

# The Bengal School of Painting

## Origin, Development and Main Features of the Bengal School of Painting:

Indian art stood at the crossroad after the decline of Mughal Empire, and the beginning of the British colonial rule after the mutiny of 1857. By the end of the century, the smaller feudal states where art survived for sometime were annexed one by the British rulers. Indian painting reached almost a dead end. The British ruler in the mean time had set-up art schools at Bombay, Madras (1850) and Calcutta (1854), and by systematic propaganda successfully persuaded the educated Indians to believe that Indians had no cultural heritage of their own. At this point of our identity crisis, there came some highly gifted artists who tried in their own way to give a sense of direction to the art movement of the country and created confidence in the traditional values and rich heritage of Indian Art and made the Indians conscious of the fact. Their efforts included Raja Ravi Varma, Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose and Jamini Roy and ably supported by E.B. Havell, the principal of Government Art School at Calcutta. This Enthused the Indian artists to turn for inspiration to true native tradition. A group of Bengal artists gave birth to a new painting style based on old Indian traditional paintings of Ajanta, Bagh, Rajput and Mughal art. They created a sort of new renaissance under the guidance and leadership of Abanindranath Tagore. Thus under the influence of Principal E.B. Havell and Abanindranath, Indian artists looked back the traditional painting of Indian with respect and got themselves separated from the blind copying of the lifeless western realism. Thus was born the Bengal School of which is more a style than a regional development, is the first school representing important art movement in modern India. During this period all types of painting, religious, social and historical events, birds, animals and landscapes were painted in this style.

## The Main features of Bengal School of Painting :

- **Based on Indian Traditions** : The Bengal School is fully based on the Indian traditional style as the subject matter of this school is based on Indian culture. The paintings based on Indian theme like 'Mahakali, 'Shiva Parwati' Krishna and Gopis etc. prove the Bengal School's Indian mentality.
- **Influence of Ajanta Paintings** : Bengal school is influenced from Ajanta Art. The qualities of Ajanta Art like rhythm, grace, harmony etc. are visible in Bengal School.
- **Linear Delicacy** : The lines of Bengal School resemble the Ajanta Paintings. Lines are delicate and rhythmic.
- **Softness and Rhythm in Figures** : The figures of Bengal School give soft effect and no hardness is there. They are graceful and have delicacy. They are rhythmic and provide pleasant experience to eyes.

- **Beautiful Colour Scheme** : The colours of Bengal School are very attractive. Wash technique is used and colours are not bright and gaudy at all.
- **Influence of Mughal and Rajasthani Schools** : Mughal and Rajasthani Schools' influence can also be seen at some places.
- **Light and Shade** : The softness in the paintings of Bengal School is due to its quality of brilliant light and shade.
- **Impressive and Indian Subject Matter** : The subject matter of Bengal School is very impressive and Indian in character. Themes used are historical, religious, literary etc.

## Contribution by the Indian Artists towards National Freedom Movement:

As the glorious tradition of Indian classical art was about to be wiped the advent of the Muslim rule in the middle ages, in the same way Indian classical art of Rajasthani, Mughal and Pahari miniature painting was about to meet the same fate with the establishment of British rule after the mutiny of 1857. The systematic propaganda by scholars like Lord Macaulay, an important member of the British Government, who drew up the syllabus for Indian schools and framed Indian penal code, and then the principals of the art and craft school of Bombay, Madras and Lahore and even established painters of the status of Burn-Jones and Jeshua Reynolds were of the view that India had no worthwhile traditional fine arts and Indians were incapable of learning it. They did their best to establish the superiority of Western art and culture over the Indians. The newly English educated young men in those days around 1850-1900 sneered at anything Indian and learnt to look at the pantheon of Indian Goddesses as near monsters. The average Indians whose lives were inextricably connected with artistic painting and floral decoration as essential part of cultural and religious celebration were totally confused and suffered from the sense of inferiority in comparison to the Western educated person. It was at this juncture that a few extraordinarily gifted artists and painters like Raja Ravi Verma, Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar, Kshitindranath Mazumdar, Abdul Rehman Chughtai, Samanendranath Gupta ably assisted by Principal E.B.Havell of Calcutta Art School came out with their excellent art work to establish once for all, the superiority of Indian art over rigid lifeless western painting, the British founded schools elsewhere in India like Bombay, Madras and Lahore were producing. The great artists gave a tremendous moral boost to the Indian Nationalist movement which started in 1905 against the partition of Bengal. Indian Society of Oriental Art was established in 1907 with renowned people and art lovers of Bengal. The society held art exhibition every year. The caricature entitled 'Peace declared in the Punjab'- by Gaganendranath made on the massacre of Jalianwala Bagh in 1921 brought out the barbarous naked cruelty of the British rulers and hardened the hatred of the Indian people against the British. Nandalal's 'Sati', 'The death of Sati', 'Ahalya's release from her curse', 'Agnidevata' won acclaim throughout India which revived the traditional culture. All these helped the people regain their national identity and gave a boost to the national 'Swadeshi'

movement for freedom. Indians lost the sense of rootless alien entity which is the greatest stumbling block to prosperity and self reliance for a nation, wrote Rabindranath Tagore. The panels on Indian folk art and Indian life in 1937 for Haripura Congress by Nandalal Bose gave a great boost to this sense of Indians to the people.

Paintings of Bengal School:

| TITLE                                | ARTIST                 |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| • Journey's End                      | Abanindranath Tagore   |
| • Tiller of the Soil (Indian Farmer) | Nandalal Bose          |
| • Rasa-Lila                          | Kshitindanath Majumdar |
| • Radhika                            | M.A.R.Chughtai         |
| • Meghdoot                           | Ram Gopal Vijayvargiya |
| • Arjun Detach from War              | Sarada Charan Ukil     |

**Journey's End (Abanindranath Tagore):-** The painting 'Journey's End' was first published in the Bengali magazine 'Prabasi' and drew acclaim from the viewers as a great piece of art. The pain and suffering of a dumb beast of burden moved the painter so much that the pain he felt can be clearly seen in the half open eye of the beast. The picture is painted in the new technique which he evolved with the fusion of tempera technique of miniature painting and wash, the Japanese technique. Red, brown and yellow wash colours give the background and the sky is filled with the diffused light of sunset. The foreground is painted in the darker tones of the same colour to intensify the sense of pain. There is a tint of blue where the animal is about to collapse. A massive load on the camel's back shows the greed of the master in exploiting the slaves to their last breath. No one is there to watch the thin stream of blood oozing out of its mouth. The weight he has been carrying all his life for his master is still enacted on his back so that it is not damaged. He has yet not given up hope of standing once more to deliver the goods to his master which he is given to carry. He is on his knees with his back legs upright and his head slightly raised as if he would make another attempt to get up. His life's journey is about to come to an end with the end of the day. The painting is suffused with a romantic sentiment yet it evokes pity and sympathy from the viewers.

**Tiller of the Soil (Indian Farmer) (Nandalal Bose):-** This is merely a part of the special painting painted to decorate the pavilion site of the Congress Session, Haripura in 1938. Artist Nandalal Bose painted it with the best combination of cross-transverse but rhythmic lines, tempera and wash technique of water colour on paper. In this painting, an Indian farmer has been shown tilling the field in traditional method. The artist has displayed the field and method of tilling it through three serpentine lines. In this entire painting, the artist used black, white, yellow and blue colours to make decoration, shape-structure and lines cross-transverse and thick and thin. The farmer's body has been shown in dark-

brown colour and his loin-cloth (dhoti) and turban in white colour. The plough has been shown in brown colour, the bullocks in white colour and clothes on their backs with blue colour. In the background, the painter has used yellow even colour, whilst, by making arched shape in the foreground, the painter has given the look of whole painting as Jharokha (peep hole).

**Rasa-Lila (Kshitindranath Majumdar):-** In this picture, the artist has shown livid Krishna doing Rasa-Lila with Gopis. He has shown fully ornamented, in multi-coloured costumes, twelve gopis, in various temperaments, dancing around Krishna. The pleasant feeling on their faces is appearing spontaneously. In hair of all the gopis are stuck braids made of flowers, the braided length of hair only one gopi is hung upto his waist. All the gopis have worn anklets round their ankles. They have worn jewels even on their hands and ears and round their necks. Even Krishn's hair has been shown as an ornamented plait of hair. On his throat is coiled a ruddle coloured cloth, and below the loin, he has worn a yellow coloured dhoti. His pleasing temperament has been presented very closely with the proper combination of green and yellow colours. In foreground of the painting, by the proper combination of green, brown and yellow colours, has been show surface of the earth.

**Radhika (M.A.R. Chughtai):-** The painting 'Radhika' is also drawn in profile. In all his works he has painted Radhika as delicate and love lorn. Postures have also been made romantic. She is delicately holding two lotuses in both of her hands. She is wearing a light colour Ghagra, a red color Choli and a yellow colour Dupatta in typical Indian style. Her braided of black tresses is flowing down her back. Her down-cast eye is unique in exaggerated arch of eyebrow. Ornaments that Radhika is wearing are impression of Radhika being delicate, flexible and graceful. There is a lamp with a stand in the left side of the painting in Mughal manner. The lamp is decorated one with the wick in yellow and red colours, it presents a realistic image of the lamp. The light of the lamp has illuminated Radhika and has given a touch of divinity. The background is painted in a perfect blending of black, red and yellow colours creating a vivid expanse of bright colours in uniform the tonal gradation. The brightness illuminated by the burning lamp is yet another remarkable achievement of the artist. He has also highlighted minute details of the costumes worn by Radhika. Each fold of the drapery has been created with excellent success. The lotuses that she holds in each hand shows symbolic representation of a delicacy. The honey- bee sitting on the lotus of Radhika's left hand is centrally composed in respect of the totality of the panting, which symbolizes the presence of Krishna.

**Meghdoot (Ram Gopal Vijayvargiya):-** This is one of the paintings of Meghdoot series. With the excellent co-ordination of colour this painting has been delineated in artistic style .Riding on flying white cottony clouds, with special rhythmicity, in the blue sky, lovelorn Yaksha and Yakshini have been shown whit real colour-scheme. Yaksha's curly hair, in ears earrings made of pearls, a pearl necklace on the throat, excellent body structure, smile on face, feeling of tenderness in hands and fingers, taking a lotus flower in his right hand, clothes embellished with the vivid shades of yellow colour and in them (clothes) rhythm city of various thin-coloured line, all these enchant the mind of the viewer. Yaksha sitting sticking by his back and her right hand has been shown putting on Yaksha's chest in such a way as if two lovers are embraced. Yakshini's hairs have been shown tied with the white flowered plait or band. On her throat is a beautiful necklace on pearls. She is covering her breast with a pink-coloured cloth and

below the loin is wearing a lustrous yellow cloth on which have been shown crumps. On her legs smile lips is seen obviously. The colour of the sky has been shown blue in upper side and down near the clouds becoming light. Four white birds have been shown flying in the foreground. This picture composed with the wash and tempera technique in Bengal style together with the feelings of tenderness is an excellent co-ordination of charming and pleasing colours.

**Arjun Detach from War (Sarada Charan Ukil):-** This is the painting delineated in 1930 by Sarada Charan Ukil, an artist of Bengal School of Art, using rhythmic lines of black colour on white paper. Normally, these lines produce an effect just like a painting as oil on canvas. The theme of this painting has been taken from Mahabharat when, Arjun detaches from war in the battle of Kurukshetra to see all his relatives and Gurus in front of his target. To solve his doubts Lord Krishna stood in front of him and appeared his Vishwarupa. The placid form of Lord Krishna is praise worthy, his four arms holding Sudarshana Chakra, Shankh and Lotus while one right hand is kept on griddle side. Arjun is sitting on the chariot keeping his both hands as begging or praying in front of Lord Krishna. Cloudy atmosphere or background is seen around both objects. This is an excellent painting which is kept in personal collection of the artist.

## Evolution of Indian National Flag:

One of the few insignias which no nation however radical can do without is its National Flag-its identity and mark of pride. Political rivalries and dynasties might die off in course of time but the National Flag lives on through generations fluttering high. The evolution of the Indian Flag, the tri-colour reflects the political development of the country during the 20th century. The building up of the National Flag as recorded in history was final outcome of various political trends, communal tensions and waves of mass enthusiasm. According to an obscure source of information, the first National Flag of India was hoisted on August 7, 1906 in the Parsee Bagan Square (Green Park), Kolkatta. The flag was composed of three equal horizontal stripes of green, yellow and red. The green stripe on the top had eight white lotuses embossed in a row. The word Vandemataram was inscribed in deep blue on the middle yellow stripe in Devnagri Script. The red stripe at the bottom had the sun in white on the left and the crescent and a star in white on the right. The second flag came out in 1921 when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was at the helm of the Indian National Congress. During its Bezwada (now Vijaywada) session, an Andhra youth Pingali Venkaiyah prepares a flag and handed it to Gandhiji. It was in two colours, red and green representing the two major communities and a large charkha extending to both the bands as a symbol of progress. Gandhiji apparently was pleased with the flag and suggested to the youth to introduce a white stripe in the middle and superimpose the charkha in blue on it. Thus was born the tri-colour of later years. Though it was not officially accepted by AICC, still it was used on all future occasions of the Congress party. Red and green represent all other communities of the country, and Charkha to represent progress. On July 22, 1947, Constituent Assembly adopted a new flag as free India's National Flag with saffron at the top, white at the middle and green at the bottom in equal proportions and the Charkha to be replaced by Chakra in navy blue which appears on the lion capital of Ashok at Sarnath, as Dharma Chakra. The diameter of the wheel (charka) shall be approximate to the width of the white band

at the middle. The ratio of the width to the length of the flag shall ordinarily be two breadths by three lengths

The significances of the colours are as follows: -

**Saffron** - Courage and sacrifice.

**White** - Truth and peace.

**Green** - Faith and chivalry.

**Ashokan-wheel** - The dynamism of a peaceful change. (Work for 24 hours)

**24 spokes in Ashokan-wheel** - 24 Hours in each day.

**Navy Blue (Dharma Chakra)** - Secularism, Trust and Truthfulness.