

MODERN INDIAN ART

CHAPTER 5

COMPANY SCHOOL AND RAJA RAVI VERMA

THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF COMPANY SCHOOL-

The East India Company came to India with the aim of trade, but gradually they interfered in administration and established their own rule in the country. It has its own administrative officers, painters, soldiers and servants. They were known as the employees of the company. In the field of education, the East India Company implemented English education. It was Lord Macaulay who in 1834 implemented the English education system. Much work was done in the field of painting during this time. European art system started being followed in educational institutions. At the same time, new techniques of photography also influenced art. According to the European style, models were used for study. Art Schools were opened at Madras (1850), Calcutta (1854), Bombay (1857), Lahore (1857) etc. places.

Thousands of drawings, watercolours, oil paintings and prints were made in European Style. Their creators were Britishers, painters, doctors, army officers, research officers, tourists and local painters who were influenced by them.

The painting work continued in Patna, Calcutta, Murshidabad, Avadh and Madras and at other places. Today these paintings are preserved at Victoria Memorial at Calcutta, Ashutosh Collection, National Library, Birla Academy of Art, Indian museum, National Gallery of Modern Art at Delhi and National Museum.

Besides India, thousands of paintings are abroad in the collection of India Office library and Records, British Library London and Victoria and Albert Museum London. The displayed paintings in the museums include oil paintings, miniature, watercolours, print making (etching and lithograph) and paintings made on mica (mica painting).

LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS- The painters of company School painted different subjects of Indian life. They made large number of landscapes. As they travelled through the country, they encountered unusual flora and fauna and wanted to capture these images. The chief landscape painters dealing in drawings, watercolours, engraving and lithographs were Thomas Daniell, William Daniell, William Hodges and William Samson. Daniell travelled through the Ganges River to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and made landscapes at Munger, Hazaribagh, Jaunpur and Ghazipur. William Daniell travelled to India between the years 1785 to 1794. He was an expert at Steel engraving and also made a series of 144 paintings. After returning to England he published these paintings in a book.

PAINTINGS ON THE FOLK-LIFE OF VARIOUS REGIONS-

The Britishers coming to India were not only curious but also attracted towards the colourful

Lifestyle, costumes, jewellery, festival and celebrations. The diversity of the various regions of the large geographical expanse of India influenced the painters. The chief painters of this subject were Emily Eden, Balthazar Solomon and Charles D. Ollie. Amongst the local painters Manu Lal, Ramdas, Sitaram, Bhavani Das and Shaikh Ziauddin were the most important. All of them painted different festivals, procession scenes, cavalcades etc. There was not much difference between the paintings of British painters and the Indian Painters.

PAINTINGS OF PLACES OF ARCHEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE-

Many British painters explored the archaeological sites of India and made paintings of historical importance which include Ajanta, Ellora, Elephanta, Kanheri Caves, Taj Mahal, Red Fort, Fatehpur Sikri and Qutub Minar. The chief painters were James Ferguson, Robert **McVile**, Colonel Robert Smith (painting of the procession of Bharatpur), Thomas Danielle and William Danielle. The medium used by them were drawing, watercolours, oil colours, engraving and lithograph. These paintings of archaeological sites are very important.

COSTUMES AND JEWELLERY-

The diverse lifestyle of the inhabitants of various regions of India with bejewelled women, men, old people and children wearing colourful costumes was presented in the paintings by the European painters. These small sized artworks are either drawings, watercolours, engravings or lithographs. The painters of these subjects were **Balthazar Solomon, Madame Belnos, Charles De Ollie, Emily Eden and William Samson**. The painters influenced by them were Fakir Chand, Shivilal, Rajaram etc.

PAINTINGS RELATED TO VARIOUS PROFESSIONS-

The painters of Company period painted the people related to different professions like farmers, blacksmiths, carpenters, goldsmith, servant, gatekeeper, cook, sweet-seller, vendor and *Madari*



PLATE 1- PROCESSION



(PLATE 2 SAPERA-SAPERAN

(juggler). The painters of these subjects were Balthazar Solomon, Madame Belnos, Charles De Ollie, Emily Eden etc. the local painters made similar paintings. These were made in the form of drawing, watercolour, engraving and lithograph.

BUST AND PORTRAIT PAINTING- Innumerable bust and portrait paintings of rajas, nawabs, Company administrators, officers and other important people were painted. These people have been painted wearing magnificent attires in distinct pose in watercolour, oil paints or gouache. Painters John Joffany, James Hunter, Tilly Kettle etc. painted the portraits of British rulers, officers and rajas and nawabs.

FLORA PAINTING- Numerous paintings of plants and trees, climbers and vines, fruits and flowers were made in company School. Watercolours, engraving and lithographs were the medium of these artworks. These small sized paintings were made for various research papers and survey-collections of plants and vegetation. The chief painters of flora were Walter Hood Fitch, Joseph Dalton Hooker, John Ferguson, Lady Canning, W.J. Hooker and Emily Eden. The names of the local painters included Gora Chand, Govind, Vishnu Prasad, Bhawani Das and Ramdas.

PAINTINGS OF ANIMALS, BIRDS AND INSECTS-

The colourful birds, insects and exotic animals fascinated the painters of that period. The painters made their countless paintings in watercolours, engraving, and lithograph medium. The paintings were of small size. These paintings were also made for research papers and animal surveys. James Forbes, Robert Holmes, Francis Buchanan, John Gold and Elizabeth etc. made paintings of birds and animals, insects and water creatures. Indian painters influenced by them also painted many such works.

We see that during the East India Company many subjects were painted. These 150 years are very important in the history of Indian art. The different mediums of painting like watercolour, oil painting, mica painting, engraving and lithograph developed side by side. Landscapes, human figures, portrait paintings and reproductions were chief characteristics of painting of this period. The most important point is that the natural scenes, archaeological sites, lifestyle of people, costumes, professions, celebrations, festivals, flora and fauna, portraits and portraiture were all painted by the British painters in their own style. The paintings made by them are also important because these places of archaeological importance have changed since then. There is also significant change in the costumes and lifestyles of people.

RAJA RAVI VARMA-

Raja Ravi Varma was born in 1858 A.D. in Kilimanoor village of Kerala. He was inclined towards painting since his childhood. He was inspired by his uncle. He took art lessons from artists like Theodor Jenson and other European painters who travelled to India. He was trained under a contemporary artist Rama Swami Naidu. Naidu was famous for his oil paintings and was considered as the finest painter of European style. Adopting the style of European studios, Ravi Varma took Indian subjects, the ideals and principles of Indian art and combined it with imagination as a base for expression.

Raja Ravi Varma had the patronage of the maharaja of Travancore, Gaikwads of Baroda and other affluent individuals. Ravi Varma painted the Indian ballads in western style. He painted various themes, which also included the portraits of *Rajas* and *Maharajas*. Dramatic elements can be observed in his artworks, which is due to the fusion of Indian with western style. His paintings were also interrelated with the drama and theatre of that period. He surveyed for the costumes and jewellery for the mythological themes and for this purpose travelled the pilgrimages related to Rama and Krishna in Northern India but with little success. He then derived inspiration from the immediate folk life and the existing drama groups and rendered



PLATE 3
A PAINTING OF RAJA RAVI VARMA



PLATE 4
RAVANA AND JATAYU

the figures of the gods and goddesses in his paintings commensurate with their mythological description.

Raja Ravi Varma started a lithographic printing press in Bombay for printing his paintings and so his works became popular and found exceptional admiration in India and were also appreciated overseas. Being based on religious themes and printing process, these paintings became popular amongst public. Ravi Varma was one of the most famous artists of his time. He gained recognition at quite an early age. Paintings of Hindu epics and narratives were his speciality and it is in his works that women have been glorified in various forms. His famous works include Ravana and Jatayu, *Bhishma Pratigya* (Bhishma's Oath), Humbling of the Ocean, *Draupadi*, *Shakuntala*, *Raja Harishachandra*, *Yashoda* and *Krishna* etc.

RAVANA AND JATAYU- Ravi Varma painted many episodes from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. (**PLATE 4**) *Ravana and Jatayu* is a famous work of Ravi Varma in which the episode of Jatayu attacking Ravana who is abducting Sita and Ravana chopping off a wing of Jatayu has been depicted. The aggressive pose of Ravana and helplessness of Sita is dramatic. The lights and shades, costumes and jewellery used and rendering of figures has perceptible European influence.

VASUDEVA AND DEVAKI ESCAPING PRISON- This painting is based on an episode from the *Mahabharata*. There is seeming western influence in rendering, tonal effect and perspective used. The theatrical effect is evident. The colour scheme of the painting is quite attractive.

IMPORTANT POINTS

1. The style that developed under the patronage of British East India Company is known as Company School.
2. Oil paintings, watercolour paintings and prints were made in European style.

3. The European painters worked with Indian painters in company School.
4. The chief painters of this School were Thomas Daniell, William Daniell, William Hodges, Emily Eden, Charles DeOllie, Fakir Chand, Shivrul, Rajaram, Govind, Vishnu Prasada, Bhawani Das etc.
5. The prime centres of Company School were Patna, Calcutta, Murshidabad, Avadh(Oudh), Madras, etc.
6. The folk life of different states, costumes, archaeological sites and flora and fauna were painted in Company school.

EXERCISE QUESTIONS

VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Under whose patronage did Company School develop?
2. In which parts of the country did Company School develop the most?
3. Which colours did Ravi Varma make use of?
4. Name two famous paintings of Raja Ravi Varma.

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. What were the main subjects of company school?
2. Name the chief painters of Company school.
3. Write about the main themes of the paintings of Ravi Varma.
4. Describe a few paintings of Raja Ravi Varma.

ESSAY TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Write an essay on the origin and development of Company School.
2. Enumerate the contribution of Raja Ravi Varma to Indian art.