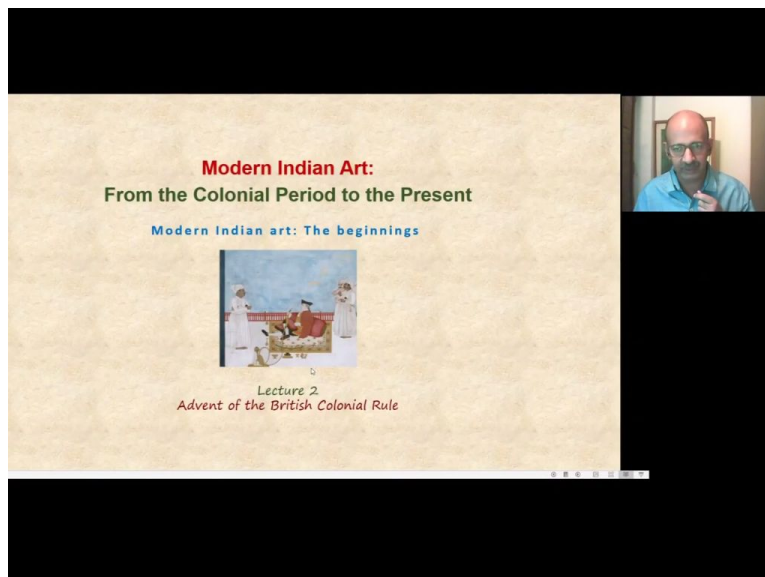


Modern Indian Art From the Colonial Period to the Present
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Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur
Lecture 2
Advent of the British Colonial Rule

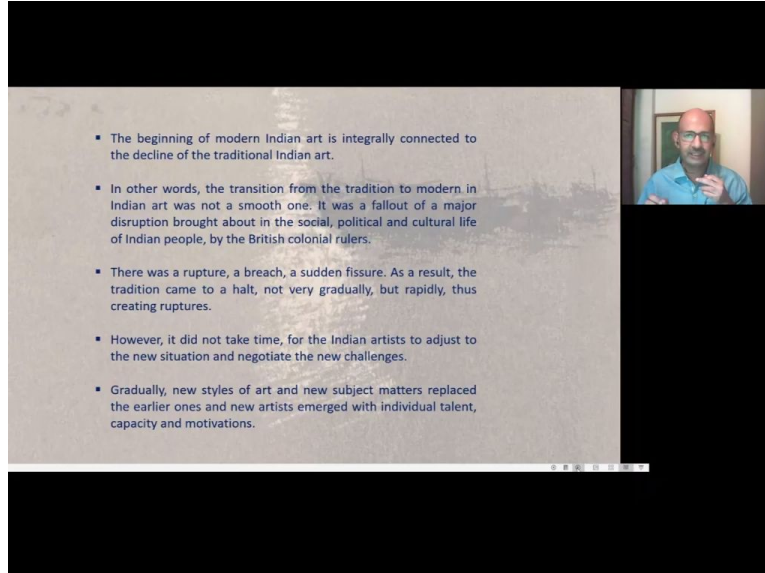
Hello, viewers. Welcome to NOC's online course on Modern Indian Art from the Colonial Period to the Present. This is the second lecture in the first week. And as you know, all the five lectures in the first week, we are going to explore the various beginnings of Modern Indian art. However, none of these beginnings would have ever taken place, unless there was a rupture, unless there was a tragic setback to the Indian traditional way of life, culturally, socially, or politically. Therefore, this lecture today has been subtitled as the Advent of the British Colonial Rule.

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Now, what exactly is the relationship between the advent of the British Colonial rule and the beginning of Modern art? The relationship has to be understood with this knowledge that with the advent of the British Colonial rule in India, not only that we lost the traditional social structure and cultural patronization, but actually there was a rapid decline, decline of the traditional visual art forms and practices.

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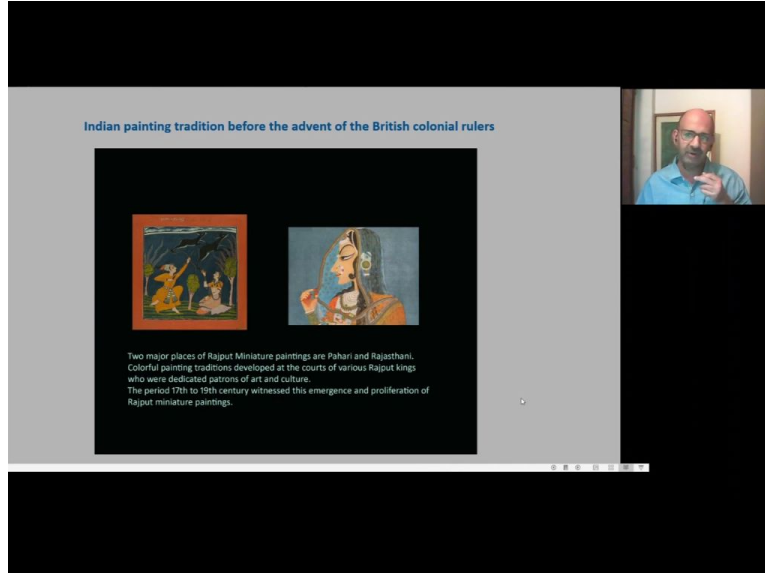
- The beginning of modern Indian art is integrally connected to the decline of the traditional Indian art.
- In other words, the transition from the tradition to modern in Indian art was not a smooth one: It was a fallout of a major disruption brought about in the social, political and cultural life of Indian people, by the British colonial rulers.
- There was a rupture, a breach, a sudden fissure. As a result, the tradition came to a halt, not very gradually, but rapidly, thus creating ruptures.
- However, it did not take time, for the Indian artists to adjust to the new situation and negotiate the new challenges.
- Gradually, new styles of art and new subject matters replaced the earlier ones and new artists emerged with individual talent, capacity and motivations.

Therefore, the beginning of Modern Indian art has to be understood as something integrally connected to the decline of the traditional Indian art. In other words, the transition from the tradition to Modern in Indian art was not a smooth one. It was a fall out of a major disruption brought about in the social, political and cultural spheres of Indian people by the British Colonial rulers.

There was clearly a big rupture, a serious breach, and a sudden fissure. As a result, the tradition came to a halt or gradually disappeared. And more often than not, it was not a very gradual disappearance. It was rather rapid, therefore, creating quick ruptures in the social and cultural fabric of India.

However, it did not take time for the Indian artists to adjust to this new situation and negotiate the new challenges posed by the Colonial rulers. Gradually, new styles of art and new subject matters replaced the earlier ones and the new artists emerged with individual talent, capacity and motivations.

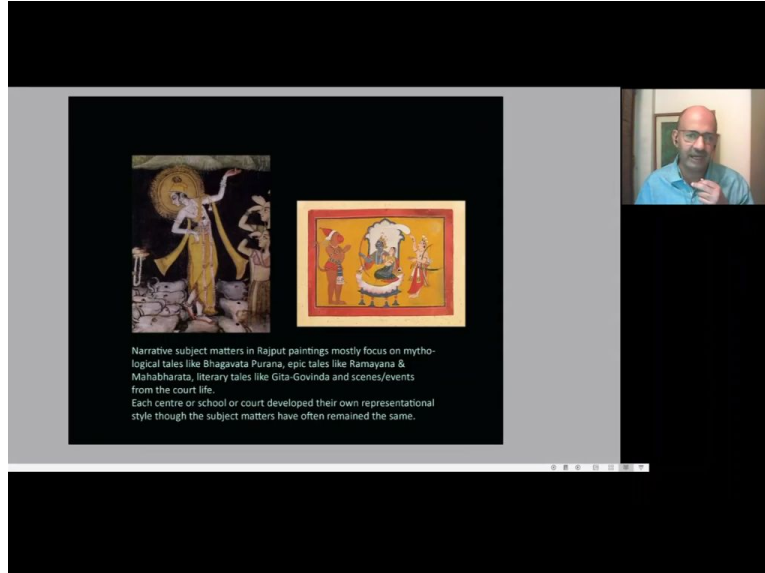
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Now, how or what was the kind of situation, what were the kind of art forms that Indians were used to before the advent of the British Colonial rulers? If we look at, for example, the painting traditions, which were actually very, very vibrant, very active just before the advent of the British Colonial rulers, we get to see, for example, two major places of Rajput miniature paintings were Pahari and Rajasthani, and colorful painting traditions developed at the courts of various Rajput kings, who were dedicated patrons of art and culture.

So, when the very existence of these Rajput kings and various other small rulers ruling different courts of India came to a kind of crisis, their existence was severely questioned, the art that they used to patronize also saw a rapid decline, simply because there was nobody left with enough money, enough power, enough social status to patronize these courtly art forms. So, the period from 17th to 19th century witnessed the emergence and proliferation of Rajput miniature paintings.

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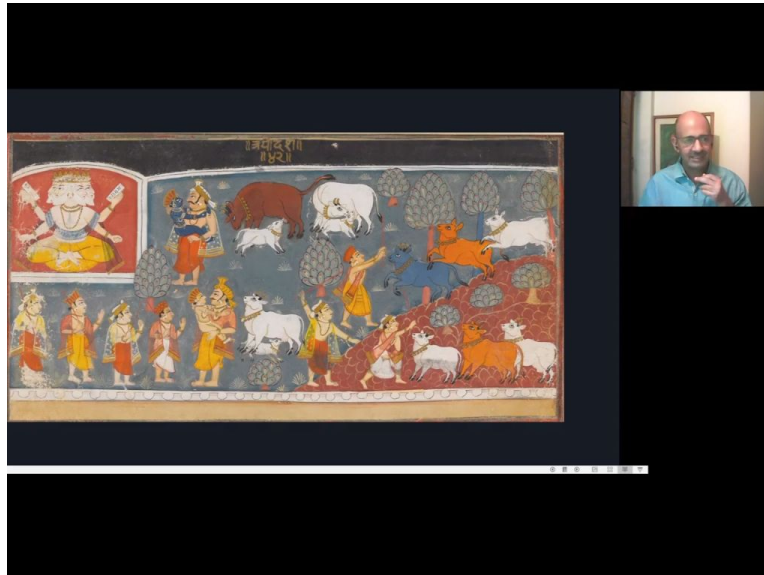


Narrative subject matters in Rajput paintings mostly focus on mythological tales like Bhagavata Purana, epic tales like Ramayana & Mahabharata, literary tales like Gita-Govinda and scenes/events from the court life. Each centre or school or court developed their own representational style though the subject matters have often remained the same.

And we also know that in these miniature painting traditions, we see, usually, narrative subject matters in Rajput paintings mostly with a focus on mythological tales like Bhagavata Purana, epic tales like Ramayana and Mahabharata, literary tales like Gita-Govinda and scenes and events from the courtly life or the royal life or the life of the kings and the queens.

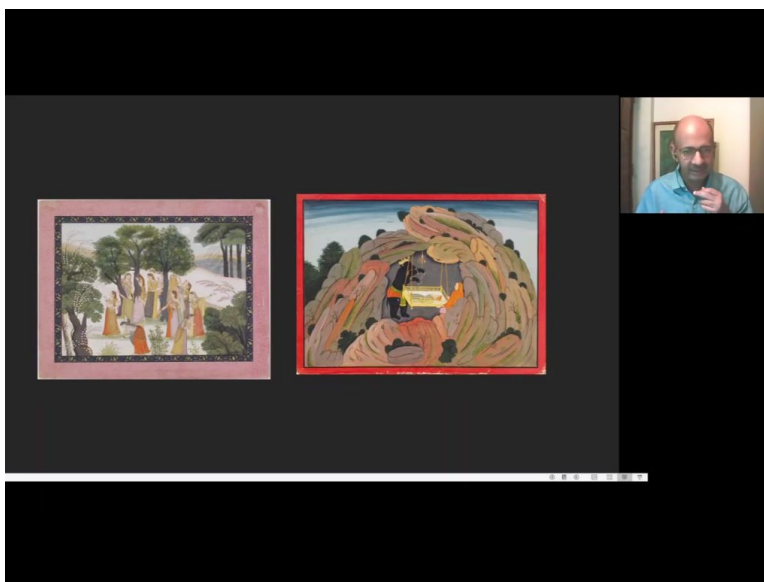
Now, each center or school or court developed their own representational style, though the subject matters have often remained the same.

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Let us look at a few examples from the prevalent traditions which saw a serious rupture, a serious setback after the advent of the British Colonial rulers. For example, this one. This is an example of a very typical miniature painting.

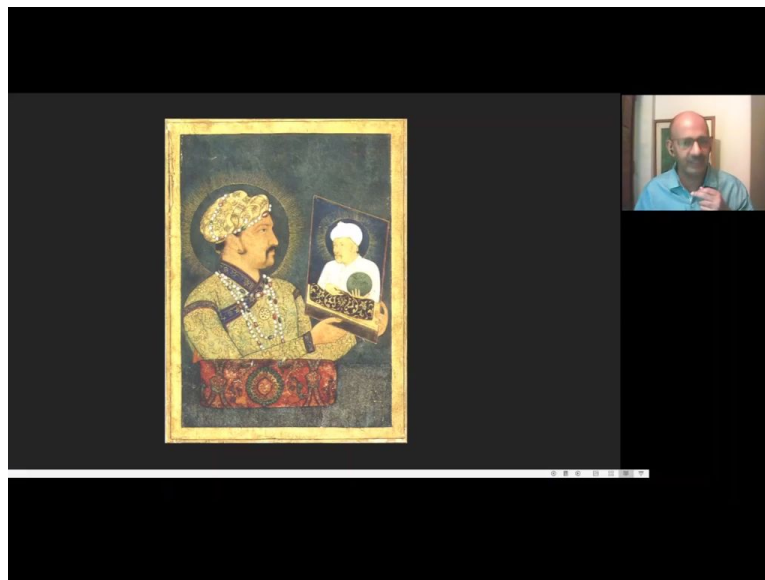
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And if you look at the figuration, trees, animals, the human beings, the compositional scheme, you will see that not only this one, but in most of the miniature paintings, they follow the certain convention developed by them, imagined by them and improved by them, refined by them, motivated by their own cultural taste and objectives.

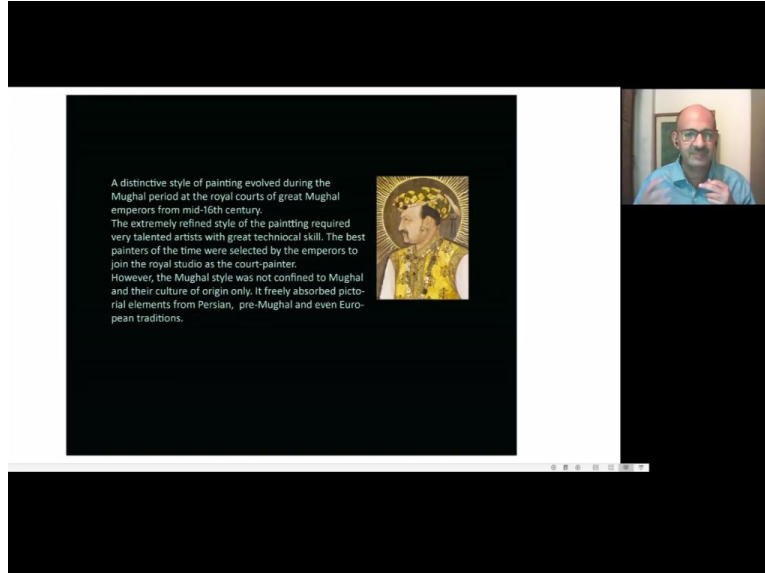
Of course, the patrons, that is the case often had a say, but hardly the patrons used to instruct or dictate that this is how you would be doing this painting. Sometimes, yes to some extent, but more often than not, it was a very natural cultural development or you can put it in other way, you can say, the way, traditional miniature paintings developed until the advent of the British Colonial rulers, that way was pretty natural in the sense it was motivated by their own cultural taste, practice and ambience. There was nothing coming from outside their own cultural milieu or ambience.

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Even in the Mughal painting, where you see that the stylistic aspects of Mughal painting did have a certain eclectic quality, that is that they derived or imbibed certain stylistic features from Persian gharanas, that is Persian traditions, even from the Western art traditions, of course, from the pre-Mughal Indian art traditions. Yet as far as the subject matter and the amalgamated styles of Mughal paintings are concerned, they were highly rooted to their culture, to their way of life.

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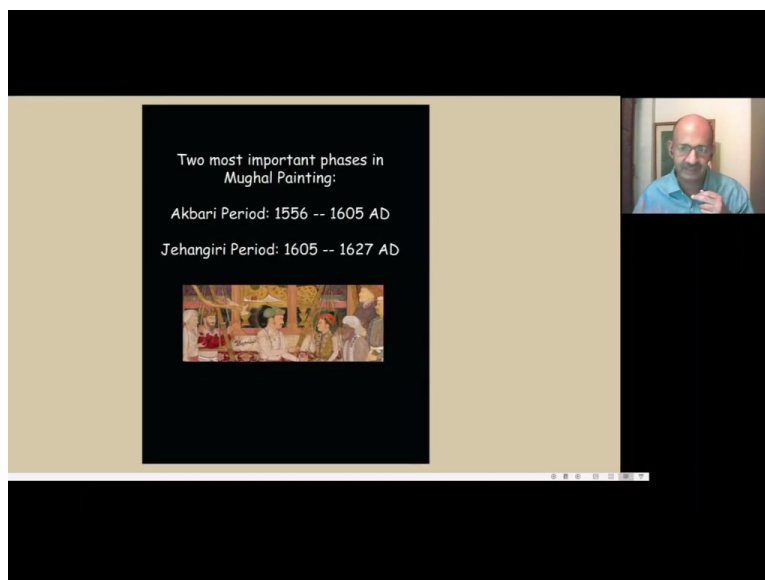


A distinctive style of painting evolved during the Mughal period at the royal courts of great Mughal emperors from mid-16th century. The extremely refined style of the painting required very talented artists with great technical skill. The best painters of the time were selected by the emperors to join the royal studio as the court painters. However, the Mughal style was not confined to Mughal and their culture of origin only. It freely absorbed pictorial elements from Persian, pre-Mughal and even European traditions.



So, a distinctive style of painting evolved during the Mughal period at the royal courts of great Mughal emperors from the mid-16th century. And the extremely refined style of the painting required very talented artists with great technical skill. The best painters of the time were selected by the emperors to join the royal studio as the court-painter. However, the Mughal style was not confined to Mughal and their culture of origin only. It freely absorbed pictorial elements from the Persian, pre-Mughal and even European traditions.



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Two most important phases in Mughal Painting:

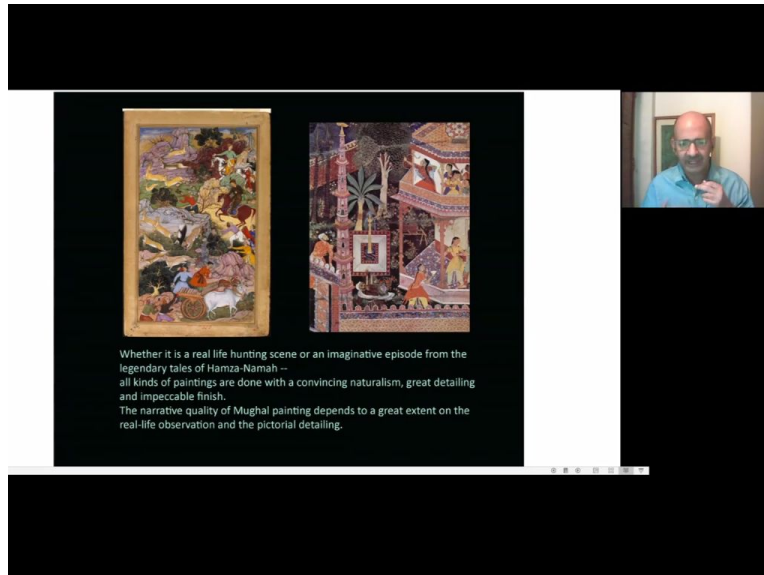
Akbari Period: 1556 -- 1605 AD

Jehangiri Period: 1605 -- 1627 AD



We know that just before the advent of the British Colonial rulers, Mughal painting was at its glory, at its best. We know that two major periods which produced some of the most beautiful, some of the most magnificent paintings are Akbari period 1556 to 1605, and Jahangiri period 1605 to 1627.

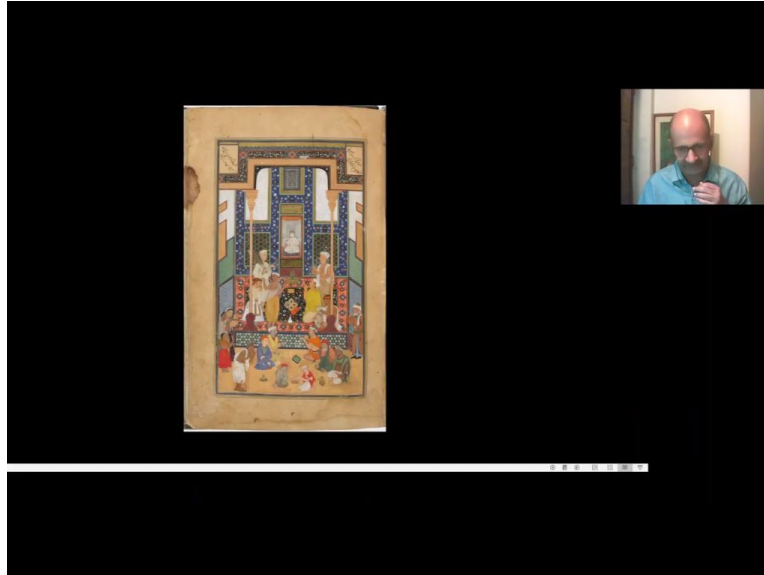
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And whether it is a real life hunting scene or an imaginative episode from the legendary tales of Hamza-Namah, all kinds of paintings are done with a convincing naturalism, with great detailing and impeccable finish. The narrative quality of Mughal painting depends to a great extent, the real life observation and the pictorial detailing.

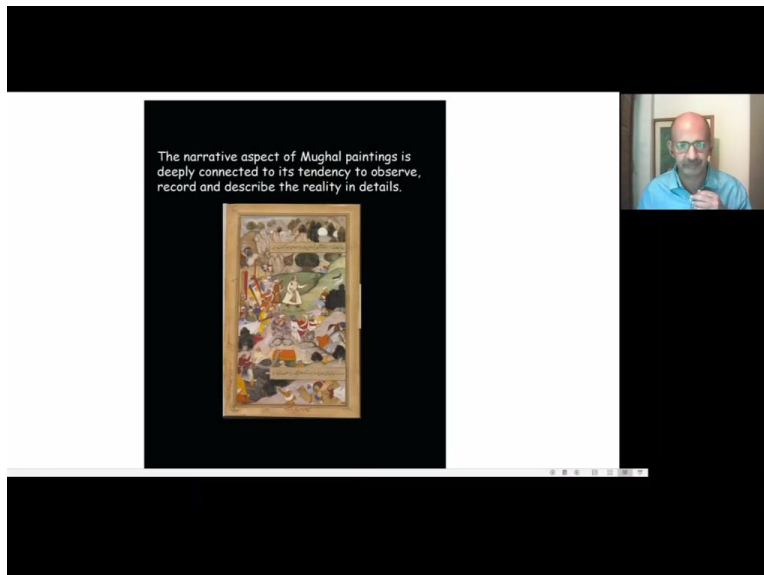
This is important because after the advent of the British Colonial rulers, the first phase of art activities patronized and encouraged by the British rulers would require this kind of observation based detailings. And therefore, the training, the experience that the painters got from the Mughal painting traditions would really be very helpful in delivering the kind of art works that was demanded from them by the British Colonial rulers.

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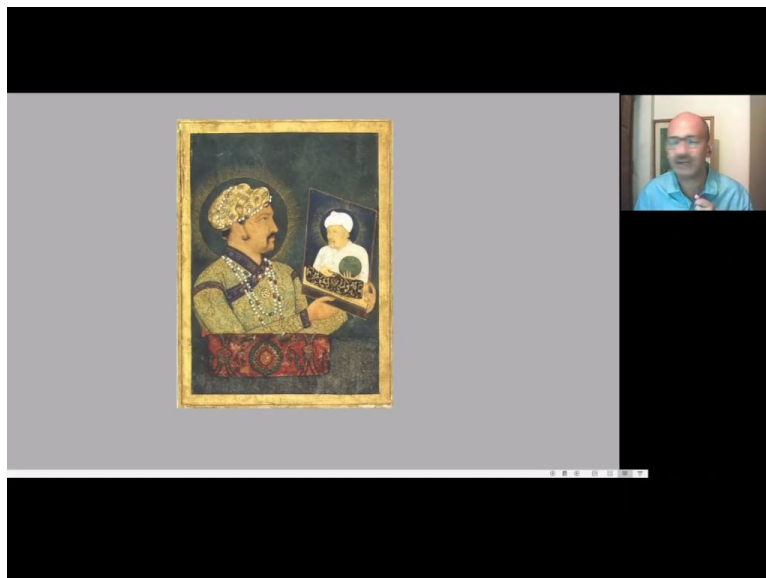
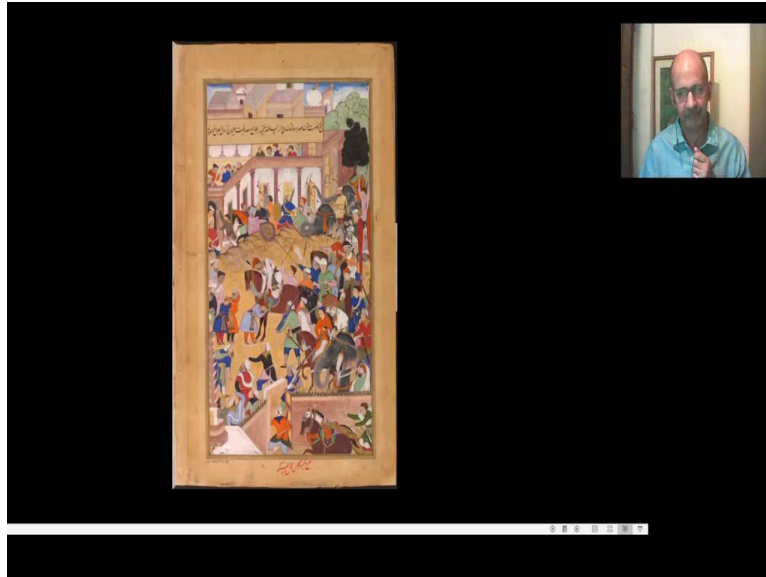
In spite of all that, there is something very courtly, something very refined, something very traditional. A kind of art, which despite its observation based visual factual details remain to a certain courtly culture.

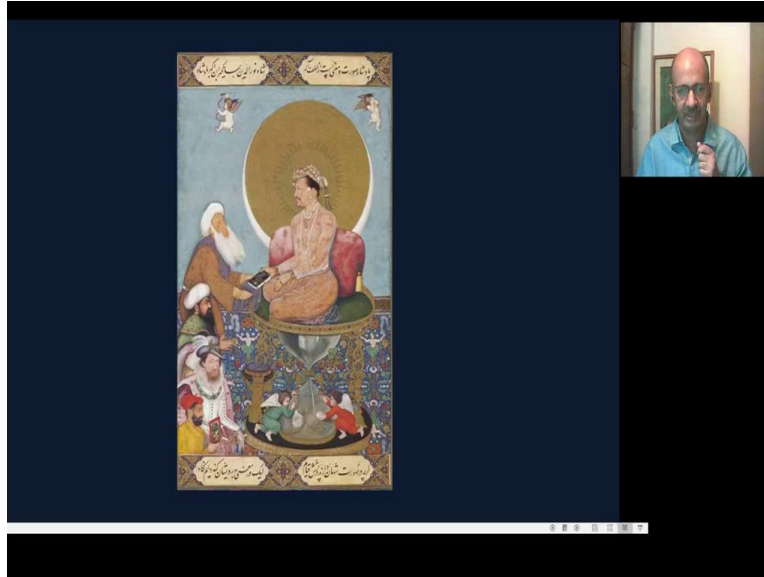
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Therefore, the narrative aspect of Mughal paintings is deeply connected to its tendency to observe, recall and describe the reality in meticulous details.

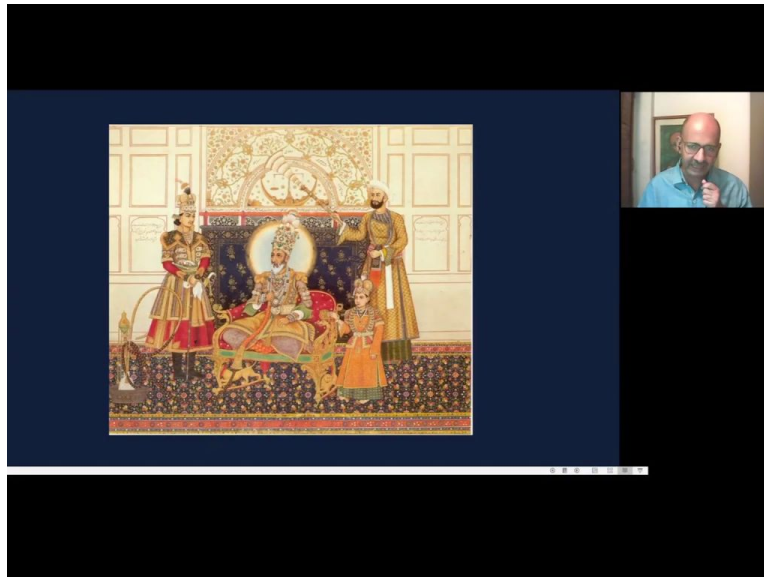
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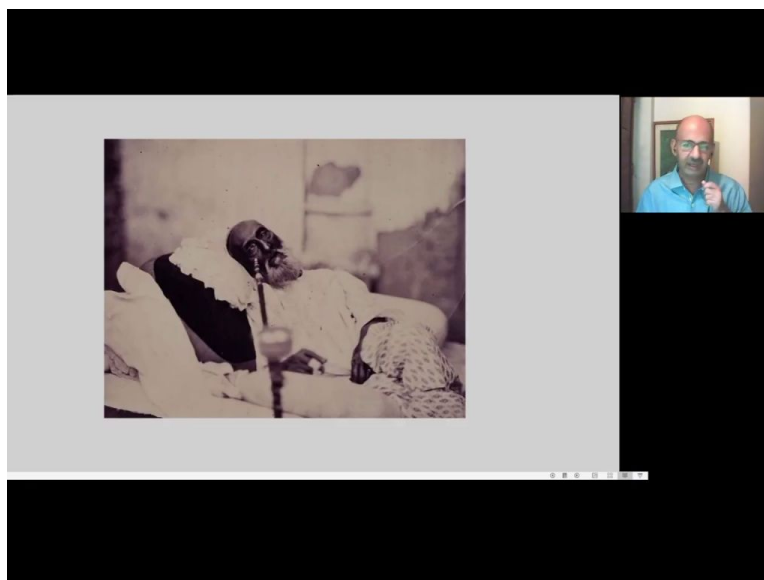
Hundreds of such paintings will testify to this particular observation. And whether it is Rajput painting, Rajasthani painting or Pahari painting or a Mughal painting, we always notice that whatever event is happening in the paintings, whatever might be the story that is being told in the paintings, they always have a context. They always have a visual background. They always have even a historical, social and cultural backdrop against which a visual story is slowly being unfolded. Now, this is now going to stop. When the Britishers come and they start their own kind of paintings, somehow we missed that background. Somehow we see suddenly that the backgrounds of those paintings have become very, very neutral. Soon, we shall see some of those examples.

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So, as the Mughal painting saw a kind of decline, partly due to the advent of the British rulers and partly due to their failures, their paintings either became extremely over-ornate, over-decorative or began to lose the warmth and the charm of the previous paintings painted during Akbar's and Jahangir's period.

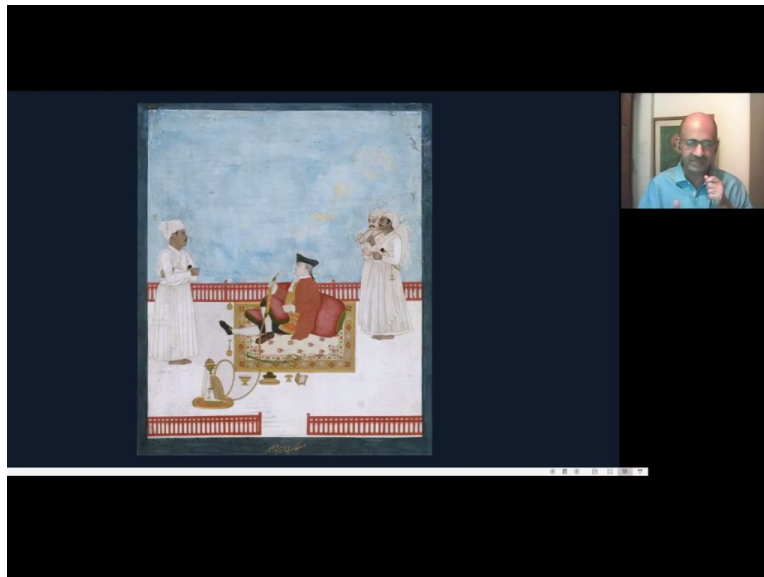
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And interestingly, this photograph, though it is difficult to believe, but yes, it is true. This is a photograph of the last Bahadur Shah, one of the greats, one of the last emperors who belong to the great glory of the Mughal empire, but he was almost penniless when he died.

Now, it is this decline that I am talking about. And let us also take note of the fact that now we do not need a painter. A photographer has arrived in the scene with a newly invented gadget called a camera with which he captured this tragic moment of the last emperor of one of the greatest empires of the world called Mughal empire.

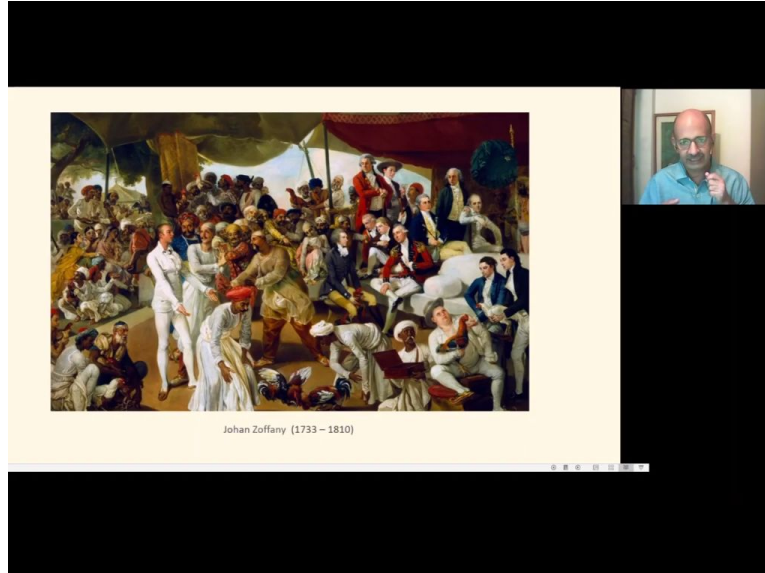
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Now look at this very interesting painting, where you see, now a British ruler is replacing a Indian king. The setup is almost the same, though the background is very crudely painted, though the number of elements got reduced. Compared to the early miniature paintings, whether Mughal or Rajput, suddenly this painting looks a little bland or blank, but that is not the point.

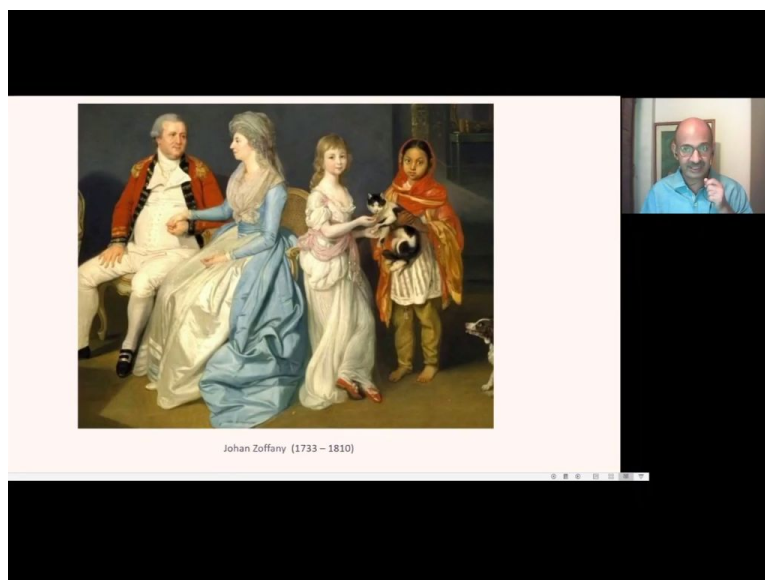
The point is now you see a British, a European, a white ruler, a pompous ruler replacing exactly that space, which used to be occupied by an Indian king whether a Rajput or Mughal. So, it is not just the decline that 18th century India was witnessing. It was also witnessing a power shift, a cultural shift, somebody was replacing someone else.

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And to capture the Indian life, to capture the Indian subjects, Britishers had already started encouraging the British painters who arrived in India from London and various other parts of Europe to paint the Indian subject matters, to paint the Indian way of life, to paint the Indian details, which for them was pretty exotic. And here we are going to see works by three different artists who are very, very well known as British painters painting Indian subject matters, Johan Zoffany.

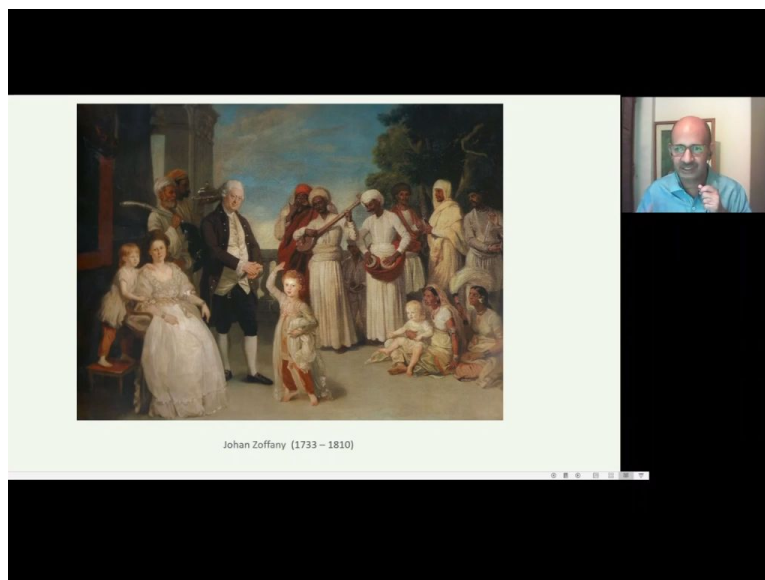
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And interestingly, even when they are painting the British people, usually they would put someone, a figure, a character, a person, in this case, a lady and apparently a maid of Indian origin, clearly creating the Otherness, clearly creating a racial discrimination within the painting.

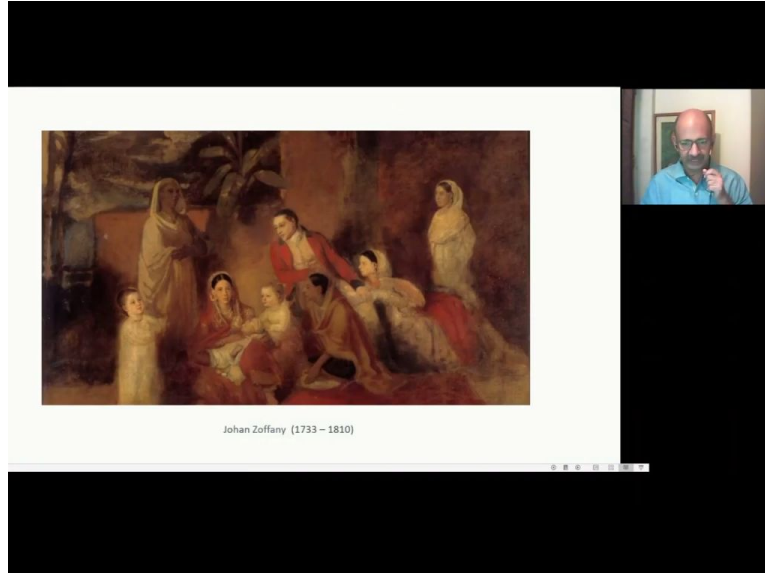
So, in many paintings painted by the British painters and later by the Indian painters belonging to the Colonial rule you will see the presence of what the Britishers used to say or call native figures, native subjects, native people.

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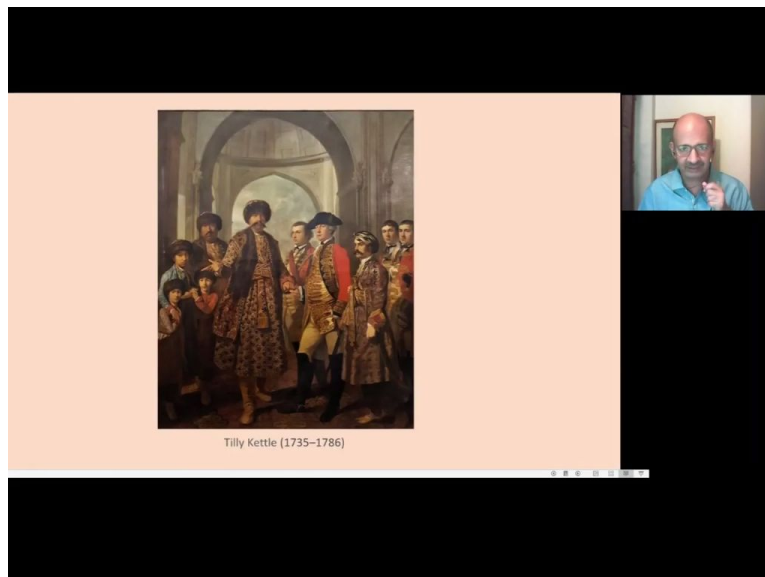
Once again, maybe the focus of this painting is on a British family residing in India, but the very presence of the 'native people' in the painting makes this painting a very interesting example of a Colonial project. The painters were sent to basically document Indian life and also glorify the presence of the British people in Indian land, and also show Indian people in a particular light.

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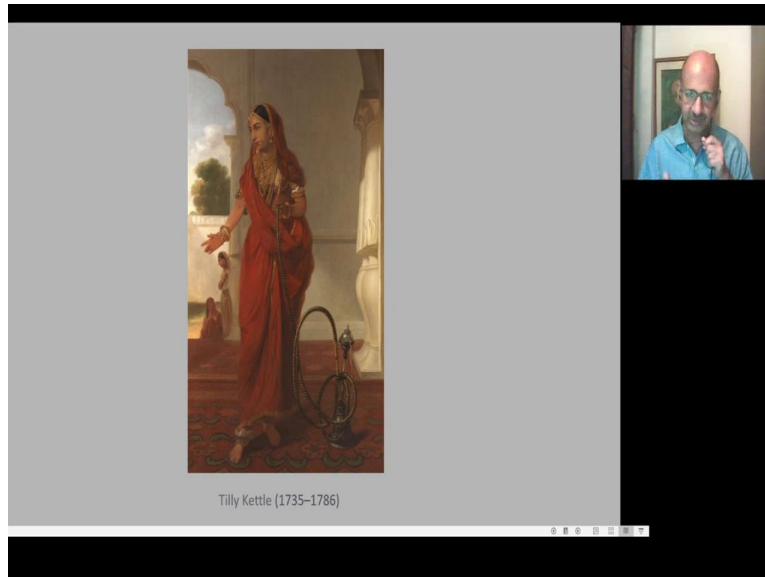
One more painting by Johan Zoffany. Almost in all these paintings, this curious presence of Indian subject matters become a very important feature of his works.

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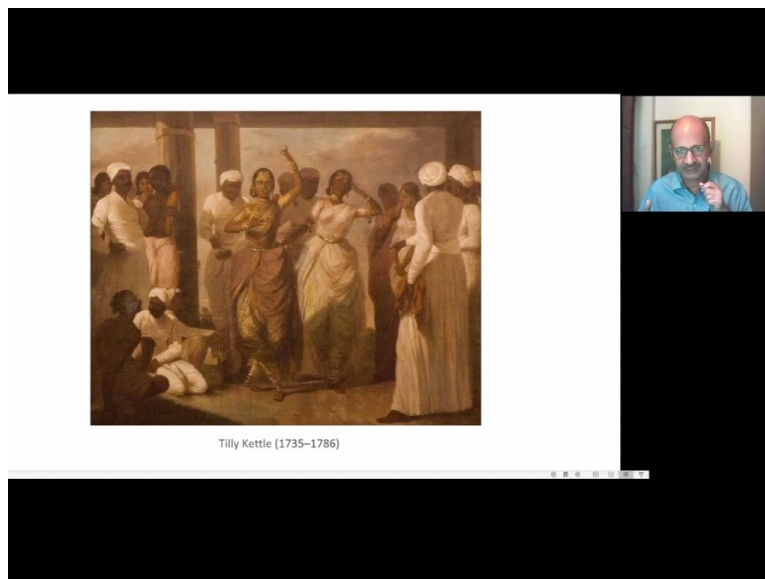
Tilly Kettle was another painter who reached India to paint, not just India, but the colonized India. None of these British painters had ever seen India before the colonization. Therefore, their viewpoint, their observation for us is a kind of pictorial documentation of the early years of colonized India.

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So they were painting both, Indian people as well as British people. But it is very important to say in which light they are showing, representing these people.

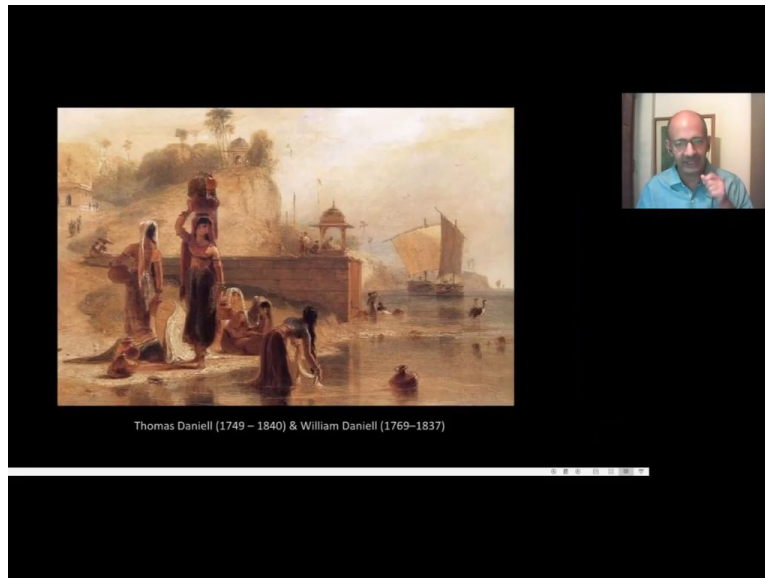
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So, very specific professions, characters were chosen from the Indian subjects, Indian people, and they were highlighted. In this case, the dancers, the street dancers, two women have been highlighted. I mean, obviously there is an orientalist perception here, orientalizing the Colonial

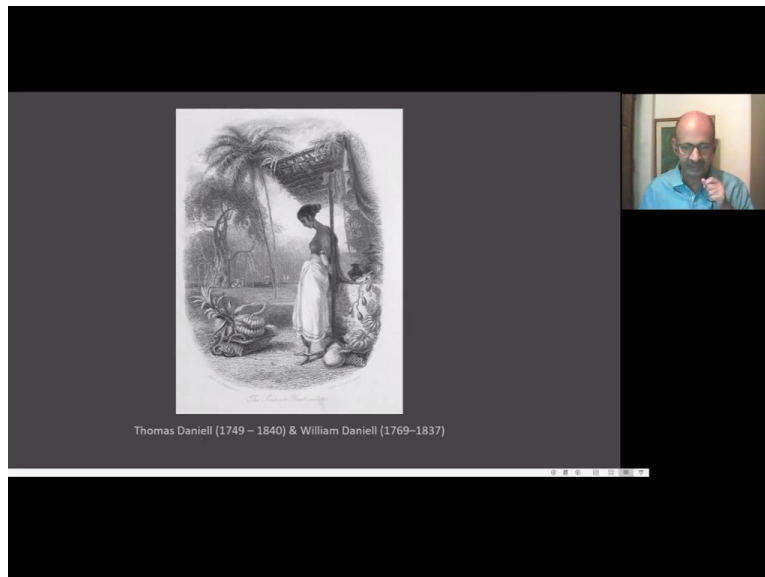
or colonized India. And that is getting very, very conspicuous in these paintings. And this was possible because there was a rupture.

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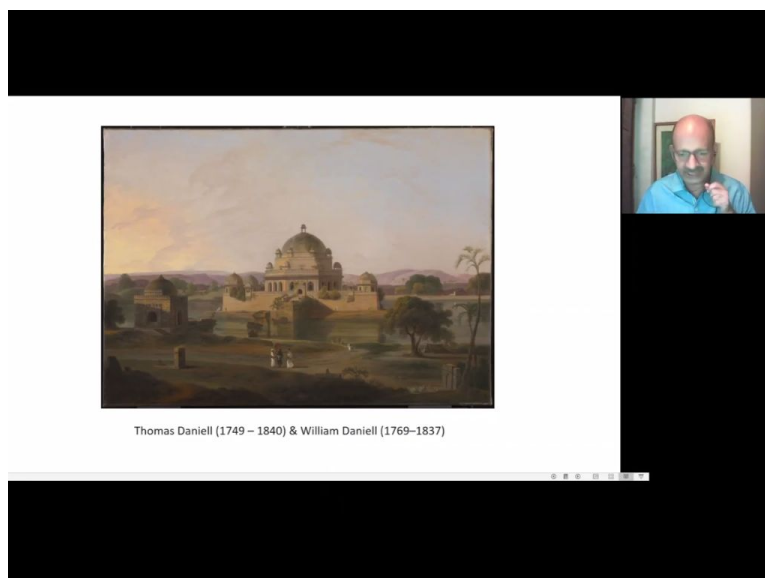
And finally, Thomas Daniell and William Daniell, the uncle and the nephew, they came here together to India and they did a lot of paintings and also etchings and drawings, not only of Indian people and European people, but also the Indian scenario, the Indian landscape, the Indian geography, the Indian heritage.

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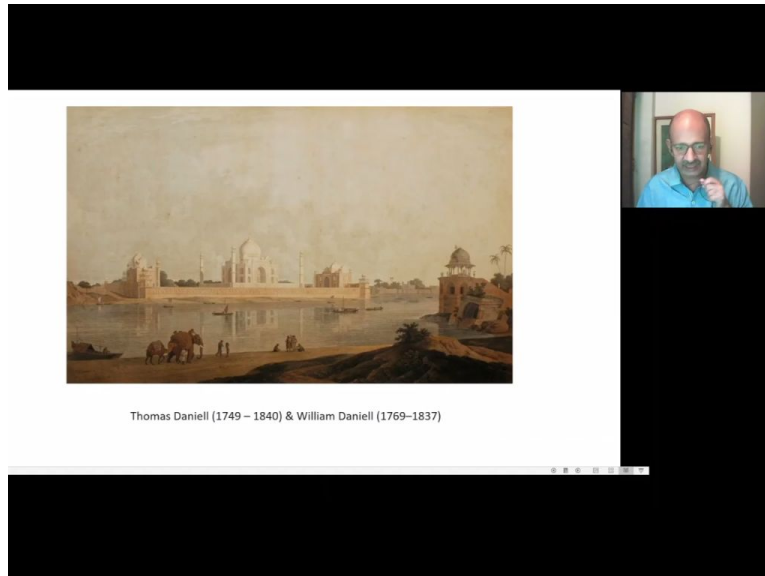
Even they never failed to exoticize a simple woman fruit seller, which was a very, very common view, probably a very common profession in certain parts of India, but the way they were highlighting it, the way they were exoticizing it is very important for us to see.

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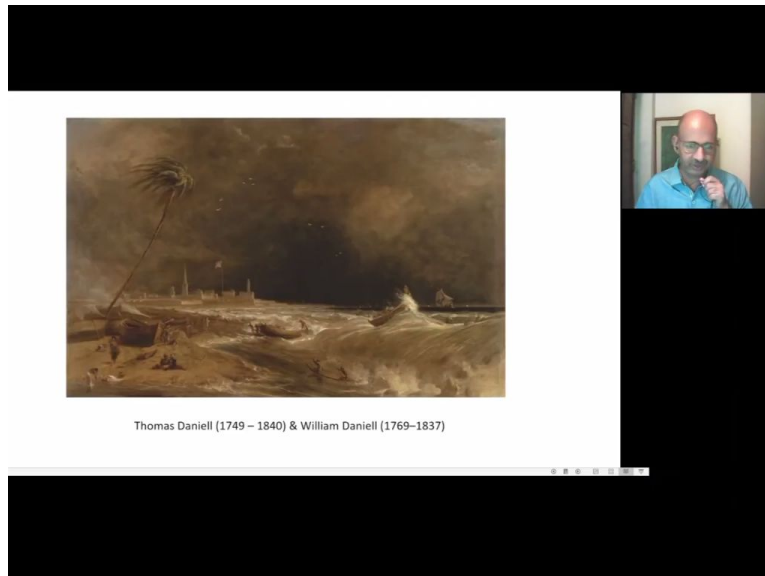
And thanks to these artists, we actually get to see how the various important, historical and heritage monuments looked like in the late 18th and early 19th century. Even before they were photographed properly, all these places were actually drawn and painted.

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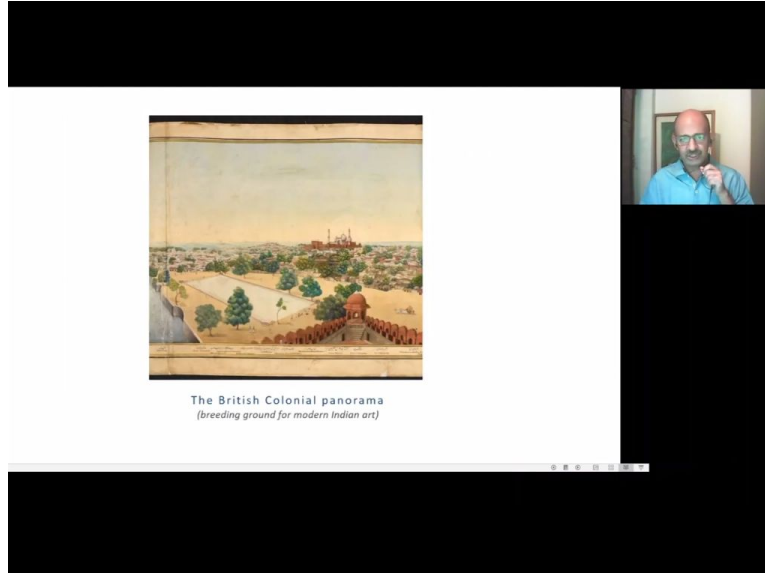
This is how Tajmahal looked like. And this is a kind of convincing representation because these artists were using a certain realistic and naturalistic visual style.

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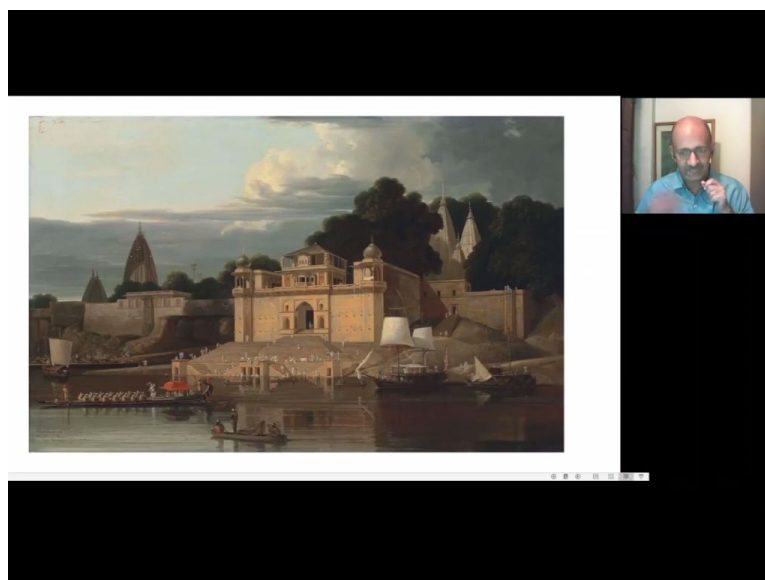
Or for that matter, a port, a seaport, near Madras. Ensuing storms, huge wind blowing. So they were not just capturing a particular scene or object, they were also, at least in some of these paintings like this, they were trying to capture a moment, a particular fleeting moment.

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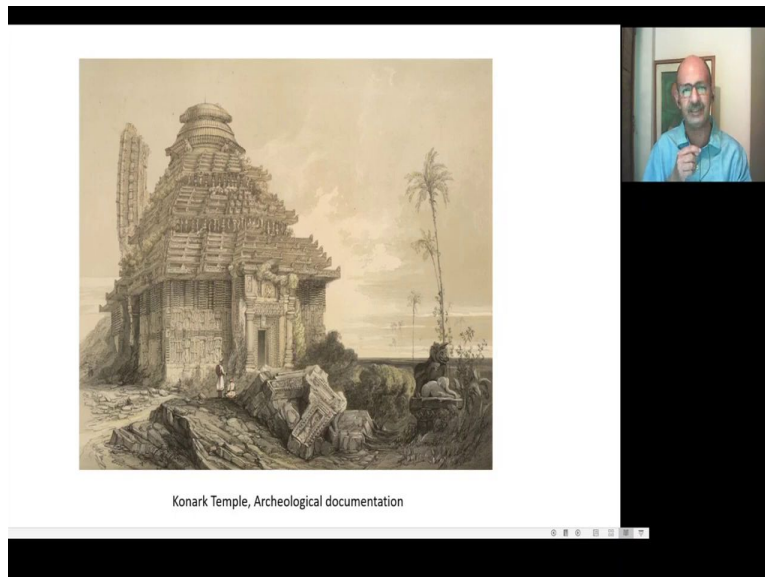
So, British Colonial panorama. It is at this point that in mid-18th century Britishers and these Colonial rulers had actually spread their power in the whole Indian panorama. So, this is a wonderful work of art by a British painter, where this panoramic view coincided with this idea, a typical Colonial ruler's idea that we have now the entire India under our control, under our rule. But the British Colonial rulers also needed, really speaking, now Indian painters to paint Indian subjects, Indian scenarios, but for the British administrators, not for themselves.

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So, slowly, we will see, and this will be the topic for our next lecture that is lecture number three, generally called Company painting, where the Indian painters would be doing almost the same kind of works which the European and the British painters did in this early phase.

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But as I was telling you, this whole idea of documenting a colonized land actually led to the creation of various important documentations. Otherwise, we would not have ever known that this is how Konark Temple looked like when it was first discovered. So, these are very important documentations from the point of view of history and archeology.

Now, therefore, we have come to a point when we are about to witness the emergence of a very, very important phase in Modern Indian art, in the early phase of Modern Indian art, and that is the Company painting. And in the next lecture, we shall discuss the characteristic features of Company painting, the different examples of Company painting and the very interesting style that was developed by the Company painters. Thank you.