

**Introduction to Indian Art- An Appropriation**  
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**Module - 02**  
**Art patronized by the Colonial rulers: (the Company paintings)**  
**Lecture: W4 - L2**

Welcome viewers to MOOCs online course on Introduction to Indian Art and Appreciation. This is the 2nd module of the 4th and last week of our course on introduction to Indian art, and as you know this last week is entirely devoted to the understanding of how Indian art is kind of transforming itself from the tradition to modern.

So, we are basically trying to trace this enormously important and significant transition. And one historical situation that was almost the kind of driving force behind this transition was of course the advent of the British. And this is what we discussed in the last module; what exactly happened to the art scenario, when the British rulers reached India and when they started ruling India; obviously, and this is what we saw yesterday in the last module that the artists lost the setup in which they were working, particularly the traditional artists who were working at the courts of various kings, and emperors.

So, because of this disjuncture, because of this particular crisis, the artists almost inevitably found themselves in a peculiar situation; where they belonged neither here nor there. I mean they are yet to become something which would enable others to identify them as, modern more updated and at the same time they also lost the previous comfort zone, where in they used to work in the traditional setup.

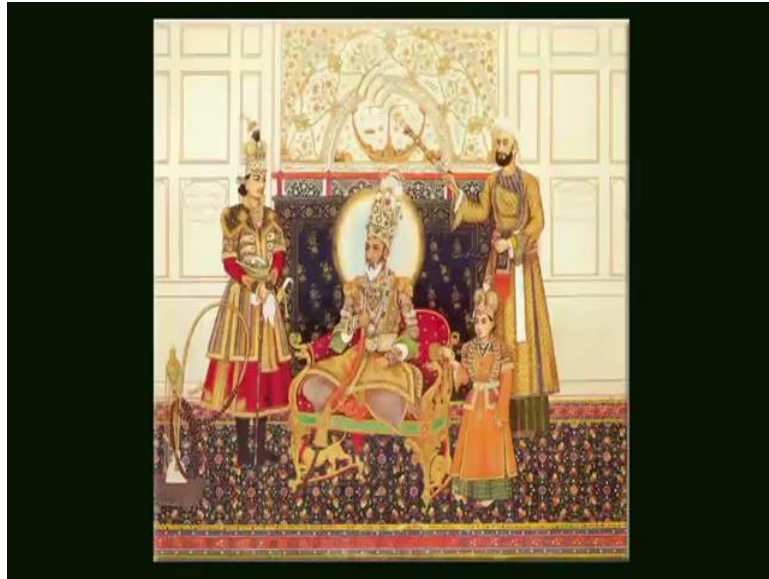
Now so we have also seen that, this was also the beginning; this point was also the beginning of not only the decline of the if not all, but of most of the major traditional art systems and at the same time it was also the beginning of a new kind of patronage system; here we have the new patrons of this new colonial India and; obviously, they were the British rulers, they now emerged as the new patrons and today in this module which is titled as art patronized by the colonial rulers.

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This is what exactly we are going to study, that how these colonial rulers have become the patrons of an entirely new art form; not exactly what they were doing previously, though some of these art works that we are going to see today, the art works patronized by the colonial rulers, some of them do carry some of the elements of the traditional art formats particularly miniature painting formats, but mostly they come up with some new ideas, new technical ways of handling painting, new features and of course, new objectives. Because now you are not serving a court culture, now the painter is not under the patronage of a particular king or emperor, now they are under the rulers; the British rulers, Who are now trying to keep the entire Indian subcontinent under their colonial rule.

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So, just as a kind of we are trying, let us recapitulate and see this is a kind of paintings we saw in the last module and we were trying to discuss the why these paintings are identified as examples of decline.

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Now, we have also noticed that, some of these paintings which belong to the late phase of the traditional art or these paintings may also belong to that particular point in history where the British are already there and the presence of these British rulers can be felt everywhere in some sense or the other.

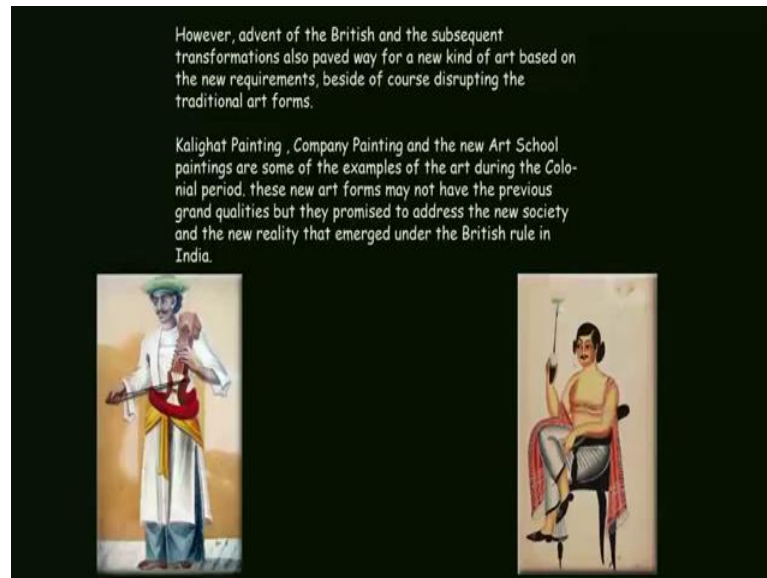
So, this is also a painting which reflects that presence, and particularly in the way the perspective has been applied in this painting; suggests that, there the traditional way of doing a painting is about to collapse; a new kind of painting may appear now.

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And we have also seen how certain elements certain features of traditional arts, is still existing, but they have lost their earlier glory and at the same time they are trying desperately to catch up with the new objectives with the new society and we have also discussed in the last module that 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 forms.

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Now, what is this new requirements, now from the point of view of colonial rulers, the new requirements implied that now the painters should faithfully record the society around; may be for the painters for the Indian artists, this is a society that they were accustomed to all the time, they were very familiar with it nothing new about it, but remember look at it at the point of view of the British rulers and try to imagine that how exotic everything must have looked to them; I mean the Indian land, the Indian history, the ruins, Indian people particularly their dress, costume the rituals and customs followed by the Indian people, the Indian society.

So, also as rulers they felt the need to document everything, this is very interesting. How not with camera, of course, they will be using photography sooner than later, but as of now, now they want to use the painters as their faithful tools obedient tools, to visually capture and record various kinds of social reality.

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For example, people from various walks of life, may be an ironsmith, an ironsmith is somebody who is very familiar to us, nothing new about it, but for a British colonial ruler; for them it is like it is like an ethnographic project, that you need to document every kind of caste, every kind of profession, every kind of habit and the different kinds of rituals, customs religious procedures, so on so forth.

So, now the same Indian painters, who were quite tuned with a certain kind of painting, and who lost job because of the collapse of the earlier setup; now it is the same painters or the painters from the same family, who found this new job. These people were employed by the British rulers to do these paintings, based on this kind of themes.

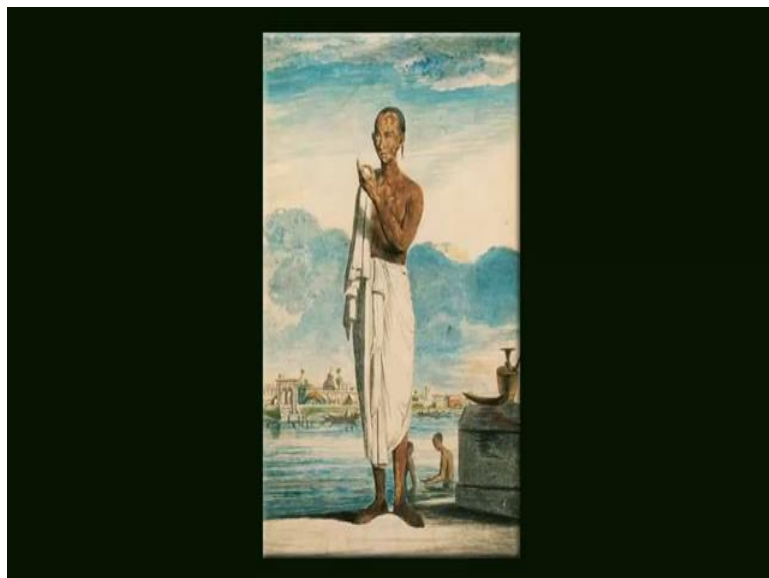
So, now, we can look at some examples which reflect this new objective of painting and this entire group of paintings patronized by the British colonial rulers is known as “company paintings” after all as you know from your history books that, initially these British rulers they reached India in the name of the company; East India company and later on they became British rulers. So, these paintings were called “company paintings” they were patronized by companies, they were the kind of response to the needs of the company people.

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So, here you see people from different walks of life, and also in different postures, in different activities, which the British rulers found very exotic, they might have found also very funny, but for them it is very important to record every activity of people, they are about to rule or they have already begun ruling. So, if they are the rulers, these are the people who are the ruled; and they need to document, not only the life of the people whom they are ruling, but also the place where the ruled people live everything.

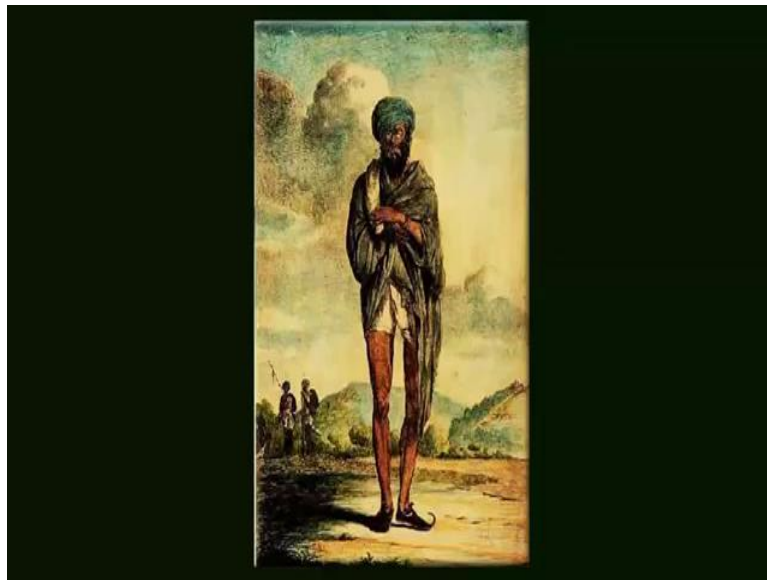
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So, an interesting category of painting does develop, you can also call “Genre painting”. I mean the life of the common people and all and the places, sometimes some of these paintings may look a little odd, may be in terms of proportion, anatomically they may not be very correct; in terms of perspective, some of these paintings may look a little problematic, but remember many of these Indian painters who are doing these things, they had never learnt this technique before, they were familiar with the traditional way of doing painting where proportion, anatomy and perspective, all these things had a very different take, they all had a very different implication, not anything to do with the European way of looking at anatomy, proportion and perspective.

So, they trying their best, sometimes they are able to catch up with these new set of techniques brilliantly, sometimes they are also facing certain problems.

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But on the whole what is created is a very fascinating group of works by the Indian painters and what we also find very interesting for us is not only the style of the painting.



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But also the subject matter, because remember photography was not very common and before 1840, of course there was no photography, not only in India, but any part of the world.

So, in a way these paintings are evidences of the Indian social life. Indian religious life, Indian cultural life and that is why for us these paintings are also historically very important, not only from the point of view of art history, but also from the point of view of social history, cultural history.

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So, you can run through these images and find out for yourself the various kinds of subject matters addressed in these paintings, and of course you also need to take note very, very carefully of the painterly techniques, the quality of the drawing, the very fact particularly if you are looking at this specifically this painting; right in front of us you might ask yourself, why does the painter have to leave the entire background almost white. why do need to do that, usually these painters traditionally speaking are habituated, they were into that convention of locating the figures on a background, they are supposed to have a background whether indoor or outdoor.

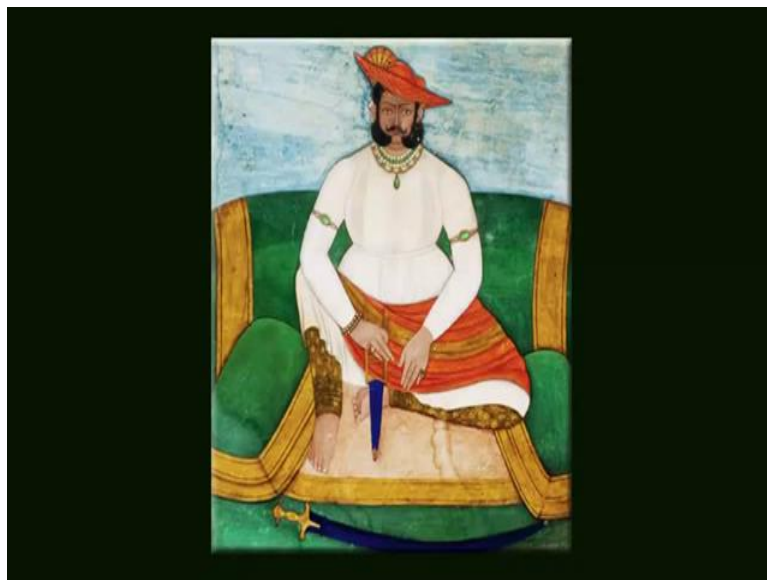
But now suddenly you come across with figures either with a background that is very minimal, a negligible kind of background little bit of horizon or sky that is all, or with no background at all; which means here their figures and their professions and their social cultural professional identities, this is what the painter wants to draw our attention to, they do not want anything extra no excess.

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And these techniques also made these paintings very interesting, sometimes subject matters like these, could be very intriguing; you can look at the painting very carefully and find out yourself.

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And this is also a very interesting painting of may be a king; whose identity is not very well established, but the way he is looking at, may be with a dagger in his hand, I mean strange kind of subject matters can be found being addressed by the painters of the company painting, but there is hardly any painting, which the subject matter is entirely

decided by the painter himself, it is assumed that all the subject matters are instructed or directed and specifically suggested by the patrons, which means the British rulers.

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Now, at this point I would also like to share this piece of small, but very important information that, not all the artists or the painters in the company painting are Indians, most of them are; But we have another section, another category of company paintings, where the Europeans mostly British painters, would be employed; the British painters who are coming all the way from England, to this new colonial land India, And these painters were employed by the company rulers the British rulers, to visually record some of the exotic lands of India; it could be ruins, some important site, and because they were extremely skillful, in depicting a scenery very realistically.

So, at their hand all these locations became almost like a photographic prototype. For us to rely on, and we can find out how these places exactly looked like may be 150 or 200 years back.

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So, within the company painting, we have these two sections, a big group the bulk of them were Indians, and a small group of European.

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And more specifically British English artists were also involved in doing company paintings, but you can identify; without even looking at the signature. Because the works done by the non Indian, that is European or British artists, would definitely have a lot of realism; very, very convincing realistic way of doing a painting; compared to the Indian company painters, who were still desperately trying to catch up with the new realistic

pictorial language, but yet also having their yet to completely get rid of the earlier traditional elements and that is one of the reasons why the company painting or the pictorial language of the company paintings those company paintings done by the Indian painters are known as hybrid language.

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## **Company Paintings – Introduction**

Europeans arriving in India during the 18th century, were fascinated by their new environment. The British wanted their visual experiences to be recorded in paintings and sketches, and found that the subjects that interested them could be depicted far more accurately by Indian than British artists.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the British employed Indian artists to illustrate the manners and customs of India and to record scenes of monuments, deities, festivals, and occupations. These works later became known as 'Company paintings' because they were created by Indian artists employed by members of the British East India Company.

There is a certain kind of hybridity a kind of add mixture a combination of some European elements, and some traditional Indian elements; Now this hybridity can be looked down upon, if you want you can say you do not want this hybridity, it is very awkward, it is neither this nor that, but it is interesting that let us call us and many modern Indian artists have found, this hybridity to be the true representation of Indian society which itself is very, very hybrid and full of plurality.

Anyway to summarize Europeans arriving India during the 18th century, they were fascinated by the new environment which I told the British wanted their visual experiences to be recorded in paintings and sketches and also graphic prints in lithograph and etching and they found that the subjects that interested them could be depicted far more accurately by Indian than British artists; this is also very interesting you may give it a thought.; why the rulers thought that the Indian subjects could be depicted far more accurately by the Indian artists; rather than the British artists.

During the 18 and 19 centuries, the British employed Indian artists to illustrate the customs and rituals of Indian people and also record the scenes of the monuments,

deities, festivals various occupations, and these works later became known as company paintings, because they were created by the Indian artists; employed by the members of the British East India Company.

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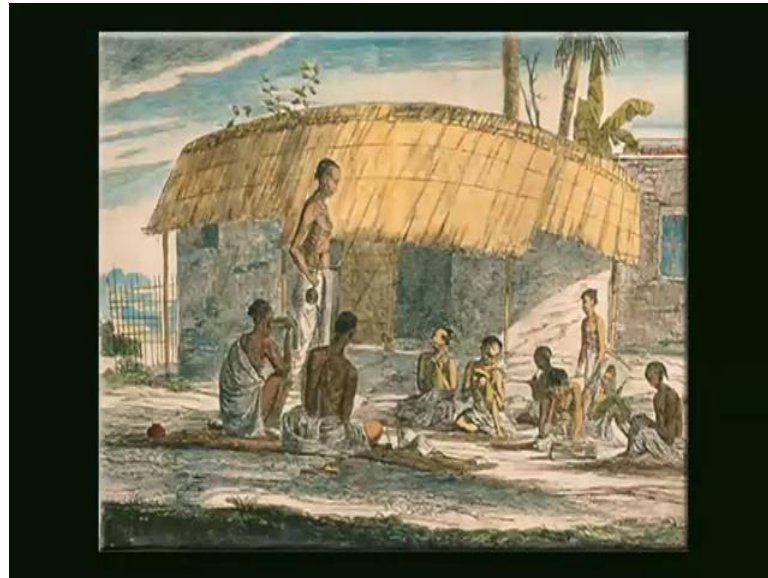
So, this is another work of art of a historical monument site, but this work is done not by an Indian artist; by a European a British artist. Because of its very realistic accuracy one can see this with full conviction.

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Now, similarly this could be a work of art by an Indian painter and this is a street from Kolkata, there are plenty of such works of art paintings, mainly which depict scenes from the streets of Kolkata and various other cities of India as well but mostly Kolkata.

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Because initially the British rulers had their capital in Calcutta and later on they shifted to Delhi. So, Calcutta being the main center in the initial phase of the colonial rule, Calcutta got lot of importance and they employed, they asked these Indian painters, company painters to paint the scenes and scenarios, and the streets of Calcutta and also the people. And the various occupations of the people in Calcutta and that are how you come to know.



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So, company style or company painting is also a term for that hybridity; it actually suggests a certain kind of hybridity, indo European style of paintings. So, it is a blending that is a blending this style blended traditional elements from Rajput and Mughal painting with a more western treatment of perspective volume and recession, but the hybridity is always very evident, because as I told you in the last module.

There is always this feeling of unsureness, uncertainty, it is neither this, nor that, compared to more well trained artworks, realistic artworks by more well trained artists, European artists. But once again as I mentioned just now this hybridity could be enjoyed also, instead of looking at it only as a demerit, one can also enjoy this hybridity and also find various interesting features appearing because of this hybridity in style.

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But in terms of content, it is hardly hybrid. It is directly about the contemporary, the then contemporary, the erstwhile contemporary social life of India. The cultural life of India, even the historical sites of India also the natural sites of India. Because for the colonial rulers, they were ruling not only people and the society, they were ruling quote unquote everything which includes the people, their society, the nature, birds, animal, the geographical locations, even their history.

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As a result they started rewriting the history of Indian art from their own perspective, that is why they needed archaeological excavations; that is why they needed artists to draw those archaeological sites accurately, and for this work they would employ Indian painters, but they also employed initially many European and British artists, but once they were able to train up the Indian painters, and this would be important to share this piece of information at this juncture, that sooner than later, the British rulers they set up a couple of art schools in India, in Calcutta, in madras and elsewhere. And they trained the Indian artists in these art schools in a method that is completely European training.

So, that now the British colonial rulers would not need, they really now would not need to get the British artists from their country, they can simply employ these local Indian artists whom they have trained, in a certain method of drawing and painting which would suit their purpose.

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So, company painting that way was very interesting, because it was able to groom this new generation of Indian artists, who now would be going to art colleges; i mean those days it was called art schools, government art schools in Calcutta; which was known as Calcutta art school, or madras art school and all that and they would train themselves up, in a certain way to serve the British rulers.

But this accuracy of observation and visual recording became a technique, it is not just about observation it is also how to execute that observation; how to implement that

observation on paper on a piece of paper with your brush and pencil and all that. So, this is a technique these Indian painters picked up very fast and they became very soon they became as efficient as their British and European counterparts.

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So, we can run through some of these slides and then come to something like this, since we are talking about the hybrid culture.

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This is a painting done by an Indian company painter and probably he was asked to do the genre scene the daily life scene and here you can see a market, which is completely

run by the women and there are women sellers, there are women buyers, customers, you can almost see all the kinds of stuffs being sold in this very traditional old market, but this is very interesting evidence, for us a very interesting historical and pictorial evidence to know about how a market would look like those days, and since it is done by a local a native artist from Patna.

So, that is why we can actually rely on his observation, because it has often happened with European and non Indian painters that they were sometimes not able to identify the objects and hence they depicted them or visually recorded them wrongly; now this is not going to happen with the Indian painters and that is the reason why the British employers they relied on Indian painters more, than the British artists. So, everything was going quite well, so far so good. But there was also a time came when some of the Indian painters felt the need to react against this pressure; the pressure of this imposing a certain kind of colonial art for everybody and this is what is going to happen very soon

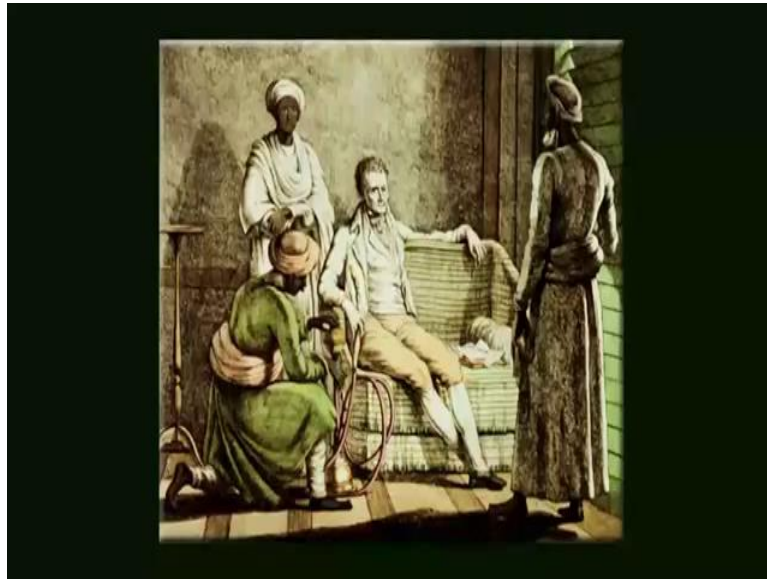
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Because by now as this particular work it suggests visually that, the British power has been firmly established on the Indian soil. Look at the flag, it has been firmly established on the Indian soil, the presence of the British can be felt everywhere in every aspect of life even the entire art practice; now it is neither traditional, nor modern, nor individualistic. It is at the kind of mercy of the British rulers.

So, slowly many intellectuals and thinkers artists too, would also gradually begin to react and in the next module this is what we are going to see; that how some of the Indian artists are reacting against this situation and as a result they are coming up with some wonderful works of art which are very nationalist in a certain sense and at the same time very anti colonial. So, the artists are also in a position, where they now need to take a standpoint.

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So, artists will be doing artworks for a cause and the presence of the British everywhere as you can see in this particular work also. Now he is almost like the king, the owner of this land and the Indians are his employed people employees, and the Indians are serving him; almost symbolically this picture represents the Indian situation at that point of time; and it is time that the artists react against that. So, the next module will be on that.

Thank you.