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(B) Description of Module

Items	Description of Module
Subject Name	Women's Studies
Paper Name	Women, Theatre & the Fine Arts
Module Name/ Title	Women in Modern Indian Paintings
Module ID	Paper- 14 , Module-9
Pre-requisites	Some knowledge about how women were painted by modern painters and who were the important women painters of the times
Objectives	To know about Women in Modern Painting and Modern Paintings by Women.
Keywords	British Art Schools, The Bengal School of Art, Contemporary Art

Women in Modern Indian Paintings

Introduction

The present module deals with those modern paintings which depict women in different aspects as well as about the women who painted and made their mark through the canvas.

The Modern art movement in Indian painting is considered to have begun in Calcutta in the late nineteenth century. The old traditions of painting had more or less died out in Bengal and new schools of art were started by the British. Initially, protagonists of Indian art such as Raja Ravi Varma drew on Western traditions and techniques including oil paint and easel painting. A reaction to the Western influence led to a revival in primitivism, called the Bengal school of art, which drew from the rich cultural heritage of India. It was succeeded by the Santiniketan School, led by Rabindranath Tagore's harking back to idyllic rural folk and rural life.

British Art Schools

Oil and easel painting in India began in the eighteenth century which saw many European artists, such as Zoffany, Kettle, Hodges, Thomas and William Daniel, Joshua Reynolds, Emily Eden and George Chinnery coming out to India in search of fame and fortune. The courts of the princely states of India were an important draw for European artists due to their patronage of the visual and performing arts and also their need for the European style of portraits

The merchants of the East India Company also provided a large market for native art. A distinct genre of watercolour painting on paper and mica in the later half of the 18th Century depicting scenes of everyday life, regalia of princely courts, and native festivities and rituals. Referred to as the "Company style" or "Patna style", it flourished at first in Murshidabad and spread to other cities of British suzerainty. The style is considered by authorities to be "of hybrid style and undistinguished quality". Post-1857, John Griffith and John Lockwood Kipling (father of Rudyard Kipling) came out to India together; Griffith going on to head the Sir J. J. School of Art and being considered as one of the finest Victorian painters to come to India and Kipling becoming head of both the J. J. School of Art and the Mayo School of Arts established in Lahore in 1878.

The enlightened eighteenth century attitude shown by an earlier generation of British towards Indian history, monuments, literature, culture and art took a reverse turn in the mid-nineteenth century. Previous manifestations of Indian art were brushed away as being "dead" and the stuff of museums; "from the official British perspective, India had no living art". To propagate Western values in art education and the colonial agenda, the British established art schools in Calcutta and Madras in 1854 and in Bombay in 1857.

Raja Ravi Varma

Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) was a remarkable self-taught Indian painter from the princely state of Travancore. His exposure to the West came when he won the first prize in the Vienna Art Exhibition in 1873. Varma's paintings were also sent to the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 and his work was awarded two gold medals. He is considered the first of the modernists, and, along with Amrita Sher-gil (1913-1941), the main exponent of Western techniques to develop a new aesthetic in the subjective interpretation of Indian culture with "the promise of materiality in the

medium of oils and the reality-paradigm of the mirror/window format of easel painting". Some other prominent Indian painters born in the 19th Century are Mahadev Vishwanath Dhurandhar (1867-1944), Antonio Xavier Trindade (1870-1935), [8] Manchershaw Fakirjee Pithawalla (1872-1937), Sawlaram Lakshman Haldankar (1882-1968) and Hemen Majumdar (1894-1948).

The work of Varma was considered to be among the best examples of the fusion of Indian traditions with the techniques of European academic art, in the colonial-nationalistic framework of the 19th Century. He is most remembered for his paintings of beautiful sari-clad women, who were portrayed as shapely and graceful. Varma became the best-known allegorist of Indian subjects in his depiction of scenes from the epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

Raja Ravi Varma considered his work as "establishing a new civilizational identity within the terms of 19th Century India". He aimed to form an Indian canon of art in the manner of those of the classic Greek and Roman civilizations. Varma's art came to play an important role in the development of the Indian national consciousness. Varma purchased a printing press which churned out oleograph copies of his paintings which graced the middle-class homes of India, many decades after he died. Considered a genius in his heyday, within a few years of his passing, Varma's paintings came under severe strictures for mimicking Western art. Raja Ravi Varma died in 1906 at the age of 58. He is considered among the greatest painters in the history of Indian art.

The Bengal School

The Bengal School of Art was an influential style of art that flourished in India during the British Raj in the early 20th century. It was associated with Indian nationalism, but was also promoted and supported by many British arts administrators. The Bengal

school arose as an avant garde and nationalist movement reacting against the academic art styles previously promoted in India, both by Indian artists such as Ravi Varma and in British art schools. During the colonial era, Western influences had started to make an impact on Indian art. Some artists developed a style that used Western ideas of composition, perspective and realism to illustrate Indian themes, Raja Ravi Varma being prominent among them. Following the widespread influence of Indian spiritual ideas in the West, the British art teacher Ernest Binfield Havel attempted to reform the teaching methods at the Calcutta School of Art by encouraging students to imitate Mughal miniatures. This caused immense controversy, leading to a strike by students and complaints from the local press, including from nationalists who considered it to be a retrogressive move. Havel was supported by the artist Abanindranath Tagore, nephew of the poet Rabindranath Tagore¹.

Abanindranath painted a number of works influenced by Mughal art, a style that he and Havel believed to be expressive of India's distinct spiritual qualities, as opposed to the "materialism" of the West. His best-known painting, Bharat Mata (Mother India), depicted a young woman, portrayed with four arms in the manner of Hindu deities, holding objects symbolic of India's national aspirations. The other prominent figures of the Bengal school of art were Gaganendranath Tagore, Abanindranath's elder brother, Jamini Roy, Mukul Dey, Manishi Dey and Ram Kinker Baij, who is more famous as the pioneer of Modern Indian Sculpture. After meeting E.B. Havell, Abanindranath Tagore worked with him to revitalise and redefine art teaching at the Calcutta School of art, a project also supported by his brother Gaganendranath, who set up the Indian Society of Oriental Art. Abanindranath Tagore believed in the traditional Indian techniques of painting. His philosophy existed in rejecting the materialistic art of the west and coming back to the Indian traditional art forms. He painted one of the mythological character

¹ Bagal, Jogesh Chandra (1966). History of the Govt. College of Art and Craft in the Centenary: Government College of Art & Craft, Calcutta, Calcutta: Government College of Art & Craft, pp.21-34

Parvati as -Ganesh-Janani which was very interesting at that time. He was very much influenced by the Mughal School of painting as well as Whistler's Aestheticism.

Another important figure of this era was Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, who rejected the classicism of the Bengal School and its spiritual preoccupations. His book *Hungry Bengal : a tour through Midnapur District* included many sketches of the Bengal Famine drawn from life, as well as documentation of the persons depicted. The book was immediately banned by the British and 5000 copies were seized and destroyed. Only one copy was hidden by Chittaprosad's family and is now in the possession of the Delhi Art Gallery. During the opening years of the 20th century, Abanindranath developed links with Japanese cultural figures such as the art historian Okakura Kakuz and the painter Yokoyama Taikan as part of a globalised Modernist initiative with pan-Asian tendencies. Those associated with this Indo-Far Eastern model included Nandalal Bose, Benode Behari Mukherjee, Vinayak Shivaram Masoji, B.C. Sanyal, Beohar Rammanohar Sinha, and subsequently their students A. Ramachandran, Tan Yuan Chameli, and a few others. The Bengal school's influence on Indian art scene gradually started alleviating with the spread of modernist ideas post-independence.

One of the most famous pupils of Abanindranath Tagore, **Shri Jamini Roy** was painter honoured with the State award of Padma Bhushan in 1955. His artistic originality and contribution to the emergence of modern art in India remains unquestionable. His new style was a reaction against the Bengal School and Western tradition. His underlying quest was threefold: to capture the essence of simplicity embodied in the life of the folk people; to make art accessible to a wider section of people; and to give Indian art its own identity. Jamini Roy's paintings were put on exhibition for the first time in the British India Street of Calcutta (Kolkata) in 1938. During the 1940s, his popularity touched new heights, with the Bengali middle class and the European community becoming his main clientele. In 1946, his work was exhibited in London and in 1953, in

the New York City. His work has been exhibited extensively in international exhibitions and can be found in many private and public collections such as the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. He spent most of his life living and working in Calcutta. Initially he experimented with Kalighat paintings but found that it had ceased to be strictly a "patua" and went to learn from village patuas. (The *Patuas* are an artisan community found in the state of West Bengal in India. Some Patuas are Hindus, while others are Muslims. Hindu Patuas are active in the Kalighat and Kumartuli regions of Calcutta, along with some other parts of West Bengal, where they are reduced in number. It is believed that most Patuas are actually converts from Hinduism to Islam.) Consequently, his techniques as well as subject matter were influenced by the traditional Art of Bengal. He preferred to be called a patua. Jamini Roy died in 1972. He was survived by four sons and a daughter. Currently his successors (daughters-in-law and grand children and their children) stay at the home he had built in Ballygunge Place, Kolkata. His works can be found in various galleries across the globe as well as in his home. It is evident that his followers and successors copied many of his works with minor variations intentional or unintentional.

Some well known works of Jamini Roy are , *Cats Plus*, *Cats Sharing a Prawn* , *Crucifixion with Attendant Angels* , *Gopini*, *Krishna and Balarama*, *Krishna and Radha*, *Dancing*, *Krishna with Gopis in Boat*, *Makara*, *Queen on Tiger*, *Ravana*, *Sita and Jatayu* , *Santal Boy with Drum*, *Seated Woman in Sari* , *St. Ann and the Blessed Virgin*, *Vaishnavas*, *Virgin And Child*, *Warrior King*, *Mother and the Child* , *Three Sisters*, *Surprise etc.*

Hemendranath Majumdar another painter in India gained popularity by painting in the western style. Women of his indigenous (former) Bengal, mostly bathing or draped in wet saris are considered to be Mazumdar's classical trademark. Some important oil

paintings of Hemendranath have subjects like *Machh Dhara* (Fishing) and *Fasal Kata* (Reaping of Crops) are remarkable.

Famous Women Painters in India

India has produced female painters who have displayed their talent worldwide; hence, bringing a change in the acceptance of women in the field of art and culture. Their journey might not have been easy but their work and expertise have showered them with popularity and respect. We have come up with a list of such prominent female painters who have inspired all with their beautiful and influential paintings. Let's look at them more closely here:

Amrita Sher-Gil

Amrita Sher-Gil (30 January 1913 ó 5 December 1941) was an eminent Indian painter born to a Punjabi Sikh father and a Hungarian Jewish mother, sometimes known as India's Frida Kahlo, and today considered an important woman painter of 20th century India, whose legacy stands at par with that of the Masters of Bengal Renaissance; she is also the 'most expensive' woman painter of India.

In 1934, while in Europe she "began to be haunted by an intense longing to return to India feeling in some strange way that there lay my destiny as a painter"², as she later described her return to India the same year. She began a quest for the rediscovery of the traditions of Indian art which was to continue till her death. It was also during this period that she pursued an affair with Malcolm Muggeridge. She stayed at their family home at Summer Hill, Shimla, for a while, before leaving for travel, in 1936, at the behest of an art collector and critic, Karl Khandalavala, who encouraged her to pursue her passion for discovering her Indian roots. She was greatly impressed and influenced by the Mughal and Pahari schools of painting and the cave paintings at Ajanta.

² Laid Bare – the free spirit of Indian art The Daily Telegraph, 24 February 2007.

Later in 1937, she toured South India and produced the famous South Indian trilogy of paintings - *Bride's Toilet*, *Brahmacharis*, and *South Indian Villagers Going to Market* following her visit to the Ajanta caves, when she made a conscious attempt to return to classical Indian art. These paintings reveal her passionate sense of colour and an equally passionate empathy for her Indian subjects, who are often depicted in their poverty and despair. By now the transformation in her work was complete and she had found her 'artistic mission' which was, according to her, to express the life of Indian people through her canvas. While in Saraya Sher-Gil wrote to a friend thus: 'I can only paint in India. Europe belongs to Picasso, Matisse, Braque.... India belongs only to me'³. Her stay in India marks the beginning of a new phase in her artistic development, one that was distinct from the European phase of the interwar years when her work showed an engagement with the works of Hungarian painters, especially the Nagybanya School of painting.

Sher-Gil married her Hungarian first cousin, Dr. Victor Egan in 1938 and moved with him to India to stay at her paternal family's home in Saraya in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. Thus began her second phase of painting which equals in its impact on Indian art, the likes of Rabindranath Tagore and Jamini Roy of the Bengal school of art. The 'Calcutta Group' of artists, which transformed the Indian art scene in a big way, was to start only in 1943, and the 'Progressive Artist's Group', with Francis Newton Souza, Ara, Bakre, Gade, M. F. Husain and S. H. Raza among its founders, lay further ahead in 1948. Amrita's art was strongly influenced by the paintings of the two Tagores, Rabindranath and Abanindranath who were the pioneers of the Bengal School of painting. Her portraits of women resemble works by Rabindranath while the use of 'chiaroscuro' and bright colours reflect the influence of Abanindranath.

³ Amrita's village". Frontline 30 (04). February–March 2013. Retrieved 26 February 2013.

It was during her stay at Saraya that she painted *the Village Scene*, *In the Ladies' Enclosure* and *Siesta* all of which portray the leisurely rhythms of life in rural India. *Siesta* and *In the Ladies' Enclosure* reflect her experimentation with the miniature school of painting while *Village Scene* reflects influences of the Pahari school of painting. Although acclaimed by art critics Karl Khandalavala in Bombay and Charles Fabri in Lahore as the greatest painter of the century, Amrita's paintings found few buyers. She travelled across India with her paintings but the Nawab Salar Jung of Hyderabad returned them and the Maharaja of Mysore chose Ravi Varma's paintings over hers.

Although from a family that was closely tied to the British Raj, Amrita herself was a Congress sympathizer. She was attracted to the poor, distressed and the deprived and her paintings of Indian villagers and women are a meditative reflection of their condition. She was also attracted by Gandhi's philosophy and lifestyle. Nehru was charmed by her beauty and talent and when he went to Gorakhpur in October 1940, he visited her at Saraya. Her paintings were at one stage even considered for use in the Congress propaganda for village reconstruction.

In September 1941, Victor and Amrita moved to Lahore, then in undivided India and a major cultural and artistic centre. She lived and painted at 23 Ganga Ram Mansions, The Mall, Lahore where her studio was on the top floor of the townhouse she inhabited. Amrita was known for her many affairs with both men and women and many of the latter she also painted. Her work *Two Women* is thought to be a painting of herself and her lover Marie Louise. In 1941, just days before the opening of her first major solo show in Lahore, she became seriously ill and slipped into a coma, and later died around midnight on 6 December 1941, leaving behind a large volume of work. The real reason for her death has never been ascertained. A failed abortion and subsequent peritonitis have been suggested as possible causes for her death. Her mother accused her doctor

husband Victor of having murdered her. However, the day after her death England declared war on Hungary and Victor was sent to jail as a national enemy. Amrita was cremated on 7 December 1941 at Lahore.

Sher-Gil's art has influenced generations of Indian artists from Sayed Haider Raza to Arpita Singh and her depiction of the plight of women has made her art a beacon for women at large both in India and abroad. The Government of India has declared her works as National Art Treasures, and most of them are housed in the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi. A postage stamp depicting her painting *'Hill Women'* was released in 1978 by India Post, and the Amrita Shergill Marg is a road in Lutyens' Delhi named after her. In 2006, her painting *Village Scene* sold for 6.9 crores at an auction in New Delhi which was at the time the highest amount ever paid for a painting in India. Besides remaining an inspiration to many a contemporary Indian artists, in 1993, she also became the inspiration behind, the famous Urdu play, by Javed Siddiqi, *Amrita* (1992), starring Shabana Azmi and Farooq Shaikh. Her work is a key theme in the contemporary Indian novel "Faking It" by Amrita Chowdhury.[33] Aurora Zogoiby, a character in Salman Rushdie's 1995 novel "The Moor's Last Sigh," was inspired by Sher-Gil.

Anjolie Ela Menon

She is India's leading artist whose work is part of several painting collections all over the world. She is a renowned muralist and has experience with sculptures as well. Her work *Yatra* was recently acquired by the Art Museum of San Francisco. She was awarded the Padma Shree award in the year 2000. Her popular work includes *Kalpana*, *Devyani*, *Mariam*, *Mutations* & more.

Arpita Singh

Born in the year 1937, Arpita Singh is a contemporary painter known for depicting woman's perspective through her work. She is a figurative artist whose canvas is dominated with vibrant pink and flamboyant blue color. Her painting "Wish Dreams" was sold for a whopping 9.6 crores in a 2010 auction. She was awarded the prestigious Padma Bhushan in 2011.

Reema Bansal

This young artist born in 1986, started painting at the tender age of 3. Support from her family and teachers motivated her to pursue her interest further. Despite her disease (neuropathy) which results in weakening of hands and arms, she has continued her passion of painting. She has received accolades for her work and has won many competitions for her impressive paintings.

Jayasri Burman

Born in Kolkata, Jayasri is a contemporary Indian artist whose works are mainly in water colors depicting the vast tradition of Hindu mythology and women centric issues. She trained from the illustrious Monsieur Ceizerzi in print making and comes from a family of eminent artists. She helped organize the exhibition "The Family" where she exhibited the work of her family members.

Nilima Sheikh

Nilima Sheikh's paintings address women centric issues. Her popular work series "When champa grew up" consisted of 12 tempera paintings narrating the story of a young girl and her hardships. Her work includes diverse style of paintings from the hand held miniature to conventional paintings. Born in Baroda in 1945, she has displayed her talent since her first solo exhibition held in 1983.

Nalini Malani

She is one of those artists whose paintings depict social and political issues influenced from her experiences as a refugee during the partition of India. She has been innovative in accommodating new mediums with her work. She has established herself as a multimedia artist and always tries to sync the modern technology with conventional style of painting.

Post-Independence

By the time of Independence in 1947, several schools of art in India provided access to modern techniques and ideas. Galleries were established to showcase these artists. Modern Indian art typically shows the influence of Western styles, but is often inspired by Indian themes and images. Major artists are beginning to gain international recognition, initially among the Indian diaspora, but also among non-Indian audiences.

The Progressive Artists' Group, established shortly after India became independent in 1947, was intended to establish new ways of expressing India in the post-colonial era. Its founder was Francis Newton Souza and S. H. Raza, M. F. Husain and Manishi Dey were early members. It was profoundly influential in changing the idiom of Indian art. Almost all of the major artists of India in the 1950s were associated with the group. Prominent among them were Akbar Padamsee, Sadanand Bakre, Ram Kumar, Tyeb Mehta, K. H. Ara, H. A. Gade and Bal Chabda. In 1950, V. S. Gaitonde, Krishen Khanna and Mohan Samant joined the Group. The group disbanded in 1956

Women artists like B. Prabha, Shanu Lahiri, Arpita Singh, Anjolie Ela Menon and Lalita Lajmi have made immense contributions to Modern Indian Art and Painting. Art historians like Prof. Rai Anand Krishna have also referred to those works of modern artistes that reflect the Indian ethos. Some of the acclaimed contemporary Indian artists include Nagasamy Ramachandran, Jitish Kallat, Atul Dodiya and Geeta Vadhera who

has won acclaim in translating complex, Indian spiritual themes onto canvas like Sufi thought, the Upanishads and the Bhagwad Geeta.

Indian Art got a boost with the economic liberalization of the country since the early 1990s. Artists from various fields now started bringing in varied styles of work. Post liberalization, Indian art works not only within the confines of academic traditions but also outside it. Artists have introduced new concepts which have hitherto not been seen in Indian art. Devajyoti Ray has introduced a new genre of art called Pseudorealism. Pseudorealist Art is an original art style that has been developed entirely on the Indian soil. It takes into account the Indian concept of abstraction and uses it to transform regular scenes of Indian life into fantastic images.

In post-liberalization India, many artists have established themselves in the international art market like the abstract painter Natvar Bhavsar, abstract Art painter Nabakishore Chanda, and sculptor Anish Kapoor whose mammoth postminimalist artworks have acquired attention for their sheer size. Many art houses and galleries have also opened in USA and Europe to showcase Indian artworks. Art scholars such as C. Sivaramamurti, Anand Krishna, R . Siva Kumar and Geeta Kapur have taken Indian Art to a global platform.