CHAPTER ONE
PIONEERS OF PRINTMAKING, ‘CALCUTTA AND SANTINIKETAN’

GAGANENDRANATH TAGORE, 1867-1938
NANDALAL BOSE, 1883-1966
MUKUL DEY, 1895-1989
OTHER PARTICIPANTS
GAGANENDRANATH TAGORE, 1867-1938
Pioneer of Satirical Impression

Gaganendranath Tagore established his artistic career around the early years of this century. He was considered as a painter with a new attitude, doing different kinds of styles, especially those paintings influenced by the cubist depictions of forms and hard-edges with simple, plain areas that were occasionally enhanced by dramatic effects of light and shades and even very dark areas that powerfully contrasted with some few selected colours in order to create meaningful compositions, but he could not avoid the Western influences on his painting. In fact, he was also interested in theatre, in acting as well as in sets designing, which had an impact on his paintings. In spite of all these directions, he had, during the second decade of the century, been much involved with satirical drawings printed in lithographic technique.

Before we go through his cartoons and satirical depictions, let us have a look at his earliest sketches and landscape dated from 1905. These sketches show that though he never conformed strictly to the style of Bengal School, there does exist an element in these works, which were related to the Bengal school in their subjects or themes. Notable among them are his 'Chaitanya series' reflecting his visionary temperament and the delicate artistic sensibility. In this series, he minimized the role of line doing away with the sculptural moulding of forms. Thus, the forms seem to represent more in terms of colour instead of line. In yet another painting entitled 'Arjuna and Chitrangada,' he used
the related colour tones deftly; so much that the draped figures seem to float with a disembodied sensation generally associated with Munch.

In order to appraise Gaganendra’s graphics, we better have a retrospection into the previous years that may shed light on his research, i.e., from the mid-19th century till the early years of this century, during which period, graphic art as a media was used for illustrative purpose in books, journals and other publications. As elsewhere in all the metropolitan cities of India, including Calcutta, which was the vivacious capital of graphic art activities, graphic media until then was regarded merely as media for reproduction, the possibilities of the medium remained unexploited and undiscovered. The commercial possibility of the medium was but considered as rewarding, the artists completely overlooked the potential of the medium for expression and aesthetically produced communication.

In such circumstances, Gaganendranath gave a new direction to the graphic media. It may be quite essential to go through some of his satirical depictions, which he portrayed through his caricatures or cartoons in order to create a sort of sequence. Relatively comic art was not alien to ancient Indian art, but it occupied a minor place. In 1850, Delhi Sketch Book - a monthly periodical pioneered the art of modern caricature in India. But the cartoons published in Delhi Sketch Book did not bear the signatures of the artists. It can be safely assumed that the cartoons were mostly done by British artists.

The British rule influenced the social fabric of the Indian society, creating a new class of 'Babus' and 'Mams,' who slavishly followed the Western way of life. All these events combined together created a fertile soil for inducing one of the endowed figures of modern Indian art to depict the prevailing condition.

The genius Gaganendra, who presented his innovations, evolved a new language of expression and communication, got the advantages of the printed media such as newspapers, magazines, periodicals and albums, in order to achieve an intensive as well as intimate dialogue with his society.

From a historical perspective, Gaganendra was the earliest artist, who strove to be different and original in his work. Though his interest in the medium of litho-prints was partial, he successfully used this expressive process for his caricatures; both to spread his ideas as well as complete independent artworks." We may hesitate to consider his litho-
prints of satirical drawings as pieces of fine art, yet the different function of these prints is very effective. Through his caricatures, Gaganendra projected his most effective comments on the hypocrisy of parasitic*2 urban Hindu, gently and directly. He, therefore, acquired a great popularity that encouraged him to fully exploit his abilities. With renewed vigour, he started communicating with a wide audience across an entire cross-section of Bengal*7 and thus began a new chapter in the history of Indian printmaking.

Gaganendra published three albums of his caricatures. The first one in 1917, titled 'Strange Thunderbolts' falls in to the social category. It contains thirteen colour and black-and-white cartoons with an introduction by the famous scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose. The second album also in 1917, titled 'Realm of the absurd.' The third one was in 1920, titled 'Reform Screams.' It should be noticed that a major part of Gaganendra's cartoons were executed in the period between 1917-1921.

To elicit a fair comprehension of his artistic career, let us first focus on some of his artistic qualities that are worth mentioning. Referring to his ability to create linear sense wherein he creates perspective, we see in each of his prints an astute observation that reflects intellectual approach and confirms the unique position of Gaganendra in modern Indian creative artwork.*3^4

Gaganendra executed varied themes in different styles and techniques; be it paintings or prints, he wielded all these mediums with brilliant originality. His works can be broadly classified into various categories: brush drawings in Japanese style, portraits, sketches of rural Bengal and water-colour. They encompassed Ranchi and Puri, Himalayan studies, caricatures of Indian life, semi cubistic experiments, folklore pictures and symbolic pictures of ill-fated people. All these phases follow a gradual progression, evidencing the multi-faceted personality of Gaganendranath.

One can easily observe the different and original style in his works. In his earliest works, Gaganendranath had adapted some of these styles to enhance his depiction and also to achieve the quality of expressive gestures and simplifications. He also evinced special interest in linear out-look instead of grotesque and exaggerated forms. Explaining these qualities, Ratan Parimoo commends, "Gaganendranath is also the first Indian painter to create personal mythology by delving into his own unconscious. Thus, he reflects the
modem Indian psyche and belongs completely to the twentieth century. His sense of humour is testified by the fondness he had in making up himself in different disguises."

Gaganendranath, inspite of his family's close association with Revivalism, remained outside its influence that gripped Modern Indian Art. He remained a non-conformist, freeing himself from the discipline of either style, be it oriental or occidental. For him, art was like a personal experience, intensely subjective that also spilled over the social contents of his caricatures. "His artistic motivation was a curious amalgam of deliberate intellection penetrated and surcharged by a romanticism of the emotionally impulsive type. Nirad C. Chaudhari, has, therefore, characterized Gaganendranath's inspiration as psychological rather than artistic. His preoccupation was more with the emotional and ideological significance of things, than with the material aspects of form and structure. To try to explain him with the help of formulas or cannons of Modern Indian Art or of the Cubist School would be ridiculous in the extreme."²

Gaganendra was born in 1867. He is one of the illustrious members of the Tagore family. He was the elder brother of Abanindranath and also the nephew of Rabindranath Tagore. He had his own creative style, which stood apart from the prevalent artistic norms of those times. He had no formal training in art and painted for his personal pleasure. Though having started as a romantic painter his style did not conform to that of Bengal school. So, we see that his art works were highly individualistic and non-conformist.

However, there is an evidence which makes us sure that he acquired the know-how of the litho-prints technique along with its related processes and the colour print reproductions from his teacher Harinarayan Bose 1868-1920, a contemporary of the well known etcher of Calcutta Ananda Prasad. Amit Mukhopadhyay's comments reveal about this passion of his, "Amongst his other interests, the three that claimed his time and attention most, were photography, play-acting and the reading of books. It might be interesting to speculate that it was probably with the magic eye of the camera that he first learnt to observe the mysterious world of light and shade that continued to intrigue him even when he took to the brush and black ink in his later days."³ Gaganendranath exploited the dramatic interplay of light and shade in his creations and at the same time also sought new horizons of modern art while dealing with the abstract and semi-abstract representations of geometrical forms and plainer surfaces. The artist in him was not
satisfied with painting alone, he also had an inclination towards stage scenery and interior decoration. He himself created the decor of his drawing room that had become a trendsetter in the 'society' of those days. His pioneering efforts for the revival of the artistic crafts of Bengal are also remarkable. But our chief concern is his interest in lithography; a hobby, which he shared with his two brothers; especially in the reproductions of their works. In fact, there was demand for caricature reproductions for the purpose of distribution through publishing materials all over Bengal region. This helped to create another department of the 'Vichitra club' in Calcutta. Gaganendra was very keen to render his satirical drawings through the Lithography process, which was achieved with the expertise of one of the Muslims printers, who was appointed for two purposes, first to give Gaganendra a helpful hand in his drawings and depictions and the second, to take charge of all the requirements of the litho-print processes including pulling the images as well as to supervise the output till the reproductions were complete and final. Gaganendra depended on this artist-assistant even in the most crucial process that concerned transferring of Gaganendra's own satirical drawing to the litho-stones. In fact, this nameless artist should be rightly considered as the highly patriotic 'Unknown Soldier,' who did his duty loyally without expecting any kind of material reward. It will be also fair enough to acknowledge the efforts of this printing technician, who was one of the major figures that enormously contributed to the success of Gaganendra's satirical and controversial prints.

Now, let us try to examine some of his cartoons, for instance, his 'Auto-speechola,' i.e., an 'Automatic Speech Making Machine' that has been best described by Amit Mukhopadhyay, "It satirises the Rajas and Maharajas of Bengal, who delivered lectures on various subjects in public prepared by others. The puppet-like doll is the symbol of an aristocrat. Holding a copy of the speech in his left hand, he is speaking through a hand microphone. The puppet is supposed to be run by an auto-speechola machine discovered by some scientist of Bengal. It is some sort of a computer that has been fed with the ready-made speeches on various topics like memorial speech, self-government speech, foolish speeches and fiery speeches in English. Also there is a set of Bengali speeches on different topics."
'University Machine,' yet another striking cartoon, this pen and ink litho-print is completely different from the rest of his satirical delineations due to the great efforts he made to create the masses of university students waiting their turn to go through the processes of graduation. They are coming from in between the great volumes of encyclopedia. The students eagerly pushing themselves through the pressing function of the heavy weighing volumes, so their bodies have shrunk flat, meaning that their bones have been already crushed before they emerged out from the so called 'University Machine.' Gaganendra successfully and masterly used the power of black and white delineation to create the meaningful contrast and also the expressive contradictory statement between the great expectations and the actual situation of the graduates.

Let us move on another amazing but bitter satirical drawing. I think it is one of his well known as well as effective cartoons 'Garden Party at an Indian House.' This cartoon was a rendering in photographic exactness depicting the extravagant ways of the elite called 'Ingo-Bungo' of Calcutta early in this century. Yet this cartoon, asking the spectator to 'Find the Indian,' is a masterpiece of satire aimed at the society. In fact, this cartoon is more than a sly dig - it is a devastating piece of self-criticism.

Perhaps Gaganendra was the first modern Indian artist to react against 'the prevailing norms and immediate surroundings.' He drew attention to human behaviour, which is so varied, its defects, its failures, etc., through social comment via his caricatures. He discerning eye spared none, which is very well reflected in the caricature, 'A wrong combination' that portrays an emancipated Indian housewife of the late nineteenth century dancing with the British Governor General. The lady depicted is his own aunt Jnanadonandini, wife of Satyendranath Tagore, the first Indian to join ICS.

Gaganendra had already established his name as his cartoons were published in many magazines, newspapers, notably among them, 'Modern Review.' But at the same time, be realized that he should not limit himself to the possibilities of imported techniques only. Therefore, he successfully used his own way of expression, inspiring the younger experimental talented artists to seek their own independent styles, instead of following the prevailing trend of conforming to revivalism.

Gaganendra also never flinched from the chance of satirizing the prominent and influential members of society, criticizing them for their hypocrisy. One such caricature is
'My love of my country is as big as I am.' Here, one can notice the inflated figure of M. Bijaychand of Bardhaman holding a cigar in his hand, 'Bijaychand was indeed a hefty fellow. He had English manners and dressed like the British. He went on lecturing about his love for the motherland. This was the contradiction among the educated and aristocratic people of Bengal. Now, notice the middle aged man listening to Bijaychand's lecture. He is in simple Bengali dress, holding a traditional hukka in his hand, in contrast to Bijaychand's huge figure; the other Bengali gentleman looks frail and small. He is supposed to be Gaganendranath himself enjoying the lecture immensely. The artist employs his wit by uniting dissimilar characters, ideas and emotion.\[^{5}\]

He did not even spare religion as he attempted to create his own religion of purity and good conscience, wherein he exposed the duality and his characteristic simplicity of lines. This fact is poignantly depicted in several of his works, notably among them, 'Profitable Devotion.' Here, he mocks at the imperishable sacredness of a Brahmin, who is gorging himself with wine and meat and also enjoying the pleasures of flesh. He has drawn the priest's face with an exaggerated style, which resembles one of the 'dhoots' of Hell as in Hindu scriptures. In yet another cartoon, with his characteristic clarity and simplicity of lines, he has depicted a priest-like character looking like a bloated demon performing the purification rites in lieu of bags of gold. This Brahmin smears cow-dung on the flowers,\[^{2}\] thus introducing dirt into the ritualistic objects.

Gaganendra's cartoons represent perhaps the most original position of his artistic contribution. At the same time, it is very surprising that his unconventional portrayal invited criticism from his contemporaries. Some even alleged that he had lost touch with the ground realities of his time. Even Nandalal Bose remarked, "We can admire him even if we would not wish to emulate his manner. The fact remains, in spite of his criticism, that Gaganendranath truly had the grasp of things. He, like his other family members, was also a member of Brahmo Samaj. Through it, he strove to synthesize the cultures of Europe and Asia, trying to get rid of the evils that had crept in Hinduism and rejecting the chauvinist outlook."\[^{6}\]

Mulk Raj Anand best describes his personality, "Gaganendranath was conscious of the impact of Britain on India."\[^{5,7}\] The catharsis of Gaganendranath's art lay in the tremendous pity he felt for these victims of his felicitous and eager pencil and brush.
However, it seems that by a peculiar individualism in his temperament as well as his great natural gift as a draughtsman, Gaganendranath was well equipped to voice the protest against the current vulgarity.  

Comic art has its roots in the ancient past. This kind of art was not unknown to ancient Indian art. But it occupied a minor place in the field of art. Most of the humorous incidents depicted in his cartoons are related to simple facts of life, like eating, sleeping and the deformities of the human form. The purpose was to idealize rather than to caricature. Gaganendra transformed cartoons as display print or work of art from the normal prints published in the journals.

Gaganendra produced about five hundred cartoons. Art historians O.C. Ganguly, Kamal Sarkar and Sovon Som, agree that he played a pioneering role in this particular category, which, in the context of his own time as well as today, is valid and relevant and of course it deserves serious attention and discussion. Gaganedra's cartoons can be divided into four categories: (a) Social, (b) Political, (c) Religious, and (d) Educational. He published three albums on social cartoons between 1914 and 1921. Gaganendra, for the first time, raised the problem: that the mythological past to which art was rooted was no longer sufficient in the changing socio-political conditions of Bengal.

It seems, sense of wit and humour were natural to the Tagores. Gaganendra, especially, had a magnificent, elemental wit, which provoked sparkling waves of laughter. But at the same time, he was the saddest.

"Beneath the witty and humorous exterior, existed perhaps the saddest and the most tragic figure among the Tagores. He succeeded in bringing a smile on everyone's face around him, but like Krishna Reddy's clown, was sad deep down, because of his comprehension of the reality perhaps."  

Says Amit Mukhopadhyay.

It is true that much of the work that Gaganendranath produced was experimental in nature, as essentially he was a non-conformist and innovative at that. But there was no place for him in the prevailing art environment, which was basically intended to promote the style of progressive realism. Therein, lies his greatness, as he was the first among the modern Indian artists to go bravely beyond the conventional traditions and styles of his time. He was looking for creative and impressive images enhanced by the power of impact.
and motivation, his intention was to go deeper into the core of his society, seeking newer methods of expression as evident from the fact of using lithography.

Amina Kar probed further the artistic qualities; "The first to consciously endow a picture with a form, rhythm and a life of its own, he strove, like many of the later moderns, after a movement pattern, which the eye could find pleasure in a sort of prelude to experiencing in the soul the harmony and the poise of cosmic order, choosing for his purpose the techniques, if not the tools, of the free and independent experimentalists of the twentieth century." Gaganendra's cartoons, playing a pioneering role in the socio-political category, bear relevance to this very day. At the same time, he, with the same poise and ease with which he dealt the visible and material world, played with the fantasy to create his own fairytale world of dreams. In all his lithos, he used the sharp contrasts of light and shade, expertly, an eerie combination of black and gold and at times, an abundance of refracted light seen in a kind of prismatic coruscation.

Towards the end of his life, Gaganendra was constrained protest against almost everything. The screams became very shrill. Even the poet Tagore is shown in the 'Poetical Scream' ascending in 'his latest flight,' which was obviously a comment on the poet's bombastic equivocations, through which one did know whether he was co-operative with the British Raj or non-cooperative against it. Gaganendra, in fact, had a deeply generous attitude towards people, in spite of the cruelty he so often brought through his delineation of men's capriciousness, cantankerousness, carelessness and vandalism.

Gaganendra's satire on Anglo-Indian life, the modern educational system, the nationalism of English Barristers-at-law, the spinning wheel as the key to civilization; was as deep as it was trenchant. Ordinarily, the cartoon fails to leave its mark on memory: the morning's cartoon is forgotten without a trace in the evening. Ashok Mitra comments on this phenomenon, "Gaganendra's cartoon worked like a surgeon's lancet: it left its mark as it let out the poison. His satire attained a special edge whenever something offended his poetic mind. This too, was the fruit of his urbane, metropolitan breeding; even Dwijendralal Roy's literary satires do not really compare with his drawing. And this is what has won his 'The Wry Thunderbolt,' 'The New Vogue' and 'The Strange Men,' a very special niche in the history of Indian graphic art," or we may say, in modern Indian caricature in print."
Gaganendra faced a tragic event that occurred when he was middle-aged. It was the untimely demise of his beloved sixteen year old, elder son. He also suffered illness in the last ten years of his life. Paralysis struck him till his death in 1938, his well-poised calm afflicted by pain and immobility. Lastly, we have to acknowledge this 'ideal of completeness of life' as Rabindranath Tagore used to describe him, whose personality was devoid of any kind of compartmentalization. "Whatever aspect of life he touched upon, he gave it an artistic orientation and an aristocratic touch of the spirit as well as the manners of his own times."

NANDALAL BOSE, 1883-1966
The Architect of Kala Bhavan's Printmaking

It was in 1917 that Rabindranath decided to found a university in Santiniketan, including schools for dance and music as well as the visual arts, which quickly gained recognition as a centre of fine arts in India. Rabindranath's family believed that the encounter with environment and its impact on man was as profound as mind's inquiry into its inner mystery and both the opportunities ought to be provided by the society. Nandalal took this belief as a challenge and sought to create this kind of educational atmosphere in Kala Bhavan. Having an experience as well as exposure to varied forms of creativity in a traditional art scene, it was possible for him to do so along with the efforts of all the members of community; be it a housewife, working men or school children; for he believed that there lay creativity latent in each one of them within their talent and potential.

Nandalal arrived at Santiniketan in 1920 on the invitation of Rabindranath. Initiated to Rabindranath's educational ideals and through environmental influence, thus, a new chapter was opened in the life of Nandalal. And a new consciousness and attempts at a bolder technique became noticeable in his further work. One can observe that within one year of his stay at Santiniketan, it broadened Nandalal's perspective on art. It we were to go through his sketchbooks of 1917 and onwards, we can easily observe his keen interest in all categories of art and craft. Indeed, Santiniketan gave him so called 'raison d'être' for such an interest.

His responsibility at Santiniketan did not stop at running the Art School in novel, modern method, but it also included his attempts in prodding the entire community to set
out for an aesthetic quest. During his tenure, between 1922 and 1935 Kala Bhavan witnessed an influx of many noted foreign artistic personalities from which the students and teachers benefited alike. Dr. Stella Kramrisch, then the young Viennese art historian, lectured on modern European art, Mrs. Millward, a student of Bourdelle, taught sculpture and Andre Karpelles, the French artist and designer, taught the techniques and craft of graphics. At the same time, artisans were invited from different parts of India, who demonstrated the methods of fresco painting, stone carving, terracotta and lacquer work. Thus, the students were exposed to varied artistic cultural influences, each one free to seek inspiration in any style or technique he preferred. Rabindranath Tagore encouraged the Indian artists "not to be herded into a pen like branded beasts and look to the future, which was... as different from the past as the tree from the seed." To him Indian artists should not typecast themselves in any particular mould, but to look to the future. He urged Indian artists to seek independent expressions and to look beyond their own cultural limitations.

If one were to understand the establishment of graphic art in Kala Bhavan as a medium of expression it becomes necessary for us to go through some facts and aspects of history. It was in Bengal, where the art of printing first started and most of the graphic artists worked in the style of Bengal School. The preferred graphic media then in Calcutta and Santiniketan were woodcut, linocut, etching, aquatint and also lithography to some extent. Modern techniques as silk-screen and colour lithography were not known. Jagdish Mittal has observed, "Strangely enough much of the technique and inspiration was derived directly from Europe and when some artists did attempt rather seriously one or the other of the graphic arts, the achievement could rarely reach a high watermark, that is because almost all were painters, who only occasionally made prints and none devoted exclusively to this art, besides they did not produce prints with a specific market in mind. They made them as they painted, it was only to try out new media."

The limited growth of this art was due to unstable conditions prevalent in Indian art standards and styles. Also, the experimental work related to graphics was either mediocre or hybrid being unimaginative and therefore did not merit any serious attention. Even the mature works of masters like Abanindranath and Nandalal Bose were not taken seriously and appreciated by few. Under such circumstances graphic arts could hardly establish itself to gain recognition as a medium of art expression. There existed also
another problem. The stark black and white prints did not make a very welcome impression on the Indian audience more used to colours. Also, since the Bengal school artists preferred the decorative style emphasizing on minute details, it led to stylistic confrontation. The best results could be only achieved in graphics with simple and bold treatment, which was essential feature of prints. The Indian artists possessed limited freedom of expression, as they were more inspired from Europe instead of nearer Japan, which had a similarity of outlook and artistic expression. It is equally surprising that though the Japanese painting techniques influenced Bengal School painting, this effect did not exist for the woodcuts. Thus, the artists remained unsuccessful in translating the style of Bengal school painting in graphic expressions. One more deterrent factor that existed was lack of print collecting habit amongst the Indians. But as contact increased with the countries abroad, graphic art activity witnessed spectacular resurgence.

In the period 1920-24, the artists who worked under Nandalal Bose at Santiniketan took to etching and woodcut techniques. In spite of the significant role of the French woman artist Andre Karpeles, the artists of Santiniketan did not take much fancy for the medium of graphic art, and only a few of them accepted this media for their pictorial expression. R. Chakravarty and M. Bhushan Gupta were two of them.

It is a matter of fact that the credit will go to Nandalal Bose, who inspired the movement constantly. His line drawing was very helpful to him to enter this wonderful realm with vigorous activities. Nandalal expressed his ideas with simple lines, he believed that the sketches have their inherent values.

Nandalal remains unique amongst the artists of his time as he created formal drawings as works of art. His themes were imaginative figures characterized by their stylization and his decorative form. The plasticity of his art harmonizes with its simultaneous graphic and liner quality. The lines are akin to those of Indian sculpture. Though being executed by brush, they have tensile strength as well as tautness. Jaya Appasamy has made an analytic study of some of his works. Quoting her, "Example of his graphic and linear quality are his works - 'Autumn' or 'Veena Player' 1934." The lines seem to feel that is portrayed, and produce a three-dimensional effect. The contours, which establish the figure, are contrasted with the more casual lines of drapery and accessories, such as the details of jewelry and hair. Most exquisite of all is the delineation.
of the hands. The gestures and bodily movements are those seen in our ancient art as much as in the stance and gait of contemporary people. Nandalal’s achievement was to grasp the essence of form with minimum of means.”

While preparing the plates for his prints such as dry point prints, Nandalal worked directly on the brass plates as if he practiced his drawings. He never used to pull his prints; his assistants did all the technical process. I am afraid, but the same is the case also for his lithograph prints.

Nandalal had definite ideas regarding his art. He emphasized more on form rather than on colour. He had an alert mind and acute intelligence, for instance, we can see that, though Nandalal borrowed the tonal variations and soft pliant movement of brush techniques from Chinese paintings, he did not take up the actual grammar of Chinese Art. Nandalal worked in this medium with delight because the process remains spontaneous and less formal, retaining the freshness of a momentary expression. He sought to suggest subjects instead of defining them. The mountain landscapes with trees executed in such an impressionistic style, was his favourite subject. He used the same technique to depict figures, birds or flowers.

The rich tones and textures of life in the country side, the splendour of the starlit night sky. He depicted them all adding a new dimension to their visual impact, the dimension of spirituality. The two qualities that distinguish his work are, its spiritual poise and intellectual thrust. He painted intuitively. But before doing so, he would go into deep meditation, as it were. Severe spiritual discipline always preceded the act of delineation. Nandalal never rejected the philosophy of modernity, which stood for innovation and investigation, for freedom and forward thrust. Let us reveal more about the issue of modernity by quoting Satyajit Chaudhury, “Nandalal believed, for an Indian modern, perseverance in exploring the uniqueness of the Indian genius as revealed in the long tradition was obligatory. One could not stand in this vacuum. He must know and touch his own soil. It was Nandalal’s firm conviction that for encountering the modern world of art, for responding to the call of the new era, an Indian artist must first of all learn an authentic language. The creative urge could reach a desired elevation, project the contemporary reality of life only in this authentic language.”
Nandaial did manage to set moving on the national scene certain trends in the design of houses, interiors, house-effects, stage and community meets, even book illustration and typography, well-nigh anonymously, but not less widespread for that fact. Nandaial had also imbibed in his works the spirit of folk art of Bengali. He had truly mastered all the nuances of the technique and then developed it in his own style. The knowledge of Indian classical painting helped him. The environment at Santiniketan, where Tagore, with his administrative prowess, was retaining artistic values amidst the rush for technical skill, deeply affected Nandaial. He was willing to experiment with all kinds of painting styles and unlike impressionists, did not confine himself only to urban life.

Nandaial raised his art so as to be able to express all his sensibilities. Where his art represents the cultural heritage, the paintings and sketches deliver effectively his message. By creating the colour, he expedites the process of his creation to convey his ideas, which are precisely expressed. Those who adversely criticize colours of Nandaial have failed to understand the meaning of the originality of his artwork as well. His colours have a universal subtlety. Nandaial, however, subordinated even his own creative life to his role as a teacher, which he held at the forefront of his mission in life. Notable and most rebellious of his pupils were Benod Behari, Ramkinkar, Ramendranath, Subramanyan and Krishna Reddy.

Nandalal's Paintings and Posters

It is quite true that Nandalal has expressed himself by combining art with nationalism, and this effort of his remains almost unparalleled among the other initial followers of Abanindranath. In his early works, Nandalal depicted scenes from 'Ramayana,' 'Nala Damayanti,' etc. While in Santiniketan, Nandalal was either in the studio or around the campus. He could not sit back doing nothing. Nandalal was a compulsive worker and had a kind of artisan's itch to keep his fingers busy. Therefore, he could come out with a large output. However, with the exception of his murals, most of his paintings and graphics were of modest size and format.

As an artist, Nandalal followed his urge, believing that he could fulfil his duty towards the society only if he remained true to his artistic self. To him Nature was not
only an external manifestation with differing aspects, but he believed that the substance of
nature had an aspect of differences and dissimilarities.

Two significant examples of his earlier paintings are 'Shiva Drinking Poison' and
'Shri Krishna as a Teacher,' expounding the Bhagavad Gita, both done in c.1913. By this
time and also during the coming years till the year 1927, when he executed his significant
painting 'Natir Puja.' Nandalal was obsessed by the wash technique. Ratan Parimoo
describes this picture in his highly aesthetic style, "The picture featuring a dancer... its
colourful composition exudes a certain excitement. The area behind the dancer's head is
saturated with blue in contrast with the overall yellowish tonality. The dancer's posture is
in rhythmic stance, but a staccato angularity conspicuously suggests her rising defiance.
For, the painting depicts the change of heart of a court dancer, who lived during the times
of Buddha. During one of the dance performances, given against her will, she throws
away her expensive jewellery to proclaim her acceptance of the status of a bhikshuki,
'Buddhist nun.' In these paintings, Nandalal chooses dramatic and psychologically
pregnant themes."

Significant in Nandalal's painting of the 1930s and also of the 1940s are 'Radha's
Viraha' c.1930, 'Way to Bolpur' 1934, both tempera on paper. 'Bina Badini' and 'The
Feeding Breasts,' both are from Haripura Congress Panel, 1937, and they are also
tempera on paper. We can also select his tempera on paper paintings 'Burning Pine', 1942
and 'Hazirabagh Road', 1943, as well as his 'Spring Festival,' 1949 and his beautiful
tempera painting 'Birth of Buddha' c.1933. Lastly we can mention his water colour
painting of 1955 entitled 'Building in the Rains' and his striking tempera painting 'Return
of the Buddha,' c.1935.

I am eager here to point out two significant works of Nandalal, earlier in his
career, about the year 1910; he did a very interesting and powerful sketch, which is a
unique depiction of what is called 'Abanindranath Studio.' Let us go through this joyful
drawing and look at the person's features, gestures and their own personal reactions or
habitual reading or smoking, next to each person Nandalal wrote his actual name such as
G.N. Tagore, S.N. Tagore, A.K. Comaraswamy, and also his own picture N.L. Bose.

However, the second artwork, which was executed in the early 1930s, is a
depiction of the birth of Buddha. This picture portrays Maya Devi standing with the
'Newly Born Buddha' depicted in quite a remarkable way. It reveals the core of Nandalal's colour scheme and the powerful rendering of the semi-nude female bodies, as well as the attractive background and the features of the two handsome maid servants as well as the decorative branches, leaves and the red, round fruits. It is relevant to mention also, his interesting wash and tempera painting titled 'Ritu-Samhar,' 1931. Here, we see, Nandalal has done the subject of Kalidasa's poem with its strong erotic overtones, in a style inspired by the Ajanta paintings and the miniature convention.

In fact, vigour and variety characterize the worksheet Nandalal rendered from 1930-1940, as he was able to wield complete mastery over the basics of Indian art tradition. In his later works, the figures of ordinary village people replaced those of mythology and legends, becoming the new pictorial symbols. This freedom of art from the literature marked a new phase in his creativity. Observant of the people conforming to the new social context, Nandalal was keen enough to move further ahead, from where he had started in his artistic journey. The work of this period reveals the special efforts he took to consciously use limited palette combined with the sculpturesque strength and architectural simplicity of his compositions. It is worthwhile here to refer to his 'Abhimanyu Vadh,' tempera on wall, Kirti Mandir, Baroda, 1945.

Nandalal was always carefully choosing subjects touching the life of people and have an appeal for them. Unlike his mentor also who seemed to live in an imaginary Persian world, Nandalal lives in a world of living human beings. He made the rigid rules flexible and has raised Indian painting to the level of Indian sculpture. In fact, Nandalal's vision of history in general and of Indian history in particular, gives him added significance.

Nandalal did not take strongly to the themes of the Great Bengal famine. Unlike his contemporaneous Zaiul Abedin and Chitta Prasad, Nandalal at that time was busy with another human aspect concerning the survival of thousands of hopeless and starving mobs. In fact, However, Nandalal belonged to a class in which tradition had always been more real than the immediate reality. "To convey the traditional, the mythological mode of thought, he used wash as the main medium. Later, he no more lived and worked on the memory-image and painted more consistently in tempera, a medium in keeping with his changed attitude and temperament, or the simple water colour, the line sketches and
drawing, paper cutting - bringing out the elemental truth of life and nature. A Santhal family, a tree, a landscape, tea-shop, anything around him aroused his imagination.5

The most significant group-project in the artistic life of Nandalal Bose is that of 'Haripura.' This project may be considered as an 'Odyssey' of contemporary Indian Art. Nandalal's acquaintance with Mahatma Gandhi remains a memorable event for him. Besides, the fascinating art of the native artisans, mixed with the master's work and also with his students' work to create some sort of root-originality. 'Haripura' was a great challenge for Nandalal and remains as a landmark in the depiction of this kind of rural daily life and innocent habits. These common aspects of Indian life6 have been rendered in Haripura series portraying folk musicians, artisans and agriculturists. Technically, these are patterns in bright colour scheme and drawn in expressive calligraphic lines. With this project, he identified himself with the village people, his style becoming bold and spontaneous. For this, he toured the villages around, observing the life style and activities, minutely noting down the impressions depicted directly with brush and inks in inimitable rapid sketches. Thus, Haripura became a case of triumph to him in lending new direction to the rural folk art.6

In Sankho Choudhuri's description recounting on Haripura: "... One team was busy mounting handmade papers on the floor; other took charge of grinding colour out of oxidized pigments. The master could make a key drawing, which the trusted disciples would fill in with colours and Nandalal would then bring all this into life with his inimitable line and brush work.46 Many sets were made, all to fit in the niches of the gates. It was a common sight to see Nandalal climbing a bamboo ladder to adjust the panels. To Nandalal, it was one of the happiest chapters of his life and the quality of the total work reflects the joy and happiness of the master."6

All of Nandalal's works were appropriately signed and dated from which one can trace the trajectory of his creative evolution. The expert can easily recognize the different types of lines and strokes. The mature lines are undoubtedly the master's, but the more ornamental and decorative lines with traditional overtones are doubtable. Experts suspect that others did this part and for reasons unknown, was signed by the master. An analytical study of these posters reveal it to be the collective result of Nandalal working with a team of his students and colleagues, an initiative likened to the medieval artists' guild system
and thus, presents a complexity to draw conclusions on this massive art work. But, there
does also exist a common consensus among artists, art-critics and art historians, that here
Nandalal manifested himself creatively with a greater degree of spontaneity, freedom and
originality than he did in his other works, which had overtones of Bengal School. Those
works included the wash technique, linear and narrative type of paintings conceptually,
somewhat like the traditions of Ajanta and miniature paintings.

In 1951, Nandalal retired from Kala Bhavan. He was made Professor Emeritus and
his association in any capacity was requested. Though Nandalal was in good health after
1950, it started to deteriorate slowing his pace of work. In own words, he has summed up
the meaning of art, reflecting his conviction and ideals: "In the sphere of art, it is not
necessary to drag in the distinction of moral values as settled by social standard,
prejudices or convention. That which is blameworthy by social standards might inspire the
artist to create an object, which will inspire thousands to rise beyond their limited notions
to a wider and purer aesthetic appreciation. Particular themes or subjects may be
condemned by some people, but the magic of the brush will reveal something
transcendent and it depends entirely on the artist's attitude and subtlety of perception of
his themes."

Nandalal's Graphics

Soon after Nandalal took charge of Kala Bhavan in 1920, Surendranath Kar came
to this institute to head the graphic studio in order to teach printmaking techniques.
Fortunately, the required facilities were already provided for woodcut, etching and
lithography to groom artists and not mere technicians. Along with their guru, Nandalal,
artists at Kala Bhavan strove to learn the essence and technique of modern printmaking to
use it as a media for artistic expression. As also, mentioned before, many Bengali artists
went abroad to study further Western printmaking techniques. Nirmalendu Das - an expert
graphic artist, art historian, as well as a collector of rare prints of earlier masters of West
Bengal, has written about Nandalal's initial exposure to graphic art. "Nandalal must have
seen Calcutta woodcut prints, which were in the collection of Kala Bhavan Museum for
early years. Those woodcuts are based on simple rough-cuts and clear distribution of
black and white. On the other hand, the bold and clear division, flat and simple picture
plane of the Japanese woodcut, and even the strong arrangement of pictorial division, the
realistic formal elements, the symphony of form and content of the Chinese woodcuts and the rubbing from the terracotta temples of Birbhum and Bankura inspired him a lot. We notice the link between these and Nandalal's graphics.

Except for Ramkinkar and Benode Bihari, few of Nandalal's contemporaries could comprehend the technical possibilities of the medium as well as material. Ramendranath Chakravorty and Marindra Bhushan Gupta, the two students of Nandalal followed the conventional practices of graphic art and were technically adept. They assisted Nandalal in pulling his prints, doing some other processes for platemaking like inking, wiping, and preparing wet paper sheets for dry point and etching. Nandalal never took up any techniques as prevalent fashion, but preferred to first assimilate the process. While others at that time in the country rushed in taking up the medium, with steadfast patience, he understood various nuances of the medium. For him, the artistic search was a sacred, religious act. His works remained witness to the intimacy between man and nature. Traditional values as well as technical training remained for him very important. For this reason, some of Nandalal's prints are considered as hallmark in the history of Indian graphic art.

Nandalal was not only acquainted with all the aspects of the development of printmaking medium, but evinced keen interest in introducing graphic art at Kala Bhavan. He strove hard to grant prominence to printmaking. He covered a wide range of subjects as a printmaker. He remained more formal in his approach rather than being a colorist. This helped him greatly to create strong black and white compositions, wherein he explored the scope and possibilities of the surface. He never undermined the role of technique in his artwork, painting, sketches or graphic art.

Before we study in depth Nandalal's attitude and experiments in this medium, I would like to state his own point of view. He believed that technique was only a means to an end. He said, "Unless you feel within you the omnipresent bliss of existence, you like things, your love or liking grows within you day by day and it is that alone, which inspires your work. An attempt at mastering mere technique is quite futile." He was conscious of the fact that an artist was to be attracted first by the external appearance of the object, which would gradually evolve into mutual relationship and culminate "by the idea or the soul of delight, which creates and enlivens eternally all this universe of form". He
believed that a great artist would intuitively start off with the understanding of abstract qualities and then given them a form and body.

Nirmalendu Das has described in detail some of particular aspects and the various elements that comprise the technique and its know-how, all of which Nandalal dealt with in his characteristic style; "Each surface of the media played a different role according to their own character. It was clear to him that the tactile feeling of each surface differs from the other. For this reason, he never tried to build up a painterly quality when he worked with a lino or wood block. On the other hand, he had developed a sketchy character in etching and dry point, utilizing liquid and flowing lines with contrasts of white, velvet, black and grey middle tones. It is interesting to notice that the lines he depicted in etching differ from the lines he created in dry points. Moreover, the lines and tones of his lithographs are entirely different from those of his pencil sketches, brush drawings, etc."9

In spite of all these, we can not claim that Nandalal had chosen this medium for total pursuit. At the same time he created a language of his own in linocut and woodcuts. He also made maximum use of the medium, thus lending it respectability. He pointed out its creative potential, which otherwise was only perceived as a medium of reduplication and a method for commercial use.

In his execution of relief prints, one can discern three directions. Let us first talk of his relief prints, especially his linocuts. He depicted the design on the lino piece or wood panel with accuracy and care. He performed this technique with the precision of a surgeon not actually bothering about the state of spiritual motivation in the process. Thus, in his linocuts, we do not look for deep expressions, as his aim remained the perfection of technique. He did not provide any scope for intuitive response, intellectual reactions or spontaneous expressions. Secondly, in his style while dealing with dry-point prints, which completely contrasted with his linocuts, Nandalal directly used his needle in a free hand approach9 to depict the design or drawing. They were his spontaneous creations with no correction required. He rendered the lines, which poured forth as if from his heart and head, correctly gauging his intentions on the print. Here, one can view Nandalal Bose at his original creative self. His prints 'Gurudev and Dancer,' 19389 might be the proper example of his dry-point delineation.
There appears to be an apparent contradiction in both his styles. Jaya Appasamy has reflected on it. Though I do not agree with her views on this matter, I think her statements do have some bearing on this condition. She wrote, "Nandalal's work, as a draughtsman, gives us an idea of the power, range and subtlety of his work. In considering the source of his talent, we see that he apprehended reality through his senses and that this visual data was conveyed to the spectator through his artwork, which are about to be a mere imitation of the rural landscapes, but in fact, they are intellectually ordered, as well as controlled by the logic of pictorial necessity and function. While being intelligible, they are not completely realistic."

I think, Nandalal, with his skills of draughtsmanship, was able to approach graphic medium with varied methods. His lithoprints such as 'Santhal Dance' c.1930, which remain the exact depiction of his drawings, whereas the dry point is the exact rendering of his line sketches that were spontaneous. His dry-point like 'Gurudeb and Dancer' 1938 and 'Village Corner,' 1937 are like a student's study of nature. However, it is worthwhile to mention some other prints of Nandalal, such as his 'Study of Trees,' dry-point 1937 and 'Baul Singer,' etching 1936.

Linocut and woodcut prints seem to have been executed by expert technicians to whom he had explained his style of rendering contour, lines, etc., who then translated them to prints as per his requirements and directions. The remaining technical process was left to those unknown technicians, who adjusted his sketches and transferred it to surface of the plates and even pulled them out to achieve those interesting prints, which are signed by him. The technical aspect remained their responsibility for any further prints, and in reality, I believe their fine quality reflects their technical prowess over the medium. Nandalal seems to depend much on some of his expert students and assistants right from when he joined Kala Bhavan. His relationship with his students, to my mind, seems to have benefited him and enabled him to grasp the lion's share of acclaim and fame. As an outsider, I think those students also deserve their share of credit, as they too were partners in the creative process of the prints. The anonymous expert never demanded or expected any benefits and they did not seek any kind of fame, they only loved to help their guru by presenting their sincere efforts.
As mentioned earlier, also Nandalal's style differed in various printmaking media. In the case of linocut his flair for black and white patterns keenly executed with simplicity is evident. He adapted the process involving the stylization or abstraction of visual sensations. But few exceptions remain - most of his linocuts are of small size depicting one or two motifs, therefore could be classified as vignettes. He remained successful in Indianizing the medium. The small size linocut illustrations (approximately 13 x 18 cm) speak volumes about his sensitive handling as well as superb technical execution. Significant print like Gandhi - Dandi March, 1930\textsuperscript{13,14} was executed twice; firstly in black and white and secondly in colour linocut.

Significant of his relief prints are the 'Tree Planting Ceremony' woodcut 1928.\textsuperscript{15} The Daughter-in-law linocut, 1929,\textsuperscript{16} 'Work' linocut 1931,\textsuperscript{17} moving to his striking linocut illustrations of 'Sahajpath' of 1930, such as 'Bullock Cart,'\textsuperscript{18} 'A Child in Bed,'\textsuperscript{19} 'Child with Lamb.'\textsuperscript{20} Nandalal employed this medium suitably to create several socio-political posters along with his students - Ramkinkar notable among them. Most of the posters were intended for the Non-cooperation Movement of 1930.\textsuperscript{14} Instead of the traditional woodcut or linocut material, Nandalal used large blocks of cement matrix. This was an advanced approach to the medium. He also did some prints concerning Santhal themes and rural landscapes and also some particular kinds of trees, such as 'Tamarind Tree,' 'Simul Tree' and 'Pine Forest,' all in 1938. In these prints, Nandalal revealed his fine use of calligraphic line combined with appropriate decorative pattern. These titles remain his most significant work in this medium.

Let us now review his lithographs. They are dominated by his typical sketch-like quality having grainy texture and swaying lines. The notable among them are 'Santhal Dance,'\textsuperscript{10} 'Mandira Dance,' 'Konark and Sun Temples,' etc. Lithography was practiced in Calcutta long before Gaganendranath Tagore took it up in 1916 and it was established in Kala Bhavan in early 1920s. In spite of this, Nandalal became involved in this medium late in his career from 1926 to 1929. He has been able to capture the essence of the Santhal Dance 1930, as he depicts the gentle sway of half-naked bodies to the rhythm of dance. The bare torso of the female dancers is depicted with delicacy and alluring suggestiveness, yet remaining very natural. The drummer seems to have lost himself in the rhythmic beats of the drum. The face of the drummer is the stylized depiction of his
mannerism as in most of Nandalal's artworks. The illumined torsos of Santhal girls contrast beautifully with the dark background and enhanced by their suggested arms and fingers. It is interesting to refer also to his pen and ink studies, which concern this theme.

Nandalal adopted the dry point method for etching. On this course, he remained surer than many of his contemporaries of Bengal School. One point that is vital that he could not attain the level of maturity as discerned in his paintings and sketches. His etchings and dry points remain characterized by fine interplay of vibrant, smooth lines executed with spontaneity. Some of his well-known etchings are "Mango-grove" 1936, 'Arjuna' 1936, 'Goat' 1938, etc. Many of his woodcuts and linocuts were published as cover pages of Visva-Bharati News, Visva Bharati Quarterly and Visva Bharati 'Bengali.' These publications retain their importance as they established the relationship between graphic art and mass media publications.

Etching caught the attention of Nandalal Bose rather late in the period 1936-1946. Though he did very few prints in this medium but he achieved noteworthy work. Prints like 'Pine Forest' 1938 and 'Arjuna,' 'Rabindranath with Dancer' 1938 and 'Landscape' bear evidence of his finesse. Let us also, mention some simple and lovely etchings of 1938, such as 'Chitrangada' and 'Picnic.' Nandalal also, did some interesting drawings and sketches, such as 'Mandira Dance' 1923, 'Rural Landscape' 1930, 'A Girl with Water Lily' 1937, 'Rikshaw' c.1937 and 'Women in a Bullock Cart' 1957.

Lastly, we come to his most significant and controversial woodcut print entitled "The Tree Planting Ceremony'1998. Let us go through this meticulous print that depicts the ritualistic procession of 'Vriksharopana' of the tree plantation. The print depicts crowds of men and women striding towards the place of ritual. They are dressed festively, carrying the objects of ritual and pray. Two strong men are carrying a sapling with reverence towards the place of worship. Young women decked up in festive garb strike varied poses in the course of procession. The print, though being very beautiful, leaves the viewer in a daze, not allowing him to concentrate on any form or object, because of the manner in which Nandalal has distributed the black and white areas automatically without that kind of special approach or the sense of understanding. The expressive language of the graphic medium that helps the artist to reveal his creative intention and also enable
him to visualize his striking image-making possibilities or the amazing feeling of the mysterious looking artwork arouse our sense of art loving. In this particular print, the viewer is not able to focus on any form or figure, which is ordinarily depicted in that picture. Besides, the human figures in the print - for instance - men as well as women in general, are dressed in the same way. Even the large bamboo umbrella seems to be similarly rendered with extremely artificial outlook. The lack of lovely variations and creativeness are acutely felt. Unfortunately, Nandalal seems to have succumbed to this fatal style for one year or so. Later on he freed himself and was able to execute a good number of successful linocuts with different ways of depictions. However, his prints were always dominated by his clever personal idiom.

As is prevalent in India and foreign countries, technicians and artisans have always assisted master artists in their creations. Sometimes they too having insight in the traditional subject matter, spontaneously transfer their expressions. They possess an instinctual sense of artistic language and point of view, but they are also bounded by their naivete and partisanship. What is fatal, in the case of Nandalal, is that such artisans rendered his creative expressions. This can be easily discerned from the varied styles, types and kinds of processes that he accepted as if he himself had executed them. It was as if he came to sign his presence and connection with the art work after everything was technically completed, and thus attaining a position in the history of contemporary Indian art.

Depending on such evidences, we might suspect Nandalal's 'Tree Plantation.' This is to say that this particular print is completely different from the way Nandalal often used his individual style of linocut prints. It is common sense to say that there is somebody else that definitely did the actual process of linocut and he might have gone further, to do also, the printing process.

In fact, Nandalal is the genius of contemporary Indian art with his achievement in the realm of fine art. He is an expert in painting, drawing and graphic art. We can not consider him to be a master of all printmaking techniques, because he did not have enough time to acquire the proper know-how of some of these techniques, but he did a good number of successful prints; especially those of relief and dry point. Nevertheless, Nandalal has had some negative points as regards his approach to the art of prints. He
failed to achieve any advanced steps towards innovative printmaking. He also kept himself inside the circle of conventional delineation and mere depictions of some ordinary scenes, portraits and village life or such. In this field, he was not a rebel, but he is one of the most important figures, not as much as an innovator, but a wonderful pioneer indeed.

As a person, he was truly a builder of contemporary Indian printmaking. Indian art as well as Indian printmaking owe much to Nandalal. His faithfulness to art, his originality and his noble deeds have inspired a great number of Indian artists that owe him a lot. He also, helped to bring art out into the open, on the walls of building or the environment. Thereafter, we can see, the growth of art that seeks to catch the eyes of the public, is larger in scale, clearer in image and more assured in its linear statement. Nandalal, took care to harmonize the existence of the old and new, to foster an amicable and fruitful environment.

MUKUL DEY, 1895-1989
The Exceptional Etcher

Very few articles or literature is available about Mukul Dey and most of them selectively deal only with a limited information. But Ananda Das Gupta's notes best sum up Mukul Dey. He writes, "After returning from England, he started working at the Society of Oriental Art, and in 1928, joined the Government School of Art, Calcutta as its principal. Mukul Dey was an etcher and the credit of introducing etching in India goes to him. He did mainly landscapes and portraits and developed a Western prosaic style." This in brief, I personally believe, best describes Mukul Dey. Further, we will be discussing about the varied point of views related to his printmaking output. While one talks about his printmaking one actually inevitably discusses how he mastered the technique, meanwhile he was not able to achieve any creative artwork, because, he did only pictorial portraits and landscapes.

It is true that Dey spared no effort to learn the fine arts. Like a completely involved artist, he first earned his way through his painting portfolio. Dey closely observed life as well as experienced it through all its joys and sorrows. He studied at the Royal College of Arts in London. Rai Govind Chandra has in one of the articles written about the success, which Dey encountered abroad. He believes that Mukul Dey can not be taken lightly as he
was appreciated by art critics all over London, Berlin, Paris as well as Tokyo. His paintings and prints were exhibited in British Museum and also some other famous museums.

He always aimed at blending the best of European craft with Indian idealism. Mukul Dey introduced the Western technique of etching with drypoint, unknown in India. He was skilled at soft lines, which were greatly admired even by accomplished Western artists. He introduced Indian life and thought in his etchings and drawings; the expressions are a masterly blend of realism with idealism.

Mukul Dey was born in 1895 near Dhaka in East Bengal. He was influenced by his drawing teacher at a tender age of ten years, he began sketching the village life around him, even before he reached the age of twelve, he had drawn the two illustrious Tagores, Abanindranath and Rabindranath, along with some sketches of landscapes.

At Jorasanko from Calcutta, Dey took his first drawing lesson from Abanindranath himself when he was only sixteen years old. Dey was a very serious student of Indian Art and his paintings also found many buyers. With that money, he financed his trip to Konark, Darjeeling, Agra, Jaipur, etc. He also visited Japan, America, and England along with Rabindranath Tagore. In Japan, artists like Yokoyama and Kwanzan, who had revived Japanese art, influenced him greatly. "Their work left a lasting impression on his mind. He learnt the technique of economy of lines and economy of colours. The inspiration to idealize realistic subjects was first infused in him by these two great men. The work he did there found place in the great 'Hara' collection.... Meanwhile, Dey moved to tour the whole of the U.S.A. exhibiting his paintings and etchings at San Francisco, Chicago, etc. A number of art critics admired his paintings and his works were picked up by various museums of U.S.A."2

Dey first began his etching in America and became so proficient in the art that he was elected a life member of the Chicago Society of Etchers in the year 1916. His etchings were highly praised in the American press. The success taught him to value hard work and self-dependence and believed that poverty was a crime.

In 1919, he contacted Muirhead Bone, a well-known painter-etcher and worked with him for several months in London, he honed his etching skills to perfection by joining Slade School of Art, London. After a few months he joined Royal College of Arts,
where he also worked with Frank Short, President of the Royal Society of Etchers in his spare time. Two years later, he got his diploma, winning prizes for his paintings, drypoints*14 and engravings. From 1921, he started working independently in London, and in the process also became a cockney. In the Bohemian atmosphere, he met many artists and art-critics, which all helped him to establish successfully in London for few years.

Dey came back to India after staying around seven years in England. "He brought with him an intimate knowledge of graphic process, particularly drypoint and etching. Whether this presages the rejuvenation of these processes in a country far away from its birthplace as has so often been the case in the past, remains to be seen, but this much we can be sure that if etching becomes a popular form of artistic expression in India, it will be because of the enthusiasm and untiring effort of one man, Mukul Dey." He was adept at using the western technique while expressing the romantic legends and mystical visions of Indian poetry and religion. His goal was not only creating his own art, but also to develop a school for Indian graphic art. This becomes a pioneering attempt, because previously no other Indian artist had expressed himself in this graphic medium.*14 Also, his stay at Santiniketan and Jorasanko with the two Tagores influenced the success that came to him.

Dey possessed an acute artistic vision and also a vivid memory, which were compatible with his habit of doing work with thoroughness. If his works were to be closely studied his command over lines and colour is revealed. The other interesting fact that is revealed is ability to produce a beautiful piece*2 with few lines or touches.*3 On the other hand, the paintings of Dey were never loud or sensational, but have a subtle quality which gradually grows over the viewer. One can see in his portraits, actual men represented with their character clearly visible. Just with tender strokes or few touches, he drew the inner soul of the subject depicting his moods and preoccupations. Dey through his artwork forces the viewer to study his mind and craft.*6 One more remarkable aspect about his portraits*5 is that like many other artists, the eyes were not the only expressive part but the entire figure lends expression,*4 giving a life-like quality to his portraits, as we see in his drypoint of 'Tagore, the Poet,' c.1932.

Dey, also like his colleagues Nandalal Bose, Samarendranath Gupta, was the product of Tagore's Vichitra Club, which had created in them an enduring interest in
printmaking. But, Dey remained uninfluenced by Bengal School. "Though Dey trained in London, his portraits in etching are related to the style set by Abanindra with its emphasis on drawing and the interest in 'character'. Unfortunately, many of them have unfinished appearance as the artist is only concerned with the portrayal of the head. Though he did many portraits of the celebrities of his times, most of them have a predominantly narrative interest, while his landscapes, which are few, are reminiscent of the work of Muirhead Bone."

The actual fact that is the cause of his mastery over lines is his remarkable sketches of the centuries old paintings that adorn the caves of Ajanta. The perusal of these studies as well as comprehending the importance of line and linear qualities as in the artist's expressions in those paintings was of great help to Dey. He had taught art to English boys in England and also had an experience of lecturing under the auspices of various official councils. This benefited him immensely, when he was appointed as the first Indian principal of Government School of Art, Calcutta, in the late nineteen twenties. To him, goes rightly the credit for working hard to revive the Indian painting section, which was nearly closed. Also, he introduced the Western system of training and created an orderly, academic approach to the otherwise haphazard teaching method of art. He also introduced the co-education system in the School of Art.

There remains no doubt about the contribution of Mukul Dey to modern Indian printmaking. But he was cast in the mould of a conventional artist rather than the creative one. His creations were limited to portraits and landscapes where he concentrated on drawing the exacting similarity of his subject. At the same time, there appears to be a control over his latent ability to give rein to his expressions. He restricted his career to recreate the similitude, with a thorough preciseness. Though being intellectual, he as an artist most of the time devoted his life to drawing or etching portraits of the celebrities of his times. His attitude is far away from the function of intimate expression, as well as his portraits though reveal life-like quality, do not depict the artist's own perception of his subject. Dey in fact, did not pay sufficient attention to the creative art of great masterpieces of Eastern or Western artists and neither to the contemporary Indian art depictions. This remains the viewpoint of my humble self, which I think can not be overlooked. Nevertheless, his expert craftsmanship at drawing, etching and drypoint

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depictions are of high quality such as in his lovely scene ‘Off Chitapur Road, Calcutta,’ dated, 1938 can not be negated, especially his introduction of etching in India and also his pioneering contribution in the field of printmaking. However, Mukul was also a successful art educationist at Santiniketan as well as Calcutta during the 30s and the 40s of this century. These two decades may be considered as the most prolific years in his printmaking career. Dey spent his evening years in his modest house at Santiniketan, and got peaceful death in 1989.

THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS

One of the most significant printmakers of those days was Ramendranath Chakravarty (1902-1955), who joined Kala Bhavan, when graphic art was already introduced there. He, along with some of his colleagues, went through the personal collection of William Pearson’s original etchings and drypoints of renowned printmaker Muirhead Bone around 1921. But they could not grasp the basics of printmaking technique. It was the French artist Madame Andre Karpeles, who helped them through her exciting graphic demonstrations in the early 20s. At the same time Gaganendranath had donated his litho-press to Kala Bhavan. Though the lithographic department could not make any significant progress, as it lacked skilled artist.

In 1923, the Mexican Connoisseur Fryman, who knew the technique of Japanese multicolour woodcut, visited Santiniketan and revealed his expertise there. As a result, Ramendranath started experimenting with the colour woodcut prints through Japanese multicolour technique. As he could not acquire the required proficiency in the printmaking technique, he wrote a letter to Madame Andre Karpeles in Paris, around 1925; "I am trying colour woodcut. Please give me advice on how to print and with which colour I should start. Give me the address where I can get woodcut materials" Ramendranath, to a certain extend was in exception. Ananda Das Gupta observed that, “He created a pattern in black and white texture to this woodcut prints. These textures were only used to add variety. The prints were mainly landscapes, rural life and genre scenes.” After his return from England in the thirties, he also did some etchings and aquatints. They were mostly detailed and executed in Western academic style. His etching and aquatints are steeped in pictorial norms and traditions; but in his woodcuts Dey used black and white contrast with virtuosity. Later, he increasingly used textures for variety and to enhance his expression to
reveal more about his art and activities. We can say he was the tutor of Haren Das. A significant printmaker of Calcutta, Mani Bhushan Gupta was another artist, whose work though limited in variety and quality, can be distinguished for his meticulous landscapes and figure drawings. Other artists - the students of Kala Bhavan, during this period executed some interesting linocuts of the Tagore plays. In fact, woodcut and linocut processes were the major medium used in Kala Bhavan.

I think it is relevant here to quote Badri Narayan, Marg, 1955; "Today, in almost every part of art-conscious world, the awakening of a new, genuine interest in the woodcut medium is discernible and it now obtains an honourable position in the family of the arts along with various, hitherto neglected graphic mediums. The connoisseur's attitude towards it has undergone a change and it has become a collector's item.... It is a matter of regret that in present-day India, there is in general a certain lack of feeling and enthusiasm on the part of artists for the graphic medium. However, the artists of Bengal are beginning to feel the possibilities of the various graphic mediums in general and the woodcut in particular. This medium should thrive and prove popular as the lowest priced original work of art."5

The other important artists, who also played an equal role in creating interest are Surendranath Kar, Manindra Bhushan and Biswarup Bose. They experimented with the woodcut medium and creatively explored it to seek different possibilities. One can easily discern the conflict between the content and form in their creations as they intended to create a picturesque effect on graphic surface. As a result, most of their prints have a painting like quality instead of graphical. They did differ from the prevalent notion of printmaking merely as a means of reproduction. But at the same time they could not grasp the exact potential and characteristic of graphic medium.

At this juncture, Surendranath Kar (1894-1970) played a pivotal role, as it was he who taught Ramendranath the basic techniques of lithography and etching. Surendranath was an artist, craftsman, technician and architect, who was sent to London in 1925 to learn the etching techniques. Though he could not master the techniques with the required expertise, he returned to Kala Bhavan and played a pioneering role in creating interest among other artists in graphic art.
Thus, Santiniketan became the centre for graphic activity in India and of active artists like Mani Bhushan Gupta and Manish Dey - who began to make prints along with another pioneering artist D.P. Chowdhary. Generally speaking, their linocuts and wood engravings were often restricted to some conventional idioms and usual approach. However, they only made a little use of this new medium out of curiosity. They were eager to acquire the current tendency in the use of contrast and some other conventional idioms, but all these processes did not help much. They were, in fact, far from creative idioms.

Samarendranath Gupta, yet another artist of this period, has a taste for realistic art expression, he also started looking for a new mode of projection, meanwhile he was deeply influenced by the environment around him. In fact, he was hovered between two influences, either in the pursuit of the tradition or in terms of intellectual expression. He has hardly succeeded in mastering any of these two forces working in the opposite direction.

Let us move to the successful and talented husband and wife Jagdish and Kamala Mittal. Both were younger artists and the product of Kala Bhavan c.1949. Jagdish was born in 1926 and Kamala in 1928. "The Mittals have attained distinction in their woodcuts and wood engravings, while their expressions in the other graphic mediums, are also commendable. Jagdish has done coloured and black and white woodcuts as illustrations for children's tales and popular fables. Kamala depicts her woodcuts and linocuts with genial-delicate subjects endearing to feminine hearts; she depicts with kindly, lively warmth. Kamala is an artist with a sensitive awareness for the woodcut." In fact, Kamala's prints are pregnant with naive charm and attraction.

The maximum number of the painter-printmakers of the transition period, which lasted till the late 50s, used the technical skill with Western training for making prints with Indian themes. In addition to this, there are few prints of 'Gandhiji' and 'Christ,' in which a black ground with bold white arabesques is used. Other artists, who have made contribution in printmaking, namely, Ranee Chanda and Sudhir Khastgir. They are the students of Santiniketan under Nandalal, Ranee with her linoprints of landscapes, scenes from Tagore's dramas, and Sudhir for his linocuts of dancers and musicians.
Later, we will see many changes in the medium of woodcut, wood engraving and linocuts. Till now the Indian artists practiced the graphic art only with the process of black and white without knowing the technique of colour prints. "It is worthwhile to know that when Nandalal sent his son Biswaroop to Japan, he learnt thoroughly this art at the famous 'Koka Studio'. He returned to Santiniketan about 1940, and started teaching the techniques of conventional woodcut, as well as the Japanese colour woodcut processes to scores of students. Though this formed part of a regular curriculum, since 1942, only a few students showed any kind of creative approach or even a leaning towards this media."8 All the students' work displays showed variety in subject matter, medium technical skill and feeling for the medium. However, the lack of technical skill required for the media, combined with dearth of print collectors. The time involved, also discouraged many from taking up this complicated but charming mode of expression.

In the forties, two more artists were also practicing etching and printmaking media. They were L.M. Sen from Lucknow and Y.K. Shukla13 from Bombay. "L.M. Sen (1898-1954) was a versatile print maker. He did etching, aquatints, drypoints, linocuts and woodcuts. He too had his training in printmaking techniques from abroad. Sen is known for his fine renderings of village scenes, portraits and figure compositions. In trying to evolve a personal idiom, he would sometime make use of a flat pattern in which line on black ground."9 L.M. Sen is also known for his keen handling of his materials and perfect finishing of his prints, as reflected in his beautiful linocut of 1940, titled "Tribal Woman."12

"Y.K. Shukla (1907-1986), in the late thirties, went to Italy and learnt etching. In 1939, he returned to India and started his etchings and joined Sir J.J. School of Art in 1945. It was only in 1952 that he succeeded in introducing graphic art as part time course, holding classes twice a week in the evenings."9 2 Few years later he was transferred to Ahmedabad, From 1960, he started his vigorous interest in the graphic medium, and achieved a number of successful etchings.13

We can rightly say that the exceptional students of Nandalal Bose, Benode B. Mukherjee and Ramkinkar Baij, along with three other outstanding painter-printmakers, namely, A.R. Chughtai, Sufiuddin Ahmed and Haren Das, may be considered as the forerunners of contemporary Indian printmaking.