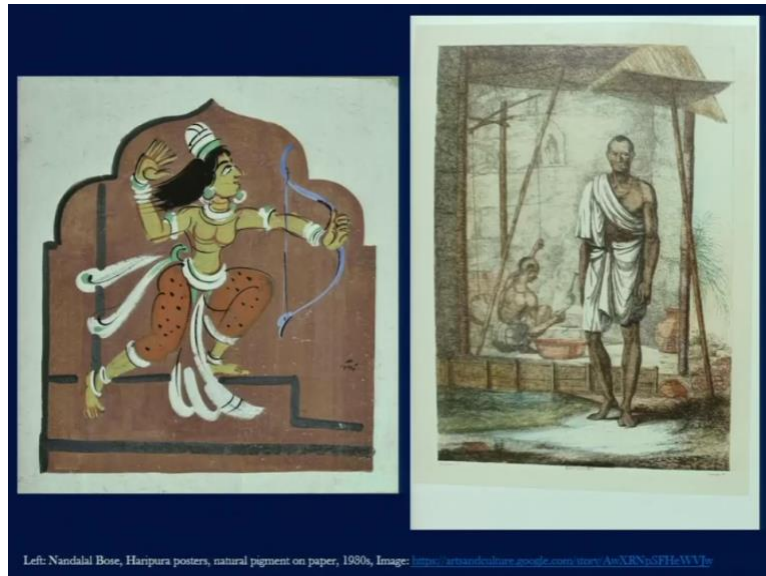


Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 50
Daily Practices and Nationalism

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Hello everyone. I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are discussing the impact of daily life in nationalism. So, we have already discussed the importance of Tagore's alternative mode of art education and then Nandalal Bose's contribution to it. So, then from there we have started talking about the Haripura posters and the Haripura posters, these 84 posters which were made for this Haripura Congress in Gujarat in the year of 1938.

And so in this one, as I have already discussed that how the Gandhian thoughts have reflected and also Nandalal Bose's approach to life and bringing art and craft together that had also made an impact in them. We also see the material that is used for making these images was also strategic. So, we find that natural pigment was used for making each and every one of these images.

So, we see that this opaque natural pigment which is also used with lime or some for giving the opacity of these colours or also the depth of the colours, so those things are used here as well. And then this particular use of natural pigment is also something that we can consider as

a very significant one because as we know that in the 19th century with the advent of the British made watercolour that was readily available in the market.

How that transformed the visual culture in the Indian subcontinent and then that was also something that was used in the colonial art institutions. So, as a departure from it, we find that in Santiniketan watercolour was used, but this opaque watercolour and the natural pigment-based paints were also something those were prioritized unlike the colonial schools. So, this is also important in terms of considering how Nandalal Bose had seen and worked under the supervision of Abanindranath Tagore.

Who had started his career with oil paint or pastel colours and then moved on to work with the gouache and tempera colour as well as the wash colours and all of them was in contrast with the British watercolour techniques. So here again as we have come to the Haripura posters, we can see that how this opaque watercolour has its impact on the overall images. And if the same image would have been done in the British watercolour that would have been a very different one from the one that we see here.

So, this image we see on the left side of the screen we have an image of a hunter woman and she is seen in the gesture of hunting. So that is the reason we see her in the profile view and when we discuss the user profile in the miniature paintings and in the manuscripts, so we have already discussed that when there is profile, so usually there is a gesture that there is other part of this narrative.

So of course, there is definitely these images are just by themselves, there is no other narrative involved in it, but this profile sort of suggests that they are in action. They are doing something, they are not just standing there to show that what all they possess and what their profession is, but they are in action, it is part of their life.

And I would say the other motivation for making these figures in action was also perhaps to indicate that these professions, all these different kinds of occupations are not something of the practices of the past, but it is very much practice of the present times and by present time in the 1930s when Nandalal Bose was making these images. So, this is also a gesture to show this is unlike the way the European documentation of the people, caste groups and occupational groups have played out to show them almost as museumified objects.

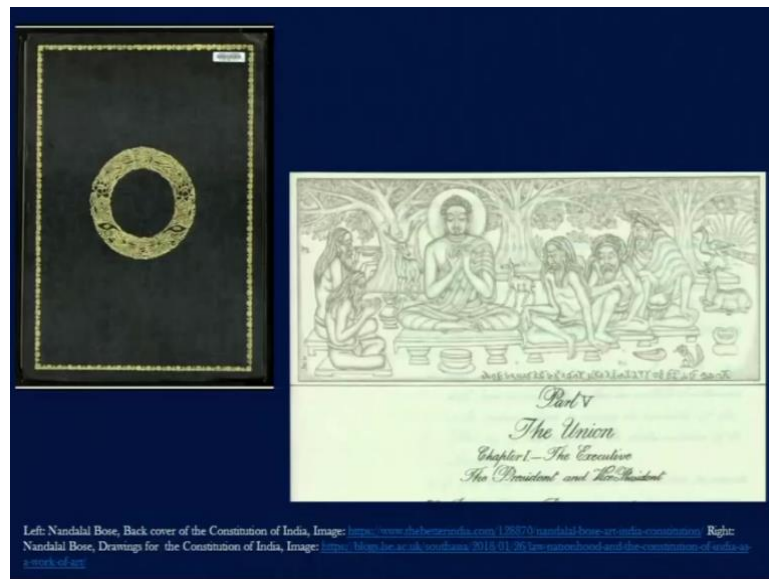
So, this is a gesture of very different one, where we see there are those occupational groups, but they are not really shown as objects, but they are shown in motion as if they are in the gesture of doing their daily need and then the artist has captured a scene from their daily life. And that is the reason I also wanted to show this image side by side with this other image that we have studied earlier and that is by Balthazar Solvyns and from this album The Hindus.

And this is an image of this kumhar and here as we can see how this figure stands in the foreground and external physical feature as well as the attire he wears, all those things are important. And then there is another person in the background, who works in the workshop and then like the bamboo structure and everything else is shown here to give a sense of how the workshop looks like, how is the working condition, and then most importantly who is this kumhar?

So, these are some of the attributes that we find here that how the external qualities were important in this documentation, these ethnographic documentations taken up by the European travellers as well as the administrators, whereas when Nandalal Bose was involved in representing the occupational groups, how his approach was drastically different. So, his approach was there to show these people in motion to show the viewers how all these different kinds of occupations are very much part of our day to day, life.

And all these all these activities are something that brings life to the entire nation to this land and that is the reason they are not really frozen in time, but they are very much in motion. So, these are some of the issues one can think about that how the ideology and also their approach towards the people. their understanding of the life around us, the daily life and their commitment to the people and the land, all these things make a difference in terms of what we draw, what we represent and how we represent.

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So, with that we also see that Nandalal Bose's contribution to the nation building had not stopped only with the Haripura posters, but after India's independence when the Constitution of India was penned, then we see that Nandalal Bose was involved in making all the illustrations, cover design for the Indian constitution. So, here on the left side of the slide we have the back cover of the Constitution and in this constitution what we find that he used this one particular motif.

So, this particular motif is a circle and circle is something that is understood as one of the most stable shapes in the entire universe, at the same time circle is also something that stands for democracy. So, that is the reason we find that how Nandalal Bose had communicated this idea of democracy which is the pillar of Indian constitution through this motif. And if we see the details within the motif, we see that there are lotuses and foliage within the circle.

And something that gives a specificity to the history of India like these lotuses and this foliage that we see that how Nandalal Bose had studied them from the Ajanta and Bagh murals in the early 1900s, they made a comeback in these motifs. Of course, he had utilized those kinds of motifs all across his career in various occasions in various places, but they definitely make a very conscious return when he was designing this constitution.

Now from there, we also see that each and every chapter of the Constitution would have images and he had also made a very careful selection of what kind of images should be there as part of in every chapter. So, for example in this part 5 we find the union and in this chapter one that

we see executed the President and the Vice President, and in this one there was a need for communicating the teachings of Buddha.

And as the reason we find that there is an image of Buddha's first sermon that takes place here in this Deer Park of Sarnath. There are the deer in the background and of course we see how the landscape is characterized by these large trees and then the image of Buddha we find and then he is in the gesture of Dharmachakrapravartana or preaching the sermon. And then we see that there are those 5 disciples who are considered those first 5 disciples who came to Buddha to learn his way of life, so they are the ones who are represented here.

So, if this is one image we find that where Buddha is represented, there are many other images where images for example like Nataraja and then images from Mughal miniatures like the royal court and then some of the very important figures from the Indian history, for example Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, then Tipu Sultan of Mysore and other people who contributed largely to the freedom fighting and to the nation building, they are all represented in various different chapters.

So, with that what we find that Nandalal Bose's commitment and how to connect the historical ways of representation to something that is here in the contemporary times, perhaps it is something we see that he learned from Abanindranath Tagore but then he had also excelled that and he had taken this to a different direction by prioritizing separate episodes from the Indian history and mythology to contribute to the visual representation of the Indian constitution.

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With that, we also find that Nandalal Bose had not only been a prolific artist, but he had also been a very successful teacher who had taught a number of students who came to be a very important artist in the Indian subcontinent and some of the artists would be Benode Behari Mukherjee and Ramkinkar Baij. So, there is this mural we have on screen that is by Benode Behari Mukherjee and here of course I apologize for the quality of the image, but for the light condition and everything it is not very easy to get a better image in this place.

So here there is this image, it is a mural that shows the campus life in Santiniketan and what we see how this idea of the daily practice and something that was already in discussion and that was perhaps prompted by Rabindranath Tagore and then the various gestures put forward by Nandalal Bose, for example doing daily sketches and bringing your sketchbook or postcards to various different site and sketching them.

So those ideas have definitely put a stress or at least definitely compel people to look more closely into the daily life, the mundane daily life, it is not something that is something extraordinary that happens, but it is just the daily life and how art also grows alongside. So, in this image what we see that this is this mural by Benode Behari Mukherjee and this is in one of the hostels in Santiniketan and where we see that there is a depiction of the campus life.

And in this image as well we see that there is a strong connection to Ajanta that how the mural in Ajanta we see that there is this mural on the wall and then how there are those architectural columns like these ones, they sort of make division between different narrative scenes and how

there are those recesses, there are also like architectural boundaries to show where one space stops and the other one starts.

So, all these different kinds of things we find and then Benode Behari Mukherjee's mural also marks a conscious departure from the use of anatomy as well as the scale. So, whereas in the European mode of education, in the colonial mode of education, we find that the scale of the humans and their relationship to architecture, for example the image that we saw the from J. J. School of Art about the fountain in the Crawford Market.

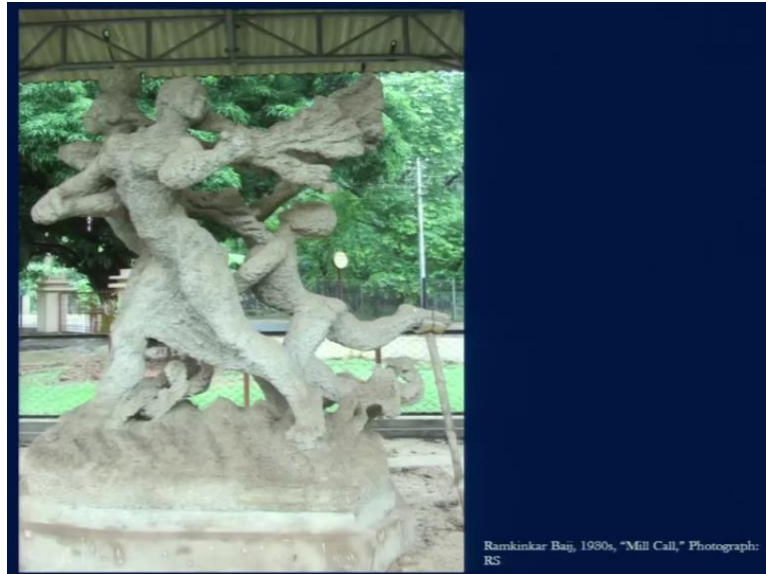
The way the scale and the proportion are shown in terms of what is architecture, what is human body is something that is deliberately denied by Benode Behari Mukherjee here. And for that reason, we find that there are those group of people who would be shown in much larger scale than perhaps the architecture and then this scale that we see here is not also constant, but there are figures who are perhaps less important, they are shown in a lesser scale in a smaller scale.

So those are the different kinds of strategies which were there in the Indian miniatures, in the Indian murals, and so those things were consciously brought back by Benode Behari Mukherjee we find. But at the same time, there were also gestures in terms of understanding that the power of brushstrokes, the power of leaving unfinished surface, those things which were not there in the precolonial Indian paintings.

And those things which were learned from the European painters in the late 19th and early 20th century or perhaps from the postimpressionist painters and also the avant-garde artists of Paris in early 1900s. So, those things Benode Behari Mukherjee was someone who definitely had knowledge of both these worlds, so something that comes from the history of the Indian subcontinent, but at the same time some of the recent art activities around the globe.

So those two things or those multiple things were brought together in Benode Behari's practice that we see. And perhaps through that we can also see the reflection of what Tagor envisioned that the students in Santiniketan should have exposure to not only the localized knowledge systems, but also the knowledge of the entire world. So, Benode Behari being trained in Santiniketan perhaps reflect this philosophy, this thought process successfully.

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The other person we will find he also made a mark in the art making in 20th century India would be Ramkinkar Baij and Ramkinkar Baij is a person whom we find that he came from this humble tribal background and then when he was in Santiniketan, he was trained under supervision of Nandalal Bose and other people. And this particular dedication to understand the mundane daily life, also the life around us that had prompted Baij to make some of his path breaking works, and this is one of his path breaking works which is called the Mill Call.

And in this one, what we see that there is a group of people, there are two women who are rushing and then there is this young child who is there who is also sort of catching up with these two women. So, basically it is a depiction of the tribal people around Santiniketan. So instead of having a romantic depiction of tribes and if we also compare that to something that was happening in the colonial documentation.

So in the colonial documentation we find that sometime that tribes were considered as the ones who are stuck in time, who have not really progressed with time, so they have their ways of being which are not really considered to be civilized enough which are not really suited for the society in 19th and 20th century, so that is how they were depicted in the images as well as in the documentation.

However, when we contrast that to Ramkinkar Baij art, then then we see he had not really considered the tribal people to be somewhere back in time, but they are also very much part of how the society moves. So here we see mill call is basically it is a call or it is the sound that comes from the mills like I mean in the mills where this local tribal people work. So, once the

mill sort of calls in the morning and then all these people, they leave their work at home and they start rushing towards the mill so that the work in the mill will begin.

So, this is something that we find that he is not really considering that Ramkinkar Baij does not really consider that this mill industrialization is something that is away from the lives of the tribals. So he made these images from his understanding of the life around him, so that is the reason why we find that his depiction of the tribals, his depiction of the people around him is very different from the way perhaps the colonial documentation would show.

And even sometimes we find how the urban educated artists would show the tribals much more in a romantic gesture that they are the ones who follow this preindustrial mode of life, so how that becomes different in Ramkinkar Baij's practice. Now, his choice of material as we always talk about material and these choices that also something that is very important. So he instead of using any conventional sculptural material, he used here cement casting.

So, he made the initial armature of the figures and then he threw the cement on the top of it and then he left the surface almost unfinished in a gesture that as if they are still running, they are still growing. So in this way, what we see that there is this particular material that is cement, it was used for the construction sites, it was used for different construction projects for industry and for making residential houses in the early 20th century.

But it was certainly not used in the art institution, it was certainly not something that was considered to be a material for art making. So, there Ramkinkar Baij made his intervention that we find that something that was used as part of the daily life, as part of our life which is not necessarily connected to the institutional art, he managed to bring that together into his art making.

So that is the reason we also see that this idea of bringing art and daily life, artisanal practices, craft all these things together the way it started with Rabindranath Tagore's intervention, at the same time Nandalal Bose's teachings that was continued with Ramkinkar Baij.

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So, to sum up all these issues what we find there as this idea of the daily life and nationalism, if we start with where we sort of looked into that the idea of daily life and some of the ideas of the daily practices those were promoted by Mahatma Gandhi, for example making hand spun hand woven cotton fabric, this khadi movement, at the same time the salt satyagraha in 1930. So, those were the political moves that also contributed largely to the artisanal sectors.

And khadi is something that was not just relevant in the anticolonial struggle in early 20th century, but even after the independence of India we find that khadi had remained equally important and even today when we stand here in the 21st century, the philosophy of khadi, the idea of self-sustainment and empowering the artisanal sectors across the country is something that we see is still relevant.

So, that is the reason these practices they require our attention and we cannot really consider them to be separate from our study of the historical Indian art objects or art practices. Now, if we see that how that also contributed to making art, so called like the paintings and so on, so that we can find in the Haripura posters. So, Haripura posters by Nandalal Bose as we can see here; in these ones we see that Nandalal Bose had gone back to this Gandhian philosophy.

At the same time his commitment to the local communities and how that all those things have come together in depicting various occupational groups and various kinds of works in the rural India. So, if this philosophy, this Gandhian philosophy or like the commitment to the daily life and daily practices which was also advocated by Rabindranath Tagore from the time of the inception of Visva-Bharati.

So those things would not have made these kinds of images, without those things these kinds of images would not have been possible like the ones that we see for Haripura congress. And as we have already discussed that how the image is of the occupational groups in Haripura posters, they mark a drastic difference from the colonial documentation, perhaps this idea, the commitment to the daily practice and knowing their power for nation building had prompted Nandalal Bose to make these images.

And then of course when we see images such as the Mill Call by Ramkinkar Baij there we find that the material which were considered as unconventional materials such as cement, which was not really considered to be part of the fine arts education, how bringing that material to the fold of fine art institution and institutional practice that had opened up new possibilities for the artists of the next generation to work further.

To question this one binary between what is art, what is craft, what is used in our daily life, what is used only for the institutional practice and how to work through those binary or how to bring them closer to each other. So, all these different kinds of practices in the early 20th century they made a mark not only in the visual culture in 20th century, but some of the things that we still carry today. Thank you.