Chapter 2
Chapter II

Historical Development and Movement of Bengal School

Bengal School had a larger role to play in the world of art, for it was here that “modern” Indian art was nurtured and found direction. Bengal School was very important for several reasons. Bengal is historically important and was one of the first seats of British power. The East India Company established a trading post at Calcutta, which afterwards became a great commercial city. Calcutta was at the same time growing to be the cultural center of Bengal, superseding earlier ancient towns.¹

The paintings of the Bengal school, far from dealt with contemporary problems or the emotion of the times are withdrawn and other-worldly. The tendency towards idealising is the only link with the heritage of ancient traditional art.² Because the ninth to the thirteenth century sculptures and paintings are by no means the earliest objects of art from Bengal. Besides the pre-historic and the proto-historic terracotta found from various sites of West Bengal, a large number of terracotta toys, dolls, small votive figures, small ritual figurines, seals with designs, and images have been found from Chandra Ketugarh in North 24-Parganas and Tamluk in Midnapur and other places of deltaic West Bengal. Bengal art came to a turning point. Recent discovery of some fragmentary evidence of the fifteen century illustrated manuscripts from Husain Shahi Bengal, the glorious period of development of Bengali literature and music, had dispelled the notion that the Sultanate period of Bengal was totally bereft of visual arts. Stylistically these paintings bear family

resemblance with the contemporary Sultanate paintings, especially of the Chaurapanchasika variety from Jaunpur. Although there is no historical evidence to prove it, one may not be wholly wrong in assuming that the distinctiveness of Bengal art enjoys has stemmed from continuous, though not unchanging, traditions of folk arts and crafts.

The situation, changed drastically after 1765, when the British East India Company took over the revenue management of Subah Bangla (the present day West Bengal, Bangladesh, Bihar and Orissa) and especially after 1793, when by the enactment of permanent settlement, the Company's government changed the system of land revenue administration so completely that the whole gamut of land centered human relations in rural areas changed. These changes were compounded by wilful suppression of Indian crafts and manufactures to turn India into an importer of machine-made goods from Britain after 1813.

All these factors disrupted the continuity of the more professional rural crafts and arts. But it was the Calcutta-ward migration of urban artists from the disbanded courtly ateliers of northern India that was bringing about decisive changes in the Indian art scene. Towards the fourth quarter of the 18th century, in the court of the puppet Nawab of Murshidabad, the East India Company's rule had firmly entrenched in Bengal and the hub of activities had shifted to Calcutta. Peripatetic European painters had already started coming into India in search of fortune. European prints (engravings, etchings etc.) had started coming into India even before that. An art school was established in Calcutta in 1854, with the blessing of the colonial government, resulting in making pre-art school artists redundant. The most significant body of drawings and paintings of nineteenth century Bengal, are the Kalighat pats, created by a close knit group of clay modelers and painters from rural areas who settled down in the vicinity of the Kali temple of Kalighat locality in the Calcutta, in search of employment. Although the stylistic ancestry of Kalighat Pats can be traced back to the rural pats of Bengal, the differences between them make Kalighat
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pats more significant as works of art.\(^3\) Here was a rich prize for such conquistadors as Robert Clive, and a secure base from which successive governors general could extend the sway and trading sphere of the East India Company.\(^4\) From the time of Warren Hastings it was the capital of the British possessions in India and a prosperous city, with advanced educational facilities and organised publishing princes had their own houses there, among them the aristocratic houses of the Tagores.\(^5\)

All through the nineteenth century, Bengal’s bicultural intellectuals were setting the tone for the new outlook on religion, politics, and literature being adopted by English-knowing Indians in other parts of the subcontinent. First the writings of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Debendranath Tagore, then the personal visits and lectures of Keshub Chunder Sen and Vivekananda, brought modern interpretations of Hinduism to Madras, Bombay, Hindustan, and the Punjab. In the political sphere it was a sign of Bengal’s preeminence that the first move to organize the Indian National Congress took the form of a circular letter in 1883 to all the graduates of the University of Calcutta. Even in literature, the innovations and experiments of Bengali writers were beginning to influence the vocabulary and style of writers in other north Indian languages. Bengal provided an exceptionally fertile soil for this movement to religious reformation.\(^6\) Bengal School, while it originated in Bengal with the work of Abanindranath Tagore, nevertheless soon became national. The students of Abanindranath himself were mostly Bengali, but in the second generation the activity of his followers spread over the country and their students (third generation) were from many parts of India. India’s art tradition, which at various periods of her history had reached great heights, fully expressing her

\(^3\) S.K. Ramachandra Rao: *Chitrakala*, Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath Art Complex, Kumaro Krupa Road, Bangalore, 20 August 2002, pp. 53-54.
\(^6\) Ibid. pp. 251, 50.
national culture, seemed, in the 19th century to have come to a natural end. Remnants of paintings survived precariously in some of the small kingdoms. After the British conquest there was no serious art that could attract or inspire an all-Indian audience. The Bengal school therefore represents the first important art trend of modern times after a comparatively a dark age.7

The 19th century in India was an era of immense change. Every phase of life was affected by the shifts in political power, economy and social values. A vast, war-torn, rigidly traditional country was shaken by new forces, and especially by the impact of western civilization.8 The term Renaissance is often used to describe the cultural efflorescence that took place in 19th and early 20th century Bengal. Actually, its use here is misleading for a renaissance means rebirth. What occurred in Bengal was not a rebirth but a gradual development in many areas making Bengal the first of the Indian provinces to possess a rich and modern milieu, with the necessary vitality to explore and create new achievements in several parallel fields. A significant point about these cultural movements is their evolution from within Indian society.9 The 19th century was also the period of the rediscovery of India's past through scientific studies in archaeology and history. Ancient Indian literature was being translated into English. The works of scholars like Max Mueller, Sir William Jones, Charles Wilkins and Sir Edwin Arnold considerably added to the prestige of oriental studies. The Western appreciation of the Indian culture, even if limited to only a few scholars, brought to Europe a different picture of India than what the imperialists did. Secondly, it gave the Indian a new self-esteem. Sir William Jones and Colebrook founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784.10 At the fountainhead of this revivalist celebration was a single aristocratic family of Bengal, called the Tagores. This multi-talented family is credited with

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contributions not only to painting, but also poetry, fiction and playwriting, and even singing, acting and dancing.\textsuperscript{11}

Prominent among the creators of a new Bengal culture was the family of the Tagore's, which through three generations produced many distinguished sons and daughters—Debendranath, the philosopher Dwijendranath, Satayendranath, a scholar and the first Indian in the Indian Civil Service, and Jyotirindranath, musician and artist. Belonging to the next generation were Gagandranath, the musician Dinendranath and the painter Abanindranath. The family house of the Tagores', at 'Joransanko' in Calcutta, was the scene of immense creative activity. New plays and poetry were beings written which were immediately produced, new music composed and new experiment in painting born. Beside the contribution of Abanindranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore in Bengal School, E.B.Havell also greatly contributed in Bengal School.

**E. B. Havell:**

Thanks to the sympathetic imaginations of the late E.B. Havell, who was then the head of the Calcutta School of art, India regained her lost heritage and became wide-awake to her past glories and achievements. When Havell saw the futility of transporting South Kensington wholesale into India and making Indian art students tenth-rate copyists of a crude type of western art.\textsuperscript{12} Being a real teacher and an ardent art critic, inspite of being a Britisher, he said that the way western art is being introduced here forcefully and the method thereof is wrong, because there can be only a little change in the basic style of an art. Total change is not possible anywhere. He came to the conclusion that the ancient and modern art of India can be given some western touch only after renewal of the same.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} http://www.indianartcircle.com/arteducation/Modemart1.shtml
\textsuperscript{12} G.Venkata Chalam: *Contemporary Indian Painter*, Nalanda Publication in Bombay, 1962, p.xiv.
The policy, which Havell put into practice was based on three considerations, the first involving the nature and function of the schools of art. Havell agreed. In all schools of art, the bias had so far lain in a western direction, and the results had been deplorable. British art, he considered, gave 'no spiritual impulse and afforded only the poorest mental pabulum, with its mechanical perspective, not related like oriental perspective to the laws of design but only empirically, to the science, of optics; with its anatomy, likewise, unrelated to artistic thought, and its "principles" which even the British failed to put into practice. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that not only had many students failed to obtain employment, but those who had were making only the most object contributions either to British or to Indian art. The most successful artist was Ravi Verma. Havell, however, was less concerned with British deficiencies than with the lack of Indian qualities. Madras, where he had first taught, had never possessed a strong artistic tradition in painting, but it had been particularly well placed for the studying of Indians religion and philosophy. His first step, after joining the Calcutta school of art, was to abolish the British system of teaching. In the ordinary European art academy (he wrote) the student goes through a long, laborious and rather painful process of eyetraining to develop his imitative powers'. True Oriental art practice was based on composition from memory rather than the eye. 'The Oriental artist develops his imitative skill mainly by the exercise of his creative power. Such a break with British methods was only a first step. But much more difficult was to create a system to take its place and to this problem there appeared to be only one answer. Indian artists, in Havell's view, must use traditional themes, express traditional sentiments, & employ traditional styles. They must understand Indian art and more especially, its 'spiritual and ethical purpose'. Havell asserts that 'even under the depressing influences of the nineteenth century, Indian art could still create beautiful things recalling the strength and spiritual fervour of its former days'. Havell's emphases on resurgentis of Indian art rather than adopting west.
Havell was truly Indian, and this would form the surest and best foundation on which to build up the revival of Indian painting. Such views were revolutionary in the extreme. Not only were they in sharp conflict with current British practice, they involved a fresh attitude to Indian art. It is hardly surprising, then, that on their introduction Havell’s students expressed shocked and dismay. And, infact, writing much later, Havell himself conceded his early difficulties. Infact, there is no artist who can overlook tradition, and most original creative talents seek vitality wherever they can find it in the impulses of history. As the pupils of Havell and Abanindranath, who imbibed the Ajanta tradition themselves, became teachers in the Art Schools of the various provinces of India, they brought up two generations of students blindly to believe in the lifeless, over-sentimentalised and ‘spiritual’ figures of their paintings, as the models of progress. And as the British contempt for Indian’s culture became intenser, this so called ‘national’ art of India, which was mainly revivalist, pitted itself against Europe as a ‘spiritual’ art against the ‘materialist’ naturalism of the west. Instead of turning for help to Havell to what called the “native living traditions of art,” the artists of Bengal School derived their main conscious influences from the court-cultures of an almost forgotten past: in particular, from the Ajanta frescoes, Mughal miniatures, and Rajput painting.

E.B.Havell brought to Indian aesthetics an artist’s knowledge and perception; he also looks to it the domatic impetuosity of a proselyte campaigning with a missionary fervor for the acceptance of the truth as he saw it. This truth satiated to him especially from the pristine excellence of Vedic thought which he claimed to be originating impulse of all the forms and motif, of Indian art in its every historical phase us apotheosis, to Havell, was reached

in the millennium of *Gupta* art, in *Ajanta* and *Ellora*, and a little less exquisitely in *Rujapt* and *Mughal* painting, and in *Chola* sculpture.¹⁷

Havell, it is true, was faced with the error of many European critics in judging Indian art by the rules and formulae of their own art, by canons of anatomy, perspective and style; he had to create (which he conceived to be his vocation) the dispositions for the understanding of Indian aesthetic. He enunciated Indian art as fundamentally idealistic and transcendental, and set himself to expound the precise meaning of symbolism in allegorical presentations, without regarding them as artistic in their own formal right and for their own sake. It was this clouded faith that Havell injected into Abanindranath Tagore, and through him, into the Bengal School, perpetuating a curious fallacy.

Abanindranath Tagore who was then a leading artist of India. Within ten years a new school of painting was established with his efforts. It was based fully on Indian traditions, which came to be known as Bengal School. Some critics, who were conservative in their nature, thought some conspiracy of Havell in the background but soon things were clear and up till now his name is held in a high regard. Some critics also did not believe that the art student can bring some novelty with the same sentiment and tradition after copying the painting of *Ajanta* etc. In his books, "Indian sculpture and paintings" "Indian Architecture" and "The ideals of Indian Art" Havell attracted the attention of the world towards the great tradition of the art of India and through them condemned the prejudiced and cured criticism of Indian art by Britishers. But Archer, in his book "Indian and Modern art", called these books as full of mistakes, while according to Manohar Kaul all the charges are false, Whatever Havell has said is correct because he was a conscientious writer and teacher with a pure soul. He further gave the proof of his greatness by not following the

dirty policy of the Britishers. Percy Brown also praised the efforts of E.B. Havell and said that ideas, which the new artist would express by copying old masters in the Indian art, would be developed in the traditional style and the same thing happened. The revolution of which Havell and Shri Abanindranath Tagore took decision, was simply to sow the seeds of Indian tradition afresh among the Indian artists, and they succeeded in this endeavor. After that Lord Curzon, who was very much impressed by the heritage of Indian art and artists. There were 30 Britishers and 5 Indians in this organization and the director was architecture, enacted legislatures for their preservation. In 1907 Havell and Lord Kitchner. Havell took him round for an inspection of the Art Gallery attached to the school. Havell had already had the Gallery cleared of all the rubbish it had accumulated in past years- third rate copies of old Masters from the refuse dump of Europe- replacing them by a few original specimens from the Mughal, Rajput and other school.  

All this was very shocking to the “cultured” people of that age. It was after this that Havell arranged for an exhibition of Indian Paintings under the auspices of his Institution. An amusing incident occurred in connection with this exhibition. Among the exhibits only a few came from Abanindranath’s studio and one of them caught the eye of Lord Curzon who was a reputed connoisseur of art. Havell would not let his “Collaborate” make a present of it to the Viceroy, but instead, set a price on it, but not quite so for Lord Curzone, it appeared. Rich though he was, Lord Curzon, according to his biographer, always kept a strict eye on his personal budget. So the Viceroy stooped to bargaining but Havell was adamant. Havell did not like any of these pictures to go to a private collection out of India. In the end, Abanindranath offered the entire series to Havell as gurudakshina. Havell was overjoyed to receive this attribute to his guru-ship and he had the pictures kept in the Indian Art Gallery.

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8 Ibid. pp. 148-149 (A Brief History of Indian Painting, 2002).
as permanent exhibits. Madras, where he had first taught the method and idea of western art, which the Indian mind was so eager to learn. But Havell proved too great a man to encourage wrong values and he soon set himself to draw the attention of the authorities and the Indian public to the work of Indian art and started his movement for the revival of the handloom industry. He set himself to restore the position of the village craft in the art life of this country. With this end in view he tried to remodel the existing art school and opened a new department of handloom. He made it compulsory for the art student to learn stenciling, paper cutting etc... 

Towards the end of 1908 Havell had to retire from the art school and leave for England on account of his health. Percy Brown succeeded him as the principal. Abanindranath continued as the vice-Principal. So by his contribution in Bengal school, Havell’s name will forever shine in the History of aesthetic revival of modern India.

Abanindranath Tagore:

In the last quarter of the 19th Century the modern renaissance of Indian art began. There were a number of more important artists who contributed a lot to this field and gave a new direction to Indian aesthetics. Among those most popular Indian artists, Abanindranath Tagore was one. The revival of Indian art by Abanindranath Tagore is a resuscitation of Indian types in the climate of his soul. 

According to Rabindranath Tagore “… When I consider who is the Person most deserving of honour in Bengal, the first name which suggests itself to me is that of Abanindranath Tagore. He has saved the country from the sin of self-depreciation. He has raised her from the depths of humiliation and has regained for her the honoured position which was hers by right. He has earned

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22 Ibid. p.7. An Album of Nanda Lal Bose With A Biographical Note.
for India the recognition of her contributory share in all that Humanity has
realized for itself. A new era has dawned upon India through a reawakening of
her art consciousness. And it is from him that the whole of India has learnt her
lesson anew. A proud place has thus been assured for Bengal through his
achievements..."24

According to Padam Mahesh wari “Abanindranath Tagore achieved
the same place in the Indian painting that Mahatma Gandhi got in the Indian
politics. He was the pioneer and the leader of Indian artistic renaissance. He
synthesized the traditional Indian style with those of the west, of China and
Japan and started a style of painting, which is called the Bengal School.
Besides, he changed the point of view of the Indian artists and created a new
spirit of enquiry and of experiment and bold innovation among them, which
deservingly earned for him the little of the “Father of Indian painting.” This
great artist was born in the cultured family of Joransanko in Calcutta on 7th
August, 1871.25

Abanindranath’s father and grandfather were themselves painters of
considerable merit and used to paint portraits and landscapes in European style.
Abanindranath made use of his father’s paint-box to paint rural scenes with
cottages and palm trees. He gradually acquired considerable skill in drawing
similar interesting pictures with his father’s red and blue and other colored
pencils. He was then about nine years old of age. About the year 1897 when
Abanindranath was about twenty-five years of age, he took private lessons
from Signor Gilhardi, an Italian artist, (then vice principal of the Calcutta
Government school of Art) on cast drawing, foliage drawing, pastel and life
study. Later he began to attend the studio of Mr.Charlesl. Palmer who had
arrived from England. After undergoing a severe training under Palmer for
three or four years, Abanindranath attained such a proficiency in portrait

painting in oils that he could finish a picture within two hours. During this period he painted many subjects in oil.  

In 1900 Abanindranath went to Monghyr where a complete change look place in his artistic activities. He gave up painting in oil after European style and took up painting in watercolor. The turning point in his artistic career came when one day in his ancestral library at Joransanko house, he came across an old illuminated Indo-Persian manuscript. The marvelous drawings and calligraphy in the book fired his imagination and inspired him to reveal his own self in his art. Abanindranath then began his famous series of pictures descriptive of the familiar scenes in the life of Sri Krishna, the divine cowherd, which are popularly known as the "Krishna Lila". These production are the effects of the subtle changes in his artistic outlook gained at Monghyr. This led him to give up his once cherished hope of becoming the Titian of Bengal. Ten years later he met E.B.Havell, then principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta. In him the youthful enthusiast found a congenial friend and sympathizer. Both worked jointly at the Institution. Since that time the Bengal school of painting has always sought for the revival of the Indian traditional art motifs. The orientation in the artistic outlook of Abanindranath created a new awakening in India and brought about a revival of the Indian Art, which for centuries lay decayed and hidden from the public view. The cultural nationalism of India of the second-half of the nineteenth century sought to find its expression within the ramifications of the genres and media, introduced, and often imposed by the colonisers on the coloniseds. The awe-inspiring authority of the Western academic-naturalistic mode of picture making and its associated technology to produce highly dramatized ceremonial pictures was first challenged by Abanindranath Tagore as something imposed by colonialism, alien to the Indian ethos. Abanindranath was the earliest self-conscious individual artist who would neither accept the authority of modes, manners and

26http://www.calcuttaweb.com/people/antagore.shtml
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The revivalist art introduced by Abanindranath was actually a synthesis of Ajanta, Mughal, European naturalism, and Japanese wash techniques. This new art style, done mostly in watercolor and depicting Indian religious, mythological, historical and literary subjects, also gained the approval of the Indian nationalists. Abanindranath preferred historical and literary subjects rather than religious and mythical ones, and with his sophisticated taste, sense of proportion, and observation he could impart a quality of grace and charm to his works. But, excepting one or two, his disciples were less gifted. Tagore’s best known painting, Bharat Mata (Mother India), depicted a young woman, portrayed with four arms in the manner of Hindu deities, holding objects symbolic of India’s national aspiration. During his stint at the Government College of Art, Calcutta between 1505 and 1515, Abanindranath made several radical changes. He replaced the European paintings on the school walls with Mughal and Rajput paintings. He started a department of fine arts and invited well-known artists from all over India and made it possible for the students to meet them. He made arts like stencil cutting and origami compulsory for all students. Outside his responsibilities as a teacher, Abanindranath also revived the affected handloom industry in Jessore and Pabna by acquiring them and commissioning the weaver to produce clothes for his family.

In 1907, Tagore established the Indian Society of Oriental Art and founded ‘The Bengal School’, which was responsible in pioneering the Bengal Revivalist movement. In the Indian society of Oriental Art Abanindranath found full scope for his activities and experimentation. All the different cultural sides of Indian life received his attention. With the help of Nandlal Bose and

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30 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Indian_painting # Bengal school
31 http://www.indianartcircle.com/arteducation/abindranath.shtml
Sain Dey, he began to study the forgotten crafts of India with a view to give back to them new life.\(^{32}\)

The Society of Oriental Art (1907), dream child of Abanindranath has the same glory as the Italian or Dutch or spanist school has. Achievements of the society were:

A. Revival of the classical, medieval, folk and traditional art forms of India;
B. Recasting of periodical styles as per necessity of the contemporary period:
C. Comparative study and assessment of the greater Indian art:
D. Propagation of the traditional and rural art and craft:
E. Improvement of art and craft education in India:
F. Conservation of old art objects.\(^{33}\)

The Indian Society of Oriental Art was started, as a result of the social contacts of Gagendranath and Abanindranath with justice Woodruff, N.Blount, O, C. Ganguly and other art-lovers.\(^{34}\) Abanindranath collected for the exhibition of the society in 1920, pieces of art and craft from all over India. The exhibition proved very popular and, people from all classes of society paid a visit. Even the Punjabi fruit sellers came to the society to see the exhibition. He was one of the founder of the society and was its active patron. On several occasions he helped the society by contributing liberally from his own pocket.\(^{35}\)

Abanindranath also received blessings and patronization of great people and art lovers like E.B. Havell, Percy Brown, Sister Nivedita, Rothenstein Ramananda Chattjee, A.K. Coomaraswamy, and many others.\(^{36}\) Under his guidance, a new generation of painters was raised, like Nandalal Bose, Asit

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\(^{35}\) Ibid. p.47. (*Abanindranath Tagore*. 1933).

\(^{36}\) Ibid. p.8.
Haldar, Kshindranath Majumdar and Jamini Roy; S.N.Gupta and a host of others. These painters cared only for Indian subject matter and sentiment, and this is an essential preliminary for any true revival of Indian painting or sculpture, since no art which is insincere, can ever be great. The whole Calcutta movement has also done much to secure protection and adequate appreciation for the masterpieces of the older schools, and some of its members have done excellent work in making copies of the frescoes at Ajanta. Abanindranath learnt pastels, watercolors and oils from the Italian artist Gilhardy and the English painter Palmer.

The Bagiswari Śilpa pravandhavali is the unique example of art of discourses in modern Indian languages.

Painting and sculpture are but two of the many attainments of this versatile genius, Abanindranath Tagore. His manifold and valuable contribution to literature in some of its important branches would rank him as one of the greatest literatures of the time. Children's literature specially has received his devoted and affectionate attention. The more important of his works on Juvenile literature are “Raj-Kahini”, “Sakuntala”, “Nalaka”, “Nahush”, “Buro-Angla” which please the old and the young alike. Abanindranath's paintings were exhibited in London and Paris in 1913, followed by another international exhibition in Japan in 1919. His appreciative audience included Rodin and Rothenstein. The largest number of paintings by Abanindranath—over 500—forms a part of Rabindra Bharati Society's collection at Joransanko. Abanindranath also contributed to the Freedom struggle. Money was raised for the National Fund by singing processions carried his painting, Bharat Mata, made to a flag. He also contributed handloom cloth from Jessore and Pabna to the swadeshi store.
So several art schools were opened at different places by his efforts, where mostly his pupils went as heads of the same. At Santiniketan, Nand Lal Bose was the head of the painting Department. At Lahore and Lucknow, Samarendra Nath Gupta and Asit Kumar Haldar were the heads respectively. At Jaipur and Mysore, Shailendra De and K. Venkatappa held the headship. Devi Prasad Roy Chaudhry took over at Madras and in the Govt. Art School Calcutta, Mukul De was the head of painting. Kshitindra Nath Majumdar went to Allahabad University to promulgate art and Sharda Ukil taught painting at Delhi. In this way the disciples of Abanindranath Tagore spread all over the country. But because of some basic drawbacks this Bengal school could not remain alive for long and came to an end by the last days of Abanindranath Tagore. But even than whatever efforts were done by these artists for the renaissance movement will ever remain alive in the history of Indian Painting.\footnote{Ibid. p.152. (A Brief History of Indian Painting, 2002).}

In the early years of the new century the Bengal School raised a storm of eulogy and protest. Abanindranath himself chose to paint pictures on subjects taken from the epics, Indian history, or even from, more romantic tales such as those of the Arabian Nights or Omar Khayyam. The nationalists of his time interpreted his painting of subjects drawn from India’s history as proper patriotism, while by others again the painting were condemned as antinational as they did not conform to traditional canons of art. Abanindranath’s work and his style almost inevitably became the prototype of the whole movement. Abanindranath’s paintings presented a new romanticism for which his audience was so strangely unprepared. He uses his subject-matter, his technique, and his otherworldly beauty to communicate feeling or to create a mood. He is not a moralist painting for our edification but an artist painting for our delight. His pictures of the gods are not icons meant for worship, but a poetic rendering of the imagery of the gods. The style he created found its appropriate language two major techniques. The first of these was his invention and is generally
called “the wash.” Abanindranath’s ‘wash’ is a kind of water colour and the choice of this medium is in itself significant. The second technique most used by the painters of the Bengal School was tempra. (This was not a method favoured by Abanindranath; its whole effect probably being too precise for his taste.). The compositions of the Bengal School are of great diversity but nevertheless one can point out some differences from the past. Abanindranath’s drawing, with its exquisite refinement and emphasis on silhouette, is one of the great qualities of his pictures. Colour is probably the most important of all elements in Abanindranath’s paintings. In his brighter scenes the colour is always under perfect control, measured out in careful amounts that contribute to a delicate balance. Abanindranath’s has to be acknowledged as a great colourist for he could create a new world through colour alone. His works “Bhārat Silpa”, “Six Limbs of painting” and “Artistic Anatomy”, and his various contributions to the Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art. Abanindranath’s love for children has led him to devote his limitless energy to the compilation the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the sacred epics of Hindustan, for the benefit of his young friends. Abanindranath’s artistic mind expresses itself not only in the field of painting but also in diverse other ways. He was interested in music and could play beautifully on, instruments like sitar, veena, esraj and reed pipes. He takes more than an amateurish interest in gardening. He did some bas-relief work on common marble used for the purpose of preparing hand-made bread and numerous portraits in pastel and oil, and has also done some fresco painting on walls. As a consequence he did not show any propensity towards narration in his paintings. His paintings were evocative of personal vision. For objectifying his very personal kind of mysticism, tinged with fantasy, he adopted and transformed cubist stylistics, without caring much for the conceptual structure of cubism. The paradigm of

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43 Jaya Appasamy: Abanindranath Tagore and The Art of His Times, Lalit Kala Akademi New Delhi, 1968, pp.16-20
modern Indian culture first found its objectification, in the visual arts, through Abanindranath.\footnote{S.K. Rao: Chitra Kala, Editorial Committee, Nandagopal and Others, Bangalore, Chitrakala Parishak, p. 57.}

The drama and stage decorations are also among the various subjects of Abanindranath's interest. He is himself an actor of no mean merit. The success of many of Rabindranath's famous plays was due in no small measure to the artistic setting designed by Abanindranath's imaginative mind. He had a great fund of humour and his rendering of comic parts in the plays of Rabindranath staged in Calcutta will long be remembered by those who have seen him acting.

Special mention may be made of his post-card paintings and sketches which he is in the habit of sending to his pupils as a sort of encouragement to them in their pursuit of art. They should be collected and published in a book form. Abanindranath had always looked after the welfare of his pupils, and besides ungrudgingly giving his help and encouragement in their work he was always ready to help them out of their difficulties with financial aid. Indeed, his timely and secret financial assistance has enabled many of his students, whose careers would otherwise have come to an end, to attain success for themselves. It was a rare fortune to be one of his pupils.\footnote{K.R. Kiriplani: Abanindra, Number, The Visva Bharti, 1942, May Vol, viii, p. 36.} As a 'modern' artist it became his mission to fill in the missing emotional content into the miniature technique of India's heritage.\footnote{http://www.bookrags.com/wiki/Rabindranath_Tagore}

His work has been of great value in the regeneration of national culture in India. Abanindranath Tagore, who was a genius artist with a creative mind, put the Indian soul before the world. It is impossible to touch on all the points of greatness of the Master's art in a short article like this. He is undoubtedly the greatest seer and path-founder in the art of modern India and the torch that he has lit will burn for untold ages and serve as a beacon light to humble votaries of art for countless generations to come. It is not often in the history of a nation that a genius like Abanindranath is born.

\footnote{45 S.K. Rao: Chitra Kala, Editorial Committee, Nandagopal and Others, Bangalore, Chitrakala Parishak, p. 57.}
\footnote{46 K.R. Kiriplani: Abanindra, Number, The Visva Bharti, 1942, May Vol, viii, p. 36.}
\footnote{47http://www.bookrags.com/wiki/Rabindranath_Tagore}
Rabindranath Tagore’s Contribution in Bengal School:

Rabindranath Tagore’s contribution to the renaissance in India is immeasurable. About from his own superb direct contribution, Rabindranath Tagore’s contribution was a source of inspiration, encouragement and help to whosoever or whatever showed any promise in literature, art, science, scholarship or in fact in any field of creativity, he helped them economically as well. He radiated faith in a resurgent India and wherever he saw any talent or genius struggling for self-expression he would go to the limit of his power and resources to help him. The Bengal school of painting owes an immense debt to Rabindranath.48

Rabindranath’s Contribution in Different Fields:

Rabindranath Tagore’s contributions to the world are beyond measure. His first and foremost contribution was the wealth of songs, poems and prose that he had composed. His gift to literature is nothing less than amazing. His work is enjoyed and celebrated all over the globe to this date.

Songs by Rabindranath Tagore:

In music Tagore’s most famous works were in Indian classical, though as a composer he rebelled against the orthodoxy of classical music. His notable variations are derived from Bengali folk-music like the Baul and Bhatiyali music style. During his visit to Europe, he also had some training in European music. Thus some of his early songs resembled the tunes of the Border, Ballads Moore’s and Irish Melodies. In later life, he tried to incorporate European style in the classical music. Among his other masterpieces are patriotic songs. Most of Tagore’s songs were his poems, which he himself gave rhythm and tone.49 His songs are part of the popular culture of Bengal.50 Many of his patriotic

49 http://www.utsav.org/content/view//108/39/.
poems are still now celebrated all over India. Today, one such example is *Janggan-man...* which is the national anthem of India.\(^{51}\)

**Novels by Rabindranath:**

Tagore's Novel is that they are absolutely modern in thought and technique. They deal with modern problems in our society and the interest is centered upon the psychological development of characters under the stress of circumstances. The number of characters in his novels is strictly limited.\(^{52}\) As a novelist Tagore gave a vivid picture of the upper and middle-class life in Bengal. Some of his famous works are *Naukadubi, Chokherebali, Gora* and *Ghare Baire*.\(^{53}\) *Gora*, undoubtedly Tagore's most important novel, has contemporary relevance because of its theme of the concept of nationalism in a multi-racial and multi-religious community like India.\(^{54}\) Tagore was the first Indian to bring an element of psychological realism in his novels.

**Poems by Rabindranath Tagore:**

Tagore started to compose poetry at the age of four. His first poem was published at the age of seven. Thus Tagore's achievements in poetry in later life needs no preamble. His poetry gives the reader the history of his emergence from the unreal and self centered worlds of adolescence into adulthood and the world of man and nature.\(^{55}\)

**Dance:**

Tagore was one of the first to support and bring together different forms of Indian dance. He helped revive folk dances and introducing dance forms from other parts of India, such as Manipuri, *Kathak* and Kathakali. He also supported modern dance and was one of the first to recognize the talent of Uday Shankar, who was invited to perform, at *Santiniketan*.

\(^{51}\) http://www.utsav.org/content/view/108/39/


\(^{53}\) http://www.utsav.org/content/view/108/39/


\(^{55}\) http://www.utsav.org/content/view/108/39/
Dramas:

Most of Rabindranath’s dramas were written at Santiniketan and the students took part in both the performing and production sides. His Mayar Khela, with some of the sweetest romantic songs was the first musical play in India. Valmiki Pratibha was another early drama by Tagore where the poet himself played the title role. “Sacrifice was the greatest drama in Bengali literature. All these dramas are vehicles of thought other than expression and they show the poet’s mind powerfully working on the subject of such things in popular Hinduism as its ritual of bloody sacrifice”. It is a protest against violence.

Lectures:

During the years of precocious adolescence, Rabindranath was absorbing the basic ideas about Hinduism and Indian, and about East and West which he later elaborated in his lecture in many lands. He traveled to many countries including parts of Japan, South America, North America, Asia Hong Kong, and Europe to offer lectures, meet with people and give speeches. His work brought him to many other places around the globe including Russia, Canada, and many more. Rabindranath wrote a Bengali essay for the family’s monthly, Bharti, which contained in embryo the concept he later made his massage to Japan, China, and the West. His message to China and Japan has awakened the memory of their past glory.

Education:

In 1901 he founded his school with the ideals of education he thought were productive and efficient. Santiniketan, which meant the place of peace,
was founded at Bolpur. The writing and publishing of periodicals had always been an important aspect of Joransanko life, and students at Santiniketan were encouraged to create their own publications and put out several illustrated magazine. The children were encouraged to follow their ideas in painting and drawing and to draw inspiration from the many visiting artists and writers.

Today Santiniketan has many branches that provides education, small-scale business and acts as a museum of Rabindranath Tagore. Santiniketan was a great success and gave birth to Vishava bharti; an experimental school which was built in 1915. Vishava Bharti has many subdivisions and subunits which work to provide the study of art, sciences and language. Vishava Bharti became a national center for the arts. Rabindranath invited artists and scholars from other parts of India and the world to live together at Santiniketan on a daily basis, to share their cultures with Vishava Bharti. Without music and the fine arts, he wrote a nation lacks its highest means of national self-expression and the people remain inarticulate. He was one of the first in India to argue for a human education system that was in touch with the environmental and amide at over all development of the personality.

Arts:

Tagore’s last role as a creative artist was that of the painter. He had no previous practice or training in drawing or painting but in his early sixties he came out alone a sudden as a master of his own peculiar style of art. It started from the erissercross scratches in the rough copy of his poems. These idle scratches, as Tagore once wrote to a friend, would urge him subconsciously at it were to give them utterance. The inspiration and urge of Tagore as an artist is different from his literary inspiration and urge.

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61 http://www.utsav.org/content/view/108/39/
62 http://www.infed.org/thinkers/tagore.htm
63 http://www.utsav.org/content/view/108/39/
64 File://C: WINDOWS/Desktop/Rabindranath%20Tagore%20education%20-%20%C…14/04/2005
Lack of a new Indian in painting continued until Rabindranath burst in upon the world of Indian painting in a blaze of glory in the late 1920’s. Rabindranath’s reservations about the trends of Bengal painting even in his own Santiniketan. There is enough evidence to show that in his own Santiniketan Rabindranath blessed the endeavour to create and strengthen a new pictorial language and respected the efforts of those who were in it, but hardly ever accepted to protect and nourish people like Binod Behari and Ramkinkar who were struggling to find place for themselves.

The development of painting is itself a symptom of social and political change not as much of course as literature but certainly quite considerably. The important moment for the appearance of criticism came silently in the works of Jamini Roy, but quite articulately both in the writing and paintings of Rabindranath Tagore. His painting, which furnished the chief occasion for his critical unsmiling on the subject, was formed by Rabindranath’s perception that the possibility of painting in the made of the so-called Bengal school was exhausted.

Rabindranath Tagore as an essential part of history:

He did it again in painting in the late 1920s’, and his new painting and its language and content was destined to dominate Bengal painting from 1950 onwards. Tagore’s work provided the beacon in the late sixties onwards, and his oeuvre suggested all the philosophical and moral problems before the painters of this age while some of his technical solutions. He would draw a woman’s head and face and painter draw the hair or sari in such a fashion as would suggest the contours and mass not only of her shoulders and bust but her entire body. This was something unique and never had happened before in Indian painting. Rabindranath’s out put of painting has profoundly influenced modern Bengal painting, working subterraneous pervading the painter’s subterraneously in ways that no other single source has done. Tagore was
perhaps the only painter who made a different journey. He was the only great Indian painter who, starting with his heritage of Oriental art, gradually proceeded towards the European.66

Although Rabindranath stood against all kinds of ritual and awe-struck obeisance to institutions sanctified by convention or power and although he would himself like to chart his own course of his subjective expression in art, he was not in responsive to individual quest to find the relevant significant in one’s own tradition, for positing one’s own identity in time and space. He would not have persuaded Nandlal Bose, the foremost of the disciples of Abanindranath to head the art of school at Santiniketan, at a time when Tagore himself had just started painting.67

Tagore discarded likeness or representation of the natural object and straightway began with the unseen and imaginary shapes stored up in memory or dream. He freed himself from ties of realism. Throughout his artistic career he continued to use ink: indeed, the great bulk of his work is in that medium. He did not try his hand at oils. Certainly not more that twice or thrice, of which he tore off one in sheer impatience. Oil takes a long time to dry and he could not afford to wait, once the urge to paint was upon him. On the contrary, he used to pour spirit into the inks to help them dry quickly. His first pictures were all drawn in black indelible ink. He put layer upon layer of bright, transparent ink which scarcely shaded off to lighter tints, he avoided shading and used his ink as transparent glaze after the fashion of the Old Masters. So that the colour glowed. He never mixed his colours, never used mixed paints. He did not use a palette; the paper was his palette. Whenever he wanted highlights he erased the ink and applied temptra, pastel or crayon, that is put a spot of opaque paint which threw up the light. His greatest achievement was the way he made his colours attain a rare luminosity. His shapes would often create the splendours

of an impasto, hard shell-like enamel. Rabindranath used his colour with the same effortless skill. This unique synthesis, this unity of colour and line ushered in a new chapter in the history of Indian painting.\footnote{Roopa-Lekha, Vole. Lx, J. of All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, Raj Marg, New Delhi, December 1988, pp.46-47.}

Tagore had long discussions on his art with Roman Rolland who wrote in his Book, ‘Inde-journal’, on 3rd July 1926 “ ----- Tagore was discussing on his application of colour in paintings.\footnote{http://www.indianarticircle.com/arteducation.Modernart6.shtml} His range of colours favours the deep tones, black and indigo, umber, dull reds and greens and deep Yellows.\footnote{www.passionyart.com/kejriwal/art.html} His love goes violet and blue and he was more liking for green.” Rabindranath transformed his lack of formal training of art into an advantage and opened new horizons in the use of line and colours. It is evident that in his search of newer form of expression in line and colour.\footnote{Stella Kramrisch: \textit{Form Elements in the Visual work of Rabindranath Tagore}, Lalit Kala Contemporary, No.2, 1964, pp.38, 39.} Up to the period of Kshanika, observes ups and downs of his creativity but after 1900 his colours, lines and forms started to get definite meaning and Tagore became more conscious about drawing, linear and colour perspectives. An untitled painting showing a view through windows is a remarkable example of his experiment and perspective. 1900-1920 was the period of evaluation. During this time Tagore’s eagerness for rehabilitating his spontaneous art got recognition of some German Extremists. Tagore returned with a concrete idea of his doings from Europe in 1921. The new art wave of our country is at best the contribution of Rabindranath, not borrowed from the west. He became both a painter and craftsman. In painting his attention was shared between two principal subjects-the majesty of the mountains and the beauty of flowers. Craft, wood work became his most absorbing passion. Self-taught, he developed his own style in both fields. Kramrisch appreciated his contributions in beautiful language...
Rabindranath Tagore is a maker of Form. To the art of India of today he gives back the dignity of its craft.\textsuperscript{72}

His paintings have more or less the same quality as his drawing; an air of being done on the spur of the moment, awakening a new sincerity, which ruthlessly eliminates all, that is superfluous. His numerous paintings of this period disclosed new aspects in the appearance of things. The artist showed for the first time an inclination, which continued throughout his later work except for a few momentary lapses, to integrate lines, gestures and rhythm with colour. An abstract feeling for pure colour was also seen emerging.\textsuperscript{73} Between 1928 and 1939 Rabindranath painted not less than 2'000 pictures, 1,800 of paintings are in Rabindra Sadna, Pictures. The Tagore memorial Museum at Santiniketan.\textsuperscript{74}

Rabindranath Tagore's famous world appearance as a painter in France in 1930 was not sudden. Long before the Paris exhibition which vaulted him to worldwide painterly fame. In spring 1930, when on a tour to France, Tagore was advised, by some art critics of local newspapers who saw his paintings to hold on exhibition in Paris. He held the first public and international exhibition of his paintings in Paris in May 1930, at the Gallerie Pigalle. The Exhibition was later held in the different countries in Europe in the same year, but India and his home town Calcutta had the honour of hosting it only in 1931, a year later of Paris exhibition. The exhibition remained open to public from the 5\textsuperscript{th} to the 19\textsuperscript{th} May 1930.\textsuperscript{75}

Art critics have pointed out that Tagore was trying to express in his lines and colours something different from what he did in his poetry and songs. If he sought peace and enlightenment in his songs, he seems to explore darkness and mystery in his drawings. Dark creatures and haunting landscapes of another,

\textsuperscript{73} Ajit Mookerjee: Modern Art in India, Publication Calcutta, New Delhi, 1956, p.15.
\textsuperscript{75} http://www.Indianarticle.com/arteducation/Modernart6.shtml
primordial and marvelous world which constituted Tagore’s work puzzle and delight the world. Vasudev also pointed to another interesting aspect when he said that though Tagore tried to given a certain direction to Indian art through Santiniketan his own style was distinctively different from the typical Santiniketan style. Duchess Anna de Noailles, in her introductory remark in the catalogue of the exhibition of Tagore’s painting “To me it is like climbing a staircase of dreamland.” After the conclusion of Paris exhibition, exhibitions were held in England, Denmark, Sweden, Rome, Germany and Russia in Europe. Later exhibitions were also held in USA and Canada. The exhibition of painting drew an unprecedented overwhelming admiration in Germany. It was shown in Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Dusseldorf, Stuttgart and other places in Germany.

Rabindranath became the voice of India spiritual heritage and for India, especially for Bengal became a great living institution. His relentless passion for his work was amazing. His total works amounts to about thirty volumes. Tagore remains a legend to Indian and legacy to people. Tagore’s contribution to the art of India remains one of the most important till date. Although he was now a world figure, his greatest literary phase was over, and in Bengal he was beginning to be respected more for his past achievements than for any continuing power. Outside India, the situation was far worse. In many countries, he was admired as the philosopher and the mystic, but in England his reputation as a writer had graduate declined.

This is because his contribution of achievements in all these fields is so enormous and gradually that makes him as an exceptional artist and thinker of India and therefore his is remembered as one of the greatest sons of the India who gave message not to only India but the entire mankind of the globe.

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76 http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/mp/2005/01/03stories/2005010301750400.htm
77 http://www.indianarticle.com/arteducation/Modernart6.shtml