

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

Lecture – 49
Daily Practices and Nationalism

(Refer Slide Time: 00:22)



Hello everyone. I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are continuing our discussion on daily practice and nationalism. So, in the last lecture we have discussed about Nandalal Bose's contribution and this alternative mode of art education which was promoted by Rabindranath Tagore in his school in Santiniketan. So, what we see that Nandalal Bose as the first principal of Santiniketan had done that there were a few things that he was known as the master or this beloved guru by his disciples and students.

So, what he did was that he did not make a distinction between various different practices. So, this is one example that we have, this is an untitled drawing on paper and in this drawing what we find that there is this ink drawing in which there are those trees which are made and each of these trees they have human faces. So, there are those flowers which have the human faces, and this might actually come from one of the Bengali stories that there were those 7 brothers and sisters who were born as those these plants.

So, this is something that we find that in Nandalal Bose's drawings, in one hand he was made drawings or paintings which had themes from the Hindu, mythology from historical events and

everything. And then on the other hand we also see he made drawings and paintings which were closely connected to book illustrations. And then we also see how his drawings had also contributed to making floor designs among many other different practices.

So, floor design or Alpona is another practice which is prevalent in various parts of Bengal and it is also something that is done with rice paste and it is rice paste which is diluted in water and then the rice paste is used with a very simple tool like a stick or sometimes it is just with a blob of cotton and then that is used for drawing on the earthen floor. So, when the rice paste dries, then like it becomes white and the earthen floor is already with the earthy tone.

So there is a contrast between the float design and its background, so that is how these Alponas are created. So, some of the counterparts of Alpona can be found in different other parts of India, in Orissa, in Tamil Nadu in Andhra Pradesh and so on. So, in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh we have kolam where instead of like rice paste, it is the rice powder that is used for drawing onto the surface.

So, what happens that Nandalal Bose when he studies or when he appreciates some of these local practices like Alpona, he does not discourage them, but he also sees that how the Alpona can feed into his work, at the same time he can contribute to making some of those these floor decorations. So, we see that how his intervention also allowed more and more students to take up Alpona for doing decorations during the festivals, also during theatrical performances.

So, this image that we see in here even though this is a drawing and it is not an Alpona, but some of the ideas for example the kind of symmetry that we find in this floor designs, for example in this image we see this clear division of the entire picture plane at the centre like this vertical division and then here how in the apex there is a bunch of flowers so that also marks it differently from the others from this hemispherical shape.

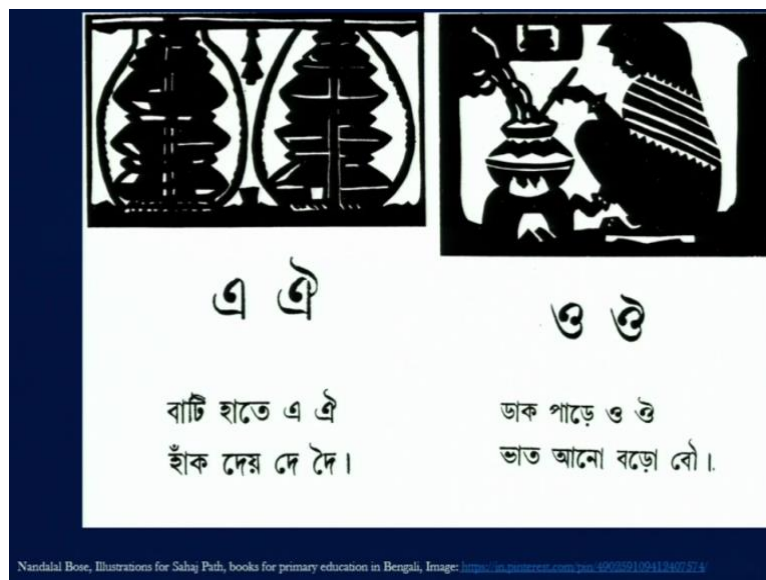
So, that is something we find this kind of design principles have perhaps been imbibed from alpona and different other craft practices of Bengal. And it is not necessarily from learning about the precolonial art practices or other art practices, but this has something to do with the craft practices. And even here the way the symmetry is maintained by showing this projection here and here.

So these are also some of the signs in which we find that how the symmetry that is learned from the artisanal works is successfully imbibed into his drawings. And at the same time, when we see that the character of the lines if we see in the artisanal works the uniformity of the lines are maintained and then the symmetry precision, all those things are given priority. So, those things are challenged here for sure.

Then we see that there are those swift lines which are used for making the forms, in some places that darkness is created by adding extra ink but this is not really done in all parts of the image. So, the characters of the line, this swiftness of the brushstrokes, these are something that we find that is perhaps different from the artisanal sectors that is something we can closely associate with the freehand drawing which were taught in the art institutions.

Of course, not in the colonial art institution, but in Santiniketan. So, these are some of the things we find that his drawing or his overall approach towards making images was something that was in between understanding art, understanding craft, understanding the institutional mode of art making, at the same time understanding the daily practices of making different kinds of artisanal works.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:09)



So, with that we also see that he had written several books or like the booklets one can say and some of the booklets are meant for students to know more about art in India and then there are some of the booklets which are there for people to copy and learn about different kinds of historical Indian images. And one would be perhaps the example is Rupavali. So in Rupavali there are those several booklets there.

Which are there for students to copy them to learn about different kinds of gestures, postures and balance in the figure, what all bends can happen in the body, how to find rhythm in the movement, all those things. So, those attempts we find Nandalal Bose's nonetheless had contributed to. Now the other thing that was also very significant was this one project that is called Sahaj Path which was Rabindranath Tagore 's project.

And Rabindranath Tagore wanted this particular book project for primary education where like the Bengali alphabets were taught to the young learners. So, what we see there each of those alphabets and all these alphabets were made part of a poetry here in the lower part of these pages and then those were associated with image on top. These images were developed by Nandalal Bose. So, Nandalal Bose was involved in making not only the drawings, but also he made them into linocut.

So, linocut is a relief printmaking process in which we find those lino sheets which were produced industrially they were utilized for making this, this relief blocks and then they were inked and printed. Now what we see here for relief printmaking, also for the purpose of people to learn from these images, there was a need for bold imagery, so something that would not have too many details and that can be understood by all people.

It is not just we are talking about people who are trained in the art institutions, but it is a book which is meant for all households that is the reason the images had to be simple but at the same time they need to convey the idea that is already there in the poetry and then it should also something that can be understood by all people. So, those things we find that in Nandalal Bose's practice that on the one hand, he was a highly skilled painter and drawer.

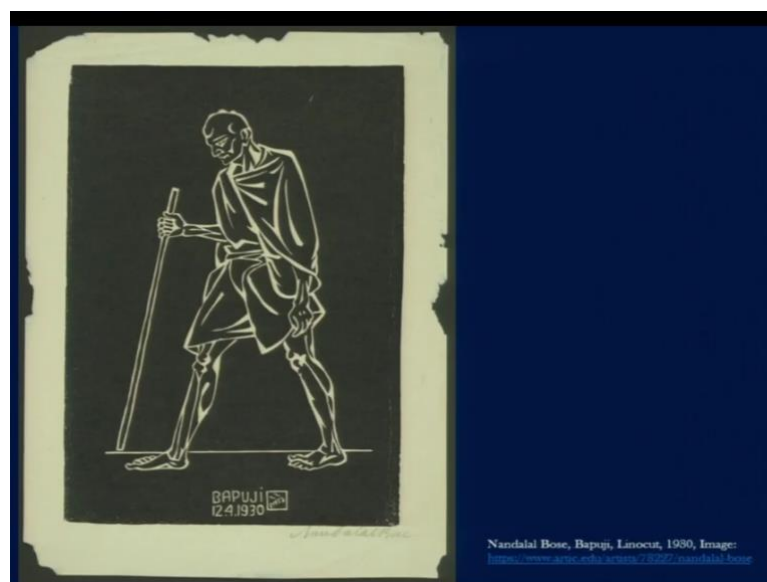
And then on the other hand he was also very much invested in teaching art to the students in Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan. But at the same time, he was also extending his practice to think how these images can be part of the daily lives of the young learners. So, extending the reach of art that is something we find and it is definitely it is a collaborative project between Tagore and Nandalal Bose in which we find that how this simple form of poetry and these images they can go side by side and they contribute to this overall learning atmosphere.

What we also see in these images is the superb distribution of positive and negative space. So, how there is course, when we talk about relief printmaking linocut, then we only have provision for the simple prints, we only have provision for this one colour, and everything needs to be conveyed with that, and in this one we see that how the same, colour is used for making the shape of this hut here and then also making this earthen oven and this small like I mean this stool for sitting.

And then of course this pot for cooking and the smoke that comes out of it. And of course, we definitely see that the same black colour is used for the carving the silhouette of this woman who cooks. So, all that I am trying to say is that within this limitation even though all these different objects and the figure needed to be carved on the same lino sheet on the same surface, but the character of these different kinds of objects.

For example like the pot, how the pot is different from the oven, how the oven is different from this airy smoke that comes out of the pot and then of course how that smoke is different from the solid figure of the woman, so all these different kind of objects and figures are understood by Nandalal Bose and they are superbly depicted in these images.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:02)



Now, another example of Nandalal Bose's linocut would be the superb image of Mahatma Gandhi and this one that came from 1930. So, 1930 as we have already discussed, that 1930 was the year when Mahatma Gandhi he announced the salt march and by that time that Nandalal Bose had made this image, by the time we find perhaps that Gandhi was already involved in the salt march or perhaps he was in the jail.

And what we see in this image is that unlike the image that we have seen earlier, how the background was cooked out for having this negative space around the main figure, here the background is kept dark and only the strokes of the linocut tool was used for carving out the image onto this lino plate on the surface. And by that what we find here is this image of Mahatma Gandhi and Gandhi whom we see he is recognizable from his physical features.

And then he also wears this humble dhoti, which is above his knees, something that was also a very conscious choice of Gandhi that he wanted to wear something that is that is more recognizable as a cloth of the workers, the agricultural laborers, the artisans and commoners. And then his upper body is covered with another piece of fabric, but just a simple fabric, it is not tailored or anything else.

And then we see he holds a stick which is also a characteristic of Gandhi and then the stick is not something that is also not part of any kind of violent movement, but it is for him to support his walking because as we know he had taken up these various marches in which he had walked extensively for which this stick was his constant companion for all these different activities.

So, we see that when he is shown here in the gesture of walking, so he is not shown here as an icon who stands and faces the audience, but he is shown here involved in his own work and that is this tireless walking and tireless struggle of overthrowing the British government. So, this is the reason what we see he is almost like engrossed in his own thoughts and when he is in the process of walking, he is moving, he is not stable, he is not somewhere who is stagnant.

So, these are some of the characteristic features that we find. Also see the kind of lines those are used, so these lines are something that we can think that how some of the characteristics of his drawings, for example if we consider this particular drawing on the left side where this calligraphic quality of the lines are emphasized, here that lines come back. So, for example if we think about the line which sort of marks his shoulder, so the depth here is much more than when the line sort of falls into to suggest his arm.

So, this is also something this very strategic, at the same time this playful gesture to play with the depth in the line, this bringing the calligraphic quality in the line is something that attributes to the dynamism of the image. So, if the entire image was executed with only uniform lines,

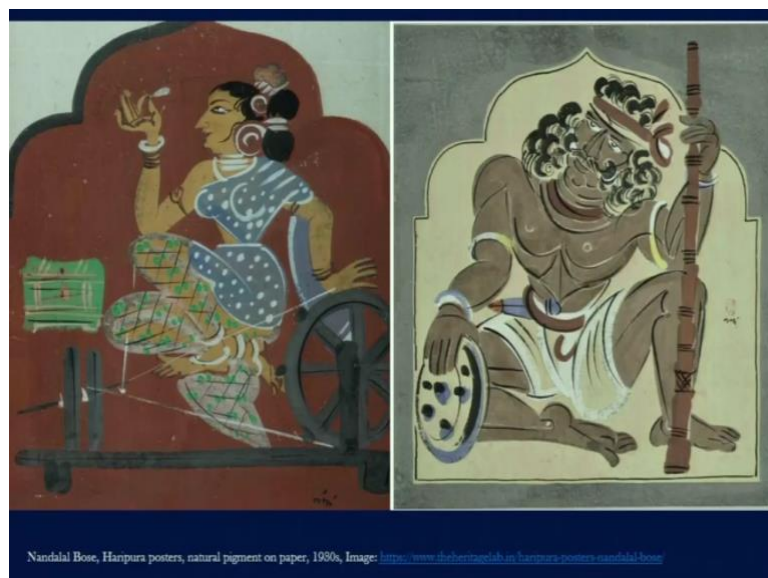
then that dynamism in this image, the sense of movement that is there in the image might not have been there. So, the character of the line is very important.

And these bold lines are achieved by using the lino cut tools, which scoops out the lino matrix from the from the plate and then that is how like these negative areas, these white areas are produced. And then of course as we know in a block then it is rolled with ink and then a paper is placed onto that to take a print out of it, so that is how the print is taken. So, these are some of the things we need to consider that how each and every detail.

Sometimes these are just very economical, but at the other times we also see that how this very careful, at the same time playful approaches towards understanding a person understanding humans but then also their internal strength, their internal characters is expressed. So, I would say in Nandalal Bose's practice, all these things came together because of his dedication towards understanding art as part of life.

It is not something that is just restricted to the institution and then alive being different from that. And that is how we also see these various activities that he had taken up over the years had reflected the diversity, the various reaches of his practice.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:16)



Now, this is another set of images that Nandalal Bose had produced and these are called the Haripura posters. And Haripura posters were the ones which were made in the 1930s. So there was this Haripura Congress in this small village called Haripura in Gujarat in 1938 and for that

reason Mahatma Gandhi of course, he was the one who had called for this congress. So he also asked Nandalal Bose to make posters for this Haripura conference.

So after Mahatma Gandhi's request, Nandalal Bose agreed to make 84 posters. So, in his supervision he made initial drawings, in some cases we find he also made the entire paintings, but in other cases we also find that he had collaborated with his students to finish the paintings and that is how 84 paintings were made which were used as posters for this Haripura Congress. Now, what happened, what is so special about the Haripura posters?

Now, if we see there was also a drive towards understanding what is India or how we understand the land. Now, this idea is something that was also nurtured by Gandhi in his lifelong commitment and if we see some of the early attempts that he had made, for example when he promoted the use of khadi in the early 1920s and then like in 1930 the salt march, so these are all different things as something that is not situated in the urban spaces, but in the rural India.

And he was deliberately in favour of that because he understood that the urban centres in India are only handful, but the majority of the land, the entire Indian subcontinent are full of the villagers and then all various occupational groups, different people who contribute to the society are mostly situated in the villages that is the reason he had his he has put much stress in understanding the life of the rural areas in India.

And by that he also meant how different kinds of occupational groups are there and how those occupations are also part of the daily life of different communities. So, for that reason we see this philosophy is also reflected in Haripura posters. So, in one hand, we find that this Gandhian philosophy of the rural sites as the sites of importance in the Indian subcontinent is playing out in these images.

But at the same time, Nandalal Bose's commitment towards the local community in and around Santiniketan had also contributed to bringing life to these images. Now, what do we see in this? In these images which are done swiftly and in some cases one can also compare them to the swiftness of the Kalighat images, but there are always similarities and differences between them. Now, what we find here, these images are swiftly done and with like minimal details.

And in all these images we find that either is only one figure or there are group of people and all of them are involved in various different kinds of occupations. So, on the left side of the image, we find that there is a woman who is involved in spinning the yarn and she is using a charka or a spinning wheel for this work and she is shown here in a gesture she is in shown here in profile and almost in a gesture that reminds us of the Jaina manuscripts that perhaps we have studied in the earlier part of this course but without any extravagant details.

Now, the entire image is also framed within this architectural frame that we find and this frame is something that was introduced in all images in the Haripura posters, most of the images in the Haripura posters. Even in this one we find that there is this architectural frame that is involved and that is not to suggest that there is an architectural space as such, but that is to frame all those figures those are there in these images.

So here we see there is perhaps a pahalwan or a security person who is depicted on the image on the right side and he is identified with dark skin and well-built body and he only wears a lower garment and he holds this bamboo stick and perhaps a shield in his hand. So, this is something that we find that as I have already mentioned that there are those different occupational groups those are depicted in this image.

So, the valour of this person and how this valour is contrasted by the graceful image of the woman on the left side, so these are also something we find that all these different kinds of characteristics are emphasized only by the use of colour or minimal details, sometimes the posture of the body, the expression in their faces they also contribute to emphasizing all these factors.

Now what we also see are different this character of the lines that particular kind of those calligraphic lines that I have already mentioned, we can see them here as well that how the line varies in depth and something that adds to the dynamism of the bodies. Now, another important aspect one can also imagine that how these images are framed, what does the frame come to signify?

Sometimes the frame can also be part of emphasizing this ground which is reserved for each of these figures to operate within, but also this is a way to give them prominence because when we see that where frame is used in the architectural setup or in the paintings which are framed

so that is that is a gesture for us to give importance to this whatever is there within the frames. So, here this visual frame.

The frame is not really done with an elaborate frame that is added around the images, but this is within the images themselves more like the miniature paintings, so it is a way to give respect, it is a way to suggest their importance in building the rural sectors in India. So, in that sense we can still see how this very strategic, but minimal use of framing is important and it is a way to emphasize that why these communities are important for nation building, it is not something that we can deny.

We will continue more on this issue and then look into few other aspects of these kinds of practices in the next lecture. Thank you.