



## NANDALAL BOSE

Nandalal Bose stands to-day on the highest pinnacle of art in modern India, yet unapproached and perhaps never to be approached by any lesser talent in times to come. As the disciple and the intimate collaborator of Acharya Abanindranath Tagore in building up the new renaissance in Indian Painting, Bose incarnates in his own works a brilliant monument to the new art of the new age, which assimilates and interprets all that is noble, all that is inspiring, all that is permanent and dynamic in the finest traditions of Indian Painting which live and re-live in his works with a throbbing life, rich with newer possibilities. To demonstrate that the old art is not dead, but lives with its immortal strength and inherent possibilities for newer expressions to suit the demands of the modern age, has been the greatest contribution of Nandalal Bose to Indian culture. This was not a mere theory or a piece of sentimental belief but was convincingly demonstrated by him step by step in a series of masterpieces covering nearly half a century. He has also demonstrated that the language and idiom of Indian Art are unique forms of visual expression—different from the languages of art in other parts of the world. It is the continental vocabulary of the Art of Asia—moving from region to region and manifesting itself throughout the centuries in diverse culture-areas, radiating from the abbeys of Ajanta to Bamian, Khotan, Qyzil, the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, to Horuiji and Nara.

Learning this forgotten vocabulary of Asiatic Art from its fountain-heads in the Indian monuments, Nandalal Bose quickly built up his basic draughtsmanship and type-ideas from the images of the Hindu temples and the frescoes of the Buddhist shrines, and began to use his newly found heritage with a mastery and a fluency and with a surprising range of expression—hardly ever used before in the whole history of Indian Painting.

One may ignore the striking originality of his illustrations of the Shaivaite mythology, surpassing the conceptions of the Kangra School ; one may belittle his imaginative visualizations of the legends of the Indian epics ; one may deride the lyricism of his Radha-Krishna themes ; one may turn away from his inspiring presentations of the Buddhist themes ; but there still remain the rhythmic strength, and the astounding range of his draughtsmanship, linking him up with all the great masters of the world—Rembrandt and Dürer, Hokusai and Korin. Above all, the Indian-ness of his creations is his unique contribution to contemporary Indian Painting.

A high compliment is due to his unique personality—his unruffled temper, his quiet reticence, his humility, his indifference to praise or blame, his distaste for publicity, his life-long devotion to his art—as that of a veritable *Yogi* absorbed in his meditation. It is difficult to choose between the two phases of his personality—Nandalal the Man, and Nandalal the Artist. As a teacher he has now no equal, living in the hearts of his many disciples and pupils. He has never attempted to impose his own style on his pupils, only helped them to develop their own style and personality in their own way—with the simple condition that they should stick to the Language of Indian Art, however much they might assimilate the lessons to be learnt from foreign sources.

It has not been possible to include in this exhibition all his works, many having passed into private collections in India and abroad. But the organizers have nevertheless assembled a very representative collection of his works.

A critical survey of his works is long overdue: it is to be hoped that this exhibition will help to inspire a comprehensive study of his unique contribution to Indian National Art.

O. C. GANGOLY

## Rasa - pati : the master of form.

'Verily, the Arts are for the Culture of the Soul':  
*atma-samskritir vava śilpani*, so say the Vedic seers.  
The Arts exalt the Emotions, they improve the Mind.  
The Senses and the finer Sensibilities find their culmi-  
nation in the Arts.

*Raso vai sah : rasam hy eva ayam labdhva anandi bhavati :*

'He verily is *rasa*—aesthetic sentiment ; a person receiving this *rasa* becomes blissful.'

The Fine Arts, with their medium of form, colour, words, musical sounds, and rhythm of movement, are a means of evoking this *rasa*, this aesthetic sentiment, in the soul. Music, Poetry, Dance and the Drama, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting—these are born out of the exuberance of the human spirit when it has raised itself from its primitive level. Like Philosophy and Meditation, and Great Action that is selfless, they help Man to ascend to God. They purge the Mind and the Emotions of baser elements ; they bring Man to a vision of the Eternal Verities.

The Fine Arts often melt into each other, like the senses. There are form and rhythm inherent in all of them. But each art has its special function and its special appeal. Music has been declared by the Greeks, past masters of the plastic arts, to be the most divine of the arts. Music is, more than any other art, free from the limitations of word and form and colour. Poetry cannot be great or real if it does not transcend the words by which it is apparently limited: it evokes its pictures which have as much a subjective as an objective truth. The Drama is a borderland art linking up Poetry and the Dance, the world of words and the world of shape and movement. Dance is sculpture and music in motion. Architecture, Sculpture and Painting are from the nature of their mediums tied down to the limitations imposed upon them. It is difficult for these to soar into the regions of the Limitless, like what Music and Poetry can easily do.

Music has been almost universally admitted as a powerful agent for emotional uplift. It is perhaps the oldest of the Fine Arts. The wizard's incantation, and the drum that sped the warrior to the fight and men and women to the dance in primitive society, are behind all sacred music, all religious chanting, all solemn reading of the present day.

*Kaner bhitar diya marame pašila go,  
akul karila mor pran :*

'through the ear, ah me! it entered the heart: it made my life ecstatic': as the old Poet of Bengal has sung.

Ecstasy through the auditory sense is permitted and even encouraged by religions that will not understand or tolerate ecstasy through the visual sense. Is it due to a certain primitiveness of outlook, which deep down in its subconscious mind has a fear and a mistrust of the picture and the image as the result of an unseen, uncanny magic? It is indeed strange that while spiritual exaltation should be permitted through one sense, *viz.*, hearing, it should be shut out through another, *viz.*, sight.

The civilized peoples of the ancient world, before the creation of the jealous god, permitted the play of the senses as a source of emotional exaltation, of religious ecstasy: in Mesopotamia, in Egypt, in India pre-Aryan as well as Aryan, in Greece, in China and in Japan; in Mexico, Central America, and Peru. Orthodox Christianity wisely permitted the use of the sight and smell as much as of hearing in devotional exercise; hence side by side with organ music and singing, there is incense in the church,—and icons in Eastern ritual, and images (one should say *idols*) in the Roman Catholic faith. The great art of the Ancient East, of Greece, of India and the Far East, and of Byzantine and Roman Christianity achieved whatever spiritual quality they possess through this acceptance of the image and the picture in religion.

In India, from time immemorial, the sense of sight was allowed free play in spiritual matters, as a necessary aid for the many. The result was the great Art of India—the beginnings of which go back to the pre-historic art of the pre-Aryan peoples, and which became established as a National Hindu Art, although in its primitive and formative stage, a few centuries before the Christian era. The greatest achievement of Hindu Art occurred many centuries after that of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and is younger even than Greek Art—it is contemporaneous with the Greco-Roman, Byzantine and Romanesque phases of European Art. But it produced masters who are unique in their own sphere, and are to be reckoned among the greatest artists of the world: whose influence extended far beyond the frontiers of their own country, into Central Asia and Tibet, into the Far East, and into South-eastern Asia—Indo-China and Indonesia. These artists made their genius serve the religious aspirations of their race, as well as of other races. Taking the human figure as a symbol of the Divinity, they achieved what was but rarely achieved elsewhere—and that, too, under their own inspiration in certain lands—*viz.*, the transfiguration of the human into the divine, or the transformation of the divine into the human.

In India, we have echoes of a primitive naturalism at Bharhut and Sanchi, a naturalism which seems to have grown out of the soil of the land. Mathura and Amaravati sing a plastic paean to the spirit of romance and sensuous beauty in a simple and noble style, with the transitoriness of this romance and beauty (implied by its themes from the life of the Jinas and the Buddha) suffusing it with a deep and a subtle vigour and giving it a meaning and a message. Then we have the synthesis of the elements, both native and foreign (Greco-Roman, some Chinese and some Persian), in the great national art of the Guptas in which Hindu India found itself for the first time. The culminating development of Gupta Art was in the frescoes of Ajanta and Bagh and the sculpture of Mahabalipuram, Ellora

and Elephanta, when some of the finest masterpieces of the plastic and pictorial arts were produced. The 'Grand Style' of the sculptures of the 7th-8th centuries then gave place to a number of ornate schools of the later medieval Hindu age, in which simplicity and strength were replaced by complex ornament and skill, robustness by cleverness. The old tradition in sculpture has continued in the South down to our day, while it has practically died out in Northern India, largely through the hostility of the aniconic Mohammadan religion of the ruling houses. In North India, however, it has survived in a few places like Rajputana and Orissa, and Nepal, where the Hindu world of ideas was not much disturbed. Painting also languished. In the South, it became lifeless; but in the North, a thin stream continued through Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanical book-illustration, which was later reinforced by a new tradition of miniature-painting from Persia. This gave rise to the great pictorial art of the Moguls in the 16th century; and the Hindu tradition, popular, religious and courtly, was also revived, particularly in the courts of the Rajput princes in Rajputana and the Panjab hills. After three centuries of a vigorous if somewhat restricted life, impact with the west almost swept away Rajput and Mogul art. Barring a few craftsmen in some of the important centres of art and religion in both North and South India, India towards the end of the 19th century practically became bankrupt in matters of art, with not even the understanding or courage to draw upon the resources of her ancestral art or the reserves of her folk-art, the very existence of both of which she forgot.

The inevitable revival came with the 20th century. The sympathetic encouragement of European art-lovers and connoisseurs of Indian Art, and the example of Japan, made Indian artistic sense and artistic talent rehabilitate themselves once again, in a new sense of self-discovery and a new spirit of endeavour. Calcutta was the home of this revival, E. B. Havell and Sister Nivedita were among its sponsors. Its leader

was Abanindranath Tagore, and its greatest artist has been Nandalal Bose, Abanindranath's pupil.

Nandalal's position is unique in the history of Indian Art. In the art of our country, not only he is a supreme master, but a great inspirer as well. More than anybody else, he has been able to breathe in the atmosphere of the greatest Hindu art of the classical times, and to make its spirit manifest itself in new settings which he has evoked both out of the old and out of his own creative genius. With the surest control over his hand and his materials, he has successfully essayed many languages: diversity is as much a feature of his art as originality. Rajput and Mogul painting and Ajanta formed his early inspiration. Indeed, these stately schools of the past gave the primary impetus to the new or revived Indian School of Painting. But he did not confine himself to a revival of a few old stylistic *cachets* merely. He essayed everything, and, like all great creators, took, out of the abundance left by his predecessors as well as materials lying scattered round about him, whatever he needed. The folk-art of Bengal—the virile terracottas on the walls of its temples, its strong line work and brush work in the Kalighat and other *pats* and in painting on cloth and on earthenware plates and dishes, its decorative colour-scheme on the old lacquered *patas* or book-covers and its brass and woodwork he appreciated, and applied to his purposes of self-expression. He studied and assimilated elements from Chinese and Japanese painting. All great art—Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek, Chinese, Byzantine or Gothic,—has its appeal and message for him; and the folk-art of all nations. A highly cultured personality, with a close and intimate knowledge of the art history of the world, and an artist of rare genius, there is nothing of the highbrow about him. He still considers himself in all sincerity as a craftsman, and he would like to feel like a craftsman of the past (who was often a great master unconsciously), having his definite position of utility and responsibility in society. And although he is distinguished as a painter mainly,

W/ he has tried, and tried successfully, quite a number of the artistic crafts: the fresco in the old Rajputana style, clay-modelling, the wood-cut and lino-cut, leather-work and *batik*, textile designing, good-carving, and lithography and etching, besides stage decoration and costuming, and architectural decoration.

I should say that Nandalal Bose's greatest achievement in Art has been both in rediscovering the Spirit of Ancient and Medieval Indian Art and in expressing what Modern India wishes to say through Art, in a manner that is distinctly national for India, and yet it is, like all truly national things, international and universal at the same time—has in fact its appeal for all those who irrespective of race and period can appreciate great things in Art.

One of the profoundest things evolved by the spirit of India under the stress of non-Aryan and Aryan impact has been the twin-conception of the divinity as Siva and Uma. This has been nobly represented in Gupta Art, in Mahabalipuram, Ellora and Elephanta, in late medieval Hindu sculpture and in the South Indian bronzes, and in Rajput painting. Nandalal Bose in a series of masterpieces on this theme has given what may be described as the most spiritual set of pictures produced in present-day India: his SIVA'S DANCE, SIVA DRINKING THE WORLD-POISON, SIVA HEAD, SIVA AND THE DEAD SATI, SIVA AND UMA IN KAILASA, SIVA WOOING UMA, LOVE AND DEATH AS UMA AND SIVA, HEADS OF SIVA AND UMA IN PROFILE, and a number of others.

The power of the artist lies in evoking the spirit through the form. It is not in Greece alone that a Pheidias gave the stamp of his genius on the conception of Zeus and Athena, and his people gladly accepted his vision of the majesty and sweetness of the divinity as truly visualising their own ideal. It undoubtedly happened also in Egypt and in Babylon, in China, in Japan, and in Java, as well as in India—wherever religion sought the aid of definite anthropomorphic conceptions for the visualisation of the divine. The

prehistoric conception of Siva, as at Mohen-jo-Daro, was carried down to the Gupta period, to be suffused by the faith, the imagination and the skill of the Gupta masters, and then by those of Mahabalipuram, Ellora and Elephanta ; the Chola bronze-founders gave of their best to this conception as they received it from their Pallava predecessors. It passed on to Indo-China and Java, to be modified by the vision which was granted to the Khmer and Cham and Javanese artists. The Rajput painters added an ineffable grace and sweetness, an exquisite aroma of romance, to their Siva and Uma figures, and this was their special contribution. The folk-painters of Bengal brought down these blessed deities from their pedestal of superhuman majesty and beauty to the rusticity of the village homes of Early Bengal, like the Bengali poets of the late medieval period: and we have the Bengalised Siva and Uma of the Bengali artists and clay-modellers as a result.

Nandalal, true Hindu that he is, realized the meaning of Siva and Uma, understood the language of the previous sculptors and painters as he understood and realized the stories and figures and the philosophy, saw the vision of Siva and Uma in a way that was given but to few amongst the artists of the present day, and in his inimitable manner he gave us a glimpse of what he saw. The result has been a fresh exaltation of the Siva-Uma idea in Art and a fresh possibility of emotional and spiritual uplift through this figure by contemplating his creations. The artist has here fulfilled one supreme function of his craft.

Nandalal has created noble figures, and he has also depicted through his brush and pencil the humdrum everyday life. The romance underlying this everyday life, with its very apparently uninspiring commonplace acts, has touched him as much as the mystery behind it. A dog lying curled on the ground ; a goat suckling its kids ; animal studies of all sorts—cows, buffaloes, horses, donkeys: a child playing with

a kitten ; a mother lying prone on her back, dandling her baby, holding it aloft with her hands—the baby crowing with delight ; aboriginal Santal girls coming back home from work, singing, and with flowers in their hair ; a boy running with a hoop ; an eighty-years old priest with trembling hands, teaching the rite of *aratrika*, or waving the light before the image of a god, to a young boy acolyte of ten years ; and sketches of flowers and trees, of attitudes of men and women, and of animals and birds, in profusion ; hundreds of pencil and brush sketches like these, all meant to be ephemeral records of life as a kaleidoscope, show one side of his vision and his mastery of form. These speak out as much as do his bigger compositions—the dance offering of the NATI (he has spiritualised, following the poet Rabindranath's creation of the character, what in Anglo-Indian and continental European parlance would be described as the Spirit of the *Nautch Girl* or the *Bayadere*) ; THE RETURN—a large-sized pencil drawing of the young villager received at the threshold of his hut by his glad young wife ; scenes from the life of Chaitanya, Vaishnava Saint and Mystic of Bengal ; episodes from the life of the Buddha ; episodes from the grand old stories of the Epics—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (I am reminded among other things of the great picture in black and white of the Pandava heroes with Draupadi and the dog resting under an age-old pine tree on a ledge of the Himalayas while on their way to Indra's heaven) ; and the Siva-Uma pictures. He has penetrated into the nature of the Gods, of the heroes and heroic women of the ancient epics and the medieval romances, of common-place men and women, of saints and simple rustics ; he has felt for the animals and the birds ; and he has even caught the spirit of the plants and trees ; in spite of decorative treatment, the way in which he has painted the trees in many of his pictures (*e.g.*, in the picture of the Buddha under a *Śala* tree) is something entirely new in Indian art, something which bears the stamp of his genius. He has eyes to see such as few men have ; he has a strength, a truth, a mystic touch which all

artists will envy and he is great in his realism, as he is great in his decorative treatment of human themes.

The direct study of Indian painting in the grandest style, *viz.*, the frescoes at Ajanta and Bagh, which he copied with some other Indian artists, has imprinted his mind with a specious quality that brought a new note in Modern Indian Art. And yet he did not think too low of the miniature. His series of small Ramayana panels, reminiscent of the language of Ajanta (these, I hear, have gone to enrich a Russian collection) has succeeded in putting the Sanskrit epic story in a series of Japanese *tanka* lyrics.

The name Nandalal Bose is of course well known to all who have watched the history of Art in India during the last quarter of a century, and thousands of people love and admire his pictures. But as the greatest painter of Modern India who has given the truest expression to India's spirit through line and colour and form, he ought to be known to millions. A greater publicity is necessary, in the public's own interest. But one great obstacle to this necessary publicity is the personality of the artist himself. He has the innate shyness of the true genius in art,—a shyness which is also the result of the artist-creator, like all leaders of men, being an aristocrat among men. But the public—the friends and admirers of the artist—might do one thing. They ought to arrange for a Nandalal Bose Exhibition of original works and of reproductions. There ought to be good and cheap albums of reproductions of his work chronologically arranged. His sketches and drawings, wonderful in their spontaneity and variety and in their truth, form a rich mine among his productions, recalling the works of Hokusai and his peers in Japan. These are scattered among his friends and admirers: a representative collection should be made for album purposes.

It will be necessary to have one or more representative albums of his work for a study of the evolution of Nandalal Bose's artistic career, which can now be

described as being in its fullest maturity ; he is 70 years old this year and we hope and pray that he will continue his creative, artistic life for many years more.

An appreciation of the work of a great artist who has moved us by his art is bound to be subjective to some extent. But judging from the way in which Nandalal's compositions have moved and shall move him, and considering also the mastery of his craft, as well as the position Nandalal has in the Art of India, the present writer has no hesitation in considering Nandalal Bose as one of the greatest and most significant names in the history of Art. Although he has expressed himself mostly through painting (as Rabindranath has expressed himself largely through lyrics and the short story), I would place him in the same rank with the Egyptian masters, with Pheidias and his peers, with the master artists of Ajanta, with the sculptors of Mahabalipuram, Ellora and Elephanta, and with the Buddhist painters and sculptors of early China and Japan,—when I consider his breadth of treatment, his repose, and his success in making the divine incarnate itself in the human. With the masters of medieval Hindu art, he has also shown his power in transcending conventions while sticking to them ; with the Chinese and Japanese landscape painters, he shows his feeling for nature, with his special manner in grasping the inner spirit of the trees and plants ; with the Japanese UKIYO-YE painters, he shares a wide sympathy and a robust quality in depicting life around him. He has attained to the aim of his art: speaking in the Indian fashion one might say that he has achieved *siddhi* or the goal of his endeavours in Art—he can be called, truly, a SIDDHA SILPI, a past master in Art.

Tvashtar, 'the Fashioner, the Artificer', is the divine craftsman in the Vedas: he is the Vedic counterpart of Visva-karma, 'the All-worker,' a manifestation of the supreme Deity, who is Prajapati-Brahman, 'the Spirit that is the Lord of Creatures',—who is recognised as the patron deity of architects, artists and craftsmen,

in later, Puranic Hindu mythology. Among the epithets of Tvashtar there is one which I consider singularly appropriate for an artist of the eminence of Nandalal Bose: it is RUPA-PATI, 'the Master of Form'; even as Rabindranath is VAK-PATI, 'the Master of Speech'.

May the deity, who is Visva-rupa, 'All-Form', whom we in India have worshipped and still love to worship in the form of Siva-Uma and Sri-Vishnu, grant to our beloved RUPA-PATI, our 'Master of Form', Nandalal Bose, long life and prosperity, and higher and subtler powers of vision and of expression; so that he might open up to us newer and newer vistas of the Spirit and of Life, to the service of Humanity, and to the eternal glory of Mother India so that we may continue to speak of him in all gratefulness, even as the Vedic sage spoke of Ushas, the Dawn Goddess, the Revealer of life, that—

*Nodhah iva avir akṛta priyani :*

'Like a Poet, he has revealed to us the things that we love.'

The Modern Review

SUNITIKUMAR CHATTERJI

Nandalal Bose is now in his seventy-first year and has behind him nearly fifty years of artistic activity, as apprentice, journeyman, and master. He is one of the original brotherhood of the modern Indian school of painting. There was one thing in this brotherhood which was not present in the brotherhood of the Impressionists of France and the Pre-Raphaelites of England. The French and the English schools were the associations of comrades and equals. The modern Indian school had from the outset a chief and a master. He was Abanindranath Tagore. Nandalal Bose's artistic inspiration and training were deeply influenced by Abanindranath. As a matter of fact, Tagore was both the official teacher and the unofficial mentor of Bose. Still it was as much through the work of Nandalal Bose as through that of Tagore that the modern Indian school came into its own. Three painters, above everybody else, represent the school. They are Abanindranath Tagore, his brother Gaganendranath, and Nandalal Bose. In strength of draughtsmanship and design, in fertility of imagination and experiment, and in the volume of output, Nandalal Bose perhaps surpasses his two great contemporaries.

Nandalal Bose has travelled farther himself, and taken the expression of modern Indian painting farther, than any other painter of the school. I can still recall the impression produced on me by some of his earliest work, *SITA'S ORDEAL OF FIRE*, for instance, reproduced in a portfolio of modern Indian painting published by the India Society of London. That painting, with its delicate drawing and coloration, was in the miniature style. It could be classed as a later development of the work of the Moghul and Rajput schools. After that came a series of drawings showing in their draughtsmanship and composition a strong influence of Ajanta. Obviously, the reflexion of Nandalal Bose's work for Lady Herringham's well-known book on Ajanta. From 1917 or so Nandalal Bose began to rise above his models and acquire a style and technique of his own. Today he is probably the most distinctive

and personal of the painters of modern India. Nothing from his hand can be mistaken for the work of any other man or school. He has completed the full cycle, which is observed in the life of every great creative artist—poet, painter or musical composer: the full cycle with its initial stage of imitation, the intermediate stage of what may be called “externalization”—the period in which an artist freeing himself gradually from the leading strings of the past and beginning to walk alone seeks to make his mark among his contemporaries by means of personal discoveries and innovations and the final stake of reflexion in which an artist emancipates himself once for all from imitative habits, even wearies of pouring out his inner thoughts for a generally uncomprehending public, and retires within himself, living a purely internal life, creating in pure joy or sorrow, with the single aim of exalting one’s soul, and materializing in works of art his entire creative power. All this perhaps sounds a mouthful, but with a great creative artist one has to take account of exalted and rarefied states of the mind. In any case, Nandalal Bose has completed all the stages which lead an artist from apprenticeship to achievement.

This he could not have done unless he had within him a clear, although perhaps only intuitive, sense of direction, and together with this sense immense boldness in experiment. Nandalal Bose is a restless experimenter in respect of both form and technique. His studies and experiments range from the determination of the nature of a binding medium or pigment to the true comprehension and discovery of the material significance of all visible things. It can be said of most painters of the modern Indian school that although they have started with experiments to begin with, they have not proceeded beyond a certain point, that they have in the end got stuck in a “style”. Nandalal Bose has always been moving and the restlessness which one finds in him is one of the attractions, if it is also one of the torments, of modern artistic life.

No longer can a painter find in his environment a sure and safe “control” for his artistic activity. There

is not to be found in any modern society, far less in contemporary Indian society, that sureness, stability, and excellence of taste and feeling on which an artist of ancient Greece or Renaissance Italy could implicitly rely, which could save him from aberrations and inanity. Thus, by the very conditions of its growth modern art is bound to be self-conscious, eclectic, and somewhat of a hit-and-miss affair. The modern painter has to make a deliberate study of all the previous forms and styles from palaeolithic painting to, say, futurism and expressionism, with the intermediate stages of Renaissance, Baroque, Moghal and Rajput, Chinese and Japanese painting. It is no wonder that in this bewildering jungle most modern painters get lost and go wrong, or that they feel tempted to imitate the successive curious things that catch their imagination, and succumb to that temptation.

The acid test of the modern painter is whether he is able to conquer his models and subdue his bower-bird-like impulse to make his work a patchwork of bright curiosities collected from every conceivable source. If it is legitimate for a modern painter to study and understand the methods of every pre-existent school of painting, it is not legitimate for him to be always betraying too obvious influences of his models, which should help only towards the formation of a personal style and give the painter greater freedom of expression. Of all great modern painters one ought to be able to say that his work could not be done unless the other schools had existed, but that one could not lay one's finger on a single spot of a painting and say that it was derived from a definite pre-existent style.

Clearly, this is a hard test. But Nandalal Bose, to give my personal opinion for what it is worth, comes through it with flying colours. One day, over twenty years ago, I had the privilege of showing him a volume of palaeolithic drawings and engravings. A look of fascinated interest came into his eyes. He seemed to be recapitulating the childlike wonder with which the prehistoric artist had contemplated and puzzled over the forms of visible things, and had in the end, through

that purity and intensity of experience which is the heritage of early man, caught the essence of shapes more successfully than his better equipped successors. Again, a friend once told me that he had found Nandalal Bose raptly watching a palmyra tree. On being asked what he was looking at so closely, he replied, simply and directly, that he was trying to catch the exact shape of the great leaf. That is the trait one would expect in Nandalal Bose—a direct and unspoilt interest in visible things, finding only the means of realizing the vision in the work of other men, and rejecting everything that was not consistent with the artist's own and individual feeling and sense of form.

It is not possible within the compass of a short note to give anything beyond just an indication of the basic formula, if we may speak of a formula in such matters, of Nandalal Bose's artistic life and output, and that formula is this: individuality achieved through infinite pains in deciding the forms of composition and the technical means. Yet, after all, it would be leaving the subject wholly in the air if nothing were said about the precise quality of his artistic individuality—both in vision and in technique. Nandalal Bose's art derives from the basic linear concepts and technique of all oriental art, Persian, Indian, Chinese and Japanese. That is to say, whenever we look at his pictures, the thing which instantly catches the eye and fixes attention is the outline of the figures and the objects. That is a way of painting which calls for the greatest mastery of drawing, for in order to be able to satisfy the human impulse to enjoy the beauty of outline, draughtsmanship must be not only correct, but also strong and rhythmic from the purely aesthetic standpoint. Nandalal Bose could not have achieved the success he has actually done in his own manner had he not been a great master of drawing.

But he has gone further. While his earlier drawings and even the drawings of his maturity show a purely linear mode of vision, his characteristic later work shows a transition from purely linear to a plastic con-

ception, but at the same time it retains all the qualities of linearity. The figures and objects stand up from this linear outline as if they were in relief. Even when Nandalal Bose's pictures are predominantly tonal, they are never free from this relief-like quality. That helps to define his style. Michelangelo used to call himself a sculptor and not a painter, and his paintings are certainly the work of a sculptural vision. But he was a sculptor working in the round turned into a painter. Nandalal Bose in his latest phase can be called a sculptor of *bas-relief* turned into a painter.

Another fundamental trait of Nandalal Bose's maturest style is its heroic manner, which owes nothing to the subjects. Perhaps the first generation of the painters of the modern Indian school depended too much on themes drawn from ancient Indian myths and legends or from Indian history in order to convey a sense of the heroic in their work. Nandalal Bose, too, has painted many legendary and mythical scenes in his day. Even in his latest phase he does not go out of his way to avoid them. But he can also endow a scene from contemporary life with sublimity. The heroic quality lies in his treatment and manner, not in his subjects as such. Even the humorous panel of one human and six animal mothers, which he painted many years ago, shows a touch of heroic quality in the firm drawing and the tranquil poses of the human beings and the animals. Even his smallest paintings are conceived in the spirit of large and spacious frescoes.

Nandalal Bose, to say a final word about him, has not followed the course which the modern Indian school has followed from about 1905 to the present day. It started with an imitation of Moghal and Rajput miniatures, and successively showing the influences of Ajanta and Bagh, Chinese and Japanese paintings, seems finally to have settled down to a complacent repetition of the old manner and in the younger painters of today to a not less complacent imitation of the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and their very latest and very fashionable successors. Nandalal stands out of this

sluggish stream of imitation. His genius has been able to cut out a channel for itself and all to itself.

March of India

NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI

I consider it a rare privilege and reward to be associated with this exhibition of the works of my guru, Acharya Nandalal Bose. It has been organized jointly by the Santiniketan Asramik Sangha, an association of former pupils and teachers of Santiniketan where he has served with such devotion for nearly thirty years, and by the Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta, where he was a student in 1906 under Acharya Abanindranath Tagore. Though the collection is not exhaustive, it seeks to represent his myriad-faced genius and the unfoldment of his art through trials and experiments ; we have been singularly fortunate in being able to bring together a number of the Acharya's earlier works through the kindness of their owners, to whom our special thanks are due, and whose names are on another page of this catalogue.

May the Acharya, still engaged, in the face of failing health and advancing years, in creating things of beauty, be spared to us for many more years.

RAMENDRANATH CHAKRAVORTY

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Sri Alakendranath Tagore  
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Srimati Jamuna Sen

Srimati Kshama Gupta

Sri Kshemendramohan Sen

Sri Makhan Dutta Gupta

Srimati Nisharani Chaudhuri

Sri Prabhas Sen

Sri Prasanta Ray

Sri Pradyot Kumar Sen Gupta

Sri Pulinbihari Sen

Sri Ramendranath Chakravorty

Sri Satyendranath Bisi

Sri Sukhamay Mitra

Sri Visvarup Bose

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over 500 in number

Efforts have been made to ascertain the dates as accurately as possible ; they are, however, to be considered as approximate in some cases.

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Numbers 123B-C, 124B-135 have been wrongly  
entered under LINE-DRAWINGS.

CATALOGUE

Exhibition of the works of  
AGHARYA NANDALAL BOSE

March—April 1954