

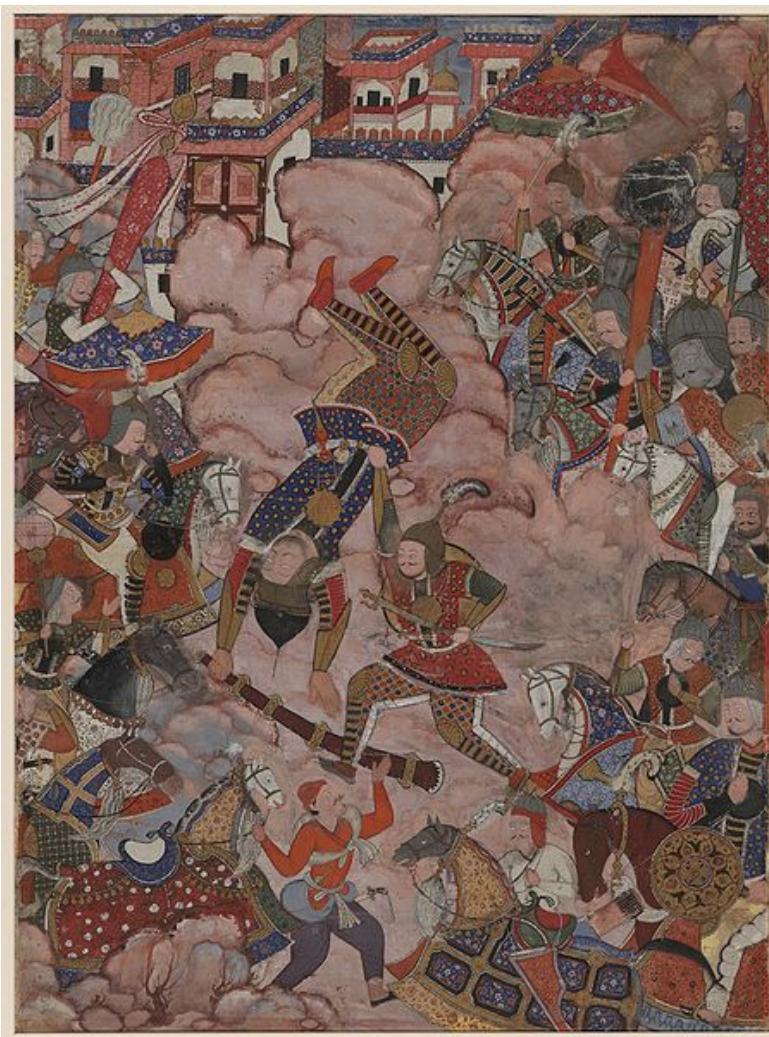
Art:

Art pre-colonialism:

Compare and contrast Indian art pre-colonialism and after:

- Pre-colonial Indian art is more direct, displaying the foreground and characters with equal focus
- Indian art during British rule uses Western influences of perspective: there's clearly a single, more important person in the piece to whom our attention should be directed
- The colours are more vibrant and show a romanticized view of the scene
- Chaos in the first painting

Slide 1:

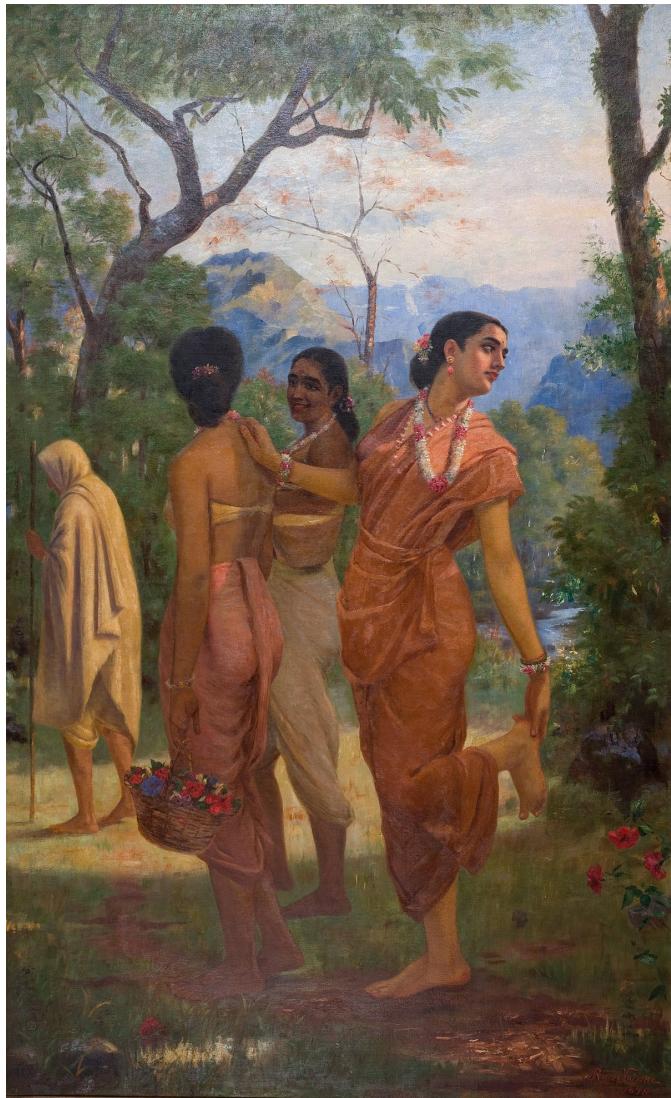




Slide 2:



Slide 3:



A far more modern rendition of this painting



Shakuntala by Raja Ravi Varma:

Used elements of Western art like their composition, perspective, and realism to illustrate Indian themes

Background:

The British established itself as the British Empire in the 18th century, which laid the foundation for modern India's contact with the West. The British oppressed the Indian population, seeking to exploit the land for its abundant resources and spices. Westernization paved the way for a radical change of artistic taste, and a style emerged that represented the adjustment of traditional artists to new fashions and demands.

This shift was partly financially motivated; Indian patrons of art became less wealthy and influential, and Western art became more ubiquitous as the British Empire established schools of art like the Bombay Art Society in major cities. Indian artists naturally flocked to Western art to sustain themselves and their art took on Western themes.

Preview Statement:

- Indian painters used elements of Western art to subvert British colonial ideology and modernize, but not westernize, India

Quote 1

Point: The painting displays British academic art styles alongside Indian art techniques to subvert British control and present an adapting yet firmly Indian identity that the British cannot crush.

- Just as Conrad writes in *Heart of Darkness*, the British saw Indians through the same contradictory colonial lens through which they justify their oppression; the British saw the Indians more morally corrupt than the “**devil[s] of violence, ...greed, and ...hot desire,” and as devils that could “sway men**”. The British were westernizing India through ‘educational institutions’, created with the sole agenda of wiping out the thought of freedom from the minds of Indian youth by inculcating in them the ‘value’ of the British presence. It was assumed that these institutions spread ‘modern education.’ This modern education had very little to do with sharing scientific, rational thinking and more to do with accepting the West’s superiority.
 - The Western influences in the painting are a nod to the British attempt to erase Indian identity and instill a British one in youth through ‘educational institutions’. The use of traditional Indian art techniques are a rebellion against their attempts to indoctrinate everyone to accept Western supremacy
 - The British thought to make the Indian youth their elite servants - Indian by blood and by colour but British in their thoughts, mindset and tastes
- **The painting is a silent rebellion against British academic art styles**
- The fact that he uses British academic art techniques implies that he recognizes British art’s suppressing influences on Indian art. He uses Indian styles because he recognizes that the British suppression of the Indian voice leaves no room for Indian thought or originality. He plays with Western influences and traditional Indian art techniques to subvert British control and show an Indian culture and united Indian identity
 - In using Western styles, Ravi Varma and contemporary artists recognized that it was crucial for India to modernize and become unique without being westernized - they saw how British ideas were not all bad but the British presence and the gross atrocities they commit need to be acknowledged
- These paintings were really about subverting expectations of what an Indian was. British depictions of Indians were condescending, displaying them in blind faith of their religion or performing menial tasks for Englishmen. These paintings were a reminder to Indians to remember their unique strength.
- Pran Neville, a student of Government College writes, “we were keen to look modern, act modern, and imbibe modern ideas in general, which in other words, meant that we gladly welcomed western influences.” This modernity did not ‘educate’ them to question, but ‘trained’ them to obey their masters.

Quote 2

Point: Varma paints the woman as an affront to British rule while using Western art techniques to make the painting as a whole more amenable to a British crowd, allowing this painting to silently rebel against British rule while adapting to it.

- Just like Trevor’s mother’s description of her abusive, controlling and petty boyfriend, “He only wants a woman who is free because his dream is to put her in a cage,” we see

a challenge to the colonial British spirit: the woman here is not coy; she is firm in her gaze. She is not dainty, but full of force. She is real and not amenable to artistic manipulations of form and colour—Varma made the background pale, not the woman's skin.

- Varma shows that the colonial British spirit to crush the identity in target settlements to exploit the land and people fails in India. Just as Abel cannot put Patricia in a cage to control and exploit her, Varma shows the British that they cannot lock India into a cage to exploit her land and people.
- He plays to Western sensibilities to make the painting and Shakuntala's look of defiance more amenable to and prolific among a British audience: he uses lighter strokes to show higher-class women and dark colour strokes to show lower-class women
 - He shows how Western sensibilities for race and class are weak and illogical, requiring just different paint to be convinced to share an otherwise anti-colonial painting

Quote 3

- Explain a slight synopsis of the Mahabharata

Point: The painting references the Mahabharata, one of India's creation stories, to tie in traditional stories and reclaim the Indian identity that the British warped and tried to crush.

- Thomas King: "Creation stories are relationships that help to define the nature of the universe and how cultures understand the world in which they exist."
- This painting references one of India's creation stories, the Mahabharata. The woman is Shakuntala, who was cursed by a sage, who said that her husband, whom she'd been dreaming about, would forget her. In this scene, she feigns pulling a thorn out of her foot to look for her husband.
 - Indians will recognize the scene and identify with Shakuntala:
 - They can identify with her dreams and search for a past, rich, vibrant India that has been cursed to forget her.
 - They recognize the British oppression as the thorn prevents her from following her friends and the old woman
 - They share the hope she carries with her friends and the old woman while walking towards a new India, one not marred with British inequalities and instead filled with the rich culture of a past India
 - **Varma's use of western realism and Indian themes make for a very subversive art piece, mocking the British empire as a thorn in her foot as she looks at the India that was and walking toward the India that will be, guarded by an older woman, representing Indian tradition.**
- **This creation story lays the foundation for Varma's painting to strengthen Indian culture and unify all of India**
 - It's about inspiring Indians with the theme central to their creation story: a will to act. It's about empowering Indians to take action against their oppressors and liberate India for themselves, each other, their ancestors and future generations

Notes on student connection:

Despite living in Canada for my entire life, I don't really cleanly fit into a Canadian identity or a South Asian Indian identity. I love talking to my extended family in India and learning more about their day-to-day lives, but I simply can't relate to their political, cultural and social references. On the other hand, while I enjoy Canadian holidays, I don't celebrate them. When I last visited India, Diwali was a month-long extravaganza and is deeply embedded in the cultural identity. Diwali in Canada however, is largely observed on weekends and isn't as deeply embedded in the Indo-Canadian identity.

Just as the woman in the painting looks for the India that she once knew but has forgotten her, I've been able to sense a disconnect between the India my parents know and the India that I know. I see the past, present and future India in this painting and it compels me to consider the thorn in my ankle. What thorns must I remove to bridge these cultures? What thorns must I remove to become a bridge for these cultures?

Notes on organization and strategies:

Compare and contrast Indian art pre-colonialism and after:

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There is splendour and beauty in Varma's mythological creations, and these played a role in the modern **re-conception of our pre-modern past, shaping nationalism and cultural confidence in a colonial age.** But the portrait of Mahaprabhu represents the reality of the world that created the painter—a world with a different aesthetic, not suited for pan-Indian appeal, but singularly striking. While Varma's work is dismissed as kitsch, this is a painting that stands against his own idealizations—**the woman here is not coy; she is firm in her gaze. She is not dainty, but full of force. She is real and not amenable to artistic manipulations of form and colour—it is the background he made pale, not the woman's skin.** And this very manifestation of her reality makes her, to me, more magnificent than Varma's breathtaking mythological canvases.

Final send-off:

The woman pulls out the thorn that tries to stop her from reaching a better world. Varma and contemporary artists saw the thorn in their ankle as the British presence in India - it had to be removed for them to reach a new India that respected their identity, culture and values. This painting itself sowed the seeds of unrest.

I ask you to consider the thorns in your ankles that stop you from reaching your ideal world. Even Further, I ask you to consider whether your beliefs, opinions or mindset can be a thorn in others' ankles. What are your thorns? How will you pull them out? How will you change your thinking to avoid being the thorn in another's ankle?