

**Introduction to Indian Art - An Appreciation**  
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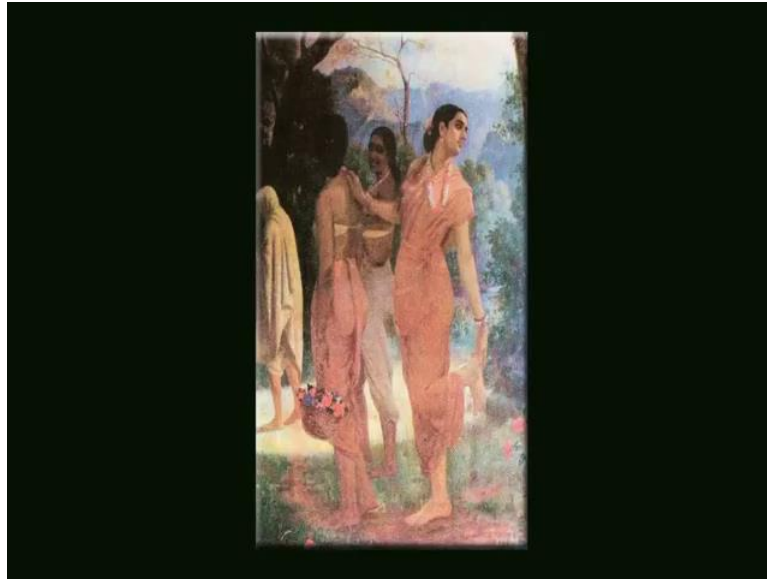
**Module – 03**  
**Art for National Cause**  
**Lecture: W4 - L3**

Welcome viewers to MOOCs online course on Introduction to Indian Art-An Appreciation. This is the fourth and last week running and as you know this week we are trying to trace the transition of Indian art from the tradition to modern. In the last two modules we have seen that how this transition was manifesting itself in various kinds of works of art mainly paintings.

We have seen the initial unsureness, the uncertainty of the artworks and of the artists when the British arrived in India and they were responsible for creating that rupture, we have also seen how or in what circumstances in what circumstances the company painting emerged as a kind of response to the new set of requirements of the new needs from the British rulers and most of these artists involved in the company paintings or company school of paintings were Indians and they trained Indians in a certain way by admitting them in various art schools which they had established.

The British rulers had established in India all in mid-19th century and the Indian painters many of them themselves became very well equipped with this new skill, with this new technique to record scenario to record life to record the social and cultural events visually with a great skill and realism. Now, they do not need British rulers, British painters at all. Now, interestingly in the turn of the century that is let us say the late 19th century and early 20th century, we also witnessed the emergence of a new kind of painters, new kind not necessarily always technically, but with a new inclination let us say.

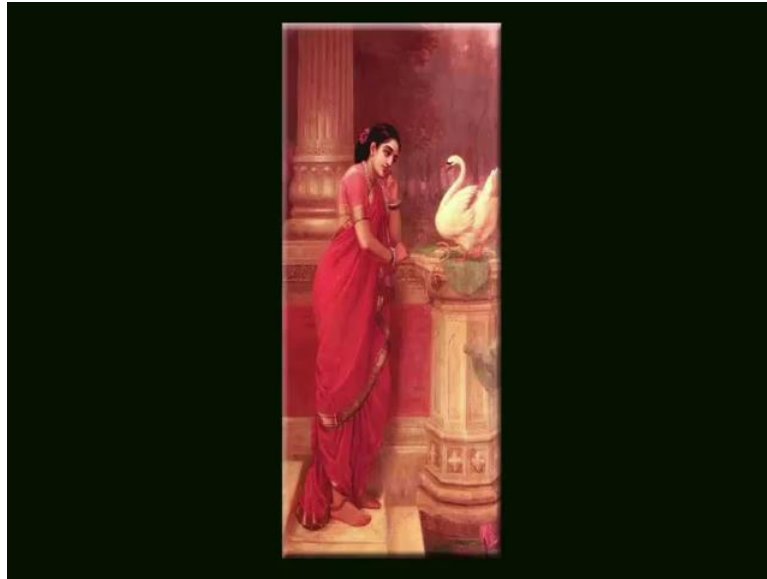
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What was that inclination basically to not necessarily digest, what the British rulers want you to digest but to think otherwise to look for an Indian identity in their work in their skill, in their technique and in their subject matter? In other words, a new generation, a whole new generation of artists began to react not necessarily violently always, but in some way or the other, they started reacting against this colonial art system this colonial art language.

Now, we have already seen and may be you are aware of this famous artist of mid 19th century called Raja Ravi Verma. He was even senior to Rabindranath Tagore. So, he had lived the time he had seen the arrival of the British rulers and he has seen how the presence of British in India was changing the entire scenario of our traditions, but instead of bickering what Ravi Verma did was also very interesting. He picked up and he picked it up very well. He picked up the technique of Western or European oil painting with that kind of realism and photographic accuracy everything very well, but instead of doing western subject, he started painting Indian subject matter and also mythology.

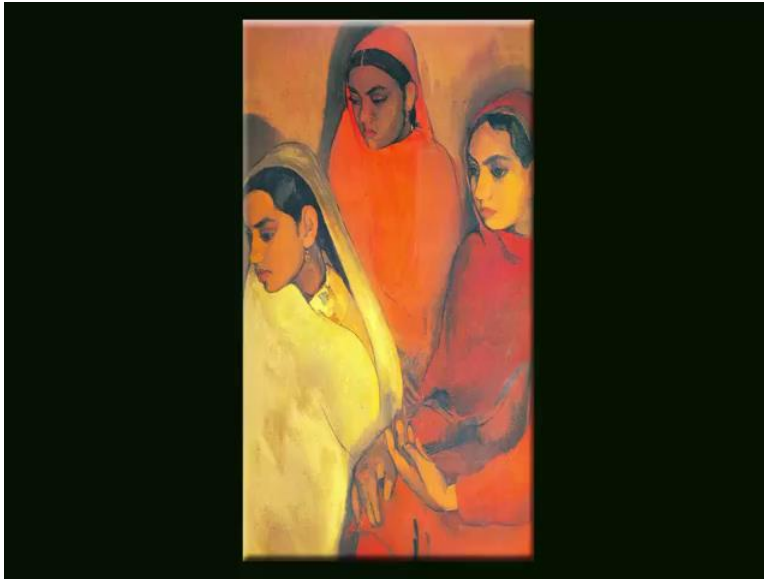
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So, traditional mythological, Indian mythological paintings now being done by Ravi Verma in western European realistic mode, you can call this again a hybrid painting a hybrid style, but at least we can say that Ravi Verma instead of succumbing or surrendering to the need or to the demands of the colonial rulers, he was at least trying to figure out something different on his own, trying to figure out how to take the advantage of the situation and make the best of both worlds.

I mean take advantage of this new European realistic language and instead of doing European subject matters, how he could show Indian feelings, Indian emotions, Indian traditions, and Indian mythology in European subject matter in a very realistic way. So, I would not say this is a very strong reaction against the company or the colonial art system or art ideas, but in a way it is a very interesting development that had already taken place in mid 19th century.

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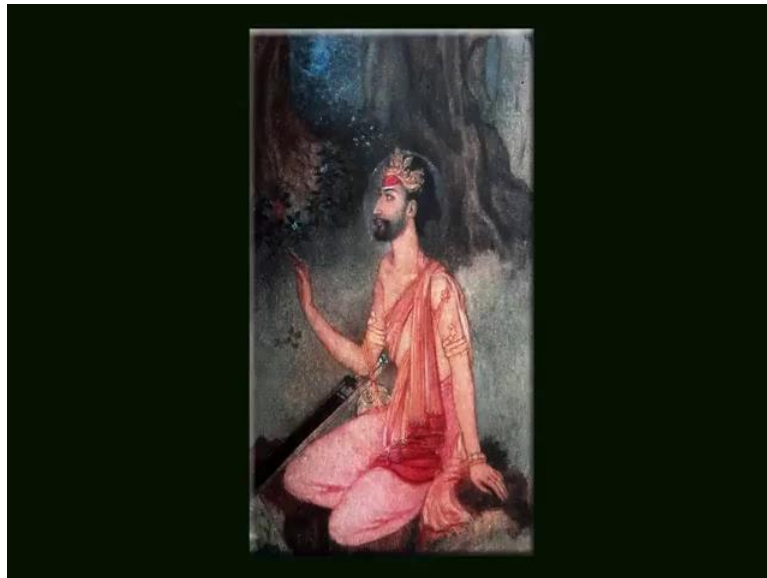
Now, in late 19th century you also get to see somebody like say the emergence of interesting artists and now you can see somebody like Amrita Shergil. So, when you look at her works and she is half European, half Indian. So, she had the training of the European art training method. So, she knew how to handle oil paintings, she knew how to handle realistic methods of doing oil paintings, but he gave up all those, she I mean. She gave up all those and she started looking at the possibilities of doing Indian subject matters in oil paintings and she also tried to transform the European method of oil painting into an Indian look to give it a kind of Indian look.

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So, Amrita Shergil was a very interesting artist that way and again not that she was outspokenly or very openly commenting on the colonial art system or was reacting against the colonial art system, but Amrita Shergil's works they a kind of evidence of a new mindset of Indian artists who refused to accept in a way whatever the colonial rulers would be asking you to do, but instead trying to find out an alternative path and this is what exactly she did. Amrita Shergil tried to find out an alternative path of painting, not necessarily following the traditional method, not necessarily following or imitating the European modern art models, but trying to develop a modern art in rooted in the Indian soil. Unfortunately she died very young and she was unable to actually complete her project, otherwise I mean she was a very promising artist.

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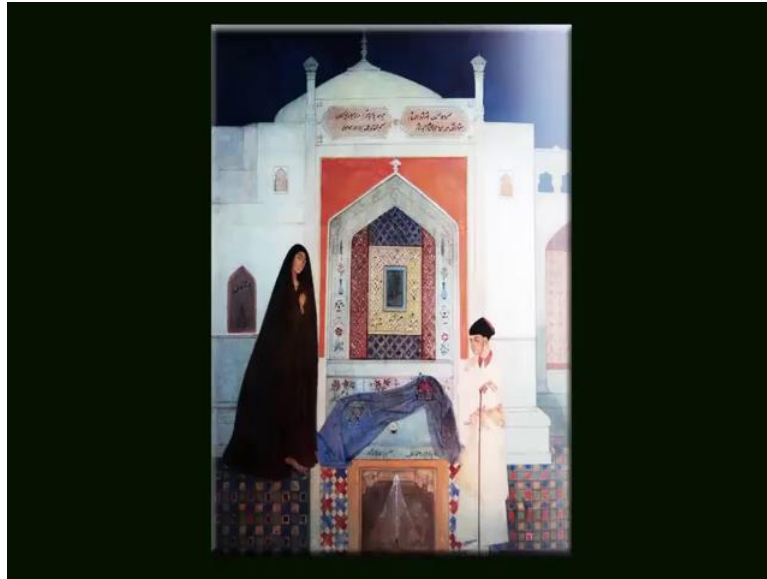


Now, after Ravi Verma and Amrita Shergil we have this enormously powerful artist from Bengal, from Calcutta Rabindranath Tagore. Now, Rabindranath Tagore can be identified as one of the truly nationalist painter who out rightly rejected the colonial art aesthetics or the colonial project of art. I mean this is how the Indians now should paint. They should almost behave like company painters; no rather Rabindranath developed his own method of painting. He tried to assert his own subject matters and instead of following the colonial aesthetic norms, Rabindranath Tagore very interestingly and very courageously he almost became the icon of the truly nationalist art.

Not that all his paintings are like that, but there are many paintings by him, many works of art

by him which are kind of evidence of art made for a national cause as against the colonial rulers as against British rulers. So, this is how we can see Rabindranath Tagore partially, though he is a very important artist also because he was very experimental. He was a multi-talented artist so and so forth, but he kind of paved a way to create an art a modern Indian art which is rooted in our soil.

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He is also known to have established what is known as the Bengal school of art and there are also artists at that point of time who are known as revivalists in order to protest against the huge presence of the European realistic art. Everywhere many Indian artists they tried to revive the Indian traditional art.

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Once again hence they are known as revivalists. In fact, partially in many of the paintings of Rabindranath Tagore, you can see that he is also partially revivalist in the sense he is trying to bring back some of the elements of traditional Indian particularly miniature painting, but he is also hybrid artist because he was also looking at Japanese art, he was looking at folk art, he was looking at modern European art as well and he is trying not exactly to match them, but trying to blend various elements in his work.

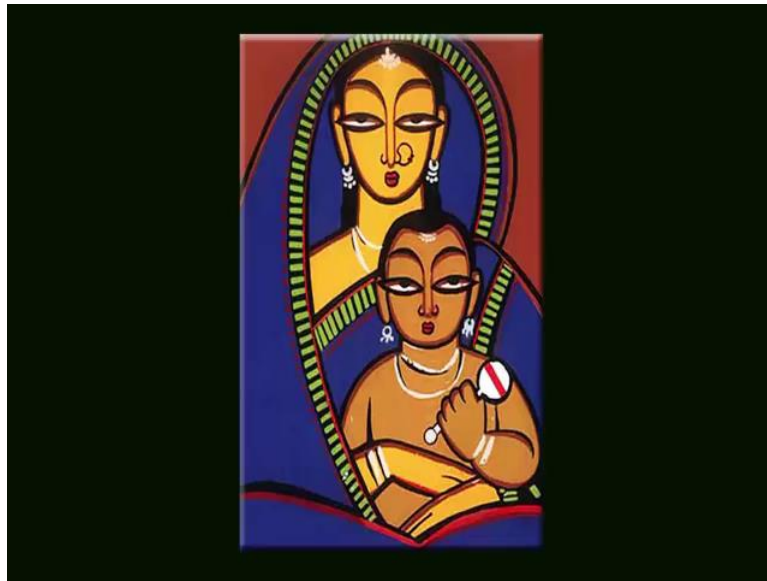
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One of his best known works is this Bharat Mata which he painted in 1905. It is so well

known, it is so famous also because he did this painting at a time at a very historical movement when Bharat Mata became almost synonymous symbolically with the spirit of India, the free India. India was not yet free. India would become independent only in 1947, much later almost 42 years later than this painting was painted, but already in this painting Rabindranath was able to express visually the dream of the nationalist Indians, Indians who now wanted to get rid of this British ruler, get rid of this colonial life and live as an independent nation.

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So, Rabindranath and many others in different ways were trying to develop an art form which is not going to conform to any of the canons set by the British rulers.



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So, whether these paintings for example this one by Jamini Roy or next one again by Jamini Roy. Look at these paintings. There are plenty of paintings by Jamini Roy.

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You can have a look at his paintings and see that though he is very modern because he started his career doing very modern European kind of paintings which he gave up very soon because he wanted to do something truly Indian yet modern. So, this is a new situation that the Indian artists are now negotiating. Previously at the beginning of the colonial period we saw that the artists were negotiating between traditional art forms and the new realistic

elements which they had learnt or they had seen in the European works, but now it is a slightly different situation.

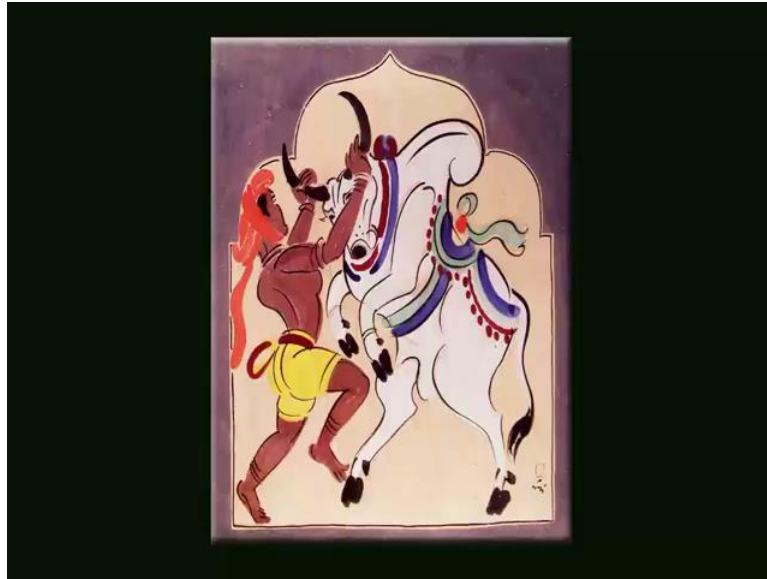
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It is not negotiating between the tradition and the European; it is a negotiation between tradition and the modern and what kind of modern not European modern, but Indian modern and Jamini Roy beside Rabindranath Tagore and Amrita Shergil and Ravi Verma could be cited as again a very important example who instead of drawing his form instead of sourcing his form from the already existing modern European art movements or art models, he looked back at our folk art traditions. You remember in one in our third week last two modules, we were looking at folk art.

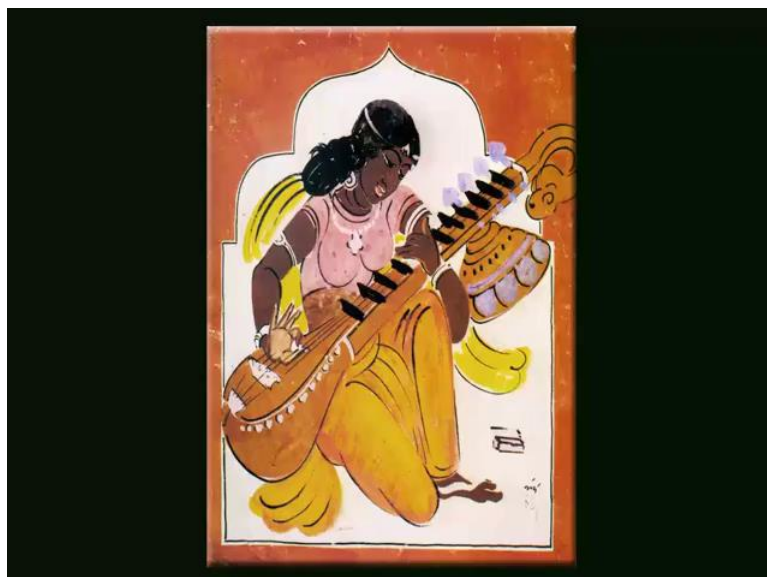
We were looking at its simplicity, spontaneity and a kind of spirit that most of these folk art forms carry within themselves. Jamini Roy was attracted to that and he found that the folk art traditions could be his source for his modern art and hence, he derived he developed his modern art from his experience from folk art. So, he himself is not a folk artist, but his development of folk art his evolution of, sorry modern art. The root of modern art was in folk art. So, this is another way of reacting another way of doing art for a nationalist cause.

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Now, we have Nandalal Bose again a very important artist in early 20th century. He lived a long life from late 19th century and he lived through the first half of 20th century and died in 1966. Now, he was a pupil, a student of Rabindranath Tagore, but again when he developed his own language his own freedom, Nandalal Bose was also doing works of art which are truly Indian and particularly this one.

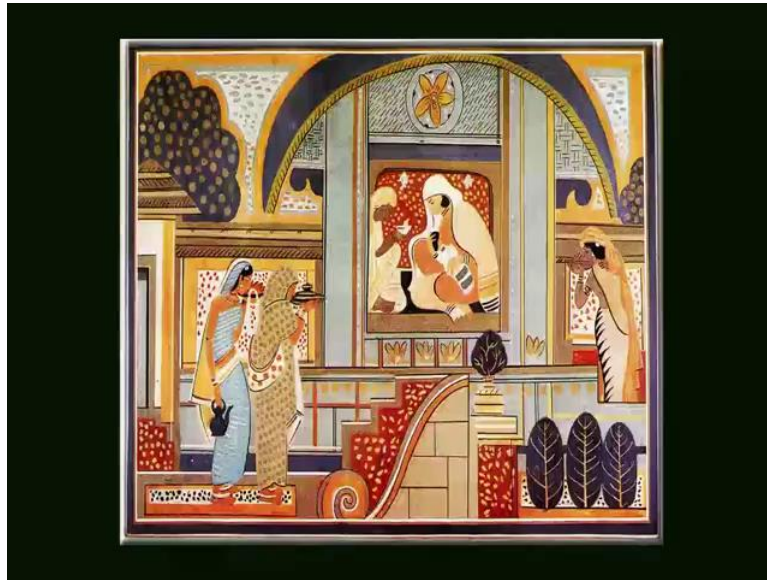
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Next one are extremely important in our context today because we are talking about the nationalist art and these two paintings; this one and the previous one were done along with

many others for Haripura congress convention in 1930s, very interesting that for a congress convention Gandhi had asked Nandalal Bose to do these paintings to be displayed on the makeshift walls, where that meeting would be held.

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So, in a way this is a public display, this is a public art lot of people came and saw and through these works, Nandalal with the encouragement of Gandhiji of course, was trying to develop a true the concept of the true modern Indian art.

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Look at many of his murals by Nandalal Bose a similar approach and the similar mindset can

be seen. Not that he has completely relinquished what is traditional, but definitely he is not so prone to the western methods. He is trying to build up his own method of painting keeping certain traditional elements intact, but at the same time devising innovative new ways.

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Yes, this is what I would like to point out very emphatically that because of this feeling on part of the artists to align themselves with the nationalist sentiment to align themselves with a kind of mindset which is looking forward to a free India, a free nation, independent India which wants to get rid of these British rulers, these artists because of this feeling because of this urge were at the end of the day rewarded with a new art language.

So, it is very interesting that this art for the cause or for a certain cause art for the nation led many of these artists to desperately look for a suitable language. I mean visual language a suitable pictorial language and Shantiniketan interestingly was an alternative school in that context established in 1919. The art school of Shantiniketan known as Kala Bhavan was right at the outset very clear that they are not going to follow the colonial system of art training and they were also not going to follow the traditional system of art training. They were resolved to develop a new form of art pedagogy, a new form of art training based on real life observation and also by studying our heritage art.

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Now, this resulted into wonderful works by very important and stalwart artists of Shantiniketan like Benode Behari Mukherjee. This one also I mean where do you categorize this painting? It is Indian western hybrid very difficult because now we are witnessing the emergence of new kind of art behind which a certain nationalist sentiment was very important and at the same time an urge, a desire, a dream to create modern Indian art not necessarily imitating what was happening in the west or the European modern art, but to develop a kind of a unique indigenous modern Indian art.

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So, Benode Behari and then followed by one of his contemporaries very well-known artists known as Ramkinkar Baij.

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He was particularly successful in developing a new modern language of sculpture because previously either we had very typically traditional religious sculpture or we had European realistic statue like sculpture commissioned by the British people or commissioned by the patrons who thought realistic sculpture is the best possible sculpture. I mean there cannot be any alternative to that, but here we have somebody like Ramkinkar who developed a style

which is neither overtly realistic nor out rightly symbolic, but he resolved this dilemma in a certain way that it creates a great energy. So, they are looking at the energy of the body, the power of the body, the social relationships between the figures and also every sculpture can create or at least can evoke a history of its own.

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So, Ramkinkar that way is very important in terms of the modern Indian sculpture and we have many more coming later on.

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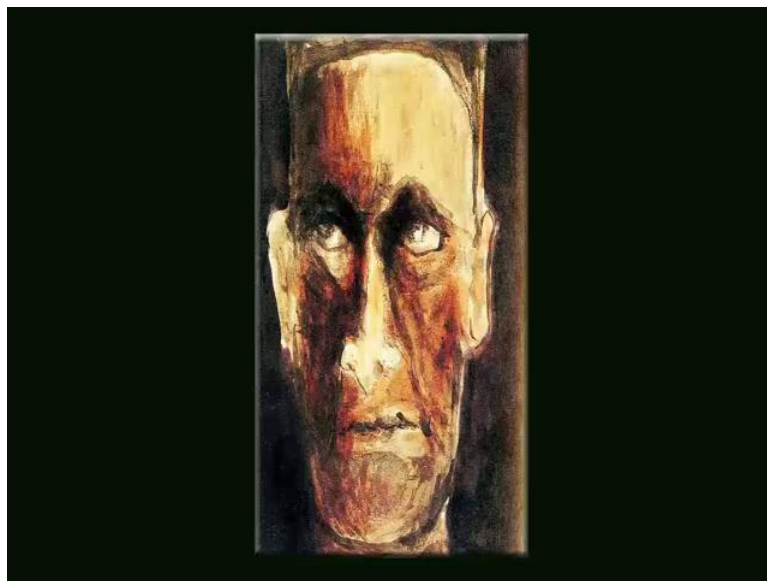




While all these things were happening we know there was this man, an extremely powerful man in all the possible creative fields. I am talking about as you have already guessed rightly Rabindranath Tagore who was already known as a great poet, great philosopher, great writer, but now at the late part of his life he also started doing some paintings.

Though initially he was slightly reluctant to show his paintings because he thought since he did not have any formal training like the way Abanindranath had some formal trainings, he would not be his works were not worth looking at, but slowly people discovered that Rabindranath Tagore like others also decidedly not necessarily driven by a very obvious or a very conspicuous nationalist kind of sentimental feeling, but definitely driven by more global feeling that we would not be confined by the definition given either by the colonial rulers or by the native Indians or by the tradition. So, Rabindranath did something like this one or the next one, almost 2000 paintings in the last 15-16 years of his life.

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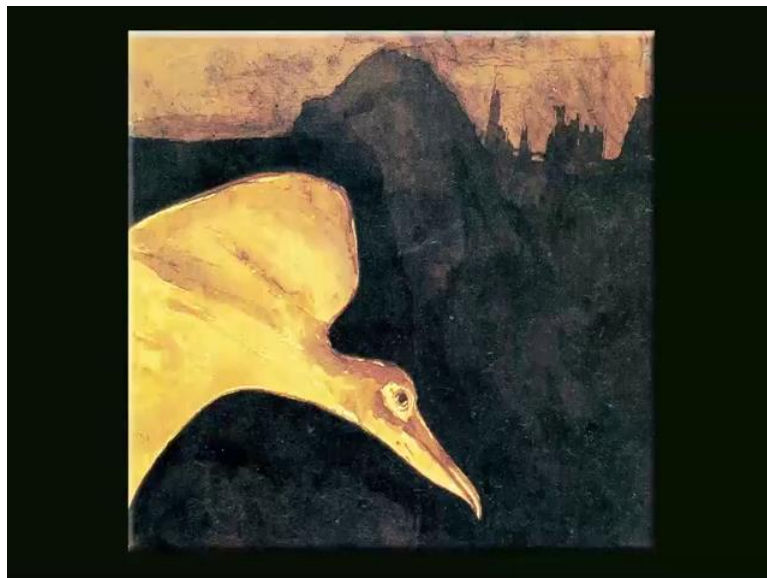
Many of them are available in many sources. So, you can have a look at them and you can see how this man was also contributing to that alternative art scenario within the context of the colonial rule.

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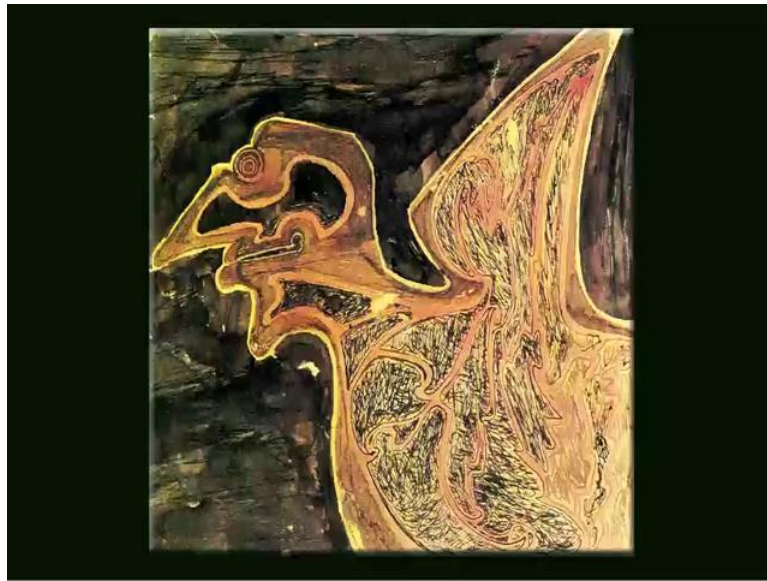
Remember Rabindranath died in 1941, six years before India became independent. So, he was still under the colonial rule, yet he was able to come up with visual ideas and visual forms which were neither colonial nor traditional nor even hybrid; something completely new.

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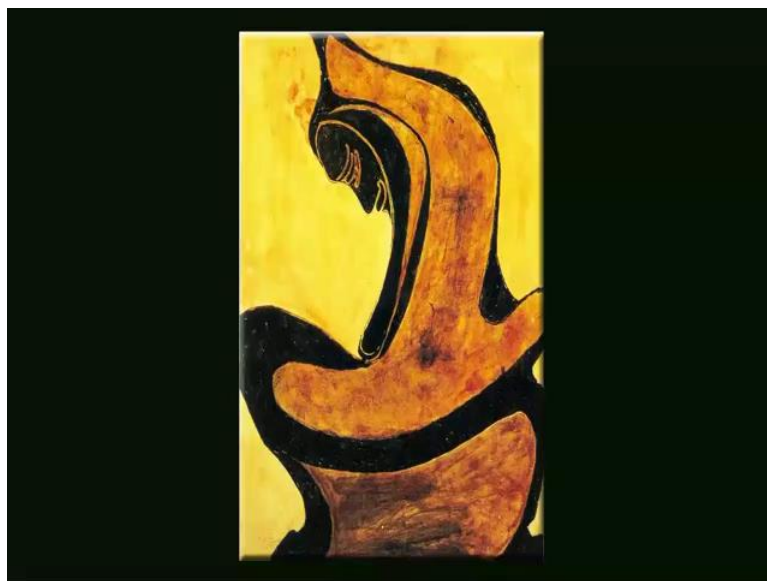


So, Rabindranath Tagore should also be a very important example in this regard also in terms of subject matter, in terms of emotional intensity of his paintings.

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While he was doing all these paintings and as you know he like Abanindranath and all, I mean they all belonged to that great Tagore family, illustrious family, culturally very talented family and there was one more person whom we will be looking at briefly right now in this context.

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Before that let me quickly summarize by saying that all artists did not react against the British colonial rule in the same way though they might not have conformed.

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All artists did not react against the British colonial rule in the same way. Stylistically artists differ from each other. They all did not necessarily react in the same manner.

But one thing that united all of them was the nationalist urge to dream at independent India.

In some way or the other, they all tried to create a national Indian identity, either through the style or the content or by deviating from the colonial norms.

Some of these artists like Gaganendranath Tagore was very direct in his cartoons—criticizing the British rule very harshly—some others were rather establishing a new swadeshi art-theory as opposed to the colonial art practice.

There is no question of conformity. They might not have conformed to the British colonial art system, yet they were not also reacting against the British colonial rule in the same way. Stylistically artists differed from each other. They all did not necessarily react in the same manner, but one thing that united all of them was the nationalist urge to dream an independent India. In some way or the other they tried to create a national Indian identity

either through the style or the content or by deviating from the colonial norms.

For example this is what we will be looking at right now. Some of the artists like Gaganendranath Tagore who also belonged to the same family, Tagore's family. He was very direct in his artwork particularly in his cartoons. Remember it was not so easy that you are creating cartoons directly against your British rulers. I mean it should have been considered as something very, he should be put in the sedition charge.

I mean it was so dangerous doing that, but he did it so powerfully, so beautifully and he criticized the British rule very harshly, but then we also have artists for example like Jamini Roy whom we have seen just now who were rather establishing a new Swadeshi art theory or an art style as opposed to the colonial art practice though they might not be attacking or criticizing the British rule in a very obvious way.

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Look at this cartoon, this drawing by Gaganendranath Tagore. So, it is very different from whatever we have seen so far. It is not the image of a scene or a particular portrait or any event. It is a cartoon and also it is out rightly humorous. It is supposed to evoke some kind of fun, but there is a very strong satire. It is sarcastic and this particular cartoon by Gaganendranath Tagore and many other cartoons by him actually repeatedly try to attack the brutal colonial rule against which the freedom fighters were fighting.

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Indian people were desperately looking for an independent India and Gaganendranath Tagore was not only criticizing the British rule, he was also criticizing many of the age old conventions of Indian society, for example the caste system. The way the Brahmins always had thought that they were superior to the lower caste and things like that. So, he has done cartoons on these issues and particularly this one is very interesting also because of the caption.

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Now, because it is a cartoon not like any other painting, the artist needs to put a caption. So,

we have these works with a caption and in this work, the caption is given bilingually both in Bangla and English. In Bangla it is called Prachanda Mamata and in English translated into English, it is terribly sympathetic because one of the British rulers had said in his speech that we are very sympathetic to our subject that is Indians, native Indians and the very next day he ordered his army to fire on the protesting Indian people.

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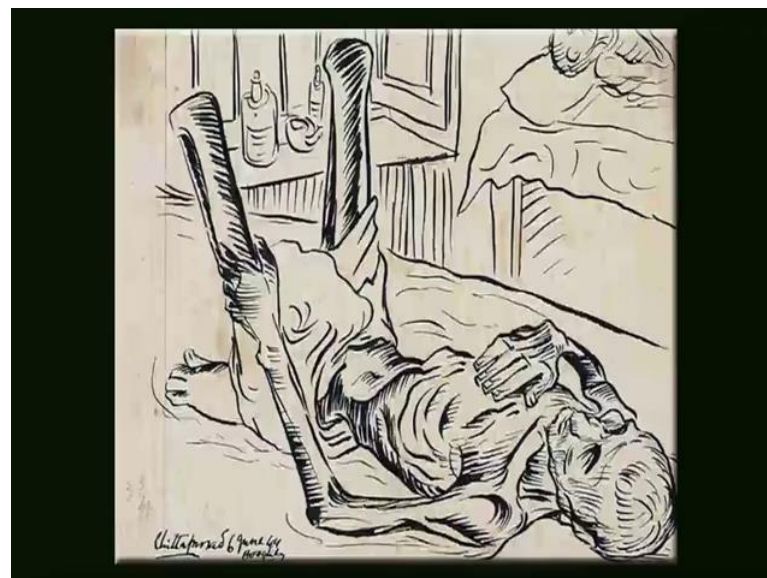
So, he is making comment on that and as an extension of this nationalist art movement, we also come across artists like Chittaprosad, Zainul Abedin, Somnath Hore, all before independence before 1947 who were directly showing depicting and recording not in a very photographic in a very new trill kind of manner, but with a lot of sympathy, with lot empathy, lot of emotional content, also some harsh brutal reality of life of the deprived of the downtrodden of the life of the oppressed.

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So, this is one such drawing of a figure who is impoverished due to the famine of 1943. Chittaprosad, Zainul Abedin they used to move around and draw and sketch the dying people on the road. So, these are very in that sense the language may not be very realistic. I mean very few lines, very few strokes have been used, but the subject matter is utterly realistic to the sense that nobody before these people Chittaprosad Zainul Abedin, Somnath Hore and others has done such drawings and paintings before they are directly looking at the abject poverty and harsh reality and making drawings out of that.

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So, this is what for example, this is also done before 1947, in 1944. So, he is doing these people. So, by doing this kind of artworks, these people were also able to let us say emancipate liberate art from the confines of very aesthetically pleasing art because whether it is done by traditionalist people belonging to the traditional sector, traditional artists or by the colonial artists usually art has been considered as an object which should be primarily speaking aesthetically pleasing.

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Now, these art works done by these people Zainul Abedin, Chittaprosad, Somnath Hore, not aesthetically pleasing they are aesthetically, morally, ethically, socially and on the ground humanitarian ground, they are terribly disturbing.

So, it is this disturbance that has become the most important and significant quality of these works of art and we will see that how the definition of reality as far as the visual art is concerned is now going to change after this particular phase, after the independence and this is what we will be looking at in the next module.

Thank you.