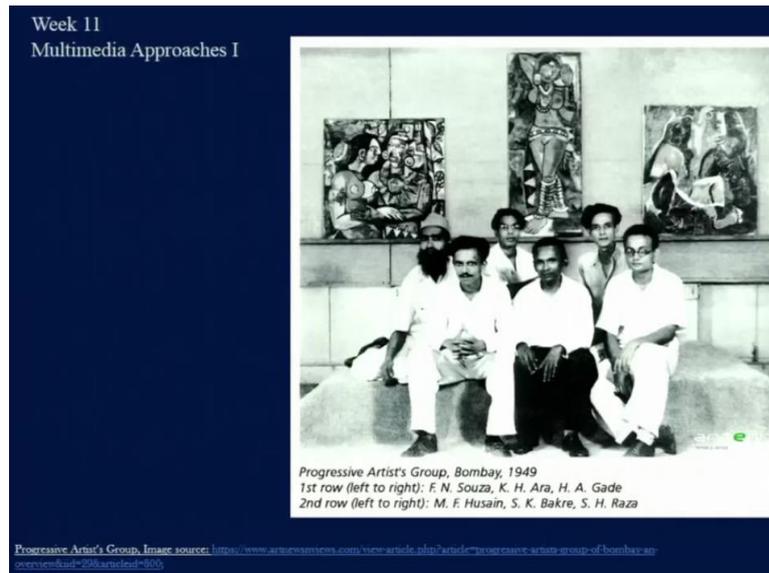


Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 51
Multimedia Approaches - 1

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Hello everyone. I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are in the week 11 of our course that is Indian art; materials techniques and artistic practices. So, this week we will be talking about multimedia approaches that is divided into 2-week span, so this week we will be talking about the first half of multimedia approaches. So, what do I mean by multimedia approaches?

So, I am not talking about the way it is called as multimedia that we understand in terms of the digital technique or if I am thinking in terms of the mixed media that is in which like there are different kinds of media which are brought together for producing one work, but here by multimedia approaches what I try to indicate is that there are many different kinds of mediatic expressions and then the different kinds of approaches which are associated with certain media.

And those things were either exchanged with each other or how different kinds of information flow from one to another and then that is how we see that different kinds of practices have shaped and sustained in the second half of 20th century in India. So, that is what I call as the multimedia approaches. Now if we start with where did it start, so it is not really that we can

put a point to that or we can suggest that this is this particular year or this is this particular decade when it started.

For example, if we think about some of the practices that had sort of emerged in the post-independence India, we do not really see them being exclusive, they had their roots in the history. However, the way they had emerged, in particular this time, keeping the sociocultural and political context in mind, then we see that there were certain issues or certain aspects of those practices which were different.

And then this tendency towards understanding the limitations and possibility of each medium and sort of bringing different mediatic expressions together this is something that we find more and more after the Indian independence. Now, in the last week, we have spoken about the various kinds of practices which added to the nationalistic rationalistic expressions as well as the nationalist movement in India.

But if we see that how those practices also had learned from history or they had their exchange with history, then we have a sense of they were also not being developed as exclusive practices. But then what happens in this very crucial time in the 1940s that there was the transference of power. And if you remember that we have looked into this map of the Indian subcontinent at the beginning of last week's lecture and then we spoke about how the entire Indian subcontinent used to be there.

And then in 1947, the Indian subcontinent was divided and the nation state India that we know today it was born. So, then we see that the entire Indian subcontinent was divided into India and Pakistan, of course it was known as the East Pakistan and West Pakistan and East Pakistan was later on made into this independent country that is Bangladesh in 1971. So, we see that from 1947 until the end of 20th century there were many different kinds of political changes.

At the same time social changes and everything, all those things have taken place. And those things have also made a huge deal of impact on how we look into material culture, visual culture, of course artmaking. Now something else we will also see how there were few institutions that came into being during this time. So, if 1947 was the time when we know that India gained its independence, then in 1949 we see that this dedicated art school in the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda that came into being.

So, we have discussed this Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda the second's portrait which was painted by Raja Ravi Varma in one of our earlier lectures. So, we are talking about this princely state of Baroda again and then there we see the establishment of this art school in 1949 that was also a crucial movement in the development of the art scene in India. So, from the inception we find that there have been many great teachers.

And under their supervision we find that many students they have also come to be some of the most well-known artists in contemporary India. So, this is one institution that we find that have contributed immensely to the development of art practice, the institutional art practice in India. During this time, we also find that in 1952 the All India Handicrafts Board AIHP was also established.

And by this time, we also find that there were discussions about what is tradition, what is modernity, what kind of technologies we need for nation building, so all these different kinds of debates were happening, we find that there were this new group of people who came who proclaim to be this artist in this newly independent country and what are their responsibilities, how do they situate themselves in that political and economic situation in independent India.

So, looking at that we find that during this time this one particular artist group came into being that is called the Progressive Artists' Group in Bombay in 1947. So, in 1947 when we see that this is also something that this kind of practices we have seen in Western Europe, for example in the early 20th century, the Fauvist group and then of course that there have been many other groups in the history of avant-garde art in Western Europe in Paris and many other metropolitan cities.

But that kind of activity or that kind of artists group was not something that is common in the India under the British rule. So, in 1947 we find that during this time these group of artists, the artists we have on screen that is F. N. Souza, K. H. Ara, H. A. Gade, M. F. Husain, S. K. Bakre and S. H. Raza. So, all of these artists we find and then later on Krishen Khanna also joined the group. So, all these people that came to be in this one artist's group and that was something that was revolutionary for their time.

And what they did also they proclaimed that they oppose this romantic approach of the painters, for example as Abanindranath Tagore and his disciples who had this romantic approach towards history but of course now when we see that we do not really consider it as a strictly romantic approach, we know that was also something that contributed immensely to the understanding of the nation.

Also to make people aware of their situation, their position in history and how they can understand the rich cultural heritage of the Indian subcontinent. But we see that here when this Progressive Artists' Group they came into being, they wanted to carve a different path for themselves. They wanted to proclaim that their position is different from many other artists who were there before them in the Indian subcontinent.

And that is the reason we find that in this metropolitan centre of Bombay, they came together, they constituted this artist's group and then they held exhibition of their works. So, all of them would put together their works in gallery spaces and they had organized these kinds of displays for the public. So, we also see that around 1948, there was this one prominent exhibition where many of the Indian historical objects were displayed.

And some of the group members of the Progressive Artists' Group including M. F. Husain had visited this exhibition and as Husain said that was an opportunity for him to see this many of these historical artifacts from India's history which were not accessible to him beforehand. So, these different kinds of influences we would find that in one hand they were looking in to the European modernist painters and artists where we find that this idea of art for art's sake was already been nurtured and already it was in high debate and discussion.

So, those things were also taken up by these painters here and they understood their position very well because during that time painting would not have been easy because that is a time when the nation building is the utmost priority and perhaps people who are working directly for building infrastructure, contributing to the army or contributing to the agricultural or food sectors are people who were considered to be the more important than someone who is indulging themselves into making paintings.

Because they do not really serve some tangible purpose in the nation building, but still why do we find these activities, these endeavours to be a significant and that is because something that

we have discussed about the idea of art, which was prompted by Rabindranath Tagore perhaps, that idea of the art is not something that is always quantifiable but it is the excess, right. So, by this excess is something that is not always quantifiable.

But that is something that says more about our society certain and then many different kinds of things which are not always visible on the surface. So, that is the reason we find that these particular practices which emerged in 1947 and of how the Progressive Artists' Group they have continued this practice that speaks something about the time and this changing society in the 1940s and at the same time what can be an imagined future for India.

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Now, if we think about their practice, their practices were more or less they were focused on doing paintings on canvas largely. So, we find that there have been this oil paintings on canvas. Now, if we think about the use of oil painting as I have already mentioned that it is not something that started with the Progressive Artists' Group, of course we know there have been oil paintings done by Ravi Varma in the late 19th century.

But in 20th century we also find that there was this another prolific painter Amrita Sher-Gil who showed the way to the next generation painters in the Indian subcontinent of how to go about it. And in Amrita Sher-Gil's work, we see that this Hungarian at the same time Indian artist, so she was trained in Paris and she had seen the Metropolitan Arts in early 20th century Europe.

And then one of her early portraits that we can find it here where we find that she had posed there for the self-portrait and if we see the kind of like the patchy brushstrokes and the way the entire surface has been built, then also the play of colours, the complementary colours, of course the balance and then the pictorial arrangement, they are highly influenced by the practice which was already established there.

For example, the practice which is known as the post-impressionist practice in which the visible brushstrokes are left and at the same time we see how the bodies or the forms which are seen on the canvas surface are not made as photographic object, but the materiality of paint, of the brushstrokes, the techniques and everything are left on canvas and it is to show this part of the process.

And then the way the form had also had its relevance to understand the underlying form in every object and creature around us and then how to see the geometricity in nature at the same time also what is the relationship between this internal geometricity and the external outlook, all those experiments we find that those were also something that are taken up by Amrita Sher-Gil. And Amrita Sher-Gil had done several of portraits.

Sometimes self-portraits, sometime portraits of the other sitters and through that we find that she had already mastered the technique of European oil painting, at the same time the avant-garde artistic conventions those were established in the early 20th century Europe. Then she travelled to India and she travelled to parts of North Western India and in Punjab where she had her family and also to the Punjab Hills which today know as Himachal and then of course later on the other parts of India as well.

So, when she travelled to India and then she was exposed to some of the paintings, for example the Ajanta murals and so on, also like the kind of the colour scheme became very different when she was in India. So, then we find that there was a visible shift in her approach and this is a painting that we find which was painted slightly later in 1935, compared to the self-portrait that we see on the left side of the screen.

So the portrait of these three girls, they were actually Amrita Sher-Gil's cousins in Punjab. So, what we find in this portrait there are those three sitters and they have their eyes lowered, they are veiled and they are seated there of course posing for this painting perhaps, but at the same

time their expression is calm and there is nothing extraordinary about these portraits. So, by that what we see here is that she had tried to understand this new kind of societal structure in India where her cousins grew up.

Then she could understand that how her life being this Bohemian and she had access to many different kinds of things, what her cousins did not have, so how to express that through the paintings. So, those things became a kind of a challenge and she had taken up this challenge through her and then she sort of merged those ideas with her existing practice of oil painting. So, in India we find that Amrita Sher-Gil's brushstrokes have become much more sort of smoothed and then there are large patches of the colour.

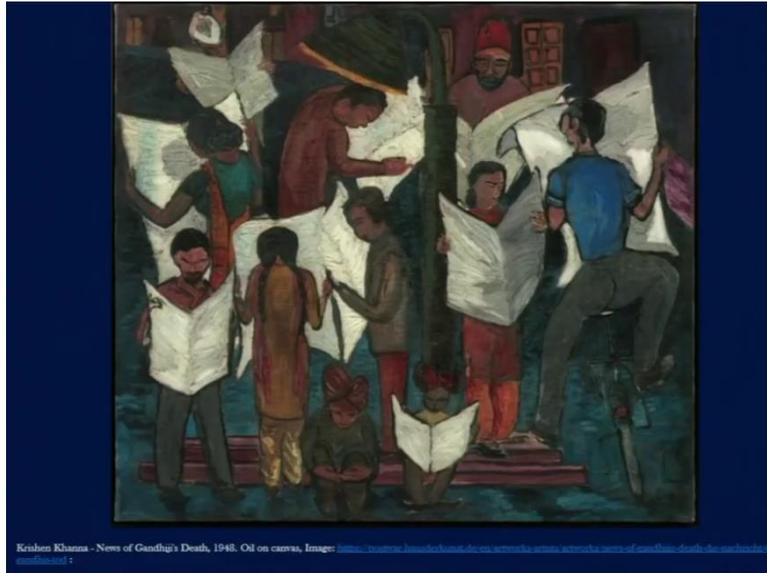
Like for example there are those feels, for example if we think about it here, how there is this large area on canvas where there is just this red attire that her cousin wears, but there are definitely modulations, slight hint of modulation to show this is an attire, but not all the details have been shown here. So some of the basic forms, the solidity of the form and the cousins almost like they are immovable.

So, those ideas how they are restricted by the rules of the society, but at the same time also how the approach towards life is different there. So, those things we find that to have reflected in the way she had built the forms and apart from that we also find that there is this masterful use of this complementary colour, how the brightness of the red is complemented by this sky blue this dupatta that her third cousin wears.

So there are definitely these attempts of showing the livelihood condition of the people there, but at the same time also thinking in terms of what constitutes a painting and painting is constituted by feels of colour and then how to contribute a life to these painted surfaces, so they are not just documentation, they are not just representation of a theme, but they are also a document of the process through which they are built.

So, these kinds of activities, these kinds of new approaches towards artwork that we find with Amrita Sher-Gil and perhaps these ideas have also reflected later on in the works of the Bombay progressives.

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So, here we have an image by Krishen Khanna and of course there are many other works by the artists, for example Raza and Souza. So, for example we find in Souza's work how there are those violent forms, there are many of the forms which are considered erotic, there are forms which have generated much controversy, but at the same time that we find this violent kind of forms, the human forms, especially women they are represented in Souza's work.

So, in some ways we find that can also be a reflection of the nude studies that those were prevalent in Western Europe. However, those studies were not there in the Indian subcontinent. So, to challenge some of the conventions which were established in India, perhaps Souza has taken up these measures of extensively working on this violent bodies, the nudes and so on.

So, this is something that we find that also came up as a strategy, strategy to deliberately deny what was there in the Indian subcontinent and as they have already proclaimed they wanted to move away from this romanticism which were prompted by Abanindranath Tagore and his disciples, but then we see what they have contributed is something that allowed the Indian audience to be acquainted with a new form of viewership.

Now, here what we see in this particular image that is made by Krishen Khanna and this painting is called the News of Gandhiji's Death and that was in 1948. So, as we all know Gandhiji died in 1948 so this is perhaps the mourning right after this tragic incident. And so we find that there are many people who have perhaps gathered in this public place where there is this one man whom we can find that he is just balancing himself on this bicycle and then still reading this newspaper.

There is this streetlight we find that stays at the centre of this image almost making this an architectural column like space that we have already seen in other images. And then we also find that there are people who are seated there in various gestures and postures, but for all of them one thing is common that everyone is reading newspapers. And the newspaper is the white surface, the white and grey surface of the newspaper they dominate the entire picture plane.

Then this white surface, this white and grey surface of the newspaper also comes in contrast to the otherwise gloomy palette of this canvas. And the gloomy palette is understandably for mourning Gandhiji's death, but also at the same time to show the political situation around this time. Now, if we think about it that this is a particular time when we find that many different kinds of experiments are happening with painting.

But this is in terms of its form, in terms of the distribution of colour because here there is this superb distribution of colour in terms of how these white and grey newspapers they are situated in these various parts of this painting and then how these newspapers are the elements which bring all those different figures together into this one narrative. So, if this is something that we find that this formal exercise has been played out in these images.

And in most of the discussions around the Progressive Artists' Group, this formal aspect, the aspect of utilizing form, the colour scheme as well as the pictorial arrangement, they get priority. But if you also think about it this painting is made in 1948 and it also refers to this event that had taken place in 1948. So, we see that the Progressive Artists' Group, the painters from this group they were not really away from the societal elements.

Even though many of their works, they might see much more abstracted, they are often considered as copies or copies of the European avant-garde paintings, but we see they were not everything about this European avant-garde painting or the modernist practices, but they wanted to bring different kinds of knowledge together and to make it relevant at a time when India gained its independence and then there were a new discussion about the role of art in society.

So, these are some of the things that we find how these newly emerging art forms were developing in this newly independent country. So, there are many other aspects we can find in terms of how the canvas painting and many other expressions have also contributed to that, but we will get into the details of all those other practices in the next lectures. Thank you.