1940s

Developments in the Modern Art of Bengal since 1940s

Abstract of the
Ph.D. thesis

Sanjoy Mallik

Faculty of Fine Arts
M.S. University of Baroda
Vadodara

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Dr. Shivaji K. Panikkar
Guiding teacher

Sanjoy Mallik
Sanjoy Kumar Mallik
Investigator

Dr. Deepak H. Kannal
Head of the Department
Department of Art History and Aesthetics

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Art-practice in Bengal has been prominently central in the rich scholarship on the trends in early twentieth century art of modern India. From the urban-folk imagery of the Kalighat pictures and contemporary prints in wood-block and lithographs to the emergence of the three Tagores (Abanindranath, Gaganendranath and Rabindranath), and then on to the legacy of the "Bengal School" with Nandalal Bose and his students creating a distinctive movement from Rabindranath Tagore's educational institution at Santiniketan, as well as the role of Jamini Roy in introducing a folk-inspired alternative, significant trans-formations in the art of Bengal have an acknowledged eminence in the histori-ography of the early "modern" in the art of India.

This research project, as the title suggests, began with the following decade of the nineteen-forties, but a little intentionally had an almost undefined upper limit for the time span that was to be investigated. Initially, the project originated from a personal quest to figure out why certain artists and art practices in the period under consideration had remained marginalized in the dominant narratives charting the "modern" in the art of India, and to realize if the reason for this lay somewhere in ideological preferences regarding the choice of pictorial language, the aims, objectives and ideals of these artists. In the course of the investigation, increasingly the two decades of the 1940s and the 1950s appeared to be sufficiently and logically coherent as a case study and hence determined the point of termination for the project, without extending it into the decades that follow, when a significantly different and transformed set of issues and concerns would justifiably demand a separate study altogether.

The present project therefore revolves primarily around three coordinates — the modernist proposition of the Calcutta Group on the one hand, that of the socially responsive/social-realistic practice centred on the socio-political events

of the period under survey on the other, and the concurrent shifts and elaborations at Santiniketan as the third. Realising the fact that there was an intricate interconnection in the nineteen-forties between the different forms of creative expression with several common issues being debated in all of these, there was reason enough to discuss these as parallel themes in a separate chapter in the project. Such a discussion not only gives a totality and comprehensiveness to the period and the ethos, but also forwards the discussion with our understanding of the issues in one of the arts supplementing and shedding light on the connected issues of another. Thereby, relevant discussions on the literature, music and theatre of the period have been included at the outset of the thesis.

The prime concern has been to comprehend the formulation of personal pictorial languages for artists within each of the three different coordinates of the project, such that the multiplicity of voices come to reveal the complexity of a situation at the given time and location, rather than any comfortable solution of a singular, uniform and unilinear progression or tendency, or a privileging of any one of these trajectories over the other. More than any attempt to write the artists of the Calcutta Group or the social-realistic trajectory back into a national narrative of the "modern" in the history of Indian art, the aim and intention of the present study has been to arrive at a balanced overview and understanding of their pictorial achievements as well as shortcomings (especially, in being able to realize art as a language of expression, thereby necessitating a logical coherence of pictorial style and content); therefore the evaluation of the visual expressions has been based on analysis of the documented body of work, as well as against the available relevant literature (of the period as well as later) which provide a contextual framework for the specific individual, period and region.

The thesis has been broadly structured into four major chapters, supported by an introduction and a conclusion, as follows.

The **introductory chapter** discusses the context of the projectinvestigation, an overall picture of the period has been attempted with a brief but relevant recapitulation of the historical background in terms of the political scenario. The context of the Second World War, and the implications of such a worldwide devastation and staking for power with respect to a colony, has been discussed in the context of the so-called 'Famine of 1943' (in effect a man-made food shortage) that left its ugly mark on Bengal. Since the cultural practitioners of the Communist party responded prominently to the disastrous conditions of the man-made famine in Bengal, it would be relevant to take note of, to the extent necessary within the scope of this introductory section, the salient features of the catastrophe. As early as 23rd September 1943, the "man-made" nature of the disaster had been already recognised, implying that human intervention itself could have averted the sufferings, or at least the degree of it.

The roots of the disaster trace back to 1939, the association of India with Britain's war on Germany that raised voices of protest but could not resist the drain of resources from the country chanelled into war-efforts. The war no longer seemed distant, when the fall of Rangoon to the Japanese cut off the supply of rice from Burma. The "Quit India" call, as already mentioned, stirred up a determined movement in Tamluk and Contai sub-divisions of Midnapore, but this also brought severe repressive measures as backlash. The repeated bombings on Chittagong not only caused much damage but raised a threatened tension in Calcutta. The soldiers of the Allied forces were stationed to combat. Amidst the bleak circumstances, and policies that had seriously disruptive effects on the economy of the region ("boat denial" and "scorched earth"), natural calamity struck a blow in the form of the cyclone that hit the coastal regions on the 16th of October, causing massive devastation to the two subdivisions where the resistance was most firm. With the destruction of several villages and the consequent loss of lives, the worst effect was felt on the paddy crop.

The chapter also discusses briefly some of the relevant debates of the decades

prior to the scope of the present study, to arrive at the paintings of Jamini Roy and the issues that were raised with respect to his oeuvre in the early part of the decade of the nineteen-forties, which should be found relevant in the context of the discussion centering on the category of the "modern", especially for the Calcutta Group. As a consequence of the colonial experience, the emerging modern in Indian painting was strongly motivated by an urge to define a national identity. In Bengal, revivalism in art sought to regenerate the present by harking back to a glorious "golden" past, nostalgically searching for themes historic and even mythic. For style, the parallel effort traced back the models to the pictorial conventions of the courtly aristocratic traditions of manuscript illumination, like the Mughal and the Pahari schools, or even further backwards to the classical past of the Ajanta wall-paintings for its formal characteristics. In contrast to such a nationalist invention of a dominant tradition, an artist like Jamini Roy stands out as an individual with a distinctly different choice. He opted for significantly alternative sources to define tradition — that of the folk-paintings and temple terracotta-relief panels of Bengal — and from these formal and stylistic references attempted to build up a viable personal pictorial language.

However, Jamini Roy had begun with an institutional training at the Government School of Art, Calcutta, where he acquired sufficient skills in the European academic-realist mode to operate as an accomplished portrait painter. Such proficiency would have provided him a prolific and lucrative professional security. His rejection of the same, therefore, and his subsequent evolving of a distinctly personal style, indicate a modernist aspiration for individuality and innovative excellence, thereby recognition of his talent and artistic genius. One has to locate the artist within the changing political scenario of the nineteen-forties, which saw the rise of a specific anti-fascist movement and the consolidation of left-politics stressing the need for a cultural alliance with the masses. According to this new perspective, it was through the exploration of popular art forms that the bond could be forged.

> "Nevertheless, in spite of the contradiction, Jamini Roy is doing the only thing possible, for whatever pattern of community life India is going to have, this folk-culture will almost certainly provide the connecting initiative. Moreover, art and propaganda are more easily reconciled in those countries where the folk tradition is still living; and in India it is doubtful whether propaganda can ever have power without drawing upon this formal heritage of the community life." (Bishnu Dey and John Irwin, "Jamini Roy", Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta, 1944, p 19)

Popular art, therefore, was believed to have a necessary social basis as a community activity where the notion of the lone-genius was alien. It was from this point of view, that Jamini Roy's response to folk-popular language and production-system was hailed as having ushered in a revolutionary change in the context of the modern in the art of Bengal. However, being evolved as a personal language by a single artist, increasingly the idea of a Jamini Roy signature style gained popularity. The central motif of the oval faced, and elongated-eyed demure girl became a new icon. Jamini Roy was typified. But it is simultaneously true that a more serious contradiction lies ahead — by confining his female figures within traditional roles and spaces, Jamini Roy actually reinforced some of those very feudal notions that the anti-fascist anti-imperial struggle was trying to challenge.

The **second chapter** titled "The developments in other forms of cultural expression: parallel and common issues in theatre, music and literature in the nineteen forties in Bengal", deals with cultural manifestations other than those of the visual arts. It begins with the shift in the field of theatre, with Bijon Bhattacharya's play "Nabanna" signifying a serious deviation from the erstwhile theatrical performances both in the theme and content as well as in its form and performance. The theme of the play has been analysed in sufficient detail, with a consideration of the plot as it evolves from the initial act through those that follow up to the concluding scene of the final. Simultaneously the play has been

situated in the context of an existing tradition of Bengali theatrical performances, thereby providing a historical perspective to the importance of the play and the significant differences brought about by it in the realm of what may be called a move "toward a political theatre".

The same chapter then continues with literature and the debate of a post-Tagorean contemporaneity and the defining of the "modern" in Bengali literature in that light. While post-Tagorean modernity in the nineteen-forties will attempt to (re)define itself against the overpowering and almost all-encompassing presence of the multifaceted persona of the deceased poet (Rabindranath passed away in 1941), it will also become a debate concerning the judgement of literature by political standards and ideological affiliation. The leftist and rightist leanings would also be evident in the newly emerging literary magazines around which the authors would be grouped according to their conviction and commitment. Politicized statements, however, would become inevitable with the death of the young poet Somen Chanda, after an attack on an anti-Fascist protest-rally of which he was a part, leading to the formation of the Anti-Fascist Writers and Artists Association, in which creative personalities of diverse political conviction would come together. However, amidst all these, modernity in contemporary literature as a tendency that does not necessarily address overtly political agenda can be discerned in many authors, an example being the poet Jibanananda Das, whose poetry has been discussed as statements that bear the distinctive mark of a post-Tagorean era.

In the domain of the Bengali song-tradition, the nationalist tradition of the patriotic songs — the *swadeshi gaan* — was to encounter a new and politically different genre of the mass or peoples' song tradition in the nineteen-forties — the *ganasangeet* — evolving specifically from the politicised leftist ambience. Where the links between the two lie and where the links snap make a perfect analysis of the newly evolving trends with respect to their inherent characteristics and lacunae. It also leads on to the discussion of the form-content debate within the *ganasangeet* tradition and the later evolution of the modern in Bengali songs

in the hands of a person like Salil Chowdhury.

Patriotic songs or the *swadeshi gaan*, which chronologically preceded the genre of the *ganasangeet*, have an appeal that sustains beyond the specificities of the period moment. On the contrary Hemanga Biswas has been extremely apologetic regarding his early *ganasangeet* — the changing political beliefs and thoughts had rendered the songs almost irrelevant and topical. Patriotic songs retain their appeal chiefly because they have more often dealt with the general impulse of nationalistic sentiments rather than actually addressing specific political details of colonial repression, in short they have appealed to more touchingly human faculties.

The contrast and the link between the two is essential in our understanding of the evolution of the *ganasangeet*. Many exponents of this genre were originally exponents of *Rabindrasangeet* (the songs composed by Rabindranath Tagore) and the *swadeshi gaan*. However the marked difference between the earlier trend and the *ganasangeet* lay in the latter's conscious addressing of the issues of international class-struggle, and the protest voiced against capitalist hoarding and accumulation. During the Tebhaga movement Salil Chowdhury composed a song in which the sickle is hailed as the tool in the hand of the peasant who will no more give up his hard-earned produce as long as there is life and self-dignity in mind to urge him on. Symbolically, he spoke in the song of the nexus between native exploitation and the foreign repression as "the black *mahout* of the white elephant"; yet the call to sharpen the sickle is left subdued in metaphoric statement. In contrast, Hemanga Biswas wrote on parallel lines but directly announced in one of his lyrics that the use of the sickle was two-fold — to cut the golden rice when it was time for harvest, and should the bullies threaten it could also be employed to take the opponent's life if necessary. The need to be primarily political — and politically correct — had dimmed the effectiveness of the song towards the very end. While nowhere in the entire song does one hear for once about the toilers in the factories, the final lines of the lyric suddenly call for a united resistance from urban-labourers and the peasants that would then immediately liberate the country! Hence, creative cultural expression had slipped into political slogan.

The **third chapter** titled "From the Famine to the Tebhaga movement: dimensions of the socially responsive trajectories in the art of the nineteen-forties and fifties in Bengal" addresses the dimensions of the socially responsive/social-realistic trajectories in the art of the nineteen-forties and fifties in Bengal especially with reference to the 'Famine of 1943' to the Tebhaga movement of 1946. Within this chapter attention has been drawn to the artists who had direct political affiliation with the Communist party as well as those who did not, with the common bond between their expression being the fact that they were moved to respond to the calamities and the atrocities from a humanitarian concern for the suffering multitude. While conscious political agenda did motivate an artist like Chittaprosad in the initial stages of his career, it was not long before he realized his increasingly differing perspective from that adopted by the party, and dissociated himself from active political engagement. But his basic faith in humanity and his sympathy and commitment towards those who toil remained undiminished throughout his life. In the example of Chittaprosad, and his lack of formal training in the visual arts, the early attempt at a modified realism in the pictorial language of the 1943 famine sketches culminating in the publication "Hungry Bengal" has been discussed. The later phase of the same artist, after his distancing from direct political attachment, consisted increasingly of images of hope and plenitude. This has been viewed as an expression of his conviction in the rising World Peace movement.

An artist of a different nature would be Zainul Abedin who also acquired initial fame with his sketches of the famine, strikingly different from the former in terms of a language but equally powerful, if not more, as a motivating image. His career is also important in the fact that he decided to shift to the erstwhile East Pakistan (later and currently Bangladesh), where he acquired the stature of an artist of national respect and acclaim, the reputed *Shilpacharya*. How Zainul's pictorial imagery transform from the turbulent days of the nineteen forties to the post-partition fifties constitute the second part of the same chapter.

Likewise the transformation in an artist like Somnath Hore, (for whom the scars

of the famine keep haunting his memory till date in the metaphor of the "wounds"), from the early sketches in the pages of the Communist party journals to the pictorial diary of the 1946 peasant movement and further on to the fifties, have been discussed with reference to the content of the images and their execution. Amongst other artists Govardhan Ash and Gopal Ghosh significantly addressed the issues of famine and the communal riot and the body of work that has been documented indicate a serious engagement with the themes of their concern.

Also discussed in the same chapter is the publication brought out by the Students' Federation of India in 1944, titled "Bengal Painter's Testimony" which in the light of the Famine and the political identity of the publishing organization becomes a significant period document for the present study.

"Hungry Bengal" and Chittaprosad's involvement introduce into the present discussion, the issue of the artist as an individual with a proclaimed political identity and conviction, and the concept of art as "reportage". Besides the propaganda poster (which was nevertheless one of the ways in which art was incorporated within the political agenda of the Communist party), the fact that the party periodicals regularly published in its journals sketches by the artists associated with its movement, accompanied with written accounts or otherwise as statements in their own right, prompts one to propose that they envisaged a "documentary" role for art. In other words, art was perhaps seen as possessing a "recording function", especially in the kind of realism that was employed in these visual documents. The simultaneous engagement of Sunil Jana's efforts with photography, from amongst which some of the remarkably stirring images of the famine were simultaneously published in the same journals, is a further pointer to this direction.

However, to read the "political" identity of this practice merely in terms of the new social-realistic content would be insufficient. What is involved in the process is a rejection of and a self-distancing from the academic traditions of the art school on the one hand as well as the "Bengal School" and Santiniketan

legacies on the other. Thereby, the attempt had been to purge art of its mythic, classicised, literary and lyrical material, and it had been possible in the early forties by concentrating on the image of a suffering and debased humanity[53].

The documentary role of art in the work of these artists is a factor beyond the simple translation of event into representation. Realism operated as an ideological and representational strategy, and there were definite ways in which these artists devised the language for such a fact-sheet of the famine. With competing definitions of reality, "realism is always going to reverberate beyond some bare conception of 'styles of art'". While realism is not identical with naturalist achievement of figuration, it also distinguishes itself from the idea of unchanging universal values such as the "classical". This dimension of the term was quite evident, even to the Nazi Germany of the nineteen thirties, and the officially approved, classicised figurative style that was promoted against the "degenerate" avant-garde was not termed realism. In the wake of the Russian revolution, discussions of proletarian or socialist art were increasingly dominated by the term "realism". In the thirties, with Hitler gaining power in Germany, Socialist Realism was widely perceived as a doctrine that could draw together artists throughout the world concerned by the spread of Fascism, and became the artistic component of a wider movement of anti-Fascist resistance. However, while there were artists who were dissatisfied with the doctrinaire aspects of Socialist Realism, one also has the instance of Picasso who had joined the Communist party. In the Universal Exposition the question of realism starkly posed a climax of the debate, in both the formal and technical issues as well as that of art's relation to society — "the National Socilaist German pavilion, with its vast classicizing Aryan heroes, directly faced the Soviet pavilion topped by Vera Mukhina's monumental Socialist Realist figures of "*The Worker and the Collective Farm Woman*" ..... raising the issue far more forcefully through its focus, not on peace, production and leisure but on war — was the Spanish Republic's installation, in its pavilion, of Picasso's portable mural *Guernica*". It was Picasso who could now write to Simone Téry that painting is "not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war for attack and defence against

the enemy".

The above discussion is very much pertinent in the discussion of the artists closely associated with the Communist party and therefore within the scope and range of its ideological directives. How the pictorial languages of Chittaprosad and Somnath Hore had changed, therefore how realism became central in their linguistic formulation and was subsequently redefined, remains the central core to this trajectory and the validity of such a practice.

It shall be of relevance here to refer John Berger's illuminating analysis of Picasso's "Guernica". He wrote,

> "Three years earlier Picasso made an etching of *Bull, Horse and Female Matador* which , in imagery, is very similar to *Guernica*. But here the matador is Marie-Thérèse, and the meaning of the scene is wholly concentrated on the movable frontier between sexual urgency and violence, between compliance and victimization, pleasure and pain .....
>
> When Picasso painted *Guernica* he used the private imagery which was already in his mind and which he had been applying to an apparently very different theme ..... For *Guernica* is a painting about how Picasso *imagines* suffering; and just as when he is working on a painting or sculpture about making love the intensity of his sensations makes it impossible for him to distinguish between himself and his lover, just as his portraits of women are often self-portraits of himself found in them, so here in *Guernica* he is painting his own suffering as he daily hears the news from his own country.....
>
> *Guernica*, then, is a profoundly subjective work — and it is from this that its power derives. Picasso did not try to imagine the actual event. There is no town, no aeroplanes, no explosion, no reference to the time of the day, the year, the century, or the part of Spain where

> it happened. There are no enemies to accuse. Ther is no heroism. And yet the work is a protest — and one would know this even if one knew nothing of its history. Where is the protest then?
>
> It is in what has happened to the bodies — to the hands, the soles of the feet, the horses tongue, the mother's breasts, the eyes in the head. What has happened to them *in being painted* is the imaginative equivalent of what happened to them in sensation in the flesh. We are made to feel their pain with our eyes. And pain is the protest of the body." (John Berger, "Success and Failure of Picasso", Pantheon Books, pp. 167-169).

A similar kind of subjectivity is discernible in Käthe Kollwitz's works depicting the common man in his plight or uprising. But in these pictures, as for example the "Outbreak, IX" (from "The Peasants' War" series, 1903), the "Volunteers" (from the series "War", 1920) and even the "Pieta" and "Woman with Dead Child" (1903) apart from a proletarian solidarity and protest they become images of profound impact specifically in the intensity of their expressionistic pictorial language and a visibly personal anguish that translates into the very basic elements of picture-making. They reach out to a realm beyond the immediate and the topical, beyond the concerns of realism in a stilted sense, through the very personal subjective feelings that liberate her images from the pitfalls of mere propagandist trappings.

The **fourth chapter** titled "Themodernist premises of the 'Calcutta Group' (1943-1953)" begins with a short history of the formation of artists collectives in Calcutta prior to the Group and the propensity for a pictorial language that is avowedly international in nature. In this regard the popularity of the Western Academic mode of picture making since the inception of the art-school curriculum, has been established as providing an ongoing polemic to the advent of the indigenous modernism of the Abanindranath-Havell combine who attempted to bring in a transformation in art-school pedagogy. This is followed by a critical analysis of the literature of the period as well as significant essays from later

period, which devote themselves to the Calcutta Group. Among these are, the 1953 catalogue note to the Delhi exhibition of the group, the article published by Klaus Fischer in the 'Marg' in the same year, Bishnu Dey's review article of a 1949 exhibition that formed part of his later collection of essays, statements by Paritosh Sen and Pradosh Das Gupta, and the debate between the latter and art-historian and critic Sovon Som regarding the aims, plan-of-action and outcome of the Calcutta Group.

The chapter continues with the discussion and analysis of the works of the individual constituent artist-members of the group, where the paintings and sculptures of Pradosh Das Gupta, Kamala Das Gupta, Gopal Ghosh, Paritosh Sen, Nirode Majumder, Subho Tagore, Rathin Maitra, Prankrishna Pal, Abani Sen, Rathin Mitra, Govardhan Ash, Sunil Madhav Sen and Hemanta Misra provide the material to reflect upon the actual working out of the Group's avowed claims to a modern language suited to the changing times. This is followed by a consideration of the category of the "modern" in an attempt to formulate a working hypothesis specifically situated to the context of the Calcutta Group.

Despite, and perhaps more so because of, the incompleteness of the historical process of modernization, for the artists constituting the Calcutta Group the experience of the modern condition of the metropolis must have been of a considerable degree to prompt the possibility of forming a collective deciding to work towards a modern pictorial expression, however loose the formation may have been. On the one hand, the famine had the visible impact of the degradation of humanity, and the impending war maintained a continuous threatening tension in the city. This historical situation was sufficient to realize that academism of both the kinds, that of the art-school as well as the 'burden of tradition' of the so-called "Bengal school", would be incapacitous in providing the necessary vocabulary. Further, other than in the domain of the visual arts, there was already a strong debate for the defining of the modern especially in literature, and the artists of the Calcutta Group could not have missed the excitement and the vitality of the discorse of their contemporaries in other fields.

However, the notion of 'progress' being equated with a political agenda, and identity of a political art being located in the propagandist efforts (taking cue from that of Soviet Russia) the artists of the Calcutta Group were determined to keep themselves out of the domain of social realism in pictorial practice, no matter how much it may prove to be an alternative in a breakthrough from the twin academic strictures. For the members constituting the group, the choices for a modernist breakthrough in art were thus zeroed down to the formal means that they finally adopted, each in his or her own individual ways as we have already observed.

Even if they had uttered the word "internationalism" so emphatically in their avowed statement — that too only once, never repeated — the artists of the Group were more concerned with a modern in which the sincerity of a response to the immediate surrounding, the experience of the urban splintered situation was of greater concern. In that endeavour, the take-off point could only be defined in the individual practices via a definition of the modern as a release from what appeared to be a confining limitation of one's institutional training. Instead of submitting to a complete fulfilment of the criteria of the languages of Western modernism that appealed to them — and we could perhaps look at this without qualitative judgement — the individual artists constituting the Group rather came up with certain visual correlates that were primarily and in their own way, contextual to the local urban experience. Even if they had not followed the exact trajectories of the languages of European modern art, they had come up with solutions in terms of form, colour, space, figuration, etc. which sufficiently had the appearance of a catapulting out from the "baggage of 'Indian-style' painting and the tyranny of a 'spiritual' Indian aesthetic". Rather than an overarching definition of an Indian modern, the Calcutta Group' efforts can be best realized from the point of a regional modern.

The **fifth chapter** titled "The formulation of a 'contextual' modernism in Santiniketan" is necessary to understand, that although both the modernist and the social-responsive groups define a standpoint distanced from the limiting

confines of the so-called Bengal School, it was from within the environment of Rabindranath Tagore's institution at Santiniketan that a viable and relevant language was being evolved by two of Nandalal Bose's students, Benode Behari Mukhopadhyay and Ramkinkar Baij, during the same period of the nineteen-forties and fifties. It was here, from within the ideology of a unified art-craft tradition and a comprehensive art-environment interrelation, that a movement in public art emerged both in painting and sculpture, in the murals executed on the walls of the various buildings, and the outdoor sculptures that form the focal points of the campus. Beginning from these instances the discussion continues with works of art on a smaller format by the same artists, as well as works by other artists (including those of Nandalal Bose) that fall within the defined time frame of the study.

The brief **concluding chapter** titled "Epilogue" sums up the earlier discussion and concludes on a note of the possibility of a simultaneous existence of diverse pictorial languages in a given time and place such that all of them approach the answer of a response to the transformed times from the point of view of their own convictions. It has been reiterated that it has not been the intention of the study to be judgmental in claiming a qualitative degree of relevance for any one of the three different trajectories over the others, in the context of the art during the decades of the nineteen-forties and fifties in Bengal. None of the three need to be necessarily viewed as a 'more 'correct' or authentic response to the conditions of times. In fact the three distinct trends represent a sense of the multiple, wherein characteristically different artists responded to a given situation in varied paths exercising varied choices.

And the exercise of these varied choices invariably involves a question of subjectivity as well as a linguistic efficacy that can cross over the topical and the immediate. In fact, in many of the artists who had once been deeply moved to a social-realist language there was a later shift to humanist concerns where the political dictum was no longer overtly apparent. Instead, as in the instance of an artist like Chittaprosad, the optimism and wholesomeness of the forms and the style of his later days were in some ways to him a reassurance of his

artistic integrity. It shall be pertinent in this regard to recall what an erstwhile cultural activist, Khaled Chowdhury, had to say later regarding the tradition of the *ganasangeet*. He wrote,

> "With the best of intentions, urban lyricists, reaching out to the rural folk, have failed to touch them with their simulated folkism, e.g. when Tagore writes, 'Ay re mora phasal kati, math amader mita...' (O come, let's cut the harvest, the field's our pal...); or when Jyotirindra Maitra, one of the brightest stars of the I.P.T.A. writes: 'Eso dhan kati kastetey di shan,/ kastey moder mita re bhai, kastey moder jan' (Come, let's cut the grain, and sharpen the sickle,/ The sickle's our pal, brother, the sickle's our life); .....
>
> We have never heard a peasant sing any of these songs, even when we have pleaded with them ..... 'How can I sing, babu, if it does not come from within me?' ....." (Khaled Chowdhury,"Questions about Ganasangeet", English transcript by the author of his essay "*Lokasangeet Ganasangeet Prasanga*", *Sharadiya Pratikshan*, 1400 *Bangabda)*

The issue of legacy in the context of the Calcutta Group has been duly valid with respect to artists of the succeeding generation in this urban centre. This simultaneously brings us to pose a parallel question for the practice of art in Santiniketan, where an overall philosophy of life lead to a unified vision of an art-life equation. But this equation too did not remain undisturbed in the fifties, with the institution transforming into a central university and succumbing to a uniformity and homogeneity of universities over the country. Forced into such a negotiation between its original philosophy and conviction and the undeniable/ unavoidable changes that followed, the question of legacy becomes as much valid for Santiniketan.

The quest for a modern language then, necessarily involves the integrity of the assimilation-expression equation, variously approached. Within these approaches and the logical consistency of their rationale lie the clues to the success of viable art-languages.

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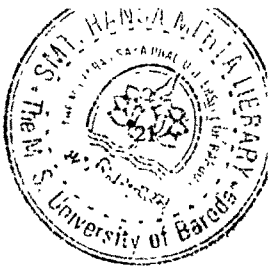

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