



Teaching Labs | Towards Modernism: Art of India from 1950–1990

Transcript of the talk

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I. Background: Late 19th Century–1950s

I am Sneha Ragavan. I am a researcher at Asia Art Archive and I am based in New Delhi.

Today, the title of my presentation is “Towards Modernism: Art of India from 1950–1990.” As you can see from the title itself, the topic is really vast. First of all, every aspect itself is quite vast. What is modernism? It’s a very big question. Art of India. India itself is really big. And the time period itself –we are looking at four decades – 1950 to 1990. Within this time period, there have been many movements, many styles, many groups, many kinds of practices. So, what I am going to do in today’s presentation is to provide just a few entry points into understanding and looking at what modernism was or is in India.

I don’t know if any of you have ever visited India, or are familiar with any of the artistic practices in India. It’s a long history. It’s a complex history. So I thought it would be useful to begin with providing some background to that history.

One of the things about Indian modernist practices is that it’s very difficult to pinpoint when it began. So rather than trying to do that today, I would begin by generally giving a brief introduction to the time period of colonialism onwards. And I will explain that briefly. But before we do that, let’s take one step back further just to familiarise all of you with India.

What you are seeing here is the Indian subcontinent, or a region that is more often, today, known as South Asia. This is a modern or contemporary map you are looking at. It consists of the nations of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Afghanistan to some extent – but when we are talking of pre-nineteenth century and thinking of pre-colonial India, we are not talking about all these nations. We are just talking about a big geographical region. So it will also be useful to show you one or two slides of what kinds of art practices were there before the nineteenth century.

Every different empire, kingdom, community has their own artistic practices, be it in the form of painting, architecture, sculpture, murals, and so on. So it would be very difficult for me to take you through all of those. But, just to give you a hint of something– so this is basically a site called Ajanta. This is in the western region of India between about the fifth to seventh century. You have these Buddhist cave paintings that were made over there. There's a reason why I have decided to show you, out of all the forms, Ajanta cave paintings. And maybe that would become clear when we look at modernist art practices later. Because a lot of modernist artists decided at some point to go back and look at Ajanta as a source of inspiration. So it becomes, in the twentieth century, Ajanta and the cave paintings in Ajanta became invoked as belonging to our classical past. Similarly, you have something as diverse, that's why I have just broadly called it miniature painting traditions, because every region across time had different kinds of miniature painting traditions. What you see on the left is actually a miniature painting from the Mughal period. This is roughly about fifteenth or sixteenth century that we are talking about, whereas the image on the right is actually coming from what is known as the Pahari miniature painting traditions, just to give you a sense of two different styles. Actually not even two, but many more styles of paintings that existed at the time before coming to the colonial period.

Colonial history in India begins with the East India Company setting up, ruling India in 1757. And the colonial period is very crucial because it really brought about a change in understanding about everything –about history, about the tradition, about the past, about the culture, and so on. Also along with colonialism came newer forms of knowledge and ways of understanding and that is why the colonial period in Indian history marks the break from where one can see something. That is why when we think about Indian history, we think about it in terms of pre-colonial, and the colonial, and then the postcolonial.

One of the things that happened alongside the East India Company was that a lot of artists who travelled along with the East India Company, travelled to different parts of India and made these paintings and artworks documenting the landscapes of India, of the British conquest of India, different forts they captured. As you can see, this is an Englishman, in fact an army officer, standing there in regal poise in India. This school of painting was known as the Company School because the artists travelled along with the East India Company. So that's why they are known as the Company School of Painting. What the Company School of Painting did was that, with their images circulating in India, it showcased this very new academic neoclassical style of portraiture, landscape, notions of the picturesque, and so on. The academic art forms that the Company School introduced very heavily influenced a lot of Indian artists of the time, because this kind of perspective, this kind of rendering of a figure, and so on, were quite newly introduced –and also medium, oil was a very new medium. Amongst Indian artists, from about the 1870s onwards, you can see a lot of artists being interested in these new forms of academic art. So basically moving away from the traditional practices and coming to try these new forms. For example, this is one of the pioneering artists who really began this...who tried this academic art and made it extremely popular. Raja Ravi

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Varma is an artist whose paintings and whose prints, more importantly, were widely circulated. You would find images of his works in almost every Indian household at some point. What he did was to try and use this academic style, in order to render mythological and religious themes. So these would be looking at folk tales, religious tales, all of these mythological texts, and trying to draw events. And apart from that, also portraits of gods, goddess, and so on. These in fact became very widely circulated through his own press. The artist himself had a printing press, which then produced a lot of these images. Portraiture and being painted in this realistic or naturalistic manner, was also something that attracted the nobility. Ravi Varma was a master artist of this kind, who was invited by a lot of noble families to make these portraits. Similarly, another artist of this time, of this kind, who did this kind of work, was M. V. Dhurandhar. And much like Raja Ravi Varma, what you can see on the left is actually a scene from one of the texts that is known as the *Mahabharata*, and this is a scene of the battle ground. These are symbolic. All of these paintings are symbolic of, for example, the victory of good over evil. On the right, you will find nationalism as a theme that begins to be portrayed using this academic form. So even though the academic art form was something that was taken from the British, the themes that were being depicted were Indian. So that was basically the point that the academic artists' works were making. On the right, for example, you will see a lot of national leaders, leaders from the national history. You have in the foreground, a sort of anthropomorphic representation of Mother India, the nation, the mother of the nation, holding the flag. So nationalism as a theme was also extremely central to this kind of academic art practices.

Before I come to the next movement, a very important movement, I would just pinpoint on the map for you some cities which are associated with art, or production of art. So you have, over here, Bombay or Mumbai, you have Delhi in the north, you have Lahore, which is now in Pakistan, you have Baroda, Calcutta, Santiniketan – Bombay, Calcutta, Madras were three British presidencies; but Delhi was later the capital of the city. Lahore was the capital of a region known as Punjab. Baroda and Bhopal come up a little later in around 1950s onwards. So I will come to that. But basically these are some of the cities that will come up in the talk today, so just to show you on a map where these places are.

If the academic art that we saw, with Raja Ravi Varma and M. V. Dhurandhar, showed national themes or mythological and religious themes and depicted those kinds of topics, there emerged a movement counter to that, which is known as the Bengal school – because it was in Bengal where the school was originated, that is Calcutta. This movement of the Bengal school is also known as Revivalism. Revivalism because the idea was that they wanted to revive something, to bring something from the past back to life. The argument of the kind of artwork that the revivalists did, basically they believed that when we do artwork, only the themes and the topics cannot be national. So their position against, say, Raja Ravi Varma, was that he was doing Indian themes but the materials, the style, the medium, the techniques, everything was actually colonial, was British. So they actually believed that in order to truly be Indian, one had to go back and look at everything from one's own past and one had to revive

those art forms of the past, which is why this was called Revivalism. And one of the pioneering artists who undertook this was Abanindranath Tagore. This work here is actually a painting of Abanindranath's brother, Rabindranath Tagore. This painting, as you can see, is very much in that academic style, which was what Abanindranath himself was originally trained in. But later you can see his language changed completely. You saw Mother India in M. V. Dhurandhar's picture, the depiction of Mother India in this very naturalistic form. You have here Abanindranath Tagore's representation of Mother India. The inspiration they drew for much of the work that the revivalists did was actually from Ajanta, and that's why I brought up Ajanta cave paintings in the beginning. These artists also believed that instead of looking only at the West or at Europe, one must also look at other traditions. So looking at Chinese paintings, Japanese paintings, all of these things became very important as part of the search for becoming an Indian modern artist.

Connected to this, a little bit, but slightly distinct, was this art institution that was founded by Rabindranath Tagore in 1921, which was in this place called Santiniketan. Santiniketan was an art school set up by Rabindranath Tagore, a university he set up in 1921 to provide alternative models of education – because until then in India, the universities were all the British universities, the government colleges that were set up by the British. Santiniketan was imagined as an alternative model for not just art education, but generally for university education. In fact the place Santiniketan was located in was very remote, it was away from the city, almost cut off from everything. One had to travel there for four hours, so it was isolated and it was almost like a monastery. So it was called the Santiniketan Ashram. The ashram is actually a monastery, a place for meditation, to slowly think of what one is studying and learning and so on. So the art school at Santiniketan was absolutely central in the modern art movement. But unlike the revivalists, who said that everything had to be Indian and national, and had to come from the national past, Rabindranath Tagore believed in something that is known as Pan-Asianism, to make solidarities and connections with artists and writers and thinkers all over Asia. One of the important figures for Rabindranath Tagore was Okakura Tenshin from Japan, with whom Rabindranath met and corresponded. His interest was not in building or coming up with a national style, but more of an international brotherhood, a universal brotherhood, that artists all over the world belonged to an international brotherhood. In Santiniketan there was also a continued and sustained interaction with artists from all over Asia. You have people from Indonesia, from Burma, from Japan, from China, visiting Santiniketan. Artists from Santiniketan also travelled very often to many of these countries – for example, Yokoyama Taikan. The kinds of paintings they made greatly influenced the style of paintings that emerged from Santiniketan. The wash technique, for example, became a very distinctive practice of Santiniketan. It was also much freer and much more fluid because Rabindranath did not believe in just practicing one style but encouraged people to come up with as many styles as possible. So artists experimented also with cubism, with impressionism, with so many other forms as well, apart from anything else they were looking at. So just to give you an idea, you will not find a single style of art practice coming out from Santiniketan. But each artist really developed their own styles. Nandalal Bose, for

example, was an important teacher at Santiniketan. But more importantly he was trained under Abanindranath Tagore. Even though he was in Santiniketan, he believed in looking back at Ajanta, and other art forms from India's past as a source of inspiration, whereas you would find someone like Benode Behan Mukherjee who was much more interested in Chinese painting and Japanese painting and also in miniature traditions. So you can see those influences in his works, in the way he has composed these murals. Or someone absolutely different, like Ramkinkar Baij, who as a sculptor is generally recognised as one of the first modern Indian sculptors for his use of material like concrete, because until that time, concrete as a material for sculpture was not really used, at least not of this skill.

So far we have seen the academic art of Raja Ravi Varma, we have seen revivalism and the Bengal school, we have seen Santiniketan. And what we will see now, is that while artists were of course looking at western art, we have seen artists looking at Chinese arts and so on. For example, Jamini Roy was an artist, a very important artist, who you can see that in his time period, 1910, he was looking at the Renaissance, early Renaissance artworks, and trying to render it in his own way. But apart from looking at classical forms, artists were also looking at folk art forms that were existing in India. So these folk art forms are not art forms of the past, but the art forms that were happening in early twentieth century, to develop their own forms of classical modern works. So if you see here, in the slide on the right, you have these Kalighat Bazaar paintings, so these are basically paintings that were made and sold on the streets, a very popular kind of way of folk painting traditions, which modern artists then developed and refined. So you can see how the eyes, the outlines become much more stylised over here in this kind of practice.

The other artist that I would like to mention here is a very significant landmark figure for modern Indian art. Her name is Amrita Sher-Gil. Born in Hungary, trained in Paris, Amrita's early works were heavily influenced by post-impressionism as you can see. But at a certain point in the 1930s, she decided to return to India and decided to travel all over India because she believed that in somewhere she needed to find her roots, and this quest once again took her back into all these important places: Ajanta, looking at miniature painting; traveling to Rajasthan and looking at various painting traditions there. You can see how the language has completely shifted from doing post-impressionist artwork, to evolving a language that is in relation to the Ajanta paintings, but is also a careful deliberation of it. There is a stylisation that's happening over here. This return to the classical past, or classical art forms, is something you will keep seeing at every stage in the history of modernist art practice.

In 1947, India attained a political independence from the British, and what you can see here are actually those two maps. You can see very clearly in these two maps the difference between what was British India and a picture of the different nation states there that came out of this time period of 1947. Along with independence, there also occurred a very important political event which was known as the Partition. So the Partition is basically the partition of India, Pakistan, and later in 1971, Bangladesh. So the partition of these nation states was a

deeply traumatic historical event. It has continued to traumatise many communities even today, because it involves a lot of resettling, migrations, and movements.

The first artist group that I will be talking about in this situation of post-independent Indian context is actually these artist associations that were formed all over India in the 1940s, known as the Progressive Artists Associations. These Progressive Artists Associations were formed in different parts of India – in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, and so on. I am going to speak in particular about the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group. They believed that the trauma of partition and the nationalist sentiment was so overbearing that it led to great political catastrophes. Therefore, they believed that one had to create new standards for living, and art could be one of those vehicles that would set these new standards. Therefore, the Progressive Artists' Group desired to break away from the Bengal school and the revivalist nationalism, and participate in an international community of artists. The idea was that one should be able to paint with absolute freedom. One should be able to paint, or to make artwork in any form and style that one was interested in doing. It is because of this, to some extent, that some art historians and art critics associate the Progressive Artists' Group as being the properly modern artists in that sense. Many arts historians believe that modern art, or the beginning of modern art, can be attributed to the Progressive Artists' Group. You can see from the images that I am showing of some artists who belonged to this school. They worked with absolutely different concerns and different styles. This is the work of F. N. Souza, who was somebody who explored in his work, apart from many things, a lot of Christian thematic. His work was also very expressionistic as opposed to, somebody who you probably have heard of, M. F. Husain, who worked in a somewhat modified cubist style, if it could be called that. I don't know if this artwork reminds you of something. That is basically Husain's take on Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. You can see here that there is a headless person seated at the head of the table, and a blinded man delivering justice next to that figure. Many of these works were created in response to many political and social appeals in the country. You can also see here another work by M. F. Husain. The composition speaks very closely to the *Pieta* of Michelangelo.

Another stylistic development that happened around this time was actually a movement towards abstraction. From about the 1940s and 1950s and so on, you have artists who were a part of the Progressive Artists' Group, but also outside, who began to explore abstraction as an important movement away from figuration.

II. The Baroda School: 1950–1980

I come to the next part of my presentation which focuses on a particular art school in India known as the Baroda School. Baroda is a city that I have already pointed out to you on the map. It's in the western region of India.

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Before I come to the art practices themselves, the creation of this art school in Baroda was a very important event. Until then, in India we had the British government colleges of art which were the major art schools. We had small regional art colleges that were teaching art. And then there was Santiniketan that provided another alternative model. The art school in Baroda was really imagined afresh. This university in Baroda already existed from about the 1800s onwards. It was created by one of the princely states of Gaekwad. It had its own ruler, its own territory until Indian independence. The university was created by a king called Maharaja Sayajirao. Baroda was developed as a university town. It became the site where it was proposed that a new art college would be set up in independent India. This setting up of the new art college was meant to provide new forms and models of art education that were different from existing art colleges –so that was different from Santiniketan, that was different from the government colleges of art and craft. At Baroda, it was proposed that in order to teach modern art for a new India...because the art school was set up in the year 1950, and India gained independence in 1947...within three years of Indian independence, you have a new art school that was being set up and that art school was supposed to represent the vision for modern art in India. They developed new forms and curricula for art teaching in Baroda. While I will come to some of those very soon, it would be important to note that some of the most significant modern artists in Indian history were in fact teachers at Baroda, at this art school. They were both artists and teachers. With regards to both their art practices and their curriculum, they actually developed these absolutely new forms of both. This image to the left is the first prime minister of India visiting Baroda and taking a tour of the art school.

While I will come to some of those new experiments in pedagogy that Baroda came up with, one of those is actually something that is known as living traditions. Living traditions is an idea that traditions don't just belong in the past. Traditions are very much alive; they are contemporary; they are rich; they are evolving; and that modern artists must pay attention to these traditions that are living. Traditions are not dead; they are not in the past; they are very much with us, alongside us, and we must pay attention to these living traditions. We must study them; we must learn them; and we must try and incorporate them in some way; we must learn from them. The idea was that one could not become a modern artist unless one had studied or learned from these very rich living traditions. An artist, who was also a teacher in Baroda, travelled all over central and western India, documenting these living traditions. You had artists looking at living traditions in their own practices. But you also had the idea of living traditions becoming very central to teaching art in India. For example, K. G. Subramanyan was an artist who studied in Santiniketan and came to Baroda, and was very instrumental in setting up the Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda. He was somebody who was most interested in this idea of living traditions. He wrote extensively about it. He tried to teach it in some way, and he practiced it in his own artwork as well. You also have other artists, and all of these are some of the biggest figures in Indian art –K. G. Subramanyan, Gulam Sheikh, Jyoti Bhatt, Bhupen Khakhar. As you can see over here, this is an exhibition that they curated called *Folk Arts of Gujarat*, where they actually went and documented a lot of these folk art

practices, curated and put up an exhibition. It was considered an integral part of being a modern artist, to be looking at all of these other practices.

Since I mentioned that Baroda was trying to develop newer forms of curriculum, you can see that this idea of living traditions was actually proposed as a course that could be taught to students. Gulam Sheikh, one of the artists, made a proposal that one should try and develop a curriculum so that students were able to study, document, and learn about different living traditions in India. Similarly, they had also proposed that there should be certain funds to document living traditions, and build an archive of these living traditions. You can see some of those documents from the art school over here. Another aspect of these interests in living traditions in folk and craft was developed by K. G. Subramanyan through this idea of the fine arts fair. I know that all of you have a very different understanding of the art fair today, which is extremely different from the idea of the fine arts fair as it was conceptualised in the 1960s. So this was basically meant to be a time where students were not restricted to their classroom or studio practice, but were able to be free and experiment with different media and art forms, and also learn and participate in workshops where they learned from crafts people to make various items. In the fine arts fair, artists like K. G. Subramanyan would make these toys – an item of craft which would then be sold at a very minimal price to anybody who came to the fair. The fair was basically a means for students to begin to experiment with things they would not do within the fixed curriculum. This had very real and practical impacts on artists' works. For example, what you see here is an artist, Mrinalini Mukherjee. This is a photograph of her experimenting with hemp, which is a kind of organic fibre material. It was only during the fair that she began to experiment with this material. Interestingly, what happened was that even though it started from the fine arts fair, it became the main material that she began to use for her artistic practice later on as well. We can see something like the fine arts fair as an experiment in pedagogy, really allowing a lot of freedom for artists and students to experiment with newer art forms.

This is the work of K. G. Subramanyan. You can also see here an experimentation going on with terracotta. Terracotta is not a medium that is normally associated with modern art. It is a medium, in India at least, associated with craft and traditional practices, more rural practices. So, K. G. Subramanyan's use of terracotta is also a very deliberate practice and choice that the artist had made. You can see over here, methods of making...this was something he incorporated into classroom techniques, where these kinds of huge murals were constructed by K. G. Subramanyan along with students as a big collaborative project in building these murals. Many of these murals were made in the 60s and they still exist today. So if anybody visits the art school in Baroda, you will still see a lot of murals that had been done as part of the students' curriculum, as part of art teaching that was done collaboratively by teachers and students together. They explored various techniques. This was sand casting, for example, just to give you a sense of some more work in terracotta by K. G. Subramanyan. Many of these artists also documented these living traditions in their own ways. For example, apart from taking photographs and apart from that formal way of documentation, many of them, as they

travelled and visited many of these places, they sketched in their diaries, and one can see the influence of it in their artwork as well. This is Jyoti Bhatt, the artist who we saw earlier who had taken photographs of the living traditions. You can see the clear influence of traditional motifs of ways of rendering. The horse, for example here, is a very deliberately stylised kind of horse, and comes from some of these very rich traditions he has seen. Even here, some of the symbols, some of the motifs that were used in these images come very directly from the living traditions that the artists have been documenting.

At one point in 1980, what happened in Bhopal, and that's why I mentioned the city of Bhopal on the map, was that there was a museum created to house all of these living traditions. It is called the Museum of Man [Manav Sangrahalaya]. This museum began to house various tribal, craft, and other folk artefacts that exist. This museum was setup by artists. This place became one of the central locations for artistic practices to develop. Artists from all over India used to travel to Bhopal. In this photo, you can see so many artists and writers from across India travelling to Bhopal to visit this place because it was a very unique museum that was dedicated entirely to looking at contemporary tribal, folk, craft, and other popular practices.

III. The Modern Artist as Traveller

I now come to the third section of the presentation.

I thought that it would be interesting to explore artistic practices as they developed through various travels that artists have made. Right from the time, if you remember we were discussing on Amrita Sher-Gil's work, she made a travel all over India, visiting all these very important sites where art forms have developed. She travelled to Ajanta, parts of Rajasthan, other parts of North India, and also South India. All of these travels had in fact greatly influenced her artistic practice. The idea of travelling, within and outside the country, has been very important in the formation of the modern artist. The artist must travel outside to see places, other forms of practices, and to learn from these. So that is why I thought that it would be interesting to see the art practices in Baroda through this lens of artists who are travelling. We have also seen in the case of the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group which I showed earlier, those are artists who travelled extensively. Many of them in fact stayed abroad. Some of them stayed in Paris, some of them elsewhere. All of these experiences of travelling had shaped their artistic practices. Travelling to different places has shaped artists in different ways – sometimes very directly in their artistic practices; otherwise, in helping them think about what their artwork was concerned with. For example the artist Jyoti Bhatt, whose images and artwork I have shown you earlier, he travelled for over two decades. He travelled to various parts of central and western India, documenting, photographing, and making notes in diaries. So we actually have about twenty to thirty years of artists' diaries of where they travelled – sketches, photographs, and other kinds of documentation that they made as they travelled to all of these places. What you see here is actually an image of one of

those diary entries by Jyoti Bhatt. Very often you also find artists making their own maps of where they travelled to keep records. Just to give you a sense of the kind of materials in these people's archives – it is actually boxes and boxes of documentation of living traditions as they travelled across many villages, towns, and cities all over India. We also find that as part of one's documentation, as part of this travel, documenting what was happening in the field was also something that many artists did take up. Documenting events that were happening in the field – not even events sometimes – just people coming together as collectives and groups, or important exhibitions and so on. All of these came to inform the artists' own practice.

I'd like to share with all of you here this very interesting anecdote about Jyoti Bhatt's travel. Jyoti Bhatt, in the 1960s, received a Fulbright Scholarship and went to the US. There he came across this etching press, and decided that he needed to get an etching press like that in Baroda as well. But because there was no way to buy one as exactly as it was, what he did was to start making very detailed drawings of the etching press with instructions of how it should be built and put together. Jyoti Bhatt, apart from being a photographer and a painter, was also a printmaker. He was a professor in the printmaking department in Baroda. What happened was that they actually built a printing press in Baroda after he came back. If you go to the Faculty of Fine Arts today, the oldest etching press that you'll find in Baroda was actually built as a result of Jyoti Bhatt's experience of having travelled and made those drawings. So traveling somewhere has also meant that ideas are travelling.

To give you another instance of something like this: this is an image of the Visual Art Archive at the Art History Department in the Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda. I don't think you can see them very clearly, but what you can see are boxes and boxes which consist of plates. These are very basic cardboard plates with images of artwork stuck on them. How this entire archive was actually built, or how the idea to build this archive came up, was when one of the artists who was the Head of the Art History Department, Ratan Parimoo, visited the Courtauld Institute, he happened to notice the rich visual art archive that the students over there had access to. He knew that they were not going to be able to get such high quality images. When he came back he decided to set up a visual art archive in Baroda. What he and all the teachers started doing was to write to museum curators, artists, and art historians, and ask them to send images and slides. Even if they were in bad quality, just send all of these images and they would be able to build a visual art archive out of this. Even while ordering books for the library, Ratan Parimoo always ordered an extra copy or two, so that some of the images from the books could be cut up and stuck onto these plates. That was how actually the Visual Art Archive in the Art History Department was developed. And the reason I am narrating all of these is because using those plates became the main tool for pedagogy in the Art History Department. As students over there, everybody was expected to go and select specific plates to make their presentations as part of the classroom teaching, as you can see in the background over there. The plates were pinned on the board and used. Therefore, the

development and idea of this Visual Art Archive by Ratan Parimoo were informed by the experiences of his travels to many places.

The other portion that I think I would like to come to now, when it comes to artists' travels, is that many artists have done a series of works based on places that they travelled to. I think it is very interesting to see how the aesthetics of that place informed their practice. As part of looking at the modern artist as a traveller, it might be interesting to see, for example, Vivan Sundaram, an artist from Delhi, trained in London but travelled to Latin America and made these portraits of the poet Pablo Neruda, and an entire series called *The Heights of Machu Picchu* in Latin America. What you can see here immediately in this artwork is, with regards to the aesthetics of this artwork, a very direct influence of the Latin American work in these images. Similarly, here is another image as part of that series made in Mexico. Many of these artists, apart from travelling outside, also travelled to various sites of art historical importance within India. Apart from merely sketching, some used them as a starting point to do something else. This, for example, was actually the Elephanta Caves on an island near Bombay. You can see that the artist has used that basic structure of it to make a commentary. There are these ways in which travelling to places did not only mean sketching, or those kinds of representations. It also meant using certain imageries that have become motifs to further one's own ideas.

I was thinking of the other aspect that might be interesting, one of the things we have been discussing is artists being influenced by various art practices, be it from the West, the East, and so on. It is not merely a question of being influenced. I think we need to make sure we understand that when artists are looking at all of these diverse practices, they were also studying them very carefully. They were also developing something on their own. This is an artist who is extremely central to the history of modern art in India, Gulammohammed Sheikh. An artist from western India, trained abroad, but lives in Baroda, and has taught for many, many decades in the Baroda art school. In this artwork, in his own art practice, you can very clearly see traces –I won't call them influences– but at least traces of...you can see there is some reference to miniature painting. It's not very direct, but you can also see some traces of Renaissance, in the way that the perspective is built into the foreground. In this detailed image it is much clearer. You can see that the elements of Persian or Mughal miniature painting traditions are something he has incorporated, especially in those figures. Also in the way that the spaces are arranged in these images is something that one is able to see. And apart from Persian and Islamic miniature painting traditions, this image is also quite interesting, because one sees the influences of Chinese paintings in these images in the way that the landscape is rendered. It is not a direct influence that these artists were taking. They are actually rendering it on their own, making it their own and rendering these images. Just to give you a hint of some more of these images from Gulam Sheikh's practice, one can think of sixteenth century, fifteenth century European paintings when one is looking at these. One can see traces of them in these artworks, apart from those very deliberate motifs and images from previous artworks that Gulam Sheikh has used. Some of these are images that he has

drawn from earlier paintings and artworks, and resituated them in a new context. You would remember in one of the earlier slides when I began, I showed these Pahari miniature painting traditions. This is actually an image Gulam Sheikh reproduced and rendered. Similarly, you have the image to the left taken from a very famous Mughal painting which you can see over here. This was a painting that was known as *The Death of Inayat Khan*. You can see the same image being rendered over here on the left, and not only that, but also see the juxtapose of an image of an artist, who is in the process of making that image, which you can also see in the previous image. So there is an attempt at looking back at this with a very clear historical mindset. It's not about merely copying something from the past, but looking at this past as history. These are also images of Gulam Sheikh here. One would be able to see in the rendering of the clothes, in drapery, in the shading, and all of these, very clear references to Renaissance, to figures like Piero della Francesca whose work he was greatly inspired by.

In fact for many of these artists, the idea of the artist as traveller also came from the understanding of the artist wanting to be a cosmopolitan figure – a figure who is able to be at home in the world. I think it might be nice to share this very interesting anecdote about Gulam Sheikh. He had travelled to Europe and the travel to Europe was almost like a pilgrimage. He went from one town to another in Italy, then to France. The idea was to visit all of these cathedrals where all of these Renaissance masters have made their artworks. As part of this travel across Europe, he had in fact prepared a map of his journey all over Europe. Very interestingly, that map was used by generations of artists who later also had the occasion to travel to Europe from Baroda, from India – generally just friends and others. It's very interesting that one artist travelled, then that pilgrimage has become an actual pilgrimage for other artists to make when they finally travelled to Europe. Finally, that map no longer exists. It is in fact a missing map. So how do we represent this? An artist Shilpa Gupta is making an installation at Asia Art Archive, looking at materials at the archive. One of the things she has tried to actually represent is this missing map of Gulam Sheikh. I think it's something that's worthwhile to come and visit and see how this experience of travel that one remembers and has some records of in the form of postcards, and how does an artist engage with this, represent this. I hope that many of you will come and see the exhibit that opens on the 21st.

Just to come back to the point of travels and influences you can see, this is a work that Gulam Sheikh has made out of tapestry. So this was in fact a work of tapestry, wasn't even a painting. You can see here that very clear reference to Piero della Francesca in these works.

IV. 1980 onwards

Now I come to the last part of the presentation.

Basically, with all of these artists like Gulam Sheikh, and many others coming together, one of the important movements or important developments that took place in Baroda, and that Baroda gets renowned for, is something known as the Narrative/Figurative. That is the introduction of a particular way of making art, a way of practicing art. The background for the Narrative/Figurative Movement is from the 1940s and 1950s onwards, one of the most popular artistic styles that emerged in India was actually of abstraction. For almost two to three decades, abstraction was one of the most practised art forms in India. There emerged questions about “where are the people in the artworks?”; “who are the subjects?”; “where are the people in the paintings?” With this intent, an exhibition brought together various artists. The exhibition was called *Place for People*, and was held in 1981. The idea was, on one hand in terms of art practices, it was against abstraction; but on the other hand, the immediate political context of the *Place for People* exhibition was also that India had just undergone a time of emergency, a time of political emergency. So, it was also about connecting people with values of democracy –and so the Narrative/Figurative of whom artists like Gulam Sheikh, who is the artist second from left, Vivan Sundaram is the artist on the right most. The *Place for People* had the set of artists, from left to right: Sudhir Patwardhan, Gulam Sheikh, Nalini Malani, Bhupen Khakhar, Jogen Chowdhury, and Vivan Sundaram. These artists together were the artists who came together to be a part of the *Place for People* exhibition, and who stood for what we know as the Baroda Narrative/Figurative Movement. By the 1980s, Baroda was well-known for this style of Narrative/Figurative. It became institutionalised as it became part of the art school to train students in the Narrative/Figurative style.

In conclusion, I would like to touch on one movement, or a group, that emerged as a counter to the Baroda Narrative/Figurative. This was a group of painters and sculptors calling themselves the Indian Radical Painters’ and Sculptors’ Association. One of their discontents with the Baroda Narrative/Figurative was the fact that it had become an institutionalised practice, but also with regard to the very subject of artwork. Who were the people that one was attempting to render? How were we trying to render them? Why had art become so commercialised? These are some of the questions that the Indian Radical Painters’ and Sculptors’ Association threw to the Narrative/Figurative. Just to give you a sense of some of the images of the artworks that were a part of this group, once again as you can see, they are not very uniform. Each artist who was part of this group rendered works in their own way, but they were united in their concerns.

I would like to conclude with this by saying that I thought it would be a good point to stop at the 1990s. Because the 1990s, with 1990 to 1991, there were some really important changes that took place in India. First and foremost, economic liberalisation and, with it, open economies and open markets. With that you have the galleries entering the art scene in a major way. That is an area of practice that has to be dealt with its own terms. The 1990s was also a time that saw a lot other newer forms of practice that emerged in very significant ways:



from photography to installations to new media to video art. That is something that probably requires a different sort of orientation and requires that much time to look at the practices from the 1990s onwards. So I think I will just conclude over here. Thank you!