Power Working on Gaze

The Legacy of Orientalism in Modern Indian Painting and the Transformation of 'Indianness' from the 1850s to the 1930s

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Picturesqueness is neither an inherent value embedded in human instinct nor simply a reflection of reality; the seemingly simple act of depiction inherently encompasses politics. Raymond William has argued that the notion of "art" and "culture" only acquired their present meanings in the last decade of the eighteenth century. These relatively new concepts are identified by particular meanings of "creativity" or "special talent," which have supported Western progressive values originating in imperialism and the Industrial Revolution.[1] That is, amidst the constant social upheavals, cultural norms and aesthetics have repeatedly been reinterpreted and acquired new meanings, which always reflect certain interests of the dominant groups in the given society. Therefore, capturing a certain image is a process for hegemonic knowledge to *make* a particular image visible, in which things are *given* to be seen.[2] Importantly, this process inevitably resonates with selection and exclusion, which, in modern art, often becomes a tool for the violent exclusion of Others:

> In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them,' almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent 'return' to culture and tradition.[3]

Art is, therefore, inevitably combined with politics, emerging in the very middle of the social and political context where racism, class divisions, and gendered discrimination intersect.

British Orientalist paintings, which gained popularity during the Victorian era (1837–1901), emerged amid the interplay between culture and colonialism. British colonial expansion simultaneously opened active cultural exchanges with its colonies, through which exotic cultures of the Orient flowed into England. Specifically, India, known as "the Jewel in the Crown" was not only one of the most significant economic hubs but also a cultural focal point of the British Empire. Subjects from India, perceived as the unknown subcontinent full of exotic fantasy, constantly attracted British Orientalists and served as a reservoir of inspiration. Intertwined with British colonial discourse, these exploring/explored relations

[1] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), xi–xviii.
[2] John Rajchman, "Foucault's Art of Seeing," *October* vol. 44 (Spring 1988): 88-117, 91.
[3] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), xiii-xiv.

have constructed unequal relations between the British self and Indian others based on British mastery over colonial India. Therefore, the Victorian fascination with unknown India was not only a source of inspiration but also combined with its assumed racial inferiority, politicizing cultural practice as a tool of British paternalism and colonial control.

However, the Orientalist discourse was not merely confined to the British Empire. Against the background of European expansionism, the "tyranny"[4] of a transformation toward modernity led by imperialism, Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution engulfed the entire world, stimulating homogenization at the global level. In India, through active cultural exchange and constant encounters with British culture, Western hegemonic norms penetrated deeply into the cultural and artistic realms and reshaped people's tastes, values, and ideas. As Homi K. Bhabha has argued, such interplays of cultures brought about a hybrid cultural space where British colonial influence and the existing Indian traditions intertwined.[5] This hybrid in-between cultural space served as the site where modern Indian painting was nurtured, encompassing various representations that articulated its hybrid identity. In other words, modern Indian paintings did not emerge 'out there,' detached from British colonial influence, but rather, they were generated within the very orbit of Western modernity through the interplay with British culture. Thus, the development of modern Indian art is inseparably linked to British colonialism, and its full picture becomes clear only through analysis of its resonant relationship with the broader socio-historical background of colonialism.

This thesis sets the timeframe for analysis from the 1850s to the 1930s, comparing the interrelationships between British and Indian modern paintings during this period. The study is interested in examining how the discourse of British Orientalist paintings has transcended unilateral dynamics within British art and has been inherited by modern Indian paintings within a continuous hybrid cultural context. By shedding light on the influence of Orientalism from Indian perspectives, the thesis aims to reveal the cross-cultural and multi-layered practice of Orientalist discourse, penetrating Indian art beyond the dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized. To clarify these concerns, this thesis centers around the following inquiry as a core research question: *How have the cultural legacies introduced by British Orientalist painters been received and negotiated within modern Indian painting from the 1850s to the 1930s?*

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[4] Carol Gluck, "The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now," *The American Historical Review* 116, issue 3 (June 2011): 676.

[5] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), Kindle.

Under the British Raj, India constantly experienced social upheaval marked by discontent with and resistance against British colonial violence, which was often concealed behind the outward splendor of the Victorian era. In the late nineteenth century, Victorian prosperity reached the pinnacle while simultaneously British cultural policies stimulated an assimilation education in India, including the establishment of a series of art schools since the 1850s. During this period, Indian culture underwent a fundamental and irreversible Westernization, which serves as the starting point for this study to observe the evolution of modern Indian art. Meanwhile, in the twentieth century, there was a rise in the momentum of nationalism marked by events such as the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and the subsequent anti-colonial movements, as well as the surge of the independence movement symbolized by the *Swadeshi* (indigenousness) movement led by Mahatma Gandhi.[6] The series of significant social changes from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century served as a driving force for diverse art movements, which spotlighted various native painters from different social backgrounds. Particularly, Bengal was not only a focal point of cultural exchange with England but also an epicenter of Indian artistic movements. Corresponding to the broader transition of society, from assimilation to the rise of nationalism, modern Indian paintings have also continually undergone a diverse transition, from pro-Western romanticized history themes to radical abstraction and childlike primitivism as anti-colonial expressions. This thesis studies British cultural colonialism from India's perspective and considers how stereotypical images in the position of the other have affected India's self-perception and modes of self-expression. By doing so, the analysis reframes Orientalist influence as an active and dynamic force—received, inherited, or disavowed within Indian paintings—rather than a static imposition from the top down.

Historiography

Linda Nochlin pioneered the study of Orientalist paintings by applying Edward Said's concept of Orientalism to Western paintings for the first time. In her essay, "The Imaginary Orient," Nochlin explicates the politics working on Orientalist painters' gaze and representation, in which the colonial and masculine powers construct a stereotyped image of the Orient. Nochlin reveals the exclusion and distortion of the image of the Orient by asking

[6] Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903–1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973), 47–63.

how and for whom a particular image came into being and, thereby, who was being silenced behind the façade of beautified imagery.[7]

Building on Nochlin's work, scholars such as Tim Barringer, Peter Mason, and Salomi Mathur have studied British Orientalist paintings in the light of imperialism. Barringer has argued the mobility of the discourse of Orientalism and revealed its impact on British culture as well as its colonial control over India.[8] On the other hand, Mason has specifically focused on the notion of "exotic," arguing how exoticizing cultural Other has supported Western superiority throughout the modern period.[9] Furthermore, Mathur has analyzed a series of Victorian exhibitions, collections, and displays of India in the nineteenth century, arguing that they functioned to construct the stereotype of a premature India in the preindustrial past, which simultaneously established Victorian self-consciousness as modern and civilized superior. These studies have revealed that the knowledge and cultural norms of Orientalist painting, which deemed India as an exoticized and picturesque other, are based on racial hierarchies and a progressive view centered around the British Empire.

On the other hand, the influence of Western modernity on modern Indian paintings has also been a central argument in Indian art history. The main scholars who have led the study of modern Indian paintings are Partha Mitter, Geeta Kapur, and Tapati Guha-Thakurta. Mitter has studied the Western influence on Indian culture and examined how Indian painters responded to European cultural impact under colonial control. Mitter has criticized the reduction of the development of modern Indian art to a history of emulation of the West, revealing the rich multivalences of the Indian painters' artistic intention behind the process of Westernization.[10] Guha-Thakurta has more fundamentally inquired about the historical process where the category of 'modern' Indian art itself has been embedded in a broader transformation of society and intellectual history centering around Westernized elites.[11] Her work has focused on the process through which the norms and lenses for framing Indian art have themselves become Westernized. Her study has enabled further critical decolonization of Mitter's research, enriching the discourse of Indian art history by questioning the

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[7] Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *Art in America* LXXI, no. 5 (1983): 118–31, 187–91.
[8] Tim Barringer, "Imperial Visions: Representations to India and Africa Victorian Art and Design," in *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain*, ed. John Mackenzie (London: V & A Publications, 2001), 315–334.
[9] Peter Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998).
[10] Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[11] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850*–1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

hegemonic language and norms of art criticism. On the other hand, Geeta Kapur has critically analyzed the specific period of modernism in Indian art, revealing the irreversible impact of Western modernity while simultaneously attempting to depoliticize the analytical framework of Indian art history.[12]

Nevertheless, there has been insufficient discussion on how contemporary British Orientalist paintings revolving around Indian themes were received, particularly regarding how their stereotypical nostalgia and exoticism influenced representation in Indian art. Furthermore, Western influence has often been framed as something that India experiences passively and homogeneously. As a result, previous arguments have primarily portrayed Westernized elite male artists as the standard bearers of homogenous Indian art, without fully considering intersectionality within India, such as caste, class, and religion as well as gender.

In particular, a gender perspective should be explored to further develop the study of Orientalist paintings. Nochlin has also highlighted the gendered aspects of Western art history. According to Nochlin, the subjectivity of artists has been implicitly framed as the Western male or the Westernized male position, wherein "he" became the transparent subject, which became *the* viewpoint of the art historians.[13] As a result, counter-voices from the subaltern have been homogenized to male artists, while women have always been silenced as speechless subjects. On the other hand, authors such as Billie Melaman and Reina Lewis have focused on Orientalist paintings and literature produced *by* Western women themselves, not on those *of* women. Melman has criticized that the Western voice has been reduced to the homogenous masculine authority.[14] Lewis has argued that Orientalist representations emerge within multilayered hierarchical structures of gender, class, race, and religion, revealing the multivocal and heterogeneous forms of materialization of cultural imperialism.[15] Their discussions can be further expanded to study non-Western contexts and thus explore how gendered relations in Orientalism unfold cross-culturally.

In sum, in Western art history, studies on Orientalist paintings have predominantly focused on self-critique and have not fully explored non-Western reactions. On the other hand, in Indian art history, the waves of Westernization have been discussed as a unilateral influence that similarly affects India homogenously. As a result, the impact of Orientalism,

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[12] Geeta Kapur, *When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2020).
[13] Linda Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2021).
[14] Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718–1918: Sexuality, Religion and Works* (London: Macmillan, 1992).
[15] Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996).

which is deeply rooted in Indian art and transcends the dichotomy between Western and Indian art history, has not been adequately discussed. Therefore, in answering the research question, this thesis pays attention to the cross-cultural legacies of Orientalism and their power dynamics *within* Indian art between elites and non-elites and men and women.

Source and Methodology

To examine the legacies of British Orientalism in modern Indian art, this analysis develops based on the visual comparative research on Victorian Orientalist paintings and modern Indian paintings, newly formed after the British invasion. Focusing on the period from the 1850s, when British assimilation policies began, to the 1930s, marked by the rise of the avant-garde and anti-Western Indian art movements, this study analyzes how the images of India, as representative of the Orient, tied to the racial hierarchy and gendered aesthetics, influenced Indian self-expression and identity formation.

The primary sources focus mainly on the paintings of Bengali artists but are not limited to them; they also include other relevant artists, students, and art movements. In addition, the primary sources include critiques from magazines and publications by artists and art critics to support the interpretation of visual sources. These sources spotlight the broader societal context in which art was accepted, consumed, and evaluated. By analyzing who accepted these artworks, how they were interpreted, and what meanings were attributed to them, the study aims to critically examine hegemonic power at work and the popularity of specific norms and aesthetics.

However, these sources and their analysis have limitations. First, it is not possible to cover all art movements within the period under consideration. For example, whereas one of the analyses in this study focuses on the anti-Western art movement in Bengal during the first few decades of the twentieth century, this focus doesn't suggest that the entire body of Indian art overcame or resisted the influence of Westernization. In fact, amid the anti-colonial momentum in Bengal, pro-Western art movements continued in Mumbai, erstwhile Bombay. As this example shows, various art movements coexisted during the same period; therefore, it is a reductive interpretation to map the whole evolution of Indian art history only by focusing on limited art movements. Keeping these limitations in mind, this study aims to broaden the interpretation of Indian art history by addressing various movements from different periods.

Second, there is a limitation of language. Because this study only focuses on sources written in English, based on my language ability, materials in Bengali and other Indian

languages are excluded from the analysis. This exclusion not only narrows the scope of analysis but also raises the issue of colonial influence embedded in interpretation, translation, and even the English language itself, which is considered an elite language. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the power relations between the subjects and myself. As the author, my own internalized power, unconsciously shaped by factors such as language, social position, and historical context, could permeate various gaps between the subjects. Throughout the entire paper, I have made an effort to unlearn the Western-centric privileges and perspectives that I have unconsciously imbued.

Finally, analyzing Indian art within the framework of modern art, which is a product of Western expansionism, runs the risk of the analysis being constrained by Western norms and the language of criticism. This thesis therefore aims to relativize the hegemonic narrative of 'modern' art and diversify the interpretation, not to affirm the framework. Thus, it is important to critique the Western-centric norms inherent in the framework itself as much as possible and to always read against the grain in the analysis of the materials.

Theoretical Frameworks

Building on Michel Foucault's argument that scrutinizes power over knowledge formation, Said has argued that the normalization of imperialist demarcations, hierarchical structures, and policies at the material level has had discursive effects on culture and knowledge, supporting Western colonial expansion.[16] Imperial practice, knowledge, and theory have turned back to reinforce the geographical colonial expansion, and vice versa, normalizing and justifying colonial control in distant lands. Importantly, through this cyclical interaction of knowledge and power, violence is conveniently forgotten, and the differences between self and the other acquire legitimacy. These two impacts, in turn, have led to the normalization of colonialism by people in the megalopolis as a justified and even mandatory norm.[17] This thesis first focuses on this interaction between knowledge and power, discussing how the process of othering has been linked to the aesthetics of Western modern art and, consequently, how Orientalist paintings have supported British colonialism. Thus, the first inquiry of this thesis is to unpack how aesthetics and colonialism intersect in British Orientalist paintings and how they supported British colonial control in India.

[16] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 8.
[17] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 10.

On the other hand, in India, the influence of cultural colonialism has emerged in a hybrid dynamic, where the legacy of Orientalist discourses is irreversibly present while mixing with the existing native cultures. As Bhabha has argued, hybridity inherently contains essentialist discrimination: By adopting Western norms, the colonized culture becomes excluded and fixed at the periphery as the "almost the same but not quite" Other, never *becoming* the West.[18] As a result, hybridity itself supports the legitimacy of the 'pure' identity of colonial authority, thereby reinforcing the discriminatory narrative of differences between the colonizing and the colonized.[19] Thus, hybrid cultural practices function as cyclical processes that ultimately return to legitimize and reinforce colonial power. Bhabha's argument of hybridity provides a useful perspective on the discussion of modern Indian painting. The following analysis critically considers how modern Indian paintings have inscribed racial hierarchy and exoticism into new norms and aesthetics and, thereby, how British Orientalist discourse has served as the transparent surveillance to sustain its legitimacy from outside. Therefore, the second inquiry of this thesis explores how the legacy of Orientalism has been internalized within the self-expression of modern Indian paintings, thereby perpetuating its discourse from within.

On the other hand, Bhabha has also argued that the perpetuated differences within a hybrid culture reveal the diversity of identities and thus expose the deception of Western singular domination. As a result, the excluded knowledge "enter[s] upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority."[20] This argument provides the possibility of negotiation from below, where the essentialist gaze imposed upon colonized India is turned back toward British colonizers to challenge their authority. Thus, the analysis moves forward to examine how it is possible to negotiate with the dominant discourse and make space within the exclusive colonial world. Specifically focusing on the rise of anti-colonial movements and nationalism since the early twentieth century, the thesis discusses the artistic endeavors to challenge Orientalist stereotypes. The concern here is how the absolute authority of the Orientalist legacy has been negotiated and undermined from within.

However, as Partha Chatterjee has identified, the anti-colonial imagination of Asia and Africa, seeking nationalism as resistance, has been confined to certain "modular" forms that have been already made available for them by Westerners. Chatterjee's perspective has

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[18] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, chap. 4.
[19] Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn, 1985): 153–54.
[20] Bhabha, "Signs," 175.

revealed nationalism itself to be a concept embedded within a specific historical context, showing that the very imagination entangled within this context "must remain forever colonized."[21] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to question the validity of nationalism itself. However, this study's central focus is to read against the grain and crucially unlearn West centrism that historically constrained intellectual knowledge. Therefore, in the analysis of nationalism within modern art as defined by the West, it is crucial to consider who has been responsible for reconstructing Indianness, how it has been defined, and who has been excluded from that category of 'Indianness.' These concerns also raise the inquiry about cross-cultural Orientalism, extending beyond the dichotomy between British colonizers and colonized India. As Gayatri Spivak has contended, the *subject* of the subaltern is "irretrievably heterogeneous."[22] Spivak has specifically focused on Indian women who neither become the "Object of colonialist historiography" nor the "subject of insurgency" of anti-colonialism, thereby being "even more deeply in shadow."[23] Thus, throughout this study, it is important to understand that "representation" does not necessarily mean "speaking for."[24] Especially for women, their depiction does not mean that women gain the right to speak for themselves, but rather, it implies that women are silenced behind the idealized image. The legacy of Orientalism, therefore, is not simply confronted by homogenous 'Indian' artists that implicitly mean elite men; it deeply permeates within intersectionality, constantly reproducing its power structures *within* Indian artistic practice. Building on this point, in the final inquiry, this thesis asks how it is possible to explore the diverse "modular" forms of self-expression from a subaltern perspective, thereby overcoming Orientalist legacies.

To explore this final question, this thesis pursues the possibility of postcolonialism rather than anti-colonialism against British Orientalist discourse. The anti-colonial movement aims for political and economic independence from British colonial control. However, it simultaneously encapsulates the paradox of its affirmation with exclusive nationalism, which has reinforced further inward oppression and exclusion. On the other hand, the perspective of postcolonialism allows one to go beyond the confines of the nation, finding the common ground for resistance against every kind of oppression in transnational spaces by fundamentally challenging the intellectual framework itself. This study critically reinterprets

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[21] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5.
[22] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 283.
[23] Spivak, Subaltern, 287–88.
[24] Spivak, Subaltern, 75.

the historiography of modern Indian art from a postcolonial perspective, aiming to incorporate diverse voices rather than being confined to anti-colonial history from a specifically male and elite perspective. Thus, this study contributes by examining the multilayered responses to Orientalist stereotypes within Indian art, aiming to relativize the Western-centric focus in the study of Indian paintings and refocus on the art of marginalized subalterns that has been overlooked thus far.

The thesis discusses these concerns across the three chapters as follows: The first chapter features British Orientalist paintings during the Victorian era, examining the connection between aesthetics and colonialism. This chapter focuses on seminal Orientalist painters who served Queen Victoria. The analysis examines how these painters constructed and prevailed the image of India through exhibitions, publications, and travel journals, and how this image construction supported British colonial domination.

The next two chapters shift the focus to Indian art. The second chapter concentrates on the early period of modern Indian art, from the 1850s to the early 1900s, examining the legacy of Victorian Orientalist paintings by looking at the internalization process. Focusing on British assimilation policies in the Indian metropolis, especially in the Bengal region, this chapter discusses how the pictorial prototypes of Victorian Orientalist paintings associated with racial and ethnic differences were received by Indian painters and how their influence laid the groundwork for the formation of Indian modern art. Furthermore, the chapter also explores the cross-cutting power structure reproduced within India beyond the colonizers and the colonized.

The final chapter sheds light on the approximately twenty-year period from 1910 to the 1930s, during the rise of the avant-garde and the flourishing of nationalist movements. This chapter focuses on the process by which Orientalist stereotypes are negotiated and resisted. By exploring radical art movements such as primitivism and folk art emerging from outside Western norms, the chapter relativizes Orientalist master narratives. Furthermore, it highlights not only elite male painters who previously dominated Indiana art history but also village-based artists, such as Jamini Roy, and female painters, such as Sunayani Devi and Amrita Sher-Gil.

Chapter 2. Victorian Orientalist Paintings

> Everything is wonderfully fascinating for an artist here. Irregular troopers with wonderful *pugrees*, fellows on camels with bright trappings, elephants, vultures, coolies, —all sorts of wild odd-looking beasts. Strange noises too: guns, bands, shrikes, cries, yells,—everything to excite the imagination, and this, too, morning, noon, and night.
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> —Valentine Prinsep, *Imperial India: An Artist's Journals*, 21.

The following analysis especially focuses on the Victorian art world, wherein the fascination with India reached a high. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 against the British colonial rule and the successive abolition of the East India Company in 1858 transformed the governance of India to the direct rule of the British crown, which marked a turning point in relations between Britain and India. Corresponding to the growing British colonial expansion, particularly since the shift to crown rule, India grew up to be the most important market as well as the vital trading partner for British manufactured goods.[25] An especially important moment was in 1877 when Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. During the Victorian reign, India increasingly inspired modern Britain's life as an unknown subcontinent that *still* maintained a past amid industrialization and modernization. The inflow of Indian goods, materials, culture, and art satisfied the Victorian public's curiosity as 'barbaric' but visually powerful.[26] The exploration of Indian goods thus was not merely the result of the random phenomenon that occurred due to individual preferences; rather, it inevitably corresponded to the growing culture of Victorian imperialism.[27]

The first section focuses on the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, a specifically symbolic event among the series of exhibitions held during the Victorian era, which showcased the prosperity of Victorian culture. The analysis includes the exhibited paintings by Victorian Orientalist painter, Rudolf Swoboda. This exhibition will provide a broader social and cultural context where Orientalist propaganda is generated and welcomed by

[25] P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), 333–34.
[26] John M. Mackenzie, "Empire and the Global Gaze," in *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain*, ed. John Mackenzie (London: V & A Publications, 2001): 240–63, 262–63.
[27] Tim Barringer, "Imperial Visions: Representations to India and Africa Victorian Art and Design," in *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain*, ed. John Mackenzie (London: V & A Publications, 2001): 314–33, 316.

Victorian audiences. Setting the exhibition of 1886 as a starting point, the next section sheds light on Orientalist travel painters, Egron Lundgren, and Valentine Cameron Prinsep as well as Swoboda. This section examines how Orientalist painters have reified their deceptive fantasy as perceived reality about India, revealing the interrelations between imperial knowledge-making and visual images. Finally, the analysis moves toward the gendered perspective of Orientalist painting. By focusing on unequal relationships between British male painters and Indian female models, the final section examines how gendered power has been combined with colonialism, thereby how a pictorial prototype of Oriental femininity has been constructed.

1. Mapping the World through Imperial Gaze

A series of exhibitions held during the Victorian reign symbolically manifested its imperial power over the rest of the world. According to Said, for the Western ruling elites, the encounter with non-Western cultures was a process where they "project their power backwards in time, giving it a history and legitimacy […]."[28] In other words, culture became a central force of colonial domination when British rulers 'discovered' Indian tradition and gave it meaning as an extended past in the present, thereby rationalizing British superiority. The exhibition thus served not only as entertainment but also as mass education, propagating a specific spatiotemporal framework based on the racialized taxonomies with the British Empire at the apex.[29]

At that time, South Kensington in London was a pivot of art and education, where various objects worldwide gathered and formed "a three-dimensional imperial archive."[30] The South Kensington Museum, renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899, was the most prestigious museum, holding a series of exhibitions of the British colonies. One of the most successful was the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886, which recorded over five million visitors during its six-month event period. The exhibition was incentivized by the desire to realize "one great Imperial display, of the resources and industries of the Empire of India, and of the Colonies that constitute what has been well called Great Britain."[31] This

[28] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 16.
[29] Paul Greenhalgh, "The Art and Industry of Mammon: International Exhibitions, 1851–1901," in *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain*, ed. John Mackenzie (London: V & A Publications, 2001), 266.
[30] Tim Barringer, "The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project," in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London and New York: Routledge: 1998), 11.
[31] *Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886: Official Catalogue* (London: William Clowes and Sons, Limited, 1886), 9.

endeavor was symbolized in the entrance, greeted by the big clocks (Figure 2). The clocks showed the time of the five places: Greenwich at the top, the major four colonial metropolises, Ottawa, Cape Town, Calcutta, and Sydney below. As Jonathan Sweet points out, these displays represented the synchronized rhythm of the world harmonizing around Britain and celebrating the advancement of science and knowledge.[32] As intended, the display of colonial goods and art based on regional classification contributed to constructing an imperial worldview with Britain at its pinnacle, mapping the world according to the racial hierarchy.

Especially noteworthy is its emphasis on village culture and craftsmanship as the "essence" of India.[33] Throughout the display, India was beautified as a place where "everything is hand wrought, and everything, down to the cheapest toy or earthenware vessel, is more or less a work of art."[34] Under the colonial rhetoric, Indian tradition and culture emerged as beautiful legacies, which were regarded as 'vanishing' and thus should be 'protected' by British paternal authority. The following sentences from the exhibition catalog represent such British attitude:

> Their beautiful manufactures which they [Indians] have produced for so many ages have proved that there is a knowledge of many branches of art, which it would be a thousand pities should be diminished under our rule. […] I have often been struck with the calamity of the introduction of our taste into Eastern arts and manufactures, for their taste is far better than ours, although we have no doubt engineering knowledge and skill, and the command of capital; and I cannot conceive of any advantage greater than that the two countries should be brought together.[35]

In other words, in the imperial language, the admiration of Indian culture represents the flip side of British smug superiority, and Indian culture is acknowledged primarily on the premise of its subordination. Thus, the Indian objects were pleased not because of their inherent aesthetic qualities, but because of the political intention behind them: the loyalty to the

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[32] Jonathan Sweet, "The World of Art and Design: White Colonials," in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London and New York: Routledge: 1998), 336.
[33] Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (California: University of California Press, 2007), 57–9.
[34] George C. M. Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India* vol. 1 (London: R. Clay, Sons, and Taylor, 1880), 131–2. Cited in Tim Barringer, "Imperial Visions: Representations to India and Africa Victorian Art and Design," in *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain*, ed. John Mackenzie (London: V & A Publications, 2001), 329.
[35] *Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886: Official Catalogue* (London: William Clowes and Sons, Limited, 1886), 9.

superior majesty of Queen Victoria over colonial India.[36] And importantly, that very Victorian consciousness of superiority 'invented' the image of India as an exoticized Orient.

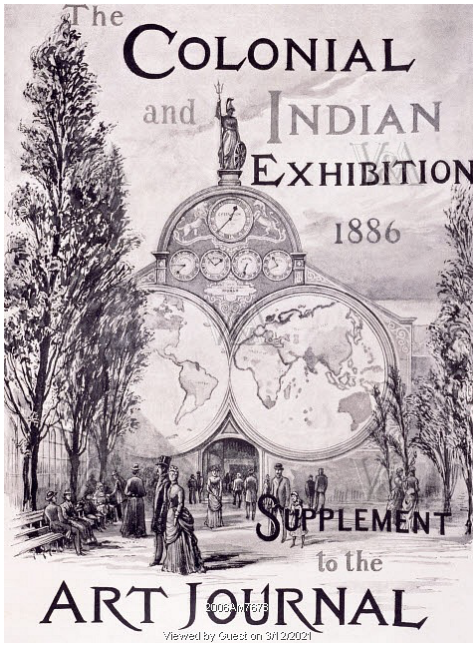

Figure 2. *The Colonial and Indian Exhibition. Supplement to the Art Journal* (1886), National Art Library.

It is important to remember that art makings and visual expressions are not merely synonymous with individual skills and practices. Their values and rules are fully captured for the first time when looking at a broader social and historical context, in which artists were embedded. Rudolf Swoboda (1859–1914), an Austrian painter who served Queen Victoria from 1885 to 1892, is one of the influential Orientalist painters amid the pinnacle of Victoria's prosperity. For the 1886 Colonial Exhibition, Queen Victoria commissioned Swoboda to travel to India and depict various Indian people, which resulted in the five portraits of craftsmen, displayed at the exhibition (figure 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). These figures, whom she admired as "such lovely heads…beautiful things,"[37] typically show racialized and exoticized 'invention' of Indian people through the Orientalist gaze. On display, these portraits were classified based on their race, origin, age, and occupation, aiming to "give the people of England some practical idea of the variety of races that are found in different parts of the great continent of India."[38]

[36] Barringer, "South Kensington," 22.
[37] Oliver Millar, *The Victorian Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 245. Cited in Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (California: University of California Press, 2007), 98–9.
[38] *Colonial and Indian Exhibition*, 12.

Therefore, the portraits of these Indian figures were intentionally controlled by the Victorian colonial desire to possess her "beautiful things." Swoboda's portraits are characterized by their detailed depiction with a particular emphasis on different types of turbans and costumes, whose textiles and personalities lend the pictures an ethnographic authenticity.[39] However, the accurate depiction attending to every detail of ethnic characters, which appears to be natural, is somewhat contrived. As Bhabha has argued, colonial power constantly uses cultural and racial stereotypes to map out the subject of control, which emerges as differences between the self and the other.[40] Thus, the exoticized image of India, which emerges as racial, ethnic, and religious differences in Swoboda's portraits, is not a reflection of preexisting reality but an endless invention and sensemaking of "something different," which comes *only after* delineating the racialized collectivity.[41] In fact, all five portraits fail to depict these figures as living individuals embedded in specific social and cultural contexts; instead, they extract definitive native figures from their real lives and fix them as idols that merely symbolize racial differences. In Nochlin's terms, these images are reduced to "taxidermy," wherein they are dehumanized as permanent "specimens" of different *types* of human beings.[42]

As the display of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886 shows, representation is the endless selection of which differences should or should not be recognized and the constant process of sense-making of these differences. In Swoboda's portraits, as well as throughout the entire design of the exhibition, the imagined fragments of 'Indianness' were consolidated into representations meant to encapsulate India as a whole. The imagined 'Indianness' thus requires intentional effort to maintain its façade of reality. Throughout the exhibition, by curating imagined 'Indian' objects and reconstructing them as an extension of the 'exotic' and 'ancient' period in the contemporary, India was subjected to surveillance and control to maintain the hegemonic narrative of Victorian superiority.[43] At this moment, visual representation and colonial power came to intertwine. As Nicholas Thomas has argued building on Foucault's work, colonial control is not necessarily exerted as a violent repression by the state, but rather it works on the very process of knowledge-making and

[39] Mathur, *India by Design*, 97.
[40] Bhabha, "Signs," 153–54.
[41] Bhabha, "Signs," 152, 153–54.
[42] Nochlin, "Imaginary," 126.
[43] Arindam Dutta, "The Politics of Display: India 1886 and 1986," Journal of Arts & Ideas, no. 30-31 (1997): 120.

construction of worldview, through which racialized stereotypes and British superiority have been internalized in both artists and spectators.[44]

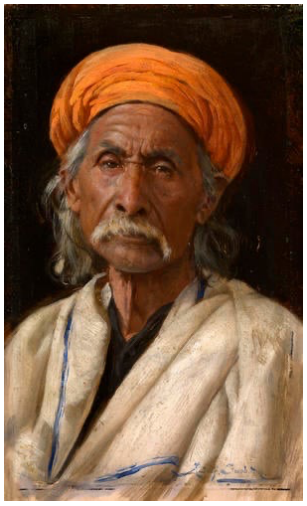

Figure 3. *Bakshiram*, 1886 (oil on canvas). The Royal Collection.

Figure 4. *Ramlad*, 1886 (oil on canvas). The Royal Collection.

Figure 5. *Muhammad Hussain*, 1886 (oil on canvas). The Royal Collection.

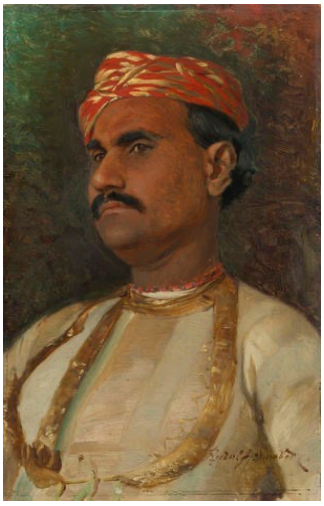

Figure 6. *Radha Bullabh*, 1886 (oil on canvas). The Royal Collection.

Figure 7. *Sha'ban*, 1886 (oil on canvas). The Royal Collection.

[44] Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 41.

2. Making Fantasy the Reality

The Orientalist fantasy has been sustained through intentional efforts of imperial culture to continually select, reconstruct, and consume favorable images of India. In addition to exhibitions, in the early period of the Victorian reign, before photography became popular, travel painters largely contributed to providing a rationale for the Orientalist fantasy and constructing the Victorian public's knowledge about India.[45] Since few British had ever visited distant India and little was known about the reality there, painters' accurate depiction of the site was convincing like documentary photography.[46] As a result, the representation of India has been condensed into reductive and stereotypical images, focusing on 'bizarre' ethnographic details such as religion, customs, costumes, and architecture, which fail to provide a comprehensive perspective for understanding the regional, cultural, and geographical diversity within India. Alongside Swoboda, a Swedish watercolorist Egron Lundgren (1815–1875), and an India-born British painter Valentine Cameron Prinsep (1838–1904) are other notable Orientalist painters who served Queen Victoria. They traveled to India under Her Majesty and provided the Victorian public with 'ethnographic catalogs' of India, as featured below.

Painters' techniques of realism skillfully blurred the line between reality and fantasy, which, at the same time, conveniently concealed colonial violence behind the idealized image. As Nochlin points out, the Orientalist fantasy has been constructed not only by depicting ethnographic details but more importantly, by *not* depicting the existence of colonizers and their violence.[47] Alongside a series of portraits, discussed earlier, Swoboda directed his Orientalist gaze toward people's daily lives. *A Peep at the Train* is one of his masterpieces (Figure 8). This painting depicts the perspective of the painter observing outside from the train window.[48] The stark landscape with plain buildings, groups of craftsmen on the ground, and ethnic garments such as turbans and scarves evoke the imagined Indian village life as a timeless world detached from the ongoing colonial role. At the same time, however,

[45] Barringer, "Imperial Visions," 317.
[46] Nicholas Tromans, "Introduction: British Orientalist Painting," in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, ed. Nicholas Tromans (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 20; Rana Kabbani, "Regarding Orientalist Painting Today," in *The Lure of the East*, 43.
[47] Nochlin, "Imaginary," 122.
[48] "Rudolf Swoboda (1859–1914), A Peep at the Train," Royal Collection Trust, accessed June 23, 2024, https://www.rct.uk/collection/403759/a-peep-at-the-train.

the contrasting composition between the painter looking down from the train, the symbol of progress and technology, and those left behind in an exotic world depicts a clear racial and imperialistic intention. By failing to depict the painter himself, whose gaze is the very agent that "brings the image into being," the painting looks like a pure reflection of reality, obscuring the fact that it was created by the painter.[49]

Consequently, the painter gained the privileged role of representing speechless subjects and transforming his fantasy into a reality without being accused. This is the moment when the line between reality and fiction becomes no longer significant, wherein Indian people are homogenously reduced to "the ironic copy over the dead original."[50] In fact, Swoboda's *A Peep at the Train*, despite its realistic depiction, contains functional elements created by the painter himself. For example, the painting was completed not in India but in the painter's studio in London. Three figures in the foreground—the old man, the boy sitting on the fence, and the girl in the red sari—are observed coming from his earlier portraits (Figures 9, 10, and 11).[51] By blending realistic elements into fantasy and skillfully concealing inconvenient truths, it successfully "betrays" audiences, making "ethnographic realism" "ethnographic reality."[52] Importantly, concealed behind the picturesque images, the ongoing colonial violence and irrationality are never accused, nor are they even acknowledged.

[49] Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *Art in America* LXXI, no. 5 (1983): 122.
[50] Michael Camille, "Rethinking the Canon: Prophets, Canons, and Promising Monsters," *The Art Bulletin* 78, no. 2 (Jun 1996):198.

[51] Royal trust 引用
[52] Peter Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 89.

Figure 8. Rudolf Swoboda, *A Peep at the Train*, 1892 (oil on canvas), The Royal Collection Trust, London.

Figure 9. *Khazan Singh*, 1886–88 (oil on panel), The Royal Collection.

Figure 10. *Sunder Singh*, 1886–88 (oil on panel), The Royal Collection.

Figure 11. *Gulzar*, 1886–88 (oil on panel), The Royal Collection.

However, contrary to the picturesque images consumed in the homeland, the subcontinent was always an area of violence and wars caused by the very British themselves. Especially the chronic failure of British governance caused discontent within Indian society, which culminated in the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and prolonged instability thereafter.[53] Egron Lundgren, who received a commission from Queen Victoria to travel to India the very next year after the Mutiny, recorded the unsettling atmosphere surrounding India at that time:

> I could not be denied that the news from divers sources of the general state of the country was rather unsettling. We lived in uncertainty between warlike reports, and the feeling that much was at stake made the cholera-laden atmosphere seem yet more oppressive. It was as if an ominous cloud had settled over India, and it was hard to avoid an impression that the storm might break at any moment.[54]

Nevertheless, the paintings that Lundgren created encapsulate abundant unique moments that were "thought might be of interest in England,"[55] clearly demonstrating a selection of images that were perceived as worthy of portrayal to please Queen Victoria. In fact, while in the middle of the unrest, his diary tells his fascination with the "magnificence" of the subcontinent.[56] He recorded that "[m]uch that I saw seemed very picturesque, and I began industriously sketching the things that amazed me most."[57] Even in the depiction of Indian soldiers, British colonial violence behind them is erased (Figure. 12). In this image, soldiers astride an elephant are transformed into beautiful and timeless images imbued with exotic charm. His paintings seem to be constituted of a miscellaneous assemblage of perceived 'Indianness,' such as architecture, animals evoking foreign lands like an elephant, and people in decorative garments and turbans (Figures 13, 14 and 15). These paintings capture India as an amalgamation of fragments of 'monuments' that do not have functions, existing for outsiders' curious gaze.[58] In short, what only matters in the representation of India is its oddness and novelty, not truthfulness, which therefore fails to capture India as a place of living, resisting, and speaking out, nor as a place characterized by religious, cultural, and geographical diversity.

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[53] Cain, *British Imperialism*, 328.
[54] Sten Nilsson and Narayani Gupta, *The Painter's Eye: Ergon Lundgren and India* (Stockholm, Nationalmusum, 1992), 51.
[55] Nilsson, *Ergon Lundgren*, 80.
[56] Nilsson, *Ergon Lundgren*, 49.
[57] Nilsson, *Ergon Lundgren*, 79.
[58] Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture*, 53–4.

Figure 12. Egron Lundgren, *Five Sikhs and Gurkhas*, 1858–59 (watercolor), from Nilsson, *Ergon Lundgren*.

Figure 13. Egron Lundgren, *A Quite of Soldiers Astride an Elephant*, 1858–59 (watercolor), from Nilsson, *Ergon Lundgren.*

Figure 14. Egron Lundgren, *Sikh Cavalry*, 1858–59 (watercolor), from Nilsson, *Ergon Lundgren*.

Figure 15. Egron Lundgren, *View of Lucknow, Mosque of Aurangzeb in the foreground* (Watercolor), Nationalmuseum.

The oblivion of violence behind Orientalist fantasy seems to reach a height in paintings that celebrate the prosperity of the British Empire and Queen Victoria's power. In 1876, Prinsep received a commission from Queen Victoria to depict "artistically unknown" India on the occasion of her ascension to the Empress of India.[59] Prinsep depicted the scene

[59] Valentine Prinsep, *Imperial India: an Artist's Journals* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), 1.

of the Imperial Assemblage in an Imperial Durbar at Delhi in 1877, which was held by then Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Lord Lytton, as a means of announcing Queen Victoria's title of Empress "with the utmost pomp and magnificence" (Figure 16).[60] As the painter himself intended to make it "a picture commemorative of the Assemblage rather than a faithful reproduction of the scene," the painting symbolically celebrates the dignity of Queen Victoria and the influence of British colonial power in India.[61] The majestic scene filled with hundreds of people and a festive atmosphere appears to glorify colonial power while conveniently turning a blind eye to the violent colonial role, exploitation, and resistance against the British colonizers.

Figure 16. Valentine Cameron Prinsep, *The Imperial Assemblage held at Delhi, 1 January 1877*, 1877–80 (oil on canvas), The Royal Collection.

3. The Construction of Oriental Femininity

In addition to racial discrimination, sexual difference has played an important role as a source of power to realize Orientalist fantasy. In Orientalist paintings, the construction of an imaginary India has often been combined with sexual desire for the control of Indian female subjects. The gendered relations between masculine power over exoticized women have constructed the pictorial prototypes of femininity, which are typically represented as their

[60] "Description," Royal Collection Trust, accessed March 8, 2024, https://www.rct.uk/collection/407181/the-imperial-assemblage-held-at-delhi-1-january-1877.
[61] "Description."

weakness and passivity.[62] Femininity, therefore, serves not as an identity that is built in women but as the label of being other, legitimating masculine power and male fantasies.[63]

Interestingly, different from French Orientalist paintings during the same period, which were dominated by the female nude, Victorian paintings preferred less eroticism as an expression of femininity. In fact, there was a firm belief that the female nude disturbed Victorian moral values. Instead, the ideal of womanhood was expressed as their moral superiority, typically emphasizing romanticized aspects of domestic life.[64] That is, Victorian values idealized women as symbols of chastity and morality, serving men in the household. For example, a woman named Jumna Bae, whom Princep encountered during his stay in India in 1876, clearly shows the gendered representation of an Indian woman, reflecting the Victorian value of femininity (Figure 17). Bae is recorded as the wife of the Gaekwar, the king of the city of Baroda. Princep recorded his memory of when he first encountered Bae with excitement, with a specific emphasis on her beauty. The excerpt from a lengthy careful observation of her physical and ethnic characteristics shows her passive position as the seen, exposed to the painter's unilateral and imprudent gaze that penetrates her entire being:

> She had on a dark blue muslin *sarree*, through which one could distinctly see her olive-brown skin. Indeed, to the waist she was virtually naked, except that across her breasts she wore a rather coquettish red and gold embroidered staylette. Her hands and feet are unusually beautiful, even in this land of lovely extremities. Both are arranged with the greatest care; every nail is carefully marked, where the flesh ceases to adhere with a semicircle of henna; and on each great toe she has two rings, and one on each little toe.[65]

In his journal, Bae was depicted as a noble symbol of a foreign land, reigning at the pinnacle of the perceived alien caste system and Hinduism. In the painter's eye, as Ronald Inden points out, caste comes to be a substantialized symbol of India, which is used as an attractive subject of Orientalist paintings, rather than an intangible Hindu concept.[66] Despite her wealth and nobility as a queen, however, Princep's admiration for Bae does not affirm her power or subjectivity. Rather, her status is highly sexualized, fixing Bae as a symbol of exotic

[62] Nochlin, "Imaginary," 125.
[63] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 15.
[64] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 166–67.
[65] Prinsep, *Imperial* India, 323–24.
[66] Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India," *Modern Asian Studies* 20 (1986): 402–3.

femininity. In her portrait, extravagant accessories and jewelry, a generously draped saree covering her entire body, and her bare feet—all of these depictions make Bae an alluring foreign presence for men.

Importantly, the expression of Orientalist femininity has been associated with social roles and expectations imposed upon women: a queen, mother, and wife. While being the wife of a king, "whose beauty excited his passions" on the one hand, Bae is expected to be a mother, giving birth to and raising children to ensure the continuity of the royal family on the other.[67] In fact, within the male-dominant structure of the royal family, her status was rather vulnerable, subject to constant threats of sexual violence and exploitation; therefore, she should be "taken care of" by the 'appropriate' authority, the British.[68] As this example shows, docility and obedience have been perused as ideal womanhood. Consequently, women were reduced to passive icons, only attracting men by "us[ing] her sweetest smiles."[69]

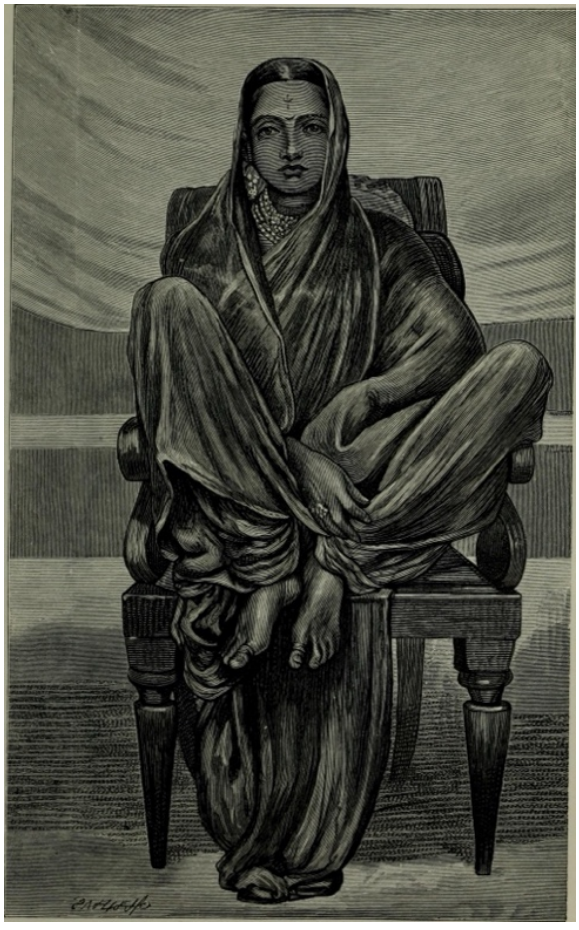

Figure 17. Valentine Cameron Prinsep,*H. H. Jumna Bae, Maharanee Regnant of Baroda*. From *Imperial India; An Artist's Journals*, 1879.

[67] Prinsep, *Imperial India*, 322.
[68] Prinsep, *Imperial* India, 322.
[69] Prinsep, *Imperial India*, 324.

Not to mention, being 'beautiful' and 'picturesque' has constructed an essential element of femininity. As Mitter points out, however, beauty is not biologically determined; rather, the notion of beauty is a cultural product.[70] In Orientalist aesthetics, beauty and exoticism are associated with the perceived weakness and fragility of women in comparison to the masculine power of imperial culture. Only when disappearing, "they are finally transformed into subjects of aesthetic delectation in an imagery […]."[71] In fact, in Victorian Orientalist paintings, women's sexualized beauty seems to reach its peak amid transience, symbolizing an assumed disappearing Indian tradition and culture. In particular, Hinduism has been associated with a mysterious and fleeting image, enhancing beautified portrayals of Indian women within the 'vanishing fate' of culture.

One of the popular Indian subjects was nautch girls, professional Hindi dancers performing in ceremonies. A series of images of nautch girls represent the idealized beauty of exotic Indian women, captivating male audiences as performers (Figures 18 and 19). The emphasized elements such as the colorful sari, accessories, and dancing posture as the symbol of foreign custom create the stereotypical image of 'nautch girls' living only within the imagined Orientalist world, detached from India's actual cultural and religious context. At the same time, these images show a certain mysterious atmosphere hidden behind the foreign religion that captivates the male gaze and stimulates their desire to dominate the female subjects who remained undiscovered until the colonial expansion. As Rana Kabbani points out, male painters and spectators seem to finally gain the gaze of the voyeur in these paintings, trespassing into a closed forbidden space.[72] As a result, the painter's gaze insensitively delves deep into the private culture, where women are depicted and yet silenced within aesthetics associated with their passivity and weakness.

That is, Orientalist painters now enjoyed the privilege of directing their gaze wherever they wanted, wherein Indian women were laid bare to the male gaze so that the painters were "able to make any study of her."[73] In this process, curiosity and desire toward the unknown mysteries hidden from the male gaze become the driving force behind the pursuit of aesthetics. According to Sara Suleri, in a portrait of Indian women, a veil covering their faces and bodies plays a central role in constructing their exotic beauty. The veil is thus given

[70] Partha Mitter, "The Hottentot Venus and Western Man: Reflections on the Construction of Beauty in the West," in *Cultural Encounters: Representing 'Otherness,'* ed. Elizabeth Hallam and Brian V. Street (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 39.
[71] Nochlin, "Imaginary," 127.
[72] Rana Kabbani, "Regarding Orientalist Painting Today," in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, ed. Nicholas Tromans (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 42.
[73] Nilsson, *Ergon Lundgren*, 59–60.

meaning beyond its function as a mere costume; it becomes a surrogate for the enigmatic culture veiled in secrecy.[74] In fact, the mystery of veiled women has been often associated with their beauty, kindling the Orientalist fantasy. In his diary, Lundgren recorded his memory when he encountered a Hindi woman in Calcutta during his stay in India from1858–1859: "Her statuesque and extremely well-formed body was scrupulously wrapped in a white veil with an abundance of folds and herms, which […] could be discerned as enveloping a Venus of bronze."[75] Lundgren's sketch of the bathing scene depicts a distanced mystical world, wherein the painter became a transparent observer as if enjoying his privilege to project his desire on the subject "with impunity"[76] (Figure 20). His record of the scene reflects the painter's excitement about the hidden body being revealed and the desire to possess it exclusively through the gaze.

> The women stepped into the water in their white veils and looked quite naturalistic in their dripping wet garments when they stepped up onto the steps once more. […] Yet hardly had they returned to the bank before they threw on dry while drapes and veils, under which they removed the wet garments that soon fell around their feet; all this was executed with a modest grace that was utterly captivating.[77]

Thus, the domination of Indian women covered by vails in the Victorian Orientalist paintings, sometimes colorful and ornate, and at other times simple and semi-naked, embodies the Victorian fantasy of a clandestine world, which simultaneously symbolizes the dominance of the male gaze penetrating secret and private space. These images, which might be associated with expectations of female roles in domestic life or aspirations toward mystical customs, resulted in the fragile and exotic stereotypes of Indian women.

It is important to remember that, here again, colonial violence and power are skillfully concealed, leaving only idealized images behind. In other words, British colonial and masculine powers are camouflaged behind the façade of picturesque images, concealing their inherent violence and irrationality as an inconvenient truth; on the other hand, however, their own power and superiority have never been forgotten and always lurking beneath the privileged subconscious of the rulers, which have underpinned the aesthetic values of Orientalist paintings. What is more, while being depicted, there is no room for the utterances

[74] Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 108–9.
[75] Nilsson, *Ergon Lundgren*, 60.
[76] Nochlin, "Imaginary," 123.
[77] "India 1858–59: Selections from Lundgren's Diary," in *The Painter's Eye: Ergon Lundgren and India*, ed. Sten Nilsson and Narayani Gupta (Stockholm, Nationalmusum, 1992), 51–2.

of Indian female subjects; they have been seen yet silenced as the beautiful idol. Their voice has been perpetually deprived under the dual oppression of colonialism and male centrism.

Figure 18. Valentine Cameron Prinsep, *Martaba, a Nautch Girl*, n.d. (oil on canvas), private collection.

Figure 19. Egron Lundgren, *Scene at the Nautch Festival*, 1859 (watercolor), The Royal Collection.

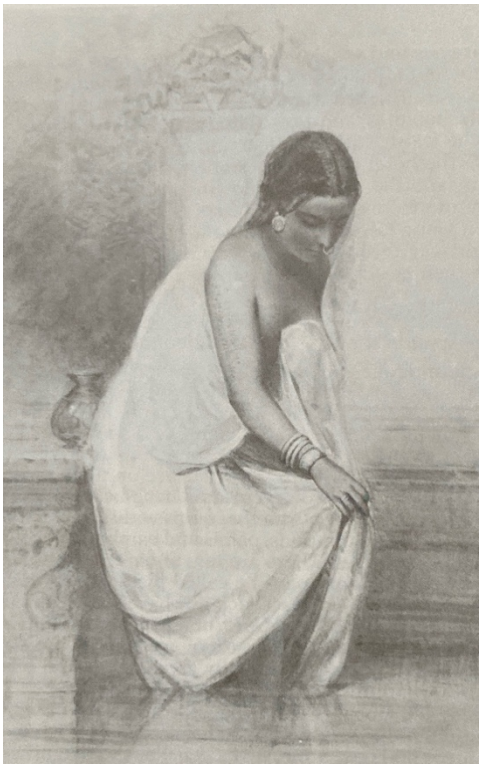

Figure 20. Egron Lundgren, *Bathing Ghat, Calcutta* (watercolor), from Nilsson, *Ergon Lundgren.*

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In short, the artistic norms and aesthetics of Victorian Orientalist paintings inherently resonate with colonialism. As discussed, domination over India has been exhibited as a beautified fantasy that encapsulates the British sense of superiority towards the exoticized India and even a certain pity towards its assumed vanishing fate. The pictorial prototype of India has been produced in constant comparison to the British self, such as superior 'us' and inferior 'them,' masculine domination and feminine weakness, and modern and pre-modern. In this process, exoticized 'Indianness' has been normalized within the racial hierarchy and beauty has been associated with gendered stereotypes of weakness and fragility. In the next chapter, the analysis focuses on how the Orientalist aesthetics embracing colonial discourse influenced Indian paintings of the same period.

Chapter 3. The Internalization of British Orientalism

The analysis from this chapter shifts the focus to Indian art during the same period, examining the influence of the Victorian Orientalist gaze from the other side. Specifically, this chapter details the internalization process of the Orientalist gaze through British cultural policies. Throughout the cultural exchange between England and the Indian metropolis, British culture flowed into Indian society and stimulated the Westernization of Indian cultural norms and tastes. Especially important is that British expansion introduced the categories of 'modern art' or 'high art,' which not only altered the existing techniques and styles of paintings but more profoundly associated Western values of progress and science with the notion of 'good' and 'beautiful.' At the same time, British oppressive policies simultaneously catalyzed the rise of nationalism among elites. Consequently, Indian art became a political tool for expressing nationalism and identity, acquiring a modern significance in expressing 'us' beyond the previous meaning of mere acts of creation. During this period, a *new* Indian identity was reinvented within the context of the introduced Western artistic norms.

The following analysis traces the trajectories from the Westernization period in the late nineteenth century to the anti-Western nationalism period in the early twentieth century. Specifically, by focusing on paintings by Indian art students and artists, it examines how Orientalist aesthetics combined with racial hierarchy and gender stereotypes have been inherited into the emerging 'modern' Indian art, and how these influences have supported Orientalist discourses from within India. First, I look at British art education in Calcutta and Bombay, examining the Westernization process of elite artists. The next section features one of the key figures in Indian art history—Raja Ravi Varma, called the "father of modern Indian art"—analyzing his hybrid-style where Western norms and Indian nationalism intertwine. Lastly, I examine pro-Indian artistic reform that pursued a 'pure' Indian identity, driven by a British educator E. B. Havell, and Indian painter Abanindranath Tagore. By focusing on the transition from assimilation to hybrid style, and finally to 'pure' Indian style, this chapter aims to reveal the perpetuated legacy of Orientalism permeating within this seemingly contrasting reaction of Westernization and nationalism.

As a final note, the reconstruction of new cultural norms reflects the influence of the hegemonic power within the given society. It is therefore crucial to pay attention to the focus

of the analysis being biased toward Indian male elites. The category of 'modern' art that frames the *new* Indian art has been developed within the expansion of Western modernity; therefore, it inherently encapsulates Western- and male-centric ideologies. Thus, another foundation of my argument is to focus on intersectionality within India, examining how colonial and masculine power working on the painter's gaze has been exerted against the non-elite, women, and other minorities of the subject.

1. Westernization of India through Assimilation Art Education

In the 1850s, a series of British art schools were established in major cities, including Madras (1853), Calcutta (1854), and Bombay (1857). The following analysis specifically focuses on the art schools in Calcutta and Bombay. Whereas dominant schools in other cities focused on training in applied arts, such as industrial skills and design, schools in Calcutta and Bombay forged their own path, specializing in distinctive training in the 'fine arts.'[78] Since this study focuses on the realm of 'fine art,' these two schools are more relevant to my purpose.

The first art school in Calcutta, known as the Calcutta Mechanism Institution, was established in 1839 and was renamed as Calcutta School of Art in 1854. In 1857, the Sir Jamsetiji Jeejibhoy School of Art, commonly known as the J. J. School of Art, was established in Bombay.[79] The education policies of these schools were based on the infamous Macaulayism, named after Thomas Babington Macaulay, who promoted an enlightening and racialist education policy in India under the guise of enlightenment. In *The Minutes on Education of 1834*, Macaulay advocated the training of natives into "Indian in blood and colour but English in taste in opinion, in morals, and in intellect."[80] As such, through assimilation education based on the Enlightenment principle of science and progress, "useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement"[81] were largely introduced among Indian elites.

Furthermore, the curriculum in the art schools in Calcutta and Bombay followed the education in South Kensington in London, which placed a specific focus on accurate drawing

[78] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 64.
[79] Ami Kantawala, "Art Education in Colonial India: Implementation and Imposition," *Studies in Art Education* 53, no. 3 (Spring, 2012): 208–22.
[80] T. B. Macaulay, "Minute on Education, February 2, 1835," accessed June 17, 2024, http://www.mssu.edu/projectsouthasia/history/primarydocs/education/Macaulay001.htm.
[81] Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates during the First Session of the Third Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland* vol. 26 (11th May-22nd July 1813), 562, cited in Gauri Viswanathan, "The Beginnings of English Literary Studies in British India," *Oxford Literary Review* 9, no. 1–2 (1987): 4.

through copying Western paintings. By copying the work of "the good painters in Europe," students were expected to acquire "the right way of seeing…so that the eyes of the young might become accustomed to the observation of what is beautiful in the form and colour of all objects."[82] Thus, teaching the most fundamental drawing meant more than just acquiring painting techniques; it was almost indoctrination, introducing the hegemonic Western perspective as the only legitimate way to interpret the world. Through British-style art education, students acquired new techniques of three-dimensional naturalism and oil painting, rooted in the Italian Renaissance.

The elite who observed Western artistic norms were called "gentlemen artists" and became a new force in Indian culture. They internalized their identity as an 'artist,' thereby differentiating themselves from traditional 'artisans' engaged in under-valued craftsmanship.[83] While internalizing 'legitimate' aesthetics, Indian traditional norms came to be regarded as "devoid at once of imaginative richness and chastity of conception, and … daubed with the hideousness of savage imagery."[84] Consequently, Western aesthetics based on Renaissance idealism became the canon that replaced folk cultures, such as 'bazaar' pictures of Hindu gods, Kalighat paintings, and miniature paintings. Before the British invasion, these folk 'bazaar' paintings were popular as native art in the city (Figures 21 and 22).[85] However, as conventional practices were replaced by Western academism, these two-dimensional and flat paintings were discriminatively labeled as "craft," which "had no scientific knowledge of the language of art."[86] Interestingly, in Kalighat, painters often depicted satire against the conservative Hindu social order, specifically targeting patriarchal relations between men and women. In these themes, women confined to the domestic sphere became the strong physical punisher of man's weakness (Figure 23).[87] By contrast, within Renaissance values, women became mere symbols of idealized womanhood.

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[82] Minute by the Lt. Governor of Bengal announcing the establishment of the Art Gallery in connection with the School of Art on 15 February 1876 – BGP/E, February 1976, No. 60, 149, cited in Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 64.

[83] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Artists, Artisans and Mass Picture Production in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-century Calcutta: The Changing Iconography of Popular Prints," *South Asia Research* 8, no. 1 (May 1988): 4.

[84] *The Hindu Patriot*, 21 June 1855, cited in Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 68.

[85] For the argument about 'bazaar' paintings, see "Artisana, Artists and Popular Picture Production in Nineteenth-century Calcutta," in Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 11–44; W. G. Archer, *Bazaar Paintings of Calcutta, The Style of Kalighat* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1953); and Ajit Mookerjee, *Folk Art of Bengal* (Calcutta: The University of Calcutta, 1939); and Ratnabali Chatterjee, *From the Karkhana to the Studio: Changing Social Roles of Patron and Artist in Bengal* (New Delhi: Books & Books, 1990).

[86] A. Hunter, M.D., F.R.C.S.E. Superintendent of the Madras School of Industrial Art, Madras, 1867, Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 58.

[87] Ratnabali Chatterjee, *From the Karkhana to the Studio: A Study in the Changing Social Roles of Patron and Artist in Bengal* (New Delhi: Books & Books, 1990), 65–7.

Through the constant exposure to the British culture, stereotypes of India filtered through the Orientalist gaze were now "repossessed" by native elites, reinforcing an image of the inferior self from within.[88] The encounter with 'superior' Western art gave Indian elites a sense of inferiority, making them aware of their position of stagnating in a "dark period." Consequently, advancing their art and culture became accepted as an urgent task for Indian elites.[89] In short, assimilation education replaced what is 'good' and 'beautiful' with Western aesthetics, thereby promoting the Westernization of Indian elites from within.

Figure 21. *Babu*, nineteenth-century Kalighat (ink on paper), Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, University of Calcutta.

[88] Roger Benjamin, "Postcolonial Taste: Non-Western Markets for Orientalist Art," in *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*, ed. Roger Benjamin (New South Wales: The Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997), 33.
[89] David Kopf, "The Universal Man and the Yellow Dog: The Orientalist Legacy and the Problem of Brahmo Identity," in *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, ed. Rachel Van M. Baumer (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1975), 44.

Figure 22. Unidentified artist: *Kamala Kamini, c. 1890* (watercolor), Victoria and Albert Museum.

Figure 23. *Courtesan Being Adored by her Lover*, nineteenth-century, Kalighat (ink on paper), courtesy Indian Museum, Calcutta.

However, the British assimilation policy did not mean Western norms had completely obliterated those of India, nor was it the intention of British governors from the outset. Instead, differences in race, religion, and ethnicity were still important elements in the assimilation policy to prevent Indian elites from fully 'catching up' with the West, and thereby sustaining British domination. In other words, the aim of assimilation policy lies in reproducing differences in light of Western values rather than purely advancing Indian society.[90] The stereotypical image of exotic India, constructed under Orientalist discourse, has thus been inherited as a crucial hallmark of the new Indian artistic norm, consistently producing the inferior other through systematized education.

As a result, Indian students faced a paradoxical expectation to inherit the Indian essence represented by traditional flat designs while adopting the skills of Western naturalism to 'improve' Indian native art in accordance with the Western norm of three dimensions.[91] Art students' works during this period represent such a hybrid process, inheriting the traditional format of Kalighat and Indian mythical themes while employing their skills of a three-dimensional and naturalistic portrayal with a romanticized mood based on British academism (Figures 24 and 25). The British influence even expanded outside of the academy. Ramaswami Naidu, an Indian painter not belonging to the art school either in Calcutta or Bombay, also explored an intermingled theme of Indian ethnographic portraits and Western nude study (Figure 26).[92] Notably, the works of Indian painters and art students were now included in a series of 'fine art' exhibitions and received high praise from the British. However, they were still categorized as 'native art' and segregated from the works of Western painters. Therefore, despite the assimilation policies, the distinction between Indian and Western artists remained strong, and the works of Indian artists were not celebrated as anything more than "native talent."[93]

[90] Kopf, "Universal Man," 44.
[91] Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 43.
[92] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Westernisation and Tradition in South Indian Painting in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906)," *Studies in History* 2, issue 2 (1986): 173.
[93] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 48.

Figure 24. *Woman Putting on Earrings* (oil on board), S. Neotia Collection), from Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, no. II.

Figure 25. Bamapada Banerjee, *Devajani Rescued from the Well* (oleograph on paper), from DAG World, "The Babu and the Bazaar: Art from 19th and early 20th Century Bengal," https://dagworld.com/babu-bazaar-institutional-collaboration.html.

Figure 26. Ramaswamy Naidu, *Three Sudra Girls of Travancore* (oil on canvas), Victoria and Albert Museum.

As David Kopf has argued, educated elites experienced an identity crisis in a cultural limbo between British culture and Indian heritage. While following Macaulayism and rejecting Indian traditional cultural practices, they also understood that they could only imperfectly and never fully belong to Western art.[94] Ironically, it was the very Indian artists themselves who reinforced and reproduced the Orientalist stereotypes of racialized and exoticized Indian images through their hybrid style, fixing themselves in the periphery of the Western art world.

At the same time, such discriminative policies became an impulse of subsequent nationalist and anti-colonial movements, typically observed as the increasing momentum of the Bengal Renaissance. As Kopf has argued, the idea of the Western Renaissance inspired Bengali intelligentsia to envision their own golden age, which was imagined as the Hindu past, and encouraged them to seek the revitalization of 'Indianness' through the Renaissance movements.[95] In general, the modernization process of Indian culture was not merely imitating Western paintings nor was it exploring its own culture outside the Western

[94] Kopf, "Universal Man," 46.
[95] John N. Gray, "Bengal and Britain: Culture Contact and the Reinterpretation of Hinduism in the Nineteenth Century," in *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, ed. Rachel Van M. Baumer (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1975), 109.

influence. As its paradoxical consequence, British assimilation policies paved the way for a hybrid modernization in Indian art history, which was further explored by the emerging painter, Raja Ravi Varma.

2. Raja Ravi Varma: The Restoration of Hindu Past within a New Aesthetic Norm

This section covers Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906), who widely spread Western-style 'modern' paintings among people beyond academia. While greatly influenced by the British Academy, Ravi Varma pursued patriotic themes such as Indian history and mythology, which resulted in his hybrid style that blended Indian nationalism with Western artistic norms. In most of his work, which revolves around female portraits, women played a central role in realizing his ideal for the Indian golden age. The following analysis sheds light on the expression of 'Indianness' and femininity in Ravi Varma's works, which allowed him to explore his own themes but simultaneously became pictorial prototypes that confined him. By focusing on these two aspects, this section aims to reveal the contradiction where the Indian artist established freedom of expression outside British institutions while still internalizing and perpetuating the legacy of Orientalism.

Despite the large-scale introduction of British art education, there was no emergence of globally acknowledged artists, nor those who made an innovative contribution to modern Indian art. Instead, many school-trained artists flowed into second-tier jobs, producing mass-produced pictures that increasingly dominated the commercial opportunities at that time.[96] Interestingly, it was not these graduates who went beyond such confines of the popular cultural level but a self-taught painter, Raja Ravi Varma, who was described as "the greatest painter of modern India."[97] Ravi Varma's distinctive popularity was extended beyond the elite patronage and spread among the Indian middle class, in which prints and magazines played a central role. Ironically, the circulation of Westernized paintings produced by art school graduates flowing into non-elite markets around the same period nurtured the 'British taste' among the middle class, laying the groundwork for accepting Ravi Varma's hybrid-style paintings.[98] According to the critics in *The Modern Review*, the popularity of Ravi Varma was "natural" in Indian art, which "although always sincere and decorative, and often spiritual and tender, was yet sometimes over-stiff or over-formal, and lacking in technical

[96] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 45–6.
[97] "Ravi Varma," *The Modern Review*, vol. I, no. 1 (January 1907): 86.
[98] Guha-Thakurta, "Westernisation," 175–6.

power." Therefore, Varma, who "broke through these conventions and produced realistic pictures of familiar subjects" was "welcomed…with open arms."[99]

Born into a family that was closely connected to the royal house of Travancore, Ravi Varma grew up learning drawing from his uncle, Raja Raja Varma, for amusement. When he was 13, his paintings were well-received by the then Maharaja of Travancore, and he earned the opportunity to receive an artistic education as a court painter, where he observed the Western style of painting. Strictly speaking, Ravi Varma did not receive an official art education, but his style of painting was greatly influenced by European paintings that he viewed in his youth.[100] In addition to his experience in the Travancore court, he acquired knowledge of painting from Western publications, such as the annual publications of the Royal Academy in London, from which he "'internalized' the language of Victorian painting."[101] Furthermore, his painting style characterized by the use of allegories based on romanticism and symbolism was influenced by the French Academy, especially Gustave Boulanger (1824–1888) and William Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905).[102] Through the study of their works, he adopted a way of depicting the human figure as a symbol of ideals and emotions (Figure 27).[103]

At that time, a wave of nationalism advocating the revival of Hindu civilization encouraged him to establish sentimental images of 'Indianness' by implementing his knowledge of Victorian and other Western paintings.[104] His nationalistic nostalgia for an imagined golden age of Indian civilization was mainly inspired by the epics and myths, particularly those from the Hindu literature of the Puranas, as well as the works of Sanskrit poet and playwriter Kalidasa (Figures 28 and 29).[105] Ravi Varma sought to showcase the perceived superiority of 'Indianness' over dominant Western authority by depicting the Hindu golden age through realistic romanticism, allegories, and emotive expression. Inspired by "the most beautiful, pathetic, and soul moving scenes in the ancient literature of India," he

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[99] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Present State of Indian Art: I. Painting and Sculpture," *The Modern Review* vol. II, no. 2 (August 1907): 107.
[100] "Ravi Varma," *The Modern Review*, 86.
[101] Partha Mitter, "Mechanical Reproduction and the World of the Colonial Artist," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36, issue 1–2 (2002): 8.
[102] K. Marthanda Varma, *Ravi Varma, a sketch*, Trivandrum, 1964, pp. 6-11; E. M. J. Venniyoor, *Raja Ravi Varma*, pp. 5-8. Cited in Tapati Guha Thakurta, "Westernisation and Tradition in SouthIndian Painting in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906)," Studies in History 2, issue 2 (1986): 165-195, 177.
[103] Guha-Thakurta, "Westernisation," 177.
[104] For nationalism movement among the Bengali elite, advocating Hindu civilization see Gray, "Bengal and Britain," 118–26.
[105] Geeta Kapur, "Ravi Varma: Representational Dilemmas of a Nineteenth Century Indian Painter," *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, no. 17–18 (1989): 68.

showcased his talent for poetic imagination.[106] His mastery of emotion and mood is specifically evident in his portraits of women. The emphasized emotion and mood rendered a dramatic and sentimental atmosphere in his paintings, representing an enraptured longing for the Hindu golden age. Through his theatrical and realistic depictions, mythical figures came to life as if they were cut from a dramatic scene, transcending mere fictional iconography. Now, one might say that the Hindu past had been revived and that Ravi Varma gained autonomy to represent the Indian identity for the people.

Figure 27. Raja Ravi *Varma, Lady in Moonlight*, c. 1889 (oil on canvas), National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi.

[106] "Ravi Varma," *The Modern Review*, 87.

Figure 28. Raja Ravi Varma, *Mahabharata-Shakuntala*, 1898 (oil on canvas), Napier Museum, Palayam.

Figure 29. Raja Ravi Varma, *Shakuntala Patra-lekhan*, 1876 (oil on canvas), private collection.

Ironically, however, through the pursuit of 'Indianness,' Ravi Varma fell into a dilemma of affirming Western Orientalist fantasies that are supported by that very 'Indianness.' That is, in the contradictory attempt to revive the past within the mold of Western academism, the exclusive Indian tradition has been redefined within racialized and gendered aesthetics, which resonate with the Orientalist anthropological intentions associated with racial exclusion. Strikingly, for his series of portraits, Ravi Varma toured the northern part of India, selectively choosing physical features and typical costumes to construct an imagined homogenous 'Indianness' in the name of Indian synthesis. For this purpose, he had the Aryans and their Vedic religion in his mind, assuming them to be a secret origin of Hindu civilization.[107] Furthermore, the image of India Ravi Varma envisioned had been constructed to a certain extent through Western Orientalist lenses. For example, his knowledge of ancient India was largely inspired by *The Hindu Pantheon* written by the British Orientalist Edward Moor, a pioneer of the British "discovery of Hinduism," which he encountered during his youth.[108] As a result, he unconsciously sought and selected images that aligned with his internalized Orientalist stereotypes about the 'Indian type' within him.

Ravi Varma's pro-Orientalist stereotype seems most evident in the pursuit of idealized femininity. In his patriotic themes, women repeatedly appeared as icons of 'Indianness.' *Hamsa Damayanti* typically exhibits the ideal of Hindu womanhood (Figure 30). This picture reflects the longing for the Hindu golden age on the majestic and mythic image of the female figure. The characteristics of oil painting, with its richness and luster, lend texture and depth to the decorative costumes, jewelry, and architecture, creating a picturesque image reminiscent of Victorian Orientalist paintings of the time. *The Galaxy* is another example where the artist affirms the Orientalist stereotype (Figure 31). This work, which depicts eleven Indian women who symbolize different regions of India, has a kind of anthropological element.[109] It looks like specimens of stereotyped Indian culture, such as costumes from different regions and traditional musical instruments, which evoke Swoboda's portraits discussed in Chapter 1.

[107] Geeta Kapur, *When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (Delhi: Tulika Books, 2020), 163.
[108] Mitter, *Art and* Nationalism, 201.
[109] Kapur, "Ravi Varma," 73.

Figure 30. Raja Ravi Varma, *Hamsa Damayanti*, 1899 (oil on canvas), Napirer Museum, Palayam.

Figure 31. Raja Ravi Varma, *The Galaxy*, c. 1903-1904 (oil on canvas), Jagmohan Palace, Mysore.

Other paintings are characterized by the gendered hierarchy between men and women in heterosexual domestic life, captured through the painter's male-centric gaze. For example, *Here Comes Father* depicts the idealized image of a woman in bourgeois domestic life (Figure 32). The woman, modeled after his daughter, symbolizes a typical ideal of Hindu femininity: a devoted mother raising her child and a modest wife awaiting her husband's return.[110] In this painting, gendered and hierarchical power intersect, resulting in stereotypical femininity based on heterosexual norms, which is expressed through the beauty and social roles of a woman. Furthermore, this painting focuses on her wealth and social status, characterized by the furniture surrounding the woman as well as her dress and accessories.[111] The male-centric gaze, penetrating the private moment of the idealized daily lives of wealthy women, typically composes Ravi Varma's works, as seen in paintings such as *Nair Lady with Mirror* and *Mother Preparing Vegetables* (Figures 33 and 34). In all these paintings, wealthy housewives are idealized as obedient, noble, and beautiful symbols of Hindu superiority.

[110] Guha-Thakurta, "Westernisation," 179.
[111] Guha-Thakurta, "Westernisation," 180.

In short, in his attempt to restore Indian tradition within Western norms and techniques, Ravi Varma became trapped in the paradox of reinforcing the stereotypical image of India that resonates with racialized exoticism and gendered beauty. Specifically, middle-class Hindi women became the ideal of 'Indianness' for the Westernized bourgeois men, depicted and yet silenced under the dual oppression of British colonialism and domestic patriarchy. At the same time, his exclusive model selection highlights the intersectionality among women, divided by class, religion, and ethnicity. The invention of the ideal 'us' was supported by the simultaneous exclusion of those who do not meet the requirements. Thus, the othering process of Orientalism has been reproduced in a more complex manner along with differences within India between male elites and domestic others. Ravi Varma's series of works represent that, in Indian art history, paintings acquired a political meaning resonating with nationalism and exclusion.

Figure 32. Raja Ravi Varma, *Here Comes Father*, 1893 (oil on canvas), Kowdiar Place, Trivandrum.

Figure 33. Raja Ravi Varma, *Nair Lady with Mirror*, 1894 (oil on canvas), Collection of Chennai Government Museum.

Figure 34. Raja Ravi Varma, *Mother Preparing Vegetables*, 1900 (oil on canvas), Government Museum, Chennai.

3. The Rise of Nationalism and Revival of 'Pure' Indianness

Contrary to Westernized education and Ravi Varma's pro-Western artistic style, the first few decades of the 1900s witnessed the rise of a more radical nationalism. Shortly before Ravi Varma's death in 1906, the year 1905 marked a turning point in modern Indian art that symbolized the advent of a new wave of enthusiasm brought by the next generation. In 1905, Bengal was partitioned by George Curzon, the viceroy of India at that time, which kindled anti-British sentiment among the Bengali people. During this period, Bengali elites spearheaded the nationalist movement, demanding *Swarāj* (self-rule) by advocating *swadeshi* (indigenousness). This new wave of nationalism further catalyzed the spread of an imagined oneness from the elite to the masses.[112] The *Swadeshi* doctrine also encouraged painters to flow into the realm of politics, wherein they sought a 'pure' essence of Indian identity against the 'hybrid' culture associated with Western academism.[113] Importantly, the year 1905 was also when Indian painter Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951) was welcomed into the Calcutta School of Art as the vice principal. As discussed below, Abanindranath became a central figure who went on to lead this new wave of Indian art.

Ironically, however, not even radical nationalism was free from British paternalism. During this period, Western Orientalists intervened in Indian nationalism by projecting their fantasy onto the pre-modern Indian spirituality that Indian nationalists had pursued. In other words, Orientalist fantasies were intertwined with Indian nationalism without contradiction. The central figure leading such intervention in Indian nationalism was British educator and art critic E. B. Havell (1861–1934), who emerged as a driving force behind educational reforms in Calcutta. He positioned Abanindranath Tagore as his partner in educational reform and, along with Abanindranath, sought the "Indian style," drawing on flat design and calligraphic patterns of traditional miniatures outside the prevailing standard of British academism.[114] The following analysis focuses on Havell's art education and examines how the Indian identity was transformed from Ravi Varma's hybrid style under British intervention and how that transition still resonated with Orientalist discourse.

Havell joined the Calcutta School of Art in 1896 as the principal of the school. In Havell's view, British-style art education based on Macaulay's education policy has "narrow

[112] Sarkar, *Swadeshi*, 47–63.
[113] Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 241.
[114] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 155.

and provincial" views and is "entirely out of touch with real Indian life and thought."[115] According to Havell, by blindly clinging to the perceived prestige of Western superiority, the previous educators had excluded traditional Indian artists and their professions, thereby inappropriately assigning Indian art a lower status without recognizing its values.[116] For example, Havell dismissed Ravi Varma's style as imitative based "on the academic nostrums of Anglo-Indian schools,' and it was looked on as 'blasphemous' in paintings on Indian mythology."[117] Instead of Westernized aesthetics, Havell advocated for the 'pure' essence of India through its spiritual beauty rather than Victorian materialism.

To achieve his vision, he appointed Abanindranath as the vice principal of the school in 1905. For Havell, Abanindranath, "certainly by far the greatest of living Indian artists,"[118] was an ideal figure to be a role model for a new "Indian style" of painting. Unlike other artists, Abanindranath distanced himself from Western-style education, and his style, which caught Havell's attention, drew upon various inspirations, such as Mughal miniatures, Ajanta frescoes, and Japanese wash-painting.[119] Specifically, his unique 'wash' technique with watercolor creates a dreamlike atmosphere with its pale and foggy colors and delicate lines, contrasting Western oil paintings based on materialistic values (Figure 35). According to Havell, "Mr. Tagore has happily been proof against the temptation to allow his artistic individuality to be cast in a common European mould." In Havell's view, Abanindranath's work appeared to have "a poetic charm and sentiment in the treatment of the old-world stories," which makes his work "peculiarly his own."[120]

[115] E. B. Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (London, 1908), 247.
[116] Havell, *Sculpture*, 248.
[117] Havell, *Sculpture*, 25.
[118] Coomaraswamy, "Present State," 108.
[119] Guha-Thakurta, "Mass picture," 19.
[120] Havell, "Some Notes on Indian Pictorial Art," *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art* 27 (1903): 30.

Figure 35. Abanindranath Tagore, *First of Lamps* (watercolor) from *The Modern Review* (November 1907).

Instead of the Renaissance objective representations, Havell sought the 'pure' Indian essence within a transcendental ideal of beauty and the inner spiritual world.[121] Such an Indian spirit is symbolically embodied in Abanindranath's work, *Bharat-mata* (Figure 36). This work, representing the pinnacle of his wash technique, successfully expresses the Hindu spirit and nationalism. 'Bharat-mata,' or *Mother India* in English, carries the blessings of food, clothing, learning, and spiritual salvation in each hand, expressing Indian nationalism through secret idealized womanhood.[122] Her religious sacredness and spiritual beauty, which marks a stark contrast to physical beauty in Western Renaissance works, evoked the revival of the Indian past for Havell: "Mr. Tagore makes a bold attempt to bring back into modern art the ideal type of divinity created by the old Buddhist and Hindu masters."[123] Importantly, the new "Indian Style" pursued by Havell embodied his Orientalist fantasies and cult of exoticism, which laid the foundation for a new era of modern Indian art.

[121] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 177–8.
[122] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 255.
[123] Havell, "The New Indian School of Painting," *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art* 44 (1908): 115.

Figure 36. Abanindranath Tagore, *Bharat-Mata*, 1905 (watercolor), Victoria Memorial.

Therefore, despite the disavowal of Western domination in Indian art, Havell's arguments simultaneously embody a Western-centric attitude at its crux. Such paradox is evident in his progressive and essentialist view, which expects a 'pure' essence of India in domains *not yet* fully Westernized. As Havell himself was aware, his interest in Indian art stemmed from archaeological interests.[124] His intention therefore lay in *excavating* the essence of India in its villages and salvaging it from notorious Western influence with his paternalistic authority. For him, Indian villages are the place where "the true artistic spirit still survives" and where "the heart of India beats, where the voices of her dead myriads still are

[124] Havell, *Sculpture*, 252.

heard, and learn a lesson that neither London nor Paris can teach," and therefore, "we must go there."[125] That is, Havell's argument depends on an imperialist discourse that assumes an inherent difference between the modernized West and pre-modern India, and it is the British educator himself who surrogates Indian nationalism. Notably, within his theory and practice, his own paternalistic power became transparent, which allowed his inherent Eurocentrism to evade scrutiny.

Other Western critics at that time also shared this essentialist view, one of whom was A. K. Coomaraswamy, a leading art critic who was active primarily in British publications. Coomawaswamy projected his Orientalist fantasy onto Abanindranath's series of symbolic works, such as *Banished Yaksha*, *Siddhas of the Upper Air*, and *Passing of Shah Jehan* (Figures 37, 38, and 39). According to Coomaraswamy, "[S]uch work a true expression of the spirit of Indian nationality, is the perfect flowering of the old tradition; a flower that speaks not only of past loveliness, but is strong and vigorous with promise of abundant fruit."[126] Importantly, both Coomaraswamy and Havell revived Indian "old tradition" with the language of Renaissance idealism and romanticism. In other words, within the framework of Western aesthetics, Western Orientalists *re*discovered tradition from the remnants of the pre-modern and its romantic and nostalgic fragments have been idealized as 'pure' Indian essence. Therefore, as Mitter points out, they do not provide the alternative of Western modernity but merely reproduce the prototype of exotic India under British paternalism.[127] Furthermore, they naively idealize exoticized women as the embodiment of Indianness, which reproduces the gendered power dynamics of Orientalist art. This issue is discussed further in the next chapter.

In conclusion, as India has been incorporated into Western modernization, Orientalist discourse has been reproduced and reinforced as a self-perpetuating process within Indian art. That is, Orientalist art is not a static object but a performative ideology that has been spontaneously reproduced beyond Victorian art. Even in the anti-Western nationalist movement, the pursuit of 'pure' Indian identity has been inherently intertwined with racialized and gendered aesthetics, which structurally fix India as the exotic other. Furthermore, the masculine and racial power inherited in the relations between painters and subjects now extends beyond the West and the East. In the context of new aesthetic norms,

[125] Havell, *Sculpture*, 253.
[126] Coomaraswamy, "Present State," 108.
[127] Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian* Art (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 276.

stereotyped images that reduce Indian identity to Hindu civilization, as well as idealize deified femininity as a symbol of nationalism, have emerged as integral elements of Indian synthesis. Consequently, a chain structure of Orientalism emerged, wherein Orientalist fantasies were continually projected onto further internalized others by Indian male elites. In this process, a homogenous and exclusive image of 'Indianness' has been invented as a *new* identity, resulting in the exclusion of various religions, ethnicities, and genders that construct India. However, it is also inadequate to conclude that all expressions that emerged after British colonialism were merely the passive mimicry of Victorian art and thus lacked agency. In fact, Abanindranath's "Indian style" allowed the next generation of artists to imagine artistic expression outside British academic constraints, which opened a new path for diverse artistic movements from the 1920s onwards. The next chapter focuses on these movements and examines whether it is possible for them to reflect the diverse voices excluded from the representation of 'Indianness' by Westernized male elite hegemonic power.

Figure 37. Abanindranath Tagore, *Banished Yaksha*, 1905 (watercolor), from *The Modern Review* (August 1907).

Figure 38. Abanindranath Tagore, *Siddhas of the Upper Air*, 1905 (watercolor), from *The Modern Review* (August 1907).

Figure 39. Abanindranath Tagore, *Passing of Shah Jehan*, 1902 (oil on wood), from *The Modern Review* (August 1907).

Chapter 4. The Wave of Avant-garde: Is an Alternative of Orientalism Possible?

In the previous chapter, I discussed how British cultural policy imposed from the top down, particularly the educational reformation, fostered the internalization of Orientalist stereotypes in modern Indian art. However, the Indian cultural movement was not always brought about by British authority, nor did it passively follow their expectations. In this chapter, I will examine the process of negotiation and resistance against British Orientalist stereotypes. The 1920s and 1930s witnessed a radical change in painting styles, moving away from the previous Orientalist aesthetics based on Hinduism, heterosexuality, and mythical ideals. During this period, art explored nationalism more freely beyond the boundaries of religion, gender, and class.

Before looking at the further transformation of modern Indian art in the first few decades of the twentieth century, it is important to mention the broader cultural background during this period, where not only Indian art but also the Western art world underwent a paradigm shift. Especially because of the growth of photography in the late nineteenth century, the demand for accurate truthful paintings was no longer sustainable, and, instead, styles such as impressionism and abstraction increasingly gained popularity.[128] As a result, the Renaissance aesthetics based on a belief in science and Enlightenment no longer maintained the authority they had previously exercised, which caused various new styles to emerge from the fluctuation of orthodoxy. This paradigm shift laid the groundwork in Western art to absorb diverse miscellaneous representations from non-Western cultures.

As revealed in the previous chapter, the very notions of art, culture, aesthetics, and value were Westernized through British cultural policies. The question remains as to whether it was possible to relativize such Western standards that were internalized as the sole legitimate knowledge, thus exploring postcolonial possibilities beyond Western frameworks. This concern is examined by looking at the process of negotiation and more radical resistance. First, I examine the nationalist art movement known as the Bengal School of Art in the 1910s and argue that Abanindranath Tagore and his followers utilized the category of

[128] Tromans, "Introduction," 20.

Orientalist painting as a platform for the anti-colonial movement, negotiating stereotypes from within the Western art world. Next, I focus on the process that radically deconstructed the Orientalist framework itself in the 1920s and the 1930s by featuring two nationalist artists, Rabindranath Tagore and Jamini Roy. These two painters advocated a 'return' to primitivism as a strategy of the postcolonial movement, which fundamentally challenged Western academic styles as well as the previous "Indian style" based on historicism. Finally, I examine women's perspectives by looking at two female painters, Amrita Sher-Gil and Sunayani Devi. The final section argues that these two painters provided counter perspectives against the Orientalist prototypes associated with racial and gender stereotypes.

1. 'Orient' as a Nationalist Platform

This section examines the process of negotiation through which the new style of Orientalist paintings introduced by Havell was inherited and further developed by Indian artists strategically. Importantly, the Orientalist discourse brought about by Havell and A. K. Coomaraswamy, which advocated the 'renaissance' of the Indian golden age against Western prejudice, paved the way for Indian artists to pursue the nationalist art movement further, wherein they negotiated with the Orientalist intervention. The negotiation discussed here refers to the process of a hybrid endeavor where the framework imposed from above was not completely rejected and replaced but rather utilized autonomously to assert the native's own voice within the exclusive framework. After Havell returned to England, Abanindranath Tagore and his pupils continued to explore the "Indian style," moving away from British paternalism. Unlike Havell, who constructed structured education according to the principles of South Kensington, Abanindranath liberated art teaching. Aiming to go beyond mere mechanical skills, Abanindranath instead teased out the inner voice of each of his students.[129] He encouraged his students to use "the living styles of [their] own country instead of the dead style of Europe in building [their] houses, mansions and places."[130] Abanindranath and his students established the groundwork for the nationalist art movement called the Bengal School of Art, which played a central role in the further transformation of modern Indian art from the 1910s onwards.

Despite its anti-Western intention, however, the Bengal School simultaneously relied on the networked patronage and support of Western Orientalists. In 1907, an association called the Indian Society of Oriental Art (ISOA) was established in Calcutta as the

[129] Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 302.
[130] "Open Letter to Educated Indians," *The Bengalee*, 1903, cited in Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 295.

institutional foundation of the Bengal School of Art. ISOA was born from Abanindranath's close network with Western Orientalist critics and artists, as well as his three students, Asit Haldar, Nandalal Bose, and Samarendranath Gupta, aiming to spread the "Indian style" paintings through exhibitions, lectures, and publications.[131] This institution played a central role in expanding the activity of the Bengal School across Europe by leveraging the popularity and support of pro-Indian Orientalists.[132] I suggest that while the term 'Orientalist art' runs the risk of affirming and reproducing the Western stereotype of India, it can also be viewed as a strategy that usurps the framework of the 'Orient' to negotiate the image of 'Indianness' unilaterally imposed by the West from within. The following analysis explores how the Bengal School of Art utilized the category of the 'Orient' as a platform for anti-colonial activities and redefined the image of 'Indianness' with their own autonomy.

The central figures leading the Bengal School were Abanindranath and one of his most successful pupils, Nandalal Bose. Notably, while they built on Abanindranath's wash techniques, his pupils further developed his "Indian style," forming the "New School" of artists. For these artists, Ajanta paintings emerged as a new historical theme to seek the ideal of the Indian past, moving beyond Abanindranath's Mughal-oriented styles and Japanese wash techniques.[133] Ajanta is a village known for its cave paintings, dating back from the second century BCE to the seventh century CE. The cave paintings are products of early Buddhist art that depict the national history, Buddhist myths, and daily life of early Indian society.[134] The hidden cave, full of rich history and unique culture, inspired the emerging native artists and its Buddist art was revived in modern art history as a new inspiration for 'Indianness.' The ISOA sponsored Abanindranath's students, Nandalal Bose, Asit Haldar, and Samarendranath Gupta, to participate in the tours conducted by British artist Lady Herringham to the Ajanta Caves in 1910 and 1911.[135] The influence of Ajanta is evident in their later works. Nandalal's early works show a clear shift from blurred lines and misty coloring of the wash technique to strong clear lines, simple primary colors, and colorful decorative patterns. For example, in *Parthasarathi*, delicate lines in brown and a figure with half-closed eyes and a distinctive posture show the influence of Ajanta, indicating a development from the "Indian style" explored by Havell and Abanindranath (Figure 40).

[131] Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 308.
[132] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 277–9.
[133] Mitter, *Art and* Nationalism, 321.
[134] "Ajanta Caves," UNESCO World Heritage Convention, accessed June 22, 2024, https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/242/.
[135] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 278.

Figure 40. Nandalal Bose, *Parthasarathi* (watercolor, 1912), Indian Museum, Calcutta.

ISOA played a central role in publicizing the Bengal School of Art through its activities, such as exhibitions, lectures, and publications. In particular, a series of exhibitions held by ISOA were quite successful, and they helped to shift people's tastes from the previous British academism to the new "Indian style" of paintings. An influential British art critic, Sister Nivedita, praised the diversity and liberty of expression of Indian painting, derived from the "main root of the divine," whose imagination and creativity were higher than anything in Europe.[136] Since the first time in 1908, the ISOA's exhibition gradually expanded in scale each year, gaining high recognition from both Indian and European societies:

> We the undersigned artists, critics, and students…find in the best art of India a lofty and adequate expression of the religious emotion of the people and of their deepest thoughts on the subject of the divine…We hold that the existence of a distinct, a potent, and a living tradition of art is a possession of priceless value to the Indian people, and one which they, and all who admire and respect their achievement in this field, ought to guard with the utmost reverence and love.[137]

[136] Sister Nivedita, *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita vol. 3* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2014), 53–4.
[137] *Times of London*, February 28, 1910, cited in Vincent A. Smith, *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1911), 4.

The works of painters from the Bengal School brought new impressions to the British art world as "the premise…of Indian artistic renaissance" and not as a hybrid with Western academism.[138] Several series of exhibitions introduced Abanindranath and Nandalal as well as other painters, such as Asit Haldar, Samarendranath Gupta, Venkarappa, and Hakim Mohammad Khan to the public (Figures 41 and 42). As Mitter points out, it is notable that in this exhibition, Indian artists' works were exhibited not within the category of discriminative 'native' academic art, but as 'true' Indian art in its own right.[139] That is, Indian paintings were no longer a product of racial differences but became a symbol of diversity, "which are different from, but not inferior to" Western art.[140] Importantly, in 1914, more than two hundred works of artists from the Bengal School toured the international exhibition for the first time, starting from Paris, moving to the Victoria Albert Museum in London, and ending in Chicago and Tokyo.[141] In short, by leveraging pro-Indian popularity, these artworks leveraged the framework of Orientalist paintings within the exclusive Western art world, showcasing Indian heritage and history through their autonomy. The division between 'us' and 'them,' which Said called the hallmark of imperialist culture,[142] now became a foothold for those trying to resist the invasion of Europe and assert their identity from within.

[138] *The Englishman*, 30 January 1908, cited in Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 279.
[139] Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 318.
[140] "Indian Art Exhibitions, 1908-1912: A Remarkable Record of Progress I," *The Dawn and Dawn Society Magazine* vol. 4 (April 1912): 22.
[141] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 280.
[142] Said, *Culure and Imperialism*, xxviii.

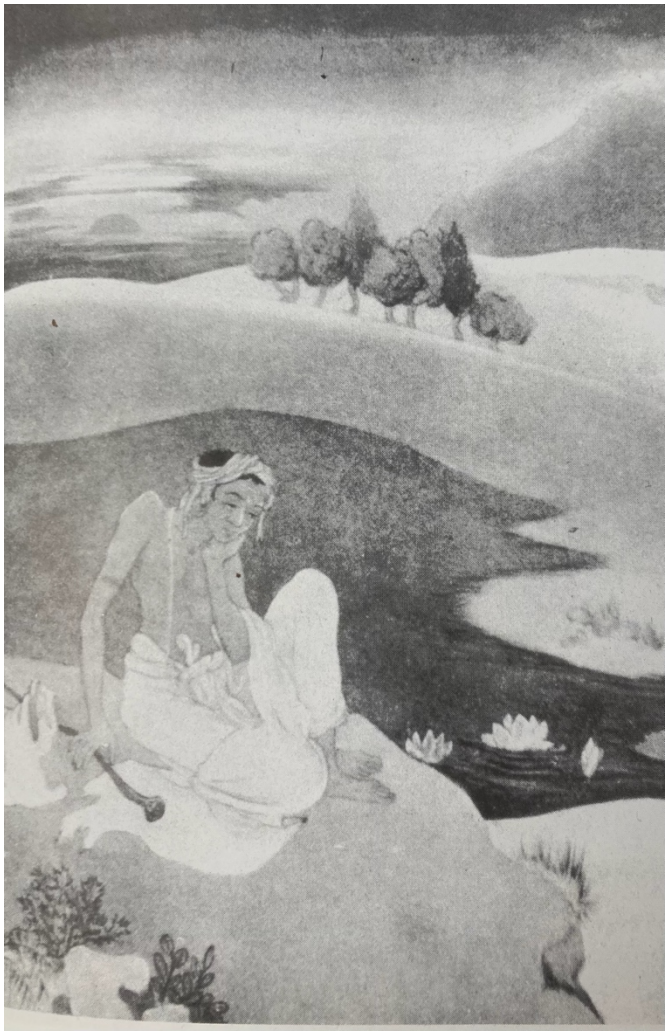

Figure 41. Asit Haldar, *His Heritage* (watercolor), from *Chatterjee's Album* (Faculty Board of Oriental Studies, Cambridge), from Mitter, *Nation and Nationalism*, no. 178.

Figure 42. Samarendranath Gupta, *The Finale*, 1917 (watercolor), from "Samarendranath Gupta Cersus M. A. Rahman Chughtai," http://blog.chughtaimuseum.com/?p=2977.

On the other hand, the pursuit of exclusive 'Indianness' became a double-edged sword, serving as both a tool of anti-colonial resistance and reproducing oppression within Indian society. Specifically, women were still silenced and idealized as a symbol of Indian nationalism. A typical example is Nandalal Bose's *Sati* (Figure 43). This work, superimposing the ideal of 'Indianness' on the transcendent portrayal of a woman, exposes the limitations of utilizing stereotypes of Indian women for nationalistic intentions. "[T]his young serene Bengali girl," Coomaraswamy writes in his critics, represents the character of selfless, devotion, and "terribly sweet perfect[ion]."[143] Her silent and secret appearance, praying in the flame without fear, lends a transcendent atmosphere to the painting. For the Western critic, her fearlessness and absence of self-consciousness were perceived as representing the "Indian conception of the glory of woman."[144] As Guha-Thakurta has argued, in the Orientalist and nationalist discourse, women became idealized as the spiritual and transcendent embodiment of the Indian ethos, in which their tranquility, selflessness, and sacrifice represented the "real spiritual essence."[145] Nandalal's *Gandhari* is another example that represents the virtue of self-sacrifice and dedication of Indian women (Figure 44). The woman in this painting is said to be hiding her eyes in sympathy with her blind husband.[146] In short, in the new style of Indian art, feminine characteristics such as moral superiority and sublimity became the orthodoxy of romanticized womanhood (Figure 45). Furthermore, the specific image of exclusive 'Indianness' extracted from historical themes was inseparable from the exclusion of other elements within India's diverse society. This reveals the limitations of utilizing the theory and practice of Western modernity. As discussed in the section on Ravi Varma and Abanindranath in the previous chapter, by projecting the fantasy of 'Indianness' onto specific images, once again, diverse classes, religions, and genders were excluded from the imagined homogenous 'Indianness.' By contrast, some artists since the 1920s have attempted to transcend these constraints of the Orientalist framework, which led to more radical art movements advocating resistance, explored below.

[143] Ananda. K. Coomaraswamy, "The Paintings of Nanda Lal Bose," *The Modern Review* vol. VI, no. 3 (September 1909): 301.
[144] "Sati, by Nundo Lall Bose," *The Modern Review* vol. III, no. 1 (April 1908): 370.
[145] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 286.
[146] Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, 288.

Figure 43. Nandalal Bose, *Sati*, 1907 (watercolor), Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Figure 44. Nandalal Bose, *Gandhari*, 1907 (watercolor), from *Prabashi*, Chaitra 1315/1909, from Guha-Thakurta, *New 'Indian' Art*, no. 80.

Figure 45. Nandalal Bose, *Ahalya*, from *Chatterjee's Album*, from Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, no. 163.

2. Primitivism in Modernism: Disturbing the Existing Aesthetics

The artists I focus on here, Rabindranath Tagore and Jamini Roy, challenged the stylistic norms and aesthetics that underpinned the earlier Bengal School. These emerging artists opened a door for the avant-garde in India, making another turning point in Indian art history. Avant-garde is an important phenomenon in modern culture, referring to a new wave of radicalism brought about by the advent of a new generation.[147] Distancing from the history themes of the Bengal School, the new generation of artists explored Indian identity within the "now" instead of the past, and "here" instead of the myth.[148] Specifically evident in Rabindranath's work, the pursuit of a return to a primitive and child-like style emerged as a notable transformation during this period, becoming an anti-urban and anti-capitalist message. Furthermore, in the previous generation, the nationalist movements were primarily the concern of the educated elite men. As a result, 'Indianness' was reduced to an ideal exclusive to elite intellectuals. By contrast, as exemplified by Jamini Roy, peasants emerged as both agents and themes of the nationalist art movement in the 1902s onwards.[149]

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[147] Renato Poggioli, "The Concept of the Avant-Garde," in *The Theory of the Avant-garde* (1-15) (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968)
[148] Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922-1947* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 124.
[149] W. G. Archer, *India and Modern Art* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 80.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)

Rabindranath Tagore, a pioneer of primitivism, demonstrated exceptional artistic talent in various fields other than painting, including poetry, philosophy, and playwriting. In 1913, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature as the first non-Western winner. During his literary career, he constantly advocated for India's independence and led the nationalist movement at the forefront.[150] Interestingly, it was not until 1928 at the age of 67, that he started painting. Although Rabindranath received no official training and only began painting later in his career, he had a great influence on modern Indian art. His childlike primitivism became a symbol of his radical art, widely acknowledged not only in India but also worldwide (Figures 46 and 47).

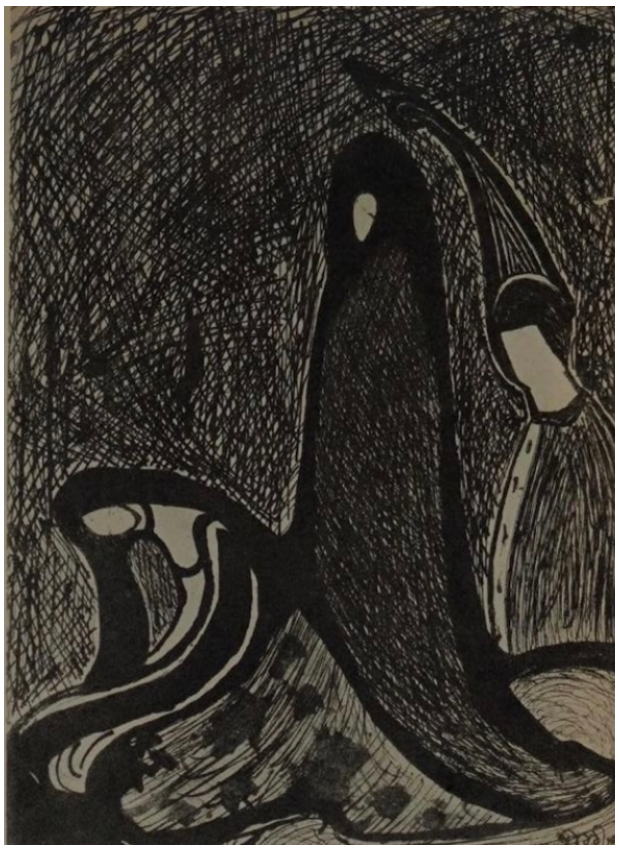

Figure 46. Rabindranath Tagore, *Black and White Threads*, c. 1930–1940, ink on paper, from Archer, *India and Modern Art.*

[150] Archer, *Modern Art*, 54.

Figure 47. Rabindranath Tagore, *Dancing Woman*, c. 1928–c. 1940, ink on paper, from Archer, *India and Modern Art.*

Primitivism was also becoming a new phenomenon in the Western art world. The shift from Renaissance to primitivism reflects the broader social background of the modernism movement at that time, led by figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud, who radically questioned the legitimacy of Western modernity.[151] They interrogated the previous worldview centered around the myth of progress in Western capitalism and technological advancement. While the exhaustion and discontent with Western modernization came to be revealed by these figures, the legitimacy of Western norms could no longer maintain authority. This was a moment when primitivism was accepted as a new wave in visual art, emerging from a crack in the previous orthodoxy with pioneering painters such as Pablo Picasso and Paul Gauguin. As Hal Foster points out, in primitivist paintings, the dominance of white heterosexual masculinity, based on the binary opposition of East and West, female and male, nature and civilization, and passive and active, began to falter.[152] As a result, in Halter's words, the civilized Western self became the

[151] Mitter, *The Triumph*, 124.
[152] Hal Foster, "'Primitive' Scenes," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (Autumn 1993): 75–6.

"perverse term" whereas the 'primitive' other became the "pure term."[153] The previous chapter discussed that the British invasion reshaped Indian artistic norms and values by excluding traditional Indian crafts and decoration as 'low' art. On the other hand, within primitivism, it was the very 'low' art that gained authenticity, making a remarkable shift from historic themes to folk, popular, and tribal themes.[154]

Rabindranath's works are characterized by impromptu spontaneity, based on subjective consciousness rather than objective observation. Through his radical style, Rabindranath aimed to break down the existing pictorial style and pursue an entirely new expression, claiming: "I strongly urge our artists vehemently to deny their obligation carefully to produce something that can be labelled as Indian art according to some old world mannerism."[155] His bold endeavor allowed him to transcend the constraints that had confined previous Indian art, such as the boundaries of superiority and inferiority, and the conventional notion of beauty. As Ratan Parimoo points out, it was not the thought or framework that brought the image into being, but the 'rhythm' born from his inner self generated the bold line and shape.[156] In his working process, colors and lines came from his inner instinct rather than the observation of the outside world:

> The hand must be trained to work freely and without control by practice in making simple forms with a continuous involved line without after-thought, i. e. its intention should just escape consciousness. Drawing should be made by allowing the hand to run freely with the least possible deliberation. In time shapes will be found to evolve, suggesting conceptions, forms and ultimately having personal or individual style.[157]

The free expression driven by the artist's inner impulse encouraged him to perceive the world in a much more liberal manner:

> All traditional structures of art must have a sufficient degree of elasticity to allow it to respond to varied impulses of life, delicate or virile; to grow with its growth, to dance with its rhythm. There are traditions which in alliance with rigid prescriptions of

[153] Foster, "Primitive Scenes," 82–5.
[154] Mitter, *The Triumph*, 31–32.
[155] Rabindranath Tagore, "Art and Tradition (1926)," in *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics: A selection of Lectures, Essays and Letters*, ed. Prithwish Neogy (Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 2005), 60–61.
[156] Ratan Parimoo, *The Paintings of the Three Tagores Abanindranath, Gananendranath, Rabindranath: Chronology and Comparative Study* (Baroda: Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, 1973), 116.
[157] Marcus Bunyan, "Automatic Drawing as a First Aid to the Artist," *The Modern Review* vol. XXI, no. 1 (January 1917): 65.
, cited in Parimoo, *Three Tagores*, 117.

> rhetoric establish their slave dynasty, dethroning their master, the Life-urge, that revels in endless freedom of expression.[158]

As a result, especially visible in his later works, the division between superior 'us' and inferior 'them' became questioned. As commonly argued, many of his works are influenced by other cultures, including Native Americans (Figure 48), African tribal masks (Figure 49), and Maori tattoos (Figure 50).[159] For Rabindranath, these cultures became an important inspiration to expand his expression. While some scholars have argued the complicity to reproduce the stereotype of others by categorizing certain cultures and art as 'primitive,' others also pay attention to the positive side of primitivism.[160] In the positive interpretation, primitivism does not provide a stereotyped and homogenized image of the other but rather represents the plurality of other societies, which becomes "the reservoir for divergent and creative humanity."[161] Surely, it must be considered that the category of 'primitive' itself originated from Western perspectives that presuppose a 'non-primitive' self, and therefore there are always possibilities to affirm Orientalist discourses. However, it is also true that primitivism holds the potential to present diverse relationships with others beyond existing aesthetics.

Considering the pros and cons of primitivism, I argue that Rabindranath demonstrates the possibility of equal and diverse humanities. In fact, Rabindranath demonstrates his positive attitude to reference other cultures: "A sign of greatness in great geniuses is their enormous capacity for borrowing, very often without knowing it."[162] In his art theory, other cultures emerge not as inferior but as equals, demonstrating the universality of humanity. Rabindranath's primitivism thus became not a means to find a superior self within inferior others but a way of breaking the presumed boundaries between 'us' and 'them.' In short, Orientalist paintings project a sense of superiority onto the exoticized other, reflecting a self-image of dominance or superiority. On the other hand, Rabindranath's primitivism does not seek exotic or beautiful images within 'primitive' to fulfill fantasies about the Orient. Instead, his work provides perspectives to look at the world outside of the racial hierarchy.

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[158] Rabindranath, "*Art and Tradition*," 63, cited in Archer, *Modern Art*, 54.
[159] Parimoo, *Three Tagores*, 122.
[160] Daniel Miller, "Primitive Art and the Necessity of Primitivism to Art," in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991), 50–71.
[161] Daniel Miller, "Primitive Art," 65.
[162] Rabindranath, "Art and Tradition," 59.

Figure 48. Rabindranath Tagore, *Dance Mask* (ink on paper), from Parimoo, *Three Tagores*, no. 308.

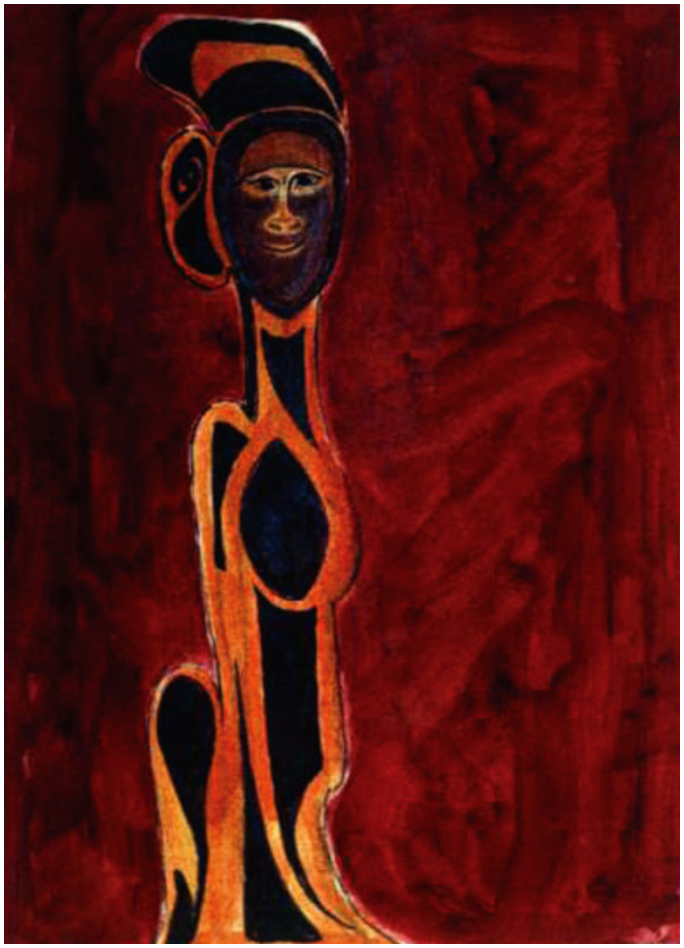

Figure 49. Rabindranath Tagore, *Untitled*, 1932 (colored ink and wash on paper), from Mitter, *Triumph.*

Figure 50. Rabindranath Tagore, *Untitled* (ink on paper), from Parimoo, *Three Tagores*, no. 278.

Furthermore, instead of exploring beautiful images, Rabindranath found artistic value in the grotesque, 'unbeautiful,' and 'ugly' themes.[163] This radical shift in aesthetics is evident in his portraits of women (Figures 51 and 52). In his portraits, the boundaries between men and women become ambiguous and fluid, and the heterosexual ideal seems to be no longer an important factor in artistic value (Figure 53). As widely discussed, Rabindranath's painting style was influenced by Freud's psychoanalysis. Mitter points out that Rabindranath's images, coming from the depths of his psyche allowed him to express the anxiety, ambiguity, and ambivalence toward human existence that was absent in the academic art or nationalist themes of the Bengal School.[164] As Freud's argument centers around gender differences, in Rabindranath's works too, the pursuit of gender and aesthetics became an intellectual inquiry rooted deep in humanity, explored with his "mind's eye."[165] The series of his enigmatic portraits of women seems to manifest the mysteries of beauty and chaos of gender differences that are even beyond human fathoming, serving as a canvas to reflect the painter's emotions, curiosity, and impulses rising from the deep inner self. Here, beauty becomes a fundamental and enigmatic question, not confined to idealized heterosexual aesthetics. His painting style, based on intuition and unconscious, rather than the observation of the external world, opened new realms of expression.

[163] Parimoo, *Three Tagores*, 122.
[164] Mitter, *The Triumph*, 75–76.
[165] Rabindranath, "The Sense of Beauty (1906)," in *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 5.

Figure 51. Rabindranath Tagore, *Untitled Head of a Woman*, 1939 (watercolor and colored ink on paper), from Archer, *India and Modern Art.*

Figure 52. Rabindranath Tagore, *Woman's Face*, c. 1929 (ink on paper), National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

Figure 53. Rabindranath Tagore, *Untitled Cowering Nude Woman*, 1934, colored ink and wash on paper, from Mitter, *Triumph.*

Jamini Roy (1887–1972)

Same as Rabindranath, Roy resisted the limited historical themes of the Bengal School. But different from Rabindranath's primitivism, Roy explored folk art, revolving around everyday life in the village. Whereas Rabindranath and most of the artists discussed thus far were from elite families, Roy was from rural Bengal with a rich folk art tradition.[166] His rural Bengal roots were a crucial part of his identity, which significantly influenced his later works. By recentering value in folk art that had been marginalized in favor of 'high art,' Roy resisted the aesthetic norms of the Renaissance. For Roy, rural communities became a site of anti-colonial resistance, where the identity of 'artisans' was revived as the opposition to the Westernized notion of 'artists.'[167]

Roy's contribution lies in reintroducing traditional themes of folk artisans into modern Indian art, thereby seeking the Indian identity within pre-colonial space and times.

[166] Mitter, *The Triumph*, 101
[167] MItter, *The Triumph*, 100.

His paintings are characterized by bold and simple lines and monotonous primary colors with vibrant village themes, such as animals and dancing women (Figures 54 and 55). As Mitter suggests, there was a political intention behind his choice of folk themes.[168] Like nationalists, such as Gandhi and Rabindranath, his pursuit of childlike simplicity demonstrates resistance to the complexities of urban life originating from the Industrial Revolution. Roy rejected Renaissance Romanticism and idealism based on progressivism and enlightenment. Instead, he traced the roots of Indian culture before the norms of art brought by the British Orientalists.

It is significant that while the Bengal School utilized the framework of Orientalism as a platform to negotiate stereotypical Indianness, both Rabindranath and Roy sought artistic values outside Western norms and recentralized realms that had been excluded from orthodoxy through the Westernization process. Their artworks thus became a more radical interrogation against British Orientalists, deconstructing the aesthetics associated with gendered beauty and racialized exoticism and thereby challenging the narrow artistic norms. Notably, this period also witnessed the emergence of women artists, discussed next.

Figure 54. Jamini Roy, *Cat and Lobster*, (tempera on paper), National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

[168] Mitter, *The Triumph*, 133.

Figure 55. Jamini Roy, *Untitled Dancing Gopi* (gouache on card), Gallery Chemould, Mumbai.

3. Breaking the Silence: Women's Voices from Below

The focus of the previous analysis has been entirely skewed toward male painters. Thus, the final section aims to turn our attention to women's representations and find voices excluded from the male-centric master narratives. The following analysis features two pioneering women painters, Sunayani Devi and Amrita Sher-Gil. While having contrasting backgrounds and career paths, both have introduced women's perspectives into male-dominant Indian art history and expanded the possibilities for more diverse representations.

Sunayani Devi (1875–1962)

Snayani was born into a Tagore family as a younger sister of Abanindranath Tagore and another prominent painter, Gananendranath Tagore, and as a niece of Rabindranath

Tagore. Unlike her older brothers and uncle, however, she did not have access to the official art education. Rather than pursuing a career as a professional artist, she was expected to devote her life to her family, which was typical for the dominant women at that time. Since she married at a young age, she has dedicated most of her life to caring for her family as a housewife. Yet, her childhood was still surrounded by artistic inspirations. Specifically, because of the brilliant artists in her family, she grew up experiencing the increasing momentum of the Bengal Renaissance. She was also influenced by Raja Ravi Varma, whose work made a specific impression on her and later became one of her creative inspirations.[169] However, it was only when she was 30 years old that she actually picked up a brush, encouraged by her husband. Her husband played a significant role in supporting Sunayani throughout her whole artistic career. After her husband's death, she lost her creative intention, resulting in the end of her short fifteen years of career from the age of 30 to 45. The short period of her activity as an artist, however, does not diminish her value. As an Indian female sculptor Amina Kar recalls, during Sunayani's time, it was "unknown and unheard of for women to do anything, even 'Art' on a professional basis, and they remained very much in the background."[170] Thus, embodying a double role both as an amateur artist who never gained an official art education and as a housewife, the very existence of Sunayani challenged the exclusive male-centric definition of 'artist' and pioneered the more diverse possibilities of artistic representation.

Sunayani developed her own style in the historical and religious themes. In her naïve yet delicate touch and color, one observes various influences surrounding her, such as Bengal folk Kalighat, her brother, Abanindranath's wash techniques, and her uncle, Rabindranath's primitive art. Despite these affluent inspirations, however, Sunayani did not exactly follow any of these examples. Instead, she pursued uninhibited depictions, guided by creative instruction, without being confined to existing styles.[171]

As Sunayani herself mentioned, the subject matter of her works revolves around her inner world: "Most of my paintings, I have seen in my dreams – after seeing them I have then put them down, the greater part of my paintings I have 'found' in my dreams."[172] Contrary to the societal constraints surrounding her as a woman, her spontaneous and free-

[169] Amina Kar, "Sunayani Devi - A Primitive of the Bengal School," *Lalit Kala* Contemporary IV (1966), Critical Collective, accessed June 22, 2024, https://criticalcollective.in/ArtistInner2.aspx?Aid=546&Eid=647.
[170] Kar, "Sunayani Devi."
[171] "Sunayani Devi: A Journey Through Naïve Art and Cultural Revival," Prinseps Research, accessed June 22, 2024, https://prinseps.com/research/sunayani-devi-a-journey-through-naïve-art-and-cultural-revival/.
[172] Kar, "Sunayani Devi."

linear paintings are imbued with a sense of liberation, as if aspiring for freedom within the world depicted in her art (Figures 56 and 57). In the dreamlike atmosphere created by wash techniques, women with half-closed eyes and faint smiles seem to symbolize their liberation, free from the oppression of the real world. As discussed earlier, whereas other male artists from the Bengal School, such as Abanindranath and Nandalal Bose, utilized historical and religious themes to depict an idealized femininity characterized by selflessness and self-sacrifice with melancholy faces, in Sunayani's works, these themes seem to become spaces where women live vibrantly, detached from reality.

Figure 56. Sunayani Davi, *Radha Krishna*, c. 1920s (watercolor), Indian Museum, Kolkata.

Figure 57. Sunayani Davi, *Untitled (Saraswati)*, c 1920 (tempera on paper), from "Sunayani Devi," Prinsep Research.

Furthermore, her female portraits represent her empathy for her fellow women, confined within the domestic sphere. With the attached tenderness and cozy atmosphere, her paintings depict a certain solitude and pensive moods of women, glimpsed from their hidden private space.[173] At the same time, these women show their hidden strength and vitality within stillness, rather than being engulfed by sadness or self-sacrifice imagined by Bengali male artists (Figures 58, 59, and 60). The serene expressions of women sharing a private conversation or cradling children capture intimate moments that reflect a unique perspective of the female painter within the domestic realm, contrasting with the prevailing prototype of docile and constrained women. These images challenge the stereotype in male-dominant society, assuming women's lack of capability and autonomy.

Strikingly, Sunayani's works gained high popularity outside of India too. Her works were introduced to European audiences for the first time in 1920–1921 through the art journal, commenting on the originality of her primitivist art. Furthermore, in 1927, she joined the Women's International Art Club exhibition in London. Even so, compared to other male artists, Sunayani has been overshadowed in Indian art history. Surely, Sunayani grew up in a privileged family environment as the daughter of the Tagore family. Furthermore, she could get support and understanding from her husband, which allowed her to explore her artistic career. Therefore, her perspectives do not represent all women's voices, and it is crucial to note that most women have been silenced without even having the means to speak up. Nevertheless, her artworks hold significant meaning in a way that reflects the woman's voice, woven in between daily chores, which have been structurally excluded from art history.

[173] "Sunayani Devi: A Journey."

Figure 58. Sunayani Davi, *Lady Holding a Fan* (watercolor), Indian Museum, Kolkata.

Figure 59. Sunayani Davi, *Krishna Consorting Radha in a Guise of a Gopi*, (watercolor), Indian Museum, Kolkata.

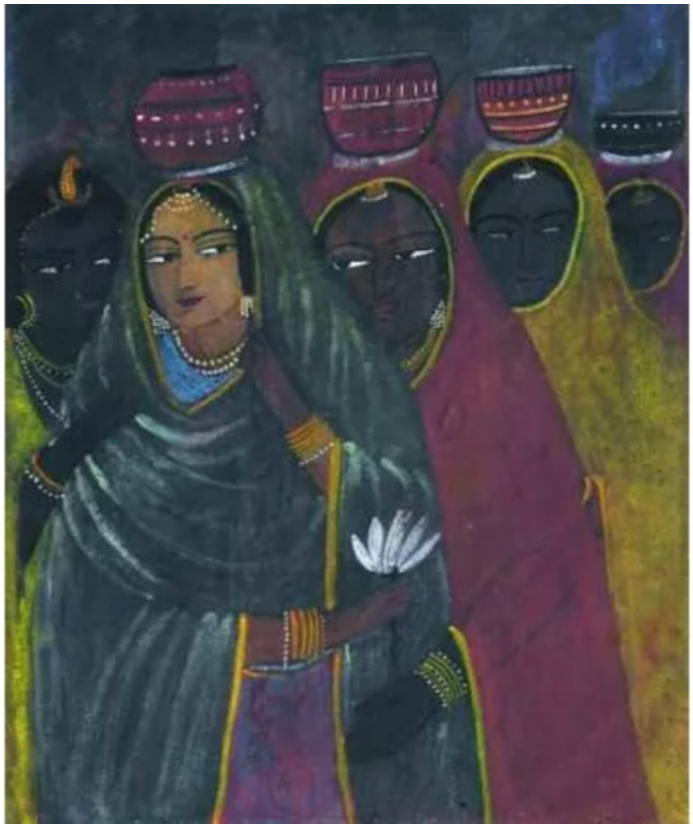

Figure 60. Sunayani Devi, *Mikmaids*, 1925 (watercolor), National Gallery of Modern Art, Bengaluru.

Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941)

In contrast to Sunayani, who sought free and dreamlike images with watercolor wash techniques, Amrita Sher-Gil painted the dilemma and ambivalence she faced in the real world with oil paint. Sher-Gil was born to a Hungarian mother and an Indian father in 1913. She lived in Hungary until 1921 when she moved to India at eight. When she was sixteen, she entered an art school in Paris, where she gained training in oil painting for the next five years. In 1934, she returned to India and explored Indian subjects until her sudden death at the age of 28.[174] Throughout her brief lifetime, Sher-Gil confronted the ambivalence coming from her hybrid identity as an Indo-Hungarian and bisexual. Her hybridity constantly appeared to her as internal contradictions splitting her, while simultaneously serving as a reservoir of artistic intention to challenge existing gendered and racialized stereotypes.

Throughout her career, the desire and stereotypes surrounding her as an Indo-Hungarian woman with exceptional beauty have inseparably haunted her. Among artists in Paris, where she was based, Sher-Gil was exoticized as "an exquisite and mysterious little Hindu princess."[175] Strikingly, rather than being victimized by the male-centric gaze, Sher-Gil turned the gaze upon herself and elevated her own image into a provocative self-portrait, including a series of nude, reclaiming the autonomy of her body (Figures 61 and 62). As Mitter emphasizes, while always exposed to Western men's gaze and desire, she maintained her independence and became nobody's muse, rejecting Orientalist fantasies about highly sexualized and exoticized women.[176] By dismantling the dichotomy between the male painter and the female subject, the image of the woman becomes a symbol of their voice emanating from within.

Sher-Gil's self-expression shares many aspects with the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907–1954). Dressed in ethnic costumes, flaunting their beauty, and using cruel humor with their iconic themes, they successfully utilize their exhibited femininity and exoticism, making them unique figures in the male-dominated art world.[177] However, their independence as a female painter was accompanied by the price of inner suffering and conflict. According to Geeta Kapur, there was a self-sacrificial negotiation in Kahlo's representation. That is, she offered herself to the viewer's curiosity and desire as an object, thereby holding the pain of a sexualized body, while simultaneously gaining autonomy in representing and liberating herself

[174] Archer, *Modern Art*, 81–82.
[175] Mitter, *The Triumph*, 47.
[176] Mitter, *The Triumph*, 51–52.
[177] Kapur, *Modernism*, 16.

through representation.[178] This self-sacrificial process could also be applied to Sher-Gil. While acquiring autonomy in exchange for her body, her body itself became a site of ambivalent tension between externally imposed femininity and resistance against it.

Figure 61. Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-portrait*, 1930 (oil on canvas), National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

[178] Kapur, *Modernism*, 17.

Figure 62. Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-portrait as Tahitian*, 1934 (oil on canvas), Vivan and Navina Sundaram, New Delhi.

In addition to bisexuality, Sher-Gil's work also reflects on her inner dilemma of the hybrid identity of Indian and Hungarian. As a hybrid presence who could never be 'pure' Indian, Sher-Gil even more strongly yearned for the Indian identity. Sher-Gil sought "to see the art on India…produce something vital connected with the soil, yet essentially Indian."[179] Her intense longing for India emerged as a distorted obsession with the poor and ugliness, in which she explored the intrinsic beauty of India. These themes were envisioned for her as a somewhat narcissistic and self-indulgent mission:

> As soon as I put my foot on Indian soil, not only in subject, spirit, but also in technical expression, my painting underwent a great change, becoming more fundamentally Indian. I realized my real artistic mission then: to interpret the life of Indians and particularly the poor Indians pictorially; to paint those silent images of infinite

[179] Sher-Gil, "Trends of Art in India," in *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Self-portrait in Letters and Writings* vols. 1& 2, ed. Vivian Sundaram (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2010), 142.

> submission and patience, to depict their angular brown bodies, strangely beautiful in their ugliness; to reproduce on canvas the impression their sad eyes created on me.[180]

Specifically, "dark-bodied, sad-faced, incredibly thin men and women"[181] made a striking impression on her. Sher-Gil incorporated the frescoes of Ajanta and chose the daily lives of Tamils in the Southern region as symbols of rural India.[182] The influence of Ajanta can be seen in her flat and bold depictions, as well as the plain and vivid color usage (Figures 63, 64, 65, and 66).

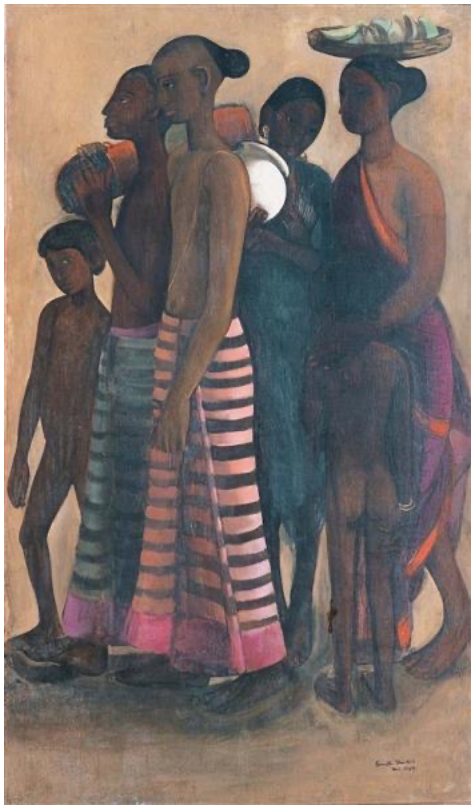

Figure 63. Amrita Sher-Gil, *South Indian Villagers Going to Market*, 1937 (oil on canvas), National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

[180] Sher-Gil, "The Story of My Life," *The Usha: Journal of Art and Literature* vol. III, no. 2, Special issue on Amrita (August 1942): 96, cited in Archer, *Modern Art*, 93.
[181] Sher-Gil, "Evolution of My Art," in *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Self-portrait in Letters and Writings* vols. 1& 2, ed. Vivian Sundaram (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2010), 139.
[182] Mitter, *The Triumph*, 56–57.

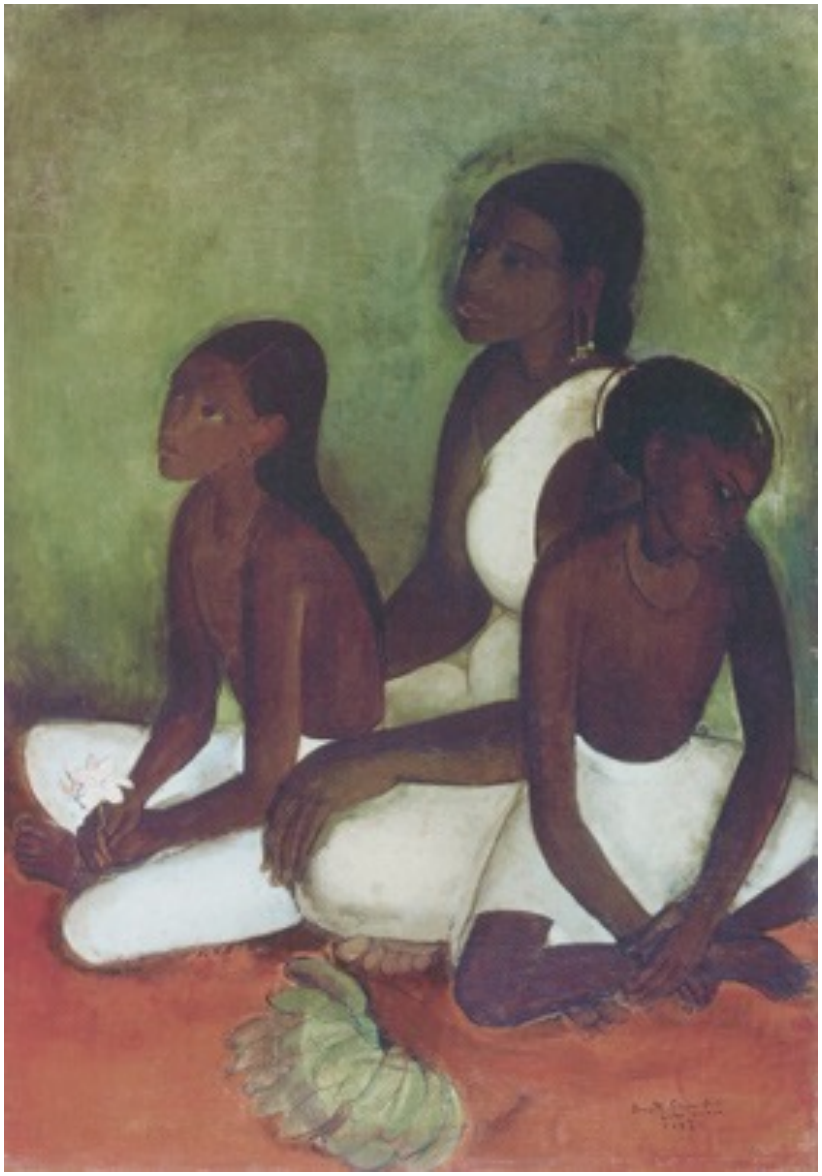

Figure 64. Amrita Sher-Gil, *Banana Sellers*, 1937 (oil on canvas), Vivan and Navina Sundaram, New Delhi.

Figure 65. Amrita Sher-Gil, *The Bride's Toilet*, 1937 (oil on canvas), National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

Figure 66. Amrita Sher-Gil, *Brahmacharis*, 1937 (oil on canvas), National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

It is important to mention here that Sher-Gil never be a neutral mediator who represents all Indian women, same as Sunayani. Specifically, regarding her background raised and learned in Europe, there were always rooms where her power, bias, and desires

come into play. Therefore, Sher-Gil's depiction of India inevitably reflects her self-indulgent fantasies coming from her Westernized position to some extent.[183] However, different from Orientalist paintings, reflecting the superiority of the self to the perceived inferior others, Sher-Gil expresses her inner pain and dilemma through the representation of India. In other words, sadness, melancholy, and pathos were not only her ideals about India but also a mirror reflecting her inner ambivalence as an outsider in India. In her art, the ambiguity of identity that cannot be categorized either as 'us' or 'them' is revealed by her narcissistic and sentimental expressions, transforming into a fundamental question about human existence. For example, *Two Girls* depicts two nude figures, showing contrasting characteristics of strength and vulnerability (Figure 67).[184] Whereas a white woman reveals her entire naked body and looks back at the audience, a black woman puts a modest expression on her face, concealing her body. In many of her works, including this painting, Indian women are often depicted with modestly bowed heads and a sad atmosphere, which makes a stark contrast to her self-portraits discussed earlier, showing provocative and cynical confidence. Such depiction of Indian figures could be interpreted as a reflection of a certain insecurity related to Sher-Gil's Indian identity: a sense of sadness and alienation as an outsider. Yet, in *Two Girls*, two Amrita, Hungarian and Indian are still connected, symbolizing her split yet intertwined hybrid identity. This dilemma of identity challenges the imagined homogeneity of the nation, sought by the previous generation artists through historical themes, and reveals the ambivalence and anxiety of the definition of identity. In short, in Sher-Gil's work, art became a tool for negotiation against imposed stereotypes. Her artwork shows a certain strength in questioning her own existence and thereby expressing the ambivalence of gender and identity, which became a powerful interrogation of the male-centric prototypes.

[183] Kapur, *Modernism*, 10–13.
[184] Mitter, *The Triumph*, 59.

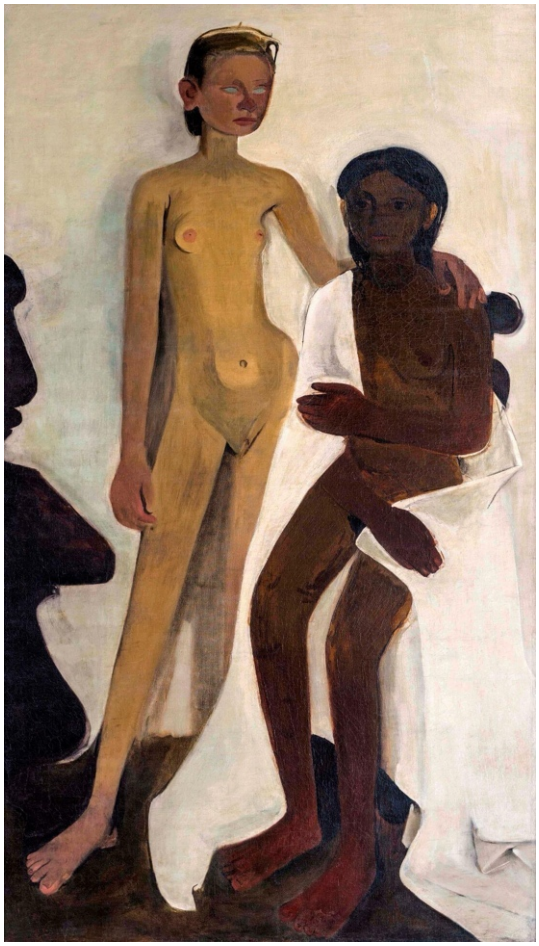

Figure 67. Amrita Sher-Gil, *Two Girls*, 1939 (oil on canvas), National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

To sum up, a series of art movements in the first few decades of the 1900s in India shows the possibility of usurping the frameworks normalized by the Western 'orthodox' canon to involve various voices, which in turn suggests the potential to reconfigure these frameworks themselves from within. Specifically, as the avant-garde emerged, the narrow norms of classical 'high art,' tracing back to the Renaissance, came into question, which challenged the legitimacy of white male-centered heterosexual aesthetics. By turning the Orientalist gaze back toward colonial authority, the previous notions of 'beautiful' and 'good' were overturned, wherein true artistic values were pursued within 'ugly,' primitive, or childlike purity. Now, art has become a means not to justify the dichotomy of superiority/inferiority or purity/hybridity between 'us' and 'them,' but rather an open-ended tool for asking questions to explore diverse perspectives on the world. This provides artists with an opportunity not only to challenge the Orientalist legacy but also to turn their gaze toward themselves, critically unlearning stereotypes internalized into established self-images. At this moment, it becomes possible to reconstruct the chain structure of Orientalism into a

process of critical introspection. When the gaze was introspectively turned to the self, the contradictions and fragility of the established boundaries between self and others became apparent. As a result, the self-evident identity based on differences becomes fractured, which simultaneously opens possibilities for more complex and ambiguous ways of being and meeting with others.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

This study focused on the trajectory of modern Indian paintings from the 1850s to the 1930s, exploring how the legacy of Orientalism has been inherited amid the interplay with British cultural colonialism. The development of hybrid Indian painting, evolving *between*, neither completely within nor outside of, British influence suggests that the impact of Orientalism extends beyond mere British knowledge formation, being internalized and perpetuated within the colonized culture. Building upon this concern, this study has critically examined how the aesthetics and pictorial norms have been reconstructed and normalized within the framework of 'modern' Indian paintings, aiming to reveal Orientalist influences on Indian self-perception and expression. The legacy of Orientalism was analyzed by looking at three different reactions: internalization, negotiation, and resistance.

Before focusing on Indian paintings, Chapter 2 examined Victorian Orientalist paintings, revealing the complementary relationship between aesthetics and British colonial control. As discussed, racial hierarchy and gendered power structures have been incorporated into the foundation of aesthetics. Importantly, the exotic image of India and imposed nostalgia expressed through Orientalist paintings do not represent inherent differences between India and the British self, but rather, these differences are created and make sense *only after* the discriminatory process of othering.[185] That is, the image of the exoticized India became preferable for the Victorian audience for the first time when these images supported the superior image of the British self within the racial hierarchy. Similarly, colonized Indian women were homogenously associated with exoticized Hindu culture and practice, framed as weak, fragile, and 'beautiful' under the masculine power of colonial authority. Despite clear colonial intentions, however, these racial and gender differences became transparent norms in Victorian Orientalist paintings, acquired authenticity, and underpinned the hegemonic imperial knowledge, which in turn supported the cultural and political domination of the British Empire.

However, such interrelation between knowledge and power has not been maintained solely from the British perspective. Shedding light on the internalization process of the legacy

[185] Bhabha, "Signs," 152, 153–54.

of Orientalism, the third chapter revealed the self-perpetuating chain structure through which Orientalist discourse has been reproduced within India. Amid the wave of Westernization, the very concepts of 'art' and 'culture' in India were reconstructed according to Western notions of science and Enlightenment values. Consequently, the internalized Western theories and aesthetics within *new* Indian art have automated the cyclical production of differences based on racial hierarchy. Specifically, as art becomes associated with the notion of 'nation' and identity, acquiring modern significance, it has resonated with the exclusive nationalist art movements led by male elite painters, such as Raja Ravi Varma, Abanindranath Tagore, and his Bengal School. As a result, the aesthetics based on the differences between 'us' and 'them' have now turned toward the inward exclusion of domestic minorities, supporting the elite nationalism that pursues 'pure' Indianness. Thus, the Orientalist power embedded in the painters' gaze has been passed down from British painters to Indian male elite painters in a chain reaction, reproducing racial and gendered stereotypes.

However, at the same time, Westernized Indian elites found themselves in an ambivalent position, still excluded from an equal position with their British counterparts. That is, despite the remarkable expansion of Westernization, the local and periphery remain essential to maintain Western domination. While inscribing 'modern' norms, Indian art thus holds an inherent paradox from the beginning: heterogeneity within homogeneity. As a result, while becoming agents of Orientalist power within India, elite painters were simultaneously marginalized as 'native' artists who never gained full acceptance in the Western art world. This ambivalence demonstrates the multi-layered effects of cultural imperialism, which increasingly blurs and expands boundaries of domination, yet reinforces the division between the colonizer and the colonized.

Perpetuating the discriminatory impact of Orientalism on the one hand, while on the other hand, the codes of othering inscribed in the aesthetics of modern Indian painting have been constantly rewritten by Indian artists, thereby making art a weapon of resistance against cultural colonialism. The final chapter examined the possibility of negotiation and resistance against the self-perpetuating Orientalist legacies inherited by earlier painters, such as Ravi Varma and the Bengal School. Specifically, new art movements, emerging in the 1920s and 1930s within the global momentum of avant-garde and modernism reconfigured stereotypes of 'Indianness' and exoticized femininity, which were defined by pro-Western hegemonic knowledge. Emerging radical abstraction, such as primitivism and child art, opened possibilities for diverse representations rich in suggestion and nuances without providing definitive answers for how to perceive the world. As Rabindranath and Sher-Gil attempted,

finding true artistic value in the 'ugly' or unbeautiful was a notable process of looking at the world beyond the fanaticism of science and progress, thereby intentionally disavowing the exoticized and gendered self-image. They suggest that if norms have been socially constructed, it is equally possible to reshape them through creative intention.

All in all, it could be concluded that the Orientalist fantasies and exoticism projected onto India have been internalized within the norms and aesthetics of modern Indian painting, persisting as a hybrid process that is continually negotiated and resisted, yet inevitably blending with native culture. On the one hand, the racialized 'Indianness' and exoticized femininity received by native elite painters introduced the code of othering and heteronormative masculinity into India's self-expression, exerting an irreversible influence on the formation and development of 'modern' Indian painting. It should be emphasized that this legacy of Orientalism shows a cross-cultural and performative process, thereby perpetuating at the core of modern Indian art until today. On the other hand, there is always room for imagining alternatives to this deep-rooted legacy. As Said suggests, old authority is not simply replaced by new authority; rather, while maintaining borders, types, or nations, these boundaries are constantly redrawn and negotiated, resulting in the emergence of new alignments. It is precisely this fluidity of boundaries and alignments that provides the possibility to challenge the static nature of identity, presenting various ways of self and relationships with others.[186] In fact, the creative perspectives of the ever-emerging new art movements reveal that the boundaries between self and the other defined by Orientalist discourse are not absolute but can be reconfigured. Art, therefore, could become a tool for diversifying and reconfiguring the existing boundaries and frameworks, not a means for presenting a specific worldview. As Dipesh Chakrabarty points out that "Western thought is indispensable and inadequate,"[187] while the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' constantly generate new forms of oppression and exclusion, they simultaneously kindle the possibility of postcolonial resistance. Importantly, the diversification of boundaries becomes a radical tool for those who have been silenced under intersectionality to gain a voice. In short, it is crucial to critically challenge the limitations of Western frameworks while also exploring how these concepts, theories, and practices could be utilized and reconfigured to make them more inclusive.

[186] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xxviii.
[187] Depesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 16.

Finally, for future research, it should be further explored to what extent it is possible to trace down the intersectionality and scrutinize the chain structures of Orientalism, which continues to permeate representations. The movements and artists covered in this study are limited to fully depict the whole picture of the Orientalist legacies in Indian art history. The rise of primitivism in the 1930s and the emergence of female artists do not signify the overcoming of Western colonialism embedded in the foundation of modern art. The perspective of queer art, for instance, may expose further intricate chain structures of power beyond the binary opposition of men and women. Furthermore, it should be critically analyzed that primitivism has simultaneously become a breeding ground for new Orientalism. For example, it has been argued that Paul Gauguin became a new driving force of Orientalism in modern art through primitivism that revolves around his central theme of Tahiti.[188] Therefore, what this study has shown is just the beginning of a further journey. There is room for further exploration into other artists and movements from various social groups, revealing the ongoing chain structures of Orientalism and the continual movements of resistance against master narratives. With a flexible and creative perspective that critically questions the hegemonic worldview, it becomes possible to trace diverse movements and expressions that have been distorted and excluded from the perceived orthodoxy. This attempt at reinterpretation of art history allows them to emerge as recurring voices, opening up a world full of inspiration and diverse voices.

[188] Desa Philippi and Anna Howells, "Dark Continents Explored by Women," in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991), 237-60.

Appendix

Map of India in 1860

"Historic Maps British India," accessed June 24, 2024, http://www.maps-of-india.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/historic-maps-british-india.jpg.

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