

Impact of Japanese Artist's Wash Technique in the Expansion of Modern Bengal School

Abstract

China and Japan traditionally consider for calligraphy and painting. In East Asia the term 'Ink and wash painting' referred as 'brush painting'. The Chinese denote it as mo-shui, while the Japanese call it suibokuga or sumi-e. Brush strokes in both are same. Painting medium for ink and wash is black ink, typically applied with long haired brushes on paper or silk cloth.

The Japanese influence of wash technique is seeming from the soft misty quality seen in the paintings which became a characteristic of Bengal School in India. At Santiniketan artists developed a new style of water colour called the Wash-technique. Wash is one of the most important techniques in watercolour painting. It is also known as wetting technique. This research is about how, the Japanese art reached India and become an integral part of Indian Artist.

Keywords: Ink, Wash technique, Painting, Calligraphy, Bengal School

Introduction

Twentieth- century art history of both countries- India & Japan has been elaborated within the framework of nation-building. While Japan was an independent state in the first half of the century, India was under Colonial rule. In spite of stark differences in the political setup of both countries, intellectuals from both nations were involved in intensive interactions

In 1902, a new technique of art was introduced by Yokoyama Taikan and Hisbida Sbusno during their stay in India where they came in contact with the Tagore's in Calcutta. This marked the beginning of India's cultural relations with Modern Japan. During their stay in the country, they were immensely impressed by the Indian artist and taught Rabindranath and his elder brother Gaganendranath Tagore the techniques of Japanese brush-n-ink and watercolour wash. Both Bengali not only learned the Japanese technique, they also engaged in innovation and modification to better suit their own needs. Abanindranath Tagore was hugely impressed by this new technique and he promoted amongst his students as well. The students who followed this technique were later known as the artists of the Neo-Bengal school of paintings.



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Gaganendranath Tagore, Smoking Hoka, 1929, Abanindranath Tagore colour Shahjadpur Landscape, water watercolour and ink on paper

For a long time in Europe, watercolour was considered a medium for the learners and one medium that is difficult to restore. However, Tempera was considered higher in status than watercolour. With the beginning of the twentieth century, new techniques, as well as better quality papers were being discovered for restoration. Artists then started exploring their world beyond the confines of realism and this gave

watercolour medium new respectability and many artists took up watercolour as their primary medium. At the same time, Abanindranath Tagore improvised a new watercolour technique called the 'Wash Technique'. It soon became so popular that it was adopted by almost all the newer artists of the time like Abani Sen and Pradosh Dasgupta.



Sati. Nandalal Bose, gold, wash, and tempera on paper Bharat Mata by Abanindranath Tagore

Process of Wash Technique

Wash is one of the most important techniques in watercolour painting. It is also known as wetting technique. This technique is generally used in covering the large area of a paper or a canvas. There are different types of watercolour washes namely Pale wash, A solid wash, gradient, layered and colour mix.

For the application of wash technique, the area of paper which is to be covered by water colour is dampened in water for which the paper is taped tightly on all the sides. For applying a wash to watercolour paper the artist needs to use a light hand. To paint, a thick paint brush is selected which is dipped in paint, containing a large amount of water and very less amount of paint. Paint is applied on the wet paper or canvas. The first stroke starts from the top of the paper. It is applied from one side of the paper to another with a single stroke. The brush is dipped in the re-inker solution and the second stroke is applied underneath the first. This process of applying watercolour is continued until the entire paper is covered. At last, the tape is removed.

Besides this, more than one colour may be used in the technique and it is specially used for landscape paintings. When gum Arabic watercolour washes are applied to a highly permeable surface such as paper, its effects are long lasting. This technique is a very important technique in East Asian art.

The beauty of Indian art lies in its delicate line work. In western art, colours and tones define the division of the space but that is not the case in wash paintings. In finishing wash painting, one has to repeat the lining of the eyebrows, eyelids, eyes, nose, lips, ears and chin. The upper lip is always made darker than the lower lip. In other areas where greater depth is needed additional depth, lines are added. Beside this, to maintain the effect of wash, the figures and other forms should fade and merge with the background.

Modification in the Technique by Bengal Artists

Abanindranath observed keenly how Taikan, using a large, flat brush spread water over a carefully painted and highly finished surface giving it a range of soft and delicate tones. Later, Abanindranath developed the technique further. After a thin transparent layer of watercolour, the painting was literally dipped in water (the Japanese never did it) which washed away some of the colours, and yet another transparent colour-wash was given on it way, after successive colour and water-washes, different colours fused together bringing out tender tones, replacing the stern geometry of European pictorial space with a dream-like timelessness.

The themes of the painting include misty and romantic visions of the Indian Landscapes, historic scenes and portraits as well as stories and events from daily life. Many other renowned artists of Bengal School like Asit Halder, M.A.R. Chughati, Sunayani Devi and Kshitindranath Majumdar also experimented with this technique.

During the first era of the 20th century, the Indian Society of Oriental Art brought out the beautiful colour reproductions of original paintings by Abanindranath Tagore, Surendranath Ganguly, Nandalal Bose and other old masters of Mughal and Rajput art. Other important artists like Bikash Bhattacharya, Ganesh Paine, and Sanjay Bhattacharya worked in water colours. Thus it may not be an exaggeration that cultural tradition had fuelled the consequent Swadeshi Movement in Bengal from 1905 onwards.



Gloomy Radhika. Chughtai. Wash and Tempera

Aim of the Study

1. To study the ink painting of China and Japan
2. To understand the process of wash technique.
3. To explore the new possibilities in wash technique
4. To know the expansion of wash technique in India

Review of Literature

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Conclusion

Indian culture is rich and versatile and its ability to assimilate art and tradition from other cultures add to its uniqueness. Japanese art has influenced Indian art culture for a long time. Indian artists have been greatly influenced by Japanese techniques. They have not only learnt and practised the Japanese art in its pure form but also modified and created new techniques suiting their art and sensibilities.

Japanese watercolour wash technique forms the basis of Wash technique developed by Abanindranath Tagore who greatly improvised the original technique and promoted the same amongst his students who later formed the Neo-Bengal school of art. This technique has now become an integral part of Indian Art form greatly adding to richness, diversity and uniqueness of our culture.

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