



Paintings Of Raja Ravi Varma- A Fusion Of Indian Tradition With The Techniques Of European Academic Art.

Dr. Dhanya B Nair

Assistant Professor of History

NSS College, Cherthala,

Alappuzha, Kerala

Abstract: Raja Ravi Varma has been one of the brightest stars among the painters of renaissance epoch of modern Indian history. He brought Indian painting to the attention of the larger world and he is considered as modern among traditionalists and a rationalist among moderns. No artist seems to have commanded such reputation among his people during his life time. He proved a vital link between the traditional Indian art and the contemporary between the Thanjavur school and western academic realism. Without any formal training he blossomed to national fame and won praise from the connoisseurs of art the world over and brought Indian Painting to the attention of the larger world..

Index Terms - Indian art, Scenes, Tradition, Portray, Pictures, Painting.

Introduction

Born in an illustrious family of the Kilimanoor fiefdom as the son of Uma Amba Thamburatti, in 1848, Raja Ravi Varma exhibited his innate love of painting in his childhood itself. Even as a child he filled his home with pictures of fauna and flora and scenes from everyday life. There was no formal schooling for him. He was taught Malayalam and Sanskrit at home in accordance with the tradition then obtaining in aristocratic houses, and to these, his uncle, artist Raja Varma added the first lessons in picture making especially drawing. Paintings in those days means primary painting pictures of Gods and Goddesses and sequences from religious lore on the walls of temples and palaces and sometimes on glass and Ivory, with the crude vegetable and mineral dyes which the artists themselves made from leaves, flowers, barks and seeds such as Kunni and manchadi, mineral earths like manayola, the white of the egg and olive oil. Impressed by the fine quality of some of the paintings by the child presented to him on the occasion, the Travancore Maharaja Ayilyam Thirunal arranged for his continued stay in the capital so that he could get an opportunity to study the rich collection of pictures in the palace and also watch some of the court painters at works. Though Ramaswamy Naiclean, the palace artist, was reluctant to give him instruction, his assistant, Arumugam Pillai volunteered to give some lessons during his leisure hours. In 1868, Theodore Jensen A Portrait painter of Dutch nationality, came to Travancore Court to do some paintings for the palace.

Raja Ravi Varma Owed his success to a systematic training, first in the traditional art of Thanjavur and then in European art. His paintings can be broadly classified into portraits, portrait-based compositions, theatrical compositions based on myths and legends. Though the artist's immense popularity lay in the third category, the first two types of works prove his merit as an exceedingly sensitive and competent. The glittering career of Raja Ravi Varma is a striking case study of academic art in India. He was the greatest artist of modern India, a national builder who showed the moral courage in taking up the profession of painting.

Ravi Varma plunged himself actively into his artistic pursuits. In 1873, he got recognition at the national and international levels and success followed success. Ravi Varma's painting Shakuntala's love letter to Dushyanta, the first ever Indian painting depicting a puranic theme from a classical literary work, not only won the same coveted medal in the Madras Exhibition of 1876 but came to be included as the frontispiece in the English translation of the Shakuntalam by Sir Mourier Williams. The picture is significant in the sense it was the first time in the long history of Indian art that a theme is taken from a purely literary source. The picture is yet more significant for the transformation it brought about in the traditional manner and style of presenting.

Ravi Varma was soon appointed by the Maharaja as the palace artist on a regular monthly honorarium and for some years thereafter he spent his time mostly in portraiture. During this period his services were also requisitioned outside Kerala for some important assignments. In 1873 he was commissioned to do the Portrait of the Duke of Buckingham, the Governor of Madras as well as of those of the members of the royal family of Pudukkottai.

In 1880, Sayaji Rao, Gaekwar of Baroda, who was camping at Ooty invited Ravi Varma to go for over there and gave him a Commission to do 13 paintings depicting scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata to adorn the walls of a new palace that was under construction in Baroda. The paintings were expected to convey to the spectators at a glance an impression of the rich cultural heritage of India. Swami Vivekananda who happened to see these pictures in the Baroda Palace in 1892 wrote to a friend as follows, "of course I have seen the library and the pictures of Ravi Varma and that is about all were seeing here." It is worth mentioning that these paintings made an immense service by popularizing the sari as the national dress of Indian women.

During his stay at Bombay, Ravi Varma had heard of the International Exhibition to be held in Chicago under the auspices of the world Colombian Commission constituted by the American government. He sent his entries to the International Exhibition held at Chicago in 1893 the same here in which Swami Vivekananda gave his historic address to the Parliament of religions in that city. A series of 10 paintings intended to give a fair idea of the rich and varied cultural heritage of this vast country were specially done by the artist for the occasion. Ravi Varma chose particularly women as his theme because it enabled him to impress on the foreign spectators the diversity of Indian tradition in dress, ornaments and customs and convey the event tenor of India life. Two of the paintings have Kerala types, the Malabar beauty and There comes Pappa. In the first is a typical Malayali lady with her rich dresses tied up above her forehead and adorned with Jasmine wreath, enjoying the music of the Veena. For the second, he chose one of his own daughters as the model. She is with her little son and is all dressed up for a visit to the temple, only her husband has to come, and he is coming so she tells her son. The life of Muslims portrayed in Begum at the bath and Expectation, the first is a scene of a zenana reminiscent of the courts of the Mughals and the Nawabs and shows a girl of noble lineage being undressed by her maids for her bath in the marble pool, and the second, of a young woman dressed in Hindu style, awaiting her lover. These paintings won wide acclaim at Chicago and Ravi Varma was awarded two medals with a Diploma.

Later, Ravi Varma had decided to devote his full attention to Puranic themes in order to invest his paintings with a mass appeal. This required not merely his painting pictures with his own hands but also producing them on a mass scale as a commercial proposition. In collaboration with an affluent Bombay Businessman Govardhan Das Khatau Makanji he started a Lithographic press at Girgaum in Bombay in 1894 and produced millions of copies of his paintings in colour and made them available to people in all parts of the country. The first picture to come out of the press was the birth of Shakuntala. It may be stated here that the Lithographic press set up by Ravi Varma was ultimately financial loss for him and he was forced to sell it in 1901 along with the copyright of all the 93 pictures produced there. But the press had helped him to fulfil partially his mission of popularizing art and thus contributing to the cause of Indian Culture. It was amidst of his pre occupations with the press in 1897 that the Travancore government gave Ravi Varma a Commission to paint two pictures a year for the state and did five paintings on Puranic themes which still adorn the walls of the Sree Chitra Art gallery at Trivandrum. They are Hamsa Damayanti, Shakuntala looks back in love, viratas court, Mohini and Rukmangada and Draupadi and Simhika. Indeed, Damayanti is the most beautiful of Ravi Varma's paintings.

It is not seemed to be worthy if it does not mention about Raja Varma , the younger brother of Raja Ravi Varma, another connoisseur who had given wholehearted support. Raja Varma started his journey with Ravi Varma at the age of 18 and continued with him for long 26 years. He wanted to stand a little behind his brother forever and ever wished to go beyond the sunlight. The death of Raja Varma on January 4 ,1905 was a huge blow to Ravi Varma' s life and after that he never used the brush and retreated to silence and passed away on October 2,1906.

Conclusion

Ravi Varma succeeded in putting Kerala firmly on the art map of India and India on the art map of the world. His works created socio- religious revival among the Hindus and also caused for Indian nationalism in general by installing in the minds of the people the sense of pride in their national heritage through the medium of his paintings. He had a clear understanding of the unity in diversity which characterized Indian culture. He made use of his gift of the brush to promote this unity. Even while presenting puranic themes, Ravi Varma chose his models from racial types representative of all parts of the country. He was fascinated by the faces of the men and women he saw in Kerala ,Tamil Nādu, Gujarat, Rajasthan , Maharashtra and all such areas of this vast sub-continent, irrespective of their faith, caste or creed and he paid his rich tributer to them all in colours of his choice on a very wide canvas. Ravi Varma's representation of mythological characters has become a part of the Indian imagination of the epics. He is often criticized for being too showy and sentimental in his style. In short, Raja Ravi Varma has claims to be regarded not only as the pioneer as more correctly the father of modern Indian art but also as one of the greatest architects of Indian Renaissance. However, his work remains very popular in India. His paintings are considered to be one of the best examples of fusion of Indian tradition with the techniques of European academic art

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