

Introduction to Indian Art – An Appreciation
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Module – 01
End of Traditional Art: Advent of the British
Lecture: W4 - L1

Welcome you all to MOOCs online course on Introduction to Indian Art and Appreciation. Well, this is the last week of this course, and the course outline of this week is titled as tradition to modern, well in this week over the next 5 modules we will be looking at, how Indian art transformed it itself by leaving the tradition behind and moving towards its own modern art. In a way we will be tracing the emergence and development of modern Indian art.

Now the first module of this week is subtitled as end of traditional art colon advent of the British. We take it very seriously I mean if you go back to your school history textbooks, you will find that the entire history of India, I mean at all possible levels at the social level, at the political level at the cultural level everything got upset may not be overnight, but over a period of time after the advent of British. So, it is a very crucial juncture for the history of India very crucial point to study Indian art also.

So, it was around, let us say eighteenth century, mid eighteenth century that the presence of the Europeans being felt in the land of India, but we are also, but what we would try to look at is, how the presence of the Europeans and particularly the colonial rulers, left a very significant impact a crucial impact on the art of India.

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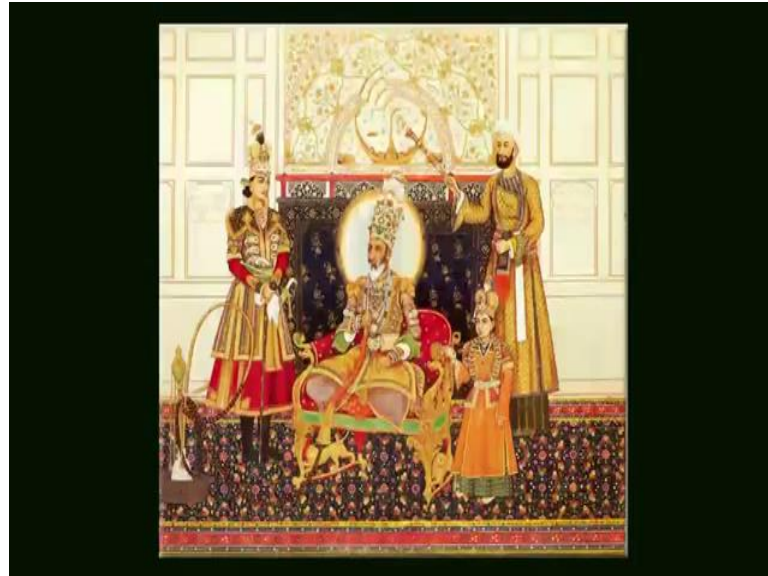
Now, this is true that the presence of the British rulers in the heart of India not only gradually changed the way Indians used to paint before, but also changed the way Indian painters and artists used to perceive things visually, before that is there, but at the same time if you look at this very strange peculiar painting done by some Indian miniature painter you can straightaway notice that, how a British colonial officer is coolly replacing the emperor or the king who is supposed to have been there on that particular place not a British officer.

So, you see there is a change or a power shift that has already taken place and that has already got reflected in this painting, but though the subject matter is radically new I mean who could have thought even a decade back or 10 years back from the time this particular painting was painted that a painter would now, have to paint a British officer instead of an Indian king, but this is what is happening. So, as far as the subject matter is concerned there is a radical change here, but as far as the style of painting is concerned as far as the visual perception is concerned there is nothing very remarkable.

Here except the fact that the painter has more or less learnt how to get rid of things, which he thought inessential I mean nothing there is not a single element that seems to be extra everything is very essential every bit of element, that you see in this painting is somehow connected to the main central subject of the painting and that is it no grandeur no extra frills and decorative bands in this painting. But soon we are going to witness a

change a transformation not only the subject matter, but also in the style of Indian painting.

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So, advent of the British actually created a rupture to be very honest it created a disjuncture it, created a kind of deep fissure between the tradition and the oncoming the forthcoming modern the new age. So, before we move on to what happened next after the colonial rulers they kind of established their power in India and they also started patronizing art in various ways, yes our subsequent modules will be at least the module number two will be on that that is the kind of art that the British rulers patronized. But today we are going to look at the changes that started to happen within the traditional art itself.

Now, according to quite a few scholars we should look at this change I mean this very unwanted change as a decline. So, when you look at this particular painting you can see that though it is this painting can be considered as one of those paintings under the banner of the Mughal portrait paintings. But there is something missing in this painting something that you might be expecting when, you are about to look at a Mughal miniature painting is it that the color palette has become duller or it is because it is lot of white which in the earlier Mughal paintings you never saw is it because that the emperor Bahadur shah probably the last great Mughal emperor, Bahadur shah the second who is seen in this painting is already on the verge of moving out relinquishing his throne. But I

mean there is something that looks a little fabricated something that looks little artificial in this painting compared to earlier Mughal paintings painted during Akbar or Jahangir period.

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Now, it is true when you look at this photograph taken at that point of time when the last emperor of the great Mughal empire dynasty Bahadur shah, when he was on his deathbed not in India, but in Rangoon in the present Myanmar erstwhile Burma I mean this photograph this is also interesting that with the advent of the British. I mean after a few decades around eighteen forties, not only that the integrity that we had in our society in our political system which helped the painters to flourish which helped the tradition of painting to grow collapsed, but at the same time a new form of picturing device came into being and very quickly because around eighteen forty photography, was invented the camera was invented around at that time and almost within a few years it reached India.

So, by mid 19 century you have a few Indian people with big size cameras going around and even all the way to Burma to take this photograph of the ailing aging emperor the last emperor the last great emperor of one of the greatest dynasties ruling dynasties of the world Mughal Empire.

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So, lot of changes started to happen and one of the very visible changes that one could notice within the painting itself is the use of deliberate use of deliberate introduction of certain pictorial devices and elements which the Indian painters learnt from the British or from the European art. I mean it is true that during Akbar's time; Akbar did receive some European missionaries as visitors in his court and he also got some European engravings as gifts and those European engravings became a major source for Akbar's painters to learn about perspective about modeling about creating certain kind of naturalism and realism, but in this particular painting you find a more deliberate and specific way of creating perspective.

Almost it seems like the painter might have used scale some kind of ruler to maintain a mathematical precision it is not that the Mughal painters, did not know about perspective before, but they never used perspective in an obvious way it is. So, obvious conspicuous, it is this conspicuousness of these European and western elements that make these paintings look as if it is on. It is way to decline the subtlety is gone this is the main point.

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So, in several such paintings painted at Mughal and also at Rajput courts, during this late period after the advent of the British several such paintings actually show they are like evidences of this lack of subtlety very obvious use of certain elements like perspective symmetry, which make the paintings look a little dull and less exciting also may be technically the painters are still brilliant.

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But in terms of the in terms of their cerebral engagement to innovate new methods, new ideas to be more creative with the elements at hand, that is witnessing a decline that is

something which is being taken over by the changing situation of the society. I mean it is not the fault of the painters let us not blame the painters it is the changing situation of the society and also because, the entire structure was falling apart there was nobody to patronize the painters.

Now because Mughal Empire has already begun to crumble the Rajput kingdoms and the kings, they are about to shut down their ruling places I mean many of them have left their places or they have just become puppet rulers at the hands of the British. So, where do the painters go now many of the painters actually lost their jobs? So, it is a very peculiar situation and a pathetic situation where the painters desperately tried to adopt themselves to the new demands of a new society that was slowly emerging under the colonial rule.

Now, this painting also was very obvious from that point of view where the painter is very calculative trying to deploy the rules of perspective in order to create the depth of the room wherein he is trying to locate all the figures, But remember in spite of all his well meaning attempts the cluster of people I mean the human figure, they still look somewhat lacking in depth I mean there is not much enough realistic spaces in between them. I mean you might also come across certain faults though the painters are trying to become more and more efficient in the use of these western pictorial elements.

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So, basically what we get to see now after the advent of the British is a strange combination a peculiar combination of certain pre British period, Indian elements or let us say some certain pictorial habit is certain perceptual habit is along with some new European elements, that is one thing and secondly, I believe because the entire situation got a little disrupted and the structures were falling apart the painters, were also leaving their jobs leaving their courts. So, there was when you look at these paintings.

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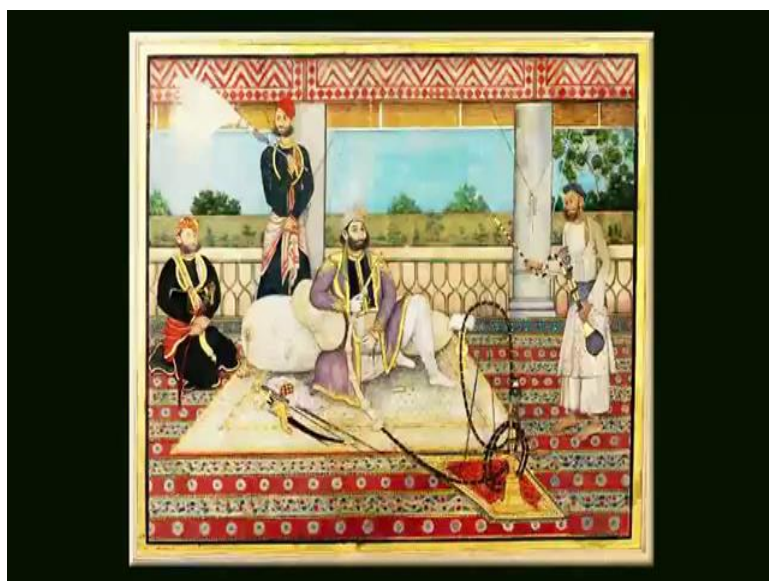
I mean, it is not something that I am making it up when; I look at these paintings done during this period and this very crucial juncture that is the period that we usually understand as the decline of the traditional art.

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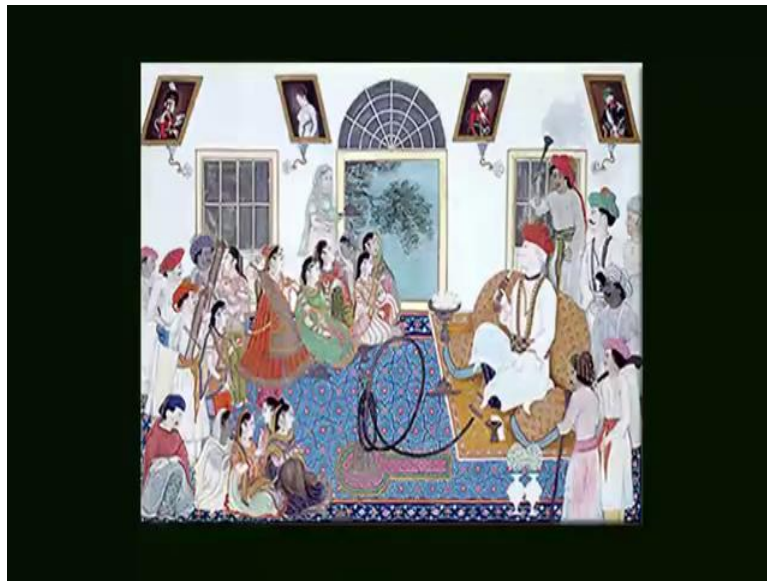
When you look at this painting you can clearly see that, there is a certain kind of uncertainty there is a certain kind of also vulnerability within the painting itself, I mean probably this unsurely that which way now you are going to move are you going to kind of adopt everything that is European and British and become the new age. British period painter or you are not simply able to give up what you had learnt and practiced may be for last few centuries as a family art as a family business as an art is belonging to family of artists. So, what do you do now? So, this unresolved situation gets reflected in the style of these paintings as well.

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So, you can simply go through all these images and try to find out that what exactly makes the art historians and scholars use these paintings or indicate. Identify these paintings as evidences of the decline of a certain tradition not just because, chronologically they are part of that phase that particular phase when the entire traditional society is on the verge of decline, but there is something about the paintings themselves that make us feel no.

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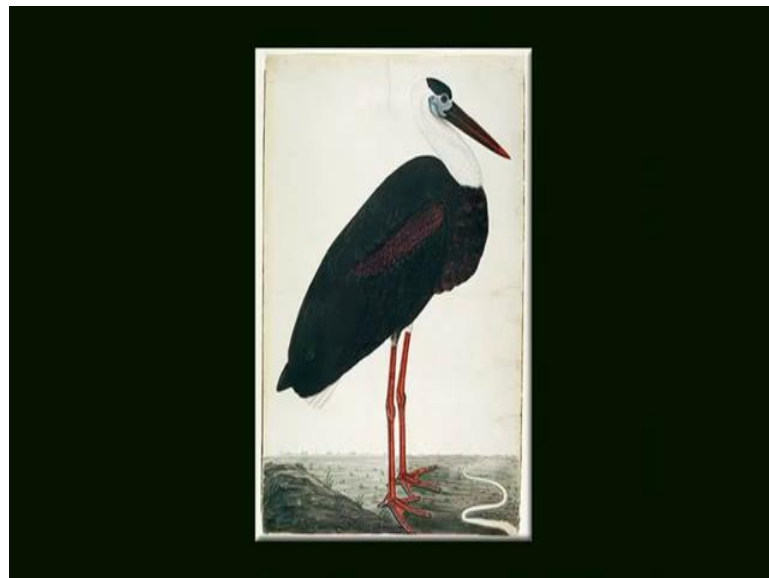
But then how do you analyze these paintings, how do you negotiate this element of decline I mean this is up to you because we have seen scholars argue between themselves.

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We have seen that where as one group of scholars are steadfast in holding on to their beliefs, that these paintings should be regarded as evidences of decline.

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Which is fine, but then there, is another group of scholars who think that despite all the problems in which the painters found themselves during this time and tried desperately to come out stronger than before, the paintings not necessarily are to be only seen in terms of it is demerit is; let us look at a also the positive sides of these paintings. Let us look at these paintings as cultural evidences of a changing society because, according to the

second group of scholars. When the society itself culturally speaking and also politically when the society itself was in such a turmoil a kind of uncertainty and there was a lot of un sureness about where the society was heading to.

So, is not it quite interesting that the paintings from this period also reflect that uncertainty the. So, called unresolved situation of the society gets reflected in the. So, called unresolved situation of the stylistic problem of these paintings, this is where the second group of scholars tried to kind of connect between the state of the society the real society out there and the stylistic problems that the painters were facing and we are also facing today as the viewers of these paintings today.

For example; when you look at this bird this, image of the painted bird well this reminds you of those many of those Jahangiri period paintings of birds and animals painted by may be Ustad Mansur or somebody else, but where exactly does the difference lie between because when you look at the image of this bird. In this particular painting this bird has also been painted. It is a delightful painting painted with great skill and an unique technique of going into the finest details including the feathers and everything the texture of the body of the bird, the subtle color modulation of the beak everything yet we find first of all that the background is too neutral compared to the real Mughal period paintings where the background used to be usually very gorgeous. Along with the painted animal or bird in this case it is a very neutral dull background.

And that is what perhaps makes us feel that the image there is something there is lackluster some the certain kind of glamour that is missing out there, but on the other hand according to that second group of scholars who, find these paintings pretty interesting as opposed to only to be considered as evidences of decline they think it is this deglamorised image of a bird and animal that makes this painting very interesting for them. Well this argument can go on, but for us it is very important to know the viewpoints of both the sides instead of sticking to anyone.

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Now, once again photographs or photography is doing a great job, during that time or it is almost in a way replacing some of the functions of the court paintings of the earlier period.

Here you can see a British hunter almost standing at top on killed tigers and it definitely reminds, you of not in terms of composition, but in terms of the pride of the human figure it reminds you of the Akbari hunting scene paintings or for that matter the Rajput paintings of hunting scenes.

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So, photography is creating a new kind of visual culture not that everybody had access to photography, but I believe gradually even an ordinary painter who was able to have some access to some houses of British rulers. The British colonial officers or even some of the rich patrons Indian patrons, they did get a chance to witness this new form of art new form of visual representation called photography.

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So, this can also be studied that whether the painters encountered or exposure to photography was making an impact on their painting as well, it is possible that it did it is possible that the image particularly the composition. The kind of photographic realism that these painters got a chance to see was very impressive for them. So, back to studios they were trying to perhaps work out certain pictorial ways not to imitate that, but to create a parallel painterly method.

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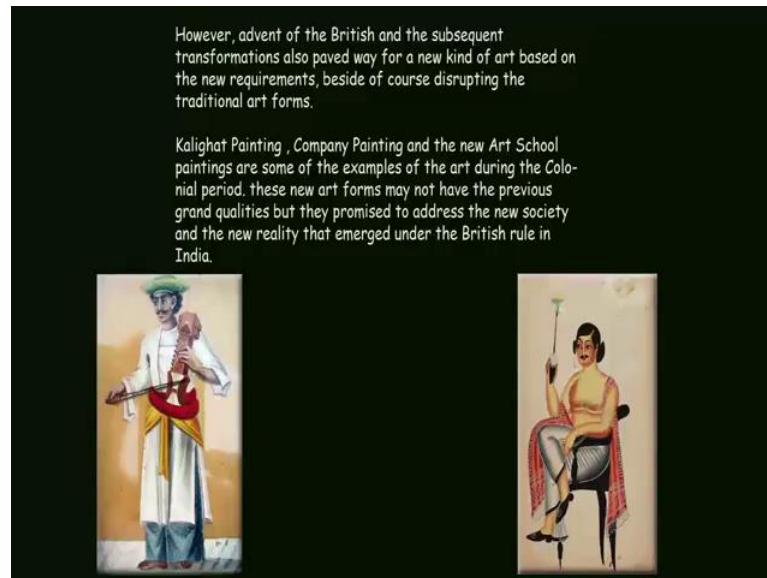


So, some of the painted images came quite close to the British, period or the colonial period photography and some of the photographs like this one actually remind us of some of the paintings other way round.

So, during the colonial period I mean after the advent of the British one of the things that was happening in a very interesting way is a new relationship, was being built up not very consciously, but naturally it was getting built up a new relationship between photography on the one hand colonial photography.

And the new kind of paintings which is still very composite in terms of style and if, you look at it in terms of demerit is you can use these terms it is uncertainty un sureness, but if you want to talk about these paintings with a more affirmative positive and appreciative attitude you can definitely evaluate and assess these paintings as paintings reflecting the contemporary situation of the society the reality of the society that unresolved situation of the society.

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Now, so; however, the advent of the British and the subsequent transformations also paved way for a new kind of art based on the new requirements besides. Of course, disrupting the traditional art formats this is what I just mentioned hence as a result what we get to see I mean these are the things that we will be looking at in our subsequent modules.

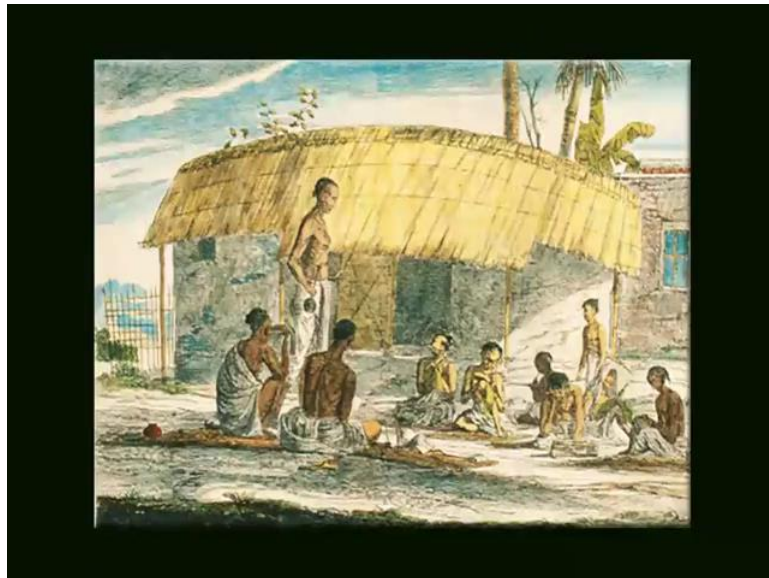
We see the emergence of Kali Ghat painting, we see the emergence of company painting and the new art school paintings these are some of the examples; of the art during the colonial period and these new art forms may not have the previous grand qualities, but they did promise to address the new society and the new reality that emerged under the British rule in India.

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So, the image that you see in this slide on the left is an example of the company painting whereas the image on the right is an example of the Kali Ghat painting. Now these are the few images of the company paintings with which we will be winding up the lecture of this module.

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But what I want to draw your attention to is a fact that. In fact, the painters now are able to capture certain kind of reality which is a very new reality not just the court reality the reality of the local people the reality of the Aam Junta, the reality of the everyday life in

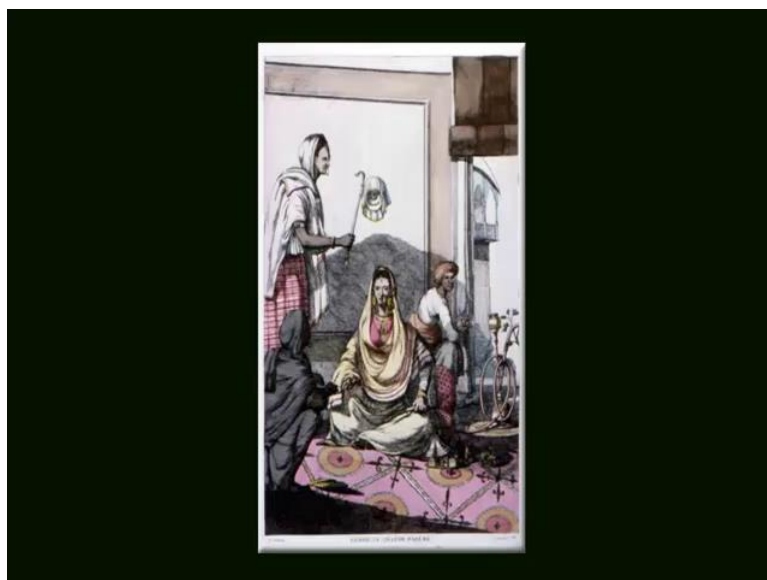
a more appropriate way than it was able to do before because before in the previous years.

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Or the previous decades these painters were completely under the patronization of the kings and the emperors.

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But now they are either working independently or working under the patronization of the colonial rulers whose one of the main motivations was to visually record the new

emerging colonial society of India, and that gave these new painters of this generation an opportunity to capture this new reality in a new language.

Thank you.