

Folk and Minor Art in India
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Lecture - 39
Artist Block Makers and Hybrid Aesthetics of Urban Folk Art

The study now we follow a timeline of approximately 100 years. To understand the art education policies of our country in the pre and post colonial era, and the art practice of all layers of the society will be included to understand the growth and evolution that took place. And when we look at the contemporary continuum of the folk art practice is very important to connect them from its past and also the near past.

Just to understand that what is the relevance of them, how can the practice survive with its glory, and what are the things that to be taken out, what are the things that are most crucial for this practice and how to fit the practice or you know this thing into the historical context. Because whether we wanted or not the culture will sustain and survive, because everything has a lifetime and if that is not over as yet it will be going on, but we need to fit that into the right historical context.

So, with that we need to also focus on the academic art during the colonial era first. The modernization in the Indian social context came about with the British rule. The British Governance in the colonial India took policies of improvisation for business communication and rules and regulation that was focusing mainly for their own benefit. And art education was not unexception. So, the not the two far paged trusts that was ruling the authority gained nevertheless the restructured in the education system. They wanted the existing education system to be altered, remodeled. And there are benefits advantageous and disadvantageous of that. So, we are going to understand that phenomenon into the context of our discussion now.

So, that is something that is established uniformly in law and also reformed the existing religious postulates. That is very important that there had been a different education center that was builded up. The Muslim students were going to Madras where Hindus were going to tolls and Chatuspathis of that time. Then, come the Christians they started

their own schools under the church and they also taught their text to some extent. In all the schools the religion was highly regarded throughout if not that was only education that they give them.

The efforts made were intended towards the materialistic culture that is favored the British ruling system making it smooth and advantageous for them. In such as situation the offshoots of nationalistic ideals inevitably entered the cultural view. National thoughts the nationalistic ideologies just got waved in to the whole thing because it was it was very very suitable for that time the post independence cultural scenario of India faced an ideological conflict that according to K G Subramanyam led into like to his word, it led into a sort of cultural schizophrenia that he mentioned.

So, it is almost like multiple identity syndrome that a same person behaving in many different ways in many different point of time. So, it created some kind of confusion and abnormality some kind of a disorder that is indicative of that. The apparent complexity in the cultural milieu was not caused only by the cross cultural concoctions. The change had been largely caused by the gradual collapse of the craft league system that flourished on the state based patronage during the mogul rule.

Before the British invaded India that was mentioned by Shoban Soan in 1998 Publication like he wrote it much before that. It is very important to understand this in this context that they had been craft clusters that was developing in Bengal outside Bengal we are focusing in Bengal, using it as an example to understand it is more like the index to get the overview of the whole country's visual culture. But things were happening in a similar direction. For example, Mughal court patronized quite a few distinctive crafts, like the brass craft, the glass wears, the glass blowing units were there, the carpet industries and many such things which was textile and so.

The crafting was flourishing during the Mughal rule by the Mughal patronage because they grew to cater to the need of the Mughal court. But after the decline of the Sultan (Refer Time: 07:01) also the Mughal rule. I mean the craft clusters were there and there had been craftsman who got trained through generations. So, that was the only tradition the only thing they were not able to find out right market. If we look at the brass cluster

in Moradabad or the glass wear in Firozabad near Delhi and Uttar Pradesh this area or the carpet making in Kashmir Badoi and other places.

We know that it was only because the patronage was not there they faced a confused state at that time that whom to work for, what is going to be our next market and there are also new demands the new time and also its the industrial revolution that gave us the face of mass production and we also discussed about the printing technology, the printed texts. And it did a lot of change into the modern visual culture of that time and was sudden change in that way. It was not very easy for the craft cluster to take that very smoothly so it just came as a shock, but it took some time to realize that things are changing. They could sense that their works are not getting appreciated in so old it is not finding right market that it enjoyed for a very long time.

So, we will talk about one character a very eminent name that I took in different context that is E B Havell. He was appointed as a superintendent in 1838 when Madras School of Industrial Art was declared a Government Organization. The British superintendents who had been appointed as principles of the art schools of British rule India, before him were not recognized artists of their native lands, because Britishers hardly cared. They felt that they needed skilled craftsman who are trained in the British academic style they needed some people to be trained for their official works, so needed a proper draftsmanship and they started training Indian students for that, they generated man power basically.

And these were the art institute's that they setup keeping that in mind, but after E B Havell came in he fell in love with India, he got involved into the nationalistic movement and that was very interesting that you know when he was appointed it all changed fortunately. So, 23 old E B Havell was a fresh graduate at that time, he was trained in draftsmanship from South Kensington School of Design in London. E B Havell 1861 to 1934 he worked in this duration. He prioritized on the development of the Indian local traditional craft, he began that way. Havell is considered a visionary to follow people like William Morris 1834 to 96 and his contemporary John Ruskin 1890 to 1900 and Roger Fry 1866 to 1934. And their ideology for the revival of the traditional craft in reaction to the Principle of the Industrial Revolution of Europe, thrive to revitalize the traditional handicraft.

We discussed in the beginning that all this art and craft movement and its ideologies that was there in Europe happened in a very different context. They were emphasizing on the handmade craft to build up the value. Here, it took a different term and through the hand of E B Havell as he had the power, he was superintending the art college setup by the Britishers. He could generate the thought and work for it to some extent. E B Havell later studied Indian art, religion and philosophy deeply and established himself as one of the precursors of nationalistic movement in India. He has profoundly influenced the art scenes of great masters like Ravindranth Tagore and Abanindranath Tagore in that time.

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Deviprashad raychowdhury 1899 to 1975 was appointed as the first principle of Indian origin to the Government School of Art Madras, in colonial India in 1929. A year ahead of it, in December 1928, the vice chancellor of Madras University S. V. Ramaswami Mudlia and legendary social servant Kamaladevi Chattapadhyay had recommended Deviprashad Raychowdhury to the post of vice principle of the institute.

In 1900, nominated in 1800 Laurence Barns 1863 to 1929 joined Bombay School of Art as principle. He could not support Havell, as he desolated the Western notion of teaching for Indian students in Government Art Collage, Kolkata. Laurence Barns did not approve Persi Brown's way of separating the departments of Western style and Indian style for Government Art Collage, Kolkata either.

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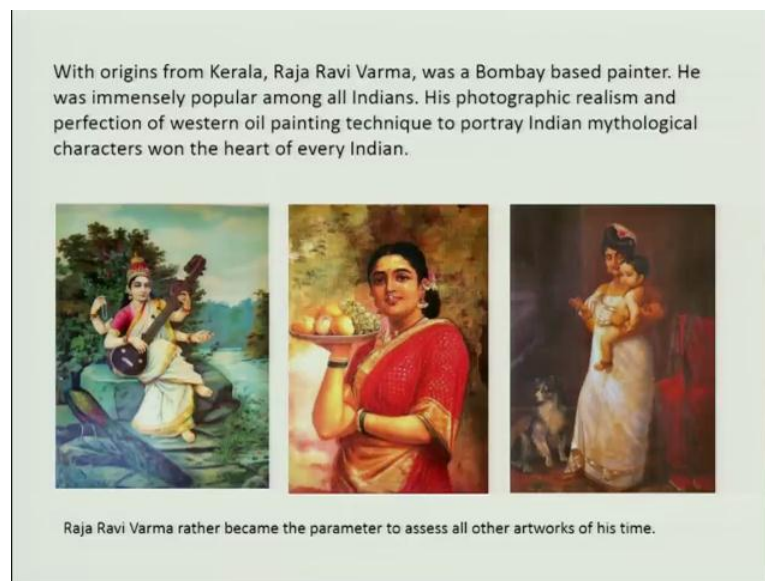
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So, let us talk about the exponents of the Bengal and Bombay schools after the separation of the opinions; fine there is one Persi brown, one Abanindranath Tagore conflict. So, this was a time when two different schools of contemplary Indian art became very prominent. One is known as the Bengal school under the vision of E B Havell and Abanindranath Tagore, and the other was Bombay school with the vision of Gladstone Saloman who perpecturlaly critisized Havell, Abanindranath and Ravidranath negativley in his book it says of Mughal art in 1932.

Before E B Havell and Gladstone Saloman the conflict had never been so apparent between the art practionars of Kolkata and Bombay school. Bombay School of Art was primaraliy influenced and motivated by the paintings of Raja Ravi Verma. We must also see the context of Raja Ravi Verma and this context who is known to be the father of modern painting in India.

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Raja Ravi Verma with origins from Kerala was a Bombay based painter. He was immensely popular among all Indians. His photographic realisms and perfection of western oil painting technique to portray Indian mythological characters on the heart of every Indian, so what we see in is his works though there are limited images here just to give you some impression and not divert you from the topic. Raja Ravi Verma who rather became the parameter to assist all the art works of his time. What we see here is he is choosing subject matters from the mythological characters often they are just as secular as the lady with the baby. So, it is the mother and child and the title of the art work is translated as here comes the father with the pet dog.

So, the subject matter ranged from the religious, mythological and daily life topics, but the kind of sensibility that he was trying portray was very interesting here. In Ravi Verma's art we see that as an artist he was trained in a British academic style. So, when

he used oil painting as the medium he painted the art works with the European style, when we say this we mostly mean Europe that is not a very right, but that is how we talk about it. So, he was trained under the European tutelage and then he incorporated all those methods and materials in his art works, but the subject matters are very consciously chosen. He never worked on any Western subject matter rather he made Indian Gods and Goddesses, he was the first one to gave the Indian Gods and Goddesses a contemporary profile.

So, they have become more naturalistic than the idealistic forms that we found out in Pattichitra painting that we saw; earlier that every time the emphasis was there on the iconographic features of those deities they never came with the kind of ideal anatomy that is very very European in nature. He incorporate, renaissance, sensibility into the Indian subject matters through Ravi Verma he became so popular that all those images of Gods and Goddesses that almost became a reality to common people. And he had lot of impact his works were so popular that he had to finally move to mass production, he produced oleograph in his studio to give his work like to because everybody wanted to own Ravi Verma and his things were shown everywhere. So, he definitely without any doubt was the person who could really attract the human mind instead of a very difficult time that he had as an artist to struggle and survive.

However we are not getting deeper inside the context of Ravi Verma he is also highly criticized now in today's context as a calendar painter, because the kind of images that he produced had a commercial bend towards it. But this is very important to know that after the folk art minor art tradition Ravi Verma took up the place and perhaps because of Ravi Verma sensibility the folk art tradition of India was just looked and perceived as something more amateurish and naive comparatively. He created some kind of a difference to the whole scene.

So, we find in Swami Vivekanandas comment in Indian art and culture, a different comment on Ravi Verma. He spontaneously states that mimicking the European art may give birth to one or two Ravi Verma in his writing. Native pata paintings with Chalchitra are rather better, at least they are brightly colored Ravi Verma puts him in grave shame. Gold paintings of Jaipur and backdrop paintings of Durga are superior to that. Their

limited ways try to expound the quality and virtue of traditional institutions to cynical modernists whether of the new intellectual class in India or of the British administrations. The attitudes of modern Indian artists to their art traditions were to some extent colored by their expositions.

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(Subramanyan, 1987).

By and large, they motivated the educated Indian to take a serious interest in his cultural facts, his art styles, his folklore, his crafts, his religion and ritual and their symbolic vocabulary. The traditional artists of India were largely untouched by their expositions, except probably in gaining a sense of pride and status, and a desire to keep some of their languishing skills alive.

Although both of them, especially Ananda Coomaraswamy, had studied the structure of traditional art practice with remarkable thoroughness, their effort to build up a unified, generic image of the tradition with a homogeneous logic of growth led them more and more into their conceptual archetype and language of symbols, and less and less into their skill and formal characteristics and environmental roots. (Subramanyan 1987).

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In 1915-16 Rabindranth Tagore expressed great concern about the slow disappearance of this art forms, the basic rural and folk art forms which are very very indigenous in their character from the cultural scene. And he also stressed up on the need of their collection conservation and study. He was particularly interested in them as art forms for their art language; the ethos, the values, and also the folk idiom that was important for Tagore. Not for historical and anthropological value so much.

Tagore as modernist looked at it from a very different perspective which is I think is most important in today's context also. He felt that an exposure to various categories of folk literature could clear the horizon of our writers, and that an exposure to folk art forms could enrich the sensibilities of our artists. Almost about the same time Abandranith Tagore motivated his favorite student Nandalal Bose to study the works of the patvas of Bengal and emulate their work methods. He also wrote his now very well known monograph on the ritualistic floorgraphics of the region Bangla Broto.

In 1923 when he went to Shantiniketan and addressed the art students of the newly formed Kalbhavan the nationalistic principle that they had in Kalabhavan, he laid special stress on the need to sustain the reactive folk and village art to the students that time. Nandalal was already involved with this, as an artist who wanted to place the foundation of the new art movement with indigenous mornings. He tried to analyze the linguistic structures of many of the countries traditional art forms, their techniques, their formal breakups, the visual basis, and the functional specialties of them. For all his limitations he was the first person in the country to make a serious and methodological effort in this particular direction.

Many other artists of his time and later responded with enthusiasm and empathy to these art forms, but their responses were often limited by the lack of analytic grasp that was there in Nanadal Bose. This is very fortunate for us that Nandalal Bose has showed us a path and we can still get to see his works and through his work he spoke about it he also wrote it very clearly and the works are all preserved now.

So, from this point it is very important for us to also look into another very important part that is the contemporary phase of folk art, how we interpret them, how we judge

them as you know even now the academic practice and the practice of folk art is going parallelly. Though after the art educators are emphasizing on building up style, the individual styles it is taking a different route. But moreover we need to just concentrate on the recent practice that we have seen in our previous lectures and understand the basic ethos with that.