storytelling with personal and social themes.

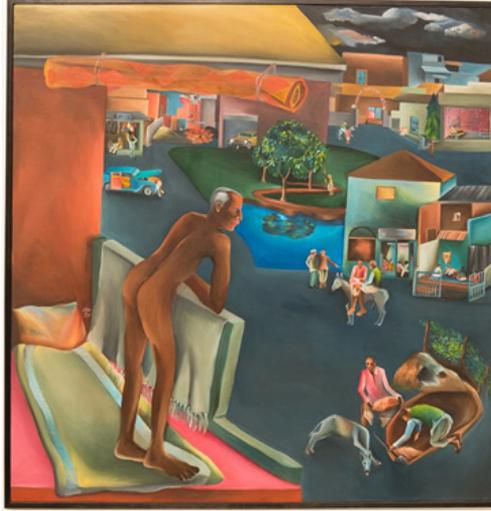


Fig.9: You Can't Please All, 1981 by Bhupen Khakhar

In works like “You Can’t Please All” (1981), Khakhar combines elements of Indian miniature painting with bold, modern compositions. The painting narrates a story inspired by a traditional fable while portraying a deeply personal and contemporary theme of identity and vulnerability. Khakhar’s use of bright colors, flattened perspectives, and symbolic imagery reflects his connection to folk art and his teacher’s emphasis on tradition as a living, adaptable force.

The painting portrays a self-portrait of Khakhar standing on a balcony, observing a dramatic scene unfolding in the background. The title refers to a well-known fable about a father, son, and donkey, where their attempts to please everyone end in failure. In the painting, the donkey and its owners are depicted in a comical yet tragic way, walking through a rural landscape while onlookers comment and judge. The fable serves as a metaphor for societal pressures and personal vulnerability, themes that Khakhar explored deeply in his works. Khakhar’s approach to this painting reflects his engagement with folk and miniature painting traditions. The flattened perspective and bright, saturated colours are reminiscent of Indian miniature art, while the narrative quality reflects the storytelling traditions of rural India. The composition is carefully layered: the background depicts the fable, while the foreground features Khakhar himself, dressed in a white undershirt and green trousers. His detached stance and

contemplative expression suggest a personal connection to the moral of the story, highlighting themes of individuality, identity, and self-acceptance. The autobiographical aspects of the painting are also noteworthy. Khakhar, an openly gay artist, often addressed issues of sexuality, desire, and societal judgment in his work. By placing himself within the narrative, Khakhar critiques the pressures of conforming to societal norms and explores his own identity with courage and wit. The juxtaposition of traditional storytelling with personal, modern concerns creates a dynamic tension, reflecting K. G. Subramanyan's philosophy that tradition is not static but adaptable to contemporary life.

Stylistically, *You Can't Please All* breaks away from Western notions of realism and instead embraces the decorative and expressive qualities of Indian folk art. Khakhar's use of simplified forms, flattened space, and bold outlines demonstrates his deliberate engagement with indigenous artistic practices. At the same time, the painting's humour and irony align with modernist tendencies, creating a fusion of the old and new.

Overall, *You Can't Please All* exemplifies Bhupen Khakhar's ability to reinterpret tradition in a modern context. The painting is both deeply rooted in Indian visual culture and profoundly personal, making it a powerful example of how K. G. Subramanyan's teachings influenced his students to develop a language that celebrated living traditions while addressing contemporary realities.

Jyoti Bhatt, a renowned printmaker and photographer, carried forward Subramanyan's emphasis on folk art and craft traditions. Bhatt's works celebrate rural India, traditional motifs, and the richness of everyday life. Bhatt's "Woodcut Prints" and "Photographs of Rural Art" document and reinterpret folk traditions, such as rangoli, tribal murals, and ritual art. His works often incorporate motifs from folk and textile traditions, reflecting Subramanyan's philosophy of honoring living traditions while giving them a new artistic life. Bhatt's meticulous attention to detail and celebration of indigenous art forms preserve the vibrancy of Indian culture.

Jyoti Bhatt's artistic practice is deeply rooted in his engagement with traditional Indian art forms, particularly folk art and craft traditions. His series of woodcut prints and photographs of rural art serve as both documentation and reinterpretation of India's rich cultural heritage. Bhatt's woodcut prints often incorporate motifs from traditional Indian textiles, rangoli, and tribal art. For instance, his prints feature geometric patterns, floral designs, and symbolic imagery drawn from rural visual culture. The

meticulous craftsmanship of woodcut printing reflects Bhatt's respect for indigenous techniques, while his modern compositions give these traditions a contemporary edge. Bhatt's use of strong lines, bold contrasts, and simplified forms aligns with the aesthetic of folk art, creating a visual language that is both timeless and modern. In addition to his prints, Bhatt's photographs of rural art document ephemeral practices such as wall paintings, rangoli, and mud relief work created by rural artisans. These photographs are not mere records but artistic interpretations that celebrate the creativity of India's rural communities. By capturing these art forms, Bhatt preserves their cultural significance and elevates them to the status of fine art. Bhatt's work reflects K. G. Subramanyan's teachings on the importance of integrating tradition into contemporary art. Subramanyan's belief in the vitality of folk and craft traditions inspired Bhatt to engage deeply with rural art forms, both as a source of inspiration and as a subject of documentation.



Fig.10: Homage to Iqbal, Etching, 1985 by Jyoti Bhatt



Fig.11: Women of northern Haryana state creating a mural painting, 1977. Photograph by Jyoti Bhatt



Fig.12: 12 Trash series 2008 Bed Ward 03 by Vivan Sundaram

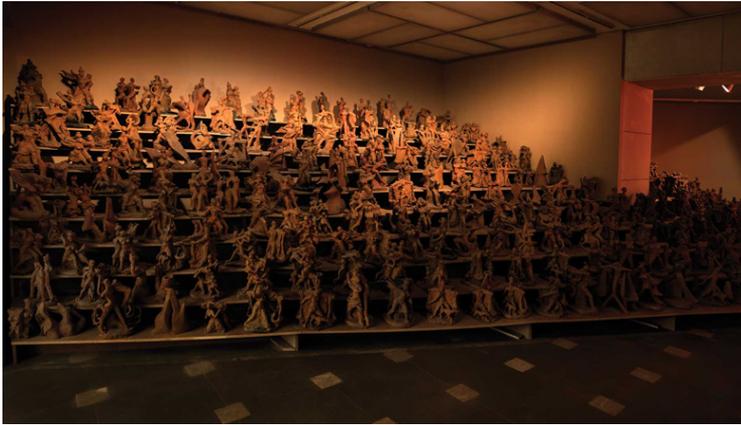


Fig.13: One and the Many, 409 terracotta figurines, 2015 by Vivian Sundaram

Vivian Sundaram's installation features photographs, archival materials, and everyday objects arranged in a way that blurs the boundaries between art, history, and craft. Sundaram's use of materiality reflects K. G. Subramanyan's influence, particularly his emphasis on integrating artistic practice with craftsmanship. By repurposing found objects, Sundaram creates a dialogue between the past and the present, exploring the ways in which tradition is preserved, transformed, and remembered. Sheikh's works often reference Indian miniature painting, Sufi poetry, and Mughal art while engaging with contemporary issues. He transforms this folk tradition into a modern visual narrative, exploring themes of urban life, memory, and identity. Sheikh's layered compositions, rich with symbolic references and storytelling, reflect Subramanyan's teachings on reinterpreting tradition for contemporary relevance.



Fig.14: Kaarawaan and other stories, 2024 by G. M. Sheikh

Conclusion

K. G. Subramanyan's vision of tradition as a dynamic and evolving entity reshaped the discourse of Indian art, bridging the gap between cultural heritage and contemporary practices. His philosophy emphasized the importance of engaging with tradition not as a static relic of the past but as a source of inspiration and innovation. By fostering a dialogue between artists and craftsmen, and encouraging the reinterpretation of traditional forms and techniques, Subramanyan ensured the continuity and vitality of India's artistic legacy. His profound influence on his students and contemporaries underscores the enduring relevance of his ideas, which continue to inspire a nuanced understanding of tradition in the modern context. Subramanyan's approach offers valuable lessons for the future, promoting sustainable practices in art and craft, empowering artisans, and encouraging artists to develop unique expressions rooted in cultural identity. By advocating for the adaptability of tradition, he paved the way for future generations to preserve their heritage while embracing modernity, ensuring that Indian art remains a vibrant and evolving force in the global cultural landscape. Through his work and teachings, Subramanyan left an indelible mark on Indian art, affirming the transformative power of living traditions in shaping a culturally resonant yet forward-looking artistic identity.

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