INTRODUCTION
A significant aspect of the multidimensional nationalist movement of India during the first half of the twentieth century was a growing cultural nationalism that reinforced the evolution of political nationalism which sought to challenge the colonial government's denial of the country's self-identity. In the realm of the arts, the colonial domination and rejection of the art heritage of the country as well as of the entire Orient were unfortunate phenomena. The Indian artists as colonial subjects, trained in Western Academic norms, worked to the detriment of the rich art heritage of the country. However, a growing self awareness increasingly visible among the Indians made inevitable a quest for a national identity and this was reflected in the sphere of art as well. At the same time was visible the growth of an Oriental identity upholding the great Oriental art tradition. It was in this context that an art organization, the Indian Society of Oriental Art, established in Calcutta in 1907, played an important role in the evolution of an autonomous art idiom during the pre-independence period by offering the much needed platform and space to the Indian artists in their quest for an identity in a colonized world. My submission attempts to analyse the endeavours of the said organization and of the artists who utilized its platform to gain an identity for Oriental art during the period 1907 – 1947. The study, it is hoped, will usher a new approach to the study of the art history of the
country by focussing not only on the stalwart artists like Abanindranath, Gaganendranath and Nandalal Bose, but on a host of relatively unknown artists including women artists who searched for an identity of their own through the Society. By sustaining many artistic journeys, by encouraging individualism of the artists, by helping them to earn recognition and by attempting to create an initiated public proud of the art heritage of the Orient, the Indian Society of Oriental Art played a vital role in the formation of the Indian nationalist ideology, as expressed through the visual image during the period under review.

In charting the career of the artists, both famous as well as the relatively unexplored, special attention has been paid to memoirs, letters and documents. Contemporary newspapers and journals have been vital sources of information for exploring the quest of the artists for distinct identity for themselves under colonial rule. The records preserved at the Indian Society of Oriental Art have been of immense value in analyzing how art practices with the active support of the Society, by attempting to uphold the Oriental ideology, strengthened the cause of the nationalist art movement during the pre-independence period.

The foundation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was no sudden or isolated phenomenon and the First Chapter of the thesis attempts to reconstruct its historical and intellectual
background. Alien domination in India characterized by political, economic and racial oppression, had resulted in a crisis of identity among the Indians. In the sphere of art, the colonial government's rejection of the rich art tradition of the Orient spelt misfortune for Indian art which became distinctly westernized. Indian art also came to be looked down upon by a section of Indians themselves. The situation was pitiable indeed! Fortunately a growing awareness of self was visible among the Indians with the Swadeshi Movement of the early twentieth century acting as a catalyst. It was realized that the evolution of a national cultural identity was an essential process and an outburst of creative activities was evident. A marked impact was noticeable in the domain of the arts and a nationalist art movement, centred in Calcutta, emerged, with the Tagores of Jorasanko playing a crucial role. The famed 'Dakshiner Barandah' (Southern Balcony) of the Tagore household, along with the existing art societies and art exhibitions organized by them, aided the evolution of a national art idiom and sought to mould the taste of the Indians in favour of Oriental art. In addition, the growth of an Oriental identity fostered by the Neo-Orientalism further strengthened the cause of the Indian artists in their quest for an identity during the colonial regime. Thus the chapter also attempts to analyse the views and endeavours of the chief proponents of Neo-Orientalism – E.B. Havell, Coomaraswamy, Sister Nivedita and the visiting Japanese artists Kakuzo Okakura, Hisida and Taikan.
The emergent Oriental art movement was a reflection of the growing sense of identity among the Indians and the establishment of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1907 was an attempt to place the movement on a firm footing through an institutional platform.

Chapter Two of the thesis attempts to analyse the aims and objectives of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, reflecting the intention of its members to bring into focus a new generation of artists whose quest for an identity in a colonized world would constitute of upholding the Indianness of Indian art as well as the rich Oriental art heritage.

The Society was established by a group of artists and connoisseurs of art who wished to ensure the promotion and propagation of the new art movement symbolizing the recovery of tradition and lost identity. The founder members of the Society included leaders of the Bengal School like Abanindranath Tagore and Gaganendranath Tagore, as well as some of Abanindranath's disciples. The eminent artist and art historian O.C. Gangoly was appointed the Honorary Secretary and he later became the Vice President of the Society. Individual endeavours also played an important role. Members of the royalty and aristocracy, men from the legal profession and business supported the Society's efforts directed towards the revival of Oriental art. Government servants also aided the
Society in the capacity of individual supporters and this was a reflection of their personal liberal attitude. Thus Governors of Bengal, top government officials and E.B. Havell, the Principal of the Government Art College at Calcutta and an ardent champion of Oriental art, supported the Society's efforts at the promotion of the nationalist art movement. The scope of the Society's objective was broadened to uphold the art of the Orient at large and the Society was to promote Oriental art by means of organizing exhibitions, lectures and publications. It must be noted in this context that the Indian Society of Oriental Art was not directed against the British government or British art, it was supposed to provide an alternative to the Government College of Art.

Chapter Three analyses the efforts of a large body of artists who utilized the platform and space offered by the Indian Society of Oriental Art in their quest for an autonomous cultural idiom during the period under review, upholding the art heritage of the Orient and engaging in experimentations with new varieties of art forms in the process. Thus established artists like Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar, Mukul Dey, Sailendranath Dey, Samarendranath Gupta and others sought to place the Bengal School on secure foundations through the Society's platform turning to the rich art tradition of the Orient for inspiration. At the same time relatively unknown artists like
Promode Kumar Chattopadhyay, Nalinikanta Majumdar, Chanchalkumar Bandyopadhyay, Chaitanyadev Chattopadhyay, Pulin Behari Dutta and innumerable others searched for an autonomous cultural identity through the Indian Society of Oriental Art. The chapter thus places special emphasis on those forgotten artists who collectively took the nationalist art movement forward during the pre-independence era. However, in their attempts at upholding Indian and Oriental art that was pan-Asian in its scope, the artists at the Indian Society of Oriental Art moved beyond the set boundaries, evolving an individualized style in the process. Their works reflected an intense love of freedom of expression and a wide variety of styles, approaches and themes. In course of time their quest for an identity became fragmented. The Indian Society of Oriental Art performed a commendable role in assisting the artists in their quest for an autonomous vocabulary for Indian art and in their attempts to explore new varieties of art tradition during the pre-independence period.

An increasing number of women artists also searched for an autonomous art idiom through the platform offered by the Indian Society of Oriental Art during the period 1907–1947 and their quest constitutes the theme of Chapter Four of my thesis. Subjected to the dual domination by the colonial government and the male members of their household, a number of women artists gradually came out of the seclusion of the inner domain
of their household to carve out a distinct identity for themselves and earn recognition through the Society.

Artists like Sunayani Devi, Gouri Bhanja, Yamuna Sen, Sukumari Devi, Sukhalata Rao, Shanta Devi, Pratima Devi and a host of others regularly exhibited their works in the Society's annual exhibitions, reflecting their earnest attempts not only to uphold the Oriental art form but also to evolve a personal style. Sunayani Devi's works especially, reflecting an independent vision and style, stood out among the exhibits for their original outlook. Not only in the sphere of the visual arts, but also in the realm of the crafts - needlework, alpana decoration, slate carving, terracotta - did the women artists seek to establish a mark for themselves. The Indian Society of Oriental Art attempted to encourage the women artists in their quest for an identity by opening a ladies' section in its art school and by awarding prizes and scholarships, thus rendering a significant service to the cause of Oriental art in a period of colonial subjugation.

Chapter Five of my submission analyses the multifarious activities of the Society and its artists aimed at the promotion of Oriental art and the moulding of public taste in its favour. A significant achievement of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was the establishment of an art school under the supervision of Abanindranath and Gaganendranath to impart training in the
Oriental art form. The Society aided the artists in their quest for an identity by organizing annual exhibitions of their works in the Oriental style. Not only the leading members of the Bengal School, but a large body of lesser known artists and even women artists showcased their works in the Society's exhibitions. The Indian Society of Oriental Art also sent specimens of Indian art to principal European exhibitions to spread the awareness of the splendid art tradition of India. In addition the Society attempted to reform public taste, not only by holding exhibitions, but also by organizing discussions on Oriental art and by publishing an art journal 'Rupam' which affirmed the strength of the Oriental art heritage. The influence of the Indian Society of Oriental Art spread far and wide with Abanindranath's disciples being appointed principals of art schools in different parts of the country. The Society thus played a crucial role in the arousal of a sense of awareness of the self among the Indians during the nationalist movement.

Chapter Six attempts to analyse the difficulties faced by the Society during the immediate pre-independence years and the inability of its artists to portray the contemporary reality. Towards the end of the 1930s the glorious days of the Society seemed to be on the wane in the face of acute financial and leadership crisis caused by Gaganendranath's death and Abanindranath's loss of much of his earlier dynamism. The Society's art journal 'Rupam' was discontinued and the Journal
of the Indian Society of Oriental Art published under the joint editorship of Abanindranath and Stella Kramrisch failed to report on the Society's activities. The immediate pre-independence years constituted a period of great turmoil characterized by growing popular militancy, communalism and intense suffering of the common man due to the devastation caused by the Second World War. In such circumstances the romanticism of the Bengal School was on the wane and the Society and its artists failed to uphold an art reflecting upon reality. The nationalistic spirit that had motivated the Society's activities earlier gradually became subdued failing to make much impact on the public.

In fact, there emerged alternative platforms for artistic endeavours in the shape of the Calcutta Group, the Kala Bhavan and the Karu Sangha. Experimentations were undertaken by the Calcutta Group involving a greater interaction with modern European art. However, it seems that the Society was incapable of undertaking similar endeavours. Thus, the art movement which the Society attempted to promote was limited in scope.

The Conclusion analyses the position of the Indian Society of Oriental Art at the time of India's independence. By 1947 the Society was established as a group of artists who had earned fame and recognition through the organization. The Society served as a focus for the aspirations of the Indian artists in
quest of a distinct identity. By bringing into public view the art form termed as the Bengal School, by helping a large body of unknown and women artists win recognition, the Society significantly aided the evolution of a national art idiom during the first half of the twentieth century. This in turn contributed to a growing awareness of self among the Indians. However, this self awareness was contradictory in nature and the chapter seeks to analyse the inherent contradictions of the art movement that the Society sought to promote.

During the post-independence period the Society was reorganized in a changed environment and thus saved from losing its distinct identity. There was a revival of the activities of the Society as the upholder of India's art heritage. At the same time the Society encouraged experimentations in art. Thus, the Society upheld not only the Bengal School of art, but also the efforts of a new generation of artists of free India whose quest for an identity was expressed in a wide variety of work reflecting an Indian cum modern idiom in art.

************