CHAPTER - II
THE FOUNDATION OF THE INDIAN SOCIETY OF ORIENTAL ART; ITS AIMS & OBJECTIVES
PL. 7 - EMBLEM OF INDIAN SOCIETY OF ORIENTAL ART
The Amrita Bazar Patrika, August 17, 1936 reported:

In the year 1907 the Indian Society of Oriental Art was formed in Calcutta to foster a new movement in painting that sought to get back to the psychology and technique of the indigenous art.

Indeed, the foundation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was a significant landmark in the history of the growth of cultural nationalism of India in the first half of the twentieth century. The Society, by bringing to the fore the rich artistic heritage of the Orient, significantly aided the evolution of a cultural identity among the Indians stifled under the weight of colonial domination. This went a long way in demolishing the myth of the cultural supremacy of the Occident and in turn reinforced the Indian nationalist movement culminating in the country's independence in 1947. The present chapter analyses the foundation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art taking into account the role played by a number of personalities, both Indian and foreigners, genuinely interested in the cause of Indian and Oriental art. It was due to the efforts of these men that the Society was established to provide an institutional platform to the movement for the promotion of a national art movement in the early twentieth century. The aims of the Society were framed with the particular objective of promoting
an indigenous art movement which would be able to assist the Indians in their search for an identity in a colonial world.

The preceding chapter has dwelt on the pitiable condition of Indian art under colonial rule accompanied by the absence of a cultural self-awareness among the Indians themselves. "For the best part of the nineteenth century, Indian art was the soulless art of a disinherited people".¹ A state of cultural barrenness existed in the country. The Government art schools were mere tools of colonial cultural domination and did nothing to uphold the rich art tradition of the country.

The situation however gradually changed with the rising growth of Indian nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century with the partition of Bengal in 1905 acting as the catalyst. In the face of colonial challenge the Indian now attempted to assert his identity as expressed in the Swadeshi movement. Such assertion was also notably visible in the sphere of the arts. Particularly remarkable was the strong Bengali urge to art expression which would arouse the lost sense of national cultural dignity. There was a growing desire among the Bengali artists themselves to break away from the colonial art norms and carve out a distinct cultural identity for themselves. This was reflected in a series of exhibitions of their works which drew inspiration from the art traditions of the country as well

as of the Orient. The noted artist O. C. Gangoly has recollected thus:

The Calcutta organization known as the Indian Society of Oriental Art grew out of the successive exhibitions of the works of the Tagore School of Art which began to be held at the Government School of Art, Calcutta, from the early part of this century.²

The Englishman, December 24, 1920 too recorded the establishment of the Society in the year 1907. A study of the history of the Society reveals that its inaugural meeting was held at 4.30 p.m. on Saturday, the 6th April, 1907, at the Government School of Art, Calcutta. Further, the Society was registered under Act XXI of 1860.³ The Statesman also recorded the foundation of the Society:

A meeting of the newly inaugurated Indian Society of Oriental Art was held in the rooms of the Indian School of Arts attached to the Museum, yesterday afternoon.⁴

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4. The Statesman, May 20, 1907
The Statesman, August 31, 1958 also noted:

Founded in 1907 through the efforts of the Tagores, the Society's offices were at first situated in the Government School of Art from where several enthusiasts started the work of research and propaganda.

Abanindranath Tagore too recollected the foundation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in his memoirs:

There was at the time a Society formed by the Zamindars of Bengal called the Landholders' Association with S. P. (Later Lord) Sinha as its President. Suren (Surendranath Tagore) used to work hard for it, and it was his idea that we should hold an exhibition of paintings. He collected together my pictures and the Japanese prints Okakura had brought with him and a few other stray pictures borrowed from different sources. With these he got ready to start the exhibition...... the pictures were hung in the billiard room and a fair number of people came to see them..... That was our first exhibition........ Two or three years later Havell wanted to build up that small art club .... on a broader basis. A Committee
was formed which we joined as members.5

The Advance, December 25, 1934 noted:

The Society's offices were at first situated in the Government School of Art, Calcutta, from where a handful of enthusiasts consisting of ...... Lord Kitchener, Lord Carmichael, Mr. E. B. Havell, the three Tagore brothers - Gaganendranath, Samarendranath and Abanindranath, Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy, Sir J. G. Woodroffe, Mr. E. Thornton, Mr. N. Blount, Sir Rash Behari Ghosh and a few other European and Indian gentlemen started the work of research and propaganda.

What is evident from the available records is the fact that a group of Indian artists and art lovers seeking an identity through the upholding of Indian and Oriental art played the crucial role in the foundation of the Society. "The exquisite work of the growing group gained appreciation that resulted in the formation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1907".6

Among the Indian artists who played a significant role in the establishment of the Society as an organization for the

5. Translated from Abanindranath Tagore, Jorasankor Dhare (Vishwa Bharati, Bangabda 1351), p.117
PL.8 - ABANINDRANATH TAGORE (1871-1951)
promotion of a cultural self-identity among the Indians, the names of the Tagore brothers must first be taken into consideration. "It also calls attention to the activities of the Society which was formed in 1907 by the three Tagore brothers ........ to encourage and promote modern Indian art."  

It was Abanindranath Tagore of the illustrious Tagore household of Jorasanko, Calcutta, who was the first to start the modern art movement in India following the line of the Oriental tradition. In his attempts to create an art tradition characterized by a non-Western identity he turned for inspiration to the art tradition of ancient and medieval India as well as to the art of Oriental countries like Japan, Persia. Abanindranath's aim was to make his countrymen aware of the artistic heritage of their own country and thus arouse their confidence in the dignity of their being. "It is time that Indians should feel the magnitude and grandeur of their art heritage," Abanindranath wrote to Havell. The artist was not content to sit in the studio of his Jorasanko house. He toiled to bring about a widespread revival of Indian painting. "He established the Seminary of Oriental Art and trained up an intelligent band of students into the new technique."  

7. The Statesman, September 3, 1958  
9. Bhabani Bhattacharya, 'Abanindranath Tagore - Birthday of a Great Artist', The Statesman, August 9, 1936
PL.9 - GAGANENDRANATH TAGORE (1867-1938)
new traditions, new forms in the expression of his school of art. He brought about revolutionary changes and gave a new dignity to Oriental art. Abanindranath was the Joint Secretary of the Indian Society of Oriental Art and gave the Society its name:

Some proposed to call it the Oriental Art Society. I said, "No, let it be named the Indian Society of Oriental Art."  

The inaugural meeting of the Society was convened by Abanindranath himself. Abanindranath hoped that the Society would help in the promotion and propagation of the new art movement 'symbolising the recovery of tradition and lost identity'.

Abanindranath's elder brother Gaganendranath Tagore also played a crucial role in the foundation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art. Abanindranath also recollected in his memoirs, "My elder brother Gaganendranath was with us ....." James H. Cousins noted, "With Abanindranath was his brother Gaganendranath a markedly different type of personality ..... He had followed his brother on the quest of artistic reality and soon attained with him a remarkable eminence in the revived style of painting".

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10. Indian Nation, April 15, 1962  
12. Ibid  
organizer, cultural deportment and personal magnetism were responsible for rallying together the British wellwishers."14 He was the backbone of the Society from the day of its birth and made it the centre of Indian culture.

Associated with the Indian Society of Oriental Art since its foundation was Surendranath Tagore, a keen lover of Oriental art and a writer of distinction. He broached the idea of organizing an exhibition of the art of the Orient by the members of the Landholders' Association of Bengal. Abanindranath Tagore reminiscences in Jorasankor Dhare, "...... it was his idea that we should hold an exhibition of paintings. He collected together my pictures and the Japanese prints Okakura had brought with him and a few other stray pictures borrowed from different sources. With these he got ready to start the exhibition".15 It was this exhibition that set the stage for the future exhibitions organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art.

Among the founder members of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was also Jamini Prakash Ganguly (1876 - 1956) related to the Tagore family. He was one of the Vice-Presidents of the Bangiya Kala Samsad in 1905 and played a significant role in the foundation of the Society in 1907. He became a

member of the Society's Exhibition Committee.

Quite a number of artists in search of an autonomous identity within the colonial framework, became the life members of the Indian Society of Oriental Art. Among them were the critic Ordhendra Coomar Gangoly, Asit Haldar, Nandalal Bose and Samarendranath Gupta, the last three being the students of Abanindranath. Ordhendra Coomar Gangoly better known as O. C. Gangoly was the Honorary Secretary of the Indian Society of Oriental Art and later became its Vice President. An artist in the Oriental style and a renowned art critic, he played an important role in the evolution of an autonomous art journalism in India upholding the artistic traditions of the Orient. As the editor of the Society's art journal 'Rupam', O. C. Gangoly attempted to challenge the contention of the colonial government that India had no art tradition worth the name. O. C. Gangoly also wrote reviews of the exhibitions organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art.

To aid the Indian Society of Oriental Art in its attempts at upholding an Oriental identity in the realm of arts, Abanindranath's disciples and associates like Asit Haldar, Nandalal Bose and Samarendranath Gupta also enthusiastically joined it. Their attempts at upholding an Oriental art heritage through the Society's platform would go a long way in the
evolution of an Indian identity which had so long remained suppressed under the weight of colonial domination.

Another towering personality, who, although not directly associated with the Indian Society of Oriental Art, influenced its foundation, was the great poet Rabindranath Tagore. Through his writings he constantly endeavoured to encourage the Indians in their quest for an identity in a colonial world. He particularly drew attention to the great Oriental heritage:

We forgot that in Asia great kingdoms were founded, philosophy, science, arts and literature flourished and all the great religions of the world had their cradles...... For centuries we did hold torches of civilization in the East when the West slumbered in darkness.....\textsuperscript{16}

Tagore thus attempted to rouse the self-confidence of the Indians and their pride in the great heritage of the Orient as compared to that of the Occident. Thus, when the Indian Society of Oriental Art was established in 1907 to promote the cause of Indian and Oriental art, it had the blessings of the great poet. Further, he introduced many foreign lovers of Indian art to the members of the Indian Society of Oriental Art. For instance,

\textsuperscript{16} Rabindranath Tagore, Nationalism (London, 1907) p.2
James H. Cousins noted, "Rabindranath Tagore was most helpful in my endeavours to absorb the significance of what was taking place and to meet the personalities through which it was proceeding. Through him and others I met the members of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, a small group of Indian and Britishers."\(^{18}\)

A large body of prominent Indians and art connoisseurs also joined the Society, for instance Maharaja Bijoychand Mehtab of Burdwan, Raja Peary Mohan Mukherjee of Uttarpura and Maharaja Jagadindranath Roy of Natore. The Empire, December 29, 1919 recorded that the Indian Society of Oriental Art ..."had the support of prominent men in Bengal."\(^{19}\) Further, it was hoped that the Society "would be patronized by all persons in Bengal who were genuinely attached to the country and that it would prosper in all respects."\(^{20}\) The inauguration of the Society's annual exhibitions in the pre-independence period was marked by the presence of prominent Indian aristocrats like the Maharajas of Burdwan, Cossimbazar, Natore, Darbhanga, Santosh, Uttarpura and the Maharani of Cooch Behar. This esteemed class of aristocrats patronized the Indian Society of Oriental Art by purchasing the works of its artists. The Maharaja of Burdwan later became the President of the Society.

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17. James H. Cousins was the Assistant Editor of 'New India', Madras. He wrote the reviews of the annual exhibitions of the Indian Society of Oriental Art.
19. Lord Ronaldshay's speech quoted in the Empire, December 29, 1919
20. Ibid
His speech delivered at the Society's annual exhibition held in December 1933, deserve special mention:

You have undoubtedly a glorious past to brood over ...... It is indeed very encouraging to note that the traditional art of India which lay dormant for a considerable length of time is making a distinct headway to regain its pristine vigour.21

Other prominent Indians were also associated with the Indian Society of Oriental Art since its inception. The Forward, December 19, 1925 noted the presence of Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose at the inauguration of the Society's annual exhibition. The New Empire, December 24, 1926 noted the presence of Rai Bahadur Badri Das Goenka, Rai Bahadur Manilal Nahar, Professor Bhandarkar at the Society's annual exhibition of 1926. Other important personalities associated with the Society at the time of its inception were Samarendranath Tagore, Mr. Justice Ashutosh Chaudhuri, Mr. J. Chaudhuri, Bar-at-Law, Mr. R. C. Bonerjee, Mrs. B. L. Mitter, Mr. P. C. Mitter, Mr. S. N. Mallick, Rai Bahadur Fanindralal De and others.22

21. The Maharaja of Burdwan's speech delivered at the inauguration of the 25th Annual Exhibition of the I.S.O.A. quoted in the Amrita Bazar Patrika, December 28, 1933
22. See Forward, December 19, 1925 and The Statesman, December 24, 1922.
Not only Indians but a group of European art connoisseurs also took an active interest in the rich art heritage of India and the Orient and played a crucial role in the foundation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art. Abanindranath recollected in his memoirs, 'Jorasankor Dhare' that civilians, judges, magistrates, governors and lieutenant governors were among the early members of the Society. These men strengthened the hands of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in its attempts to arouse the "lost sense of national cultural dignity and the inspiration of creative authenticity".

What is remarkable about the inaugural meeting of the Indian Society of Oriental Art is the presence of a large number of Europeans interested in the cause of Indian and Oriental art. From the complex of the founder-members of the Society it is apparent that at least in the formative stages, members of the colonial intelligentsia in close and friendly association with the Indian members of the Society, played a significant role in aiding the organization's attempts at the promotion of a national cultural identity.

25. The Englishman, December 15, 1922 noted, "The roll of its (I.S.O.A.) members is made up of an equal number of Indians and Europeans, whose interest in Oriental Art help to sustain the activity of the Society in popularizing a genuine revival of the traditions of old Indian art".
Among the European members of the Indian Society of Oriental Art mention may be first made of E. B. Havell, appointed the Principal of the Calcutta School of Art in 1896. With his arrival a new movement in Indian painting began at the turn of the century. He was one of the very few exceptional Englishmen who had realized that the whole policy of anglicizing India was wrong. Practically and theoretically Havell tried to make the Indians aware of their Great Art Tradition. His books on Indian art — 'Indian Sculpture and Painting', 'Indian Architecture', 'The Ideals of Indian Art' — drew world attention to the rich artistic heritage of India and raised the Indian morale. Along with Abanindranath Tagore, Havell founded the Bangiya Kala Parishad in 1905 to recreate a national art style. His efforts at emphasizing the essential aesthetic quality in Indian sculpture, architecture and painting played a crucial role in preparing the stage for the foundation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1907. Havell awakened Abanindranath's "creative genius which brought about India's artistic renaissance and brought into being the Indian Society of Oriental Art".26 In 1906 Havell left for England on account of his mental derangement. Yet he was made a member of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in absentia because of his unique contribution towards the revival and promotion of Indian and Oriental art.27

The first President of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was Lord Kitchener, the Chief of the Army, Fort William, Calcutta and an ardent lover of Indian art. One of the Society's Joint Secretaries was Mr. Norman Blount, a jute-broker and a real admirer of the other Joint Secretary, Abanindranath Tagore. The Lieutenant-Governor, Lord Carmichael attended the Society's inaugural meeting in 1907 and later became the President of the Society. Mr. Justice Rampini was voted to the Chair. Mr. Justice Holmwood and Mr. Justice Woodroffe were also important members. Others present at the inaugural meeting of the Society were Dudley B. Myers, C.F. Larmour, Lt. Col. Phillot, E. Meyer, A. Stephen, W. Garth, Sir Herbert Risley, W. Gregory, H.G. Graves.²⁸ Active members of the Society at its early stage were also two Swedish businessmen in Calcutta, Mr. Rueboson and Mr. Muller. The common factor among these distinguished Europeans was that they were all lovers of Indian and Oriental art and they joined hands with the Indian artists and art lovers to form the Indian Society of Oriental Art to encourage and promote Oriental art.

Among the European members of the Society, a special mention may be made of Sir John Woodroffe, a Calcutta High Court Judge and a lover of Abanindranath's school of art.²⁹ He

²⁹. It was due to Woodroffe's insistence that the Society adopted an elaborate programme of popularizing reproductions of the paintings of Abanindranath and his pupils.
was one of the founder-members of the Society and later became its President. He had a high regard for Indian art and analysed its phases of development through his writings with much expertise. He also worked hard to promote Abanindranath's style of painting abroad and secure for it an honourable position. Abanindranath Tagore recollected in his memoirs that since his English was inadequate for the preparation of the catalogue of paintings during the Society's annual exhibitions, he requested Woodroffe, whose preparation of a catalogue might well be described as a piece of literature! Every picture exhibited by the Society had a detailed story printed beneath it. Abanindranath used to jot-down what he could in broken English, to be corrected and polished up by Woodroffe. Woodroffe tried to draw attention to India's rich artistic heritage and hailed the art style upheld by Abanindranath and his pupils. He pointed out that Abanindranath's work was a sign of what may be given to the world if the Indian people regained their artistic heritage and realized that their duty was not to borrow from others but to give of their own. In this context Woodroffe noted that the Indian Society of Oriental Art was "doing good work by its endeavour to arouse in the India of to-day the beautiful spirit

30. It was as a result of Woodroffe's untiring efforts that reproductions of paintings of Abanindranath and his students appeared in journals of Japan. He wrote essays and articles on Indian art and artists which were published in the Japanese art journal 'Kokka'.

which inspired the artistry of her great past".32

The role played by another foreign admirer of Abanindranath's style of art, Lord Carmichael, needs to be analysed here. Much before Lord Ronaldshay, Lord Carmichael as the Governor of Bengal and the President of the Society encouraged Abanindranath's art by various means. He purchased a number of paintings of Abanindranath and his disciples in the Society's exhibitions. He played an important role in the establishment of the Indian Art Gallery in the Art School and for some time acted as the President of the Gallery. It was due to his efforts that the 'Art Purchase Committee' was formed. He was also an ardent collector of traditional Indian artefacts. Abanindranath held Lord Carmichael's artistic sense and style of art appreciation in great esteem.

The name of Mr. Thornton, an engineer in the Martin Company and an artist himself, deserves mention here. He was always eager for the Society's advancement and for the welfare of its artists whose works he purchased as a means of helping them.

Another important European connoisseur of Indian art whose efforts considerably aided the Indian Society of Oriental Art in its attempts at upholding an autonomous cultural identity

32. John Woodroffe, 'A Modern School of Indian Painting' published in 'Kokka' (1908)
was Dr. James H. Cousins, the Assistant Editor of the Madras journal 'New India'. Although Calcutta was the birthplace and the prime centre of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, gradually its influence began to spread to different parts of India. In Madras, the influence of Bengal's new art movement could be markedly felt, thanks to the efforts of Cousins who used to write reviews of the annual exhibitions organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art, personally attending such exhibitions in Calcutta at the special invitation of Sir John Woodroffe. It was chiefly at Cousins' initiative that an exhibition of modern Indian paintings organized under the auspices of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was arranged in Madras in 1916. Cousins thus noted on this exhibition:

The first exhibition of modern Indian paintings in South India was given in the rooms of the Young Men's Indian Association, Madras, from February 19 to March 4, 1916. My enthusiasm was shared by Mrs. Besant, who at once became the patron of the event........ The exhibition made a stir in the cultural life of Madras....... All concerned were satisfied with what had been taken to be a historical event.33

In 1919 the Indian Society of Oriental Art was reorganized chiefly with government aid. A truly great impetus was provided
by the then Governor, his Excellency Lord Ronaldshay, an ardent admirer of the Tagore School of Painting. He personally met Abanindranath and Gaganendranath and believed that the new art movement which "these modern exponents of Indian art" were promoting deserved "encouragement and support" of the government. He proposed that the Indian Society of Oriental Art "..... needed to be reorganized and placed on a firmer footing". He also proposed that it was necessary to find a suitable accommodation to serve as the head-quarters of the new centre and to arrange for the publication of a high class journal devoted to the cause of Indian art. He also promised to secure government grant for the Indian Society of Oriental Art. He analysed the considerations that influenced him to take a deep personal interest in the renaissance of Indian art:

Throughout the whole wide sphere of art I am in profound sympathy with the spirit of Indian unrest. As a result of it I look forward to seeing the peculiar genius of the Indian people finding renewed expression in a language of its own ........ The school of painting is in no sense a Government School of Art. It is a national movement - the fair flower of an indigenous growth which excites the interest and sympathy of Government, but which would most assuredly wither into decay were we to
endeavour to bring it under Government control. All that we are doing is to render it such assistance as will enable it to blossom. When it has succeeded in doing that I look to see it grow into a vast tree with spreading branches, watered by the affection, the encouragement and the support of its own people.34

The Governor inaugurated the new centre of the Indian Society of Oriental Art on December 4, 1919, by arranging an evening party at the Government House where a private viewing of the exhibits of the Tagore School was organized. The meeting was attended by about two-hundred guests, mostly Indian. With the aid of Government grants the Indian Society of Oriental Art hired an extensive flat at 6, Samavaya Mansion in the Hindusthan Insurance Building on Hogg Street where a school for teaching painting and sculpture was opened.

Thus, the Indian Society of Oriental Art was established as an organization to uphold the cause of Oriental art by the untiring efforts of a group of men eager for the promotion of an Indian art movement which would give the Indians a sense of identity in a colonial world. Not only Indians, but also Governors and highly placed government officials were associated with the Society with which they developed a close and friendly

association from the very beginning.

The inaugural meeting of the Indian Society of Oriental Art held on April 6, 1907 was addressed by Mr. Justice Rampini who had been voted to the Chair and who invited suggestions from the gentlemen present. There arose the issue of finding a proper name for the Society. Some proposed to call it the Oriental Art Society. But the name of the Calcutta Society had to be distinguished from an art society which existed in Paris under the name of The Society of Oriental Art. Abanindranath recommended that the Society be named Indian Society of Oriental Art. The name was accepted by all.

At the conclusion of the meeting it was proposed by Mr. Justice Rampini and carried unanimously -

1. That a Society be formed to be called 'Oriental Art Society of India'.

2. That H. E. Lord Kitchener be appointed the President of the Society.

3. That Mr. Rampini be elected Vice-President.

4. That Mr. Blount and Mr. Abanindranath Tagore be appointed Joint Honorary Secretaries and Treasurers.

5. That ladies shall be eligible for membership.³⁸

The object of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was to promote the cause of Oriental art by bringing to the fore the rich artistic heritage of India and the Orient by means of organizing exhibitions, lectures and publications. This would in turn contribute to the growth of self-esteem and a sense of identity among the Indians.

The Statesman, May 20, 1907 published an article on the objects of the Indian Society of Oriental Art:

The objects of the Society are the cultivation by its members and the promotion among the public of a knowledge of all branches of ancient and modern Oriental art by means of the collection of objects of such art and the exhibition of such collections by the Society; the reading of papers, holding of discussions, the purchase of books and journals relating to art, correspondence with kindered societies or collectors and connoisseurs, the publication of a journal and by such other means as the Society may hereafter determine, as also the furtherance of modern Indian art by

holding public loan exhibitions, the encouragement and assistance of Indian artists, art students and workers in artistic industries, by among other means, help given to them.

The Society's journal 'Rupam' whose object was to represent the traditions of India and the Orient in general, as expressed through art, has referred to the objects of the Society in similar terms:

Amongst other means, help given to them (artists) by the Society, towards the disposal of their work, the holding of public exhibitions of works of modern Indian art, the award of prizes and diplomas at such exhibitions, as also by such other means as the Society hereafter may determine.39

An analysis of the objects of the Indian Society of Oriental Art reveals that its primary objective was to afford the public an opportunity to see the works of the pioneers of the Indian renaissance movement in art and at the same time make it aware of the splendid art heritage of the other countries of the Orient. The Society was also to adopt necessary measures to ensure the furtherance of the cause of Indian art and secure for

39. Rupam, January, 1920
it recognition and honour which it had been unjustly deprived of under colonial rule.

Lord Ronaldshay, deeply interested in the affairs of the Society, declared:

I am a warm sympathizer with the objects of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, namely the cultivation by its members and the promotion amongst the public of a knowledge of all branches of ancient and modern Oriental Art and I agree that the means by which the Society seeks to achieve its objects are admirable.40

The Governor further proceeded:

I hope that it will be thoroughly understood that this hall has not merely been engaged for the purpose of exhibiting the pictures .......... I hope it will become something more than a mere place of exhibition. I hope it will become a centre in which all those who are interested in this movement and culture of India generally will find a home where they may come and discuss matters of interest ....... where they come and hear lectures delivered upon subjects of interest to themselves and where they may

40. Lord Ronaldshay’s speech, The Englishman, December 5, 1919
The Indian Society of Oriental Art was initially a localized, focussed institution with its chief motto being Indianness of Indian art. It served as a platform for those Indian artists and art lovers in search of an autonomous cultural idiom within the colonial framework. The Society received the support of European connoisseurs of art who supported an Indian art movement that was not necessarily narrowly chauvinistic. E. B. Havell noted, "While opposed to the mechanical stereotyping of particular traditional forms we consider that in only an organic development from the national art of the past that the path of true progress is to be found". The Englishman, January 30, 1905 had already noted, "What therefore is desired from the Indian artists worthy of their name is something distinctly Indian". Such declarations became the motto of the Indian Society of Oriental Art.

The Indian Society of Oriental Art was to give institutional backing to activities centering around contemporary Indian art. The Society first came into prominence by associating with the project of the London India Society to have new copies made of the Ajanta frescoes under the leadership of Lady Herringham.

41. Lord Ronaldshay's speech, The Englishman, December 30, 1919
42. E. B. Havell, Letters to the Editor, Times, February 21, 1910
The India Society deputed Nandalal Bose and Asit Kumar Haldar to work under her supervision at Ajanta. The copies were subsequently published by the India Society of London and much admired in Europe.43

At the same time the Indian Society of Oriental Art did not wish to be limited to a narrow nationalistic outlook. It therefore encouraged its artists to explore new varieties of art forms turning to the art of the Orient that was pan-Asian in its scope, in its attempts to challenge the colonial government's rejection of Oriental works of creation. The art of the Far East—China, Japan, Java as well as the art styles of Persia, Arabia generated great enthusiasm among the artists. Both Abanindranath Tagore and Gaganendranath Tagore were greatly indebted to the art of Japan as evident in their use of 'wash' technique and the Japanese brush technique. Some of Gaganendranath's works showed affinity with the Japanese wood-block prints. Abanindranath was also influenced by the art of Persia as is evident in his 'The Poet'. The artist's Arabian Night and Omar Khayyam series also bear testimony to his indebtedness to the art of Arabia and Persia. Nandalal Bose was also greatly inspired by the art of the Far East. His 'Japanese Dance', his study of landscapes and his 'Brihannala', a

43. See Ratan Parimoo, The Paintings of the Three Tagores (Baroda, 1973), p.55
panel painting on silk in fresco style inspired by Javanese art form\textsuperscript{44} bear testimony to the point. Asit Kumar Haldar, Mukul Dey, Benode Behari Mukherjee were also indebted to the art of the Far East; Benode Behari executed murals in the Persian style. Critics like Jaya Appasamy and K.G. Subramanyan have noticed in Benode Behari's mural on medieval saints on the walls of Hindi Bhavan at Santiniketan definite influence of Persian style.

The works of some relatively unknown artists like Promode Kumar Chattopadhyay and Chaitanyadev Chattopadhyay revealed a marked 'Tibetanism',\textsuperscript{45} while Dhirendra Krishna Deb Burman and Manindrabhushan Gupta's art also reflected the cultural contact between India and the Far East. The art of the Far East also inspired artists like O.C. Gangoly, Sudhansu Sekhar Chaudhuri,\textsuperscript{46} Bratindranath Tagore while the influence of Chinese and Japanese calligraphy was marked in some of the early works of Gopal Ghosh, a member of the later constituted Calcutta Group. The Society also encouraged H. Hariharan to execute decorative pottery in the Japanese and Persian styles.\textsuperscript{47} In addition the Society organized an exhibition of Japanese colour prints in 1936 and another of reconstructions of Iranian frescoes in 1938.

\textsuperscript{44} See The Statesman, December 26, 1928
\textsuperscript{45} The Forum, January 26, 1924
\textsuperscript{46} Sudhansu Sekhar Chaudhuri's 'Siamese Actress' reflected the influence of Siam.
\textsuperscript{47} The Amrita Bazar Patrika, January 29, 1937
The object of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was thus to uphold the art of the Orient. Yet at the same time the Society took upon itself the task of creating an awareness of the contemporary art trends of the West. In its annual exhibition of December 1922, the Society showcased the works of the Bauhaus artists of Europe – Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger, Johannes Itten, George Muche, Gerhardt Marcks, Lothar Schreyer, Margit Tery – Adler, Sophie Korner. The exhibition also displayed the reproductions of other modern artists of Europe.48 The Society was congratulated for exhibiting original works by the European avant-garde never before seen in India. Stella Kramrisch in her introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition highlighted the fact that in spite of the difference in the artistic objectives of the Western abstract artists and the Orientalists, they were making a common front against academic art.49 The same exhibition also showcased the works of the talented Andree Karpeles from Paris. The Englishman, December 15, 1922 congratulated the Society for ".... its enterprise in putting together examples of these latest movements in the West".

The Indian Society of Oriental Art was also to publish an art journal 'Rupam' which was to be a landmark in the evolution of art journalism in the country. 'Rupam' was to pioneer a trend in Oriental research, publishing articles on the

49. See Dr. Max Osborn, 'The Indian Art Exhibition in Berlin', Rupam (July – December 1923), p.74
art and architecture not only of the country, but also of the Orient as a whole. In addition, the Society was to organize a series of lectures by distinguished personalities on the art heritage of the Orient.

The Indian Society of Oriental Art was thus to serve as the bedrock providing the necessary sustenance for the flourishing of the new art movement of which it became the champion and the campaigner. It gave institutional backing to the new art movement parallel to the Government Art College which upheld Western academic norms. The Bengal School with the Indian Society of Oriental Art at the background, utilized the Society's platform to showcase its art drawing inspiration from the Swadeshi movement. Inspired by the nationalist fervour the motto of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was to promote the Indianness of Indian art and this became its identity in the first half of the twentieth century. This was to serve as a contrast to the later groups like the Calcutta Group, which, constituted in 1943 during the years of the Second World War, attempted to portray the stark reality of the contemporary times. At the same time the Society in its attempts at asserting the strength of Indian art, sought to uphold a pan-Asian Oriental heritage which in turn reinforced the growing self-awareness among the Indians during the pre-independence period.