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**FREEDOM FROM THE PAST?  
INDIAN AMERICAN ARTISTS**

**LAVINA MELWANI**

Tara Sabharwal belongs to the younger generation of artists, and has been in New York just three years. After studying art at Baroda Art College, she got a scholarship to Royal College of Arts in London. She has lived in London for ten years and participated in shows in England, India and Germany. For her, coming to America was freeing, rather than traumatic. "In England there's a very definite Englishness that you're up against and you're The Other to this Englishness. In New York I find it very much easier because here everyone is from everywhere. You come here with your baggage but so does everybody else."

About the question of identity, she observes: "I don't do work which is about the search for identity per se but it does come through in my work. If you talk pictorially instead of thematically, then pictorially my work is made up of elements which are very particular to Indian art, and elements which are very particular to European art and it's more in the use of both elements that you make a sort of eclectic identity. There are Indian artists who don't use the search for identity as a theme, but if you're sensitive to their work, you can read it."

Sabharwal also raises the question of judging Indian art by western standards. She says, "We're living in a world today where what is western is termed as contemporary and the way the west sees art from India is that it picks out whatever is relevant to it. If America is doing gender studies, it'll pick up an artist who's doing gender issues. But everything else which is being done in countries like India which is not of direct concern to Americans is not even considered art — it's just considered, like *National Geographic*, like culture. We shouldn't as Indian artists just follow what's being dictated to us as high art by the west. We have to follow what's right for us."

She believes that it is possible to express concerns without resorting to narrative, and uses the example of dance: "Take Bharat Natyam : There's the traditional classical style. But what if somebody does the same dance but uses modern techniques or uses some interpretation or does the same dance on crime on 42<sup>nd</sup> street? Don't you think its very overt that what they're doing is part of something but they're relating it to something else? In the language of pure art, that's how it happens."