

**GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM AND ITS RECEPTION IN  
EARLY INDIAN MODERNISM (1920s – 1950s)**

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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## **DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE**

This dissertation titled, “German Expressionism and Its Reception in Early Indian Modernism (1920s – 1950s)”, submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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### **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation titled, "German Expressionism and Its Reception in Early Indian Modernism (1920s – 1950s)", submitted by Rahul Dev, the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is his own work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Parul Dave Mukherjee', is written above the name of the Dean.

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For errors and omissions in this research work I am solely to be held responsible.

*Rahul Dev*

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## INTRODUCTION

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'*German Expressionism*' is a term which describes one of the most influential movements of art that took place in the heart of Europe in twentieth century. While its historical significance within western modernism has been subject of study, German Expressionism's influence on non-western modernism has not been studied. The beginning of twentieth century was very disturbing as it saw two world wars, resulting in massive disturbances across the world. This was a period when existing social and political order stood challenged. Corresponding to such upheaval, many movements of art appeared which were to upset the existing norms and styles of art. These movements though at variance with each other, carried the tendency of doing something different from conventional way of art. Amongst many-Cubism, Dadaism and Futurism, to name a few, German Expressionism was a path-breaking phenomenon, which was fundamentally, developing a voice of protest against existing social ills.

German Expressionism, owing to its character of protest, received substantial attention from Indian artists. The point of contact with the ideas and idioms of this movement was initiated by artists in Bengal. In this period, Indian art was going through a phase of stagnancy and dullness. Its themes were essentially traditional and there was an urgent need of broadening the horizon of artistic thinking and cultural practice. Subsequent to this phase, modern Indian art was introduced to the idioms of German Expressionism and after that it took a very different direction. My topic is to study this particular juncture of early modern Indian art and look at the exchange of different aesthetics that took place.

My main focus on a particular strand of European modernism as in German Expressionism and explore the pervasive impact it had on the emerging modern art of India. My other line of enquiry is to examine the prevalence of German Expressionism, out of all other western art movements and inquire into the tremendous appeal that this specific art movement had for generations of Indian artists.

Expressionism quintessentially was not a unified movement, which could be defined in precise terms such as 'Cubism' or 'Futurism'. As aptly stated by Shearer West,<sup>1</sup> the featured that could come close to perceive the movement of Expressionism was its polarities. One could find an overarching episteme within which pacifists and glorifiers of war found space. German Expressionism developed in two phases. In the first phase, artists were projecting spiritualism and 'inner necessity'. The second phase saw the artists using art as a way of responding to socio-political crisis. Art in this phase was a tool of protest. Having such striking polarities, what was common was the urge in this movement to overturn the prevailing aesthetic and social values. There was also convergence of typology of forms used by them which were dangerously angular, fevered, garish, distortions of form, stark contrast of color, and erotic continues to this day.

These are some of the broad characteristics by which Expressionism as a movement can be framed and referred to. What becomes very interesting is to see and explore in some detail how these features emerged in diverse cultures and circuits of art. The receiving culture exhibited enormous capacity to absorb as well as reconfigure the specific vocabulary to suit its new cultural needs. The art of Bengal School, in my understanding, happens to be such a case study to assess and come to terms in some detail, what was the magnitude and the nature of influence it tend to cast across diverse cultures.

In the subcontinent of later part of nineteenth century, the angst against alien domination was pushing motives and themes of art towards a 'revivalist' tendency. Artists began to draw inspiration from traditional idioms of mythologies, Mughal and Rajput miniatures and Ajanta frescos, under the banner of 'Indianness' or *Swadeshi*.<sup>2</sup> And these themes were not only recurring but began to debates about art. Abanindranath Tagore and his disciples were the exponents of this traditional and revivalist mode of art

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<sup>1</sup> Shearer West, *The Visual Arts in Germany, 1890-1937*, Manchester University Press, 2000, p-83.

<sup>2</sup> Tapati Guha-Thakurta. *The making of a new 'Indian' art.*(Cambridge: Cambridge University,1992), p.227.

making. A kind of stagnancy and lacuna of themes had begun to show up and was also facing criticism.

It is at this critical juncture, the worldwide travels of Rabindranath Tagore in the continent of Europe brought an intervention primarily in which he urged for broadening the horizon of thinking in terms of art and performative activities. Out of the many sources of inspiration which spilled in many other fields, the exposure of artists in Bengal to German Expressionism was a very critical one.

In actuality, the first major direct contact between practicing Indian painters and Expressionists work of art took place in 1922, with the arrival of Bauhaus Exhibition in Calcutta. But this was the culmination of correspondences and acquaintances over a certain length of time and this was also the beginning of several developments which further pushed the boundaries of this exchange and exposure to other major provinces and their respective art circuits.

In the first chapter, I focus on the emergence of Bengal School of art and its method of expression and its themes and how from the traditional and revivalist stagnancy, it moved on to receive exposure from German Expressionism. Dealing with the nature of influence, the narrative moves on to highlight primarily the change in outlook that resulted in the incorporation of primitive art and the efforts of artists to establish a symbiotic relation with nature and the role of Romanticism. The development further points out how a vocabulary of protest through which a critique of colonial modernity and the apathy towards its domination came to be expressed in artworks.

The second chapter sequentially moves onto explore the emerging social dimension of Expressionism through the artwork of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore. These two luminaries and the desolate and despairing times of World War II brought about a situation where human tragedies and artistic creativity came face to face and gave rise to a powerful tool of protest in the sub-continent. *Bengal famine*, *Tebhaga movement* and anti-colonial struggle happen to provide a backdrop of artistic endeavors of that moment which were driven by angst. In this moment of gloom, the style of Expressionism found astounding recurrence in terms of angular faces, ribbed frames of human figures,

distorted anatomy which paved the way for a new language of protest. This was the period when art in the sub-continent was no more contented to be for its own sake but was acquiring a sharp socio-political purpose which has been traced in some detail.

A brief chapter follows to look at formations of the practitioners of artworks in the urban centers where groups of artists positioning themselves within political traditions began to work voraciously in Calcutta (*Calcutta Groups*), Bombay (*Bombay Progressives*) and Delhi (*Delhi Silpi Chakra*). Their emergence, tryst with established norms of art, defiance and the parallels of such formations with artists' groups in Europe are the themes which run through the chapter.

Edward Said says, "Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel from one period to another. Cultural and intellectual life are usually nourished and often sustained by the circulation of ideas, and whether it takes the form of acknowledged or unconscious influence, creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation, the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both fact of life and usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity."<sup>3</sup>

The primary consideration which runs through the chapters is to primarily dive deep into understanding the travel of ideas and the compatibility and contestations they find in different periods and in different cultures-the outcome of which is change for both the cultures which are bridged by these ideas.

Thus, the voyages made by artists and thinkers of the sub-continent to Europe and the manner in which they received exposure to European modernism and subsequently, these ideas permeated in the sphere of art. My curiosity of studying German Expressionism in this context is to go back to the basic endeavor of looking at these cross cultural spheres of artistic activities that defied the rigid frames of periodized phases of art history.

Literature regarding two exhibitions-*Selected Expressionist paintings of India (1975)* and *German Expressionist Paintings (1982)* aroused my interest in trying to understand their

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, "Traveling Theory", *The World, Text and Their Critic*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1983), p.226.

relevance in modern art of India. Reading further, the realization dawned on how fundamentally it permeated not only the art scenario and contributed to its emergence but also the subtle ways in which imageries were fashioned in the context of colonial past and also to reflect on my post-colonial reinterpretation.

Out of wide array of literature which exists in this field, I have narrowed down on certain works pertaining to the specific issue under review. W.G. Archer<sup>4</sup> was the first to notice, the fact of influence of German Expressionism in shaping up Modern Indian Art. This led Mulk Raj Anand to find similarities and draw parallels between works of Tagore and their German counterparts Klee and Kandinsky. Tapati Guha-Thakurta's study of the Abanindranath Tagore and his 'school' provides much broader understanding than any other writings.<sup>5</sup> Then, the journals such as *Viswa-Bharti Quaterly* and *Rupam* provided minute details which helped in consolidating and substantiating the claims in forming the arguments.

R. Sivakumar's<sup>6</sup> work helped in understanding the context of colonial modernity in relation to the artwork of Nandalal Bose and Ramkinkar Baij. His insight on the pedagogy of the artistic growth of Santiniketan was useful in developing the trajectory of the modern art in Bengal. Writings of Prabash Sen, Pranabranjan Ray and Paula Sengupta on Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore's artwork against the backdrop of socio-political turbulence provided the necessary material I was looking for to cover the narrative of my research topic of this particular period. Pradosh Dasgupta and Sanjay Mallik's essays assisted in the segment of the 'art collectives' particularly *Calcutta Group*. Yashodhara Dalmia and Geeta Kapur's writings essentially on *Bombay Progressives* was fundamental to my understanding of the Group and provided all the relevant information that went into forming the respective segment. Apart from them, many books and journals pertaining to modern Indian art have been referred during my course of study.

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<sup>4</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, "Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore", *Marg Supplement*, Vol. XIV, (1962), pg.

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<sup>5</sup> See. *The making of a new 'Indian art'*, (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1992)

<sup>6</sup> R. Sivakumar, *Santiniketan: The Making of a Contextual Modernism*, New Delhi: NGMA, 1997



Series of other essays, monographs, catalogues and interviews shaped my understanding on different aspects of the issues I was working on and which have informed my framework. The selected paintings compiled in this research will bring out the correspondence between German Expressionism and its reception in modern art of India.

## **CHAPTER-I**

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### **Bengal School and Santiniketan: An Expressionist Response**

## CHAPTER-I

### 1.1 Indian Nationalism (revivalism or Indianness) v/s Rabindranath Tagore's Universal language

In the end of eighteenth and beginning of nineteenth centuries, a new category of art was taking shape. Art was based on the principles of 'tradition' and 'Indianness' that was the roots of nationalism.<sup>7</sup> It is the nineteenth century Abanindranath Tagore had already made his presence felt as he replaced Raja Ravi Varma in course of altering the new ideology of 'Indianness'. Abanindranath was projected by E. B. Havell as the representative of 'artistic revival' in modern India.<sup>8</sup> Coomaraswamy claimed that the

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<sup>7</sup>This is considered to be a New School of Indian Painting' discovered in the time during *Swadeshi* years of Indian nationalism. This school defined the self conscious role in movement to gain independence and identity from the lost Indian art. As idea of Indian Renaissance in art took hold, artists and the members of the movement recognized their strength in this old form of Indian art to counter the western academic norms of art. This could be a one of the reason responsible for discarding Ravi Varma's approach to the art. Partha Mitter, Art & Nationalism in Colonial India: 1850-1922, (New York: Cambridge: 1994). Tapati Guha-Thakurta, The Making of a new Indian Art, (New York: Cambridge, 1992). K. G. Subramanyan, Moving Focus, (New Delhi: Lalit Kala,1982)

<sup>8</sup>See. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, The Making of a new Indian Art, (New York: Cambridge, 1992), pp. 146-147 and 186-189. Tapati Guha describes the context in which the art was taking such a dramatic shift in our country (especially Bengal) in the beginning of twentieth century. She says that the understanding of Orientalism paved the way for Indian art fraternity to comprehend the artistic attitudes of the west and measure it with their own 'traditions'. Later, it resulted to put an 'Indian defense' in reaction against the 'western bias' by the time it was dominating the European view of Indian art. It has been observed that Ravi Varma's art had fulfilled the required criteria's of nationalistic view point in terms of representation in order to construct the country's glorious past, most importantly, in the context of 'nation building'. The deficiency pointed out in his art, that the awareness of 'foreign style' in his rendering of paint. In addition his works appeared melodramatic and the iconography of women was too explicit; which abolishes his stature in the context of professed 'Indianness' or 'Indian-style'. While the art of Abanindranath completely fit into it: his painting 'Bharat-Mata' (image of motherland) had found much acclaim in this context. Abanindranath was choosing his thematic from the Indian epics and Mughal idioms of paintings. Moreover, this particular painting has had controversial history. Earlier the painting began its career as 'Banga-Mata' that summoned from a genesis in *Anand Math* -Bankim Chandra's eulogy to a Hindu proto-nationalism led by warrior monks. Also see Partha Mitter. Art and Nationalism in Colonial India (1850-

works of Abanindranath such as *The passing of Shah Jahan (Banished Yaksha)*<sup>9</sup> and *Kalidasa's Megha-duta* to be hallmark of 'Indian-ness' or 'Indian-style' of art in comparison to the works of Raja Ravi Varma. E. B. Havell and A.K Coomaraswamy emerged as an important voice of Indian art in the alternative camp that was driven by the idea of 'tradition' and 'Indianness'.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the camp drew two more members; Sister Nivedita and Kakuzo Okakura, to bring much impetus to the campaign against intrusion of 'Western' values in Indian art. E.B. Havell, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Sister Nivedita were critiquing the western industrialism under the rubric of *Swadeshi* ideology,<sup>11</sup> elaborating the spirituality element of Indian art as the anti-thesis of

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1922). (New York: Cambridge, 1994) pp.221-222 and Ranjit Hoskote. "A Dozen Ways of Viewing India", *Art India*, Vol.5, 2000, p.41. The term 'Indianness' is coined by Havell and he is being criticized on the grounds : (a) promoting Macaulay's education policy and (b) the concept of 'Indianness' defined exclusively as Vedic and excludes other minority vis-s-vis Islam, despite its significant presence as an integral part of Nation. See. Osman Jamal, "E.B. Havell: The Art and Politics of Indianness. *Third Text*, (winter, 2000- 2001), pp.12-19.

<sup>9</sup>Coomaraswamy was being criticized for his notions that underlies in the militant Hindu consciousness and further these notions have developed into a pernicious justification for ethnic-religious divisionism in South Asia. See Ranjit Hoskote, "Art of Writing Art: E.B. Havell and A.K. Coomaraswamy", *Art India*, Vol.6, Issue 2, Quart.2, (2001), pp.26-27. santosh s. asserts that the usage of Mughal idiom by Abanindranath in his oeuvre, particularly in this painting- *Passing of Shahjahan*. He claims that the painting is playing the politics of 'other', where Muslim ruler depicted as an 'absent presence villain. Abanindranath anxiety about Muslim 'other' is visible in this painting. For details see. santosh s. - "Towards an Anti-History' of Indian Art: Nationalism and Modernity", *Nandan*, (Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 2004), pp.18-27. On the other hand, Ratnabali Chattopadhyay alleged the early art of Abanindranath and his disciples; dependent on Hindu religion exactly like the work of those hack painters which they denounced as non art. See "Nationalism and Form in Indian Painting: a study of Bengal school", *Journal of Arts & ideas*, No's 14-15 (Nov. -Dec. 1987), pp.34-35.

<sup>10</sup> E.B. Havell served as a Superintendent of Madras School of Arts in 1884 and then the Calcutta School of Arts. In his writings, primarily he centered on the attack on 'British Philistinism', the term propounded by him and injuries occurred towards Indian art. See. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, pp. 146-184.

<sup>11</sup>Ranjit Hoskote describes this group as 'savant-garde' of Indian cultural nationalism, which made contribution in setting the tone of nationalist discourse with an influential set of conceptions and attitudes, an ideology of Indianness. Further Hoskote adds that the 'savant-garde' failed utterly to understand both

Renaissance naturalism. Abanindranath oeuvres were claimed to be ideal to fit into in the frame of *Swadeshi* ideology;<sup>12</sup> the idea that was to capture the nation's imagination towards the reconstruction of glorious past as well as to recover the status of 'high art' of the nation. It is true that the 'Indianness' or 'revivalism' manifested in the art of Abanindranath's 'School', was established on the values of Romantic aesthetic to counter the Western academic norms. But in course of time, it has been observed that his art became mannerist and lost its experimental fervor.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the personal image of Abanindranath got tarnished in the larger image of national revival, with its banalities.<sup>14</sup> Many of the artists have felt that Bengal School's approach towards 'revivalism' and 'Indianness' was hampering the possibilities for a new kind of art in India.<sup>15</sup> As Pradosh Das Gupta points out, it was Rabindranath who saw the revivalist movement as regressive and repeatedly urged his nephew, Abanindranath and his disciples to broaden his vision and rebuild the course of Indian art in a significant way.<sup>16</sup> It has been observed that this period of Bengal School was experiencing certain crisis in a sense that the school

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modernity and Indian situation. See "Art of Writing Art: E.B. Havel and A.K. Coomaraswamy", Art India. Vol.6, Issue 2, Quart.2, (2001), pp.26-27.

<sup>12</sup> The word *Swadeshi* means literally 'own country' and has been used in recent years in India to denote that side of national movement which aimed at making India self contained and self sufficient by critiquing the western industrialization and its negative effect on country . For detail reading see. A.K. Coomaraswamy, Essays in National Idealism (Delhi: Munshi Manoharlal, 1981), pp.153-167.

<sup>13</sup> Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Chapter. 6, (Cambridge:1992)

<sup>14</sup>Benod Behari Mukherjee, "Abanindranath Number", VBQ, VOL.VIII, parts I & II, (May-Oct, 1942) quoted by K.G. Subramanyan, Moving Focus, (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1978) p.69.

<sup>15</sup>At this juncture, Bengal School was failing to produce something new in its art; paving the way for the formation of 'Calcutta Group' .See Pradosh Dasgupta, "The Calcutta Group", Lalit Kala Contemporary. Vol. 31 (1981) and R. Siva Kumar, "Modern Indian Art: A Brief Overview", Art Journal, Vol. 58, No. 3. (Autumn, 1999), pp. 14-21 Sivakumar says, Rabindranath taught his nephew to respond to nature and relate it to the society, but unfortunately Abanindranath and his disciples had not reached the mark. On this premises, 'revivalism' in art of Bengal School was being questioned. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, (Cambridge: 1992) p.314. On the other hand, Gagendranath Tagore an artist emerging from the same forum of Jorasanko had already experimented with the modernist language. His cubist compositions were the hallmark of his experiments in 1920's

<sup>16</sup>Pradosh Das Gupta, op.cit.

was losing its vitality and creative expression. The Master, Abanindranath had felt and visualized his theme shrouded in mystic appearances. The rendering of his paintings was being seen too wishy-washy, dreamlike without constituting any definite form. And his disciples were much weaker in rendering the style of the paintings they took over.<sup>17</sup> It was quite evident that Rabindranath was not fully content with new art movement initiated by Abanindranath Tagore and his students.<sup>18</sup> Rabindranath expected art to be placed on a higher pedestal than what Bengal School had achieved.<sup>19</sup> These upheavals in Indian art led to a demand for a new artistic approach in the first half of twentieth century and probably Rabindranath was in constant search for a new universal language to transform his expression into art which could transcend the divides of region, language, culture and custom.<sup>20</sup> Rabindranath's artistic expression of this time was product of universalism as he began to approach art on the footing of nationalism, but soon after seeing the blows of imperialism and World War-I, he turned towards the idea of Internationalism to counter all forms of jingoism.<sup>21</sup> Rabindranath had a firm belief in

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>According to K.G. Subramanyan, in recent times some critics have relegated him to a complete obscurity and failed to register Abanindranath as 'father figure' of modern art movement or some dismissed him as an artist of any consequence as if he took up painting for his pastime or hobby. See K. G. Subramanyan, Moving Focus, (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1978) p.69.

<sup>19</sup>Jayanta Chakrabarty, "Faces and Masks in Rabindranath's Paintings", Nandan (1990).p.31.

<sup>20</sup> Tapati Guha-Thakurta, The Making of a new 'Indian' art (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.133. She says that the language of literature is confined within the readership of a particular language, whereas a painting or sculpture, as Tagore contended, this could belong to a whole nation or to a whole world. By assessing the universal appeal of language she demonstrates the art had taken much attention, through reproduction (Raja Ravi Varma) in magazine. And he (Rabindranath) hoped art would be the main factor in bringing the nation by its common, universal appeal.

<sup>21</sup> According to Sandip Sarkar, Rabindranath studied the art of Man from primitive times to Expressionism. The shaking of the foundations during World War I and post-War period was reflected in his writings and paintings. For this reason, he was not satisfied with isolationist insularity of the 'Neo-Bengal' School's theories, practices, and methodology. See Sandip Sarkar, "Art of Writing Art: Abanindranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore", Art India, Vol.6, Issue 2, Quart.2, 2001 Also See R. Siva Kumar, "Modern Indian Art: A Brief Overview", Art Journal, Vol. 58, No. 3. (Autumn, 1999), p.17. Also there is a need to

universal human values that had the capacity to transcend asymmetrical power relations and were a part of his self-definition of cosmopolitan.<sup>22</sup> As he writes “(even) the Western universities have not yet truly recognized the fullness of expression is fullness of life. And a large part of man can never find its expression in the mere language of words. It must therefore seek for its other languages- lines and colors, sounds and movements. Through our mastery of these we not only make our whole nature articulate, but also understand man in all his attempts to reveal his innermost being in every age and clime.”<sup>23</sup> These words of Rabindranath directed towards an urgency to explore new sensibility in Indian art; driven by one’s natural instinct to substitute a tedious art of Bengal School of that period by a new universal language. Caught between universalism and cultural specificity made him an optimist vis-a-vis the use of art as a universal language.<sup>24</sup> Rabindranath took up painting at the age of sixty five. The question that comes up, is concerning the influences and imageries, that Rabindranath had drawn upon which led him to move beyond the framework of Bengal School considering ‘German Expressionism’ as a tendency had bearing on his artistic language; then it is obvious to ask how German expressionism<sup>25</sup> (as one of the modern style) had impact on him to draw and paint.<sup>26</sup>

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understand the difference between Universalism and Internationalism. Former is reflected in the philosophical thoughts and latter is being used in cosmopolitan references.

<sup>22</sup>Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, (Oxford, 2007), p.77.

<sup>23</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Creative Unity*, (London: 1922), p. 196 quoted in Andrew Robinson, *The Art of Rabindranath Tagore*, (Calcutta: Rupa, 1989) p.53.

<sup>24</sup>Partha Mitter. op.cit, p.77.

<sup>25</sup> As we know the relationship modernism and Primitivism is a polarized field, which requires a re-reading through recent theoretical debates. Nevertheless, by taking the assumption from an essay-“Interpreting Primitivism and mass Culture, and Modernism: the Making of William Worringer’s Abstraction & Empathy” New German Critique, No. 80, (Spring - Summer, 2000).by Mary Gluck. I would like to clarify my reason that why I am interested in locating Tagore in the category of Expressionism i.e. partly based on based on Gluck’s argument- , she argues, for a complex middle ground between the celebrators and detractors of Primitivism, as she puts it for Expressionist. ‘Primitivism is fluid and transforming complex of responses to contemporary issues rather than a fixed and rigid phenomenon. Tagore’s artistic language

Rabindranath had already established himself in the world through his literary contributions during this period and now he was motivated to approach the language of art.<sup>27</sup> The quest of his language was to determine his freedom of mind. In the search of language, he admits that he drew upon the teachings of Upanishad, which shaped all his thoughts and life. Therefore unity expressed through many and varied manifestations. And the process of realizing this unity, gives us freedom.<sup>28</sup> The idea of freedom goes parallel with the notion of 'Romanticism'<sup>29</sup> that begins with the uneasiness and anxiety experienced by human's unreality, that anxiety and uneasiness was majorly voiced by Immanuel Kant through his enquiry in the *Critique of Judgment* and associated with him by his philosophical literary successors.<sup>30</sup> Kant asks' "How can I express my freedom and

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has often been compared with primitivism/Expressionist works of European artists. Thus, there is a possibility to identify the Expressionist influence on Tagore.

<sup>26</sup>Dadaism, Surrealism and Cubism were the other influences that have been noticed by the critics and Art-historians. For details see Mulk Raj Anand, *Marg*, Vol. XIV, No.2, 1962 and Ratan Parimoo, *The Paintings of Three Tagores*, (Baroda: M. S. University, 1973).

<sup>27</sup>It has been felt that this period marks cultural exchanges in the world. There was urgent need to understand each others values through the language of art and literature due to circumstances led by World War I and other upheavals in the world.

<sup>28</sup> Rabindranath Tagore on "Freedom" *VBO*, Vol. 23, No. 2 August,(1957) pp. 84-88 It has been noticed that freedom to express was the central idea of Romanticism.

<sup>29</sup>The Romantic movement stressed strong emotion as a source of aesthetic experience, placing new emphasis on such emotions as trepidation, horror, and the awe experienced in confronting the sublimity in untamed nature and its qualities that are "picturesque", both new aesthetic categories. It elevated folk art and custom, as well as arguing for a "natural" epistemology of human activities as conditioned by nature in the form of language, custom and usage. One of the key ideas and legacies of Romanticism is assertion of nationalism which became central theme of Romantic art and its philosophy. In Germany 'Expressionist artists had owed much to the German Romanticism. The developed ideas like inner necessity or 'inner life had deeply rooted in philosophical roots of Romanticism. In German language term like 'Geist' refers not just to the spirit but to emotion, intellect and all sought of human existence that are not purely corporeal. See. Shearer West, *The visual Art in Germany*, (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 200).pp. 59-64 and 'romanticism', [www.wikipedia.com/romanticism](http://www.wikipedia.com/romanticism)

<sup>30</sup> Michael Kelly, "Romanticism.". *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press) p. 176-179. Also Catherine King with Nicola Durbridge, "Case Study 7: Rabindranath Tagore: making modern Indian art before Independence" in *Views of Difference. Difference Views of Art* ,Yale Univ. Press,



rationality, somehow lodged deep within me noumenally, in a phenomenal world ordered under physical causal laws....The concept of freedom is meant to actualize in the sensible world the end proposed by its laws.”<sup>31</sup> Kant’s purpose was to actualize freedom in his life. At certain level as Rabindranath had too engaged with the notion of freedom in art and life; underlies in the ‘Romantic notion’ that characterizes the artist as an individual and also separates him. By highlighting two thinkers, Rabindranath Tagore and Kant; Pabitrakumar Roy asserts that they have something common in implying the idea of freedom.<sup>32</sup> For Rabindranath, the ‘Upanishadic’ philosophy and its concept of *maya* marked as a framework for relating into the Romantic notion of creativity and artistic freedom. Rabindranath presumed that not only the ‘work of art is *maya*; but also the entire world could be looked upon as a work of art, for art is essentially about ‘image-making’. The term *maya* is ancient in its use, in the Rg–Veda, though Rabindranath is employing in modern context.<sup>33</sup> Further Roy, hypothesizes that Rabindranath’s expression of ‘image making’ drives the truth that has something to do with images. The very notion of an image invokes the idea of freedom, what Kant demands and fashions forth an image of nature for itself. And thus nature is human reality- a product of freedom.<sup>34</sup> That the beauty of nature does not hold any finite purpose and cannot be reduced to any agenda. This is what Rabindranath refers to when he states that there is no mapping of beauty that is mere fact or what we derive is purely an ‘expression’. Similarly Kant articulates, ‘beautiful’ or ‘beauty’ is universal voice.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, we can assume

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(London) 1999 p.186; formulates the idea of New Indian art as ‘a synthesis of literal, romantic, Victorian and Indian, Eastern and Art Nouveau. Description is based on P. Billmoria’s writing in ‘The enigma of Modernism’ in Modernity in Asian Art (ed.) John Clark, University Of Sydney, No 7, Wild Peony, Sydney pp. 29-44 .

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pp. 176-179.

<sup>32</sup> Pabitrakumar Roy “Tagore’s Theory of Art, VBO, Vol. 45, No. 2 August, 1979 pp. 3-67.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Therefore, we can assume that Rabindranath echoes the idea of Kant, which he discussed in ‘Nature and Freedom’. Kant articulates that, our pleasure in beautiful object must come from a free play of determinate concept, and that is why there can be no precise rules of our judgments of taste: rules presuppose determinate concepts. Paul Guyer. “Nature and Freedom” in Kant ,(Routledge:2006) pp. 314-315.

that this notion appealed to Rabindranath against the backdrop of colonialism; whereby, art of Rabindranath was far from it. Indian identity was more concern of Abanindranath. On the other hand, model of academic art was highly charged up by the classical principles of 'beauty and perfection'. For Rabindranath, these circumstances compelled him to approach a universal language to move beyond fixed notions of art.

What primarily attracted Indian artists to Expressionism was a notion of freedom from preset norms and values. One comes across the engagement with freedom in the works of German Expressionist's artists. The idea was represented in the manifesto of *Blue Reiter*, which says "although individual freedom of expression was essential, the individual artist should not just create for himself or herself, or even for the nation but for the world, the society, the *volk*."<sup>36</sup> This carried a powerful attempt to prevent artistic enterprise from becoming a tool of national propaganda. On this observation, Rabindranath's idea of freedom had common parlance with Expressionist artists. Rabindranath was expecting to see it beyond the framework of regional and national as similar to German Expressionist, after experiencing the deterioration of art of Bengal School. Rabindranath had made a comment after seeing the deterioration of Bengal School that he says, "When in the name of Indian art, we cultivate with deliberate aggressiveness a certain bigotry born of the habit of past generation, we smother our soul under idiosyncrasies unearthed from buried centuries. These are like masks with exaggerated grimaces that fail to respond to ever changing play of life."<sup>37</sup> This is a striking remark which opens up numerous vistas for arguments. Rabindranath's critical concepts such as 'personality' and 'surplus in man' have great connotation in the context of his 'expressions'. Pabitrakumar Roy suggests that personality comes from Latin, *per*, meaning 'through', and *sono* meaning 'to speak'. Therefore, through the actor in drama

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<sup>36</sup> Franz Marc, "Two pictures", in Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc (eds.) *The Blue Reiter Almanac* (London: 1912), quoted in Shearer West, *Visual Arts in Germany* (Manchester: Manchester Univ., 2000), p.113.

<sup>37</sup> Pradosh Das Gupta, "The Calcutta Group -Its Aims and Achievements", *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, Vol. 31, (1981), p. 5.

who speaks'. In non-drama of Orient, actor wears mask to hide himself. In Tagore's vocabulary the derivation of personality has moved further to the speaker, that's why 'personality' is powerful word for Rabindranath and used exclusively in the human context.<sup>38</sup> The term 'personality' had echoed in the political writing of Expressionist publication- *Die Aktion* written by Arthur Drey in which he insisted that 'Art is the expression of personality'.<sup>39</sup> Hence, the very act of incorporating emotions provides higher level of consciousness to the man and the baggage of these emotions becomes the 'Surplus in man'. So, both the concepts are inter-related to conceive Rabindranath's doctrine.<sup>40</sup>

The study highlights other important aspect that lies beneath the usage of term 'mask' in above quotation of Rabindranath. It compels us to look at the idea of 'empathy' coined by art-historian Wilhelm Worringer in his path-breaking work '*Abstraction and Empathy*' (1908). Worringer drew an explicit analogy between his description of the transcendental inclination of abstract *kunstwollen* or artistic volition.<sup>41</sup> Wilhelm Worringer's '*Abstraction and Empathy*' had influenced many artists of the Expressionist movement; particularly the artists of *Blaue Reiter* (Blue Rider). It is can be argued that though Rabindranath was using primitivist-abstractionist language in his art, it revolved very much around the notion of *empathy*. It is evident in the writings of Rabindranath, in

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<sup>38</sup> Pabitrakumar Roy, "Tagore's Theory of Art", *VBQ*, Vol. 45, No.2 (August,1979), p.37.

<sup>39</sup> 'Kunst ist der Ausdruck einer Personlichkeit: Arthur Drey, *Kunst: Neue Sezession*(Vorbericht), *Die Aktion* (27 Feb, 19110, pp 52-53 quoted in Shearer West, Visual Arts in Germany.(Manchester: Manchester Univ.. 2000),p.113.

<sup>40</sup> Pabitrakumar Roy "Tagore's Theory of Art, VBQ. Vol. 45, No. 2, (August, 1979) pp. 3-67.

<sup>41</sup> I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Parul Dave Mukherjee for pin-pointing the idea of 'Wilhelm Worringer's -*Abstraction and Empathy* to comprehend the artworks and aesthetics of Rabindranath Tagore. It is notable that many critics have claimed or given a status of the manifesto or official guide to Expressionist aesthetics or aesthetic bible of German Expressionism. For details see David Morgan, "The Enchantment of Art: Abstraction and Empathy from German Romanticism to Expressionism". Journal of History of Ideas, Vol. 57, No. 2, (Apr. -1996), pp.317-341.

which his usage of term *anubhuti*, a Sanskrit synonym for the English *empathy* occurs frequently in the context of the self's relationship with nature.<sup>42</sup>

It is observed that the concept of *empathy* is a legacy of idealism and it is implicit in Schopenhauer's account of contemplative absorption in art.<sup>43</sup> The concept of empathy became one of the major themes in nineteenth-century German aesthetics. Before Worringer, Theodor Lipps had sought to describe *empathy* as psychological function fundamental to aesthetic experience. Lipps characterized it as an "animation of an object which becomes a mirror of the viewer's personality", which is what often Rabindranath employed in his aesthetics.<sup>44</sup> *Empathy* is one's relation with the objective world by means of objectifying oneself. Aesthetic sympathy means "to experience and feel oneself in another, at the same time in as characteristically intensified, pure and free a manner as the nature of the aesthetic object brings with it. Aesthetic enjoyment based on this is the felicitous feeling of objectified self."<sup>45</sup> Pabitrakumar Roy subscribes this view in his essay- *Tagore's Theory of Art* in which he says, "for Rabindranath, aesthetic experience is a projection of the self as well as an introjections of it in respect of nature. Then, the notion of art as an overflowing of the self into the object added the notion of art,

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<sup>42</sup> Pabitrakumar Roy, "Tagore's Theory of Art, *VBO*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (August, 1979), pp.42-44.

<sup>43</sup> David Morgan describes the development of empathy in German aesthetics and its derivation from the George Simmel's published work *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (1907)*, in which Simmel gave a long chapter to Schopenhauer's "Metaphysik der Kunst" (The Metaphysics of Art). This essay gave thought to Worringer to further develop the idea of 'abstraction and empathy', a treatise. "Two broad phases in the history of empathy theory should be distinguished. The first consisted of an enthusiastic aesthetic experience which sought to break down the distinction between subjective feeling and objective realities, an experience often described in pantheistic terms. The second phase represents the attempt to construct a theory of perception in which human feeling is projected into forms through the eye's constructive acts of visual interpretation." cited from David Morgan, *op.cit*, pp.320-321.

<sup>44</sup>Theodor Lipps, "Aesthetische Einfuehlung," *Zeitschrift fur Psychologie u. Physiologie der Sinnesorgane*, 22, (1900), p.426, quoted in David Morgan, "The Enchantment of Art: Abstraction and Empathy from German Romanticism to Expressionism", *Journal of History of Ideas*, Vol. 57, No. 2,( Apr. -1996) .pp.317-341.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.* pp.432-33, quoted in David Morgan, "The Enchantment of Art: Abstraction and Empathy from German Romanticism to Expressionism", *Journal of History of Ideas*, Vol. 57, No. 2,( Apr. -1996) .pp.317-341.

comprehending the object into the self.”<sup>46</sup> In contrast to *empathy*, *abstraction* characterizes the use of abstract line in geometrical ornament which offered comfort to primitive humanity because it excluded all traces of human life; i.e. change growth and decline which made for an insecure and finite human existence. Abstraction created space of aesthetic experience which provided a refuge to the artist from the caprice of the organic world.<sup>47</sup> It has been noted that the primary aim of *abstraction* was to transcend nature by denying space in representation.

According to Worringer, under the rubric of *abstraction* as a style, all artistic expression whether representational or not- Gothic architecture, primitive ornament, ancient relief sculpture, was directed by denial of use of inorganic forms. *Abstraction*, he suggests, can be anything anti-naturalistic, or any art which does not function through *empathy*.<sup>48</sup> This leads us to critically contemplate Rabindranath’s leanings towards concepts such as *abstraction* and *empathy* but his existential perspective was large enough to include the natural as well as its transcendence.<sup>49</sup> That’s why Rabindranath is called an expressionist but with a difference and the connotation of ‘expression’ is very rich in the context of his aesthetics.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Pabitrakumar Roy, pp.42-44.

<sup>47</sup>David Morgan, pp.317-34.

<sup>48</sup>Wilhelm Worringer “From Abstraction and Empathy (1908)”, Modernism: an Anthology of Sources and Docs. Eds. Vassiliki Kololtroni, Jane Goldman, Olga Taxidon. (Edinburg Univ. Press, 1998). pp. 72-76.”

<sup>49</sup> Pabitrakumar Roy, pp.42-44; describes Rabindranath’s engagement with the *einfuhlung* (*empathy*) theory on the ground of his concepts like ‘surplus in man’ and ‘personality’. *Empathy* is synonym with anything naturalistic which includes emotion, consciousness, acts of *empathy*, etc. And all these characteristics can only be achieved through his higher concepts like ‘surplus in man’ and ‘personality’. So, art for Rabindranath is not a function of desires or emotions as natural sentiments.

<sup>50</sup> Pabitrakumar Roy. op. cit, p.38. Roy specifies him as an Expressionist with a difference, because his artistic expression is not mere his own experience but the experience of the ‘personality’ i.e. ‘personal’ and his experiences with the world. His usage of ‘Expressionist’ is valid here on the basis of the other critics who have considered his works, closer the ‘Expressionist style. Also Mulkraj Anand.(Marg. Vol. XIV., 1962), Ratan Parimoo (*Baroda*: M.S. University,1973), Dinkar Kowshik, Doodled Fancy, Santiniketan: Kala Bhavan,Visva-Bharati,1999) and Andrew Robinson (Rupa:1979)

If we throw some light upon art-historical debates in Europe that poses naturalism and Expressionism in opposition to each other. While in the case of Rabindranath's artworks, one can locate a curious blend of these ideas using the leverage of notions of *abstraction* and *empathy* together. Geeta Kapur argues that in India understanding of environment was connected with nature-culture continuum and notion of modernism was treated as alien one, especially during the phase of national resurgence.<sup>51</sup> At this juncture, modernism declared not only culture to be in discontinuous relationship with nature, it also declared aesthetic traditions to be disjunctive and art practice to be manifestly constructed.<sup>52</sup> However, modernism had already made its presence felt in the national or popular objectives of art in Bengal during 1920's. The art of Rabindranath manifested the synthesis of modern and natural.

## 1.2 European influences on Rabindranath

In Germany and elsewhere in Europe, the idea of 'freedom in expression' was central to the expressionist artists. By using such a language, the artist had intended to overthrow all the shackles created by the society. And subsequently, that language graduated to become the 'language of protest'. For instance, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner a member of '*Die Brucke*', announced in his manifesto of the year 1905 the following, "We want to achieve freedom in life and action against the established older forces. Everyone belongs to us who directly and without falsification represents those which make him artist."<sup>53</sup> In similar vein, Rabindranath was striving to break free from the old forms (what he calls 'old world mannerism'). Admitting eclecticism as historical imperative, he said "there was a time when human races lived in comparative segregation and therefore the art

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<sup>51</sup>Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism*, (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), p. 111. Kapur describes the environmental project of Santiniketan and its location in the context of Modern art.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p.116.

<sup>53</sup>L.D. Ettlinger, quoted Buchannin in the essay- "German Expressionism and Primitive Art", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 110, No. 781 (Apr 1968), p.195.

adventures had their experience within narrow range of limits.”<sup>54</sup> He was exploring an artistic language to oust the former codified norm of the art of Bengal School. It is evident through the fact that he appealed, without hesitation, to the artists that they could borrow freely from other cultures to break through the rigidity in Indian art. In one of the reviews on Rabindranath’s art, Stella Kramrisch remarks that the impulses and realizations of his paintings and drawings were outside his literary work and meant to be the expressions of freedom and leisure.<sup>55</sup>

Many critics and art-historians have speculated that the poet’s oeuvres have influences from European veterans of art. And it is a known fact that he maintained regular correspondence with the art circuits in Europe and also paid regular visits to the continent. While travelling abroad, Rabindranath had visited many galleries and museums of the Europe and America.<sup>56</sup> Rabindranath was already to a great extent familiar with the works of Van Gogh. In Germany, he had widely seen, besides the masters like Nolde, Klee, Kandinsky and Munch, the paintings of the Expressionists.<sup>57</sup> Besides, visiting to the galleries and museums, he met many artists such as Kathe Kollwitz, Modigliani, Andre Lohte and Johanes Itten. As Rabindranath was not afraid of borrowing from European cultures, he said, “frankly that in spite of borrowings, the artist will remain naturally Indian.”<sup>58</sup> Further, he remarks, “A sign of greatness in great geniuses is their enormous capacity for borrowing, very often without their knowing it...Only mediocrities are ashamed and afraid of borrowing, for they do not know how to

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<sup>54</sup>Rabindranath Tagore, The Meaning of Art (1921) (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1983), p.18 quoted in R. Siva Kumar, “Modern Indian Art: A Brief Overview”, Art Journal, Vol. 58, No. 3. (Autumn, 1999), p.17.

<sup>55</sup> Stella Kramrisch, “Form elements in the visual work of Rabindranath Tagore” Lalit Kala Contemporary, vol. III, New Delhi. 1964.p.37

<sup>56</sup> Swati Lal, “Rabindranāth Tagore’s Ideals of Aesthetic Education”, Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 18, No. 2, (Summer, 1984), pp. 31-39, She traces the Rabindranath’s larger aesthetic contributions through his International affinity and his travels to the various parts of the globe.

<sup>57</sup> Ratan Parimoo, The Paintings of Three Tagores(Baroda: M.S. University.1973).p.119.

<sup>58</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, “Art and Tradition”, VBQ, Vol. I. Part 1, (1935), pp.3-4.

pay back the debt in their own coin."<sup>59</sup> Thus, Rabindranath should be considered a first modern artist who borrowed the modernist idioms of the west and adapted them to suit to his cultural need.<sup>60</sup> He produced a large number of works in the span of fifteen years; these are works of many kinds, some of them are decorative constructions of European paintings. On the other hand, some drew from the primitive motifs and masks.

While he was open to artistic vocabulary from outside, but at same time he demonstrated a critical and conditional acceptance to it. Rabindranath had ample exposure to 'primitive' art in British Museum and other ethnological collections before he saw modern art.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, he may be regarded as the first modern Indian painter, who was aware of qualities of primitive art as well as had definite sense of modernist internationalism.<sup>62</sup> Here the usage of the term 'primitive' does not imply that Rabindranath's paintings had similarity with the paintings of cave dwellers or savage. The term 'primitive' is applied here, for the reason that Rabindranath's paintings would appear to bear certain qualities or resemblance of the drawings of primitive man in terms of its crudeness of form and virility of expression.<sup>63</sup> (Plate. 1) Devi Prasad claims that Rabindranath's art is genuinely modern primitive, because as a painter he had not

<sup>59</sup>Ibid. p.6.

<sup>60</sup> Though Gagendranath approached modern idiom like Cubism, but he was incorporated indigenous themes (e.g. Dwarka Puri) through his cubist compositions. While Rabindranath was working in totally different manner by drawing inspiration from altogether different sources similar to pattern of European primitivist artists.

<sup>61</sup>R. Sivakumar, "Rabindranath and Indian Art Scene". My Pictures. Viva Books, 2005 (introduction and notes). To be noted that Andre Lohte and Johannes Itten were significant members of Bauhaus Group and their works were exhibited in the Bauhaus exhibition (1922) in Calcutta. Kathe Kollwitz is another important woman artist and her artistic language has come closer to the purview of Expressionism. Also see 'Drawings and Paintings of Rabindranath', Dinkar Kowshik (ed.), Nandan, Kala-Bhavan publication.1987 and Dinkar Kowshik, Doodled Fancy, Rabindra-Bhavan, Visva Bharati, 1999 pp. 5-9.

<sup>62</sup> Ratan Parimoo, Three Tagores (Baroda: M S University, 1982, quoted in Catherine King with Nicola Durbridge, "Case Study 7: Rabindranath Tagore: making modern Indian art before Independence", Views of Difference. Difference views of Art. (London: Yale Univ. Press. 1999) p.186.

<sup>63</sup>Nandalal Bose, "On Gurudev's Art". VBO, Vol.VII, Part IV, (Feb-Apr.1942), p.209. Quoted in' Devi Prasad, "Tagore's Paintings", VBO, Vol.45, (1979), p. 114.

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followed any tradition, school or style in particular. In his method of painting, he was not constrained by any previous training in technique, which made him flexible and apt at drawing inspirations from diverse streams. Secondly, one can consider it primitive, because unlike his poetry and philosophy, it strikingly projected a profound spontaneity and his instinctual responses to the world of forms, with which he had become familiar on account of his life long interest in nature.<sup>64</sup> The idea of using primitivist language as weapon was to display antipathy towards the colonial rule and its expansion of industrialization.<sup>65</sup> As Coomaraswamy remarks that Rabindranath must have looked at many pictures in his life but there is not even single one to be culled out from his set of works which could demonstrate the presence of a theme which he had seen before.<sup>66</sup> According to K. G. Subramanyan, Rabindranath's approach to painting is not always the same, there are some paintings which appear naïve and expressionistic because they were rendered from his unconscious mind. That is why critics have claimed them to be a genuine or naïve expression.

In course of exploring relevant literature on Rabindranath Tagore, one comes across comparisons with Expressionist and Bauhaus artist which is almost inescapable. It bares rich details of the artistic exchange of ideas at international level; a glimpse of which can be seen in the arrival of the phenomenal Bauhaus exhibition to Calcutta in 1922.<sup>67</sup> The works exhibited in the exhibition included artists of the likes of Paul Klee and Kandinsky along with Lyonel Feininger, Johannes Itten, Gerhard Marcks, George

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<sup>64</sup> Devi Prasad, "Tagore's Paintings", *VBQ*, Vol.45, (1979), p. 114.

<sup>65</sup> Partha Mitter says that the use of primitivist language was customary in most of the colonial countries. By highlighting the role of Alferdo Lam, Mitter argues that it was not only Indian artists were valorizing the primitivism but artist from the other colonial countries have combined the western aesthetics with Primitivism. See Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism* (Oxford: 2007), p.229.

<sup>66</sup> Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Introduction", *Exb. Cat. Of Rabindranath*, Boston (1930) quoted in Devi Prasad, "Tagore's Paintings", *VBQ*, Vol.45, (1979), p. 114.

<sup>67</sup> Rabindranath had invited this exhibition. In many ways, this exhibition had helped Rabindranath and many other artists to seek inspiration from western art trends.. See. Sandip Sarkar, "The Art of writing on Art: O.C Ganguly, Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Niharranjan Ray", *Art India*, Vol. VI, Issue II. 2001, pp.31

Muche, Lothar Shreyer, Sophie Korner and Margit Terry Adler.<sup>68</sup> Rabindranath was instrumental in bringing this exhibition to India. The critics speculate that Bauhaus exhibition was important to the extent of being a turning point in Rabindranath's artistic career.

Mulk Raj Anand considers W. G. Archer as the first critic to notice Tagore's artistic affinities with the paintings of Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, exhibited in the Bauhaus exhibition in 1922.<sup>69</sup> Bauhaus was the first European exhibition of its kind to come to India. Notably, the arrival of Bauhaus exhibition heralded the avant-garde tendencies in India.<sup>70</sup> In Germany and Denmark, special reception had been given to the

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<sup>68</sup>Partha Mitter, in the chapter *The Formalist Prelude* in 'The Triumph of Modernism' (Oxford: 2007) pp. 15-18. Mitter elaborates upon the Bauhaus as a design school (later to be known as the academy/school of architecture) and the engagement of its artists with eastern philosophy & spiritualism. During the visit of Bauhaus in Weimar, Rabindranath Tagore quickly sensed affinities with teaching method of the school and arranged the exhibition in Calcutta. Also see L P Sihare's article- *Indian Contribution to Expressionism and Its impact on modern Indian painting in "German Expressionist Paintings-An exhibition catalogue"*, (N G M A: New Delhi) p. 155. Refer to Tapati Guha-Thakurta "Rabindranath Tagore" in *Manifestation III* (New Delhi: Delhi Art Gallery Publication, 2004). R. Siva Kumar in *Intro. & Notes : My pictures- a collection of paintings by Rabindranath Tagore*, (Viva:2005) p xii

<sup>69</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, "Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore", *Marg* Vol.XIV, No.2, 1962 measures the criticism of the earlier writer on Tagore. According to Anand, Archer is considered to be the first one, who brought out the meticulous criticism of Tagore's work in the one of the essays in his pioneer book titled -'India and Modern Art'. He compares Tagore works with the Bauhaus-Expressionist artists such as Klee and Kandinsky. Furthermore he hypothesizes the idea of self-expression or sub-conscious on the premises of psycho-analytic theories of Freud and Jung. He extends his arguments by making comparisons with the works and ideas of Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky.

<sup>70</sup> Partha Mitter, (Oxford: 2007), p.10. I guess this is very loaded term in its usage in the context of Bengal School/Santiniketan without specifying any further argument. It may be possible in this context, but we need to verify it and to explore deeply, which will lead to another detail study. Also I would like to assert John Clark's argument in the context of Asian avant-garde in *Modern Asian Art*, (Craftsman House publication, 1998) p.16. He says, that with academy realism, artists were privileged as interpreters of the new because of its different cultural origination. They were doubly privileged when this transfer was relativised in a second and continuing manner by other styles and even more so when the relativisation of style was integrated to art discourse as in various modernist styles. The artist became a technician of the new or the advanced, but was also legitimated as disruptor or re-constructor of earlier paradigms, and

works of Rabindranath and the connoisseurs of art have identified resemblances with their own masters like Edward Munch and Emile Nolde.<sup>71</sup>

By granting some similarity between Rabindranath and Munch, Dinkar Kowshik says, “there is a wide chasm in their outlook; Munch’s utter anguish stands out in sharp contrast with Rabindranath’s mood of play (*leela*).”<sup>72</sup> Some of his pictures are reminiscent of European influences. (Plate.2) And few of them suggest parallels in Negro and Haida art.<sup>73</sup> (Plate.3) Ketaki K. Dyson’s endeavor to read Rabindranath’s art in different manner gives us a new dimension to the study under the rubric of German Expressionism. In her investigation, she found that Rabindranath probably had a partial color vision deficiency; the kind known as protanopia, in which the wavelengths of light that we see as the color red are lost to the eye, and there is confusion between red and green in perception.<sup>74</sup> This led her to trace Rabindranath’s trajectory to paint and draw in

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received a virtual license to act a member of institutionalized avant-garde. This was partly because the artist was a member of new modern and technically trained intelligentsia.

<sup>71</sup> Dinkar Kowshik, Doodled Fancy, (Santiniketan: Rabindra-Bhavan, Visva Bharati, 1999) 5-6. Kowshik provides the details about the reception, which Tagore art had received in the Europe and analyzing the formalist qualities of their painting with Tagore. The excerpt from *Vossische Zeitung*, 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1930, Berlin, reviews the work of Tagore and admits the similarity between the Tagore’s manner of piercing through the outer reality and that of modern European, particularly German artists.

<sup>72</sup> *Leela* (play) has a direct connection with the notion of *rhythm*. He subscribes the principle of *rhythm* to all arts which transforms inert materials into living creation. *Rhythm* has a strong connotation in Rabindranath’s references. *Rhythm* is considered to be a mental state of a person by which he gives responses to transform his energy into certain form whether writing poetry, dance and applied to painting and drawing too.

<sup>73</sup> K. G. Subramanyan, Moving Focus, (New Delhi: Lalit Kala, 1983) p.68.

<sup>74</sup> Ketaki K Dyson. Rev. of *Ronger Rabindranath* by Ketaki K. Dyson and Sushobhan Adhikary, (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1997) in <http://www.parabaas.com/rabindranath/articles/pKetaki2.html>. This is very simplistic to assert; such a statement, but one has to look at the set of his works which he produced during his life time. Tagore’s works comprised of various subject matters from the landscape, angular figures to animals, etc and manifestation of his approach is different in each set of paintings. Thus, it is invalid to judge an artist by reading a set of works produced at specific period of time. I would say that an art historically framed argument would give a more nuanced interpretation.

fabric of his artistic language through various documents. Rabindranath entered into art making lately in his life due to his color vision deficiency. In order to bypass color vision deficiency, Rabindranath had taken the route via primitivist form making- like Expressionists who were breaking all rules in the construction of forms and the application of colors.<sup>75</sup> For Rabindranath it was easy to comprehend the pattern of black and white form making that could be seen in the woodcuts of German Expressionist. Further, Ketaki suggests, “he learnt the angular composition, the division into simple colored planes and the use of the anti-line.”<sup>76</sup> If Rabindranath’s paintings have resemblance to the Expressionist school, then may be partly because the idea of Expressionist school was to discredit ‘academic disciplines of anatomy, light and shade and naturalist colors’. After such an enquiry it is possible that Expressionist/primitivist idiom was best suited for Rabindranath’s artistic endeavors. Though he was looking forward to universalism but at same time he was aware of not to undermining the local and the particular. Rabindranath was trying to foster a non-hierarchical dialogue with the west to encourage change but not to wipe out ‘differences’.<sup>77</sup>

R. Sivakumar highlights that “ Even then our art is sure to have quality which is Indian,” and added” but it must be an inner quality and not an artificially fostered formalism; and therefore not too obtrusively obvious, nor abnormally self-conscious.”<sup>78</sup> The above idea had given impetus to the artist of next generation to make a smart and brilliantly a creative diversion from the older patterns.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> R. Siva Kumar, “Modern Indian Art: A Brief Overview”, Art Journal, Vol. 58, No. 3. (Autumn, 1999), p.17.

<sup>78</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, “What is Art? (1917) in Tagore Art & Aesthetics, ed. Prithvi Neogy (New Delhi: International Cultural Centre, 1961), p.18 quoted in R. Siva Kumar, “Modern Indian Art: A Brief Overview”, Art Journal, Vol. 58, No. 3. (Autumn, 1999), p.17.

### 1.3 The idea of self-expression and child art

Rabindranath was responsible for fostering awareness among Indians of the need for International brotherhood. This led him to build up a vital relationship with intellectuals of West such as Einstein, Schweitzer, Bergson, Keyserling, Bertrand Russell, Romain Rolland, Gilbert Murray and Sylvan Levi; also helped him to exchange ideas.<sup>79</sup> The exchange of ideas with European counterparts had a bearing on his aesthetical viewpoints as well as a deep influence on the ameliorated understanding of his own art. For instance, it seems Rabindranath was aware of the writings of Henri Bergson, particularly, *elan' Vital* (Creative Evolution).<sup>80</sup> While reading Rabindranath's essay, on Art, one comes across the argument that the Bergsonian impulses of *elan' vital* qualifies the human consciousness which is distinct from the subjectivity of animals and plants.<sup>81</sup> For instance, Rabindranath says, "For man, as well as for animals, it is necessary to give expression to feelings of pleasure and displeasure, fear, anger, and love. In animal, these emotional expressions have gone little beyond their bounds of usefulness....Man has a fund of emotional energy which is not at all occupied with his self preservation. This surplus seeks its outlet in the creation of Art, for man's civilization is built upon his surplus."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Swati Lal, "Rabindranāth Tagore's Ideals of Aesthetic Education", Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 18, No. 2, (Summer, 1984), pp. 31-39

<sup>80</sup>I am indebted to Prof. Rajendra Dingle, (C.G.S. /J.N.U.), for suggesting me to include 'Bergsonian' idea of *elan' vital* in the discussion of German Expressionism. When Creative Evolution as writing had appeared in 1907, it became a Bible like resource for many artists and philosophers of the time including Picasso.

<sup>81</sup> It has been noted that German Expressionist and Fauvists were largely influenced by Bergson's idea of *elan' Vital*. And Bergson is known as a vitalist philosopher. German artists were already passionate to work with the notion of 'inner necessity'. Further it was fuelled by the Henri Bergson's publication –*elan vital* (Creative Evolution), a book emphasized the importance of intuition, rather than objectivity, as the basis of artistic creation. Shearer West, *The Visual Arts in Germany*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 60.

<sup>82</sup>Rabindranath Tagore, "What is Art?" in Rabindranath Tagore on Arts & Aesthetics, (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1961) pp. 10-28.

Rabindranath had attempted to distinguish animal's impulses of expression from human being. He marked out this difference through the idea of 'self-expression' associated with human creativity. The notion of 'self-expression' was articulated through the phrase 'surplus of man', a key word in most of his writings. The kind of 'surplus' he articulates in the context of creativity, noted by number of critics and art-historians, have identified as his phenomenal act of 'self-expression'. W.G. Archer claims that the poet must have noticed the changing new principles, which were motivating force for many artists in the world. This observation of Archer appeared in a pioneering article entitled 'Automatic drawing' in the *Modern Review* (Calcutta) appeared in January 1917. Moreover, he claims that this article may have influenced Rabindranath which persuaded him to render his volatile expressions. It says, "Applied the psycho-analytic theories of Freud, Jung and their school as an aid in releasing their cramped and suppressed imaginative fancies of the modern artists. And "automatic" scribbler of twisting and interlacing lines permits the germ of idea in the subconscious to express or at least suggests itself to the consciousness.....By these means may profoundest depths of memory be drawn upon and the springs of instinct tapped. Yet let it not be thought that a person, not an artist, may by these means become one, but those artists, who are hampered in self-expression, may find in it a power and a liberty elsewhere undiscoverable."<sup>83</sup> W.G. Archer's argument faced harsh criticism from the scholars at Santiniketan for discussing Rabindranath's genius in such trivial terms.<sup>84</sup>

In this context, Bishnu Dey puts forth his view as follows: "Archer is too naively enamored of the Unconscious by which he seems to suggest only the dear old concept of the libido, and is not content to make a general statement on the role of the unconscious in Tagore's paintings, but must weave strange fantasies to his own on the phallus and the vagina and try to find them in Tagore's paintings, in fairly straight-forward pictorial

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<sup>83</sup>Quoted in Mulk Raj Anand, "Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore", *Marg*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, (1962), p.9.

<sup>84</sup> Bishnu Dey asserts that Rabindranath's pictures were not influenced by any artists like Kandinsky or Klee; rather he produced those pictures with his great strength. Moreover, Dey harshly criticized Archer for putting wrong information in his book title- *India and Modern Art* (1952). See. Bishnu Dey, *India and Modern Art*, VBQ, Vol. 25, part 1-2, (1959), pp.81-103.

figures which can be much more satisfactorily explained by the demands of Tagore's pictorial rhythm..."<sup>85</sup> Rabindranath was investigating in his writing; whether art as an expression had a social function, or was just a vehicle of catering to our aesthetic needs. Was it a reflection of realities or was it just an undersigned impulse? It is the impulse of our being itself, which bursts out in a reflexive manner through the form of art. On this premise, we can argue that to an extent, similar impulsive emotion had been encountered by the German Expressionist while they were shaping and chiseling their art, in which giving a creative outlet to the 'inner necessity' enjoyed higher priority rather than fulfilling other formal aspects of art.

According to R. Siva Kumar, the purpose of art for Rabindranath was 'self-expression' or more precisely an expression of personality and by personality he meant the intimate and mutually transforming dialogue between individual man and the world. 'If this world were taken away', it would lose its content.<sup>86</sup> Further, Sivakumar asserts that Rabindranath's thinking had a reciprocal relation between the artist's personality and his contact with the world. Therefore, songs or pictures that belong to the artist are not merely facts- they are personal facts.<sup>87</sup> The 'self-expression' of Rabindranath has been understood in many ways, as some speculate that it is a naïve expression of art or child like, but not childish or playfulness of rhythm and line.<sup>88</sup>

The 'self-expression' of Rabindranath has twofold implication in this context. One, according to Tapati Guha-Thakurta, goes with the idea of 'self reliance' or 'self-development' and thus, we can see how 'self-expression' had emerged as a key note of

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<sup>85</sup>Bishnu Dey, "India and Modern Art", *VBJQ*, Vol. 25, Part 1-2 (1959), pp. 103-105. Bishnu Dey attacks through this writing on presupposition given by W.G. Archer on Bengal school art with wrong facts and errors in his book- '*India and Modern Art* (1952).

<sup>86</sup> R. Sivakumar, "Rabindranath and Indian Art Scene", *My Pictures*, (Delhi: Viva Books, 2005) pp. (introduction and notes).

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Exhibition Rev. by A K. Coomaraswamy "Drawings by Rabindranath Tagore" *Rupam*, O.C. Gangooly (ed.), No. 42-44, (April- July, 1930).

*Swadeshi* ideology in Bengal.<sup>89</sup> The program of constructive *Swadeshi*, in which Rabindranath Tagore and the members of Tagore household had actively participated in building the self esteem of nation.<sup>90</sup> Self-reliance also meant to set up indigenous enterprises and the influence of *Swadeshi* was so enormous that cultural sphere could not go out of its scope. Rabindranath's thoughts were instrumental in this movement.<sup>91</sup>

The second idea of 'self-expression' was in terms of making bold and confident manifestations of inner emotions through various performative forms of art.<sup>92</sup> This was about carving a space where through the medium of performance an outlet was to be provided for the expression of self in its most cathartic and impulsive form.<sup>93</sup> It is possible that to an extent Rabindranath had encouraged 'self-expression' in the children

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<sup>89</sup>Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The making of a new 'Indian art*, p.188.

<sup>90</sup>The idea of *Swadeshi* will be discussed in the next section. The *Swadeshi* period has bearing over the ideologies of that period which had shaped the new trends of art in India.

<sup>91</sup>Bipin Chandra, *India's Struggle for the independence*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 1988), pp. 130-131. Chandra describes at length about the *Swadeshi* movement in which he admits that the role of Rabindranath and his school was exemplary to the entire nation. Also see. Partha Mitter, (Cambridge, 1994) pp.234-264

<sup>92</sup>This is not to be confused with the theatrical performance, but performance of the body attuned with mind, even an act of scribbling, doodling or painting in that matter.

<sup>93</sup>For instance, a song penned by Tagore for children, flows in the following way,

*The sun has sat on the lap of clouds and melted the rain away, We have a free day, O brother, we have a free day*

*Not we know, how we are going to spend the rest of the day; wish we lose our paths in the wild woods today,*

*We pack of carefree lads today have all the fields to play: We have a free day, O brother, we have a free day.*

"Megher kole rod utheche", by Rabindranath Tagore (Translation ours).

This is how Tagore throws all kinds of childlike imagination into the pool of a rhythm to make us see the world through the unhindered and boundless eye of a school going lad who without the slightest botheration hurls himself into the bounties of nature on a day of leisure. Imminent here, is the radically harmonious view of nature—the clouds, fields, woods as a source of pleasure away and different from the discourse of 'wilderness' as a precarious state of existence and altogether different from the city oriented, monotonous humdrum of the discourse of colonial modernity.



of his school at Santiniketan.<sup>94</sup> There are speculations that child art as concept was heralded by Franz Cizek into the educational curriculum or pedagogy; Rabindranath had visited him in Vienna in 1921. Unquestionably, Rabindranath must have developed his understanding of children art by acknowledging Cizek's work with them.<sup>95</sup> Partha Mitter construes the significance of child art, which late nineteenth century had discovered in the autonomous world of children and the value of their creativity. Further, Mitter forms the hypothesis that via the tropes of a child, based on Freud's idea that provided modernist artists adopted the theoretical discourse of 'regression' into childhood as a state of becoming elemental. This passage to Rabindranath suggests, Mitter interprets, "a clue to Tagore's own approach to his art: the psychoanalyst compared child's play or daydreaming with creative imagination, which through its mastery over 'underdeveloped dispositions and suppressed wishes, liberated dominant memories."<sup>96</sup> Mulk Raj Anand asserts that children have an instinctive grasp of their fantasies and daydreams, the surrender to imagination, is perhaps more open to them. He tries to say that in order to follow the course of child development, the artist becomes a primitive man or emerge from formless nebula to emotional expression.<sup>97</sup> The concept of child art is vital for the artists of modern times.<sup>98</sup> For the modern artist, regressing to childhood allows his/her sensibilities to reign on his/her rational skills.

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<sup>94</sup>Devi Prasad, Art: The Basis of Education, (Delhi: National Book Trust, 1998 ), pp 42-46.

<sup>95</sup>Devi Prasad, op.cit. , pp 42-46. The author speculates the visit of Tagore to Vienna and in identifies his affiliation with child art. Also see. Mulk Raj Anand; "Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore" Marg Vol.XIV, No.2, 1962.

<sup>96</sup> Partha Mitter, The Triumph of Modernism, pp. 72-75. He exemplifies the importance of child art was deeply felt in Europe and it was discussed widely by the reputed authors. To understand Tagore's picture, Freud and Gombrich, ideas of child art, have been articulated in the text.

<sup>97</sup> Mulk Raj Anand op. cit.

<sup>98</sup>Likewise Picasso experimented with the unconscious childlike mind. He never decided what to paint; he just allowed his sensibilities, to paint in manner of child or primitive. Mulk Raj Anand (Marg. Vol. XIV, 1962)

By assuming Rabindranath's color vision deficiency, Ketaki K. Dyson infers that this handicap persuaded him to construe his imagination from naïve-child art.<sup>99</sup> For Walter Benjamin, childishness is a very important stage and according to his understanding, the new technological developments in our society have resulted from the fantastic projections of childish imagination.<sup>100</sup> This conception has come closer to the view similar to that of Marx, in which "the naiveté of the child brings pleasure to the adults and the adult attempts to reproduce the child's veracity on higher level."<sup>101</sup> Rabindranath had understood the power behind the child's imagination and he transferred the idea not only in his artistic vocabulary, but also in the framework of education model.<sup>102</sup> He was aware that the childlike expression carries the fullest of emotions; as he observed while talking about movement of art in education that, "as you smile or weep, each emotion is expressed in some movement of your face. But as a child you smiled with your whole body, you wept with the whole muscle...The whole body tried to express whatever deep emotion you felt."<sup>103</sup> In this regard, Rabindranath's approach towards art making has been often compared with Paul Klee, an important member of *Blue Rider*<sup>104</sup> and Bauhaus, who took inspiration from the painting from his son Felix, then, got inclined to observe keenly the expressions of child art.<sup>105</sup> To him it was the most primitive form of art; therefore he was interested purely and simply in discovering how a

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<sup>99</sup> Ketaki K Dyson, Rev. of Ronger Rabindranath by Ketaki K. Dyson and Sushobhan Adhikary, (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1997) in <http://www.parabaas.com/rabindranath/articles/pKetaki2.html>.

<sup>100</sup> Esther Leslie, Modern European Thinkers: Walter Benjamin, (London: Pluto Press), pp. 72-75 (Online edition).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> He was dedicated towards the set up of an institution to impart education to liberate child from codified classroom and inculcate ideas of being in nature.

<sup>103</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, "The Art Movement in Education", in Rabindranath Tagore : Pioneer in Education, (New Delhi: Sahitya Chayan), p 104.

<sup>104</sup> Die Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider) was the group of avant-garde Expressionist artists; founded in Munich (1911) for more details see. Edward Lucie-Smith, Art Terms, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994) p. 30.

<sup>105</sup> Werner Hartman, The Mind and Work of Paul Klee, (London: Faber & Faber, 1967) pp. 49-50.

primitive instinct finds a formal structure appropriate to content.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, Klee had shown interest in studying the formative power of unconscious of the children.

Framing connection between colonialism and notions of childhood, Ashis Nandy argues that colonialism had picked up these ideas of growth and development and drew a parallel between primitivism and childhood.<sup>107</sup> The idea determined the theory of progress which was studied not only in the Europe but also in other parts of Africa and other colonial countries.<sup>108</sup> On this basis certain codes were formulated to reform them into the mode of westernization and modernization. The theory also summarized the traits of childlike/childish primitivist such as innocent, ignorant, masculine, loyal, savage etc. It suggests that probably the artists of this period, including Rabindranath had fair knowledge about these terminologies set by the colonizers, which they manifested in their art to counter their oppression as a mode of resistance.

#### 1.4 Influence of Pedagogy

In the emergence of alternative artistic language, style or attitude such as primitivism (or German expressionism), we have to appraise the pedagogic structure of the institution (Bengal school) that played fundamental role towards the nourishment of one's artistic language or attitude. Thus, it is not the crisis of artist's language that requires attention but we also have to consider the 'weltanschauung' of intellectual minds those who were pouring the ideas towards institution building. Rabindranath was instrumental in the formation of Bengal School, and was also a great source of inspiration for his successors such as Nandalal Bose, Benodebehari, Ramkinkar Baij, etc. In 1901 Rabindranath started

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. The idea had already been explored by the by William Worringer in his treatise- '*Abstraction and Empathy*'. It is evident that Worringer extracts his theory on abstraction from child-art, primitives and spirituality. As we know that '*Abstraction and Empathy*' was a vantage point for German Expressionists such as the Blue Rider.

<sup>107</sup> Ashis Nandy, "The Psychology of Colonialism" in *The Intimate enemy*, (Oxford: 1983) pp.14-16.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. quoted from V. G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes to the Outside World in the Imperial Age*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 243.

shaping up the small model of school at Santiniketan. Initially he was thinking of conventional curriculum of education for children but through his dabbling in art, he realized that the kind of liberating education he had imagined would remain crucially incomplete without the inclusion of art into it. Rabindranath's school was modeled on the *ancient tapovans* or forest schools and therefore it made sense to Tagore in opening his school at Santiniketan-a non-descript village without any history or heritage of learning culture.<sup>109</sup> Essentially, the entire set of this educational program was a critique of modern education system and regimental classroom tutelage and at the same time not ignorant of the necessity of making a new beginning in the century *albeit* by taking an alternative road other than which the colonial regime offered. This resonates in his text called "The Parrot's Training" in which he says "a golden cage was built with gorgeous decorations to provide an ignorant bird with a sound schooling."<sup>110</sup> Rabindranath was seeking harmony in education which he visualized in the interdependence of man and nature, of man and universe. He believed that artists would enter into a harmonious relation with his surroundings, accompanied with the realization that it was a profound symbiotic relation of interdependence with nature, which was the cornerstone of human existence. And exploring the various dimensions of this symbiosis through the most creative of artistic expressions was set as the primary task of the education model he envisioned.

Moving into the endeavor of moulding young minds through an alternative education, Rabindranath was confronted with the problem of how to introduce the child to the physical world around. This task set his thought process towards forming an opinion on the contemporary situation of political aspirations and notions within the country. Not much had to be looked for in order to come face to face with the surging idea of nationalism that was brewing in the upcoming generation of the sub-continent. It is more than evident that Rabindranath discredited the notion of nationalism which he claimed was an imported idea from the West.

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<sup>109</sup>R.Sivakumar, *Santiniketan: The Making of a contextual Modernism*, (New Delhi: NGMA, 1994)

<sup>110</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, "The Parrot's Training in R. N Tagore: Pioneer in Education, (Delhi: Sahitya Chayan) Also see Swati Lal, "Rabindranath Tagore's Ideal of Aesthetics", *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 18, No. 2, (Summer, 1984), pp. 31-39.

In this direction, his first intervention was in the field of art and literature. Therefore, he was looking towards his own tradition and repeatedly urged fellow artists to search for their own artistic idiom. It was this route which made Rabindranath's path cross with Gandhi. And Rabindranath could actually find a companion in Gandhi, who was trying to initiate a similar moral search back into the history and culture of the sub-continent in order to come up with a different ethic than that of western nationalism. Many a thought got exchanged in this voyage of searching the soul of the soil. The Tagore's family had played a quintessential role in shaping up *Swadeshi* movement in Bengal. Rabindranath participated in 'Satyagraha movement' led by Gandhi. However, by this period, the borders of Rabindranath's area of intervention had come to be defined quite distinctly. Rabindranath confined his life to the agenda of education and art which led to a respectful and mutual dissociation of Gandhi and Rabindranath on the platform of political program. But the similar impulse which had brought Gandhi and Rabindranath on a common ground continued to play dominating presence in their activities and efforts.

One of them was the common vision of 'rural upliftment' to counter pose colonial materialism. Rabindranath conceived that nationalism of west was vulgar and it was being used to organize people for political and economic purposes. He advocated that instead of imitating the western model, we must find our own unity by taking into account the racial differences between western and Indians, which does not rule out basic unity. For seeking this unity, Rabindranath proposed to look at medieval saints like Nanak, Kabir and Chaitanya, etc.<sup>111</sup> It was remarkable that he was undermining the idea of nationalism as a monolithic identity through his cultural practices. This period informs us about the Rabindranath's shift towards pluralistic universalism.

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<sup>111</sup>Rabindranath Tagore, "Nationalism in India", in Nationalism, (London: Mc Millan & Co., 1937). I am indebted to Pulak Dutta (Dept. of Graphics, Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan) for suggesting me this valuable argument. These saint- figures have great connotation in our culture of protest which resists all sought of oppression to any society or a human being. The ideals of these saints were fabricated in the philosophy of Tagore and their ideologies accommodated the *Swadeshi* modus operandi. Likewise German Expressionism was considered to be the language of protest in Germany and due its wide purchase; it was absorbed by the artists in other parts of the world.

Referring on Gandhi's and Tagore's source for alternative of nationalism, Nandy points out that theirs (Gandhi and Tagore's) was a distinctive civilizational concept of universalism embedded in the tolerance encoded in various traditional ways of life in a highly diverse, plural society."<sup>112</sup> That Rabindranath had shown antipathy towards western nationalism and the evils of modernism is a well known fact. In critique of modernity, obviously what happened was that 'pre-modern' got glorified. While admiring the 'pre-modern' one should bear in mind that the pluralism encoded in the traditional ways did not share the democratic and egalitarian values but were mostly based on discrimination and hierarchal differences between certain castes, cultural and religious groups.<sup>113</sup> However, Rabindranath is concerned, he was too well aware of these differences to lapse into indiscriminate veneration of traditions.<sup>114</sup>

Therefore, Rabindranath had admiration for Japan- which was taken as an exemplary of a perfect synthesis of western and oriental ideas. He observed that "Japan has imported her food from the west, but not her vital nature. Japan cannot altogether lose and merge herself in the scientific paraphernalia she has acquired from the west and be turned into a mere borrowed machine."<sup>115</sup> It is apparent that he was greatly impressed by the role of art in Japanese lives which was similar to his own ideals. The cross-cultural contacts that led to Pan-Asianism that began with Okakura Kakuzo's visit to India in 1902. It strengthened Rabindranath's endeavors towards his educational program that would encompass similar values of this particular society but then extended from local/Indian/ pan-Asian/ international /humanist universalism.<sup>116</sup>

Geeta Kapur argues that for the artists in Bengal, close tuning with his natural environment implied the means of appropriating the modern via Regional/Local. This led them towards a part-philosophic, part-materialist approach and ultimately became a

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<sup>112</sup> Anita Prakash in Rev. of *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism* by Asis Nandy, *Social Scientist*, vol. 23, No. 1/3 (Jan.-Mar., 1995) p.129

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, "Nationalism in Japan", in *Nationalism*, (London: Mc Millan & Co., 1937).

<sup>116</sup> Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism*, (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), p.106.

ground for cultural synthesis.<sup>117</sup> Culture is considered to be a loaded word and which decides many things such as the studies of artisan and artifacts, conventions of different categories of art, a range of communicability in the changing context of art.<sup>118</sup> Further the idea of 'living tradition' created a linkage between the nature and culture and obviously with human labor; which informed the pedagogy of Santiniketan.

Rabindranath's role in shaping the institution is unmatched for he achieved the goal of blending the tradition of folk and spiritual as well as embracing the currents from the modern movement. In this regard, Santiniketan as a cultural and artistic sphere registered the presence of intellectuals and mentors from all around the globe. This 'modernism' germinated at this period and now Indian artists were getting familiar with the other movements of the West. Stella Kramrisch's lectures on modern art and movements spread their awareness amongst the students of Santiniketan.<sup>119</sup> Nandalal Bose took over charge of Kala Bhavan as principal in 1921.<sup>120</sup> He imbibed Rabindranath's ideals which sensitized him to the importance of nature and urged him to relate art with society.<sup>121</sup> The influences of Rabindranath led him to realize that an art that responded to the everyday realities of contemporary life and environment could be more authentic form of national art than a revivalist art dealing with mythological or historical themes.<sup>122</sup> His commitment towards the institution building ushered new heights in Santiniketan. In this regard, the curriculum of Kala-Bhavan was radical in some respect as pointed out by Geeta Kapur.<sup>123</sup>

Systematically, the artists were introduced to craftsmen at work and they were encouraged to rework on traditional materials as well as they were open to the other

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p.106.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Prof. R Sivakumar. K.G. Subramanyan, "Man and his work", Lalit Kala Contemporary, Vol. 30, p. 34. informs us about the lectures of Stella Kramrisch on modern art that helped artists such as Ramkinkar to cultivate modern European sensibilities.

<sup>120</sup> Kala Bhavan was formed in year 1919.

<sup>121</sup> R. Sivakumar, Santiniketan: The Making of a contextual Modernism, (New Delhi: NGMA, 1994).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Geeta Kapur, op.cit. (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000) p.107.

trends from outside. Santiniketan fostered cultural affinities with Bauhaus (Germany). The heads of both the institution; Walter Gropius (Bauhaus) and Nandalal Bose (Kala-Bhavan), turned their progressive ideas into precise teaching methods in spite of the sharp cultural differences.<sup>124</sup> Both the institutions recognized significance of craft in the industrial culture without setting up any hierarchy between artists and craftsmen. The impact of Bauhaus was tremendous. It not only tended to nurture the sensibilities of the artists, but also helped them to focus on the curriculum of Santiniketan in all aspects of creativity such as mural design, stage projects, graphics & design, dance, environmental sculpture, etc. These new developments in art in Bengal School made possible that the artists of Santiniketan were more aware about the trends of modern art and movements of the West.

According to Sivakumar, Bauhaus was not the only movement, which influenced the modern artists of Bengal (or India). Moreover there were other resources like art journals and magazine which were functional to bring awareness among the art lovers and artists about the current discourses on art. By setting the tone of art-criticism and writing, the art journals such as *Prabasi*, *Rupam*, *Modern Review* and *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* were frequently publishing the reviews of exhibition by the distinguished teachers and art historians such as A.K. Coomaraswamy, Stella Kramrisch, O.C. Ganguly, Benoy Sarkar, etc.<sup>125</sup> The flourishing of these art journals, were to an extent, responsible for exposing o the pupils of art schools to modern art.

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<sup>124</sup> Sovon Som, "Santiniketan and Bauhaus", Nandalal Centenary, Vol. *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, (1983) pp. 51-56. Bauhaus was an institution in Weimar/Dessau (Germany) established after the World War I and imperative in the German Expressionist movement as a whole such as theatre, crafts, design, painting, films and architecture. Many of the Expressionist artists like Kandinsky, Klee etc have contributed through their skills and teaching methods. For details see *Bauhaus(1919-1928)*, Ed. Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius and Isa Gropius, (New York: Museum Of Art, 1975)

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Prof. R. Sivakumar (Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan, 2008), the new developments in the art and its interactions with the other cultures paved the way to the scholastic writings on art from the intellectual from the other part of the world. Art criticism became the critical tool to comprehend the art within India as well as overseas. The important feature of these journals was to publish the paintings and other forms of art, which was the great source of information to the art lover in order to appreciate the art.



### 1.5 Environmental Primitivism<sup>126</sup>: Ramkinkar Baij and Nandalal Bose

The manifestation of 'primitivist' leanings in Rabindranath's art had brought out the debate of 'primitivism' in the context of art of Bengal. Further, it is evident that this period marks the flourishing of modernism. After Rabindranath, the notion of primitivism had been explored by the artist in their art such as Ramkinkar Baij and Nandalal Bose.<sup>127</sup> 'Primitivism' had tremendous impact on the art of Bengal. The modern artists of Bengal School, identified folklore and the '*Santhals*' (a 'tribal' population)<sup>128</sup> as their source of inspiration and often depicted them in their art. The enriching forms of folk arts such as *Kalighat pat*, *jadu patua* (scroll paintings) and *Kantha* (quilts); had already captured the

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<sup>126</sup> The term 'Environmental Primitivism' has been used by Partha Mitter, which refers specifically to the Santiniketan and its pedagogical association with the environment. See. Partha Mitter, *Triumph of Modernism*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 2007).p.78.

<sup>127</sup> See. "Primitivism" in *Critical Terms of Art History*, Eds. Mark Antiff and Patricia Leighton, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996) .Primitivism is the product of historical experience of the self and more importantly as an ideological construct of colonial conquest and exploitation. Also in western culture it's applied in negative as well as positive sense. The artists of western modernism have widely incorporated 'primitive' elements in their art and it varied from each other in their application. The cubist artist had approached 'primitivism' for bringing radicalism in their art. While modernists from Gaugin to Wassily Kandinsky and other members of German Expressionist movement, had imitated the forms of rural folk art of Russia. They had considered the forms and elements of rural folk art superior than the art of their own region in terms of the spirit, simplicity and unity with nature that they expressed longing on their part to escape the complication of urban industrialized middle class life. Also see Partha Mitter "Prologue" in *The Triumph of Modernism* (Oxford: 2007).

<sup>128</sup> Marinn Carinn- Bouez, "From Forest to Factory: The Santhal Conception of labor" in Peter Robb (ed.) *Dalit Movements and Labour*, (Oxford,1993). According to 'Santhal' myth – '*Santhals*' during the Golden age had never worked and by living in forest they had never introduced to the death. But Hindu god Thakur (shiva) introduced the death to the community. Later they came to be known as laborers and also division of labor occurred in their skills too. The 'Santhal' term for work, *Kami*, is borrowed from the Hindi *kam*, while *raska*, and is a word of Munda origin means pleasure-here implies as drinking, dancing and making love. At present this community provides their labor to steel factories centered on West Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa. pp. 151-158.

imagination of the artists in Bengal.<sup>129</sup> The Folk art was considered to be the ‘low brow’ of society and its revival gave impetus to the nationalists’ resurgence. The ‘primitivism’ of Bengal school was part of their cosmopolitan attitude as it was being a universal tendency manifested in the art of non-Western countries to counter rapid development of western industrialization and technological progress.<sup>130</sup> ‘Primitivism’ of this period was not an isolated terminology; rather on the footing of modernism, it was driven by a universalist tradition and yet at the same time bears the imprint of its provenance and gestures towards specificity vis-à-vis a nation, or a region.<sup>131</sup> In the European context, the main objective of ‘primitivist’/Expressionist artists was to take refuge from the heightened forms of urbanization and industrial society based on the idea of progress. While in India; as pointed out by Mitter, modernists have idolized rural India as a real site of nation, evolving artistic ‘primitivism’ as an antithesis of urban colonial values.<sup>132</sup> David Pan insists that the Expressionist artists had taken ‘primitive’ values from the art of Africa, Asia and Oceanic countries to eliminate the unifying “imperialist” or “nationalist”

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<sup>129</sup>Gurudasay Dutt, The Folk arts of Bengal and Crafts of Bengal: The Collected Papers, (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1990) quoted Daniel Roycroft, “Santalism: Reconfiguring ‘the *Santhals* in Indian art and Politics. *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1,(2006). 161. According to Gurudasay Dutt, the jadu patuas were the link between the mainstream and the marginal cultural zones of Bengal, which he predicted as ‘*Santhals*’.

<sup>130</sup>Primitivism was meant to exclude the idea of progress, along with the aesthetic sense based on this idea. The nineteenth and twentieth century witnessed the rise of colonial expansion and rule in the non-European countries. Moreover, the colonizers were exploiting the natives and its resources through the process of industrialization and technological advancement. Witnessing this common fact, artists of the non-western countries also had started using the vocabulary of ‘Primitivism’ in a hybrid form for their own resistance against imperialism. David Pan, Primitive Renaissance: Rethinking of German Expressionism, (London: University Of Nebraska, 2001) p.6 and also see Partha Mitter, (Cambridge: 2007) p.11.

<sup>131</sup>The argument discussed with my supervisor Prof. Parul Dave Mukherji. Within the context of modernism, literati or artists appropriated the styles and features of ‘primitives’(aboriginals) and incorporating their simplicity and authenticity into modern art, was the project of transforming western art. Further see. *Primitivism*, in Critical Terms of Art History, Eds. Mark Antiff & Patricia Leighton, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>132</sup> Partha Mitter, (Oxford: 2007), pp.10-11.

perspective and to harness the multiplication of local aesthetic possibilities.<sup>133</sup> What we develop from this argument is that the artists in rural Bengal was working almost on the similar model as discussed above, but there is a major difference different spatial and temporal location.

Mark Antiff and Patricia Leighton drew upon this difference which was determined by the physical and temporal synchronicity.<sup>134</sup> Further they observe that ‘this physical and temporal synchronicity is replaced by typological time frame defined in terms of western progress and primitive regression. For the west, it means to enter into a foreign culture is to leave one’s own “mature” culture and so to enter into an “infantile” past (Africa, Asia, or oceanic cultures are said to be the “childhood” of western civilization).<sup>135</sup> In Bengal, modern artists of Santiniketan were not outsiders or alien to the culture of tribal *Santhals*. This brings us to the view that the milieu comprise the ‘ethnographic present’ which denies all the racial barriers and allows the artists to appropriate their cultural forms, to open up the conceptual, cultural and geo-political frameworks that colonialist constructed as ‘aboriginal’.<sup>136</sup> It suggests that the artists and intellectuals of Bengal were familiar with the habitation of ‘*Santhals*’. Moreover, they had made interventions by depicting them in their oeuvres. For instance, Santhal life had been manifested in the works of Benodebehari Mokherjee and Nandalal Bose. Devi Prasad Roy Choudury’s painting of ‘*Santhal mother and children* (1924) informs us about the popularity of ‘Santhal’ in their subject-matter. References of ‘*Santhals*’ can be encountered in the literary works of Rabindranath such as ‘*Santhal woman*’<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>David Pan, op.cit. (London: University Of Nebraska, 2001), p.6.

<sup>134</sup>“Primitivism” in Critical Terms of Art History, Eds. Mark Antiff & Patricia Leighton, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996)

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>Daniel Roycroft, “Santalism: Reconfiguring ‘the Santhal in Indian Art & Politics’”. Indian Historical Review, Vol. XXXIII. No. 1, (January 2006), p. 159.

<sup>137</sup>Rabindranath provides vivid description of Santhal woman in one of the text published in Visva-Bharati Quart.Vol.1, Part. 1 (April, 1935). Devi Prasad Roy Choudhry’s work registered high acclaim in the Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924, Partha Mitter (Oxford: 2007), p.31.

### 1.5 (a) Expressionism and Ramkinkar Baij

Ramkinkar has consistently been claimed by artists and critics as ‘primitivist’. At the same time, strong affinity between his works and western modernism has been noticed. As K.G. Subramanyan remarks that “there are certain unusual minds that responded *instinctively* to a cultural climate- like some *animals* that read with their body atmospheric and seismic changes.”<sup>138</sup> He pointed out to the fact that Baij had a gifted impulse for connecting with environment and responded to changes in his surroundings in such a finesse that came to be manifested both in his life and art. Both art and life was ingrained in his ‘personality’ what Rabindranath always meant in his writings. He was considered as a ‘man of soil’ (*matir manush*) and therefore he responded to his primitive instincts that he transformed into art of his lifetime. (Plate. 4) For Ramkinkar, it was his peasant’s roots that defined his nature of modernism. When Ramkinkar entered into the art scene of Bengal, there was indeed ‘primitive’ art had gained ground within European modernism.

Overcoming any anxiety of western influence, Ramkinkar unabashedly drew inspiration from European modernism making a breakthrough in Indian artist’s attitude towards the west. As Gayatri Sinha points out, “He (Ramkinkar) was borrowing from western arts precisely as modern western artists were borrowing from other cultures linking discrete periods, styles, or oeuvres through the affinities uncovered by his own sensibility.”<sup>139</sup> He had opportunity to study with progressive European sculptors like Lisa von Pott and Madam Milward. Both of them lived in Santiniketan for short period in 1920’s. Lisa von Pott was first instructor in Santiniketan School and Milward was the student of great sculptor Bourdelle.<sup>140</sup> Ramkinkar had fair knowledge of the modern European art and its issues; that he experimented with all kinds of techniques in his

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<sup>138</sup> Remembering Ramkinkar: K.G. Subramanyan’s interview with R. Sivakumar, Ramkinkar Baij Centenary Exhibition, (Santiniketan: 2007), p.14. Subramanyan’s comment undermines the artist intellect by recognizing the animal’s instinct in him instead of considering his sensitivity for his immediate environment.

<sup>139</sup> Gayatri Sinha (ed.), Indian Art: an Overview, (New Delhi: Rupa), p.77.

<sup>140</sup> Jaya Appaswamy, “Painter and Sculptor”, Lalit Kala Contemporary, Vol. 30, p.41.

paintings and sculptures from realism to cubism, from primitivist-Abstraction to surrealism and so Expressionism. K.G. Subramanyan argues that it was not his personal response to render such a language rather this response was as similar to the European artists of the west, who were looking towards the non-western art.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, he says “in thirties and forties the artists were not yet subjected to the impact of theories of art history that designed the development of modern art as an orderly procession with an inbuilt logic and an arid sense of sequence to be called ‘a distinct tradition’.”<sup>142</sup>

Ramkinkar’s narratives traversed through many world view, context, and landscape and as his observations of these forms compelled him to render in the art forms. Ramkinkar’s oeuvres manifested various subject-matter rooted in his environment. But much emphasis would be given to his works such *Santhal Family (1939)* and *Mill Call (1954)* that brings us closer to our basic argument based on his affinity with primitivism and modernism. (Plates 5 and 6)

It is interesting to observe the manner in which the influence of European modernism is disavowed by Jhanak Jhankar Narzary on ground that Ramkinkar’s genius and individuality will get compromised. Jhanak Jhankar Narzary renowned sculptor in Santiniketan School disqualifies Ramkinkar’s affinities with any language of modern western art. Narzary says that though he had first hand knowledge about all art movements of the west, but he was driven by his own unmatched talent. Therefore his dynamics of play with styles, with mediums or language refuse a singular categorization. On the question of primitivist/Expressionist renderings in Ramkinkar oeuvres, Narzary replies that his expressions like Expressionists were never personal or personalized.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> K.G. Subramanyan interview with R. Sivakumar”, Ramkinkar Centenary Exhibition 2006-07 (catalogue), Santiniketan: Kala Bhavan, 2006-07, p.15. In his another writing Subramanyan acknowledges that Ramkinkar was aware of work of core cubist like Picasso and brought into number of his works the a kind of plastic ambivalence or metaphoric distortion comparable to his, the major part of his works shows that he used the lessons of Cubism and its antecedents in a rather personal way. See. K.G.Subramanyan, “Man & His Works”, Lalit Kala contemporary, Vol. 30.p. 34.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.,p.15.

<sup>143</sup>Interview with Jhanak Jhankar Narzary, (Head of Dept. Art History, Santiniketan), 2008.

Ramkinkar's approach to form and the structural logic of forms were very strong, whereas Expressionist were not conscious about form, rather for them 'emotion' was more central to their approach.<sup>144</sup>

'Santalism'<sup>145</sup> gave artists like Ramkinkar working with the visual medium, a material form to an emerging anti-colonial consciousness. His work *Santhal Family* defines the Santiniketan engagement of local *adivasis* (primitives) and that paved the way to link-local-International nexus. Founded in 1919 as an internationalist universal project, Santiniketan generated a conservative 'civilisational' discourse and facilitated more radical utopian interventions.<sup>146</sup> Ramkinkar liberated this universal message by liberating the concept of 'Santhal' from the discourse of tribalism to hybridize it as primitive/peasant/proletariat.<sup>147</sup> Ramkinkar interventions facilitated '*Santhals*' participation in Santiniketan modernity in which *Santhal* is no more known as victim of colonial exploitation.<sup>148</sup> Yet, he facilitated an inter-cultural sensitivity among the middle-

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<sup>144</sup>At this period, Ramkinkar had move beyond the trappings of 'national' phenomenon and he was aware of the usage of modern style. As already mentioned it is not valid to discuss about appropriation of modern idioms by the artists of non-west, but importantly what impetus it provides to the social or political context in colonial state. See John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (1998) pp.241-242 and also K.G. Subramanyan, *Moving Focus*, (1982)

<sup>145</sup>'Santalism' is term employed by the Daniel Roycroft in his article to develop Marxist accounts of artistic nationalism. See. Daniel Roycroft, op.cit.

<sup>146</sup>Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism*. (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), p. 282,289 quoted in Daniel Roycroft, p.162

<sup>147</sup>Ibid. p. 162. Roycroft says that Geeta Kapur endeavors to investigate the valorization the '*Santhals*' modernity is fetishised if other historical and cultural interventions are ignored.

<sup>148</sup> There were many 'aboriginal' tribes including *Santhals* had gone through the exploitative processes of colonial system. The colonial administration recognized that 'aboriginals' experienced colonial modernity in many ways that differed from the experiences of other groups (especially in the region of Chota-Nagpur -Jharkhand and Bengal). These 'Aboriginals' were passive victims and exploited in manifolds-by Hindu caste moneylenders and landowners, targeted by potential converts Hindu and Christian missionaries and against the administrative policies that thrown them from their access to their own forest and traditional system. See Daniel Roycroft: op.cit.

class viewers and readers to perceive 'Santhals' as a cultural community. This led to negotiate 'Santhal' as agent of local-international modernist project.

#### 1.5. (b). Expressionism and Nandalal Bose

In similar vein, Nandalal Bose had also depicted the lives of the *Santhals* in his paintings and appropriated the folk art. Though a teacher in Santiniketan, he had substantial knowledge about the languages of modern art, but he chose to work with mythological and traditional idiom. He took inspiration from the folklore such as *patuas* and his access to the Ajanta murals, revealed his association at different levels in art, earlier he was deriving his themes from Indian mythology and history which replaced by the rural life and landscape.<sup>149</sup> Notably, the famous German expressionist artist, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner had visited Ajanta. He was inspired by the Ajanta murals and one of his paintings *Five Bathers in Lake (1911)*' bears resemblance to the details of Ajanta Murals that revealed in his preparatory drawing.<sup>150</sup> Nandalal had discovered the folk art and Ajanta paintings at same time and so few works that followed he tried to combine them.<sup>151</sup> He was ardent follower of Gandhian values and this led him to accept the message of *Swadeshi* in its practical aspect. He was personally invited by Gandhi to construct a township, on the occasion of Faizpur Congress convention. He was asked to apply the rural material and employ local craftsmen to set up the *pandals*. As a result, he produced the marvelous series of *Haripura* posters using local colors and ground.

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<sup>149</sup>Nandalal shifts in his artistic approach had happened due to the educational programme based on the idea of universalism that denounced the Abanindranath School based on 'Indianness'; may led him to take different route via folklore as it was being used as weapon against the colonial materialism and to escape from British academic art. See R. Sivakumar, *Santiniketan: Making of a Contextual Modern*, (New Delhi: NGMA.1997) pages not given.

<sup>150</sup>Tapan Bhattacharya. "Sublime Intervention: The German Expressionist 'connection with Indian Art and Thought'", *Nandan*, Vol.XVII, (1997), pp.60-61.

<sup>151</sup>R. Sivakumar, (New Delhi: N.G.M.A.,1997)

Sivakumar says that the Haripura posters are the landmark of his artistic career also exemplifies his appropriation of the folk.<sup>152</sup>

The idea of looking at our heritage of folk and mythological elements goes parallel with the Kandinsky's approach to his own culture.<sup>153</sup> Kandinsky was exploring the spiritual in art by rejecting superficial and materialistic way of life. He embarked upon the idea of 'Symbolism' and its emphasis on spiritual and emotional states. Pursuing the idea the 'Symbolism', artists often adopted the traditional, mythological iconography. Kandinsky had developed his deep involvement with 'Symbolism'. Kandinsky's Russian roots facilitated his access to his own rich heritage of folk tales and peasants wood cuts.<sup>154</sup> Kandinsky had admiration for the oriental art traditions which he saw in one of the exhibitions of Oriental art in Munich in early twentieth century. Tapan Bhattacharya observes in his essay that the delicacy, the depth of such art, its abstract quality, freedom of color and form made a lasting impression on Kandinsky.<sup>155</sup> It is not only Kandinsky, there are other German thinkers like Goethe and Schiller had appreciated the depth of India's culture and civilization. To trace the cross cultural interaction between India and Germany, Goethe's eulogy to Kalaidasa's Shakuntala is worth mentioning; Schlegel regarded Indian philosophy as superior to Greek philosophy.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, Schopenhauer admired *Upanishads* for universal understanding of man. Goethe was also enamored by the Indian theory of 'Symbolism' of colors. And notably the association of colors and

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid.

<sup>153</sup>Kandinsky was the important member of the 'Blue Rider' Group in Germany, one of the variants of German Expressionism tradition. He was native of Russia and he appropriated the folk traditions, fairy tales and shamanistic traditions of the primitivist religious art. See David Pan. (London: Nebraska, 2001),pp. 102- 103.

<sup>154</sup>Shearer West, *The visual Art in Germany*, (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 200),pp. 59-64.

<sup>155</sup> Tapan Bhattacharya, "Sublime Intervention: The German Expressionist 'connection with Indian Art and Thought", *Nandan*, Vol.XVII, (1997), p.61. Earlier the relation between Kandinsky and oriental art was being explored by L. P. Sihare and furthermore he expresses that Kandinsky's involvement and indebtedness to Indian doctrines shaped his aesthetic theories; revealed in his letters. See L P Sihare "Indian Contribution to Expressionism and its impact on Modern Indian Paintings" in *Exhb. Cat., German Expressionist Paintings*,(1982) N.G.M.A, New Delhi. 153-155.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.



music was another favorite idea of German Romanticist that captured by Kandinsky in the some of his paintings. Thus, the cross-currents of India and Germany are very old and both the cultures borrowed ideas from each other at times.

While in eighteenth and nineteenth century, India had exerted a dominant influence on the German imaginary. Early twentieth century witnessed a shift in the direction of cross-cultural influence. When modernism entered India, particularly Bengal, German Expressionism fired the minds of Indian artists and supplied with a paradigm of artistic freedom a means of resisting colonial definition of art. In the works of Nandalal Bose we could find the similar engagement with outline and linearism that bore resonance with symbolist style.

His encounters with tradition and environment capture the varying moods and gestures of the people around him. Sivakumar observes that “Nandalal Bose had strong observation of the artifacts and aesthetic objects which he usually internalized into his memory. Thus he saw a loose connection between drawing from memory and composition...this also helped him to think of representation and decoration as compatible, rather than as mutually exclusive, concepts”.<sup>157</sup> This brought him closer to the artists like Matisse.<sup>158</sup> In terms of Expressionism, one could presume Nandalal as the Bengali primer informed by his constant use of elongated eyes and attenuated figures in his painting, this trait was a hallmark of the early art of Bengal School.<sup>159</sup> One of his paintings –*Mother Feeding Her Child* (plate 7). is embodiment of ‘decorative Expressionism’ of Santiniketan School. This is validated by the fact that this painting was being selected in the exhibition on ‘*Expressionist Art in India*’.<sup>160</sup> As pointed out by L P Sihare, “there were set of painters who were not eager to sympathize with sufferings and

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<sup>157</sup>R.Sivakumar, op.cit.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid.

<sup>159</sup>The trait reminds us of the art of Abanindranath’s school in which they derived their thematic from Indian mythology, Ajanta paintings, Jaina manuscripts, Mughal and Rajput idiom. The use of rich colors and bold brushstrokes was partly derived from the patas paintings.

<sup>160</sup>The exhibition title -‘Expressionist Paintings from National Gallery of Modern Art’ (1975), curated by L.P.Sihare in N.G.M.A, New Delhi.

oppression of social class. Their main concern, above all, was expression...so these artists were deeply interested in exploring the subtleties and nuances of pictorial elements in order to make their paintings basically expressive".<sup>161</sup> For Nandalal Bose, it was the formalism of French Fauvism that found ready acceptance.

Thus, in India, the response to Expressionism cannot be understood within the narrow frame of German Expressionism alone. It was neither a passive absorption of the idioms and themes nor did it meet an abject resistance. Instead, the interaction initiated a complex dialogue of aesthetics and metaphors through the medium of art soaked in the common pool of self-expression and therefore none of the cultures it touched could maintain its puritanical form but became pregnant with hybridized cultures and that which fruited in the period after Rabindranath.<sup>162</sup>

The two strands of Expressionism French and German co-existed in the works of Nandalal Bose and Ramkinkar Baij. If Nandalal paved the way for a more national/classical idiom in 'decorative Expressionist' style, then Ramkinkar Baij found greater resonance in the cubist-expressionist language that openly endorsed international modernism. This enabled them to form a direct link with international modernism and shaped out the local as site of creativity and solidarity rather than oppression and exploitation.<sup>163</sup> Moreover the primitive components of their hybridized language strengthened the educational and aesthetic discourses of Santiniketan that constituted contextual modernism.<sup>164</sup> Roycroft asserts that contesting colonial constructions of 'aboriginality and the 'Santhal' the Santiniketan movement engendered a progressive

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid. L.P. Sihare established similarity between Nandalal and Matisse. Sihare said that Indian artists towards their avant-garde experiments, favored Expressionism without caring to differentiate between nuances and subtleties of French i.e. fauvism' and German versions of style.

<sup>162</sup> Assumption is based on my previous argument in which artists were could not differentiate between fauvism and 'Expressionism'. That experiment was prevalent in the Europe art scene in the beginning of twentieth century, whereby many artists have rendered both the style together to simply achieve quality of distortion.

<sup>163</sup> Daniel Roycroft, op.cit., p 166

<sup>164</sup> The term 'Contextual' is borrowed from the writings of R. Sivakumar. i.e. 'Making of Contextual Modern' (NGMA,1997)

cultural consciousness. Especially the works of Ramkinkar Baij literally placed the common aboriginal '*Santhals*' into modernist aesthetics, by incorporating their cultural specificity of the region. The language of expressionism or we can say that at least the expressionist attitude facilitated him to reject the elitist traits. These traits were underpinned in previous visual interventions. What R. Sivakumar explores in his writing, thereby he says "Santhal life as a subject matter had antecedents in the works of both Nandalal and Benodebehari. However, there was '*marked difference*' in Ramkinkar's approach."<sup>165</sup> In quest of this '*marked difference*', Santosh S. had pin-pointed that "Ramkinkar's contribution to art as a great one and why he remains a minority in Indian art even though he dealt with two major languages, one being the national modern (Bengal School) and the other a European modernist."<sup>166</sup> (Emphasis ours)

Bringing these two aforesaid arguments on a plane, it can be clearly seen how the singular niche carved in artwork by Ramkinkar is located in the hybridized language, which bore testimony to the rich dialogue of that Expressionism had with modern Indian Art. Further, this was the very language that became the most potent tool used by Ramkinkar in giving a political slant to his art. We would see further dimension of the move made by artists seen at both, aesthetics as well as political levels.

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<sup>165</sup> R. Sivakumar, Santiniketan: Making of a Contextual Modern, (New Delhi: NGMA.1997) pages not given.

<sup>166</sup> Santosh s., "Some Notes on Ramkinkar" in Searching Lines, Nandan Mela, Kala Bhavan publication, Santiniketan, 2004.p. 30. By deriving an argument from Gilles Deleuze, Santosh says Ramkinkar did not outcaste himself from major/dominant languages instead took part in them, with a minority positioning. This enabled him to constructs the 'literature' in major language and everything in this minority literature is 'political' Further to this argument by santosh s, we have to appraise the positioning of the Ramkinkar in the context of Santiniketan. Equally, we need to critically examine the categories like 'minority' for him, by considering the fact; that Santiniketan as a site was open to him to work freely in cultural and social milieu. Sivakumar asserts that Ramkinkar's associations with down trodden and their subject matter does not that we position him in the same category. If artists such as Courbet depicted the life of workers in his paintings e.g. 'Stone Breakers' it does not qualify him to position him on the same footing. Interview with R Sivakumar, Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan, 2008.

## **CHAPTER-II**

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### **Social Expressionism: The Art of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore**

## CHAPTER-II

As it is evident from the preceding chapter, artists of the Bengal School and Santiniketan had some leanings towards Expressionist language align with their own social conditioning. This chapter will primarily focus on the contours of Social Expressionism in Bengal that manifested itself in the emerging art of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore during 1940's.<sup>167</sup> Both artists- Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore had responded to the social turbulence of those times such as the 'Bengal famine' and the 'Tebhaga-Peasant movement'. The social theme and content of their art had political affiliations with left parties and socialist organs of India. While in Germany, a couple of decades ago, Expressionists had inclined to the politics of left-wing ideology due to socio- political upheavals during the course of World War I. As a result, the society witnessed a social revolution which transformed the role of German Expressionist art. In similar vein, one could trace the roots of this process of radical consciencization back to

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<sup>167</sup> Here, I appropriate the term 'Social Expressionism' from 'November revolution' in Germany after World War I that politicized the nature of art. The representation of Expressionist art that was based on the principles of 'spiritual' and inner necessity' got transformed into various subject-matters. Under the influence of socialism, art encompassed the subject-matter such as agony, cry, despair, death, rape, murder, xenophobia of the cities, etc. More interestingly, German Expressionist art became no longer the leisurely bourgeoisie activity rather it registered its access to the proletariat and common masses through the rapid circulation of periodicals, posters and crude forms of woodcuts. In this regard, I have observed that a few social and, to some extent, stylistic affinities with the art of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore with German Expressionist art which was produced during the course of World War I. Some people claim that their works have the tendency of realistic art. That is partly true, but by looking at the Expressionist perspective, artists like Kathe Kollwitz was also called 'realist' in her depiction of subject. What I want to highlight that though these artists were diligently depicting reality of war and its sufferings, but the reality had grotesque appeal of horror, anger and despair. Thus, that very inhumane situation was depicted through Expressionist distortion of light and shade or some times with elongated grotesque body posture or limbs. The recurrence of elongated hand gesture in the works of Expressionists is one of the most powerful way of conveying a fatalist sense of despair and defeat and has been a common trait of Expressionist artists; later it was loosely borrowed by number of artists in India and abroad, to name a few such as Rabindranath Tagore, Ramkinkar Baij, M.F.Hussain, F.N. Souza, Satish Gujral etc, including Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore in this context.

the twenties of Germany, where the Expressionists were going through a similar phase of radicalization of themes in their artistic agendas. The art of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore evolved during the politico-social cataclysm, and their approaches are reminiscent of German Expressionists. In this study, we can juxtapose the artistic language of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore with the Expressionists which was the marker of their socio-cultural protest against all odds. Significantly, it has been noticed that Expressionism became the highly complex movement of cultural protest, which overturned the prevailing aesthetic and social values on a universal scale.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, it will be relevant to throw light upon the approaches and agendas of artists of German Expressionism after World War I.

### 2.1 Expressionism in Germany: Second Generation 1918-1919

After World War I, Germany experienced military defeat, economic collapse and revolution-all in quick succession. All these events proceeded towards a 'Revolution' often known as 'November Revolution'. Group of workers and soldiers gathered in middle of the city- Berlin. Meeting no resistance from state, they took possession of public buildings and properties by planting the red flag of revolution on each of them.<sup>169</sup> The entire city came under the grip of workers and soldiers; quickly they formed councils modeled on the Russian Soviet pattern.<sup>170</sup> Feeling the seriousness of the events, many German Expressionist artists arrived to join the workers and soldiers in solidarity including Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Max Pechstein, Paul Klee and Otto Dix, Georg Grosz;

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<sup>168</sup>Stephan Von Wiese describes the common features of Expressionism; they can be identified within its enormous formal diversity and are more a matter of content. They spring from its critique of contemporary civilization. The aim of Expressionism is solidarity of all peoples, avowal of a humanly ordered world and fight against the Beast in every situation of life. See. Stephen Von Wiese, "a Tempest Sweeping This World: Expressionism as an International Movement", German Expressionism (1915-1925): The Second Movement, (Munich: Prestel, 1988-89), p.18.

<sup>169</sup>Joan Weinstein, "Expressionism in War and Revolution" in German Expressionism: Art and Society, eds. Stephanie Barron and Wolf Dieter-Dube, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997).pp. 40-41.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid.

formed their own artists 'councils' or participated in it. Through these 'councils', they wanted to achieve their revolutionary aspirations: *the November Group, the Working Council for Art, the Action committee of Revolutionary artists*.<sup>171</sup> They anticipated a revolution in which art would play a vital role as well as would render a notion like "Expressionism" as a valid criterion of political life. Moreover, German Expressionists realized that Expressionist' art had the potential to appeal to the *volk* (masses) that comprised of industrial workers, peasants, laborers and proletariat from all walks of life. They came up confidently with their manifestos stating, "Among other things, the artistic freedom, an end of capitalist art market, rejection of academy art representations and a creation of a new proletarian audience for their art."<sup>172</sup> By registering the spread of Revolution, Socialism became the epithet that drew many German Expressionist artists to join the revolution, including the Dadaist, with the common goal in their mind i.e. to strengthen the proletarian cause.<sup>173</sup> The Expressionist admired the workers for demonstrating their activism in the realm of Socialism and Communism which helped Expressionists to not only participate in the reformation of academics, museums, and

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<sup>171</sup>Joan Weinstein, *The End of Expressionism: The Art and Revolution in Germany, 1918-19*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 1. The art "councils' were widespread in the major cities of Germany during the revolutionary fervor: *Working Council for Arts* and *November Group* in Berlin, *Soldier and Workers Council* in Dresden, Rival artists council in Munich. Besides, these councils formed by prominent Expressionist artists, there were extraordinary number of Expressionist exhibition societies that flourished in virtually every provincial art capital in Germany after the 1918. Robert Jensen, "Who Speaks for the Revolution?". Rev. of *The End of Expressionism: Art and the Revolution in Germany 1918-19* by Joan Weinstein. *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 17, No.2, (1994), p.127. At same time these groups were criticized for their communal agenda in two ways- in their own sense of shared values, and their desire to create systems and aesthetics that would speak to the masses. Secondly, for projecting their 'Gemeinschaft' mentality of brotherhood that was based on regionally rather than on national or International level. See. Shearer West, "Community and Personality: art on the left" in *The Visual Arts in Germany*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) pp.113-114.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup>Dada art was equally radical in approach and Dadaist artists were actively engaged in the theoretical debate over left-wing radicalism and possibilities of creating a proletarian culture. However Expressionist art was highly debated and gained mass popularity. Perhaps. Dadaist could not match the universal appeal of Expressionism.

exhibition policies, but also shaping the social fabric.<sup>174</sup> German Expressionist made their art accessible to the masses to gain the popularity of 'Expressionism' as well as to demonstrate resistance through their art. This led them to publish their art on the book jacket of journals: *Der Sturm*, *Die Aktion*, *Revolution*; then newspapers and posters. Interestingly, the Expressionists realized the impact of the printmaking that fulfilled their quest for the bold, emotion-laden forms that would immediately capture and directly convey their intense engagement with life.<sup>175</sup> The Expressionist found that the medium of printmaking encouraged a synthetic, abstract style that powerfully expressed emotions, revealed inner truths and influenced the development of their style of painting.<sup>176</sup> In this effort to approach art in a new way, they turned to the medium of woodcut and considered it truly German. They knew the significance of woodcut in the life of German people, which is evident in the observation made by the art-historian Wilhelm Valentiner. He summarized the cultural and historical meanings that made the medium so highly charged: "From the time of the oldest timberwork architecture of Germans, from the wooden sculpture of German Gothic and Renaissance, from the art of the woodcut of

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<sup>174</sup>Ida Katherine Rigby, "Critics, Artists and the Revolution" in German Expressionism: Documents from the End of Wilhemine Empire to Rise of National Socialism. Ed. Rosa-Carol Washton Long, London: University of California, 1995), pp. 173-174, apart from this view, the German Rexpressionist artists were also questioned for their complicated history and their aim to triumph the revolution; accruing the power through their revolutionary rhetoric. See. Joan Weinstein, "Expressionism in War and Revolution" in German Expressionism: Art and Society, eds. Stephanie Barron and Wolf Dieter-Dube, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997).pp. 40-41.

<sup>175</sup>These Expressionist publications brought out various views and impressions of the German Expressionist movement which included the literary works and poetries; graphic art, particularly the woodcuts were more popular among the readers. Though both the periodicals had personal rivalries of editors- Herwarth Walden and Franz Pfemfert, but in the course of time both consolidated by separating their routes; former tended to favor the artistic avant-garde and latter literary avant-garde. See Thomas Friedrich, "A turn toward the public? The Expressionists' Media, Books, Posters, and Periodicals" in German Expressionism: Art and Society, eds. Stephanie Barron and Wolf Dieter-Dube, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997). pp. 85-89. It has been speculated that literary Expressionism has also been widely contributed to historicize the project of post-war Expressionism, which was perhaps a more potent agent in shaping the public image of Expressionism that the Visual arts. See Robert Jensen, op.cit.,p.126.

<sup>176</sup> Ida Katherine Rigby, op.cit. .pp. 173-174



Durer's time, the German artist has preferred the use of wood for the expression of his ideas in architecture, sculpture and printmaking."<sup>177</sup> Gustav Hartlaub, a passionate supporter of Expressionist art, considers in his writing that woodcut in particular was well suited for expressing the German temperament and celebrates its potential for revealing the direct, symbolic and gestural language of inner agitation.<sup>178</sup> It has been observed that most of the artists in German Expressionist movement had experimented with the medium of 'printmaking'. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was one of the prolific printmakers, belonged to the artists group-*Die Brücke*. His artworks comprise 1000 woodcuts, over 650 etchings and dry-points and more than 450 lithographs. Notably, Kirchner is known to be a pioneer who had his plates printed in the periodicals like *Der Sturm* and many woodcut illustrated books. According to Kirchner "the impulse that drives the artist to work in the graphic arts is perhaps in the part the striving to fix the singular, flowing form of drawing permanently and conclusively. The technical manipulations, on the other hand, certainly release in the artist powers that do not come into play in much easier handling of drawing and painting."<sup>179</sup>

As we know, a number of Expressionists artists were experimenting with printmaking, but amongst all the mediums, they favored woodcuts. Nevertheless, it will be injustice to leave out the role of Kathe Kollwitz in artistic revolution amidst of World War I. Kathe Kollwitz's revolutionary stature inspired the artist such as Somnath Hore in Bengal that will be discussed in the next section of this essay. Nonetheless, she was one of the

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<sup>177</sup>Wilhelm Valentiner, "Karl Schmidt-Rotluff", *Der Cicerone* 2 (1920), p.467 quoted in Ida Katherine Rigby, (ed.) op.cit. , pp. 140-141. Thomas Friedrich notes that despite the expressionists desire to break free cleanly from artistic tradition, Durer's woodcuts aligned German Expressionism with German tradition in a way that could revive a nationalistic enthusiasm in works coming from Germany. See Matthew Johnson, "Expressionism and The Print: Idealism Cut from the Block, exh. Cat. "Walking a Tightrope:German Expressionist Prints", <http://web.grinnell.edu/art/gexp/> quoted from Thomas Friedrich, op.cit. p.85

<sup>178</sup>Gustav Hartlaub, "The New German Print" (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1920) in Ida Katherine Rigby (ed.), op.cit.

<sup>179</sup> L. de Marsalle [E.L. Kirchner], "On Kirchner's Prints, "Genius,1921, 215-63 quoted in Ida Katherine Rigby (ed.), op.cit. , pp. 145-146

leading woman artists known for her Expressionist style. Kathe Kollwitz belonged to a family with a long history of radical political and religious commitments. She was impressed by the reading of a tract by one of the founders of Social Democratic Party- August Bebel's *Woman under Socialism* (1883); convinced her that women could be emancipated under Socialism.<sup>180</sup> She chose the woodcut medium after seeing the Ernst Barlach's prints in July 1920. She admitted that the powerful condensation of emotion she had not been able to achieve in other mediums, was possible in woodcuts.<sup>181</sup> Kollwitz had shown her commitment for the poor. For instance, she made contributions of her works to the International anti-famine campaigns. Her works were admired by the upper class liberal public and therefore used to raise money for socialist cause. She responded to the murders of great revolutionary communist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg by depicting funeral scene in woodcut; she depicted haunting scene of funeral of dead Liebknecht, surrounded by proletarian mourners.<sup>182</sup> She was always ambivalent to her political position and sometimes criticized by the communist for overemphasizing hopelessness and despair rather than encouraging active resistance. Kollwitz's response was that she was representing life itself, not social misery.<sup>183</sup>

It has been suggested by intellectuals from the left-wing that 'Expressionism' as a movement was not able to fulfill their aspirations of what they wanted to achieve rather it worked as catalyst for Fascist ends. The argument has come to light in the writings of German Marxist, initiated by Georg Lukacs in 1934.<sup>184</sup> He vilified the movement as escapist and regressive, for extraordinary poverty of context in contrast to pretence of delivery. For Lukacs, "Expressionist represented a subjective idealist theory of knowledge that mystified social problems rather than clarified them, regardless of the

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<sup>180</sup>Kathe Kollwitz, "diary entries" (1918-1920) in Ida Katherine Rigby, op.cit. pp. 185-188.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Shearer West, *The Visual Art in Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.115-116.

<sup>183</sup>Kathe Kollwitz, "diary entries" (1918-1920) in Ida Katherine Rigby, op.cit. pp. 185-188.

<sup>184</sup>After the revolution, at the time when Fascist were gaining its strength, Georg Lukacs had assessed the role of Expressionism in his writing – "Expressionism: Its significance and Decline" (1934)

sincerity of the intent and pretence to unleash the reality.”<sup>185</sup> Further he says that the abstract and chaotic style of Expressionism ultimately exposed the class bias of the movement because of its obscurantism, it voiced an antagonism towards middle class values, but did not connect them to any economic underpinnings, deflects the issue to an eternal and abstract conflict between bourgeois and anti-bourgeois.”<sup>186</sup> His intervention suggests that Expressionism was a programmatic method of distorting reality and adaptable means for fascist agenda.<sup>187</sup> Considering the axiomatic that Expressionism was revolutionary in nature, but its relationship with the political left was not comprehended before World War I, Joan Weinstein comments that “despite the fact that Expressionist artists and their critics often used the rhetoric of politics and political left before the war, there has been no systematic discussion in the literature of socialism and avant-garde art in imperial Germany.”<sup>188</sup> Further he remarks that “Whatever the political commitments of the left, but their art was conspicuously debated in left wing political terms.”<sup>189</sup> Expressionism was being attacked for its allegiance to the left and was also defended by many influential people within left-wing. For Instance, Karl Scheffer, editor-*Kunst und Künstler* was among those who attacked Expressionism for its commitment to the left and condemned their art for their proletarian outlook. In its defense, Gustav Pauli, a prominent Hamburg museum director, claimed that the proletarian orientation of Expressionism is one of its strengths. Further Pauli adds that “the new Expressionist art seems to me rather an art of the aspiring, struggling popular classes. The works of these

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<sup>185</sup>Emily Braun, “Expressionism as Fascist Aesthetic” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 31, No. 2, Special Issue: The Aesthetics of Fascism, (Apr., 1996), pp. 273-292.

<sup>186</sup>Emily Braun, op.cit., pp. 273-292.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. in this article authors provides other perspectives to comprehend German Expressionism as a movement. By subscribing Berman, Braun says that Primitivism under rubric of Expressionism can be read in many ways, both fascist and anti-fascist. On the other hand he says that the condemnation of the Expressionism by Nazis complicates the issue, as the connections between the two have been largely ignored in favor of the larger view of victimization of modern art. Also the propaganda of De-generate art was to an extent bolster this view and the participation of Emile Nolde, (one of the prolific artist of the Expressionist movement) in the Fascist camp; tend to strengthen the argument.

<sup>188</sup> Joan Weinstein, *The End of Expressionism*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), p.9.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. p.10.

artists would go better in a sober laborer's home than in salon silken wallpaper."<sup>190</sup> Whatsoever the Expressionist were trying to achieve in their art, but to some extent they accomplished their prime criterion, that, to depict the social miseries of proletariat. In course of two decades, Expressionism witnessed the transformation in terms of its themes and contents, which has to be underlined. It is the common feature of Expressionist representations that to adjust with any formidable circumstances and thus it is universal in its appeal.

## 2.2 Social Expressionism in the context of Bengal

There is a need to comprehend the social fabric of Bengal in which the revolutionary art of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore rose to prominence and to study the circumstances in which the appropriation of Expressionist attributes came about in their art. The *Bengal Famine* and *Tebhaga* peasants movement were the crucial stages which provided the fury and passion which shaped up the talent of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore in Bengal.<sup>191</sup> The social climate of Bengal was reminiscent of post-war Germany during 1940's in which both the artists responded.<sup>192</sup> In Germany, society was witnessing a crisis due to its

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<sup>190</sup>Gustav Pauli, "Reiseberichte," Hamburg Kunsthalle, archive 119a, 9 July, 1917, quoted Joan Weinstein, op.cit. p.12.

<sup>191</sup> In 1943, Bengal suffered an infamous famine. The natural calamity struck in the form of cyclone and sub-divisions of Tamuk districts. Agriculture suffered and the paddy crop was severely damaged. The fertile land was transformed into a deficit zone. The freezing of supplies for war-front and the greed of hoarders, as well as mis-administration to an extent tolled the human sufferings and numerous deaths. Cited from Sanjoy Mallik, "Impulses of 1940's", in Gayatri Sinha, *Indian Art: An Overview*, (New Delhi, Rupa), p.88.

<sup>192</sup> Despite there is a major difference between experiencing a war and natural calamities such as drought, flood, etc. or colonial oppression, but all these events endorse a violence on society. And the artists have always been responded to such acts and so, their works are testimony of its resistance. Here I mean to say that the experiences of war and social upheavals led the Expressionist artists to respond to these events, overwritten by Socialists and left wing sympathy. In similar vein, Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore responded to the 'Bengal famine' and *Tebhaga* peasants' movement against the backdrop of World War II which to an extent they have depicted in their art. Notably, the art was largely being produced for the masses in forms of posters, drawings and graphics; often printed in the periodicals and journals of the left-wing. The artists had made commitments towards the cause of proletariat and communist ideals.

horrific industrial growth which led to World War I, while Indian society; predominantly agrarian in its outlook was confronting the evils of feudal landlordism which was working in tandem with the British rule leading to extreme marginalization and pauperization of the society in terms of material existence as well as values. The famine of Bengal was an episode which revealed the dirty underbelly of the 'benevolent' Empire to the fullest and exposed the politics of colonialism to an unprecedented extent. The famine had disastrous consequences for the political economy of the region. The soul of Bengal was shaken by this event, the tremors of this quake found their way to the pages and scripts of many a writer, performer and artist to share their experiences of Bengal Famine with the masses.<sup>193</sup> *Tebhaga* movement of 1946-47,<sup>194</sup> followed the famine, gave a further impetus to this objectification of a politically motivated response to societal events in the arts.<sup>195</sup> At a larger level, the International struggle against Fascism was shaping a radical solidarity among writers and artists all over the world. Moreover, the leading movement was being organized by the Communist Party of India (CPI) and other socialist organs against mayhem in Indian society. CPI was forming connections between writers and artists and peasants and working class insurgency. By making these observations, Samik Bandyopadhyay traces the roots of this process back to the twenties in Germany. Further, he draws upon the statement of Georg Grosz, one of the Expressionist artists and an ardent follower of the left, who said: "What should you do to give content to your paintings? Go to a proletarian meeting; look and listen how people there, people just like you, discuss some small improvement of their lot. And understand- these masses are the ones who are reorganizing the world. Not you! But you can work with them. You

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<sup>193</sup>The most significant outcome of in the arts of the 194 famine was birth of new kind of socially responsive birth of socially responsive realistic theatre. For example, the production of Bijon Bhattacharya's plays *Nabbana* under the aegis of IPTA. See Pranabranjan Ray, "The Political in Art", No.22, (April, 1992), *Journal of Arts & Ideas*, New Delhi, p.66.

<sup>194</sup>The movement was led by agrarian wing communist workers, in championing the cause of the sharecroppers, launched the *Tebhaga*, (*literally*, *Te=Three+ bhaga=share*) movement. For details see Pranabranjan Ray, no. 22, (April, 1992), *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, New Delhi and Samik Bandyopadhyay, "Introduction" to *Somnath Hore: An Artists Diary*. (Calcutta: Seagull, 1990)

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

could help them if you wanted to! And that way you could learn to give your art a *content* which was supported by the revolutionary ideals of the workers.”<sup>196</sup> (Emphasis ours)

In addition, one of the staunch supporters of ‘Neo-impressionism’ expressed his view when war was declared, he said that “war enriched us and we have changed since yesterday... We had theories but what we lacked was *content*, and that is being given to us, my brothers by the times... Unity has been granted us by the war.”<sup>197</sup> This brings us to argue that the language of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore embarked on the *content* part of the Expressionism that helped them to exemplify the multiple layers of violence on society.<sup>198</sup> Though, we don’t have any evidence that these artists were familiar with the language of German Expressionists (especially Chittoprosad), but we can assume that they must have come across to their works in the communist journals and newspapers.<sup>199</sup> Undoubtedly, as a result of World War I, Expressionism became the product of political movement in Germany and their politically charged message appealed across the border. Now considering the Expressionism as a language of cultural protest on a universal scale,

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<sup>196</sup> Samik Bandyopadhyay, *Somnath Hore. Tebhaga: An Artist’s Diary and Sketchbook*, (Calcutta: Seagull, 1990) p. X.

<sup>197</sup> After World War I, Expressionism attracted artists, who were rendering other styles in their art such as Impressionism or Neo-Impressionism. Julius Maer-Graefe, “Der Krieg beschert uns,” *Kriegzeit: Künstlerflugblätter* 1, no. 1 (31 August, 1914), quoted in Joan Weinstein, “Expressionism in War and Revolution,” *German Expressionism Art and Society*, eds. Stephanie Barron and Wolf Dieter-Dube, (Thames and Hudson, 1998) p.35.

<sup>198</sup> Interview with Pulak Dutta, Graphic Dept., Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan. I am indebted to Dutta for his kind suggestion to intervene in this area. According to him, one could trace many similarities between the graphics of German Expressionists and the works of Chittoprasad and Somnath Hore in terms of its content not really the formal characteristics. It is evident that the art of latter, they produced in the middle of political crisis and so the nature of their art was highly political like German Expressionist. For instance, the art of Kathe Kollwitz, George Grosz and Beckmann produced during the November revolution; the political turbulence of times provided content to the Expressionists for their art. Likewise in India, *Bengal famine*, *Tebhaga peasant movement* and oppression by British Rule facilitated the content to the artists to generate awareness among the masses.

<sup>199</sup> The journals, periodicals and Newspapers have significant place in the communist Society because it fused the thoughts and feelings of writers and artists with those of the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers. See. Mao Tse-tung, *On Literature and Art*, (Lucknow: Rahul Foundation, 2008) p.15.

art of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore can be gauged on basis of their Expressionist attributes.<sup>200</sup> Gayatri Sinha identifies the period in which both Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore responded to the socio-political terror.<sup>201</sup> Sinha asserts that “the period of the 1940’s, as distinct period of social trauma, of peasant uprising, British oppression, famine and the violent massacres that accompanied partition, produced a particular typology...Excellent examples are the drawings of Somnath Hore and Chittoprosad’s *Hungry Bengal* works on the ‘Bengal famine’- in which drawings are themselves an act of resistance, unprecedented in Indian art, although the prevailing emotional response of the poor peasantry that they depict is broadly one of intense fatalism. Since 1940’s depictions in art of acts of terror have challenged the overarching power of the state and marked an area of active protest.”<sup>202</sup> Thus, it allows us to argue that the art of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore manifested the emotionally charged language of cultural protest in against the social disorder and assertion of such a language qualifies their Expressionist attitude.

Moreover, we have to discern the social conditions which favored the flourishing of the revolutionary art of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore. Both the artists preferred to work in the medium of printmaking and realized its potential for the masses, to depict the wounds of 'Hungry Bengal' and stimulate the patriotic fervor of an enslaved people.<sup>203</sup> The political works of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore were meant to be accessed by the masses in the form of political posters and journals such as '*Hungry Bengal*' and '*Jannayuddha*'. Disseminating the message through their art, both the artists anticipated the impact of their graphics and drawings to the masses. The visual medium such as

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<sup>200</sup> German Expressionism was the only anti-war movement in the world of arts and this was on an International plane and it has been observed that artist of the next generation adapted this language for cultural protest. Stephan Von Wiese, op.cit. pp. 119-120.

<sup>201</sup> In the wake of 1940’s, colonial-India experienced social turbulences such as man-made Bengal famine that followed by peasant uprising of Tebhaga movement amidst of Quit India movement (1942) and World War II. Gayatri Sinha perceived these events produced particular typology and thus is not less than terror on the society. see “Art in the time of Terror” Vol. XI, Issue IV. *Art India*, 2006.

<sup>202</sup> Gayatri Sinha, “Art in the time of Terror” Vol. XI, Issue IV. *Art India*, 2006, p.24.

<sup>203</sup> Paula Sengupta, “Evolution of printmaking practices in India”, Vol.(unknown), Printmaking edition, *Art India*, 2006.

prints was exemplary to the masses in Bengal. What it meant is that the populace of Bengal was much responsive to the world of images of socio-religious or political occurrence.<sup>204</sup> Let us first see what was the legacy was like.

It was due to the rapid urbanization of Calcutta that it became the centre of printing activities in the eighteenth century.<sup>205</sup> This period witnessed that the several professional, including engravers from Europe had settled down in Calcutta, the capital of British India. Paula Sengupta observes that “in the last quarter of eighteenth century, British owned presses employed the member of local artisans. This led them to learn to put their own traditional skills to new uses and application. The rudimentary training that they received at these printing and publishing outfits, however, was oriented to equip them with technical skills specific to requirements of the British presses; it did not assist in the development of printmaking as an art form.”<sup>206</sup> These local artisans have developed their own aesthetics that is recognized world over. One of the unit of these presses known as *Battala* prints were popular among the common masses of Bengal.<sup>207</sup> *Battala* prints were usually cheap in prices and mostly rendered in woodcuts. The *Battala* images of gods and goddesses such as *Shiva*, *Chaitanya*, *Vishnu-avatars*, *durga*, etc. were common in every middle class household. According to Paula Sengupta, prints made during this time explored folk, religious, social, and political themes, and catered essentially to the semi-

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<sup>204</sup>Comparing to the milieu of Germany in the 1920's, we could find similarity. As I already mentioned that the Woodcuts and linocuts were particularly well suited to expressing the German temperament and since Durer's time they are significant in the lives of Germany. But the printmaking in Germany was in much advanced state in terms of its status as art, whereas in India prints were categorically confined in the category of folk art and notably, Printmaking as an art form emerged in India less than eighty years ago.

<sup>205</sup>Calcutta was hub of printing and publishing houses. Earlier these printing houses were disconnected from the mainstream and were not catering to the indigenous demands. Their prints depicted exotic Indian landscapes that tended to appeal mainly to the colonial European sensibility.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup>*Battala* was most prolific 'school' that grew in the markets of north Calcutta. *Battala* was known as a book district due to its wide range of printing presses and busy engravers. *Battala* products were carried to the villages and small towns generally by travelling hawkers. See Nikhil Sarkar, "Calcutta Woodcuts: Aspects of a Popular Art", *Woodcut Prints of nineteenth Century*, Ed. Asit Paul,( Calcutta: Seagull, 1983),pp.12-17.



educated masses that thronged mofussil towns and suburbs.<sup>208</sup> Besides, it is notable that Kalighat *patas* of nineteenth century Calcutta had political content, it would be better to view the *patas* of Kalighat as social criticism from subaltern, conservative point of view.<sup>209</sup> The cartoons with social and political content published in the Bengali journal-*Punch*, but they were very crude in their appearance. Consequentially, the cartoons of Gagendranath Tagore had received much acclaim in this period. Thus, Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore's art was well suited in the milieu of Bengal, where the masses would easily partake the meaning of their art.

### 2.3 (a) Chittoprosad

Chittoprosad came to notice through his powerful drawings of the tragic man-made Bengal famine of 1943. He was born in a small town called Naihati in 1915. Since childhood he lived in various small towns of Bengal. In 1930's he shifted to Chittagong with his family. His higher education took place in Govt. College of Chittagong. During his college years, he was involved in the national movement to which he contributed posters, drawings and cartoons. Chittoprosad was a self-trained artist and he never attended any art school. In 1937-38, Chittoprosad became acquainted with the Communist movement and took active participation in the agitation against British's 'scorched earth policy' after Japanese invasion in 1941 in the countryside of Chittagong.<sup>210</sup> This event brought misery to the inhabitants and for this, Chittoprosad travelled from village to village with the teams of voluntary aid. The horrendous

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<sup>208</sup>Paula Sengupta, op.cit.

<sup>209</sup>Pranabranjan Ray, "The Political in Art", No.22, (April, 1992), Journal Of Arts & Ideas, New Delhi,p.67.

<sup>210</sup>This event took place in the backdrop of World War II, in which British were solely responsible for their unprepared measures. See Prabhas Sen, "Chittoprosad: The artist", *Chittoprosad* (New Delhi: Lalit Kala, 1993). Moreover, Japan was aliging with Fascist forces and pursuing its imperialist ends. The writers and artists of the International Communist block had strongly expressed their anti-Japanese and anti-fascist sentiments through the mode of art and literature. Mao Tse -tung, op.cit. pp. 12-13.

experiences of these villages intimated him about the lives of poor people and their folk culture.

Chittoprosad had commitment and love for the downtrodden and oppressed people leading him to pursue the dreams of International Communist movement to build up a society without any exploitation.<sup>211</sup> To a certain degree, his enthusiasm to work for the poor helped him to overcome his lack of formal training. Chittoprosad was an admirer of Nandalal Bose and had desire to study under him, but unfortunately it could not materialize.<sup>212</sup> It has been speculated that one could see direct influence of Nandalal on the drawings and lino-cuts of Chittoprosad. The rendering of India's folk and classical art forms subscribes the Nandalal artistic trait that Chittoprosad adapted in his lino-cuts.<sup>213</sup> This characteristic of his art facilitated him to communicate with the local rural populace and made him familiar with our rich folk-art forms endowing his work with dynamism and simplicity.<sup>214</sup> In his drawings and linocuts, Chittoprosad was depicting the hardship, angst of rural life and at the same time was also celebrating the chasm of rural, which to an extent recalls the Expressionist notion to take refuge from the material life of urban centers.<sup>215</sup> For example, *Lovers* (Plate.8) conveys the idea of taking refuge from material life which majorly explored by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in his painting *Figures walking into the Sea* (Plate.9). The subject-matter of this work is different from the works such as *'Hungry Bengal'* that centered on the Bengal famine and its calamities. The work like

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<sup>211</sup>Prabhas Sen, op.cit.

<sup>212</sup>Paula Sengupta, op.cit.

<sup>213</sup> Prabhas Sen, op.cit. Also I have already mentioned in the previous chapter about the language of Nandalal Bose that encompassed bold brushstrokes and elongated figures and bold coloring; echoes few characteristics of Expressionist art.

<sup>214</sup>This argument made by Prabhas Sen, Chittoprosad, (New Delhi: Lalit Kala, 1993), points out the approach of Expressionist artists. In the aegis of socialism, Expressionists had broadened their subject-matter from 'inner-necessity' and 'spiritualism' to the depiction of underprivileged class and proletariat of society. Notably, the Bengal famine and peasants oppression in Bengal brought misery to the rural masses and they were driven by hunger and poverty. According to Marxist interpretation of class they would be called proletariats of the society. [www.marxism.org](http://www.marxism.org).

<sup>215</sup>In last chapter, I have discussed that the Expressionist felt that the folk and traditional motifs are vital part to resist the processes of urbanization and industrialization.

*Drought* (Plate.10) resembles the content of work like *Family* (Plate.11) by Emile Nolde. The depiction of starved children immediately suggests impact of poverty in their lives. Their gloomy and depressed posture, filled with poignancy of their burning eyes offers a very stark sight to the viewer almost to the point of being grotesque.

Though stylistically, Chittoprosad was an individual, who did not adhere to any pre-established precedents and schools, but in terms of content, his works resemble some of the Expressionist representations.<sup>216</sup> As this period witnessed the drastic change in the artistic attitude and its goals, in parallel, modernist artists such as Ramkinkar Baij were already responding to the social turbulence that he manifested in his works. At the same time, artists groups like 'Calcutta Artists' were forging their affinities with modern idioms and importing the languages from the West.<sup>217</sup> Paula Sengupta remarks that the visual language of modern art was rapidly altered.<sup>218</sup> It was due to the social conditions in which *Swadeshi* movement under the rubric of struggle for independence swept the subcontinent and masses were devastated by famine, drought, flood and finally partition, that demanded sudden shift in the artistic attitudes. Under these circumstances artists were searching for a new intellectual and artistic identity, which eventually culminated in

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<sup>216</sup>Paula Sengupta, 'Foreign and Indigenous influences on Indian Printmaking', PhD Thesis submitted to Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan, 2000. Sengupta considers Chittoprosad stylistically an individual in his approach, but I would emphasize the content part of his works that are reminiscent to the Expressionist representations of post war Germany. The idea is not judge 'Expressionism' in a celebratory mode rather I am trying to put forward the basic characteristic of Expressionism that exemplifies the language of protest, which no other modernist language of 'ism' has appealed in a universal scale at that time.

<sup>217</sup>The artists such as Abani Sen, Govardhan Ash, Annanda Dey and Digin Bhattacharya formed a Young artists' Union by renting common studio called 'artist Rebel Centre, their practice was centered around the anti-sentimentalism obviously referred to "Bengal School" romanticism, the artists rejected the art school brand of academic realism in practice and turned towards the relatively contemporary art languages that had evolved through the European modern art movement, for inspiration. The Union of Artist Rebel centre' could not last for long, but became motivating force to form group such as "Calcutta Group" in 1943. See. Dr. Sanjoy Mallik, 'The Calcutta Group'; *Art & Deal*, Vol. 3 No.2 issue 16, 2004.

<sup>218</sup> Paula Sengupta, exh cat. 'Haren Das: The End of Toil (1945-1990)', Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2008, p.19.

the birth of Indian modernism.<sup>219</sup> On the contrary, his contemporary such as Haren Das had also depicted village life and he was equally considered as much an artist of downtrodden as were Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore.<sup>220</sup> In terms of their language, that makes Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore different, is their avowal of modernist idiom, whereas Haren Das continued to remain dedicated to British academic art tenets and Victorian ideals.

Chittoprosad's works such as *R.I.N. mutiny Bombay* (Plate.12) and *Bengal famine (1946)* echo the content of Ludwig Meidner's *Revolution* (Plate. 13) modeled on the Delacroix painting *Liberty Leading the People*; the central figure of man seems to suggest that Revolution was an only alternative against the tyrannies of society. The revolutionary character of his art was better known in the West. His works had been exhibited in many parts of the world and the major exhibition of his works was held at Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1956. Chittoprosad art gave impetus to medium of printmaking that probably he was the first one to realize the power of printmaking as a medium for the masses rather than the elite.<sup>221</sup> It echoes the attitude of post war expressionist artists. Chittoprosad's political commitment had inspired Somnath Hore to depict the social misery of the rural masses.

### 2.3 (b) Somnath Hore

Somnath Hore is one of the extraordinary artists for whom the Bengal famine and vindictive events of *Tebhaga* peasant uprising became a haunting experience. These events made a lasting impact on his artistic sensibilities thus becoming the major concern of his artworks. Pranabranjan Ray implies an argument by drawing upon the opinion of

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<sup>219</sup>Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. Though Haren Das was depicting the toils of rural milieu in his reliefs, but his works could not capture the passion, angst and emotions of the common people. While the works of Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore would be able to achieve it due to their rendering of expressionist tendency.

<sup>221</sup> Paula Sengupta, 'Foreign and Indigenous influences on Indian Printmaking', PhD Thesis submitted to Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan, 2000.

social psychologist, like Erik Erikson that “probability of occurrence of such intensely felt experience is greater in the childhood and early youth than in advance years. A traumatic or a profound adolescent experience tends to so condition the *emotion* and value structures of a person that it governs the action pattern of the subject as *leit motif* through the rest of life. The horror of haunted events was deep-rooted in his memory that fused with his *emotions*.”<sup>222</sup> (Emphasis ours)

Here, *emotion* is value word in the context of Expressionism and it is apparent that in most of the works, Expressionists rendered their highly charged emotions and pathos. In the works of Somnath Hore, one can possibly find affinity with linguist mode of Expressionism.<sup>223</sup> In number of his works, one can trace a distant echo of Expressionist attributes such as distortions on pictorial ground, animated face, elongated body postures—hands and limb gestures, etc.

Somenath Hore was born in 13<sup>th</sup> April 1921 in Chittagong, now in Bangladesh. He was quite young during the time of the famine. Since school days he was passionate for his interest in visual arts. He started copying portraits by the old masters of European art. As soon as he completed his Higher Secondary, he moved to the Calcutta to pursue B.Sc. course in City College, where he came in contact with some functionaries of the Communist party.<sup>224</sup> But soon he went back to Chittagong.

In the end of the 1942, Chittagong port miles south at the Somnath’s own village was bombarded by Kawasaki Bombers of Royal Japanese Air force, which caused many deaths and injuries. Somenath witnessed the ravaged village, strewn with dismembered limbs of the victims, dead bodies with gaping bowls disgorging flesh, blood, pus and human excreta, dead child clinging to injured mother’s body and dead livestock lying together.<sup>225</sup> Somenath documented the gruesome scene of horror and pain in his numerous drawings the sketches. According to Pranabranjan Ray, these sketches were his

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<sup>222</sup>Pranabranjan Ray, “Hunger and the Painter”, *CRESSIDA*, Vol.1, No.2,(1981) Calcutta.

<sup>223</sup> Interview with Pranabranjan Ray, art –critic, Calcutta.

<sup>224</sup>Pranabranjan Ray, op.cit. ,(Calcutta: 1981), p.2.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

first attempts at visualization of the *emotional* response to a worldly event.<sup>226</sup> (Emphasis ours)

During the same time he came in touch with Chittoprosad, who was also travelling village to village to document the famine in his sketches and drawings those published in weekly periodicals –*Janayuddha* (Bangla) and *People's War* (English) under the aegis of Communist Party. Somnath Hore followed the same activity, what Chittoprosad was doing. Consequently, his drawings and sketches started appearing in *Jannyuddha* and *People's War*. As he became an important part of the organization and contributed through his skills in drawings, posters and pamphlets of the Party. Somnath writes, “As for myself, I was interested in producing posters as this gave me an opportunity to draw and express myself, though in rather naïve way. My posters were usually put up in market places, shops and trees.”<sup>227</sup> Members of the Communist Party of India recognized his talent and encouraged him to join Govt. School of Arts and Crafts. There he was attracted towards Zainul Abedin, who was also doing the same sought of documentation of famine stricken areas. Somnath was very impressed by Zainul Abedin that he admits, “This was a turning point in my life. Zainul Abedin, the painter who depicted the victims of the famine with powerful *emotion*, was my teacher and mentor.”<sup>228</sup> It was very obvious for Somnath to get influenced by Zainul Abedin, whose artistic forays were centered on the famine.<sup>229</sup>

Soon, Somnath Hore became fascinated with the medium of printmaking and he took this passion seriously. He began experiments in printmaking under the guidance of Shaifuddin Ahmed, now a well known printmaker in Bangladesh. In his early experiments, he did couple of wood-engravings in which he reworked themes from his

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid. The statement points out that the art of Somenath Hore was fused with lot of humanly emotions. Notably, though earlier artist had no formal training but he portrayed those unpleasant events purely driven by his emotions. The argument recalls us of the art of Rabindranath Tagore, which was also charged by his emotional and pathological sensibilities to overcome formal academic training of art.

<sup>227</sup> Somnath Hore, “Wounds”, in exh. Cat. Somnath Hore: Bronzes, (Nov. 1995) CIMA, Calcutta. P.12.

Also quoted in Paula Sengupta, PhD. Thesis, Visva -Bharati (2000), Santiniketan.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid. p.13.

<sup>229</sup> Pranabranjan Ray, op.cit. Calcutta, 1981

*Tebhaga* diary.<sup>230</sup> Somnath drew lessons from the works of Kathe Kollwitz as already mentioned. He writes, "Coming as I did from a rural background, I had a diffidence about my vision and capabilities which is still with me...Chinese wood engraving of this period after the German artist Kathe Kollwitz, were influences that drew me to this craft."<sup>231</sup> According to Pranabranjan Ray, "he used Kollwitz Expressionist devices of non-distinction between the line and the mass, and of expressing *emotion* and mood through retention in the bodies of the line-masses the effect of the gestures of the arm and/ or the wrist and/ or fingers which created the line-masses under strain of emotion- for the expression of moods and emotions generated by societal factors."<sup>232</sup> (Emphasis ours)

His works such as *Village People* and *Peasants' Meeting* are reminiscent of the *Memorial to Karl Liebknecht* (1919-20) by Kathe Kollwitz. (Plates.14and15) The pictorial arrangement of figures and their simplified facial expressions provide an image of psychological depth that reflects the awful reality of their lives. An '*Untitled*' lithograph illustrates the bony figure, with thin limbs, starving abdomen; echoing the typical attributes of Expressionist style. (Plate.16) He was more interested in learning lessons from western avant-gardism, rather than looking at the indigenous sources. In the period of 1935-50, he took inspiration from the works of Picasso and German Expressionists. Notably as Ray suggests, "In this period Picasso sought to combine the results of Cubism with social and human concerns. His figures of this period were stripped to their bare structural essential and structures of the motifs were transformed into images in terms of their exact linear and plan metric correlates on two-dimensional

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<sup>230</sup>Somnath Hore documented the movement by making sketches and drawings of the events. Samik Bandyopadhyay ascribes this act as similar to the approaches of the artists in Germany in the 1920's, in which, largely expressionists artists were giving content to their art by incorporating the sufferings of masses-revolutionary workers, labors, soldiers etc.. See, "Introduction" in Somenath Hore: *Tebhaga* Diary. (Calcutta, Seagull, 1990). This is one of the most significant documents to study the history of *Tebhaga* movement. For students of Visual arts, it is a first hand document to study how societal factors condition the development of a creative mind. Cited Pranabranjan Ray, *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, No.22, (Apr. 1992), New Delhi.

<sup>231</sup> Somanth Hore, "Wounds", in exh.cat. Somnath Hore: Bronzes. (1995), CIMA, Calcutta.

<sup>232</sup>Pranabranjan Ray, "Hunger and The Painter", *CRESSIDA*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Winter (1981) Calcutta, p. 14.

pictorial space.”<sup>233</sup> Unlike artists of the Santiniketan School, Hore manifested the spirit of struggle in his works as it was well described by his own emotion laden personality. Further in his artistic career he developed his style with scores of experiments in printmaking and then sculptures, but his *Wounds* of famine remain his source of expressions.

Nonetheless, this period witnessed the upheavals in the colonial societies in which artists were borrowing the vocabulary from the west for their own resistance against the colonial oppression and futile World War II.<sup>234</sup> As already discussed in the previous chapter artists of Santiniketan School were embracing eclecticism for getting away from the work by a form of routine. As aptly put by K.G. Subramanyan, “...it is important get shock and impact from an alien culture which provides a fresh impetus and inspiration to a sagging creative will.”<sup>235</sup> Therefore, the artists of this period embarked upon the modernist language. So did the artists such as Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore. The stature of both the artists-Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore will always remain inspirational, who gave new heights to Indian modernism. Their endeavors were exceptional in the history of modern Indian Art in which they perceived the agony and pains of masses and faithfully depicted in their works. Moreover, they revolutionized printmaking by liberating it from the traditional technological limits and fusing it with new avant-gardist language on aesthetic plane.<sup>236</sup> They were exemplary to the artists of our generation. In 1980’s, the ‘Realist’ depicted the social misery in a similar vein. One of the members of group- Pulak Dutta admits that the appropriation of Expressionist

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> It has been observed that World War II became the subject of representation in visual art in Asian countries such as China, Indonesia and India. John Clark, *Modern Asian Art*. (Craftsman House, 1998), p.247

<sup>235</sup> K G Subramanyan, *The Creative Circuit* . pp. 32-36.

<sup>236</sup> Paula Sengupta, PhD Thesis, submitted to Viswa Bharati, Santiniketan, 2000.



language is a requisite to represent social oppression and its anger.<sup>237</sup> The 'Realists' had lot of influences from European modernism and especially Expressionism.<sup>238</sup> (trasl. ours)

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<sup>237</sup>Exb. Brochure -"The Realist" group comprised of Santiniketan educated artists -Probir Biswas, Nirmalendu Das, Pinaki Barua, Nitai Mazumdar, Ramaprasad Bhattacharya, Pulak Dutta, Sushanta Guha, Suranjan Basu, Rati Basu, Sumatra Sengupta and Sukanya Bandyopadyay. Interview with Pulak Dutta, (Dept. of Graphics) Kala Bhavan, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan.2008.

<sup>238</sup> Pranabranjan Ray, "Political Scenario of Critical Realism" trasl. Subir Dey, CHS/JNU in (05, May 1990) *Desh* (Bangla), Calcutta.

## **CHAPTER-III**

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### **The Art Collectives and their usage of 'Expressionism'**

### CHAPTER-III

Expressionism found congenial reception in India, especially during and after 1940's. In the previous chapter, we have already explored that the coalescence of social engagement with Expressionist language was eventually achieved by Chittoprosad and Somenath Hore. By the usage of Expressionist idiom, Indian artists responded to the trauma of social, political and cultural events of pre-Independence India. The destructive famine of Bengal, the horror of World War- II, the struggle for Independence (Quit India movement), communal riots and inexorable partition stirred the emotion of the artists. All these episodes had such impact on the landscape of the country, that it could not be ignored by anyone. Being artists, such events stirred their sensitivities to an unprecedented extent. They were unsettled and only hatred, despair and defeated greeted them in the everyday experience of life. Thus, these themes of human and social conditions began to dominate their work. Problems such as hunger, pathos, hardships, denial and suppression of the struggle of freedom by British rule were common experiences of the country now. At this juncture, artists realized the urgency to respond to these pathetic events by embracing a modernist language of the West. It was the Expressionist mode, where the fundamental objective was a direct communication of feeling or emotion, which appealed to most of the artists.<sup>239</sup>

Thus the decade marked a turning point in attitude towards modernism, which saw the emergence of artists groups in major cities- namely Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>239</sup>P.N. Mago, *Contemporary Art in India*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2001). p.81.

<sup>240</sup>The artists Group called Young Turks had also experimented with European modern art languages and the developments were taking place in the other art centers' of India e.g. Madras, Lahore, Srinagar and Lucknow. See P.N. Mago, Op.cit.. S.Sawant explores that the formation of Art collectives burgeoning in all major cities of the country. Further, she states that the idea of the Indian nation as a form of a cooperative social contract took on a provisional shape. It is also a period when modernist attitudes were produced and fashioned by the concentration of economic and cultural power in the imperial metropolitan centres of Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta, and Madras, against the backdrop of great social deprivation in the rural hinterlands. Shukla Sawant, "Art Collectives in the Age of Anxiety (1940-50)", (Essay forthcoming in Marg)

The *Calcutta Group*, *Bombay Progressives* and *Delhi Silpi Chakra* strengthened the pillars of Indian modern art by borrowing modernist use of formal elements from Western modern art. The art collectives of Calcutta and Bombay were called 'progressives' because they took a clear cut position along with leftist/socialist ideology. For them, the idea of being progressive implied a modernist use of formal elements inspired by modern Western art.<sup>241</sup> On the other hand, the *Delhi Silpi Chakra* was a group of artists, mostly refugees who hailed from Lahore to Delhi in the wake of partition and took membership in the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS).

Most of the members of 'art collectives' had tendencies derived from German Expressionism. Reasonably, Expressionist mode of language was universal in its appeal that was best exemplified in pain, agony, angst and horror of society. The member/ artists of the art collectives' who majorly embarked upon the Expressionist idioms, essentially were Rathin Maitra, Nirode Majumdar and Paritosh Sen (Calcutta Group), F.N Souza and M.F. Hussain (Bombay Progressives) and, Pran Nath Mago and Satish Gujral (Delhi Shilpi Chakra).

This chapter will trace the Expressionistic tendencies in the works of artists/members of the art collectives as well as the reasons that demanded the usage of such tendencies. It has been noticed that after independence of the country, the art collectives ceased to happen. And subsequently, artists became more individualistic and got occupied with carving out their own spheres which rendered these collectives defunct. However, the language derived from Expressionism that depicted the cathartic experiences of pain, suffering, alienation, and agony; remained with them for many years after independence. Therefore, it is pertinent to discuss the set of works which clearly carried the essence of Expressionism.

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<sup>241</sup>R. Sivakumar, "Modern Indian Art: A Brief Overview", *Art Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 3. (Autumn, 1999), pp. 14-21.

### 3.1 Calcutta Group (1942- 1951)

The Calcutta Group was the first art collective in India. It was formed in 1942-43. The artists who constituted the *Calcutta Group* were, Nirode Mazumdar, Subho Tagore, Gopal Ghose, Rathin Maitra, Prankrishna Pal, Pradosh Das Gupta, and Kamala Das Gupta. Apart from them, Ramkinkar Baij, Gobardhan Aish, Abani Sen, Madhav Sen and Hemanata Mishra also participated in the activities and exhibitions of the Group.

In the 1920's the Bengal School movement had won many laurels. As we know that the pictorial language initiated by Abanindranath Tagore and his pupils was based on the notion of "Indianness", it began to face criticism for its dullness and stagnancy. Reacting to this situation, Rabindranath decided to paint and draw, incorporating the Western modern idiom in his art. Simultaneously, Gaganendranath Tagore was experimenting with the 'cubist' and 'futurist' constructions of form making. On the other hand, an artist like Jamini Roy followed a different route. Though the latter was trained in canonical technique and tradition, he broke away from it and embraced different styles from folk art, mainly Kalighat *pats*.<sup>242</sup> Amrita Sher-gil was an artist who set the contours of modernism and inspired later artists. She was born to a Hungarian mother and a Sikh father; came to travel in rural India, and captured the poverty, sadness, pain, toil as well as the triumphs, shrill and robustness of rural people in her paintings.<sup>243</sup> Sadly, she passed away at the young age of 29, a year before *Calcutta Group* was formed.

The members of *Calcutta Group* were well informed about the art trends and the movements of the West. This can be comprehended from the statement in their Manifesto: "The guiding motto of our group is best expressed in the slogan 'Art should aim to be international and interdependent'. In other words, our art cannot progress or

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<sup>242</sup>Yasodhara Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art*, (Oxford:2001).P29. Jamini Roy is called father of folk renaissance of India, who offered an alternative vision of modern Indian identity. The works of Jamini Roy set a new radical local identity in opposition to pan-Asian historicism of Bengal School. The assertion of folk medium in his art sought to restore the collective function of art and thereby disavow artistic individualism. See. Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, (Oxford: 2007). pp.100-101.

<sup>243</sup>Her paintings- *Hill men*, *Hill Women* and *Women on charpai* are best illustrations in this context.

develop if we always look back to our past glories and cling to our traditions at all costs. The vast new world of art, rich and infinitely varied created by masters of the world over beckons us... We have to study all of them deeply, develop our appreciation of them and take from them all what we could profitably synthesize with our own requirements and tradition. This is all the more necessary because our art has stood still since eighteenth century. During the past two hundred years the world outside of India has made vast strides in art, has evolved epoch making discoveries in forms and techniques. *It is therefore absolutely necessary for us to close this hiatus by taking advantage of these developments in the Western world.*"<sup>244</sup> (Emphasis ours)

This informs us that the artists were consciously taking a step forward for setting a new movement in art. It is interesting to notice that in 1920's the artist group -*Die Bruecke* and *Die Blue Reiter* in Germany was constituted to achieve the common purpose of challenging the old institutional model in the beginning of twentieth century, as asserted in their manifesto. For instance, the manifesto of the *Bruecke* highlighted the faith in the future that the *Bruecke* search for renewal had envisioned. The *Bruecke* group was working to create a new German art, which stood in opposition to the barren art of the Wilhemine establishment. Interestingly, the artists of *Calcutta Group* admitted their inclination towards Western art movements, whereas artists of the *Bruecke* acknowledged in their chronicle their debt to tribal Arts of Africa and Oceania.<sup>245</sup> Hence, the period of 1920s onwards marks the cross-cultural exchanges of ideas between east and west that strengthened the structure of International modernism. For artists, these cross-cultural developments facilitated the comfort zone to borrow the language from each other for their own social conditioning.<sup>246</sup> As in the backdrop of the socio-political

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<sup>244</sup>Pradosh Das Gupta, "The Calcutta Group: Its Aims and Achievements", Lalit Kala Contemporary 31, (1981), p. 7.

<sup>245</sup>E.L. Kirchner: program of the artist group, Brucke, 1906, and Chronicle of the Brucke" 1913 in German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhemine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism, (Ed.) Rosa-Carol Washton Long, (University of California Press, 1993) pp.22-23.

<sup>246</sup>The World War and other social factors in the world forced the intellectuals to share their thoughts and ideas from each other. For Instance, in the previous chapter we have explored the art and literature of Rabindranath Tagore developed on the principles of universalism and internationalism. As soon as the

unrest, the artists of *Calcutta Group* came together to define its modernist slant to break free from the preexisting artistic canons. The embodiment of form and style is the unifying characteristics in the works of members of the Group.<sup>247</sup> “*Man is supreme, there is none above him*” was the motto of Calcutta Group. This motto echoes the idea of ‘*Superman*’ revealed in the philosophy of Nietzsche, whose ideals had much appealed to the Expressionists’ artists of the *Brucke*.<sup>248</sup> By observing focus on ‘Man’ by Calcutta Group, Sanjoy Mallik remarks that the focus of ‘Man’ came across to them, due to unprecedented suffering of man- made famine and World War; such disasters compelled them to respond in their art. For them, the immediate quest was to explore a new modern visual language; rather than to embark upon the stagnant languages of the past.

The members of *Calcutta Group* were not inspired by any art of past and they tried to get over from the nostalgia feeling of the Bengal School, moving ahead with the idea of a different ideology of creating a synthesis between the East and the West.<sup>249</sup> At the same time, they challenged and criticized the Bengal School of painting for representing religious and mythical theme in their art.<sup>250</sup> The Group realized that the artist could no longer be blind to his time, immediate surroundings, his people and society. To depict such despair, though there were many other streams worth drawing inspiration from, the language of Expressionist idioms which by now had acquired certain congeniality, fit into

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“Calcutta Group’ was formed World civilization experienced one more grand World War II and resulted more horrendous results than the previous one. Therefore, intellectuals of this time, including artists were searching for better possibilities to foster ‘peace’ and ‘harmony’. And this process was taking shape in all sought of Intellectual activities i.e. literature, theater, visual arts, etc.

<sup>247</sup>Sanjoy Mallik, The Calcutta Group, *Art & Deal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (2004), p. 16.

<sup>248</sup> Nietzsche introduces his conception of ‘Overman’ or ‘Superman’ in his writing- Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885).. It provides a lesson that ‘Man’ is a form of life that must be overcome. His narrative presents an epigrammatic and fragmentary account of an experience of being beyond the human and describes a series of encounters with men-even the ‘highest’ and ‘ultimate’ man –that suggests that mankind is a degenerate species that must find a new way of a living. See. “The Overman”, in Lee Spinks , *Friedrich Nietzsche*,(New York, Routledge, 2003)

<sup>249</sup> Pradosh Dasgupta, “The Calcutta Group: Aims and Achievements”, *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, Vol. 31, (1981), p.8.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*.

the mode most conveniently. In his article "Expressionism in India"; Anis Farooqi remarks that all the members of Calcutta Group had Expressionist tendencies derived from the West - partly from German Expressionism and Fauvism.<sup>251</sup> But among all of them, apparently Rathin Mitra, Paritosh Sen and Nirode Majumdar appropriated the Expressionist tendencies in their works.<sup>252</sup>

Rathin Mitra's themes revolve around laborers and workers, nudes and urban settlements. This informs us that his thematic choices were similar to the artists of the west,<sup>253</sup> particularly Expressionist. For example, '*To the Mill (1950)*' echoes the style and content of the work by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner- *Tramlines in Dresden (1908)* which embodies mass of lines, pictorial settings, composition, and distortion of colors. (Plates. 17 and 18)

Similarly, Nirode Majumdar was exposed to the European art scene, during his stay in France and there he came across the trends of French Modernism.<sup>254</sup> Moreover, he had experience of working in the studio of Andre Lohte, who was among the significant members of Bauhaus and his works were exhibited in the Bauhaus exhibition in Calcutta. Nirode Majumdar's exposure to the west reflected in his artistic sensibility which is evident in his work titled-*Two Sisters*, (Plate.19) in which he depicts two female figures holding each other-a stern visage. The dint of primitivist bold line, elongated limbs, and savage female figures suggests borrowing from the Picasso's "*Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*". (Plate.20) Also, the composition of this work is similar to that of Otto Muller's *Three Nudes (1925)*.

Paritosh Sen's affinity with Expressionism is not only revealed in his paintings but also in his writings. He has written an essay called '*Ami*'(I) and an autobiography- '*Zindabahr*' in which he embarks on a search of 'self' in his immediate environment.

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<sup>251</sup>Anis Farooqi, "Expressionism in India", *Rooplekha*, Vol. L, No.'s 1 and 2 (1978-79), AIFACS, New Delhi.

<sup>252</sup>After going through the works available in published journals and Catalogue, I have come to the view that the works of these three artists are closer to the expressionist idiom.

<sup>253</sup>Sanjoy Mallik, op.cit.

<sup>254</sup>Ibid.



Kunal Chakrabarty acknowledges that Expressionism had a major influence on Paritosh Sen. Further, he says, “Expressionists define expression as recognition of images or objects that embody feeling. Expressionist art is thus a visual mode of cognition, a metaphorical activity which strives to express not the intrinsic self, but man’s relation to the universe. Expressionist literature extends the concept still further so that narrative development is replaced by succession of episodes and an exclamatory and elliptical style. No wonder the major exponent of expressionist literature- Oscar Kokoschka – was a painter by profession. ‘Zindabahaar’ in general and ‘Ami’ in particular, display all these characteristics- Visual Imagery as cognition, metaphoric language as medium, and episodic narration as form and heightened sensation as content.”<sup>255</sup> In fact, Paritosh Sen’s “*self-portrait with pipe*” (Plate 21) in which rendering of the paint is similar to expressionist making of portraiture, particularly- Oscar Kokoschka, i.e., strong lines, stark expressions, bold accentuated colors, self-introspective posture are the qualities of his portraiture.

### 3.2 Bombay Progressives (1947-1951)

The Bombay Progressives was formed in Bombay in 1947. Its members were K.H. Ara, Sadanand Bakre, H.A. Gade, M.F. Hussain and F.N. Souza. Souza was the founding member of the Group and an ardent member of Communist Party. It has been observed that two members of ‘Bombay Progressives’ – F.N. Souza and M.F. Husain were more inclined towards Expressionist language than the other members of the group. Chaitanya Sambrani describes that Husain’s *Portrait of Souza* is the defining image of the moment which marks the new beginning of modern art, with the formation of group in 1950.<sup>256</sup> Further he adds “The bare bodied Souza, cigarette in mouth, is represented in the animated brushwork and accentuated color associated in Europe with *Expressionist*

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<sup>255</sup> Kunal Chakrabarty, “The Artist’s ‘I’”, Paritosh Sen: Contemporary Indian Artists Series (In Retrospect), (Ahmadabad: Mapin, 2001), p.37

<sup>256</sup> Chaitanya Sambrani, The Progressive Artists’ Group, in Indian Art: An Overview, (ed.) Gayatri Sinha, (New Delhi: Rupa). p.97.

*painting*, particularly a manner of Kokoschka. Souza stands in front of an easel, the surface of which is hidden from us, his expression a study in intense concentration. Standing as a self-conscious modern subject he exposes his physical being to the viewer in a well-known trope that enables bodily exposure to stand in for emotional display... It is interesting to see the way in which this brash up-fronting of the self, central to the *romantic-expressionistic* tendency in early modernism in Europe.<sup>257</sup> (Emphasis ours)

The transitional period of 1940-50's witnessed the reception of Expressionism in a grand way. As already mentioned, Expressionism was the language that propounded the universal value of humanity embedded with emotions and feelings. This period witnessed the transformation of India after the massive struggle for Independence and the people of the nation were emotionally agitated. The new policies of nation building and modernization were taking shape to bolster the nation-state.<sup>258</sup> The status of art had been questioned by the new artistic interventions by artists across the country. Further, this challenge was sharpened by the *Bombay Progressives*. The sphere of 'Fine art' was being dominated by elite conceptions until this time, the Academy art training was especially based on these ideas.<sup>259</sup> The formation of '*Bombay Progressives* broke this ground.

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> As it has already been explored that the 1940's was crucial period for India, which experienced the progression of many discordant events such as *Bengal famine* and *Tebhaga* peasants uprising, *Quit India movement*, and failure of dialogues between Gandhi and Jinnah, consequently partition. Finally these events culminated into the nation's independence. The progressives were instrumental in their endeavor to imagining and representing a sovereign modern Indian nation. The ideas of 'Progressives' was rooted in the left-wing struggle. Moreover, the title progressive was associated with Progressive Writers' Movement which was started by Communist writers and travelers in the 1930's. Geeta Kapur acknowledges that the left-wing interventions defined the Indian modernity. The communist movement of the 1940's offered a real alternative in political and cultural terms. The formation of Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA) and Anti-Fascist Writers Group was milestone of this period, which immediately inspired many artists and cultural activists of this time. See Geeta Kapur, *When was Modernism*, New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), p.301. And Chaitanya Sambrani, op.cit.

<sup>259</sup> Geeta Kapur rightly points out that these new artistic endeavors under the rubric of Progressives, challenged the old canons located in the "brahmanical/sanskritisised" resources; privileged as the Indian tradition. See. Geeta Kapur, op.cit, p. 301.

Reasonably, most of the artists in the group belonged to working class backgrounds and to minority communities.<sup>260</sup> The Group embraced European Modernism with motivation to learn rather than accepting the antipathy that academic and revivalist artists of various 'Schools' had professed. Sambrani observes that though they desired to look towards European modernism, but at the same time, their gaze went inward, to the mythical and classical sources of the country, inhabitants and their art, festivals, and lifestyles.<sup>261</sup> To an extent, they had embodied the Primitivist attitude in their art by drawing from folk and tribal motifs and fusing with modernist language.<sup>262</sup> One of the best illustrations of such fusion can be seen in Husain's painting- "*between spider and lamp*" (Plate. 22), as it exemplifies the Expressionist tendency of applying bold colors with thick brush strokes, strong lines and animated figuration.

F.N. Souza and M. F. Hussain were educated in the J.J. School of Art, Bombay. The art curriculum of the college was primarily based on neo-classical Victorian models. Later the institution began to impart training in "Indian Style" and mural painting. Souza was expelled from the institution as soon as he showed his discontent towards the curriculum and moreover due to the fact that he had participated in the student's demonstration against anti-national practices of the English principal-Charles Gerrard. Hussain was another fellow who did not follow the curriculum of the institute. The major influence on the *Bombay Progressives* was from the War émigrés of Germany and Austria. The foreigners – Rudi Von Layden, Walter Langhammer and E. Schlesinger had immigrated to India after the rise of Nazism in Germany.<sup>263</sup> Yashodra Dalmia says that the involvement of these foreigners with art was central to its development in India in the formative years of the group. They not only patronized the art of *Bombay Progressives* but also instilled the European sensibilities into the latter's artistic approach that was radically different from the Academy art styles.<sup>264</sup> We can assume that to a certain

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<sup>260</sup> Geeta Kapur op.cit, p. 303.

<sup>261</sup> Chaitanya Sambrani, op.cit.p.303.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> I am indebted to Geeta Kapur for providing me this reference.

<sup>264</sup> Yashodra Dalmia, The making of Modern Indian Art. (Oxford: 2001). p. 58.

degree, these war émigrés had educated them about the Expressionist styles and idioms because they were quite familiar with the Expressionist art movement of their country. At this time, a series of three exhibitions was being mounted at the Institute of foreign languages. The exhibits were the self-portraits of artists, mostly Expressionists such as Kathe Kollwitz, Carl Hofer, Max Liebermann, Oscar Kokoschka, Otto Nagel, and Van Repper. This exhibition had made an impact on the Bombay art sphere.<sup>265</sup>

It has been noticed that the works of Souza had Expressionist tendencies. The deliberate rough and jagged handling of paint suggests that he was very much familiar with the Expressionist idiom and his later works bear traces of the formative influence of Picasso in his artistic development.<sup>266</sup> *Death of the Pope*, (Plate.24) a painting by Souza, is reminiscent of Kathe Kollwitz's work, *Memorial to Karl Liebknecht* (Plate.15). In this particular painting, he rendered paint similar to expressionist treatment, in which facial expressions were very crude and unsymmetrical and quite interestingly distorted so as to bear a grotesque character out of the images.

His rebellious attitude determined his choice of Expressionist language which he used to achieve in his artistic goals.<sup>267</sup> His subject-matter covered religious figures of Christ, nude erotic females, and landscape. The female nudes are remarkable in their rendering; the rounded trunks, elongated limbs, boldness of lines, broad facial features, voluptuousness and distortion of proportions. These above qualities evoke the primitivist tendency, which were captured by many French and German artists such as Gauguin, Matisse and Expressionists namely, Karl Schmidt Rotluff, Erich Heckel and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in the beginning of twentieth century. It has been observed that his problematic representation of the feminine presence that shattered all conventions of the idealized nude, falling quite distinctly into the uncomfortable space of the "naked",

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978), p.16.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid. The artists of the German Expressionist movement had gone against all odds to challenge the old institutions and voiced against the state and establishments. The Max Beckmann and George Grosz and Otto Dix were anarchist in many ways. Also see. H. Goetz, "Rebel Artist Francis Souza", *Marg*, Vol.3, (1949).

gestured towards a wide range of influences not all necessarily “classic”.<sup>268</sup> According to Hermann Goetz, Souza sourced his imagery of female erotic figures from the Yakshis, Kahjuraho temples, figurines from Mohenja-daro and Borbudur reliefs.<sup>269</sup> In addition, Souza explored the primitive picture and carvings of peasantry, and folk art of India. Souza’s landscapes are reminiscent of Expressionist /fauvist idiom, closer to works of Kandinsky; the renderings of colors, bold brush strokes, and distortion of proportion achieved by Expressionists in their art. Undoubtedly, Souza appropriated the Expressionist idiom in his art but in comparison to Expressionist artists of Europe, his use of color in its rendering is relatively weak, which is the most effective element of Expressionists on account of its symbolic and emotive power.<sup>270</sup>

Notably, M.F. Husain’s painting entitled -*Zamin* (1955) received much appreciation and the work was rendered more or less in the expressionist-cum symbolical style.<sup>271</sup> Later, it won national acclaim at National Exhibition of Art organized by Lalit Kala Akademi. The painting depicts the habitation of archetypical Indian Village, representing visual percept of its people and their activities. Representing the rural folk of India in Expressionist idiom had been previously conceived by artists such as Ramkinkar and Nandalal Bose but Husain appropriated this idiom in a much advanced manner with more artistic freedom of material, forms, technique and style.<sup>272</sup> Husain comments on this particular painting as the following, “In this painting I brought the village life together. The other thing was that like Jain miniatures, the sections idea, but giving an organic feel in which you tell a story. This was the first time I used this method. Rudy von Leyden referred the work to Beckmann’s wild beast force but at that time I did not know about

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<sup>268</sup> Shukla Sawant, op.cit.

<sup>269</sup> H. Goetz, op.cit, p.38.

<sup>270</sup> Geeta Kapur, op.cit

<sup>271</sup> Anis Farooqi, Expressionism in India”, Roopekha, Vol. L, No. 1 & 2, (1978-79), AIFACS, Delhi, p.52.

<sup>272</sup> This supposition is based on the argument made by Chaitanaya Sambrani that the Progressive artists had reached to the full artistic freedom in terms of their use of material and forms, technique etc. Moreover, they suspended their social and national identity. See. Chaitnaya Sambrani, op.cit.p.106.

German Expressionism. After I got a few books on German Expressionism<sup>273</sup> It suggests to us that more or less, Husain had a fair idea about the Expressionist idiom.

Geeta Kapur asserts that “Husain’s adoption of Expressionist vocabulary has something to do with that youth zest which seeks an identity by breaking down formal, academic structures in supposedly impulsive manner of the Expressionists. The *self portrait* (1950) in the footsteps of Van Gogh is a very early example of Husain’s Expressionist mode.”<sup>274</sup> The elements of Expressionism persisted with him incidentally due to his virtuosity, his restlessness, and his compulsive mobility, which doesn’t allow him to work on canvas patiently.<sup>275</sup> Further, she points out that the Expressionism is the consequence of emphatically emotional state of being, in which Husain is not, and therefore he cannot be Expressionist. There has always been element of detachment in his works. He always avoids state of anxiety, aggression, painterly or otherwise.<sup>276</sup> The earlier works of Husain had manifested the Expressionist attitude but his later works absorbed different styles, though he adhered to the rendering of the indigenous subject.

### 3.3 Delhi Silpi Chakra

Partition was one of the painful aftermaths of independence, in which the harsh experiences of the migrants were starkly portrayed in the writings of Bhisim Sahani, Kushwant Singh and Manto. So far as visual art is concerned, it was the artists of *Delhi Silpi Chakra*, who personified their experiences of toil, anger, pain and agonies of

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<sup>273</sup>Quoted in Neville Tuli, *Flamed Mosaic*, (Ahmadabad: Mapin, 1997), p. 206.

<sup>274</sup>Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*,(New Delhi: Vikas, 1978), pp. 137-138.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.137-38.

<sup>276</sup>Ibid. One could not estimate the artist’s oeuvres by considering his/her behavioral pattern, which is outward; externally manifested. The idea Expressionism explored the inner ‘spiritual condition’, and ‘the inner tension’ which was best attempted in the Expressionist stage to make an inner man visible; not merely to outrage its audiences. This can applied in the context of Husain, in which his restlessness, virtuosity and impatient character driven him to work in the Expressionist mode. Furthermore, he was exploring inner and personal truth in his art. See David Kuhn, “The Poetics of Expressionist Performance: Contemporary models and sources” in *German Expressionist Theater: the Actor and the Stage*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), p. 86-87.

partition on the canvas. As we know, most of the artists moved to Delhi from Lahore after partition and became the members of AIFACS. The functionaries of AIFACS were non-artist members and the organization was partly governed by them. This created some sort of friction among artists and non-artist members. The dissidents of the group organized themselves into an art collective –*Delhi Silpi Chakra*. The *Delhi Silpi Chakra* was formed in the year 1949. The artists of *Chakra* came together on the basis of their professional interests and needs-Free from the benevolently patronizing control of non professionals and they formed alliances with other writers, poets and musicians to strengthen the art scene of the country.<sup>277</sup> They encouraged the progressive young artists to seek themes different from the popular trends of what the painters of Bengal School had achieved. With their new artistic vision, they elaborated on their motto ‘Art illuminates life’. Their manifesto declared, “The group recognizes that art as an activity must not be divorced from life; that the art of nation must express the soul of its people and ally with the process of progress. The group recognized that the artists have come together to work towards the progress of art and through art, help build a virile national culture and the brighter life in the country.”<sup>278</sup> Initially, the group was formed by B.C.Sanyal, Kanwal Krishna, P.N. Mago, Dhanraj Bhagat. Sanyal was most senior among them. Later the group attracted talented artists such as Devyani Krishna, Satish Gujral, Ram Kumar, Avinash Chandra Kewal Soni, Bishambar Khanna, Rameshwar Broota, and Paramjit Singh

The *Chakra* artists were inspired from the modern art movement in the West, but they drew upon the traditional Indian art as well. Partition also gave a new dimension to their work as they carried their experience of social turmoil and upheavals with them, which they transferred in their works by appropriating formal language of modernism.<sup>279</sup>

The works of P.N. Mago and Satish Gujral have the attributes of the Expressionist language. The treatment of works like *Siesta* and *Jalianwala Bagh* by P.N. Mago, exemplifies the expressionist idiom. *Siesta* (Plate.25) showed the effect of jagged

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<sup>277</sup> P.N. Mago, *Contemporary Art in India*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2001), p72-73.

<sup>278</sup> Delhi Silpi Chakra: The Early Years, Exh. Cat. NGMA, New Delhi, 1998.

<sup>279</sup> P.N Mago, Op.cit. p.74.

landscape of anguish human bodies rendered in cubist-expressionist mode; the angular and stretched body postures; has distant echo of the style of Lyonel Feininger, a member of Bauhaus. While the pictorial composition of *Jalianwala Bagh* (Plate.26) is reminiscent of Picasso's *Guernica* (Plate. 27), the splintered bodies, the elongated limbs, cry and angst of human suffering gives the image of expressionist theatrical setting with a lot of pathos.

Tragedies of partition lingered on, in the art of Satish Gujral. He says that "the experience of partition sunk in me so deep that after partition, when I began to paint without any conscious effort, the human suffering, brutality of man towards man became my major theme."<sup>280</sup> Gujral's works represented the barbarism of man in distorted, defaced and mutilated manner, which he executed in Expressionist idiom. He was inspired by Jose Clemente Orozco which David Craven suggests, reveals Orozco's indebtedness to El Greco; Goya and Austro-German Expressionism.<sup>281</sup> His Expressionist tendencies are slightly different in their usage from other artists. For example, he applies thick layer of paint with bold brushstrokes on his canvases. The following two pieces of art are the clearest illustrations of the influence of Expressionist tendencies on themes of partition, *Condemned (1957)* and *Despair (1954)*. (Plates 28 and 29)

In summation, one can see that these art collectives were at variance with each other so far as their position was concerned. Most of the artists of *Calcutta Group* were purely aligned with the language of modernism. *Bombay Progressives* were influenced by European art movements but they also drew from traditional and rural imageries and fuse them in their art. However, both these groups maintained an open association with communist ideologies in the beginning but gradually that took a backseat. *Delhi Silpi Chakra* was eclectic in their inspiration and did not have any partisan leanings in their art practice. Therefore, they did not have any constraints of maintaining a politics in their artwork and addressed issues which they felt for.

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<sup>280</sup>Satish Gujral, Interview with BBC (Documentary), date unknown.

<sup>281</sup>Exh. Cat. Satish Gujral (A Retrospective), NGMA, New Delhi, 2005.



## **CONCLUSION**

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During the course of researching this topic, I came across many a lives and many a journey which were dedicated in carefree pursuit of one's instinct across time and space. Further, I was able to have a glimpse in different times and could follow trajectories of ideas across decades and centuries in the sphere of art. And this was not an idea of a certain kind of brush stroke or a cut on certain paper. But it bore testimony to establishment of different cultures and dialogue at the level of aesthetics and its politics.

From this, arose an understanding that an artwork was not merely an aesthetic artifact that soothes the finer senses of creativity but a product of its immediate surroundings and historically and culturally located artists. German Expressionism began as a movement primarily to unsettle established norms of art in the west but as the nationalist Empires in Europe began to collide with each other in a massive show of strength, vital changes in attitudes and human landscape could not allow the artists to remain outside the realm of politics and it began to take a clear political dimension.

Art and politics at this juncture, were not in impermeable compartments anymore. And characteristics of the politicization of art and when art came to be understood primarily in term of Expressionists, pacifists and war-worshippers alike battled to stand on this platform. As one goes through this trajectory of artists and their guilds (*Die Brucke and Blaue Reiter*), it is very tempting to make a similar comparison of this phenomena happening a couple of decades later in the sub-continent; the Bengal School in particular. Where a 'traditional' and 'revivalist' school of art begins to experiment with different forms and as the height of anti-colonial resistance reaches a new summit, artwork and artists become political in a unprecedented way. I would resist the making a very simplistic argument of "East following the West". In fact, it is this very kind of polarity of categories and binary opposition which needs to be challenged. Though, certain terms do betray this intention, the theme which is under review is where my attempt begins at defying this rigid frame of references.

The art of Bengal School was not a passive recipient of the ethos of German Expressionism or any other European idiom. However, the exchange which occurred through series of travesties cannot be denied. One also has to consider the fact that this was not a platform which was free of hierarchies and was an absolute liberating sphere. Thus, the primary consideration which I have tried to maintain throughout is to unearth the social history of this culture and how there was a rich and complex synthesis of ideas which germinated and the fruition of which can be seen in the first half of twentieth century in the sub-continent, where from Abanindranath Tagore to Ramkinkar Baij, artwork and culture moves through a trajectory of revivalist idioms to developing a powerful vocabulary of protest through visual art and the act of artwork becoming a political one. Thus, similar in trajectory so far as the intention of artwork is concerned, but the politics and the context through which such a trajectory spread itself out was not the same.

Abanindranath Tagore through his artwork was critical of the Empire but so was Ramkinkar Baij but in a hugely different way. While Abanindranath Tagore was glorifying everything of the past, Baij being much more ferocious in depicting the apathy of lives during colonial period was not blind to the social ills of the traditional society. This transition maintains a crucial transit point and that point happens to be Rabindranath Tagore, who stepped up as a painter only for the sake of mounting a healthy critique of the 'revivalist' notion through his oeuvres but at the same time was critical in ample measure regarding the problems of western and European manners of thought as well. Thus, if the Expressionist tendencies in relocating sources of inspiration in primitive art were an act of appropriation, then the redefining of relation of man and nature in harmony; in sharp contrast to the project of colonial modernity, was an innovation which was rooted in the historical moment of its time. Thus, an aesthetic comparison of Bengal School of Art and the German Expressionists clearly shows that it was neither an absolute similarity nor difference but a complex permutation of both.

And this exchange only got richer over the decades. And the puritanical notion of borrowing was shed frankly by the decades of 1940s. The artists groups as well as veterans like Somnath Hore did not hesitate in admitting their inspirations from European

artist. Thus, here we see in praxis, that art carved a niche of its own where the rigid notions of colonial modernity were not welcomed.

As the anti-colonial struggle gathered ground and visual imageries produced by different artists became a powerful medium, coupled with the shattering experience of famine, certain techniques and gestures began to standardize people of the emerging nation in different frames which again was not without its own hierarchies. One of them to be referred to is the image of primitive art and primitive man. Usage of grotesque distortions of human anatomy was soon to enter the political rhetoric of the new born nation.<sup>282</sup> These methods which with the coming of post-colonial era entered into the canons continued to fill galleries and art museums as one can realize in retrospection. Thus, as this tradition of rich legacy of cultural exchange and traversed ideas prolong, one can see a similar tendency in recent times which bring forth through this visual medium the same questions before the post-colonial state very similar to the way the colonial state was interrogated.

The engagement with German Expressionism has continued even to the present times. Most of the artists of 'Kerala radical group' appropriated the attributes of Expressionists during the 1980's. Savi Savarkar who is a Dalit uses the Expressionists vocabulary quite explicitly and self consciously.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>282</sup>The assumption has been developed from the argument made by Shukla Sawant in one of her article. By pin-pointing towards the nature of art produced by Chittoprosad in 1940's, Sawant says that after the Bengal famine the representation of female body became one of the sites onto which horrors of famine were deeply inscribed. The language of realism used by these artists depicted an image of womanhood which was directly in the conflict of the image of Plentitude (Annapurna goddess). Shukla Sawant, "Art Collectives at the Age of Anxiety (1940's -50's), Forthcoming in Marg publication. Considering the core of argument, we can say that the diversion from the themes of goddesses and gods to depict the social reality was totally a political act by the artists such as Chittoprosad and Somnath Hore.

<sup>283</sup>The term 'rawness' is recently used by Prof. Shivaji Pannikar, in Delhi Biennale seminar in March- 'elective affinities' constitutive differences: Contemporary art in India' in the context of Dalit representation of art as well as Dr. Y S Alone further expounded on the subject. The term equates the language of *Expressionism*, in general; loosely applied to depict anger, agony, despair or chaos of society. e.g. Dalit Expressionism of Savi Savarkar. Interview with Johnny M. L.,(art-critic, Delhi), 2007. Savi

How does one explain such persistence of appeal that German Expressionism had for generations of Indian artists till the contemporary moment. If German Expressionism came to be identified as some kind of “universal” language of protest and when artists across different decades found them confronting painful and traumatic social and political conditions, they felt compelled to embrace the language and rhetoric of German Expressionism, itself an upshot of social angst and political turmoil.

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Savarkar admits that he inspired by the German Expressionists art, especially the style of Max Beckmann. Interview with Savi Savarkar, (artist and Lecturer, Delhi College of Art, New Delhi, 2007)

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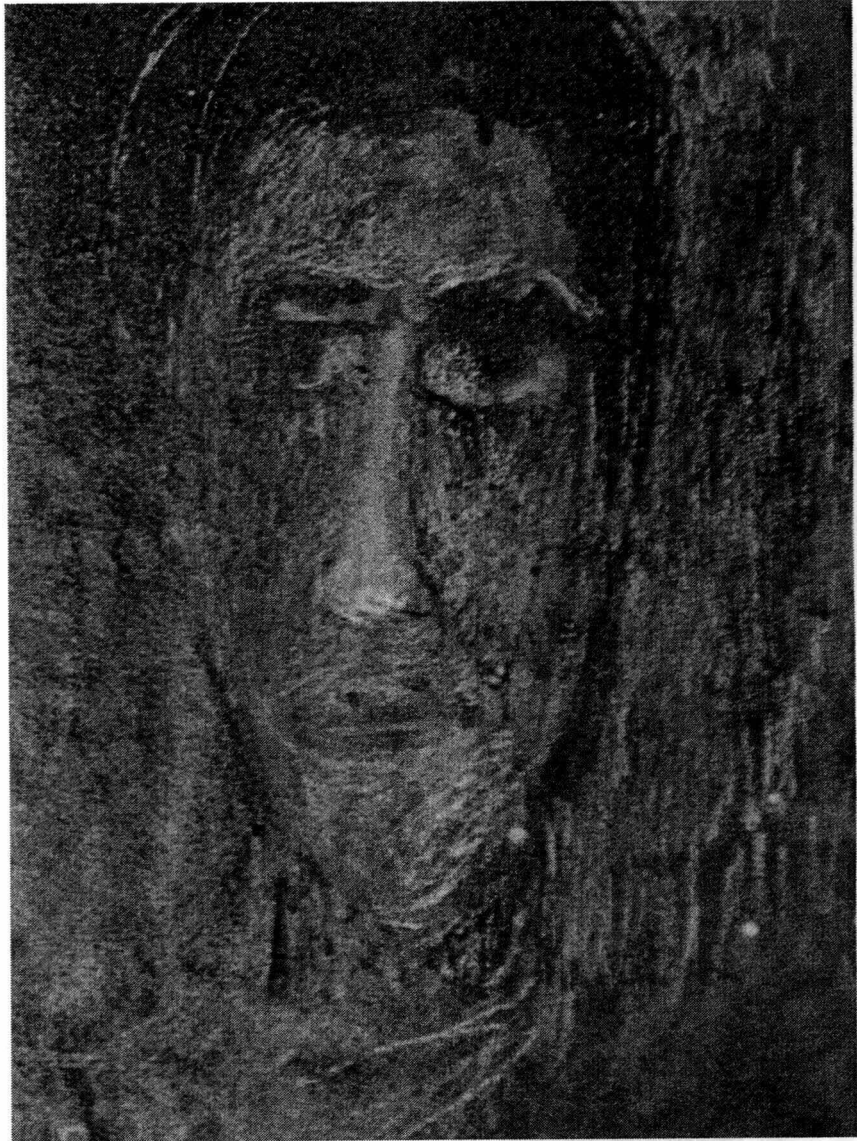
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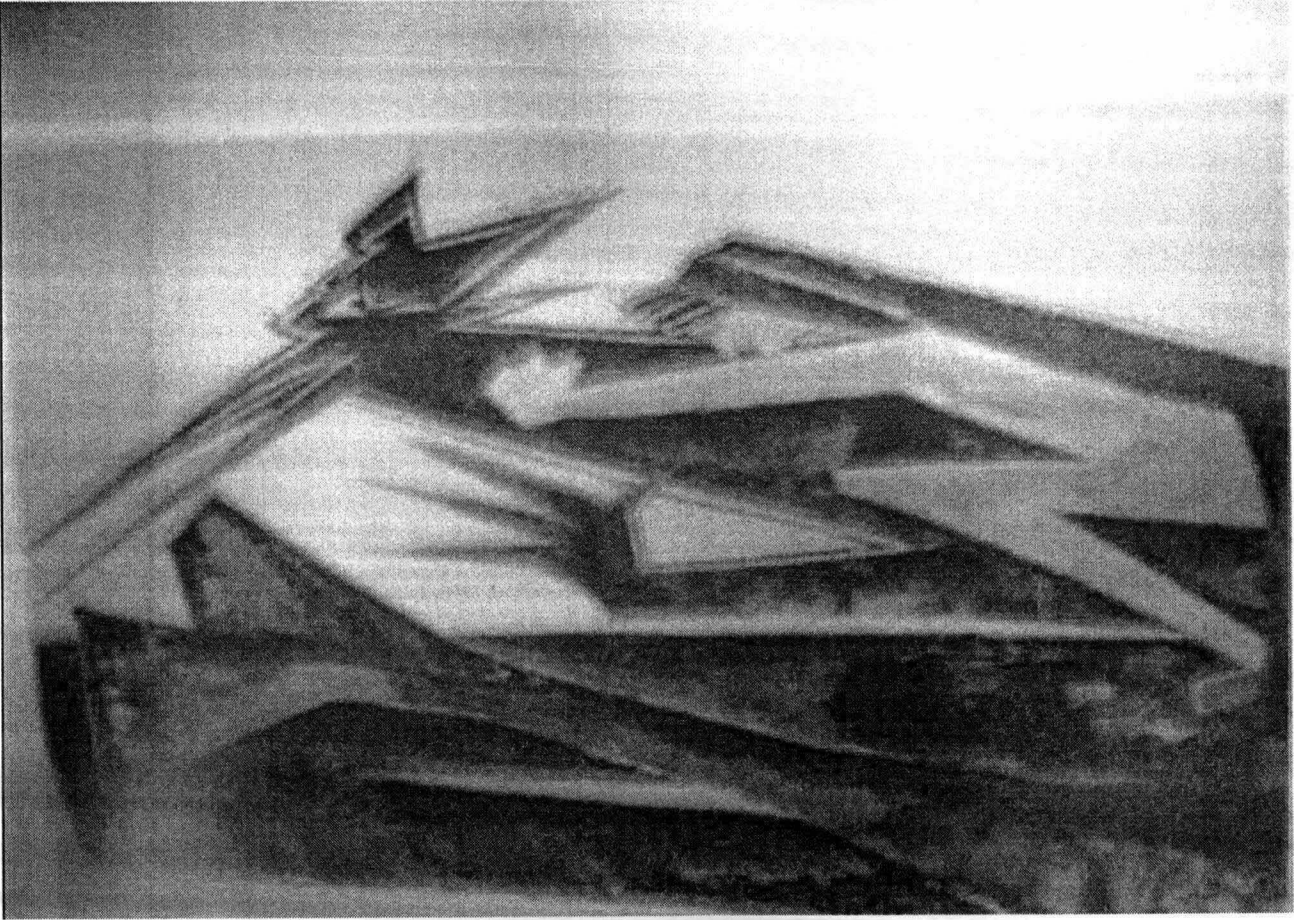
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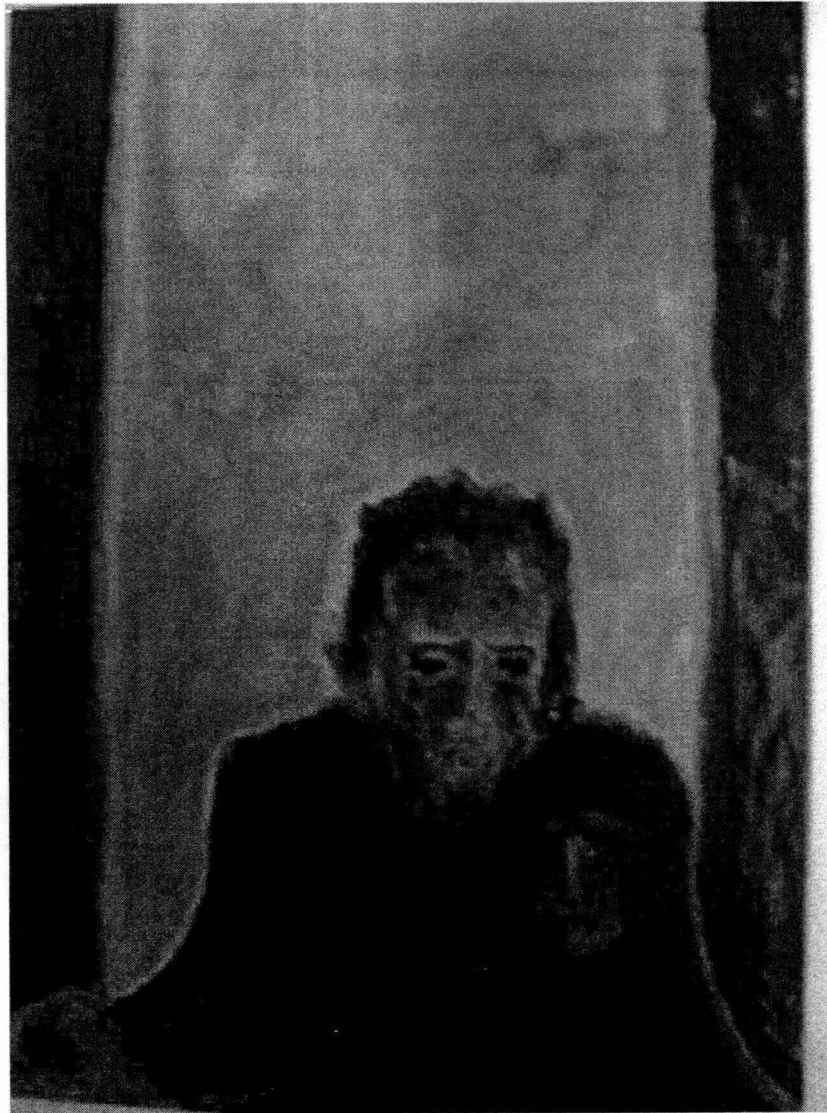
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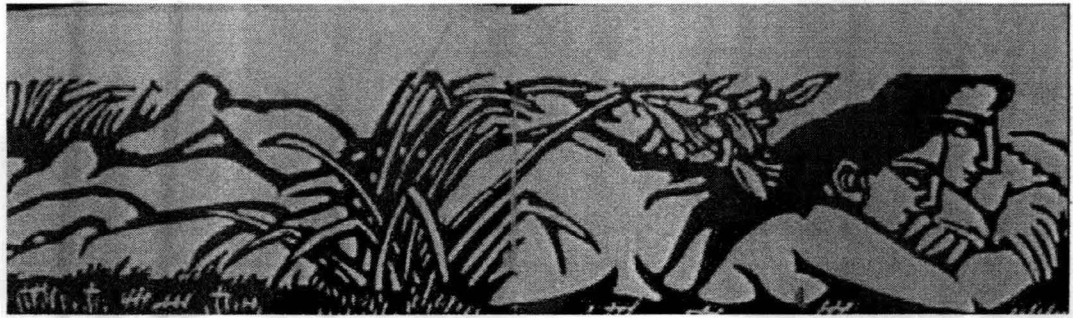
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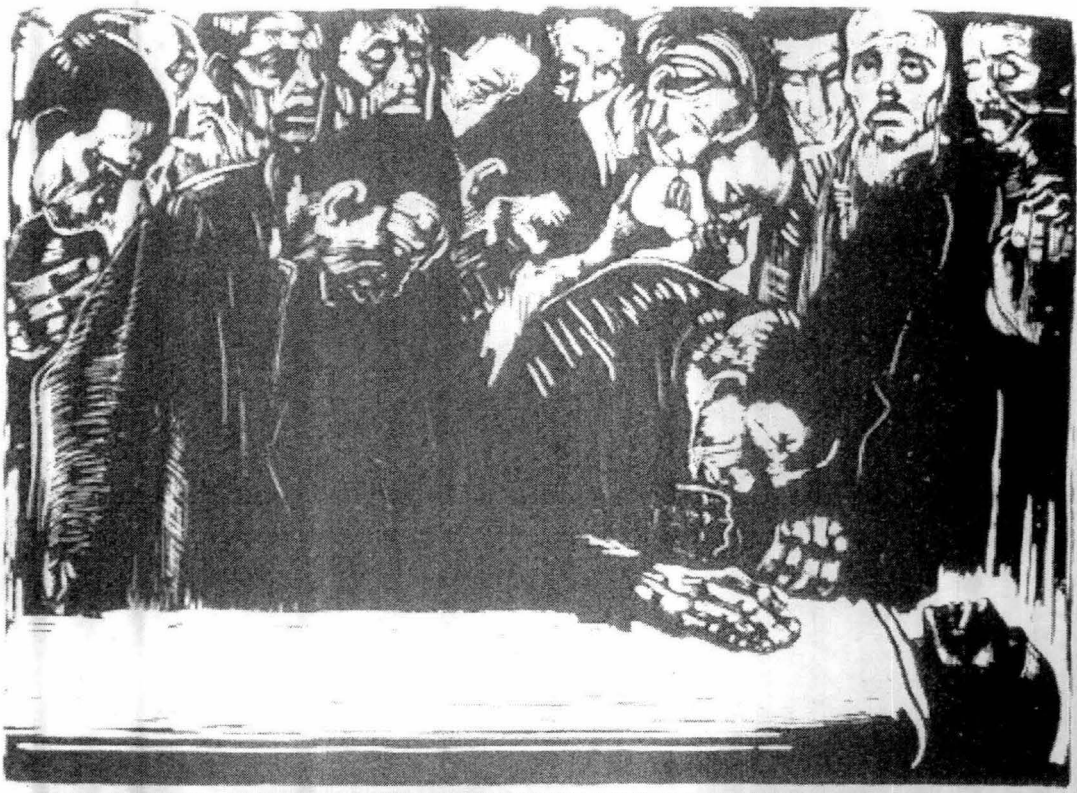




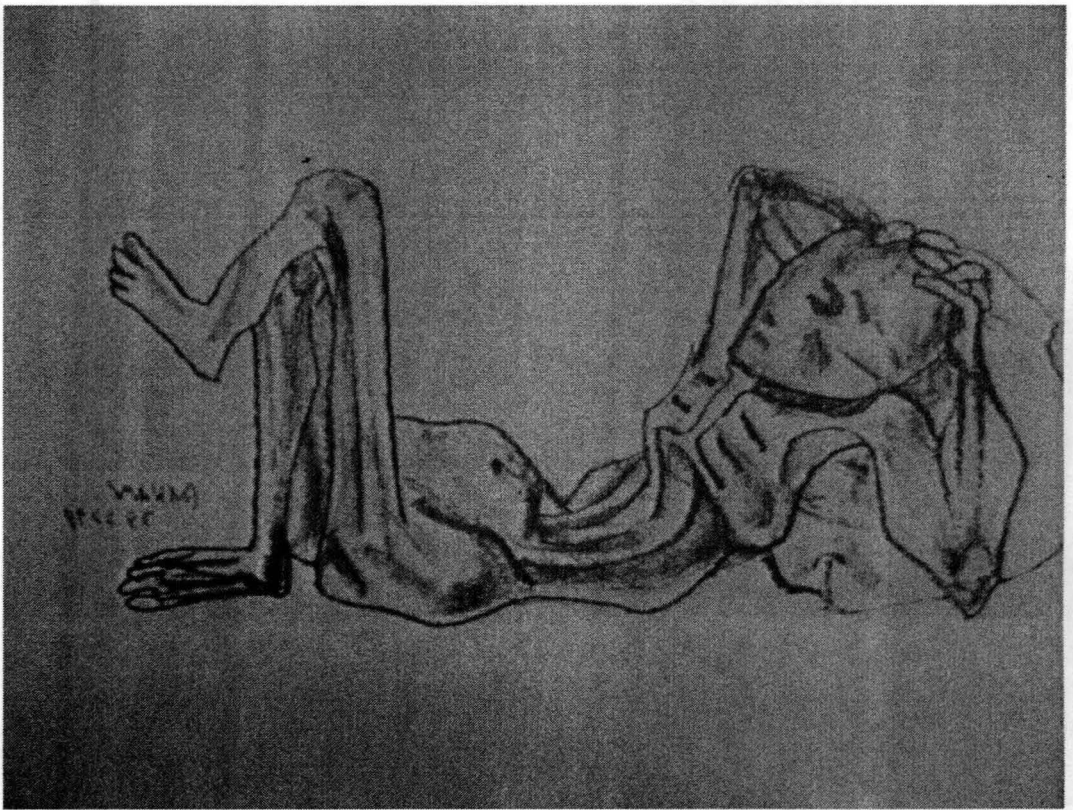
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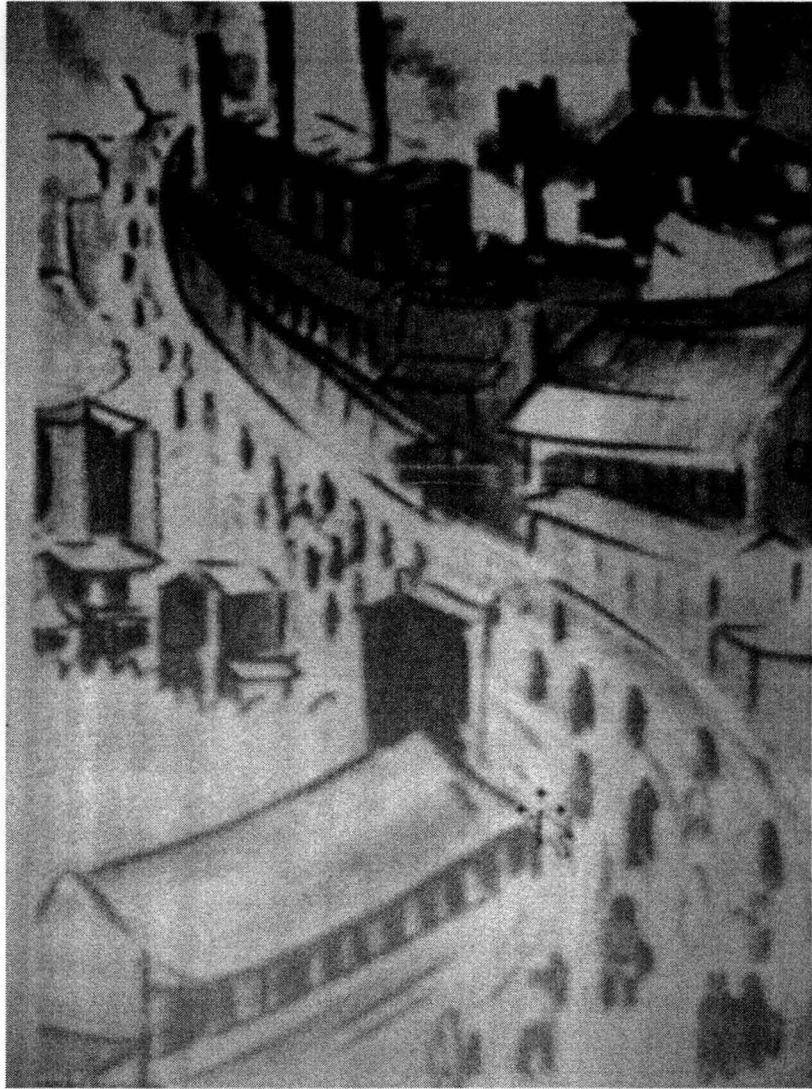
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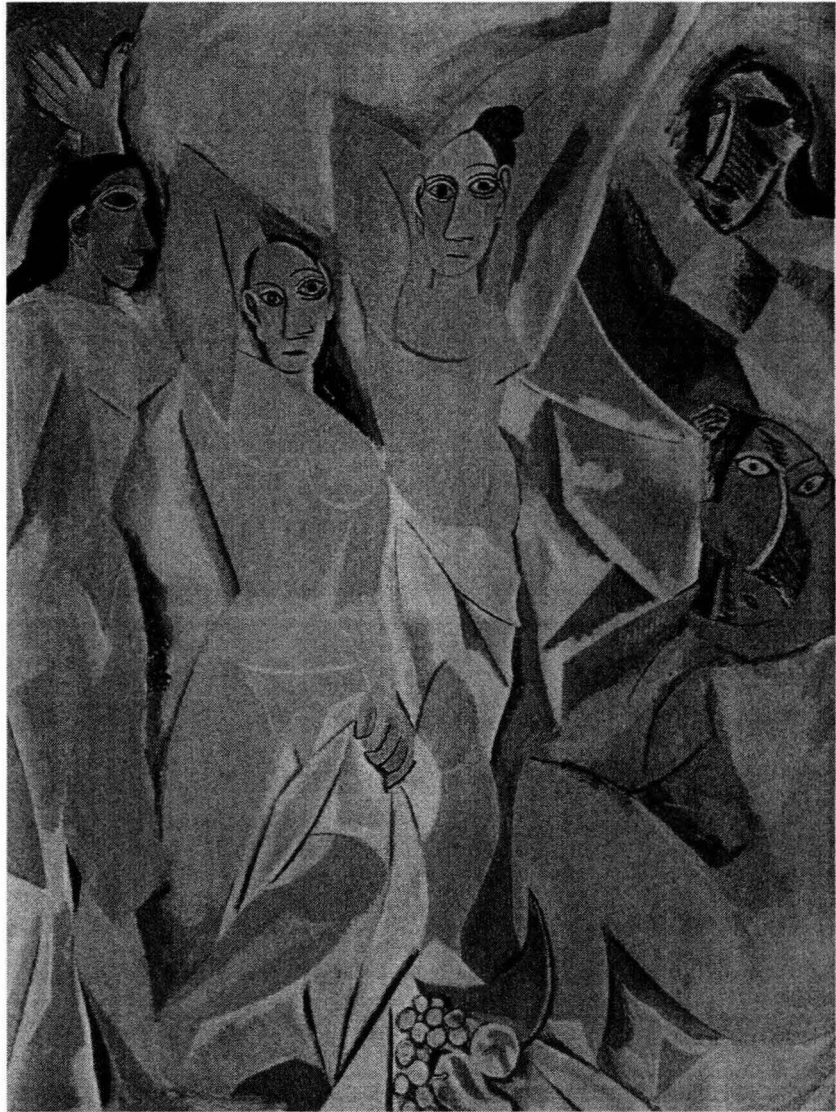




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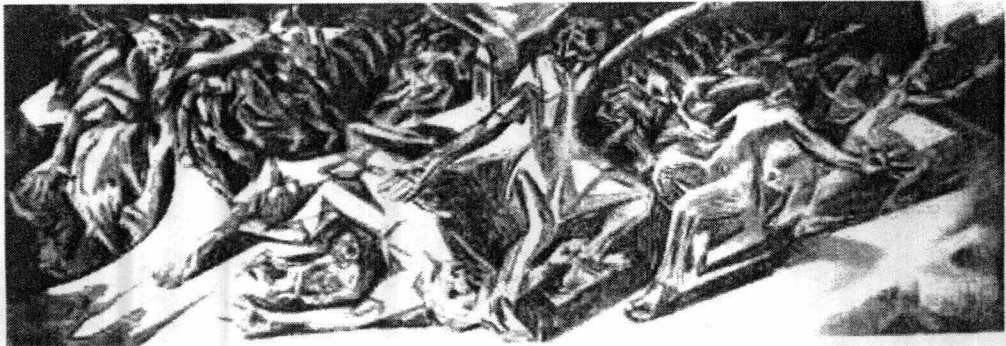
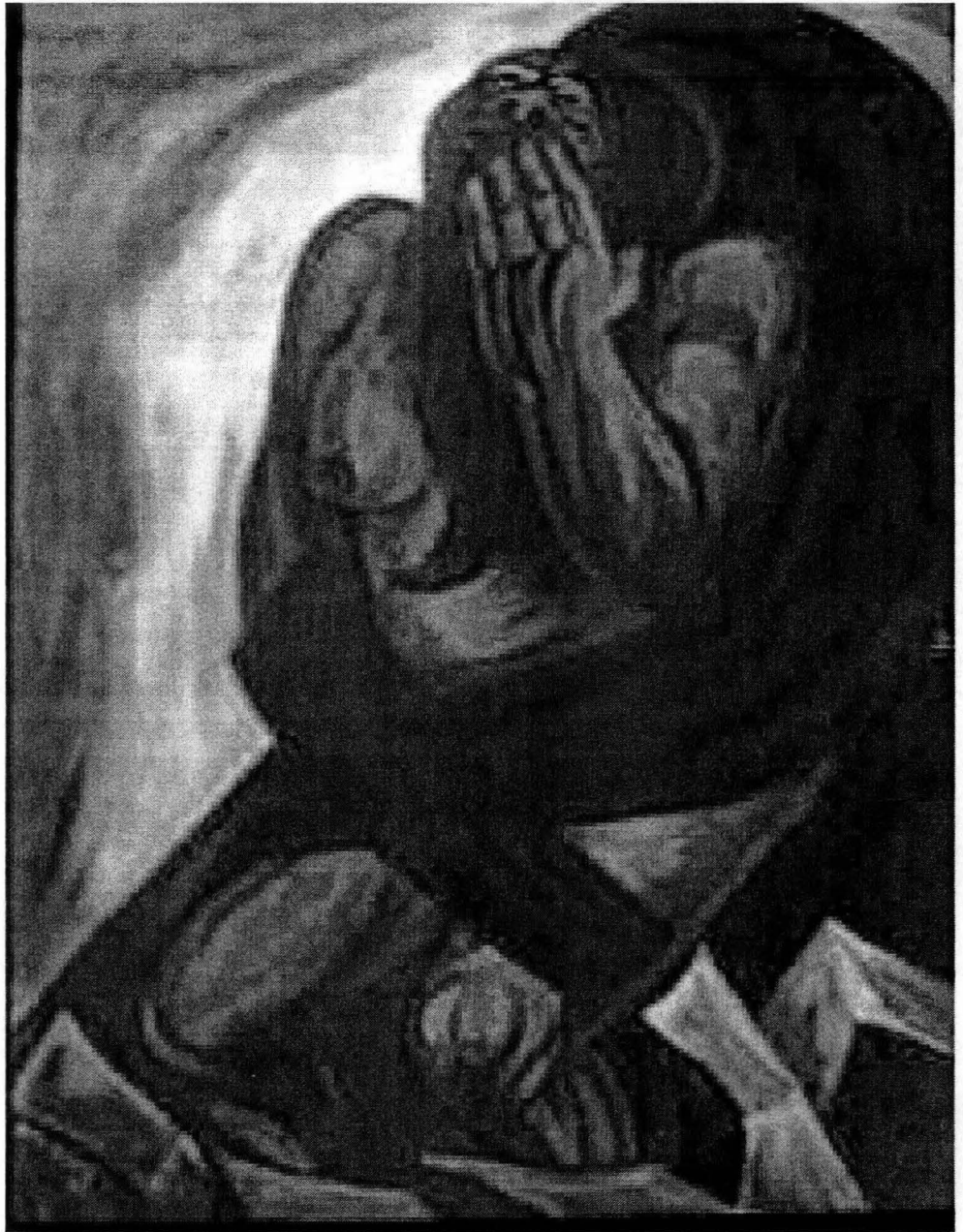


Fig. 10. The people of the Bay of Chiriquí.

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## LIST OF PLATES

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1. "Untitled", by Rabindranath Tagore, Ink and Watercolor on Paper, undated, Source: Andrew Robinson, 'The Art of Rabindranath Tagore' (Calcutta: Rupa, 1990).
2. "Untitled", by Rabindranath Tagore, Ink and pen on Paper, undated, Source: Andrew Robinson, 'The Art of Rabindranath Tagore', (Calcutta: Rupa, 1990).
3. "Untitled", by Rabindranath Tagore, Ink and Watercolor on Paper, undated, Source: Andrew Robinson, 'The Art of Rabindranath Tagore', (Calcutta: Rupa, 1990).
4. "Boy with Dog," by Ramkinkar Baij, Oil on Canvas, Late 1930s, Collection: Devi Prasad.
5. "Santhal Family (outdoor sculpture)", by Ramkinkar Baij, Cement fondue, 1938, (Personal Documentation), January 2008.
6. "Mill Call (outdoor sculpture)", by Ramkinkar Baij, Cement fondue, 1956, (Personal Documentation), January 2008.
7. "Mother feeding Child", by Nandalal Bose, Tempera, 1938, 52.7 x 58.6 cm. Source: catalogue-Selected Expressionist Paintings of N.G.M.A collection.
8. "Lovers", by Chittoprosad, Lino-cut, 1952, 2.1/5 x 10.5 inches. Source: Prabhas Sen, 'Chittoprosad' (LKA,1993)
9. "Figures walking into the Sea", by E L Kirchner, Woodcut, 1912,146 x 200 cm. Source: Wolf D. Dube. 'The Expressionists' (Thames And Hudson, 1973, 2001.)

10. "Drought", by Chittoprosad, Lino-cut, 1945, 7.5x 13.5cm. Source: Prabhas Sen, Chittoprosad (LKA, 1993).
11. "Family", by Emile Nolde, Woodcut, 1917, 24 x 32 cm. Source: Wolf D Dube, 'The Expressionists', Thames And Hudson, 1973, 2001
12. "R.I.N. Bombay Naval Mutiny", by Chittoprosad, Drawing, 1946. 7 x 3 ¼ cm. Source: Prabhas Sen, 'Chittoprosad (LKA, 1993).
13. "Revolution", by Ludwig Meidner, 1912-13. Oil on Canvas, 80 x 196 cm. Source: Joan Weinstein, 'The End of Expressionism', 1990.
14. "Peasants' Meeting", by Somnath Hore, 1951, Wood engraving, 13 ¾ x 18 inches, Source: Ray, Pranabranjan, Somnath Hore (LKA, Year not mentioned)
15. "Memorial of Karl Liebknecht, by Kathe Kollwitz, 1919-20, Woodcut, Source: Shearer West, 'The Visual Art in Germany 1890-1937.(1988)
16. "Untitled", by Somnath Hore, 1977, Lithograph, 29 x 50 cm. Source: Ray, Pranabranjan, Somnath Hore (LKA, Year not mentioned).
17. "To The Mill", by Rathin Mitra, 1950, Oil on canvas, Source: Sanjoy Mallik, 'The Calcutta Group (1943-1953)', Art & Deal, Vol.3, (2004).
18. "Tramlines in Dresden, by E L Kirchner, 1909, Etching, 27 ½ x 30 7/8", Source: Wolf D. Dube, 'The Expressionists', Thames and Hudson, 1973, 2001.
19. "Two Women", by Nirode Majumdar, Etching, 1950s, Source: Sanjoy Mallik, 'The Calcutta Group (1943-1953)', Art & Deal, Vol.3, (2004)

20. "Les Demoiselles d' Avignon, by Pablo Picasso, 1907, Oil on canvas, 96 x 92", Source: Pablo Picasso (A Retrospective), MoMA.
21. "Self Portrait", by Paritosh Sen, 1956, Pastel on paper, 42 x 36", Source: Kunal Chakrabarti, 'Contemporary Indian Artists Series: Paritosh Sen', Mapin, 2007.
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29. "Despair" by Satish Gujral, 1954, Acrylic, Source: Satish Gujral: A Retrospective exh. Cat. NGMA, New Delhi, 2006.