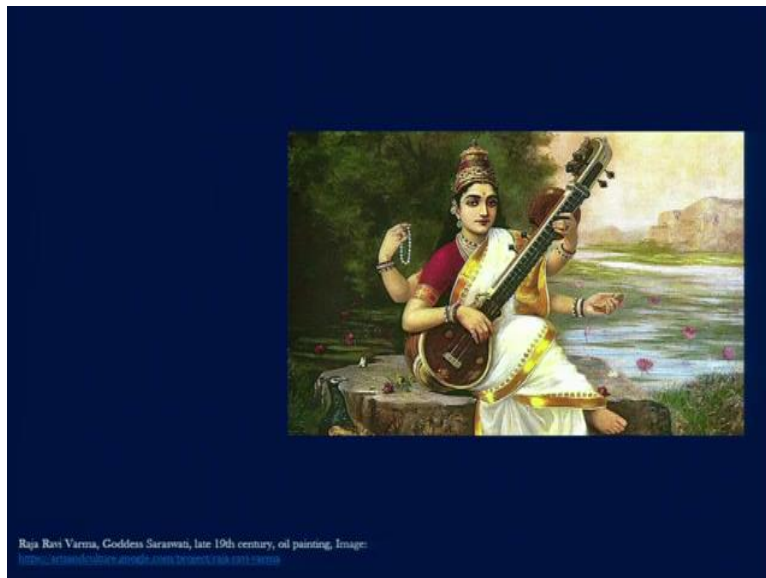


Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
Prof. Rajarshi Sengupta
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology – Kanpur

Lecture – 45
Prolific Painter

Hello everyone, I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are talking about the painter this prolific painter Raja Ravi Varma and his contributions.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:25)



So, as I have mentioned that I mean he is one, he is this painter who had excelled the skill of making portraits and also model studies. And he had not only just used the models for depicting certain domestic scenes or just for different kind of like moods. But he had also used models for recreating certain kind of mythological scenes and scenes from the Hindu epics and so on.

So, here there is this image of goddess Saraswati and even though like I mean we see a cropped image of that but it is not really a cropped image. I mean we already discussed the use of cropped images in Raja Ravi Varma's work. But this image is not specifically cropped image but for the quality of the image I preferred this particular image here. So, what happens in this?

We find that I mean there are models and Ravi Varma had used models for and made them sit in this particular posture. So that I mean he can paint images of the Hindu gods and goddesses. So, this particular image of Saraswati that we find and she is placed in this natural setting. She

sits on this piece of rock and then there is a that there is a peacock, who which sort of like I mean looks towards the goddess.

And then in the background we find this lake where there are leaves and lotuses. And then there is also large tree in the background which sort of gives a background when which sort of like I mean helps emphasizing the figure of Saraswati in the foreground. Now, what else we see in this image? That there are particular references to the costume and the jewellery in part of Maharashtra and Southern India and those would make repeated appearances in Ravi Varma's paintings.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:41)



So, for example this is another image and as I have already mentioned that how there are those mythological scenes? So, in Ravi Varma, he not only just painted the portraits or like I mean the small scale images. But I mean he had also painted these large narrative scenes in which we see that some of the most dramatic events of the Hindu epics for example, from Ramayana and Mahabharata had unfolded.

So, this is an image this is the Sita's bhumi pravesh and in this one we see that how there is this prominent figure of Rama, who sited on this royal throne. And he has this expression of bewilderment in his eyes and his right hand is also like, I mean gestured in a way that I mean there is an unfinished a conversation that is there. And then what else we see that? There is the figure of Devi Sita and she is gazes at Rama.

And then like I mean part of her saree, the pallu of a saree sort of like I mean flows in a gesture that she is in a motion to go inside the earth. And already like the Earth goddess, she is shown here, she sort of like a bit lovingly embraces Sita and she sort of like I mean take Sita to the earth. Like I mean, the earth has split open and then Sita had desired to like I mean go inside the earth.

So that is the moment when we see that I mean all this events are unfolding. So, that right beside drama, we also see the twin sons that is Lava and Kusha. And then there are these two figures, they are almost in the darkness and they also have this expression of bewilderment in their eyes, astonishment in their eyes. And in their physical expression that how did this miracle happen?

And this is something that was not really expected or desired but it eventually happened. And in the background we see this other figure, who is in this pensive mood, perhaps Lakshmana and who mourns Sita's Bhumi Pravesha. So, this is all we see there and then here also we see that how there is this big pillar and that sort of like I mean and then there is this it is a fence or part of a balcony through which like I mean the rest of the palace complex is seen.

And which is an imaginary reconstruction of the palace of Ayodhya. So, if these are the things that we find there that some of those European customs of using a thick column and then having a window to the exterior wall that is shown. And then all the other things those are also unfolding here, we see that I mean it is not just a single source of light that is used but it is almost like a very strategic and dramatic light.

That is like I mean that just highlights, the images of Rama and Sita. And so, this is something that we cannot really just claim to have it is root in the European like I mean the custom of showing the single direction of light. But this perhaps also comes from the theatrical performances and the use of this highlights in the theatrical performances in the stage settings.

So, Raja Ravi Varma as we all also know that I mean in in Maharashtra, he had worked in Bombay. He worked very closely with the theatre performances and from there we see that I mean this stage like setting. And at the same time, some of those theatrical gestures, postures, expressions they also come very prominently in Ravi Varma's images. So and then also like I mean the character of the light.

As well here, we see that how the character of the light is also something that is beyond, the natural like the setting. It is much more theatrical than the way we would see the sunlight falling on this figures. So, these are some of the ways in which we find that how there are those different kind of visual and audio visual references though those appear in Ravi Varma's work and then like the theatricality.

So, the in the theatre performance, the theatre performance is something where visuality and then audio and then like the movement of the body, everything come together to sort of like I mean bring life to those performances. Whereas in a painting, we do not really have the audio components, we do not really have the direct movement of the body. But what happens in that? Is that I mean all those components, the audio component and then like I mean this high degree of dynamism.

All those things are expressed through the visuals and that is the reason we find that certain decisions are been made certain strategies had been taken. And but those strategies are also playful, it does not really look like that there is an imposition of those theatrical quality in this image. But the merge seamlessly with the theme and they contribute largely to creating a mood a of like I mean of this particular episode.

So, these are some of the things that we find that how Ravi Varma had excelled? Not only like I mean not only the European customs or like I mean interpreting this mythological, the Hindu mythological themes. But also had thought through the importance of different media. And then how to bring the essence of performance into the still surface of painting.

So, those are some of the experiments that we find in Ravi Varma's work which all also add to the complexity of his process, at the same time the complexity of his thought process. Now, another thing that we find in Ravi Varma's images, is that many of his celebrated paintings, like I mean the images which were initially made as paintings for patrons and patrons all across the Indian subcontinent.

And then not necessarily just the Hindu epics but sometimes from the epic poems and then also from the literary works of Kalidasa and so on. So, those kind of works we also find that I mean when he painted them initially then those paintings were they gained such popularity.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:22)



That after a point that Ravi Varma decided to make reproduction of those paintings in this very specific lithographic technique which is called Oleograph. So, we have already seen that how Oleograph had was functioning in the mid and late 19th century. So, many of the lithographic presses for example, the Calcutta Art Studio, Chore Bagan Art Studio in Calcutta then the Chitrashala studio in Puna.

So, all those studios had shown the possibility of the lithographic prints. And the way in which like different kind of this the shading use of half tone and all those things can be implemented in lithograph. In the printing technique which is not always possible in etching or in the relief printing techniques. So that was something that was picked up by Ravi Varma and eventually we see the establishment of the Ravi Varma press.

And then there we find that this chromolithograph prints were produced. And since lithograph gives the kind of the modulation, the kind of this the smudging effect and different kind of like I mean the light and shade everything all those things lithograph allows the artist to experiment with all those different characters. And that is the reason Ravi Varma found that to be very close to the expression of oil painting.

And that is the reason we find that how the Ravi Varma press had managed to make all this highly complicated, technically highly complicated lithographic prints with multiple colours, like the ones we have on screen. And then after those prints were made then we find that those were actually put a film of oil, of linseed oil was actually placed on the top of each print.

So, this filming was I mean this oil filming that particular process is something that is known as oleograph, where this oil film was placed on the top of this print. But it is not just simply placing oil on the top of the print because that will make the print soaked and it will deteriorate the print. So, this is a particular mood in which like I mean this oil film thing was placed on this prints and that happened in Germany.

So, it is like I mean assume that how the prints were made in India and then they were sent to Germany for this oil filming at least in the initial stage and then they were sent back to India. Now, for this oil film on the top of the prints they had this lustre and there is a reason like I mean the shine of the oil painting that would have there in this oleograph prints as well.

And that is the reason this particular, I mean of course that is the reason they are called oleograph but that is also the reason why it gained a new kind of clientele? The people who would not be able to acquire oil paintings, they will not be able to, the people who cannot afford oil paintings for their high price. They can afford to have this oleograph prints at their home and at a much lesser price.

And so that is how like I mean the distribution of the Ravi Varma prints was across the Indian subcontinent. So, this was something that was happening and we also find that I mean Ravi Varma's this mythological scenes, this highly dramatic and narrative mythological scenes. So, for example this one that we have in the right side of the screen that is it is an episode from Mahabharata where Krishna played the envoy.

And then he made an effort to stop the war which did not happen eventually. so, this is particular episode from Mahabharata that we see here. And here what happens is that? This kind of the setting and then like the all the figures who are modelled after the real human beings and then all the other details of the fabric, textile, architecture and everything they make this particular scenes believable.

And then when they were reproduced by the Raja Ravi Varma press then reproduced in numbers and then they were distributed all across. So that is how we find that this image has played a huge role in popularizing the Hindu mythological tales. And that is also something

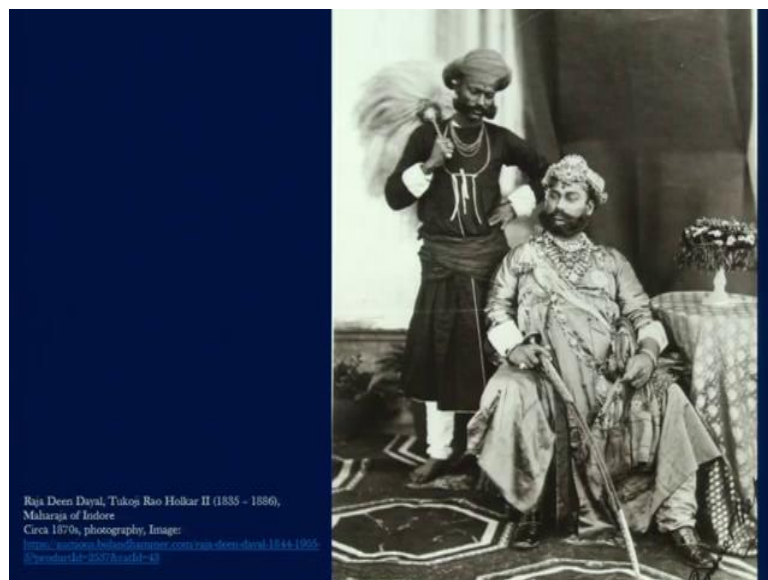
that we would find that how this Ravi Varma prints would be used for different advertisements and in the calendars the way we also see the calendar prints today?

So, just a clarification that I mean not just Ravi Varma's prints which were the mythological prints which were used for the advertisements as well as for calendars. So, we also have prints from like Calcutta Art Studio from Chitrashala Studio, those were also used for similar purposes. However, the dedication in making this constructing this scenes by Ravi Varma that was something that made his images very different from the other lithographic images.

The chromolithographic images which were available in the market and that is the reason we also find that why Ravi Verma's images demand like I mean a different kind of attention for understanding them and their impact their long-standing impact on the Indian visual culture? So, from Ravi Varma as I have already mentioned that in the later half of the 19th century, we already find the use of photography.

And the use of photography is also something that we can consider, as part of this new colonial media, I mean this is something that is definitely not part of the painting technique.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:06)



But we can see this that I mean how this the use of photography also transform the visual culture during this particular time? So, in photography we find that the early photographic experiments those took place in in 1830's in 1840's in in France and part of Western Europe. And then slowly it became much more established practice for documentation. So, it started with like I mean the photographing practices in the studio or in the indoor setup.

And then we see that I mean how the portables the photographic unit those that came into existence and then people can carry the entire photographic unit to different sites? And that is how like I mean the documentation of different architectural site and then like I mean, the natural sites and then like people, community and all those different kind of things those started taking place in the late 19th century.

So, with that we also find that in the in the later half of 19th century, in the second half of 19th century, photography had also arrived in the Indian subcontinent. And some of the European photographers like Beetho and all, they have travelled across the subcontinent and they have photographed various sites. So, in that line we find that in the 1860's and more in the 1870's this one particular person Lala Deen Dayal, who was born into this Jain family near Meerut in Uttar Pradesh.

So, he became one of the most important photographers in the history of Indian visual culture in 19th century. So, what we find there is that in the 1870's we find that he was, he started practicing with the technique of making photographs. And initially he was operating from Indore and then within a year or so, of him taking a photograph, he got the opportunity to travel with the colonial administrators and the rulers for across the subcontinent.

And during that time, he had documented that their arrival in different places but also with time he had excelled his technique. And then what we find that, afterward he had established his own studio in Indore, his own photographic studio in Indore. And then in the 1880's in the 1890's around that time we find that he had also travelled to many other parts of the Indian subcontinent and several princely states.

So then perhaps like I mean we can perhaps, the most important one was the state of Hyderabad and so but anyways I mean we will come to Hyderabad. But before that I mean here is this one image and this perhaps comes from 1870's in the early stage of his photographs. And here we find that Tukojirao Holkar II so, he like I mean he is the Maharaja of Indore. So, as I have mentioned that he had his photographic studio in Indore.

So, we see that I mean how the this portrait painting tradition that was now slowly being replaced by photography. So, photography is something for which they come in the ruler would

have to sit there only once, instead of like I mean giving the artist sitting for like multiple times. But we see that I mean how the this particular like the arrangement, the pictorial arrangement that is still sort of care is the references of the oil painting tradition.

So, for example if we see this ruler who is sited in the centre of this image in his royal attire then there is a table which also sort of like I mean it blocks the viewers gaze. Something that we have already seen like the table or a column would do that in the oil paintings. And then behind him, we have this attendant figure who is in the gesture of like I mean using a fly whisk to fan the king.

So, this is also a marker of his reality that he is wealthy enough to have multiple attendants and they would serve different purposes for him. So, this is some of the things we find that how like I mean instead of having a pillar this this attendant figure who is clad in this dark costume, almost serves the purpose of this pillar to sort of block the viewers gaze and also like direct the viewers attention to this central figure.

Now, some of the other things we also find in this photograph is that they are not looking directly at the viewers. So, in photograph since there is this tendency of capturing a moment. So, there were like different kind of experiments that in some photographs, we find that people would look directly in the eyes of the viewers. And in other photographs like this one, we find that they are almost caught in this action.

Where they are gazing at something else or they are almost in the day to day action and then like the photographer had casually captured it. I mean of course, it is not a casual captured this is a well-planned photographic arrangement. But like I mean this particular way in which the eyes of the sitter like the royalty that gazes towards this direction and then this person looks downward.

And also, not really in a gesture of being like I mean just in attention in the straightforward like strictly vertical fashion. So, those things add to a sense of movement and it is almost like, how these two figures are caught into in their day to day activity and the photographer has just captured it. So, it brings this immediacy to the viewers. So, the kind of the constructed reality that the oil paintings had for the 3D modulation, also for their lifelike quality.

And in the photographs, what we find that I mean this particular lifelike quality is enhanced? And then this immediacy to the sitters between the sitter and the viewer was also established in this images.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:37)



Now, as I have already mentioned that I mean perhaps Raja Deen Dayal or like I mean he was given the this title of Raja by then like I mean so, when we see that I mean his career. And perhaps one of the most important phase of his career was in the late 1880's and 1890's when he served for the Nizam of Hyderabad. And so, what we find that? He had not only just captured various court activities.

But he had also captured different sites in the city of Hyderabad and different part of the state of Hyderabad. So, some of the archaeological sites, some of the historical sites so, there are so, he had captured portraits, architecture, court events, political events and so on. So that way we find that there is this extensive range he had covered through his photographs. And of course, like I mean the framing and positioning of the people with the and their relationship to the architecture and everything.

All those things are carefully constructed. And that is the reason what we find that I mean Raja Deen Dayal, was a person who had the technical mastery. At the same time he was also a person who had excelled the skill of composing the picture and arranging the different elements in the picture to have the most efficient view of them.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:13)



So, with that when we try to conclude this session, I just point to certain aspects of it. So, if we see that I mean the arrival of the new media during the colonial time period. We see how watercolour is one of the tool for which was used for documentation that can be the botanical documentation that can be documentation of the people that can be documentation of the site.

And how that also emphasized this eyewitness, like I mean this evidence like a quality in them? And then when we move towards the use of oil painting and then how oil painting was used primarily by the European painters for making portraits? Like for example, this portrait by Tilly Kettle. And then also some of the important political encounters or some of the sites which of the landscape and so on, those are also part of their expression.

So, those were employed in this images for documentation as well as recording this sites and to make them close to the reality. And then we have also looked into that how this expression of oil painting? And then like the European anatomy, the use of light and then the distance perspective view and all those different things. Those were learned and sort of internalized by artists like Ravi Varma, Raja Ravi Varma.

And then he had also imbibed certain theatricality into those images and by all those things he had also he had implemented this knowledge into representing, the Hindu mythological themes among many other themes which were pioneering. And that also showed a new direction for the Indian artist to function in the art market, as well as, he had also popularized the way the images of the gods they would stay in the Indian homes.

Not only during his time but many in the next century and so on. So, with that we would conclude the session. Thank you.