

## 12

# Pioneers of Contemporary Art Movements in India

### 12.0 INTRODUCTION

When Indians lost their war of independence in 1857, India became a British colony. At that moment, art movement succeeded in weaning away the young painters to the strong influence of British naturalism and classical western art, but it soon lost its relevance. The age-old themes derived from epics and classical literature, so popular among the Bengal School artists, did not remain relevant to the needs of a changing society. The Indian people on the one hand were reeling under the British oppression and on the other hand were trying to throw away the yoke of slavery. They were struggling to usher in an era of independence, of self-respect and self-determination in socio-economic and political spheres. The need was felt for an art form which reflected the mood of a changing society.

### 12.1 OBJECTIVES

After studying this module, learner will be able to:

- Describe the evolution of Bengal School art.
- State the name of artists, methods and material, sizes, themes and places of enlisted paintings.
- Tell the title of enlisted paintings of the period.
- Identify the art of Bengal School painting from other paintings.



While travelling into India, British brought prints of paintings from Europe. The availability of European prints provided Indian artists new modes of expression and new ways of looking at problems of naturalistic representation. This European component in Mughal painting was a lasting contribution that filtered through into the later regional schools from which Company artists were recruited. Many of the traditional artists got opportunities to see them at work. It was in this informal and un-programmed way that the Indian artists of, what has been called the Company School of painting, gained some skill in the Western type of realism. When this change was taking place arose one artist who became the legend of Indian paintings of modern era in the form of Ravi Varma (1848-1906)



## 12.2 RAVANA AND JATAYU

Title	–	<i>Ravana and Jatayu</i>
Artist	–	<i>Raja Ravi Varma</i>
Medium	–	<i>Oil</i>
Style	–	<i>European</i>
Collection	–	<i>National Museum; New Delhi</i>

### General Description

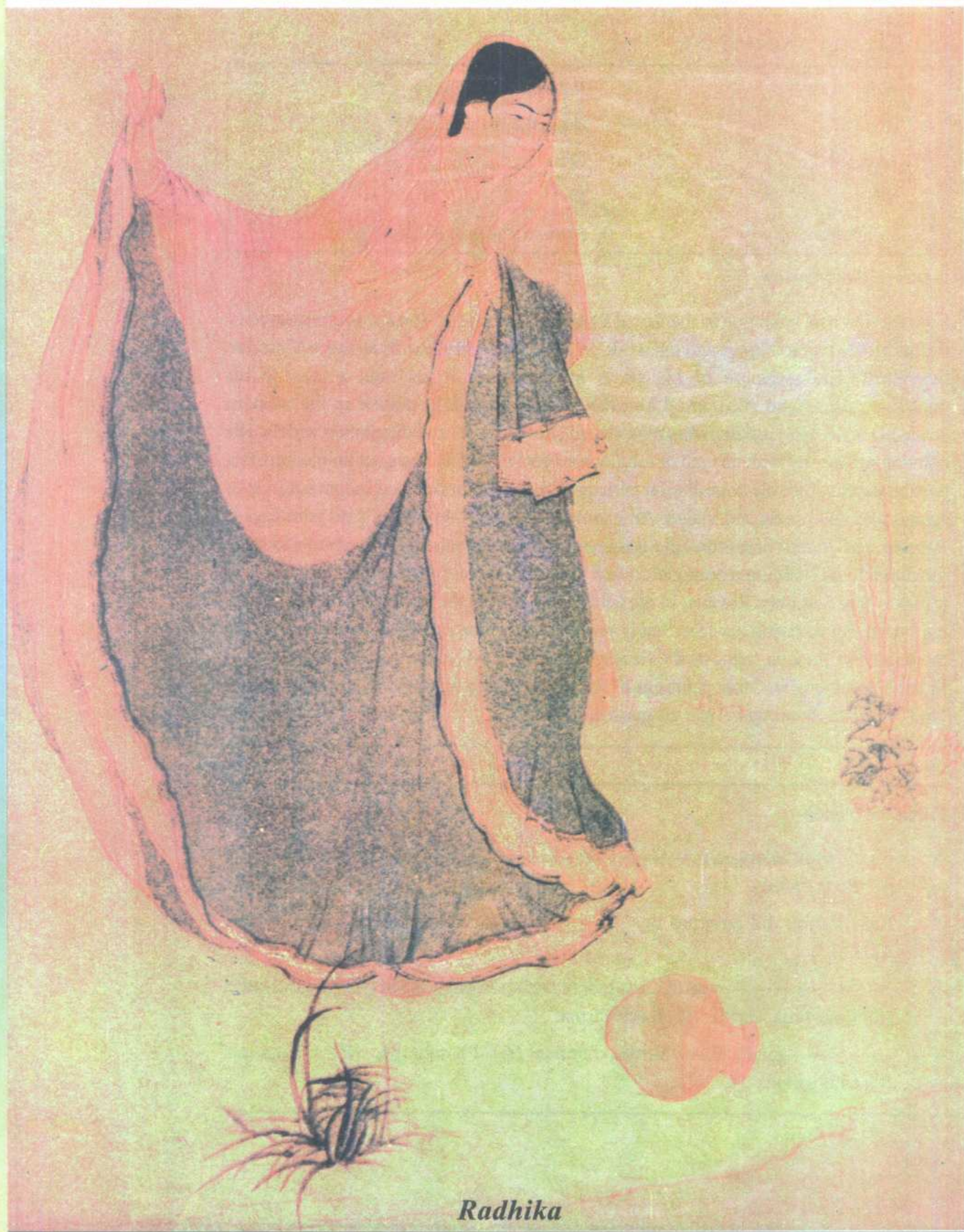
Raja Ravi Varma belonged to the Royal family of Travancore (on the south west coast of India). He painted in oil and his work, in a late Neo-classical style, has a Victorian heaviness. The staginess of his art is much clearer to us than it was to his contemporaries, who considered him the most outstanding painter in the western academic style. His painting were reproduced in oleographs and distributed widely. His painting are mostly with an epic or religious subject matter. He was not an incompetent portrait painter, his sole contribution perhaps is that he re-introduced Indian subjects as sacred national ideals and vision. An example of Raja Ravi Varma's oil paintings is *Ravana and Jatayu* based on epic Ramayan. Varma reveals here his ability to seize movement and build up a composition on the principle of dynamic balance. Jatayu is trying to free Sita from Ravana. In the act Ravana has cut the right wing of Jatayu with his sword. By covering her face Sita is avoiding to see the cruelty of *Ravana*. Upward movement of *Ravana* suggests the fleeing with *Sita*. Ravi Varma perpetuated a kind of Indian feminine type. Other paintings of Raja Ravi Varma '*Harishchandra*', '*Bhusma's Vow*', '*Hansa Damayanti*' are all good examples.

### IN-TEXT QUESTIONS (12.2)

Fill in the blanks-

1. Ravi Varma belonged to \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Artist family (B) Royal Family (C) Poor Family.
2. Ravi Varma did painting in \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Water colour, (B) Tempera, (C) Oil.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ was the first Indian painter to paint in Oil (A) Alagiri Naidu, (B) Raja Raja Varma, (C) Ravi Varma.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ made Ravi Varma famous (A) Photograph, (B) Oleograph, (C) Lithograph.





*Radhika*



### 12.3 BENGAL SCHOOL

Abanindranath Tagore, a member of famous Tagore family of Calcutta, wanted to develop a form of art which could be identified as Indian art and at the same time contemporary in style. His studio in the balcony of Tagor's place at Jorasanko became the centre of this art movement and around him gradually built up the Bengal School, including such artists as Nandalal Bose, Sarade Ukil, Asit Kumar Haldar, Chughtai and others. Several of these were appointed Principals of art schools in different parts of the country and spread the style of Abanindranath, which is known as Bengal School style of Art.

In the Art Schools at Bombay (now Mumbai), Madras, (now Chennai) Kolkata and Lahore which had been established by - the British, the western art education used to be given in which water colour and oil paint techniques were taught in western styles. For some time Abanindranath worked as a teacher in Kolkata Art School and made arrangement for teaching Indian classical art. Thus he was able to generate a great interest in the young students for the Indian Classical art. Undoubtedly the Indian sentiments were deeply rooted in the Bengal School.

The characteristics and the themes of Bengal School are reflected in the historical, religious literary paintings etc. the most significant characteristic of Bengal School is in its colour system which is known by "wash" technique.

Bengal School could make its impression on the contemporary Indian art for a limited period because the young artists of next generation mostly started being influenced by the then prevailing social and political conditions.

### 12.4 RADHIKA

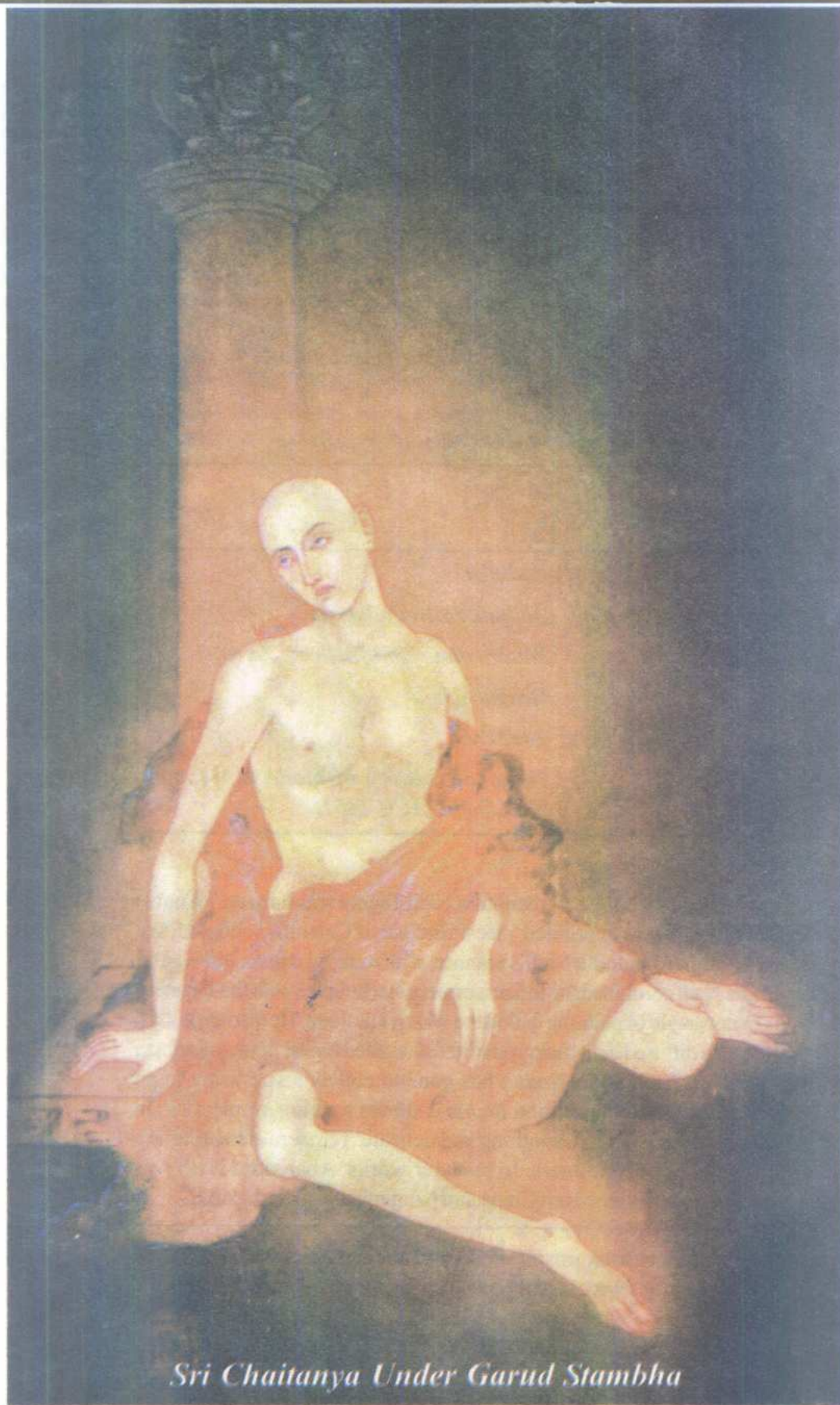
Title	– Radhika
Artist	– Abanindranath Tagore
Medium	– Water colour and Wash on Paper
Style	– Bengal School
Size	– 14x21 cm
Collection	– National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi (ACC 1861)

#### General Description

The foremost pioneer of Bengal School, Sri Abanindranath Tagore was born on 7 August 1871. In 1905, Abanindranath was appointed Vice-Principal of Calcutta School of Art. Younger artists began to adopt Abanindranath's manner, with its tepid colour and wistful sentimentality. Abanindranath combined the Indian tempera - techniques with the Japanese water colour evolving a new style of painting called the wash technique. He also evolved a mystic and mellow style with diffused light background and elongated lyrical figures. Radhika is an example of Abanindranath style. Radha has gone to collect some water in an earthen pot from river. In a simple composition Radha is shown wearing a typical sari in Bengalee style. The figure is very natural, soothing and delicate. Tempera also became a popular medium of Bengal School painters. In his later works Abanindranath was influenced by calligraphist and painters from China and paint makers from Japan.

Students of Bengal School took inspiration from ancient epics classical literature; their compositions were usually based on the format of Rajput and Pahari paintings.





*Sri Chaitanya Under Garud Stambha*

### IN-TEXT QUESTIONS (12.4)

Fill in the blanks:-

- (1) The new style of painting evolved by Abanindra Nath is called as \_\_\_\_\_.
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_ is an example of Abanindra Nath Style.
- (3) Abanindra Nath was influenced by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ from China and paint makers of Japan.

### 12.5 SRI CHAITANYA UNDER GARUD STAMBHA

Title	–	<i>Sri Chaitanya under Garud Stambha</i>
Artist	–	<i>Nandlal Bose</i>
Medium	–	<i>Wash and Tempera on Paper</i>
Style	–	<i>Bengal School</i>
Size	–	<i>22.8 x 40 cm</i>
Collection	–	<i>National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi (ACC 4791)</i>

#### General Description

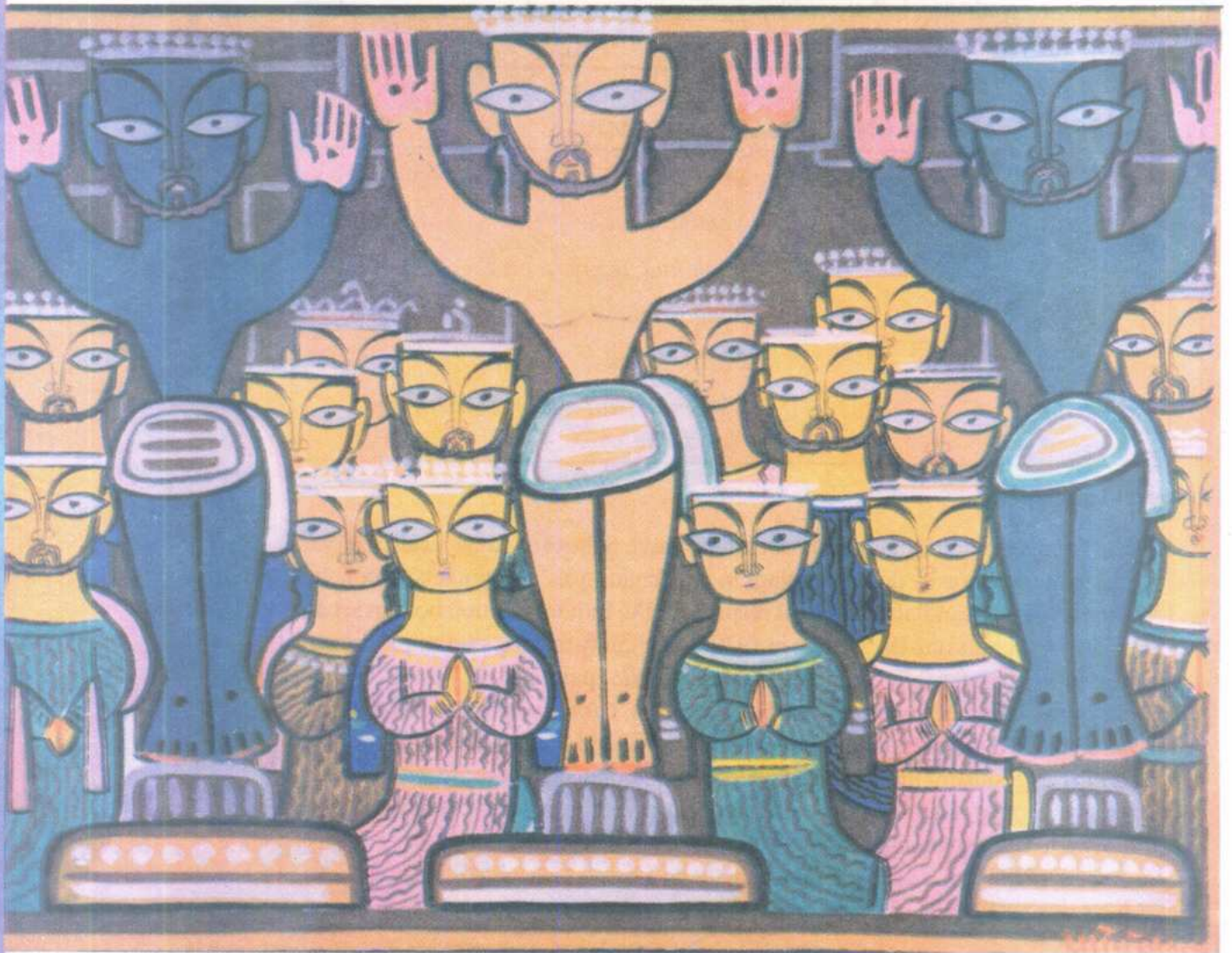
Abanindra Nath's disciple Nandlal Bose learnt at Govt. School of Art & Craft, Calcutta and extended the tradition by doing paintings in a different style. Shantiniketan flourished under Nandlal Bose. Nandlal had a great respect for the Indian tradition both in art and life. He visited Ajanta and the Bagh caves in 1920-21, carefully making studies and drawing of the murals which later reflected in his works. *Nandlal painted Sri Chaitanya under Garud Stambha* in mixed medium (wash & tempera). *Chaitanya* in grief is reclining against a pillar. He is supporting his body with his right hand. Part of his body is covered with a cloth. The gesture of limbs suggests depression. Longish fingers are with feminine delicacy. On the top of pillar Garud-the carrier of Lord Vishnu, is sitting. A devine light is pouring down to Chaitanya suggesting the blessings.

### IN-TEXT QUESTIONS (12.5)

Circle the correct word:-

1. Art schools were established by (A) EB Havell, (B) British, (C) Abanindra Nath
2. Nandlal Bose followed (A) EB Habell (B) Gogonendra Nath, (C) Abanindra Nath
3. Nandlal Bose learnt at (A) Govt. School of Art, & Craft calcutta (B) Art School of Mumbai (C) Art School of Madras.





**Crucifixion**



## 12.6 CRUCIFIXION

<i>Title</i>	–	<i>Crucifixion</i>
<i>Artist</i>	–	<i>Jamini Roy</i>
<i>Medium</i>	–	<i>Tempera on cloth</i>
<i>Style</i>	–	<i>Folk Art</i>
<i>Size</i>	–	<i>88.5 x 66.5 cm</i>
<i>Collection</i>	–	<i>National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi (ACC 157)</i>

### General Description

Jamini Roy developed his own style rejecting both Bengal School and western style. His style is based on Bengal Folk art form. Jamini Roy was born in April 1882 at Baliatore District Bankura in Bengal. When Jamini Roy was sixteen years of age, he was sent to Kolkata (Calcutta) to study painting. Though he was trained in western techniques but instead of using western facilities he reduced to seven colours which he prepared with local earth colours crushed in tamarind glue or in the white of the egg. For the greys, he used the mud of river; for the vermilion he took from the ritual composition used by women; blue is just the simple indigo and white lime. And when he required black, it was the modest black of soot that he employed. In the preparation of his canvas he used cowdung. In his paintings he portrayed all the activities of the people. He expressed religious scenes, strange ritual dances etc. Jamini used the traditional tempera technique. His sources of inspiration were the pata-chitras of Kalighat and terracotta toys of Bankura. His paintings show a remarkable economy of lines, simplicity of drawing and solidity in his compositions. The art of Jamini Roy, however, does not limit itself to the face of India; it has sometimes searched for inspiration from outside countries. It resulted in strange portrait of Christ. Crucifixion is the resemblance with those painted in Byzantium and is an astonishing painting. This painting in tempera on paper shows the event of crucifixion of Christ. Amongst three figures, two right and left side figures are painted in dark colours thus giving the importance to the central figure. In the background a number of followers are praying with folded hands. The mood of the entire painting is grief.



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**IN TEXT QUESTION (12.6)**

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Choose the correct word:-

1. Jamini Roy used (A) Natural colours, (B) British colours, (C) Wash Colours
  2. Jamini was born in (A) April 1882, (B) June 1838. (C) July 1882
  3. Jamini Roy used the traditional (A) Tempera Technique (B) Acrylic Colours (C) Oil Colours
  4. The mood of Jamini Roy's Crucifixion is (A) Joy, (B) Horror (C) Grief.
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**12.7 SUMMARY**

After the negligence of Indian art by the later Mughals, the new rulers emerged as artists. Ravi Varma born in a princely family of Kilimanoor near Travancore. Raja Ravi Varma painted in oil and in a style that was akin to academic realism. Both means and methods were European. He was popularized through the oleographs issued by his press established in Bombay.

The greatest contribution of the Bengal School was restoring the pride of educated people in their rich cultural heritage and weaning them away from thoughtless imitation of British art and western cultural influences. Thus the Bengal School succeeded in bringing the painters, sculptors, poets and musicians into the mainstream of the Indian Art.

The painters, who started their career under the guidance of masters of Bengal School, were soon exposed to the art of Impressionists and the Expressionists of Europe. This exposure opened up new dimensions of pictorial arts to them. They started experimenting with new mediums, themes and techniques. Their paintings started reflecting a new sense of freedom and a great individual thrust. Artists rejected the romanticism and lyricism of Bengal School and moved over to working on themes which were relevant to the changing socio-political conditions of the country. These painters and sculptors are called the radicals of Bengal School.



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**12.8 MODEL QUESTIONS**

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Give brief description of the following:

1. What was the purpose of East India Company to recruit the Indian artists?
2. Describe the themes of Ravi Varma's paintings?
3. Write on Abanindranath's Painting 'Radhika'.
4. Describe the painting 'Chaitanya under Guard Stambha'.

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**12.9 ANSWERS OF IN-TEXT QUESTIONS:**

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12.2 : 1B, 2C, 3C, 4B

12.4 : (1) Wash-techniques, (2) Radhika, (3) Calligraphist, painters.

12.5 : 1C, 2C, 3A

12.6 : 1A, 2A, 3A, 4C



### 12.10 GLOSSARY:

Neo-classical style	- European style of painting and sculpture developed from mid 18th through the mid 19th centuries.
Naturalism	- technique of rendering an artistic subject so as to reproduce its natural appearance in detail.
Epics	- a poetic composition
Realism	- treatment of forms, colours, space etc, as they appear in actuality.
Victorian	- painting, sculptures done in Europe during the reign of Queen Victoria.
Contemporary	- then existing, same age
Academic style	- style followed by the curriculum prescribed by Britisher. Engraving/etching/lithograph-all printing process.
Calligraphist	- person who knows the art of writing beautifully.
Shantiniketan	- place situated in West Bengal. Rabindranath Tagore made this place as a centre of art and literature.
Ajanta	- situated near Aurangabad (Maharashtra) and famous for fresco painting.
Bankura	- situated in West Bengal, famous for terracotta temples.
Byzantium	- an ancient Greek city.
Forums	- groups
Mellow	- soft
Vermilion	- Red colour