CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

India, a land remarkable for her rich cultural heritage, religious and spiritual values, philosophy, rishis and sages, is equally renowned for her artistic treasures. She is the heir to a glorious tradition in art. Down through the centuries various religions have inspired and supported her artists. Buddhists gave the first great impetus to art followed by Hindus and then by Muslims. Until modern times, however, the original contribution of Christians to this panorama of Indian art amounted to very little, although there are instances of Christian subjects making their appearance in the Mughal miniatures. Many of these, however, were copies of western representation of the theme. Not till the 20th century did artists begin to evolve an art that was Indian as well as Christian. Many of the modern Indian painters were at one time or another inspired to depict Christian subjects. Among them Angelo da Fonseca stands out as a pioneer championing the cause of Indian Christian painting. When he started his experiments in the early 1930's the way was still uncharted. His appearance on the Indian art scene marks the beginning of a serious, interesting and important phase in the indigenising of
Christian painting. His works show to what extent he adapted and integrated indigenous forms into his art.

A. Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study aims at exploring and bringing to light the life and works of Angelo da Fonseca, hitherto unknown or little known except to some close friends and to a limited public. Attempts are also made to highlight his achievements and to examine his contribution and place in Indo-Christian painting. Hence attention is focussed on presenting a comprehensive view of his art, emphasizing his pioneering efforts in indigenising Christian painting.

No systematic and substantial study has yet been made or anything solid written about Fonseca and his art, except some articles in newspapers and magazines both Indian and foreign; a booklet with two and a half pages of text and some pictures of his early period by Sepp Schuller¹, another one with a few pages by E.L.King², the few pages in Cardinal Celso Constantini's book on Christian Art in the Missions³, and R.W. Taylor's Jesus in Indian Painting⁴. All of these supply more or less

1. Sepp Schuller, Angelo da Fonseca - India's Catholic Artist (translated by H.C. Mascarenhas), Aachen, 1938.
the same general information regarding Fonseca, his training and a few sweeping comments and opinions on his painting. Also a number of press reviews of his exhibitions exist. These again do not in any way add more useful information other than what is already generally known. However, no concentrated effort has been made so far to make an in-depth study of his creations. This present work, therefore, undertakes to explore his artistic genius and intends to throw light on his vast productions. Such a study, in the circumstances outlined above, is most appropriate and imperative.

Though Angelo da Fonseca made great strides in Indo-Christian art despite struggles and opposition, he is practically unknown and unrecognized among modern Indian painters; nowhere does his name figure in their list. This attitude of blindness, overlooking the worth of his art which is on a par with other modern painters is in no way justifiable. This study hopes to create an awareness in the Indian public and in particular in the Christian community of Fonseca's contribution to Indian Christian painting and to fill up a certain lacuna in the history of modern Indian painting.

The many facets of Fonseca's artistic genius can be appreciated only when one gets a comprehensive and over-all view of the varied manifestations of his artistic expressions in the different techniques and media.
Hence the attempt is made to present a panoramic view of his works, stressing the development of his thought and style as seen through his art during the span of about three and a half decades.

3. Limitations

As the aim of this work is to provide an integral picture of Fonseca's works and of his pioneering efforts, it does not intend to probe into details of types, figures, their costumes and ornaments. They are treated generally as Indians dressed in Indian garments and adorned with Indian jewellery. Nor are any steps taken to include the efforts and works of his contemporaries or near contemporaries or those of the generation that followed in this field.

C. Preview of the organisation of the thesis

A brief review of Christian themes in Indian painting is outlined in Chapter II. The conditions of painting prior to Angelo da Fonseca, including the Bengal School, form the matter for study in Chapter III together with his early life, training in art, his aims and objectives and the influences that shaped his art. Chapter IV throws light upon the bold step he took in the direction of Indian style representation of Christian subjects, the characteristics of his style, and his
early experiments in this field. The works of his mature period - the 50's are dealt with in Chapter V. It opens with the important event of the European tour with his exhibition between 1948-50. Attention is drawn to the numerous representation of the Madonna theme under various forms and titles and to the devotional pictures. Chapter VI dwells on the works of his final phase, further developments in his style, important religious works of the period and his experiments in other materials and techniques. In all his religious works emphasis is laid on the interpretation of the meaning of the painting along the line of the artist's thought and development as well as on his role in the context of indigenisation of Christian painting. Chapter VII is devoted to the study of his secular works of art which are equally important and interesting. This is followed by the concluding chapter and a few valuable and significant appendices.

D. Sources of Data and Method of Procedure

The main source of data for study were the original paintings of Fonseca, a large number of which are in the possession of Ivy Fonseca, the widow of the artist. The artist's own albums, containing photographs of his early works, proved to be very useful as these were the only means of obtaining any information regarding his early paintings. These were easily made available for study.
by the kind liberality of Ivy Fonseca.

The second important means employed for obtaining information was through personal contacts - interviews and letters. Persons who were closely associated with the artist, i.e., his wife, two of his sisters, his nephews, friends, schoolmates, benefactors, and well-wishers who are domiciled in Pune, Bombay and Goa, were interviewed in person. Those who live abroad were contacted through correspondence.

The little that was available by way of published materials, such as articles in contemporary newspapers and magazines both Indian and foreign, as well as the limited number of pages devoted to his art in a few books, were helpful. As early as the late 30's people like Cardinal Celso Constantini and Sepp Schuller took interest in Fonseca's endeavours and began to publish articles in foreign newspapers and magazines about his art. Later many others followed suit in India too. These articles and press reviews of his exhibitions in India and abroad were useful to a certain extent. Some of these were readily obtained through Ivy Fonseca from the artist's own collection of newspaper cuttings, of press reviews, articles, magazines and typed notes.

The materials collected by the above methods were subjected to a process of thorough study, analysis,
synthesis, evaluation and interpretation. Original paintings and photographs of paintings were analysed to study their style, character, types, composition, use of perspective and colour scheme. Certain themes painted several times over a period of time were studied to trace their development in style, composition, colour, etc. Other works were analysed and synthesised to draw up certain general and specific characteristics of his style at a given period. These are illustrated with examples keeping in mind the development of his style and the trend of his thought. Works are evaluated for their artistic merit and intrinsic value and interpreted for their meaning and significance.