Jnanapravaha

JNANAPRAVAHA MUMBAI
QUARTERLY

APRIL - JUNE 2023

CONTENTS

Director's Note

As we approach the end of our academic year on April 30th, 2023, there is much to mull over and plan for the new iterations beginning July 2023. The acceptance of 'hybrid' as the default mode has helped make our pedagogical choices both in terms of scholarship and content, and reach a global audience. Fortunately, scholars have started travelling and are very keen to engage with a live audience – in fact, some gently refuse to conduct seminars and lectures virtually! We will, however, continue to offer and present all our lectures, seminars and courses in physical/hybrid and virtual formats.

The last quarter witnessed several in-person seminars and lectures and a few virtual ones as well (in addition to our ongoing courses). The inner pages carry insightful accounts of all. We are grateful to Profs. Molly Aitken, Chaitanya Sambrani, Ebba Koch, Riyaz Latif, Pushkar Sohoni and the innumerable scholars of Indian Aesthetics (IA) and Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory (ACT) for sharing their current research and scholarship so magnanimously – we are enriched.

One of the tasks that we have set for ourselves is to relook at the rubric nomenclatures and make space for collaboratives and globalisms that spill out of neat silos. Recent cutting-edge scholarship is challenging 'Buddhist', 'Islamic', and 'Hindu' from their exceptionalism to embrace connections and show their essential pluralistic natures. The scholarly interest in Indian Ocean Trade is a case in point, where seemingly far-flung geographic areas and their visual cultures are proving to be very intimately connected, demanding a revision in their close reading.

Similarly, we are revising our privileging of the Western intellectual world of ideas and its theories which have traditionally provided the bedrock for the understanding of aesthetics, criticism, and their institutions, to include other marginalised but important points of view in an increasingly globalised world. The rich thoughts and offerings that have always existed in the Arabic, Persian, and Chinese worlds, for instance, as well as those of indigenous peoples everywhere, have to be retrieved and shared to give vital pedagogical alternatives. Our Indian Aesthetics course and the rubric of Indian Intellectual Traditions have been attempting to disseminate our treasures, especially visual, from within – but can we go a step further and see whether our aesthetic theories of emotion, hermeneutics and meaning can be understood as a knowledge system globally? These theories are in Classical Sanskrit – there is a whole extraordinary world in other languages such as Tamil awaiting wider discovery.

The new calendar will be informed by these concerns. Along with training our lens towards other searing issues of technology and its impact, museums and other art institutions, indigeneity, and artistic voices, we hope to break new ground by addressing fresh frontiers. So do look out for all our announcements!

With my warmest wishes,

Rashmi Poddar Ph.D.
Director

AESTHETICS

A Folio from the Manuscript of Kalpasutra and Kalakacarya Katha: Jaina Tirthankara Enshrined (upper panel), Celestial Dancers (lower panel). c.1475

JPM's Aesthetics offerings include:
(1) an academic yearlong Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate course in Indian Aesthetics, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Yoga & Tantra, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (3) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Southeast Asian Art and Architecture, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (4) a fortnight of public seminars and lectures in Islamic Aesthetics; (5) an ongoing series of public seminars in Buddhist Aesthetics; (6) an ongoing series of public seminars in Southasian Painting; and (7) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.

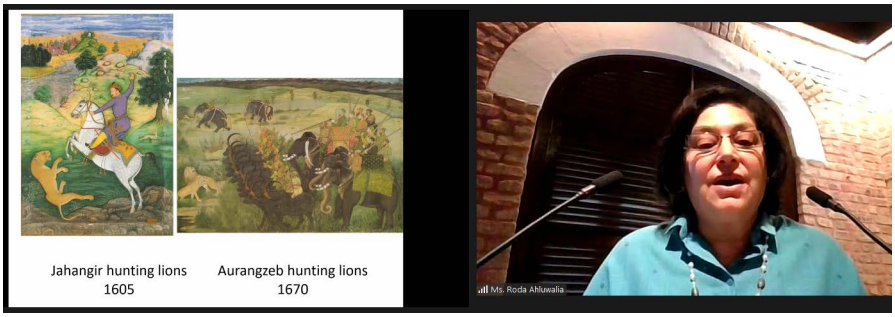
Indian Aesthetics

From January onwards, the Indian Aesthetics course provides a delightful immersion into painting. Dr. Leela Wood began this journey with her deep knowledge of Ajanta paintings brought to the class through her rare photographs of the site and particularly of the murals of Cave 17. The scholar also expounded on the canon of painting described in the *Chitrasutra* of the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* to assess if the rules of painting which it codifies can be applied to painting at Ajanta, a link which is difficult to establish. The practice of painting is discernibly mature in the Ajanta caves. Theory in the *Chitrasutra* is likely to have emerged from this practice which employs line and colour with fluidity and intuition. The dovetailing of such stylistic and pictorial conventions expressed in text and image is not immediately identifiable at the site which uses complex and innovative rendering and composition. The placement of the visual narrative of *Jataka* tales in Cave 17 is a marvellous illustration of the freedom with which the paintings have been composed even though

Dr. Wood was able to reveal a pattern related to the themes of these stories in the murals.

Dr. Kavita Singh continued to mine the riches of Indian painting in her sessions on 14th to 16th-century portable paintings in the subcontinent. She clarified that the use of the term 'pre-Mughal' is unsuitable in the context of these paintings, not least because it is anachronistic. Students were privy to her thorough exposition of early paintings which included some that were part of delicate and delectably illustrated Buddhist manuscripts. She also discussed the less sophisticated, earthy illustrations on Jain palm-leaf manuscripts. She went on to later Jain manuscript illustrations, commenting on their characteristic angular style which has three-quarter faces with an extended eye. Her painstaking examination included an overview of the material, structure, design, subject matter, illustrations, and style of these manuscripts. She mentioned that since a large number of manuscripts were destroyed in the 12th and 13th centuries when sultanates became more powerful in India and the Ghurids attacked the north of the subcontinent, scholars can only work with the remaining, incomplete material and derive an incomplete picture. Delving into early Sultanate and Deccani paper manuscripts, and using comparison to throw light on these, she also explored the *Chaurapanchashika* style of painting which was named after a unique and striking manuscript that employed it.

Roda Ahluwalia's lectures on Mughal, Rajput, Pahari and Deccani painting introduced students to the huge body of work produced in Mughal India when manuscripts and *muraqqas* (albums) became an important part of courtly life and were popular among the elite. Under Akbar's patronage, the production of extremely fine painting for such books reached unprecedented numbers through the work of more than a hundred artists in the royal atelier. These artists, drawn from varied backgrounds, collaborated to create an innovative style which brought together elements drawn from the Indic, Persian, and European traditions. Even though Akbar's successor Jahangir retained only thirty master artists in his atelier, the paintings produced during his reign were supremely refined and included several studies of plants and animals against a plain ground. These works had the magnificence and detail of the Mughal oeuvre despite their allegiance to European scientific studies. Jahangir also commissioned several allegorical and clearly political paintings that aggrandised the ruler and placed him at the pinnacle of the world. Mughal painting continued to trace an arc that sought political heft as seen in the *durbar* scenes painted for Jahangir and Shah Jahan, in whose reign painting veered towards stasis and no longer remained as novel and brilliant as before. Rajput and Pahari paintings drew on the Mughal style but by and large included more Indic and local characteristics. Scholarship has delved into the twin revelatory methods of history and biography to map the movements of painters and patrons and shows how Mughal-trained artists possibly painted for Rajput rulers in both the plains and the hills, modifying their output to match the taste in their new location and the desires of their patrons. The lyrical beauty of Pahari paintings and the majesty of *Ragamala* paintings and other North Indian genres were nevertheless aimed at fulfilling the political goals of those who commissioned them. These complex connections between power and art can be discerned very clearly in both the north and south of the subcontinent. In the Deccan, rulers such as Ibrahim Adil Shah II leaned towards the syncretic, the esoteric, the mystic, and the occult

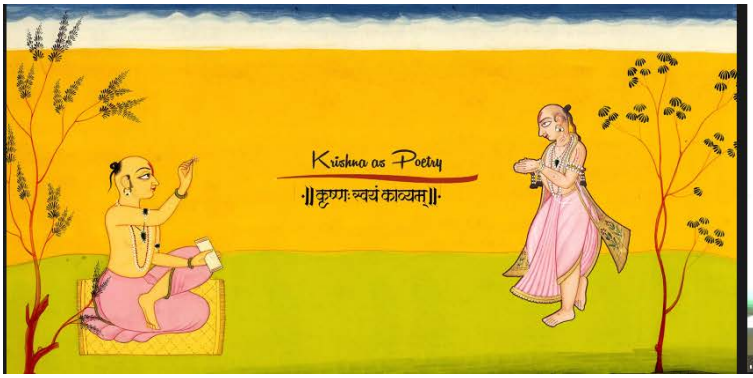


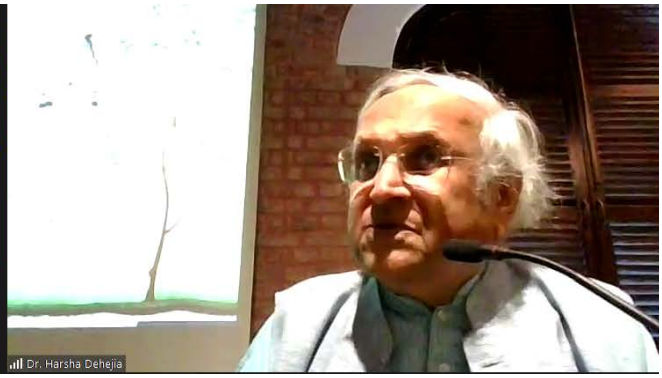
in the music and the poetry that he created and the paintings that he commissioned.

The somewhat neglected scholarly field of painting in the Mughal provinces was the focus of a pair of lectures by Mrinalini Sil and Dr. Parul Singh. 18th and early 19th-century Murshidabad painting was polyvalent and discontinuous, reflecting the tastes of diverse patrons such as the *nawabs* of Murshidabad and their courtiers, French and English East India Company officers, and Jain mercantile communities. This wide-ranging patronage is reflective of the upheaval of fast-paced historical change which produced an unusually layered society. The lesser-known manuscripts examined by Mrinalini Sil reveal varied aesthetic sensibilities as well as cosmopolitan styles and themes, indicative of this patronage, but also of inter-regional and transregional artistic networks. Dr. Parul Singh's lecture focussed sharply on particular aspects of Awadhi painting at Faizabad and Lucknow to show how these cultural centres became more important than the Mughal capital of Delhi from the mid-18th century. At this time, the Mughal prince Gauhar was ousted from Delhi and sheltered at Awadh until the establishment of formal British rule in India in 1858 when he became Emperor Shah Alam II, a figurehead whose reduced status is revealed in a painting that represents him as a tiny figure in the massive architectural vista of the Red Fort. Understandably, the refined painting of Awadh shows the ambivalent relationship of centre to periphery in its focus on space, territory, identity and control. This is apparent in the fine details of paintings, which the scholar analysed carefully. The hybridity of this production reflects both the period and the regimes under which it was produced.

Dr. Harsha Dehejia's sessions explored the philosophy that underpins Krishna *shringara*, a popular devotional standpoint that sees Krishna as the male principle adored by *bhaktas* (devotees) who consider themselves as female in relation to him, regardless of their sex or gender assignment in the world. Such a standpoint necessitates the dualistic philosophy of *dvaita* where deity and devotee occupy two poles as seen in Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. This nevertheless merges into *advaita* in the important *Bhagavata Purana* text which combined several Indic devotional strands. Krishna *shringara* is manifest in poetry such as *ritikavya*, and painting such as the *pichhwais* of Nathdwara. At other centres of worship including Jagannath Puri, song, dance, and *bhoga* or food offerings become the focus of *bhakti*, giving it an aesthetic dimension. According to Dr. Dehejia, dance and devotional practices as apparent in the journey which devotees of Vitthala make on their way to his seat at Pandharpur align more with *bhakti* than with *shringara* (where the *bhakta* also becomes a *rasika* or aesthete). The *bhakta* submits wholly to the deity while the *rasika's* primary means of enjoyment are the senses.

Dr. Himanshu Prabha Ray's exposition of the space of the sea, not simply in relation to land, but also as autonomous and potent, opened fresh vistas for IA students. The scholar analysed the role of the sea in trade with lands both to the east and west of the subcontinent, and also its importance as a space due to which cultures met and intermeshed. The long subcontinental coastline prevented the insularity of the region, which was evidently linked to the outer world even 5,000 years ago, even though traditional histories have mapped connections largely from the time of the arrival of the Europeans in the 15th century. Professor Ray's wide-ranging session dealt with the boats and ships that made seafaring possible, and the places that these boats visited, which were as far afield as China, and included Burma, Java, Malaya and other places in the archipelago of Southeast Asia, as well as the Middle East and Africa. The resultant trade, and religious and



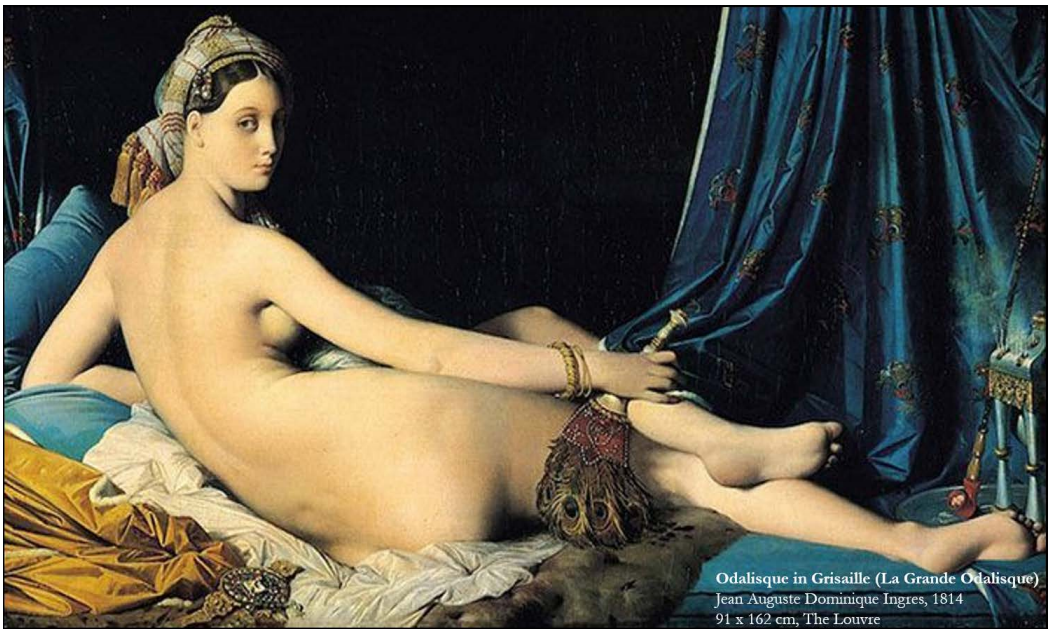


cultural notions and beliefs that crossed the seas as people met and interacted, have left behind material cultural remains that reflect travel. Eleven depictions of ships in the narrative wall murals of the Buddhist temple of Borobudur in Central Java are testimony to the importance of the sea at the time. The speaker emphasised that rather than read a tale of 'influence' that travelled only one way, leading to similarities, it is important to examine differences that must have stemmed from local interactions with external culture and cultural production. Her examination of coastal shrines and their audiences dwelt on two case studies, the first from Tamil Nadu and the second from Gujarat. In both instances, temples were built facing outwards, which begs a re-examination of their archaeological context in relation to the maritime. In Tamil Nadu, the edifice she referred to functioned as a marker for ships until the British built a lighthouse close by. The scholar examined the temple of Harshal Mata or Sikotar Mata in Saurashtra, Gujarat, showing that the audience for the temple was not simply the fishing community and the town in its immediate vicinity but also seafarers who ventured further afield: to this end, she discussed evidence of the temple's probable linkages to the island of Socotra located off the Horn of Africa.

An examination of the aesthetics of the colonialist and nationalist period in the subcontinent began with an exploration of the period's art in the context of Edward Said's *Orientalism* by Dr. Jaya Kanoria. After delving into instances of Orientalism seen in European painting, she demonstrated that the same characteristics are apparent in paintings of the colonial period in India, including those of the Company school. European patrons mapped the land as well as its people, flora, fauna and culture in these paintings, commissioning them from Indian artists. Here, the enlarging of the Self, in this case the coloniser, and the diminishing of the Other, here the colonised, can be seen by the discerning eye. Despite the colonial need to maintain 'difference', European categories of the Romantic, Picturesque and Sublime crept into Company School painting as these tropes were adapted to Indian subject matter by both Western and Indian artists painting for European patrons. The session was a demonstration of the application of critical theory and frameworks to the analysis of visual art.

Dr. Suryanandini Narain's analysis of photography in the colonial era showed how the medium was used differently by coloniser and the colonised. One end of the spectrum made the camera a tool for surveillance, political control, racial intensification and voyeurism; at the other end, the local population was able to use it more democratically for self-documentation, challenging the colonial view while also inevitably mirroring and continuing it. The work of major practitioners of subcontinental photography during the colonial period reveals disjunctures in visuality and time, spaces and people, as well as the media employed.

The rich sweep of the last three months is appropriately diverse, reflecting the variety of subjects and lenses that the Indian Aesthetics course employs to convey a deep understanding of the subject. We look forward to the culmination of the course in the month of April, which will allow students to witness the trajectory of architecture, philosophy, and aesthetics in the colonialist-nationalist period and lead into the contemporary. – ***J.K.***



Odalisque in Grisaille (La Grande Odalisque)
Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, 1814
91 x 162 cm, The Louvre

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Brown Britain: 'Indian' Art, Imperial Encounters & Diasporic Dreaming

April 22nd, 2023, 5:00 - 6:15 PM IST | Prof. Zehra Jumabhoy (Lecturer in the History of Art at the University of Bristol, UK)

Online Public Lecture | Platform: Zoom

Raqib Shaw, Self Portrait in the Study at Peckham, after Vincenzo Catena (Kashmir version), 2015. Acrylic and enamel on birchwood © Raqib Shaw. Photo © Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd. Courtesy White Cube. The work will be included in "Raqib Shaw: Ballads of East and West", a major exhibition which will travel to four US institutions, organised by the Frist Art Museum (Nashville) and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Boston)

This talk will investigate ideas of Britishness, Brown-ness and colonial identity in the contemporary British art-world. It will frame this discussion via research-led curatorial projects that the speaker has been involved with. Artists such as Yinka Shonibare, Raqib Shaw & the Singh Twins will feature in the talk.

Islamic Aesthetics

PAST PROGRAMMES

Surface, Depth, Bewilderment: Propositions for Thinking about the Feminine in the Paintings of Mughal India

January 9th, 10th & 11th, 2023, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Molly Emma Aitken (Associate Professor at The Graduate Center and The City College of New York (CUNY))
Physical with live streaming on ZOOM

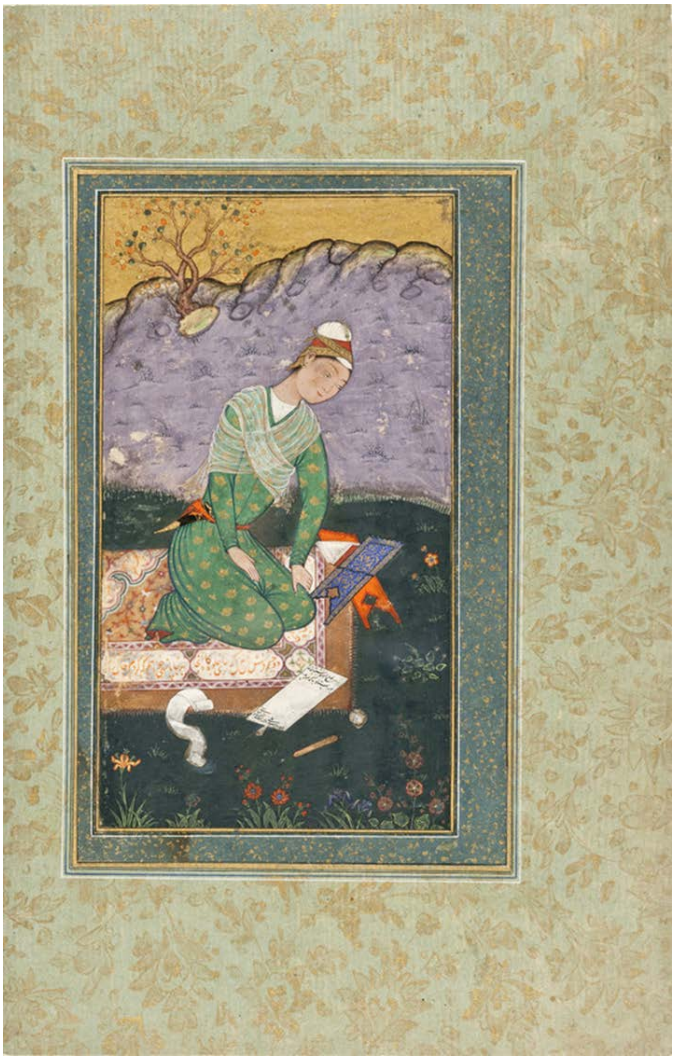
Two women sharing a quiet moment, Polier Album, I 4597 fol 39v, Late Mughal, 40 x 28 cm, Museum fur Islamische Kunst, Berlin

Prof. Aitken's poetic exploration of 18th- and 19th-century Indian paintings offered "a field of play" regarding the contemporary aesthetic enjoyment of these works rather than crystallised knowledge. Poets of the time likened paintings to women and women to paintings; the speaker argued that the aesthetic of femininity in these works, shaped by complex cosmopolitan cultural flows, was a sacred and affective pictorial quality of presence through which "emotional experience was known and refined, and the nature of self discovered". Painting was "a vehicle of a vibrant emotional culture" and in these works, "gender was an aesthetic, cultural and devotional guise which created meaning".

The paintings of the time are often portable objects in relief: glistening; smooth; velvety; sculptural; fragile; yet conveying strength. The wet process of painting, tools such as brushes, the varied preparation and use of colours sometimes drawn from precious materials such as malachite, lapis lazuli and gold, their application and burnishing shaped these works. The surface of the paintings also depended on the many types of paper and its sources, on artists and on connoisseurs whose taste gave impetus to its creation. Cognoscenti cherished and enjoyed a painting not only as an object but also its aliveness. Compositions travelled across regions and cultures and were copied, reinterpreted, and replayed in a variety of ways through memory and the use of *charbas*, animal parchment pricked with holes to trace drawings. Recognisable compositions that held the character of a scene also hinted at depth.

Sometimes depth is in the surface of paintings: Rajput colour, pattern, and line that simulates mass arouse the viewer; Mughal painting renders emotion in an atmospheric manner. Depth is revealed by looking with insight, looking inwards, and through the hermeneutic act. Painting has been seen as a veil in the poetics of art. According to the Mughal emperor Jahangir, a painter's sensibility and imagination unveiled sacred truth through art. The motif of painting was a poetic resource for connoisseurs and painters, the latter seen as the lovers of painting, which was the beloved. These ideas resonated with the

mystical tension of Sufi thought, popular at this time. The beloved, like the painting, called up the thrill of forbidden idolatrous desire, reminiscent of *shahidbazi* in which Sufis gazed upon male beloveds, who were pale-faced boys in whom Sufis saw the qualities of God. Love, inevitably linked to representation, was a test of the self and not dependent on sexual preferences which were socially unimportant in Mughal India. For instance, Mir Sayyid Ali, a Persian painter in Humayun's court, addressed the emperor as a beloved in a well-known painting of himself as a beautiful boy.



Prof. Aitken suggested that in the 18th-century Indic context, images of the boy as beloved became uncommon. There was a shift from the semiotics of heterosexuality and a fascination with femininity. Painting explored "feminine beauty as image as paint as illusion, which left masculinity (but not men) behind". The beloved came to be represented in an Indic womanly form: employing feminine imagery was considered auspicious and efficacious. Images such as those of *apsaras*, *shalabhanjikas* and *alasya kanyas* (ancient archetypes of beauty in the Indic context) or the Persian *peri* began to be transposed skilfully into paintings of women. The Mughals and Persian families that thought of India as 'home' were also immigrants, and Hindu, Rajput, European and Persian all had the potential to be seen as 'foreign' in specific Indic contexts. In the cosmopolitan Mughal milieu, this had complex repercussions in painting, engendering, for instance, paintings of women gazing at 'other' women, seemingly in the manner of *shahidbazi*. An obsession with the poetic trope of the other, often using representations of 'foreigners' such as *apsara*-like idols gazing into a mirror, can be discerned in visual art. "Your form defies description; see yourself in the mirror", says a verse, indicating that the woman herself cannot understand her own form unless it is turned into a two-dimensional painted image doubled by the mirror that reveals her sacred beauty. Presenting women in the Indic convention of profile which withheld half the face and inflamed desire, painting was more, yet less than words, giving rise to both its inadequacy and its magic. Rajput paintings depicted the *chitrini nayika*, beautiful like a painting, and sometimes rendered the female beloved as a divine presence. Women trained to become living incarnations of art, and noblemen treated these courtesans or *tawaifs* accordingly. A humorous painting of men enjoying the performance of an ageing *tawaif* underscores her identity as art. Erotic passion of a shattering intensity coloured all hierarchic relationships.

Persianate and Indic traditions and taste came together in this social world. Hindi and Urdu allowed a cultural confluence between Sanskrit and Persian- or Urdu-speaking elites, both of which commissioned paintings. Important differences between these traditions provided creative tension, leading to a productive cosmopolitan conversation. Paintings presented iconic images of the beloved as idol, a Hindustani form also legible to the Persianate nobility through Sufi ideas. The *Bhakti* strand intermeshed with Sufi thought: the Mughals sought to be *rasikas* and, like the Rajput *maharajas*, became *nayakas* in cosmopolitan artistic representations which used iconography and tropes usually associated with Krishna. The poet Sundar presented the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as Kamadeva, the Hindu god of desire, in whose presence the women of his *zenana* became still, like painted icons. The wholeness of a kingdom was known from its art,

and representations of beautiful women became a cultural attribute of kingship and urbanity.

In marriage, male-female alliances were necessarily normative but not in the aesthetic realm; as a poetic ideal, love was neither domestic nor bound by gender. The extraordinary motif of women with women proliferates in Indic painting from the late 17th to the early 19th century. This genealogy is repeated across Indic societies, styles, and locations, making the examination of the affect rendered in these paintings important: there seems a fresh sentiment or *bhava* in this informal, vernacular, worldly, and contemporary aesthetic. In paintings, the space between two *sahelis* (perhaps maidservants, distinguished from *sakhis* or friends) or women, gazes locked, is charged with sexuality. Often, one woman is dressed in the Rajput *ghagra-choli*, while the other wears Mughlai clothes with a turban, perhaps preserving a memory of the Rajput presence in the Mughal *zenana* and telling a tale of cultural difference and intermingling through which hybridity emerged. Amir Khusrau referred to his work about Dewal Rani and Khizr Khan as an allegory of the fusion of cultures through marriage. This is also a romanticisation of conquest, as apparent in a painting by the Mughal master Manohar which depicts Prince Murad lying on a bed with a Rajput princess. Such art became more prevalent in the time after Aurangzeb's death, when imperial alliances with Rajput families were rare. Intriguingly, there are also female pairings of this type: in one painting a pair of women gaze into each other's eyes, sexual arousal apparent in legs splayed apart, the carpet below the bed alive with animal imagery.

In the Hada Rani Mahal of Nagaur, there are representations of beautiful women who are in a spatial relationship with the king in his *durbar* and comport themselves in an imagistic style in response to both outer male royal authority and inner self-discipline springing from etiquette; the palace seems to have been predominantly for *vilasa* (dalliance) and offers an instance of the architectural placement of hierarchies of women. *Apsara*-like depictions are seen at the front while images of two women together can be found at the back. The Sheesh Mahal at Nagaur has depictions of pairs of women all around the room. They are associated with effervescence, intoxication and volatility apparent in the depiction of wine bottles, clouds, and lightning in this space. The use of *araish*, made of seashells and eggshells, creates a mirror-like, shining, cosmopolitan sense of marble in this architecture, and a different scale and materiality from representations on paper. Images of women, including *Ragamala* depictions (which sometimes use courtesan-like figures) are fluid and imbued with scent, blooming with love through the inclusion of flowers and with the sound of musical instruments seen in paintings.

The Bhim Vilas palace at Udaipur has several paired typologies on its walls: the King with one of his wives, Krishna with Radha (both reminiscent of auspicious *mithuna* couples on temple walls) and a pair of girls, presented not as *gopis* but in the style of a cosmopolitan *majlis* or gathering. In a Mughal response that mirrored this genealogy of pairing, symbolic of growth and prosperity, Jahangir was depicted with Nur Jahan and other women in a love scene. Pairs of women are also found on large cloth paintings. The scholar noted that a clearly cosmopolitan Mughal painting of two beauties gazing on each other has a Devanagari inscription on the verso stating that the women are drunk. In the Sufi world, drunkenness and intoxication are metaphors that refer to a mystical experience of ecstasy often characterised by bewilderment and perplexity. Paintings, including those commissioned by male patrons, depict women who are full of auspicious presence and replete in each other's company: Maharaja Anup Singh of Bikaner, who was in the Deccan with the Mughal armies, acquired a Mughal-style painting of women carousing, a pleasure scene where they seem more than content in the absence of men. In paintings of a Mughal *mardana majlis* or *mehfil*, which stressed etiquette, Sufis or holy men are always present. The scholar compared this with a painting where propriety seems less important than the sexual titillation of young boys (perhaps pre-gender and so interchangeable with women).

The *majlis* is an oft-repeated cosmopolitan theme with similar compositional elements used in the North, including Delhi and Awadh where depictions of gatherings of women drinking wine on rooftops on musical afternoons are seen.

An intriguing Mughal painting by the artist Govardhan portrays Jahangir celebrating a riotous Holi in an intoxicated state with a large group of women in the *zenana*. Sexual metaphors are apparent in the empty bed mirroring *nayika bheda* paintings, in the upward thrust of a playing fountain and in spurting *pichkaris*. While Jahangir's memoirs describe Holi as something he had seen only from afar, this painting tells a different story about this king with a Hindu mother and wives. His lack of control in the image perhaps mirrors the state of his kingdom which was being run by his wife Nur Jahan. Yet in the Indic, and particularly the Rajput world, this genealogy of the chaos of Holi and yielding to love made the Mughal emperors strong, akin to the consummate Indian lover, Krishna, who embodied the nine *rasas*. The scholar noted that this painting of disorderliness in the *zenana* is a conundrum that invites creative thinking. The verses on the back of the page speak of death, and of the drunkard as having more divine knowledge than a *sheikh*. Painted almost ten years after Jahangir's death in the time of Shah Jahan and perhaps critical of the former ruler, the work presents Jahangir as a tilting axis amid diagonally presented architecture and a melee in his *zenana*, with the women in the foreground absorbed in play among themselves.

Nevertheless, Jahangir's relatively isolated figure supported by two women is in the centre of the upper third of the page where painted court scenes and scenes of his birth also place him. The painting depicts the theme of sight and blindness and is alive with awareness of the viewer as several women gaze directly out of it. "Pregnant with possible meanings and ambiguous in casting praise or shame on Emperor Jahangir's memory", the work does not allow for stable interpretation. Perhaps this is why it produced multiple copies, variations, and bewilderingly diverse responses in many places: its compositional elements can be seen in many later Holi scenes, revealing that such masterpieces sometimes produced genealogies of their own. Another painting of Nur Jahan's *zenana* reveals that both images depict a real space with subtle differences that hold symbolic and metaphorical meaning.

A painting by Bishandas depicting a bird's eye view of the well-guarded *zenana* at the birth of Prince Salim shows women of different ethnicities with particular faces. Bishandas's work was probably based on a painting by Kesav Kalan and Dharamdas. Bishandas may have painted contemporary women into his work to emphasise the conception of the emperor's enormous *zenana* as one with ethnic and religious variety and a microcosm of the world, made orderly by his wisdom and authority. Painting lay between reality and metaphor, the surface inviting the viewer to look deeper.

In Lucknow, poets of the *Rekhti* genre made women their protagonists, sometimes spoke in a female voice and used vernacular, reflecting the language of women. They presented women falling in love with each other as a doubling, reflecting contemporary social predilections that may have been attractive to men. Yet these poems are not as broad in their spectrum as paintings which presented an idealistic vision of same-sex love everywhere from Bikaner to Udaipur, from Bundi and Kota, and from the Deccan to Delhi and Agra, showing how women's subjectivity

was being explored over a wide geography. The time also saw the rise of many powerful women such as the courtesan Udham Bai alias Nawab Qudsia Begum, the wife of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah; Nur Bai and Mah Laqa Bai, stupendously wealthy and well-respected courtesans, the Begum of Bhopal and others who flaunted masculine traits while male nobles of all creeds indulged in gender play and "performed femininity", a "guising" undertaken for political, social or devotional purposes. In late Mughal painting, women are presented as male rulers had been presented earlier, seated with a hookah and attendants, being entertained by performers on terraces, participating in an urbane culture in repeated compositions that record their powerful patronage. Cross-dressing in this society was normative, seen in the quintessential example of Chand Bibi in her turban. Entertainers, especially, escaped the confines of gendered subjectivity in the courtly world. Huge numbers of women served by women occupied the *zenanas* across the region and ran a parallel autonomous world, which curiously began to be portrayed in painting only from the late 17th century. An Awadhi painting of this type presents a *begum* who is being entertained. Tableaux drawn from other paintings repeat several often-used compositions of yogis and yoginis (one of whom rests on a swing as she performs her standing *tapas*), dancers and musicians. Performance and guising, revealing and concealing, are at the centre of this world, both in art and in life.

The hierarchy between different ranks of women and different types of entertainers is clearly apparent across genres, styles, and locations: in Rajput paintings, Rajput women are represented as decorously beautiful while entertainers are dressed in more flamboyant Mughlai clothes. A woman's attraction for other women was assumed. Women in the Mughal world were often in each other's company in *zenanas* and were enmeshed in power relationships and hierarchies which ranged from friendship to rivalry and from love to erotic passion. Women, usually Muslim, who could cross into the *zenana*, entertained its residents who had the privilege of *pardah* and held their own *durbars*. Images were a way of *bhavana* or world-making, creating a courtly ethos through representation of etiquette and ritual which were relevant to the social life of this time. Pleasure was formal, and images of orderly performances present the separation between entertainers and wives. Guising and gendered role play were common: among entertainers and courtesans, the youngest girls dressed in men's clothes both inside and outside the *zenana* until they became older. Femininity can be seen here as an emotional register, with entertainers performing real feelings which could be experienced through art. In paintings of women with women, which have been largely ignored by scholars, the speaker discerned a yearning for intimacy, an exploration of gender and self-reimagining, sweetness and passion, as well as cultural play. Prof. Aitken argued that these paintings, which invite an identification with female subjectivity regardless of sex, are wordless texts which express the volatility of Mughal society.

In paintings, both in the North and the South, love was a recurrent theme. In a *Ragamala* painting from Nagpur, a lord offers *paan* to the singer, but conceptually also to the beloved (preparing to receive him in the register below) who the performer makes present to him in the seductive grace of her song. Hearing, referred to as *darshan*, was one of the four ways to meet the beloved. Love was also possible by seeing the beloved in the mind's eye while hearing the vision in the song. One could fall in love with a picture and become immersed in the image to the extent of losing awareness of the beloved. In the Nagpur painting, the magical play of meaning allies with colour; the composition and details create a mood of anticipation and desire. A staircase connects the two registers of the painting. The play of the gaze, like invisible strings, is taut between singer and *nayaka*, and deferred between *nayaka* and *nayika*. Gazes touch, arouse and transform, stimulating *rasa* between characters and between audience and painting. The garden of plenitude in which the characters are seated promises their union.

On the third day, Prof. Aitken examined the aesthetics of bewilderment. She began with a folio from the Dublin *Chandayana* manuscript in the Rylands library, in which a yogi faints upon seeing the heroine Chanda's beauty. The stimulation and delight in the world blinds the viewer; Chanda is unaware of the celestial light of her own beauty. The folio in which the yogi describes this beauty to the king in song has a black sky between them, which becomes filled with music and yearning. The *nakhshikh* description in poetry turns Chanda

into metaphor, expressing a perfect, aniconic beauty akin to the black sky. Sleep, fainting and blackness become metaphors for not seeing or illusion, also present in the *gopis'* search for Krishna, who is beyond apprehension. Emptiness is a more powerful metaphor for emotion than the visible. The speaker referred to Awadhi paintings of architectural vistas which display a charged absence down the central axis (at the complex juncture when the Mughal emperor had been dispossessed of the throne, but when provincial rulers gained autonomy). She contrasted this to a painting from Jaunpur in which hyper-masculinisation is visible in the thrice-repeated figure of the Maharaja down the central axis, surrounded by figures of women. The relationship of the centre to the periphery in Indic painting is important to visual thinking and widely divergent from Western modes of composition. Decentring, amazement, uncertainty, fainting and intoxication take over from sight and insight in the aesthetics of bewilderment. The speaker put forward yoginis as representative of this aesthetic. She referred to a wide range of poetry and paintings to explore the representation of yoginis. In South India, depictions of yoginis were ubiquitous, for instance in *kalamkari* and *Ragamala* paintings. Sometimes yoginis were wandering figures of musicians who presided over "*durbars* of wild animals as sovereigns in the natural world".

Early *Ragamala* paintings made for Ibrahim Adil Shah II of Bijapur around 1570 make possible the *darshan* of sacred sound through iconic single images floating against fields of colour. Poets and painters in the ruler's court were described as budding flowers on which the Sultan's gaze would rest like the generative, tasting touch of a bumble bee on a flower, giving rise to the blossoming of genius. Ibrahim Adil Shah II was attuned to unorthodox thought, delved into the aesthetics of *Rasa*, wore *rudraksha* beads and worshipped Saraswati. In a famous, mysterious, Persianate painting attributed to his reign, an enigmatic yogini dressed in Indian orange towers between a middle ground with flowering plants taller than trees and a gold sky against which is juxtaposed a silent city. A gold river flows in the foreground. In an erotic gesture, a myna bird offers a morsel to the ready lips of the yogini who gives the viewer a dangerous *darshan*. She has been seen as a bereft lover who has renounced the world and turned to Shiva, as a beloved who inspired mystics. Kings turned to such yoginis for occult power, riches, and victory. Yoginis were morally ambivalent and dangerous because they could also grant death and destruction.

Northerners experienced the Deccan as a place where kings such as Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah of Golconda, who wrote poetry as a *virahini* yearning for her lover, spoke in a woman's voice. In yearning, passion exceeded reason, and to lose control in such a way was to become a woman; the Sultan used this voice to express his own overpowering desire. The heroine of Indic poetry had a female friend in whom she confided: Deccani male poets wrote themselves into the friendships of women. This was the aesthetic that Maharaja Anup Singh brought back with him to Bikaner, seen in the paintings of carousing women, women's friendships and love which he commissioned. The ruler acquired Deccani paintings including *Ragamalas* by various means, taking them North. Artists, such as Nathu, who were with him in the Deccan, learnt the prevalent style, the use of Deccani colours and sensuous motifs, and encountered the yoginis of the South. Nathu painted an acolyte (rather than a woman who had achieved the fierce femininity and sacredness of the Bijapur yogini) wrapped in a woollen shawl against a sulphurous yellow sky, the edge turning orange. Pigments were imbued with symbolism and efficacy: sulphur was alchemically female (and used for the Goddess) while the red of mercury was considered male (and related to Shiva). The Rajputs worshipped *Kuladevis*, who were female *shaktis*. The Maharaja and his painter perhaps pay tribute to feminine power in this painting. The peacock fan that the figure holds and a deer antler around her neck proclaim her as a devotee of Shiva and a Nath practitioner.

Remarkable and incandescently powerful beings,




even goddesses with supernatural powers in 17th-century Bijapur, the 'other' kingdom of the South, these yoginis retained their command of magic in Bikaner where this was conveyed through scenic representation. The 'foreign' Deccani colour palette and other Southern features are apparent in paintings of the enigmatic, even desirable, female Nath practitioners who congregated outside villages and turned away from courtly refinement, despite their delicate appearance embellished by pearls and curls. Living on in the memories of Bikaner artists, yoginis inspired many Northern paintings where they were portrayed as a social presence in everyday life. Written about in Keshavdas's *Rasikapriya*, they were ascetics, but equally spiritual guides of women and their companions, appearing in many painted works as intimates of women, granting fertility and other largesse, especially to the elite. In Northern 18th-century paintings, such as one by the Bikaner master Murad, yoginis withdrew from kings, becoming more human and less divine, and sometimes tricky characters ranging from saints (who were also *sakhis*) to subversive renegades. It was the yogini who sometimes took the role of a man when all-women gatherings became wild. Painters depicted the androgynous nature of yoginis by giving them beards and flat chests; they have been pictured as ambiguously masculine and feminine, mortal and immortal, sexual and ascetic, and free of the constraints of society.

The enigma of yoginis is an ancient presence in South Asia, but many such images appeared in Lucknow, where in the 18th century, painters took up the theme with renewed fervour. This can be seen in a painting by Mihr Chand, where two men in hunting green, one carrying an iris that marks them as imperial princes, gaze upon a group of women. A theatre of sexually charged gazes comes to life: the erotic, desire-filled appraisal of the men at one end of the work is met by the sexual withdrawal of a yogini and her companion at the other. The spectrum of responses from the women placed in between shows conflict; the unmarried girl frankly curious, returning the men's gaze; the two mature women caught between gazing curiously at the princes and turning away, one with a saucy sidelong glance. A mother gazes raptly at her baby, who gazes at the viewer, who must, in turn, choose whether sexuality or renunciation will colour her own gaze.

A pair of *nim qalam* paintings in an important Mughal album place King Solomon, emblematic of justice, and Majnun, emblematic of passion, in the charged spot at the centre of the upper third of the folio. Justice and passion are two guises in which the presence of the divine manifests. Another *nim qalam* painting places a Golconda yogini playing her *vina* to an animal court in the same magical spot or *bindu* which holds sacred power in works across the Mughal world. Krishna, too, is placed in this spot. Another painting depicts *gopis*, enchanted animals and golden birds (reminiscent of those in the painting of the famous Bijapur yogini) gazing at a yogini clad in orange. She is playing a flute, a masculine instrument, confirming her in-between state, a sacred presence that escapes definition, seated at the *bindu*. Two women in the foreground reminiscent of Hindu-Muslim pairings turn the painting into a performance. Guising and different picture types become layered together. The work nevertheless retains its aura of sacrality.

History records that men and kings, including Muslim kings in the 18th century, still worshipped yoginis, who were foreigners, no matter what their location. However, paintings depict women, perhaps because they were associated with unorthodox forms of prayer and seen as superstitious, deluded and heedless, seeking out yoginis for everyday benefits. Women were a cultural mixture, also a defining characteristic of 18th-century Lucknow, which boasted of a Ganga-Yamuna *tehzeeb* at this time. The magical yoginis went one step further; they inhabited unorthodox, mixed spaces, making differences such as those of gender and religion melt away with their music. In later paintings of this time, yoginis featured as iconic figurations of sonic and emotional effects, harking back to early Deccan *Ragamala* iconography. Yoginis are seen in musical imagery of all types, including the ascetic, the religious, and the metaphysical. The unknown could be seen by them by viewing with insight. In many paintings, we see women, including princesses, seeking out yoginis outside urban spaces. One such painting gives the viewer a *darshan* of listening in the charged, riverine space between a yogini playing music and a bowing princess, deer drawing close, turning one of the women into Todi *ragini*, the other into Sarang. Art leaps the space between the figures. A painting depicts a woman seeking so far that the landscape turns European. The mysterious yogini found her way to unlikely places: the German painter Zoffany inserted a yogini into a painting within his painting that depicts the Swiss mercenary Antoine Polier interacting with other Lucknow grandees such as the French Claude Martin. Late-Mughal Lucknow with its mixed society was a place caught in-between in more ways than one.

Prof. Aitken also noted the bewilderment that arises when holding a masterpiece. The viewer is wonderstruck by the skill of the artist, the genius and aliveness of the work, its delicacy, its many textures and its revelatory, yet delusionary quality. Each miniature masterpiece, replete with tiny details, is coherent, providing the viewer with the tools to experience it, yet provocatively ambiguous. In her seminar, the scholar conjured up the networks of relationships that produced curious genealogies of art in the Mughal world, avoiding complete reliance on the sometimes-misleading teleological linearity of art-historical context. **– *J.K.***

The Planetary King: Humayun Padshah: Inventor and Visionary on the Mughal Throne

February 7th, 2023, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Ebba Koch (Working with The Aga Khan Trust for Culture on a Museum for Humayun's Tomb in Delhi)

Online Public Seminar | Platform: ZOOM

The lecture by Ebba Koch put into perspective Humayun's place among the better-known Mughal kings. It detailed his contributions to art and architecture, and outlined his success in laying out the base for the Mughal imperial cult that would follow.

His numerous achievements not having been well recorded until now, Ebba Koch's book tries to redress this.

Ebba Koch stated that Humayun was the link that helped in the continuity of knowledge and traditions of his Timurid-Persian origins, in passing them on to his court and his dynasty. These would have been lost in transition had Humayun not been the scholar he was.

Humayun's personality played a key role in all his achievements, and perhaps this is why an introduction to his personality and his life experiences were the starting point of the lecture.

Both Dr. Poddar and Ebba Koch, in their introductions, described Humayun as a highly intelligent scholar, scientist, occultist, poet, and a

Statues of Humayun garbed in planetary colours by Jill Watson, 47 cm(ht), bronze, colours in oil paint, 2021

keen reader who travelled with a portable library on camel back. He enjoyed solitude and spent a lot of time reading and thinking. At the same time, he was also a gifted general who was very interested in astronomy and astrology, occultism, and was a patron of the arts and architecture.

Ebba Koch shared that Humayun was also someone who had ambitions of making a place for himself in history. It appears from the lecture that this goal was very important, as he formally accepted the Shia faith in order to get assistance from the Shah of Iran for his campaign to win Kabul.

"He had a complex personality, pronounced individualism, and was someone who enjoyed solitude to read and think, and giving in to long periods of pleasure or sexual indulgence while at the same time being a great hunter, wrestler, warrior and general."

Born in Kabul, he was one of the most widely travelled Mughal kings as his campaigns took him all the way from Gujarat and Bengal to Iran via Kabul, Delhi and Agra. It was perhaps his travels through Hindustan that helped him understand local culture and hierarchies, and assimilate this knowledge of the people and their culture in his campaign to rule.

The speaker went on to outline incidents from Humayun's life which showed him to be a humanist as well as reveal the high place that occult and divination held in his life, and which appear to be an essential part of his personality. Humayun tended to look for good and bad omens all around him – be it in names of people he encountered or incidents that occurred. Prof. Koch gave the example of the white cock landing on Humayun's shoulder before battle, which he considered to be an auspicious omen, which was considered to be important enough to be recorded and illustrated in the *Akbarnama*.

Humayun's knowledge of astronomy and his deep engagement with the occult led him to imagine and believe in a utopian society achievable by tapping into the positive energies of planets. He skilfully used this idea to set up a new court structure according to cosmic categories which were based on the astronomy and cosmic structure known at the time. The cultural belief in astrology prevalent at the time aided this project.

In order to further this planetary concept and to break up any tensions within the new structure, Humayun also had a cosmic carpet made which represented a scientific cosmogram of the universe which followed the general geocentric scheme of Muslim astronomers of the day.

The planetary court had three categories: the *Ahl-i-Daulat* (royal family, nobility, army), *Ahl-i-Sadat*

(men of learning and men of letters – philosophers, poets, nobles) and *Ahl-i-Murad* (musicians, minstrels, dancers, artists and craftsmen).

His court sat according to their place on this cosmogram, breaking existing hierarchies. The carpet was also used to play a game of dice. This not only brought play, mirth, and intermingling into the court, but also incorporated the Indian tradition of dice games which were already familiar to and a part of the culture of his local courtiers.

This sympathetic relationship between the planets and his court was established through colour. He met his courtiers and subjects on days of the week that corresponded to their occupations, wore clothes in colours that appropriately corresponded with the planet or celestial body of the day (white on Monday for the moon, red on Tuesday for Mars, blue on Wednesday for Mercury and so on), and even had seven pavilions made for the seven days of the week for his princesses in the same corresponding colours.

He seemed to have drawn inspiration for this from the traditions of the planetary cult of Upper Mesopotamia, which was perhaps connected to a seven-day week from Assyrian times. He, thus, reached back into a mystic past and used that along with the culture and belief in astrology of those he administered to create new settings, rituals, and social interactions for his newly assembled heterogenous court, which helped him diminish ethnic and religious strife and disagreements, while at the same time setting himself up as the rightful cosmic king and the ruler of the planets.

The entire planetary system plays well with Humayun's intent to subvert conventions, assimilate multiple cultures and his own belief in the occult to set up a new social system for his rule.

As a ruler, he was a patron of the arts and architecture, and continued the tradition of glorious musical and historical meetings ever alive in the literature of the Muslim courts.

It has long been assumed that the Mughal school of painting originated with the arrival of Safavid painters Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd al-Samad in Humayun's Kabul court.

Ebba Koch illustrated this through two paintings by Abd al-Samad. The first was a 108 cm x 108 cm painting on cloth titled '*Princes of the House of Timur*' which was probably painted at the end of 1549 to depict Humayun's reinstatement to the throne of Kabul. The painting stands by itself without any forerunner from earlier traditions. It later became a dynastic piece for the Mughals through significant interventions initiated by Jahangir, wherein Mughal-dynasty kings and princes were later added to the piece. The dynastic group portrait later became a distinct genre of Mughal painting.

Another painting from the 1550s by Abd al-Samad titled '*Humayun and Akbar in a tree house*' depicts the court culture of Humayun with extravagant settings and interaction with nature. It depicts astrologers, astronomers, scholars, poets, artists, musicians with Persian musical instruments showing that all these had been given a prominent place in daily court life. It also depicts a young Akbar presenting a painting to Humayun. The painting being presented is a miniature replica of the same painting, and this sequence of the miniature drawn inside the miniature appears to occur infinitely. This is a concept not unfamiliar to India as well.

The artist Abd al-Samad was also the tutor of Akbar, teaching drawing and painting to the young prince, showing that Humayun was keen to pass on the appreciation of creative pursuits to his son. This seems to have percolated down to further generations of Mughals.

The painting also introduces a theme of nature into the visual discourse of art and kingship – to engage architecturally with nature – and this desire to take nature as an imperial motive

became a grand theme for Jahangir; to tame the landscape of his territories and make them into gardens by imprinting them with architectural elements and inscriptions.

Moving on to architecture, Ebba Koch listed out and described a number of buildings that could be associated directly with Humayun or his close associates, namely Sher Mandal in Purana Qila in Delhi, which was built as a library and observatory, Nila Gumbad, Sabz Burj, etc. Ebba Koch suggested that it is possible that the Sabz Burj in Delhi was built as a tomb for Humayun's mother. The ornamental system of the vault in Sabz Burj has references to a manuscript created at Herat in 1435-36, again demonstrating a link to his Timurid heritage.

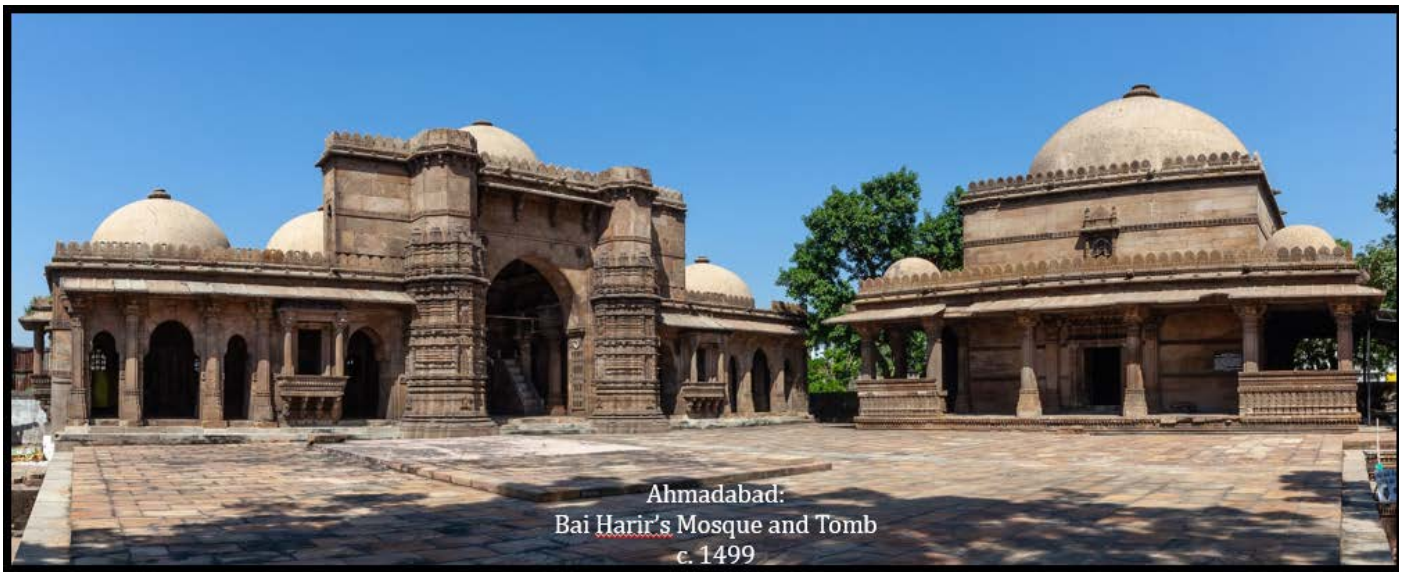
Humayun also designed a number of ephemeral buildings; his historian Khwandamir had to record these for posterity in chronological order of their conception. The planetary court, cosmic carpet, floating palace, *bazaar*, gardens, a movable palace, a movable bridge, a talismanic palace on the banks of the Yamuna – these were all inventions of Humayun, recorded by his historian.

It appears that the tomb of Humayun is based on his own design of the floating palace – recreated as a tomb befitting a king who very likely shaped the Mughal empire. **– *M.G.***

Ornaments in Stone: Monuments of Sultanate Ahmadabad

March 17th, 2023, 6:30 - 8:00 PM IST | Dr. Riyaz Latif (Associate Professor at FLAME University, Pune,) and Dr. Pushkar Sohoni (Associate Professor and the Chair of the department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune)

Physical with live streaming on ZOOM



The Islamic Aesthetics programme at JPM aims to explore the diverse and rich artistic traditions of the Islamic world.

In this session of the Islamic Aesthetics programme, two scholars – Dr. Riyaz Latif and Dr. Pushkar Sohoni – presented their research on the monuments of the Muzaffarid (Ahmad Shahi) dynasty in Gujarat. They displayed the visual culture of these monuments that reflect a unique fusion of local and Islamic influences, creating a distinct visual and architectural style. These monuments are extensively expounded in their book *Sultanate Ahmadabad and its Monuments: The City of the Muzaffarids (Ahmad Shahis)*.

Dr. Rashmi Poddar provided a succinct historical background to contextualise the emergence of the Muzaffarid dynasty in Gujarat, tracing its origins to the invasion of Alauddin Khalji

of the Delhi Sultanate in 1298. Further, a rule independent of Delhi was established and Zafar Khan (later Muzaffar Shah I) became the sovereign of the Gujarat Sultanate. Its capital, Ashaval (later known as Ahmedabad) became a thriving capital under Ahmad Shah I. This was expanded upon in the discussion, with particular attention paid to the aesthetics of this region's syncretic richness. This became known as the Gujarat Style.

Ornaments in Stone: Monuments of Sultanate Ahmadabad

The discussion was divided into two sections. Riyaz Latif led us through the representative Sultanate Monuments of the 15th and 16th centuries in the first portion. In the second part, Pushkar Sohoni discussed Ahmedabad's urbanity and compared it to other cities that emerged around the same period.

Part One: Representative Sultanate Monuments

Dr. Riyaz Latif began by narrating how Arab Muslims impacted coastal Gujarat prior to the political establishment of Islam in India. Earliest surviving Islamic monuments are found in Bhadreshwar in Kutch: the Mosque and Shrine of Ibrahim is one of them. In these monuments and most of the later Islamic monuments in the Gujarat Sultanate, one notes predominant local influences. Structures incorporated elements from Hindu, Jain and other regional traditions.

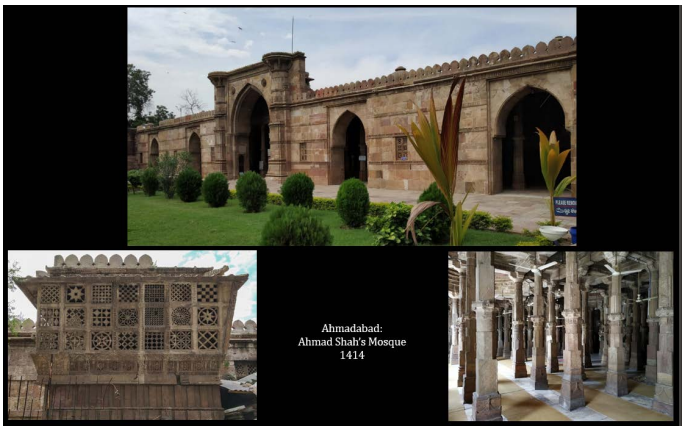
Apart from early structures made from pillaged temple components, the local visual culture permeated the newly constructed Islamic structures. Various building typologies, as well as native materials and artisanship were employed. Through a mélange of Islamic influences, and the Indic textures, patterns and motifs, these structures created a distinct visual vocabulary. These monuments reflected the Muzaffarid rulers' political and religious goals, as well as their patronage of local art and culture.

It was fascinating to learn from Dr. Latif that the practice of incorporating Indian elements into Islamic architecture was so entrenched that we have Vastu Texts from the 12th century focussing on the components of mosques and tombs. The mosque is referred to as *'rahman-prasad'* or *'rahman-suralaya'* which means 'Rahman's temple'. The Sanskrit canon devotes an entire section to this.

Two mosques built under the Tughlaq Governors were presented – the Jami Mosque at Cambay (1325) and the Hilal Khan Qazi's Mosque at Dholka (1333). They represent the architecture of the Gujarat Sultanate.

This style incorporated elements from the Jain and Hindu temple styles, such as a trabeated system, post and lintel structure, false corbel domes, and a large central arch. The façade's articulation with three openings and the proclivity for building massive clearstories that allow for the placement of intricate *jalis* show influences of the local, Indic manner.

Ahmad Shah-I commissioned a mosque for himself three years after the foundation of Ahmedabad, revealing the main architectural foundations of the city. The façade is trabeated, and arches are flanked by intricately ornamented buttresses. This feature from Ahmad Shah's Mosque (1414) recurred in the later monuments.



Dr. Pushkar Sohoni likened the royal enclosure of this structure to the *sabhamandapa* in temple architecture and suggested that the *maqsurah* of the royal enclosure is patterned after the *kakshasana* of the Gujarat Chalukya-Solanki temples. This exemplified direct borrowings from local architecture. Dr. Latif described how local structural components and styles were seamlessly translated into mosques, which were designed to meet needs of new masters in a sacred context.

Next came the massive Jami Masjid with its enormous central courtyard encircled by prayer halls. Constructed in 1423-24 by Ahmad Shah-I, it features the standard typology of the Gujarat Sultanate monuments of having ornately

decorated buttresses flanking the arched entry at the façade, which recurs with consistency ahead.

In a slightly different style was Rani no Hajiro (1450), a tomb complex for Ahmad Shah's queens, featuring cenotaphs on raised plinths surrounded by *jalis* and perforated windows. Dastoor Khan's Mosque (1463) has an open courtyard and a prayer hall. Rani Rupmati's Mosque follows the Maru-Gurjara vocabulary. Its *jharokhas* with brackets exemplify intricate stone artisanship.

Bai Harir's Mosque and Tomb (1499) has its buttresses modelled after minarets. They move towards the structure's corners, signalling a typological shift. This recurs in Rani Sabrai's Tomb and Mosque (1514) and in Saiyad Usman's Mosque (1460), whose buttresses are pushed out to the edge to form turrets. Baba Lului's Mosque, of the late 16th century, also has elaborate bastions and minarets of the same type. This detail was accentuated with even taller minarets of the next gem that Dr. Riyaz Latif presented – the Mosque of Muhafiz Khan (1482). A photograph of the sandstone structure was shown alongside an exquisite wooden model of the mosque created by the British as a study. There are two such meticulously crafted models that are now in the collections of the LACMA and V&A museums. Sidi Saiyyed's Mosque (1573), one of the last buildings built, was left unfinished. Despite its simple architectural design, this structure represents the pinnacle of western Indian carving heritage, with its superlative sandstone tracery and *jalis*. Popular among these is the Tree of Life panel.

Aside from individual structures, the Sarkhej Roza was depicted as a large complex comprised of numerous sacred structures. It was built between the 15th and 16th centuries. There are mausoleums, a palace, a tank, and pavilions. It also includes the tombs Mahmud Begada.

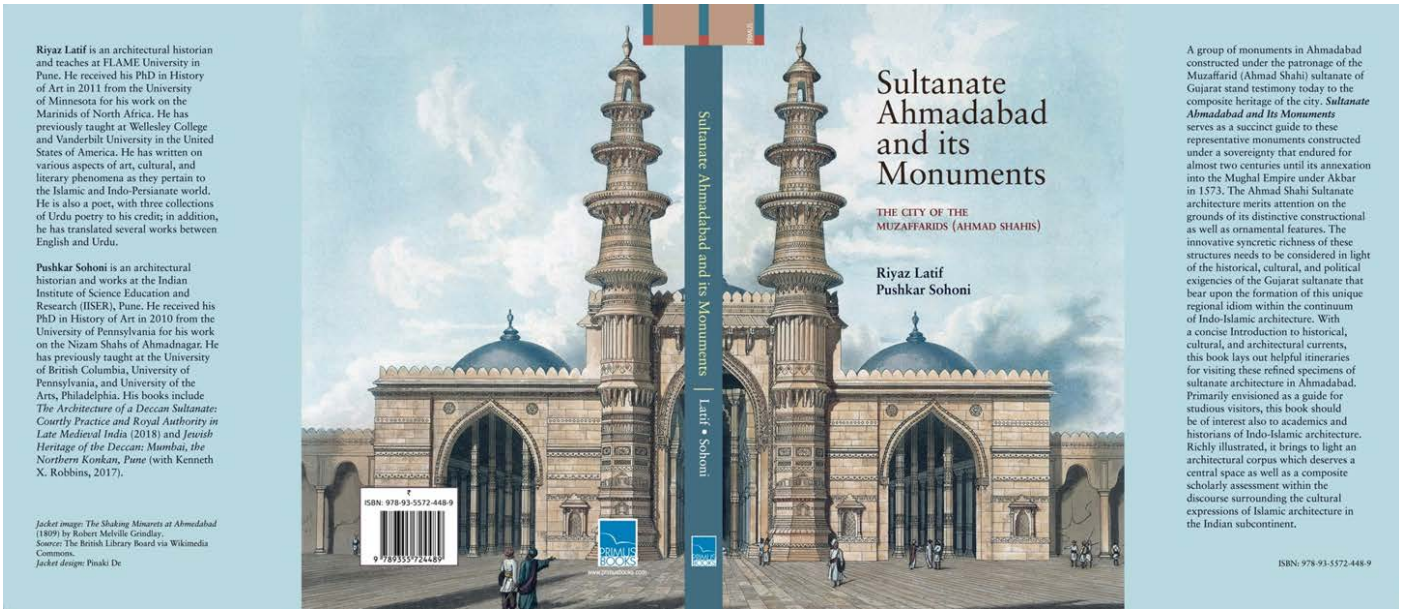
Unlike all stone monuments presented earlier, Darya Khan's Tomb and Azam and Mauzzam's Tomb were built in brick, allowing for a central plan, a large dome and central arch, and squinched arches.

Dr. Riyaz concluded by expressing how Indic tradition heavily influenced the Sultanate designs, with motifs such as *ghata-pallava*, *kalpataru*, and lamp on a chain. Local building practices, artisans, Jain-Hindu customs, and patronage all helped to blossom a new stylistic idiom.

Part Two: Urbanity of Ahmedabad

Dr. Pushkar Sohoni's presentation showed how the Indian subcontinent came under unified rule with the Khilji conquest of northern India followed by the Tughlaq's conquest of the peninsula. In the early 1300s, the whole entity disintegrates, fragmenting into independent reigns. Important ones to proclaim sovereignty are Tughlakabad in the Tughlaq reign, Jaunpur in Zafar Khan's time, Khandesh and Bengal, Vijayanagar during the reign of Harihara-I, and the Bahmani Sultanate.

Ahmedabad's urbanity was compared by Dr. Sohoni to other cities that arose around the same period, such as Bidar, Malwa, and Tughlakabad.



They were linked by the fact that they were each rooted in their own geographical specificities. This was expounded with samples from some of these locations.

At Mandu, the old fort city of the Malwa in Madhya Pradesh, the Tomb of Hoshang Shah was completely covered in marble, conveying a kingly architectural language. Certain planning methods, such as those seen in the Jahaz Mahal, and ornamentation of *hamams* and royal enclosures, are unique to Mandu. Bengal was known for its indigenous brick architecture and carved terracotta ornamentation. Stone was rarely used in construction due to its unavailability. Ornamentation was done by glazing terracotta, but due to bad glazing quality and unfavorable weather, the glaze chipped off and did not last. Black basalt and laterite were abundant in the Deccan. Unlike in other regions of the west of the subcontinent; here, stone is dressed like brick. Even the Bahmani fort of Bidar was built in red laterite but gave the impression of being made of brick.

The Gujarat Sultanate maintains its own manner, the Gujarat Style. Regional ornamentation, such as *udgams* of Solanki-style temples, can be found only here and nowhere else.

Ahmedabad links the Gujarat Sultanate to the broader world of the Tughlaq Sultanate. In the Jami Masjid, west is the direction of the prayers. This is widely assumed to point toward Mecca. Because the Royal Palace or enclosure, or Bhadra, is situated to the west of the Jami Masjid, resultantly, people praying in the direction of Mecca also pray in the direction of their ruler, to bring about reverence to him. This is something that Tughlakabad, Daulatabad, Firoz Shah Kotla in Delhi, and Ahmedabad all have in common.

Dr. Pushkar Sohoni explained an interesting fact about the geography and planning of Ahmedabad. The river is located on the west side of the Sultanate capital city, followed by the Bhadra (royal enclosure) to the east. Given that the river is to the west, the inward traffic would enter the city from the east, paying respect to its founders at Rani no Hajiro and the Raja no Hajiro, then offering prayers at the Jami Masjid, then crossing the Teen Darwaza, they would enter the *maidan-e-shah* or royal maidan, where the

victorious army would assemble in front of the palace. This royal procession route is set through the orientation and the clustering of structures. This is found in many Islamic cities around the globe, such as Samarkand, creating a feeling of grandeur, dignity, and pageantry.

The exposition shown in this section by Dr. Sohoni helps draw connections between the inland sultanate cities and traces global connections.

Towards the Guidebook

Some of the great books on Ahmedabad that were presented are: *Architecture at Ahmedabad, the Capital of Goozerat*, *Muhamadan Architecture of Ahmedabad* and the *Marg* volume on Ahmedabad, and even the *Walking Tours Ahmedabad*.

Continuing this literary legacy, Dr. Latif and Dr. Sohoni's handy guidebook *Sultanate Ahmadabad and its Monuments: The City of the Muzaffarids (Ahmad Shahis)* serves as a guide to these structures that today, serve as testament to the city's composite heritage.

Conclusion: Syncretic Identity

The session provided a glimpse into the artistic aspects of the Gujarat Sultanate. Dr. Riyaz Latif and Dr. Pushkar Sohoni discussed Ahmedabad's distinctive architecture and showed how Muzaffarid monuments reveal a complex interplay of cultural influences and aesthetic sensibilities in medieval Gujarat. It has been endearing to see such syncritic edifices display fluidity of social, political, and religious identities by way of the Sultanate's artistic endeavors through the Gujarat Style, which is a rarity in today's time. ***– P.P.***

Yoga & Tantra

PAST PROGRAMMES

Shakta Tantra and the Great Goddess in Early Medieval India

October 4th, 6th & 7th, 2022, 5:30 – 8:00 PM IST | Prof. Shaman Hatley (Associate Professor of Asian Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Boston)

Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom

Day 01: The Bhairava Tantras and Tantric Goddess Cults

Dr. Shaman Hatley began the lecture on *tantra* with an overview of its origin and the contradictions inherent in it. Around the 6th century CE, *tantric* traditions emerged and were simultaneously adopted across different religious traditions. For example, the *Shiva*-centric, *mantra marga* tradition, the *Vishnu*-centric *Panchratra*, and the *Buddha*-centric *Vajrayana*. The *tantric* path was considered more efficacious than previous religious systems as it was designed to help individuals acquire supernatural powers as well as a quick way to liberation, through an elaborate system of rituals and meditational practices.

Mantras which are the core teachings of all *tantric* traditions are divinised and worshipped as *mantra* deities. These deities are arranged in a very specific manner to form the basis of a *mandala* composition. However, to enter a *mandala* system and to connect with the *mantra* deity at the centre, a disciple must receive a *guru's* initiation (*diksha*). By diligently following the strict code of conduct, the initiate can transform one's body into a *yogic* body that eventually leads them to become one with the *mantra* deity. The aim is to transcend duality and in due course gain liberation. *Tantric* rituals are vastly diverse. They include both public forms of temple rituals as well as antinomic practices such as dwelling in cremation grounds, smearing one's body with ash and so on.

Dr. Hatley went on to discuss the three distinct branches of early *Shaivism*. The first is the *Maheshvara* branch, which is a devotional tradition of lay *Shaivism* that does not require initiation or asceticism. The second branch is the *Atimarga*, an initiatory sect of ascetics who live exclusively in cremation grounds. Lastly, the *tantric mantra marga* which over time became the dominant form of *Shaivism* across India.

Sadashiva – the five-faced ten-armed deity, is the central focus of the early *Shiva*-centric *Mantra marga* tradition. Each face (*Tatpurusha*, *Vamadeva*, *Sadyojata*, *Aghora* and *Ishana*) corresponds to a specific *mantra* and is also the source of distinct *tantric* scriptures.

One specific genre of *tantric* literature that Dr. Hatley discussed is the *Bhairava* tantras, which are linked to *Shiva's* fierce state – *Aghora*. These *tantric* texts emphasise mortuary asceticism and are divided into two branches: the *Mantrapitha* corpus of texts oriented towards *Bhairava* and the *Vidyapitha* text oriented towards the goddesses. The goddess tantras are further divided into *Yamala* and *Shakta tantra*, with the latter having two primary cults – the *Trika* and the *Krama*.

In the 9th century CE, a *guru* named *Matsyandra* reformed the *Shakta* tradition by turning away from elaborate rituals of the *mantra marga* towards simpler practices emphasising liberation through *yoga*. This allowed householders to easily participate in ritual practices which in turn led to the development of different cults within the

Shakta tradition.

Day 02: The Yogic Body

On day two of the lecture series, Dr. Shaman Hatley delved into one of the oldest *Bhairava tantric* texts called the *Brahmayamala*. Although theoretically, it focusses on the divine couple *Bhairava* and *Chandakapalini*, its ritual practices are centred around the goddess.

Moving on to the topic of the *Yogic* Body, Dr. Hatley explained how *kundalini* yoga first evolved within the *Shakta* and *Kaula* traditions. In *tantric yoga*, the body is elevated to a divine level through the installation of *mantra* deities. The *kundalini*, along with being *Shiva's shakti*, (seen as the vital force that allows creation to unfold) is also believed to lie dormant at the base of the human torso and can be awakened through *yogic* meditation. This vital force is made to ascend upwards towards the top of the head, (from the gross to the subtle states of consciousness) ultimately merging with *Shiva*.

Day 03: Shakta Art, Ritual and Material Culture

On the last day of the lecture series, Dr. Hatley began by discussing how the *Bhairava tantras* intersect with the lay community as a public religion. He explained how the *Devipurana* synthesises the *Bhairava tantric* tradition with the *Brahmanical* regional traditions and repurposes esoteric *tantric* rituals for common public use. For example, the *Kali tantric mantra* is used in the *Navratri* festival. The focus of the *Devipurana* is on the Great Goddess (*Mahadevi*) called *Sarvamangala*, who has sixty different forms such as *Durga*, *Parvati* and *Chamunda*. This pantheon of goddesses gets expanded subsequently as a circle of sixty-four *yoginis*. On one hand, these wild and powerful *yogini* goddesses were worshipped for protection and prosperity, and on the other hand women practitioners accomplished in *yoga* were also called *yoginis*. This class of deities - the *yoginis*, were perceived as also manifesting as women of the world, thus blurring the boundaries between the divine and the human.

Dr. Hartley then explored the *tantric* material culture through two examples: the circular open-to-sky temples dedicated to the *yoginis* and the *khatvanga* (skull staff). *Yogini* temples proliferated across India from the 9th to 12th centuries CE and are based on a *mandala* plan with a central courtyard and a shrine at the centre. Each goddess within the temple has her own set of rituals and *mantras*. They are worshipped individually as well as collectively depending on the purpose of worship.

The *khatvanga* is one of the most important *tantric Atimarga* ritual object. It is linked to the myth of Shiva, who cuts off the fifth head of Brahma and, to expiate his sins, must carry a skull staff as part of ascetic observances. Only those initiates whose practices are oriented towards *Bhairava* are required to carry a staff.

The two basic types of pre-*tantric* staff are the trident type and the club with a skull on top. With the rise of *tantric* traditions, the trident staff merges with the skull on the staff. In the Tibetan *Vajrayana* tradition, a skull staff with a trident top and a spike at the bottom is associated with *Mahakala*. The one with the three human heads topped with a *vajra* is associated with *Vajrayogini*. The context of these *khatvanga* must be understood in distinctly Buddhist doctrinal terms. Whereas in the *Shaiva* system, the skull staff is identified with *Bhairava*, and the *shakti* elements are represented by the three prongs of the trident, inscribing the entire *Shiva* cosmos onto it. This shows that the *Mantramarga* traditions combine both the trident and skull design into their *khatvanga*.

In this lecture series, Dr. Hatley took the audience through the religious and historical context of *Shaiva tantric* literature, specifically the *Shakta-Bhairava tantras*, and its convergence with regional traditions. He also provided insight into the development of the *kundalini* system and a peek into *tantric* material culture. Overall, *tantra* is a complex and multifaceted practice that has continued to evolve and adapt over time. ***– B.P.***

CRITICISM & THEORY

Apnavi Makanji | Untitled - Significant Other | 2018 | Courtesy: Vadehra Art Gallery

JPM's Criticism & Theory offerings include (1) a Certificate course in Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) an ongoing series of public seminars and lectures in Indian Intellectual Traditions; and (3) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.

Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory

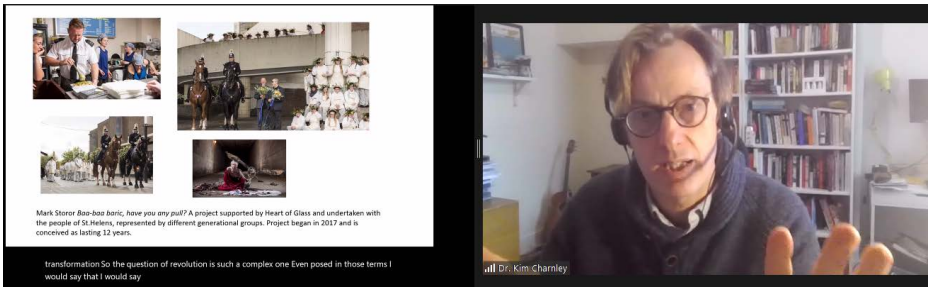
Unlike the previous edition of the ACT course which concluded in mid-December, this academic year saw the course continuing through January and early February of 2023 to allow for more in-depth engagement with contemporary questions in aesthetics. A thorough report of the course so far can be found in the January – March 2023 issue of the *Quarterly*.

We began the new year with a look at the idea of the 'everyday' through the lens of visual culture. Over two sessions with Prof. Suryanandini Narain of Jawaharlal Nehru University, we were introduced to the field of visual culture via a look at the contributions of key theorists, before delving more particularly within the unique place that photography occupies in theorisations of visual culture. A key question Prof. Narain urged us to consider was the tension between the particular and the general that undergirds attempts at theorisation – given that everyday practices have a 'science of the singular' and are irreducibly specific, which does not allow particularly well for formulating a general theory. However, this is a productive tension, as visual culture undeniably appears within the discourses of numerous disciplines including art history, anthropology, sociology, film studies, and photography, and therefore also acts as a glue bringing varied ideas together. Fundamentally, what visual culture stresses is that *seeing* is a mediated experience.

Analysing visual culture through the lens of 'popular' mediums like printmaking and photography in early 20th-century South Asia, Prof. Narain opened a fluid terrain of discussion. Here, questions of dissemination, iconicity, practices of worship, emerging forms of consumer culture as well as changing modes of identity formation and assertion were encountered through seemingly quotidian forms of visual culture that were often ignored or sidelined within larger institutional discourses until far into the 1990s, particularly in India. In our second session with Prof. Narain, we turned our attention to photography and considered another tension – between inclusion and exclusion – within larger domains of art practice and theory. An especially useful medium for critical discourse on the idea of the *everyday*, photography, unlike painting or sculpture, is a form of image-making that is practiced by most people living today. And yet, most photographs that have so far been produced tend to follow certain patterns. Family photographs often depict events like weddings and birthdays, tourist images follow in the wake of earlier tourist images – to give us millions of similar photographs of the Taj Mahal for example, or sunsets. Tracing the history of photography in South Asia from its beginnings as an anthropometric tool in the hands of colonial officials through its adoption by the indigenous elites and eventual proliferation within society at large in the late 20th century, Prof. Narain outlined the complex and interwoven nature of pattern building. Are family photographs alike because of a desire to emulate an aspirational image, or to conform to an established norm? It is both, of course, and much more, as we observed when seeing images from institutional archives, family albums as well as the work of artists who have subverted these patterns in subtle and intriguing ways.

When engaging with the discourse around visual culture in South Asia, questions around identity, visibility, invisibility, assertion, and resistance are constantly felt – who constitutes Indian society, what is an Indian family, where does representation also become repression, and how can we read against dominant forms of representation? Here, Prof. Y.S. Alone of Jawaharlal Nehru University provided us a framework to deconstruct a dominant theoretical logic in South Asia while making visible its underlying problematics of exclusion. What is

clear is that without an engaged critical analysis of the logics of Hindu caste society and its ongoing practices of violence and marginalisation, we cannot hope to come close to a mature critical understanding of Southasian life and therefore its cultures. Over three intense lectures, Prof. Alone reflected on established discourses of modernity and the discipline of Postcolonial Studies, critically revealing their refusal to address the centrality of caste in determining who were acknowledged as modern subjects and citizens. Through careful engagement with the writings of 19th-century anti-caste social reformer Jyotirao Phule and the ground-breaking work of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, we looked at the making of the Indian nation-state politically, as well as culturally, breaking down the ways it has been built on a fundamentally unequal system.



Prof. Alone's theorisation of the concept of 'Protected Ignorance' was particularly illuminating in its analysis of how contemporary discourse in South Asia fails to be effective as it cannot acknowledge and account for the primary role that caste has had in shaping this society. In an especially riveting final lecture, Prof. Alone took us through the work of artists whose work had consistently stood as a challenge to entrenched ideas of modern art. By also presenting the work of contemporary artists whose art is actively redefining the ways in which identity, resistance, anti-caste struggle, and justice are understood, Prof. Alone opened up an immensely productive space for discussion and understanding.

In the final four lectures of the course, we dove distinctly into the space of contemporary discourses around representation and the effectiveness of decolonial discourses, art's relationship with activism, the roles that social media has played in shaping our understandings of the public sphere, and how we can return to a foundational definition of aesthetics in a quest for truth, beginning with a conversation with Dr. Mark Sealy, curator and director of Autograph ABP, a London-based photographic arts agency. Dr. Sealy's conceptualisation of the idea of *racial time* was particularly important in bringing a fresh perspective to ongoing debates on representation, especially within photography. According to him, "a photograph of a racialised subject must be both located in and then de-located from the racial and political time of its making, and not solely articulated by its descriptive (journalistic) or aesthetic (artistic) concerns. … it is only within the political and cultural location of a photograph that we can discover the coloniality at work within it, and only then, through understanding this, can a process of enquiry begin into the nature of its colonial cultural coding."

Dr. Kim Charnley, Professor at the Open University, UK, furthered the debates around representation through a nuanced look at the concept of social practice or *'arte útil'* as a method of production for contemporary art. Bringing into focus another inherent tension – that of art's social function with the increasing financialisation of the art world within which art is made, exhibited and circulated. How do forms of political activism, social awareness and institutional critique function within this seemingly irreconcilable tension, and are there ways to meaningfully address it? Looking at the practices of select contemporary artists including Tania Bruguera and Felix Gonzales Torres and their careful negotiation of these complexities was especially useful in furthering an engaged discussion on art's role in the public sphere.

Of course, no understanding of the public sphere in our current context can ignore the enormous place of social media in shaping public discourse. Here, Prof. Matthew Flisfeder of the University of Winnipeg brought into focus why it is crucial for us to imagine social media as a metaphor "to read the form and structure of the reigning ideology and consciousness, and the reigning forms of enjoyment, their contexts and their settings within the culture of 21st-century capitalism". In the class discussion, we considered the possibility of whether it is even possible to have an authentically *social* media as Prof. Flisfeder argues for, and how we may move towards it.

In the final session of the course, we returned to a fundamental definition of aesthetics with Prof. Matthew Fuller of Goldsmiths, University of London. Drawing from his recent, seminal book, co-authored with Eyal Weizman of Forensic Architecture, Prof. Fuller expanded the classical Western philosophical understanding of aesthetics developed by Kant which prioritised the notion of disinterested observation as an individual subject, into an argument for the value of collective sense-making. Through a showcase of a few key projects of the research group Forensic Architecture, Prof. Fuller illustrated the power of collective forms of evidence collection and the meticulous piecing together of narratives – essentially sense-making or the practice of aesthetics in the truest sense of the term – in fleshing out a more legitimate conception of truth. Being both an artistic as well as a research agency involved with the justice system, Forensic Architecture occupies a unique space within contemporary discourse, and to engage with the immense breadth of their work was an especially fitting way to draw this year's ACT course to an end.

The 19th-century French poet Stéphane Mallarmé's dictum that "things already exist, we don't have to create them; we simply have to see their relationships" leaves us once again where we started – in trying to think with constellations, to see the relationship between idea and object, and between constellation and universe. As always, this year we conclude the course not with any questions definitively answered, but with an enhanced awareness that what matters is our ability to see, understand, and appreciate the relationships between them, through history and in our own time. We hope we are able to bring a new edition of the ACT course back very soon. – ***A.T.***

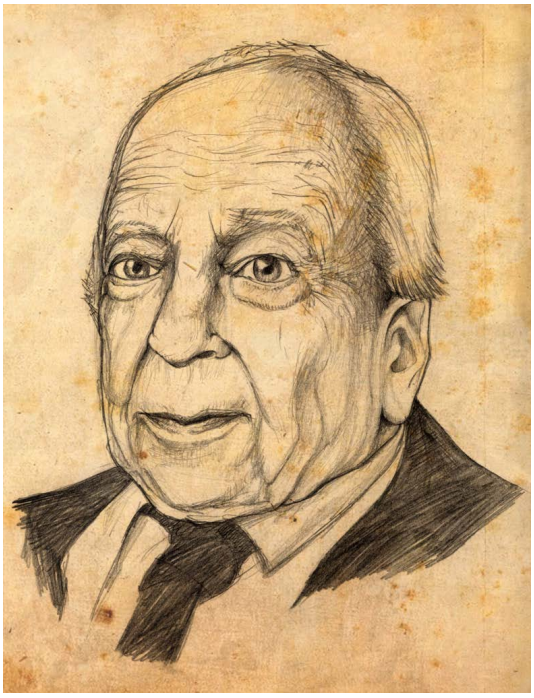
PAST PROGRAMMES

Ethics, Aesthetics and the Historical Dimension of Language

A seminar series on the selected writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer

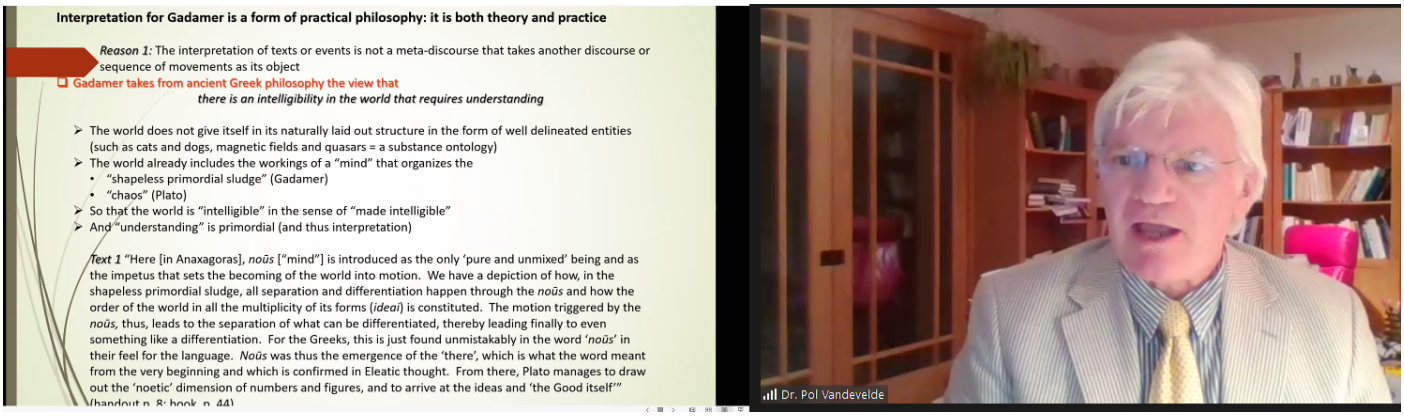
December 9th, 14th & 16th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Pol Vandevelde (Professor of Philosophy, Marquette University, USA) & Prof. Arun Iyer (Associate Professor of Philosophy, IIT Bombay)

Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom



Things don't make sense in a readymade way. Even if we do discern something from a thing's readymade-ness, there yet remains more to unearth. This is the fundamental claim of Hermeneutics – there is *always* more than meets the eye. And so, our relationship with the world around us, our relationship with other people, and our relationship with things in themselves cannot be and is not merely passive. Even when we are not consciously engaged in the act of sense-making, our unconscious selves are engaged in the act of discerning; we reason with things, we reason with other people, and we reason with ourselves. And it is this fundamental facet of human experience that philosophical hermeneutics calls *interpretation*.

The German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, while widely considered to be one of the most fundamental figures in the field of philosophical hermeneutics, lived and worked through an incredibly eventful 20th century. What



is intriguing is that although Gadamer lived to the age of 102 and was actively engaged in key debates around philosophical thought till well into his 90s, today he has become somewhat of an overlooked figure amidst the titan-like status of some of his peers and contemporaries. Over a three-session Public Lecture Series conducted by Prof. Pol Vandevelde, Professor of Philosophy at Marquette University, and Prof. Arun Iyer, Associate Professor of Philosophy at IIT Mumbai, we delved into three fundamental areas of consideration in Gadamer's work – Ethics, Aesthetics and Language, under the heads, *The Good*, *The Beautiful*, and *The One*. Based on their translation of Gadamer's writings from German in a book titled '*Ethics, Aesthetics and The Historical Dimensions of Language: The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer*' (Bloomsbury, 2022), Profs. Vandevelde and Iyer located Gadamer as a philosophical glue between the realms of theory and practice in an argument laid out in the following sections.

The Good

A fundamental intervention by Gadamer has been his demonstration that there is an ongoing and interchangeable relationship between theory and practice. Drawing from his extensive, lifelong engagement with ancient Greek philosophy, Gadamer argues that interpretation is not a meta discourse, that is, a discourse that is *above* its object. Rather, he takes the position from the ancient Greeks that there is an intelligibility in the world that requires understanding, extending a point made earlier by Heidegger. With this, Gadamer moved distinctly away from two more traditional notions of interpretation, namely Monism and Pluralism, where the first argues that there is only a singular 'correct' interpretation of a text or an event, and the latter contends that there are multiple interpretations, all of which are equally valid. However, for Gadamer, both positions fail in their assumption that there exists a specific object that is already well delineated before interpretation arrives at it. They fail precisely because as the ancient Greeks argued, the world itself has a certain articulation, but this articulation only reveals itself when we are involved in the world and participate in it.

But if understanding is the key dimension of human existence, then how do we call that which we understand? To the ancient Greeks, this was *nous*, translated roughly as 'the mind'.

Drawing from Anaxagoras, a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, it emerges that for the ancient Greeks, "*nous* is introduced as the only 'pure and unmixed' being, and as the impetus that sets the world in motion". Gadamer draws a line first from Anaxagoras to Aristotle, who elaborates on the separations made within the world by understanding, that *nous* 'comes to the door' from the outside, and like light, makes difference distinguishable in the world. But drawing the line further into Western philosophy, Gadamer comes to the progressive loss of the power of the concept of *nous*, to what he calls an 'anaemic' idea of 'thinking', as expressed in the Cartesian concept of *cogito*, which would become the central idea of Western philosophy from the Enlightenment onwards (as in Descartes's famous proclamation – *Cogito, ergo sum*, I think therefore I am). For Gadamer, it was this move that more than any other, restricted our ability to truly interpret the world. And so, he argues, we must return to Anaxagoras.

Gadamer, however, does accept Plato's argument for a move away from direct access to things to a discussion about things, using arguments as the

basis for coming into an interpretative space. And therefore, as interpretation requires an engaged discussion, those engaged in it bring their own *ethos* (character and value) into interpretation, thereby making themselves accountable to both the authors as well the readers of a text. Gadamer also accepts Plato's argument to move away from a view of the world as already laid out in a natural order to one that is 'cutting up' the world through concepts. And because this ordering into concepts is done as an intervention, the *ethos* (character and values) in their interpretation also makes itself evident.

The Beautiful

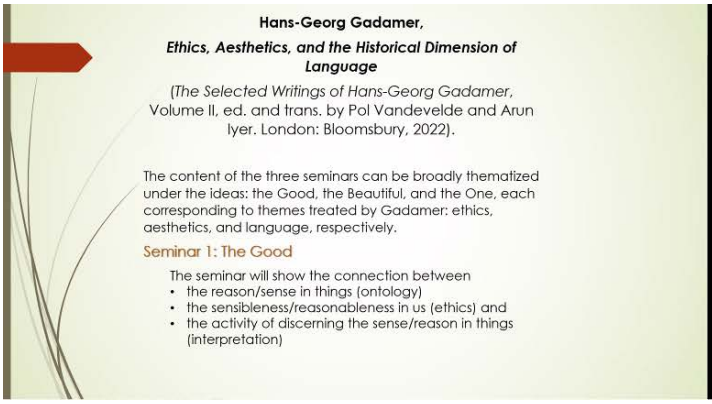
On the work of art, Gadamer argued that beauty is not merely a quality of the artwork but a description of its very being. Following on Aristotle's *Poetics*, Gadamer understood an artwork's beauty as an excess of being over reality. That an artwork essentially conveys reality to us and is not merely a duplication of reality. As the essence of reality, art is, therefore, something more than reality. But every work of art also presents to us two important questions – the iconographic, and the hermeneutic. The iconographic question urges a description of what is represented, and the hermeneutic asks what an artwork 'says' to us, even when we do not know what its iconographic content potentially means.

But how do we answer, or even attempt to answer these questions? For Gadamer, to truly understand a painting, and to converse with it, is to read it, like a text. To get into a work of art, we cannot simply look at it, as a surface and expect it to reveal itself to us fully. Gamader asks in his 1979 text *On the Reading of Buildings and Paintings*, "How do we learn to read? How do we learn to understand? In reading we stumble, and the self-evidence of reading further escapes us, we must go back because manifestly a horizon of anticipation has not been fulfilled. This is like a shock. We go back. We read one more time, we rectify, we change the emphasis and all those things that we all know bring something written or printed again to speech."

The One

To understand, therefore, there needs to be a looking beyond and behind what is said. So the questions are not only directed to or at a work of art, they also address its history, its context, its materials, all in an effort to feel out its 'horizons', which potentially contain the answers we seek. Using the example of van Gogh's famous painting of a pair of worn-out shoes, Prof. Vandevelde demonstrated how a journey to understanding can also lead each of us in a different direction, given that in the act of interpretation we bring our own *ethos* to bear as well. While an art critic writing on van Gogh's painting gave important historical contexts to the making of the work, including how the painter possibly bought the shoes at a Parisian flee market, for someone like Heidegger, this information is inconsequential to what the artwork itself says. Rather, it might even impede the viewer's imaginative experience to know too much about the 'actual' truth of a work's making. Another interesting example illustrating the subjective nature of understanding is the fact that over the last two hundred years, there have been over 65 official English translations of Homer's *Odyssey*, an ancient Greek text written over two millennia ago. Yet despite the proliferation of translations, there never seems to be a consensus on a 'definitive' one, and there doesn't seem to be any need to have a single 'true' version either.

Ultimately, Gadamer says, "language is the element in which we live, as fish live in water." It inevitably



characterises our human experience of the world, as it already contains an understanding of the world within it that correspond to a universality. And drawing that further, our conceptualisation of the world too thus originates in language, which of course means that they originate in life, in human experience. And so, for Gadamer, there is always the possibility of tracing language back to the origin of a concept.

While this short report cannot hope to elaborate in detail on the depth of Gadamer's writing concerning understanding, interpretation, subjectivity, the work of art and translation, Prof. Vandevelde's and Prof. Iyer's own intervention in bringing Gadamer to the forefront of discussion and consideration has been of fundamental value. As artists, writers, and viewers of art ourselves, to have even a cursory glance into Gadamer's work opens up a door to deeper inquiries into our own relationship to practice, interpretation, and engagement. ***– A.T.***

Multiple Modernisms: Europe, Asia and Beyond

January 7th, 14th, 21st, & 28th, 2023, 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM IST | Dr. Chaitanya Sambrani (Art Historian and Curator, Australian National University, Canberra)

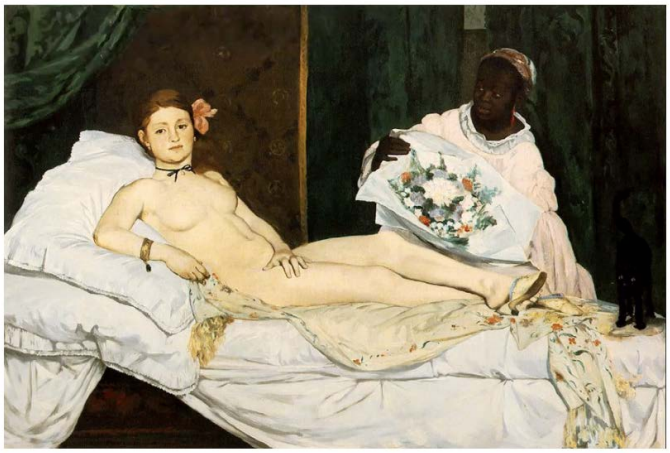
Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom

Session 1:

When does a place begin to *look* recognisably modern? For Paris in the mid-19th century, it emerged through the blood and rubble of revolution. And as the dust from waves of social upheavals gradually settled across Europe after the events of 1848, the city stood at the threshold of a monumental restructuring. Impacting everything from its urban plan and architectural style to the social relations among its bourgeois population, the latter half of the 19th century came to define the transformation of Paris from a largely medieval labyrinth scarred by successive revolutions into a glittering metropolis, the heart of European culture, and the centre of France's imperial colonial project.

While beginning the story of Modernism in art amidst the 9th century in Paris is very much in line with established social, cultural, and even political histories, it is in contextualising it amidst narratives of colonialism, empire, and social upheaval that we can really begin to flesh out the reach of its impact. Over a series of four sessions held across a month, and filled to the brim with information and insight, Prof. Chaitanya Sambrani, Associate Professor at Australian National University, led us through some key arcs of this incredible story. Each week, a global cohort of students, our team from Mumbai, and Prof. Sambrani from Canberra, Australia, came together over Zoom to explore, deconstruct, and sometimes (often) marvel at the ways the project of modernity impacted the societies it encountered, transforming them as well as the world at large with each generation of artists, intellectuals, activists, and revolutionaries who lived through it. Focussing on Europe, India, Japan, and Indonesia as the major sites of inquiry, the series made amply evident the point that the history of Modernism does not follow a straight line, where only a Eurocentric, nationalist, or even postcolonial perspective is sufficient to understand it.

And so, we return to Paris. In 1853, shortly after Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte declared himself emperor of France and became Napoleon III,



Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1865

a relatively minor bureaucrat named Georges-Eugène Haussmann was elected Prefect of the Seine. Haussmann was instructed by the emperor to *aérer*, *unifier*, *et embellir* Paris – to bring light, air, and open space in a hitherto 'dark and congested' city while unifying its disparate parts into a cohesive, beautiful whole. In the incredible photographs made by Charles Marville of what became a 20-year-long project that completely transformed Paris, we got a sense of the scale of the destruction of centuries-old structures, roads, and modes of communal living. In their place came wide boulevards that cut through Paris at exact angles, new urban layouts of buildings that followed a single style, the foundation of new cultural centres for the bourgeoise like the famed Opera house, and the institution of new innovations like gas lighting that ushered in a new understanding of public space and its occupants.

It was in this rapidly transforming city, amidst a time of vast technological innovations through industrial capitalism, that art too took on new formations. Like the photographer Marville, painters like Camille Pissarro and Claude Monet too were drawn to Paris, painting its boulevards and train stations, and with it, a new generation of citizens – men and especially women of a social class who could now afford to engage in activities like leisure in newly created public spaces. While Pierre-Auguste Renoir's lively crowds of young and attractive men and women out in parks and boats on the weekends seem to depict a more optimistic social sphere, his contemporary Gustav Caillebotte's carefully composed scenes describe a more brooding atmosphere. The emergence of women (albeit largely middle and upper-class women) onto the urban landscape as more independent actors created significant friction. Who was the 'respectable woman' and who was not? Caillebotte's paintings seem to make us shift distractedly between our own gaze as viewers admiring his female subjects, to cautiously peering at the men watching them in his paintings, who in turn both desire and are fearful of these new women.

European Modernism's female protagonists have long been identified as the subjects of great male artists, with Édouard Manet's *Olympia* being the most scandalous example of the defiance of established social conventions of these new 'modern' artists. However, it is striking that despite the increasingly transgressive presence of women in public life and art in this period, the history of modern art barely acknowledges or remembers its female artists. A notable example of this erasure is that of artist Berthe Morisot, an Impressionist painter living and working in the heart of the Impressionist circles of Paris in the late 19th century. Married to the brother of Édouard Manet, Morisot was also a subject in the work of many of her male artist peers. When comparing their impression of femininity with Morisot's own more nuanced and complex paintings of the women around her, we cannot but notice the stark difference in how women and their place were understood by the deeply patriarchal society of the time.

European art of the 19th century was engaged not just with depicting the transformations in landscape and society it witnessed, but was also obsessed with inventing new forms for this depiction. As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, a new group of artists emerged for whom colour, line, and form took precedence over the subject in determining how a painting came to be. In *Notes of a Painter* (1908), Henri Matisse wrote, "What I am after, above all, is expression…I am unable to proceed beyond a purely visual satisfaction such as can be procured from the mere sight of a picture…I am unable to distinguish between the feeling I have for life and my way of expressing it." The invention of photography in 1839 and its increasing proliferation through the 19th century, followed by the emergence of cinema at the turn of the 20th had brought about a crisis of representation for the artists of this time, but it also inevitably inspired a breakaway from long-entrenched ideas of representation. Art brought to Europe from cultures previously

unknown, placed in museums and made accessible also proved pivotal to the development of European artists. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, two artists at the helm of the movement that later came to be called *Cubism* were deeply influenced by both technological advancements in photography and cinema, as well as the art of so-called 'primitive' cultures they encountered.

Undoubtedly, the most important events of the early 20th century were the First World War that tore across Europe and the colonised world, and the subsequent Bolshevik revolution leading to the birth of the Soviet Union in Russia in 1917. When considering the work of the *Futurist* artists, whose manifesto came out in 1909, a mere five years before the outbreak of war, it becomes evident that these artists were already sensing the advance of rupture, and through their work, were in many ways actively working towards it. Dynamic and full of restless latent energy, the work of artists like Giacomo Balla and Umberto Boccioni seems to be vibrating within the confines of their canvasses, their sculptures trapped mid-flight. In the *Futurist Manifesto*, the theorist and founder of the *Futurists*, Filippo Marinetti writes: "We are on the extreme promontory of ages! Why look back since we must break down the mysterious doors of impossibility? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the Absolute for we have already created the omnipresent eternal speed."

Session 2:

Our second week began on the other side of the globe as we moved from the 'centre' of Modernism to its so-called 'peripheries'. Yet as Prof. Sambrani elucidated through his lecture, the claim that Europe was the sole progenitor of the project of modernity and that all other cultures were either led by or emulated it is not only misplaced but harmful. Such a view erases the active participation, as well as path-breaking interventions into modernity undertaken by other cultures despite the crushing force of colonialism and the virulent racism that Europe threw at them. But what was also especially interesting about the early history of Modernism outside Europe was the emergence of a new class of artists, writers, and intellectuals who melded together traditional forms of artmaking with new ideas gleaned from transformations in Europe.

Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906), *Gypsies, (a.k.a. Poverty),* 1893, Sri Chitra Art Gallery, Thiruvananthapuram

Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906), *There comes Papa,* 1893, Private collection

In the history of Modern Indian art, perhaps no other figure exemplified this hybridity more than Raja Ravi Varma. Born into nobility in Kerala, Ravi Varma was an active figure in art as well as politics by virtue of his closeness to the throne of Travancore. Ravi Varma's European-style oil paintings depicting Hindu gods and goddesses and his romanticised renderings of Indian 'beauties', popularised even further by his innovative use of printing technology catapulted him to a level of stardom that no singular Indian artist had so far enjoyed in colonial India. Ravi Varma's work was not universally lauded, however, and within the intellectual and artistic milieu of the time, it was also heavily critiqued. As Prof. Sambrani pointed out using two paintings made by the artist in the same year, and depicting the subject of a mother with her children, Ravi Varma's Indian identity did not make him any less susceptible to Orientalist and essentialist tropes in the depiction of a poor woman on the street with her morose children whose painting he titled '*Gypsies*', while the more elegant painting of a wealthy woman serenely holding her child with a dog at their side was titled '*Here Comes Papa*'.

Ravi Varma's contemporary in the world of photography, Lala Deen Dayal (famously known by his title of 'Raja' Deen Dayal) also worked, like Ravi Varma, largely for wealthy Indian clients drawn from the nobility, along with the European elite occupying the highest levels of the British Raj. His beautifully composed photographs could in one sense be seen as fully playing into the European fantasy of the Raj, exemplified by big game hunts, mysterious Indian princes gazing pensively into the camera, dressed in dazzling attire, and images of India's ancient temples,

tombs, and palaces. But Deen Dayal's work could also be read through the perspective of a colonised people adapting to the new political and social reality enforced upon them, where although still unimaginably wealthy and socially powerful, they had been stripped of any real political power, and turned instead into largely ornamental figures. Deen Dayal's photographs thus hold a more melancholic reality, of adaptation through coercion, and the need for survival.

For the largely Southasian audience of artists, writers, and academics in the classroom for this series, many of the artists (both European and Indian) seen so far had already been encountered in some form. But what made this series truly unique was the engagement with the history of Modernism in Indonesia and Japan through the 19th and 20th centuries. Rarely do we bring the perspectives of these geographies in attempting to understand the move to modernity in Asia, preferring to skip instead between India and Europe as the only two poles of value. What was fascinating therefore was to move from the work of Indian painters and photographers of the late 19th century into Indonesia, and find striking parallels in the work of Indonesian artists who were themselves contemplating their place within colonial confines.

As we began with the imagination of the colonial picturesque at the hands of the Daniells and William Hodges in India, we encountered colonial Indonesia too, through the depictions of European artists. Traversing through the detailed still lifes painted by Elisabeth Johanna Koning and the similarly arranged photographs of Isidore van Kinsbergen, and then the by now familiar romanticised depictions of village life, beautiful women, and idyllic landscapes made by painters like Mari ten Kate and Jan Daniel Beynon, we emerged ultimately onto a striking 1841 self-portrait made by the Indonesian artist Raden Saleh. Often considered the first 'modern' artist of Indonesia, Saleh had been born into local nobility, trained in Europe for many years, and painted for the European aristocracy before returning to Indonesia after a 20-year absence. Like Raja Ravi Varma, Saleh's medium was oil painting in the style of High European art. His depictions of hunts and the sublime natural world often emulated the work of the European masters he had learnt from, and yet, it also sometimes defied this entrenched gaze, most notably in his depiction of the moment the anticolonial Javanese Prince Diponegoro was defeated and captured by Dutch colonial forces in 1830. Saleh's painting of the scene shows a defiant prince who has been defeated but not diminished, and his title '*The Capture of Prince Diponegoro*' belies the pride that Saleh held for this national hero who had stood up against colonial rule.

While both India and Indonesia were directly ruled by European colonial interests, Japan became an interesting exception in the story of Modernism. A country that until the Meiji Restoration of 1868 had remained closed off to the world under a strict policy of isolation, Japan was forced to open its doors through the intervention of an American military force in 1855. Under its young new emperor, the country leapt into a modernisation project the likes of which had so far been unheard of. Within the first decades of its borders being thrown open to trade, Japanese society, its landscape, and its art witnessed radical transformations. And although Japan itself was never directly colonised by Europe or America, it engaged in its own colonial project within Asia, particularly in Korea, and in the 20th century in China.

Utagawa (Gountei) Sadahide (1807-1878/79), *Foreigners in the Drawing Room of Foreign Merchant's House in Yokohama*,1861
Triptych, woodblock print, 35.6 x 25 (approx.) cm, each, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Japan's relationship with Modernism is one that

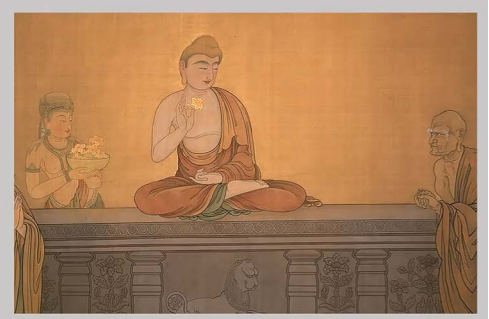
is intertwined with Europe's own complicated relationship with the idea. The country's sudden opening up led to Japanese art, especially its vibrant print culture quickly finding its way into European art collections, and from there, influencing the work of its most prominent artists, including Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin and Berthe Morisot among others. At the same time, the transformations in the European urban landscape found their way to the rapidly modernising cities of Tokyo and Yokohama, bringing revolutionary new technologies like the steam engine and photography to a society that had been shaken awake from its feudal traditions. One of the most fascinating mediums through which to trace this transformation is the *Ukiyo-e* style of Japanese woodblock prints. Utagawa Hiroshige, who was considered the last great master of the *Ukiyo-e* school, lived, worked and died in the last decades before the fall of the *Tokugawa shogunate*. His son-in-law Utagawa Hiroshige III, however, lived through and depicted in his own *Ukiyo-e* prints, the rapidly transforming society in the first decades of the Meiji Restoration. Within the span of a generation, Japan had changed beyond recognition. And while Hiroshige III's prints still followed the style of his master, he depicted a new technological age where both the landscape as well as the social relations among its inhabitants were at a moment of churning.

And like India and Indonesia, Japan too witnessed the rise of a class of artists who took up the mantle of European-style painting. Termed *Yoga* in Japanese, this employed European rules, mediums, and norms of art-making, while engaging in themes and subjects that were Japanese. Most notable among them were the work of Asai Chū and his contemporary, Kuroda Seiki. Both were born into high-ranking Samurai families in the transition years before the Meiji Restoration as Japan began to open up. Their high birth enabled them to be educated in European art, literature, law, and governance from a young age, and both lived in Europe for significant periods in their life. As Prof. Sambrani pointed out, in their work we see an interesting parallel with the work of Raja Ravi Varma in India and Raden Saleh in Indonesia. Themes include a rural idyll, serenely beautiful well-dressed women set amidst waterfronts, and landscapes that emulate a fantasy of universal beauty. Although Japan's own relationship with Europe was defined on different terms from that of colonised India and Indonesia, the desire to be recognised as artistic and intellectual equals to Europe plays under the surface in the work of all three artists in a way they may have recognised in each other.

Session 3:

While the first generations of artists influenced by and trained in Europe took their style from the West and depicted themes drawn from their own cultures, the artists who came after decidedly broke away. By the 1880s in Japan, a new group of emerging artists led by the pioneering painter Okakura Kakuzō aspired to throw down the predominance of the *Yoga* style in favour of *Nihonga*, or true Japanese style painting. Okakura Kakuzō is significant also in the story of Pan-Asianism. In 1903, he wrote, "Asia is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilisations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the *Vedas*. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal, which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce all the great religions of the world, and distinguishing them from those maritime peoples of the Mediterranean and the Baltic, who love to dwell on the Particular, and to search out the means, not the end, of life."

Hishida Shunsō (1874-1911)



Mahakasyapa smiling at the lotus flower, 1897, 145.7 x 272.7 cm, Tokyo National Museum

Okakura Kakuzō argued for a 'third belt' of artists who neither looked exclusively to the West nor to their own traditions for sole inspiration, but whose ideas merged to form larger spaces for cross-cultural solidarities across Asia. The artist Yokoyama Taikan, who was both a student and later collaborator of Okakura Kakuzō, was one

of the most prominent figures of *Nihonga* and a deep believer in the idea of Pan-Asianism. Yokoyama travelled extensively, visiting India, the USA as well Europe, and in his work explored themes from Indian mythologies, and landscapes, especially his beloved Mt. Fuji, in a style that was deeply rooted in traditional Japanese painting.

India too was witnessing a period of churning throughout the early 20th century. The painter Abanindranath Tagore, his brother Gaganendranath and their most illustrious uncle, the poet and painter Rabindranath Tagore were all at the heart of an effort to reclaim traditional forms of painting, amidst a rising wave of nationalist political activism in Bengal. The Tagore family's fortunes had prospered beyond measure through their centuries-long engagement with British interests in India, yet opposition to British colonial rule also churned within the highly educated and Anglophone Tagore family. Okakura Kakuzō's call for Pan-Asianism resonated especially well with Abanindranath Tagore, and many Japanese artists were invited to India by the Tagores to teach, work, and engage in debate with Indian artists. Abanindranath's own most well-known intervention in the history of modern art in India is his rendering of *Mother India*, an imagined deity in the mould of a Hindu goddess who stood as the embodiment of national identity. And while Abanindranath's paintings revived the style of classical Mughal miniature art, his brother Gaganendranath was bolder, taking on the modes of illustration, political cartoons, and posters as well as experimenting with Cubism in his work.

Modern art's relationship with women is a complicated one, and as seen through its history both in Europe and elsewhere, women's roles were largely confined to ornamental or transgressive subjects rather than active agents.

M F Husain, *Man*, 1951, oil on fibreboard, 126 x 249 cm, Peabody Essex Museum

The Hungarian-Indian painter Amrita Sher-Gil, however, was determined to have her work recognised as equal to and even greater than that of the 'masters' of Europe. She proclaimed famously in 1934, "Europe belongs to Picasso, Matisse, Braque, and many others. India belongs only to me." Although trained in Paris and working within a European tradition in her early work, her return to India in the early 1930s led to a shift in her practice, through her growing interest in depicting the lives of ordinary Indians. Prof. Sambrani's astute observation on her work points out, however, that although Sher-Gil's legacy is of immense importance to art history, her representation of her own countrymen largely remained coloured by an Orientalist fantasy – the unchanging and unknowable nature of India's vast landscape and people, often identified only as 'hill people' or 'South Indian', and engaged in activities that trapped them in an eternally pre-modern frame.

India's independence in 1947 from British colonial rule was a deep turning point in the story of Modernism. As the country limped into 'life and freedom', independent but torn apart by Partition, art too came to a moment of reckoning. In the bastions of art education like Shantiniketan (a progressive university started by Rabindranath Tagore in Bengal), artists like Ramkinkar Baij were charting a new and more hopeful path towards this new era, while also remaining critical of the work that had yet to be done in achieving a truly equal society. Across the country in Bombay, a new and dynamic group of artists who called themselves the 'Progressive Artists Group' were also charting new directions for art. F.N. Souza, wrote in their inaugural exhibition in 1949, "Today we paint with absolute freedom for contents and techniques, almost anarchic; save that we are governed by one or two sound elemental and eternal laws, of aesthetic order, plastic coordination, and colour composition. We have no pretensions of making vapid revivals of any school or movement in art. We have studied the various schools of painting and sculpture to arrive at a vigorous synthesis." And it was this group, which included artists like M.F. Hussain and S.H. Raza who came to define Modernism in post-independence India, perhaps more so than any other.

Across the Indian Ocean, Indonesia too was

engaged in its own nationalist movement through the early 20th century. Its fight for independence from Dutch colonial rule was compounded by the brief period of Japanese occupation amidst World War II. For the artists of this turbulent period in Indonesian history, modes of representation, debates on national identity, and the role of art in politics all came to the forefront of their practice. In the work of painter Basuki Abdullah, Prince Diponegoro, the 19th-century figure who fought colonial rule, came to be symbolised as a mighty nationalist hero, in the style of European history painting. And while romanticised landscapes and alluring women remained a theme in the work of both Indonesian and Western artists working in Indonesia at the time, it soon began to be ruptured by a new wave of artists. The Dutch artist Ries Mulder, who lived and worked in Indonesia in this transitory period, was instrumental in the formation of the Bandung school of artists, which melded Cubism and abstraction into their work.

Perhaps the most important artist to lay the foundation of Indonesian Modernism was Sindudarsono Sudjojono. A painter, poet, and critic who was an ardent nationalist and didn't shy away from incorporating political themes into his work, Sudjojono is widely regarded today as the 'Father of Indonesian Modernism'. Both through his own artistic work and through PERSAGI (an acronym for the Union of Indonesian Painters), Sudjojono played a lead role in bringing forth a nationalist, politically astute, and formally innovative style of Indonesian art of the time.

Session 4:

In the last session of the series, we tackled questions of affiliation, experimentation as well as contestation in the latter half of the 20th century. We began with the work of Affandi, an Indonesian artist who was also a contemporary of Sudjojono. But unlike Sudjojono, Affandi was a completely self-taught artist who encountered Western art much later in life. And yet, his work has a depth and presence that resonates across time. Especially poignant and striking are his portraits of his mother, and his depictions of the harsh political and economic realities of the lives of ordinary people in postcolonial Indonesia. Alongside Affandi, to see the work of Ahmad Sadali provided a fascinating parallel. Trained under Ries Mulder and part of the Bandung School of artists, Sadali's work was deeply influenced by abstract expressionism as well as Cubism. While Sadali's work, unlike Affandi, did not expressly confront political issues, Indonesian art more broadly was very much influenced and impacted by its political realities. In 1950, a group of artists, writers, and intellectuals founded the cultural and social movement, LEKRA (Abbreviated in Indonesian from Institute of People's Culture), in affiliation with the Indonesian Communist Party. Their manifesto from 1963 states, "For us, culture is the struggle to perfect (improve) conditions of human life (living conditions). We do not prioritise one cultural sector over another. Every sector struggles together for culture according to its nature." Perhaps the most remarkable artist associated with LEKRA was Hendra Gunawan, a painter, revolutionary and guerrilla fighter, who was imprisoned by the dictatorial Suharto regime

Affandi, *Mother inside the room,* 1949 Oil on canvas, 134 x 155 cm, Affandi Museum, Yogyakarta

and yet continued to paint even in prison.

After the end of the Second World War, Japan was left reeling from unimaginable devastation. In the years immediately following the end of the war, Japanese artists struggled to articulate the experience of the collective trauma of its people. In 1956, a new group of artists began to work with their own bodies and materials as both tools as well as concrete expressions of ideas. Calling themselves the *Gutai* group ('*gu*' – tool or means; '*tai*' – body or substance; '*gutai*' – concreteness), the group's 1956 manifesto read, "The art of the past now appears to us as a deception clothed with appearance that claims to have meaning. Let us put an end to these heaps of simulacra that clutter altars, palaces, salons, and antique shops. They are fraudulent ghosts that have taken on

the appearance of other materials through the magic of paints, fabrics, clay, metals, and marble, to which humans assign a senseless role … *Gutai* art does not change the material but brings it to life. *Gutai* art does not falsify the material. In *Gutai* art, the human spirit and the material reach out their hands to each other, even though they are otherwise opposed to each other. The material is not absorbed by the spirit. The spirit does not force the material into submission. If one leaves the material as it is, presenting it just as material, then it starts to tell us something and speaks with a mighty voice. Keeping the life of the material alive also means bringing the spirit alive and lifting up the spirit means leading the material up to the height of the spirit."

Two of the most intriguing artists of the *Gutai* group were Kazuo Shiraga and Atsuko Tanaka. While Kazuo Shiraga's practice was very much situated in masculine encounters with nature and material, particularly evident in the piece *Challenging Mud* (1955) where the artist wrestles with wet earth until either one can prevail, his contemporary Atsuko Tanaka's approach emerged from a desire to be one with material, and to aid it. In one of her most well-known pieces, titled '*Denkifuku' (Electric Dress)*, first shown in 1956, Atsuko Tanaka performed wearing a gown made of electric lights, in what could only have been a gruelling physical experience, to become a single unit with her material.

Apart from the *Gutai* group, we also looked at another contemporary movement, named *Mono-ha*, which roughly translates to 'Encounter with Being'. In a 1969 text on fellow *Mono-ha* artist Sekine Nobu, Lee Ufan writes, "Since time immemorial, the world is always completely fulfilled 'as it is'. Man, however, cannot see the world that exists as it is 'as it is', because of the heightened workings of his own consciousness of standing before the world…. Yet among these goings-on, one lone 'Happener' unveiled a near-miraculous different world." Both Lee Ufan and Sekine Nobu worked to explore the encounter between natural and industrial materials, and the tensions that existed at their intersections. A particularly memorable piece was Sekine Nobu's *Phase of Nothingness*, a polished steel tower holding up an enormous rock, which when seen from a particular angle, reflects the environment around it, making it appear as though the rock is afloat in mid-air. Another prominent artist associated with Mono-ha was Yayoi Kusama, an artist who remains one of the most important contemporary artists in the world to this day.

The final group Prof. Sambrani introduced to us was 'Group 1890', a group of Indian artists including Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, Jagdish Swaminathan, and Jyoti Bhatt among others who worked collaboratively for a brief period of time in the 1960s. Although they only held one exhibition together in 1963, it was their manifesto that stood out in our subsequent class discussion. In it, J. Swaminathan writes of the history of modern art thus far in India, "from its early beginnings in the vulgar naturalism of raja ravi verma [sic] and the pastoral idealism of the bengal school, down through hybrid mannerisms resulting from the imposition of concepts evolved by successive art movements in modern european art on classical, miniature and folk style to the flight into 'abstraction' in the name of cosmopolitanism, tortured alternately by memories of a glorious past born out of a sense of futility in the face of a dynamic present and the urge to catch up with the times so as to merit recognition, modern indian art has by and large been inhibited by the self-defeating purposiveness of its attempts at establishing identity." Intentionally written completely in lowercase, the manifesto is a searing assessment; however, it ends with a note of defiant optimism of the power of art, and its meaning to the artists who create it, for it states, "art is neither conformity to reality nor a flight from it. it is reality itself, a whole new world of experience, the threshold for the passage into the state of freedom."

It is somewhat of a miracle that a subject of this magnitude, the history of modern art in Europe and Asia could be covered in a mere four sessions without being overwhelming or too dense. It is a testament to Prof. Sambrani's ability as a teacher and scholar to be able to lead us through this complex terrain full of contradictions, conflicting narratives, untold as well as forgotten stories, and a scale of art that is truly breathtaking. ***– A.T.***

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Free Public Lecture | April 4th, 2023 | Tea: 6:00 PM, Lectures: 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST
Platform: Physical with Live Streaming on Zoom

Comparative Classics: On Greek and Indian Epic Poetry

Phiroze Vasunia (Professor of Greek at University College London)

'In the beginning was the word.' This paper reflects on ancient Greek and Sanskrit epic poetry (the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Mahabharata*, and *Ramayana*). We look at the beginnings of the poems and reflect on the linked themes of grief, pain, and poetry. The *Iliad* begins with the anger of Achilles, for instance, and the *Ramayana* with the anguish of 'Valmiki'. Both epic traditions imply that song and poetic traditions begin in grief, pain, and trauma. Why should this be the case? Why does verse have to come from suffering? We look at the poems comparatively and see how each helps us appreciate the themes of the other.

Freud's Antiquity: Object, Idea, Desire

Miriam Leonard (Professor of Greek Literature and its Reception at University College London)

Anyone stepping into Freud's study in London will be immediately struck by the vast array of figurines, books and artwork on display that either originate from, or are inspired by, the ancient world. Freud read more books on archaeology than on psychology, and he drew continued inspiration from the fields of anthropology and classical studies. Whilst many of Freud's concepts - the Oedipus complex, repression, penis envy - have entered the everyday life of numerous languages, only a tiny fraction of the broader public has any idea that Freud's theories emerged out of an intense engagement with 19th-century archaeology. This paper takes a close look at the 'archaeological metaphor' in Freud's thought.

Creative Processes

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Sharjah Biennial 15: "Thinking Historically in the Present": India at the Sharjah Biennial - Situating 12 Participating Artists

April 27th, 2023, Tea: 6:00 PM | Lecture - 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Physical Only at Jnanapravaha Mumbai

Introduction on the premise of the Sharjah Biennial 15 by **Shireen Gandhy** (Director, Chemould Prescott Road) along with a presentation of artists in the biennial.

Followed by presentations by Anju Dodiya, Prajakta Potnis and Reena Kallat (Artists present in Mumbai)

Artists of the Sharjah Biennial 15

Amar Kanwar
Anju Dodiya
Archana Hande
Lavanya Mani
Mithu Sen
Nelly Sethna
Nilima Sheikh
Pablo Bartholomew
Prajakta Potnis
Reena Saini Kallat
Varunika Saraf
Vivan Sundaram

The event will be an in-situ live one, in collaboration with Chemould Prescott Road and Sharjah Biennial 15.

Curatorial Processes

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

In the Mood: Exhibiting Udaipur's Paintings of Place

May 1st, 2023, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Debra Diamond (Curator for South & Southeast Asian Art at the Freer Gallery of Art & the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, The Smithsonian's National Museum) and Dr. Dipti Khera (Associate Professor in the Department of Art History and the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University)

Online Lecture | Platform: Zoom

A Splendid Land: Paintings from Royal Udaipur, November 19, 2022-May 14, 2023, National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Presented in collaboration with The City Palace Museum in Udaipur administered by The Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation. Photo: Colleen Dugan

Around 1700, artists in Udaipur (a court in northwest India) began creating immersive paintings that express the moods *(bhava)* of the city's palaces, lakes, and mountains. These large works and their emphasis on lived experience constituted a new direction in Indian painting. With dazzling paintings on paper and cloth—many on public view for the first time—the exhibition *A Splendid Land* reveals the environmental, political, and emotional contexts in which the new genre emerged. It explores the unique visual strategies that artists developed to communicate emotions, depict places, and celebrate water resources.

The exhibition is organised as a journey that begins at Udaipur's centre and continues outward: first its lakes and lake palaces, then to the city, onward to the surrounding countryside, and finally to the cosmos. A side trip immerses visitors in the emotions surrounding the monsoon, the annual rains so crucial to Mewar's prosperity. Throughout, a soundscape by the renowned filmmaker Amit Dutta invites audiences to fully sense—and not just see—the moods of these extraordinary places and paintings.

Announcements

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN INDIAN AESTHETICS

July 2023 – April 2024 | Typically Saturdays 2:00 to 6:00 pm

Hybrid mode: PHYSICAL & ONLINE | Online Platform: Zoom

Plaque with Winged Kamadeva?
Chandraketugarh
Sungha, c. 2nd century BCE
Terracotta, 22 x 10.5 cm

Introduced in 1999, Jnanapravaha Mumbai's academic, year-long Postgraduate Diploma/ Certificate course in Indian Aesthetics (IA) examines the historical development of visual forms in context, employing the disciplines of art history, archaeology, architecture, anthropology, literature and philosophy. The course traverses 5,000 years of Indian visual art, including pre-modern, modern, and contemporary forms as well as popular traditions, to illuminate aesthetic trajectories in the sub-continent. Internationally renowned scholars introduce students to this art, ensuring a material, geographical, historical, social and cultural base that is broad and extensively representative. In keeping with JPM's mission, the course has evolved over the years to include topics of current research.

For admission, you are required to submit:
A digital copy each of your last degree certificate, CV, short bio (100 words) and passport-size photograph.

Fee structure:
Diploma (subject to writing and attendance) – Rs. 60,000 | Certificate (subject to attendance) – Rs. 50,000

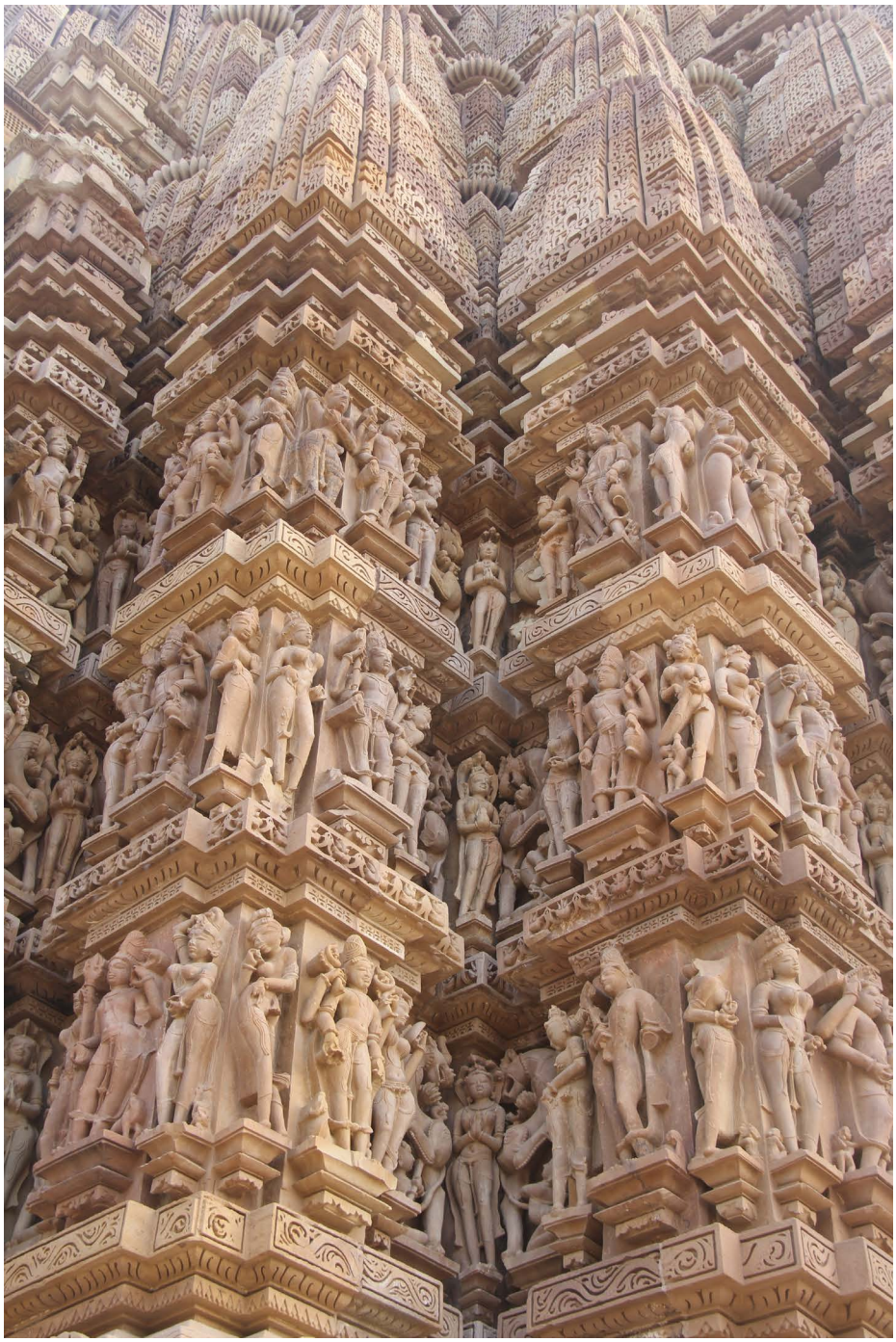
Registration: www.jp-india.org

INDIAN TEMPLES

A semester-long certificate course offering fresh insights based on latest research findings

August 10th – November 16th, 2023 | Mainly Wednesdays 6:30 to 8:30 pm IST

Online Platform: Zoom



Khajuraho_Temple-Madhya_Pradesh- Image courtesy - Wiki Commons

Faculty Scholars:

Adam Hardy
Arathi Menon
Crispin Branfoot
Heeryoon Shin
Jennifer Joffee
Katherine Kasdorf
Lisa Owen
Nachiket Chanchani
Padma Kaimal
Pia Brancaccio
Pushkar Sohoni
Subhashini Kaligotla
Tamara Sears
Vidya Dehejia

Curated by: Dr. Neeraja Poddar

Supported by: Jai & Sugandha Hiremath-Hikal Ltd.

More details will be made available on our website in May 2023

Fee structure:
Certificate (subject to attendance) –
Rs. 16,000

Jnanapravaha Mumbai is deeply indebted to the following for their support:

BENEFACTORS

Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation
Vineeta & Arvind Kanoria
Dipak & Rohitashwa Poddar
Saroj Poddar, Adventz Group Of Companies
Madan & Usha Sethi
Sohni & Dipak Tanna

PATRONS

Vinod Doshi, Echjay Industries (CSR) Foundation
Dhruv Khaitan, Trustee, Kumudini Devi Khaitan Samvedna Trust
Dilip Piramal, VIP Industries Ltd.

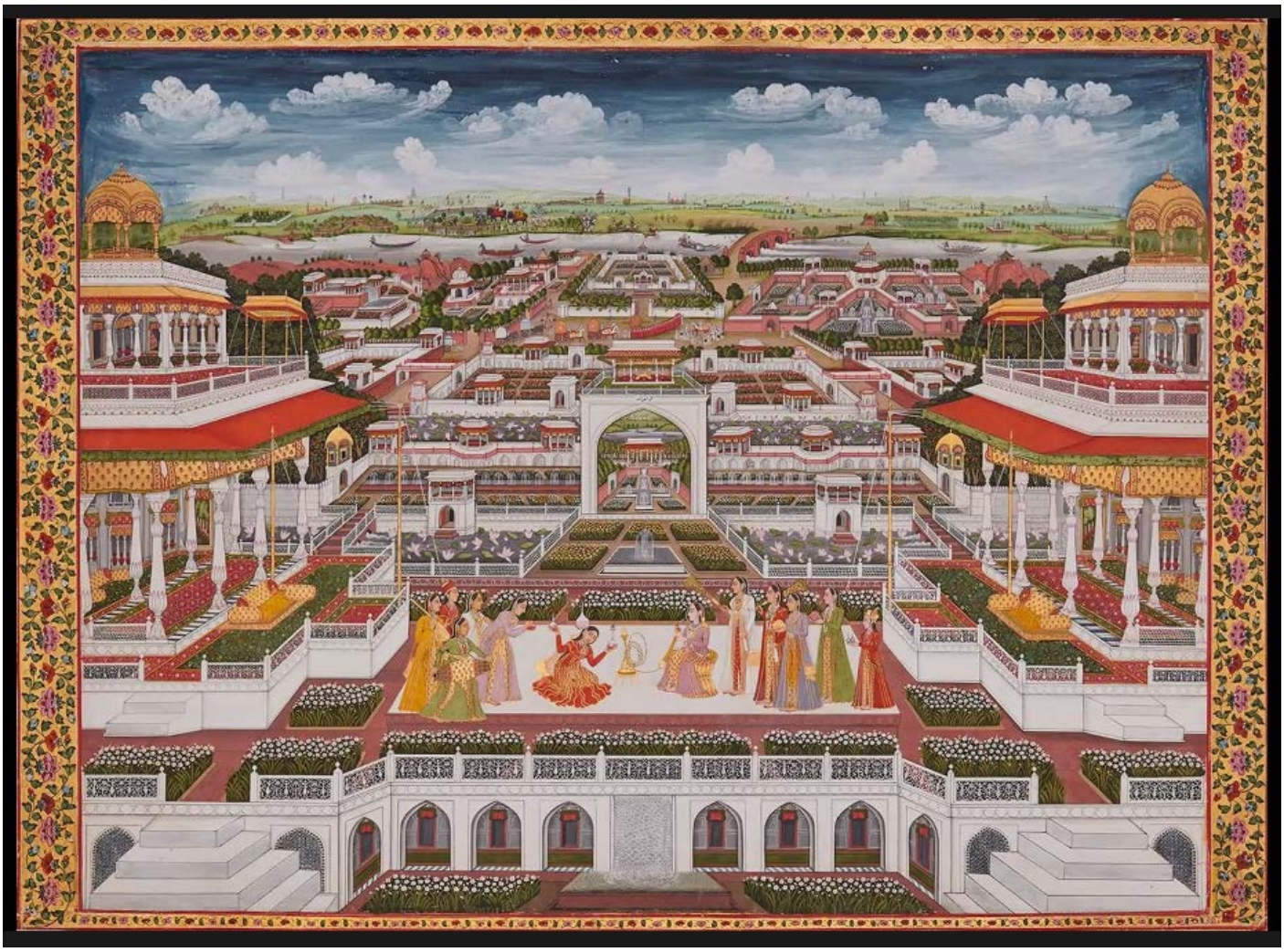
PARTNERS

Shekhar Bajaj, Bajaj Electricals Ltd.
Minakshi & Shishir Bajaj
Avantika & Puneet Dalmia, Avanee Foundation
Deccan Heritage Foundation
Poddar Foundation
Jai & Sugandha Hiremath, Hikal Ltd.
Rochna & Tarang Jain, Varroc Foundation
Priyam & Gayatri Jhaveri
Ajay & Vandana Kanoria, Asiatic Oxygen Ltd.
Anurag Kanoria
Deepak & Smita Parekh, HDFC Ltd.
Maithili Parekh & Shashank Singh
Aditya Ruia
Shamina Talyarkhan
Bahram & Arti Vakil
Dayanita Singh

FRIENDS

Lolita Shivdasani

Jnanapravaha is a registered Trust. Contributions qualify for 80G benefits. We are eligible for CSR contributions, as specified in the Companies Act (2013), and have been awarded FCRA clearance from the Government of India. For further information, please contact our support team at support@jp-india.org.



We know we have made a difference. Our endeavour to encourage and facilitate pedagogy meaningfully continues with the firm belief that the humanities are indispensable to the well-being of the community and the individual.

*****

Contributors to the Quarterly:

AT - Adira Thekkuveettil
BP - Bhavna Pundir
JK –Jaya Kanoria
MG - Meghna Gill
PP - Prajakti Pai

Text Editor: Suchita Parikh-Mundul

Design and Layout: Sharon Rodrigues

*****

Queens Mansion, 3rd Floor, G. Talwatkar Marg,
Fort, Mumbai - 400001. India.
www.jp-india.com
Facebook: JnanapravahaAtMumbai
Twitter: @Jnanapravaha_M
Instagram: Jnanapravaha_Mumbai