

Art and Design Education in Nineteenth Century India:  
British Background and Development in South Asia

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## Abstract

Design education in India in a broad sense started in the mid-nineteenth century at three art schools in Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay. Another school was founded in Lahore in 1875. Although established during the colonial period, these schools are important for the history of art and design education in India and Asia also. The Madras School of Art was started in 1850 by Alexander Hunter. With the opening of the industrial section, it renamed the Madras School of Art and Industry. In 1852, it became the Government School of Industrial Arts. The Calcutta school was established in 1854 as the School of Industrial Art by the Society for the Promotion of Industrial Art. The South Kensington School of London supported it and selected Henry Hover Locke for the post of the first principal of the Calcutta school. It was renamed the Government School of Art in 1864, as the Government Schools of Design in Britain had started to be renamed Schools of Art since 1853. Locke stressed on imparting art education along the lines of South Kensington where academic naturalism became predominant. Earnest Binfield Havell served the Madras school as superintendent from 1884, and moved to the Calcutta school in 1896. He put emphasis on the Indian style of art instead. Havell also studied at the South Kensington School, but less academic and more familiar to the Arts and Crafts. The other historical art school is Sir J. J. School of Art founded in Bombay. Although histories of the Government Schools of Design were written in Britain, schools established in India were rarely included. By including these Indian schools in this history, we can get a broader view of the history of design education in the nineteenth century.

*Keywords: Art and Design Education, India, Madras (Chennai), Calcutta (Kolkata), Bombay (Mumbai), South Kensington system*

## Introduction

While Asia has its own unique traditions and a long history of art, the idea of art education came from Europe in the mid-nineteenth century; from Britain to India and from Spain to the Philippines. Although art education was introduced almost simultaneously in both regions, several art schools in succession were founded in India, while only a few academies or schools of art were founded in the Philippines in the early nineteenth century.

From the mid-nineteenth century, art schools supported by the British Government were founded in major Indian cities such as Madras (Chennai), Calcutta (Kolkata), Bombay (Mumbai), and Lahore (Pakistan's Punjab region) focused on industrial arts. Some of these schools were renamed "school of arts" and renamed again as "school of arts and crafts", which was one of the reasons nineteenth century art education history in India is unique and important in global design education history.

These changes in India were related to similar changes in art education in Britain in the nineteenth century. The first Government School of Design was founded in London in 1837, renamed the Central Training School of Art in 1853, the Normal Training School of Art in 1857, and the National Art Training School in 1863. In 1896, it was reformed and renamed the Royal College of Art, with the Central School of Arts and Crafts being founded by the London Country Council in December of the same year.

Although European academic art education mainly based on life drawing was introduced in most art schools in India, some British teachers sought to develop art education methods based on traditional Indian art and industrial arts. Unlike the British art schools established in major Indian cities, some other art schools founded by the Maharajas (Indian princes) attempted to cultivate local art traditions. This study compares the histories of the four major Indian art schools in Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, and Lahore (Pakistan since 1947). By comparing them with a few important schools and institutes in the former British Commonwealth (former territories of the British Empire), the historical significance of Indian art and design education in the nineteenth century is enumerated.

In this paper, we will focus on not only educational content but also the name of schools and their gradual changes. Although the name expresses contents as well as organization, few publications in art and design history are fully paying attention to the change of their names by sometimes using newer ones to describe the history of the preceding period.

### Madras (Chennai)

On May 01, 1850, the Madras School of Art was established by Alexander Hunter (1816-n.d.), Resident Surgeon of the Madras Presidency, as a private art school. Although a Scottish portrait painter, James Wales (1747-1795) had initiated training a few students at Shaniwarwada in Pune in 1792 at the request of Peshwa Sawai Madhavrao (1774-1795), this came to its end within a few years due to the death of both James Wales and Sawai Madhavrao in 1795 (Macquarie Archive). Therefore, this was the first art school founded in India and one of the first in Asia.



*Fig.1* Government College of Fine Arts (former Government College of Arts and Crafts), Chennai

Born and raised near Edinburgh, Hunter had been a pupil of the Royal Scottish Academy and a draughtsman in the dissecting room of the Edinburgh Infirmary. He was also a pupil at the Life Academies and Schools of Design and Modelling in Edinburgh and Paris (Dewan, 2002). Although he was undergoing more important training to become a surgeon, his studies at these academies and schools indicate that training in different specializations such as art, technology, and medicine were more interrelated in the early nineteenth century. On completing his studies in Edinburgh in 1837, his father secured for him a medical appointment in India.

The Government School of Design was founded in London in 1837. When the Madras School of Art opened an industrial arts section after its foundation, the term “design” was added to the school’s name. The development of the first art schools in India was closely associated with the Government School of Design in Britain. While undertaking his medical duties in India, Hunter began experimenting with pottery production and was also interested in developing local resources into local industries. The local techniques he learned were developed into a pottery production program in the industrial arts section of the Madras School of Art.

The name of the art school was altered several times. On the inauguration of the industrial arts section in June 1851, it was amended from the Madras School of Art to the Madras School of Art and Industry. In 1852, after being taken over by the government, it was renamed the Government School of Industrial Arts and has since been referred to also as the Industrial School of Arts, the Madras School of Art and Design, and the Madras School of Arts and Crafts. In the twentieth century, the name changed again to the Government School of Arts and Crafts, Madras, to the Government College of Arts and Crafts, and to the Government College of Fine Arts, Chennai, at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In 1865, Robert Chisholm (1840-1915), the British architect pioneering the Indo-Saracenic style in Madras, was appointed head of the Madras School of Industrial Arts. After Hunter’s retirement in 1873, Chisholm became superintendent of the school. After his retirement in 1884, Ernest Binfield Havell (1861-1934) became superintendent. Havell began his career in South Kensington and studied at the National Art Training School, where his interest in Indian crafts developed. Although the Government School of Design had been renamed the



Fig.2 Former Government College of Arts & Crafts (Government School of Industrial Arts in the 19th century), Chennai

Central or Normal Training School of Art and then the National Art Training School and was progressing toward academic naturalism, an interest in decorative arts and crafts was also developing in Britain and Europe in the 1880s. Havell was twenty-three when he became superintendent and, during his decade long tenure, he started developing art education based on Indian rather than western models

After Havell's departure from Madras in 1896, William Snelling Hadaway (1872-1941) became superintendent in 1907, and continued Havell's focus on more traditional Indian art. Hadaway had studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts. He specialized in book illustration, jewelry, and metal design. In the 1870s, the influence of British art education was also spreading in the US, especially in Massachusetts, where Walter Smith (1836-1886), also a South Kensington school graduate, became professor of art education and Massachusetts State director of art education (Smith, 1872). Smith had been an industrial arts education pioneer and had disparaged academic naturalist art education; however, in the early 1880s, when academic art education was becoming cherished again and the influence of William Morris (1834-1896) was also gaining ground, he faced increasing criticism. Both Havell and Hadaway belonged to this new generation of the Arts and Crafts movement proponents. Morris was a pioneer of both the Aesthetic Movement and the Arts and Crafts Movement. Both Britain and India were shifting from industrial arts education to art education and/or arts and crafts education in the late nineteenth century.

### Calcutta (Kolkata)

The Government College of Art & Craft in Kolkata is one of the oldest art schools in India. It was founded at Garanahata, Chitpur as the School of Industrial Art on August 16, 1854, as a private art school. In 1864, it was renamed the Government School of Art, and in 1951 it became the Government College of Art & Craft.

The Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta, celebrated its one hundredth anniversary in 1964 and in 1966, published a book, *Centenary: Government College of Art & Craft, Calcutta*, which included a very detailed paper "History of the Govt. College of Art & Craft"



Fig.3 Government College of Art & Craft, Kolkata

by Shri Jogesh Chandra Bagal. In the introductory chapter, Chandra Bagal discussed the origins of the Mechanics Institute, Calcutta.

The institution in its origin had a distinct character of its own. But the movement for its start may be traced much earlier than when it first came to the light of day. The Mechanics Institute or Institution was founded in Calcutta on the 26th of February, 1839 to provide for young men, preferably of the Eurasian brand, training in mechanical arts. (...) The prominent Europeans and Indians formed a committee of management for the institution. (...) The institution began with promise but could not carry on long for want of public support. We hear nothing of it in the late forties. (Bagal, 1964)

The first mechanics' institute was founded in Scotland in 1821 as the School of Arts of Edinburgh, with a second being established in Glasgow in November 1823. The first mechanics' institute in England was the Mechanics' Institute of Liverpool founded in July 1823, with a further institute being founded in London in December the same year. In Canada, the Montreal Mechanics' Institute was founded in 1828, and the York Mechanics' Institute was founded in Toronto in 1830. In Australia, the first mechanics' institute was established in Hobart in 1827, with the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts opening in 1833. While the mechanics' institutes in the UK, the USA, Australia, and Canada are partly kept as libraries or recorded in documents, those in India were not well-documented.

Although the names of the first mechanics' institute in the world, the School of Arts of Edinburgh and one of the first mechanics' institutes in Australia, the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, were similar to those of art schools in the nineteenth century, there was a clear difference between the two in the west. Mechanics' institutes were intended as educational establishments for primarily adult education in technical subjects for working men; therefore, in the nineteenth century, schools of arts in the west were referred to as schools of mechanical arts rather than schools of fine arts. The School of Arts of Edinburgh later became a large public university, Heriot-Watt University, which does not have a department of art or design. The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts still teaches some programs comprising public lectures and courses and has a lending library and other activities based on its adult education mission;



*Fig.4* Government College of Art & Craft, Kolkata

however, there are no major art or design courses.

As Chandra Bagal wrote, there was also no clear distinction in India between the fine arts and crafts and the fine arts and mechanical arts. The term “industrial arts” was used in the names of most major art schools founded in India in the nineteenth century. Before the foundation of the Calcutta school, there was a Mechanics Institute or Institution in Calcutta founded in February 1839 for providing mechanical arts training for young men. As the Mechanics' Institutes were educational establishments originally founded to provide adult education to working men in mainly technical subjects, they were often funded by local industrialists as they would ultimately benefit from having more knowledgeable and skilled employees. While similar organizations were sometimes simply called Institutes, none were art schools. However, when Alexander Hunter established the Madras School of Art, the institutes and art schools were partly interrelated or similar until the mid-nineteenth century.

The committee for the Society for the Promotion of Industrial Art wrote to Richard Redgrave (1804-1888), superintendent of the National Art Training School (former Government School of Design) in London early in 1864 requesting for the selection a suitable candidate for appointment as principal for the School of Industrial Art. For this, Redgrave selected Henry Hover Locke (n.d.-1885). In June 1864, Locke reached Calcutta and took charge of the school, which subsequently came under the control and supervision of the Director of Public Instruction. After this, the status of the committee changed to a mere advisory or consultative body (Bagal, 1964). In Calcutta, Locke stressed the imparting of art education along the lines of the South Kensington school in London (Ghosh, 2015). He remained principal of the Government School of Art until 1882.

After Locke's death in 1885, the post of vice-principal was created, to which an Italian artist, Olinto Ghilardi (1848-1930) was appointed. Ghilardi was the mentor of Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), who studied at the Government School of Art in Calcutta. E. B. Havell was then appointed superintendent of the Government School of Art, Calcutta, commencing his post a day after his arrival in Calcutta on the 5th of July 1896. Havell was principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta from 1896 to 1905, where he developed a style of art and art education based on Indian rather than western models along with Abanindranath Tagore, a



nephew of the poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) who was going to establish *Visva Bharati*, today's Visva Bharati University, in Santiniketan, West Bengal.

## Bombay (Mumbai)

In Bombay, or Mumbai, the School of Art and Industry or the Sir J. J. School of Art and Industry was founded on March 02, 1857 by a Parsi-Indian merchant and philanthropist, Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy (1783-1859), who was impressed by the quality of the craftworks at the Great Exhibition held in Hyde Park, London, in 1851. He decided that there needed to be a school for art and industry in Bombay to train Indian craftsmen. The school started with elementary drawing and design classes at the Elphinstone Institute, but its main purpose was to provide instructions in painting, drawing and design, ornamental pottery, metal, and wood-carving and turning. Complicated machinery was indispensable and training was provided by master craftsmen who could manufacture artistic craft products and preserve the traditional skills and techniques of Indian crafts (Sir J. J. School of Art, *The Glorious 150 Years of Sir J. J. School of Art*, Mumbai). The School of Art and Industry operated as an experimental school during the lifetime of Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy (Sir J. J. School of Art, *Story of Sir J. J. School of Art*, Bombay).

A journalist and art critic, Joseph Archer Crowe (1825-1896) was offered the post of overseeing the Bombay School of Art and Industry. After studying painting in Paris, Crowe returned to London in 1843 and started his career in journalism while pursuing a parallel career in art history. He worked for the *Daily News* and was Paris correspondent from 1849 to 1852. During this time, he was also appointed editor of the *Bombay Gazette* and *Bombay Standard* and the *Illustrated London News* sent Crowe to cover the war in India (c. 1855-56). Although he was selected and trained in England to be appointed as the first superintendent of the school and relocated to Bombay in 1857, the role did not materialize. In July 1857, an expert painter and engraver, George Wilkins Terry (n.d.-n.d.), was appointed as the school's first drawing master and he started taking full time classes in 1860. He became so popular that the school was called "Terry's school." As the number of students increased, the need for an assistant became apparent.

In 1865, Terry visited London to search for expert teachers for the school and found John



Fig.5 Sir J. J. School of Art, Mumbai

Lockwood Kipling (1837-1911), John Griffiths (1837-1918), and Michael John Higgins (n.d.-n.d.). In the UK, the Department of Science and Art was established, and, in 1853, the Government School of Design was renamed the Central Training School of Art and then, in 1863, as the National Art Training School. By this time, it was focusing on teacher-training to supply art masters to the department's network of art schools at home and abroad. In 1856, the London school moved from Mar-

lborough House to South Kensington and, in 1864, Henry Hover Locke was sent from South Kensington to Calcutta. In the following year, Kipling, a specialist in architectural sculpture, Griffiths, a specialist in mural painting, and Higgins, a specialist in ornamental ironwork, were all sent to Bombay. In Bombay, Kipling's son, Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was born in December 1865. William Terry retired in 1877 and, three years after his retirement, John Griffiths was appointed superintendent in 1880.



Fig.6 Sir J. J. School of Art, Mumbai

As Deepali Dewan pointed out, one of the central contradictions in colonial art education curriculum was the co-existence of mandatory naturalistic drawing classes and training in traditional Indian art (Dewan, 2002). However, naturalistic drawing lesson was very popular in these major cities in India, especially at Sir J. J. School in Bombay. In 1877, the number of student in its drawing school was 111, while that in both architectural and decorative departments was only nine. The departments of pottery, wood engraving, metalwork, etc., were separated and fine art became a more important central objective of the school. The name of the school became Sir J. J. School of Art (*Story of Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay*). Draftsman's class was attached to Sir J. J. School of Art in 1896 and reorganized as a course to make it suitable for training in architecture in 1913. It became Sir J. J. College of Architecture. Sir J. J. Institute of Applied Art started operations in the buildings of Sir J. J. School of Art in 1935.

## Lahore

In 1875, the Mayo School of Industrial Arts, named in honor of the recently assassinated British Viceroy of India Lord Mayo, and the Lahore Museum were founded in Lahore, Punjab. John Lockwood Kipling, who had been teaching in Bombay, was made the first curator of the Lahore Museum and the first principal of the Mayo School of Industrial Arts. The Mayo School of Industrial Arts was restructured as the National College of Arts, Pakistan, in 1958.

By May 1873, Kipling had decided to apply for the post of principal at a new school of art in Lahore. Kipling had married Alice MacDonald (1837-1910) in 1865 and moved with his wife to India, where he had been appointed as a professor of architectural sculpture at the J. J. School of Art and Industry in Bombay.

Alice was the elder sister of Georgiana MacDonald, who had married Edward Burne-Jones, a painter and best friend of William Morris. Although it was 1887-88 when the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society was organized and the exhibition and movement formally commenced, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. had been established since 1861; therefore, the Arts and Crafts Movement had essentially started in London without its future movement's

name.

Unlike Henry Hover Locke or Walter Smith, Kipling, who had studied at a few art and design schools in the early years of the South Kensington system, was a proponent of fine arts and crafts as well as design. In 1866, a younger sister of his wife, Agnes MacDonald, married Edward Poynter, another painter, who served as principal of the National Art Training School from 1875 to 1881 and president of the Royal Academy of Arts at the end of the nineteenth century. Kipling was an advocate of both the academic and anti-academic schools of art. As a specialist in architectural sculpture, he taught sculpture, architecture, drawing, and design in Lahore, a historical, traditional city in Punjab, until 1893.

### Some other art schools in Nineteenth-century India

There were also some other art schools established in nineteenth century India. Aided by Thomas Holbein Hendley (1847-1917), the Jaipur School of Art was established by Maharaja Ram Singh II (1835-1880) in 1866. Unlike the three British government schools of art in Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay, where the main focus was drawing, a western skill, the Jaipur School of Art was established to promote more local technical and industrial arts (Tillotson, 2006).

According to Giles Tillotson, the Jaipur durbar felt that the art schools of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay focused too much on drawing, which they considered a western skill. Although they endeavored to promote more local industrial arts, they also received support from a European surgeon, Dr de Fabeck (n.d.-n.d.), who was a Rajasthani art enthusiast and who also agreed to direct the Maharaja School of Art in Jaipur.

Valentine Cameron Prinsep (1838 -1904), who had been born in Calcutta and was a painter and friend of Burne-Jones and Edward Poynter, visited the school in Jaipur in 1877. He was impressed by the mechanical skills and handiwork rather than the students' drawing abilities (Tillotson, 2006). Unlike the three government schools of art, there have been few historical studies on the local or Maharaja schools even though there are some other important art schools in various cities across India.

### Conclusion

In 1961, based on a report by Charles and Ray Eames, the National Institute of Design, one of the first design research and educational institutes in India, was founded in Ahmedabad by the Indian government. However, design education in India in a broad sense started in the mid-nineteenth century at the three art schools founded in Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay, with a further school being founded in Lahore in 1875. These schools were also the first art schools or industrial art schools in Asia. Although they were established during the colonial period and basically managed by the British government, they were very important to the development of art and design education in India and Asia.

While the Madras School and Calcutta school moved to traditional art, the Bombay school taught mainly western art. Although many teachers who came from Britain were graduates of the South Kensington school, their ideas about art and design changed over the genera-

tions from industrial arts to fine arts in the 1860s-70s and from fine arts to the arts and crafts in the 1880s-90s.

The history of art and design education in India is closely related to that of Britain. While the history of art education in British has long been studied, the study of the history of art education in India is only now developing. However, to more deeply analyze the history of art and design education in the nineteenth century, comparative studies from major English-speaking countries are necessary. Through a comparison of the histories from UK, US, Canadian, Australian, New Zealander, Indian, and South African art and design education, we can understand the global, intercultural and interdisciplinary development of each country's art and design education.

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