CONCLUSION
During the period 1907 - 1947 the evolution of the nationalist art movement reflected the Indian artists' quest for an identity in the face of colonial domination and the Indian Society of Oriental Art rendered a commendable service in this respect by offering the necessary platform and space. For the greater part of the period, Indian art belonged to Abanindranath and his followers, whose style linked to the Oriental art heritage was easily identifiable with the growing philosophy of nationalism. It was the Indian Society of Oriental Art that brought into public view this vital art form termed as the Bengal School. The renowned artist Mukul Dey noted,

"The orientation in the artistic outlook of Abanindranath created a new awakening in India and brought about a revival of Indian Art which for centuries lay decadent and hidden from public view."  

The Governor, Lord Ronaldshay, thus expressed his views on the Bengal School:

"..... a group of connoisseurs in India started to advocate the claims of Indian pictorial..."  

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forms. In the old masterpieces of Buddhist art and in the later schools of Moghul and Rajput painting they discovered a noble and worthy body of traditions of a great pictorial language .... which offered valuable materials for the foundation of a modern school of Indian painting ....

There is one point on which public opinion seems unanimous, namely that the productions of the school have been inspired by a genuine respect for Indian sentiments .... The school has revived with great success the spirit of old Indian art.2

The Forum, January 26, 1924 reported:

The whole movement which it represents is a movement of hope and promise for the nation. It is well therefore that its stability and progress should be a matter of the liveliest concern to every true nationalist.

Not only the artists of the Bengal School, there were also

2. Lord Ronaldshay, 'Oriental Art, A National Movement', The Empire, December 31, 1919
countless other relatively unknown artists and an increasing number of women artists, working in their unique style, whose quest for an identity during the first half of the twentieth century collectively took the art movement forward. It was this collective effort that was brought into public view by the Indian Society of Oriental Art. The Society served as a focus for the aspirations of the new generation of artists and helped in the moulding of public taste in favour of Indian and Oriental art. As Lord Ronaldshay noted, "...... it is evident that the movement has succeeded in bringing about a little revolution in public taste".\textsuperscript{3} It was also reported in the contemporary press,

\begin{quote}
\ldots\ldots\text{the public has reason to be grateful for the useful service which the Society is rendering in a sphere of activity which has well deserved the appreciation and cooperation of the public}.\textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

The annual exhibitions organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art served a dual purpose. They provided the necessary platform to the artists, known and relatively lesser known, to uphold their art. At the same time they aided the artists in their quest for an identity by gaining for them an Indian viewership which became proud of the art heritage of

\textsuperscript{3} Lord, Ronaldshay, Op.Cit
\textsuperscript{4} The Englishman, January, 1921 (Specific date unavailable)
the country, as well as an international viewership which now recognized the rich art tradition of the Orient. This in turn contributed to the growing awareness of self among the Indians during the pre-independence period. At the same time the Society encouraged experimentations among its artists while they remained connected with the past.

It must be noted in this context that this self-awareness was contradictory in nature. The Indian's awareness of self had come through Western knowledge imparted mainly by the European Orientalists. The Bengali artist was thus placed in a paradoxical situation. He oscillated between two characteristics—a national identity and a unique individuality deriving from the acceptance of European concepts. Academic Realism upheld by the art school training was never completely abandoned in favour of the Bengal School. Thus the nationalist art movement led by Abanindranath and Nandalal Bose was accompanied by a parallel movement upholding Academic Realism led by Hemendranath Mazumdar and Atul Bose.

The works of the artists in quest of an identity through the Indian Society of Oriental Art, also reflected this contradictory trend. Akshay Maitreya, while examining the art produced by Abanindranath and his followers agreed that since it was not characterized by a strict adherence to the ancient
canons, true Indian art was not born.\textsuperscript{5} He commented that Indian art in the hands of Abanindranath and his followers had lost its alphabet ('barnaparichay') and therefore a nationalist art idiom could not evolve. The noted art historian Jaya Appasamy too noted that Abanindranath's art did have some resemblance with western art. She points out that Abanindranath was closest to Western art in portraits and landscapes. Again he was deeply interested in character, a quite un-Indian trait. Abanindranath's style in Bharat Mata has been seen by Jaya Appasamy to be more Western than Indian.\textsuperscript{6} Gaganendranath Tagore used water-colour in the frank European manner and brought in light and shade something quite novel in Indian painting. His adherence to realism also speak of his affinity to Western academic art. The art of Abanindranath and his followers has thus been criticized as non-traditional.

However critics like Benoy Sarkar saw revivalist tendencies in the art form upheld by the Bengal School that the Indian Society of Oriental Art sought to promote. Indeed, everyone is aware of Abanindranath's pride in India's rich art heritage. It was Abanindranath who was the first among the Bengalis to criticize the belief that the dawn of a new era would be heralded in the sphere of Indian art only by an imitation of the West.

\textsuperscript{5} Akshay Maitreya, Bharat Shilper Katha (Calcutta, 1982) pp.73-74.
\textsuperscript{6} Jaya Appasamy, Abanindranath Tagore and the Art of His Times (New Delhi, 1968), p.32
Yet, following one's own tradition never meant to Abanindranath the unquestioned acceptance of the ancient artistic style. He thus expressed his views:

School is a thing which I hate .... I have tried my best not to mar the individualism of my pupils by forming them into a school. They are not to follow any art Eastern or Western but they are to give us their own art after carefully studying all the arts of the world - that is the teaching I give them.\(^7\)

Infact Abanindranath attempted to develop a new language of aesthetics as is evident in his writings.

The works of the lesser known artists who sought an identity through the Society's platform also did not always rigidly adhere to the art canons of the country and reflected the artists' individualism.

It must be noted that although the Society played a commendable role in aiding the Indian artists in their quest for an identity in a colonial world, the art form it upheld, inspite of its nationalist leanings did not express the nationalist fervour as vigorously as to threaten the British government. The colonial

\(^7\) Abanindranath's letter to W.S. Hadaway, quoted by Satyajit Chaudhuri in Abanindra Nandantattva (Calcutta, 1977), p.197
regime in no way felt threatened by it and it even appreciated a painting like 'Bharat Mata' which it felt was non-political in quality without "disruptive political connotations".

The activities of the Indian Society of Oriental Art aimed at the upholding of an autonomous art idiom was never directed against the British government as such. The works exhibited in the Society's exhibitions were apolitical in nature. The Statesman, January 4, 1920 thus noted:

The exhibition is one to be grateful for. It is a haven of rest from politics .... Only once did one notice the faintest reminder that such thing as politics existed - a picture illustrating 'Hartal Day in Calcutta' with Hindus and Muslims together ..... For the rest the exhibition room is a place where one may forget everything except the world of art.

A significant aspect of the quest for an identity on the part of the Indian artists through the Society's platform was the heavy dependence of the artists on the forms and values of Indian feudal art which made it impossible for them to portray the contemporary reality. In an article published in Advance, December 29, 1934, it was noted:
It (the ISOA) has done much to revive and popularize Indian art traditions and culture. But the dominance of the past inherent in a revivalist movement is still there. There is creation but the created bear much of the stamp of the past. Although it is impossible and undesirable to break entirely away from the past, Indian Renaissance movement in all branches of national life demands bolder art conceptions, bolder choice of themes and bolder and free sweeps of the brush .... We are awaiting ..... the self-imposed mission of the Society.

In 1947 India achieved her political independence and the British administrators left the country. Independent India stood with her head held high, with an autonomous identity of her own. Yet the contemporary trauma as expressed in the Partition, communal holocasts, infrastructural constraints shed a dark shadow over the country. The contemporary art scene also felt the impact of the current developments. A sense of both disruption and continuity influenced the art world.\^8 Further, due to the lack of an integrated approach an art infrastructure had

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\[^8\] "1947 was an arbitrary line for an inner creative journey, despite the profound changes it may have symbolised. As a result both the sense of disruption and continuity prevailed" – Neville Tuli, The Flamed Mosaic, Indian Contemporary Painting, p.202
not yet properly developed. "It would take a long time to evolve an art infrastructure given the lack of an integrated approach.\(^9\)

Yet, the climate for art changed considerably after 1947:

The open doors and wide skies of Indian freedom have given a considerable impetus to Indian art. What grew precariously in the atmosphere of a hot house in the British period is now vigorously putting forth new leaves and flowers .... It is ..... self-aware and eager to record new fields of experience .... The struggle for survival seems at this moment an incentive rather than an obstacle to growth.\(^10\)

According to the noted art historian Jaya Appasamy, "The artist (in the post independence era) forsook his ivory tower to become an active member of the society.\(^11\) She further noted that the group of artists prominent in the 1940s and 1950s were a senior generation who could be called "painters of transition". Thus artists like Sailoz Mukherjee, B.C. Sanyal, K.K. Hebbar, S. Chavda or N.S. Bendra reflected in their art the romanticism of the earlier period. At the same time their subject matter was drawn from the life of the people. They showed a desire to be

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Indian in both technique and spirit and their subject matter showed an idealization of the ordinary. A younger group of artists searched for an autonomous art vocabulary through the formulation of a personal style "giving the East-West oscillation a renewed swing." Modern Indian art in the post-independence period became a vortex of currents and cross currents.

Today, the arts in India enjoy an unprecedented freedom ..... the modern artists sets a high value on originality.13

There emerged another group of artists showing an interest in texture, working with metal, wood, nails, fabrics, burnt-wood.

It is in this context that the role of the Indian Society of Oriental Art to uphold the cause of art in independent India needs to be analysed.

During the initial post-colonial period, infrastructural constraints constituted obstacles in the way of the Society's attempts to uphold the cause of Indian art. In 1956 Nihar Ranjan Ray in whose hands had fallen the organizational leadership of the Society, noted that along with the organizational and financial difficulties facing the Society, there was "the increasing lack of warmth and support in the community"

for the ideals of the Society. The Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was still published but it seemed to be almost on its last legs. Over the whole enterprise there seemed to loom a feeling of 'hopeless improvisation'.

In order to place the Society on a firm footing once more Nihar Rajnan Ray suggested a revision of the constitution of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, a thorough reorganization of the institution and drafting of a well considered programme. He also recommended the handing over of the Society with all its assets to Rabindra Bharati. However, two members of the Society, Dwariknath Chatterjee and Srimati Tagore opposed the dissolution of the Society and they were given a chance to reorganize it. It was particularly the personal sagacity of Srimati Tagore which saved the Society from losing its separate identity and helped in its maintenance with funds raised from public and private sources for about two decades.

A report published in The Statesman, September 3, 1958 noted:

Recounting the Society's history, Mrs. Shrimati Tagore, the Secretary, said that the Society was the mother organization which had

fostered the beginning of Indian art, saved it and nourished it through the long period of derision and attack by its opponents.

Mrs. Tagore regretted that the Society had been greatly handicapped in its activities by the shrinkage of grant given by the Government and general economic depression. "Aware of our limitations and the magnitude of the task before us, we feel that the Society is a sacred trust which the great masters have bequeathed to us and we are determined to continue the work and uphold the aesthetic traditions of our country.

The Hindustan Standard, April 17, 1962 also noted, "Mrs. Shrimati Tagore explained the objectives of the Society and requested the Government to see to its financial requirements."

The contemporary newspapers also referred to the revival of the Society's activities. "The Indian Society of Oriental Art .... appears to have warmed itself up after a long time", noted The Hindustan Standard, December 9, 1964. The Yugantar, March 5, 1966 was also happy to note that the Indian Society of Oriental Art was regaining its lost glorious position as the upholder of India's art heritage.
Srimati Tagore, who was appointed the Secretary of the Society, felt that ".... it was necessary for the young artists to be aware of the artistic experiences of the past, so that enriched by these experiences new forms could be created".15 This statement of Srimati Tagore is indicative of the efforts of the Society to encourage experimentations in art in the post-colonial period.

Infact during the post-1947 era, the Indian Society of Oriental Art rendered valuable services in upholding the cause of Oriental art. The Statesman, August 31, 1958 noted that during the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1958, "Mrs. Shrimati Tagore, Secretary of the Society said that efforts were being made to resuscitate the organization with the publication of a number of art journals, exhibitions and lectures on art".

Accordingly the Indian Society of Oriental Art organized a series of exhibitions upholding the works of not only the great masters of Oriental art like Abanindranath, Gaganendranath, Nandalal and others, but also of a new generation of artists of free India whose search for an Indian identity resulted in an immense variety of work.

15. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, February 29, 1964
The Society's Golden Jubilee Exhibition held in 1958 at the Artistry House, Calcutta, afforded "an opportunity to see the works of the pioneers of the Indian renaissance movement in art". Among the notable exhibits were Abanindranath's portraits in pastel and an excellent piece from his Omar Khayyam series. Gaganendranath Tagore's 'Padma', 'Night', and 'The First Sight', Nandalal Bose's 'Kiratarjuna', 'Krishna and Arjuna', 'Jagai Madhai', Khitin Mazumdar's 'Chaitanya Leaving Home', Mukul Dey's 'Santhal Girl', Surendranath Ganguly's 'Floating the Paper Boat' were some of the specimens of the Bengal School that were put up for exhibition by the Society. As the then Governor of Bengal, Miss Padmaja Naidu mentioned in her inaugural speech at the exhibition:

The broad canvas of the pictures shown in the exhibition represented the golden era of Indian art covering the last 50 years. It was like a flag being unfurled and India declaring her enduring value of art again.

In 1958 a second exhibition of Indian painting was organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art. In this exhibition a section was devoted to old Rajput, Kangra and

17. Inaugural speech of Smt. Padmaja Naidu, Governor of Bengal, reported in The Statesman, September 3, 1958
Mughal painting.

In 1959 the Society organized its first solo exhibition of the artist Gopen Roy's paintings. The Statesman, January 23, 1959, reported thus:

Gopen Roy who is known for his Indian style paintings in tempera and wash is exhibiting over 50 of his pictures at the Government Industrial Museum, 21, Chittaranjan Avenue, Calcutta. The exhibition is organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art.

The Statesman further noted that the artist "looks for inspiration to mythology, mysticism and literature..... he has imbibed considerable inspiration from Gaganendranath Tagore. Certain artistic trends and experiments of the Bengal School are reflected in his compositions and treatment of tempera..... His series on folk-lore draws the biggest crowd".18

By the mid 1950s the contemporary Indian art scene came to be influenced by modern abstract ideas from the West. In Calcutta a new generation of artists were coming to maturity by the early 1960s. "They would merge the orthodoxies of the British academic discipline, the Bengal School, Santiniketan and

18. The Statesman, January 23, 1959
modern Western art". The Society for Contemporary Artists (SOCA) established in 1960 sustained many artistic journeys in the realm of modern art.

Towards the mid-1960s a reaction set in and efforts were visible towards the evolution of an Indian-cum-modern idiom in art. The realization dawned "that an Indian identity must be created capable of absorbing modern 'isms' and emerging with something fresh" and this "became the motivating principle of the 1960s".

In this context the Indian Society of Oriental Art which had already covered fifty years of national life heralded a very important phase of Indian art. The exhibitions organized by the Society during the period clearly reflect "the Society's objective of encouraging and helping struggling young artists and art students who live in obscurity and do not have many opportunities to exhibit their work". The Patriot, March 23, 1966 noted, "The aim of the organizers, the Indian Society of Oriental Art ..... is to provide a source of inspiration to the young Indian artists who tend to Western art without understanding their own artistic heritage".

20. The SOCA was founded by Nikhil Biswas, Bijan Chowdhury, Shyamal Dutta Roy, Sanat Roy, Ganesh Haloi and other artists.
22. The Statesman, November 12, 1975
In January 1963, members of the studio attached to the Society organized an exhibition of their paintings. Among the works displayed Pravat Gaguly's 'To the Horizon', 'Dreamland', 'Wayside', Manoranjan Shah's 'Kalimpong', Niren Ghosh's 'Before the Storm', Ardhendu Banerjee's 'Pardeshi' were specially noted by the Amrita Bazar Patrika, January 15, 1963.

In 1964 the Indian Society of Oriental Art organized a mixed exhibition of modern art and traditional Indian style paintings. Kalyan Sen, Biren De, Gopen Roy and Ardhendo Banerjee used traditional techniques and themes. The Society also seems to have made a special effort to obtain paintings from new artists like Barin Roy, Samar Bhowmick. A few artists like Asis Pradhan, Rabindra Paul and Niranjan Tarafdar seems to have been inspired by the style of Gaganendra Nath Tagore. Other artists represented were Chandrasekhar Seth, Judhajit Sengupta to name a few.23

Thus, the exhibitions organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art in the post-colonial period were a mixed affair. Paintings of varied nature were exhibited. Prosanto Roy's exhibits in the annual exhibition organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1964 showed his mastery of Japanese and

23. See The Hindustan Standard, December 9, 1964; Amrita Bazar Patrika, December 18, 1964

One also comes across a number of women artists who utilized the space offered by the Indian Society of Oriental Art in the post-colonial period to uphold their experimentations in art. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, January 15, 1963 took note of Maya Roy's 'Sweet Sadness', Bithi Ghosh's 'Music of Sea', Manjulika Kumar's 'Pratiksha' done in Indian technique whereas Karuna Shaha's 'Kalimpong' reflected the artist's individualistic style. In the Society's annual exhibition of 1964, Bithi Ghosh, Manjulika Kumar, Arundhuti Roy Chowdhury, Amina Kar, Lakshmichhanda Kapoor, Renu Roy Chowdhury showed much individuality. In the Society's exhibitions of 1970, 1971, Chitraniwa Chowdhuri's 'Cloudy Evening', Bharati Bhattacharyya's 'Baul', 'Sandhyarag', Chitra Dey's mural like illustrative painting

24. The Statesman, January 14, 1967 noted, "There is a fine exhibit from Prosanto Roy showing his mastery of a style in which Japanese and Chinese artists excel".
25. The Statesman, November 12, 1975
'The Kingdom of Cards', Swapna Sen's 'Setu', Sharmila Saha's 'Sister' are interesting. In the Society annual exhibition of 1970, the exhibit of Chitrita Dey, a former student of Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan was rewarded. The Ananda Bazar Patrika of August 29, 1970 referred to her award winning decorative panel drawn in the Indian technique.

Other women artists who exhibited their works on the platform offered by the Indian Society of Oriental Art in the post colonial period were Sarama Bhowmik, Ranjana Chowdhury, Kiran Baru, Gita Bhattacharya, Nafisa Ahluwalia.26

Apart from upholding the endeavours of individual artists in their attempts at the evolution of an autonomous idiom of art in the post-colonial period, the Indian Society of Oriental Art also organized exhibitions to bring the traditional arts of India before public view. In 1958, the Society exhibited old Rajput, Kangra and Mughal paintings.27 In 1966 the Society exhibited miniatures from Western India. The Hindustan Times, March 23, 1966 noted,

With Western Indian miniature paintings at the Rabindra Bhawan (New Delhi) we travel back on the time machine to the 18th century....

26. See The Statesman, November 12, 1975
27. The Statesman, November 30, 1958 noted, "The exhibition includes a section devoted to old Rajput, Kangra and Mughal paintings".
One is thankful for this peep into the past to the Indian Society of Oriental Art.

In the Society's exhibition of 1966 beautiful miniatures mostly lent by the Jain muni Punyavijaya of Ahmedabad were also exhibited. The oldest specimens on view were dated to the 12th and 13th centuries. Two fascinating cloth paintings belonging to the 15th century were also displayed. In addition, "There are manuscript covers in wood ..... what lends this exhibition special interest is the presentation of illuminated manuscripts of the 17th, 18th and even 19th centuries".28

Folk art also occupied a pride of place in the Society's exhibitions. The Society attempted to showcase how in the domain of folk art beauty and utility were harmoniously blended. In the Society's annual exhibition of 1962, "Among the most remarkable exhibits are a series of Kanthas with exquisite embroidered designs collected from different districts. The exhibition which had carefully selected exhibits of wood, terracotta, brass etc. showed the various trends of folk art in this country".29

Further, in the Society's exhibition of 1966 -

Mention should be made of toranas

29. The Statesman, April 17, 1962
dominated by the image of Ganesh, decorated pillowcovers, skirts, handprinted handkerchiefs, choli, cradle covers and a variety of large and small hangings ..... There are brass oil lamps and bronze figurines and idols, wood and clay articles in service of religion. Mirror and beadwork is common ..... A toyhorse is an attractive showpiece.30

The same exhibition presented a pageant of the splendour and beauty of the traditional peasant crafts of Gujerat. There were also a few admirable scrolls and other exhibits from Rajasthan and other places ..... their originality and indigenous pictorial quality attracted the spectators.31

Terracotta works were also displayed. Bimal Seal's sculptured fireclay works, Dibakar Sen Roy's terracotta works deserve special mention. In 1970 an exhibition of Japanese woodcuts of the late eighteenth century was organized.32 The Society's annual exhibition of 1972 was marked by the display of "a fascinating array of articles traditionally displayed at Hindu weddings".33 The most interesting among those was a little house, trees and compound made of spices by Purnima

31. Ibid
32. See Hindusthan Standard, January 24, 1970
33. The Statesman, November 23, 1972
Chatterjee. The Statesman, November 23, 1972 noted, ".... this lady revives and recreates this lost art". In 1975 an exhibition of the folk art of Bengal and Gujerat was organized by the Society. The Statesman, October 29, 1975 thus reported, "On view is an overwhelming number of handicrafts representing the unique traditions of the two states".


Yet, one cannot deny the fact that during the post-colonial period the Society's attempts at upholding the cause of Indian artists in search of a distinct identity met with severe constraints. The grants of the Lalit Kala Academy were stopped. The Society itself stopped accepting the Rs.1500 annual grant from the State Government owing to the hassles involved in its
collection. Gradually the Society stopped the publication of its journal owing to the shortage of funds. Further the Society's efforts to promote Indian art during this period cannot be termed as efforts to promote Oriental art as Indian art became something more than mere Oriental art. Modern Indian art became a vortex of new currents and cross currents and the Society seemed incapable of promoting contemporary art forms. In view of these constraints the Indian Society of Oriental Art appeared to be a relic of the past trying in its humble way to maintain its existence.

However, the situation seemed to change:

From 1980, it is heartening to state, the Society appears to be coming out of the morass in which it had to sustain its existence for decades. After a long interval the art studio of the Society is working regularly and attracting a new generation of students; publications are being stabilized and a new gallery for regular exhibitions has been set up at its present premises. A proposal is being noted to start a children's section of the training studio. What is more, the public mind is perceptibly veering round towards it, a fact which alone is of the
greatest importance for another renewal of the Society's life.34

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