

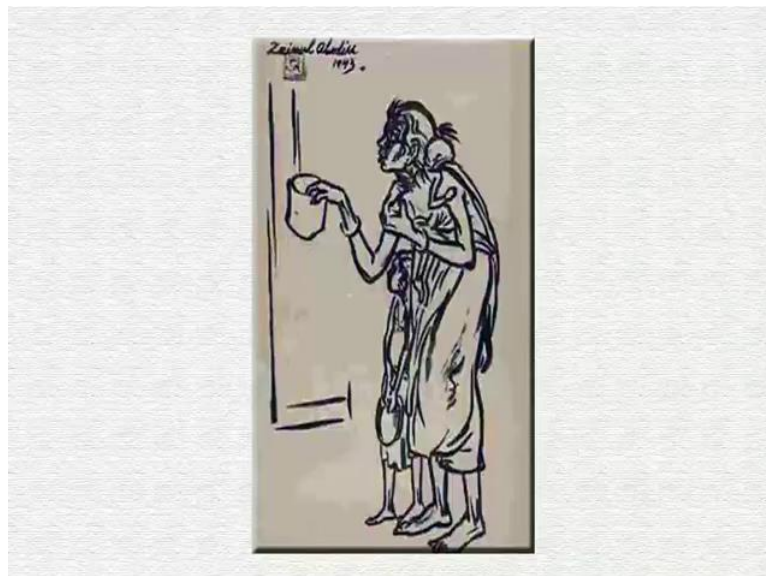
**Introduction to Indian Art – An Appreciation**  
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**Module - 04**  
**Art in the post-Independent India**  
**Lecture: W4 – L4**

Welcome viewers to MOOs online course on Introduction to Indian Art and Appreciation. This is the 4th module of our last week, where we are discussing the tradition to modernity, the journey from tradition to modernity in the context of Indian art. Now, in the last module we discussed how a group of artists driven by a certain nationalist sentiment reacted against the colonial system of art practice within India and as a result they came up with some brilliant artworks reflecting the need, the desire, the dream of creating an alternative art language, an alternative art form different from what the colonial rulers were expecting from us.

Today in the module 4, we will be looking at different attempts, the different thoughts, the different ways of looking at art practice in the post independent India.

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Now, we need to remember that post independent India that is post 1947, the history of that period did not begin with all that glory. I mean despite the fact that it was a momentous thing to happen in the history of India, India was ultimately free from the colonial rulers on 15th

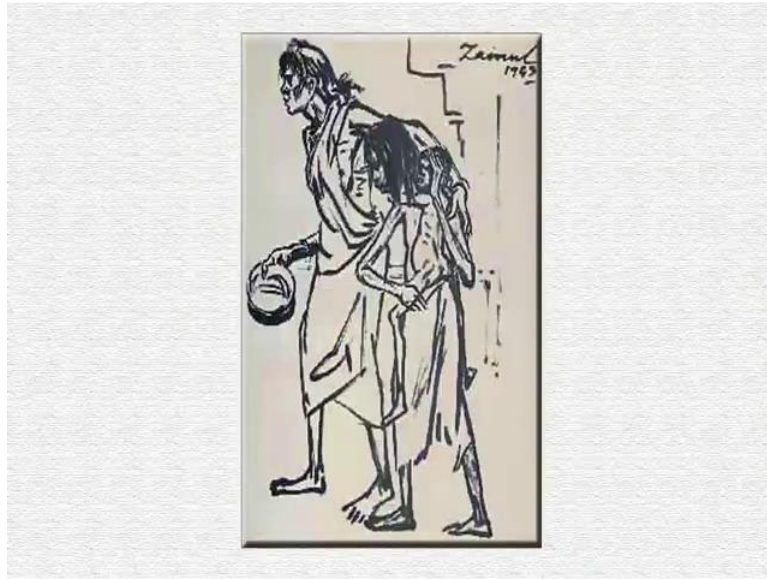
August 1947. Yet there were lot of things happening which disturbed, disturbing things were happening which disturbed the Indian people. For example, in 1943 there was this famine leaving thousands and thousands of people impoverished hungry and many of them perished just out of hunger. We also remember that 1947 along with the independence due to a very fruitful very successful freedom movement, there was also this migration. Almost let us say forced migration known as the infamous partition of India 1947 leaving thousands of people to migrate from this part of the land to that part of the land.

So, politically, socially and otherwise also, there was a certain kind of disturbance, but in spite of all these disturbances, post independent India also witnessed an extraordinary urge within the people and particularly cultural activists like writers, poets, artists, musicians, performers to create a vision, a dream of India which will help in nation building activities because post-independence also means there is a huge amount of responsibility on Indian people to build up the nation gradually and as you know when you build up a nation economically and education wise, health wise, culture plays a very important role in this entire process and it is in this cultural field that visual art left a very important contribution in the post independent era, but post independent era was also witnessing as I just mentioned the continuation of the impact of certain disturbing moments like famine.

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Partition and artists like Zainul Abedin Chittaprosad and later Somnath Hore who have been responding and reacting to these incidents in their artworks, they also by virtue of the response by virtue of their commitment to a certain kind of society, commitment towards a certain kind of cause, they also came up with an art language which is undoubtedly realistic.

There is no question about that, but at the same time they also developed a style of drawing and painting which could be very expressive also because you see this is very important, because during the colonial period and in the context of the company painting, the brand of

realism that developed visual realism, it was almost neutral. There was a kind of neutrality.

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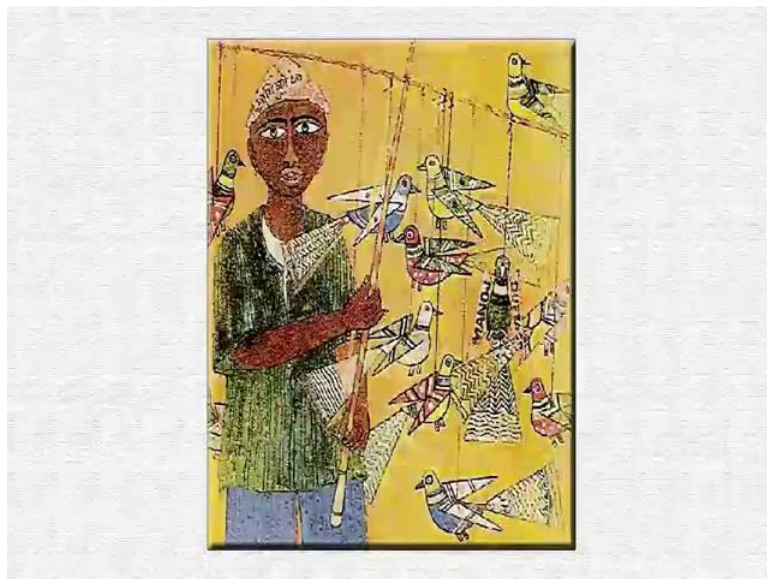
You are not supposed to be emotionally engaged with what you are visually recording, but here artists like Zainul Abedin Chittaprosad, Somnath Hore, they were not neutral and emotionless observer. They were emotional artists. They were observing certain degrading and extremely disturbing and annoying circumstances of life with a very strong emotion, a very strong mindset and as a result their artworks like this one is not just a visual record of a dying man, not just simply faithful drawing of an impoverished suffering man, but it is the suffering itself which is the main content of the painting or the drawing.

It has to be very expressive and it has to be full of emotional content. So, this is the contribution of these people who responded to very disturbing events like the famine of 1943, the partition of 1947 and all those political turmoil on the eve of 1947, independence of India because their responses in a way paved way to a very expressive art language which in turn would help the Indian artists to move towards developing a modern Indian art and these people like Somnath Hore, they not only excelled in drawing and painting and print making, but also in sculpture.

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So, in various kinds of mediums these artists began their practice whereas one of their aims was to help the nation building process through their artwork. Another aim was also to make their art internationally known. This international acceptance, this global acceptance was definitely an important agenda that was shaping their mind. So, this would result in a practice wherein artist would not only be looking at our own past and heritage and Indian traditional elements, but they would also be looking very carefully and studying the developments.

The current developments taking place in the modern western art not that they were going to,



they were trying to blend this with that, but this whole awareness of the global scenario is a very important aspect of the post independent modern Indian art. It was also a very important aspect of the post independent Indian nation. India also made all kinds of efforts, so that its presence can be felt globally. It was under the British rule for several years, several decades, almost more than two centuries. They have had enough and now Indians want to be known as an independent nation and potentially powerful to be self-sufficient, to be useful and to be important in every sphere of life.

So, we have people like Paritosh Sen for example, who lived through the turmoil of partition and independence, but eventually he also tried to build up a language, a pictorial language which would rightly express the spirit of the post independent India.

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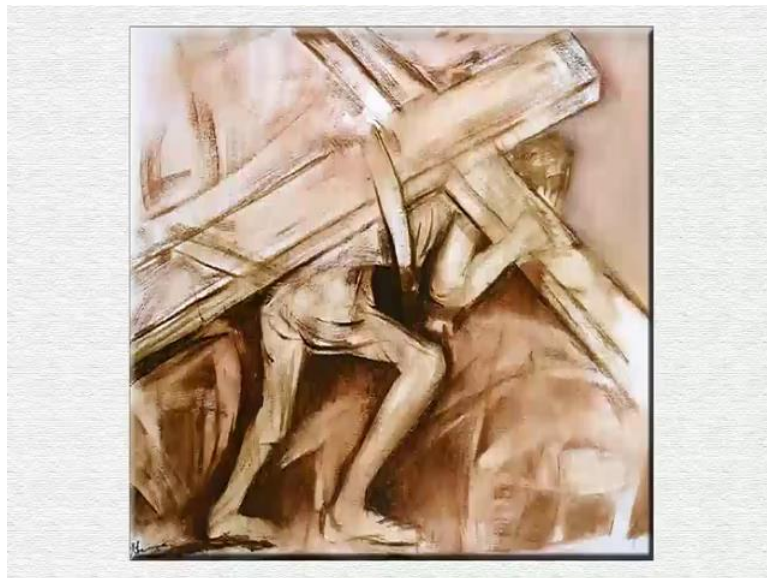


In other words, post independent Indian art does not necessarily mean that all these artists had a singular agenda. No, it only means in fact if you look at the entire range in one single module, we would not be able to see many, may be just a few artists and few artworks, but if you study yourself and look at the entire range of the post independent modern Indian art, you will be amazed to see the variety of styles, the entire range of aesthetics, the pictorial languages, different kinds of idioms used by different artists. This is because variety was not an issue.

I mean there was no problem having a lot of variations in their art language and expressions. The issue was that there should be a global awareness of what we are doing. The issue was

our art. Our art practice should become at par with the nation building activity of the newly independent India because you see as far as the global awareness is concerned way back in 1922, Rabindranath had already invited Vienna's art historian Stella Kramrisch to Shantiniketan and requested her to deliver a series of lecture on modern western art. So, even Tagore was also very conscious about this global and international awareness of cultural scenario.

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So, you have somebody like Krishen Khanna from Bombay doing lot of artworks, where the people are in the figures painted here are known to him familiar people sometimes. It also do something based on a motive drawn from a religious world or a religious thought, but what is interesting in all these figurative works is that the painters are trying to experiment and explore the possibilities of human body.

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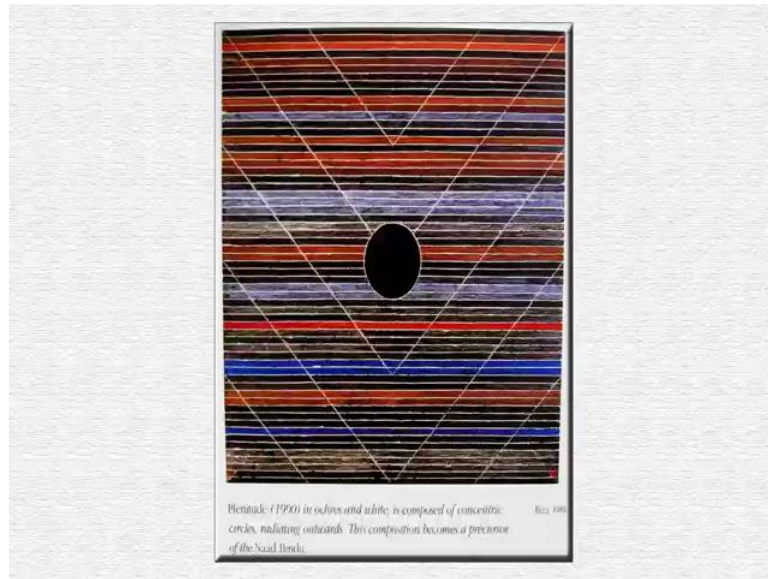


In other words is becoming the central motif in most of the post independent art. Though in a place like Shantiniketan, even after independence in 40s, 50s and 60s landscape nature was still a very strong subject matter, but post independent art in the urban centers like Calcutta, Bombay there we see the artists looking at human figures as potential areas to express their feelings, personal feelings, individual feelings, social feelings and also shared feelings.

Now, within this framework we also have an artist like Raza who completely devoted himself to abstract art throughout his life. He explored and experimented with the possibilities of abstraction, but it is not a kind of modern western art abstract. Raza's abstract art is very much rooted in the Indian ethos, Indian philosophy and Indian aesthetics of abstraction. In fact, many of his abstract paintings have very typically Indian name like Bindu.

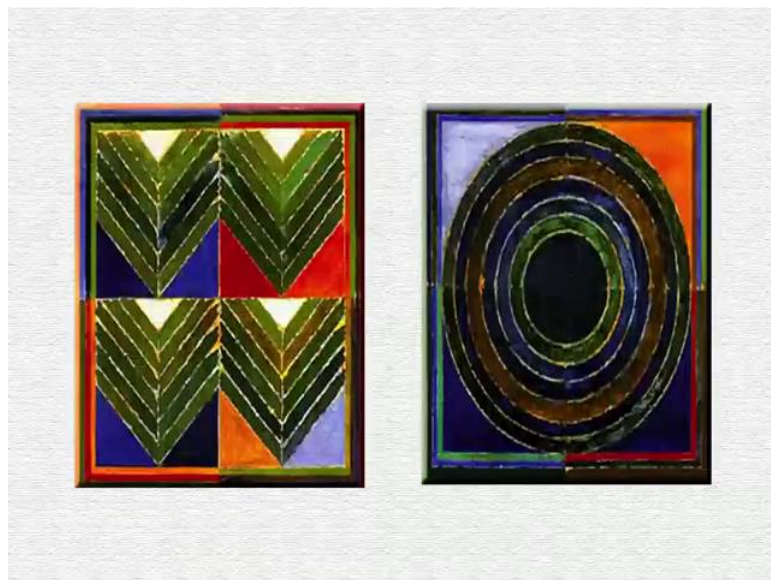


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Bindu is the name of not one of his paintings, but series of paintings many, paintings and he develops on this idea of Bindu, this idea of the dot, the circle. Since the entire thought process is very abstract, his paintings are also very abstract.

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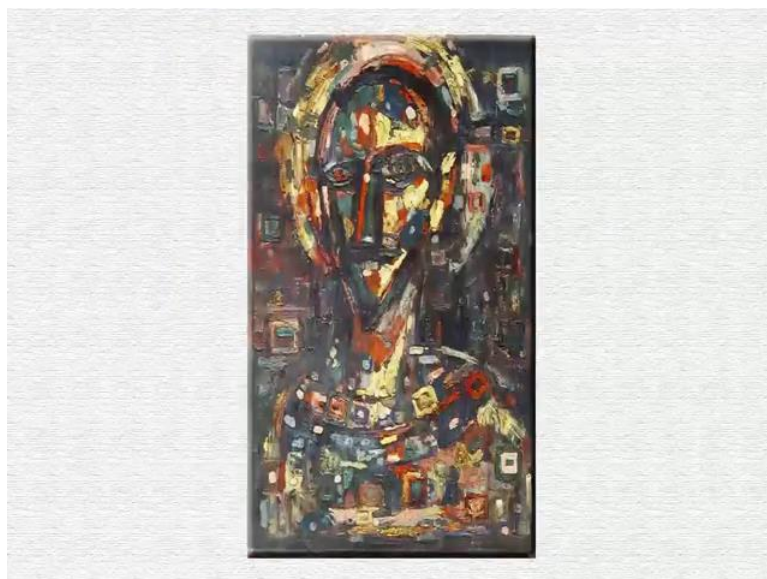


This is one more by the same artist Raza. So, it is interesting that in this context wherein the other artists are working vigorously to develop on the idea of the body to explore the possibilities of human figure, here you have one artist Raza from Bombay who was drawn to the possibilities of abstraction right from the late 40s.

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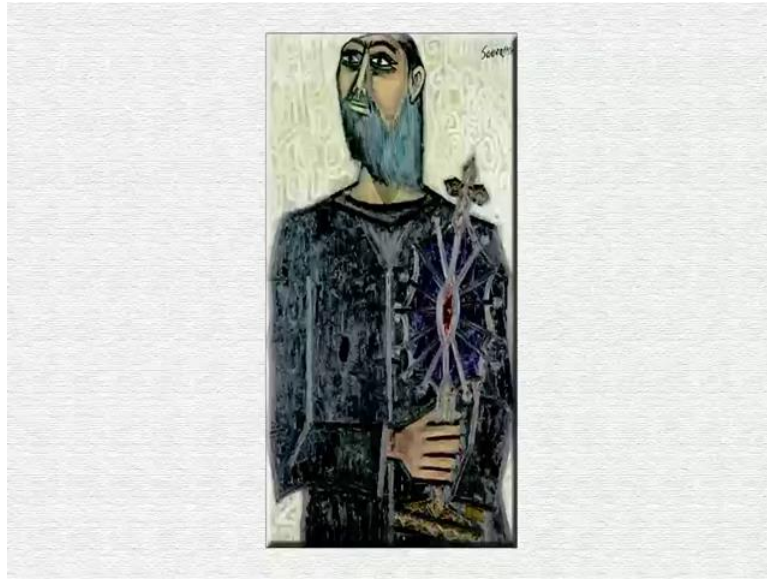


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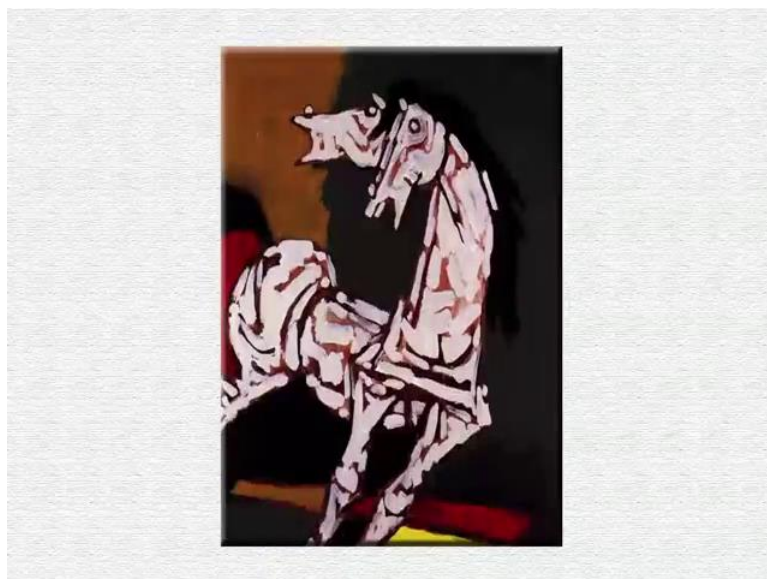


One more by Raza and Souza was another artist from Bombay who should also be considered as a very important post independent modern Indian artist not just because of his subject, but because of his form subject matter and also his method of doing a painting which is very unconventional which may have some connections with certain European tradition, but overall Souza was very much rooted to his individual psychological sensibilities which was the source of many of his paintings.

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Then of course, we have this towering figure in the post independent modern Indian art Husain, MF Hussain, Maqbool Fida Hussain. If we are talking about post independent modern Indian art in the context of building a new nation, then Husain should be our poster boy. He is the face of that nation building activity from the visual cultural aspect.

In fact, Husain was not only creating a new form of modern art, he was also creating a new audience for modern Indian art because after all as the saying goes art ceases to exist if you do not have an audience and Indian audience were. So far interested mostly in what was



traditional or pseudo traditional, but now Indian artists were interested in doing something more contemporary, something more modern, something that would echo the ethos of the current society, the current time, but where is that audience.

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So, Husain created art which is stylistically difficult to build to paint even in terms of technique Husain's way of doing oil painting and drawing is not easy. He was a very skillful artist no doubt about that. His skill, his dexterity is mind boggling yet compared to what you see in a painting by Souza or Raza, Husain's paintings are easier in the sense that when you look at the subject matter when you look at the motifs, even if the motifs are very distorted, the horses look very elongated male and female figures look bit distorted, it does not matter to anybody.

Almost any common person, common viewer can relate to at least can respond to Husain's painting. Not that Husain's paintings are easy, but Husain's paintings in terms of the motifs in terms of its composition are comfortable for the audience to respond. In other words, Husain was very successful in creating a whole generation of art audience, art viewers because of his popularity.

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Also because of the fact that he deliberately never tried to make his art very difficult to understand or even difficult to view and then of course, he often used very well-known popular motifs like Mother Teresa, like Tagore, like Satyajit Ray and very well-known motifs from our popular culture in order to make his art also not just easier, but to create a bridge between his art and the audience through the culture. In order to make this statement felt that he is not making art only for an elitist group of people like collectors and gallerist, his art has that power has that uncanny power which empowers everybody to look to feel to enjoy.

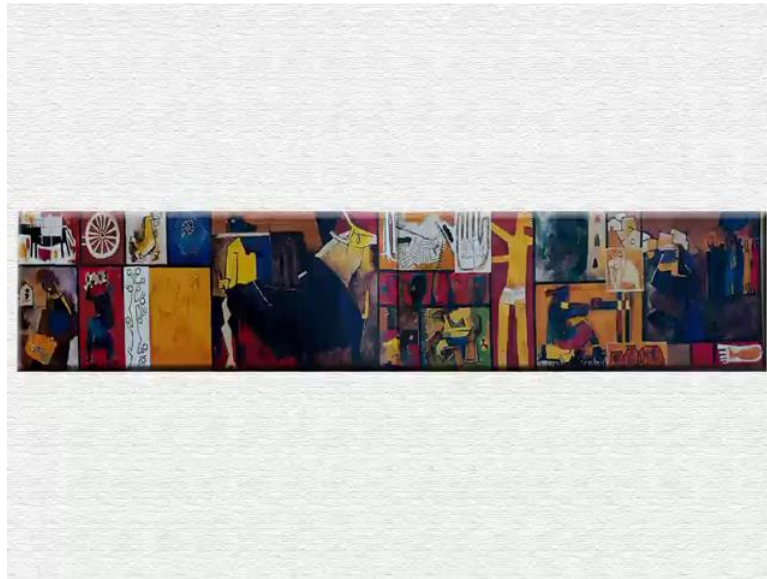
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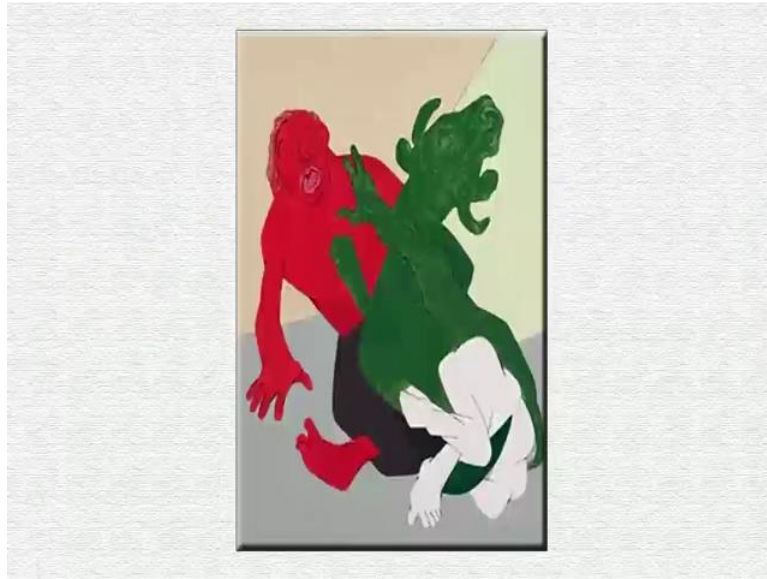
So, despite the fact that Husain like most of artists who have lived long and worked throughout his life may not have been always very consistent in terms of quality, I believe in every artist. There are these ups and downs that is not the issue, but the point is that being a very prolific painter, he has been able to continuously explore this possibility of making art more tangible, more understandable, more appreciable from the common viewer, from the common people.

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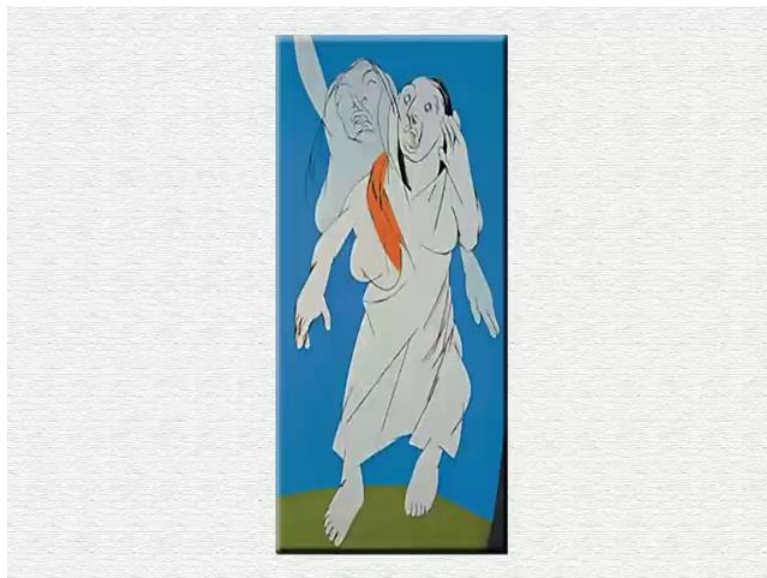
Also his artwork is extremely supportive of the idea of the dream of a new nation that most of the Indian people were envisioning. So, this is one painting called Zameen an evidence of how Husain's idea of a new independent nation that is India completely merges very well or reflects and supports the idea of nation that is shared by everybody, by the political leaders, by the common people, by the nation at large. This is not to say that Husain was a nationalist painter in the sense some of these painters like Rabindranath Tagore and others were during the British period. It is to say that Husain was successfully responding to his time to the ethos of his time.

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Then similarly we also have another artist contemporary to Husain called Tyeb Mehta from Mumbai.

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Again, in fact Tyeb Mehta's distortion of forms the way he experimented with the anatomy, these distortions created a new style, a very powerful style to deal with the human body and that made his paintings look very contemporary, very modern in every possible way.

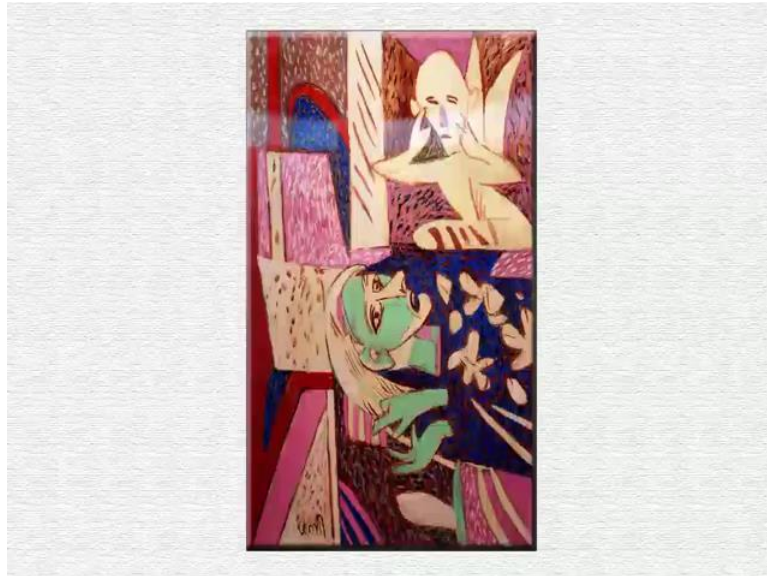
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Then, we also have another towering figure in the context of modern Indian art of post 40s, post-Independence called KG Subramanyan who passed away last month. Now, Subramanyan in a way his modernity or his contemporaneity lays in the fact beside others the fact that he was extremely versatile. He was versatile in every possible medium. This is also a

way to break the traditional notion of that one particular artist is skilled in one particular medium.

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So, this specialization aspect the idea of being a specialist in particular medium is completely ignored and ruled out by a very versatile artist like KG Subramanyan and because of the whole nature of his art which is very well constructed, very well structured, very well textured and definitely very colorful with lot of play with form color drawing etcetera.

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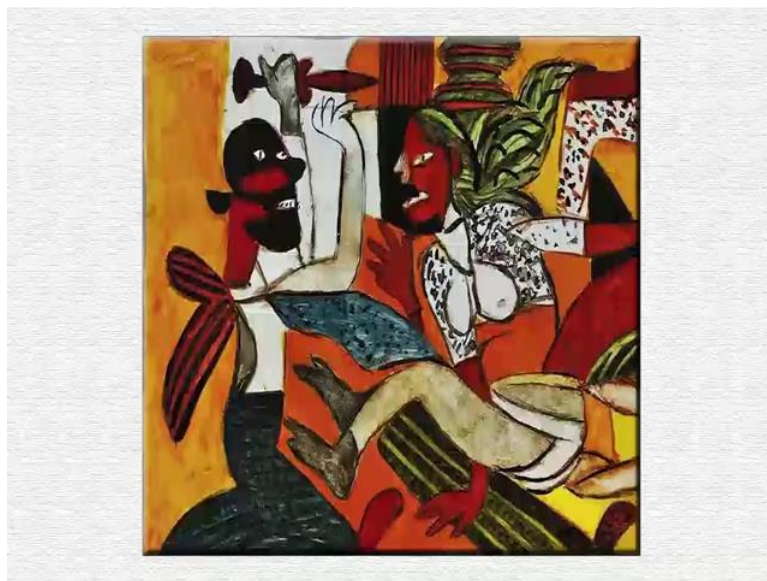
Many of his works are also very funny and there is an element of fun, there is element of



playfulness and you remember this idea of playfulness was very pertinent when we discussed Indian folk art because in most of the examples of Indian folk art, we find that playfulness is not a quality; it is also a driving force and it is not a coincidence that KG Subramanyan drew his inspiration a lot of it actually from Indian folk art traditions.

So, almost as a natural phenomenon in Subramanyan's works also you find this playful quality which is not only playful in terms of its figuration and color juxtaposition and formal organization, it is also playful in terms of the subject matter, in terms of the content.

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That is why Subramanyan often can be very sarcastic, very witty. Some of his humors in his paintings are very sardonic. It is possible because a modern artist like him is out of the shackles of either traditional art or the colonial art. He is free to invent and innovate.



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That is what he has done throughout his life to the extent that he has also played with Indian mythology, not with irreverence, but with love, with his playful quality almost like the way Indian folk artists have also played with Indian mythology.

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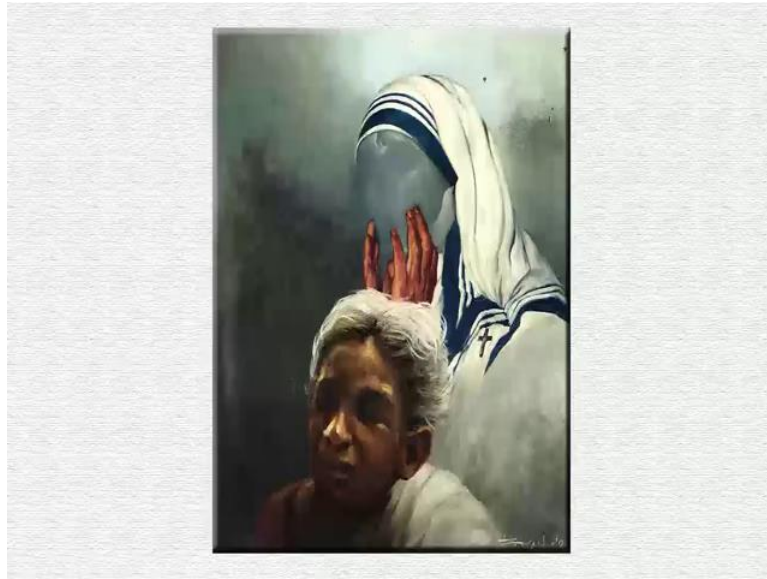


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Now, we have also slightly later somebody like Bikash Bhattacharya an artist who lived and worked in Kolkata. Bikash Bhattacharya is a typically post independent modern Indian artist who deliberately made an urban environment a very strong element in his paintings not subtly, but very directly. He also used a realistic language of painting and his people his environment his composition is extremely urban, but not the very contemporarily, very new urban slightly an old urban setup relating himself with a place where he lived and worked that is north Calcutta, old north Calcutta. So, it is also very interesting that at the hands of people like Bikash Bhattacharya a new urban modern Indian art is taking shape. We can take note of this.

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Then like Husain, he has also used, Bikash Bhattacharya also has used mother Teresa as a motif, motif of compassion, motif of suffering, motif of empathy, but you can make a beautiful comparison between these two paintings.

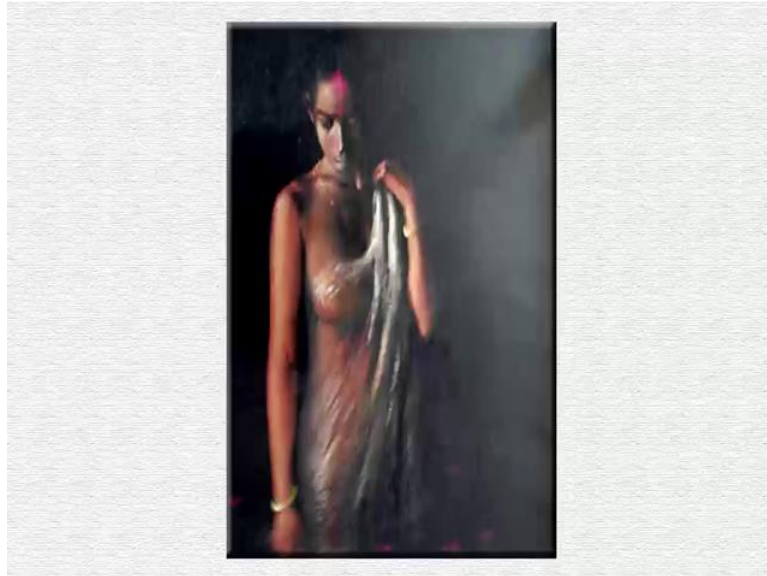
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The painting where you see Husain using mother Teresa and this painting, where Bikash Bhattacharya is also using mother Teresa, but in a slightly different way. A comparison would be very interesting and within this urban setup within this urban psychological kind of feelings Bikash Bhattacharya was also a very powerful artist when does this kind of

surrealistic paintings, where the entire painting looks a little uncanny, a little magical little eerie also, but at the same time it evolves all those spheres and anxieties that a modern society carries within itself.

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One of his most famous series of paintings is known as the doll series. You may have a look at his doll series later on.

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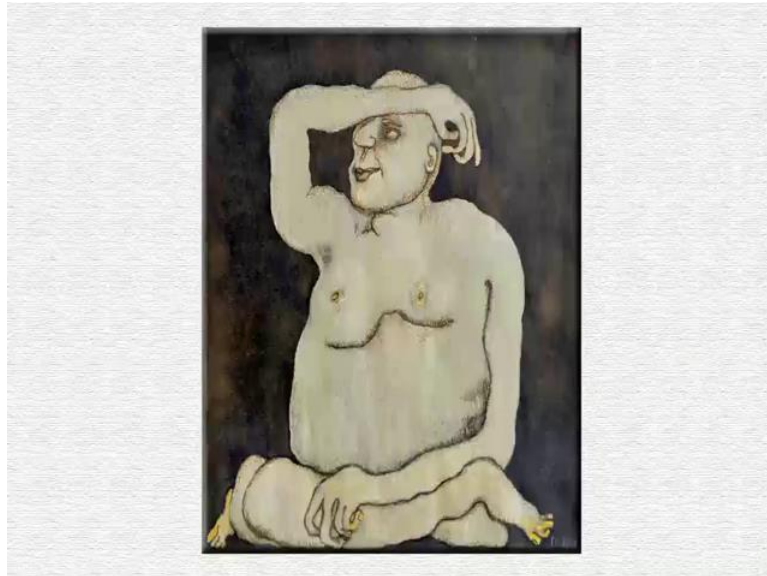


See how the urban dream, the urban life has been addressed in his paintings, but not necessarily to please us, not necessarily to give us a very comfortable feeling, but rather



Bikash Bhattacharya's paintings evoke a sense of not fear exactly, but a sense of uneasiness, a discomfort probably.

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That is also a very important quality in modern Indian art a sense of discomfort which would be later taken up by one of his contemporaries Jogen Chaudhary in his drawings and paintings where the body itself looks very discomfort, a discomfortable body though of a man.

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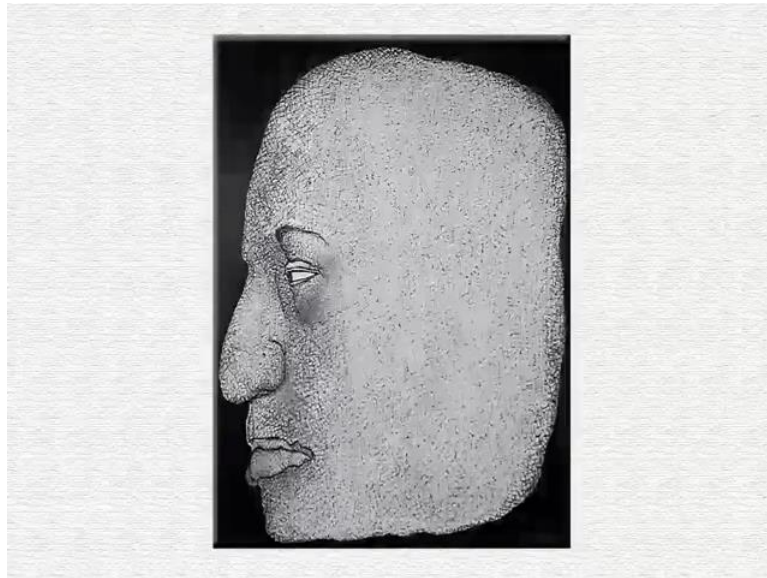


Here does not seem to be very discomfortable with his body, we feel discomfortable. So, a



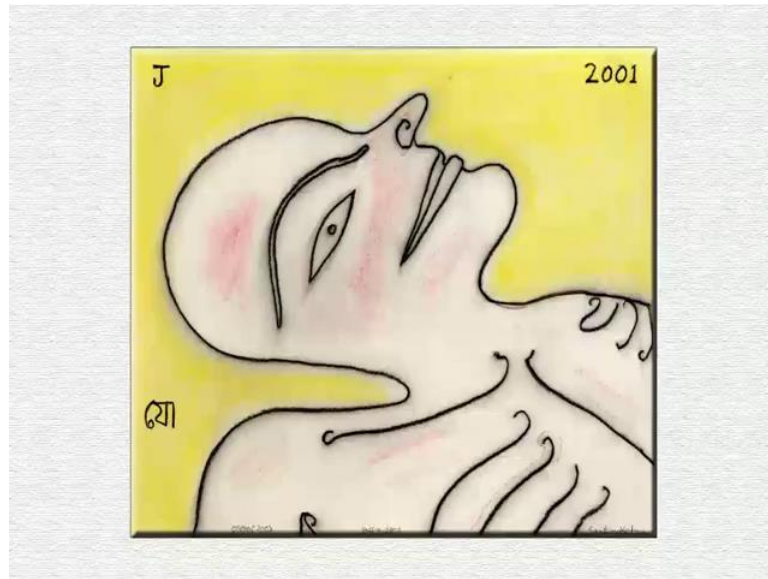
certain kind of discomfort combined with a sense of humor and a sarcasm and also fear is what many of these artists like Bikash Bhattacharya, Jogen Chaudhary, and previously KG Subramanyan were looking for trying to create a new opening of modern Indian art for the next generations as well.

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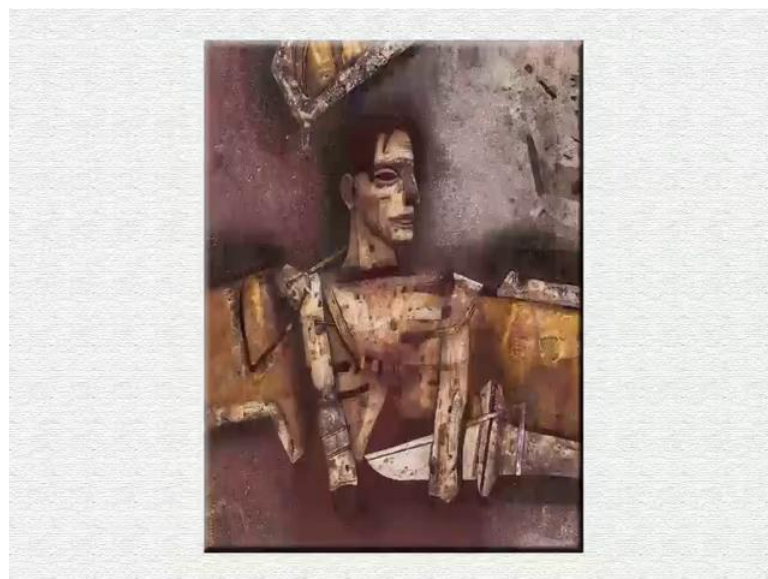


So, even a one single drawing of a head of unknown person by Jogen Chaudhary could be so enchanting without anything else in it. Still you can keep looking at it for hours and feel the passion, feel what this particular image provokes you to think feel and even relate and even imagine. I mean after all at the end of it when you keep looking at this image for a while, you feel this is not a face that is going to keep you in comfort. So, deliberately keeping you in some discomfort, some kind of uneasiness is what many of these artists are trying to do.

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Then finally after Jogen Chaudhary not chronologically after he was a couple of years senior to him, we also have a very famous well known artist from that period called Ganesh Pyne. As an example I am taking there were many others also? Ganesh Pyne also is no more, but he has left behind hundreds of wonderful paintings done very delicately using the water color techniques used by or followed by artists like Rabindranath Tagore.

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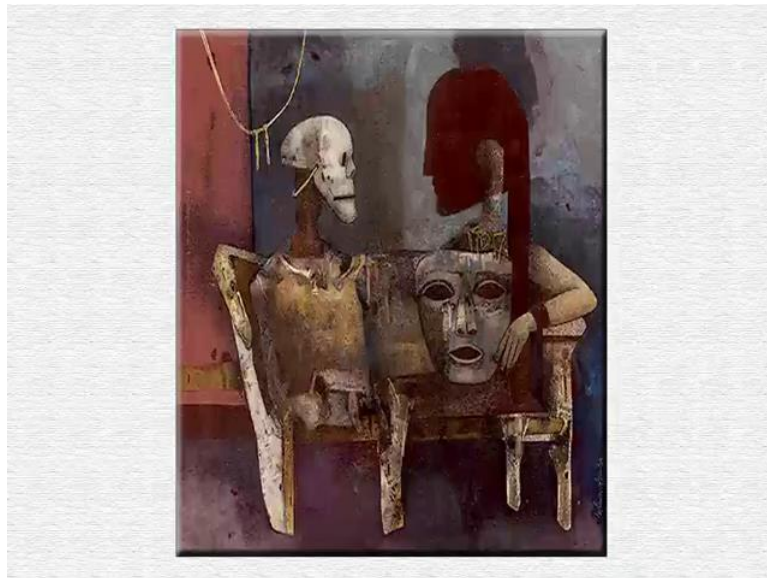
Even the miniaturists, the miniature painters before, but instead of once again creating a world of pleasure what Ganesh Pyne does here he creates a world of pensive thoughtful mood and almost intangible. Though compared to his paintings, Bikash Bhattacharya's paintings look more tangible more palpable, but Ganesh Pyne's paintings despite the fact that you can identify well, this is the figure, this is a wall, this is a lamp, this is a furniture and this is a cloth. So, there is no problem in identifying what has been shown in the paintings yet the mood that is created is deeply disturbing or very pensive or may be melancholic.

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Now, how do you read that is up to you and this is how at our every sphere of our existence art is becoming a very important expression not only for the artists, but also for the new generation of art audience. In post independent India, they know that the function of art is not restricted only to any particular objective. It can be highly individualistic and it can be deeply psychological at the same time. It can be very social, it can be very outward, it can be very introvert. All these possibilities were opened up like taking them out from the Pandora's Box during this period after 1947.

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These are only the few artistes that we have discussed, very few, but there are lot more which you can search and look at their works to get a broader and a better view of this entire period of post 1947, but before we move on to our next module where we will be talking more about some of the very contemporary trends in modern Indian art, let us look at this painting and try to analyze whether it makes any sense to you or not.

If it does, please explain what and if it does not, again please explain as to why it does not make any sense. After all this is one painting where it seems the artist is confronting death. What kind of death he is indicating with this very pensive, very brooding question I wind up today's module.

Thank you.