

**Modern Indian Art from the Colonial Period to the Present**  
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**Lecture 14**  
**Diversities in Style and Content: 1950s onward**

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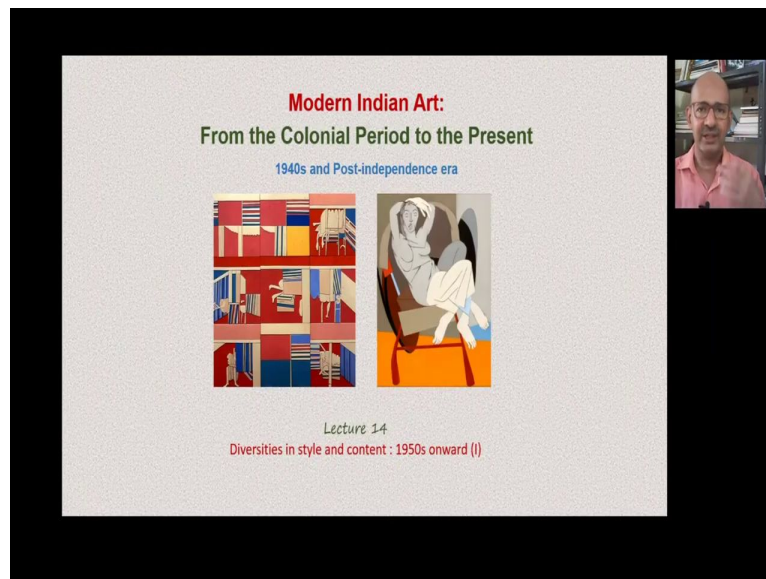
Hello viewers, welcome to MOOCS online course on Modern Indian Art from the Colonial Period to the Present. Today, that is the 14th lecture from this series and also followed by the next one, that is the 15th one in these two lectures, we will be mainly looking at the developments taking place in Modern Indian art from 1950s onwards.

Now some of these artists who were pretty active during this time were already there in the 1930s and 40s. They continued to work but not necessarily repeating what they had done before but innovating new ideas and new expressions. And the new generation, now that is coming up from the late 1940s and 1950s are looking at the possibility of innovating new styles, new thoughts, new ideas, new formal qualities.

Therefore if we have to kind of characterize the developments of modern Indian art taking place from 1950s onwards, Individualism would be one word to explain and represent this phenomenon, a strong individualism in terms of stylistic search, in terms of thematic exploration and in terms of a new language, to develop a new language for his or her own art this becomes a kind of remarkable feature during this period.

So, let us look at the artworks produced by these artists and before that quickly certain background information is needed to locate these new individualistic searches in the field of modern art from the 1950s onwards.

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Now from around the 1950s modern Indian art begins to witness a huge diversity in form, style and content. I have already mentioned that and diversity also appears in mediums and materials used to create artworks. this is also something that we are going to notice, how many of these artists are not happy anymore with the conventional mediums and, therefore trying to explore, discover, innovate new mediums and materials for their artistic expression.

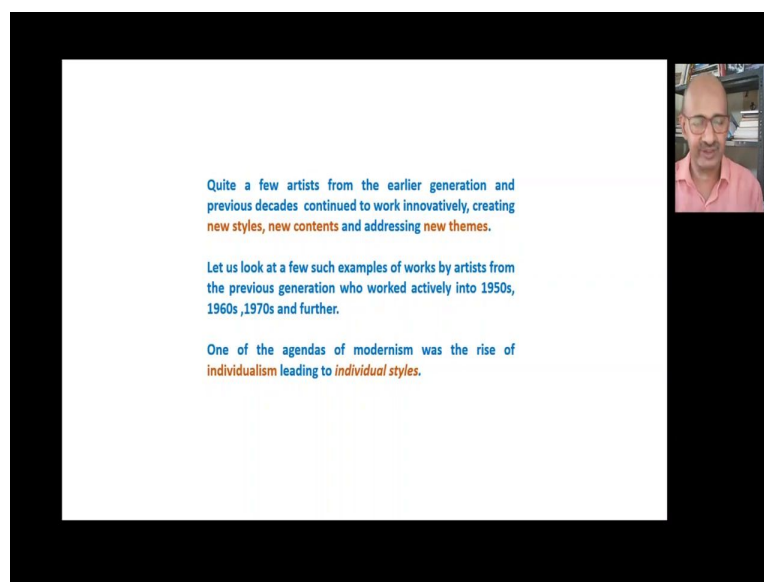
Now, one of the reasons behind this diversity is the urge to experiment, so experimentations. Not necessarily a preconceived form but to explore and venture into the unknown areas of medium, material, style and themes would be a hallmark for many of these artists who are pretty active from 1950 onwards.

Now, also the absence of a singular dominant ideology be it Swadeshi or the ideology of Calcutta group of 1940s or the ideological orientation of the PAG that is Progressive Artists Group in Bombay because of the absence of that because of the absence of one singular dominant ideology- diversity of thoughts, ideas and concepts became very important to proceed with the developments of modern Indian art along with new experiments and new artistic goals.

So, an individual artist could set his or her own artistic goal irrespective of any group or any dominant ideology.

Now, other important reason is the broadening of exposure to world art, now Internationalism also became a buzzword from 1950s it had started already before, particularly when Rabindranath Tagore himself was constantly insisting on an international awareness and knowledge but now we see from 1950s onward the artists have become even more conscious about the benefits of an international or global outlook, therefore in their art often we find elements borrowed from or imbibed from the larger global art scenario. International exposures through art books, magazines and sometimes personal trips and travels or scholarship travels to western countries really opened up the horizons, the new horizons for modern Indian art.

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Now, quite a few artists from the earlier generation and previous decades continued to work innovatively creating new styles, new contents and addressing new themes, I have already mentioned that, now let us look at a few such examples of works by artists from the previous generation who worked actively into 1950s, 60s and 1970s and also further. Now, one of the agendas of modernism was the rise of individualism leading to individual styles, now that from 1947 India is an independent country, therefore the freedom that we are talking about is not only a political freedom or social freedom. it is also an intellectual freedom, it is also a creative freedom to think independently instead of depending on any dominant ideology.

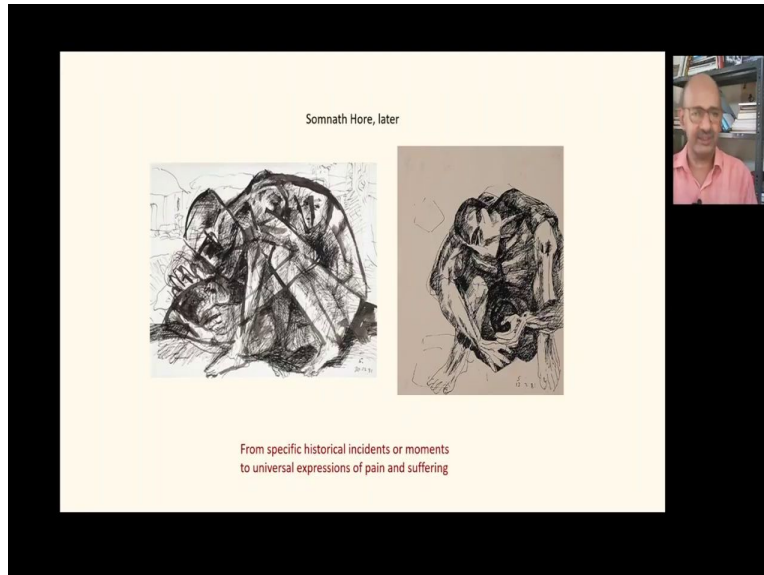
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Now, look at this work by Somnath Hore who was a main artist figure in the 1940s- socially and politically committed artist- and he continued to recall certain themes quite frequently, themes whose sources can be found in the 1940s and his personal experience with some tragic situations and life conditions which he had witnessed in the 1940s but even in 1972 somebody like Somnath Hore was revisiting the impact of 1940s but in a completely new style and in also a new medium.

For example, the medium is paper pulp, the style is pretty abstract but the theme is extremely real, that is, wound, the wounds which are left behind on our mind, on our body even after two, three decades of the original incident be it a communal riot or partition or any kind of violence. So, Somnath Hore was one of those artists from the 1940s but continued to be not only active but extremely innovative to the extent that he comes up with this hitherto unknown, unseen medium of paper pulp to be used as a creative medium.

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So, later Somnath Hore also develops in his drawings, etchings and paintings he has also done a few sculptures- new styles, new representational character and the pathos, the feeling, the sense of agony and suffering or pain that Somnath Hore tries to depict through his artworks done after 1940 that is 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s have become more universal rather than around a very specific and topical incident.

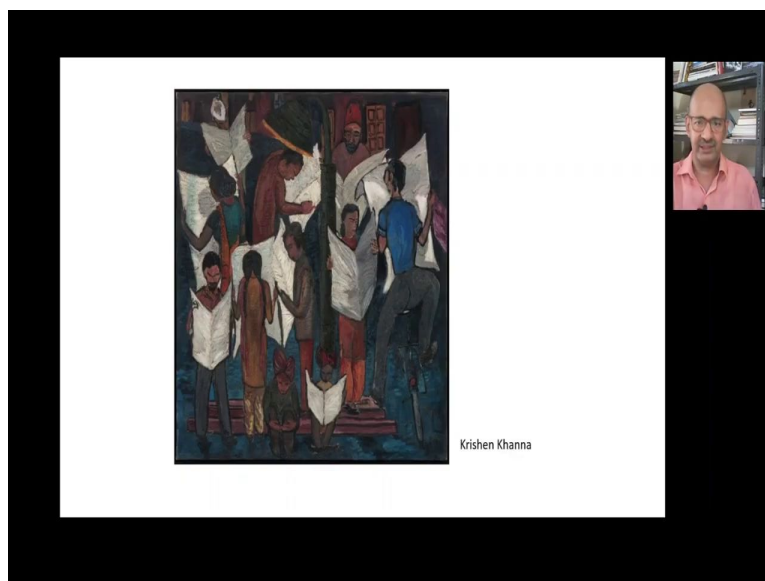
So, pain becomes a shared experience, suffering becomes a universal feeling and that is how Somnath Hore is now conceiving his form, his figuration and the details which he often avoids but once in a while might be using as a reference to locate these figures in a given situation. So, universal or ideal expressions of suffering, pain, tragedy would become more and more a visible feature in many of these artists even in the artworks by artists who started their career after the 1940s that is from the 1950s.

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One more Somnath Hore where you can see that increasingly he is also experimenting with the form, with the anatomy, with the skeletal anatomy not only to convey certain pathetic conditions of human life but also to make it more and more universal, more and more kind of acceptable to a larger public or audience.

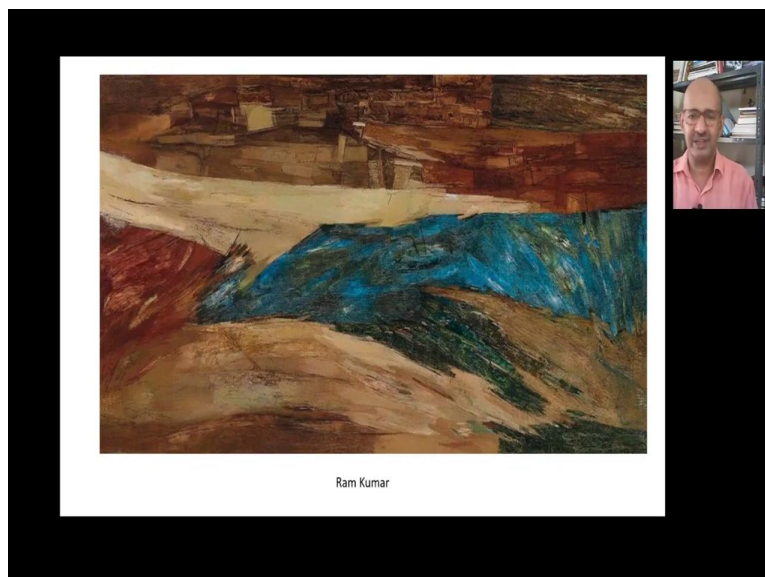
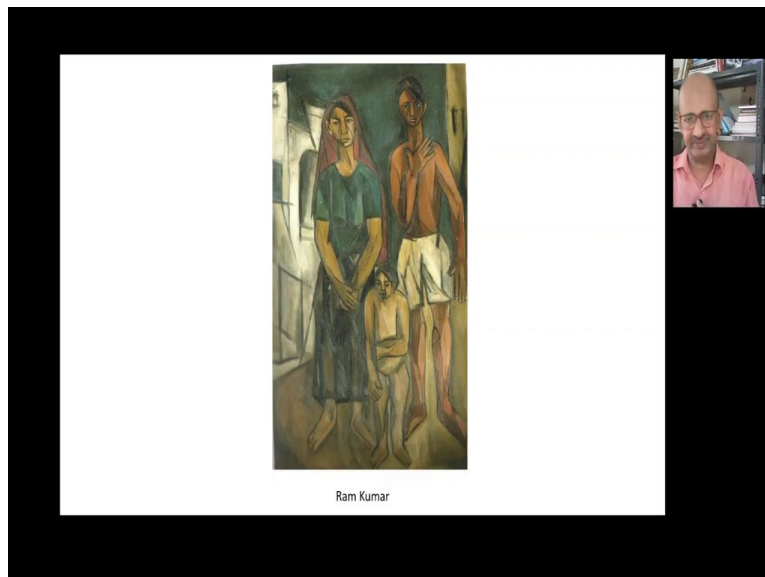
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Similarly, the Bombay based artist Krishen Khanna- he was a close associate of Bombay Progressive Group and continued to work until recently and in his work and also in the works of

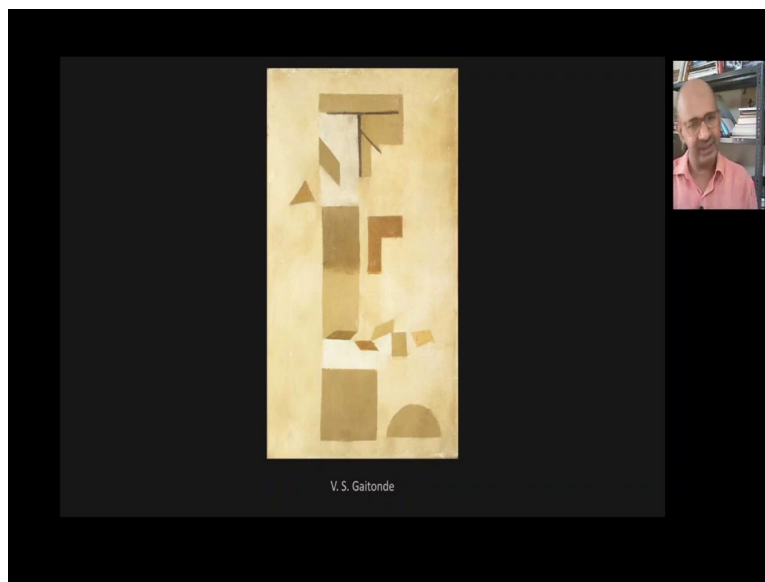
artists from slightly later generation for example, Sudhir Patwardhan whose works we shall see in the next lecture, in their works which includes like Krishen Khanna, Sudhir Patwardhan many others, the new urban life of the Indian cities and in this case Bombay becoming a new space, a new compositional space, a new visual space to experiment and to deal and negotiate the new experiences of urban life, therefore in their works the urban situations, the urban themes become or increasingly become a very favorite topic.

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Even Ram Kumar- this is one of his early works where you can see Ram Kumar is also painting within an urban situation, a couple, a family evidently and obviously coming from a rural life to the city probably in search of job and food and money, so they are addressing the ever changing city life, they are addressing the people of the city or coming to the city, so there is a social observation here but not necessarily with any direct political statement and the same Ram Kumar later on develops a remarkable visual idiom to represent landscapes and bordering on almost an abstract painting. However when we shall have a separate lecture on the abstract paintings and abstract arts of modern Indian artists we can get back to Ram Kumar once again.

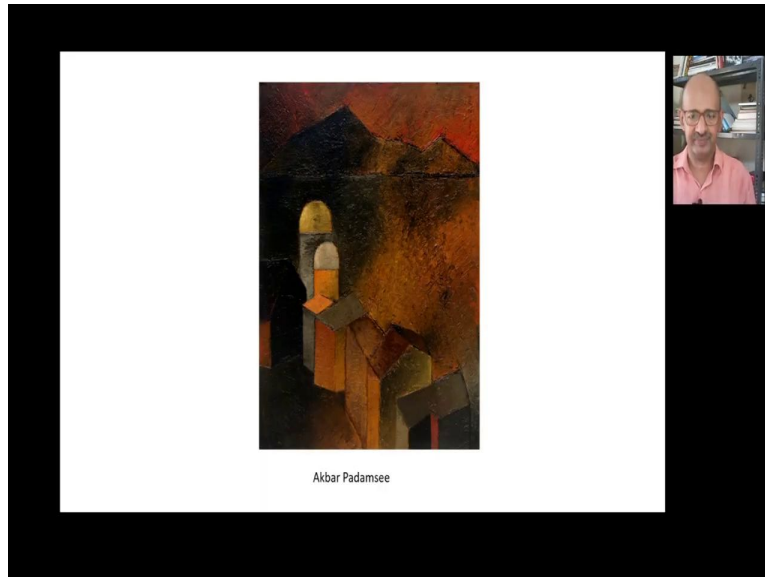
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Talking about abstraction, from Bombay we also have V. S. Gaitonde- a close associate of Bombay Progressive Group and Gaitonde was one of those exceptional artists from that period who consistently focused on the possibility of abstract painting in his works, this is one such example.

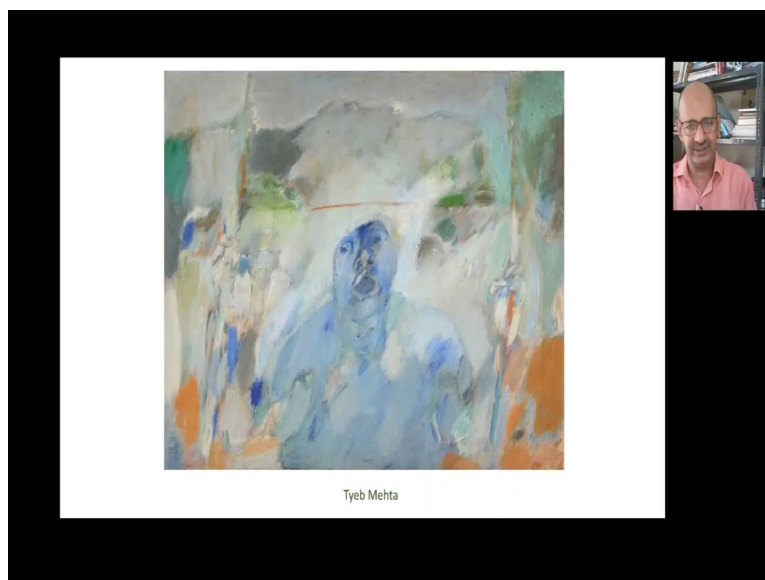


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We also have Akbar Padamsee- again a close friend of Progressive Artists' Group in Bombay, he never joined the group literally but he was a good friend of all the members in that group and once in a while he also participated in their joint shows, group shows. Even Akbar Padamsee in his rather conceptual landscape is using signs and symbols of city life, so most of them- these new artists directly or indirectly addressing city life, the new urban situation of post-independent India as the new space, new visual space to explore their art.

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Tyeb Mehta- from Tyeb Mehta onwards apart from the new urban space we also get to see the beginning- not exactly the beginning but we can say ‘new beginning’ of a very important trend in modern Indian art that is the new figuration. figures which may not have any direct identity. This man could be anybody, so the anonymous identity is still there but despite this anonymity what an artist like Tyeb Mehta does is he tries to bring all kinds of expressions within the human body.

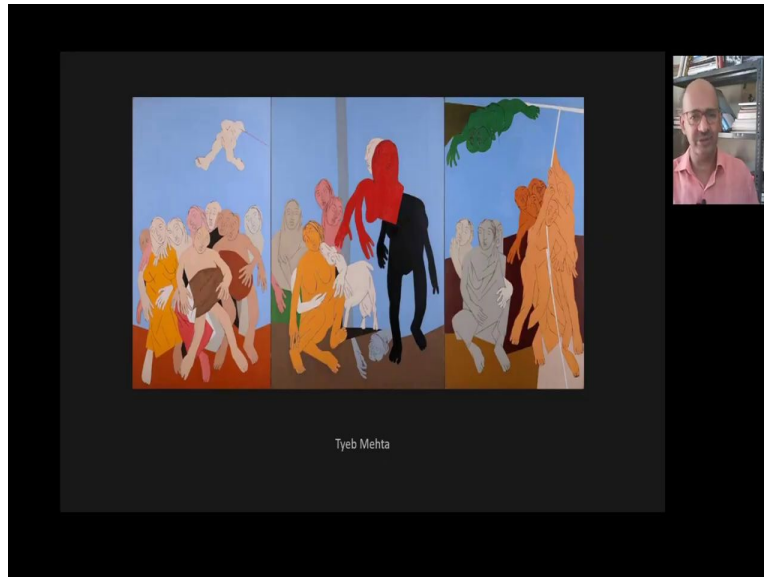
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And he tries to build human bodies, human figures with a new kind of anatomical distortion, anatomical stylization and this new figuration definitely contributes to the developments of modern Indian art from 1950s, more you look at the paintings by Krishen Khanna, Tyeb Mehta you will realize that one of the core concerns in their art was to develop new idioms, new ways of expressing different kinds of emotions and circumstantial reactions through the human body.

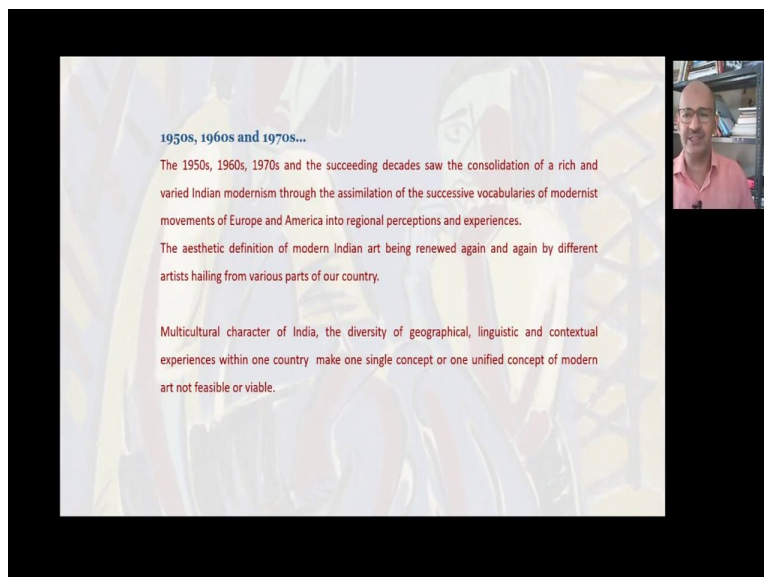
So, the expressions certainly belong to the human life but the modes of expression belong to the artist because he was trying to find out new means of expressing the themes instead of going for either a direct academic, realistic method or for that matter they also did not like to go back to the stylized Bengal school format, therefore this new figurations are coming up.

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And we all know that to some extent these new figurations and these new figurative artists were also indebted to and they were grateful to the developments in modern western art.

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So, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and the succeeding decades saw the consolidation of a rich and varied Indian modernism through the assimilation of the successive vocabularies of modernist movements of Europe and America into regional perceptions and experiences and this is

something that we need to take note of- that definitely many of these artists were influenced by the developments of modern western art.

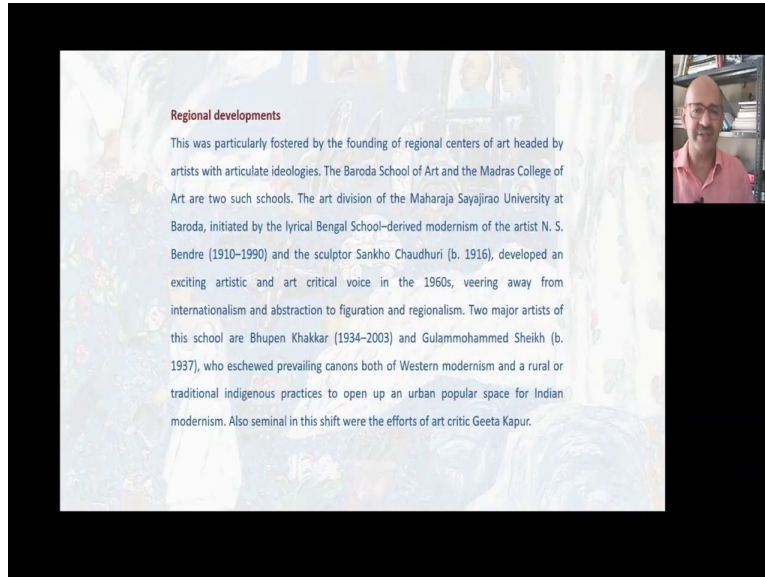
They did imbibe a lot of elements mainly stylistic elements sometimes could be a conceptual ideas also from the modern western artists but the credit goes to these Indian artists to have that enormous creative ability to transform those ideas into something that is our own, something that is Indian, something that reflects the regional perceptions, therefore, despite the influences of modern western art on the modern Indian artists the influences disappear very soon.

They leave the art of these artists and they make them more and more original, natural and authentic. Now, the aesthetic definition of modern Indian art being renewed again and again by different artists hailing from various parts of our country, this is also important because here we are suggesting the value of multiplicity and multiculturalism, the fact that India was not following a single dominant ideology anymore is also a kind of proof of this multiculturalism that different regions within India encouraged the artists to think differently and to define modernism in their own terms.

So, the way an artist from Bombay, let us say in the 1950s and 60s would be looking at the definition of modern art, it is highly possible that it would be very different from the way the new Madras Artists from 1940s, 50s would be looking at it. So, if asked what or how should we define the modern art from the post independent era there will not be a single answer, we have to define modern Indian art from the post independent era in terms of the different centers of art activities, different regions and here it becomes very important that now modern Indian art cannot be a pan-Indian activity.

Now, we have pockets of modern Indian art. we have Baroda, we have Kolkata, we have Madras, we have Bombay later on we will have Bangalore and various other centers mainly the most important metropolis- each of the centers is going to encourage a new idea, new vision of modern Indian art. So, this multicultural character of India, the diversity of geographical, linguistic and contextual experiences within one country make one single concept or one unified concept of modern art not feasible, not viable. We are looking at the diversity of definition also.

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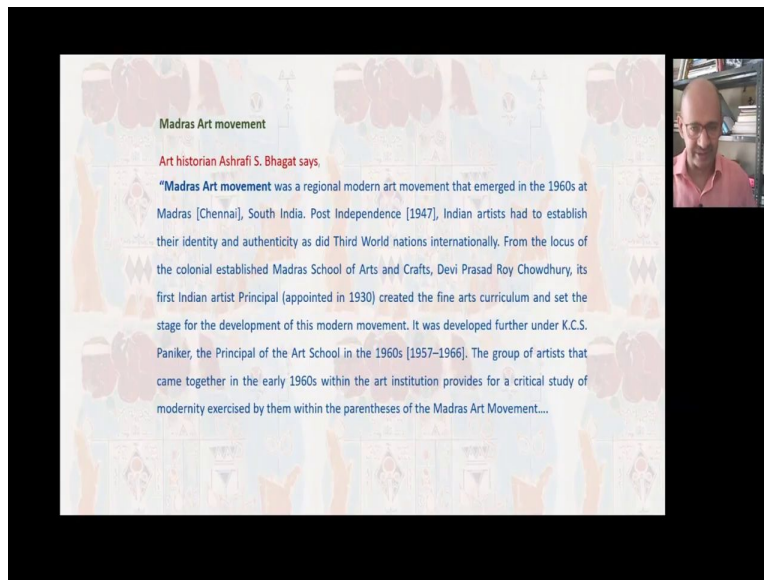


So, regional developments become very important now and this was particularly fostered by the founding of regional centers of art headed by artists with articulate ideologies- that is, individual ideologies, not one single dominant ideology. So, that is why slightly later, from the 1970s and 80s we have Baroda Art School. We already have earlier Madras College of Art which also kind of initiated Madras Art Movements. The art division of the fine arts college in the Maharaja Sayajirao University at Baroda initiated by the lyrical Bengal School in the beginning- a kind of derived modernism of the artist N. S. Bendre who gave the leadership to the Baroda Fine Arts college in the beginning and this famous sculptor from Santiniketan Sankho Chaudhuri was also there and they developed a very exciting and a very vibrating artistic environment and also they developed an interest in a critical voice from the 1960s veering away from the internationalism and abstraction to figuration and regionalism but internationalism as a source of inspiration was always there, though none of these artists wanted to make their artwork obviously look global but they were certainly grateful to the global art movements.

Now, two major artists from this school are Bhupen Khakhar and Gulam Muhammed Sheikh whose artworks we are going to look at in our next lecture that is the 15th lecture, I am just giving an introduction to that scenario today and these artists also eschewed, they avoided the canons of both western modernism and rural or traditional indigenous practices to open up an urban popular space for Indian modernism and also individual take on Indian modernism. During this time we also have very famous, very articulate, very knowledgeable art critics coming up

whose writings, whose conceptualizations helped a lot to build a new critical intellectual art atmosphere in India and one of them is very famous, for example Geeta Kapur as an art critic very well known who has literally shaped the intellectual world, the cerebral world of the modern Indian art after 1960s.

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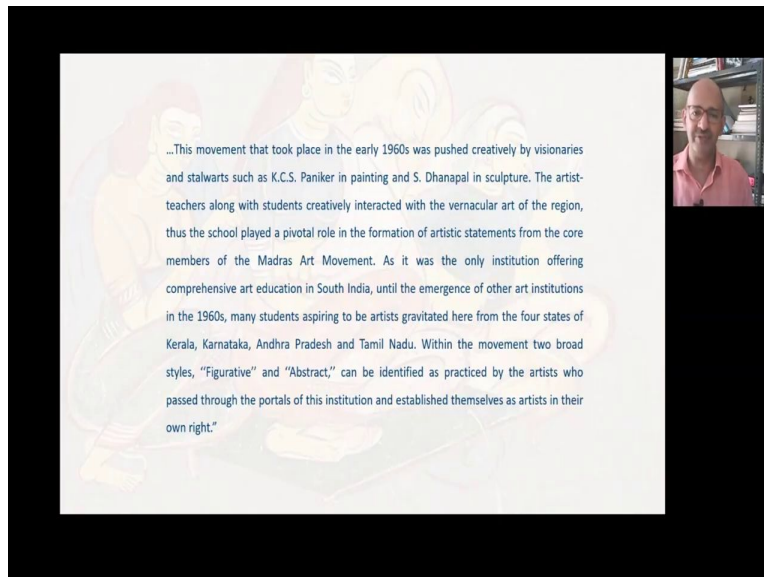


Now, I just mentioned Madras Art Movement, now an art historian based in Chennai, Ashrafi S. Bhagat says Madras Art movement was a regional modern art movement that emerged in the 1960s at Madras- Chennai. Now, the post-independence Indian artists had to establish their identity and authenticity as did third world nations internationally, that was a great responsibility because you are now no more a colonized country or a free country so it is up to you as an artist to give shape to this new identity and also authenticity.

So from the locus of colonial-established Madras school of arts and crafts, Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhuri, its first Indian artist principal he created the fine arts curriculum and set the stage for the development of this modern movement, it was developed further under K. C. S Paniker, the principle of Madras Art School in 1960s, the group of artists that came together in the early 1960s within the art institution provides for a critical study of modernity exercised by them within the parenthesis of the Madras Art Movement.

So, Madras Art Movement essentially started from the Madras Art College and later on this is going to spin over and would become a very active movement even outside Madras Art College but the beginning certainly happened from within the Madras Art College institutional space.

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Ashrafi S. Bhagat moves on and she adds that this movement that took place in the early 1960s was pushed creatively by visionaries and stalwarts such as K. C. S Paniker in painting and S. Dhanapal in sculpture. The artist teachers along with the students creatively interacted with the vernacular art of the region. Thus the school played a pivotal role in the formation of artistic statements, from the core members of the Madras Art Movement. So, again it is the institutional space which was very very important at that point of time and played a very important role in shaping the ideas of the Modern Art Movement in Madras.

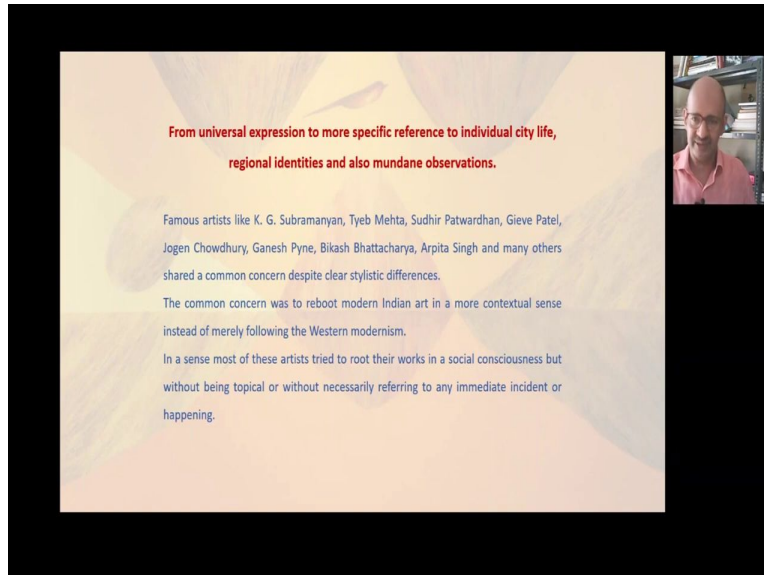
So, the modern art movement in Bombay would be different, in Baroda would be different, in Kolkata would be different and this is one of the most fascinating aspects of modern Indian art—something that you do not get to see in any other country. Each country will have more or less its own version of modern art followed by almost the entire country but India it is not so, thankfully it is not so because multiculturalism, regional cultural histories definitely and personally I think it should encourage the artists to develop their own thoughts, own expressions, own creative ideas instead of following one dominant ideology and that is what exactly is happening from 1950s onwards in the modern Indian art Scenario.



As it was the only institution offering comprehensive art education in South India until the emergence of other art institutions in the 1960s many students aspiring to be artists gravitated here from the four states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Within the movement, two broad styles that is, figurative and abstract can be identified as practiced by the artists who pass through the portals of this institution and establish themselves as artists in their own right.

So, remember, on the one hand we have very strong and powerful trend of figurative art, I already used the term figuration, the new figuration movement not only from Madras from all over India but in different styles and we also have something that we call abstract where the figurative references are absent and what has been foregrounded in abstract art is the possibilities shown by the basic and fundamental visual elements like line, color, form, space, composition.

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**From universal expression to more specific reference to individual city life, regional identities and also mundane observations.**

Famous artists like K. G. Subramanyan, Tyeb Mehta, Sudhir Patwardhan, Gieve Patel, Jogen Chowdhury, Ganesh Pyne, Bikash Bhattacharya, Arpita Singh and many others shared a common concern despite clear stylistic differences.

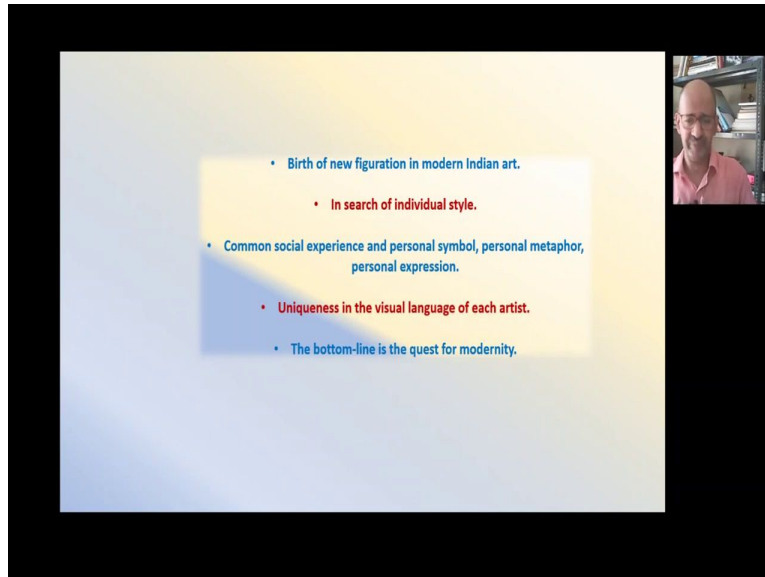
The common concern was to reboot modern Indian art in a more contextual sense instead of merely following the Western modernism.

In a sense most of these artists tried to root their works in a social consciousness but without being topical or without necessarily referring to any immediate incident or happening.

So, from universal expression to more specific reference to individual city life, regional identities and also very mundane daily life observations and therefore we have famous artists like K. G. Subramanyan, Tyeb Mehta, Sudhir Patwardhan, Gieve Patel, Jogen Chowdhury, Ganesh Pyne, Bikash Bhattacharya, Arpita Singh and many others who shared a common concern, yet every one of them followed an individual style, the common concern was to reboot modern Indian art in a more contextual sense instead of merely following the western modernism or simply reacting to the topical incidents within India.

They wanted to go deep into the process of contextualizing and also conceptualizing and defining modern Indian art in their own terms. In a sense, most of these artists tried to root their works in a social consciousness but without being topical or political and without necessarily referring to an immediate incident or political happening.

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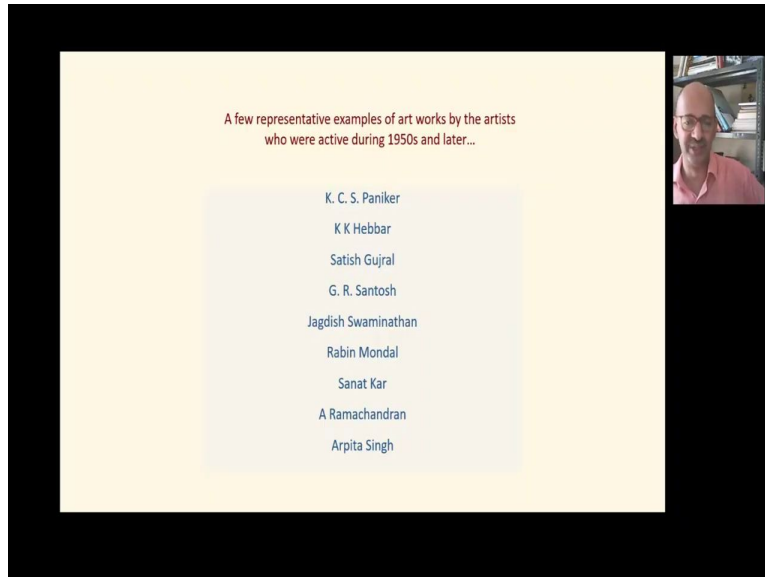


So, the birth of new figuration in modern Indian art now becomes the hallmark followed by a search of individual style, followed by the common social experience and personal symbol, personal metaphor, personal expression, followed by the uniqueness in the visual language of each artist. so the bottom line of all these art movements from Madras to Baroda to Kolkata to Bombay is the quest for modernity.

So, modernity is something that cannot be solved once and for all, so you can always ask why cannot they resolve it once and for all and then go ahead with your paintings and art activities, no it cannot be so, as the situation, life situation, social situation, political situations keep changing and moving- modernity, modernism, modern art also needs to be redefined at every step and that is what is happening even today not only in India in the entire world.

In new circumstances, a new definition of modern art is always required and that is why the renewal of modernity, modernism becomes a very important aspect and also, therefore the quest for modernity, so what is modernity today may not be the same tomorrow.

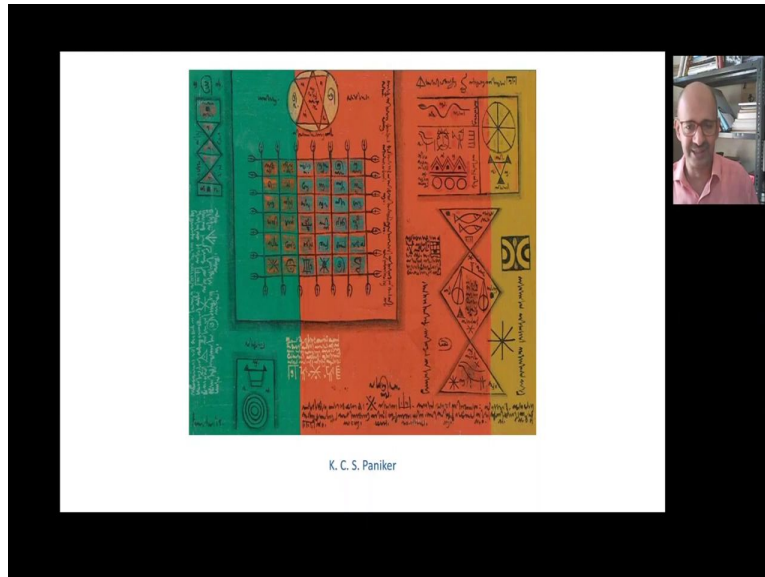
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Now, a few representative examples of artworks by the artists who were active during 1950s and later- of course, we are missing out on some other important artists here but they will feature in our next lecture, that is lecture number 15. So, we have K. C. S Paniker, the leader of the Madras Art Movement, we have K. K. Hebbar, Satish Gujral, G. R. Santosh, Jagdish Swaminathan who is very well known as J. Swaminathan, Rabin Mondal from Kolkata, Sanat Kar also from Kolkata, A. Ramachandran who studied in Santiniketan from Kerala and lived in Delhi and then of course, Arpita Singh from Delhi.

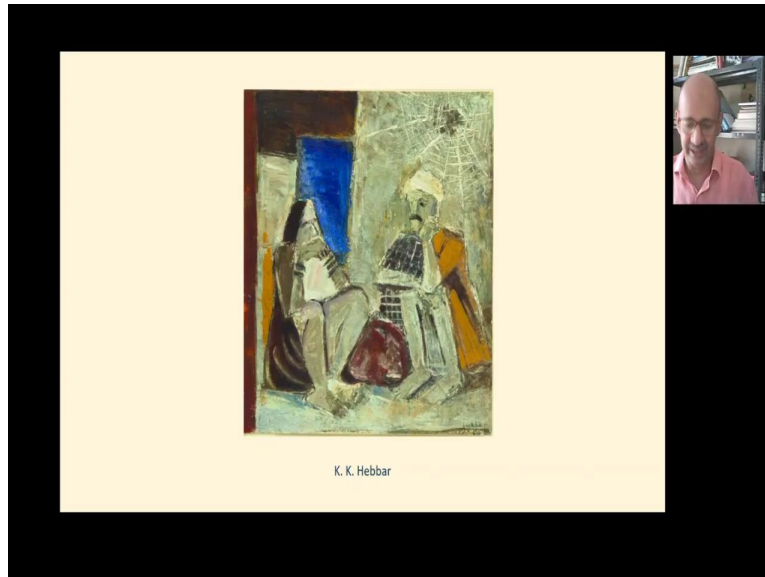
So, this is just not exactly random but a selective sampling of some artists and remember they are not all, there are many other important artists and of course, it is not possible to cover all of them in one or two lectures. So, I am being a little selective and paying attention to regional representations, how artists are working from different regions of India and these criteria will also be applied while selecting the artist for my next that is 15th lecture.

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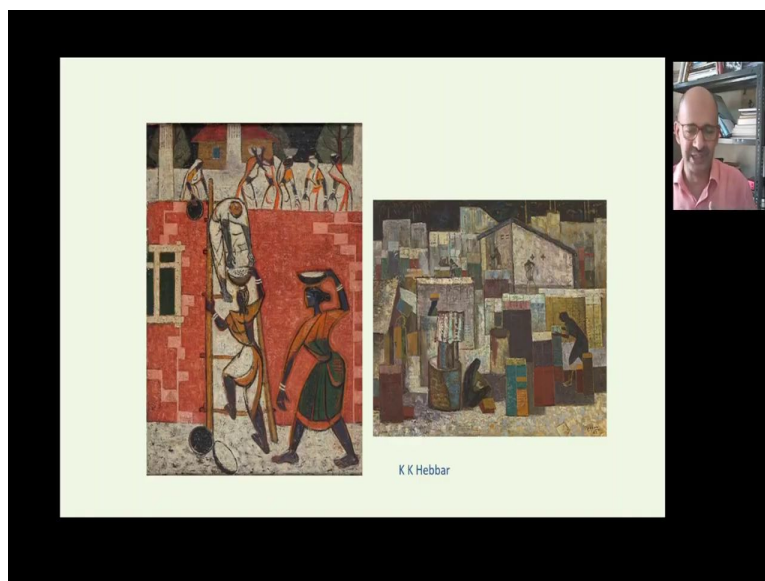
K. C. Paniker- he was trying to redefine his own modern art in terms of certain traditional symbols, traditional signs, not just derived from certain tantric schools but also derived from some established and not so established, maybe a little obscure religious practices. but as you can see at the end of the day Paniker's paintings do not look any religious, they do not serve any religious person, any religious reason or any religious idea, forget about serving any religious institution, his paintings actually propose a new set of formal values by using certain signs and symbols from our own past, religious past particularly.

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We have K. K. Hebbar once again directly addressing people on the street, people migrating from the villages to the rural areas with great hope but also with despair, so again a lot of artists even K. K. Hebbar like Krishen Khanna, like Tyeb Mehta like even Akbar Padamsee he is also looking at or exploring the subject matters that he finds and observes in the daily life around.

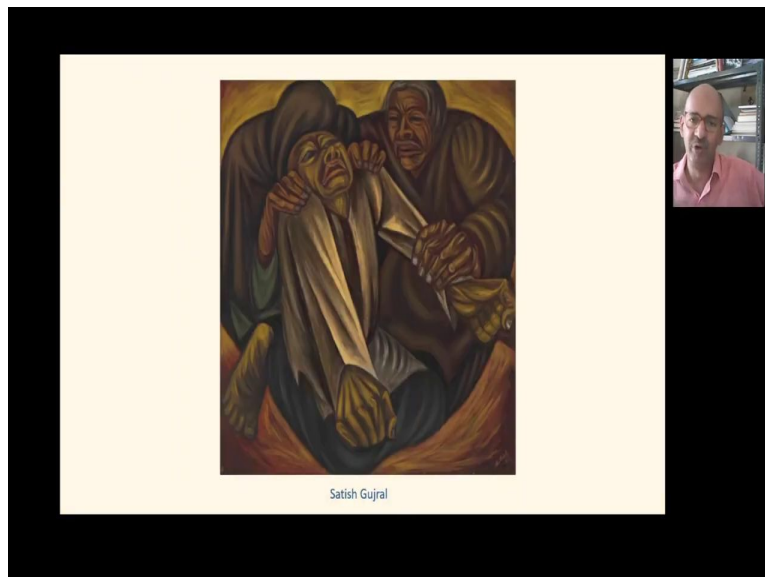
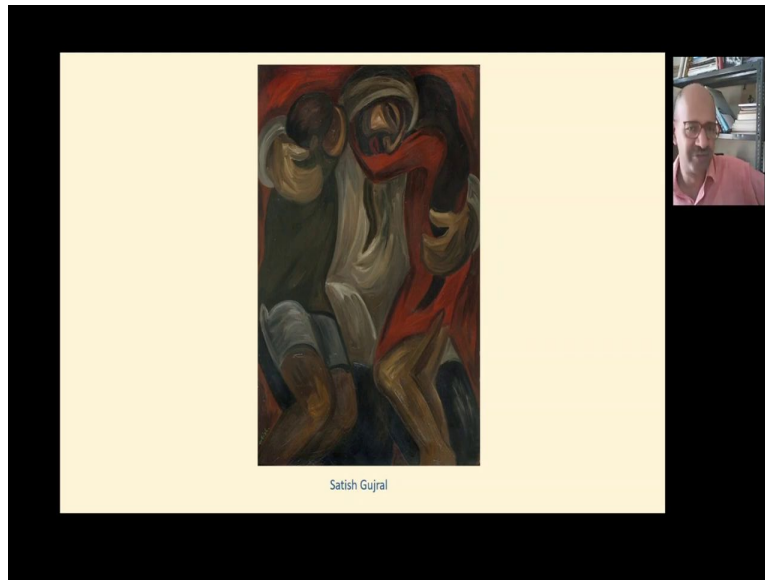
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K. K. Hebbar paints directly certain themes that he observes in the new India particularly, we must remember that the new India, new independent India was very busy with constructions,

constructing buildings, offices, housings and a city not one- many cities were getting rebuilt. So, these kinds of activities were pretty common those days and K. K. Hebbar was addressing them and therefore contributing to this particular genre, urban experience-based genre, the art which revolved around the new urban experiences in the post-independent era.

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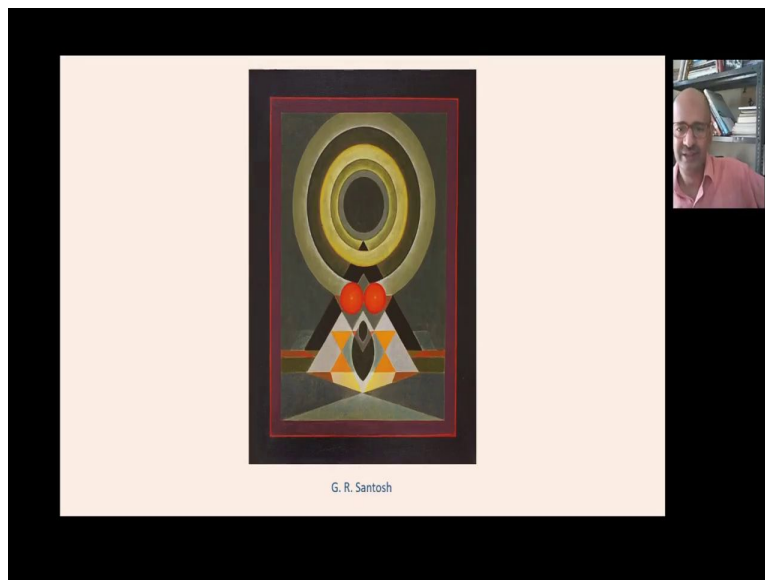


We also have Satish Gujral who was carrying the trauma of partition and many of his paintings even later paintings we can see that trauma but what is also important here in both these

paintings by Satish Gujral is his approach to figuration, his exaggeration of the fingers and limbs even the bodies and the point is, for what?

To evoke certain pathos, certain feelings. Of course, there are emotional content in his paintings but instead of making it very literal Satish Gujral like many others were concentrating more and more not on the literal elements of a painting but on the expressive elements of the paintings and this is what exactly is happening here.

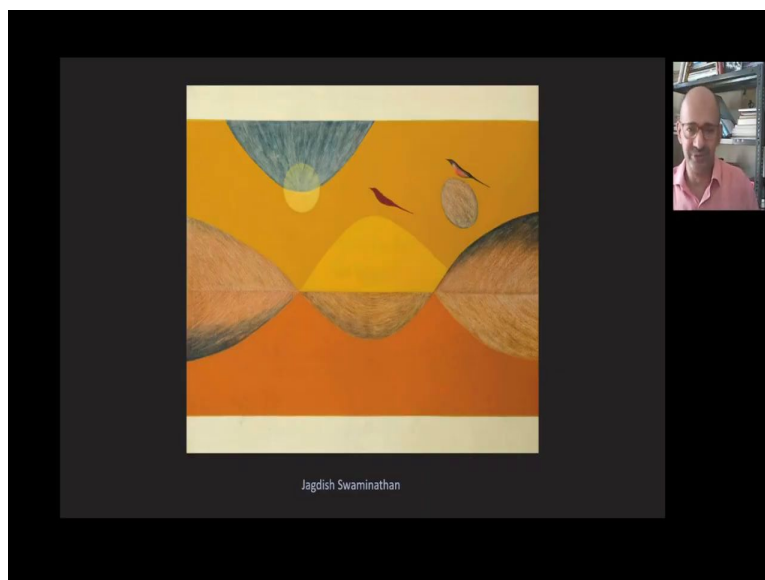
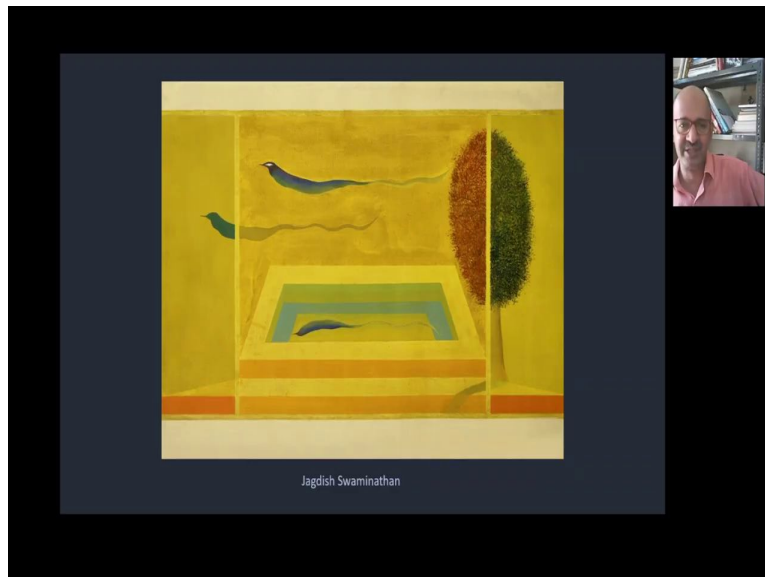
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Then we also have somebody like G. R. Santosh who tried to look at the possibilities of imbuing and using the symbolic values of some forms and colors and patterns and symbols related to the tantric cult of Indian life. Now, we all know that the tantric practice was and still is a very important religious practice, ritualistic practice in many parts of India and somebody like G. R. Santosh almost like the way Raza from Bombay Progressive Group located Bindu as his most important symbol to develop his modern art G. R. Santosh similarly, was looking at the possibilities of tantric symbolism to develop his own modern art.



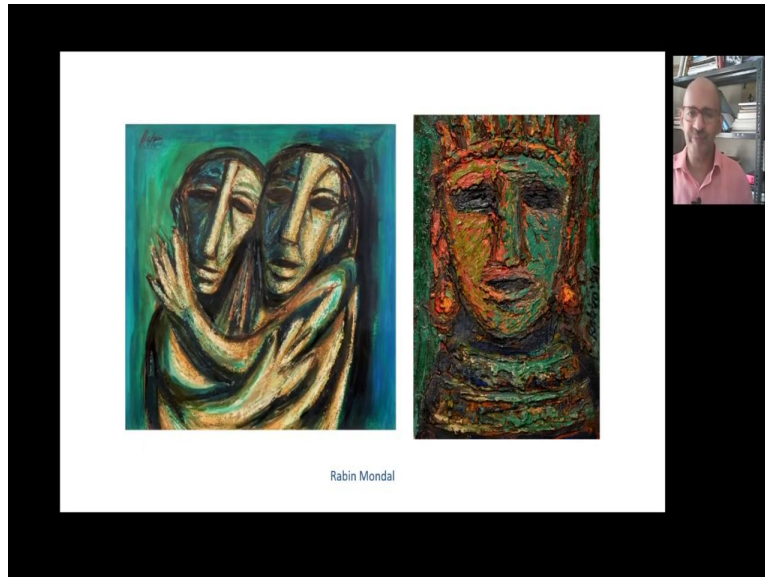
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We have Jagdish Swaminathan who was greatly influenced by the rural and folk art but no direct influence. there might be some thoughts and ideas derived from folklore but the representation- in terms of representation you find Swaminathan exploring the new formal possibilities which modern art kind of offered to us instead of going for a very typical schematic representation, Swaminathan explored the possibilities of abstraction as a part of his painting- although his paintings are not abstract per se, his painting is not like Gaitonde. You can see clear indication of birds, reflections, mountains, probably a sun over there and also a cloud which is half covering

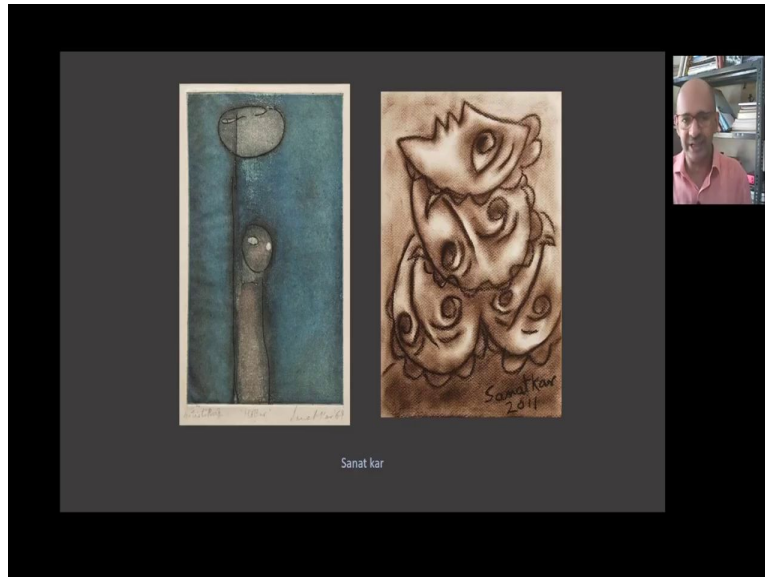
the sun but the presence of abstraction in his forms is undeniable. This is also a new way to redefine your art, to re-imagine your art.

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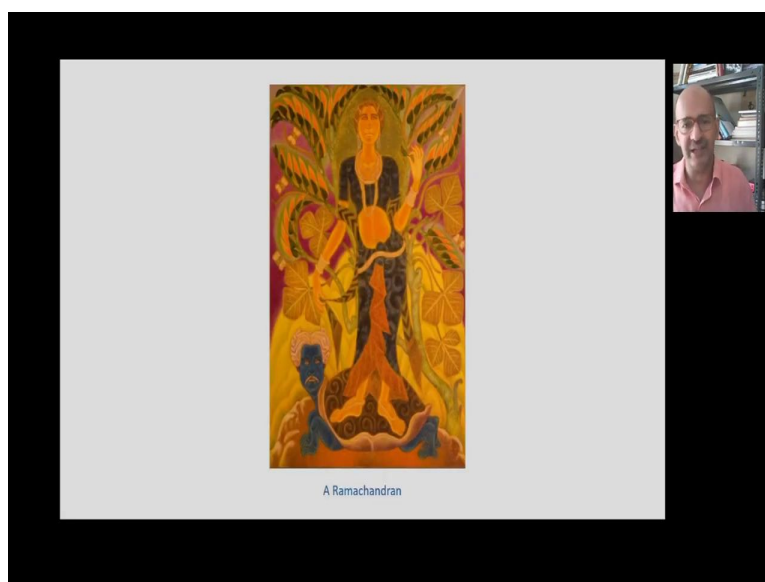
Rabin Mondal from Kolkata was again a very important artist because he redefined human figuration in a vigorous way, very loud way with a very strong color palette, very strong linearity and it is not totally impossible that he could have been influenced by certain primitive art. but the way Rabin Mondal appropriates that and creates his own art which is primarily about human expression, expressions not just on the face but also in the body and therefore, figuration -very strong robust figuration became very important for these artists like Rabin Mondal.

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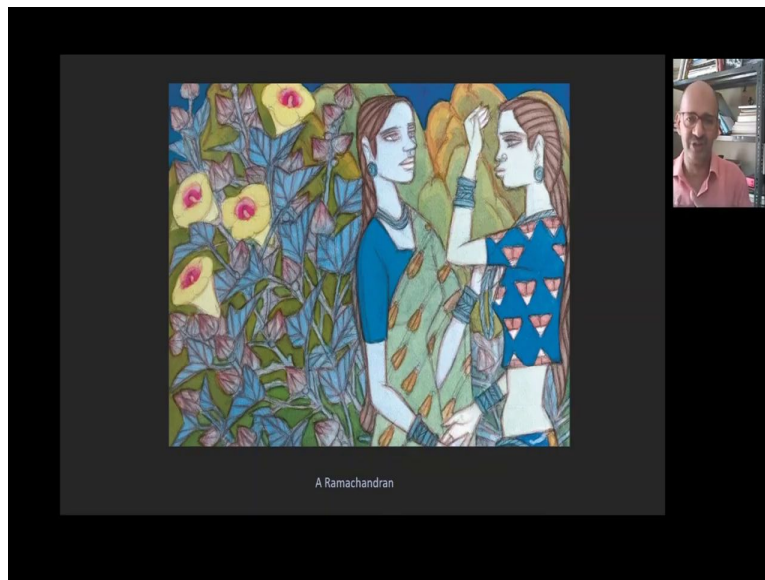
And we also have from the same generation Sanat Kar from Kolkata who later on became the professor and principal of Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan. he was also looking at the possibilities of new stylistic expressions, themes are there, human beings, society, different tragedies and paradoxes, aspirations, dreams and loss of dreams and despair of human beings but these themes are not very pronounced in their works, at least some of their works, what is more pronounced is the stylization.

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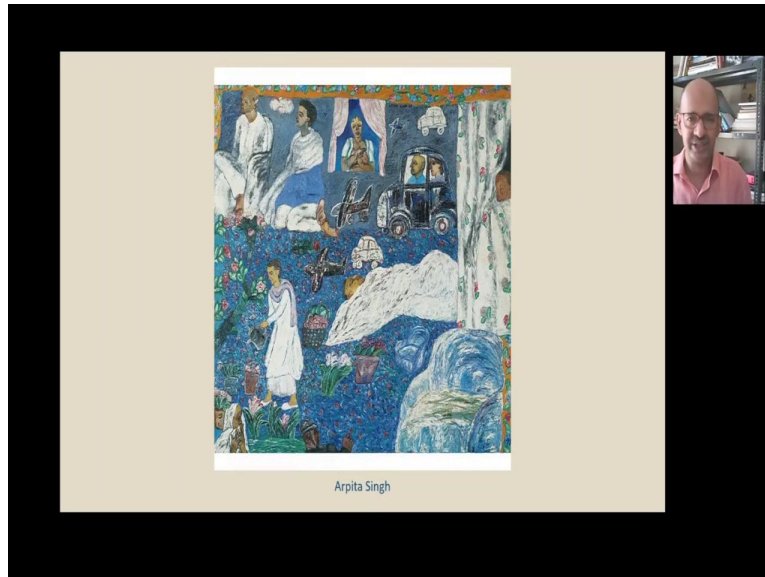
Then we have from Delhi, originally from Kerala, studied in Santiniketan A Ramachandran who as you can clearly see not only these paintings but many other paintings which are available, also online you can see that how Ramachandran was trying to explore the possibilities of reusing certain traditional themes, elements, gestures, motifs.

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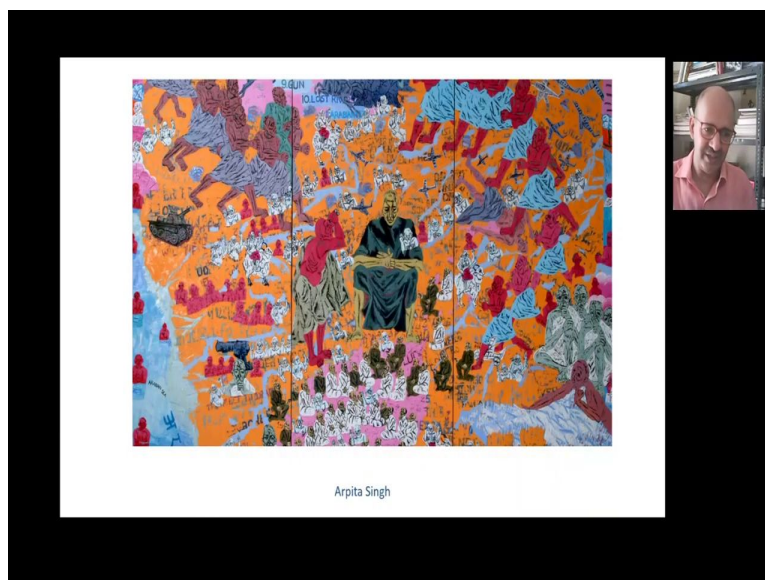
But completely in his own way, following his own drawing style and interestingly on the one hand you see a strong presence of myth, mythology in Ramachandran's paintings- on the other hand you see the presence of the new urban men and women, also a very strong presence of nature, flowers, trees, foliage, leaves. So, kind of revisiting these three areas and trying to bring them under one stylistic idiom was probably one of the goals of A. Ramachandran for his own art.

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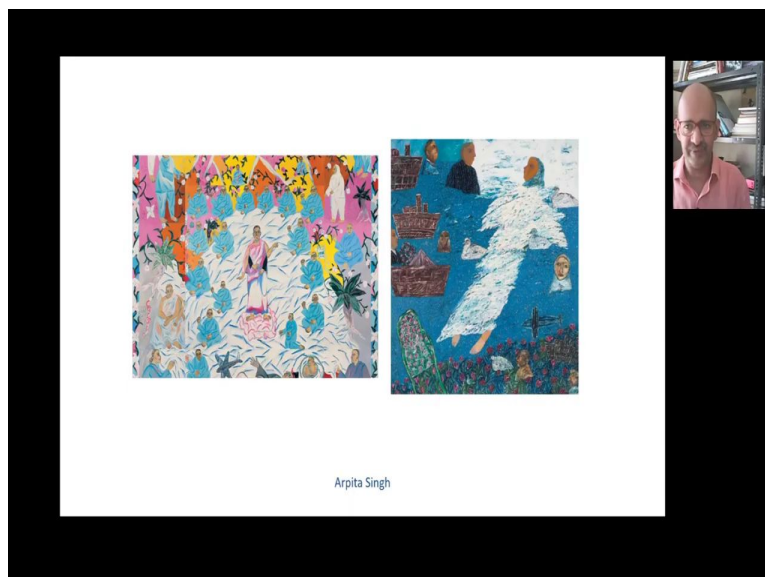
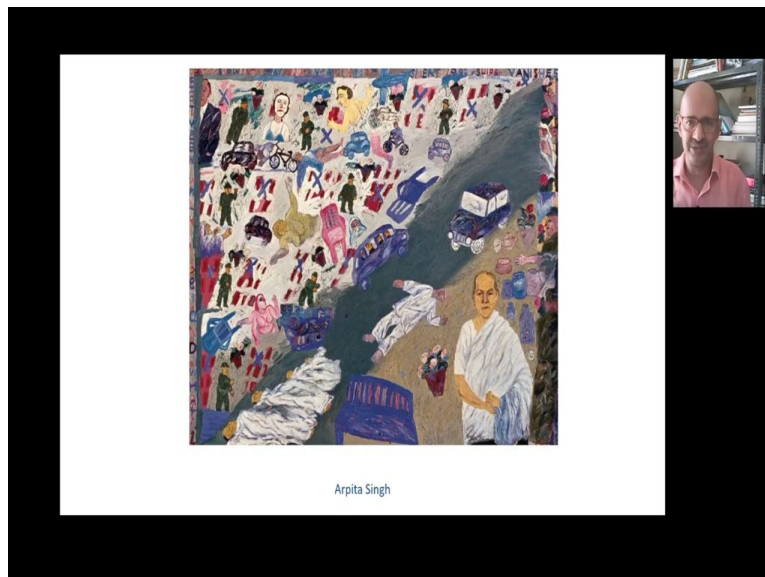
Then Arpita Singh from Delhi, she is more directly addressing the new city life particularly in relation to the middle class life of India, what is now the middle class doing in the new Indian life? Obviously, it was all about a very very busy life that most of these paintings by Arpita Singh revolved around but at the same time she was also in many of her paintings evoking the sense of dream, the sense of imagination and also the possibilities of providing new space for women.

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There are many paintings by Arpita Singh where a woman figure is the protagonist, not just as a model but a protagonist in the painting who happens to be occupying the center stage, in other words in many of her paintings Arpita Singh certainly even if not so directly gives a feminist stance, there is a feminist ideological underpinning in some of her paintings and this issues, political issues, gender issues like feminism would become very important areas to pay attention to for the later generation artists.

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One more Arpita Singh- again very strong presence of women in her art is something that we should pay attention to and try to understand how the new generation women painters are coming up with new ideas. So, it is important that we look at the presence of both male artists and female artists without making any discrimination we can also say that we do see certain elements in many of these women artists particularly from the later generations which probably was not in the thought horizon of many male artists, we shall continue with this idea in our next lecture that is the 15th lecture, thank you.