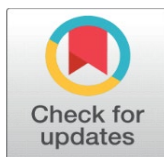
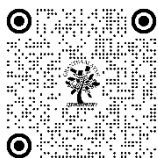


FOLK-STYLE TRADITIONS IN INDIGENOUS ART OF JAMINI ROY

Sonika ¹  

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Drawing and Painting, Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed to be University) Agra, India



Received 25 May 2022
Accepted 09 July 2022
Published 19 July 2022

Corresponding Author

Sonika, sonikasandhu1@gmail.com

DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i2.2022.143](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i2.2022.143)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2022 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

In early years during the twentieth century, there was a move towards seeking cultural roots, among artists in Bengal, guided by Abanindranath Tagore. Jamini Roy was one of them who made the pioneering efforts to foster self-respect for the indigenous creative output and greatly influenced the perspective towards art in those times. Jamini Roy received his art education through Western art perceptions but as opposed to the aristocratic perspective of the Bengal Art School, Jamini Roy drew inspiration from folk style traditions to create a peculiar indigenous style of his own. He found a quality of freshness, directness and robustness in the artistic spirit that still survives in the scrolls, Kalighat paintings, Puja images and the hordes of artifacts created for rituals – all synthesized with the visual effects of Kanthas and Alpanas. Strong beauty of line work, powerful colour scheming and flawless motifs characterized his impeccable style. Roy, in fact, was trend setter as he had projected the popular style amongst artists to adopt folk style and folk traits to recondition the art works in 1930s. His style of painting is still relevant in today's Contemporary Art scenario. The images, motifs, symbols, and idioms used by Jamini Roy inspired a number of Indian artists of present times.

Keywords: Folk-Art, Traditions, Indigenous, Jamini Roy, Bengal School

1. INTRODUCTION

For the centuries, Fine Arts formed an integral part of the enormous cultural heritage of India. The evolution of Indian modern art and European modern art has been closely linked, though its growth in India has been somewhat dissimilar to the west. But since the beginning of the 1900th century the accomplishments of European artists influenced the Indian art scenario in a great way. This effect expanded with the increase of political power of the British and more significantly with the establishment of art schools in the major and big towns of Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai after the mid – nineteenth century to impart training in Western techniques. The conflict between Indian and British cultures became the genesis of Contemporary Indian Art.

In early years during the twentieth century, a certain lack of direction was observed in the Indian art scene because of prolonged British rule and its vacillating policy. However, at that time when our identity – element was in distress, some talented artists came forward and led the Indian art movement and fostered a sense of trust regarding indigenous traditional values and enormous cultural legacy. Mahatma Gandhi hailed to awaken the peasant population of the country to create awareness about the notion of indigenous society, which greatly impacted artistic sensibilities and resulted in the emergence of cultural nationalism. It took the form of resolutely indigenous but modern art among the proponents of Bengal School who drew inspirations from Ajanta murals, Mughal miniatures and scroll paintings of eastern Asia. Under the influence of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and E.B. Havell artists like Abanindranath and others came to look upon folk arts and village crafts as the finest example of Indian tradition. Infused with nationalist pride the proponents of Bengal School made a determined effort to respond vigorously to the western academic challenges and this has been described by Tapti Guha Thakurta as the attempt, “to create for Indian art both the legacy of classical past and the pride of an uncorrupted living tradition.” Some exciting experimental approaches were noticeable in their works. Jamini Roy was one of them who made the pioneering efforts to foster self- respect for the indigenous creative output and greatly influenced the perspective towards art in those times.

2. OBJECTIVES

Jamini Roy developed his remarkable indigenous style of painting on his own taking inspiration from folk-art traditions of Bengal. To establish this fact, following are the objectives:

- 1) To study the emergence of cultural nationalism through Bengal school of art.
- 2) To study the factors involved in making Jamini Roy’s art style unique.
- 3) To analyse folk - style traditions in indigenous art of Jamini Roy.
- 4) To study the characteristic features of Roy’s paintings and render an artistic appreciation to them.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Jamini Roy, a living legend who spoke through his paintings in a language of common people was born in April 1887 in Bankura district of West Bengal. His actual name was Jamini Ranjan Roy. During his mid teen years, he joined Government Art School in Calcutta. Under rigorous and disciplined formal training, he attained technical competence and maturity. He received his art education through Western art perceptions from Calcutta Art School which was one to teach western academic painting in those days. “This style stemmed from European Art of the 19th century and was concerned with documenting nature and man, perspective, light and shade, anatomical drawing and so on constituted the grammar of this art.” [Appaswamy \(1973\)](#)

Figure 1



Figure 1 Lady on the Horseback

Source <https://www.inspicanvas.com>

Jamini Roy learnt to handle oil successfully. It was here that Jamini Roy achieved accomplishment in portrait and landscape painting in typical European style. After three decades of educational journey, Roy came back to his native place in Bankura. Here he found a quality of freshness, directness and robustness in the artistic spirit that still survived in the scrolls, the bazaar paintings of Kalighat, in the puja images, in toys and dolls and the hordes of artifacts created for rituals- all synthesized with the visual effects of Kanthas and Alpanas. He found among the folk artists, Kalighat folk painters and clay artisans, a power and distinct style, simplicity in their creation and the use of pure and elementary colours, as in Figure 1.

Mahatma Gandhi laid stress for more interaction through discrete means of communication with the peasant population of the country to harness the benefits of the freedom of mind and traditions prior to attainment of actual political liberation, which greatly influenced Roy too. Therefore, in the Bengali folk culture and style, Jamini Roy searched hidden elements which could be used to create an art style that could face the challenge posed by the Western Avant-garde Modernism and still have indigenous nationalistic identity. Ray (1981) As opposed to the aristocratic perspective of the Bengal Art School, Jamini Roy drew inspiration from folk style traditions to create a peculiar indigenous style of his own.

Roy's early compositions were on the one hand a portrayal of simplicity of Kalighat Paintings and on the other it was a mark of subtlety. "During these years, in fact, the relation of his work to that of bazaar painting is not unlike that of Picasso to Negro sculpture. Certain stylistic idioms are absorbed. A wholly new approach to painting begins to be apparent." Sen (1971) This seems to be in his earlier popular iconographical compositions, distinctive to his subsequent experimentations such as with Biblical iconography or Santhal themes.

4. CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Jamini Roy was also a portrait painter and was commissioned now and again by Calcutta patrons. But after 1910 he turned his back to oil portraits and Abanindranath's nostalgic style. Jamini Roy discovered his real ingenuity and developed his distinct indigenous style in 1940 -1950. He was attracted to the folk-

art sources adopting not only the freest possible manner, characteristic of native folk arts to shape the figures in his works, but also formal ideas from Orissan and Jain manuscript illustrations of the medieval period. There were many stages of this particular way of painting execution.

Figure 2

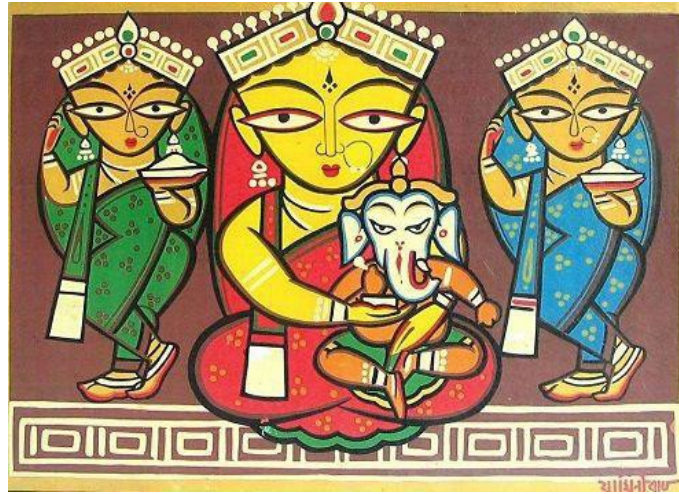


Figure 2 Goddess Parvati and Ganesha

Source <https://www.pinterest.com/>

In the first phase, after the mid-1920s he adopted an increasing use of firm and majestic curves and simple elegant forms related to those of Kalighat Painting. These paintings are drawn with sweeping brush lines and less colour is used in them. “The forms, mainly women, are stylized and curvilinear and completely fill the composition.” Appaswamy (1973) Rhythmic colour strokes provide a pleasant look to the paintings in spite of their decoration. High lights like jewellery are quite minimal, as is visible in Figure 2.

Figure 3

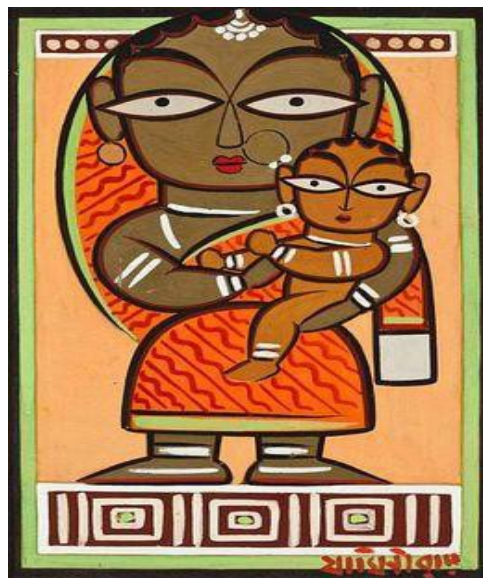


Figure 3 Mother and Child

Source <https://www.pinterest.com/orangeblossoms/jamini-roy-paintings/>

In the second phase, however, his style gradually became more decorative than poetic or sensuous. He moved away from Kalighat, although he retained some of its characteristics like the large eyes and the oval faces. There was a certain maturity in the style. In some of his works of the early 1930s, the stress is on the vertical rigid forms reminiscent of Byzantine icon paintings. The painting in [Figure 3](#), entitled “Mother and Child” in tempera is a fine example of such painting. Bright colours were used by the artist. The colours are mostly found to be nontransparent and non-textured and outlined with bold blackish pigment. Dotted embellishments in blackish, vermillion, or whitish colours complete the painting compositions, which sometimes consists of heads of figures symmetrically disposed on either side of an ornamental tree, a fringe of figure etc. [Appaswamy \(1973\)](#)

Figure 4



Figure 4 Krishna and Balarama

Source <https://www.pinterest.com/>

The painting in [Figure 4](#), entitled “Krishna and Balarama” in tempera is an excellent example of such composition. The subjects of this phase are mother and child, dancers, Fakirs, animals and so on. The figures are flattened and tightly pressed into the composition.

Figure 5



Figure 5 Cat and Lobster

Source <https://www.indigoart.in/page/indian-modern-art>

The emphasis is on pattern and the whole composition is stylized and decorative. His paintings on the theme of Christ and the satirical paintings of animals, like those of cats with protruding eyes, clearly show the influence of the Jain School. One such painting is entitled “Cat and Lobster” [Figure 5](#). But, by and large, his paintings are marked by the conventional features of the native folk paintings, i.e., the flattening out of design in depth and of voluminous and otherwise massive forms, by omitting light and shade and use of pure and positive colours in an interaction of their tonal quality and strength. [Mago \(2001\)](#)

In subsequent to the second stage, the designs of Jamini Roy were more carefree and natural. Composition is with adjacent areas and at times including margins, colour scheming is quite daring, sometimes he returns to a linear design. [Appaswamy \(1973\)](#) Roy presumes some primitive elements of folk such as head, big eyes, front position of the body, the repetition of dots and lines as decorative elements. Jamini Roy’s paintings are sheer expression of rhythmic lines drawn with curved and elliptic sweeps that define the robust forms of his figures. He seems to be subordinating everything to repetitive decorative rhythm in his panel pictures but not in his sketches, some of which are powerful spontaneous expressions. He added an element of subtlety and sophistication to the simplistic painting of Kalighat, resulting in a strongly individualistic style. Strong beauty of line work, powerful colour scheming and flawless motifs characterized his impeccable style, as reflected in [Figure 6](#).

Figure 6

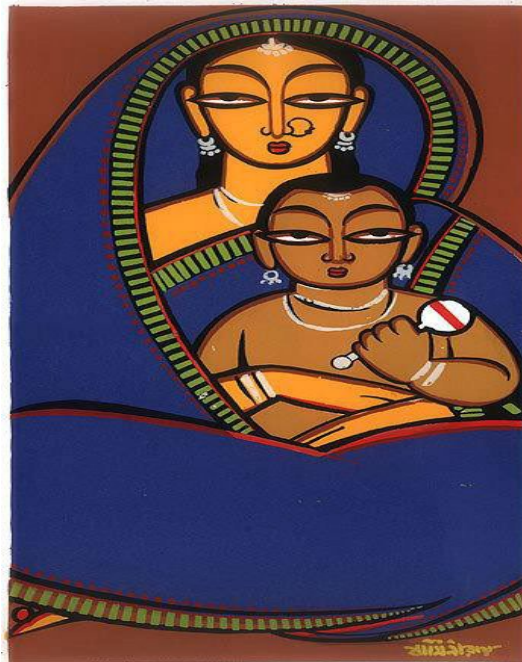


Figure 6 Mother and Child

Source <https://www.dollsofindia.com>

Jamini Roy used tempera as a medium. He also changed his palette from oils to mineral and vegetable dyes popularly used in villages, so as to fully identify with the village ethos. His colours are prepared from roots, fruits, and mud. At times, he even used old clothes and torn sarees for canvas. First of all, these are made stiff by

smearing them in cow-dung and then coated with the wash of chalk. Sometimes he also used cheap plywood and handmade cardboard. The colours used in his paintings were bright and powerful. They were golden yellow and blue, dark green and Indian red, rich brown and ivory black, even dove grey and old rose. These colours were prepared from local rock-dust mixed with the glue of tamarind seeds or occasionally white of egg. Vermillion was used from the mercury powder used by Hindu women in their ritual worship. Grey was a composition of alluvial mud; blue was made from indigo and white from common chalk.

5. OBSERVATIONS

As is well known Jamini Roy adopting a style based on folk-art after a great deal of heart searching. Like most Indian painters of his day, his early life was one of struggle of style and of rejected solutions until he finally found and evolved his personal style. Starting his career as a portrait painter in the Western academic tradition and later experimenting with impressionism he subsequently discontinued both. And though the Bengal School was then in the ascendant, he found it too eclectic to be attracted to it. To overcome this stalemate in the art scene of that time, he strove to strike a new path by turning to native folk-art traditions wherein he discovered the art impulses and genius of his own people. His style was unique and special in the sense that it has an indigenous source in the folk culture of a country and for this very reason, it acquired great convenience and popularity, as in Figure 7. In his search for finding an identity, he styled his artistic activities as a 'Patua' – the Bengal folk painter. For, he compared his free repetitious approach to that of the 'Patua'.

Figure 7



Figure 7 Krishna

Source <https://www.archerindia.com>

Jamini Roy's Paintings were a reflection of his life which was simple, harmonious and unusual. What made his work different from others was that he drew his strength and inspiration from the traditional culture and the ordinary life of common people. However, Jamini Roy's art had nationalistic significance, especially when India was trying to free itself from the clutches of the political and cultural influences of the West. In April 1973 at the ripe age of 85 years, Jamini Roy passed away to be remembered by the whole artist fraternity.

6. RELEVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

Jamini Roy was the first artist to prominently and creatively use folk-art at a time when more Indian artists were attracted to alien art forms. He, in fact, was a trendsetter as he had projected the popular style amongst artists to adopt folk style and folk traits to recondition the art works in 1930s. Mago (2001) His style of Painting is still relevant in today's Contemporary Art scenario and his explorations of the aesthetic norms of folk art were successful in reviving the spirit of indigenous art traditions. Because in any sphere, tradition is neither a thing of the past, nor a static and lifeless phenomenon. It's a continuing process – the past giving birth to the present and the present giving birth to the future. In this way it follows the seed-plant-fruit relationship of the perpetual order of nature. Thus, tradition is very contemporary in art also where the aesthetic norms of bygone days are valid for artistic expression even today. It showed Roy as a precursor to many upcoming modern artists entering the art scenario of India.

Decades later this trend was echoed in the thought and art of people like J. Swaminathan, K.G. Subramanyan, K.C.S Panikar, K. Srinivasalu, Prabhakar Barwe, Jayant Parikh, Rameshwar Singh, Biren De, Jaidev Thakore, Madhvi Parekh, and Manjeet Bawa. These are to name a few but the images, motifs, symbols, and idioms used by Jamini Roy inspired a number of Indian Artists of present times. Thus, his legacy is being carried out by many contemporary artists even today and in this sense his pursuit of artistic labour was successful and relevant enough.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Appaswamy, J. (1973). Jamini Roy. Article in National Herald : Sunday Magazine.
- Appaswamy, J. (1968). Abnindranath Tagore and the Art of his Time. Lalit Kala Akademi.
- Bhardwaj, V. (1996). Kala Chitrakala. New Delhi : Praveen Prakashan.
- Bhatnagar, N. and Chandrikesh, J. (2001). Bengal Shaili ki Chitrakala. Delhi : Ananya Prakashan.
- Mago, P. N. (2001). Contemporary Art in India- A Perspective. New Delhi : National Book Trust.
- Ray, P. R. (1981). Sketches of Jamini Roy. Lalit Kala Contemporary. (31). 22-28.
- Sen, S. (1971). The Art of Jamini Roy and Amrita Shergil. Article in Rachna.