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# A Study of the Mother Archetype in Abanindranath Tagore's Bharat Mata Painting and its Influence in Indian Cinema.

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#### **Abstract:**

The classic picture "Bharat Mata by Abanindranath Tagore is important to the discussion of Indian nationalism and cultural identity. The goal of this study was to investigate how the mother archetype is portrayed in this important piece of art. Utilizing Jungian analytical psychology and cultural studies as a framework, this analysis explores the cultural implications and symbolic imagery rooted in the depiction of Bharat Mata as a mother. This research clarifies how Bharat Mata represents the maternal and protecting qualities of the Indian people while also representing their collective identity and ambitions by analyzing the painting's visual components, historical background, and sociopolitical connotations. The research also looks into the mother archetype's continuing resonance in Indian cultural narratives and how it might affect conversations about society and politics today. With through. By employing a multidisciplinary methodology, this work advances our comprehension of the intricate relationship that exists between

**Keywords:** Mother Archetype, Abanindranath Tagore, Bharat Mata Painting, Nationalism, Bengal school of art, Indian cinema, neo-Hindutva.

#### INTRODUCTION

Abanindranath Tagore's rich artistic expression helped Modern Indian Painting find its way and flourish in the early 20th century. This influenced the Bengal Renaissance art movement and helped pave the way for Indian nationalism. He was the Pioneer of Bengal School of Art and his works were greatly inspired by the Swadeshi art movement. His paintings are vivid examples of the combination of Western art and Indian traditional art form. In this study, we are going to look at how Abanindranath Tagore expressed his vision towards modern Indian painting and how his portrayal of Bharat Mata<sup>[]</sup> was very much relevant during the Indian independence struggle, and how it was able to emotionally move thousands of patriots then and what impression it had on other art forms and the image of present Bharat Mata in 21<sup>st</sup> Century India.

Abanindranath Tagore, popularly known as Aban Thakur was born on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1871 in Jorasanko, Calcutta (Kolkata). He was greatly inspired and moved by the Swadeshi ideology in Indian Art and founded the Bengal School of Art Movement which later led to the development of modern Indian painting. His artistic mind explored not only in paintings but also in the fields of Literature and Music. He mastered the art form of the Western world and presented a new idea of painting in combination with Indian traditional art form which included the traditional Mughal Miniature painting. Though he picked



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the necessary elements of naturalism preferred by the colonial administration, he felt the importance of Indian Folk Art.

In the 1890s he illustrated the life of Krishna which drew the attention of E.B. Havell who appointed Abanindranath as the vice principal at the Government School of Art in Calcutta. His career here was short but the impact was immense. In the year 1896, Havell and Abanindranath together saw the need of Indianise art education in the colonized country. Originating in the Bengal School, Revivalism became the key movement in Indian Modern Painting. The Swadeshi ideology and the Bengal School were the two major elements that permeated the Revivalism of Indian cultural art forms and artistic methods at the time of British Colonization.

Abanindranath learned to work with pastel colors from Italian artist Olindo Gilardi. He majorly focused on the "tones and tonality" of the painting and became the only Indian artist to be able to achieve an effect of "Venetian Color" in the paintings with the help of pastels or crayons.

From Charles C. Palmer, Abanindranath was introduced to the various styles of painting such as Oil Painting, Portrait Painting, Water Color, and many more. The methods of perspective drawing were also introduced to him by Palmer and combining all the lessons from various tutors he picked up his style of visualization.

Later with the art of Bengal School, The Wash Technique<sup>[11]</sup> became associated with India. The actual origination of Wash Technique is when Abanindranath was trying to imagine a pan-Asian cultural identity, he looked for inspiration in traditional art forms from Persia to Japan. His uncle Rabindranath Tagore was friends with Okakura Kakuzō and that occasionally brought Japanese artists to Kolkata, such as Yokoyama Taikan, Hishida Shunsō and Katsuta Shōkin. With Abanindranath Tagore the Wash Technique<sup>[11]</sup> was introduced in Bengal by using subtle Ink and Brush.

He clubbed all the techniques such as European, Japanese, Mughal, and Rajput to form his own palette, and to achieve this the Indian independence movement played a huge role in his artworks.

Being the pioneer of the Bengal School of Art he combined traditional Indian techniques such as the Mughal Miniature and Pahadi<sup>[12]</sup> painting with European art forms and the amalgamation of these two became the key aspect of Abanindranath's artwork.

**Literature review:** A well-known literary subgenre examines the social, political, and cultural circumstances that led to the creation of "Bharat Mata" as a symbol of Indian nationalism. The formation of national identity in colonial India has been studied by academics like Partha Chatterjee (1986) and Sumathi Ramaswamy (2010), who have highlighted the influence of visual culture on collective imaginaries. They contend that the representation of Bharat Mata by Abanindranath Tagore captures the political conflicts and cultural goals of the Indian nationalist movement, especially in the early 20th century.

Another line of investigation examines the painting's mother archetype's symbolism using psychoanalytic theory. Scholars of Jungian theory such as Erich Neumann (1955) and Marie-Louise von Franz (1974) have examined the Great Mother archetype in diverse cultural settings, emphasizing its correlation with fertility nutrition and collective unconscious.

Scholars like Ashis Nandy (1983) and Sudhir Kakar (1982) have studied the maternal imagery in Indian mythology and its reverberation in nationalist rhetoric within the Indian setting. Moreover, Tagore's painting's aesthetic components and visual components have been closely examined by art historians. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1917) and Stella Kramrisch (1924) have examined how



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Tagore's works combine Western academic methods with Indian creative traditions, placing "Bharat Mata" in the larger framework of the Bengal School of Art and its revivalist goals. Recent academic research has also addressed the mother archetype's gendered aspects in "Bharat Mata." Within nationalist discourses, feminist critics such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985) and Mrinalini Sinha (1995) have criticized the essentialization of womanhood and the erasure of multiple gender identities. They dispute.

They emphasize the maternal symbol's patriarchal and exclusive connotations in their argument for a critical examination of it.

Methodology: The study of the mother archetype in Abanindranath Tagore's "Bharat Mata" painting involves a multifaceted methodology blending art analysis, cultural contextualization, and psychological interpretation. Through a thorough visual analysis, including examination of composition, color, and symbolism, alongside an exploration of Tagore's artistic style and techniques, the study aims to uncover the nuances of the mother figure's portrayal. Cultural context plays a pivotal role, contextualizing the painting within India's nationalist movement of the early 20th century and delving into the significance of the mother archetype within Indian culture and mythology. Furthermore, employing psychological frameworks such as Jungian analysis facilitates understanding the archetypal themes of nurturing, protection, and identity embedded within the artwork, offering insights into both individual and collective unconscious motifs. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study seeks to illuminate the rich symbolism and cultural resonances of Tagore's portrayal of the mother archetype in "Bharat Mata," contributing to a deeper understanding of its significance within Indian art and nationalism.

#### Role of Abanindranath's Bengal School of Art:

The Bengal School of Art, led by Abanindranath Tagore, played a significant role in the Indian nationalist movement by using art as a medium for political expression. This art movement emerged in the late 19th century in Kolkata, India, and aimed to revive the country's rich artistic heritage by rejecting Western art styles taught in colonial institutions. The Bengal School of Art focused on creating a uniquely Indian art form that expressed the nation's cultural identity and fueled Indian nationalism.

Abanindranath Tagore, the founder of the Bengal School of Art, was a key figure in this movement. His paintings, such as Bharat Mata, depicted a young woman with four arms in the manner of Hindu deities, holding objects symbolic of India's national aspirations. This painting established a pattern of patriotism and became a powerful visual language that complemented the political and ideological rhetoric of the time.

The Bengal School of Art's aesthetic and thematic choices provided a visual language that powerfully complemented the political and ideological rhetoric of the time. Art, thus, became an effective medium for political expression, merging culture and politics in a way that had a lasting impact on the Indian freedom struggle.

In addition to Abanindranath Tagore, other notable artists of the Bengal School of Art included Nandalal Bose, M.A.R Chughtai, Sunayani Devi, Manishi Dey, Mukul Dey, Kalipada Ghoshal, Asit Kumar Haldar, Sudhir Khastgir, Kshitindranath Majumdar, and Sughra Rababi.

The Bengal School of Art's influence in India declined with the spread of modernist ideas in the 1920s. However, there has been a surge in interest in the Bengal school of art among scholars and connoisseurs as of 2012.

The Bengal School of Art's legacy is significant in the world of Indian art. Its deep impact on the cultural



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landscape of India and its role in shaping the trajectory of modern Indian art cannot be overstated. The artists of the Bengal School delved into the realms of ancient Indian art, particularly the miniature paintings of the Mughal and Rajput traditions, and aimed to assimilate the spiritual and philosophical underpinnings of these traditions into their work, infusing it with a sense of reverence and spirituality. The Bengal School's emphasis on cultural and historical narratives of India, its celebration of the country's rich heritage, and its conveyance of a sense of pride and nationalism made art a medium for reasserting India's identity and reclaiming its artistic autonomy. The fusion of traditional and modern art in India created a distinct visual language that resonated with both traditionalists and modernists. The Bengal School of Art, led by Abanindranath Tagore, played a significant role in the Indian nationalist movement by using art as a medium for political expression. The school's aesthetic and thematic choices provided a visual language that powerfully complemented the political and ideological rhetoric of the time, making art an effective medium for political expression and merging culture and politics in a way that had a lasting impact on the Indian freedom struggle. The Bengal School of Art's legacy is significant in the world of Indian art, as it produced a significant legacy in the world of Indian art and shaped the trajectory of modern Indian art.

#### **Bharat Mata concept (1905):**



Fig. 1. Bharat Mata by Abanindranath Tagore

The feminine body and the various facets of "mother"—motherland, mother language, and motherhood—have functioned as the most effective and universal emblems of nation-imagining in nationalism. The



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mother symbol was particularly potent since it could have various meanings depending on the situation. Charu Gupta(2021)

The widely uttered slogan "Bharat Mata ki Jai!" is a very common refrain in India, especially during patriotic occasions. Even if it's frequently used, very little contemplation is given to the significance of the whole concept of Bharat Mata and its symbolic and spiritual idea and how it emerged during the Indian Freedom Fight and has continued to stay relevant even after that.

The idea of Bharat Mata emerged with an emotional sensibility to devote freedom to the motherland against British Colonization. The key elements Abanindranath implied was

The Swadeshi Movement where the idea was to create and utilize products made in India, he used handmade paper for the painting.

The Japanese Wash Technique<sup>[11]</sup> where he was inspired by the unique painting style and incorporated it with Traditional Indian Art forms of Mughal and Rajput.

Both of this was introduced and got into practice

with the Bengal School of Art Movement<sup>[3]</sup> and that led to the Modern Indian Painting<sup>[1]</sup>.

With Abanindranath's Bharat Mata, Indian Freedom Fighters idolized a strong Mother Archetypal image that emotionally moved them to not only fight against British Rule but they were ready to sacrifice their own lives for National Freedom. Bharat Mata became the goddess of the struggle and people started worshiping the mother for Victory. Now with Abanindranath's painting freedom fighters had a spiritual strong motherly image that represented their country on one canvas.

#### **Painting Analysis:**

Abanindranath used watercolor in Bharat Mata and his composition was very much relevant in depicting a strongly worshiped mother archetypal image.

The vivid Saffron color symbolizes Fire (Agni) which portrays the struggle for independence. It also represents Sacrifice, light, and the quest for salvation. The saffron color depicts religious devotion.

The mandala behind her gives her the image of a godly persona which portrays her as a Motherly Goddess of the Country.

She is wearing a saree in old Bengali style and the curvy yet very strong lines of the garment give the essence of her being strong and the same time calm in nature.

In her four hands, she holds a Rudraksha mala, a white cloth, sheaves of paddy, and a palm leaf manuscript. The **Rudraksha mala** is strongly associated with Shaivism and is also known as the beads of salvation. Thus, it represents the **spiritual strength of the nation**. The piece of **White Cloth** that she holds refers to the clothing that we wear. While the white color stands as a symbol of peace, it also represents cotton, which has always been an important contributor to India's economy. The **Manuscripts** are the Vedas that are the source of all knowledge and reflect the country's strong educational background. Last but not least, the rice **Paddy** emphasizes the rich food that our country produces. He places some lotus at the bottom which is also considered the National Flower and here Mother India who represents the strength of the country very strongly is also portrayed with the softness of the flowers. Her four hands give a multi-dimension to the depiction of a Strong Indian Woman. So, Tagore's Bharat Mata is a personification of India's rich economy and cultural heritage which emotionally strengthens the mother Archetype in India.

#### **Influence of Bharat Mata on Indian Cinema:**

Bharat Mata depicts the concept of Mother India as a nurturing and protective figure, embodying the spirit



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of the nation. This artistic representation of India as a mother figure has had a profound influence on various aspects of Indian culture, including literature, art, and cinema. In the context of Indian cinema, the influence of the Mother archetype, inspired by Abanindranath Tagore's Bharat Mata painting, can be observed in several ways:

**Nationalistic Themes:** The image of Bharat Mata as a motherly figure symbolizes the nation and its people. Indian filmmakers have often incorporated nationalistic themes in their movies, portraying the struggles, sacrifices, and triumphs of the country. The mother archetype serves as a powerful symbol of unity and patriotism. Films like Mother India (1957), Kismet (1943), Kranti (1981) are the evident example of that.

**Matriarchal Characters:** Indian cinema frequently features strong and virtuous female characters who embody the qualities associated with the Mother archetype. These characters often play pivotal roles in shaping the narrative, guiding and inspiring the protagonists, and representing the values of selflessness and sacrifice.

**Symbolism in Visual Storytelling:** Directors and cinematographers draw inspiration from visual arts, and Abanindranath Tagore's iconic painting has influenced the visual representation of Mother India in cinema. Symbolic imagery, such as using the landscape to represent the motherland or incorporating motherly figures in key scenes, can be traced back to the influence of the Bharat Mata painting.

**Mythological and Historical Epics:** Indian cinema often adapts mythological and historical stories that involve powerful female characters. These narratives, rooted in Indian culture and heritage, resonate with the concept of the Mother archetype and contribute to the portrayal of women as symbols of strength, wisdom, and nurturing care.

**Social Messages:** Films in Indian cinema sometimes convey social messages and advocate for societal change. The Mother archetype is utilized to highlight issues such as women's empowerment, and the importance of family values. The nurturing and protective qualities associated with the Mother archetype are leveraged to promote positive social change.

In the 1943 film **Kismet**, the Bharat Mata image played a huge role in one of the songs called "**Dur Hato Ae Duniya Walo**" where people of India are loudly expressing that India is a country of **Communal Harmony** and no one deserves to look at them and break their Unity in the stage-backdrop of Bharat Mata. The film's portrayal of Bharat Mata as a divine mother figure has become ingrained in Indian popular culture and nationalist imagery.



Fig. 3. Bharat Mata in Kismet\_ Dur Hato Ae Duniya Walo (1943)



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Bharat Mata depicts not only a nurturing selfless mother character but it strongly portrays a woman of values who inspired thousands of lives to fight against barbaric colonization. Kismet's skillful integration of the mother archetype and the Bharat Mata symbol demonstrates the film's profound cultural significance. By tapping into deep-rooted Indian values and nationalist sentiments, the film left an indelible mark on the cinematic and social landscape of the country.

**Mother India:** The mother archetype in Indian cinema often embodies the selfless, sacrificial love of a mother for her children and nation. The mother figure represents the enduring cultural traditions and indomitable spirit of the Indian people. The 1957 film Mother India, directed by Mehboob Khan, is a landmark in Indian cinema that cemented the mother archetype as a national symbol. Nargis' powerful portrayal of the resilient, sacrificing mother Radha has become one of the most iconic performances in Indian film history.

The film's influence can be seen in countless subsequent depictions of the mother figure in Indian cinema, solidifying its place in the national consciousness. The mother archetype in Indian films often represents the willingness to endure hardship and make personal sacrifices for the greater good of the nation. The mother archetype transcends individual identities, becoming a unifying symbol that represents the collective spirit of the Indian people. Early depictions of mothers in Indian cinema often adhered to conservative, idealized representations of womanhood and motherhood.

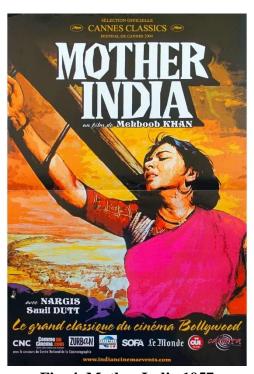


Fig. 4. Mother India 1957

Devi: Bharat Mata, or Mother India, is a prominent female personification of the Indian subcontinent, often depicted as a goddess-like figure. In Devi, this maternal archetype is central to the film's themes of devotion, power, and the tensions between tradition and modernity.

The character of Bharat Mata, as embodied by Doyamoyee, serves as a symbolic representation of the complex relationship between the individual, the family, and the nation. Her elevation to a divine status



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reflects the reverence and power associated with the maternal archetype in Indian culture.



Fig. 5. Devi ,Satyajit Ray 1960.

Satyajit Ray's Devi masterfully examines the maternal archetype of Bharat Mata, revealing its multifaceted nature and the tensions it embodies within the context of Indian nationalism, tradition, and modernization. The film's enduring legacy reflects the continued relevance and complexity of this powerful symbol in Indian culture and cinema. The film's setting, a traditional Bengali household, reflects the powerful role of the mother figure within the family structure. Doyamoyee, the protagonist, is elevated to a divine status by her father-in-law, who believes she has been possessed by the goddess Kali, the ultimate mother deity.

#### **Bharat Mata of the 21st Century:**

During the Indian Independence Bharat Mata emerged and played a crucial role in inspiring and emotionally moving the freedom fighters of India. Bharat Mata was the mother nature that represented the country as a Whole with its strong Communal Harmony. What makes India stand out in the World is its Diversity among all religions and the Unity that binds its people together in one Nation. In the paper Visualizing the Impact of Art: An Update and Comparison of Current Psychological Models of Art Experience Matthew Pelowski Atal (2016) said Impact of art gradually changes. So we can say In case of Bharat Mata 21<sup>st</sup> century is not the same as the previous days of the painting.

During the Independence struggle Abanindranath's Bharat Mata united people across the country to fight for and to sacrifice their life for their motherland, for they wanted their country to be Free from the Barbaric Power of Colonization.



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Fig. 6. Bharat of RSS

As in the current political situation, we see an influence of Motherland getting depicted as the "Land of Hindus" and is up for building a "Hindu Rastra". The Bharat Mata image has changed its spiritual and symbolic meaning in organizations like RSS.

The mother archetype once fought against the barbaric power of Britain is now being deconstructed Reddy identified the "diffuse logic" of Hindutva as being both hazy and in process, with the potential to become "a mediating discourse in its own right." Edward Anderson used this identification to frame "neo-Hindutva" (Citation2011, 421). Some have observed that Hindu nationalism among expatriates is especially remarkable in that it is unique and hybrid, with "vernacular forms that negotiate local, legal, social, moral, and political environments in ways that variously concentrate or dilute their ideological emphases," according to Reddy's Citation (2012). In this time the Bharat Mata in the influence of neo-Hindutva transforms into an angry warrior over time from the peaceful mother image. Gone are the days of the demure, submissive Bollywood heroine. Today's leading ladies are bold, assertive, and unapologetic in their pursuit of agency and independence. They grapple with complex social issues, fight against oppression, and inspire audiences with their resilience and determination.

Gupta and Gupta (2013) analyze the representation of social issues in Indian cinema, with a specific case



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study of Slumdog Millionaire. The findings of this study offer insights into how the mother archetype is utilized to address social issues and inequalities in Indian society.

#### **Knowledge Gaps and Future Research Directions**

While the influence of the mother archetype in Abanindranath Tagore's Bharat Mata painting is evident, there is a gap in understanding its nuanced portrayal in Indian cinema. Future research should focus on conducting a comprehensive analysis of the mother archetype in Indian films, exploring the diverse representations and their impact on societal perceptions of motherhood.

Additionally, the existing literature predominantly focuses on the influence of Indian cinema on the audience, with limited exploration of the socio-cultural factors that shape cinematic representations of the mother archetype. Future research should delve into the historical, religious, and socio-political influences on the portrayal of motherhood in Indian cinema, providing a more comprehensive understanding of this archetype's significance.

#### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the concept of Bharat Mata, as illustrated by Abanindranath Tagore's iconic painting, has played a significant role in shaping the cultural and national identity of India. Emerging during the Indian Freedom Fight, Bharat Mata became a symbol of strength and unity, inspiring countless individuals to fight for the country's independence. Abanindranath's artistic representation, rooted in the Swadeshi Movement and the Bengal School of Art, depicted Mother India as a powerful, nurturing figure embodying the nation's rich cultural heritage and economic strength.

The influence of Bharat Mata extended beyond the canvas, impacting various facets of Indian culture, including literature, art, and cinema. In the realm of cinema, the mother archetype, inspired by Tagore's painting, found expression in nationalistic themes, matriarchal characters, visual storytelling, mythological and historical epics, and social messages. Films like "Kismet" in 1943 used Bharat Mata as a backdrop to convey messages of communal harmony and unity.

However, as we move into the 21st century, the concept of Bharat Mata takes on a new and complex dimension. The contemporary representation of Bharat Mata by organizations in the light of neo-Hindutva diverges from the inclusive and diverse spirit that once united the country. The shift towards promoting a "neo-Hindutva" may challenge the secular and democratic principles that Bharat Mata stood for during the independence struggle. The Motherland, once a symbol of unity against colonization, is now being deconstructed to serve divisive political ideologies.

In this evolving context, it becomes imperative for India to reflect on the true essence of Bharat Mata—a symbol that should unite all citizens irrespective of religious affiliations. The challenge lies in preserving the inclusive spirit of Bharat Mata, ensuring that the diverse tapestry of the nation remains a source of strength and pride in the face of evolving political narratives. The journey of Bharat Mata, from a unifying force in the fight against colonial rule to a symbol subject to political reinterpretation, underscores the importance of safeguarding the pluralistic ideals that define the spirit of Modern India. \

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