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Malaviya Moolya Anusheelan Kendra
in collaboration with
Inter Cultural Studies Centre
organizes

Two-day National Seminar

**Indian Visual Cultures through
Paint, Print, and Digital Media :
Shifting Patterns and Shaping Possibilities**

Date : 23rd - 24th January, 2025

Venue : Malaviya Moolya Anusheelan Kendra, BHU

Dr. Deepali Yadav
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Conveners

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The conference intends to examine how visual culture has been reshaped in different periods, from eighteenth-century colonial India to post-millennial India with an emphasis on paint, print, and ‘the digital’ alongside other significant mediums which have been central in shaping practices of seeing in India. The history of visual culture through these centuries is marked by royal patronage of paintings, a practice further appropriated by the administratively employed Company School of Painting, the dissemination of various kinds of visual texts through print, and the proliferation of images through forms of mechanical reproduction including photography and cinema. The present-day visual culture and the nature of textuality have become a unique mix of aural and visual that transcends earlier forms to include echoes / reverberations / memories / of visual experiences that continue to play a definitive role in narrating our everyday lives. These landmark junctures or shifts in the history of India’s diverse visual cultures are indispensable to understand how the sense of self and surroundings relies on our practices of seeing that decide what, where, and how we choose to see/unsee. It is this tendency of visualizing in a particular manner that gathers our responses to different arrangements, spaces, and processes that exists in its visible materiality. Sumathy Ramaswamy (2003), Gayatri Sinha (2010), Sandra Freitag (2017), and Dev Nath Pathak (2022) are some studies that trace divergent trajectories of Indian visual culture which attempt to examine the significance of visuality to understanding the everyday, ordinary and the mundane. Nicholas Mirzoeff states, “In this swirl of imagery, seeing is much more than believing. It is not just a part of everyday life; it is everyday life.” This everyday visuality that appears harmless and obvious becomes central to the construction of spectacle, surveillance, morality, governance, nationalism, etc. The conference seeks to examine how the site of sight is interrelated with that of knowledge and power and how notions of visuality are in constant motion and interplay for meaning-making.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, paintings catered to princely regimes which underwent a subtle shift with the arrival of Company-commissioned painters in the latter half of the century by combining Rajput and Mughal elements with Victorian landscape. These paintings largely focused on showcasing the cross-cultural experiences of Indians and the British in India showing how colonialism reshaped the identity and living experiences of Indians as well as their British counterparts. Also, in England, paintings about everyday life in India were considered important possessions by British administrators that became testimony of their sahib lifestyle and status. The content of Company paintings largely remained limited to the creation of an exclusive Oriental gaze that also became the source of knowledge production about India and its people until the arrival of print culture.

The Portuguese invasion had already introduced the first printing press in Goa in the sixteenth century. Yet it was almost three hundred years later that the 'Indigenous printing and publishing industry took off ... in the first half of the nineteenth century.' It is in line with this transition that print culture in India led to mass-produced visual culture through indigenous images in the form of posters, pamphlets, cartoons, God calendars, etc., which went on to become more democratic 'by allowing... to purchase the prints which were inexpensive and within almost everyone's budget.' This led to the emergence of a vast repertoire of works including those of Raja Ravi Varma, images of nationalist iconography, and other more vernacular expressions.

The arrival of cinema and television accentuated public forms of consuming images that have been subject to close critical scrutiny where, in continuation with paintings and photography, the frontality of the image, "the darsanic" etc. are foregrounded. (Prasad 2021) The cinematic image, especially that of the star, also has an afterlife in the form of its public percolation as hoardings, cut-outs which makes it difficult to delimit cinema merely as an aesthetic form and enter into complex relations with questions of publicity and the potency of the image. (Jacob 2008, Mazzarella 2013) It needs to be highlighted that the questions of visibility and the larger "sensorium of the everyday" can be addressed only by investigating

intermedial networks and connections established across different representational formats. Television was primarily meant for broadcasting public-oriented educational programs in Hindi which also promoted national integration. Shows like Buniyaad, Hum Log, and other mythological shows like Ramayana and Mahabharata bridged the pre- and post-liberalization shift. However, it was in the last decade of the century when an unforeseen change was experienced in the medium with the advent of satellite channels in 1991.

The televised audio-visual content changed the entire dynamics of TV watching but also went on to cater to and address the specific needs of newly constituted India's middle class in the era of liberalization. Though the visuals generated in this era of liberalization were easily accessible by the masses but the contemporaneous transformation of viewers into consumers of commodities. Simultaneously, the impact of liberalization was also felt with the arrival of the Internet, which in post-millennial India has become the basis for the introduction of a parallel/alternative television-watching experience. These alternative television or OTT channels showcase the earlier mentioned predecessors by entering into their daily rural lives, dreams and suburban spaces. The user-friendly ability of internet devices that offer an opportunity to create visual content on social media platforms has taken India's visual culture back to the masses for the first time after the introduction of print culture. Usage of gifs, memes, smileys, and avatars, are perfect examples of personalized visual culture that is available as per individual requirements.

As Sumathy Ramaswamy identifies "visual turn" of the modern age should be understood as "the conviction that visibility...itself does not lie outside history, culture politics...this turn follows from a recognition of the enormous power of images to transform and mobilize self and community" (xiv) Some of the questions that the conference seeks to answer include: Has visual culture marked its full circle in contemporary India by being accessible to all classes once again after the advent of print? How are the production and consumption practices of visual culture, across centuries, responsible for making it more accessible and democratic? What are the

implications of this shift from being a citizen to consumerism to finally advocating democracy? How have various technological developments transformed the nature of visuality in India? Can one derive ethical and political forms of belonging and critique that sustain contemporary technological transformation in the domain of visual culture? What are the methodological difficulties associated with reading and interpreting visual texts today? Papers examining a particular historical phase or analysing interrelatedness in Indian visual culture are welcome to explore paint, print, and digital media amidst the diversity of existing visual forms. Papers that look at clusters of visual materials within intermedial networks and specifically trying to locate shifts and transformations in viewing practices or in the nature of the image are most welcome.

Some of the broader themes that the conference seeks to engage with include :

- Production, consumption, and circulation of images
- Interplay and intersectionality of images on different platforms
- Politics of visibility, invisibility and counter-visibility
- Iconography, symbols, allegories
- Changes and challenges in colonial and postcolonial visualities
- Approaches to visual archives and unexplored domains
- Canonical and popular images
- Imagination of self and collective through visuality
- The image as a site of affective intensities
- Local, national, and global alignment of images

Selected conference papers will be published in an edited volume through an academically reputed international publisher.

Important dates :

Abstract submission : **November 30th, 2024**

Full paper submission : **January 10th, 2025**

Email for abstract and paper submission : indianvisualculturesmmak@gmail.com

Registration fee : ₹ 1000 . The details for submission of the registration fee will be shared with the selected participants.