

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

Lecture - 56

Hello everyone, I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are at the week 12 of our course Indian art materials techniques and artistic practices. So this week is the concluding week for our course and this week will be talking about multimedia approaches, which is a continuation of our discussion from the last week. So in the last week, we have spoken about some of the development.

From the, you know, from the in 1940s during the time of India's independence and continued until 1990s or 2000s around the time and have seen that certain kind of practices how there were many back and forth in terms of how the question about material, the question about the majority all those things have emerged in artistic practices, at the same time how establishment of certain kind of institutions.

For example MSU Boroda or NID in Ahmedabad then the, Later the other centers all of them have contributed largely to the making of the contemporary art and design in the Indian subcontinent as I mean, especially in the independence nation state of India. Now this week will be talking about the multimedia approaches and I will be focusing more from 1990s until today, that there are certain things that we need to keep in mind.

That, what are the key developments during this time period? So from the 1990s we find with the new liberalization with this new growth in economy when India was so called like opening up to the world for the different companies to sort of have more newer kind of collaboration with the Indian market at the same time with the workforce. Then we find that there were increased uses of technology in many sectors.

So, for example, we see rapid industrialization in terms of the textile sector, then we also see that, how machinery making, development of a software and everything. They have also emerged with the new liberal this approach in Indian economy. So with that we also find that there was a

tremendous growth of the urban economy. So if you remember in the last two weeks when we spoke about the you know, in the early 20th century.

This nationalist approach like I mean, when we see the people who were in favour of the British rule to decline then we find, starting with Gandhiji and other people and then even during the during the first few decades of India's independence, we find that there was a considerable stress on the development of the rural sectors in India. Now, I cannot say that I mean the rural sectors are ignored after 1990s.

But what we see there was a disproportionate rise in terms of how the urban centers came into prominence. So the metropolitan city is and then some of the other urban centers whose specifically, where well known for industry or you know education. So they came into the scene and this growth of the urban centers that we also find that how people from various rural background.

They can be from the artisanal sectors, they can be from you know, different group of people who were arriving in the urban center for education for work and everything else. They have also shaped the social political situation during this time and that also started reflecting on the, Art market. Now with that we also see that there was increased movement in terms of that how many Indian art is designers, they started travelling abroad.

So something that we have discussed in the earlier week as well that how people like Riten Majumdar and, people like Neeli Satna and the other artists like Gulam Mohammed Shaik and all they have travelled abroad and they have interacted with the different sectors of art and design making all across the world or several parts and then they brought those knowledge back to India and that is how we see that there were different kind of conversations which were happening between artistic practices.

So that is something we see this time as well, but we also find that West, like I mean, especially Europe and North America where more and more opening up like I mean in terms of the galleries the museums, there were more and more opening up to recognize the contemporary, I mean the

Indian artist and the designers from this time. So before that we definitely have some of the path breaking exhibitions.

The some of the landmark exhibitions will include like textiles and ornamental arts of India in 1955 at the museum of modern art in New York and several other exhibitions but from this time we find that the critique the curator the art historians, did they have also a stressed on the contemporary art making in India and not just the things which are from the history or some of the stuff which have the artisanal background.

So this is something we find that it was certainly a new kind of development in terms of Indian art and also how the market relation the relationship between the artist, curator, educators designers, art historians, so that sort of started changing and more dynamic conversation started shaping up from this process. Now with that we also see that slowly there was discussion about new media and by new media strictly which is understood at least from the late 1990s and early 2000s?

That the media which were traditionally not incorporated in the artistic practices and by artistic practice. I mean that the artistic practices which started from the mid 19th century in the colonial art institutions. So the traditional paintings, sculpture printmaking, Installation. So those things were at the same time then we find that in the idea of new media came to represent a group of technologies, which were previously not incorporated in the artistic practices.

So as I have already mentioned that in the 1990s, this decade marks a huge importance in terms of how technology is incorporated in our daily lives, so there is no surprise that technology also became an integral part of art making. So during this time we find that there are more experiments with audio with video and then certain. So for example that I mean, if there are movement images, if there are audio files, how they're also been made as part of the so-called display in the white cubes or in the gallery spaces and the museum spaces.

So this is something that definitely requires attention from all of us to two understand differently from the earlier art making. However I would also like to be a critical of this word new media, so when there is this term new, we always needs to question this idea that new compared to what,

new compared to when. So this is some of the questions we need to ask and if we see that I mean how technology which was already in use in, you know in the Indian society that was observed that was incorporated in the artistic practice.

This tendency we should not find it to be a new approach because even previously whenever we have, for example, if we think about like the rock cut architecture. So the technology of carving the rock and looking at the wooden structure, so that had also a reflected on the contemporary art making or making the architecture. So we should not think that this newly emerging technologies and their reflection in the art is something that is new.

So strictly speaking that when we speak about new media, we mean like this technological interventions into art making but we always have to be careful about how we make how we use this kind of terms. Now talking about new media, what are the kind of representations we talk about. So I will start this discussion from this one a particular work by artist Nalini Malani, and that was not displayed in 1990s.

But from 2013 and from there we will slowly go back in time and come back again, so in this work as you can see that I mean, it is a drastic departure from the works on canvas the works of the sculptural works and so on.

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So in this one what we see that there are some of those fiberglass cylindrical shapes those are hanging from the ceiling so instead of like I mean having them on the gallery wall. The walls are always been very important in terms of the gallery display as we can see for four viewership but here it seems like I mean more than the walls we find that, I mean this hanging projection from the ceiling they get its importance.

And that is something that we can think about it, that how the shift from the wall to the ceiling. Something that is not displayed vertically on the wall, but vertically from the ceiling that is that is a different approach in terms of how the artists think about the space. Then we see in this fiberglass cylinder, there are hand drawn images and then there are light projected onto them and that is how, like the images are reflected on the walls.

Now what happens in terms of like when there are those multiple cylinders which are in action and then there are motor attached to them. So that they constantly evolve where they do not stay in the same place, but they revolve like those the prayer wheels in the Buddhist monasteries. So when we see that is happening, then we see constantly the images which are projected onto the wall, they keep changing.

And for that and since this is a transparent surface, the cylindrical shapes. So for that reason one image gets overlapped with the other and for the light projection even if like, I mean, there is a change in the direction of the light then one image can superimpose with the other. So all those things so what we see that on the wall the kind of images they emerge from this projection at the same time using this very material for which makes this kind of overlapping superimposition possible is something certainly was not used before.

So this kind of interventions we find that in the artworks and when we go into the thematics of this work, so we, find that Melanie Milani the way she describes her childhood memories of moving from the city of Karachi to Bombay and then how there are those questions about identity in the newly independent nation state of India in the 1940s 1950s and this slowly her exploration about this identity politics her position in the society.

So this superimpositions and then this, you know identity which is always in flux, which is not something that is constant. So those things got reflected into the way these images are also constructed and their transform. So this kind of motion and movement is something that is not just there as part of like the technological exploration but it is very much part of it is very much part of the concept that the artist put forward for the viewers to see through it or to appreciate it.

In this work, we also find images like this one here as you can see that this is an image of a Britisher killing a tiger from the back of an elephant. This is a well-known Kalighat image that is there now in the collection of the Victoria Albert museum. So some of those historical images they also make their you know appearance in this highly complex works and if we think about like, I mean the medium where it is painted now.

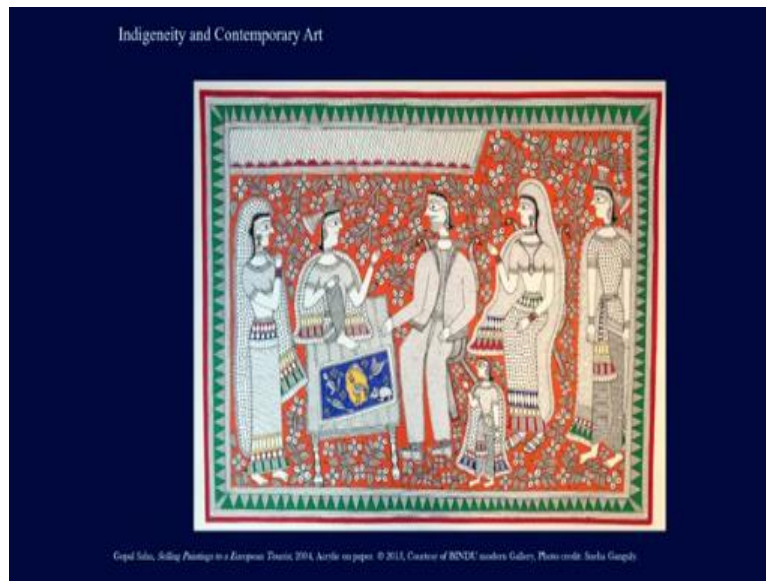
So if the; earlier image was painted on the paper and then this was now painted onto this transparent surface, which is then projected onto the wall. So all together the history is brought back to the contemporary times but at the same time the context is changed. So there is a back and forth between that so this also comes to address like some of the complexities during our times that how much we are keeping the parts of the history with us.

And how much; that is transforming with each and every transformation so changes in our society. So those kind of questions we find they are put forward when this technological advancement took place in the Indian society and how those technologies were embraced and critically assessed by the artist for creating this dialogue with people with history with culture and of course addressing the issues of identity.

So with that we also find that I mean during 1990s that there was also as I have already mentioned that a large number of people they started moving from the rural sectors to the urban centers and that also prompted a move of the artisans, so called the folk artisans the ones who are situated in the villages, so they in a large number we find that they have started moving to the cities,

So something we can think about that, how in the 19th century. The Kalighat Patuas was were also functioning.

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But this term we find that this kind of activity was happening all across India and some places like Delhi Haat, Shilpramam in Hyderabad and the other craft markets the most became the hub where many people from the entire nation they started coming like many artisans. So that also gave a new dimension to the field of the contemporary folk art in India, or like I mean folk art or not. So those questions come into being.

So from the 1960s we find that there were several such kind of like the so-called folk art practices which came into prominence and then like I mean people like Jagdish Swaminathan whom we have discussed in the last week, so people like them they have also put considerable effort to highlight some of the artisans like Jangarh Singh Shyam who came from this from the Goan community.

So things like that were happening from the 1990s we find that people like, people who came from this community backgrounds like artisan communities, some of them were also received some of them have also received training from the institutional art practice and from this artist institutions and that is how we find that how they have also contributed to the making of this new kind of folk art which is which is suited for an urban audience.

And some of the examples we can see here. So this is an image by Gopal Saha and this is called

the selling paintings to a European tourist in 2004 and in this one we find that this is acrylic colour that is used on paper. So instead of using earth pigment or you know, the mineral colours we find this radially available acrylic colour is used here on paper to show something in the format of the traditional model when you paintings.

And if you think about the theme, the theme is basically, how it shows this one European tourists who arrives in this village perhaps and then there is an artisan who shows you know, this the Madhubani painting. So this is a painting about the process of selling painting. So this is something that certainly we can see as a theme of how that actually is a departure from the earlier works.

Because the earlier works perhaps indicate certain events from their social cultural background, sometimes we definitely see the changes in the society are also recorded. But painting about the process of selling painting or about the process of making painting or artwork is something that is certainly unique that we can find on all those things happen after this new kind of dialogues came into being.

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Now, this is another image that we find and this is by the celebrated Worli painter Jivya Soma Mashe and then Jivya Soma Mashe's works we see that, I mean how they have also, you know those works they celebrate the this this stick like figures which, have drawn with the rice paste on the on the mud walls of the Worli village. So here we see that this is again, it is a acrylic on paper

and this is not about the traditional agricultural process or the village life.

But this instead shows the process of coal mining. Coal mining is also something that in that part of Maharashtra is also a prominent occupational sector and of course that I mean, there are many issues that we find that how the local people with the governmental body is there are always. So as I have mentioned earlier that how Jivya Soma Mashe is celebrated painter in Worli, from Worli than how he has also successfully incorporated some of this questions about material technique.

And some of the practices which were already been there in the Worli region of Maharashtra. So as you can see that I mean, he has those celebrated the stick-like figures which are drawn with rice based on the mud walls and now we see that how those figures come to represent something those was certainly not there in the earlier paintings. So here we see the coal mining process instead of seeing how the agricultural process.

And then depiction of the social cultural life and the gods and the goddesses how their presented in this paintings. So it is a departure from the for sure and at the same time we also see that I mean how there was a shift in terms of the profession that the loss of agricultural land and then how the coal mining had also we can more and more prominent in this regions. So this artist like Jivya Soma Mashe, so they have made an effort to comment on this social this this change in the socioeconomic situations in the 1990s into thousands.

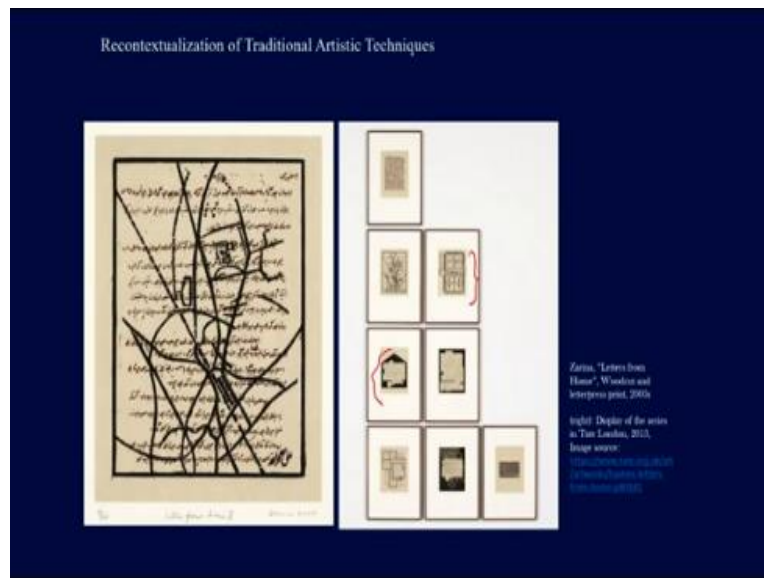
And how their training in this particular process is like making of the Worli paintings how that have enabled a new kind of expression which is certainly which can certainly be distinguished from the, contemporary urban artist in India and here what we see that there is a deliberate use of acrylic colour to replicate this the effect of mud wall. So that is how like I mean, the gestural marks of the mud walls, those are deliberately made here like as we can see all those gestural marks are also left in the background of this image.

And then acrylic colour is used for replacing the rice paste that is used with the stick whoop to make those stick like figures and then this large narrative scenes. So this kind of activities we find that how this change in the social, political situations, the economic situations, cultural situations

and more importantly the move of the rural artisans to the urban sectors more and more interaction between the urban market system.

And the buyers with the rural sectors that started making changes in terms of how we see the so-called folk art. And a lot of times whereas like the artisans are identified within their community people like Jivita Soma Mashe, Bhuri Bai, then of course Gopal Saha and many others we find that how they have also charted their path as individual artists and not artisans. So this kind of discussions that they were put forward by this larger socio political changes that started happening from the 1990s.

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Now during this time, we also find that there was a tremendous effort in terms of recontextualization of the traditional artistic practices, so like the traditional artistic techniques. So in one hand we certainly see there was not drive towards moving beyond the traditional works like painting, sculpture, installation, graphics and so on and moving towards the so-called new media.

When we; also see that there where artists who have recontextualized the use of some of this traditional media of expression. So here we have Zarina Hashmi's works which are called the letters from home and all those works are made from work cut and letterpress print. So these are you know, this entire series was actually developed in the 2000s and what we find that Zarina Hashmi had expressed her this memories and experiences of reading and keeping the letters which

were sent by her sister from the city of Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh.

So we find that I mean after the partition of India then her family stayed back in Aligarh, there was also there was this entire family moved to Pakistan this newly constructed country and then where we find that I mean after this time that she was also in constant move between Thailand, in France and then eventually she ended up in the USA, in the in the east coast of USA.. So during all this movement she also missed out on a number of changes in her hometown in a Aligarh.

And so what happened that when her sister wrote about those changes like when the ancestral house was sold when their mother died and everything. So those things she could not really be there. In person. So that is the reason what we find that those letters became historical document for her and when she overlap those letters with maps of places, it can be city maps sometimes there are like I mean plan of houses like this one or like, I mean a shape of a house like this where the letter is securely kept within the house the shape of the house.

So this kind of imagery we find that I mean much more sort of immersive meditative and the images which, were created by woodcut or letterpress. So the language of print was incorporated as part of making this kind of a personal archive. So this is what we find in Zarena Hashmi's work: how does this medium of wood cut, letterpress and sometimes in taglio and all which you learned in Thailand as well as in France.

So those were recontextualized in terms of how they came to serve as fragments of memory and history from her home.

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So this is another work by Zarina and what we see, this is called the book of travels. It was made in 2012 and it is an accordion book. So accordion book is also something that we find in the field of printmaking and paper making and what we see that there is this one line which sort of continues in the entire book in this artist book and there are no other text nothing and the line is sometimes broken it is dismantled and then like again it continues.

So is a gesture perhaps like I mean how the bold lines we also find that sort of marks the boundary between lands and also like I mean through travels how we transcend those boundaries. So for her in the book of travels in this artist book this kind of ideas of this kind of concern about the line, its ruptures it is continuation and the relationship to her life those things came into you know on surface.

The language of wood cut is also some you know that contributes to this bold lines sometimes crude sometimes disruptive, so how the technique is then you know, that helps the artist to come to this this point of exploring this practices. So we will continue more on this practice and at the same time, like I mean some of the other issues in the in contemporary art in India in the later lectures, thank you.