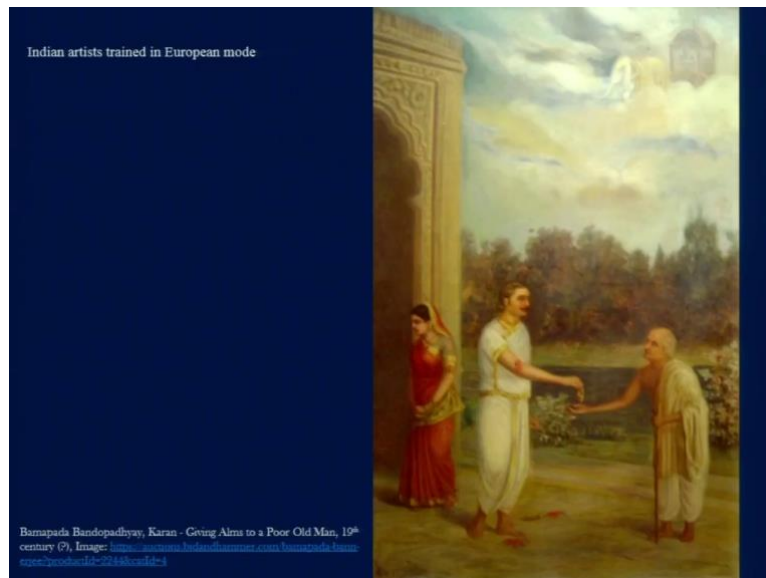


Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 44
Colonial Media - Part 3

Hello, everyone. I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are continuing our discussion on the new Colonial media. So, we have already started talking about the oil painting and here we will go more into that. So, the history of oil painting in the Indian subcontinent as we have seen that had started with the European painters that they have shown the way and they are the ones who have continued with painting portraits, painting landscapes and different events which hold much political and cultural significance.

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So, we see from the 1850s around that time the mid 19th century number of colonial art institutions that came into existence. So, for example, the Calcutta School of Art or later on which came to be known as the Government School of Art. And then like we also have the J. J School of Art in Bombay then also we have the Government School of Art in Madras and then the Mayo School of Art in Lahore.

So that kind of like those art institutions came into existence. Now, for the administrative purpose and also for the growth I mean that was also punctuated by the growth of and popularity of oil painting among the administrators, as well as the Indian royalty and the Indian

Elites. We find that I mean the colonial administrators felt the need for training the Indian painters or the Indian people, in the mode of oil painting.

So that they can serve the colonial administration as well as they can practice as a artists but trained in this new European mode of representation. So, for that reason we also find that during this time in the second half of the 19th century, there were some of the painters who were trained in this European mode of training and they started doing oil painting. So, we see this, painters were trained in the European style anatomy.

And they have also studied the replicas of the Greco-Roman Marbles and of course also like I mean they have also studied and copied various oil painting and other images from the Renaissance and the later times. So that is the reason we find that this new like I mean group of Indian painters who came to be known, as individual artists. So, they were the ones who we find that they have embraced this European medium that is oil painting.

At the same time, they have also incorporated this European the study of human anatomy. Then the single point perspective will view and implemented that to depict certain stories which have relevance for the South Asians or the people from the Indian subcontinent. So, this is one of the example like that so this is an image which is painted by Bamapada Bandopadhyay and this particular image that shows an episode from the Hindu epic Mahabharata.

In this particular image, we find which is made sometime in the 19th century perhaps in towards the end of 19th century. In this one, we see that there is this figure of Karan and he is stood there and the I mean he stands at the center of this image and give arms to this elderly man or a poor old man but then we also find that there is this woman who is dressed in this red and brocade saree and she sort of turns back towards the palace.

And then like I mean there is a reference to this palace which is very different from the landscape that is there in the most part of the image. So, it kind of shows that I mean they are at the threshold of this Royal Palace Complex and this the woman who is, presumably Karan's wife is turning back from this particular scene and moving towards the palace. And why that is happening is? Because that I mean whoever have known the story in Mahabharata.

So, they know that I mean this old man is not just an ordinary old man but the god, the king of the Gods, Indra himself. So, to suggest that connection we also see in the in the clouds. There is this almost this hidden figure of this Chariot which is drawn by Airavata. Airavata is this white elephant which is also the mount of the God of thunder Indra? So, this is something that we find that this is an image in which a particular scene from Mahabharata unfolds.

And here we have that I mean the figures who are drawn according to the European convention the anatomical convention, those are sort of implemented here. Also, we have the single point perspectival view that the viewers are at the same point where the artist had stood and from there the viewer can see the entire image. And then we also see that I mean how the different physiological features?

How the physiological feature of this old man has been depicted differently from this? This young king that is Karna and then also that I mean how certain features? For example, certain areas of these image has been highlighted like the figure of Karna and then like I mean the two other figures around him. They are the ones who have been highlighted and part of this porch which almost looks like I mean a remnant of the Mughal.

And later Mughal architecture we discussed Arch Gateway, so they are the ones which are highlighted in this image. Now, then like I mean this highlighted figures are complemented by this thick vegetation in the background. And the vegetation they do not have much specificity in them I mean even though they are done with detail but there are not too many different elements which draw the viewers' attention towards them.

So that is how they also make a background which will like I mean which will emphasize the importance of the figures who are standing in the foreground. So, those are some of the conventions, the artistic conventions that we also see them to be established in the European oil paintings. So, those things we find them to be present here as well. And then also the use of the sky even in this image, we find that there is this low line of horizon.

So, this is something that we have seen and already, as we have discussed that how this was? This particular visual character had arrived with the colonial visual culture and so. And then in the sky we have that there are clouds which sort of like I mean mask part of this blue sky and

then within the cloud, this almost hidden figure of this divine Chariot. That is there in this right corner which announces the identity of this old man who receives arm from a Karna.

So, these are some of the things we find that how there is this a tendency towards bringing these different modes of visual convention as well as like I mean some of the stories which might have been relevant for particular patrons all like I mean in particular like region in the Indian subcontinent. So, there are like I mean the regional specificity. Then like I mean there are stories like Mahabharata Ramayana which had been widely circulated across the subcontinent.

And then there are the European painting customs. So, all those things they come together in these oil paintings.

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This is another painting that we have here and this is an image which is we do not know about the painter. Now, something we also find that during this time that it is not just the painters who are trained in the art school but also, there were other painters, perhaps who had they have practiced oil painting during the late 19th century in Bengal and some of those oil paintings like this one that we have here.

They also they depict religious themes. So, for example, this one shows a particular religious theme which also had it is importance in Bengal and this particular image is called Kali Krishna and where we know that I mean how the goddess, Kali who is represented here is shown here

as a form which is an amalgamation between both Kali and Krishna? In other words, it is an assemblage of the Shakta and the Vaishnava philosophy.

So, both these sects were prominent in Bengal and historically, there have been fights. There have been debates between these communities and there were also some of the attempts in which like I mean it was suggested that both this path of devotion, they eventually marched to one and this is one image that sort of like I mean suggests this like I mean path of devotion.

So, this is something we can find that I mean it had. It is culturally historically, this particular theme had its importance in Bengal and this particular theme might not resonate with all other parts of the Indian subcontinent. Now, if we also see that the way in which the figures are constructed the rounded figures this almost like I mean this heavy block like figures. That is also something we find that it might have their like I mean their routes in the scroll painting tradition.

So that is not something that comes directly from the European artistic anatomy that also has their Regional Bengali routes. So, these are some of the things we find in which how a certain kind of like I mean this amalgamation of different art styles and different cultural connotations those happen in these images. Now, the other thing that I would also go into is that the exact way in which certain political relations or the episode between Britannia and the East those take place.

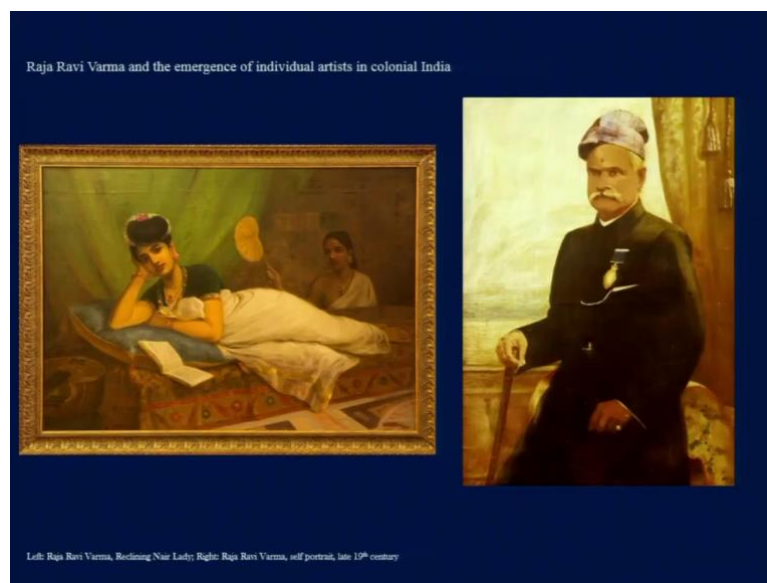
And how oil painting makes all those different episodes believable? So, this here as well like I mean the depiction of the real people in this like in this Bengali landscape and then the figure of Kali Krishna who is also situated among the real people and with all modulation and everything else. So, the way it has been depicted here so that also brings this particular episode close to life.

So, the devotees or they would definitely like to see their beloved deities to be more closer to the reality and that is the reason we find that how oil painted images of the Hindu gods and goddesses? They also gained prominence during this time period. So, oil painting for both the political portraiture for like I mean for those constructed realities the way we have already discussed them.

So, here there is a different kind of constructed reality that we find and then like I mean how the devotees also respond to that? So, this is also that I mean this kind of images. We can also think that how these images also gained a prominence over time? And they also paved the way for the calendar friends like I mean the kind of the images of the gods that we see in around us today.

So, these are some of the images from the 19th century. They have started the custom of making the god figures much more closer to the life.

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So, from there I mean we will get into discussing another artist. So, if we have already considered like looking into the artist who were trained in this colonial art institutions. Then there were also people like Raja Ravi Varma and then who was a primarily a self-taught artist. But then he also was considered as one of the first individual artist in the colonial India. So, what happened with Ravi Varma?

So, Raja Ravi Varma he was born into this royal family of Travancore which is close to Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala and we see that I mean from the very early age. He was interested in learning this European mode of painting. So, here is a portrait of Raja Ravi Varma. It is a self-portrait and then what we see that? I mean he had made the effort of learning the artistic anatomy and I mean of course, the European anatomy.

And he is also someone who had done extensive model study? So, by model study this is something that we can think about that I mean for example, here we have this one image in the

left side, where there is this reclining Nair lady. So, Nair is this caste group from Kerala and we see that I mean she is draped in this Kasavu saree and with this one on the top of her head which is very typical of Kerala and part of Tamil Nadu as well.

So, this is what we have here is this a particular person who is represented in this portrait and perhaps Ravi Varma had made the person sit or like I mean reclined in front of him to paint this. So, this is a kind of practice in which we find that I mean earlier some of the like I mean the painters who specialize as portrait. They would do it for the Royal people for the elite but not necessarily they would have like I mean this models being present in their studio to be painted like I mean to be taken as reference.

So, the model painting like I mean painting after the models this custom was very much there in Western Europe and with the colonial art education that had also arrived in the Indian subcontinent. And Ravi Varma is one of the first people from the South Asian origin, whom would find to use this particular way of visual expression extensively in his images. So, in some of the images in the earlier images, we would find that I mean how he would portray this models?

Like I mean the way we have this reclining Nair lady but then we also find that how he had used the models for constructing some of the mythological scenes? And they all almost looked like some kind of stage performance. So, these are the ways in which we find that Ravi Varma had taken up on this European or this Western mode of expression and had excelled in it.

And then pushed further the boundary of like I mean the limitations of these expressions and how to make it more suited for the audience in South Asia? And that is perhaps one of the reasons why Ravi Varma, is considered as one of the most important artists in the history of Art in Indian subcontinent? So, there is so in the career of Raja Ravi Varma what we find?

That he was a tray after he had his extensive training and practice in oil painting and portraiture then he had also served as the court painter in many princely courts. I mean not many like I mean several princely courts in the in India and here we have one of the one such portrait. So, this is Maharaja Sayajirao the third in Baroda and so this is an oil painting by Raja Ravi Varma. So, if we see the visual customs that I mean what all we find in this image that what is represented?

So that particular pillar that I have already mentioned, we see these pillars in this one side of the image it almost like I mean sort of blocks the end and also like directs the viewers gaze towards the center of the image where the main figure is standing. And then we also have this large velvet curtains in the background which is also a marker of aristocracy. So, this is there and then in the foreground we find this Maharaja Sayajirao the third he is well dressed and he stands in the center of this image.

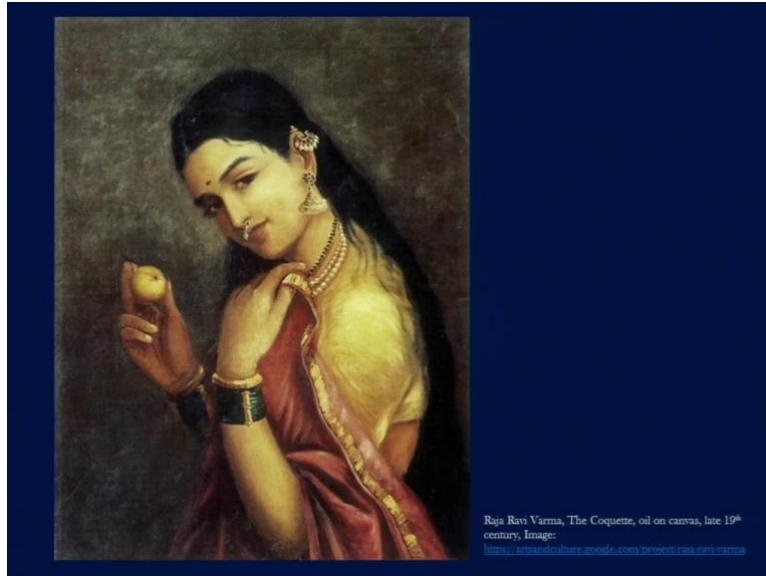
And then in the side there is this table which is covered with this velvet like or silk table cover and then there are books and there is an ink pot. So, these are some of the science in which we see that how the identity of this rulers or the sitters? Were also inscribed not through words or not through written expression but through the visual expression. So, in one hand as part like as a marker of his reality he holds the sword in his left hand.

But he also places his arm carefully on the table where books and ink pots and everything else is there. So that means that he also positions himself as a man of learning and as we know today that I mean how a Maharaja Sayajirao was also very important in terms of like building library, building the a huge collection of art objects and eventually, like I mean how those were like I mean they contributed to the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, after the independence of India.

So, this is something that we find that how this particular language of oil painting, in which things are made believable. So, in there how the sitters they also tactfully addressed their interest and also like have been tactfully inserted their identity in this images or something that they wanted the viewers to see about them. How those things are implied through the different objects or their position in this images.

So, these are the ways in which we find that how oil painting was used and people like Ravi Varma had like utilize, the language of oil painting to sort of work with that.

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This is another image we find that and as I have already mentioned that Ravi Varma had extensively used models for a painting these images. In this one, we find this particular image is called the Coquette and which basically means a woman who a flirtatious woman. And in this image, what we find that there is this woman and she holds a fruit in her hand, a ripe fruit in her hand.

And in a way that how there are those sort of like underlying erotic and sexual connotations in this. And at the same time, we what all we see in this image? Is that this unidentified woman, who is definitely a model for Ravi Varma she sort of like I mean manages her falling pallu look from her shoulder and then like I mean she also gazes at the viewers with a hint of smile in her face.

It is almost like an inviting gesture so and then like I mean the fruit is something that is also is understood with like I mean with fulfilment with also like I mean with sexual desire and eroticism. So, those things are there those are symbolically present here in this image as well. Now, what else we see in this image are also that? How the details of the jewellery and then like the character of this silk garment had are also been depicted.

But then all those things are placed against this unidentified background and this background is almost that I mean it does not really have any specific character for which the viewers gaze falls onto this woman. And but the thing is that I mean what is there in this image? That there is this super play of light and shade. So, there is a particular direction through which the light falls onto this figure and we all can see that.

And for that reason, certain areas like the shoulder part of a face and then very importantly, this fruit in her hand, all those things are illuminated. And for that reason, what happens here is that? The other places are also sort of like I mean been modelled accordingly. So, part of the image we will see that I mean how the mid tone had sort of like I mean complemented this highlighted areas?

And then there are places like this falling hair which has this dark tone. So, it is kind of like I am in this superb arrangement of mid-tone, dark tone and the highlights and their distribution across the picture plane is something that make the viewers eye travel across like this painted canvas. So, those are the reasons what we find that? Raja Ravi Varma was not just interested in terms of like learning this technique, understanding the direction of the light and the anatomy studying models.

But he was also very much invested in how to compose an image? And in this particular image if we see that this is a cropped image, it is not really that I mean the woman is not shown in it is entirety. So, this kind of abruptly cropped images are not something that we find usually in the earlier Indian paintings. So, if you think about like the miniature paintings and all the only places where we find the bust or like the portraits of the images.

Where there are like Jharokha or like I mean a portrait which is seen through a window but we do not really see this kind of abruptly cropped images. So that is also something that we find that perhaps like I mean that shows perhaps a close correlation with not only studying the models but also how this kind of framing is there in photography? So, here we are not addressing photography directly in this painting and we do not know that.

I mean if photograph if this person was first photographed and then sort of translated into painting. But I am suggesting that the language of cropping the language of framing this figure in this particular way has it is reference in the photographic practices. And by the end of 19th century that also made it is appearance will get into more on this issues also the role of photography and painting in the next lecture. Thank you.