



# Negotiating Tradition and Modernity: A Practice-Based Study of Contemporary Visual Art in North Karnataka

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**Abstract-** Using a practice-based analytical framework, this study explores the dynamic conflict between tradition and modernity in contemporary visual art practices in North Karnataka. Examining how historical visual languages are recreated within modern artistic discourse is made intriguing by the region's rich artistic legacy, which includes indigenous artisan techniques, mural traditions, and temple sculpture. This study presents tradition and modernity as interrelated and mutually transforming processes that influence artistic identity and creation rather than as antagonistic forces. The study emphasizes practice as a method of knowledge creation by fusing theoretical investigation with studio-based experimentation. The study investigates how artists interact with inherited cultural forms while reacting to global influences, technological developments, and changing socio-political realities. It does this by drawing on postcolonial perspectives and theories of cultural hybridity. The study illustrates various tactics of adaptation, reinterpretation, and resistance through case studies of particular artists and community-based practices in North Karnataka. These include the use of modern materials in conjunction with indigenous techniques, the conversion of traditional motifs into abstract or conceptual forms, and the integration of individual and collective memories into visual storytelling. The researcher's personal artistic practice, which serves as both method and result, is an important part of the study. The studio work illustrates the tension and balance between continuity and change through experimentation with mixed media, layering techniques, and material interventions. The resulting artworks exhibit a composite visual language that unites material and mental dimensions, local and global, and past and present. The results imply that North Karnataka's modern visual art actively redefines tradition as a dynamic, ever-evolving entity rather than passively preserving it. Artists are critical actors who reinterpret and reconstruct tradition to meet modern issues like identity, memory, and cultural sustainability rather than being passive inheritors of cultural traditions. The study also emphasizes the value of practice-based research in the field of art since it allows for a more profound comprehension of creative processes that cannot be adequately expressed through language alone. In the end, by highlighting regional viewpoints and stressing the importance of localized artistic activities in forming global visual culture, this research adds to the larger conversation on Indian contemporary art. It promotes a broader interpretation of modern art that acknowledges the fruitful interaction between tradition and modernity.

**Keywords-** Tradition, Modernity, Contemporary Art, Practice-Based Research, North Karnataka, Cultural Identity, Visual Language

## I. Introduction

In the debate of contemporary Indian art, the link between tradition and modernity has been a major issue, especially in areas where cultural legacy still influences daily life and artistic creation. This interaction takes place in a unique setting in North Karnataka, with its rich history of temple building, mural painting, folk customs, and craft-based activities. The region's visual culture is profoundly rooted in historical continuity, but it is also influenced by modernization, globalization, and technological advancement. Using a practice-



based method, this study aims to investigate how modern visual artists in North Karnataka manage these seemingly opposing pressures.

In the context of Indian art, tradition is a dynamic continuum that changes throughout time and space rather than a permanent or static object. Traditional arts including Surpur painting, ceremonial art, textile customs, and sculpture have long been associated with religious, social, and cultural purposes in North Karnataka. But these forms have changed significantly with the arrival of modernity, which was characterized by colonial contacts, the development of art institutions, and the growth of international art networks. More and more modern artists are interacting with this inherited visual lexicon through conceptual reconfiguration, abstraction, and reinterpretation rather than outright duplication.

Artists are able to transcend traditional boundaries thanks to the introduction of new materials, media, and display techniques brought forth by modernity. A move toward experimentation and innovation is shown in the use of acrylics, digital media, installation, and multidisciplinary techniques. Inspired by local stories, symbols, and material customs, artists maintain a connection to their cultural heritage. The binary opposition between the traditional and the modern is challenged by this dual engagement, which produces a hybrid visual language that expresses both continuity and change.

This study uses a practice-based research approach, in which artistic practice is a primary form of inquiry rather than just an outcome. The research attempts to produce knowledge through the act of creation by fusing theoretical frameworks—like postcolonial theory and cultural hybridity—with studio experimentation. The tensions, overlaps, and conversations between tradition and modernity are explored through the researcher's own creative process. This investigation is further supported by field interactions, visual recording, and material experimentation, which allow for a deeper engagement with both individual artistic expressions and communal practices.

## **II. Research Objectives**

- To investigate how North Karnataka's modern art techniques are influenced by traditional visual culture.
- To examine how artists reimagine tradition within contemporary, international contexts.
- To investigate the use of practice-based approaches in artistic research.
- To create unique pieces of art that represent the balance between contemporary and tradition.

## **III. Research Questions**

- In what ways do North Karnataka's modern artists interact with traditional visual forms?
- What aspects of artistic materials, concepts, and presentation are influenced by modernity?
- Can theoretical knowledge and artistic creativity be connected through practice-based research?
- In what ways does modern visual language reflect regional identity?

## **IV. Literature Review**

USES PERFORMANCE PHOTOGRAPHY TO REINTERPRET IDENTITY AND HISTORY, CHALLENGING NOTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY AND TRADITION.

The intersection of tradition and contemporary art has been widely discussed in Indian art discourse. Scholars emphasize that Indian art cannot be separated from its historical and cultural contexts. According to art practitioners in Karnataka, identity and historical consciousness remain central to artistic production.

Institutions such as the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath promote research-driven and practice-oriented engagement with Indian art traditions, encouraging artists to reinterpret heritage through contemporary practices.



Contemporary artists like N. S. Harsha explore global themes while retaining local narratives, often working across media such as painting, installation, and public art. Similarly, Pushpamala Community-based practices also play a crucial role. Collaborative projects with indigenous groups in Karnataka emphasize process, collective authorship, and cultural continuity, redefining contemporary art beyond institutional frameworks

## **V. Structure Of Theory**

Research Based On Practice: Knowledge Produced By Artistic Endeavors, With A Focus On Producing As Research.

(Homi Bhabha) Cultural Hybridity: The "Third Space" Where Tradition And Modernity Converge Is Art.

Theory Of Postcolonialism: Examines How Regional Customs Both Adapt To And Resist Global Modernity.

This study is based on:

## **VI. Methodology**

### **1. A Practice-Based Method**

The creation of artworks in the studio as a means of inquiry forms the basis of this research.

### **2. Techniques Employed**

Experimentation with materials (both classic and modern media)

Documentation (notes, photos, and sketches)

Field trips to nearby artisan communities

Visual evaluation of artwork

### **3. Choosing A Case Study**

Influences from institutions (galleries, residences)

Community-based methods

Local musicians

## **VII. Context: Art In North Karnataka**

North Karnataka is a historically rich and culturally diverse region whose artistic traditions have developed over centuries of social, political, and religious change. Temple architecture, mural painting, sculpture, and color full folk customs are the foundation of this region's visual culture, which continues to influence both modern artistic endeavors and communal life. The region's rich history is demonstrated by locations like Pattadakal, Aihole, and Badami Cave Temples, where elaborate carvings, iconography, and innovative architecture have long functioned as visual narratives of religious and cultural identity.

In North Karnataka, ritualistic and practical contexts are deeply entwined with traditional art forms. Hereditary artisan societies have long passed down crafts like textile traditions, metal crafts, mural painting, and wooden carving. Surpur painting, which originated under royal patronage and is distinguished by intricate figurative compositions and mythological subjects, is one prominent example. These customs are ingrained in social institutions, celebrations, and daily cultural life and are not just artistic manifestations.

Nonetheless, these conventional forms have been greatly impacted by the shift to modernity. Both the creation and reception of art have changed as a result of new materials, evolving patronage structures, and the emergence of formal art education. By offering venues for experimentation, exhibition, and scholarly interaction, organizations like Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath have been instrumental in connecting ancient



knowledge systems with modern art practices. North Karnataka artists are hence more involved in both regional customs and international creative discussions.

Modern painters in the area have started using creative methods to rework classic motifs and techniques in recent decades. This covers conceptual investigations of identity, memory, and cultural change in addition to the use of mixed media, installation, and digital techniques. With many artists utilizing indigenous knowledge systems while placing their work inside modern frameworks, the lines between art and craft are becoming more hazy.

Additionally, the scope of creative practice in North Karnataka has been broadened by the rise of alternative art spaces, community-based initiatives, and artist-led projects. These platforms promote conversations between rural and urban settings, resulting in partnerships that subvert traditional hierarchies in the art world. This dynamic interplay between continuity and change, where tradition is continuously reinterpreted rather than abandoned, is reflected in the region's art scene.

North Karnataka's artistic context is therefore an important field of study within the larger discourse of Indian art since it offers a convincing foundation for comprehending how contemporary visual art negotiates the complicated link between heritage and modernity.

## **VIII. Case Studies**

### **1. Contemporary Artists And Hybrid Practices**

A notable trend toward hybrid practices that actively negotiate the nexus of tradition and modernity is shown in the rise of contemporary artists in North Karnataka. These artists create new forms of expression that are both locally rooted and globally relevant by reinterpreting and recontextualizing conventional visual languages within global artistic frameworks. In the area where cultural memory, identity, and global consciousness collide, this hybridity becomes a defining feature of contemporary visual art. N. S. Harsha is a well-known illustration of how local iconography and global themes can coexist. Harsha uses elaborate detailing and recurring patterns that recall traditional aesthetics, drawing inspiration from Karnataka's everyday life, folktales, and miniature painting traditions. But his works tackle more general issues like migration, globalization, labor, and collective identity in addition to regional narratives. His large-scale pieces frequently feature crowds, maps, and symbolic characters, producing visual metaphors that are both rooted in local sensibility and resonate beyond cultural boundaries. This fusion of the local and the global encompasses conceptual approaches as well as stylistic components. Interdisciplinary methods, including installation, digital media, performance, and site-specific interventions, are becoming more and more popular among contemporary artists. These methods broaden the potential for visual expression and question accepted notions of art. This hybridity is further reinforced by the use of non-traditional materials in conjunction with indigenous techniques, allowing artists to play with shape, texture, and meaning. Hybrid artistic production is influenced not only by individual practices but also by community-based and collaborative approaches. Artists frequently collaborate with regional craftspeople, incorporating modern ideas and presentation styles while utilizing age-old techniques like weaving, painting, and craftsmanship. In addition to reviving customs, this contact challenges the hierarchical divisions that have traditionally divided art and craft. The negotiation of identity is a crucial aspect of hybrid activities. North Karnataka artists negotiate a variety of cultural influences in a world that is gradually becoming more interconnected, striking a balance between exposure to global art movements and their local tradition. Their visual language, which blends traditional iconography with modern abstraction or conceptualism, frequently reflects issues of displacement, cultural transformation, and the quest for belonging. In the end, the work of artists such as N. S. Harsha shows that hybridity is an innovative area rather than a compromise between tradition and



modernity. It makes it possible to develop new artistic vocabulary that respond to both contemporary circumstances and historical continuity. These hybrid approaches are essential in creating a modern art scene in North Karnataka that is vibrant, inclusive, and globally involved while maintaining a strong connection to its cultural heritage.

## **IX. Community-Based Art Practices**

By emphasizing collective authorship, shared knowledge systems, and socially engaged processes, community-based art practices in North Karnataka are essential to reimagining modern visual art. These methods place an emphasis on cooperation with rural and marginalized populations, where art is ingrained in daily life, ritual, and cultural continuity, in contrast to the individualistic paradigm of artistic production frequently associated with modern and contemporary art. By challenging traditional divisions between art and craft as well as hierarchies between artists and artisans, these methods broaden the definition of modern artistic practice.

North Karnataka has a long history of community-driven creative forms, including ceremonial adornment, mural painting, and textile production, where expertise is passed down orally and practically from generation to generation. These customs are included into festivals, homes, and religious settings rather than just galleries or marketplaces. When interacting with these traditions, modern artists and collectives frequently use participatory approaches, collaborating with regional craftspeople to jointly produce works of art that represent cultural narratives and common experiences. Through this method, the community is positioned as active participants in artistic production rather than just subjects, giving them a sense of agency and ownership.

Traditional methods are often reinterpreted using modern frameworks in collaborative projects. For example, mural traditions may be turned into site-specific public artworks or textile-based techniques could be transformed into installation art. These changes enable the preservation of ancient information while also recontextualizing it within contemporary discourse and presentation forms. Artworks that are both culturally specific and philosophically pertinent to current issues are produced by combining indigenous techniques, local materials, and group labor.

Engaging with social issues including gender, identity, labor, and sustainability is a key component of community-based art practices. Artists raise awareness of often-overlooked stories by collaborating closely with underrepresented groups, such as women crafters, rural craft communities, and economically challenged populations. The sustainability of traditional traditions in the face of industrialization and globalization is also aided by these partnerships, which generate alternative economic prospects.

## **X. Conclusion**

Using a practice-based framework, this study investigated the intricate and dynamic interaction between tradition and modernity in the context of contemporary visual art practices in North Karnataka. The study shows that tradition and modernity function as interconnected and dialogic forces that continuously influence artistic creativity in the area rather than living in antagonism to one another. Inherited visual languages, such as those found in temple art, mural traditions, folk practices, and artisan skills, are used by artists as dynamic resources that may be reinterpreted, changed, and recontextualized within modern discourse rather than as static references.

Analysis of classic forms, like Surpur art, shows that adaptation and revival are inextricably intertwined. Tradition changes in reaction to shifting socioeconomic and cultural circumstances, as seen by the shift from



mural-based techniques to portable media like canvas and the use of contemporary materials like acrylics. Simultaneously, the enduring nature of narrative themes and symbolic motifs highlights the resilience of cultural identity notwithstanding these changes.

Studying modern artists, such as N. S. Harsha, reveals the rise of hybrid techniques that combine regional symbolism with global issues. While staying grounded in local sensibilities, these approaches demonstrate a broader artistic vocabulary that tackles topics like migration, identity, and globalization. Such hybridity puts modern art in a position of negotiation, creativity, and cultural discourse while challenging binary frameworks.

Community-based art techniques, which emphasize cooperation, group authorship, and participatory procedures, are equally important. Artists address current social challenges and help preserve and reinvent traditional knowledge systems by interacting with underprivileged and rural people. The scope and purpose of modern art are redefined by these practices, which blur the lines between art and craft, individual and collective, and aesthetic and practical.

This study's practice-based methodology has been crucial in connecting theoretical investigation with creative output. The research has produced insights that go beyond textual analysis through studio experimentation, material exploration, and field involvement, highlighting the significance of embodied knowledge and creative processes in comprehending art.

In conclusion, North Karnataka's modern visual art emerges as a vibrant area where tradition is actively reinterpreted rather than just preserved. New forms, meanings, and possibilities arise from the continuous negotiation between the past and present, confirming the significance of local artistic practices within the larger discourse of modern Indian and international art.

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