CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND
The foundation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in Calcutta in 1907 was no sudden or isolated phenomenon. It constituted a vital aspect of the growing cultural nationalism in colonial India in the early twentieth century and should thus be studied in the context of the broader historical and intellectual framework. British rule in India, characterized by oppression of the subject race, had resulted in a crisis of identity and loss of self-respect among the colonized Indians. This in turn made a quest for a national identity inevitable among them, as expressed in the political and economic nationalism in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Significantly the struggle against colonial domination manifested itself in the realm of culture as well. As the renowned art critic Stella Kramrisch noted, "...after the British impact and 150 years of British rule there was the search for a national identity even in art". Art was being raised to the status of the new religion and the artists were becoming its new prophets. Different philosophies were coming into play influencing the emergence of art as the new religion for the Indian artists in the context of the Indian nationalist movement. The great poet Rabindranath Tagore set out to make his countrymen aware of their national self-identity:

The old Indian pictures and other works of art were laughed at by our students in imitation of the laughter of their European school masters .......... They have had a long period of encouragement in developing an appetite for third rate copies of French pictures, for gaudy oleographs, abjectly cheap, for the pictures that are the products of mechanical accuracy of a stereotyped standard and they still considered it to be a symptom of superior culture.2

Tagore proclaimed, "Self-expression must be our aim"3. He further declared, "It is for the artist to remind the world that with the truth of our expression we grow in truth".4

Such ideals greatly influenced the Indian artists who revealed their aspirations for rising in the dignity of being through immortal works of art. This in turn created an awareness among the Indians of the great artistic heritage of their country which in turn added to their self esteem and contributed to the growth of a national identity among them.

It was around this time that the European mind turned

2. Rabindranath Tagore, The Religion of an Artist (Calcutta, 1936), pp.8-9
4. Ibid, p.56
towards the art of Asia and discovered a world of aesthetics of a completely novel character. "The art of Japan was the first to open this sealed book to the Western world and to the hitherto accepted ideas of fine art. It was found that the art of Eastern countries stood as high as any art of Europe".5 While the appreciation and acceptance of Japanese pictorial art enlarged the boundaries of art, a group of connoisseurs in India started to advocate the claims of Indian pictorial forms. "In the old masterpieces of Buddhist art and in the late schools of Moghul and Rajput paintings 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".6

It was in this context that the Indian Society of Oriental Art played a crucial role in assisting the Indian artists in their search for an identity during the anti-imperialist nationalist movement in the first half of the twentieth century. By promoting an indigenous art movement marked by a resurgence of pictorial art and upholding the great art tradition of the Orient, the Indian Society of Oriental Art offered a valuable platform to the Indian artists to stand face to face with the challenge of the intrusion of colonial culture and ideology during the pre-independence period.

5. 'Oriental Art, A National Movement', The Empire, December 31, 1919
6. Ibid.
Since the establishment of the British rule in India during the middle of the nineteenth century, the Indians felt their identity constantly threatened by the high handed attitude and policies of the British authorities. Indeed, "British rule in India became the most spectacular case of imperialism in modern times". The basic characteristic of the British rule in India was the inherent contradiction between the interests of the colonizer and the colonized. The absence of a sense of self-awareness among the Indians had been one of the contributory factors that had aided the foundation and consolidation of the British rule in India. Yet, paradoxically, it was the British rule itself which created an awareness of self-identity among the Indians and paved the way for the growth of Indian nationalism.

A vital factor in the growth of nationalism in the country was the Western impact and the introduction and spread of western education in India. "By the 1800s the total number of Western educated Indians was nearing the 50,000 mark". Although described as a "microscopic minority" by the British, it was the Western educated middle class, familiar with the prevailing spirit of democracy, nationalism and liberalism in Europe, that was the first to feel its identity threatened under colonial rule.

7. Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Late Nineteenth Century (Cambridge, 1968), p.1
Indeed, the high-handedness of the ruling class was much in evidence -

In the second half of the nineteenth century, India was furnished in all departments of state with highly organized and trained services, fully geared to the growing complexities of administration ....... With these virtues however went a certain aloofness and an unconcealed consciousness of superiority which the educated Indians found galling.9

Attitudes on the part of the governed were also changing. The Western educated middle class was especially eager to regain its basic rights and a number of middle class political associations were set up in course of the nineteenth century culminating in the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885.10 However, great disappointment set in when the middle class realized that its very basic political demands like council reforms, jobs in the civil services and simultaneous civil service examinations remained unfulfilled. Lord Curzon's assumption of the post of Viceroy made matters worse as he reduced the elected element in the Calcutta Corporation, tightened

10. See Anil Seal, 'The Politics of Association', The Emergence of Indian Nationalism - Competition and Collaboration in the Late Nineteenth Century (Cambridge, 1968).
official control over education and limited press freedom.

Racial discrimination practised by the British and white arrogance further added to the middle class grievances.\textsuperscript{11} The racial cleavage between the Indians and the Europeans was obvious.

In the post-Mutiny period, the middle class also came to nurse the feeling that economically the results of British rule had been really disappointing and even injurious. There was an increasing realization of the link between the British policies and the growing poverty of the country. The Journal of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha noted:

\begin{quote}
The indication of the extreme poverty is so appalling that in any other country the Government would have been forced to take up this question into its serious consideration under penalty of a revolution.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Indian nationalists like Dadabhai Naoroji drew attention to the 'Un-British' rule in India and referred to the continuous impoverishment and exhaustion of the country as a result of the drain of her wealth and de-industrialization of the country under

\textsuperscript{12} Journal of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, quoted by Bipan Chandra, The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India (New Delhi, 1966) p.11
British rule. The Indian nationalists denounced 'the wretched, heart-rending, blood-boiling condition' of India and regretted that the country was growing poorer day by day. The liberal professions became overcrowded and prices rose sharply. The Indians, particularly the Bengalis came to increasingly nurse a markedly anti-British feeling looking upon the British rule as the greatest curse with which India had ever been afflicted.

In the realm of the arts the impact of colonialism was especially marked. "......... Indian art presented a test case for the Western understanding of India because its aesthetic qualities differed so much from those of the classical West". Indian gods with their many arms were regarded as 'multiple limbed monsters' because in Western perception they defied all ideas of rationality. To Hegel the supposedly formless images of Indian art were expressions of Indian mentality which he defined as 'dreaming consciousness'. Ruskin looked down upon Indian sculpture, painting and architecture as representing un-Christian ethos.

In the nineteenth century there was also a denial of Indian art altogether. Macaulay in 1835 vigorously attacked Indian culture and advocated the training of a class of persons "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals

14. Ibid.
and in intellect. In 1835 Sir Charles Trevelyan even defended it as a necessary instrument of imperial policy:

The only means at our disposal for preventing revolution is to set the natives on a process of European improvement.

James Mill, the author of the History of British India, noted that the Indian arts were in a primitive state and that the Indian fine arts were generally 'unattractive, unnatural and offensive'. His views considerably influenced the Government's art policy in colonial India.

In a paper read before the Indian section of the Royal Society of Arts, Cecil Burns, the Principal of the Bombay School of Art, expounded and defended his views regarding the right policy for the art schools in India and his views represented the official attitude towards Indian art during the colonial period.

Burns affirmed that up to the year 1850 India from an artistic standpoint was almost entirely isolated from the rest of the world. This isolation protected the Indian craftsmen from the competition of the other countries of the world. On account of this isolation they became unambitious and lost whatever

15. Macaulay's Minute of 1835, quoted in W.G. Archer, India and Modern Art, p.18
16. Charles Trevelyan, quoted by Archer, p.18
17. See Dr. Ratnabali Chatterjee, 'Nationalism and Form in Indian Painting: A Study of the Bengal School', pp. 8 - 9
power of original thinking they may have formerly possessed." The construction of the Suez Canal opened the floodgates of European art upon them when they were unprepared. Burns noted:

India from an artistic point of view quickly became and has since remained a suburb of Paris and London. ...... The ancient craftwork of India is as dead as the art of the Greeks or as that of the Renaissance in Europe.18

Burns further argued that the British officials must recognize the present condition of things as inevitable and permanent and adapt their administrative policy to these conditions. In other words they must let the degraded artistic standard of modern life govern their artistic policy and throw over Indian traditions as worn out and useless.

Such ideas and attitudes profoundly influenced the colonial government's art policy in India that came to be based on the vehement rejection of the Great Art Tradition of the country. The impact of colonialism was felt through the organization of the art education. Art schools and art societies became the instruments for imparting art education in the Western

18. Report from Cecil Burns, Principal of the J. J. School of Art, Bombay, Simla, 1901
'Academic' style based on the syllabus of the School of Industrial Arts at South Kensington, London. In 1854 was established the Government School of Arts in Calcutta and it emerged as the main platform for the imparting of art education in the Academic manner. The object of the institution was -

....... to give the native youth of India an idea of men and things in Europe both present and past, not that they might learn to produce feeble imitations of European art, but rather that they might study European methods of imitation and apply them to the representation of natural scenery, architectural monuments, ethnical varieties and national costumes in their own country.19

Art students now received training in Western artistic norms and Indian art became distinctly Westernized. The art school academism, by imposing an arsenal of alien norms and skills on the Indians and by keeping them isolated from their cultural roots thus did violence to the native Indian genius. The government art schools "........ did not encourage the individuality that we associate with modern art ... So there was no educational

PL.1 - HEMENDRANATH MAZUMDAR, FIGURE STUDY

PL.2 - ATUL BOSE, FIGURE STUDY
ferment or rethinking of values here".\textsuperscript{20}

Especially disheartening for Indian art was the fact that Indian art was scorned at and looked down upon by her own people. In Bengal, Bombay and other cities of upper India, "a new middle class had come into existence, educated in British ideas, moulded by Western conceptions and scornful of early forms of Indian expression".\textsuperscript{21}

By the middle of the nineteenth century the taste of the elite and to some extent of the underclass had become thoroughly Victorian.\textsuperscript{22}

The various forms of folk art that existed in different parts of the country were relegated to the position of 'bazaar art' in the face of neglect of the elites.

Indian painters working in the late nineteenth century in the 'Academic' style were J.P. Ganguly, Hemendranath Majumdar, Atul Bose, M. F. Pithawala, A. K. Trinidad to name a few. However, the Westernization of Indian art reached its zenith in the works of Raja Ravi Varma (1848 – 1906) referred to as 'the first gentleman painter'.\textsuperscript{23} He took India back to feudal

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} K. G. Subramanyan, The Living Tradition: Perspectives on Modern Indian Art (Calcutta, 1987), Chapter 1, p.5
\item \textsuperscript{21} W. G. Archer, India and Modern Art (London, 1959), p.19
\item \textsuperscript{22} Partha Mitter, Indian Art (Oxford 2001) p.173
\item \textsuperscript{23} Partha Mitter, Art and Nationalism in Colonial India: Occidental Orientations, 1850 – 1922 (Cambridge, 1994), p.12
\end{itemize}
PL. 3 - RAJA RAVI VARMA

i - KADAMBARI

ii - A LADY HOLDING A FRUIT

iii - SITA VANAVASA

iv - MILK MAID
themes. His style reflected a combination of Victorian realism and Indian subject matter. Abanindranath Tagore noted the marked European influence on Ravi Varma's works, lamenting Sita standing in the pose of Venus is one of them! Abanindranath further commented that Ravi Varma's nationalism, being not truly indigenous, was not part of India's art heritage. Yet, in a way, Ravi Varma did contribute to the growth of a national identity among the Indians:


........... the untrained public, finding a painter who ....... produced realistic pictures of familiar subjects, welcomed him with open arms. It has indeed been his reward for choosing Indian subjects that he has thus become a true nationalizing influence to a certain degree.

On the whole, India in the nineteenth century presented an unfortunate scenario of art-barrenness. "India's art tradition which at various periods of her history had reached great heights, fully expressing her national culture, seemed in the nineteenth century to have come to a natural close". With the loss of authority and influence of the feudal princes and rulers,

25. See Abanindranath Tagore, Rani Chanda, Gharoa (Vishwa Bharati, Bangabda 1348), p.32
PL.4 - WILLIAM DANIELL, 'STARTING FOR TIGER SHOOTING'

PL.5 - FRANCOIS BALTHAZAR SOLVYNNS, 'HOOKAH BURDAR'
their patronage of Mughal and Rajput painting was no more forthcoming. There was a continuation of traditional schools of art only in isolated pockets such as the Punjab Hill States and some princely estates in Rajasthan. A 'mixed and generally decadent art' prevailed in the plains of India at centres like Delhi, Oudh and Patna and in the south in Hyderabad, Mysore and Tanjore. "By decadent one means a certain lack of spirit, dryness and formalism that pervades these works".28

Several English painters like Thomas and William Daniell, Tilly Kettle who visited India early in the British period, painted Indian subjects especially the picturesque scenes. They constituted the counterpart of memoirs or letters written home about India and were of a 'predominantly documentary significance'.

Another kind of art that grew up was the Company School of painting which tried to serve the British colonial taste 'in the depiction of the picturesque and the ordinary'.

India's traditional artistic heritage thus stood rejected under colonial rule. British academic art popularized through the European artists, the Company School and the colonial art education did much to violate the native artistic genius and by the end of the nineteenth century art in India reached a state of

The grievances of the Indians under colonial rule were increasing day by day. But "...... if grievances were mounting, so was the new mood of confidence, pride in the heritage and potentialities of the country and self-reliance". The nineteenth century was marked by the dawn of a new India which drew inspiration from the glorious traditions of the past as well as from the currents of new thought. It was a period of religious and social reforms characterized by a spirit of revolt against medievalism, "........ a broadening and rational cultural outlook and a potentially creative zeal for wholesome activity .....".

There was a quest for a 'glorious' past as expressed in the researches in ancient Indian history and civilization by Max Muller, William Jones, Cunningham and other scholars and the spirit of revivalism upheld by the Arya Samaj, the Theosophic Movement and Swami Vivekananda. Defence of Hindu traditions became respectable through the works of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay who reinterpreted Krishna as the ideal man, culture hero and nation builder. Krishnaprasanna Sen claimed that all discoveries of modern science had Shastric precedents. Swami Vivekananda bitterly criticized the present-day degeneration noticeable in all aspects of life. Evoking the glories

29. Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903 - 1905 (New Delhi, 1973) p.27
of the Aryan tradition, he emphasized on self-help and the building up of manly strength. The Hindu Mela organized in 1867 by Nabagopal Mitra attempted to promote a sense of self-help and self-awareness among the Indians by exhibiting Indian manufactures. The spirit of self-help was also emphasized by Rajnarayan Bose by popularizing the use of indigenous articles.

The ongoing cultural-ideological struggle constituted an integral part of the evolving national consciousness. By bringing about the initial intellectual and cultural break it made "a new vision of the future possible".31 Further, it was a part of the resistance against colonial cultural and ideological hegemony. "Out of this dual struggle evolved the modern cultural situation."32

The atmosphere was marked by a growing sense of self-confidence and pride among the Indians who were now eager to carve out an identity for themselves within the colonial framework. International events like the Boer War, the victory of Japan in the Russo-Japanese War, destroyed the myth of European invincibility and added to their self-confidence.

Among the Indians, particularly the Bengalis, there was a new will to freedom, an increasing desire to rid the country of

32. Ibid.
British control. The growing national consciousness alarmed the 
British. In July 1905 Lord Curzon announced the partition of 
Bengal and the scheme was to be implemented on 16th October, 
1905.

The educated Indians eager to discover their identity, 
realized that Curzon's real intention was to break the backbone 
of Indian nationalism. Their desire to challenge the colonial 
high-handedness found expression in a spontaneous patriotic 
outburst in the shape of the Swadeshi movement. As Sumit 
Sarkar has noted, "..... by 1905 the sense of identity was strong 
enough for the Partition to provoke widespread anger and lead 
to a genuine patriotic outburst".33 The Swadeshi movement 
called upon the Indians and specifically the Bengalis to attach 
themselves to everything Indian and to become aware of their 
own potential strength in order to effectively challenge the 
British Government. The new self-awareness created by the 
Swadeshi movement resulted in a burst of creative activities in 
various spheres, particularly the arts. The Bengali artists under 
the active leadership of Abanindranath Tagore attempted 
earnestly to revive the pre-colonial art in order to challenge the 
Government's denial of the rich artistic heritage of the country 
and to prove their national identity. For the first time an art 
movement started, which came to be recognized as 'national' by

both the British intellectuals and the British media:

The seeds from which a movement towards modern Indian painting grew were the existing Western academic art education which seemed against the grain of Indian psyche, a reaction against the popularity of artists such as Ravi Varma; the vast cultural Indian heritage which was being denigrated by a Macaulayan cultural policy and forgotten by its own people; a growing sense of Orientalism ....... as well as the political climate and its urgent issue of national identity reflected in the Swadeshi movement.34

The new art movement was centred in Calcutta, the Raj capital until 1911 and "the first home of Indian nationalism".35 It was an important commercial centre and the chief port of India. In addition, Calcutta was "undoubtedly the centre of Bengali bhadralok civilization ...".36 Some of the first Indian inhabitants of Calcutta were the trading partners of the British. These men played an important role in Bengal's economic history by purchasing landed estates with the help of their profits in trade. For instance, the Tagores of Calcutta used some of their earnings

in trade and administration to buy up the Zamindari of Rajshahi.37

The 'Advance', December 24, 1930 noted:

In a city like Calcutta - the centre of an amazing commercial and industrial life - an emphasis on its cultural life is a peculiar need ...... And it is the peculiar function of Art to offer the much needed stabilizing influence, which induces the community to stick to the real values of life ...... The time has indeed come for the citizens of Calcutta to realize that art is as valuable in the growth of a great city as docks, steamships, tramlines or banks.

A Western lifestyle was rapidly spreading among the bhadraloks of Calcutta whose culture came to be marked by the prevalence of a "taste for things European".38 Abanindranath Tagore lamented that there was nothing called Indian art in those days and no one realized the value of Indian art! Only European art was admired.39 The merchant princes lived in Neo-classical mansions and collected specimens of European art.

37. Initially, the Tagores worked for the French and the British.
39. See Abanindranath Tagore and Rani Chanda, Jorasankor Dhare (Vishwa Bharati, Bangabda 1351), p.80
Their palatial buildings were decorated with Victorian architecture, furniture, sculpture and painting. The Marble Palace of the Mullicks, the Tagore Castle at Pathuriaghata, Dwarakanath Tagore's Belgachchia Villa had large collections of Academic sculpture and paintings. Often the wealthy families purchased the entire household effects of the British returning home. "Such a steady accumulation of European objects in colonial cities helped transform elite taste".40

The Western educated middle class in fact tended to look down upon the indigenous art forms. Thus India's rich cultural heritage was forgotten by her own people. The Statesman, December 12, 1930, while reviewing the situation noted:

In the absence of an art loving public the necessary patronage and incentive have been lacking.

However, it was in Bengal that the search for an identity in the realm of culture started. It was here that the modern movement in painting in India can said to have begun. During the Swadeshi movement an indigenous art movement was born in Bengal under the leadership of Abanindranath Tagore hailing from the illustrious Tagore family of Calcutta. Drawing inspiration from the artistic heritage of the country, the movement

was basically a search for national identity in a colonized world.

The modern movement in painting received its most powerful stimulus not from the urge to see differently and therefore to draw differently, but from the urge to feel and act patriotically and bring painting to the service of Swadeshi and Nationalism.41

The atmosphere for the evolution of an indigenous art movement had become favourable in Bengal since the last decade of the nineteenth century. Among the distinguished families of Bengal which encouraged the Indians in their search for an identity and played a crucial role in the birth of a new India, the foremost was that of the Tagores of Calcutta. It was the Tagore residence at Jorasanko located at 5, Dwarakanath Tagore Lane, which became the centre of modern Indian art. Particularly, the Southern balcony of the house can be regarded as the birthplace of modern Indian art!42 This balcony, famed in Bengal's cultural history as the 'Dakshiner Baranda' provided an important platform for the evolution of a national identity in the sphere of the arts. A new phase in Bengal's art history was inaugurated here.43 It served as the platform for the enactment of

42. See Prabodhendunath Tagore, Abanindra Charitam (Calcutta, 1994), p.46
43. See Pratima Devi, Smriti Chitra (Calcutta, Bangabda 1371), p.58
PL. 6 - NANDALAL BOSE, 'THE ARTISTS STUDIO', JORASANKO
significant scenes of the drama of Bengal's cultural history.

The 'Dakshiner Baranda' was a separate world altogether, it was the scene of immense creative activity. The three Tagore brothers Gaganendranath, Abanindranath and Samarendranath engaged in cultural pursuits here and met people interested in the same. Books were read, pictures painted and ideas discussed. New plays, poetry and music were composed, new experiments in painting undertaken. The idiom of a new art form evolved here. It was in this Southern balcony of the Tagore residence that the realization dawned that a new approach to art was necessary for the evolution of a national cultural identity and an important beginning was made in this respect.44

For the Tagore brothers, the Southern balcony was their studio and living room alike. While Samarendranath was more interested in literary pursuits, Gaganendranath and Abanindranath engaged in artistic activities. The issue of the revival of Indian art, rather Oriental art was taken up seriously. Abanindranath not only instructed his students who flocked round him, in the varied techniques of Oriental art, but also attempted to recapture the essential national spirit in his own works—'Abhisarika', the Radha-Krishna series, 'Building of the

44. For the activities in the 'Dakshiner Baranda', also see Mohanlal Gangopadhyay, Dakshiner Baranda (Vishwa Bharati, Bangabda 1388), p.1 and Abanindranath Tagore and Rani Chanda, Op. Cit., p.80
Taj', 'The Last Hours of Shah Jahan', 'Bahadur Shah', 'Bharat Mata'. Sister Nivedita, while reviewing Abanindranath's works, commented, "They are the perfect expression of Indian conceptions ......"45 The 'Bharat Mata' particularly became the new symbol which emerged as the visual image of India and contributed to the growth of a cultural identity during the Swadeshi period.

It was in the Southern balcony that Abanindranath met the Japanese artists Count Okakura, Hisida and Taikan. Pratima Devi, the daughter-in-law of Rabindranath Tagore, recollects in her memoirs that the Japanese artists discussed Oriental art with the Tagore brothers in the Southern balcony.46 While Gaganendranath learnt the technique of silk-painting from the Japanese artists, Abanindranath received instructions in the 'Wash-technique' which made his rejection of European techniques of painting more pronounced. The Japanese artists learnt the Indian techniques of painting from Abanindranath. He explained to them Puranic themes and they painted on subjects such as Sri Krishna's Rasleela, Dol Leela, Yudhisthira Going to Heaven.

The doors of the Southern balcony were widely open for all. Men from all walks of life, friends, neighbours came to meet

the Tagore brothers and discussed various issues oriented towards the search for a national identity. Abanindranath recollects that the balcony was filled with the sweet scent of flowers and the fragrance of orange juice, betel-nut and tobacco served to the guests. Uma Devi, Abanindranath's daughter, also recollects that a number of writers, artists, top government officials and even Viceroy's visited the Southern balcony of the Tagore residence to catch a glimpse of Abanindranath's paintings. It was here that Lord Carmichael, Lord Ronaldshay discussed the idea of the Indian Society of Oriental Art for the promotion of an Oriental art movement.

The Tagore brothers also attempted to replace the Western style décor of their home by Oriental décor. Mughal paintings, furniture in the indigenous style, brass lamps from South India, bonsai plants in Chinese and Japanese vases now came to adorn the Tagore household and the Southern Verandah. Dealers in artefacts visited the house to sell Oriental sculptures, precious stones, craftwork from different parts of India, Nepal and Tibet.

The Southern balcony of the Tagore residence at Jorasanko thus prepared the stage for the search of a national identity through the idiom of art and this served as a vital background to the foundation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1907.

47. See 'Jorasankor Dhare', Op. Cit. p.80
48. See Uma Devi, 'Babar Katha', p.28
However, the Southern balcony of the Tagore household was not the only platform for the promotion of an Oriental art movement. Art societies and art exhibitions also played a crucial role.

In the early nineteenth century, art societies were established for the British amateur artists in India and in 1831 the Brush Club of Calcutta held an exhibition of their works. Annual exhibitions were organized by these art societies and they were attended by the general public. However, these exhibitions benefitted the art-school trained painters including Indian artists such as Gangadhar Dey and were vehicles for developing a taste for Western academic art among the public. The opening of a public gallery in Calcutta in 1876 was a notable event, for it was felt in the official circles that a permanent display of Western masterpieces was required to inspire the youth of the country. We also come across the Calcutta Art Society, but it too offered no encouragement for the evolution of a national identity through art. The Calcutta International Exhibition organized in 1883-84 was also a demonstration of the progress of the art schools.

Yet, exhibitions did bring to the fore fine specimens of Oriental art. The great exhibition of 1851 held in the Crystal Palace of London marked the success of Indian art wares in

51. Mukul Dey, 'Which Way Indian Art', Centenary, Government College of Art and Craft (Calcutta, 1964) p.59
London. Since the late nineteenth century Calcutta's art loving public was gradually becoming acquainted with exhibitions. It was however a series of exhibitions of the works of the Tagore school of art at the beginning of the twentieth century, that helped in moulding the taste of the Indian public in favour of Oriental art. This in turn aided the development of a sense of cultural nationalism.

Art clubs also had an important role to play in the process. An informal art club, the Kham Kheylali Sabha, was set up by Rabindranath in the 1890s. Further,

Something like an art club also grew around Mr. Havell, where artists and art connoisseurs, both European and Indian, met almost regularly towards the evenings at the Art School and used to discuss about Indian art in all its aspects.

In 1905 was established the Bangiya Kala Samsad and artists of different sections were its members with Abanindranath.

52. "It was the discovery of the country's living traditions of craftsmanship and decorative design that had assigned India its pride of place in the circuit of world fairs and international exhibitions." - Tapati Guha Thakurta, Monuments, Objects, Histories : Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post Colonial India (New Delhi, 2004), Chapter 2, p.49
serving the Samsad as its Secretary from the very beginning. The Samsad "helped indirectly Mr. Havell in his reorientation scheme".55

Further, an exhibition of paintings by Abanindranath and a few Japanese prints brought to Calcutta by Kakuzo Okakura, was arranged by Surendranath Tagore at the premises of the Landholders' Association. It was highly appreciated by the elites of the city.

Of great significance in the context of the attempts by the artists and the art lovers to promote a national art movement, was the growth of an Oriental identity fostered by the new Orientalism that upheld the rich art tradition of the Orient.

British Orientalism in India can be traced to the efforts of Warren Hastings who "aimed at creating an Orientalized service elite competent in Indian languages and responsive to Indian traditions".56 His policies "contributed enormously to the awakening of the Bengali mind".57 The foundation of the Asiatic Society in 1784 by Sir William Jones to enquire into "the history and antiquities, arts, sciences and literature of Asia" significantly contributed to the growing appreciation of the West for India's heritage and culture. Along with Jones likeminded Orientalists

55. Op.Cit
57. Ibid, p.19
like H. L. Colebrooke, William Carey, H. H. Wilson and James Princep also made significant contributions to the process of rediscovery and revitalization of Indian culture. This was "the Orientalists' most enduring ...... contribution to modern India's cultural self-image". Knowledge of the Hindu golden age was to become "the cohesive ideology underlying a new sense of community".

In the early nineteenth century, the Orientalists' attempts at restoring India to her rightful place among the civilizations of the world, received a setback with the victory of the Anglicists as expressed in Macaulay's Minute of February, 1835. Macaulay's view of casting aside all that was Oriental and Indian in tradition greatly influenced the then Governor-General Lord William Bentinck in passing his famous Resolution of the 7th March, 1835, that declared that "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and culture amongst the natives of India....."

With the spread of Western education in the nineteenth century, the indigenous system of education receded into the background. In the government art school the introduction of Western academic training to the great disadvantage of Indian art, discouraged the promotion of the indigenous art tradition.

59. Ibid.
Thus, the environment for the promotion and cultivation of Indian art was indeed unfavourable.

However, since the late nineteenth century the situation gradually became favourable with the growth of an Oriental identity as promoted by the new Orientalism. Its main proponents were Orientalists like E. B. Havell, Coomaraswamy, Count Okakura and Sister Nivedita who formed enduring relations with the members of the Bengali intelligentsia with whom they worked to promote the cultural change in Calcutta.

E. B. Havell took charge of the Government School of Art in Calcutta as its Principal in 1896 and was a consistent promoter of a sense of Oriental identity among the Indians by making them aware of their rich artistic heritage. Havell vigorously refuted Cecil Burn's contention that Indian art was dead. Through his books - Indian Sculpture and Painting, Indian Architecture and The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival in India, he attempted to draw world attention to the great artistic tradition of the country, thereby raising the Indian morale.

Havell thus declared, "...... Indian art is not dead".60 "Indian art is not yet a withered tree. Its roots are still alive and healthy ......"61 He further asserted:

60. E. B. Havell, 'Indian Schools of Art', The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival in India (Madras, 1912), p.96
61. E. B. Havell, 'The Theory of Art', The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival in India, p.15
Indian art is still a living thing with vast potentialities of such unique value to India and all the world that it should be regarded as a great national trust which Great Britain is bound to honour and duty to guard and maintain.\textsuperscript{62}

Havell noted:

The old Indian picture and sculpture galleries such as those at Ajanta, Amaravati and Ellora, as well as the Chitrashalas, the private galleries of the aristocracy, were schools of religion and morality, of national culture and history. There will never be a true renaissance of art in India until the fine arts are restored to their proper place in the national life.\textsuperscript{63}

Havell further pointed out:

We have succeeded in persuading educated Indians that they have no Art of their own, though evidence of its existence are many and great, indeed very much more extensive than those of British Art ........... We have far more to

\footnotesize
63. E. B. Havell, 'Fine Art and its Revival in India', The Basis, p.46
Havell argued that his main object was to help the educated Indians to a better understanding of their own national art. "Learn to know your own art before you seek to know what Europe thinks and does ......," he said. He lamented that Europe was too convinced of the intellectual inferiority of the Oriental races. Yet, Havell argued:

It is only in the East that art still has a philosophy and still remains the great exponent of national faith and race traditions. In Indian idealism we shall find the key to the understanding ...... of all Asiatic art ......

Havell thus drew attention to the underlying unity inherent in the art of the Orient. He further noted:

The East, reawakening, is becoming conscious of the truth of her inspiration, and at the same time is learning from contact with Western civilization, the causes of her own decadence.

64. E. B. Havell, The Studio, July 15, 1908
66. E. B. Havell, (The) Ideals of Indian Art, p.51
67. Ibid., p.41
At the same time Havell noted, "India has lost self-respect and self-reliance, pride in her own artistic culture and faith in her spiritual mission". He contrasted the situation with that of Japan:

Art in Japan is not a luxury for the rich, but the basis for national education.

Havell thus proclaimed:

India must attend to the revival of her own national artistic culture, the foundation of all true education.

He appealed to the educated Indians to take the initiative of keeping alive the traditional arts of the country without waiting for government aid:

You do not expect the Government to understand and aid you in your religious movements. Why should you expect them to understand and keep alive your art?

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68. E. B. Havell, 'Fine Art and its Revival in India' p.37
69. E. B. Havell, 'Education and National Culture', (The) Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival in India, p.65
70. Ibid
Havell thus attempted to make the Indians proud of their artistic heritage. He also adopted certain practical measures to resurrect the national genius and create an awareness of self among the Indians. He reorganized the Art Gallery adjacent to the Art School into three sections with one section specially devoted to the fine arts. In 1904 with Curzon's approval, he sold the European paintings and had them replaced by fresh purchases of Indian miniature paintings of Mughal, Rajput and other schools. Havell noted:

I began an attempt to place the study of Indian art upon a proper footing by arranging a collection of Indian ornament, architecture, painting and sculpture in proper correlation as a connected whole.\textsuperscript{72}

Further, in order to promote Oriental art, Havell replaced the Western Academic training imparted in the Art School by Oriental art which was henceforth to be the basis of instruction. More significantly, he persuaded Abanindranath Tagore to take up the post of the Vice-Principal of the Art School in August 1905 and it was due to their joint intervention that conditions favourable for an Oriental art movement were created.

In his attempts at restoring the lost glory of Indian art, Havell found a like minded Oriental in Ananda Kentish

\textsuperscript{72} E. B. Havell, Indian Sculpture and Painting (London, 1907, 1923), p.17
Coomaraswamy (1877 - 1947), an individual in search of his own identity, trying to understand Indian art in its own terms. "Ananda Coomaraswamy had a finer erudition and a wider intellectual grasp than E. B. Havell". Son of a Ceylonese father, Coomaraswamy "had a truer insight into the nuances of local imagery. He started as a connoisseur of traditional arts".

Coomaraswamy argued, "Nations are made by artists and poets, not by traders and politicians". He believed that the problem was "not so much one of the rebirth of an Indian culture as it is one of preserving what remains of it". The noted artist and art critic, O. C. Gangoly commented that Coomaraswamy "devoted his life to the revival, regeneration and interpretation of Indian art". Coomaraswamy did not believe in an Indian regeneration without an artistic regeneration. In the preface to his 'Essays in National Idealism', Coomaraswamy noted, "It is possible to find in true art not merely the spiritual but the material regeneration of India". Not only the art of India, but the art of the Orient in general was upheld by Coomaraswamy in his attempts to demonstrate the highest quality and beauty of Oriental art. In his brilliant series of books:

73. K. G. Subramanyan, Op.Cit
74. Ibid
77. O. C. Gangoly 'Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy' in S. Durai Raja Singam ed. Homage to Ananda Coomaraswamy (Malaya, 1951 - 1952), p. 90
and monographs - Notes on Jaina Art (1914), Vishwakarma, One Hundred Examples of Indian Sculpture (1914), Myths of the Hindus and the Buddhists (1914), Rajput Painting (1916), as well as Medieval Sinhalese Art (1908) and The History of Indian and Indonesian Art (1927), Coomaraswamy presented Indian and Oriental art through the most expensive and accurate processes of reproductions. In an interesting talk on Javanese theatre, Coomaraswamy referred to the influence of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata on the shadow theatre of Java. His article 'Notes on the Javanese Theatre' published in 'Rupam', July 1921 revealed his deep interest in the culture of South East Asia and his conviction that the art and culture of Asia had drawn its origin from the art and culture of India.

Coomaraswamy declared that he did not believe in any regeneration of the Indian people which did not find expression in art. He lamented that the educated Indian lagged behind the rest of the world in artistic understanding and its direct outcome was evident in the inefficiency and poverty of the country. Coomaraswamy contrasted the situation with Japan:

Japan is to a large degree living upon the strength of her past. That strength lies far more than we can suspect in her art.  

78. A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Essays in National Idealism' p. iii
Coomaraswamy further proceeded to declare that there were European artists who believed that if a new inspiration came into European art, it would come from the East.

Coomaraswamy thus attempted to draw attention to the art heritage of the Orient. He called upon the Indians ".... to believe in the regeneration of India through art ...."79 asserting "Indian art can only revive and flourish if it is believed by the Indians themselves".80 He noted, "The true Nationalist is an Idealist and for him that deeper cause of the unrest is the longing for self-realisation".81 He thus concluded, "The first expression of national idealism is then a rehabilitation of the past".82

In the official British policy Coomaraswamy saw the non-comprehension of the average Europeans of the essential characteristics of the traditional Indian art which played a crucial role in the degradation of the traditional arts of India. He pointed out to the spirituality of Indian art and the anonymity of the Indian artists and compared it with the materialism of Western art. Coomaraswamy thus attempted to bring about an awareness of self among the colonized Indians, preparing them in their quest for an identity in the face of

80. A. K. Coomaraswamy, "The Influence of Modern Europe on Indian Art", Essays in National Idealism p.77
82. A. K. Coomaraswamy, The Dance of Shiva (New Delhi, 1987), p.166
colonial domination.

The arrival of the Japanese artists, Count Okakura, Hisida Shunso and Yokoyama Taikan with their message of the ideals of the East further championed the cause of the Asian Orientalists in their search for an identity in a colonized world.

Kakuzo Okakura (1863 - 1913), an eminent Japanese scholar of noble descent and the leader of the movement for the renationalizing of Japanese art was an ardent spokesman for the cultural revival and national resurgence in Asia. He broke away from the Imperial Art School of Japan and launched the Nippon Bijutsuin, the centre of the new art movement where Taikan and Hisida were his associates. As Sister Nivedita has noted, "Kakuzo Okakura has long been known as the foremost living authority on Oriental Archaeology and Art".83 His masterpiece work, (The) Ideals of the East, in which he attempted to enunciate the special character of an Asian ethos, came to be recognized as the first attempt by an independent Asian to speak about his own art in his own terms.

Okakura presented the picture of a single, integrated civilization of the Orient whose culture differed vastly from the material culture of modern Europe, declaring "Asia is one."84

84. Kakuzo Okakura, 'The Range of Ideals', (The) Ideals of the East, p. 1
and "........ if Asia be one, it is also true that the Asiatic races form a single mighty web".85

Okakura referred to the affinities between Indian art and Chinese and Japanese art which was due to the existence of a common early Asiatic art. He attempted to show Asia as a united living organism each part dependent on all the others. Okakura argued:

The tasks of Asia today then becomes that of protecting and restoring Asiatic modes. But to do this she must herself first recognize and develop consciousness of these modes. For the shadows of the past are the promise of the future.....

It was some small degree of this self-recognition that remade Japan and enabled her to weather the storm under which so much of the Oriental world went down. And it must be a renewal of the same self-consciousness that shall build up Asia again into her ancient steadfastness and strength.

...... But it must be from Asia herself ..... that the great voice shall be heard.

85. Ibid, p.3
Victory from within or a mighty death without.\textsuperscript{86}

O. C. Gangoly, the noted artist and art critic, praised Okakura's efforts to place Oriental art on such a high pedestal and asserted that it was a matter of great pride for the Indians.\textsuperscript{87}

Sister Nivedita was also in admiration of Okakura's efforts:

...... it is very reassuring to be told by a competent authority that here also once as in religion during the era of Asoka, she (India) evidently led the whole East impressing her thought and taste upon the innumerable Chinese pilgrims who visited the universities and cave temples and by their means influencing the development of sculpture, painting, architecture in China itself and through China in Japan.\textsuperscript{88}

Okakura's (The) Ideals of the East was "a classic statement of pan-Asian sentiments"\textsuperscript{89} which became central in the new discourse of Orientalism.

\textsuperscript{86} Kakuzo Okakura, (The) Ideals of the East, pp. 240 - 241, p. 244
\textsuperscript{87} See O. C. Gangoly, Bharater Shipla O Amar Katha (Calcutta, 1969), p. 237
\textsuperscript{88} Sister Nivedita, Op. Cit., pp. xii - xiii
It was with Okakura's arrival at Calcutta in 1902 that a significant association between the artists of the Bengal School and the Japanese artists commenced and this was to have a deep impact on the Indian artists. Abanindranath and Gaganendranath were impressed with the techniques of Japanese art, as well as with the simplicity of Japanese taste, which led them to replace the ornate Victorian décor of their household with simple objects in the Oriental style. On his return to Japan Okakura despatched his pupils Taikan and Hishida to Calcutta to learn the rudiments of Indian art and Hindu iconography. Taikan also learnt Mughal painting from Abanindranath. Abanindranath and his elder brother Gaganendranath learnt the techniques of 'Wash' painting, painting on silk and other aspects of Japanese art from the Japanese artists which encouraged them 'to move towards a new world of sensibility'.

The cause of the emergent Oriental art movement in India at the beginning of the twentieth century found an ardent supporter in Sister Nivedita (1867-1911), disciple of Swami Vivekananda who inspired her as an art critic. She stood forth as the champion of the great art heritage of India and the Orient in the face of Western challenge. "If there was anything in the heart of Nivedita which could be taken as her grand mission it was the restoration of the national consciousness". 90

She constantly endeavoured to develop a sense of identity among the young artists, urging them to revive ancient Indian art, promoting modern Indian art in the process.

Nivedita believed that an artistic revival was of the utmost significance in national awakening. "Nivedita believed Art to be a potent factor in the awakening and strengthening of the national feeling".\(^{91}\) It was thus her firm belief that the rebirth of art was "essential to the upbringing of the motherland - its reawakening rather".\(^{92}\)

Nivedita drew attention to the great art epochs of the country - the art of Gandhara, Sanchi, Amaravati, Ajanta, Elephanta "which cannot yet have died". She argued, "An age of nationality must resume into its own hands the power of each and all these epochs ....."\(^{93}\) Upholding the glorious art tradition of India Nivedita asked, "Shall the Indian Padmini be succeeded by the Greek Helen?"\(^{94}\)

It was Sister Nivedita who first introduced Havell to the meaning and significance of Indian art. This in turn led Havell to encourage Abanindranath Tagore to uphold the Indian style and technique in his art. The path was thus prepared for the

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93. Ibid
94. Ibid
great revival of Indian art at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Swami Lokeswarananda has noted:

Nivedita was not only the most ardent champion of Indian art, but also its most enlightened critic. If in later years the Western intelligentsia showed interest in Indian art and acknowledged that it possessed a charm and grandeur not to be found in its counterparts elsewhere, it was largely because of her ......

Nivedita lived in the great time of national revival in India. She had great faith in the role of Art in exalting the spirit of the Indians. In a letter to Miss J. Macleod, Sister Nivedita wrote, "I sometimes think that our greatest work in modernizing India might be done through Art ...." She discussed the issue of promotion of Oriental art with Havell, Okakura and Abanindranath. She is believed to have requested Abanindranath to paint the picture of Bharat Mata which she hailed as the first great masterpiece of the new style of Indian art.

Nivedita thought it to be of supreme value to show Asia as "a united living organism, each part dependent on all the others, the whole breathing a single complex life".97

Nivedita also recognized the growing sense of identity among the Indians. She thus commented:

India ...... appears to be waking up these days ..... for the people are feeling their power. I think Curzon has broken the British Empire.98

The message of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore also greatly influenced the evolution of a cultural identity among the Indians in the early twentieth century. Tagore himself was greatly influenced by the Swadeshi movement. He proclaimed that the national movement began "to give voice to the mind of our people trying to assert their personality. It was a voice of impatience at the humiliation constantly heaped upon us by people who were not Oriental ...."99 Tagore declared that the Indians had to build up a nation but not in imitation of the West and pointed out that the national movement was started "...... with a great courage to deny and to oppose all pride in mere borrowings".100 He drew the attention of the Indians to

97. Sister Nivedita, Introduction to Kakuzo Okakura's (The) Ideals of the East, p.xx
100. Ibid
the greatness and beauty of Oriental Art, proudly proclaiming that China and Japan had no hesitation in acknowledging their debt to India in the artistic and spiritual growth of life".101

The views of Tagore played a crucial role in the emergent Oriental art movement by arousing the dignity and confidence of the Indians in the cultural heritage of the country.

In the early twentieth century, thus, there was a marked awareness of the 'self' and a growing sense of identity among the Indians as reflected in the Oriental art movement that was taking shape. The realization now dawned among the artists and the intelligentsia of the need to place the movement on a firm footing through the institutional platform of an art society. Of considerable significance in this respect was the new appreciation of some Englishmen for the culture and heritage of the country and that of the Orient in general. It was this merger of interest that led to the establishment of the Indian Society of Oriental Art.

This was, then, the environment in which the concept of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was nurtured and it constituted the background to its foundation in 1907.