CHAPTER V

INDIAN AESTHETICS: TWO TWENTIETH CENTURY THINKERS AND AN ARTIST

In this chapter, the focus of study shifts from Western to Indian aesthetics in the twentieth century, mainly as formulated in the earlier half of this century. The thought of two great thinkers and the work of a well-known artist of this period is examined in relation to the problem of the autonomy of the work of art, as well as art in general. The two thinkers whose aesthetic views are studied in this chapter are Rabindranath Tagore and Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Indian artist being K.K.Hebbar. This thought and creative work have to be understood in the light of the great political movement which was under way at their time, which formed so powerful a context that no insulation of thought and art from it was possible. Accordingly, this chapter includes brief historical notes on the background against which this aesthetical thought and art came into being.

**Western Ethnocentricity, Indian Cultural Specificity**

We shall see that the question of the autonomy of the work of art cannot be considered in the twentieth century Indian context without reference to the tensions, or dialectical political relations between the colonial, ruling power and the ruled colony, and later, in the context of the tensions between modern, Western ethnocentricity and Indian cultural specificity.
Both Rabindranath Tagore and Ananda Coomaraswamy, two men of
genius who tower on the intellectual and literary scene of India
of the early twentieth century, found the questions of this
thesis urgent, though they may not have framed them in a similar
manner. Both lived through the era when India was consolidating
her strength to overthrow colonial rule, and create an identity
for herself. This great movement worked in all spheres of life.
The cultural-aesthetic sphere was no small component of this
multi-faceted movement.

Strangely, however, the questions that were urgent in that
period of historical upheaval, continue to be pertinent today.

Coomaraswamy and Tagore both were faced with the questions:
Does autonomy of art mean, to us, autonomy from art-forms derived
from alien political rulers? Does it mean the resurrection of
the art-forms that comprise the cultural heritage? Are the
ancient art-forms of our country relevant for all time, thus
pointing to an eternal essence? What is the relation of art to
present time? What is its relation to philosophy? What, after
all, is the nature of art?

Rabindranath Tagore's aesthetic thought exhibits a strong
criticism of Western modernism. But it does not submit to
ancient aesthetic forms. Rather, it supports a kind of autonomy
of art different from the Western, formalist conception of the
same, a more thoroughly aesthetic autonomy. Tagore believed that
art should spring freely from the depths of the artist's mind.
His was an aesthetics of all life. He hoped that humans would
find beauty in all of life, and that everything he or she did
would be aesthetic. This can be construed as the dissolution of the boundary between art and life, completely annihilating the autonomy of art, or it can be seen as an autonomy of art so complete and all-pervading that it fills all life - both nature and human life.

Ananda Coomaraswamy presented the ancient Indian aesthetic with his own implicit philosophical - aesthetic position, which explicates an autonomy of art through certain timeless characteristics. We see that Coomaraswamy upheld a certain traditional view of art and was largely critical of the developments that were taking place during his own time. He even took a strongly critical view of Western culture for its fascination for novelty in art.

The autonomy Coomaraswamy spoke of was the autonomy of traditional religious forms in art. In a sense, he took a post-modern view too, for he strongly resisted, at least theoretically, the Western, modernist position.

The last part of this thesis is devoted to the work of a well-known Indian artist of this century, K.K.Hebbar, who worked in the direction which had been opened up by the Tagores, and other creative people, early in this century. In Hebbar's work we see an artist grappling practically with the questions this thesis has been engaged with in a theoretical study.

The Intellectual Background of Tagore's Thought

Rabindranath Tagore formulated an aesthetics of ecstasy, based on a fundamental principle of spirituality : the principle
of a One, universal Mind pervading all creation, the Brahman. Within this framework, he was able to accept all difference. The monistic and idealistic cosmological principle he enunciated was also endlessly creative, taking innumerable, ever-new forms. Although he derived this philosophy from the Upanishads, he remained outside the ambit of the traditional cultural and philosophical orthodoxies.

More than the great poet that he was, he was like Sufi saints whose songs he had come to know early in life. He had a rapturous-spiritual relation to the world. Art for him was an overflowing of creativity and joy, breaking across all barriers, all conventions, uncontrollable. In this view he was related to romantic poets, both Indian and Western. Like the Romantics, Tagore was always in conflict with established traditions.

I refer to Niharranjan Ray's work on Tagore, titled, "An Artist in Life" (1967) to understand his socio-cultural background and the development of his thought, particularly about art.

A Time of Promise

When Tagore was born, the Bengal Renaissance was well under way. It was a time of great promise, a time when older structures of thought were being questioned and shaken. A number of thinkers and literary figures had already enriched the atmosphere with their socio-political thought, literary contributions and cultural questioning.

The Bengal Renaissance forms an important component of the background of Tagore's thought. At least partly due to this
effervescent movement, Tagore was able to nurture a lively interest in the cultural heritage, reach out towards Western ideas, and open his mind in new intellectual directions. Though it occurs much later in world history than the European Renaissance, it has certain parallels with the latter. It must be noted also, that though we shall only examine the history of Bengal at the time of Tagore, the thought formulated there had similarities, in varying degrees and of varying intensity, with that of other parts of the country at that time.

Nihar Ranjan Ray writes:

"Some forty years before he (Tagore) began to write, Indian thought, through the efforts of Rammohan Roy, had been linked with the intellectual movements in the West. In fact, the most remarkable feature of modern Indian culture, if we date its history from about 1814 when Rammohan started his activities, is its international content and orientation. It is, indeed a product of the unique synthesis of ancient and medieval Indian cultures with the culture of modern Europe......" (Ray, 1967, p.16)

In this sense then, the Bengal Renaissance also differed from the earlier European one: it was already a post-modern inter-textuality, destined to participate in the transition of a colonial reality into a post-colonial one. It was, in fact, both a fertile reception of Renaissance and post-Renaissance thought
streams, as well as an overthrow of the political domination which had its seeds in that thought.

This complex relationship between the Indian cultural framework and the Western one, this unquiet intertextuality was the soil from which Tagore's thought was nurtured.

The Beginnings

Ray takes the beginning of the Bengal Renaissance to coincide with the beginning of Rammohan Roy's contributions to the Indian intellectual world. We know that unlike the European revival of thought, culture and scientific inquiry, the Renaissance in Bengal occurred in the context of colonial rule, drawing impetus from it, as well as building resistance to it, defining a new national identity in opposition to it, as well as being in some vital ways enlightened and enhanced by it.

We see here the turbulence of two cultures or "epistememes", as Foucault would call them, in conflict, struggling for autonomy. We see also the dissolution of the boundaries between them at various points, an overlapping, a borrowing which led to critical self-examination, and growth and change.

The autonomy of art which was formulated in this period, meant at times an autonomy of the ancient, traditional forms and concepts in art which the colonial rulers had either denigrated or failed to understand, at times it meant being free of our traditional culture which was looked upon by our own thinkers as stagnant, and at any rate, inadequate for the prevailing historical situation. It was thus partly an assimilation of the
modernist Western, concept of art, and partly a rejection of the same.

We see Western modernism exerting a liberating influence on Indian thought and social life at this historical juncture. British rulers in India introduced Western education and Western modernist ideas here in order to establish the hegemony of their own culture, that is, its autonomy. But Indian thinkers made creative use of the Western ideas which entered their intellectual life, undertook critical appraisals of their own prevailing culture, sought to liberate the same towards new directions and eventually used Western ideas to overthrow the autonomy of Western colonial rulers in various spheres, including the aesthetic. To my understanding, this was perhaps a great Derridean deconstruction in practice: elements within a text, a cultural complex were used to unravell the same.

Relation to Past and Future

Like the European Renaissance, the one in Bengal also moved backwards and forwards through history: it returned to its cultural roots, but also sought the liberation which would make a forward movement possible. In addition, the intellectuals in Bengal took inspiration from the ideas of the French Revolution to build up a concept of individual liberty. The strains of thought which developed in this line were liberal as well as leftist.

Rammohan Roy infused the revolutionary liberalism, which he learned from European thinkers, into Hinduism. But his
followers, the Brahmos, did not transform the Hindu religion with the same power as the Protestants transformed Christianity in Europe, as a result of which the medieval structure had completely disintegrated there. The Brahmos did, however, act as agents of social change. They reposed their faith in a one supreme Reality, Brahman, and resisted the rituals and rigidities of traditional Hinduism. Roy established several educational institutions wherein Indian as well as Western systems of thought were studied. He dearly loved the revolutionary ideals he derived from the French Revolution and held similar hopes for India.

The young Bengal group, formed around the brilliant thinker, Derozio, at about 1826, represented a leftist strain of thought. This group was altogether against the traditional Indian structures of social organization, thought and culture. They stood for the liberty, or autonomy, of the individual, deriving their inspiration from the French Revolution. They advocated the study of mechanical science, and set up institutions with this programme. They stood heroically at the vanguard of political movements. Theirs was a thoroughgoing autonomy, we can see, of a Western-type, West-inspired modernism.

The Derozioan leftists were severely isolated and opposed by most Indians of their time. Their concept of individual autonomy was completely alien to the thought of this country. Here I would point out, we see a resistance to the Western concept of individual autonomy. Rabindranath Tagore's thought, developing
later, took something of this position, but was not extreme as this was.

Rammohan Roy's followers continued to work for social change, which meant a movement beyond feudal and medieval structures, but they did not abandon their traditional culture altogether. Rabindranath Tagore's father, Devendranath followed this line of thought.

But Madhusudan Dutt took an extreme position at this time. Heretical towards Hinduism, and a convert to Christianity, he was the first to open the doors of intellectual and literary Bengal to English, Greek, Latin and Italian influences. In short, he was completely enamoured of Western Civilization, including its dominant religion. To my understanding, what he stood for was a complete autonomy of Western culture.

Isvarachandra Vidyasagar's thought and work, however, remained close to Rammohan Roy's, who was the most eminent and pioneering figure of the intellectual upheaval we are referring to here. Vidyasagar remained close to the people, not alienating himself through extreme positions, and continued the reforms in thought, society, and culture initiated by Roy.

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, though known for his novels, was a great intellectual force in the Bengal of this time. His novels were marked by a keen and critical social awareness. He had deeply imbibed the cultures of the East as well as West. He even kept abreast of European socialist movements. He nurtured Western progressive ideas derived from Comte, Spencer, Mill and Fourier. He valued scientific inquiry, nurtured a revolutionary
social attitude and still idealized elements of the Indian cultural past.

The conflicting and unresolved tendencies in Bankimchandra's thought crystallized among his followers as a narrow, sectarian outlook, not quite true either to an Indian traditional position, nor to a Western progressive one. Eventually, a regressive tendency developed in this line of thought, which identified the nascent national awareness solely with Hindu culture.

The national consciousness was formulated in the main during the decade 1850 to 1860. The attempt to build up a self-reliant national culture was greatly dependent on a rediscovery of the past, but also imbibed elements of Western thought. Ancient and medieval Indian history, Vaishnava poetry and Sufism were some of the areas which were researched.

There was an atmosphere of intellectual flux and turbulence, in which medieval orthodoxy made way for the Western Renaissance concept of individual freedom, or a degree of individual autonomy. New channels of life-experience were opening up. Intellectual and emotional sensibilities were vitally alive. The Tagore family was part of this awakening in Bengal.

Dwarkanath Tagore, Rabindranath's grandfather was an associate of Rammohan Roy and Devendranath, Rabindranath's father, was Roy's disciple and a prominent personality in the Brahmo Samaj. Devendranath studied and cherished the ideals of the Upanishads, but avoided a rigid, sectarian position. He gave his family a liberal, enlightened, cultured atmosphere.

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Rabindranath, with his exceptional sensibility and receptivity, imbibed several influences in this environment.

The most dominant influence that Tagore assimilated was of the Upanisads. Explaining this influence, Niharranjan Ray quotes Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan as saying:

"Philosophy in India is essentially spiritual. It is the intense spirituality of India, and not any great political structure or social organization that it has developed, that has enabled it to resist the ravages of time and accidents of history...." (S. Radhakrishnan, quoted by Ray, 1967, p.40).

Ray continues by commenting that traditional Indian thought was not predominantly raciocinative, unlike Greek thought, nor an exploration of the subjective, emotional world. Although there is no dearth of intellectual debate among the various schools of Indian thought, and of scientific knowledge as well, the Indian mind was most concerned about spiritual reality.

Yet, the Indian mind was equally at home in the realms of matter as well as spirit. The religious-philosophical works remained close to the everyday world. Literature expressed philosophic truth. The epics presented the same truths in the form of myths. In India, the great truths of philosophy and religion were communicated to the common people. Here, I would point out, we see an inter-relatedness of ideational structures, rather than isolation and autonomy.
Humanism and Poetic Form of Upanishads

Ray presents a humanistic interpretation of the Upanishads as, in his view, they influenced Tagore’s thought. These texts present a concept of man as identified, or merged, with the Divine or one principle of Spirit that permeates all creation. There is also a concept of immanence rather than transcendence here. God exists within man, and within the natural world. There is no distance, no separation, no sense of a higher level at which the Divine exists. Man and God are of the same essence. This makes the Upanishadic concept of man highly potent. It projects him as a being endowed with endless possibilities. Although there are said to be stages through which the human consciousness passes before it comes to the realisation of its nature as essentially divine, there is no pessimism in this philosophical position, no lament about the cycle of birth and death. The ecstasy of the final realisation is the dominant characteristic of this system of thought.

More than the philosophic enquiry of the Upanishads, Tagore was receptive to their passages of exultation, expressed in sublime and luminous poetic form. He strove to restore the spirit of the Upanishads in his own time. In his re-discovery of India, these texts formed a dominant element. But this is an understatement, for he was so absorbed in their truths, that he lived and breathed them, to the end of his days, and they resonated through all his major creative works. In comparison, he found the "Gita" cold and raciocinative.
The concept of man he developed on the basis of his Upanishadic viewpoint, prevented him from supporting any socio-cultural divisions within the newly forming national consciousness and beyond the limited goal of national freedom, he did not even support a divisive nationalism, an isolated identity for nations of the world. His concept of man was thus extended beyond nationalistic boundaries to encompass all humanity.

In a sense, then, Tagore's thinking was also post-modern in its refusal of concepts with rigid definitions, which in the social realm could lead to sectarianism, and in the national realm, to aggressive chauvinism. He therefore strongly warned his own people against caste-divisions, and national chauvinism. But he may also be criticized for his universalism.

Tagore extended his humanistic and monistic philosophical understanding to Buddhism, particularly the Mahayana tenet that there is no personal salvation unless all other sentient beings are also saved from suffering. He saw in this tenet the basic oneness of humanity, and the sacredness of all life. He rendered into narrative and dance-drama, several anecdotes from the Buddhist Gathas and Avadanas.

Tagore responded deeply to the poetic character of the Upanishads as well as of Buddhist literature. We shall see later how this relates to his concept of art.

Tagore included in his scholarly and cultural studies the epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and the works of Kalidasa. He was greatly influenced by the attitudes of Valmiki and Kalidasa towards nature, and imbibed much of their rich
imagery, creating a similar kind in his own works. We see here that Tagore could relate to the art and culture of historical periods other than his own.

Medieval Prophets

Tagore extended his study of ancient Indian philosophical thought and literature to the medieval period, and was perhaps the first modern Indian thinker to show a continuity between the two. The medieval culture of India was a composite one, Tagore came to see, its content deriving from several sources: pre-Aryan, tribal religions, Upanishadic Brahmanism, some foreign influences of an ancient time absorbed into Hinduism, and also Islamic influences. Its medieval prophets took elements from Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, preached the equality of all human beings before God, and warned against sectarian divisions. It is easy to see now that the thought of medieval saints must have appealed strongly to Tagore.

These prophets came from among the commonest people and contributed to the folk tradition, and Tagore was completely receptive to their thought and poetry. The medieval tradition of saintly literature had been forgotten by the educated, upper classes. It was rediscovered during the Bengal revival, and Tagore played no small part in this process.

The Tagore family studied Vaishnava poetry deeply, in which the subjects were mainly the love of Radha and Krishna, and relations between God and men, Heaven and earth. Tagore was of the view that this beautiful, lyric poetry spoke not only about
the love between Gods, but of human love as well, and about earthly joys and sorrows. In Tagore's vision the separation of the Divine from the human and the earthly was obliterated. We can see that this vision works against the autonomy of any concepts.

As he studied the art and folk-lore of the common village people of his country, he remained deeply concerned about the poverty and degradation they lived through. The universality of his fundamental philosophical position enabled him to maintain an openness at all social levels, and towards all nationalities.

Thus, he was also receptive to Western thinkers and poets. Ray mentions Romantic Western poets such as Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and Swinburne, whose works Tagore read, as also T.S.Eliot and Walt Whitman. (Ray, 1967, pp.53, 54). Tagore was open to Western thought such as that of Spencer and Darwin, and the socialist thought of Maxim Gorki. He resisted any sectarian tendencies he came across even in Western thought. He was indifferent to the idea that a minority elite could preserve civilization, that is, he resisted the cultural autonomy of an upper class elite as leading and preserving civilization.

One can draw a parallel between the openness of Tagore's position and his steadfast refusal of rigidity in thought with the post-modern phenomenon of concepts losing rigid definition. But there is an important difference: Tagore's thought was united by an underlying principle, the monistic spiritual concept of Brahman, while Western post-modernism is largely an unqualified pluralism.
Tagore's post-modern openness is to be seen in his words, quoted by Ray:

"............just as it is futile mendicancy to covet the wealth of others in place of our own, so also it makes for utter destitution to keep ourselves segregated and starved by refusing the gift which is the common heritage of man." (Ray, 1967, p. 398)

Tagore resisted the polemics or dichotomy of the self and the other at all levels, and in all spheres of life.

In the following words, which I quote from "Nationalism", a collection of Tagore's essays, we see that he warned against political chauvinism learned from the West:

"..... I am afraid of the rude pressure of the political ideals of the West upon your own. In political civilization, the state is an abstraction and relationship of men utilitarian .... it is an eruptive inflammation of aggressiveness". (Tagore, 1985, p. 49).

Finally, and perhaps this is the most characteristic attribute in Tagore's personality, the poet and seer become one in him. The poet-seer expresses truths of the intangible world in symbols, parables, metaphors and analogies. He speaks the great truth he sees in a rich imagery. The spiritual experience of the individual in union with the Universal principle is what finds expression in all his creative work. The Universal Spirit fills the poet-seer's life, and his art.
A unique concept of the autonomy of art emerges from Tagore's aesthetic viewpoint and from the large corpus of his creative writings. This autonomy is rooted in a monistic principle, and is an abundance of creativity, an abundance of joyous energy, taking innumerable forms; it breaks through every arbitrary limitation. No cultural segment of humanity, no single art-form can claim autonomy before this, but all forms are celebrated.

Tagore's Concept of the Work of Art

We shall see here what Tagore himself says about the work of art. As I searched his writings for aesthetic theory, it became evident to me that nowhere does he explicitly put forward a formal, in the sense, an academic one. Although he has much to say about art, the creative process and the spirit of the artist, the question of the constitution of the work of art is not dealt with at length. I shall present here what he does articulate on the subject.

In the "Religion of an Artist", which I refer to here as published in Sisirkumar Ghose's "Angel of Surplus" (Ghose [Ed.], 1978), Tagore alludes to cultural specificity, though this is not his main concern:

"Languages are jealous. They do not give up their best treasures to those who try to deal with them through an intermediary belonging to an alien rival......Poems are not, like market commodities, transferable". Further on, he says.
".......Man cannot reach the shrine if he does not make the pilgrimage......." (Ghose [Ed.], 1978, p.4)

Tagore acknowledges the difficulty of understanding the artwork which belongs to another culture. It may reveal some of its treasure after a pilgrimage, a study of long years. But such pilgrimage need not be academic, for about his own songs he writes:

"I have composed many songs which have defied the canons of orthodox propriety and good people are disgusted at the impudence of a man who is audacious only because he is untrained. But I persist, and God forgives me because I do not know what I do. Possibly that is the best way of doing things in the sphere of art......."

(Ghose [Ed.], 1978, pp.45)

Like Barthes' concept of the text flowing without rigid structure, escaping canons, unconcerned about boundaries, like Lacan's unconscious evading formal structures, Tagore's concept of the work of art implied here is one that resists orthodox conventions. In this position, he is both post-modern and romantic, and romanticism is seen to persist in some texts of post-modernism.

A Poet's Religion, a Mystic's Art

Further on in this essay, Tagore shows that for him religion and art are intimately related. This too is a post-modern position, much removed from the desacralization of art which led
to the modern, Western view of art as autonomous, as purely aesthetic. Tagore writes:

"My religion is essentially a poet's religion. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channels as does the inspiration of my music. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life. (Ghose [Ed.], 1978, p.5)

As his religion is that of a poet, his art is, inversely, that of a saint, an enraptured mystic. But while the post-modern thinkers will not speak of the mystery and wonder at the heart of reality and the inner human world, preferring to speak only of the elusiveness of meaning in sign-systems, Tagore romanticizes this obscurity of meaning. Also, where many post-modern thinkers, such as Derrida, are wont to deconstruct sign-systems without poising any fundamental principle to which deconstruction leads, Tagore can be said to deconstruct orthodoxies to reveal an underlying monistic, idealistic cosmological principle. Thus Tagore's concept of art relates as well as differs from post-modern concepts of the same.

He says, in the essay we are considering:

"I had been blessed with that sense of wonder which gives a child his right of entry into the treasure-house of mystery which is in the heart of existence": (Ghose [Ed.], 1978, p.5).

The coalescing of art and religion is developed further when Tagore draws an analogy between art and the creation of the universe, and between the artist and God: both are engaged in
creative play; both bring forth an abundance of forms. The
dissolution of the boundaries between art and religion works
against the concepts of the autonomy of each.

I quote here from Tagore's "Personality":
".... we are to make this life our poem in all its
expressions; it must be fully suggestive of our soul
which is infinite. .... The consciousness of the
infinite in us proves itself by our joy in giving
ourselves out of our abundance". (Tagore, 1980, p. 63).

This brings us to the concept of surplus or overflowing
abundance in Tagore's aesthetics, somewhat related to the post-
modern idea that since both art and criticism cannot ever
capture meaning, wholly and correctly, the effort goes on,
endlessly. But in Tagore's concept of superfluity there is
something positive, missing in the latter: man's capacities
exceed his utilitarian requirements, and flow as pure, joyous
creativity in art. The post-modern view of endless enunciation
and criticism is not such an overflow; it even admits the
anxiety over the lack, the absence, the ever-promised and never-
fulfilled meaning.

Not all post-modern theory is so dark and impoverished of
spirit. There are some attempts to re-instate the sacred and the
magical and the mythical. I refer here to Northrop Frye's
interest in mythologies (Frye, 1974).

Tagore's concept of surplus as the genesis of art is, of
course, liable to criticism. Was it evidence of an abstruse
ahistoricity? Although Tagore did not refer to the concept of surplus as the Marxists use it, in materialistic terms, how could he fail to see its inappropriateness in a society living a colonial present in which the majority of the population had been exploited and driven into poverty by alien rulers as well as feudal upper classes indigenous to the land? This majority could hardly have had surplus energy beyond their struggles on a material level. But Tagore's writings do reveal deep social concerns, and hence this criticism must not be stringent.

A Formalistic Definition

Tagore continues in this vein, to give a formalistic definition of beauty. Thus, we see that in his aesthetics there are contradictions co-existing. While earlier we saw post-modern strains of thought, here we see modern formalism which supports an autonomy of the work of art, all in the same essay:

"What in common language we call beauty, which is in harmony of lines, colours, sounds or in grouping of words or thoughts, delights us only because we cannot help admitting a truth in it that is ultimate." (Ghose [Ed.], 1978, p.8)

Elements united in harmony within a whole, delight or "rasa" as the ancient Indian aesthetic theory speaks of, an ultimate essential truth expressed in the work, all these characteristics mark the work of art as autonomous.

But immediately after saying this, Tagore returns to his emotive-spiritual, rapturous vein of speaking about art: it is born out of the love between an artist and reality, rather than
isolation. This love makes objects of the world vibrant and radiant, though they may not in themselves be great or beautiful, or useful. The epistemological position here is that not only do we construct reality through our own modes of perception, and categories of knowing, but also through our own modes of feeling.

Tagore goes on to explicate one of the fundamental ideas of his aesthetic-philosophical position. Art is born out of the relation of the soul of man to the world. But since there is only one Universal Mind or Self in creation, the relation of man to the world is an extension of himself, a discovery of himself in others. This experience is one of unqualified joy.

Here again, the philosophy works against the concept of the autonomy of the work of art: there is no possibility of speaking here of the one and the other, the kind of demarcation necessary to make the work stand apart and autonomous. In fact, Tagore's philosophy works on several levels against the dichotomy of self and the other. And further on, when he says that the work of art is characterized by rhythm, again it is difficult to develop the line of thought from here to the concept of autonomy of art, because rhythm characterizes all creation in Tagore's view.

But there are swings back and forth in Tagore's philosophy of art, between modernistic and post-modernistic positions, if the former is understood to be one of universalism and the latter, pluralism, if the former is concerned to define concepts and realities, and the latter concerned to show that this is untenable. For, immediately after speaking of the delight of the
self going beyond itself to find itself in others, implying a movement from subjectivity to intersubjectivity and textuality to intertextuality, Tagore subsumes it all under the monistic principle of the Universal Spirit which is the same in all beings and all things in creation.

**Criticism of Western Modernity**

He does, however, show common cause with post-modern thinkers in his criticism of Western modernity:

"...life's movement is impeded with things and thoughts too difficult for a harmonious assimilation..... This has been growing evident every day in the modern age, which gives more time to the acquisition of life's equipment than to the enjoyment of it. In fact, life itself is made secondary to life's materials, even like a garden buried under the bricks gathered for the garden wall. Somehow the mania for bricks and mortar grows, the kingdom of rubbish dominates, the days of spring are made futile and the flowers never come." (Ghose [Ed.], 1978, p.12)

Like Coomaraswamy and Western Romantics, Tagore is an early post-modern thinker here. He rightly points to the modern touristic love of the miscellaneous, and the novel, and its aesthetics of the scatalogical, all of which it requires for its dulled sensibility. Utilitarian man, he says:

"fights Nature, banishes her from his world, deforms and defiles her with the ugliness of his ambitions." (Ghose [Ed.], 1978, p.18)
But if human beings care to, they can find Paradise on earth. Art and beauty are co-extensive with the life of the spirit and with nature, and humans may find resonances of themselves in each other, as Tagore expresses repeatedly in his visionary writings and speeches.

About humans, spiritual experience and art, Tagore writes, in "The Religion of Man":

"Men, in order to make this great human experience ever memorable, determined to do the impossible; they made rocks to speak, stones to sing; caves to remember ... such heroic activity ... answers the question: 'What is Art?'. It is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Real". (Tagore, 1988, p. 87).

Tagore refers to Spiritual Reality as the "Real".

We have thus a conflicting image of art in Tagore's aesthetics: it enjoys a rapturous freedom, it assumes eternal, essential forms, yet it partakes of intersubjectivity and through a monistic spiritual principle, is related to all creation. His aesthetics shows links with romanticism, formalism as well as post-modernism. But, to my understanding, the most important point to note about this aesthetic thought is that it locates the work of art in a historical space which is an interstice between two cultures, Western modern and traditional Indian, and accords to the work an autonomous creativity, which differs from the Western concept of autonomy because it yet remains related to universal, spiritual creativity.
Since Tagore did not subscribe to any orthodox aesthetic theory, he held the individual creativity of the artist to be important. The artist must look within and create freely according to his inner vision and his intimate relation to the world. He must relate to the world unhampered by conventions, Tagore held. Far from speaking of the death of the author, Tagore romanticized the creative imagination from which come works of art. Not only this, he believed that this creativity could be a universal phenomenon: all art could permeate all living.

Thus the formalist view, taking art as autonomous breaks down in Tagore's position in relation to the artist and in relation to life. But like in most post-structuralist theories, here too one may say that a thoroughgoing, all-pervading autonomy of art is posited.

As in most aesthetic positions studied in this thesis there is a shifting autonomy here also. For, Tagore would have been quite willing to keep an object of art aside and contemplate its beauty. But he would find art in craft-objects of daily use as well, and he would have been willing to see the relation of works of art to their cultural environment, to nature and to the spirit. All these relations can be observed in the vast body of his own creative works.

On the other hand, when Tagore takes a critical stand against the invasion of the culture of Western modernity in India, he is not concerned to defend Indian socio-cultural conventions. He could have spoken here of difference, of
cultural specificity and basic, cultural presuppositions inherent in social structures, of the injustice of the hegemony of one socio-cultural structure over another. He did not, to my understanding. His criticism was based on universal premises: Western modernity is detrimental to human values, to nature, to the spiritual life, and eventually, to art.

It was rather Coomaraswamy who was concerned about cultural specificity, who hoped that Western modernism would not interfere with the Indian cultural fabric, the texture of Indian traditions. Ironically, Coomaraswamy did not live for long periods in India and therefore the culture he romanticized was not perhaps an intimate part of his own experience. Had he lived in India, he would perhaps have felt the need to be somewhat free of the cultural matrix. He might have formulated a more critical and less nostalgic view, closer to Tagore's.

Ananda Coomaraswamy: A Brief Historical Note

In my study of Ananda Coomaraswamy's theoretical views about art, I am first and foremost troubled by a paradox: he spoke eloquently for universal principles, and at the same time was one of the first thinkers of this century who presented a strong critique of Western ethnocentricity, and in fact, the whole complex of Western, modern culture. While he enunciated universal concepts, he was deeply concerned about a historical phenomenon: the conditions of cultural deterioration in India and Sri Lanka caused by British colonial rule.
Coomaraswamy held a doctorate in geology, but after working as a mineralogist for a brief period, he devoted his life to the study of the arts and crafts of Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and the Islamic countries, bringing to this study his gift of keen scientific investigation. But in his later years he strove to understand the philosophical sources of the arts he investigated. He had a syncretic or unifying view of the arts. He uncovered the common ideas, expressed in common motifs and gestures in the various arts he studied.

Coomaraswamy’s Idealism

Underlying his aesthetic views is a distinct philosophical position. He adopted the idealism of the Vedanta, but his thought cannot be said to be limited by this school. He studied the philosophical thought of the East and the West, wherever it was informed by religion, and tried to synthesize it into what he termed the Perennial Philosophy.

One of the thinkers Coomaraswamy deeply admired was the Greek, Plotinus. Roger Lipsey recounts a story about Plotinus’ reluctance to have a portrait made of himself, which aptly illustrates Coomaraswamy’s position. Plotinus said to the insistent painter, Amelius:

"Is it not enough to carry about this image in which nature has enclosed us? Do you really think I must also consent to leave, as a desirable spectacle to posterity, an image of the image?" (Lipsey, 1977, p.4)

I shall go on to refer to the collection of seminar papers on Ananda Coomaraswamy titled "Paroksa" (1984). Some critics
hold the view that Coomaraswamy's thought was not an idealism
divorced from empirical reality because it was also a philosophy
of work and art; and it was not a reactionary harking back to
the past but a critique of the present and a beacon-light to the
future. I refer here to Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan's foreword in
"Paroksa", on Coomaraswamy. (Shaikh, Subramanium, Vatsyayan

Coomaraswamy linked his aesthetic views to a philosophical
position, as well as a cultural critique. Vatsyayan holds that
perhaps he was a prophet who saw, at the beginning of this
century, where Western science and technology were leading the
world, and sensing calamity for man and nature, offered a
philosophical-aesthetic thought, which if followed could arrest
man's movement towards the precipice.

Ananda Coomaraswamy's father, like Tagore's, was a highly
cultured gentleman. Like Devendranath Tagore, Sir Mutu
Coomaraswamy took a keen interest and was well-versed in ancient
Eastern texts, but also open to the best of Western culture.
Although he lost his father when he was hardly two years of age,
Ananda Coomaraswamy inherited a passion for Eastern culture from
his father. He did not live for long periods in Sri Lanka or in
India, but almost all his adult life was devoted to the
rediscovery of the cultures of India and Sri Lanka, and towards
the struggle against the hegemony of modern Western culture
brought to the colonies by European political powers.
Three Major Periods

Roger Lipsey divides Coomaraswamy's life into three major periods (Lipsey, Vol.3, 1977, p.5). In the first, he lived in England, Sri Lanka and India. Towards the end of this period, he came into contact with the Tagores in India, and observed the birthing nationalist movement at close quarters. In 1917, he moved to the U.S.A, where he worked as curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. This is the second period of his life, when he carried out researches into Eastern cultures. In the last and final stage of his life, he researched the philosophy behind the arts he had studied and wrote about it. According to Lipsey, the work of this period is most memorable.

I shall speak here only of the time he spent with the Tagores in India. Between 1907 and 1917, Coomaraswamy visited India several times, and stayed mostly as the guest of the Tagores. When Coomaraswamy came to India in early 1909, a political and social crisis was aiding the consolidation of the nationalist movement in Bengal. A British proclamation of September 1905 had divided the large Bengal province into two. The British hoped that the division would make the provinces more manageable, but history was going another way.

In Britain, Coomaraswamy had already been sharing with other intellectuals a growing interest in William Blake and anti-industrialism. In India he easily became a participating and inspirational figure in nationalist politics. He was empathetic towards the movements of boycott of British goods, and "swadeshi", or support of Indian-made articles.
But the political and economic movement of resistance to British rule quicklyflowered in the cultural sphere as well. In 1912, E.B.Havell and Coomaraswamy strongly criticized English planners of New Delhi, urging them to use the services of Indian architects.

Inspite of the political turmoil of this period, life in Bengal was not devoid of delights. When Coomaraswamy joined the Tagore family in 1909, they lived a charming, creative life, engaging in several arts and intellectual enquiries.

During his visits to India, Coomaraswamy articulated his views about art and its relation to other spheres of human activity. Even at a time when nationalist feeling was strong in the country, he held that freedom could not be merely political and economic, but rather, and more importantly, must be cultural. He held that a poet and artist like Rabindranath Tagore could do more for a nation than politicians with limited vision.

In his book of essays of 1911, _Art and Swadeshi_, in the essay, _Poems of Rabindranath Tagore_, he writes, as Lipsey quotes:

"The pure politician is often no nationalist at all, in an idealistic sense ........ It is the work of poets (poet, painter, sculptor, musician, "artist" - all these are synonyms) to make their hearers free; it is they alone who establish the status of nations". (Lipsey, 1977, p.84).
Further on in the same essay, he says:

"The painters of our visions - the makers of our songs - the builders of our houses - the weavers of our garments, these all are a touchstone that can turn to gold for us both past and present, ..... could lead us back to a world to which our real greatness belongs, a world for which nothing can ever compensate..... We have poets as our guides to take us back to the elemental and real things in life....." (Lipsey, 1977, p.84).

Thus, in Coomaraswamy's view, art was not so ideal as to be unrelated to political struggle, an ivory tower in the midst of historical change; rather, it had great power to make nations, or revive them. But he was also intensely nostalgic for the traditional art of India. Though he had a close friendship with Abanindranath Tagore, and a continuing one with Rabindranath, he did not appreciate the modern Indian art much, to which they contributed. In his view, ".....it is not what the world has a right to expect from India", as he wrote in the essay "The Modern School of Indian Painting" of 1911, quoted by Lipsey (Lipsey, 1977, p.85).

He saw the art of the Indian past as embodying lasting values of life, a way of life still valid for the present, and despised the quest for material prosperity, which Indians were learning from Europeans, in his view. Indians were hoping for a materialistic utopia to be
"...established when we have learned enough science and forgotten enough art to successfully compete with Europe in a commercial war." (Lipsey, 1977, p.89)

Thus Coomaraswamy's appraisal of traditional Indian art was interwoven with a strong adverse criticism of the modern, liberal, materialistic culture of Europe.

Coomaraswamy's Theoretical Position

This study focusses on the Indian aesthetic theory as it developed after the age of the Upanishads, as presented by Coomaraswamy. The problem of whether art should be autonomous or related to life figures throughout Coomaraswamy's writings. One senses that his exposition of Indian aesthetics has been developed in a polemical relationship to the modern Western view of art as autonomous.

Art and Tradition

In his work, "Introduction to Indian Art" (1969), Coomaraswamy says that art in India, "serves the purposes of life, like daily bread". (Coomaraswamy, 1969, p.XI). It expresses the experience of a whole society. Comparing Eastern and Western art, he speaks of the advantages of traditions in the East. The artists in the East were largely professional craftsmen guided by traditional aesthetic principles. Their names and idiosyncracies did not dominate their works, which expressed rather a collective genius. Though not individualistic, the art
was intensely expressive, being produced from an immediate experience, to which the traditions led.

The cult of autonomy or individuality in the West produced a few men of genius among artists, and reduced the majority to mediocrity, in Coomaraswamy's view. Art expressed the personal and was expected to be novel. This can lead to incoherence or solipsism, and requires researches into an artist's life. Coomaraswamy also points to the dichotomy between folk and fine arts, which the emphasis on individuality produced in the West. The common people found it difficult to understand the fine arts.

The division between folk and fine art did not exist in India, Coomaraswamy says, and "the coherence of the culture showed itself in all the arts of a particular period from pottery to architecture" (Coomaraswamy, 1969, p.XII). The smallest fragment of textile and the most elaborate temple were artistically related.

**Criticism of Art for Art's Sake**

The concept of art for art's sake, which means a thorough autonomy of art, and excludes the functional completely, draws strong criticism from Coomaraswamy, because such art, in his view, is unrelated to life and speaks in riddles. Relation to life, and an expression that is accessible to people by and large, are seen here to be basic tenets in his aesthetics, and having a purpose or function does not exclude a work from the category of art. Coomaraswamy's concept of art thus differs
fundamentally from the Western formalist one which posits the work of art as autonomous.

Coomaraswamy presents the position of the "rasa" theory of Indian aesthetics as one which elicits his own support. In it, a vital relation between art and life is maintained. The nine 'rasa's or dominant moods which can be portrayed in art are the nine major emotions in life, and in general, the experience of 'rasa' or delight in art is akin to the spiritual experience, the highest experience possible in life. Sculpture, painting, the temple architecture, all aided the spiritual experience.

In his "Introduction to Indian Art", Coomaraswamy says,

"A race producing great art, however, does so, not by its 'love of art', but by its 'love of life' and, in India, art was an integral quality inhering in all activities, entertained by all in their daily environment . . . ." (Coomaraswamy, 1969, p. XI)

Thus, Coomaraswamy consciously upholds the position of Indian aesthetics that art must be related to life rather than autonomous. From the above it is seen that art is related to spirituality but not restricted to it. Its lack of autonomy indicates its assimilation into all activities of human life.

The concepts of unity and harmony which characterized Indian art pertained to the culture as a whole, and even where they characterised the individual work of art, they did not make it stand apart and autonomous.
We may discuss Coomaraswamy's theory in relation to the later Barthes', who saw the literary text as one which relinquishes its autonomy and participates in a free-flow of discourse, by which term is meant a whole culture, a weave, an intertextuality. We may say that Coomaraswamy also speaks of the weave, or intertextuality of Indian culture and of the work of art being a part of this texture. Both thinkers speak of the joy of non-autonomous art.

The Problem of Meaning

But in Coomaraswamy's theory an underlying spiritual principle is posited, and meaning accrues to the work of art from this principle. Meaning does not become obscure, except in the sense of the mystery of Ultimate Reality. Post-structuralists like Barthes show the boundaries of dominant concepts in a culture, and of signifying systems such as a work of art, to be deconstructible because meaning, according to their arguments, can never be arrived at. In this way, though Coomaraswamy's concept of art is related to the post-structuralist's discourse about it, through the view that art cannot and should not be seen as autonomous, the two positions differ with regard to meaning.

We shall go on to discuss Coomaraswamy's aesthetic theory further. He had a distinct non-romantic view of the artist, and was critical of the Western conception of artistic genius, as well as any sense of individuality or autonomy of the artist. Thus, he rejects the autonomy of the work of art as well as the individual artist. (Coomaraswamy, 1969, p.78).
Coomaraswamy speaks in support of the Medieval European concepts of art, which had a very wide connotation. Form in the mind of the artist, and as created in a material medium, was understood at this time, he says, as an intellectual activity, as well as skill in making things. It was certainly not seen as an imitation of nature. The work of the engineer, cook, mathematician and surgeon was included in the category of art. He relates this view to that of Indian aesthetics.

"Where everyone makes daily use of works of art there is little occasion for museums, books or lectures on the appreciation of art." (Coomaraswamy, 1969, p.79)

He seems to indicate here that when art came to be viewed as autonomous in the West, the common people were impoverished of it. Art was mystified, being presented as a special phenomenon, the understanding of which is the privileged domain of a few, and which requires the mediation of these few for its access to others.

No Qualms About Utility

Coomaraswamy takes a diametrically opposite view to Langer's when he exhibits no qualms about art having a utility value. When an image of a deity serves the purpose of religious devotion or spiritual contemplation, Coomaraswamy sees this as utility, and accepts this concept of art. Here, as in medieval Europe, art loses its autonomy to religion and the spiritual quest.

It is in Western industrial societies, Coomaraswamy writes, that John Ruskin's words become applicable, "Industry without art is brutality" (Coomaraswamy, 1969, p.79).
Art and originality

Art being related to all life's activities, it was not required to be original, in the sense of "novel", Coomaraswamy holds, explaining that when art serves life's purposes, it cannot make novel forms constantly, for man's needs remain the same, by and large. But "originality" can be taken to mean "coming from the source", and therefore vital, created with feeling and inspiration. In this sense, Indian art has been original. Medieval Christian art also had this quality, expressing as it did, eternal principles intuited at the source, that is, man's inner being. Ideas were the common property of all men and all ages. Here Coomaraswamy's view concurs with the post-structuralist one, which deconstructs autonomy of text as well as writer to show intertextuality.

In "The Dance of Shiva" (1974), Coomaraswamy refers to the abundant literature on poesis and drama, in Sanskrit and Hindi, to be found in India. Here one finds a well-formulated theory of drama, which presents a defense of art, but relates it to the four aims of life, "Artha", "Kama", "Dharma" and "Moksa".

The Experience of Rasa

With regard to this aesthetic theory, the first question that arises is what is its central concept. We are informed that while some hold it to be style, and some thinkers hold it to be suggestion or "vyanjana", most hold it to be "rasa". This may be taken to mean "flavour or essence", "aesthetic emotion" or "the aesthetic experience". To my understanding, the concept refers
both to the quality of the work of art, as well as the subjective experience of artist and audience. The theory of rasa elaborates nine major moods, any one of which forms the dominant motif in a work to unify a work of art and lend it completeness and autonomy.

Not only the beautiful but also the terrifying, and even the repulsive could be a "rasa", or a dominant motif in a work of art. Art was to be contemplated for the "rasa", or mood, or motif.

Though the "rasa"s were related to emotions that occur in life, and the experience of "rasa" in general to spiritual experience, this theory stated that art was beyond good and evil, and was neither moral nor sensuous. Coomaraswamy mentions that the aesthetician, Vishwanath, emphasized that the aesthetic experience was primarily imaginative: without the role of the imagination, the audience is not competent to experience a work of art. (Coomaraswamy, 1974, p.55). To my understanding, this emphasizes creativity above all other considerations, and the joy associated with it. Coomaraswamy explains, drawing from the views of Dhananjaya in "Dashrupa", that it is not instruction, statement, narrative or illustration that is the purpose of art but the distilling of joy.

Thus, in my view, the theory of "rasa", as elucidated by Coomaraswamy, does develop the defining characteristics of art, which could lend it some sort of an ontological autonomy.

Imagination in Art

Perfection in skill of execution is not considered important in this theory, since the audience can complete a defective or
incomplete work of art in the mind through the force of the imagination, or feeling of religious devotion. The uncritical audience is swayed by sentimental, pretty or edifying works of art, while the true connoisseur appreciates the serious and difficult qualities of form, and is competent for the true aesthetic experience.

In this theory, it is acknowledged that a work of art can be variously imagined by an audience, so that a plurality of meanings is possible. The work of art is called "kamadhenu", (Coomaraswamy, 1974, p.68) that is, "rich with meanings". Langer also touches upon the possibility of multiple images of a work of art, but does not dwell on this problem, which she holds to be unrelated to the question of the nature of the work of art, which should be viewed "objectively", according to her theory, and without reference to subjective states.

The Concept of Unity

Coomaraswamy speaks of an identity which characterizes the experience of art, which I understand as the loss of consciousness of division between perceiving subject and perceived object. This is a distinct epistemological position, and once again a dissolution of autonomy, both of the art-object and the subject who contemplates it. But since in India, the art-object was most often a religious symbol, the dissolution of the self led to an experience of identity with the all-pervading Divinity. The concept of identity in Indian aesthetics is thus a
very comprehensive one, and epistemology includes knowledge of Divinity.

The loss of autonomy in Indian Vedantic aesthetics means, in the final analysis, the merging of the self with the supreme Spiritual Being in the universe.

Coomaraswamy traces a similar doctrine in the works of Goethe, William Blake, Schopenhaur, Croce and the Chinese thinker Hsieh Ho (Coomaraswamy, 1974, p.58). Thus, though Coomaraswamy takes a strong stand against Western modernity, he does not uphold the autonomy of each culture of the world, and of various periods of history. He is rather given to uncovering links or overlappings, resonances and concomitances between certain cultures of the world. Here he finds a common doctrine of the immanence of an Absolute spiritual principle in all reality, in the thought of the above mentioned thinkers from various parts of the world.

A Comparative Study

In his work, "The Transformation of Nature in Art" (1956), Coomaraswamy continues his comparative, critical analysis of Eastern and Western aesthetic theories, drawing parallels between medieval European and traditional Oriental art. He distinguishes European Art as of two different kinds, one Christian and scholastic, the other belonging to the post-Renaissance period. The earlier, medieval art and aesthetic thought was related to that of Asia.

Since the Renaissance, Coomaraswamy holds, European art became increasingly personal. My own study shows that this is
the period when the concept of man as autonomous develops. Coomaraswamy holds that during this period it became increasingly difficult for the European mind to think in terms of unity. He refers, I understand, to unity between man and all creation, between the various spheres of human activity and between art and other spheres of human life.

In a brief reference to Islamic art, Coomaraswamy says this art is a link between the East and the West. Islamic aesthetics forbids the representation of nature. Here Coomaraswamy gives us an important tenet of his own aesthetic theory: "naturalism is antipathetic to religious art of all kinds, to art of any kind..." and, art does not express "the likeness of anything on earth" (Coomaraswamy, 1956, pp. 4,5)

Thus, not nature, but the underlying Absolute principle or some aspect of it, some form of deity to be worshipped, these are the subjects to be represented in art. Not nature, but nature informed or transformed by the spiritual principle is to be depicted.

Coomaraswamy's idealism and formalism links his theory to Langer's formalism and the post-structuralist view of art, or discourse, as self-reflexive, and all these three positions are pitted against post-Renaissance naturalism. But Langer's formalism leads to an autonomy of art, keeping it at an intellectual level, and post-structuralist thought leads to an autonomy of culture, divorcing it from reality and excluding all possibility of knowledge of reality. Coomaraswamy's theory
leads, on the other hand to a comprehensive concept of unity, through formalism.

The Creative Process

Coomaraswamy explains how the artist worked in India. He was required to conceive the image of the deity to be worshipped, in his own imagination. He was required to be a sincere devotee. His work required "sadhana", practice, "mantram", recitation of sacred words, and "dhyana" or concentration. He was to imagine the form of the deity according to prescribed canons. The sacred forms were said to exist in Heaven, and were drawn ("akarsati") to earth by the artist, through the inner space of his own mind, "antarhrydaya-akash" (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p.6). The links with Platonic idealism are quite clear here.

My own view is that "dhyana" serves not to draw forms from any ideal place, far away from the artist, but to recreate prescribed forms in his imagination or mental world.

Coomaraswamy explains that when, having imagined the prescribed form, the artist creates it in a material medium, making it lively through his devotional feeling, it is not an expression of his personal self, but an objective form. If there is anything his own, it is merged in a generality, I would say, which is also spiritual.

However, I do not see the personal as deserving elimination in art. Personal difference and idiosyncracy may rather be celebrated as a truth about human beings, and of the universal principle taking different forms.
We may note that in Langer's formalism also the artist's subjectivity is denied.

**Rhythm in Art**

In India, Coomaraswamy continues to explain, all the arts were thought of as having a divine origin. Temple architecture was referred to as "Kailashbhavana", heavenly forms realized on earth by the artist.

Coomaraswamy speaks here of the spiritual ecstasy of the artist as his autonomy dissolves in spiritual contemplation of the deity, prior to artistic creation. He speaks also of his being absorbed in cosmic rhythm, referring to this absorption as "Chandomaya". This integration between individual and universal Mind leading to artistic creation is "yoga", or skill in action (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p.7).

We have extensive quotations from the Vedas, Upanishads, and various treatises on aesthetics from Coomaraswamy throughout his writings. He says, "the spiritual significance of rhythm in art is plainly asserted" by these texts. (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p.9, note 8). These ancient texts assert that all rhythms correspond to cosmic rhythm. Rhythm in art, the rhythm of nature's cycles, and the spiritual rhythm which unites the individual self with the Universal Being are all related.

Language is considered simultaneously an art and the integration of the human and the Divine, "Sanskrit". It is also called the language of the city of the gods, "devanagari". The various arts are called "devasilpani", the creations of the gods, as I translate the word. Everything created by humans was to be
guided by the gods. Thus, there was no defining and separating line between the fine arts and the humble crafts, between the beautiful, the decorative and the useful artefact.

We can see here the absence of a distinction on which to base the autonomy of art in general, and the work of art in particular. There is a discussion of the nature of art, the process by which an artist creates a work, and the nature of the experience of art by an audience, in this theory, yet the elucidation of the characteristics of art does not lead to a view of it as autonomous, in this theory.

The Problem of Mimesis

Imitation or mimesis in art was admitted in Indian aesthetics, Coomaraswamy explains, but this did not refer to representation of nature, but rather of "angelic" forms, intuited by the human imagination. He explains the "Vishnudharmottara", XL, 11, 48, as stating that likeness or "Sādṛṣya" is essential to painting. Drama is said to be "lokavṛtttaanukarna", that is, following the movement of the world. These references to imitation do not mean representation of nature in its sensuous aspect, but rather nature in harmony with the Divine and nature in a movement harmonious with Divine rhythm.

Coomaraswamy explains the concept of "Sādṛṣya" further, as "con-similarity", "co-ordination" and "analogy". Other concepts, "pramana" and "pramātr" are mentioned in Indian aesthetics along with "sadṛṣya". The latter concepts refer to ideal proportions required in a work of art.
"Sadsya" is not a likeness in nature but an analogical likeness. The idea or species of a thing is represented through "sadsya". It is known intellectually, rather than through the senses. (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p.13).

There is another aspect of "sadsya" which refers to a correspondence between the form and the sensuous elements within a work of art - a co-ordination of concept and percept, of sound and meaning.

This correspondence occurs in spiritual experience also, as identity of the individual and the Divine, during consummation of yogic practice, "samadhi" attained after "dhyana". (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p.163).

At the end of "The Transformation of Nature in Art", Coomaraswamy writes:

"Heaven and Earth are united in the analogy (sadsya) of art, which is an ordering of sensation to intelligibility and tends towards an ultimate perfection in which the seer perceives all things imaged in himself" (Coomaraswamy, 1956, pp.56,57).

Art, Culture and Reality

Thus, Coomaraswamy placed the art-object within a culture, and upheld that traditions should weave a culture together and that the art-object should be part of the cultural texture. The individuality of the artist was unimportant, in his view, as was the novelty or difference of the work of art. He admits some possibility of varying interpretations by the audience of a work
of art, but on the whole does not dwell on the problem of
hermeneutics.

Though he presents a strong criticism of Western modernity,
and supports the specificity of Eastern cultures, he does not
assert the right of every culture to its specificity. He does
not work out the problem as post-structuralists have done in the
West. He tends to make general statements, theorizing in
precisely the manner of which post-structuralists present a
criticism.

With regard to the problem of the relation of art to
reality, where post-structuralists assert that art is self-
expressive and not about reality, Coomaraswamy holds that it is
symbolic of reality in the sense of an all-pervading monistic
Spiritual principle, and is part of a comprehensive experience of
unity.

A study of a Post-modern, Post-colonial Indian Artist: K.K. Hebbar
The Cultural Background

I refer to a work, "Moving Focus" by K.G. Subramanium, artist
and aesthetician, for a brief study of the cultural background of

Modernism in art came to India through the British rulers,
who looked upon themselves as the harbingers of cultural growth
in the colony, while in fact, they undervalued its cultural
heritage. (Subramanium, 1978, p. 40). They succeeded in
alienating some of the upper classes in India from their own
cultural environment, and in creating a schism between those who
adopted Western ways and those who clung to the older traditions.
But a small group of intellectuals, Indians as well as British, resisted British cultural hegemony in India.

The art of this period must be understood in the light of these socio-political-cultural circumstances. Indian artists of the early twentieth century "were individual artists standing on the ruins of an artisan tradition, unsupported by any steady patronage" writes K.G. Subramaniam (Subramaniam, 1978, p.41).

The older images of Indian artistic and linguistic traditions had lost their magic in the onslaught of Western rationalism and scepticism. The artists had to form a new relationship with their present environment. They searched along expressionistic, individual paths.

But the problem of the relevance or irrelevance of the cultural heritage troubled them. Subramaniam offers the view here that easy solutions were to be avoided and contact with the living environment is always important. This points to the position that whether one takes from the heritage or not, art must create its idiom afresh, in relation to its environment. An autonomy of the cultural heritage can prove detrimental to a living art.

Pathways Closed

For the twentieth century Indian artist, submitting to the hegemony of the culture imposed by British rule as well as a mechanical recreation of the cultural past were sterile options.

In the early part of this century Indian artists worked in the realist mode encouraged by the British through their
Government run art-schools. But Indian artists could not wholly accept the underlying objective rationalism of this artistic mode. This was the genre in art which had prevailed in the West since the Renaissance.

Indian artists could not paint in this mode with conviction and soon began to look for other alternatives. In Europe too, the optical-realistic perspective was losing ground.

Scholars like Ananda Coomaraswamy advocated a return to the social matrix of the past, and to artistic modes that were an integral part of this matrix, basing their argument on moral and spiritual superiority of the ancient structures. Other thinkers, like E.B. Havell, whom Subramaniam quotes, held that Indian artists need not be tied to the relics of antiquity and should "realise the priceless value of true living art......"

(E.B. Havell, quoted by K.G. Subramaniam, 1978, p.42)

The Tagores were the first to make noteworthy efforts in this direction, that is, to create a new language in art which would be valid because of its sensitive and responsive relation to its present.

Rabindranath Tagore allowed his paintings to well up from the unconscious, unhampered by the technicalities of any mode of expression. Abanindranath, his nephew, found a language for himself which was full of delicacy, and expressed his own innate sense of magic and mystery, which he perceived in the most commonplace scenes of life. Thus, whatever the subject he chose, he was able to infuse it with his own response to the life around him.
Amrita Sher-Gill

A number of great artists fill the canvass of contemporary Indian art, in my view, but I shall mention only Amrita Sher-Gill, before taking up K.K.Hebbar's work for study.

In Sher-Gill's work too, we see the dilemma of what should gain autonomy in art. In her early work we see the autonomy of the Western academic style, which meant a realistic portrayal of subjects, taught in European art schools of the early twentieth century, its weaker version prevailing in India. Later, on coming to India, she was very enthusiastic about the traditional art of this country. She attempted to incorporate the non-objective perspective of Indian miniatures as well as the style of the Ajanta murals in her work. She was not altogether successful, and only towards the end of her tragically short life, did she find enough freedom from the technicalities both of the Eastern and Western modes in art, to create powerful works of her own. Was it then a purely aesthetic character that triumphed here, an autonomy of art breaking free of conventions?

Her paintings reveal, however, that once she came to India she never ceased to relate to its cultural heritage as well as the present environment. Thus, her eventual success in painting means that she had assimilated what she took from the tradition and was able to use it creatively. In this creativity, I may venture to say, lies the true autonomy of art.

This exemplifies the historical situation in which the artist, K.K.Hebbar worked, and shows other artists and thinkers
grappling with problems similar to those Hebbar faced in relation to his work as a painter.

**Influence of Rural India**

V.R. Amberkar, art critic, informs readers in a monograph at the beginning of a small book titled "Hebbar", that K.K. Hebbar was born in a tiny, picturesque village, Kattingeri of South Kanara, in 1912. The natural beauty as well as the colourful village festivals, dance and song of his rural childhood remained in his memory all his life, and influenced his work. In most of his long, creative life, he tried to portray in his paintings, not the precise vision of reality, as an objective, scientific observer, but the surge of feeling, the intensity of inner human life, the artistic distortions which express the characters of things, people and other living things. In all these qualities he broke away from the Western realist vision, and found an autonomy of art.

He had a great sense of music and dance. Thus, lines which express movement form an important element in his works. Sometimes the line conflicts with the masses of colour. In many works, the line-work triumphs and dominates the painting.

When Hebbar became free of Western academic modernism, it was partly to these sources of creativity that he returned: rural life, festivals, natural beauty, dance and music.

V.R. Amberkar writes, that the artists of Europe like Matisse and Braque, whose works Hebbar saw during his stay there, helped in the above mentioned process of becoming free of the modernist-
realist perspective, that is, chiaroscuro (Amberkar, 1984, p.3). The shading in his paintings did not show the chiaroscuro perspective any more, but became independent orchestrations of colour.

This movement away from the modernist perspective is termed "ideoplastic" as against "physioplastic" by V.R. Amberkar (Amberkar, 1984, p.1). That means that the imagination, the feeling, the culture to which the artist relates finds expression in his work, and not just the physio-reality.

To my understanding, this movement in Hebbar's work away from the modernist view also freed him from portraying the upper and middle classes of society, to depict the lives of those people with whom he felt a deep bond - simple village folk, and when they came to the cities, the lower classes engaged in humble occupations. Thus we find fishermen and fisherwomen, fruit vendors, men in small dhotis dancing, or praying to the snake god, and sweepers and sweepresses, in his work. We also find humble, poor people running away from natural disasters as well as destructive, man-made catastrophes, such as war.

Hebbar's freedom of style enabled him to express all these things in a powerful, convincing way.

K. K. Hebbar's Paintings

K.K. Hebbar's work was built on "sustenance from the vast treasure accumulated from the past and practised at present all over the world," as he says in the beginning of "Voyage in Images", a book of reproductions of his major works over about
fifty years, compiled in 1991. The dedication written by him in the beginning of this book also deserves to be quoted:

"To, The Indian visionaries of the past, who had a sense of fantasy, reality, surreality and magical power in abundance". (Hebbar, 1991, p.1.).

So we see that Hebbar drew from the artistic wealth of the East as well as the West. He moved freely in his creative journey, unhampered by national boundaries. But certainly, there is often a feeling of confinement and consequent rebellion, sometimes against the traditions of the West, sometimes against those of his own country. All along, however, he gives us works of great power and beauty.

**Western Academic Tradition**

To begin with, he is trained in the Western academic tradition. He paints in a style largely realistic but softened by impressionistic vision and technique. He produces portraits and landscapes in their style. This is markedly a colonial influence on this artist. The Western modernist perception has been imposed on the Indian one. It is a cultural domination of which Fredric Jameson and thinkers like him have been concerned about.

But this phenomenon can be looked at in another way. We have here the appropriation of the colonizer's culture to serve the expressive and creative needs of an artist who belongs to a colonized, and later free nation.

"Thoughts" (1942) "Karli Caves" (1939) and "Street Scene" (1940) belong to this period of Hebbar's creative life.
After these works, Hebbar continued to paint realistic-impressionistic portraits to earn a living. This indicates that there was a demand for this Western-style portraiture in India, at that time.

Own Traditions

After working in this direction for some time, Hebbar grew dissatisfied and felt a need to break away from the Western academic tradition. He turned now to the traditions of his own country. He studied the illustrations in Jain manuscripts, miniatures of the Rajput and Mughal schools, and the Ajanta murals. But he applied these Indian traditional techniques in an innovative way. He rejected the themes of these traditions, which he found to be religious and expressive of the life of the upper classes. He preferred to depict various aspects of rural life in his country.

Thus were produced works such as "Cattle Mart" (1942), "Threshing" (1944), and "Festival Dance", (1945). In these paintings, the colours are flattened out, and forms are clearly delineated. The Western style perspective, or vision, is thus eliminated, but some perspective does figure in the works, for the figures in the background are shown smaller in size than those in the foreground. Be that as it may, these paintings convey a great sense of rhythm and delicacy. Humans, animals and trees are together in harmony.

Surrealism and abstraction came to Western art rather late in the course of its development, that is, in the twentieth
century. But, as Hebbar writes in "Voyage in Images", he was always aware that surrealistic and abstract qualities had always been a part of traditional Indian art, and had co-existed without difficulty. He says he attempted such a fusion in his works "Ganesh" and "Deity" (the date of the former not being printed in "Voyage in Images", and of the latter being given as 1983). We can see that Hebbar succeeded eminently in this effort, particularly in the work "Ganesh". Few images of Ganesh convey such strength of form, such mysterious power, and beauty of harmonized colour, as does this work.

The form in this work is neither wholly Eastern nor wholly Western. The form is painted, in certain parts, in flat colour, which is an Eastern style, and in some parts it is impressionistically shaded as well as softened. And its surrealism links it to the Eastern as well as Western traditions.

The work occupies, to my understanding, a space in-between Eastern and Western cultures, a space creatively its own.

In the summer of 1946, Hebbar went on a tour of south India. From this time, till he left for Europe in 1949, he painted the landscapes and figures which had impressed him in Kerala. These paintings show forms of a bold and strong character. Although he painted with abandon, feeling free of the imposition of any style, during this period, there is, as he himself admits, an influence of the painters, Paul Gauguin and Amrita Sher-Gill, on his works of this period. It is noteworthy that the former was a Western and the latter an artist of mixed parentage - both Indian and European.
It is also noteworthy what kind of painters these two were, who at one point in his career influenced as well as released Hebbar's creativity. Paul Gauguin was a painter disillusioned with European culture and seeking beauty in primitive cultures free of despoilation by the West. Amrita Sher-Gill was inspired by Paul Gauguin, and by traditional Indian art. They were both artists who refused to be confined by any traditions, and took inspiration freely wherever they found it.

"Beggars", "To Maidenhood", "Hunger" and "Pandits" are all works which show strong characterization of human forms as well as a strong use of colour, as found both in Gauguin and Sher-Gill's works.

In 1949, Hebbar visited Europe on a study tour. He visited well-known art galleries and museums and took training in Paris. One sees a conflict within him at this time. He experienced a desire to learn from the West, and at the same time felt dissatisfied with the quest.

**Influence of Music and Dance**

Back in India, he did not work for two years or so. He writes that the whole history of art, in India as well as the West, crowded his mind as multiple influences, and actually blocked his creativity. He found release in Indian dance and music. He even learned Kathak dance, which brought rhythm to his drawings. He writes in "Voyage in Images" -

"The lyricism and soothing quality of Indian music, the grace and rhythmic quality of Indian dance, both folk
and classical, inspired me to express my feelings in line and colour". (Hebbar, 1991, p.2)

Thus, though he travelled in Europe, it was Indian culture which inspired him to draw and paint again. His line-drawings do indeed incorporate a fine sense of rhythm. There is restraint and economy, yet great expressiveness in these.

Further on in his career we find Hebbar engaged with universal, humanitarian concerns, and working, as he himself explains, in a style, neither Eastern or Western. "Hunger" (1949), "Paisa" (1960), Atrocity (1971), "Shelter" (1976), "Refugees" (1971), "Holocaust" (1980), "Gas Tragedy" (1985) are some of Hebber's works belonging to this category. We can see that they spread over the rest of his working life. These paintings depict the sufferings of downtrodden humanity, as well as those caught in natural and man-made tragedies. The method of expression is partly representational, partly expressionistic and in part, powerfully symbolic.

After his study-tour in Europe, when Hebbar re-established an inspired relation to his own culture, we find actually that a creative synthesis and freedom informed his work. He took something from Western modernisms in painting, as well as from his own culture, but was not dominated by either. These qualities marked his work for most of his career. V.R. Amberkar, art critic, wrote in a monograph published by the Lalit Kala Academy in 1954, and quoted by Hebbar in "Voyage in Images":

"Hebbar is a difficult artist to tag a name on. He is unorthodox, though trained in an orthodox, Western style."
Avowedly an Indian mannerist, he is free from pseudo-traditional clichés. Though a lover of non-realistic forms, he is not an abstractionist. Deeply interested in the inter-weave of forms and space, he cannot be called a cubist. The different modalities of modern painting, however, are touched on and off, without making a creed...." (Amberkar, quoted by Hebbar, 1991, p. 4, 5).

Thus, to my understanding, Hebbar crossed the boundaries of Eastern and Western cultures repeatedly, then took something from each to create a powerful expression of his own. It may be said further, that he continued to have an intense relationship with his home environment, and that he recreated aspects of Indian traditional culture in a contemporary idiom. This idiom, in the Indian context, was informed by Western modern influences, but not dominated by it.

A Freedom of Portrayal

As a consequence of this East-West synthesis, a freedom in portraying form was achieved. The clearly defined, flat form of Indian miniatures gave way to a loosely defined form. Some aspects of such forms could then be emphasized and some aspects eliminated altogether. Colour also came to be used more freely. Perspective became more imaginative and expressive.

I would refer here to "Drummer" (1966), in which the huge, red drum carried by a man wearing a red turban, conveys the powerful sound it must be making. The rest of the painting is in
dull colours. The forms of both drum and drummer are sketchily drawn.

In "Folk-Rhythm", (1962) the dancing men are drawn only with lines, but these convey a great sense of movement.

Further on in Hebbar's career, we find more and more play with form and space. In "Sankirtan" (1975) only the busts of a god and goddess are shown hovering in the space of the upper canvas. Some devotees, beating drums, singing and dancing, are confined to a blue, oval space below. The gods seem to be floating. We have here a most imaginative use of perspective and a break-up of space.

In "Naga Mandala" (1986), a snake-god is inscribed in a large, square, greyish stone, while the forms of devotees dancing and praying are shown below, on a much smaller scale. The difference in size of the forms creates a powerful, surrealistic impression, while the theme is eminently Indian.

In the paintings in which Hebbar tried to convey the feeling of music, the forms almost melt into a space filled with colour rhythms. In these paintings there is a strong element of abstraction and constructivism, but form is still not completely lost: it is present as subtle suggestion. The colours vary between bright, pleasing and soft. A feeling of music does indeed come across, from these masterpieces. I refer to "Veena" (1973), and "Percussion"(1974) here.

Hebbar was both fascinated by and suspicious of Western technology. His paintings of rockets and trains show his admiration for Western science. But, in other paintings, he
depicts catastrophes caused by modern factories and weapons of war. "Holocaust" (1980), "War and Peace" (1977), and "Refugees" (1971), express these fears and concerns.

The artist moves easily from his concern with Western technology to an enchantment with non-Western, spiritual themes. "Homage to Sun and Moon" (1964) and "Faith" (1977) must be mentioned here. The former captures the mysterious power of the Sun and Moon deities of the ancient Mayan civilization. The latter succeeds in conveying the power of some supreme, religious principle in the universe: the throng of devotees is dwarfed before a river-side temple, whose dome rises high while the swirling river and the city on the far shore, fill the rest of the work.

"Offering" (1989), "Ritual" (1989) and "Tree of Fertility" (1988) succeed in similar way in conveying an awesome religious experience.

The Power of Nature

In some paintings, the religious dimension is absent but there is a sense of the power of nature, dwarfing human beings. One would refer here to the works, "Forest" (1985), "Kites" (1986), "Aakash" (1986), "Wealth of the Sea" (1990), and "Surging Form" (1989). It is noteworthy that further on in his career, Hepbar portrayed man and nature in relation, and not man as exercising a right to dominate nature.

In fact, individualism and humanism as a triumph over nature, and a rejection of ancient, primitive cultural forms,
such as dance and music, never figure in Hebbar's work at any point. While his work was enriched and released by modern Western technique, his vision and his experience, as expressed in his art-works remained deeply Indian.

Unlike some artists and writers of modern Western and modern Third World traditions, Hebbar never lost the sense of nature's magnificence. Except in a limited number of earlier works, one does not find the modern Western, that is, humanist, perception in Hebbar's works. Man is shown dwarfed before the power and immensity of nature, and the Spiritual principle. But the human form is shown always in movement, in rhythm with the universe. Thus, to my understanding, he inhabits the post-modern world without conflict. If at all a conflict occurred, it did so very early in his career, when he broke with his Western academic training.

In some paintings, however, Hebbar comes close to an almost complete abstraction. Among these works are "Energy" (1982), "May Flowers" (1989), "Surging Form" (1989), and "Goa" (1990). About these works, as he says in "Voyage in Images", he simply let his creative spirit take him where it willed. Most of these works, however, are rooted, or inspired, in a significant experience of nature, he explains.

Across Cultural Division

In conclusion, we may note that there were repeated transgressions in K.K. Hebbar's career as an artist. At first he crossed the East-West cultural divide to acquire Western academic training in painting. Later, he transgressed the limits of this
tradition to rediscover his own. Further on, he transgressed the limits of his own tradition to create a space for himself which was a new space, unchartered, wherein he had to resolve the problems of artistic expression in his own way. He did this by taking something from the East as well as the West, and achieved a successful, creative resolution. Stylistically, his many transgressions finally led to creative freedom, and thus he never acquired a rigid style. The only criticism I venture is that in a few, very few works, the traditional, given symbolic form turns out clumsy, e.g. "River Kaveri".

With regard to form, one can easily notice a gradual dissolution, in Hebbar's works, leading towards abstraction. Sometimes the form is drawn only in lines, while colour harmonies fill the works. Later, even the line is broken, and there is only a suggestion of form, while the play of colour dominates. However, form is not completely lost in Hebbar's work: abstraction is not complete.

Thus, in Hebbar's work a post-modern process may be observed, in which boundaries of tradition and form were transgressed, and dissolved to some extent, to release fruitful creative energy.

In this complex, troubled post-colonial situation, with its many conflicting and interacting cultural currents, Hebbar was able to find creative resolution of the aesthetic problems he had to face. The partial dissolution of form in his work reflects the post-modern, post-colonial tendencies in art, while the triumph of creative energy represents an autonomy of art. His continued
relation to nature, without mimesis, and to spirituality, and resistance to the modernist-humanist viewpoint relate him to post-modern artists and writers all over the world. In most of Hebbar's work, we see an autonomy of art as the celebration of the aesthetic without loss of certain preferred relations to the spiritual and to nature.

At the end of this thesis are included two plates of K. K. Hebbar's works, which show how the rendering of form underwent transformation therein.