

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGES OF 18TH CENTURY BENGAL THROUGH COMPANY SCHOOL OF PAINTING FROM MURSHIDABAD AND CALCUTTA

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Abstract: The history of 18th century India is marked by two most important political changes. The first half of the 18th century saw the decline of the Mughals and the rise of the succession states which was followed by the rise of the British raj in the second half of the 18th century. The entire historical debate regarding this political change mainly moves around the two basic questions i.e., whether the establishment of the Company raj led to a complete break from the past or there were elements of continuity. However, the participants of this debate have mainly focussed on the economic and political sources of the period to understand this transitional phase. The cultural aspects of the period, especially painting, remains highly neglected. The artists associated with the Murshidabad School of Painting that developed under the close patronage of the Nawabs gradually adjusted their perception schema as per the taste and preferences of their new patrons, the Britishers. Thus, the purpose of my paper is to show to what extent the indigenous artists were able to adjust with the taste and preferences of the new patrons or in other words we can say that was there a complete cultural break from the past or there was a cultural continuity.

The eighteenth century in Indian history is marked by two important transitions. The first half of the eighteenth century saw the fall of the Mughals and emergence of the regional powers. And the second half of the eighteenth century i.e., after the Battle of Plassey (1757) saw the rise of the English East India Company as a major political and economic power in India. Regarding the decline of the Mughals there has been much debate among the historians. Secondly, was the decline of the Mughals followed by a 'Dark Age' in Indian history i.e., an all round debasement of polity, economy and culture?

Historians such as Jadunath Sarkar were of the opinion that it was the personality of Aurangzeb and his religious policies which was solely responsible for the decline of the Mughals. Sarkar opined that the peasant rebellions that ultimately destroyed the Mughal political stability, was the 'Hindu Reaction' to Aurangzeb's Muslim orthodoxy.

Satish Chandra said that it was due to the malfunctioning of the jagirdari and mansabdari system which actually depended on revenue collection and its distribution. However Irfan Habib came up with a totally new definition. He viewed the decline of the Mughals in economic terms.

He said that the abrupt confiscation of the social surplus dragged the peasantry towards poverty which led to peasant migration and rebellion. This gave birth to an economic crisis and disturbed the political stability of the Empire. Whereas J.F. Richards emphasized on the problem of *be-jagiri*, he was of the opinion that the problem of *be-jagiri* was not a real crisis but an artificial crisis created by the administrative policies of Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb kept aside the well assessed land for the khalisa region to meet the increasing demands of the Deccan war. As a result the nobles who were left without jagir rose into rebellion and weakened the political base of the Empire.

M. Athar Ali drew our attention towards both economic and cultural crisis. He first introduced the concept of cultural crisis in the long debate regarding the fall of the Mughals. He said that the first half of the eighteenth century witnessed the downfall of the Mughals, but also the decline of the Safavid and the Ottoman Empire. And all these events were not a mere coincidence. He says "It is a regrettable gap in our study of the economic history of the Middle East and India, that no general analysis has been attempted of the changes in the pattern of trade and markets of these countries, as a result of the new commerce between Europe and Asia. There is a tendency to belittle the significance of the great commercial developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for eastern economies, owing to the small volume of goods that entered international, or long distance, trade at that time. But the real question is not of volume, but value. In terms of value, long-distance trade must have accounted for a sizeable portion of the gross product in all the economies with which we are concerned".¹

The discovery of the Cape of Good Hope brought about a great change in the international trade market. It not only opened new trade routes but it also led to the emergence of Europe as the principal market of the Eastern commodities. It brought large amount of gold and silver to the Eastern market but at the same time luxury manufactures of the Orient were diverted to the markets of Europe. As Athar Ali say's "My suggestion is that these developments caused a serious disturbance in the economies of the Eastern countries, and intensified the financial difficulties of the ruling classes. The Great Silk Road no longer carried the great caravans; and this must have distinctly impoverished Central Asia (the Uzbek Khanate). But in India and Iran, too, the costs of luxury articles rose - and, after all, for members of the ruling class it was these luxuries that life was all about. The income previously obtained no longer sufficed. Here was a factor for an attempt at greater agrarian exploitation; and when that failed, or proved counter-productive, for reckless factional activities for individual gain, leading to interminable civil wars. Such conditions would, of course, spell the end of the great empires".²

There were other historians who gave importance to non-economic factors. Herman Goetz emphasized on the eighteenth century music and architecture. Goetz documented the resilience of the Mughal society as reflected in the evolving music and architectural styles in the wake of the Imperial collapse.³ Again Seema Alavi says that the linguistic component of

this critical cultural interface between regions and empire is elaborated upon by Muzaffar Alam in a more recent essay on the making of Persian as the ‘imperial language’. Alam shows that the tensions between the regions and the empire were also expressed as friction between Persian and the vernaculars, which suggests that evidence of resistance of Mughal rule may not be available in the Persian material, but may lie instead in vernacular texts and oral traditions generated in the regions.⁴



Plate 39.1: British resident Fullerton smoking *hukkah*, Murshidabad Style, executed at Patna, 1760, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Plate 39.2: A military officer of English East India Company, Murshidabad, 1760, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Plate 39.3: A Lady smoking *hukkah*, Murshidabad, 1760, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Plate 39.4: A Dwarf flying squirrel hanging from a kuru creeper, 1780, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



Plate 39.5: Custard Apple Plant, commissioned by Lady Impey, Calcutta, 1775, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

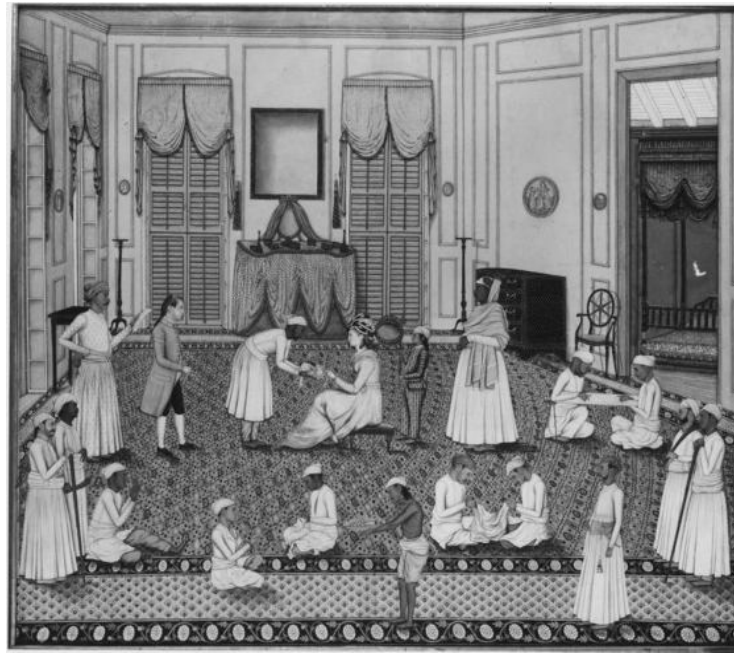


Plate 39.6: Lady Impey conversing with her Housestaffs, Calcutta 1775-78, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



Plate 39.7: Mary Impey looking at her daughter dancing on Indian music, painted by John Zoffany, Calcutta, 1783, Museo Nacional Thyssen Bornemisza, Madrid.

From the above analysis of the causes behind the decline of the Mughals we see that most colonial and nationalist historians wanted to say that the decline of the Mughals was followed by a 'dark age', while the Marxist historiography gave emphasis to the economic factors and to some extent to the changes in the networks of trade. The impact on style and form of regional architecture and painting was relatively untouched. Mughal painting is one of our most important sources of information for the medieval period. Mughal artists not only painted the pictures of the Emperors or the members of nobility. They were very keen at depicting ordinary people which we can see in the paintings showing the construction of the Agra fort. It gives us information about the labourers and craftsmen, both male and female, involved in the construction of the fort. As Terence McInerney says no attention has been paid to the Mughal paintings dating from the reign of Bahadur Shah I to Bahadur Shah II. He is of the opinion that though the invasion of Nadir Shah totally devastated the Empire of the Mughals but it had no effect on the painting.⁵ From this we may infer that although an economic crisis was generated, it did not represent an all round decline of the Mughal culture. The Emperors of Delhi still retained their atelier where we see the evolution of the Chitarman style of painting.

During the course of the 18th century, when the central authority became weak, there emerged the Provincial Mughal style of painting. Again to cite McInerney, "The great tradition had shifted to Murshidabad, Faizabad and Lucknow where again Chitarman, Nidhamal and Hunar interacted with the younger artists to propagate a tradition of painting that was open to innovation yet conscious to its roots".⁶ From this I can say that neither was the death of Aurangzeb followed by a dark age nor was there a decline of the Mughal culture in the first half of the eighteenth century. If the economic condition had turned so critical, then how could the English East India Company succeed in establishing such a vast Empire financed by the economy of Bengal, one of the most important subah of the Mughal Empire. As P.J. Marshall says Bengal became 'the British bridgehead'. Actually the Mughal culture did not decline it only changed its form.

Coming to the second half of the eighteenth century we see the rise of the English East India Company as the major political and economic power. Regarding the establishment of Company rule in India historians are divided among themselves on two issues: whether Company rule led to the continuation of the existing administrative and economic apparatus or did it make a clear break from the past? Historians such as B. B. Chaudhury and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya are of the opinion that Company rule initiated a kind of change in matters concerning the economy. According to them promulgation of the Permanent Settlement (1793) was a kind of institutional innovation followed by an increase in rural credit. The distress sale of estates by the defaulting zamindars both created a land market as well as changed the composition and functioning of agricultural labourers and share croppers. The social base of the agricultural labourers was expanded. Now it included the persons who had lost their holdings. Irfan Habib maintains that the Grant of *Diwani* and the introduction of Permanent Settlement marked a clear break from the past.

On the other hand there is a group of historians, who on the basis of their regional/ micro level studies have observed that in the initial period of colonial rule, the English East India Company continued with the existing administrative and economic apparatus of the Indian sub-continent. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay was of the opinion that the English victory at Buxar (1764) is however more important than the battle of Plassey (1757). Company received the grant of *diwani* in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa but still Company treated the defeated Mughal emperor with respect because of his continuing symbolic significance in the eighteenth century Indian politics.⁷ Indeed, not before 1857 was the sovereignty of the Mughal Emperor formally repudiated by the British. According to Athar Ali, the Mughal administration was being subverted to a new use.

C. A. Bayly, Burton Stein, Ashin Das Gupta on the basis of their regional studies on agriculture, trade routes, local market and land distribution system opined that the Company gradually grafted itself over the networks of indigenous economy and infrastructure. With the passage of time the traditional towns and centres of economic activities faded away. Indigenous merchants and landed elites who proved themselves as loyal followers drifted towards the Company and started to seek their fortunes in the newly established cities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Burton Stein added something more to this theory of continuity. "He was of the opinion that at one level, Company rule exercised its monopolistic control over the social and economic process unleashed by the military fiscal state of Tipu but, at the same time, its efforts, at times ambivalent, regarding the introduction of modern capitalist relations in land affected the bargaining position and independence of labour".⁸

So, again we see that the debate regarding the establishment of Company rule in India in the second half of the eighteenth century mainly centers around the economic factors especially revenue settlement and agrarian productions. The cultural change as was reflected through painting, architecture and literature remains neglected.

As the power and prestige of the Nawabs started to decline the artists who were associated with the Murshidabad court lost the patronage of the court. Now they looked towards a new group of patrons whose perception of art and of the use of perspective were totally different than that of the indigenous artist. As Ratnabali Chatterjee says "To the Indian artists this visual ideology offered a challenge. Measured against the European, the skills of the Murshidabad court artists were considered as those of craftsmen. Their meticulous attention to details, the small formats of the paintings and jewel like colours offered the same novelty found by Europeans in an 'Oriental' ornament. These were to be used not to record, or eulogize a patron's power (as they had done previously) but more a bric-a-brac, to decorate only a very small corner of a palatial mansion".⁹ In this situation the indigenous artist had to adjust their perception schema to that of the Europeans. As most of these European patrons were associated with 'John Company' or 'English East India Company', this category of painting came to be known as the 'Company School of Painting'.

In this chapter I will attempt an analysis of the evolution of this Company School of Painting, i.e., how the subject matter and the schema of these paintings changed in accordance with administrative and socio-economic changes under the Company rule. Though the Company School of Painting started its journey in Madras and thereafter evolved in different parts of the country with minor variations, for the sake of convenience in the present context I will mainly deal with the paintings that evolved in Calcutta, Murshidabad and to some extent in Patna. Apart from this I will also try to analyse how the indigenous artists, who looked towards the patron for both the delineation of the subject matter and the necessary artistic material, adjusted themselves with the new situation where they had to adapt themselves to the free market forces.

II

The Company School of Painting first appeared in the southern part of India especially in Madras and Tanjore. As Mildred Archer says, “about 1702, seventy eight paintings were made by the Indian artist for Niccolao Manucci, the Italian adventurer who after an eventful life had settled in Madras in 1686 and was busy writing his *Storia do Mogor*. In the first year of the eighteenth century he was engaged on the fourth volume of this work which described Indian manners and customs, and he wanted illustration for it which he could dispatch with the manuscript to Europe”.¹⁰ From eighteenth century onwards the indigenous artist could no longer receive the patronage of the traditional Indian courts. During the Anglo-Mysore war these indigenous artists were employed in large number by the Company officials as draftsmen and map makers.

With the passage of time the Company School of Painting got disseminated into the eastern part of the country. Murshidabad, the seat of Bengal Nawabs, was the first place in the Bengal province to experience the development of a semi-European style of painting. In the initial period, in drawing the British portraits, the Murshidabad artists followed the same miniature style. Actually, when Nawabs were no longer sitting with gold dinars in their pockets to give patronage to these artists, the latter easily substituted anyone within their perception schema who was ready to play the social role. A remarkable example of this transition to British portraiture is the portrait of Fullerton, a British resident at Patna (**Plate 39.1**). The Indian Museum, Calcutta, also possesses a number of portraits, made in Murshidabad in around the 1780s, showing Europeans with powdered hair and tricorne hats.¹¹ This change in the perception schema happened not only in Murshidabad but also in other parts of the country. In a painting of Tanjore we can see a British resident and two Indian military commanders on horseback, elephant with kettledrums, cavalrymen and a great crowd with illuminations.¹² In this painting the honour of riding a horse, a symbol of royalty, was now bestowed upon a European moreover the figure of the resident was much larger in size than the others present in the painting.

Apart from these portraits of the British residents the Murshidabad artist also indulged themselves in commissioning the portraits of the Mughal Emperors and other indigenous rulers such as those of the Bengal Nawabs, Chait Singh of Benaras or Badi al-Zaman Khan of

Birbhum. These portraits were simplified versions of the earlier miniatures with similar compositions – a figure seated amongst the cushions on a marble terrace with railings fringed with a hedge of flower plants, or standing against a blue sky and distant horizon.¹³ Gradually British taste was felt in these paintings such as shadows were attached to the feet of these figures, the transparent water colour took the place of the bright gouache and opaque water media (**Plate 39.2**). But by the turn of the century the western techniques became more prominent in these paintings. Elongated figures with long *jamans*, the folds indicated at the bottom of the skirt with a jagged line, began to appear. The paintings were also frequently surrounded with a heavy black border and the whole effect was somber to a degree. Other influences were now brought into play, resulting in a complete reformulation of the types of composition of which Murshidabad artists were capable. British artists had begun to arrive in Bengal, both portrait painters and landscape artists. William Hodges's *Select Views in India*, published in London 1785-88, and Thomas Daniell's '*Twelve Views of Kolkata of 1786-88 influenced Indian artists*' representations of topography, while François Baltazar Solvyns' '*250 Coloured Etchings of the Hindoos*' published in Kolkata 1795 and 1798 greatly influenced their handling of the human figure.¹⁴

From the above analysis of the Company *kalam* in Murshidabad a question might arise as to why the British residents of Murshidabad took interest in commissioning the portraits of the Indian rulers along with those of the British residents. If we look into the political realities of the days then we can see for many years the Company ruled as an "Indian Ruler". It recognised the authority of the Mughal emperor, struck coins in their name, used Persian as the official language and administered Hindu and Muslim laws in the court, according to the shastras and the sharia respectively.¹⁵ So, in this situation it was very natural that Company officials took interest in the customs, traditions and governance of the Indian rulers and the only way to visually record these things was through painting. Thus, they took keen interest in commissioning the portraits of Indian rulers and the picturesque representation of their grand *durbars*.

On the other hand if we look into the stylistic aspect of these paintings we can notice the dilemma of the artists who constantly had to make adjustments due to the changes that were taking place in the broader socio-economic perspective. In the portraits of the Indian rulers commissioned by the Britishers the presence of the European elements were very clear. In these portraits indigenous artists were giving the effect of light and shade and were trying to create an illusion of realism. These features of Renaissance art were very common in contemporary European paintings. Representation of the human anatomy in indigenous painting was becoming very prominent. The conflict within the perception schema of the indigenous artists becomes very clear when we look at the portrait of Fullerton, a British resident, and that of an Indian lady squatting on an European style chair smoking *huqqa* which is on a small table (**Plate 39.3**). In the portrait of Fullerton, painted at Patna (1760-64), we see an European person being awkwardly seated on a carpet on a terrace with a birds eye perspective, whereas in the portrait of the Indian lady painted in the same period at Patna we see an Indian lady seated on an European

styled chair with a naturalist view point (see Archer). Again in the portrait of Fullerton there is no use of shadow but in the portrait of a military officer of the East India Company standing with his dog and a small attendant, painted at Murshidabad (1765-70), there is an attempt at using light and shade as we can see shadows being attached to the feet of the figure. However this use of light and shade in the Company paintings of Murshidabad reached its climax in a painting depicting the *Muharram* festival. The entire night sky being lit up with crackers and lamps creates a kind of fantasy and illusion.

Towards the last quarter of the 18th century, Murshidabad, the seat of Bengal Nawabs, lost its glamour. A large number of artists started their journey towards the newly emerging city of Calcutta. They came in search of new patrons or in other words in search of their livelihood. Sita Ram was the last surviving artist of the Murshidabad school who came to Calcutta in 1810 and received the patronage of Warren Hastings. Before moving into the analysis of the evolution of Company painting at Calcutta it would be better if we look into the brief history behind the evolution of Calcutta as a new urban center.

III

Calcutta had never been a traditional Indian town nor did it have any indigenous artistic tradition. Being the seat of the colonial government its planning and structure was totally modelled in the neo-classical style of Europe. Company government actually wanted to give a feeling of homeliness to those who were coming to India to serve the purpose of the Company in the East by leaving behind their families and familial habitat miles away in Britain. As Thomas and William Daniell wrote, “the bamboo roof suddenly vanished; the marble column took the place of brick walls”.¹⁶ Again Maria Nugent (A Journal from the Year 1811 till the Year 1815) writes on 14th October 1811 “and then we were delighted with the scene-Fort William, the buildings of Calcutta, the banks of the river, the odd shaped boats formed a very striking and really beautiful scene....”¹⁷ But this picturesque journey from the odd shaped mud houses to the perfectly planned symmetrical buildings was not an easy passage.

Job Charnock, assumed to be the founder of the city of Calcutta, having quarrelled with the *subedar* of Bengal in the year 1686, left Hooghly and settled down few miles below the river in a village named Sutanuti. Thereafter for the time being he again went to Hooghly but in 1690 he permanently settled down in Calcutta.¹⁸ Actually the name Calcutta was not used at that time. The British settlement in Calcutta comprised of three villages named Sutanuti, Govindapur and Calcutta. Even the name Calcutta was not used till 1700. Purnendu Potri says that till 27th March of 1700 all the letters that were sent from Calcutta to the Director Generals in London were addressed from Sutanuti rather than from Calcutta.¹⁹ At that time the demarcation of Calcutta as follows - from Bagbazar to Barabazar Taksal was known as Sutanuti, from Taksal to the present day Customs House as Kolkata and from Customs House to Bhawanipore was known as Govindpur.²⁰ In the meantime in 1717 the British East India Company received a *farman* from the Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar. By virtue of this the Company was given duty free trading rights in Bengal. And with the passage of time they gradually became the *zamindars* of Calcutta

or in other words we can say the tax collectors. In 1727 the High Court was established, and thereafter the Government House etc. By 1757 the city of Calcutta was ready to serve the imperialistic zeal of the English trading company. And in this situation it was very natural that it would attract a large number of artists when they could no longer receive any patronage in the traditional towns of the country. On the other hand the English residents who were coming to Calcutta wanted to preserve their experience in the visual form and the only way to do it was by commissioning artists for the pictorial representations. It was natural that the indigenous artists had to adjust their perception schema with that of the Europeans which was completely different from theirs. Apart from these internal changes there were also certain external factors which deeply affected the indigenous artistic traditions.

Lulled by the fortunes of East Indies a large number of artists from England migrated to the newly established city of Calcutta in order to seek their fortunes. Foremost among these European artists to settle in Calcutta was Tilly Kettle (1771-1820). Thereafter came John Zoffany (1783-89) and Arthur Davies (1785-95) and gradually their paintings and artistic production got disseminated in the city. The 'Brush Club' was founded under the joint initiative of the European and indigenous art loving people. The Royal Academy was established in London in 1768 under the sole initiative of King George III. So, the artists who came to India were deeply influenced by the Royal Academy paintings where they were trained in the illusionistic art of the Italian renaissance. But commissioning these European artists was not very cost effective and the indigenous artists, who were trained in miniaturistic tradition, had to adjust themselves with the illusionistic art to meet the requirements of their new patrons.

Other than these internal and external factors orientalist thought also played an important role behind the evolution of the Company School of Painting. In other words we can say that orientalism provided the philosophical background to the evolution of these kinds of artistic traditions. Orientalism was a kind of knowledge thrust to know Indian culture and tradition but not for the upliftment of the Indian society. As Eugene Irschick says "Orientalism produced a knowledge of the past to meet the requirements of the present, i.e., to service the needs of the colonial state".²¹ And this fact is again corroborated by grand-son of Sir Elijah Impey where he says, "When the members of the Supreme Court proceeded to India, they had almost everything to learn with respect to the habits, customs, and prejudices of the natives, and the manner in which they would be affected by the strict administration of English laws. This knowledge, which was wanting, could be acquired only by time and experience in India".²² Barwell Impey again says "he (Sir Impey) felt that a knowledge of the languages used in writing or in speaking by the natives, would become a judge who had to administer the law to them, and that such knowledge was indispensable to one who would obtain a proper insight into their characters, and their habits of thought and action".²³

Thus, it is not surprising that some of the residents like Impey began to commission Indian artist to paint certain themes of the exotic orient. Lady Impey was especially interested in the flora and fauna of the east. In this case the availability of Indian artists became very useful to the Europeans. Though the indigenous artists had no knowledge of perspective or of light and

shade but, being miniature artists had the ability of minute detailing (**Plate 39.4**). This fact is again corroborated by Maria Graham in her book '*Journal of a Residence in India*' where she writes "The botanical garden is beautifully situated on the banks of the Hooghly, and gives the name of Garden-reach to a bend of the river. Above the garden there is an extensive plantation of teak, which is not a native of this part of India, but which thrives well here; and at the end of the plantation are the house and gardens of Sir John Royds, laid out with admirable taste, and containing many specimens of curious plants. After having visited the garden, Roxburgh obligingly allowed me to see his native artists at work, drawing some of the rarest of his botanical treasures; they are the most beautiful and correct delineations of flowers I ever saw. Indeed, the Hindoos excel in all minute works of this kind".²⁴ This capability of minute detailing was exploited by the Lady Impey to get the paintings of Indian flora and fauna. It has been said that Sir Elijah Impey and Lady Impey commissioned as many as 300 paintings in Calcutta in between 1777-1782. From 1777 onwards they employed mainly three Indian artists to paint their collection of Oriental flora and fauna- a Muslim Shaykh Zayn al-Din, and two Hindus, Bhawani Das and Ram Das (**Plate 39.5**).²⁵

Again Lord Hastings his wife employed Sita Ram to record views of places which they saw on their journeys, and also to record the flora and fauna of India. Hastings' occasionally refers to Sita Ram, in his journal, as Bengal draftsman who was engaged in the official establishment in and around Calcutta. At some unknown stage he was picked out for the superiority of his work and was given training in pure watercolor technique that suggests access to the work of George Chinnery and his pupil Charles D'Oyly. His principal work survives in ten volumes of drawings recording Hastings' *journey from Calcutta to Lucknow*, Haryana, Agra and back in 1814-15.²⁶

Another outstanding patron of Company paintings in Calcutta was Maria Nugent. She intended to record each and everything that struck her imagery during her residence in India from 1811-1815. She writes on 14th October 1811 "The materannee never makes her appearance, unless called for by the ayah, but sit squatting like a cat on the back stairs, with a long veil, which covers not only her head, face and shoulder, but her whole person- her dress is a coarse petticoat, very full her arms are covered with silver bracelets and are really remarkable pretty and well shaped"²⁷ She again writes " I pass over many descriptions of people, dresses, buildings as I intend to get drawings of everything...."²⁸ On 29th February she writes "Sir George in council. — Low and unwell myself— did not see any company. Captain Caulfield sent me a present of wild boars' teeth. I mean to begin a collection of curiosities of all sorts, drawings for my dear children".²⁹

It was not only Lady Nugent but also other British residents like Fanny Parkes also took interest in Indian people and their costumes and intended to get the sketch of those odd ones. Fanny Parkes writes in her book (*The Journey in Search of Picturesque Representations in India*)- "The sketch of 'the sircar' is an excellent representation of one in Calcutta : they dress themselves with the utmost care and most scrupulous neatness in white muslin, which is worn exactly as represented; and the turban often consists of twenty-one yards of fine Indian muslin, by fourteen inches in breadth, most carefully folded and arranged in small plaits ; his reed pen is

behind his ear, and the roll of paper in his hand is in readiness for the orders of the sahib. The shoes are of common leather; sometimes they wear them most elaborately embroidered in gold and silver thread and coloured beads. All men in India wear mustachoes; they look on the bare faces of the English with amazement and contempt. The sircar is a Hindoo, as shown by the opening of the vest on the right side, and the white dot, the mark of his caste, between his eyes".³⁰

Initially the artists painted the European portraits from an indigenous sense of perspective, with the gradual establishment of European dominance over both economy and politics of India, the artists had to change their perception schema to cater to the taste and preferences of the new patrons who were mostly Europeans. Sometimes the subject matter remained the same viz. the portraits of the Mughal emperor or the *darbar* scenes of the nawabs, but these were painted from an European perspective. At other times, the subject matter changed but perspective remained the same. Though they adjusted their perception schema with European taste and preferences, the artists did not give up the indigenous style of painting. It has been shown how they still retained the ability of minute detailing for which they were engaged by Lady Impey to paint the natural history drawings i.e., the paintings of flora and fauna of the exotic East.

Thus there is no doubt that indigenous artists had to go through certain changes to adjust their perception schema to suffice the taste and preferences of their new patrons. And this adjustment was never an easy process as it is very clear from the paintings of Murshidabad and Calcutta respectively. At the same time the elements of continuity were also very prominent. Especially if we look into the set of Natural History Drawings commissioned by Lady Impey then we can see the features like minute detailing, an unparalleled skill of an indigenous miniature artist, was very clear in those paintings. Again in another painting where we see Lady Impey giving instruction to her household staffs, painted by Shaikh Zia ud-Din (**Plate 39.6**), certain traditional stylistic features are very clear such as the lotus scroll bordering the carpet spread over the floor of the room. Though there is a sense of perspective in the overall setting of the painting, at the same time the mindset for eulogizing a patron is also very clear. As here the patron was Lady Impey so her posture is elevated and her figure is also a bit enlarged which is not very congenial with the overall perspective of the painting. At the same time if we look into another painting of Lady Impey where she is looking to Marian **Impey dancing** on indigenous music, painted by John Zoffany (**Plate 39.7**), then the changes and continuities in the perception schema of an indigenous artist becomes more clear. In both the paintings we see the use of light and shade and the notion of perspective but stylistically they are very different. So coming to the question was there a complete cultural break from the past? From the above analysis of the company paintings from Murshidabad and Calcutta respectively, we can definitely say that there was not a complete cultural break from the past, there were certain changes with elements of continuity at least till the end of eighteenth and beginning of 19th century.

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