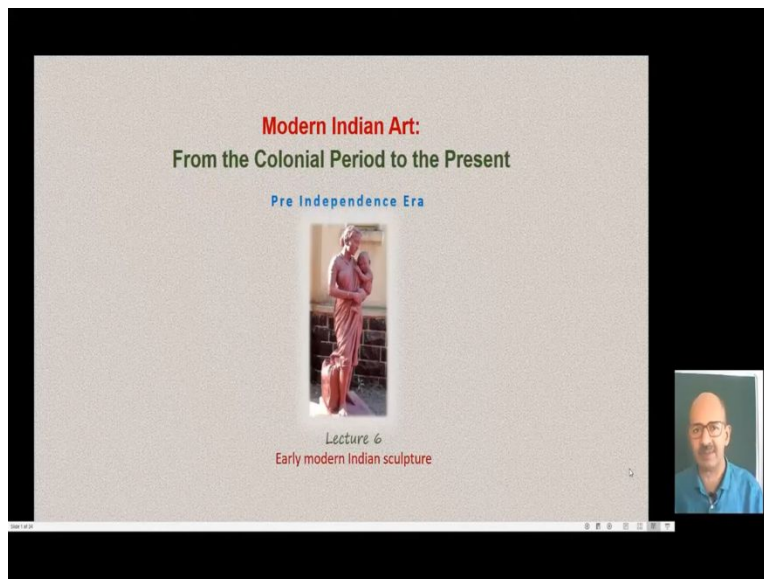


Modern Indian Art from the Colonial Period to the Present
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Lecture 06
Early Modern Indian Sculpture

Welcome to NOC's online course on Modern Indian art from the Colonial period to the present. Well, today is the 6th lecture from this course or the first lecture from the second week. The second week, according to the classifications, is dedicated to the history of Modern Indian art just before Independence. Hence it is also called the pre-independence era. And the 6th lecture, which is the first class from the second week is devoted to the early examples of Modern Indian sculpture.

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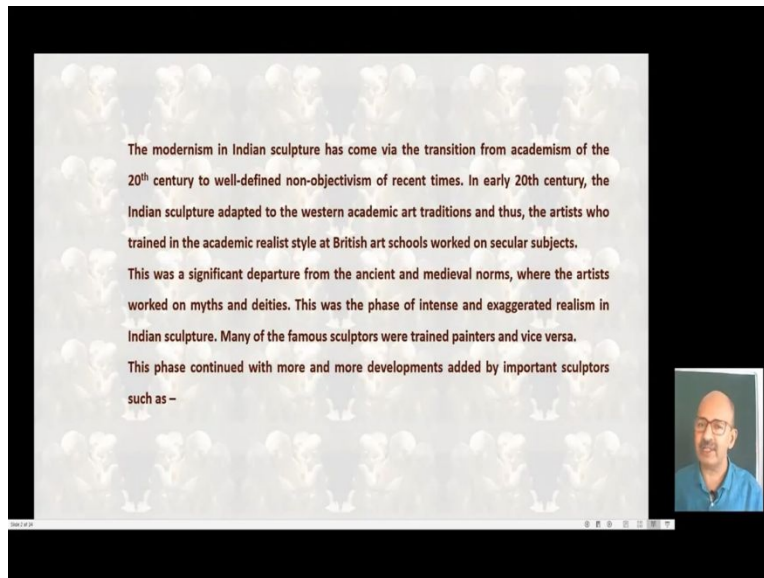


We always have that curiosity that is- what is happening to the field of sculpture while the paintings, for example, Company painting, Kalighat painting, and all these things are coming up and shaping the early history of Modern art, particularly painting. But what is happening to the field of sculpture?

Now out of that curiosity, we come across some names mainly sculptors and some important artists who have contributed significantly to the development of early Modern Indian sculpture. Now early Modern Indian sculpture, almost like the early paintings like Company paintings

would generally, I would not say imbibe but somewhat follow or derive elements from- stylistic elements and technical elements from the British or European Academic style of working.

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Therefore, many of the early examples of Modern Indian sculpture show a very close affinity to the sculptural traditions of the Academic type, the Realistic type, the Naturalistic kind of academic, sculptural traditions of Europe. So the Modernism in Indian sculpture has come via the transition of or from Academicism of the 20th century to very well defined non-objectivism of recent times.

So the journey that we see of Modern Indian sculpture from an Academic style or Realistic style to something really Modern in terms of the fact that in the later developments of Modern Indian sculpture, we clearly see a kind of outrage against the Academic style of sculpture. And the entire focus was on the exploration and the experimentations with the formal aspects of Indian sculpture.

So in the early 20th century, India's culture adapted to the Western Academic art traditions and thus the artist who trained in the Academic Realist style at British art schools worked on secular subject matter. So this is very important as far as Modern Indian sculpture is concerned. Even when you are looking at the early examples of Modern Indian sculptures, we can clearly see a very, very visible shift from the traditional types.

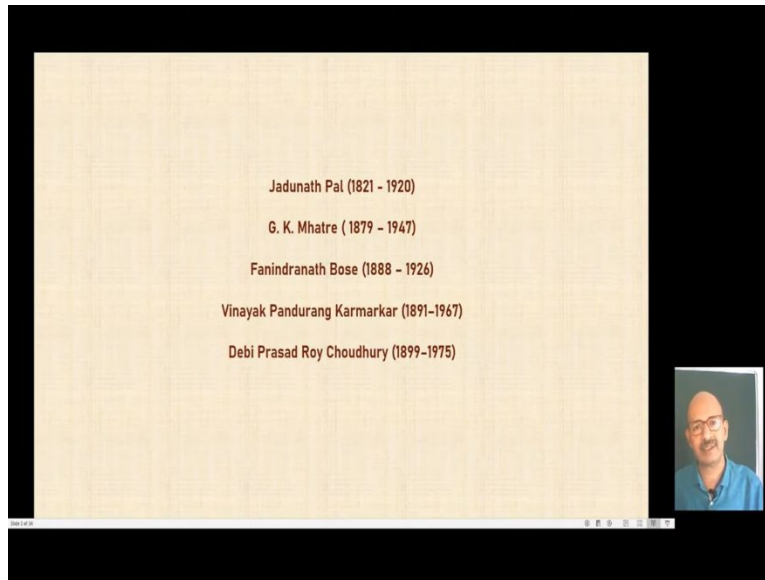
And we shall soon see a few examples from the traditional Indian sculpture only to once again

realize how great, how important that shift was to move away from the canons of traditional Indian sculpture, to move away from the demands of the traditional Indian sculpture and mainly, to move away from a by-and-large religious cultural tradition of the past and historic India to a much more non-religious, secular, personal, individual, social, subject matter oriented sculptural traditions of Modern India.

So, the beginning was there in the early phase itself. So there was a significant departure, needless to say from the ancient and medieval norms where the artists worked on myths and deities and therefore religion. And this was the phase of intense and exaggerated realism as we shall see in the works by Karmakar, by Mhatre, by DP Roy Choudhury and so on and so forth. And many of these famous, very famous sculptors were trained as painters also sometimes, but their skill in Academic Realism, their training in Academic Realism, in particular Academic pedagogy of fine arts was absolutely superb, of a very high order.

Therefore, the application of skill, that kind of Academic skill on the realistic sculptures and more often than not most of these sculptures made by the early Modern Indian sculptors were commissioned, in that sense they were 'commercial art's, 'commissioned arts', commissioned by mostly the British rulers. Therefore, there was no chance of going for a stylized or distorted kind of figurative style. It was almost written, it was almost predetermined that these sculptures that they would be making would certainly follow the European Academic style yet certain differences, certain distinctive features can also be seen here.

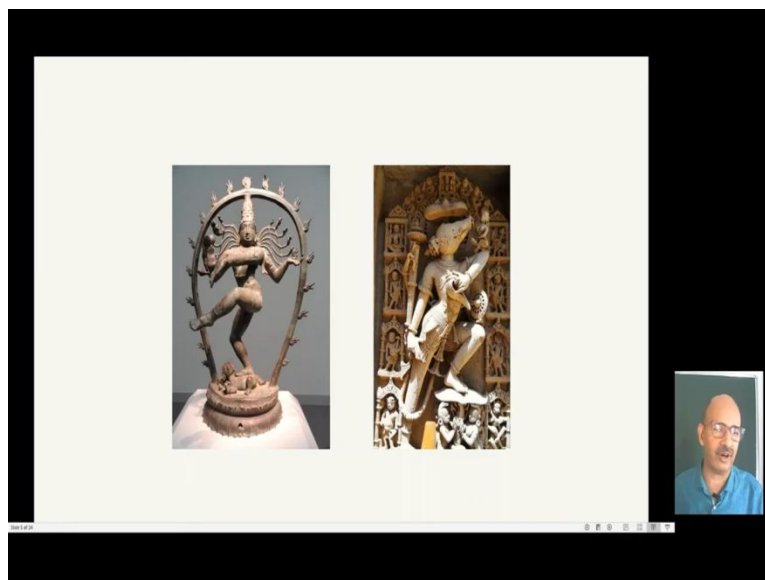
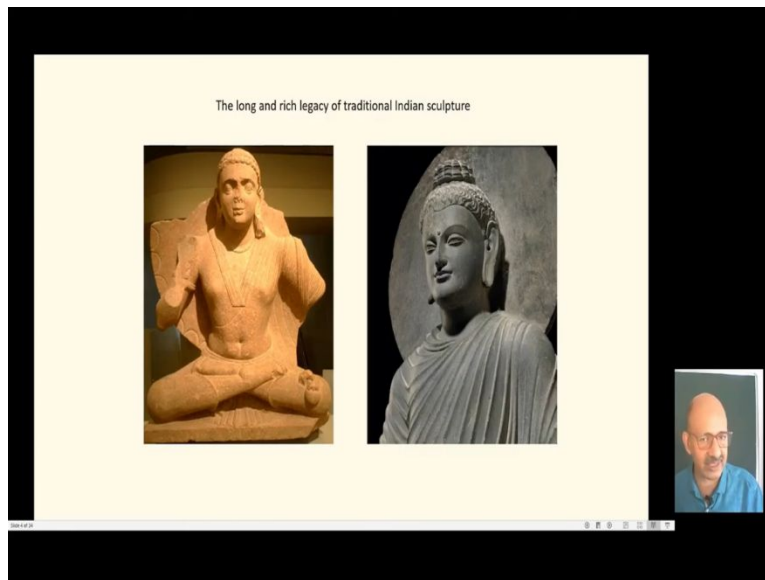
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Now, some of the famous names from the early Modern Indian sculptural tradition or sculptural phase, if you say, are Jadunath Pal- 1821 to 1920; G K Mhatre- 1879 to 1947; Fanindranath Bose- 1888 to 1926; Vinayak Pandurang Karmakar- 1891 to 1967; Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury-1899 to 1975; of course there were quite a few more than them.

We have selected these few mainly because their contribution seems to be much more significant than the others and they are famous, and also for the students it will be easier to find their works either in the books or from the internet compared to many other sculptors who are less famous and whose works are less known even in the virtual domain.

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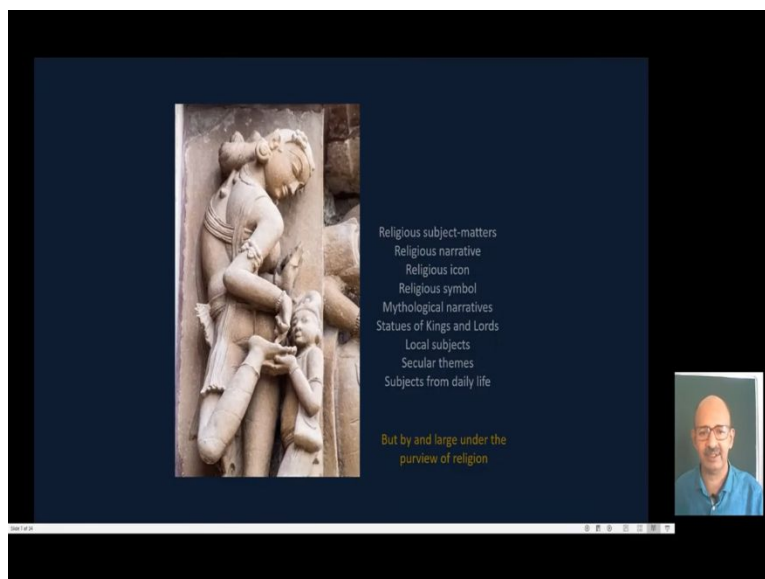
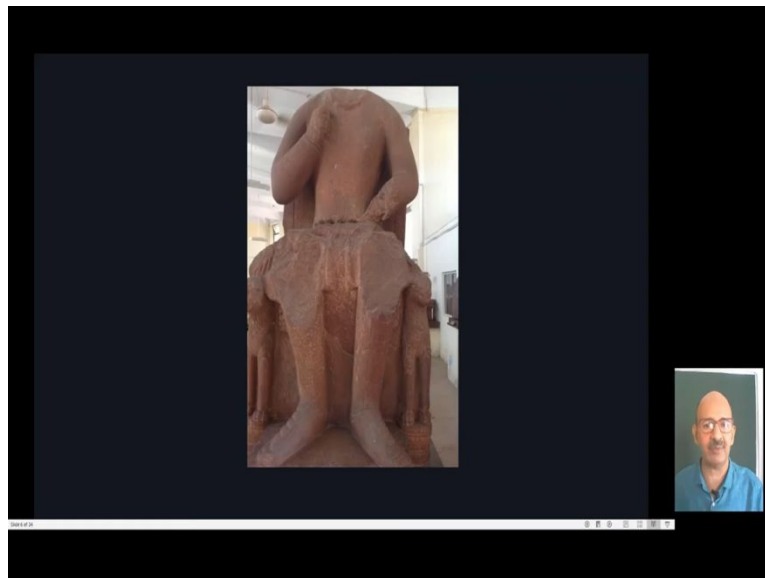


Now before we come back to these artists, let us have a quick look at the long and rich legacy of traditional Indian sculpture where we see mostly huge images, iconic images of icons that is Gods and Goddesses and deities like Lord Buddha here or Bodhisattva or Nataraj or Varaha avatar of Vishnu. Be it from the Hindu religion or Buddhist religion or Jain religion, these iconic images formed a major part of traditional Indian sculptural tradition.

And the materials and mediums used in this tradition are also pretty varied. You find bronze, you find stone, you find terracotta, mostly these three, but sometimes you also find sculptures made in wood. Now, in later Modern Indian sculpture even the traditional materials will be

compromised. Artists will come up with very innovative mediums which we shall see in the third week and also a few examples in the fourth week of this course.

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So, this is stone and the statue of a king from the Kushana period and also these marvelous figures which are often called Yakshis or women figures, adorning the temple walls are there. So the range of subject matters are not so limited as we might tend to think in the context of traditional Indian sculpture. We can even come across beautiful examples and plenty of them, of traditional Indian sculptures from various places of India which are actually secular in the subject matter thematically and also in the sensibility.

But whether secular or strictly religious, all these images generally come under the purview of religion. And this is where the most important shift will take place in the Modern Indian sculpture that is the patronization. There will not be any religious patron to patronize Modern Indian sculpture. This is not to say that the traditional Indian sculptural traditions came to a complete halt and stopped after the advent of the British, no it only got reduced, number of temple building activities got reduced.

But when people or certain religious authorities did have money, they certainly patronized some temple building activities, some art activities on that temple but because that was not a living tradition anymore, the living tradition was rather the Modern one-therefore, mostly in the Modern period, the kind of temples you see even today with beautiful sculptures and architectural ornamentations, they are mostly copies from our great past. Innovative religious sculptures are not so easily available to be seen today. But you see a great amount of innovation taking place in the non-religious, secular, Modern Indian sculptural traditions.

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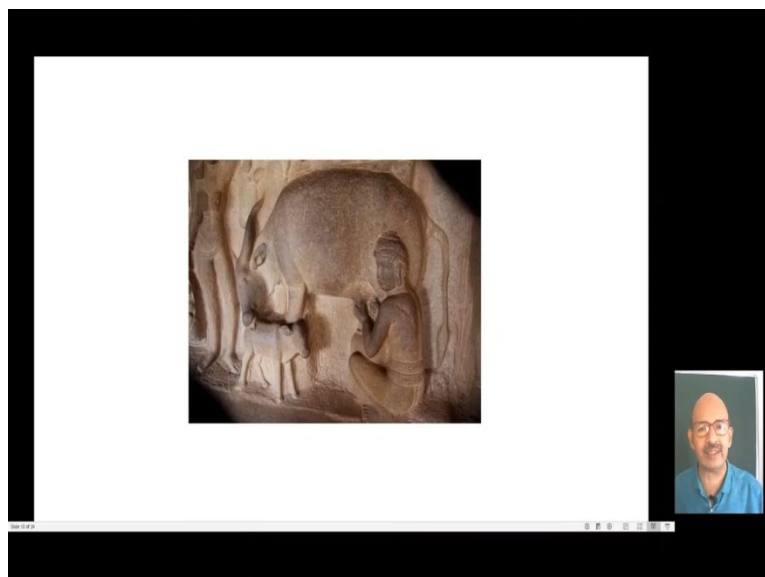
Even when you see this individual, independent and huge sculpture of elephant in Mahabalipuram, Ratha temple complex, though directly the elephant may not have anything to do with any particular religious meaning, but it is also true that this elephant stands within a campus that is entirely dedicated to religion. It is a religious campus.

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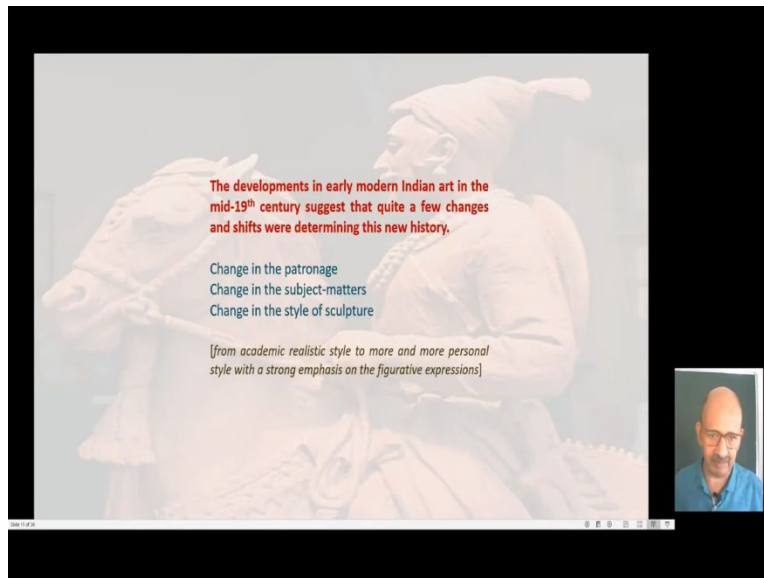
Even when you see, as you see on the extreme left and on the extreme right two terracotta images which are actually very secular images, images from observation, daily life, yet they form a part of the temple of Bengal terracotta tradition. And the one in the middle where you see a monkey couple with a baby monkey on the lap, again, individually this group of monkeys have nothing to do with any religious connotation. They are probably a part of the natural environment around Mahabalipuram, yet it is also true that all these motifs come under the larger panorama of a religious space.

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Even this one from Mahabalipuram, though the subject itself, as you can see, is directly derived from the daily life around.

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So the developments in early Modern Indian art and particularly in the sculpture in the mid-19th century suggests that quite a few changes and shifts were determining this new history and this applies to both painting and sculpture that is change in the patronage, change in the subject matters, change in the style of sculpture from Academic Realist style to more and more personal, individual style with a strong emphasis on the figurative expressions and when we say 'with a strong emphasis on the figurative expressions', we certainly can expect to see some distortions in the figure, some exaggerations in the figure, some kind of extensions of certain parts of the figures, so therefore, it is not realistic anymore.

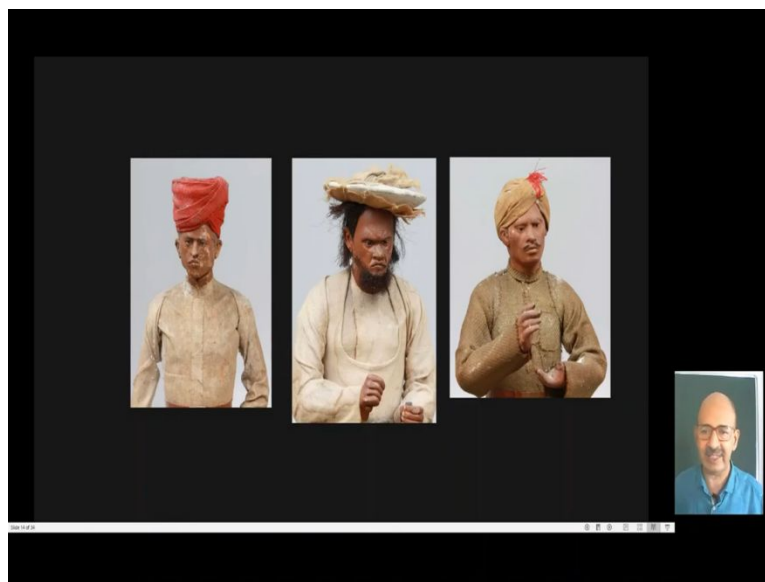
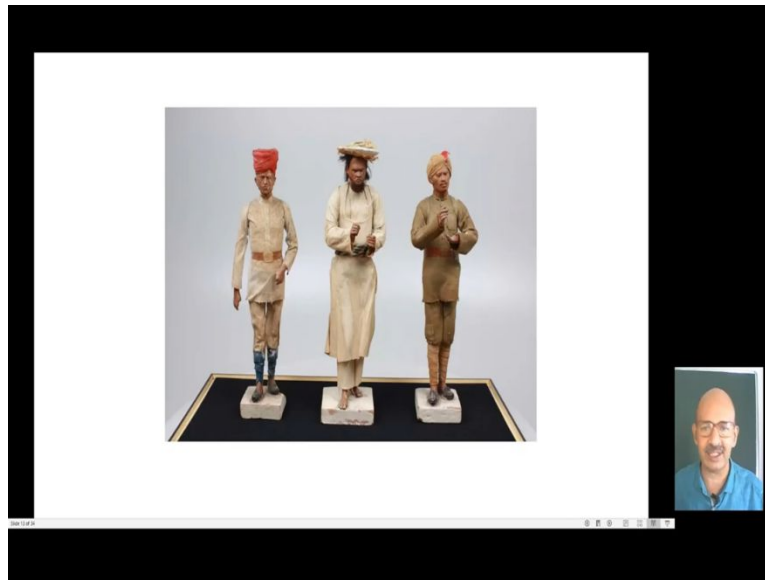
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Now one of the earliest sculptors from this early part of Modern Indian sculpture was Jadunath Pal who was famous for his clay sculptures. So first of all, we see a different medium that is clay which is very Indian. I do not think the British patrons would ever use that, unless they found somebody like Jadunath Pal hailing from the traditional clay idol making family.

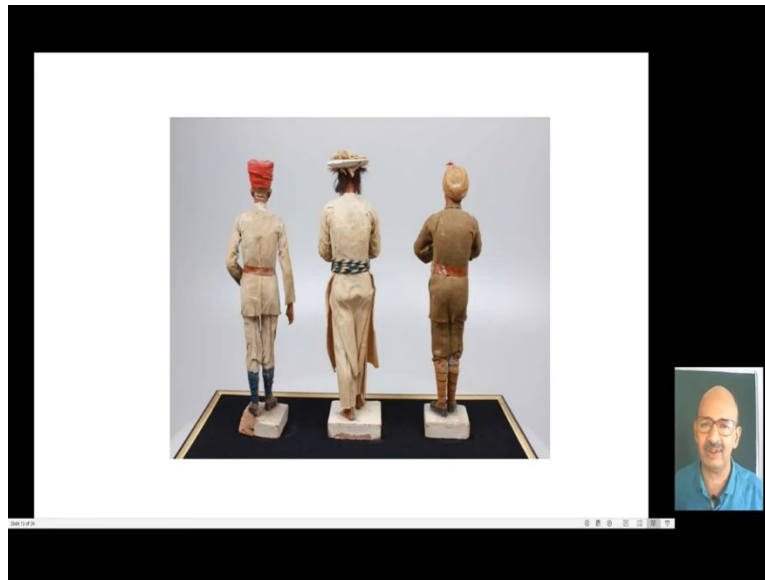
And in the past, even if there were clay sculptures, unless the clay has been passed through fire and turned into a terracotta, there is hardly a chance to see them surviving till today. Therefore, a new medium got introduced with, as you can see apparels, accessories, color and most important is the fact that the subject matters do not have anything directly to do with any religious propagation.

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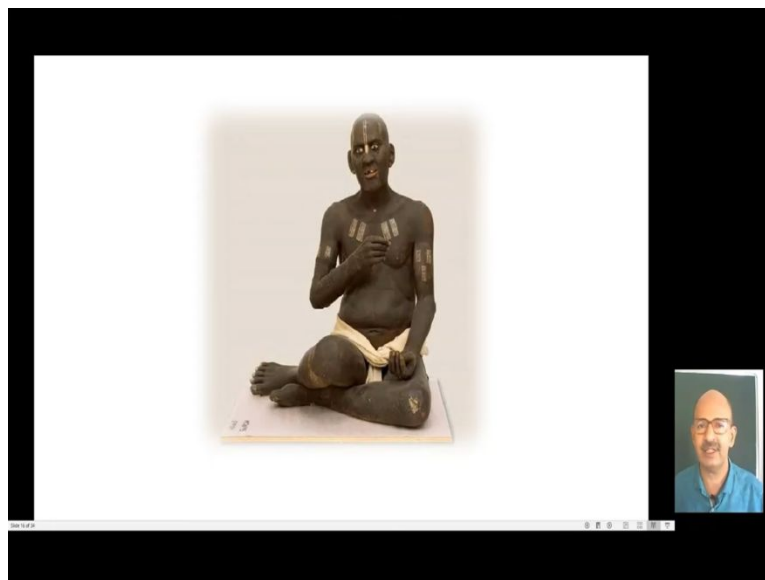
It is all observations from daily life, individual characters, individual professions- exactly what you have seen in company painting. Almost a sculptural replica of Company painting. And also look at the details of the body, details of the faces, details of the expression. Now these detailing certainly comes from a training in the Academic Realism, a kind of Academic studio practice where a student is taught to learn these details, to achieve these details and also to learn the technique to apply these details on to their sculptures and this is exactly what is happening now.

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So whether you see them from front or profile or back, you get to see some amazing details, realistic details, naturalistic finish of these figures.

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And of course the amazing range of subject matters including their profession, different types of people and characters that you see around in 19th century India, they all form part of the subject matters of Jadunath Pal.

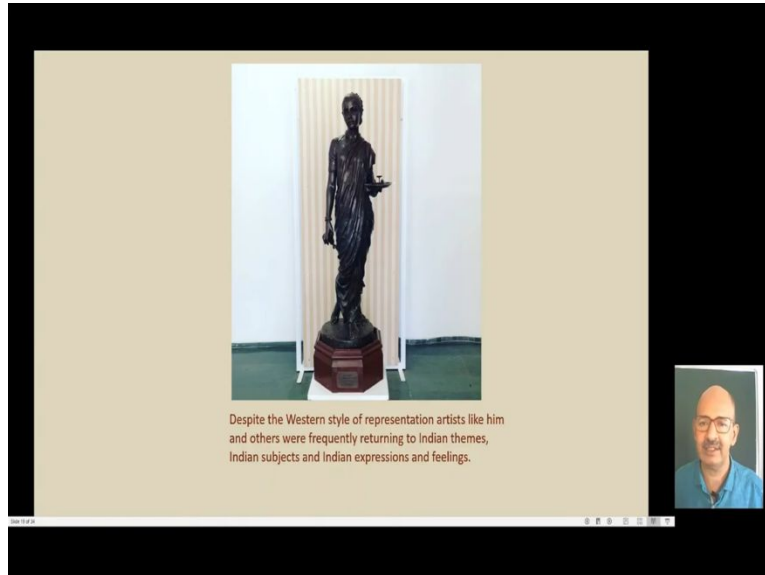
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Now the second one, a very important sculptor from the western India, from Bombay was G K Mhatre. As you can see these two sculptures as examples are enough to suggest that they were commissioned by the British patrons. And since they were commissioned by the British patrons so their requirement was pretty clear that they wanted a realistic depiction of may be the King George on the left and some British colonel on the right, this is what exactly they wanted to have

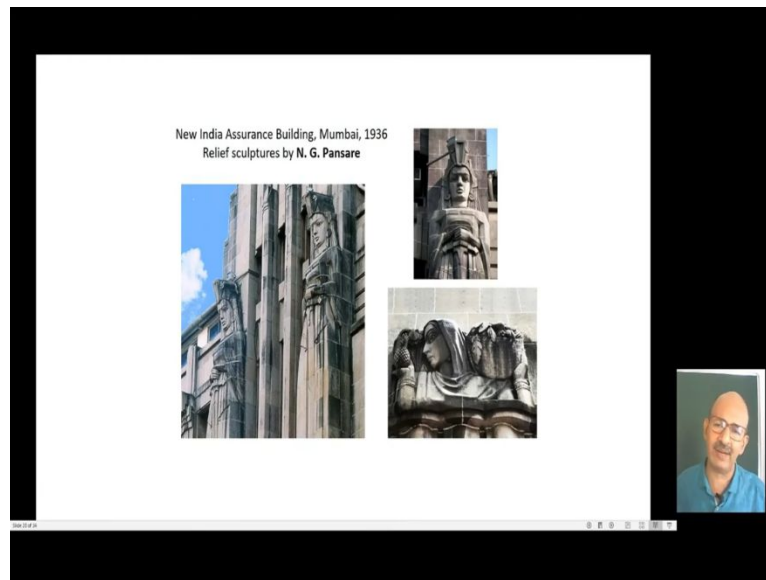
and G K Mhatre was an amazing sculptor who actually achieved these skills, as good as or could be better than many European counterparts and they satisfied, his sculptures actually satisfied the patrons to a great deal.

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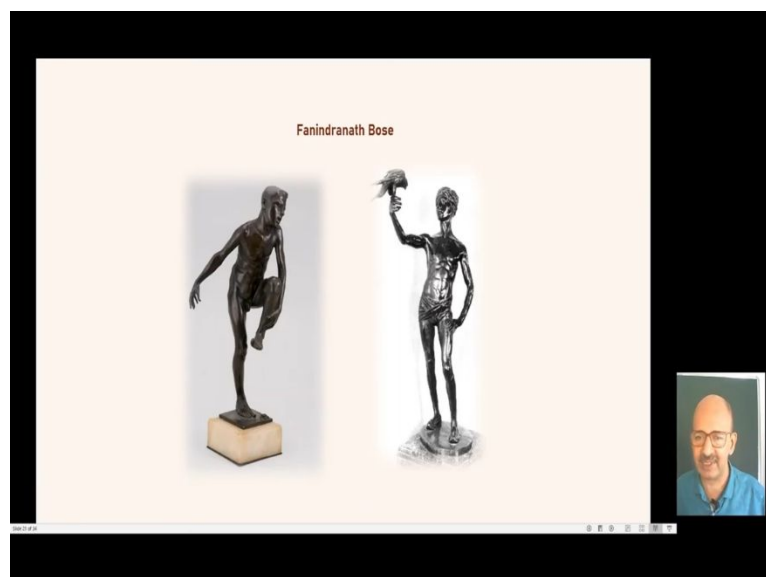
But Mhatre also did a sculpture like this which is very typically Indian, in terms of Indian sensibility. This sculpture is known as 'To the Temple' by G K Mhatre. It is very clear that despite the western style of representation, artists like G K Mhatre and later many others were frequently returning to Indian themes, Indian people, Indian figures, Indian subject matters and providing certain kinds of Indian expressions and feelings to these figures. 'To the Temple', as this sculpture is well known as by G K Mhatre, is one such brilliant example from his oeuvre.

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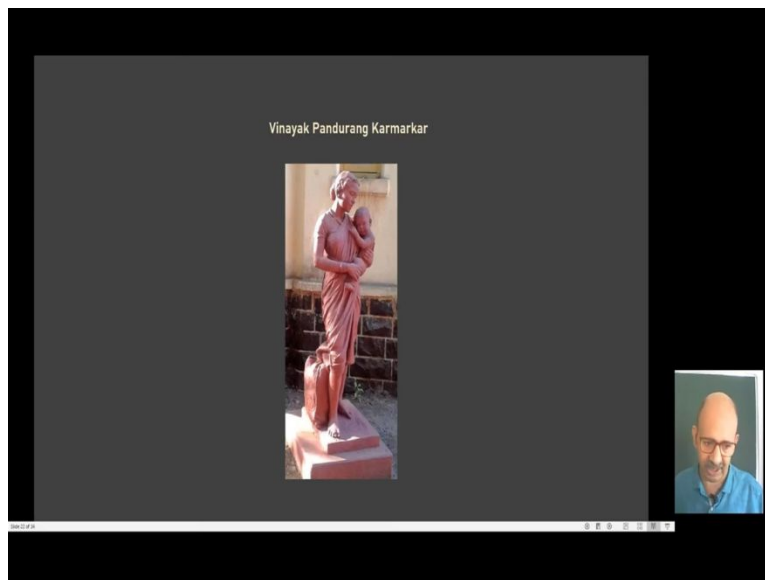
Then we also have somebody called N G Pansare, though this is a later work in 1936, but he was also one of the sculptors who not only acquired the Academic skill, he also learnt how to kind of bring some changes in the stylistic representation of these figures and he also got commissions to do huge sculptures, for example this one, The New India Assurance Building in Mumbai made in 1936 and N G Pansare, the sculptor was the designer consultant for this huge architectural project.

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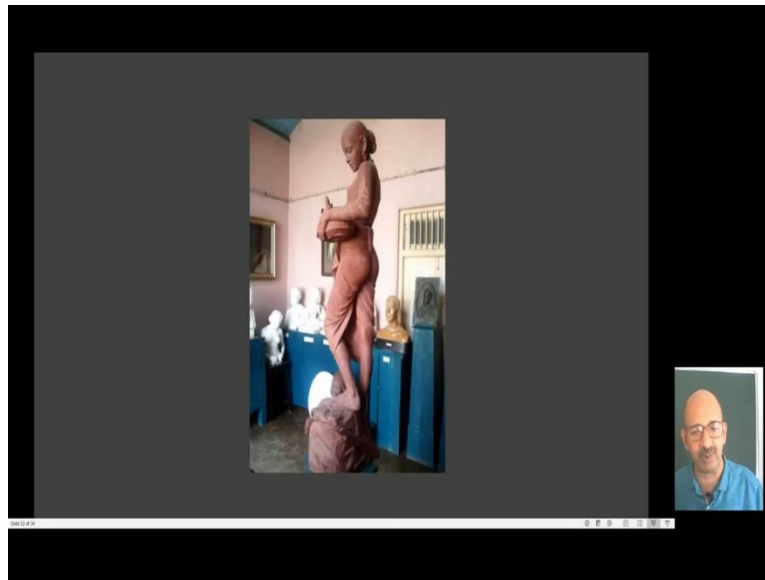
Coming back to again one early sculptor- Fanindranath Bose, you can see how Fanindranath was applying his academic skill to certain expressions. For example, the one on the left is called 'The boy with a Pain'. It is very interesting, the subject matter does not have any immediate context. It is simply his immediate expression, his pain and his reaction to his own pain is what the subject matter of this sculpture constitutes. Whereas the one on the right, that is a lad again with a bird perched on his right hand, is again a beautiful example of a sculpture that catches a little vignette, a little piece of life from the life around.

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Then we have this, again a very famous sculptor called V P Karmarkar, Vinayak Pandurang Karmarkar. And many of his sculptures, right at the outset suggest that he was certainly showing a great inclination towards Indian subject matters. As you can see here, an Indian woman standing with a child on her lap and maybe she is carrying some jute bag, which is kept below next to her leg, whatever it is clearly the sensibility is very Indian in spite of the fact that Karmarkar is using European Academic Realistic techniques.

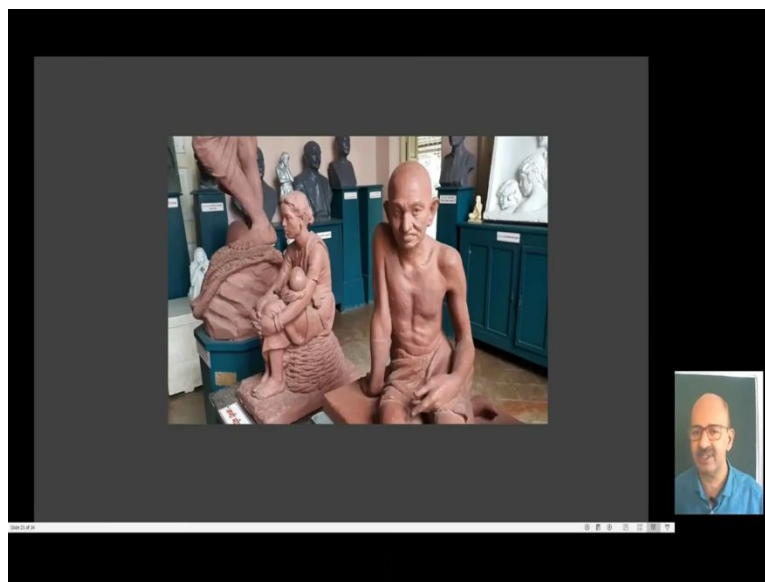
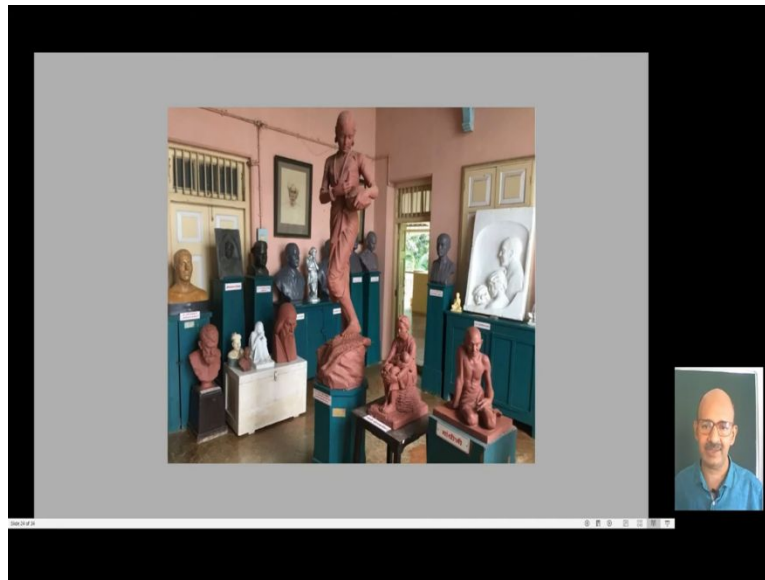
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Or for that matter this one, but there is also an element of pose. It is a Naturalistic style but the gesture and posture of many of these women would have a certain pose- that is some kind of pre-planned posture was there in his mind which he obviously asked his model. Yes, again a new trend is coming up which was learnt from the British training that you might need a model in your studio in order to make a perfect realistic representation.

We have seen that among the painters Raja Ravi Varma had done this before. We have seen that among the painters, again Amrita Shergill did this before but Amrita Shergill mostly used herself as a model but Raja Ravi Varma or in this case Karmarkar would actually use professional models to model for him and he would study that model and then come up with his own idea.

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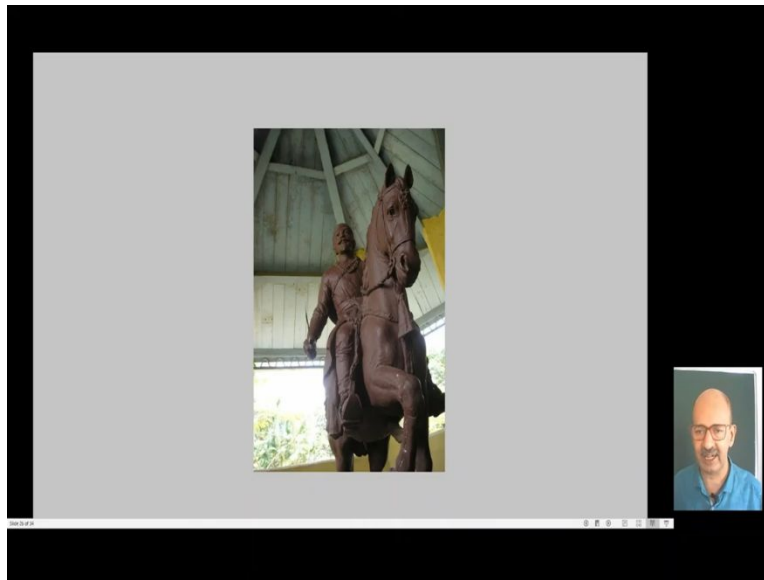


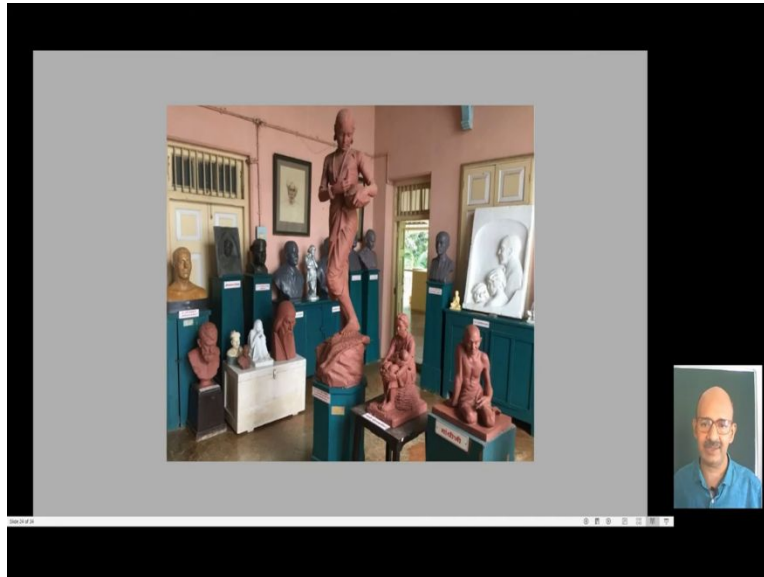
Now as you can see in this photograph which is a room in the Karmarkar museum where this particular sculpture is kept and where you can see the room is surrounded by so many other sculptures by Karmarkar and his family. Needless to say, because of the huge commission works that he was receiving, Karmakar had to actually start a kind of workshop, a kind of factory, sculptural factory, where hundreds and thousands of these sculptures were made.

So sculptors now completely detached from the traditional setup, which was more or less guided by, determined by, patronized by the religious authorities, sometimes the royal authorities. Now these sculptors from Modern Indian art, they now have a new group of patrons, mostly the

British rulers. And they have already achieved this most incredible quality of Academic Realism.

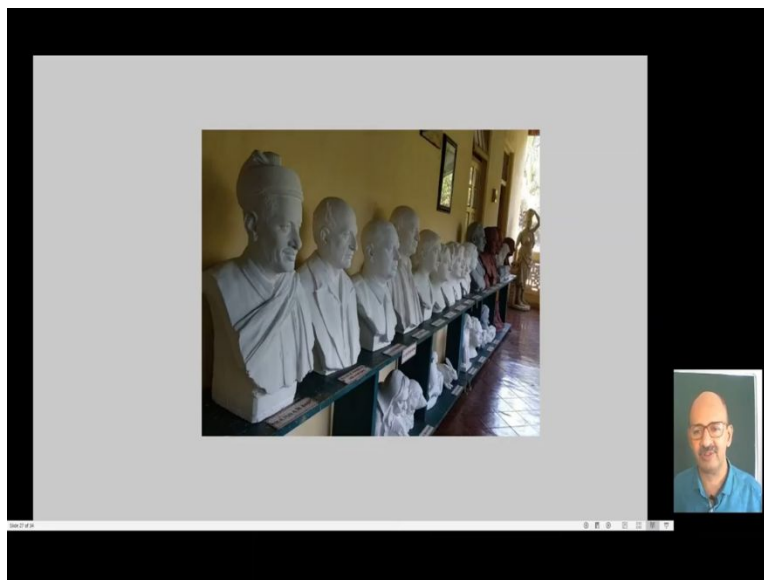
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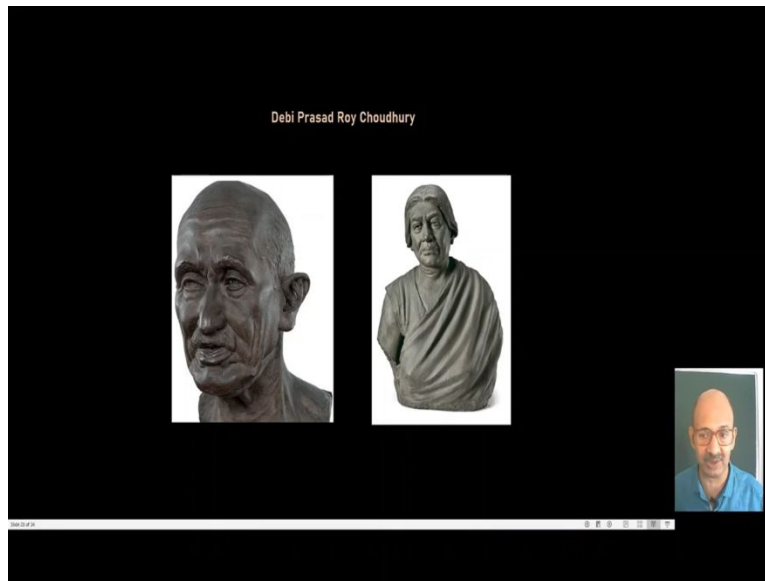
So whether it is Shivaji on top of a horse or Gandhiji, as you have seen before or a lady standing with some domestic utensils but standing with a posture, Karmarkar was excelling in the realistic representation of his sculptures.

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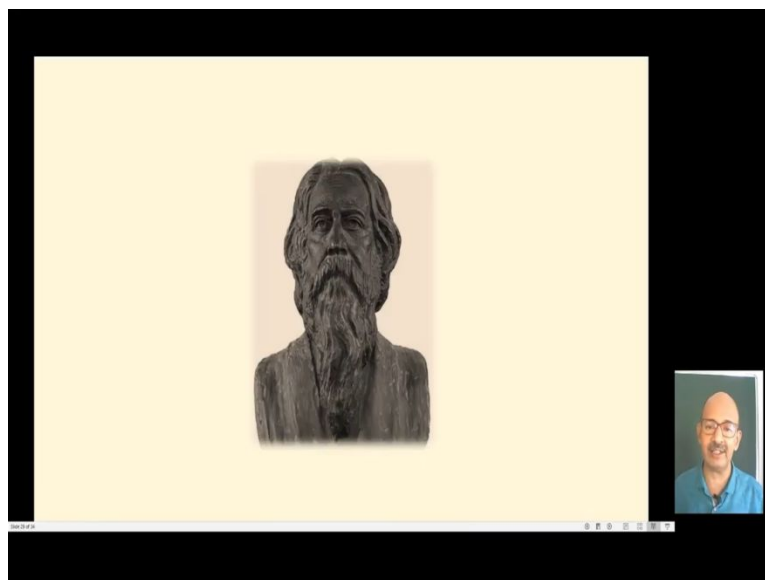
And this is again a row of portraits which you can find displayed at the Karmarkar Museum. If you ever go there you will find this series of portraits which again suggests that portrait making was a very frequent activity patronized by the British people and therefore this kind of sculptors like Karmakar,- they were in great demand.

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Now the next sculptor that we want to mention today is Debi Prasad Roy Choudhury coming from the immediately succeeding generation and he was also a great sculptor in portrait. In the art of portrait, Debi Prasad actually excelled and he, I must say, went one notch above many of his predecessors like even Karmarkar.

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So Debi Prasad Roy Choudhury right at the beginning had this penchant for Academic and Realistic detailing and representation. Portrait is one such category of expression for him but he used that same Academic skill also to develop thematic sculptures, not particular portraits, but thematic sculptures which are not even religious, not derived from any mythology, but directly from a certain idea of life or idea from life.

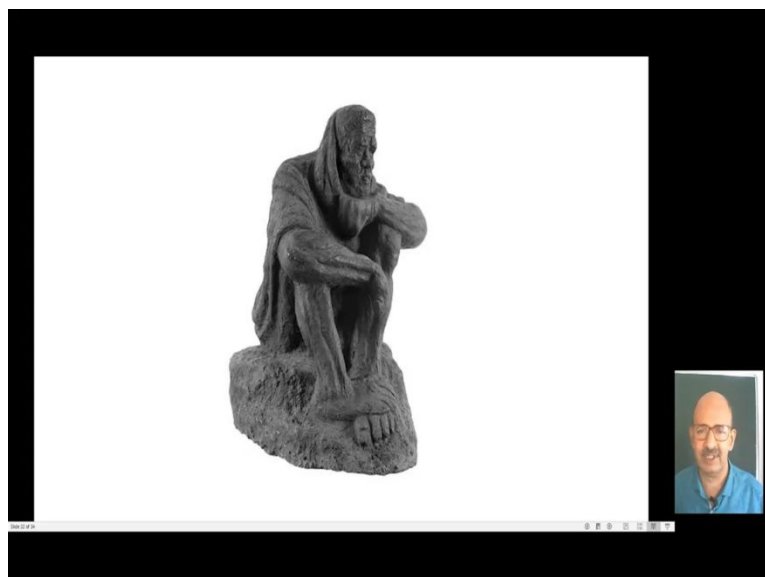
And in this sculpture, you can see it is all about labor, laborers, basically I must say it is a kind of glorification of the huge amount of labour that labour class gives to construct, to erect something and they are indispensable for most of the activities which we need for our lives, for a civilization to grow.

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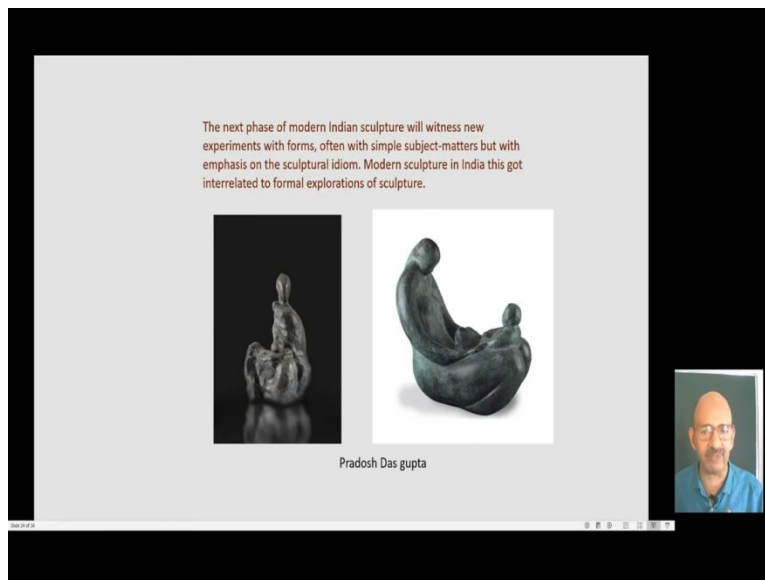
Now when Debi Prasad Roy Choudhury is dealing with such a theme, you can see how carefully and how meticulously he is going for the details of the muscles and the nerves and the energy and the tension of the physical exertion and the strength that you can see in the bodies of these laborers, and therefore he is not showing this intense expression of strain, labour, energy, physical prowess as something tragic but he is rather valorizing them. He is glorifying them and he is also asking us the viewers to pay respect to this labour, to this physical labour without which we are completely helpless.

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So Debi Prasad Roy Choudhury excels either in this kind of physical expressions or even with portraits which we have seen already and this kind of sculptures directly addressing a figure or a person or a state of being.

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So more or less this is the range within which the early Indian sculptors were operating. What we shall see next in one of our following lectures when we discuss certain other developments from the Modern Indian sculpture, we shall see that this later Modern Indian sculptors are leaving behind this accurate, meticulous detailed descriptions, physical descriptions of sculptures but going for formal experiments for example Pradosh Das Gupta from 1940s, who we shall discuss

later.

But before we wind up this class today just let me tell you that this next phase- following phase of Modern Indian sculpture will witness new experiments with new forms and often with simple subject matters but with a strong emphasis on the sculptural idiom. So Modern sculpture in India got this kind of shift, not only from religion but also from the academic, realistic, detailed description of human body, so this particular attitude got interrelated to the formal explorations of sculpture.

So Modernism as far as sculpture is concerned, after these four or five sculptors that we have discussed just now, we will take a new shape and we will focus more and more on the shape, form, rhythm and all kinds of formal aspects of sculpture. So this is where we kind of wind-up today's lecture. And in our next class we shall move on to a very, very important idea or a phase in Modern Indian art that is nationalism and its impact on Modern Indian art. Thank you.