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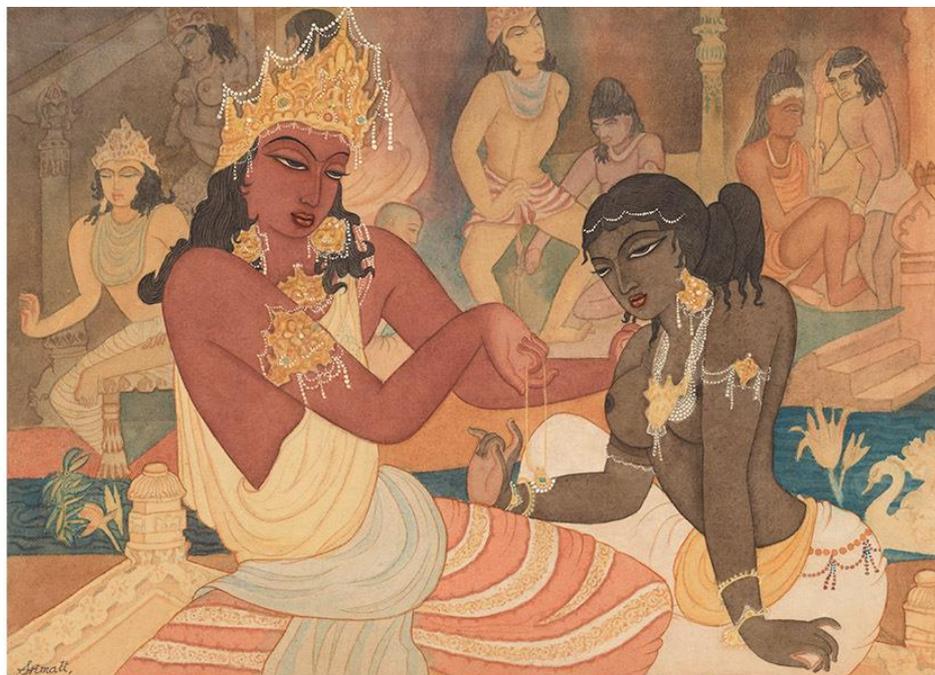
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**Art Movement in Bengal in the early 20th Century: Some
jottings on an intra-Asian Artistic Discourse**

Amitava Bhattacharya
Former Tagore Research Scholar,
Affiliated to Victoria Memorial.



The objective of this article is to review the artistic scenario of Bengal in the early 20th century and its cross- cultural exchanges with other Asian nations. The famous Bengal School of Art Movement, had connection with the Japanese pan-Asian network and this is

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endorsed by the Okakura discourse between Indo-Japanese artists and scholars. These intimacies led on to fascinating artistic and stylistic encounters between Nihonga painters and the Bengal school. Okakura's argument on Asian Unitarianism attracted many Asian cultural nationalists. It fostered Indo-Japanese artistic dialogues centering on Calcutta. However, these exchanges continued nearly for two decades and gradually lost momentum after the death of Okakura in 1913 and due to the increasing conflict between Nihon Bijutsuina and Koka (art journal of Nihon Bijutsuin), many painters of this school went to Europe for survival. Later, the Japanese ultra-nationalist aggressiveness witnessed severe opposition in Asia. That evoked Rabindranath Tagore's critical stand on Japanese ultra-Nationalism.

The aim of these jottings on intra-Asian paintings has been to unearth exchanges between the artists from China and South East Asia and Santiniketan in which Tagore was the key figure. His visit to China in 1924 and to South East Asia in 1927 unbolted the door for cultural exchanges with these parts of Asia. During that period the artistic scenario was very fervent in China and colonial South East Asia. After the dynastic decline in China following the May Fourth cultural movement, artists were searching for a modern language of art beside salon and guild specific colonial art practices to get rid of the sterile traditional banality in the Ching period (1644-1911). The cultural nationalists involved in Boedi Oetomo and Taman Siswa movements in Indonesia played a key role in this modern artistic discourse. Many artists came to Santiniketan and Calcutta with renewed interest to undertake new experiments in Indian art.

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New Awareness of Western Naturalism

Encounter and negotiations:

The arrivals of Western academic naturalism in Asia has had a long history since the 19th century. Asia had some early contacts with Western art through traders and missionaries. Thus exposures to Western art via various channels had kindled interest in Western naturalism and perspective techniques among the artists of the region during 16th and 17th century. Later, Western art and its academic acceptance became widespread in Asia through various trajectories like guilds, salons and the establishment of art institutions by the colonial rulers or by the independent nation states. In general, the adoption of Western art was introduced because of the demand of independent nations like Meiji Japan and the Yoga realist School by Kuroda Seki and others; the demand of reformist intellectuals during the anti feudal social movement in China and for the serviceable needs of colonial rulers as in India and partly in South East Asia. So the adoption of Western visual realism played a seminal role in the growth of Asian art. Many encounters and negotiations fed the quest and led on to develop the representational national identity, looking into their own traditions for stimulations. In this backdrop we see the fascinating growth of multiple syncretic features in Asian art.

Alternative Regional Initiatives in Asia: Nihon Bijutsuin (Tokyo Gadan) 1989-1913 was founded by Okakura Tenshin with his disciple painters like Kano Hogai, Hasimoto Gaho, Yokoyama Taikan, Shimamura Kanjan, Hisida Sunso. This apart, there was also a new art practice denouncing official Bijutsugako in Tokyo. These schools effectively internalized the stylistic elements from Western paintings. There was also the Kano School in 16th century, following Rinpa School in which Ogata Korin was the leading painter.

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Bengal School of Painting (1896 onwards)

Important modern Indian art movement in Asia was established by a high level of aesthetic sensibility incorporating elements from Eastern artistic traditions like Persian, Indian Miniaturist School, East Asian tradition and later Japanese new Nihonga of Tenshin's school in Tokyo in particular. The Japanese elements in Taikan, Hishida, and Kanjan found new expression in Abanindranath Tagore and his disciples' paintings. This art movement received considerable inspiration from E. B. Havell, Sister Nivedita, Coomarswamy, Tagore and others.

Lingnan School (Lingnan Huapai) in South China 1906-1945, was founded by three painters in South China trained in modern Nihonga in Japan and inspired by the pan-Asian idea of Okakura. They were inspired by Japan's national essence guocui in Chinese synonym to Japanese kokugakai, to make Chinese national identity.

Bengal School of Painting and its Japanese Association

In 1903 the painter Taikan, and Hishida Sunso visited Calcutta. Later Nandalal Basu went to Japan in 1916 with Rabindranath Tagore and met Taikan in his studio in Tokyo. It was a most celebratory decade of Indo-Japanese artistic exchange in technique, method and material. Thus artist Abanindranath and his disciples got firsthand experience in Nihonga. The Japanese painters like Taikan and Hishida Sunso made paintings based on Hindu iconography. In Japan Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose's works were printed in famous Koka art journal in 1908-1909. Later Arai Kampo and Katayama Nanpu visited Calcutta in 1916.

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Beginning of a new trajectory of Asian artistic exchanges: Rabindranath Tagore's visit to China in 1924

The poet laureate visited China with Nandalal Bose and others. Kalidas Nag delivered a lecture on Bengal Art Movement in Beijing. They met many artists and scholars. Nandalal Bose made few fascinating drawings and wrote few letters on his understanding of new Chinese art to his colleagues later in Santiniketan.

Chinese Artists destination to India- Gao Jinafu, the leading exponent of Lingnan school in India in 1931-1932

Gao Jinafu visited India mainly for three reasons:

1. To meet poet Rabindranath Tagore
2. To study Ajanta Murals, Indian Temple Architectures and Landscapes
3. To meet Abanindranath Tagore and Gaganendranath Tagore in Calcutta.

After his return to China Gao Jinafu delivered a series of lectures on Indian art in 1955 in his posthumously published book (*Wode Xindai Guohuar Guan*) The book received serious attention despite the new change in China. In his book Gao wrote an article on relation between the six methods (Liufa) in Chinese paintings written by Xie.

Major Chinese artist in Santiniketan (1939-1940)

Xu Beihong came to Santiniketan towards the end of 1939 at Tagore's invitation. Xu Beihong's purpose behind accepting the invitation was to publicize the anti-Japanese war to win the sympathy and understanding of the Indian people. Xu met Mahatma Gandhi at

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Santiniketan. He had some interactions with the artist Binode Behari Mukhopadhyay who made a short trip to China and Japan in 1937. Rabindranath Tagore organized his exhibition in Calcutta and Santiniketan which received a warm response. The funds raised from sales were sent to help the Chinese refugees from the war of China.

New foundation of India: South East Asian artistic exchanges: Rabindranath Tagore's visit to South East Asia in 1927

Tagore visited South East Asia for three months in 1927 accompanied by Surendranath Kar, Dhiren Krishna Dev Barman and Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay. They visited Indonesia, Siam, Malaya and Burma. This visit unbolted the door to South East Asia and developed mutual artistic exchanges. Surendranath and Dhiren Krishna did some fascinating picture postcards to document the cultural experience in S. E. Asia. Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Indonesia was very important to build the bridge between Santiniketan and cultural nationalists associated with Taman Siswa educational movement in 1922, the successors of Boedi Oetomo movement in 1908.

South East Asian artists in Santiniketan



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Affandi Koesoema, Indonesian artist (1907-1990) started his career as a self-taught painter after formal school education. Predominantly an oil painter and activist he formed a group of five painters close to Taman Siswa and leader Sukarno. He came to Santiniketan in 1949 with his wife and daughter and stayed on for two years. However, Nandalal Bose advised him to travel in India and paint on India as he had nothing to learn in Kala Bhavan. He made a fascinating series of paintings and drawings based on his travels in India.

Rusli, an Indonesian artist (1916-1985) came to Santiniketan to study art in 1932 for six years. He studied tempera painting, mural, ink brush application on paper, history of eastern and western art and the vision of Santiniketan. After his education in Santiniketan, he directly participated in the Indonesian revolutionary struggle. As a painter he produced strong captivating characters in his paintings although they appeared rather simple at a glance.

Edhi Sunarso, Indonesian artist (1932-2016) was the most celebrated sculptor. He was captured by the Royal Dutch Army during pro-independence movement in 1947 and was imprisoned until 1949. Edhi came to Santiniketan to study under Ramkinkar Baij for two years (1955-1957) with a UNESCO scholarship. His works reveal a powerful plastic clarity and inner strength. He became the mentor of modern Indonesian sculptors and a public figure to produce a huge range of post colonial monuments.

Fua Haripitak (1919- 1993) an artist hailing from Thailand. Fua Haripitak studied under Nandalal Bose from 1941-1945. In Santiniketan he studied ancient Indian art, mural and preservation. He helped to develop traditional tempera method of Thailand and restoration of Thai traditional mural painting. Haripitak in his later period began to restore various historic temples in Thailand. In 1983 he received the Raman Magsaysay Award for public service.

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Bagyi Aung Soe (1924-1990) A pioneer of modern Burmese art: a painter, illustrator, writer and a Buddhist by heart. He came to Santiniketan in 1951 for two years under the Indian Government scholarship. The Burmese thinker Dagon Taya who was a mentor of post-war writers in Burma encouraged him to study in Santiniketan. In Santiniketan he developed a deep interest not only in the Indian and Western modern art but also in Buddhist philosophy and in Rabindranath Tagore's philosophical ideas.

Epilogue

It is quite apparent from these jottings that the Intra-Asian artistic exchanges that took place in the early part of 20th century were not mere coincidences. It was rather a set of historical circumstances at both the ends which created the scope for mutual exposures between Asian artists and their traditions. These contacts inevitably raised pertinent queries on pedagogy, visual perception and traditional vision which are still relevant. Artists from various Asian countries reflected their mutual understanding and experience through artistic discourse and artistic practices. In the beginning it was the pan-Asianism endorsed by Okakura and other Asian ideologues. Later, the second phase of intra-Asian dialogue blossomed in the realm of Tagore's vision and initiative to make his Santiniketan a centre for international cultural exchange. Artists from Asian countries were inspired to move towards Santiniketan since 1920s. Their intention was to imbibe the eclectic mode of art practices internalizing East and the West in Santiniketan.

These documents left by the Asian artists through paintings and travelogues are somewhat sporadic in nature. However, one can also decode reflections and capture illuminating sparks

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from the documents. Moreover, it is very evident that at the core, through the artistic exchanges serious academic issues and practice came to fore. It may make us aware of the necessity to take the issues to open up the dialogue track once again in the context of the early phase of Asian modern art.
