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Do Local Ecologies Shape Artists' Aesthetic and Professional Decisions? A Qualitative Exploration in The Indian Context

Nandini Talukder , Priyadarshi Patnaik

Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, India

Abstract

The Indian art ecosystem is rich and diverse, where Indian artists are strongly shaped by institutions, markets, historical background, and local cultures. In this context, this paper explores artists' aesthetic and professional art-making choices and orientations through case studies of two major art hubs in Kolkata and Baroda. It attempts to examine regional and local variations in the Indian art scene, which can be crucial in understanding the local ecological dimensions shaping artistic choices. It uses a qualitative approach using thematic analysis of transcripts from semi-structured interviews conducted with art students, emerging artists, and professionals from both hubs and content/image analysis of artworks photo-documented during field visits. Key findings suggested distinctive differences between these two places. Baroda was marked by a stronger market and financial confidence, which support art practice as a professional career, and institutional encouragement for greater freedom in terms of concept, medium and techniques. Kolkata, on the other hand, indicated financial uncertainty and career diversion for artists. A more homogenous and tamer artistic trend was identified where artists were less experimental, and the influence of the historical background of Bengal, such as the traditional preference for mediums or techniques, still continues. However, artists from both hubs demonstrated a strong independence regarding their truthfulness to subjects and viewed art-making as a journey for research and self-growth. Findings provide strong indications that local ecologies shape artists' aesthetic and professional choices. This has implications for better policies and revitalized institutional approaches to support regional art ecosystems.

Keywords: Artistic Orientation, Creativity, Cultural Diversity, Indian Art Ecosystem, Regional Variation