

# PHOTOGRAPHY: A POOL OF POSSIBILITIES

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## ABSTRACT

The question whether photography should be considered art or not was an ongoing debate in the decades following its discovery. It had to fight a tough and controversial battle in terms of being considered as an art form. Finally, photography has successfully changed the perception of people about the work of art. Also, being a flexible medium it has given tremendous amount of possibilities and innovations in the field of fine arts. This paper deals with the analysis of the works of different artists in India, who have been working to explore the unknown in the field of fine art Photography.

## KEYWORDS

Photography, Photography artists.

## INTRODUCTION

Fine-art photography is photography created in accordance with the vision of the artist as photographer. Fine art photography stands in contrast to representational photography, such as photojournalism, which provides a documentary visual account of specific subjects and events, literally re-presenting objective reality rather than the subjective intent of the photographer; and commercial photography, the primary focus of which is to advertise products or services.

When we look photography as an art of making photographs, we take into consideration a number of things about the photographer, the photograph and the viewer. The photographer falls into two categories. The first kind picks up the camera and shoots without thinking, the main purpose of this activity is to capture a particular moment and share it with family or friends. The aesthetics do not play much of a role. The second category of photographers sees the subject and an idea is formed in their mind, the composition and positioning of elements in the frame are visualised before shooting. The photographer thinks about what the picture is going to communicate beyond what is depicted in it. There is conscious effort in the thought process which results in a certain positioning of the elements.

The photograph is a product of the activity of the photographer, most of the time translating a Three-dimensional world into a two-dimensional image. So the image once formed will have an independent identity, though related to the original situation when it was captured. The chemical or digital process also plays a major role in bringing the image to the visible level. Once the photograph is created, it is free from original reference. The equipment, photographic process and the time of capture affect the quality of the end product. Here the quality is also judged by the situation where the image is used. It may be an illustration in a newspaper or an article. It may be reproduced in a book, or as an independent image in a gallery or on the

wall. Depending on the situation or the use, the scale at which the quality of a photograph is judged varies. The viewer also plays an important role in the process of photography. The viewer interprets it from many perspectives. Firstly as an onlooker who sees the image as documentation of an event or an object. The second way of interpreting a photograph is seeing it as a process and an experience. In the first way of seeing, if the expected is demonstrated in technically accurate manner the viewer's intent is satisfied. In the same way as the photographer tries to communicate a certain idea through the picture, the viewer also tries to experience something from it. In a latter this happens when the image triggers a stream of thoughts in the viewer's mind, created from a visual vocabulary that already exists. The photograph creates cross connections and builds a new perspective that leads to an aesthetic experience.

This paper is based on the cogent analysis of the experiments that have been carried out in the field of fine art photography to explore new dimensions of this flexible medium. Researcher has also examined the art of various contemporary artists in India to know how they have used their artistic skills to present photography as a cluster of multiple possibilities. The focus is mainly on the artists like Pushpmala N, Sheba Chhachhi, Diwan Manna, Vivan Sundaram, as researcher believe that they have tried something new and experimental in their works. In the end, being an experimental artist himself, and from a 'painting' background with a profound interest in photography, researcher has also been trying to discover a new visual vocabulary by amalgamating these two art forms (photography and painting). Therefore in this paper, researcher has also explained some of my works along with the techniques and ideas that researcher has discovered in this pursuit.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The 19th century, was an age of several new and significant discoveries among which were photography, cars, airplanes and electricity. Photography was invented during the first three decades of the 19th century as a direct consequence of advances in chemistry and topics (the science of the behaviour of light). The word photography comes from two Greek words that mean "writing with light."

## **PHOTOGRAPHY VS. PAINTING**

Photography soon became a popular interest and was perceived as a threat to miniature paintings which enjoyed popular patronage at that time. Photography as such provided a realistic image which was more objective than subjective and its novelty appealed to those who preferred an exact likeness. Its ability to effortlessly render tones, detail, and perspective effectively put an end to the practice of certain forms of painting, such as portrait miniatures.

Protagonists of art suggested that photography be used to preserve paintings etc and not replace them, in the same way as printing and typing/shorthand had helped

preserve literature. This was also the time when the Company school of art was beginning to fade and the camera was moving into a position of privilege. Moreover, it is widely believed today that photography created an impetus for painters to forsake straightforward description in favor of more interpretive or abstract styles, such as impressionism, cubism, and abstract expressionism. Photography itself has been defined as an essentially modern art because of its relative newness and its reliance on the machinelike camera.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY COMES TO THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT**

Photography arrived in India earlier than in other parts of the world mainly due to the enthusiasm of the Colonial Powers. Despite lack of speedy transport and communications, equipment for Photography was available in India as early as 1850s. The Bombay Photographic Society was formed in 1854 with 200 members. Similar bodies were formed in Madras and Calcutta in 1856. Hardly any daguerreotypes of this period have survived but paper negatives and calotypes, albumen prints of excellent quality are in possession of museums and individuals. The East India Company declared Photography to be the most accurate and economical means of recording the architectural and archeological monuments for official records, travelers etc.

Besides foreigners there were a host of Indian photographers who distinguished themselves and opened flourishing studios throughout India. Surprising as it may seem, between 1840, to 1900 there were more than 70 studios in Bombay and about 40 in Calcutta, as well as many located in other cities like Delhi, Hyderabad and Agra. In fact Lala Raja Deen Dayal had at one time simultaneously studios in Indore, Hyderabad and Bombay. Some of the early names in the field of Indian photography were Dr. N. Dajee, Nasserwanjee, Ahmed Ali Khan of Lucknow, Raja Ishwar Chandra Singh, Shivashankar Narayan, Rajendra Lal Mitra, Prodyot Kumar Tagore, Ganpatrao S. Kale, S.H. Dagg, C. Iyawsawmy, and above all, the most well known - Raja Deen Dayal.

Indian photography is now gaining in stature internationally as a series of international exhibitions testify. Understanding its evolution from a historical perspective and recognizing the power and potential as well is apparently the binding thread. Today Indian photographers like Raghu Rai and Dayanita Singh are well established internationally and an increasing number of Indian photographers are also gaining exposure and recognition on the international circuit. Participating in Biennales has been part of this process too. This has and will continue to impact the market value of photography as it gains momentum as an artistic medium, educating buyers and gallerists alike.

The Delhi Photo Festival in 2011 was followed by a burgeoning list of photography festivals in India. This platform is now celebrating this medium which for ages has

been labelled as a marginal art form. Mumbai, Goa, Pondicherry, Hyderabad, Shillong, India Habitat Photosphere and currently Travel Photo Jaipur, the Pink City's open air photography festival, held in Jaipur in February 2016. The list is growing. One hopes that the status of education in this art form for practitioners, curators and critics alike, will also develop and expand, creating meaningful artistic parameters and culture in the field of photography.

Digital photography and computer technology have transformed the face and creative possibilities in the realm of photography. They have introduced whole new approaches to expression and communication. Highly sophisticated software allows photographers to further explore the real and imagined, metaphor and dream... It aids and abets; enabling powerful images and layers that subvert time and reality, perhaps blending several images into a single frame. This new digital world is alluring and magnetic in its emotional expression and the photographer can post-produce, wielding technology like an artist's brush. The new genre of digital cameras have also democratised photography; the mobile phone camera and the 'selfie' obsession have brought this voyeur of reality into the awareness and psyche of all and sundry: rich and poor, young and old. Paradoxically this familiarity breeds a new respect and curiosity for a genre of art that even painters and sculptors include in their repertoire.

## **ARTISTS AND THEIR WORKS**

### **DIWAN MANNA**

Diwan is a contemporary photographer and a former chairperson of Chandigarh Lalitkala Academy. While going through his artworks researcher sometimes felt teleported to his conceptual compositions. researcher genuinely like the treatment of the photographs and the way they were executed. His photographs raise questions about it self and what is represented. He combines images with objects, moving in consciously chosen space in order to create a multimedia reality. Coming from a painting and theatre background his work depicts the possibility of crossing boundaries between photography, painting, acting and the body arts. He seeks to search for a sense of belonging in order to illuminate and valorize the life as it is. The effort is simply to attract and enhance attention to the momentary, which is the very basis of the permanence.

He tries to come to terms with the insidious and unrecognized forms of the degradation of our sense of life and honour within ourselves as well as in others. He is not merely interested in presenting images of destruction of human goodness, courage and beauty but tries to tap the unsuspected and as yet unrealised sources of tenderness, fortitude and humanity in us.

Diwan is a thematic photographer; his themes however do not override the aesthetics of his pictures. How he frames them, structures them and works out their textures is a source of strength of his kind of photography.

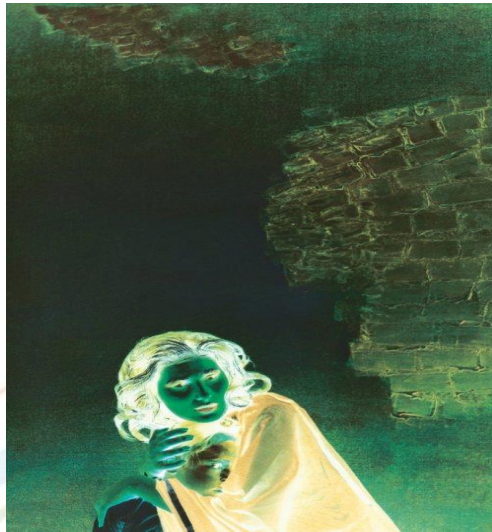
Manna's repertoire or work consists of a number of pictures in series, bases on different themes like violence, suffering etc. He likes to convey the stories of the society through his camera as he says; "As long as there is violence in this world, ways and means of dealing with it might differ with times but as long as the issue is there, artists all over the world will keep responding to it, so do I"

He started with experimenting in a darkroom, he wanted to express the negative thoughts but he also wanted to make sure that the visuals do not hit the audience very negatively but at the same time "negativity" should come across. Over the years Diwan's eye has grown increasingly mature, viewing reality from different perspective. Years of constant practice of working and re-working ideas, elements and methodologies to represent them and having seen a lot of meaningful works done by photographers of Europe and America , many notions or ways of approaching photography have been destroyed for him, at the same time some existing ones have been strengthened and reconfirmed. Some of his works are discussed below;



Violence 1

The above image is from the series of photographs by Diwan Manna that is titled as "Violence". This series is a reflection about common cruelty all over the world. Here major characters are women. Violence affects directly men, who are killed in majesty of law. Women are left alone and suffer as they are still dependent on men economically, financially, emotionally and female sense of security also depends on men in developing rural societies in India. That is why he is trying to feature mostly women.



Another Picture from the same series

Another series work titled “Shores of the Unknown” captures the complexities of life and death; life before life, life after life and everyday life day by day. Female profiles in shrouds accompanying a bird, the symbol of soul



Shores of Unknown 1



Shores of Unknown 2

These were the floating images of death, the fantasies we weave around it. At the centre of these pictures is a figure of a woman in the outlines fleshed out and bares at times, an appearance, an illusion. In the last picture, she seems to be fading into a tunnel, which makes the passage from life to death. Death is not a physical event but a symbolic reality we keep hovering around.

Photography is understood in India in a simple way; close to documentary photography. Conceptual photography which Diwan Manna creates is not practiced. Viewers in Europe are more open to alternative forms of photography; conceptual or experimental photography.

Going through the images of life Diwan manna's pictures one is disturbingly struck by the bewildering life around us. In configurations of the unknown and the known we begin to see what is so familiar to us and we are not aware of. The strange feeling that he creates in us is that we do not care to see what is so overwhelming and formidable and does not leave us any option and alibis for not seeing it.

In picture after picture this sense of lack of awareness of our surrounding increases, as we grow familiar with this kind of imagination at work. We are witnessing a breakdown and fusion of life and art forms. Traditionally we divided art forms as time art and space art. These pictures create a space that helps us understand our world and ourselves through his camera eye. One is not sure what one is witnessing is a photograph, a painting, theatre, cinema or all of them at the same time. These pictures reveal to us the areas of our insensitivity, carelessness and cruelty in various forms.

### **PUSHPMALA N**

She was formally trained as a sculptor but eventually shifted to photography to explore her interest in narrative figuration. Her works has been described as "performance photography" as she frequently uses herself as a model in her own works. She likes to use the elements of popular culture in her art to explore place, gender and history and often works in series.

She used terracotta and paper mache as medium in her early works and participated in the landmark exhibition, 'Seven Young Sculptors' curated by Vivan Sundaram, exhibited in New Delhi in 1985. The demolition of Babri Masjid and the communal violence that ensued in its aftermath, especially the Bombay riots in 1992-93 heavily inspired her landmark show, 'Excavations' that was exhibited in Gallery Chemould, Mumbai, India in 1994. 'Excavations' was a conceptual shift from her earlier works as she moved from figurative sculptures to assemblages of objects made of cheap materials and thrown away papers. The project tried to look at contemporary history as an archaeological site. She explains her shift in the medium, "In my early sculptures, mainly in terracotta, I was interested in creating an indigenous language based on an essential idea of "Indianness", using poor

materials and folk art references. A new language had to be used to express the sharp disjunctures and fragmentations in the tumultuous realities around us".

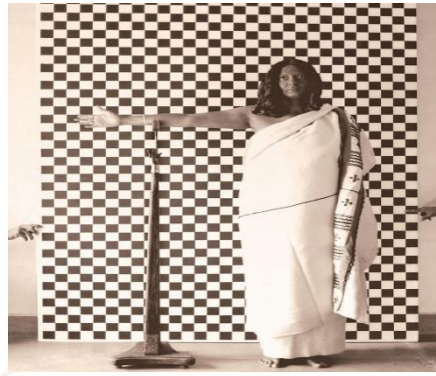
By later part of the 90s, Pushpamala N. left sculpture altogether and shifted to photographic works. Often created as series, the artist refers to these photographic works as 'photo-romances'. She acknowledges that it was Bhupen Khakhar, painter and her friend who inspired her for this kind of photo performances. Using her own body to perform the various roles in these series, her 'photo-romances' borrow from popular culture, mythology and historical references interspersed with wit and humour to offer a critique of the contemporary society."Phantom Lady or Kismet, a photo romance," presented as a solo exhibition at Gallery Chemould in 1998, the artist created a series of noir-thriller photographs of herself alternately as a gangster's moll and a masked adventurer.



Still from 'Phantom Lady'

She continued with these photo-romance series with 'Sunhere Sapne' (Golden dreams) that was realised during the 1998 Khoj international workshop at Modinagar, Delhi where she tried to capture the fantasy of an average middle-class housewife, dressed in the urban uniform of housecoat and petticoat, and her alter ego, a girl in a golden frock with a bouffant hairdo. She followed it other photo-romance series like 'Dard-e-Dil'(The Anguished Heart) in 2002, a narrative photo sequence set in Chawri Bazaar, Delhi; and 'Bombay Photo Studio' a project that she undertook from 2000-03. In 2004, her project 'Native women of South India', a collaborative project of performance photography realised with British Photographer Clare Arni, looks at photography as an ethnographic tool and deconstructs the popular images of the 'native' woman.





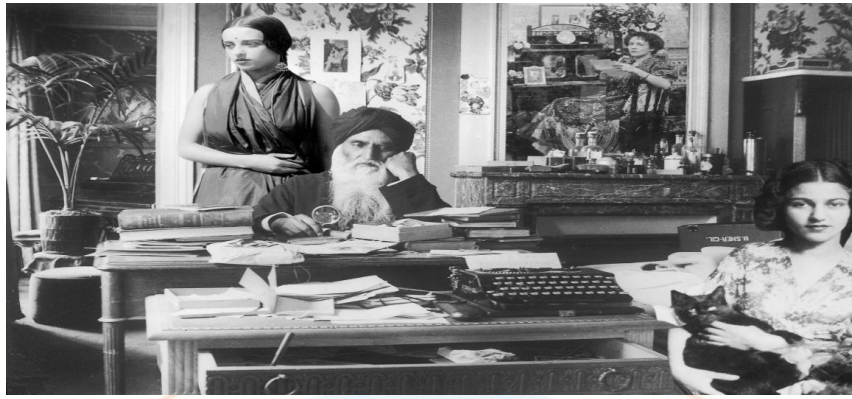
From The Ethnographic Series Native Women of South India: Manners & Customs, 2000-2004

Extending the performative aspect of the photo to video films, she made 'Paris Autumn', a work of fiction in the style of a gothic thriller, narrating the story of the artist's stay in Paris in 2005. The 35-minute film of black and white still photographs opened in Galerie Zurcher, Paris, France and has been premiered at different venues across the world. Her last film, 'Rashtriy Kheer and Desi Salad', an eleven-minute film made in 2007, was about using material from her mother's and mother-in-law's recipe books and is an ironic look at the Indian family post-independence. Her work has often been compared to American artist Cindy Sherman's.

### **VIVAN SUNDARAM**

Vivan is an Indian contemporary artist. He works in many different media, including painting, sculpture, printmaking, installation, video art as well as photography. His works constantly refer to social problems, popular culture, problems of perception, memory and history. He was among the first Indian artists to work with installation. His latest installations and videos often refer to his artistic influences; among them are Dadaism, Surrealism, as well as more recent Fluxus and the works of Joseph Beuys.

"Retake of Amrita" is one of his famous photographic works, actually it is a black and white photomontage series in which time and space are reinvented using intimate family photographs. He combined two legendary figures (his aunt Amrita Shergill and her father Umrao Singh Shergill) into fictitious digitally manipulated settings.



Retake of Amrita Shergill

Digital photomontages are re-stagings of photographs. In his introduction Vivan Sundaram describes Umrao Singh as "the essential photographer" whose work he has reorchestrated with a "digital wand" some half a century later. This "wand", he writes, allows the artist to "slip between and behind the paintings" while the "painted figure can be seen to be real, as real as the artist or the model." Digital imaging allows for new insertions and juxtapositions resolutely destroying the possibility of absolute closure. All visual texts defy foreclosing because readings can be as diverse and plural as the readers themselves. But digital intervention makes the text itself endlessly transformative. Post-photography and the emergence of digital imaging has been extremely effective in significantly changing the ways we perceive our relationship between the world of the images and that of lived experience.



Retake of Amrita Shergill

Vivan Sundaram's photomontages are constitutive of multi-layered intersections of different space, time, cultures and geographical territory. The photographer and his subject, the artist and her paintings coexist simultaneously with real and representational characters. The disruption of space, time and chronology displaces familiar practices of image production and exchange.

### **RESEARCHER'S EXPERIMENTS WITH PHOTOGRAPHY**

Most of researcher's work is an Earnest and conscientious efforts to persuade mankind to leave their material world and realise where the entire human race is heading, as Banksy said "art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable". Researcher's works are an attempt to help people realize the injustice, discrimination, outrage, malpractices and other issues prevailing in our society. Researcher always find himself attracted towards the social evils responsible for ruining and degrading us, our societies and our world.

As a visual artist, researcher has the protagonist and researcher's works is his mouthpiece. Researcher tries to portray these issues in his own way. Rather than confining to any particular boundary, researcher believes in focusing on the need of the subject. One can also see the traces of minimalist/conceptual approach in researcher's works. Recently, researcher has started experimenting with the printed photographs on flex. The prints then again treated with acrylic colours according to the theme/subject of the work to bring out the desired results. The outcome of this amalgamation of painting and photography is really fascinating and creates an atmosphere that ultimately leads to the aesthetic experience. Some of researcher's works are explained below;



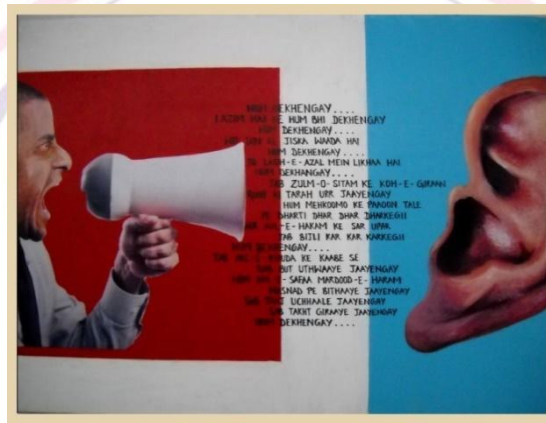
Forgotten Nandi 1

The above imageries to capture the contrast between the holy eminence of cows and their actual condition in our country. A cow sitting near a stack of garbage on

road, she was looking very sad and despondent. This visual language strike directly to people's minds and make them realize the idea behind this artwork.

The artwork was composed and cropped and printed the images on a flex; other elements of the composition are painted on the sheet. The cows are made to be seen as left-out and trapped, whereas its counterpart 'Nandi' (An idol, well placed in the temples with all the luxuries) is shown superior and mobile. To give mobility to The Nandi on such terrain, attached long narrow legs to Nandi (same as Dali used with elephants in his compositions), legs of desire.

This literal amalgamation of photography and painting creates a new dimension, The Idea was conveyed in a way that it must inculcate in the viewer's mind and force him/her to think, as well the overall aesthetic experience of the viewer remains intact.



Hum Dekhengay

"Hum Dhengay" is a popular Urdu nazm written by Faiz Ahmed Faiz. In 1985, the then president of Pakistan "General Zia Ul Haque" banned "Sari" (a part of the traditional attire for women on the subcontinent) as a part of his programme of forced islamicization. That year, Iqbal Bano, one of the Pakistans best loved singers and artists, sang "Hum Dekhengay" to an audience of 50,000 people in a Lahore stadium wearing a black sari in a protest.

The above painting relates the present situation of our country to that historic event. No one has a right to speak against the advancing facism and intolerance in the country. People are being killed, youths/students are being put behind the bars, media are being paid for the news but if you speak against it you will be honoured with the title of "Anti-National".

The composition illustrates a frustrated youth screaming those revolutionary words to an Ear, ear of everyone who is a part of this despotism and the size of the ear depicts how big the problem actually is. Loudspeaker is used as a symbol to emphasize the boldness and determination to fight against the system and injustice.

The technique and treatment of the artwork is same as explained in the previous artwork.

## CONCLUSION

Though Photography reached us way back in the 1950's, we are still behind in this particular art-form as compared to the Europe and America. The reason for this is that there is a little amount of attention is given to develop a substantial visual phraseology since childhood in India. Contrary to this, in the West, children are been taken to museums/art galleries. They have reprints of Picasso, Van Gogh in their houses. But here in India there is a lack of this training for children. We grow up looking at religious calendars or a general landscape or scenery. To develop the capacity to deal with the kind of abstractions, children are needed to be more familiar with fine arts, as they grow up they will have a better understanding of visual language.

However as explained, many Indian artists are now trying to push the boundaries with their creative skills and capabilities. Diwan Manna, whose work is not merely frozen mirror images of objects around us, it is his vision and the experimental treatment of the photographs that counts and makes the viewer teleported to his conceptual compositions. Vivan Sundaram, whose successful attempt to merge different spaces in time turned out to be an interesting event in the world of fine arts. It is worth mentioning the advancement of technology has also played an important role to give more strength to develop photography as fine art, digital softwares like Photoshop and Illustrator are proved to be the boon for the artists/photographers to give them immense space to perform various experiments with their creative skills.

It can also be concluded that fine art has always been is search of something new and interesting. Enough has been said through the art of painting, Artists are now embracing new mediums and techniques to cater to the demands contemporary art world. It is high time to give new definitions to the contemporary art practices, and photography being a comparatively new invention, gives enormous possibilities as a medium to be used as Art.

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