

Analyzing the Connection between Art and Politics during the Indian Nationalist Movement

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 15 May 2019

Keywords

Art, politics, Nationalist movement.

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ABSTRACT

This study is conducted with an objective to find out the association between art and politics through the history of the Nationalist movement in India. Any workmanship creation, which is consigned to popular assessment, becomes a weapon in the social or political battle. In the twentieth century, English guideline with western leaning had over-smothered Indian's opportunity of self-articulation. In this interim, Indians frantically felt an urgency for nationalistic development. To accomplish this objective of the nationalist movement and to bring the fundamental changes, Indian artist used their artworks as a medium and as a weapon. "Swadeshi movement" was an essential part of the freedom movement in order to develop the patriotic fervour in India. This paper focuses on three extraordinary artists, including Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, and Chittaprosad and in their revolutionary artworks. The artworks of these artists explored new paths in Indian art and also promoted the spirit of the Nationalist movement, which was prerequisite for the Indian political situation during the twentieth century. These three artists painted the daily life of the commoners with the utmost simplicity that brought forth the self-sufficiency of Indian culture. Their artworks further encapsulated the continuous struggle of the common mass in India that made their works highly political with a socialist-realist approach that is quite relevant to the modern contemporary global art scenario.

1. Introduction

Politics is an exercise concerning the administration on the general public, nation or region. The characteristic of art and politics are not quite the same in nature. However, they are interrelated in the context of their advancement. Any workmanship creation relating to popular assessment becomes a weapon in the social or political battle. Despite the fact that the artist has an extremely delicate personality, the challenges and rebel against the disgrace and persecution move them profoundly. In a memorable period, when numerous artists consolidate with a unique sensibility, it will transform into a movement all alone, and this will achieve the basic man's central core.

The British rule was anything but a pounding diary for Indians because it plundered Indians to a considerable measure that offering them profits. Britishers utilised Indian craftsman and their abilities to build up their Colonial rule. In the twentieth century, English guideline with western leanings had over smothered Indian's opportunity of self-articulation. The same wonder occurred in each range of Indian craftsmanship, culture, society, legislative issues, and the economy. In this interim, Indians frantically felt the urgency for the nationalistic development. To accomplish the objective of the nationalist movement and to bring the fundamental changes, Indian artist utilised their artworks as a medium and as a weapon. Details of their endeavours are mentioned below:

"Swadeshi movement" is an essential part of Indian patriot development. It urged Indian individuals to quit utilising English items and to utilise their own handcrafted items, which became an extremely fruitful strategy to re-establish the Indian legacy and economy. Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Binod Bihari Mukherjee, Ramkinkar Baij, Zainul Abedin, Chittaprosad, Somnath Hore are the few names

whose fine arts set an example in Swadeshi movement. This paper focuses on three (Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, and Chittaprosad) extraordinary artists and their revolutionary artworks.

2. The objective of the Study:

The main objectives of this research paper are to develop an understanding of the relationship between art and politics through the history of the Nationalist movement in India. Besides, this paper tends to discuss the political atmosphere of India during the Indian Nationalist Movement and also identifies the effects of a political movement in art and culture during this period. This study also focuses on the roles of artworks and artists in the changing political scenario of India during the Swadeshi movement. It studies the role of Indian artist in bringing forth socio-political concern during the Indian Nationalist Movement. The Nationalist movement in India certainly has its political impact on the contemporary artists of that time, and these artists demonstrate their patriotic fervour through their artworks.

3. Research Methodology:

A descriptive approach has been taken up for conducting this research study. This research study is based on secondary data that is collected from various sources, including books, journals, magazines and websites.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

The filthy political decision by Lord Curzon to partition Bengal in 1905, led to the rising of the "Swadeshi movement" firstly in Bengal, and soon the ideology of Swadeshi began to revive the Indian art. To oppose the partition, contemporary artists of that time created some mass popular paintings which have directly influenced political thinking's common people. (Sharman, www.theheritagelab.in) Mahatma Gandhi

used art as the tools of protest and as a means for promoting the national awareness of self-sufficiency in his non-violent movement during the Indian independence movement.

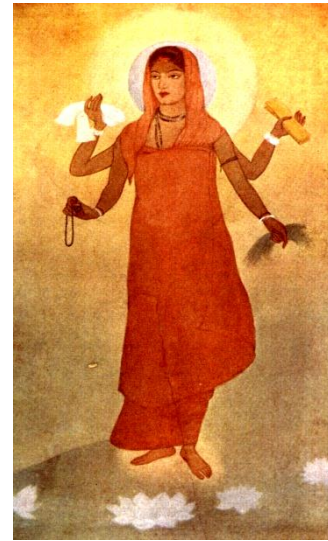
On the other hand, some artist blurred the line between art and politics for the common mass of India by depicting the scenario of common people's miserable plight which had a direct bearing with the contemporary political decision (Churchill's decision and Bengal famine). Indeed, the Nationalist movement in India had a major political impact on the contemporary artists of that time that was highly reflected in their works. The artworks of these artists assisted in developing the patriotic fervour among the common mass of India.

4.1. Abanindranath Tagore:

Abanindranath Tagore arguably was one of the most influential artists of the "Swadeshi movement". The impact of his Indian style within a pan-Asian aesthetic of paintings in the revival of Bengal school of art was unparalleled. He explored new paths in Indian art to promote the spirit of the nationalist movement, which was the fundamental demand of the Indian political situation during the twentieth century. The motives of the Swadeshi movement was to reject the western cannons in every possible way, and the Indian intellectuals took this movement to another level by rejecting western art and aesthetic. Abanindranath was trained in the western tradition of painting, but gradually he started doubting in the potential of western art and produced works of art that were socially impactful. He was reluctant to use oils and pastels and was in favour of watercolour and the Japanese brush stroke technique for his artworks in order to incorporate with the premise of Swadeshi movement. Mughal, Rajasthani, and Ajanta style, known as Bengal 'School of Art' was loftily revived to oppose the western style.

4.2. "Bharat Mata" a symbol of the nationalist movement:

Around the climax of the Swadeshi movement, especially after the partition of Bengal in 1905, Abanindranath Tagore made his most famous iconic painting "Bharat Mata" which exemplified the highest value of Indian art. Yashodhara Dalmia describes this painting as, "The water-colour depicts an ethereal female figure in a sari emerging from swathes of mist, carrying in her four hands emblems of nationalist aspiration—food, clothing, learning, and spiritual knowledge. The multiple arms, the halo, and the lotuses at her feet appear to emphasise divine transcendence as she became the first icon for the nation that had to undergo penance to free itself from the foreign yoke."(Dalmia, 23) Tapati Guha-Thakurta evaluates, "...more than any other; this painting firmly fixed the epithet 'nationalist' to his recreation of Indian-style."(Guha-Thakurta,255) So, there is no doubt that 'Bharat Mata' is considered as the most nationalist or political or Swadeshi painting of this period. Hence, the above artwork imbued with Swadeshi elements in the form of 'Bharat Mata' simultaneously affirmed Abanindranath Tagore's inclination towards the contemporary movement of nationalism.



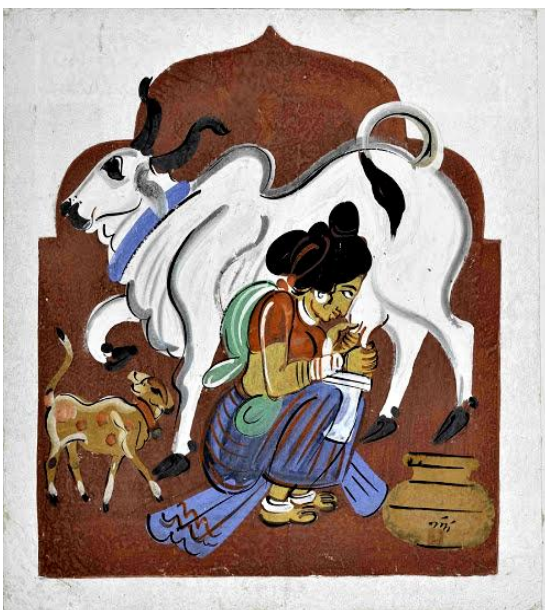
Abanindranath Tagore, *Bharat Mata*, 1905, watercolour paint. Source: Internet

4.3. Nandalal Bose:

As an apprentice of Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, who was profoundly inspired by Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi's ideology stimulated a countenance of modern Indian art. During Swadeshi movement every nationalist of India mainly 'father of the nation'- Gandhi and 'Kobi guru'- Rabindranath Tagore had their common aspiration to inspire the general masses and the artist of India to encourage the hand skills and to keep alive the fundamental sources of their cultural heritage. The spirit of independence was to organise the Indians into a potent political compels at every stage of their lives. As a follower of these two ascetics, Nandalal's core motivation of his artworks was "art for the community" and "collective art initiative". His early sagaciousness of Indian art through the perusal of Ajanta and Bagh murals, mediaeval paintings of the Jain, Rajput and Mughal miniatures, Kalighat pot paintings and far Eastern art. had earned him tremendous success, and he also contributed in the development of an aesthetical sense of national identity through his artworks. Mahatma Gandhi was a great admirer of Nandalal Bose because he had the ability to make an aesthetic account with the simplest materials of the contiguous. He successfully overcame the miserable obligation of the contemporary Indian economic and political situation of the British Raj. He became the inspirational persona of the Indian nationalist movement. In 1936 Mahatma Gandhi for the first time requested Nandalal Bose to acquire the accountability of organising and directing the decorations and execute an appropriate visual demonstration for the Lucknow Congress. He successfully accomplished his responsibilities in the Lucknow Congress convention that was followed by the Faizpur session of the Congress. Gandhi once again convinced Nandalal to take responsibilities of Haripura Congress convention. (Dinkar,n.p.)



Nandalal Bose, Rhythm of Life, Haripura Posters



First displayed: 1938, Congress session, Gujarat.

4.4. "Haripura Congress" convention

In Haripura Congress convention Nandalal Bose made a distinction between the rural life and culture of India. He painted the daily life of the ordinary people with a simplicity which brought to mind the self-sufficiency of Indian culture. He depicted subjects like Hunters, Musicians, Bull Handlers, Carpenter, Smiths, Spinner, Husking women and modest scenes of rural life including animal rearing, child-nursing and cooking. These were very thoughtful reasons for Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the Congress party to use the murals and poster paintings. Images had the advantage over written pamphlets because they could also reach to the illiterates and thus, the application of these to the pandal became part of public space. As K.G. Subramanyan confers about Haripura posters... "All the same, art did not figure prominently in Gandhi's list of priorities. His main objective was to strengthen the self-assurance of the Indian people and motivate them to fight for their independence with his methods of non-violent action that called for enormous physical and mental courage.

Then educate them in the values they needed to uphold in a free India to make it a land of peace-loving and compassionate human beings, which provided equal rights and opportunities to each person to live creatively to his full potential. In the face of the vision of dire poverty amidst large sections of the Indian people and the various social ills and disabilities that impaired their progress talking about art seemed to him a kind of sacrilege." (Subramanyan, n.p.) Indeed, despite all circumstances, M. Gandhi with Nandalal Bose proudly utilised art to proclaim the political concerns, which significantly clarified the relationship between art and politics.

4.5. Contribution of the artist Chittaprosad :

To comprehend the involvement of art and politics in Indian Nationalist movement, it is necessary to confer Chittaprasad's life struggles and his artworks, although he was an unfortunate one among the eminent world of artists, he was devoted to his work and his ethics. He was vigorously involved in national movement during college years and made a name as an artist by making posters, drawings, cartoons. He did not have formal training in art, but his inner endowment and consciousness of socio-political demand for reformation gave birth to an artist with an activist soul. In his early phase of life, he was influenced by communism and aggressively made a protest against the British scorched earth policy during World War II. Later, in adherence to the Communist Party, he enacted as an artist for the publications and propaganda of C.P.I. (Communist Party of India) Party. During this period, he became famous for his drawings of the great man-made famine Bengal of 1943, and these pictures have recurrently emerged in the pages of the 'People's Ware' and 'Janajuddha', the organs of the Communist Party. His drawings generated consciousness of social duties for his contemporary artists. His empathy and the penetrating studies of the victims of Bengal famine was aptly reflected in the statement of Somnath Hore, "At night, I would watch him deftly fill out the pencil sketches done throughout the day with a brush and Chinese ink in the light of a lantern. I remember him saying. "Somnath, see this girl standing here, how big her eyes are! What hair! How long has she had nothing to eat ! Her eyes were burning, seemed about to burst out of their sockets! Her collar bones, her ribs, poor girl, were sticking out of her skin..." I would listen to making vague sounds of agreement. I could understand he was talking to himself, re-living the scene in his mind and breathing in life into the pictures." (Hore, n.p.) The sketchbook of 'Hungry Bengal' was printed in 1944; the British authorities saw it as an indictment against their governance; they seized and destroyed the entire print run.



Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, Orphans, Source: e-resource



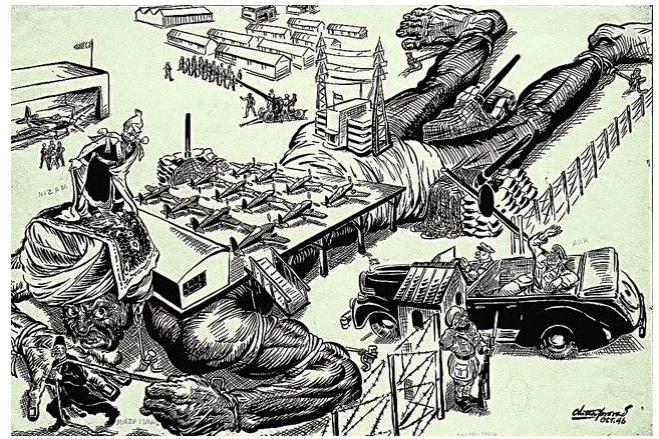
Lino-cut. Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, *Gone Mad*, 1952 Lino-cut: e-resource.

In 1949 Chittaprosad left C.P.I. Party due to protest against the inconvenient decision of this party and gradually withdraw himself from active politics. Once again, he enthusiastically joined the World Peace Movement, which was another political concerns according to the global political situation after World War II, and since then he pledged his art to the cause of peace. 'Angels Without Fairy-tales' by Chittaprosad, dedicated to the International Conference in Defence of Children which was filled with the magnificent series of lino-cuts depicting Indian children and their lives as working members of poor and oppressed families. (Sen,n.p) Chittaprosad had always been in control of the political language in his artwork. As a self-confession, he wrote to his friend in a letter in June 1953, "No one knows it better than me that I am not a genius like Van Gogh. And precisely because I am not, my heart and life lie in the country's revolutionary struggles. I am dying because nobody seems to have any need of me."(Tatke,<https://www.thehindu.com/>)

Chittaprosad's artworks are the documentation of the Indian National Movement, Bangladesh War, the contribution of Communism in India, the Nehru period, World War II and the history of the World Peace Movement. Some critic thought his works are artistically weak, but without any formal indoctrination, the determination and continuous struggle made his works highly political with the socialist-realist approach, which is more relatable to modern contemporary global art scenario.

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Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, *By the Cost of life*, 1946, Ink on paper.

5. Conclusion

Art is a political window of a country. Artists and their artworks reflect the political situation of an era because the politics of contemporary society profoundly influence them, so is the political environment influenced by the works of art of the artists. The political circumstances during the Indian Nationalist Movement bring a substantial change in the attitude of Indian artists towards the Indian art culture. Artist like Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose play a significant role in Indian art revival. The artists of that time develop a unique idiom of modern art, which defines the spirituality of the East and rejects the materialism of the West. Such artworks inculcate self-confidence and hope among the Indians to fight for their independence. The works of Chittaprosad is passionate documentation of the role of Communism in India when his art becomes a tool of protest against all inequality in society.

Acknowledgement

I bow in reverence to Almighty God, the most beneficent and the most merciful, whose kind blessings led me to complete this work and produce it in its present form. My special mention goes to my enthusiastic supervisor Dr Zeba Hasan, Department of Fine Art, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, who deserves the credit for many ideas expressed in this Paper and who has guided me to complete the work with his invaluable comments, patience and encouragement. I am also indebted to all the teachers from the Department of Fine Art A.M.U, Aligarh and my Friends & all of those people who helped me in various ways throughout the preparation of this paper.

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