

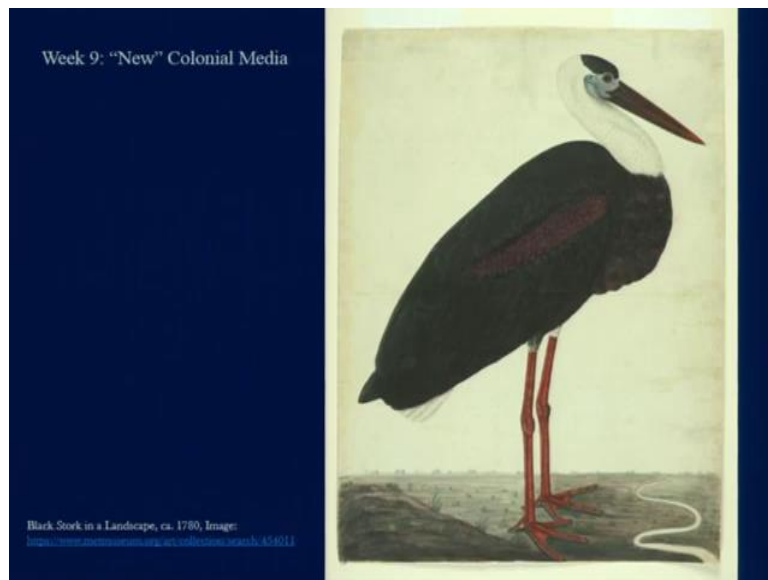
Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 41

The Colonial Interventions in the Indian Subcontinent and their Impact on the Visual Culture

Hello everyone, I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are continuing our discussion on The Colonial Interventions in the Indian Subcontinent and their Impact on the Visual Culture. So, today or this week, in the week 9, will be talking about this so, called new colonial media.

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And as part of that we can we will be discussing the painting media. So, for example we will be talking about the watercolour, the British watercolour and then will also talk about the oil colour. So, we will be touching upon similar themes that we have already looked into in the earlier week. And for example, when we spoke about printmaking and then why those were not only just important for making the for the documentation?

But also, how that was also important for the administrative work also for building a knowledge repository for the colonial rulers? And then also that I mean how the indigenous people the people in India they have interpreted that and they have embraced it and made it as a part of their own expressions. So, the interaction between this the colonial media and the vernacular culture.

So, those things will also be touching upon in this week as well. Now, the thing is that I mean we will be looking into the painting media this week. So, in terms of like the new colonial media we will be talking about as I have said that the British watercolour. Now, one might ask that I mean why British watercolour is different from the kind of watercolour we have already seen?

Because we have already seen a number of watercolour practices where the pigment is binded with some glue. And then like I mean water is added to it and then that was painted onto the paper surface. And or like I mean similar kind of mineral based colours those were applied onto wall surface for making murals. So, if those are the things that we have seen already in India then or in the Indian subcontinent.

Then, why do I say that? I mean this is a new material for doing the works. So, in terms of British watercolour we are talking about the watercolour which are manufactured in factories. And as the reason we also find this fresh hues, those will start coming up in the market which kind of views were not really available earlier. And then this range of colours that we also see which were coming from the British factories.

And those were not necessarily used in the gouache technique or the tempera technique which were already been prevalent in the Indian subcontinent. So, in Indian subcontinent the kind of watercolour we have seen those are mostly the opaque watercolour. So that means that I mean that is already it is a bit thick and it already has some kind of lime or other binders in it and that is the reason it is not translucent or transparent.

Now, the British watercolour for it is so, they are not bind with this slime like additives. And then there is the reason we find that I mean the transparent patches of the watercolour those are applied onto the paper. That makes a very different kind of visual presence as compared to the kind of the opaque watercolour that we have seen in the Indian context. Now, also we see this British watercolour, the colours are applied with the brush in very thin patches.

And that is how we find that I mean the transparency of the colour and then like I mean the surface of the paper, all those things can be seen in this painted papers. So, those are the reasons we find the visual presence as well as, this technical issues are different when compared to the

opaque watercolour practices in the Indian subcontinent. And there is a reason we include that as part of discussing the new colonial media.

So, here we have one of the example on screen and this is a black stork in a landscape and it was made around 1780. So, the end of 18th century. So, in this images what we find that? I mean one can still argue that I mean the kind of the Mughal documentation that we have seen. That they had the documentation or the representation of different kind of flora and fauna which also appears here.

So, for example this black stork is there but the thing is there are also some of the striking differences one can see. So, of course there is a stress on the, this minute details of the stork. So, each and every feather and then all the curves of the body and then all the different kind of features. So, for example how the feathers are different from the from the beak of the stork? And of course, like I mean the eyes, the other part of the body everything else.

So, how all of those things are done with outmost care? So that all the differences in the physiological aspects are revealed in this images so, those things are certainly there. And then we also see that I mean what kind of landscape is used here? So, again there is this low horizon line, something that we have already discussed that I mean the line of horizon is pretty low in this images, keeping rest of the area in this image empty.

So that gives an empty and almost like a which was considered as a neutral space, nothing is neutral but neutral space. So that I mean one can see all the physiological features of whatever flora, fauna is there for the viewers to see. So, for that reason they needed this kind of a neutral they preferred this kind of a so, called neutral background and then in this the lower register of this image we find there is a suggestion of a landscape.

And the landscape here we find that it is a perhaps it is a flood plain, there is little bit of suggestion of slightly like a hilly or a plateau like land. And then the rest of the land is plain with shrubs and occasional trees in the background. And then in the land we also find there is a river which flows in the right corner of this image. And the meandering path of the river suggests that I mean this is a land which is on the plain.

This is one of the characters of the rivers that flows through the plain land that I mean we see all the curves and this meandering path which does not happen in the hilly landscape. So, this is also a suggestion perhaps to tell the viewers that what kind of landscape are there associated with the black stork? Or like I mean what kind of places where these black stork inhabit in the Indian subcontinent?

So, these are some of the ways in which we find that there are this minimal use of landscape for suggesting more and more information about the main object or main creature of interest in this images. So, this kind of images we find to be prominently made during this time period. Now, this images we also find that I mean they are called as the company paintings and company painting is a term that is used for understanding some of this like I mean some of these nuances of this new kind of practice.

In which what we find that? When there are the travellers, the government officials, the ambassadors the, I mean we are talking about mostly of the who are associated with the British East India company and the other European this organizations. So, we find that I mean when they are in the Indian subcontinent. And they want to have some kind of souvenir or they want to start making this knowledge repository for having a large scale documentation of the flora, fauna.

And different kind of architecture and other sites from the Indian subcontinent. So, they employed a number of painters or the drawers and who would work for this East India companies. And that is the reason this paintings came to be known as the company paintings. Now, we also find that I mean in this time that I mean of course that it came into prominence in the 18th century.

And then it continued until some part of 19th century, before the advent of the photographs. And of course that I mean we also see that when the drawings were transformed into prints. Then making this paints I mean putting the paints taken effort in in making all these images also become less. So that is how we find that I mean between 18th and 19th century only this company paintings have flourished and then slowly died out.

So, this is something we find in this there and when we talk about the company painting. So, art historian Marika Sardar she points out this issue that how company painting is something

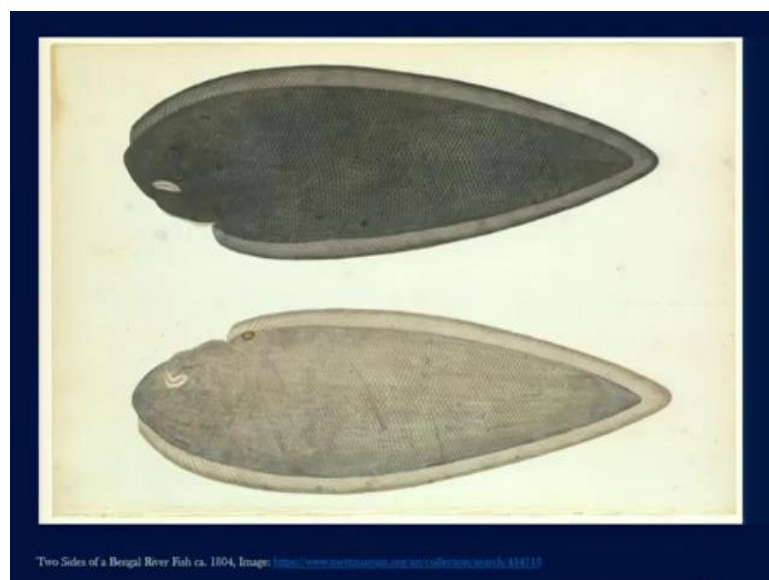
that is not there all across the Indian subcontinent but only in few pockets? So, for example we see the important the colonial cities. For example, we have spoken about this coastal cities which came into prominence during the colonial period.

So, for example Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and so on. So, in those cases we find that how those places where there is a strong presence of the British East India company? So, in those places we find how this company paintings have also flourished? So, for example Calcutta, Patna in Bihar and then Tanjavur or Tanjore, these are some of the places where we and Mysore of course.

Where we find that I mean this company paintings or like I mean this so, called new paintings they have emerged and flourished. Now, Sardar also argues that how this kind of painting practices were not there in the places like the Punjab hills like the areas where we have a number of the miniature schools and then also Nizam's Hyderabad? So, the sites which were all like I mean the areas which were under the rule of the princely states.

So, they had very different kind of approach in painting during the same time when this company paintings were developing in this newly found cities or some of the other cities. So, these are some of the differences we can find that this is not really a widespread movement or not really like a widespread practice all across the Indian subcontinent. But it is something for us to think that how certain areas and certain kind of patronage that have been crucial for the emergence and a sustainment of this company painting?

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So, from there if we see some of the characteristic features of what this company paintings are or like I mean what kind of approaches they have taken? So, this is one of the example and this comes from Bengal. So, this is this image shows like two sides of a Bengal river fish. So, the in this particular image what we find and this one was made in 1804 that means the very early decade of 19th century.

So, in this image what we have? There is this there is no other background or anything like the one we have seen here. And here all we see is the like the two sides of this river fish and this two sides are done with almost this scientific precision that the front side and the back side. And with, in this one we see all the details of the scales of the fish, the fish skin and then all the other body parts.

And so, everything is recognizable and they are done in such a way that this can be studied by the people whoever are looking at these images. So, they can be studied for understanding the physiological features. How that is similar or different to the other fish or the other animals people study? So, those are the kind of issues we find in this images. That how that they provide the both sides of this fish.

Or like I mean any of the images it is almost like I am mean the stage where you will be where one indulge into more and more like in-depth study of the flora and fauna. So then during this time we find like a similar kind of approach, we can also find in botany. Where the dissection and the cross sections those ones will be studied from the stem of the plant, the flower the fruit and everything else.

So, here we find like I mean it is not a cross section but I mean it is the entire fish. And how those are also sort of like I mean they respond to that kind of scientific study. So, here the removal of the background also suggests that how the object that we see here is the foremost important thing? And that is the reason there is no need for showing it in any other background.

So, the removal of the background also suggests that it is closeness to this kind of the scientific study. So, today we understand this images as art objects but perhaps the reason for which they were created. We can see the removal of the background also attest to it is importance as a in the field of documentation, archiving as well as for the scientific study of them.

So, these are the ways in which we find that you this is also a departure from the earlier approaches in the watercolour painting in the Indian subcontinent. That even though during the Mughal time period, we find that there are those minute studies of the plants and the animals and birds and so on. But this right now like I mean during the 18th and 19th century under the colonial rule, what we find is that?

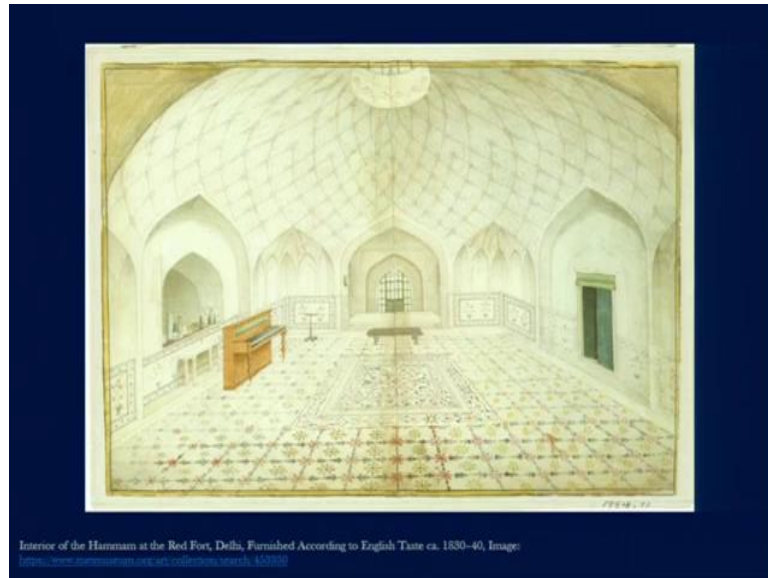
I mean there is this new kind of study in which to understand this physiological features of them. And sometimes getting into the getting beyond the skin. So, understand the skeletal structure and then like the details of the skin and then the veins and everything else. So, this is a new kind of study of the nature that we find that that arrived with the Western European people. And this is something that we also see that I mean how the practice of painting also assist them to go with it?

So, this for that reason these paintings as I have already mentioned that today, we understand them as part of the art making process in in 18th and 19th century. But we can see that I mean how this paintings were somewhat in between art which is appreciated for it is visual, for it is aesthetic value but also for it is scientific value. That I mean how this images can be studied by the people who are perhaps not present in Bengal to see them first-hand?

But somewhere else and they can interpret and they can have more like a comprehensive knowledge about the about the fish and the different kind of animals from this part of the Indian subcontinent. So, similarly the company paintings we find that I mean they are not just restricted in terms of their thematic. But they had a wide range of issues to address. Now, we what we find that that I mean those light patches of the watercolour, they are used.

And then very careful minute brush strokes of different degree those were employed for making the objects or the sights. But the thing is that, I mean we also find that I mean there are no bright colours.

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As like I mean, the ones we have seen in some of the miniature paintings for example, like the ones from Basholi from Mewar and from Deccan and so on. So, here we find much more subdued pastel like colours sombre tones so, those are the ones we find there. And that is also something, we can associate with the so called British taste and those are the ones we find that also being evident in this images.

So, as I have said that I mean in many of the sites like I mean in Calcutta in Patna in Tanjore and it might also be possible in Delhi. So, in this places what we find that? I mean perhaps there were some of the painters who were trained in the royal courts or their ancestors were trained in the royal courts for making miniature paintings. So, there we find that I mean some of those painters, some of those artists would be employed by the East India company for executing this images.

And that is the reason the kind of precision, the eye for detail and then like I mean the strong linearity those things something that we have studied in the miniature paintings are still present here. But then what we have is that? This they also have this strong orientation towards geometry and then of course this colour palette that I have already mentioned. So, those things and then the perspectival view, the single point perspectival view which is also something that we see that being celebrated in Western Europe.

So, some of this conventions, some of this intricacies of making this images would be different from what we have studied in the miniature paintings. So, in a way we find that this company paintings also are very hybrid in nature, where different kind of this the art styles, different

kind of style of making these images, different kind of material, knowledge they are all coming together to give life to this images.

Now, coming back to the content what we see in this particular image? So, this is the interior of a Hammam or like the bath, in the red fort in Delhi. So, what we see here is? That I mean there is the depiction of this Mughal era architecture, I mean the Hammam was built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. So, what we have here is? This the interior of this place where there are and of course that I mean one can see.

That I mean the perspectival view is very different from what we have studied in the miniature paintings. If in the miniature paintings we have multiple perspectival views some can be from the single point perspective. But then there are also like the bird's eye or the aerial view or there are like I mean many different kinds of this layered perspective. They are used in the single picture plane for conveying certain ideas.

Here, what we have is that? I mean as if the artist is standing right at this point and then the artist is observing everything from this point. So, whatever we see here we are almost seeing it through the eyes of the artist, it is a very different kind of approach from the miniature paintings. So, what is happening in this case is? That I mean this is also something we find in the renaissance paintings and the paintings those are done in Western Europe later on.

Where the subject position of the artist is imposed on to the paintings, by putting the this single point perspectival view. And so, the is the position of the artist through which the viewers also see the image. The viewers do not have like multiple perspectives to encounter the image or see it differently. Now, what else we find in this image is all the details that has been done.

And perhaps like I mean the most important part we find here is this, the tiled floor. And all the details of the tiles and then like I mean the at the centre, the way we have like I mean this the centrepiece, all are made in marble and then the inlay work. So, something that is also celebrated for the Shah Jahan's time period, So, these are some of the things we find and as we have already studied this marble inlay work or Parchin Kari in Taj Mahal or in the Tomb of Itimad-ud-Daulah.

So, similar kind of this the floor decoration or this marble inlay work, we find it here as well. Now, what else become different here? Is this is not just an interior but this is also an interior which is furnished according to the English taste. So, what does that mean? So that means that I mean during the end of 18th century, in the 19th century apparently many of this Mughal buildings or the sultanate buildings in Delhi.

And some of the other cities, they were rented or sold or given to the British resident to stay. And that is how we find that perhaps this is also the Hammam, either it was inhabited by British officials or it is a kind of a visual reconstruction of how it would look like if this is transformed into a habitable space? And that is according to the British taste. So, what we find here is that? There is a minimal use of furniture.

So, here we find there is a wooden piano and then here there is a bench that we find and apart from this bench and this wooden piano, perhaps there is this small it is a table like a small table like form. we also find it here. And then in this niche, in this here we have like I mean a number of bottles, perhaps the bottles made of glass and porcelain so, it is a display of different bottles here.

So, apart from this bottles, the piano and this bench we do not really see any other furniture in inside this place. And we know that I mean how this minimalistic approach to emphasize the serenity in this interior? At the same time to celebrate, the existing the marble inlay work, as well as like I mean you know the ceiling and everything. So, how to enhance the beauty of this places according to the British taste? So that is something we find it here.

Now, if we compare it with like I mean, the kind of images or perhaps like I mean, the interior scenes we find in the Mughal miniatures. So that will be very different here and the kind of interior since we find those will be shown with people there and different kind of activities and here all we see is this this deep silence or the serenity. So, something we find that how this aesthetic choice those are made?

And then transforming this existing architecture into something that is like I mean that is then taken over by the British? That marks a new era. And that is also something that is this even though this is just a visual but this visual has the power to talk about the political situation

during this time period. That how the land of the Indian subcontinent which already has its history, now that is being transformed according to the British taste?

So, this is some of the ways in which we can see that there are those deeper meanings in this company paintings. And why they have much value for historians for all of us today to you for us to understand, the situation, the socio-political cultural situation in the late 18th and 19th century. We will continue on this theme in the next lecture. Thank you.