

CHAPTER 6

INDIAN RENAISSANCE

THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF BENGAL SCHOOL-

In 1884, E.B. Havell became the principal of Madras School of Art. There was some awakening in India with the founding of Congress. Havell contributed to the same, attracted the attention of the world towards great traditions of art of ancient India, and said, “The European arts are an introduction to the material things whereas Indian art is infinite and timeless.” After some time he became the principal of Calcutta School of art. Here Abanindranath Tagore who was the pioneer of Bengal style or Thakur style, was influenced by the western, Persian, Chinese, Japanese, Mughal and Ajanta art. The synthesis of all these styles initiated a new style known as Bengal style. Abanindranath tutored many a students who advocated and promoted this style in different parts of the country. These artists were Nandalal Bose, Asit kumar Haldar, Surendra Nath Gupta, Devi Prasad Rai Chaudhry, Ukil Bandhu etc. Even having their distinct style, all these artists were influenced by Abanindranath Tagore.

The prime source of inspiration for this style was Ajanta, Mughal and Rajasthani paintings. Japanese, Chinese and Persian art also influenced it. There is simplicity, clarity and naturalness in this style. The absence of rigidity facilitated the development of individual style of every artist. The linear delicacy and dynamism of this style tried to reach back to the ancient art of painting to the best of its ability. European principles were followed along with the figure drawing rules of the ancient art in rendering anatomy. The colour scheme was soft and complementary. Watercolours were applied to a large extent which was used in wash technique by some and tempera by others. Paintings were based on ancient, historic and mythological themes along with the portrayal of Indian domestic life but there is no trace of the immediate environment on them.

This style began as a revolution. It met resistance initially but the participating artists and art critics persisted and succeed in their endeavour. The exhibitions of their paintings were held outside India too. The efforts of Mr. Havell, Dr. Ananda Coomarswamy, Asit Kumar Haldar and Shri Ganguly in introducing and explaining the importance of this renaissance are significant. The seeds of Indian traditions were sowed with this revivalist art though this style met its end soon after and the artists pursued their own individual styles but from the point of view of art Bengal School is important in the Indian art scenario.

1. This style is simple and lucid.
2. The importance of rendering was reinstated.
3. Soft colours replaced gaudy effect. Wash technique was applied to create a mystical effect.

4. Lights and shades were used charmingly to create a dramatic effect and emphasis on photographic realism ended.
5. This style was deficient in the appropriate treatment of architecture and nature.
6. The Mewar or Akbar era tradition of relation between form and space also ended. There was an effort to depict a subject on flat surface in a simplified manner.
7. Imported paper and water colours were used in Bengal School.
8. Mythological narratives, social, ordinary life and historical romances were mostly painted in this style.

In this way, his revivalist art movement is famous in the history of Indian art for the renowned titles of art history like Renaissance art, Thakur Style, Bengal Style of art etc.

THE CHIEF PAINTERS OF BENGAL SCHOOL AND THEIR PAINTINGS-

NANDALAL BOSE-

A foremost pupil of Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose successfully led the movement initiated by his master. Born on 3rd September, 1883 in Munger district of Bihar, Nandalal Bose gave up college education to seek art education from Abanindranath Tagore at the School of Art, Calcutta.

He copied the murals of Ajanta and Bagh caves and sought inspiration from them. His style bears close resemblance to Ajanta in lines, expression and forms.

The themes of his paintings included the Hindu mythological and religious narratives and the events from the life of Buddha. His famous paintings are namely Sati, Shiva drinking poison, Buddha and Mesha, Durga, Partha sarthi, Arjuna, Santhal-Santhalin, Yaksha and Megha, Gandhi ji's Dandi March etc. Nandalal Bose was the head of the Art Department at Shanti Niketan. He accompanied Rabindranath Tagore in China and experimented with ink. He made a special poster series for Haripura session of Congress using novel technique. He was popular as Master Moshai at Shanti Niketan.

He was honoured with *Padmavibhushan* by the Government of India. He also remained a revered member of Lalit Kala Academy. He presented his views on art in his books *Shilpkatha* and *Rupavali*. His painting titled “Shiva Drinking Poison” can be termed an iconic painting of Bengal School. It has been rendered in soft, rhythmic lines and the lines, form and facial features all represent the influence of Ajanta. Single tone colour scheme has been used in wash technique.



PLATE 1- SHIVA DRINKING POISON

Taking traditional art as a base, he prepared a painting series for Congress session at Haripura in free, natural and bold forms where the glimpses of Indian folk life were presented in bright colours and strong lines. *Dhaki* and *Devi* are the finest examples of this style.

ASIT KUMAR HALDAR-

Asit Kumar Haldar is that name in the famous artists of Bengal School who worked constantly to serve Indian art for years.

After studying under Abanindranath Tagore he was appointed as head of the Department of Art at Shanti Niketan and later worked as the Principal at Jaipur School of Art and Lucknow School of Art. His famous early paintings are *Saraswati* and *Mahakali*. He also made copies of the cave paintings of Ajanta, Bagh and Jogimara. The themes of his paintings were usually mythological. Besides making paintings on *Meghadoot*, *Ritusamhar* and *Mahabharata*, he also made paintings on the works of Omar Khayyam. There is lyrical fluidity and charm in the lines, colour scheme, figure drawing and composition of his paintings. Light and Rhythm, Kunal, Akbar, Study of Vedas are a few of his important works.

He wrote two books- “Art and Tradition” and “Our Heritage in Art” which proved to be extremely helpful for art students. He has written that “Indian paintings have the heritage of cultural and ancestral legacy of ancient tradition which is the solid foundation of our cultural treasure. Tradition is the very fundamental of our art on which the temple of the present and future art is being founded.”

Haldar placed folk art highly in traditional painting. He is of the view that public should not neglect art as the inherent love of human for art is vested in it and the subjects pertaining to human life are reflected in it.

His painting 'Mother and Child' is made in the style of Abanindranath Tagore. **(PLATE 2)** This painting is an example of soft and delicate colour scheme possessing delicate lyricism of lines. Due to the application of wash technique the yellow and red colour also seem pulverulent. The composition is simple with an uncomplex background and foreground.

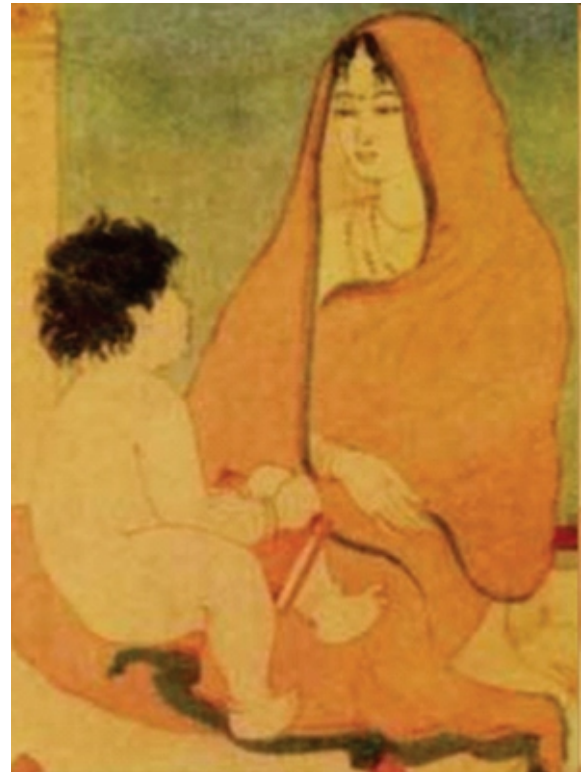


PLATE 2- MOTHER AND CHILD

MOHAMMAD ABDUR RAHMAN CHUGTAI-

Mohammad Abdur Rahman Chughtai was born on 21st September 1897 in a Mughal family of artists. His ancestor named “Ahmed” was the chief architect-sculptor of Jahangir. Chughtai was one of the most famous artists of the Indian art renaissance. His paintings are especially important due to their emotive and aesthetic qualities. Seeing his animal depiction, gesticulations and style of painting natural backdrops, a few scholars term his brush style as Persian-Mughal and a few as Iranian Mughal art. Chughtai painted many Hindu religious and mythological narratives.

The characteristic features of his painting style are natural beauty, attractive composition, lifelike figures, dynamic and fine lines, attempt at lights and shades, attractive facial expressions, soft and rhythmic hand gestures and depiction of beautiful jewellery etc. Western influence is visible in a few figures of his paintings. His painting *Vishwamitra* is worth mentioning in this respect where the faces and hairstyle of Rama and Lakshmana carry Japanese influence although the trees in the background carry more of Mughal

influence. A few of his paintings reflect the influence of Ajanta. The legs of figures are longer than usual.

These kinds of figures include *Usha* (First Rays of the morning sun), Krishna with flute, Krishna instructing Arjuna, Draupadi and Pandavas and Wife of Chaitanya etc. The colour scheme in his paintings is very charming and appealing. The study of Chughtai's paintings reveals his love for lotus flower because pink lotuses have been abundantly painted by him. His painting *Devdasi after Holy bath* and *Chitralkha* are worth mentioning for their artistic merits and colour scheme. His later paintings have the influence of Kangra School colour scheme.

Many art critics considered him painter of International standard. Besides India his paintings were exhibited abroad and are in the collection of England, Germany, France, Russia, America and many other countries.

The painting titled “*Radhika*” is his most important work that displays his unique art. **(PLATE 3)**

The appeal of colours, lyricism and dynamism of lines along with the expressions of *Radhika* are very powerful. The painting can be termed as one of the finest of Bengal School.



PLATE 3- RADHIKA

ANANDA COOMARSWAMY-

Ananda Coomarswamy was born in 1877 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. His father was Tamil who settled in Sri Lanka. He was a barrister. He married an English woman. His father died shortly after his birth. His mother took him to England where he was brought up and educated. After completing his education Ananda Coomarswamy was appointed as an officer of Sri Lanka in Colombo where he developed a fascination and interest for Indian art and philosophy. This fascination and interest brought him closer to India and he wrote many books on Indian culture, art and philosophy and gradually he became famous as the finest exponent of Indian art.

Ananda Coomarswamy made several visits to India between the years 1908 to 1913 and travelled to places of artistic importance and collected information related to the subject. He researched Rajput and Pahari styles and collected paintings and in 1916 published two illustrated units on Rajput art through Oxford Press and highlighted the Indian miniature tradition before the world. His writings related to Indian art were also published in the prestigious research papers and magazines.

Ananda Coomarswamy wrote about 20 books which are as follows-

1. History of Indian and Indonesian art
2. Introduction of Indian art
3. Rajput painting
4. The dance of Shiva

Through his books and writings Ananda Coomarswamy presented the Indian art, religion and culture before the world and earned prestige for India. His contribution to the history of Indian art is unforgettable.

E. B. HAVELL-

E.B. Havell occupies a distinct place in the history of modern Indian art. He presented the theoretical aspect of Indian art simply, clearly and factually. He presented his views on the technical aspects, symbols, building process and development system of Indian architecture, sculpture, and painting comprehensively. There is a broad description of *Abina to Zarab* (method of making miniatures) and the paper (*Vasli*) used with reference to Mughal School which is extremely important even today for art teachers, students and scholars. Havell presented the different aspects of Indian art through his books and writing before the world and brought Prestige to Indian art. In the year 1896 Havell was appointed the principle of Calcutta art School. He observed that influenced by the European art teaching system the Indian artists and students neglected Indian art and were following Western art. Like a true art-lover Havell appreciated Indian art amidst critics, proponents, and westerners. He also presented the view that instead of Western art the Indian artist should be there at on Ajanta, Rajput, and Mughal style. He also accepted in clear words that Indian art is closer to the soul and reflect eternal truth instead of materialistic world where as Western art is its opposite and closer to materialism and though it has physical beauty it lacks spirituality.

In favour of the Indian art E.B. Havell wrote the books Indian Sculpture and Painting, Indian architecture and Ideals of Indian Art. Through his works he attracted the attention of the world towards traditional Indian art and presented the artistic values of Indian art. The contribution of E.B.Havell in the field of Indian art is invaluable.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE-

The name of Rabindranath Tagore is important in the field of Indian painting. Being versatile, he was a good writer, poet, musician, philosopher and a good painter too. He started painted towards the advanced age of 67 years. His painting began with his writing. Editing the irrelevant words of his writings and poetry, he would render forms to his imagination and enjoying this creation of forms he started painting and in a few years, he painted approximately three thousand paintings. He never received formal art education. Therefore, his art is natural and unbound by conventions that he taught the Indian painters. His mediums were also unbound. He used coloured ink, pen and watercolours to paint. He was experimental with his work and applied colours with brush, hands or at times with cloth and sometimes he rubbed flowers and leaves to create a colourful effect which reflected a child-like quality in his works.

There is an abundance of abstract figures, faces, trees and plants in the paintings of Rabindranath Tagore. There were several exhibition of his paintings at international level which made him world famous. Dreamlike sequences are mystically painted in his works. The dark colours have been used more in his paintings and in some of his paintings, he has experimented with bright colours along



PLATE 4- MOTHER AND CHILD

with dark colours. He was an experimental artist who liberated art from the conventions and set ideals making it a powerful medium of self-expression for which he is known as one of the pioneers of Modern Indian art.

His paintings are usually untitled but his painting of mother and child by its own nature and expression illustrates the same. This painting depicts the form of a woman and a child in simple lines. The head of the woman is bent over her child. Face has been drawn with light lines. His painting “Woman” shows a bent face of a woman. Only the face of the woman and a hand are visible. Rest of the body is covered with clothes. Yellow and brown colours have been used in the painting.

ABANINDRANATH TAGORE-

In 1817 on the day of Janmashtami a New Bright star rose in the Thakur family of Jorasanko in Bengal who was named Abanindranath. After his initial school education he was tutored at home for Sanskrit and Persian languages and music. He inherently grasped literature, music and arts from his father Gunendranath, grandfather Girindranath, his uncles Jyotirindra and Rabindranath. His father and grandfather were good artists so he started painting under their guidance. At the time when Abanindranath entered the field of painting, most of the Indian Painters were working in European style. Therefore Abanindranath received formal education of art from the Italian artist O. Ghiraldi and British painter Palmer and made paintings in European Style. His early paintings are made in pen and ink which include sketches, portraits and landscapes. The paintings based on Rabindranath Tagore's book *Chitrangada* are his early paintings.

Abanindranath worked in this style till about 1895 but later on true inspiration from the miniature of Mughal School were part of his ancestral collection whose influence can be clearly seen in the paintings painted between the years 1895 to 1900. For example the paintings of “Radha Krishna” series present synthesis of European and Indian style. At this time, due to the existence of Rabindranath he studied the *Vaishnava* verses of Chandidas and Vidyapati and made paintings based on them. At this point, he reverted to Indian style from European style exemplified in his painting titled “*Shuklabhisara*” which is considered to be his first painting in pure Indian style. Incidentally, Abanindranath met the Principal of Calcutta school of Art, E.B. Havell who became an inspiration for Abanindranath to base his works on the great Indian styles and paintings. He studied Ajanta, Rajasthani, Mughal and Pahari paintings and made a series of paintings on *Buddha Charitra* and *Krishna Charitra*. He also made Indian mythological texts and Sanskrit literatures as the theme for his paintings and painted incidents from *Ritusamhar*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata* etc. *Abhisarika*, *Shri Rama* and *Mayamriga*, *Buddha* and *Sujata* etc. are noteworthy paintings for their Indian imprint.

In about 1901-02 Abanindranath was introduced to the art of Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida, the artists who came to Calcutta as guests of the Tagore family. He not only learned wash technique from them but also experimented in this style. “*Omar Khayyam*”, “*Virahi Yaksha*” and “*Ganesha's Mother*” are his important paintings in wash technique.

Along with new experiments he kept working in traditional Indian style. He travelled to Ajanta, Ellora and Bagh caves with other Indian artists and made copies of many fine Ajanta paintings. Amongst the paintings made between the years 1901-1905, his “*Building of Taj*” and “*The Last Days of Shahjahan*” present Mughal composition colours and treatment. Inspired by the revolt against Bengal division, he made a painting titled “*Bharat Mata*” which is a unique painting.

In 1907 A.D. Abanindranath with his elder brother Gaganendranath founded “Indian Society of Oriental Art” which led to an awakening in the eastern art values and modern Indian art. In the organised programmes of the society, paintings of Western Japanese artists were exhibited along with the works of

Indian artists. Through his art, Abanindranath remained attached to all aspects of life and society. Besides painting mythological, religious and literature themes he also painted landscapes, paintings of birds and animals, portraits and general life in which *Devadasi*, *Kajri*, *Suryapuja* and paintings of the actors and actresses of Bengali theatre are significant.

In the years between 1920-1926 he made a potent use of pastel colours which is evident in the notable portraits of Gandhi, Tagore, and C.F. Andrews. “Alamgir”, “Noorjahan”, and “Aurangzeb” are important paintings of this era. The important paintings of his later years include the painting series of “*Laila-Majnu*,” “*Kavi Kankan Chandi*” and “*Krishna Mangal*”. In 1941, after painting “The Mahaprayana of World Poet Rabindranath” (The Death of Rabindranath Tagore), he more or less gave up painting.

Besides being an ideal painter Abanindranath was an ideal teacher, art critic, literary figure, theatre artist, musician and sculptor. His contribution to the Indian Renaissance is unforgettable.

Abanindranath painted “Bharat Mata” in the year 1905. It was the first representative painting of his new Bengal style. It was inspired by the movements against the division of Bengal. Painted in wash technique, delicate colours and lines have been used in this painting. Bharat Mata has been symbolically presented with four hands. Painted against flag background the Mughal style border has been used in this painting.

The painting of Shahjahan watching the Taj presents the Mughal influence especially its architecture and rendering carry the Mughal miniature style. The human figures have been depicted in a very simple manner. Limited use of colours is a characteristic of Bengal School.

JAMINI ROY-

Jamini Roy was born in Bankura (West Bengal) in 1887 A.D. He studied art at Government School of Art Calcutta. Initially he made paintings based on western style and later paintings were done in Bengal style. Dissatisfied, he was influenced by the folk art of Bengal (Kalighat) and *Pattachitra* of Bihar. He drew inspiration from the tribal art and potters, weavers, local toy-makers and continued painting. In this way, Jamini Roy emerges as an experimentalist before us. The figures in his paintings are ornamental with sharp eyes extending to the ears. Simple and impressive colour scheme, clarity of lines and simple composition are the chief characteristics of his paintings.

Jamini Roy embraced the symbols of folk art and applied them in a new scheme. His paintings related to rural life can be termed outstanding examples of his art. Besides painting subjects related to folk art, he also painted mythological and religious themes. He conducted new experiments with tempera colours on cloth, paper, boards and mats. He always had a vision for research. He used bright colours and simple forms. The lines of most of his paintings are bold and rhythmic. Later on he also sculpted wood. His paintings “Jesus Christ” and “*Shringara*” are sublime.

Jamini Roy's religious feelings, simple tendency, folklore and pure approach of colours impressed the later artists. He passed away in 1972. His main paintings are *Three Pujarins*, *Santhal Dance*, *The Last Supper*,



(PLATE-5) BHARAT MATA

Cat and the Lobster, Two Cats and a Crayfish.

“Three Pujarins” is the most appreciated and notable painting of Jamini Roy. Simple, straight bold lines with simple figures are the features of this painting. Bright yellow and blue colours make the painting very attractive. Depiction of figures in minimal lines, sharp eyes extending from nose to ears and small lips are very pleasing. **(PLATE 6)**

The painting of Krishna and Balrama has been painted in folk style with simple forms. Lines and delineation is very appealing in the work. There are rhythmic and dynamic figures on two-dimensional flat surface. The colours of the painting are also charming.

AMRITA SHERGIL-

Amrita Shergil was born in 1913 in Hungary capital Budapest. Her father was an Indian and her mother a Hungarian. Since childhood, she was interested in paintings and trained at an Italian atelier in Florence at the age of 11. Later she also trained at ateliers in Paris. In Paris she observed the works of French impressionist artists and studied them. In 1931 paintings were exhibited in Paris which made her world famous. In 1934 he returned to India and won gold medal at the exhibition of all India Fine Arts and Craft Society for her painting titled "Indian girls". From 1934 to 1937 she travelled the whole of India and was very impressed with the Indian art and life after seeing the paintings of Ajanta. She understood the flat softness and symbolism of the paintings of Ajanta and Pahari paintings. The influence of Paul Gauguin is seen in the paintings of Amrita Shergill. The most important works of Gauguin are related to Tahitian island where he painted the lush green region and the beauty of women. Amrita Shergill followed the same style and painted Indian themes in it.

Although she received Western education, she was very close to Indian culture. Her paintings carry the distinctive technique of Indian arts, rhythm of lines, lyricism and brightness of colours. There has been a potent and self expressing use of red and yellow colours in her paintings.

Amongst the main paintings of Amrita Shergill South Indian Villagers, Hill Women, Bride's toilet, *Brahmacharis*, Three Sisters, The Banana Seller, *Haladi* Grinders, Story-Teller and two elephants in Red. "Three Sisters" is one of the main works of Amrita Shergill. The figures and colours bear the influence of Paul Gauguin. She has presented the costumes and culture of Punjab in a spirited manner. "The Bride's Toilet" is another noteworthy painting of Amrita Shergill which possess simple forms and dusty colour scheme. The folk culture of India can be seen in this painting.



PLATE-6 THREE PUJARINS



PLATE 7 THE BRIDE'S TOILET

IMPORTANT POINTS

1. Bengal style was developed by Abanindranath Tagore and E. B. Havell
2. The inspiration of this style were Ajanta, Mughal and Rajasthani painting styles.
3. The style is simple clear and natural.
4. Importance was given to lines.
5. Soft light colours have been used.
6. The main themes of the style are Indian mythological narratives, historical narratives and social life.
7. The main pupils of Abanindranath Tagore were Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar, K. Venkatappa, Shailendra Nath Dey, Sharda Charan Ukil etc.

EXERCISE QUESTIONS

VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Name the pioneer of Bengal School.
2. Name three main painters of Bengal school.
3. Who painted “Bharat Mata”?
4. Which medium did the Bengal School painters work with?

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Give an introduction to Ananda Coomaraswamy.
2. Write briefly about the paintings of Rabindranath Tagore.
3. Which style did Jamini Roy base his own style on?
4. Where did Amrita Shergil receive her initial education?

ESSAY TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Write about the stylistic characteristics of Bengal School.
2. What was the contribution of Abanindranath to Indian art? Elucidate.