ABSTRACT

Jamini Roy – The very name evokes images of bright, rich colours, large symbolic eyes, bold, flowing, curved lines and a sense of the theatrical. An artist whose work was difficult to define – contemporary art or folk art. An artist who was one of the fathers of the Indian contemporary art movement. Jamini Roy was born in 1887 in a village in the Bankura district of West Bengal - an area well known for various forms of folk art and craft especially pottery and clay work. He was the first Indian artist to consciously model his work entirely on folk art.

In the present study we are going to discuss “Folklore and motifs in Jamini Roy’s paintings”

By the word 'folk-lore' a folklorist means myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, folk verses, folk beliefs, folk superstitions, customs, folk drama, folk song, folk music, folk dance, ballads, folk cults, folk gods and goddesses,
rituals, festivals, magic, witchcraft, folk art and craft, and variety of forms of artistic expression of oral culture or rural and tribal folks or unlettered city dwellers that bind man to man. Most of the people from the rural Bengal are guided by the above mentioned attributes. In Chapter I we tried to explore the real meaning of folklore in context to Indian folk art.

Folk art in Bengal includes several forms of painting, painted toys, terracotta, kanthas (quilted embroidery) and alpanas (floor decorations). These are all interrelated and reflect the lifestyle and culture of the people, their rites, customs and celebrations. Chapter II describes historical background of Bengal art and various folk arts of this province. Jamini Roy was essentially rooted to the soil. Even though he virtually spent his life in the city of Kolkata. Perhaps an inner tranquility helped him to maintain a certain calm in spite of the tension of the life around him. Chapter III gives a detailed study of Jamini Roy’s life, distinct phases of his life, and his early works.
It goes on to describe several events that influenced him to turn to indigenous sources for inspiration.

From about the mid 1920's Roy started experimenting with folk art styles. Initially he drew a lot of inspiration from Kalighat Pat paintings as well as terracotta work on temple walls of Bengal especially Bishnupur temple. He also showed his fascination for the paintings of peasant painters of Bengal who used to sell their work at the rural bazaars. From this, evolved the Jamini Roy the world knows so well. The lines became bolder and simpler, the colours rich and the images lyrical. Over time, Roy moved away from canvas and started using different types of fabric, cloth, wood, mats, etc. and started using colours and pigments made from vegetables. He selected themes from joys and sorrows of everyday life of rural Bengal, religious themes like-Ramayana, Sri Chaitanya, Radha-Krishna and Jesus Christ were also painted by him. Chapter IV gives an explicit study of his themes, style and technique, with a
brief account of the women in his paintings. The chapter ends with the critical appreciation of various critics.

Jamini Roy gave a novel and daring direction to the art of colonial India by evolving his idiom of expression out of Bengal's folk-painting. He successfully bridged the gap that developed in the cultures of the traditional rural Bengal and the colonial Kolkata. It was Jamini Roy who provided a broader base to the art of modern India by enriching it with ethnic substances. The art of Jamini Roy was a milestone in contemporary Indian Art. Not only did it break away from the notion that art was the sole preserve of the upper classes and had to necessarily follow European styles but it also brought to fore the folk art language. Introduction of bold yet simple and minimal use of lines also brought in the new wave of reducing images to the bare essentials and yet tell the story emphatically.

Thus the aim of Jamini Roy at the formalistic level can be simply defined as a love for simple uncluttered shapes,
vibrantly coloured and organised in a simple manner derived from various complex traditions. At the emotional level his aim appears to be to create a harmony between an imaginative concept and his technical expertise. Occasionally, his paintings suggest a social message but that is always indirect and veiled. It is therefore, his formal characteristic as also the easily infusible aesthetic that Jamini Roy transmitted to some of his contemporaries and younger artists.