

CHAPTER - IV

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their interventions: Kala bhavana (1920-1930)**

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The concept of '*Kala bhavana*' developed from the informal art space of *Vichitra* which was established in Jorasanko. This word was used profusely by Balendranath Tagore & may have influenced Rabindranath who would follow his writings quite regularly.

Tagore became critical of the art practice & pedagogy which developed in Kolkata under the guidance of his nephew Abanindranath Tagore. He feared that Indian society of oriental art was stereotyping the prevalent art practice as an Oriental form only. They were essentializing the idea of the Oriental. Tagore was equally critical of the western materialism and the European idea of progress.

Rabindranath mentions –

“We have for over a century been dragged by the prosperous West behind its chariot, choked by the dust, deafened by the noise, humbled by our own helplessness & overwhelmed by the speed. We agreed that this chariot –drive was progress, & that progress was civilization. If we ever ventured to ask, ‘progress towards what, & progress for whom’, it was considered to be peculiarly & ridiculously oriental to entertain such doubts about the absoluteness of progress.”¹

Progress for him was not only in the realms of science and technology but in looking at the pre-industrial crafts tradition, the aesthetics of the every day. He aimed at indigenous modernism which was more inclusive in nature rather than the idea of modernism understood in the west though it tended to

1 Quoted from a lecture delivered in China By Rabindranath Tagore, 1924

appropriations of the femininity through the discourse of crafts. He denied the essentialized identity formations in imagining the national.

'Tagore regarded political solutions as artificial & temporal. For him cultural practices which had not lost sight of fundamental humanity, were more durable & substantial. Culture was affected by education, but the forms developed by imperial modernity were stifling. Similarly the forms developed in the Calcutta Government Art School did not connect with Indian traditions in ways Tagore felt were important to its social & cultural rejuvenation. Hence, the need for founding a university rooted in eastern concept of art, traditions of gnos- sis, and pedagogy, where international cultural relations could be fostered. The world had already 'globalized', cultural meetings were already in process. So far clash rather than confluence characterized the encounters. The latter, Tagore understood, was desperately needed.'²

Tagore's idea of returning to the pre-industrial past saw the shift of an art educational centre from an urban situation to that of the rural. It was secluded from the urban centre & its values but enriched itself and the villages through communitarian practices like collaborative crafts projects & agricultural skill development. Whereas Havell's anti-colonial art education emphasized on the Aryan past, Tagore's Kala Bhavana intended to connect with its locale and to a certain extent with the subalterns. He, in an essay in 1919 in *Bharati* mentions –

"Our colleges which are factories to produce clerks, have no place for music & fine arts. The colleges which we have named national also have no place as the necessity of these in social life is being lost.'" In 1919 he established Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan. The teachers were Surendranath Kar, Asit Halder & Nandalal Bose. There were no classes on still life but emphasis was given on the natural environment. He conceived Kala bhavana not as an art school but

² David Gall, *Covering Polarized Modernity. Counter – modern art education. Santiniketan the Legacy of a Poets school*,p.7

as an art studio. Studio practice was emphasized. The concern for degrees & diploma was not there. 'The 1919 prospectus mentions-

- 1) The Visva – Bharati is for higher education.
- 2) The system of examination will have no place whatever in the Visva – Bharati, nor is there any conferring of degrees.
- 3) Students will be encouraged to follow a definite course of study, but there will be no compulsion to adopt it rightly.'³

David Gall comments – 'In the new experiment in art education in Santiniketan Nandalal Bose & his fellow artist teachers incorporated an understanding of cultural distinctiveness, hybridity, selective disjuncture's from, and continuities with, traditions into their pedagogy and art practice. The subtle persistence of modernist presumptions in postmodernity, make Tagore's art education experiment, with its shortcomings, an important source of insight for overcoming imperial modernity's subtle legacies.'⁴

The aim of Visva bharati was *Vishwam yatre Bhavati eka niram* (where the world is a nest).Hence there was a conscious effort to bring in the western ideas, to bring the best examples of Western art to the student of Kala bhavan. Towards the end of 1921, Stella Kramrisch comes to Kala bhavana and gives lectures in art history from ancient Middle Eastern to Western, till the art practices contemporary to her times like Cubism and Bauhaus. This was perhaps the first attempt to disseminate the knowledge of modern western art in India.

This endeavor to give Kala bhavana an international aura is being articulated in Binode Behari's words –

"And since art at Santiniketan was fostered by Rabindranath not as a national activity which carried patriotic value but as an educational & cultural necessity for the complete individual, opportunity was provided to the artists

³ Shobhan Shome, Vichitrasabha theke Visva Bharati Kala bhavana, p.337

⁴ David Gall, Covering Polarized Modernity. Counter – modern art education. Santiniketan the Legacy of a Poets school, p.1

for the study & understanding of the European & other schools of art & their modern developments; in particular; the admirable analysis of those schools of art by modern European critics. Such comparative study has a natural result of broadening the student's intellectual outlook.''⁵

Andree Karpeles an artist from France joined Kala bhavana in 1329. She preferred the language of Post-impressionism. She taught oil painting. Students were trained in painting still life & portraits. She taught woodcut. It is through her that Kala bhavana was initiated into expressionist woodcut prints. It made a deep impact & the result was the '*Sahaj Path*' illustration by Nandalal Bose. It became very popular in Santiniketan. Satyendranath Banerjee, Prabhatmohan Banerjee & Shanta Nag were her students. *Vichitra* was the most important contribution of Karpeles which she found with Pratima Devi.

I would like to quote some important aspects of *Vichitra* which Andree highlighted in her essay '*Vichitra*' –

“What are the aims of our *Vichitra*? They are numerous & very different but all have in view the same ideal : to make in Santiniketan a real centre of revival for arts and crafts, to make our *Ashram* the cradle of a new decorative Art based on Indian traditions but suitable to the new ideals of modern life.

We have already induced two craftsmen to come and work with us – one a lacquer worker from Ilambazar and the other a carpenter from Goalpara. The first one is an example of perfectly skilful workmanship applied to an inartistic aim namely the making of realistic fruits etc. & we have had to struggle against the conservative ways. The other one has a special genius for wooden toys & skilled in many different ways and is very willing to try new experiments, he is for us an e.g. of the promising future we have in front of us when our artists will co-operate with the craftsmen of our villages.

A short list of items which are being produced –Book binding, embroi-

5 Shobhan Shome, *Vichitra Sabha theke Visva bharati Kala Bhavana, 1915-1951*, p.357

dery, bags, cushions, ladies requisites.

Furniture – book – stands, screens, looking glasses, pots, boxes – Terra-cotta Tiles, frescoes for the decoration of the house.

Ladies might organize small exhibitions of our products in their homes and thus attract customers and orders

Widows and girls wanting to learn a trade or craft that would not interfere with their domestic duties, should also study at Vichitra

It must be well understood by all those who are willing to help us that we are not trying to create luxurious objects which would be not in harmony with the spirit of the Ashram and its surroundings-we want to create simple objects made out of simple materials, but of perfect and refined workmanships and finish.''⁶

These passages provide a glimpse to the effort of the Santiniketan art movement to reach the masses, aestheticize the everyday, and bring a change in the taste of the masses. It was trying to bridge the gap between the new elites and the subalterns and emphasized on communitarian practices.

This endeavor in handicrafts shifted to Srininiketan and got a new name: the Shilpa bhavana (The Industries Department) of Sriniketan. This included weaving, spinning, durrie making, Batik, leatherwork, lacquer work, book binding, carpentry etc. In Calcutta, Subhash Chandra Bose inaugurated the Sriniketan Emporium Centre on December, 1937. The agricultural and rural reconstruction centre at Sriniketan introduced different handicrafts in the surrounding villages and the village women were taking active part in them. Miss Green ,Prabhabati Majumdar , Pratima Devi and Sukumari Ghosh initiated the village women to these crafts. It was in this background that the first Women's conference took place at Sriniketan in March 1932, nearly 500 women from adjoining villages (Benuria, Bandgora, Goalpara, Bolpur and Surul) attended it. The village women learnt the different branches of crafts which helped them economi-

6 Shobhon Som, Vichitra Sabha theke Visva bharati Kala bhavana,(1915-1951),p.367

cally.

Lisa Von Pott came to Santiniketan and taught sculpture. She taught modelling and casting. After her came Margarate Millward who also taught sculpture and initiated the students to anatomical studies. In 1931 the Hungarian Mother and daughter Sas Brunner & Elizabeth Brunner came to Santiniketan. Ju Pion and Su Bei Ho came to Santiniketan. They would do work with Chinese ink. Students would also learn by observing their working process and paintings.

Rathindranath Tagore was an instrumental force in the growth of Visva Bharati, Santiniketan. His contribution to the development of crafts is very valuable. He learnt leather craft from abroad & introduced it in Kala bhavana. Different usage of leather was explored. It became a form of art expressing varied artistic designs. The usual '*modas*' Which were (bamboo stools) made in Birbhum got a nice seat cover of beautifully designed leather cushion. Santiniketan art education thus focused on the experiential, a part of the everyday life, constructed and catered to the new taste and made art affordable to the middle class. This experiment experienced modernism in its own indigenous tradition which transcended polarization of colonial & anti-colonial & enriched itself from the transcultural intersections & the indigenous sources.

From its very inception Kala-bhavana enrolled female students .Girls from elite families found safe shelter in Santiniketan. Mr.B.W.Tucker points out----'One of the most striking aspects of Modern India is the rapidly increasing share that Indian women are taking in public affairs of the country .In recognition of this fact most of the colleges are opening departments for women. Santiniketan has long been in the vanguard of the movement for female education. Believing as we do in the unity of all life we have not created a separate women's department but have long welcomed women as equal members of our corporate life. Our experiment with co-education has been criticized by our more conservative fellow countrymen but in our years of experience not a single inci-

dent has occurred to give us a reason to doubt the wisdom of our policy. Living in a progressive community that enjoys the influences of the family who have been pioneers in the movement for the full development of their personalities unrestricted by outworn conventions. Here they are thrown into living and direct contact with the finest expression in modern Indian art, music, literature and drama .They are also guided into the understanding of the ideals and arts of home making .Because women have not yet felt the pressure of economic competition as men have it is our hope that the guardians of the young women of Bengal may appreciate the unrivalled opportunities that Santiniketan furnishes for the education of women and that large numbers of young women may come to us for their education.'⁷

Jyotirmoyee Devi writes—“Calm , cool serenity of a village where there it is not troubled by kalaazar ---truly as if it is an ashram, the first thing which we observed was the easy movement of the girls. In the festivals, on the village road, school, library, in the karate room, fair— I don't know whether such spontaneous movement, such easy seat was there in Bangladesh –there is nothing like this ----I cannot say whether the women are free in any other ashram like this. But there they get such bonding, studying in schools with boys and when grown up studying in separate departments, working together in Kalabhavana in any festival sitting on the carpet like older days but boys would sit on one and on the other side will be the girls, as if the entire thing is like a family. No differentiation is there.”⁸

Parul Dave Mukherji points out- ‘In civil society, it is through cultural practices that hegemony in Gramscian sense is maintained. As for example, in discourses on art and art history, woman are assumed to be objects of patriarchal representation (woman as source of inspiration for the male artist) rather

7 The Santiniketan Ideal [The Viswabharati News] ,Modern Review,October 1939 p.457

8 Santiniketane Meyera,by Jyotirmoyee Devi Jayasri,1338(Bengali) 1st year ,Poush ,9th edition p.736

than as having any agency in signifiatory practices. Not that there has always been dearth of woman artists but that of the cultural will to accord significance to their practices and hence leading to a systematic omission to their contribution.⁹ The question often raised why women artists? why talking about this difference is—‘.....the cultural field can be re-imagined as a space for multiple occupancy where differencing creates a productive covenant opposing the phallic logic that offers us only the prospect of safety in sameness of danger in difference, of assimilation to or exclusion from the canonized norm.’¹⁰ Moreover Pollock warns against being counter hegemonic producing another set of essentializations or imagined sameness .It can be based on discussing the operation of binaries which co-exist ,influence each other, challenge , contest and celebrate in the same cultural space.

The art practices discussed in this chapter speak about the hegemonic nature of pedagogy present in Kala bhavana at that time: the sameness, the influence and also moments of contest. From its very inception Kala bhavana had female students. And it also held classes for the women who were interested in fine arts, they were mainly the relatives of the staff members of Visva bharati.

A rough list can be made-----

1921-1926 - Sukumari Devi, Srimati Hatisingh, Gouri Bhanja,Sabita Thakur,Basanti Majumdar, Santa Devi, Indusudha Ghosh

Before 30s came---Jamuna Basu,Rani Chanda,Nibhanani Chowdhury,Firoza Begum,Hasi Hasimoto,Savitri Krishnan, Geeta Roy ,Mandira Devi,Rosalin,Rodipetty,Santa Desai,Firoza Begum

1934—Renuka Kar, Celina Vikramratne ,Indulekha Ghosh

9 Editorial,Gender and representation,May 2006,Women's Studies newsletter,Women's studies Research Centre,M.S University,issue no 14

10 What is the Canon structurally? From Differencing the Canon ,Feminist Desire and the writing of Art Histories by Griselda Pollock ,Chapter-1,p-11

The artists whom I have discussed are those who could be documented either through their or other's memoirs and essays which were being rarely found on them. J.H.Stape provides a definition of memoirs-'Based upon recollections of a well-known person, a 'memoir', a term borrowed from the French, tends to be more casually structured than biography. Less subject to the demands of chronology and tending, on the whole, to avoid slants, angles and the grinding axes, the memoir is freer and sometimes less self-conscious.'¹¹ The memoirs are fluid and less contoured by time and hence the choice of events in the following discussion also doesn't follow a particular narrative structure but brings forth the presences of women in the public institution of art education and the interventions they made.

Sukumari Devi was one of the pioneer students and women teaching in Santiniketan. She joined Kala bhavana as a student around 1920s. She was a child widow and came from a village called Chandpur now in Bangladesh. She could draw *alpona*, make *kanthas*, draw on *pidhis* and make moulds. Rabindranaath saw her *alpona* and encouraged her to join Kala bhavana. She learnt drawing from Nandalal Basu .Her formal training changed her perception of the traditional form of *alpona*. She also painted narrations from Ramayana and Mahabharata in watercolour. She had developed her own style



Figure 1Sukumari Devi

11 J.H.Stape,Introduction,A memoir of Austen by James Austen- Leigh,p.7

in painting like the alponas, especially when she painted lotuses. (Fig.1) In 1924 she joined Kala bhavana for teaching alpona and embroidery. She was called 'mashima' (aunt). She sat next to a window in the museum and used the wash technique. Her passion for ornamentations influenced her eye for a detailed rendering of ornaments in her paintings. Rani Chanda referred to her painting on Rashleela where, she decked up all the Krishnas and the Gopis. This reference was being mentioned in *Shab hote apon*, a memoir by Rani Chanda.

Kironbala Sen was from the afternoon classes. She was immensely enthusiastic about painting and clay modeling. She also worked on the murals in Shyamali (the mud house in Uttarayan, a residential complex where Tagore stayed). Santa Devi remembers her eagerness to paint. 'She would appear with her new works in between few days. She painted a girl with a lamp. She had less time but her urge to paint was very strong. Later a painting titled *Ghare baire* was published in Prabasi.'¹² Kironbala would be invited to execute *alponas* whenever any occasion happened, such was the situation before Sukumari Devi joined Kala Bhavana. (Fig.2)



Figure 2. Kiron bala Sen,
Mother and child, Watercolour, size unknown

Shrimati Tagore joined Kala bhavana to learn painting. She was mainly known for her creative dance performance. She presided over the Oriental Society of art and organized many exhibitions.

Santa Devi (1893-1984) was born to Ramananda Chatterjee and Manorama Devi. Her art education began in school. The teacher taught how to draw straight lines. Sometimes he would get big wooden cubes and ask to do model study. He also taught to measure the distance with pencil. Later another teacher came and she learnt painting. She completed B.A with Padmavati Gold medal. She got a teaching opportunity but was not allowed to do so. She mentions, at that time someone asked her father, "Will you put your daughter in a glass case?" Later she joined the Brahmobalika Vidyalay in Kolkata and taught there without any salary.



Figure 3 Santa Devi, a copy of Padmapatre ashrubindu by Abanindranath



Figure 4 Santa Devi, Portrait of mother, published in

Her father Ramananda Chattopadhyay published Modern review and Prabasi .Both of them had art writings and reproductions .They were well circulated in the upper and middle classes. Hence Ramandanda had an interest in art education of his children. After his son Mulu died, he wanted Santa to learn art as Mulu was keen on painting and sculpting. Nandalal taught her for some

time but he left for Santiniketan. Nandalal would say that everything in nature moves accordingly. 'We think that the trees grow unbound, but it's not like that, they have forms of their own which they follow-some are as sharp as the needle, some are blunt headed...He would emphasise on the individual quality of each material like metal, wood and stone.....He used to make us copy drawings from Ajanta, but allowed to compose any painting independently too.'¹³

Ramananda used to take his daughters to exhibitions. On one such occasion, they met Gaganendranath who asked whether his daughters painted .Ramananda told him about the little beginnings. Then Gaganendranath suggested him to put them under Abanindranath's training. Santa would be taken to Jorasanko where she would get her art lessons from Abanindranath . There in the Southern verandah, he would look at paintings, give suggestions and would keep on painting. She would vividly remember the Jorasanko environment and had strong memories of two paintings by Abanindranath Tagore-*Padmapatre ashrubindu* and his Mother's portrait. One can also see her special fondness for the painting *Padmapatre ashrubindu*.(Fig.3) She copied that painting in her drawing book. This also suggests that she was probably trying to learn the nuances of image making by copying his work. She mentions about watching the process of wash technique. The portrait of her mother was published by O.C.Ganguly in Rupam.(Fig.4)



Figure 5 Santa Devi,Kantha

13 Santa Devi,Purbasmriti,p.81



Figure 6 Santa Devi, embroidered blouse

Later she went to Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan. There she learnt water-colour. She also learnt oil and woodcut from Andree Karpeles who was there in Santiniketan. She refers to the informal nature of the classes. Like her earlier lessons, Nandalal would emphasise on observation. Painting classes were conducted in the first floor of Pearson's house. The bigger room was for the boys and the smaller ones for the girls. She in her memoir *Purbasmriti* refers to a *karkhana* probably she meant the workshop of *Vichitra* where due to Pratima Devi's initiative book binding, wooden dolls, colouring and varied embroidery was being done. She also mentions about *mashima* (Sukumari Devi) and mentioned that she was good with floor painting (*alpona*).

Due to domestic responsibilities she had to return to Kolkata. Later she got married but carried her work slowly but regularly. Her interest was varied, she was interested in solving mathematical puzzles and crosswords. She was also interested in architectural design, one can see that in the geometrical floor designs for her own home. (Fig.8) The belief in reducing art and craft distinction in Santiniketan art movement is also seen in her work. The figure of Rama is repeated in both her painting and kantha work, one can see a continuation. (Fig.5), (Fig.7), (Fig.9) She was also a deft embroider. (Fig.6) Like her contemporaries she too referred to Indian mythologies. There were mostly layouts for her

compositions. She would prepare a preliminary sketch of the composition and then execute it. The spaces she represents are mostly bound within domestic sphere. There is a tree with birds, which is just across the road next to her house. Images of children throng her work.



Figure 7. Santa Devi, untitled, 20x22cm, watercolour



Figure 8. Santa devi, Floor design



Figure 9 Santa Devi, Kantha



Figure 10 Santa Devi, Women worshipping, A drawing from her sketch book

Worshipping woman became a common iconography of the contemporary times speaking of reverence as seen in *Natir puja* by Nandalal Bose or the Pujarini in the paintings of Pratima Devi and Sukhalata Rao. (Fig.10) (Fig.11) Such figures were also found in Santa's paintings. The painting of the girl on the

swing was being talked about in *Punyasmirti*, a memoir by Sita Devi. Rabindranath suggested that the girl was none other than Sita, Santa's sister. She mentions that her paintings were exhibited in Porabazar but the irony was *pora* in Bengali means burnt so was the exhibition, all her works were destroyed. Such incidents happened again. Gaganendranath sent a ship full of paintings. He liked two of her oil paintings. There were two paintings of the huts. He asked for those. Then there was a ship wreck and those were drowned. Some paintings were sent to Rangoon and they were returned with a bronze medal. 'Once I thought I will become a good artist but nothing happened . I recall the appreciations and become glad. But now I can't even paint.' ¹⁴



Figure 11 Santa Devi,Untitled,20x22cm,watercolour

She was also a prolific writer and wrote for Journals. Her article on Jamini Ray is worth mentioning. Her memoir about her father Ramananda Chatterjee *Bharat-mukti sadhok Ramananda Chattopadhyay O Ardashatabdir bangla* is an important document of that time which points out to the important aspects of the beginning of Indian Journalism with the publication of *Modern review* and *Prabasi*. She got the *Bhuvanmohini Swarnapadak* for this memoir. Her other memoir '*Purbasmriti*' was about her own self. She translated for *Prabasi* under the pen name of Jagatdurlabh Bhattacharya. She translated the *Hindusthani upakatha* by Upendrakishore Ray Chaudhuri. She also published a handwritten magazine called *Sreyashi* whose cover page was painted by her mother Manorama Devi and Protima Devi. She wrote *Udyanlata* in *Prabasi* under the pen name of Sanyukta Devi. 'If I wouldn't have lost myself in the life of domesticity then could have used that training for bigger causes. Could see lines and colours among the various wealth of nature, gained the power to observe nature in no time but it was later shrouded due to trifling things.'¹⁵



Figure 12 Santa Devi, Untitled, 20x22cm, watercolour

15 Santa Devi, *Purbasmriti*, p.82

The landscape with mountains, the position of the tree cutting across in the middle reminds of a Japanese composition. A thoughtful woman with a portrait in profile resting on the parapet reminds of Sunayani Devi's 'Moonlight Sonata'. (Fig.15), (Fig.13) Mythological character of Rama makes its presence again and again in her work. The two dominant features of the Japanese and Indian miniature paintings are prevalent in her works. The figuration belong to Indian miniature tradition. The two birds remind of Mansoor(the painter from Je-hangir's court) whereas the large trunk is cut short alluding to Japanese paintings.(Fig.12) The leaves are natural and not decorative.



Figure 13 Santa Devi,Untitled,20 x 36 inch,watercolour

The composition which may have depicted Kaikeyi is a composition in pink and white with delicately rendered drapery. There are also compositions with children playing near the river bank done with light and dark washes. (Fig.14),(Fig.16)



Figure 14 Santa Devi,Untitled, 20 x 27 inch,watercolour



Figure 15. Santa Devi, 20 x 28cm, watercolour



Figure 16. Santa Devi,
Girl on the swing, 20x22cm, watercolour



Figure 17. Santa Devi, Untitled
20x28cm, watercolour



Figure 18. Santa Devi,
sketch of a child, pencil, 20x22cm



Figure 20 Santa Devi, Untitled
18 x 32 cm, watercolour



Figure 19. Santa Devi, Untitled
28 x 20 cm, watercolour



Figure 22. Santa Devi, Untitled
22 x 20cm, watercolour

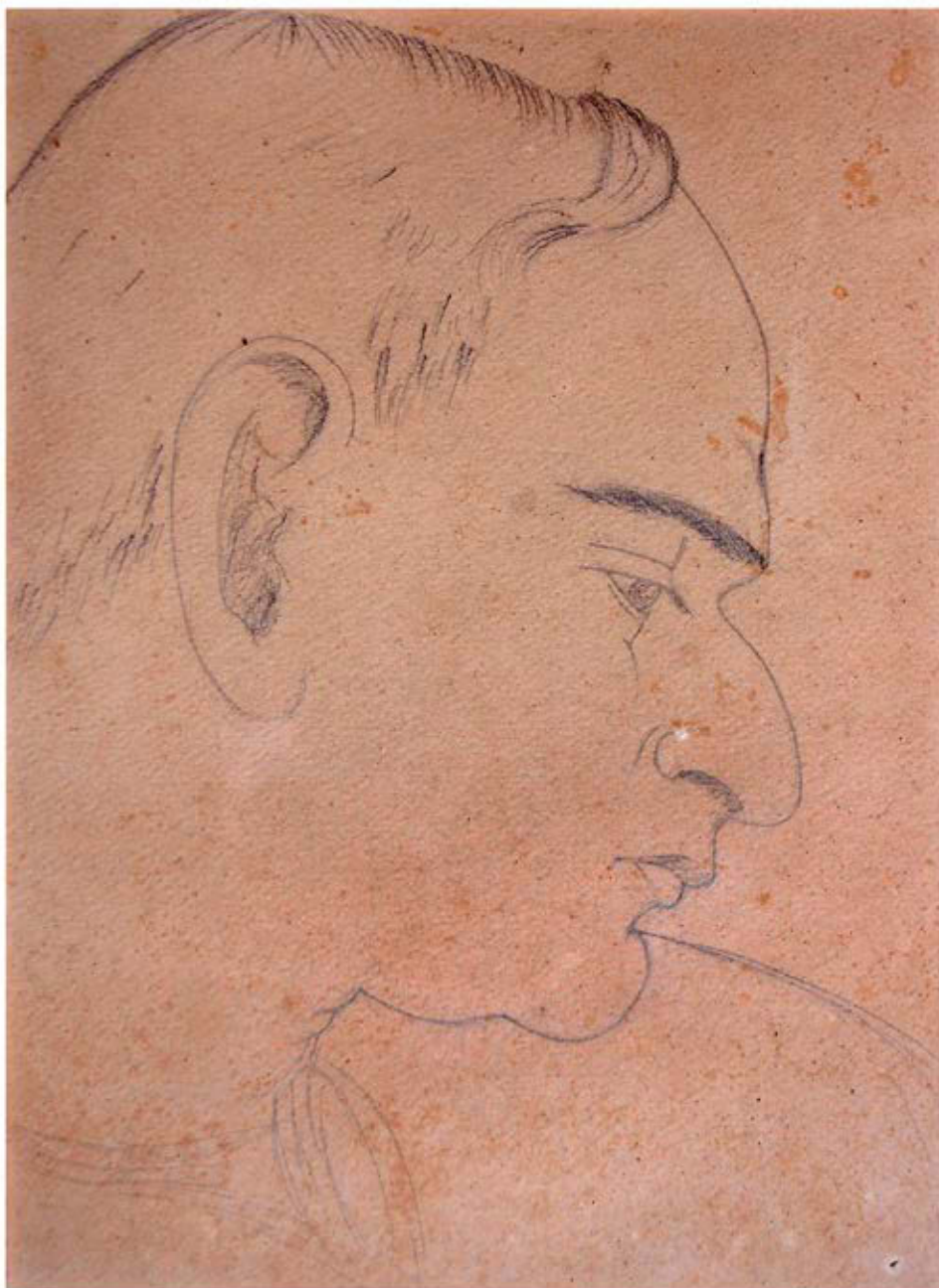


Figure 21 Santa Devi, A portrait,
32 x 18 cm, watercolour

Gouri Devi(Bhanja)(1907-1998) was born in Munger, Bihar. After completion of school in the Brahmavidyalaya (Santiniketan) she took admission in the painting department and received diploma. She received her early training under her father Nandalal Bose and maternal uncle Surendranath Kar.

She was also a talented dancer. In 1926 in *Natir puja* (a dance drama), Gauri enacted the role of *Shrimati*---Abanindranath told Nandalal that 'this girl has touched fire. Keep her carefully'. After that Gauri got married to her father's friends' son Santosh Kumar Bhanja. But that was her last dance performance. She was the honorary teacher of Fine arts and crafts in Kala-Bhavana, Visva-Bharati between 1928-1933. She was a teacher in the same subjects and institute between 1933 to 1957, Assistant lecturer between 1957 to 1967 and lecturer between 1967 to 1972. She got the Paschim Banga Academy Prize in 1978, D.Litt. from Rabindrabharati in 1991 and in 1998-Deshikottam from Visva Bharati.



Figure 23. Gauri Devi, Pujarini,
tempera, size unknown



Figure 24. Gauri Devi, A design



Figure 27. Gauri Devi, Drawing, pen and ink, 1989



Figure 25. Gauri Devi, Batik work



Figure 26. Gauri Devi, A flower study, pastel, 1983

In the southern hall in the Chinese department there are large mural paintings of Buddhas by her. She also designed costumes for Chitrangada and Tasher Desh like Pratima Devi. She invented many things like, the decoration with grains. Ornaments of dry grass and crowns were made of flower and jackfruit leaf. She had an in depth knowledge of Javanese Batik ,Badhni of Rajasthan, embroidery, leather embossing, macrom ornaments, macrom wall hangings and Manipuri textile. She used to teach Manipuri weaving, batik, leatherwork, embroidery, ornamental design, floor painting and fresco.

In 1952, she along with her students designed the 26th January tableau. The Santiniketan designs were not ornate but catered to the new urban elite with a sense of traditional design and contemporary needs. She was a part of the arts and crafts movement in Santiniketan. This new taste tried to replace

the cheap imitation of the west. Design became a compulsory part of Kalabhavan . Nehru requested Nandalal to design the original constitution of India. Gauri Devi was part of this project. In each painting original gold leaf was used.



Figure 28.The costumes and stage design contemporary to Gauri Devi

Other than her father, her mentor was Sukumari Devi. From her she learnt the traditional form of alpana. She tried to adapt what Nandalal discussed in his essay on Ornamental art: the abstraction of natural forms to develop alpana patterns. His emphasis on nature study to understand the basic idea of the structure of forms is apparent in Gauri's art practices. As Swati Ghosh mentions that Gauri used to study not only the flowers but the small insects like, bumble bees, humming birds and butterflies. Though the flower was not naturalistically represented it was represented, in a stylized manner in her alpana or batik work. Those stylized forms however retained the basic structural form, like the Shefali flower would retain the circular spiraling patterns.(Fig.25),(Fig.26) According to her if a *shilpi*(artist) thinks about crafts then it will also help to improve imagination. On the other hand it is to be observed that the study of natural forms were also important for the creation of new forms or patterns

in design. Hence the rhythm in the dancing bodies of the santhals and that of the flower stalks in her nature studies and the batiks have a common thread. Designs evolve from natural elements like egg, lotus seed, gourd, bud, wheat, betel-leaf, *kalka* and conch.(Fig.27)

Another important element she uses from the traditional painting is stippling which she used in her alpona as well as the nature studies. She participated in the wall decoration and the alpona or floor painting for the Congress Rostums of Haripura(1938) and Kalyani(1954) and was also part of the ornamental fresco work for the 'Sahid smarak Mandir' at Jabalpur. Her works are also there in Mahajati Sadan.

Once on the first day of Baishakh Gauri was doing floor painting on the Santiniketan mandir, suddenly Abanindranath came. She maintained extreme precision. There was a familial bonding of a grand-daughter and grandfather. He told her that yours is all *khari-darir alpona* i.e. measured alponas: measured by rope and drawn and divided by rope and chalk. But Gauri drew it again with free hands and Abanindranath was satisfied. Whenever she used to draw on the prepared soil of the *Amrakunja* (The mango groove) she would draw the main lines with free hand. Then divide it and draw over it with chalk. But she also believed that if one calculates more then it becomes very dry. It loses its spontaneity. It all started with assisting her father. Then with observation of nature.

She painted the natural surroundings of Santiniketan, its people and religious icons from *Krishna Leela*. There are representations of the *Pujarini* image, the image which she immortalized through her performance as the Nati. (Fig.23) The image of the Pujarini evokes the Indian miniature tradition in figuration of the woman and the detailed pattern of the leaves of the Banyan tree. This figure also reminds of the *Abhisarika* by Abanindranath. The 'Saraswati' on the other hand shows how pictorial design became an important constituent of image making in Santiniketan, she had used the sinuous lotus forms from the

alpona which also reminds of Ajanta. (Fig.29),(Fig.30)



Figure 29. Gauri Devi, Saraswati, 23 x 28cm, watercolour



Figure 30. Gauri Devi, Pujarini, 20 x 22 cm, watercolour



Figure 31. Gauri Devi, Mother and child, 22X20cm, watercolour



Figure 32. Gauri Devi, Portrait of Abanindranath Tagore, watercolour, 20x22cm

Gauri Devi moved towards the secular imagining of the alpona patterns, taking it from its usual space that is the floor to the textile .She collaborated with her father and like him was instrumental in designing the festivals right from the seed ornaments to the ground decoration .The design movement based on the tradition and innovation blended to evolve an eclectic view on art which would be traditional and modern in its representational modes. K.G.Subramanyan mentions- 'And later when she was saddled with the responsibility of grooming the craft skills of Kala Bhavana she turned into a systematic pedagogue who planned step by step a sequential choreography of craft education.'¹⁶

Indusudha Ghosh was a political activist and was very much devoted to Karu Sangha. She came to Santiniketan in 1926. Later she joined Nivedita Girl's school for teaching Indian style painting. She stressed on the self-reliance of these women through crafts and was also attached with Nari seba Sangha, a Kolkata based organization for empowering women economically. She painted a lot while she was in jail during the freedom movement. (Fig.60)

Rani Chanda (1912-1997) Her father was Kulachandra Dey & mother was Purnasashi. Her Father was a poet. After Rani's father died Purnasashi shifted to her father's house. Trunks full of memories were also shifted to the new place. Her father's clothes, paintings by Gaganendranath & Abanindranath, letters written by them, all were part of those trunks. Rani would go through them. But she was most attracted to the books on paintings of Durer, Rembrandt and Leonardo Da Vinci. Since childhood she would observe her Brother Mukul Dey's paintings. Their family used to subscribe to 'Prabasi'. Rani used to copy the images published in them. Rani's mother was a brilliant story teller, Rani would visualize the stories while her mother narrated them .Laxmi puja took place in their house. There would be no idols but Laxmi would be painted on a wooden

¹⁶ K.G.Subramanyan, Introduction, Gauri, Birth centenary volume, Viva bharti, Santiniketan, p.3

post by a village woman. It took three days and Rani would observe that intently.



Figure 33 Rani Chanda, Mother and child, watercolour



Figure 35. Rani Chanda, untitled, watercolour

In 1927 she along with her family shifted to Kolkata where her brother Mukul Dey became the principal of Govt. college of Arts and Crafts. In 1928 Rabindranath got Rani enrolled in Kalabhavan, Santiniketan. She started learning from Nandalal & Vinayak Masoji.

Her direct association with artists started in the flat for the Principal of Govt. Art School with huge rooms & high ceilings. It was a huge space. Jamini Ray did not have a proper studio space at that time. Mukul Dey gave him some space. In the west there was a big drawing room. It became a collective studio space. The floor space was divided into four sections. One part of the

four sections became his working space. In another section painted Mukul Dey in his leisure hours or holidays. Rani would work next to Jamini Roy. The other section was for Nandalal Basu, when he visited Kolkata occasionally. Her elder brother would often work on her painting, make changes or fill colour while chatting with Jamini. She would observe intently, absorb the necessary suggestions and go on working further. Nandalal would also help Rani understand the nuances of painting, rendering of colour, make necessary changes and give suggestions on her paintings.



Figure 34. Rani Chanda, Life's evening, watercolour



Figure 36. Rani Chanda, Portrait of C.F. Andrews, 1934, pencil sketch

In 1928 Rani left Kolkata for Kalabhavan, Santiniketan where her formal training started. Next to Nandalal's studio there were three studios with three rooms in each of them. In one studio was Binodebehari and Masoji. The other two rooms were for female students. Two girls would sit in one room. Rani got her space in one such room. She sat next to the window. Nandalal selected that space for her. She attended classes regularly sitting next to the window, pinning up her paper, moistening it, taking a lunch break and then again came started working. Though there were no strict rules and regulations about the class hours, Nandalal – would often take a round, would sit next to a student and show the student according to his/her needs. Whenever he would work on somebody's paintings all the student's would gather around and observe.

Thus he would not only teach the technicalities but make one aware of the conceptual frameworks of art practice. After the completion of a painting she would wait for Nandalal's final touches. For her, his remarks and touches could only bring completion in her paintings. Rani mentions about the informal nature of Nandalal's teaching methodology. She reminisced - 'I paint during painting hours, sketch while walking and moving. Wherever I go I sketch, even while sitting and chatting under the trees. One day I may have made excess sketches and all of us from Kala bhavana were going for picnic near Kopai River. In my bag was sketching material –plain cards, pencils. While going I was sketching. In my left hand, I was carrying the cards, on the right was crayon and ink. One day all of us from Kala bhavana were going for picnic near Kopai river. In my



Figure 37. Rani Chanda, Expectation, watercolour



Figure 38 Rani Chanda and Abanindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, 1946, watercolour

bag was sketching material –blank cards, pencils. While walking I sketched. In my left hand were the cards, on the right was crayon and ink. Nanda da came and walked next to me. After some time he said – 'There was a hunter in our

village. Every night he would make five little balls. He would never make more than five. The next day he would kill five birds with those five balls. He would never spoil one ball." I understood what he meant. So no more hurried sketches one after the other but if I paint five cards then those five had to be complete.'¹⁷ Many grass flowers would bloom in Santiniketan. As if the red carpet is dotted with these flowers. She would walk carefully looking for those flowers and pluck it and paint it. She would keep them in the water tumbler next to her. One day she found a different variety of these flowers in her tumbler. She was amazed by the red lustre of the flower. Nandalal made those artificial flowers to bewilder his student. Rani painted a set of those flowers. This set was sent to Kolkata for exhibition. Rani got gold medal from the Indian Society of Oriental Art.



Figure 39. Rani Chanda, Rainy season, watercolour

Whenever Nandalal painted, the students observed him and roamed around with him. He would teach while walking, he would try to inspire them to observe nature. Recalling his mentor's advice that the artist's meditation is with eyes wide open and not closed. I have discussed in the Second Chapter about his views on rhythm. Rani would echo the same while talking about his teaching methods. She mentions- 'the rhythm of bamboo and grass are same. But this connection would only work for Alpana not in painting. In painting an object needs a proper shape. But the basic rhythm should be there. The main rhythm

¹⁷ Rani Chanda, Shob hote apon, p.10

should be observed. If one overlooks the particular rhythm of the bamboo then it will be like a spine less man, it will be bend, nothing will remain.'¹⁸

This structural strength can be seen in Rani's paintings. Rani would not only attend painting classes but classes on Bengali literature, music and dance. She was also trained in Jaipuri Fresco and assisted Nandalal in the fresco 'Birth of Nimai' (Nimayer Janmo) which was done on the walls in front of the library. Rani was also part of the endeavour to make indigenous color. Abanindranath was disappointed that they painted in indigenous style but the material like the papers and the colours were imported. He praised Japan in regard to paper making which particularly suited the artistic style in Japan. Rani would collect red soil from the khoai. Then she along with other students and teacher would soak the natural colours in water. The remaining colours would be used. Thus saffron and yellow was made. Mineral colour was required for green. Stones from Jaipur were rubbed on a grinding stone with water and then soaked. Thus indigenous colour was made.¹⁹ Tempera would be made on Nepali (Rice paper) paper manufactured in Kalimpong, she also assisted Nandalal on a mural project done in the children's section which was inspired by the animals and flowers of Mughal & Rajput painting.

Rani also learnt crafts from Rathindranath & Pratima. She mentions about the brass and pewter work. In the southern veranda next to Uttarayan, Rathindranath started their informal workshop. Rani would use embossing on brass or pewter plate and attach it to the wooden box. Pratima taught them and worked herself. On the other side of the veranda, Rathindranath would do leatherwork. He would also teach while working. Rani would cut the leather, trace the design; colour it and stitch it. She puts forth 'I would be happy even if a threefold handbag was being stitched by me. The colours couldn't be washed. We would be proud of the stains as it proclaimed that we had done

¹⁸ Rani Chanda, Shob hote apon, p.10

¹⁹ Rani Chanda Apan Katha, p.15



Figure 40. Rani Chanda, Gauri Shankar, water colour



Figure 42. Rani Chanda, Bouma, watercolour

Pratima also taught pottery. She got a new Potter's wheel from abroad. Its height was that of the stool and one would paddle and work. Pratima made vases. So did Rani . Nandalal and Surendranath Kar taught them Batik. There were wooden spoons with copper bowls with small and fine pipes. It was being used in Java. Surendranath Kar got it from Java. Rani would go through many trial and errors before she made a piece of batik. It was not easy to work with it. It needed practice and training. Nandalal made the process easier. He used paint brushes to apply the hot wax on the cloth. The wax didn't spill. Batik technique was used in leather also. Instead of wax, a thick glue was used. She and her fellow students would make sari, bedcover and discuss each other's skill. Rani also mentions about the informal classes with the wives of the teachers as sometimes there were no girls found for enrollment in the painting and music classes. 'The seniors told her (Pratima and Sudhira) Kiranbala Sen, Manora-

²⁰ Rani Chanda, Shob hote apon, p.36

ma, Kamal Tagore, Sudhira Bose, Mira Devi, Pratima Devi and Kumudini Ghosh would join in this group. There was no particular time for their training. Rani puts forth – Nandalal would give full freedom. Kiranbala would make little figures, Pratima would paint, she learnt it from her uncle Abanindranath Tagore before, she continued to paint. She would paint in small and big papers. Meera would stitch. Manorama would make moulds. Kamal Bothan (sister – in – law) would offer pan (arrange the betel leaf) and chat.’²¹

Her art experiences would also get enriched by the presence of different artists who came to Kala bhavana for a short stint and work there. She in her book *Shab hote apon* mentions about the presence of the mother and daughter Sas and Elizabeth Brunner. They painted the portraits of Rabindranath, and Gandhi and few landscapes. Painting portraits of the guests and the members of the Ashram were quiet common as it had been already observed in Pratima's works and also in Shanta, Gouri, and Chitranibha's. Rani describes in her own words ‘Gurudev resides in Shyamoli, we and sahib (Andrews) reside in Konark. One day I asked him – ‘I want to draw a portrait. He was hurriedly rushing outside with a file. He stopped at that very moment and sat in front of Konark and asked me to do it then and there only.’²² She was not ready, but he was. She hurried and got a crayon pencil and paper. Profile portrait was easier for her. Hence she made a profile. After it was completed, she showed him. He said ‘‘why you made a profile, can't you see I have a short nose? Profile of people with small nose doesn't look nice. The profile portrait of the Chinese and Japanese people is a great injustice towards them. Make a frontal portrait of mine!’’ Saying this he posed like a little boy. He forgot all work that day.’²³ (Fig.36)

Ju Pion came from China. He was a very famous painter. Rani observed

21 Rani Chanda, *Shab hotey apon*, p.40

22 Rani Chanda, *Shob hote apon*, p.78

23 Rani Chanda, *Shob hote apon*, p.78.

him while he painted and he observed while she painted. Ju Pion observed her for hours sitting on the floor, Rani had to paste a paper on the floor to paint large paintings as no big easel was available. She would work on tempera and Ju Pion in oil, ink & brush. Ju Pion took away a painting of Shyamoli (a house in Uttarayan) by Rani and in exchange sent a painting of a Shimul (a red flower of the cotton plant) by his friend.



Figure 41. Rani Chanda, The strokes of dawn, watercolour

After her son Abhijit was born she would work in the studio in her home. Nandalal would call her to see his paintings. He called her to see the preparatory sketch for the Baroda mural. Even she would call him if she faced any problem while painting, she shared one such experience of her. She painted a series on; *Radha's Viraha'* (Separation of Radha). "Radha has come out after listening to the falling of dry leaves, maybe there was a footfall. There was a night sky and a tree. I couldn't push the tree to the background. The more I finish, the more it appears in the fore ground. It was a big painting, I mounted it in a big board and painted. The size created a problem, it could not be moved. There

were no rickshaws. I couldn't take it to Kala bhavana and show it to Nandada. Hence, sent a note in Abhijit's hand. I am in trouble due to a tree. Nandada came. He sat in front of the painting. Observed it for some time and asked me to prepare some colour. He befriended the tree. The tree moved.'²⁴ Nandalal never lectured but gave anecdotes. Her art experience also enriched with Nandalal's mentor Abanindranath. Rani would write down memories of Abanindranath in the books - *Gharoa, Jorasankor Dhare, Shilpi Guru Abanindranath and Shabhote Apan*. They also collaborated while painting.

Abanindranath had his own reservations against giving women a status of an artist, he doubted the ability of a woman to become a full-fledged painter. He says —'How much you try woman cannot be genius, woman are named as Shree that is Laksmi. They would deck, decorate, cook and weave, they will fill everything with beauty and genius is maleness that is different. How much you do, woman cannot become that. They are Laksmi .Shiva is mad, we call him genius, his maleness –is that possible for woman to acquire? And Rabinindranath Tagore asked him why woman cannot be genius and requested him to explain it .Then Abanindranath answered that because there had been no woman of genius till his time, there are enlightened woman but not genius, he then looked at the girls and said never try to be a genius, you are *Shree*, you cannot become a genius, you will only be sad. Yes, *Saraswati* is a genius. Why did she manifest herself in that form? Her true form is not that, it's full of maleness. Read about her description in *Veda*.'²⁵

In another instance when the boys showed him landscapes he encouraged them. He asked them whether they wanted to be landscape artists and then told them to move around with easel and paint landscapes. He encouraged them and asked them to continue but pointed out that the girls could

²⁴ Rani Chanda, Manush Nandalal, p.27

²⁵ Rani Chanda , *Shilpiguru Abanindranath* published by Viswabharati Granthan Bibhag, Kolkata, Vaisakh 1379 (Bengali) pp.48-49,

not become landscape painters because of this. He even compared them as ornaments.

Abanindranath criticizes the painting of the Santhals, the sudden craze to paint the subaltern life, to depict the primitive. 'He said – you are struggling for full freedom of art from tradition. But you are creating another trap of a new tradition. How will you know about the outer world if you restrict yourself within the boundary of the santhal life? When did primitivism find such place?'²⁶ (Fig.37)

She went to Jorasanko with her painting, a big one. It had a Santhal girl resting on the Shimul tree. It was painted with thick colours. Abanindranath drew a pot near her feet as if she had gone to fetch water and is resting for a while. He painted some flowers here and there. He said – 'Everything in this painting is a straight line. The santhal girl is standing straight though leaning on the tree. The legs seemed to be wooden. Why did (nature) give joints in our body? Both the curved and straight lines make our bodies beautiful.'²⁷ The rigidity of the legs disappeared after the pot was painted. Abanindranath always stressed on creating a story, a narrative in one's painting and so was Nandalal, everything in the composition had to have a meaningful relation. They collaborated and painted a series on Santiniketan. Rani narrated the story of the making of this series. Abanindranath wanted to paint Udayan. He asked Rani to draw it. After she finished, she showed it to Abanindranath. He coloured it. The entire morning he gave washes and then in the evening he finished the painting. Then both of them signed. Like this they painted Shyamoli, the mango grove, Simhasadan, Ghantatala²⁸, Dinantika, they painted almost every place in the Ashram precinct. Sometimes Rani would also paint the colours and render details. Then he would ask Rani to observe the surrounding people and the

26 Rani Chanda, Shilpi Guru Abanindranath, p.40

27 Rani Chanda, Shilpi Guru Abanindranath, p.44

28 Shyamoli, Simhasadan, Ghantatala, are architectural spaces in Visva bhārati campus, designed in indigenous terms

trees, the Buddhist monk, the creeper, the well, three girls whispering. She would paint all these sitting next to him. He would give washes, play with colours. This playful art of painting was named as '*Durga nam japa*' i.e. reciting the name of Durga. She painted many portraits of Abanindranath. He remembered his portrait very well. He would give a little touch of colour here and there and the portrait would gain accurateness. He also painted her portrait. (Fig.38)

In Rani's paintings one can observe the influence of Nandalal and Abanindranath. She pointed to a very important difference between the art practice in Santiniketan and Abanindranath. She would do oil and tempera with thick brushstrokes whereas Abanindranath would use minimal colour which was suggestive in nature. In her work both types of colour application can be seen.

She also painted Abanindranath's *Kutum Katam* as he instructed her to do and found that they were actually abstractions of nature. One day Rani composed a painting according to Abanindranath's suggestion. After that she took it to him. He applied the color, changed it and completed it. Then they thought it's better not to sign it and invented a fictive name 'Bombete' by which he was infamous in his childhood. He made a set of Kutum Katam on Rabindranath's *Balmiki Pratibha* and arranged them as sets on a tray and asked Rani to paint it. Rani painted six paintings based on the *Kutum Katam*, Abanindranath also collaborated.

In *Gauri Shanker*, the figuration has a deep impact of Nandalal Bose. The treatment of the trees show the reflection of environmental studies. The halos at the back and the crescent which is also an attribute of Shiva became part of the nature and reduced to abstract forms and constructs a focal point of the triangle which is being constructed by Rani Chanda with the figures of Shiva, Parvati the mountain peak, the crescent and the halos.(Fig.40) Her Rainy season shows the wide horizon, the palm trees and Khoai (mud mounds) with rain clouds hovering over the sky.(Fig.39) The painting is rendered in quick and bold

brushstrokes loaded with colour and a swiftness that matches Impressionism. The 'Strokes of dawn' reminds of Abanindranath's advice to Rani where he says that thick colour patches bind a surface, it becomes like a mosaic, the colour should diffuse to create unity and suggestions. It evokes the mistiness of the morning where the form of the tree seems to be melting in the mist, losing itself in nature evoking Turner's depiction of a misty morning.(Fig.41)

The two palm trees is a composition with palm trees constructing the foreground, middle and the background. She creates a distance with the sizes of the trees and the detailing. A moon peeps in between the palm trees, creating an ambience of a moonlit light. These landscapes show her engagement with the natural environment of Santiniketan, they are like quick sketches and neither idealized or romanticized but reflect the immediacy.(Fig.43) 'Life's Evening' is also an unidealized portrait done with quick and varying brushstrokes with highlights of white which shows Rani's strength in portraiture and application of colour. The lost look in the ageing face towards a distant future is her theme. (Fig.34)Rani got arrested in 1942 as she participated in the Swadeshi movement and she was also jailed.Her passion for painting continued,she would sketch even the fearful jail guard.She has sketched her memories of jail in the memoir '*Jenana phatak*'. 'Bouma' (Daughter –in-law) is a painting capturing the intimate moment of blessing the bride. The environment is cut short to show the human drama of emotions rendered in two bold blocks of white and red.(Fig.42) The brush strokes show the same swiftness as that in the landscape. The background green highlights the composition. This again reminds of a sketch by Nandalal which he left as a blessing for Rani. The drawing was of a woman wearing the sari in a Bengali traditional manner (atpoure style) and the other wore the sari in the contemporary fashion – they belonged to two domains, the home and the world. They are embracing each other. Nandalal

blessed – 'Let the home and the world unite.'²⁹ The dilution of the spaces – the domestic and the public space or the space of art practice is not different. Both the spaces interact, the boundaries were thin as were the classes in Santiniketan bound by the familial bonding which made the art engagement of female students more easier.



Figure 43. Rani Chanda, Two Palms

29 Rani Chanda, Manush Nandalal, Desh Binodon, 1982

Chitraniha Chowdhury (Nibhanani Devi)(1913-99) was married in 1927.

She travelled and stayed in several spaces in Bangladesh erstwhile known as eastbengal. She shifted from Murshidabad to Gomoh and then to Chandpur. She would keenly observe the changing landscape. Her brother in law was involved in the Swadeshi movement and he built up a school but there was a lack of female education. The new house had an enriched library and Prabasi was being subscribed. She was interested in painting *alpanas* and decorating *pidis* (wooden seat of small height). Later she designed a cover page for Prabasi, where her interest in design is visible.(Fig.44) 'After my marriage I entered the



Figure 44.Chitraniha Chowdhury,
Coverpage of Prabasi



Figure 45.Chitraniha Chowdhury,
Portrait of Tejeshchandra Sen

new threshold. Observing my eagerness to paint, my in-laws decided to send me to Santiniketan. As soon as I heard about this I began to imagine so many things about Santiniketan. Images of ancient Indian *Tapovans* would emerge.It seemed as if I had gone back to the time of ancient India and imagined poet Rabindranath as the rishi.' Once during the vacation she was all alone, Rabin dranath sent her to Nandalal Bose for painting lessons and Dinendranath for music. He constantly encouraged Chitraniha.Tagore arranged for a separate

girl's hostel which due to his wishes had no grills. The warden didn't want to stay—'If the girls don't have the courage I will give it to the boys. He told the girls-'Let it be! I will make a tiger's cage (a new hostel with grills), then only you will go to a new house'³⁰

He always told—I have built this ashram especially for the girls so that they can learn independently. 'He always stressed on free movement.' 'Once our warden ordered that no one can venture out of Srisadana without any urgent need and also restricted their movement to a santhal village in the west and till Gurudev's house in the north, till a palm tree. But it was nothing compared to the restrictions imposed on girls elsewhere, they were freer in Santiniketan.'³¹



Figure 46. Chitraniha Chowdhury, Alauddin Khan, 1952

30 The quotations are from Chitraniha's Unpublished memoir 'Smritikatha'

31 The quoted portions are from Chitraniha's unpublished memoir 'Smritikatha'

'I still remember that Gurudev was going to Persia on the invitation of the king .He also asked me to come but I didn't show much interest because I was possessed by the spirit of painting. At that time I was working on the big scroll of the Santhal marriage.' It's mentioned that Chitrani bha used to go to different villages and teach their children. Village upliftment became one of the important aspect of the swadeshi movement. Most of the women were involved with these socio-political activities. The first image belongs to the interior life of the Santhals, the representation of the laboring body of a santhal weaving a rope and being observed by his wife and child. The other being the marriage of the santhals, it's a scroll of almost seven foot long and follows the continuous narrative tradition of Indian painting.(Fig.47),(Fig.48)



Figure 47. Chitrani bha, Santhal Family, watercolour

'Many a times in Uttarayan(the residential complex of Rabindranath Tagore) when special guests came everyone was not allowed. But I was so enthusiastic that I took Gurudev's permission beforehand. After Gurudev Indira Devi Chowdhurani used to facilitate my meetings. I was introduced to intellectuals from many countries and with her co-operation I made their portraits.'³² Once she painted a riverscape of Meghna(a river in Bangladesh). Abanindranath and Gaganendranath appreciated this painting. But after some time she came back and saw Abanindranath Tagore has touched in many places and the painting had completely changed. 'Once a Japanese girl came to Santiniketan and stayed there for some days. She used to live with us, her name was 'Hoshisan'.Later she went to Srilanka and took to Buddhism and became a nun. When she first came to Santiniketan she used to teach us flower arrangement. Karate, dagger games and lathikhela was there, because he wanted that women should be brave. In the 1930s, during the, Salt Satyagraha she worked with villagers of Bhubandanga and Surul.



Figure 48.Chitraniha Chowdhury,Santhal marriage,watercolour

After completion of the course she went to Noakhali. She started a free art and craft school or Centre for the villagers and introduced leather work, embroidery, bamboo matting along with alpana, drawings and designs. Then she taught in Kala bhavana in Santiniketan for a year in 1937. Then again went back to Noa kahali .She did a fresco at Dhaka, showing a village life by the

32 Indira Devi Chaudhurani was a musician,writer and Rabindranath's niece

river Ramana. After partition she shifted back to Santiniketan and did many portraits of important people. This is the portrait of Alauddin the musician, the character is well brought out. Most of them were autographed by the sitter. These portraits show the eagerness of the artist to document her times, the time in which Santiniketan had visitors thronging the university which spoke for interdisciplinary curriculum and also had political personages visiting the institution. She did more than one fifty portraits between 1928-1989. She did *alpana* at the Gandhi mandap in Rajghat . She had an exhibition of paintings and crafts at Birla Academy of Art and Culture in 1982 where she showed her forty two watercolours ,sixteen pastel, sixty three portraits, twenty one sketches and designs. She could play esraj, bina and sitar.(Fig.45),(FiG.46),(Fig.51) Her paintings reflect her immediate environment. The *Vasanta utsav*, is again a common theme seen in most of the artists residing and working in Santiniketan. The study of the *Kadamba* flowers and the *Palash* flowers with the birds retell the pedagogic practice of Nandalal Basu and his stress on the experiential nature of learning about one's own surrounding and its representation.(Fig.49),(Fig.50)



Figure 49. Chitrani Bha Chowdhury, Kadamba Flowers, watercolour



Figure 50. Chitrani Bha Chowdhury, Vasant, 6th Year vol, 1937, watercolour



Figure 51. Chitraniha Chowdhury, Neel Bohr, 1960, Pencil sketch



Figure 52. Chitraniha Chowdhury, Ekalavya

The influence of Indian miniature painting is prominent in 'Gosthojatra', where among the Rajasthani architecture Yashoda and her sons are in interaction. 'Ekalavya' is another painting which refers to a mythological narrative that becomes an image of the subaltern sacrificing his skill for the larger privileged class. Like Pujarini images it also becomes a symbol of sacrifice for the larger narration of nation. (Fig.52)

Jamuna Devi(Sen)(1912-2000) Jamuna's father was Nandalal and mother was Sudhira Devi. She followed her father and sister Gauri Devi as a pedagogue. She joined Kala bhavana as a student before the nineteen thirties. In her earlier days as a student she was not interested in crafts: needle work and alpona. She learnt fresco, modelling and linocut. Jamuna learnt crafts while teaching it to the students. After Nandalal retired Jamuna and Nani Gopal Ghosh started the two years certificate course. It was meant for the house wives of Santiniketan. They learnt batik, embroidery and weaving. In 1958, during the Poushmela the female students put up a stall where handicrafts were exhib-

ited and sold. They even received orders. That was the revival of Karusangha. Years later, in 1961, the Sangha was revived by some women workers under the leadership of Smt. Jamuna Sen. 'The name remained the same but the artists' colony transformed into 'Women artists' association, Santiniketan. The sangha aims at encouraging members to do handicraft at their spare time from home-chores, and also market³³ these.' Batik was the main focus of the sangha. It connected to the urban and the local. *Katha* also received equal importance. (Fig.54) There are landscape paintings which speak of visual travelogues as can be seen in the paintings of Abanindranath and Nandalal . There are sea-scapes, mountainscapes of Darjeeling and Ghats.(Fig.55)(Fig.58)

There are innumerable cards showing nature studies. She also did linocuts. The linocuts show performers from Tasher desh and a Bengal hut. Her linocut showing the women in toilet reminds of Jamini Ray. The works are linear in nature and the black and white is well balanced .Her woodcut of Krishna recalls the reference of *Patachitra*.(Fig.56) In1960's she worked on collages with colour paper.(Fig.57) They are mainly of birds resting or birds in flight. There are batik works which show the stylized natural forms and some are completely geometric. Motifs of Kanthas , Batiks and alponas are common. Sometimes they have Far Eastern influence.(Fig.54)



Figure 53.Jamuna Devi,Batik work

33 Binodebehari Mukherjee,Karu Sangha, ,reprinted in Karusangha,Santiniketan Shilpisambai by Pulak Dutta, p.49



Figure 54. Jamuna Devi, Kantha Work



Figure 55. Jamuna Devi, Ghats, 18 X 14 cms, watercolour



Figure 58. Jamuna Devi, Landscape 18 X 14 cms, watercolour, 1965



Jamuna Devi,Untitled, 18 X 14 cms, Lino cuts



Figure 56.Jamuna Devi, Untitled, 18 X 14 cms, Lino cuts



Figure 57.Jamuna Devi, 18 X 14 cms, collage, 1961



Jamuna Devi, Untitled, 18 X 14 cms, Lino cuts

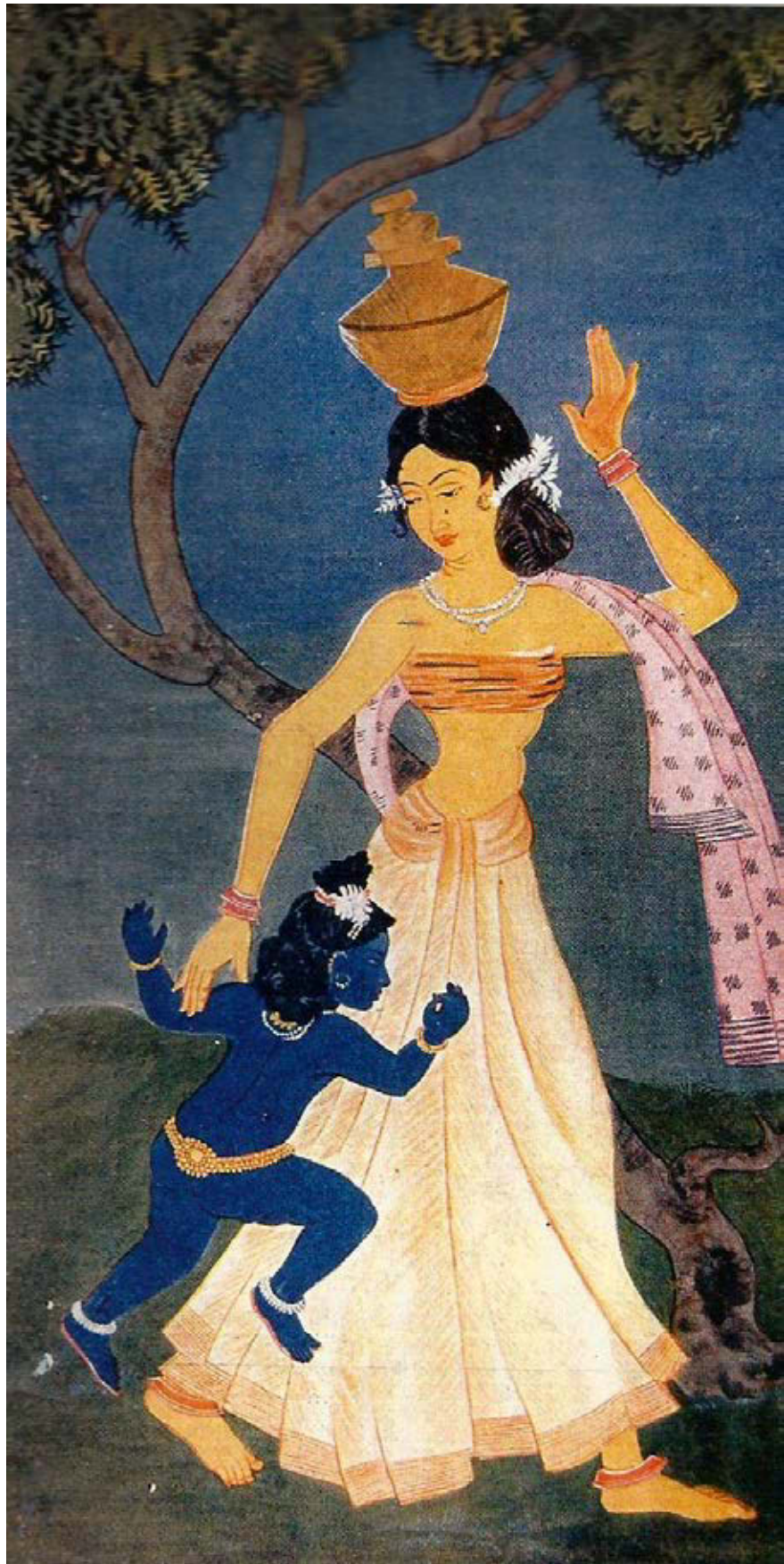


Figure 62. Jamuna Devi,
Yashoda and Krishna,watercolour

Anukana Dasgupta was proficient in painting and graphics i.e. in linocut. She helped Nandalal with Sahaj path illustrations. After completion of her education in Kala bhavana she joined Shillong's Ladykeny School as a headmistress. She also wrote books for children.(Fig.59)



Figure 59. Anukana Dasgupta, Dancer, watercolour

Indulekha Ghosh came to Santiniketan in 1934. She learnt batik and leather work. She excelled in music. She also worked with the refugees of Punjab in Nilkheri and Phulia in Bengal.

Thus it is to be seen that most of these women sought to be either associated with Design Centres or went for teaching. This partially echoes Hiranmoyee's concern regarding the suitable profession of women. The question which comes to mind is about what were their spaces of subjectivity in this passive revolution which involves being drawn into the hegemonic fold and the role of women themselves as agents in this hegemonic process. Nationalist ideology in late 19th century Bengal legitimized the subjection of women under new patriarchy, thus the history of the women's movement is that of contestation. When Gauri Devi asked Abanindranath can't the women be great artists? He brings up the question of men being genius and women being involved in their families and they do not possess genius. This reminds of Linda Nochlin's discussion on women artists. She mentions- 'Art Historical monographs, in particular, accept the notion of the Great Artist as primary, and the social and institutional structures within which he lived and worked a mere secondary 'influences' or 'background'. This is still the golden nugget theory of genius. On this basis is, women's lack of major achievement in art may be formulated as a syllogism: If women had the golden nugget of artistic genius, it would reveal itself. But it has never revealed itself... Women do not have artistic genius.'³⁴

The increase in the number of Mahila Silpa Samitis and Narishilpasalas exclusively for women as well as journals edited by themselves makes the question of agency visible. Lynne Walker's comment in the context of The Arts and crafts movement and the world war, can aptly describe the situation---'.... Thus the Arts and crafts Movement had prepared the ground, in some quarters at least, for the challenge to the dominant patriarchal status quo which

34 Linda Nochlin, Art and sexual politics, Why have there been no great women artists? p.8

came with the great war .Through alternative patterns of labour and production women in the Arts and Crafts movement had struck at the centre of the gender –power nexus, the financial dependency of women ,to struggle against the Victorian ideology that had restricted them to the private world of home and bourgeoisie respectability.³⁵



Figure 60. Indusudha Ghosh,a sketch form
Mandira,July-August,1938

The art of crocheting and needlework or ritualistic floor paintings were part of an accomplishment for the well brought-up young woman. These marginalized practices of the women were adapted/appropriated to formulate the indigenous modern. The idea of modernism when reframed into the counter discourse of indigenous modernism in Santiniketan subsumed the interior domain or the art forms practiced by women, depersonalized it for the new existence of the indigenous modernism outside the boundaries of the feminine space. The domestic rituals transcended the form of the small work of individual/familial agency and there is a return to the everydayness of art which opened up the wider public domain like spaces of political meetings, public buildings and artists' collectives.

35 Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkhan(editors),The Arts and Crafts Alternative, A view from the interior; feminism women and design ,p.166



Figure 61. Gauri devi, Nani churi, Jayashree
Agrahayan, 1931



Figure 62. Shanta Devi, Preparatory sketch
for figure 17, ref to page 190.