The Promise of the Modern: State, Culture, and Avant-gardism in India (ca. 1930-1960)

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In many ways, questions that this dissertation attempts to address were first raised during my undergraduate training at the Department of Art, Aesthetics, and Criticism, Faculty of Fine Arts, M. S. University of Baroda. I can never forget a question Shivaji K. Panikkar asked after every presentation at the Department: *So what*? This question continues to haunt my academic and pedagogic engagements. If I inherited from Shivaji the passion of conviction, Frederick M. Asher and Catherine B. Asher, my mentors at the University of Minnesota, taught me the generosity of compassion. I have tried to integrate both conviction and generosity in my approach to objects and ideas. It is Rick who challenged me to question ideas that had previously seemed foundational and irrefutable. In response to this challenge, I exceeded the limits that I had inadvertently imposed on myself. Without Rick and Cathy's unstinting support, this dissertation may indeed have looked very different. I could not have hoped for better mentors and can only aim to live up to their expectations.

I am more indebted to my dissertation committee than they probably know. In response to my distress call, Michael Gaudio agreed to meet with me every week during a

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Many beyond the University of Minnesota have been equally unstinting in their support. I am particularly indebted to Rebecca Brown, Partha Mitter, Saloni Mathur, Parul Dave-Mukherji, and Tapati Guha-Thakurta for invaluable guidance. I am also indebted to my 2010-2011 scholar-year cohort at the Getty. There is something quite miraculous about being at the Getty Research Institute. Here work gets done quicker, pages fill up faster, thought flows more smoothly. But the Getty Research Institute is not just a building, not merely an institution – it is people whose support, friendship, and intellectual company allowed me to accomplish a vast amount in very little time.

For a very long time, I was convinced that my dissertation would have to be perfect. Eventually, I realized that if I held on to that hope, I might never finish. The umbilical cord must be severed. My family in Calcutta, Tapati and Swapan Gupta, Bejoy Chakraborty and Krishna Ray, and Panchali Ray – held my hand as I navigated what appeared to be a void. My parents sutured me with characteristic calm, laying my fears to rest. With Sugata Ray, my comrade, I learned to redraw the boundaries of the self. To acknowledge him would be against the spirit of all that we have learnt together. This dissertation owes its existence to him as much as it does to me. I, however, claim complete ownership of all its flaws.

To those who still dream of changing the world.

In solidarity.

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Introduction

May 9, 2007

May 9, 2007: Business as usual. I arrived at the Faculty of Fine Arts campus, Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, Gujarat to see the whole campus transformed with open-air displays and classrooms and studios filled with examination works. The Annual Display, an annual exhibition of student's works, had just begun. The Department of Museology had come alive with video projections, while the lecture hall had interactive artworks that covered its dreary walls. Professors, visiting artists, and art historians were huddled over paintings, sculptures, and examination papers in the Department of Graphics and Printmaking, Department of Painting, the Department of Sculpture, the Department of Applied Arts, and the Department of Art History and Criticism. Students lounged around, drinking tea, heatedly discussing the works exhibited. I ran into many I knew – artists, critics, and historians. Given that the Faculty has been the epicenter of the India's art world for the last fifty years, the Annual Display offered the alumni a space to come together every year. The excitement was palpable.

The Faculty of Fine Arts had been established in 1949, only two years after India's Independence. As the first post-independence art institution in India, its founders were overtly aware of the larger implications of the role of the Faculty in reframing fine arts education in post-colonial India. Writing on the pedagogy of the Fine Arts Faculty, the artist Nilima Sheikh (b. 1937) thus notes:

> First of all, the future artist was made conscious of his or her place in history. This could include a position from which the arts of the land could be reclaimed and freshly discerned; from which, with the birth of the modern nation, the adventure

> of modernism as initiated in the west could be experienced; from which the artist could claim access to art history of the world. Yet, implicit in this willed and conscious opening up of geographical, historical and cultural boundaries was the nationalism central to the cultural ethos of newly independent India.[1]

Little did we imagine that it would all change within a matter of a few hours. On May 9, 2007, a man accompanied by a horde of media reporters and the police stormed into the campus. They headed directly to the Department of Graphics and Printmaking and specifically to the studio where the young art student Chandramohan had displayed his gigantic prints. There was a vague rumor across the campus – the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council), an extremist sectarian anti-Muslim Hindu political group, had arrived. All of us rushed to the graphics studios only to be stopped by the intruders. Before one could even protest, Chandramohan was dragged out and whisked away – to the police station, we assumed. By then, the Department of Graphics had become a stage for Niraj Jain (accused of the 2002 Gujarat carnage by the Concerned Citizens Tribunal, Gujarat) to demonstrate the sheer perversity of the art produced at the Faculty of Fine Arts.[2] Students who dared to protest were physically dragged out of the Department while Jain and his accomplices repeatedly guided the media and the police through the studios, each time elucidating "expert" opinions on the display.

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[1] Nilima Sheikh, "A Post-Independence Initiative in Art," in Gulam M. Sheikh ed. *Contemporary Art in Baroda* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1997), 55-143, 55.

[2] On February 27, 2002, a train was attacked at the Godhra railway station in Gujarat killing over fifty Hindu pilgrims. The Godhra attack prompted retaliatory statewide massacres against Muslims in Gujarat. The Gujarat state government not only failed to prevent the riots, but actively fomented anti-Muslim violence in the state. For this history, see Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat: Plurality, Hindutva and Beyond* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005).

Subsequently, Chandramohan was arrested and charged under sections 153A, 114, and 295 of the Indian Penal Code for promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and race, committing acts prejudicial to the maintenance of harmony, and defiling places of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class. His graphic prints critiquing the excesses of religion, both Hinduism and Christianity, apparently exemplified the debased anti-national art produced at the Faculty of Fine Arts. Once this performance was over, Jain, accompanied by the police, combed the Faculty in search of other such "offensive" objects. He soon found a number of art works that were supposedly "offensive," hanging over the steps leading to the graphics studios.

I still remember spending many evenings, sitting on those very steps, sipping black coffee, and discussing the social relevance of modern and contemporary art in India. While our days were spent in classrooms discussing art and its histories, the conversation would carry on through our spare time. Perhaps, somewhat idealistically, our concerns, as students, were not merely restricted to art and its histories. We believed in the possibility of using art as a means to move beyond the limited art world that we inhabited. In keeping with this concern, the school also held art fairs where artists and students produced low-cost works for local consumption.[3]

I remember queuing up, alongside the middle-class of Baroda, to buy works by well known-artists – Gulam Sheikh, Bhupen Khakhar, K. G. Subramanyan – to give just

[3] In 1961, the Fine Arts Faculty "decided to throw open its gates to the public of Baroda" by organizing an art fair. "The function of the fair," Sheikh writes, "it is not difficult to infer, was to establish contact with a larger community, with the town itself. It was a time when the artist community extended itself to find creativity outside the classroom and studio." Sheikh, "A Post-Independence Initiative in Art," 101-106. These fairs would eventually become a bi-annual event, complete with performances, art shops, and food stalls. The money raised during the fair would be donated.

a few examples. While, on the one hand, the fair was a fundraising campaign for the art school, on the other hand, spreading awareness about contemporary art and its practices was an implicit agenda. Through these various events, the Faculty continually sought to engage the local population of Baroda in a productive dialogue. In the same spirit, the Faculty raised funds through art auctions each time Gujarat was hit by a natural calamity, for example the earthquake of 2002.

Of all these events, the Annual Display was the only time the Faculty did not seek out the local population. It was an internal examination, to be seen and judged by a committee consisting of the faculty and an external jury of invited artists and art historians. At the same time, alumni, friends, relatives, and sometimes a stray gallery owner or collector looking for "fresh talent" would visit the campus. Like many alumni, I too revisited my alma mater during the Display in May 2007. In a way, it was a homecoming after a gap of five years. Almost naïvely, I had assumed that "home" was still as I had left it in 2002. In my mind, the cultural censorship of the Gujarat government only one year earlier – the banning of the films *Rang De Basanti* and *Fanaa* or the attack on M. F. Husain's installations in Ahmedabad – were stray incidents that had happened "elsewhere."[4] Not at "home." Baroda was a cosmopolitan cultural heaven – a feeling that I shared with many in the art community. Yet, the 2002 violence of Godhra and its aftermath should have been enough to alert us: we were up against a leviathan –

[4] In 2006, a coalition of Hindu right-wing organizations forced cinema halls and multiplexes in Gujarat to boycott films in which the actor Aamir Khan played a role. *Rang De Basanti* and *Fanaa* were two such films that were never released in Gujarat. The Hindu right-wing groups prevented the release of Khan's films in Gujarat as a response to the actor's critique of the government's policies. The banning of the films was part of a series of cultural censorships by the Hindu right wing in Gujarat including the 1998 and 2006 attacks on the artist M. F. Husain's paintings in Ahmedabad.

the complicity of the police, administration, and the bureaucracy – that was systematically attempting to destroy any democratic counter space.

It took Niraj Jain, a Baroda-based leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and an afternoon's work of hooliganism, to remind us that our "home" was preciously fragile – we would have to lock horns with the cultural fascism and intolerance that has today become so integral to Gujarat's majoritarian politics in order to retain the democratic space that we had once carved out. There was, however, something very singular about the attack on the Faculty of Fine Arts. This was the first time that an art school had been censored in India. That this was an art institution that had consistently sought out a dialogue with its immediate local context as a strategic artistic praxis rendered the moment infinitely more poignant.

In an unprecedented show of solidarity, the art world took to the streets across India. Protest meetings ensued across the country and demonstrations were held in New Delhi, Thiruvannamalai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, and Kochi, among other cities. Each meeting was attended by as many as two hundred supporters from all walks of life. The battle was fought on many levels – emails, blogs, public protest meetings, legal proceedings, petitions, press releases, and signature campaigns.

On May 14, 2007, hundreds of artists, art lovers, and others associated with the art world traveled to Baroda from across India to stand in solidarity with the art students at the Faculty of Fine Arts (Figure 1.1). Their sheer numbers brought Sayajibaug – the area around the Faculty – to a standstill. With the help of a number of alumni, art students created an installation outside the Graphics studio, organized skits, sang protest songs,

and handed out posters (Figure 1.2, 1.3). Passing local people not in any way connected to the art world joined them, swelling their ranks. In a certain way, the May 14 protest was a moment of art activism. While, on the one hand, the art world initiated dialog with local communities, on the other hand, the very act of congregating in public in support of freedom and democratic rights reinserted the figure of the artist as one who radically transforms the social.

This moment of crisis was indeed a very crucial moment, a moment that raised a number of critical questions about the ways in which art functions in society. Where does one locate intellectual liberty and the autonomy of art when democracy itself is at siege? What is the interrelation between art, aesthetics, and politics? Can this relationship be constituted without compromising the specificity of artistic praxis and political praxis? Can we imagine art as political without giving in to propaganda? How are we to map the anti-institutionalism of modern and contemporary art within these contested terrains? It is against the backdrop of these and other such questions that this dissertation was conceptualized and researched.

Keeping in mind the specificities of the 2007 attack on the Faculty of Fine Arts and engaging with the questions that this incident engendered, this dissertation turns to a different but equally critical juncture in the history of Indian art. In hope of recovering a politics for today, I focus on the decades between the 1930s and the 1960s. This is a particularly fascinating period in the South Asian context. It was in this period that the first commercial art galleries were set up. Following the 1954 establishment of the National Gallery of Modern Art, the first museum of modern art, and the Lalit Kala

Akademi, the only state-sponsored art academy, discourses of art criticism came into being. Interestingly enough, some of the questions that artists and critics asked in 2007 bear a startling reverberation to those posed in this period.

The period between the 1930s and the 1960s was also marked by a deep inter-visuality between artistic, architectural, cinematic, and artisanal cultures with a number of artists freely moving between different genres of cultural production, producing a complex and inter-textual visual world. This complexity was further magnified by an intense internationalism, with a number of international figures being invited to conduct projects in India. The French architect, designer, and urban planner Le Corbusier's (1887- 1965) work in Chandigarh is perhaps best known in this context. Yet, this politics of West-centric internationalism was at odds with the cultural alliances that India sought through the Non-aligned Movement, a coalition of "Third World" countries opposed to the bipolar politics of the Cold War. This politics of strategic alliances created a peculiar tension, a post-colonial predicament that continually attempted to redraw center-periphery relations and construct a discourse around modern art that continually tried to mark the Indian modern as distinct and different from its Western counterpart. I discuss all of these moments in my dissertation. I ask: What did modern art symbolize in this period? I try to approach this question through a number of different sites – the public fair, the art museum, the urban public sphere, and the space of domesticity.

History and Historiographic Topos

Over the last fifty years, modern Indian art has produced its own narrative. Yet, this narrative closely shadows the metanarrative of the Western modern. The story begins

in the late 19th century with the establishment of art schools in colonial India. While there are stray examples of short-lived art schools prior to the 1850s, the Madras School of Arts and Craft (now renamed Government College of Fine Arts) was the first institution to experiment with systematic art training. Established in 1850 by Alexander Hunter, the school began imparting lessons in subjects ranging from botanical drawings and lithography to woodcarving and pottery.[5] Soon, yet another art school opened its doors in Calcutta. Established in 1854 by a group of Bengali elite under the aegis of the Society for the Promotion of Industrial Art, the Calcutta School of Art intended "to develop inventiveness and originality, to supply skilled draftsmen, designers, engravers, to meet increasing demand, to provide employment, to promote taste and refinement in the application of Art, among the upper classes to supply the community with works of art at a moderate price."[6]

In a certain way, the establishment of the Calcutta School of Art was a response to the East India Company's 1854 directive to confirm "upon the natives of India those vast moral and material blessings which flow from the general diffusion of [Western] knowledge" through the establishment of institutions of special education.[7] In keeping with this aim, subjects taught at the Calcutta School included decorative and figurative drawing, oil painting, modeling, lithography, and photography.[8] The School's students

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[5] For a more detailed discussion on Madras School of Art, see Deepali Dewan, *Crafting Knowledge and Knowledge of Crafts: Art Education, Colonialism and the Madras School of Arts in Nineteenth-century South Asia* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Minnesota, 2001).
[6] Author Unknown, *Rules of the Society for the Promotion of Industrial Art* (Calcutta: Society for the Promotion of Industrial Art, 1856), 1.
[7] *Despatch of the Court of Directors of the East India Company* cited in W. Meston, *Aspects of Indian Education Policy* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1922), 3.
[8] For a history of Calcutta School of Art, see Jogeshchandra Bagal, *Centenary: Government College of Arts and Crafts, 1864-1964* (Calcutta: Government College of Art and Craft, 1966).

not only participated in the annual fine art exhibitions held across India from the 1850s onwards but also found employment as draftsmen and illustrators at the various government offices. The Bombay School of Art followed shortly. In 1857, the Parsi industrialist Jamsethji Jijibhai (1783-1859) set up the school.

Although the art schools in Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay began as private endeavors, they were gradually taken over by the British government as part of an initiative to gain an increased control over education in the colony. The Madras School became a government institution in 1854, closely followed by the Calcutta School in 1858, and the Bombay School in 1864. Aimed solely at craft education, the Mayo School of Art, the youngest among the colonial art schools, was established in Lahore with government support in 1875.

With government patronage, there was a consorted effort to redesign art school pedagogy in India, modeling art education in the colony on South Kensington's design pedagogy.[9] For instance, after the Bombay School was taken over by the government, the curriculum was restructured and South Kensington trained teachers such as Hugh Stannaus, Michael John Higgins, John Lockwood Kipling and John Griffiths were appointed.[10] Similarly, with the appointment of the South Kensington trained Henry Locke as the Principal of the Calcutta School, the school's curriculum was reoriented with the introduction of South Kensington's multi-stage pedagogic model. Students were

[9] In 1853, the Department of Science and Art at South Kensington put together the National Course of Art Instruction, a national curriculum for art and design education. Later known as the South Kensington system, the curriculum emphasized training in drawing. Beginning with flat objects and ornamental patterns, students incrementally progressed to more complex objects and drawings from plaster cast reproductions of Greco-Roman art.

[10] John Lockwood Kipling would be transferred to Lahore in the position of the Principal of the Mayo School of Industrial Arts in 1875.

now "engaged in systematic courses of instruction, in drawing, and its application to decorative arts, to lithography, wood engraving, painting, wall and surface decoration; also classes for drawing and shading from the round, for painting in distemper and fresco, for photography, and for modeling in clay and taking plaster casts."[11]

Indian modes of depiction – flat, anti-perspectival, and schematic – were inimical to the pedagogic ideals of the colonial art schools. A new interest in India's artistic and cultural heritage coupled with a paternalistic aspiration to "civilize" the "natives" coincided with the formalization of art school pedagogy in 19th-century India, as Mahrukh K. Tarapore has pointed out.[12] It was this institutionalization of European ideals of art and aesthetics that the art administrator, historian, and aesthete Ernest B. Havell (1861-1934) would oppose in the early 20th century. I touch upon Havell's ideas on art and education in Chapter One, Three, and Four specifically discussing the implications of his ideas in artistic and aesthetic practices of the 1930s and the 1940s.

Of course, the pedagogic aspirations as well as the successes and failures of the colonial art schools have been the site of much scholarly scrutiny over the last twenty years. For example, focusing specifically on the early history of the Madras School, Deepali Dewan has argued that the coexistence of training in traditional Indian decorative arts and in European naturalism produced a "schizophrenic" program of art education at this school.[13] The continuous intersection of "fine art" and "decorative art" training was further complicated by the rhetoric of the decline of Indian crafts and the necessity of its

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[11] Alexander Hunter, *Correspondence on the subject of art education in different parts of India* (Madras: Gantz Brothers, 1967).
[12] Mahrukh Tarapore, "John Lockwood Kipling and British Art Education in India," *Victorian Studies*, 24 (1980), 53-81.
[13] Dewan, *Crafting Knowledge and Knowledge of Crafts*.

revival. Along with scholars such as Abigail McGowan working on the 19th-century colonial project of craft revival, Dewan too sees art schools as part of the larger project of colonialism that sought to "protect," "preserve," and "revive," "traditional" artisanal practices.[14]

This on the one hand. On the other hand, the coming of the art schools and the introduction of oil painting were critical in the unfolding of modern art in India. Scholars have seen the introduction of perspectival realism and the medium of oil on canvas as crucial to the trajectory of both modern art and the making of the figure of the modern artist in India. Focusing on the period between the 1850s and the 1920s, Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Partha Mitter argue that by importing to the colony a set of entirely different aesthetic criterions and visual languages, art school pedagogy was central to the creation of a new category called "fine art." [15] This transformation brought about a disjuncture between traditional artisans and a new group of artists who saw themselves as "professional artists."

But what did European realism denote to the 19th century Indian artist? Realism in the European context had a specific connotation. It was a particular social and artistic movement, which, traced through Romanticism, culminated in the works of the 19th-century French Realists such as Honoré Daumier and Gustave Courbet. Indian artists, however, had little knowledge of this trajectory. What they encountered instead were derivations and reproductions of the earlier salon artists – the works of Jacques-Louis

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[14] Abigail McGowan, *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[15] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c.1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

David, Francois Gerard, and Antonio Canova. They appropriated this language of realism to represent their own mythologies – from multi-headed multi-armed gods performing incredible miracles to incidents from epics represented in the guise of history painting. Mythology was thus brought alive, gods came to earth, and the visual language of the colonizer was mobilized to symbolically reclaim the colonial landscape.[16]

The almost meteoric rise of Ravi Varma (1848-1906), an artist who cast himself in the role of an professional artist in the Victorian mold in 19th-century India, is a key moment in the unfolding of the trajectory of modern art in India. The mythification of Varma, following a Vasarian model, began when his earliest biographers described him as the first "gentleman artist." The image of the artist as a romantic hero pitted against hostile forces perhaps captured the Indian imagination, as Mitter points out.[17] As K. M. Varma wrote, "he had no one to guide and instruct him in the technique and mysteries of oil painting […] yet nothing daunted [him] […] he worked till he overcame all difficulties."[18]

Contemporary scholars repeatedly cite these late 19th and early 20th-century biographies. Indeed, this citation serves to further reinforce Varma's charismatic appeal. Varma is thus produced as India's first artist genius, or, as Mitter puts it, "the artist as charismatic individual."[19] His career then becomes emblematic of the triumph of will and talent over training, or, as Geeta Kapur describes it, "not only the struggle of the artist to gain a technique but the struggle of a native to gain the source of the master's superior

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[16] For a more detailed discussion, see Geeta Kapur, *When was Modernism? Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), 145-178.
[17] Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922*, 181.
[18] K. M. Varma, cited in Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 179.

knowledge, and the struggle of a prodigy to steal the fire for his own people."[20] When posited thus, the allure of Ravi Varma as the progenitor of modern art for an erstwhile colony should be obvious.

It is, however, the career of Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) that marks, according to Guha-Thakurta, the coming into being of Indian art and artist in a new and modern sense of the terms. Informed by the politics of anti-colonial nationalism and inspired by indigenous painting traditions, Tagore articulated an "Indian-style" of painting in the early 20th century which then developed into an art movement, now called the Bengal School. It is in the Bengal School that Guha-Thakurta locates a growing aesthetic self-awareness and a special concern with individuality, creativity and an "Indian" identity.[21] Tagore and his pupils developed a style that privileged emotive qualities over correctness in form and proportions.

However, even as the Bengal School stood identified with the anti-colonial nationalist movement, Abanindranath Tagore increasingly distanced himself from nationalist politics in the 1920s and the 1930s, withdrawing instead into a self-referential domain of creativity. For Guha-Thakurta, Tagore's withdrawal from nationalist politics becomes a key moment that marks the coming into being of an autonomous domain of art, a moment when modern Indian art comes to its own. Thus, while Tarapore, Dewan, and McGowan contextualize 19th-century craft revival movements in India, Guha-Thakurta and Mitter produce a compelling history of modern art in late 19th and early 20th-century India.

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[20] Kapur, *When was Modernism?*, 148.
[21] Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art.*

A set of significant art historical tropes emerges from these narratives, the most obvious being the figure of the modern artist creative genius, resolute in his individualism. Somewhat less obvious but equally powerful is the claim for a separate institutional space for modern art and the modern artist, a space that is both distinct from that of artisanal practices and distant from the praxis of nationalist politics. This strategic separation of fine arts and crafts, the artist and the artisan, artistic creation and political action is woven into art historical discourse.

Guha-Thakurta's discussion on Abanindranath Tagore is a case in point. Guha-Thakurta reads Tagore's paintings produced in the 1920s and 1930s alongside the artist's memoire. In his memoire Tagore wrote that although intelligence and brilliance could exist even among artisans, the individualistic creative artist was the greatest genius. In contrast to the nationalist public sphere marked by political action, Tagore posited the inner creative world as the true habitat of the artist genius.[22] This separation then becomes for Guha-Thakurta emblematic of the coming into being of an autonomous domain of art, produced by and for the bourgeois.

This notion of autonomy of art is central to the construction of the category called modern art, at least in the Western context. As Jay Bernstein has noted, modern art is characterized by autonomy and "modernism is that increment in which art becomes self-conscious of its autonomy."[23] The idea that art is governed by its own logic, a logic that is independent of art's social and political value, is intrinsic to this idea of autonomy. The coming into being of a modern art, an art that was autonomous, unfolded through the

[22] Abanindranath Tagore, *Gharoa* (Santiniketan: Visva Bharati, 1941), 75-76.
[23] Jay M. Bernstein, "Adorno's Aesthetic Theory," in Fred L. Flush ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 139-164, 146.

making of 19th-century bourgeois art – art produced in a bourgeois society. It was bourgeois art that marked a decisive turning point in the use value of the art object. Often produced and consumed collectively, both sacred and secular courtly art had a specific use value in terms of community formations. This was not the case with bourgeois art, typically an individualistic expression of an artist, received and consumed by individual audiences.

If bourgeois art reflects a certain self-understanding of the bourgeoisie and is received as an autonomous aesthetic object removed from the socio-cultural context of production, both the production and the reception of the object is in excess of and therefore lies beyond the direct and utilitarian practices of life. As John Berger writes, "seen in this fashion, the separation of art from the praxis of life becomes the decisive characteristic of the autonomy of bourgeois art."[24] It is this withdrawal from the direct praxis of life, in this case nationalist politics, which produces, in Guha-Thakurta's narrative, the coming into being of an autonomous domain of art in India in the late 1920s and the 1930s. That Abanindranath Tagore was independent of courtly patronage further supports the recuperation of the figure of Tagore as a step towards the coming of modern art and artist in India. This is a crucial step, one that makes space for 1930s experiments with modernist aesthetics.

An exhibition of Bauhaus artists held in Calcutta in 1922 marks the beginning of avant-garde art in India, both Guha-Thakurta and Mitter assert. As Mitter writes: "The radical formalist language of modernism offered Indian artists such as Rabindranath

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[24] John Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 49.

Tagore and Jamini Roy a new weapon of anti-colonial resistance. In their intellectual battle with colonialism, they readily found allies among the Western avant-garde critics of urban industrial capitalism, leading them to engage for the first time with global aesthetic issues."[25] Moving away from both the realism of the colonial art schools and the revivalist visual language of Abanindranath Tagore's Bengal School, artists such as Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Jamini Roy (1887-1972), and Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938) embraced a modernist simplification of form in the 1930s. Simultaneously, Amrita Shergil (1913-1941) made rural India a surrogate for her own gendered location within the larger nationalist struggle. Along with the primitivists in the West, Indian artists turned to the everyday and the quotidian as a critique of the dominant metanarratives of nation and nationalism that had been a hallmark of art produced by the previous generation. It is in this that Mitter locates the avant-garde's critique, in other words, the resistance of the avant-garde.

This idea of the avant-garde is well aligned with Theodor Adorno's vision of the avant-garde as articulated in *Aesthetic Theory.*[26] Resistance to and negation of societal conventions characterize Adorno's avant-garde. In Mitter's text, the societal conventions appear in the guise of the dominant rhetoric of nationalism. Autonomous art, in Adorno's sense, does not, however, have the ability to sublate the social dimensions that it negates. It has no specific use value. Its only purpose is to resist and to exist in itself. Having advertently or inadvertently adopted Adorno's avant-garde, Mitter's text is troubled by

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[25] Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-garde, 1922-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10.
[26] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

artists such as Nandalal Bose (1882-1966) who strategically aligned themselves with the Gandhian movement to make art praxis into a distinct communitarian activity. Quite understandably, Mitter's section on Bose departs most from the conceptual framework that he lays out in his text. I begin Chapter One with this 1930s moment, a moment that is marked in scholarly discourses by a rupture, a separation of artistic practices and political praxis.

However, Mitter's idea of a "virtual cosmopolis" is both useful and liberating for my project. To contextualize the Indian artist's engagement with European modernism, Mitter puts forward the idea of a "virtual cosmopolis," a term that allows Mitter to counter charges of derivativeness that had been leveled at modernist Indian art in this and subsequent periods. The "virtual cosmopolis" is a cosmopolis that is not a defined geo-political territory but resides in the imagination. Borrowing Benedict Anderson's idea of the nation as an imagined community, Mitter suggests that modernity too created a trans-national imagined community brought into existence through print capitalism and the hegemony of the English language. To explain this community's critical engagement with Western modernism, Mitter proposes the term "virtual cosmopolis." As Mitter writes:

> The hybrid city of the imagination engendered elective affinities between the elites of the center and the periphery on the level of intellect and creativity. […] The encounters of the colonial intelligentsia with modernity were inflected through virtual cosmopolitanism. One of the products of such encounters was global privimitivism and the common front made against urban industrial capitalism and the ideology of progress. […] Primitivism was not anti-modern; it was a critical form of modernity that affected the peripheries no less than the

> West. Primitivists did not deny the importance of technology in contemporary life; they simply refused to accept the teleological certainty of modernity.[27]

This is a crucial and incisive argument, one that poses a serious challenge to the idea of modernism as necessarily unidirectional, flowing from the West to the East, from the center to the peripheries, from the originary to the derivative. The idea of the "virtual cosmopolis" then allows me to circumvent questions of the originary and the derivative in the period that I am focusing on. While indeed the very idea of the originary and the derivative is worth debating, this is not a question that I foreground in this project.

Having adopted Adorno's avant-garde, Mitter's own text mimics a unidirectional and teleological unfolding of modernism in India, a narrative that yet again replicates the metanarrative of Western modernism. For Mitter, the "first phase of modernism" characterized by the Indian artist's engagement with primitivism as a resistance to colonial modernity concludes in 1947 with the formation of the Independent Indian nation-state.[28] Mitter signals the Bombay-based Progressive Artists Group (established in 1947), as the "main architects of Indian modernism, which came to fruition later in Nehruvian India."[29] The Progressive Artists Group's engagement with internationalist modernism and abstraction then is central to the next phase of modern Indian art.

This places the modernists of the 1930s and the early 1940s in place of the historical avant-garde, leading to the true avant-garde of the Progressive Artists Group – an avant-garde that was purportedly anti-institutional and revolutionary. Other scholars

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[27] Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, 11.
[28] Ibid., 10.
[29] Ibid., 227.

such as Yashodhara Dalmia reiterate the same argument.[30] In Dalmia's narrative, the Bombay-based Progressive Artists Group too emerge as both the principal architects of Indian modernism and the first true avant-garde. With the coming of the Progressive Artists Group, the Indian modern finally catches up and becomes one with the teleological unfolding of modernism in the West. It is with the Progressive Artists Group that there is a complete break with tradition and earlier historicist modes of depiction practiced by the artists of the Bengal School. The visual language of abstraction posed by the Progressive Artists Group is thus entirely new.

This, yet again, returns us to Adorno. The category of the new is central to Adorno's theory of modern art. For Adorno, newness is not merely the rejection of earlier artistic motifs, themes, and techniques. Rather, newness is conceived as a radical break from the past. It is the category of the new that becomes the developmental principle of modern art. "A cryptogram of the new is the image of collapse," Adorno writes. "Only by virtue of the absolute negativity of collapse does art enunciate the unspeakable: utopia."[31] For Adorno, non-functional purposelessness is a primary character of avant-garde art. Adorno's avant-garde can merely speak of utopia. It cannot concretize it, not even negatively. Negation, collapse, confrontation, anarchy, and nihilism emerge as the key signifiers of the avant-garde. As Adorno writes: "The shaft that art directs at society is itself social; it is counterpressure to the force exerted by the *body social.*"[32] The avant-garde then is always in confrontation with the social.

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[30] Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[31] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 32.
[32] Ibid.

Adorno's confrontational avant-garde finds its almost perfect reflection in the Progressive Artists Group's now often-quoted 1949 declaration: "Today we paint with absolute freedom […] almost anarchic."[33] The history of 20th-century Indian art, as it has been scripted over the last fifty years, thus remains a narrative of heroic artist figures, bold formalist manifestoes, and radical creative acts. The figure of the artist – a social outcaste, anti-institutional, and uncompromisingly estranged – perhaps remains the last myth of the legacies of modernism, resolutely haunting this history. So much so, that in spite of categorically stating that "modernism in India does not invite the same kind of periodization as in the west," an astute cultural critic such as Geeta Kapur herself goes on to trace precisely the same lineage of the Indian modern that I have outlined above.[34]

Perhaps an alternative history of the Indian modern, a history that does not replicate the metanarrative of the Western modern, needs to begin by rethinking the idea of the avant-garde in India. Although I do not wish to produce yet another set of periodization for the Indian modern, Peter Burger's idea of the historical avant-garde as imagining a different praxis for life is nevertheless useful here. European avant-garde movements may be defined as an attack on the status of art in society, rather than an all-out confrontation with bourgeois society itself, Burger suggests. As Burger writes: "What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men."[35] Then, in complete contradiction to Adorno, who sees avant-gardism to be in essence anti-functionalism, Burger suggests that the avant-gardists demanded that art become practical once again. As Burger writes:

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[33] F. N. Souza in *Progressive Artists Group*, Exhibition catalog, July 1949, Artists' Center, Bombay.
[34] Kapur, *When was Modernism?*, 292.
[35] Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 49.

> When the avant-gardists demand that art become practical once again, they do not mean that the contents of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art *functions* in society, a process that does as much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content.[36]

For Burger, avant-gardism is then a mode of transforming art into praxis for life. In effect, the avant-garde aims to transform life itself, producing a new praxis of life based on art.

Jacques Rancière also makes a similar suggestion.[37] Aesthetics, Rancière suggests, understood not as a theory of art appreciation but as a system that determines what presents itself to sense experience is in essence political. If we can agree in principle that social and political participation are determined by modes of perception, then we can also agree that aesthetics, a system of sense perception, has a central role to play in political intervention. By intervening in the realm of the aesthetic, the avant-garde then makes a distinctly political intervention – an intervention that first and foremost attempts to invent a new form of life and new life praxis. It is this incarnation of the avant-garde that I attempt to recover in this dissertation.

But why speak of the avant-garde today? Why speak of the purported autonomy of art today? In many ways, the 2007 Baroda incident has once again brought to the forefront pressing questions regarding the autonomy of art. This time, however, the question is posed specifically in terms of art's legitimate space (a space that is distinct

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

from the larger space of the social) and its rightful public (a community of privileged viewers who may be given access to this autonomous space). Kavita Singh thus writes in the recent exhibition catalog, *Where in the World*:

> Although art that shocks is explained as a kind of electro-therapy for society, today its meaning depends upon its being seen by the artworld, and not by society at large. Provocative and transgressive work is mounted or enacted for an audience who will understand it as art […] Art calls for its autonomy, which is why art expects to be granted a freedom not given to non-art acts of speech. […] The problem arises when this kind of art is seen by those who are not meant to see it. […] In case this happens, it is not because the *compact* between artist and audience has broken down; it is that someone who was not part of the compact has entered the scene.[38]

In such a formulation, the autonomous space of art is necessarily constructed as an exclusive elite space. In such a space, art is reserved for an eye that can behold it as only art. Art's radicalism, its investment in imagining a different praxis for life, is sacrificed to its own autonomy. Locked into such an irrevocable autonomous domain, it cannot even function as Adorno's avant-garde – a counter-pressure to the force exerted by the social. In such a formulation, art can only speak to the initiated or convert the already convert. Needless to say, this rigid frame of autonomy creates its own strictures and closures, its own hierarchy of the privileged initiated and the transgressors. Conversely, only those artists speaking from within the frameworks of the "compact" may speak in the name of modern and/or contemporary art. Can one think beyond this limited space of the "compact" to think of another possible politics for today?

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[38] Kavita Singh, Shukla Sawant, and Naman Ahuja, *Where in the World*, Exhibition catalog, December 2008- May 2009, Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi, 75. Emphasis mine.

Other Stories

At the stroke of midnight, on August 15, 1947, India gained Independence. If this was a moment of exhilaration and hope, it was simultaneously a moment of intense anguish for the new nation-state and its citizen subjects. From 1946 onwards, the subcontinent had been shaken by the violence of communal riots, and the subsequent Partition had resulted in the slaughter of thousands of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus as millions crossed the "shadow lines" separating India and Pakistan.[39] In effect, this exodus generated a curious momentum in the realm of culture as the nation-state strove to rehabilitate its new citizens, among them artists, critics, and others associated with the art world. How did the art world navigate this moment of crisis? How did they imagine a new form of life and a new life praxis based on art? These are some of the questions that this dissertations grapples with. In doing so, I aim to chart a different trajectory for the Indian modern. I begin in the 1930s, the precise moment that is marked in scholarly discourses by a rupture, a separation of artistic practices and political praxis.

This dissertation is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of modern Indian art from the 1930s to the 1960s. Rather than producing a chronological narrative of this period, the chapters are instead organized thematically. Chapter One takes up the theme of artistic intervention as mode of strategic alteration of vision and perception. By focusing on modern art practice and nationalist politics as it played out in the exhibitions of arts and crafts organized during the annual meetings of the Indian National Congress, India's primary anti-colonial political party founded in 1885, Chapter One examines the

[39] Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 155.

interrelation between vision, modern art, aesthetics, and politics in early 20th-century India. Artworks – paintings, sculptures, and murals – installed across the pavilions and exhibition grounds of the annual meetings of the Indian National Congress served to insert art into the spaces of the everyday. Further, from the 1930s onwards, artists also designed temporary townships, pavilions, parks and bazaars for the Congress' annual meetings. The interior design and decoration of the pavilions at the Congress meetings offers a glimpse into the ways in which nationalist politics transformed space in 1930s India. I suggest that this aesthetic sensibility carried within it the potential for reordering the everyday, binding art praxis and political praxis in an intricate relationship of mutual imbrications. Locating the genealogy, the politics of such artistic interventions, in its larger 19th and early 20th-century history, Chapter One anticipates the central concerns of this dissertation.

Drawing on ideas regarding a politics of inhabitation and a politics of everyday introduced in Chapter One, Chapter Two takes as its theme artistic practices as a mode of negotiating the experience of inhabiting a modern Independent India. The first three decades following Independence are now inevitably remembered as the time of Nehruvian socialism, secularism, industrialization, and modernization. State sponsored projects of industrialization and modernization – planned cities, giant steel plants, hydroelectric projects, and power stations – are perhaps the most iconic images of this period. How was this new India experienced and how was this new experience negotiated? This is a question I take up in Chapter Two. In the backdrop of state sponsored building projects, reinforced concrete, the primary building material in this

period, asserted an obdurate presence in the visual field through artistic and cinematic practices. What then was the relation between modernization, the rhetoric of progress, modes of experience, and aesthetics?

Through visual practices, concrete emerged as a powerful metaphor of progress in 1950s and 1960s India, I argue. Locating the genealogies of this metaphor within 1930s articulations of a modern subjectivity, I suggest that this metaphor both arose out of, and attempted to come to terms with, the experience of inhabiting a modern India. Using sculpture, public murals, cinema, and photography as a lens, I suggest that reinforced concrete as a metaphor of progress generated a visual practice and a set of new iconographies that continually sought to negotiate the new in terms of the old. In effect, this negotiation produced a visual politics that continually resisted the dehumanizing rationality of Western modernism. The repeated insertion of this aesthetics in the public spaces of the new nation-state through public sculptures, murals, cinema, photography, and print culture altered the visual landscape, yet again reconstituting vision, perception, and everyday aesthetics. Both the language of abstraction and the materiality of concrete thus made available a vocabulary of resistance, posing a powerful reworking of (Western) modernism.

Chapter Three focuses on the institutions and their role in the institutionalization of modern art and its aesthetics of progress. In Chapter Three, I am less interested in the processes of art making but rather focus on the apparatuses that rendered art legible and visible – art history, criticism, and the exhibitionary order. The history of the National Gallery of Modern Art, the first museum of modern art, and the Lalit Kala Akademi, the

only state-sponsored art academy, is central to this chapter. While the National Gallery of Modern Art, through its collection and display, produced, for the first time, a narrative of modern art in India, the Lalit Kala Akademi played an equally important role through its exhibitions and art publications.

Given that both institutions were formally inaugurated in 1954, merely a few years after India's Independence, scholars who have written on the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Lalit Kala Akademi see these institutions as powerful sites for the construction of a national identity. Tracing a deeper history of these institutions from the moment of their conception in the 1930s to their reorganization in the 1960s, I rethink the space of/for art – symbolic, notional, as well as real – in Chapter Three. Unlike the mythologies of the heroic unfolding of modernism, this deeper history allows me to foreground debates, coincidences, accidents, contestations, and negotiations through which the museum, the academy, and the narratives that frame the intuitions today were produced.

Although an institutional history of modern art may well seem counter-intuitive in a dissertation that aims to investigate the relations between avant-gardism, artistic practice, and everyday politics, this chapter on art institutions makes possible a strategic maneuver. By now we are familiar with narratives of the museum and the academy as an instrument of authoritative knowledge making. We are also familiar with the deep interrelation between the museumizing imagination and the discourses of art history. In contrast, by probing both the foundational moments of these two institutions and the modes through which their discourses came into being, Chapter Three attempts to

produce a better understanding of the lineage of modern Indian art as we know it today. In doing so, the chapter simultaneously reveals the cracks in this lineage.

In Chapter Four, I suggest that the museumizing imagination of the National Gallery of Modern Art and the discourses engendered by the publication projects of the Lalit Kala Akademi had implications that extended beyond the immediate confines of the art world. If in the earlier chapters I discuss the relation between modernization, the rhetoric of progress, modes of experience, and aesthetics in the public spaces of late colonial and early post-colonial India, in Chapter Four I turn to the space of the domestic to suggest that the public and the private were reconstituted simultaneously in this period. The central question that Chapter Four asks is: What did modern art signify for audiences unfamiliar with its intellectual discourses and aesthetic virtuosity?

Examining a wide range of material, I foreground allusions and citation of modern art in unexpected spaces – in popular films, advertisements, and even women's journals. Producing an inter-textual mapping of such citations and allusions across museological discourses, art historical narratives, and the popular media, I ask: What then can the pervasiveness of modern art tell us about the early post-Independence cultural field? I suggest that the intersection of experiences creates an interdependent and continually shifting relationship mobilized through the act of reading images, advertisements, magazines, newspapers, billboards, the act of seeing this world reflected on the silver screen and in art works, and the act of inhabiting this world. In this complex experiential field, an experiential field constituted through shared texts and images, everyday life becomes inseparable from public culture.

Continuing with this theme, I then focus on the work of a number of artists such as Nandalal Bose, Pran Nath Mago, and Ratna Fabri who turned to utilitarian design between the 1930s and the 1960s. I suggest that the domestic space became a locus of art practice. Such interventions in the domestic were strategic. Such interventions were political. Such interventions allowed artists to transform the mundane, making art a part of the everyday. Yet, working with a certain notion of the autonomy, art historians have thus far ignored such mundane objects – tables, chairs, handbags, and curtains. By focusing on artistic interventions in the practices of the everyday, Chapter Four rethinks the practices of avant-gardism in South Asia in this period. By recuperating the contours of this art world, I foreground a rhizomatic network of believes and desires that cut across a complex visual world extending from the public to the domestic, from the elite to the popular.

Thus, taking up a central theme, each chapter focuses on a similar timeframe. Given that each chapter traverses an almost identical temporal frame, specific artists and art works return to my narrative at multiple junctures. Although I insert markers in the text to direct the reader to other contexts and other readings of the same event, artist, or artwork that resides elsewhere in this dissertation, I resist producing a synthetic cohesion. In doing so, I attempt to move my text beyond a definitive and structured narrative of the Indian modern. This mode of narration allows me to resist closure. I wish to tease out the ways in which modern art and its aesthetic discourses fundamentally altered and restructured the way people perceived the world, saw their own identities, and negotiated the experience of inhabiting a modern India.

Chapter One

Through *Swadeshi* Eyes: Vision, Modern Art, and Nationalist Politics.

> The important thing is that the question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics be raised at this level, the level of sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization.
>
> - Jacques Rancière, 2004.[40]

> I hate "art for art's sake," which I think is a lamentable aberration of the human mind.
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> - Mohandas K. Gandhi, 1931.[41]

Vision, Modern Art, and Nationalist Politics

Scholars writing on the visual culture of early 20th-century India have identified the decade of the 1930s as marking a sharp break between modern art and political practices. It has been argued that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's (1869-1948) *swadeshi* brought culture and politics into conversation through a mobilization of spinning and artisanal practices as a performative and regenerative act of decolonization.[42] This simultaneously severed connections between anti-colonial politics and modern art. As Partha Mitter writes: "The decline of the Bengal School coincided with this period when art and politics parted company; in Gandhi's program there was no room for art with the possible exception of Nandalal Bose's decoration of the Haripura Congress, done at

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[40] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 18.
[41] Mohandas K. Gandhi, "Statement to *The Island*, London 1931," in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 54 (New Delhi: Publications Division Government of India, 1999), 6. (Henceforth CWMG)
[42] The word *swadeshi* literally means for one's own country. *Swadeshi* signified a rejection of British commodities and a revival of indigenous industries as a mode of decolonization. For a history of the larger politics of *swadeshi*, see Ajit Kumar Dasgupta, *Gandhi's Economic Thought* (London: Routledge, 1996).

Gandhi's behest."[43] Yet, the role of the visual in framing, conceiving, and disseminating an imagination of the nation, community, and identity in the 1920s has been readily acknowledged. Lisa Trivedi especially stresses the centrality of vision in Gandhian politics when she writes, "Gandhi regarded visual experience as a neutral and transparent kind of communication that was open to everyone, and he privileged visual discourse as a means to spread the idea of national community."[44] She sees the sartorial practice of spinning, donning hand-spun cotton *khadi*, and the public display of the spinning wheel as central to community formation. While Trivedi demonstrates the centrality of vision in Gandhian politics, Emma Tarlo too writes about Gandhi's orchestrated manipulation of his own visual image as a performative political act.[45]

Apart from Tarlo and Trivedi, both Sumathi Ramaswamy and Christopher Pinney have also claimed the visual as constitutive of politics. As Ramaswamy writes: "Against the ingrained anti-visualism of the social sciences […] I insist that pictures, too, have stories to show and arguments to manifest, and that images are not just illustrative and reflective but also constitutive and world making rather than world-mirroring."[46] Similarly, Pinney asks: "Can one have a history of images that treats pictures as more than simply a reflection of something else, something more important happening

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[43] Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922*, 379. John Lang, Madhavi Desai, and Miki Desai also assert that the politics of *swadeshi* did not affect architects and architectural practices remained unchanged, perhaps due to its overt dependence on patronage and institutional support. John Lang, Madhavi Desai, and Miki Desai, *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity – India 1880 to 1980* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 117.
[44] Lisa N. Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 38.
[45] Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 62-93.
[46] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

elsewhere? Is it possible to envisage history as in part determined by struggles occurring at the level of the visual?"[47] Pinney quite persuasively suggests that the anti-colonial struggle, at least in part, was fought at the level of the image itself. Indeed, in the recent past, a number of scholars have turned to the visual to better understand *swadeshi* and popular nationalist politics from the 1930s onwards.

Print culture occupies a privileged place in this "pictorial turn," to use W. J. T. Mitchell's phrase, which marks the social sciences today.[48] For example, Sandria Freitag has argued that the visual vocabulary of the nation and nationhood was very quickly disseminated through print capitalism, which had become readily accessible in colonial India in the early 20th century.[49] As a result, popular visual culture, with its iconic and cartographic imaginary, has become intrinsic to our understanding of the working out of 20th-century anti-colonial nationalism and the imagination of a national community. In contrast, as if abruptly fissuring off from this larger visual world, modern art is presented as both autonomous and self-referential. As Ramaswamy suggests, the aesthetic preoccupations of "fine arts" had little impact on the popular visual world of 20th-century India.[50] If indeed that is true, then one has to concede that modern art had little impact on community formations as well.

I want to make a different argument. I want to argue that Gandhian politics and *swadeshi* required, indeed called for, a close affiliation between modern art and politics.

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[47] Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 8.
[48] W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[49] See Sandia B. Freitag, "The Realm of the Visual: Agency and Modern Civil Society" in Sumathi Ramaswamy, ed. *Beyond Appearances: Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 365-387.
[50] Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation*, 57.

Swadeshi signified not only a rejection of British commodities and a revival of indigenous industries as a mode of decolonization but also a rejection of the Anglicization of the everyday more generally. By the 1920s, aesthetics had become a critical ground for the articulation of this national political consciousness. The subsequent importance of the rural for a more inclusive imagination of a national community further brought modern art and nationalist politics into closer association in the 1930s. "The real India lives in its villages," as Gandhi had famously remarked.[51] I want to argue that the 1930s shift of focus from the urban and the recuperation of the rural as the "real" of India demanded a parallel relocation of sense perception for a different imagination of a national community. Given that a community imagines itself through a shared world of legible signs, the incomprehensibility of signs – an incapacity for a particular kind of sense perception – is also the premise for exclusion. The shared realm of the sensible, the visible, and the legible thus determines who is and who is not authorized to partake in a community. A new imagination of the national community then is also a remaking of its aesthetic frame.

The post-1920s politics of *swadeshi* and the recuperation of the rural as that which was authentic to India, then, demanded a "[re]distribution of the sensible." By "distribution of the sensible," Jacques Rancière implies the ways in which modes of social and political participation are determined by modes of perception. He situates this "distribution," not through popular visual practices, but through avant-garde aspirations to "invent a new form of life."[52] The "distribution of the sensible" delimitates what can

[51] CWMG, Vol. 92, 115.
[52] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 16.

and cannot be seen, what can and cannot be said, what can and cannot be heard. The very nature of political action then rests on a redistribution, reorganization, and reorientation of sense experience. In this sense, aesthetics, understood not as a set of artistic practices or a theory of art appreciation but as a "system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience," has much in common with politics.[53] Aesthetics, being a system that conditions, determines, and orients sense experience is thus in essence political as much as politics is in essence aesthetic. Although the arguments presented in this chapter anticipate the thrust of this dissertation, this chapter specifically focuses on modern art practice and the politics of *swadeshi* as it played out in the exhibitions organized during the annual meetings of the Indian National Congress. This allows me to reexamine the intersections between modern art, national imaginings, and community formations.

Scholars including Trivedi, Kama Maclean, and Gyan Prakash have already located Congress exhibitions within the colonial exhibitionary order constituted through industrial exhibitions, cartographic projects, displays of technology and science, as well as anthropological and museological practices. While Trivedi sees Congress exhibitions as a mode of mapping and thus rendering visible the cartographic contours of the nation, Maclean posits the exhibition as a potent space for the "competition of minds."[54] Focusing specifically on contestations between the colonial government and Indian National Congress at the Kumbh Mela, Maclean notes how this important triennial pilgrimage fair at Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh became a site where contending ideologies

[53] Ibid., 13.
[54] Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation*, 59-66; Kama Maclean, *Pilgrimage and Power: The Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, 1765-1954* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 162.

and agendas were played out. Both the government and the nationalist elite significantly relied on modern technology to produce dazzling spectacles – from speaking sculptures to mobile floats – to render visible and persuasive their ideologies for the millions who attended the fair. Writing about colonial museums and exhibitions, Prakash, on the other hand, foregrounds the nexus of vision and the spectacle. He writes: "The project of colonial pedagogy required the 'unlearned' Indian whose education could be accomplished only by repeated visual confrontations with scientific knowledge embodied in objects. But addressing and reforming the eyes of such viewers demanded that science express itself as magic, that it *dazzle* superstition into understanding."[55]

Put differently, this argument can also be read as follows: the success of colonial pedagogy was premised on a certain reformation of vision, the process of unlearning and inculcating a different kind of seeing, perceiving, and comprehending. In order to achieve this reformation, pedagogy had to transform itself into a visible form that was capable of "dazzling" into compliance incongruous native visions. The colonial government's reliance on "ocular demonstrations" as a tool of reform was hardly restricted to the space of the museum and the exhibition.[56] By the mid 19th century, Object Lessons had become embedded in the colonial government's discourses of reform. Developed by the Swiss educationist Johann H. Pestalozzi (1746-1827), these lessons had become an integral part of the education system in England and the colonies by the early 19th century.[57]

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[55] Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 31. Emphasis mine.
[56] Government of Punjab, Proceedings of the Home Department [General], 118/1918, 35, India Office Records, British Library, London (Henceforth IOR).
[57] For a history of Object Lessons, see Jedan Dieter, *Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and the Pestalozzian Method of Language Teaching* (Las Vegas: P. Lang, 1981).

Pestalozzi believed that by having the student closely observe and describe objects drawn from nature, not only could the learner's sense perception be modified but capabilities of moral and ethical judgment also reformed. In colonial art schools established to educate Indians in design, aesthetics, and moral values, Object Lessons led to an emphasis on drawing and systematic productions of drawing textbooks.

Take, for example, *The Illustrated Indian Journal of Art*, an 1851 manual for drawing lessons by Alexander Hunter, the founder of the School of Arts in Madras (established 1850). The exercises in this text were derived from J. D. Harding and J. G. Chapman's drawing books, used extensively in corrective schools in London. Inspired by Harding and Chapman, the *Illustrated Journal of Indian Art* contained step by step drawing lessons which aimed "first to exercise the eye, and then to set before it rigid accuracy."[58] While lessons in the anatomy of flora and fauna provided a frame to see nature appropriately, lessons in human anatomy placed the idealized Greco-Roman body within a measured grid (Figure 2.1). It was assumed that each lesson, when repeated *ad-infinitum* would ultimately, in a performative mode, condition the native eye to see "accurately" and produce a new framework of sense perception. Object Lessons worked through a "metaphysic of the eye," as the scholar Jedan Dieter describes it.[59]

The colonial government's attempt to reformulate native vision through Object Lessons was, however, met with stringent critiques. Resisting British pedagogy, anti-colonial nationalism vehemently argued for a de-colonization of vision, a re-distribution of the sensible. In a series of essays addressed to the Indian National Congress, the

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[58] Alexander Hunter, *The Illustrated Indian Journal of Arts, Part I* (Madras: J. Dumphy, 1851), 4.
[59] Dieter, *Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi*, 49.

reformist art administrator Ernest B. Havell argued that India's cultural and political sovereignty would become a reality only when the Indian mind was decolonized through a rejection of "European spectacles."[60] And, it was through a recuperation of traditional drawing pedagogy that an "authentic" Indian way of seeing, comprehending, and representing the world could be reinstated. Havell's project was neither singular nor unique. At precisely the same time, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), Havell's contemporary, was in process of drawing up an elaborate proposal for the teaching of drawing in schools in urban Sri Lanka. Using medieval Sri Lankan drawing manuals such as the *Rupavaliya*, a text containing instructions for producing images of gods and mythical animals, and the *Vaijayantaya*, a manual of measurements, mixing of colors, and preparation of brushes, Coomaraswamy traced the various steps by which drawing was mastered by the traditional artist.[61] The drawings reproduced by Coomaraswamy provide a sharp contrast to the mimetic realism of Hunter's drawing book series (Figure 2.2). It is, then, at this level – at the level of vision, sense perception, and aesthetic reordering – that anti-colonial politics was articulated. As I argue in this chapter, it is precisely also in this sense that *swadeshi* politics was, in essence, aesthetic.

Art and the Politics of Persuasion: Early 20th-century Spectacles

The Jatiya Mela (national fair), later renamed the Hindu Mela, held annually in Calcutta from 1867 to 1881, was a precursor to Indian National Congress's annual exhibitions. Although the Hindu Mela primarily focused on indigenous fine arts and

[60] Ernest B. Havell, *The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival* (Madras: The Theosophist Office, 1912), 107.
[61] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Teaching of Drawing in Ceylon* (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries Co., 1906).

crafts, agricultural produce, farm implements, and other industrial products were also displayed. The fair was primarily intended to promote national consciousness, patriotism, unity, and self-sufficiency in India in general and Bengal in particular.[62] Strategically timed to coincide with the day of *Chaitra Sankranti*, a traditional harvesting festival, the Hindu Mela very quickly became a popular annual urban festival.[63] This was the first time that the space of the fair, a space for traditional community formations, was appropriated and reinvented to serve a distinctly different ideological program.

This was also the first time that modern Indian art was displayed in a space well beyond the rarefied, racially segregated, and strictly hierarchic British art galleries and salons in colonial India. By the 1860s, a number of British art societies, for example the Calcutta Brush Club and the Simla Fine Art Society, had started organizing annual art exhibitions. Most of these societies had been established for the encouragement of resident European amateur and traveling artists. Although the exhibitions received significant press coverage, participants at these exhibitions were exclusively European and its visitors restricted to the British and the native elite.[64] Even in their position as donors or lenders to the exhibitions, the hierarchy between Europeans and the Indian elite was clearly discernable. For example, although the 1854-1855 exhibition of the Brush Club included a number of Indian donors, none were included in the committee set up to organize the exhibition.[65]

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[62] For the politics of this Mela, see David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979).
[63] Jogeshchandra Bagal, *Hindu Melar Itibritta* (Calcutta: Moitrei, 1968), vi.
[64] Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 66.
[65] Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art*, 47.

It was only in the 1870s that Indian art students from art schools in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras began participating in colonial exhibitions. By this time, these exhibitions had become a forum for the display of progress made by colonial art schools. However, although Indian artists forayed into the "charmed circuit" of "fine arts" constituted almost entirely of European artists and patrons, their works were displayed in a special category reserved for "native artists."[66] It was also in the 1870s that the Simla Fine Art Society opened itself to submissions from Indians in a new section called the Native Industrial Art Section. However, "fine arts" still remained a prerogative of the West. Aimed at encouraging "native workmanship in various branches of ornamental manufacture," the Native Industrial Art Section restricted its submissions to "industrial arts" rather than "Fine Arts."[67]

The Society did not permit the display of oil paintings by Indian artists until 1881, when the Maharaja of Faridkot, a patron of the Society, forced them to accept an oil on canvas titled *Ravenswood* by an artist at his court.[68] It is within this context of a colonial exhibitionary culture that the Mela becomes an important moment. While the Mela's organizers intended the fair to primarily showcase indigenous crafts – textiles, pottery, leatherwork – Dwijendranath Tagore, a patron of the Mela and an art connoisseur, insisted on the inclusion of fine arts. While Indians are quite aware of artisanal products, few had encountered modern art, Tagore argued. Simultaneously, Tagore argued against British views of Indian art as unsophisticated and artisanal.

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[66] Ibid., 46.
[67] Proceedings of the Revenue and Agricultural Department, April 1883, Proceeding 3, IOR.
[68] *Report of the Third Exhibition of Native Fine and Industrial Art* (Simla: Government Press, 1881). Having made this exception, the Society was forced to rename itself the Society for Native Fine and Industrial Art, thereafter accepting works in various media, including oil paintings.

While the Mela's organizers categorically asserted their nationalist motivations by stating that the fair "was neither organized for religious reasons, nor for mere entertainment or pleasure, but for the betterment of the country,"[69] in 1870 the *Anandabazar Patrika*, a Bengali newspaper, compared the Hindu Mela to similar fairs organized by the British for the "entertainment of the *memsahibs*."[70] Although vivid descriptions of the Hindu Mela are not available, this comparison suggests that the Mela functioned well within the culture of colonial exhibitions that were routinely organized in India from 1853 onwards.[71] By the late 19th century, princely states had also started organizing independent exhibitions to promote and encourage local arts, crafts, and industries. Like the Hindu Mela, many of these exhibitions were part of traditional festivals.[72] In 1901, the Indian National Congress joined this larger exhibitionary culture by organizing an industrial and art exhibition, albeit in a small scale, to coincide with its annual meeting. And over the subsequent years, the Congress Industrial exhibition grew significantly more spectacular.

From its very inception in 1885, the Indian National Congress had showed an acute awareness of its own annual meetings as public spectacles. As Rajendralal Mitra, the Bengali archaeologist and Chairman of the Reception Committee of the 1886 annual Congress meeting, stated: "No one who witnessed this vast gathering, one of the greatest ever known in Calcutta, will ever forget it. To not a few, in startling contrast with the

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[69] Cited in Bagal, *Hindu Melar Itibritta*, 7. Translation mine.
[70] Ibid., 21. Translation mine.
[71] The first of these exhibitions, the Exhibition of Native Industry, had been organized in 1853 in Madras by Richard Temple.
[72] For example, the annual Mysore Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition, the first of which was organized in 1888 by the Maharaja of Mysore, a princely state in south India, was part of the traditional Dussehra (festival of lights) celebrations. M. Shama Rao, *Modern Mysore: From the Coronation of Chamaraja Wodeyar X in 1868 to the Present Time* (Bangalore: Higginbothams, 1936), 123.

present scene, arose a remembrance of another vast gathering of representative men from all parts of the Empire – the Delhi Assemblage. But how different the two scenes!"[73] The Delhi Assemblage that Mitra refers to was the ceremony organized in 1877 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Victoria as the Empress of India. Appropriating the format of a traditional *durbar*, ceremonial meetings between Indian princes and their courtiers, the Assemblage had ceremoniously played out a ritual of power and subordination.[74] Gifts given by the Indian princely states to the Prince of Wales during his 1875-1876 tour of India were displayed in the accompanying exhibition. These gifts had a special political significance. It was in commemoration of the Prince's successful visit, as a sign of British imperial relationship with India, that the British Parliament had given the Queen authority to assume the title Empress of India.[75]

The first large scale Congress Industrial exhibition was strategically timed to coincide with the next imperial *durbar* – the Delhi Durbar of 1903. I suggest that by strategically "mimicking" the visual practices of imperial Durbars, the Congress appropriated colonial spectacles, transforming them into strategies of anti-colonial resistance. It was through such elaborate and performative rituals that the Congress very visibly marked the colonial public sphere with its anti-colonial presence. While the 1877

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[73] Abdul M. Zaidi and S. G. Zaidi, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: S. Chand and Company, 1980), 73.
[74] See Bernard Cohen, "Representing Authority in Victorian India" in Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 165-210.
[75] These gifts were also catalogued and repeatedly exhibited in England between 1877 and 1881, both as marks of loyalty on part of the Indian princes and as representative examples of Indian art. Indeed, the two functions were interdependent. In order to function as marks of loyalty it was imperative that the gifts very quickly transform themselves into exemplary representatives of Indian art. For an understanding of the political significance of these art-objects in 19th-century England, see John S. Brewer, *A History of England* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), 707-748.

Durbar commemorated Victoria as the Empress of India, the 1903 Coronation Durbar proclaimed her successor Edward VII as the Emperor of India.

Described as the "grandest thing ever known in Asia," the 1903 Coronation Durbar outdid the former one in splendor and opulence (Figure 2.3).[76] The events of the Durbar were reported so widely that it came to stand in as the exemplary spectacle in British public imagination. So much so that a 1910 sketch published in the *London Illustrated News* depicting the preparations for the Festival of Empire bore the following caption: "Rehearsing the greatest pageant since the Coronation Durbar at Delhi" (Figure 2.4). The 1903 Coronation Durbar thus became a reference point for every imperial spectacle that followed. The art exhibition that accompanied the 1903 Durbar had been conceived as an integral part of the spectacle. The Durbar's "author" Viceroy George Curzon intended the exhibition to redress the grievance that British apathy had brought Indian artisanal practices to a systematic ruin. The exhibition's primarily impetus was to reinstate an image of the British Raj as a patron, benefactor, and protector of Indian art and culture.

In the colony, however, the Coronation Durbar, dubbed the "Curzonation Durbar," faced severe criticism from the Indian press.[77] The most humorous of these was *Lord Curzon in Indian Caricature*, a collection of cartoons, published shortly after the Durbar. The book's tongue-in-cheek introduction proclaimed: "This unpretentious little book is offered as a humble souvenir of the Delhi Durbar: in its pages our popular Viceroy, as the representative in the great Coronation Durbar, of the greatest monarch of

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[76] Charles E. Russell, *The Uprising of the Many* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1907), 187.
[77] Prem Narain, *Press and Politics in India, 1885-1905* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970), 58.

modern times, is the central figure."[78] The frontispiece, reproduced from the *Hindi Punch*, depicts Curzon strenuously laboring at the edifice of the Durbar while Lady Curzon, in the form of a fairy, hovers around the rising pillar, holding conversation with Diwali, the festival of lights, regarding the art exhibition (Figure 2.5). Newspapers, on the other hand, referred to the exhibition as an "ugly" "failure," "a glorified bazaar" with "no surprises."[79]

These reviews were placed alongside its rivaling event: the opening of the 18th annual meeting of the Indian National Congress and its "marvelous" exhibition.[80] In this year, the exhibition became a central focus of the Congress meeting with, for the first time, a separate committee formed for curating the exhibition.[81] Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad of the princely state of Baroda, a well-known patron of art, lent support to the exhibition.[82] Local artists, architecture students, and teachers from Kala Bhavan, a technical and industrial art school set up by Gaekwad in 1890 in Baroda, were involved in the erection and decoration of the meeting's temporary pavilions.[83] Two of the school's woodcarving students, Lallubhai Mansukhram and Bhaichand Ghelabhai, had already won awards at the 1895 Empire of India Exhibition in London. These and other

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[78] Harishchandra Talcherkar, *Lord Curzon in Indian Caricature, Being a Collection of Cartoons* (Bombay: Babajee Sakharam and Co., 1903), i.
[79] For an overview of vernacular press reviews, see Julie F. Codell, "Gentleman Connoisseurs and Capitalists: Modern British Imperial Identity in the 1903 Delhi Durbar's Exhibition of Indian Art" in Dana Arnold, ed. *Cultural Identities and the Aesthetics of Britishness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 134-163, 153-154.
[80] *Hindoo Patriot*, December 30, 1902, 6. Cited in Codell, "Gentleman Connoisseurs and Capitalists," 155.
[81] Zaidi and Zaidi, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 4.
[82] For Sayajirao Gaekward's art patronage, see Sheikh, ed. *Contemporary Art in Baroda*.
[83] For a history of Kala Bhavan, see Makrad Mehta, "Science Verses Technology: The Early Years of the Kala Bhavan, Baroda, 1890-1896," *Indian Journal of the History of Science* Vol. 7, No. 2 (1992), 145-170.

students of the Kala Bhavan's School of Art submitted works for display at the 1903 Congress Exhibition (Figure 2.6).[84]

The 1903 annual meeting and exhibition of the Indian National Congress suggests that the spectacle of the Prince of Wales' 1875-1876 tour of India, the 1877 Assemblage, and the subsequent 1903 Durbar had left an indelible mark on the Indian imagination. If the Durbars had set the precedence of erecting elaborate temporary buildings and pavilions, royal tours of India had initiated the practice of constructing ceremonial gateways and decorating towns with banners, festoons, and lights. For example, in preparation of the Prince of Wale's 1875 visit, the whole of the Bombay city had been decorated by students of the Bombay School of Art (established 1857) with flags, brightly colored festoons, ceremonial gateways, and festive lanterns (Figure 2.7).[85]

These aesthetic practices now became an integral part of Congress rituals. During the 1903 Madras session of the Congress, the city was embellished with festoons, evergreens, triumphal arches, and banners while private residences were decorated with flags and paper lanterns. Such elaborate practices transformed the public spaces of the city for the duration of the meetings allowing the Congress to very visibly mark its presence in the colonial public sphere. By "mimicking" the format of imperial Durbars, colonial spectacles were thus appropriated and made into strategies of anti-colonial

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[84] For a list of exhibits, see H. T. Harris, *The Madras Industrial and Arts Exhibition 1903: Descriptive and Critical Report on the Exhibits, with 21 Photo-Process Plates, the Awards List, and an Index* (Madras: Srinivasa, Varadachari, and Co., 1905).

[85] See William E. Gladstone Solomon, *The Bombay Revival of Indian Art* (Bombay: Published with permission of the Government of Bombay, n.d.), 114.

resistance.[86] This strategy of aesthetically marking the public spaces of urban India as a political practice necessitated a greater involvement of art students, artists, and architects. A "contractor," "one to whom Madras owes not a few of the buildings which are its main attractions," was responsible for designing the Congress exhibition pavilion in 1903 (Figure 2.8).[87]

The fact that the well-known architect or "contractor" responsible for a number of prominent buildings in Madras remained anonymous in the Congress reports suggests that architecture, as a profession in the Western sense, had not yet come into being. In contrast, Ravi Varma (1848-1906), who was invited as the judge for the fine arts section, was already recognized as India's most prominent artist. Born in the south Indian princely state of Travancore, Varma's reputation was well established by the late 19th century. By 1903, Varma had become something of a national hero.[88] That Varma was not a product of the colonial art school system yet was proficient in European techniques of *trompe-l'oeil* added to the artist's charisma.[89] Befriended by Congress leaders including Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Dadabhai Naoroji and felicitated in 1904 by the

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[86] Homi Bhabha's notion of mimicry is useful here. Bhabha suggests that mimicry as a practice both constitutes and disrupts the working out of colonial power. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 85-92.
[87] Zaidi and Zaidi, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 4, 442.
[88] For example, see Author Unknown, *Ravi Varma: The Indian Artist* (Allahabad: Indian Press, 1903). For later critical assessments, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Westernization and Tradition in South Indian Painting in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906)," *Studies in History* Vol. 2, No. 2 (1986), 166-198.
[89] Varma's struggle to master the technique of oil painting had taken on a legendary ring even during the artist's lifetime: Varma "took the fire" of Fine Arts from the British to mobilize it for a distinctly national imagination, as one of the artist's early biographers, K. P. Padmanabhan Tampy, put it. K. P. Padmanabhan Tampy, *Ravi Varma: A Monograph* (Trivandrum: Kripon and Co, 1934), 7.

Congress for his contributions to the nationalist movement, Varma's early biographers described him as a key protagonist in the task of nation-building.[90]

At the 1903 Congress exhibition in Madras, Varma displayed his oil on canvas *Lady in Moonlight* (Figure 2.9). While sartorial markings such as the use of regional attire and jewelry ensured easy identification with the figure for its local audiences, the image simultaneously located the figure of the waiting woman within romantic tropes already well established in pre-colonial Sanskrit poetry. Paintings such as these acquired multilayered meanings, especially in context to contemporaneous nationalist impetus for reviving Sanskrit literary traditions.

Simultaneously, the Ravi Varma Press, established by the artist at Lonavala in the 1890s, disseminated Varma's portraits of nationalist leaders to a wider audience. For Varma's early 20th-century biographers, it is the establishment of this press that bore testimony to the artist's patriotism. Varma's mass-disseminated oleographs functioned just like nationalist speeches, the Congress leader Surendranath Banerjee is reported to have remarked.[91] However, Ravi Varma's status as the foremost Indian artist would soon be eclipsed by Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), whose works were also displayed at the 1903 Congress exhibition.

By the first decade of the 20th century, displacing Varma's Neo-Classical academic realism, Tagore's "Indian style" or "Oriental style" painting emerged as the locus of a new "national art." Abanindranath Tagore soon gathered around himself a group of dedicated pupils. With Tagore as the progenitor, this new group of artists –

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[90] For example, see Ramananda Chatterjee, "Ravi Varma," *Modern Review* Vol. 1, No.1-6 (1907), 88-90; S. A. Pillai, *Ravi Varma and His Art* (Publisher and Place of Publication Unknown, 1928).
[91] N. Balakrishnan Nair, *Raja Ravi Varma* (Trivandrum: Publisher Unknown, 1953), 141.

known as the New Calcutta School or the Bengal School – developed a style, which privileged emotive qualities over correctness in form and proportions. The Bengal School's rejection of oil painting and academic realism for tempera and indigenous artistic traditions began as a localized, regional trend, which found a national support base in the *swadeshi* movement. Art historians and critics such as E. B. Havell and Ananda Coomaraswamy, as well as nationalist leaders including the Anglo-Irish social worker Sister Nivedita (Margaret Elizabeth Noble) and the Irish Theosophist Annie Besant, played an important role in framing discourses of art and *swadeshi* around Tagore and his pupils. Varma now stood identified as derivative, "vulgar" in his imitation of a foreign artistic repertoire.[92]

In contrast, Tagore's Japanese wash-style 1904-1905 painting *Bharat-mata* or *Mother India* became an iconic image of anti-Partition *swadeshi* in Bengal (Figure 2.10). The nation, here imagined as a young acetic woman dressed in saffron and wearing *rudrakshya* (the markers of renunciation), holds in her four hands a rosary, a sheaf of grain, cloth, and a manuscript – symbolizing the promise of food, clothing, spiritual salvation, and education. The abstract ideal of nationalism was thus given a tangible (Hindu) form in this iconic image. *Bharat-mata* was enlarged on a silk banner and carried in *swadeshi* processions in Calcutta.

However, even as the Bengal School stood identified with *swadeshi*, from the 1920s onwards Abanindranath Tagore, the doyen of this movement, increasingly distanced himself both from politics and from the gouaches that stood identified as the

[92] This criticism of Ravi Varma was not based on a specific aesthetic criterion but on intuitively defined rhetorical aesthetic and ethical discourses, as Guha-Thakurta has pointed out. See Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art*, 187.

Bengal School style. The watercolor *The Hunchback of Fishbone* from the artist's *Arabian Nights* series (ca. 1930-1933) is often read as symptomatic of the artist's disengagement from politics (Figure 2.11).[93] By placing the narrative within the artist's three-storied residence, Tagore reproduced a hierarchical structure for the art world where the creative artist occupied the uppermost level, disengaged both from craftsmanly practices and nationalist politics. Craftsmen – the tailor, the potter, and the metalworker – inhabit the first floor of the mansion. Intellectuals, politicians, and bureaucrats occupy the second floor. The individual artist genius places himself at the uppermost level of the mansion.

In contrast to the nationalist public sphere marked by political action, the true habitat of the artist genius was then the *andarmahal*, the inner spheres of the home, and the *antarmahal*, the inner creative world, as Tagore noted in his memoir.[94] Over the subsequent years, Abanindranath withdrew further into an idiosyncratic world of personal metaphors and symbols, creating toy-like forms with driftwood. For scholars writing on the Bengal School, Tagore's withdrawal into a self-referential and autonomous domain of art becomes a parable of art's disengagement from politics. As Tapati Guha-Thakurta writes, "Clearly, Abanindranath's art movement represented a major break: it marked the coming of age of 'Indian' art and 'artists', in the new modern sense of the terms."[95]

Histories of this coming of age are marked by the claiming of a separate institutional space for the artist, a space distinct from that occupied by the traditional artisan. This then becomes the template upon which a teleological narrative of the

[93] For example, see Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art*, 267-268.
[94] Tagore, *Gharoa*, 75-76.
[95] Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian"Art*, 5.

unfolding of modern art in India is scripted. It is impossible to imagine, within this existing episteme, a space where modern art can exceed the designated confines of the "art world."[96] It is this "art world," composed of a cooperation between historians, critics, and artists that produces the framework through which art comes into being, is made visible in the gallery or exhibition space, is consumed, is critiqued and discussed. By separating art from the practices of the everyday, the existing strictures and closures of this "art world" make impossible an understanding of art's function within the space of the everyday. And it is precisely this purported closure that has led scholars, for example Ramaswamy, to claim that "despite the interventions of practitioners of fine arts," the larger visual world of 20th-century India remained a world of mechanical reproduction and popular print culture.[97] Yet, a very slight shift in focus makes obvious a close affiliation between modern art and everyday politics.

In the following section, I will focus on the 1920s. I want to argue against the tendency to read the decade of the 1920s as a rupture between aesthetic and political discourses and the coming into being of an autonomous domain of modern art. 1920s *swadeshi* signaled a reorientation of thought – *khadimindedness* as Gandhi described it.[98] This new political imperative was also an aesthetic imperative. With the "Indian style" reordering of the Congress pavilions and the introduction of sculptures and portraits into the Congress precincts, the visuality of the Indian National Congress meetings underwent a complete transformation in the 1920s. I suggest that not only did the architecture of the

[96] Here I specifically draw on the sociologist Howard Becker's notion of the art world as "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things." Howard S. Becker, *Art worlds* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1982), x.
[97] Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation*, 57.
[98] CWMG, Vol. 54, 375.

pavilions reflect an intimate awareness of contemporaneous aesthetic and art historical debates but an increasing number of artists also began participating in the Congress meetings. Paintings and sculptures displayed in the Congress precincts simultaneously occupied entirely different registers – sometimes critically discussed in art journals, sometimes functioning as ritualized markers of nationalism and patriotism. In certain ways, then, modern art and aesthetics not only framed but also became synonymous with 1920s *swadeshi*.

Aesthetics, Modern Art, Nationalist Politics, and Art History: The 1920s

In the course of 1919-1920, following his return to India from South Africa, Gandhi gained prominence within nationalist politics and the Indian National Congress. In 1920, in spite of some initial resistance on part of a number of Congress leaders, the Indian National Congress passed the Non-Cooperation Resolution at Gandhi's insistence. This call for Non-Cooperation involved the boycott of imported British merchandise as well as British educational, judicial, and electoral systems in favor of nationalist schools, arbitration courts, handspun cotton (*khadi*), and cottage industries. Simultaneously, in an effort to make Congress "a real mass political party," crucial changes were made within the Congress, also at Gandhi's insistence.[99] Explicating the connections between *swadeshi* and *swaraj* (to put it simply, self-government or home rule) through his speeches and writings, Gandhi, in turn, promised *swaraj* within one year.[100] In keeping

[99] Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (Madras: Macmillan, 1983), 197.
[100] For example see Gandhi's essays published in *Young India* in the early 1920s. For a more nuanced reading of *swaraj*, see Ajay Skaria, "Only One Word Properly Altered," in Debjani Ganguly and John Docker, eds. *Rethinking Gandhi and Nonviolent Relationality: Global Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 115-138.

with the transformation within the Congress, the 1921 exhibition of the Congress annual meeting focused specifically on *khadi* and indigenous artisanal industries.[101] And in the early 1920s, the Congress made spinning and the use of *khadi* compulsory for its members.[102]

The 1920s *swadeshi* invented and popularized a new "national style." As Lisa Trivedi writes:

> The most striking aspect of this style was a form of nationalist dress that was adopted by much of India's predominantly middle-class Congress members, but *swadeshi* provided more than new articles of clothing. It popularized a reformed lifestyle. Patriots did more than wear *khadi* clothing; they slept on *khadi* bed linens and decorated their homes, inside out, with the cloth. Even more significantly, because *khadi* was a tangible object, it easily became within a decade a popular, powerful political symbol used in protests and other gatherings in British India's public spaces.[103]

Gandhi's journal, *Young India*, actively propagated this new style through advertisements and catalogs of *khadi* products. This was hardly contrary to Gandhi's intentions. As Gandhi stated: "Khadi is as much for the fastidious as it is for the poor. From the very beginning it has been our endeavour to introduce into Khadi as much beauty and decoration as we can. […] This was and still is the correct [attitude]. *Khadimindedness*

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[101] The exhibition was divided into four sections: a demonstrations section, a museum, a sales room, and a space for display of works submitted for a competition of *khadi* products. While the demonstrations section educated the visitors on spinning processes, the museum displayed exemplary specimens of handspun cloth and other products including woodwork, earthenware, stoneware, and leather products. Over the course of a week, 400000 visitors came to the exhibition.

[102] However, by the late 1920s Congress had stopped actively promoting *khadi* although it continued to posit *khadi* as a mark of anti-colonial resistance.

[103] Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation*, 1-2.

does not mean that art and design should have no place in khadi."[104] In effect, while *swadeshi* signified a reorientation of thought (*khadimindednes*), it simultaneously reorganized public and private spaces of habitation, lending them specific anti-colonial significance. Indeed, the two were interdependent.

While descriptions of a *khadiminded* reordering of the domestic are not available, the transformations in the interior design and decoration of the pavilions at the 1921 Congress meeting offers a glimpse into the ways in which 1920s Gandhian politics transformed space. If the earlier meetings of the Indian National Congress mimicked the format of imperial Durbars as strategies of anti-colonial resistance, the 1921 Congress meeting in Ahmedabad, Gujarat provided a distinctly different spectacle. Every temporary structure erected in the hundred acres occupied by the Congress was constructed with *khadi*. In contrast to the "luxuriously furnished" pavilions of the previous Congress meetings, complete with heavy curtains, imposing pillars, chandeliers, and European style "waiting and drawing rooms," the 1921 pavilions were decorated in an "Oriental style," with *khadi* rugs, mattresses, and cushions on the floor.[105]

This reordering is significant. By the early 20th century, material artifacts had already begun to function as "external signs that spoke lucidly of inner consciousness of their characters," as Swati Chattopadhaya has pointed out in her study on urbanity and socialization in colonial Calcutta.[106] While the use of Western artifacts and furniture in elite mansions was common in the late 18th and the 19th centuries, it was through the

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[104] CWMG, Vol. 54, 375. Emphasis mine.
[105] Zaidi and Zaidi, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 1, 543.
[106] Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 217.

work of novelists such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Rameshchandra Dutta in 1870s Bengal that these artifacts began to accrue particular kinds of meanings that associated them with undesirable lifestyle choices. The negative connotations of Western furnishing in terms of a loss of indigenous subjectivities had such a wide currency by the late 19th century that a number of elite families of Calcutta auctioned off their collections of Western art, European decorative objects, and furniture as a mark of their commitment to the ideals of *swadeshi*.[107] "Indian style" furnishings with low seating arrangements and indigenous crafts now replaced the Europeanized interiors. The "Oriental style" *baithak-khana* with its ubiquitous mattresses and cushions on the floor, a room where men gathered to socialize, gained a renewed popularity in urban Calcutta. Although this transformation in colonial Calcutta is well documented in contemporaneous literature, there is sufficient reason to believe that the rejection of European domestic artifacts had a much larger purport.

The Congress interiors then replicated the *baithak-khana*. This reordering not only engendered an entirely different aesthetic but also altered the way in which the body navigated through, and interacted with, space. While one is expected to sit upright on a chair with feet set on the floor, the possibility of sitting cross-legged while reclining on cushions allowed for a certain freedom of the body. It is likely that this strategic move away from the formal atmosphere of the European drawing room towards the more informal *baithak-khana* with its indigenous modes of sitting made possible a different kind of socialization. The *baithak-khana* was essentially a space where men gathered – a

[107] See Abanindranath Tagore, *Apon Katha: My Story* (Chennai: Tara Books, 2004).

space that was, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, also the space for democratic speech, friendship, camaraderie, and "new sentiments of intimacy."[108]

The culture of the *baithak-khana* was, as Chattopadhaya reminds us, quintessentially a product of colonial urbanity "firmly rooted in the familiar network of the neighborhood."[109] Within the culture of the *baithak-khana*, identity was constructed in terms of the local, the regional. It is interesting that the Congress appropriated the form of a *baithak-khana* at a time when the organization attempted to reorient itself to focus on the local. This concern with the local also manifested itself in the architecture of the four temporary gateways erected to mark out the boundaries of the 1921 Congress meeting site in Ahmedabad. However, rather than drawing on contemporary architecture of Ahmedabad, the gateways replicated the much famed Teen Darwaza, constructed in 1411 by Ahmed Shah, the founder of the city of Ahmedabad. In contrast to the generic triumphal arches constructed on occasion of the previous Congress meetings, this doorway very skillfully located the Congress within the preexisting pre-colonial fabric of Ahmedabad, offering the residents of the city an already familiar icon.

Over the subsequent years, the Congress's citation of pre-modern architecture grew significantly more politicized. In 1922, the Congress meeting was held in Gaya, Bihar. As was customary, four temporary gateways were constructed. The gateways resembled the eastern gateway of the ca. 2nd-century BCE Sanchi Stupa I, a Buddhist monument in the princely state of Bhopal. The citation of a Buddhist monument paralleled the Congress' involvement in the controversy between Hindus and Buddhists

[108] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 195.
[109] Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 208.

over ownership of the Bodhgaya temple, located approximately seven miles from Gaya. Not surprisingly, the Congress session was attended by a large number of Buddhists from across the country.[110] Here, the Maha Bodhi Society, a premier Buddhist organization, formally requested the Congress to intervene in the conflict between Hindus and Buddhists over ownership of the temple at Bodhgaya.[111] Within the next four years, Rajendra Prasad – a lawyer from Bhopal, the future President of the Congress, and a close associate of Gandhi – would be asked to head a committee to prepare a proposal for an amenable solution to the conflict.

In spite of a commitment to the local, why did the Congress choose to cite Sanchi, a monument located at a distance of six hundred and twenty two miles from Gaya? The citation of Sanchi is more symbolically charged than is immediately apparent. By the early 20th century, Sanchi occupied a peculiarly valorized position both in the colonial and nationalist imaginary. The eastern gateway of Sanchi Stupa I had been central to the 19th-century celebration of Sanchi as the Buddhist monument *par excellence*. A replica of this gateway had been ceremoniously erected in the South Kensington Museum's gallery in London among plaster cast replicas of monuments from various parts of the world and displayed at the London International Exhibition of 1871 as exemplary of Indian architecture. While the colonial archaeologist James Fergusson had first proclaimed

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[110] See Bhikkhu Silabhadra, "Bodhgaya Temple Question," *Maha Bodhi Society of India: Diamond Jubilee Souvenir* (Calcutta: Maha Bodhi Society, 1952), 177-181.

[111] For a history of the conflict between Hindus and Buddhists over ownership of the Bodhgaya temple, see Dipak K. Barua, *Buddha Gaya Temple, Its History* (Bodh Gaya: Buddha Gaya Temple Management Committee, 1981); Jacob N. Kinnard, "When the Buddha Sued Vishnu" in John Holt, Jacob N. Kinnard, and Jonathan S. Walters, eds. *Constituting Communities: Theravāda Buddhism and the Religious Cultures of South and South East Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 85-106; Alan Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya (1811-1949): Anagarika Dharmapala and the Mahabodhi Temple* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2006); Frederick M. Asher, *Bodh Gaya: Monumental Legacy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Sanchi as the epitome of Indian architecture, the importance of the relief sculptures of Sanchi was foregrounded by early 20th-century Orientalist and nationalist scholars such as Havell and Coomaraswamy.[112] By the end of the 19th century, Sanchi stood in as representative of Buddhist art and architecture of India. The Congress's citation of Sanchi, then, drew on this complex and multilayered 19th and early 20th-century archaeological, museological, art historical, and aesthetic discourses.

The organization of an exhibition of pre-modern art at the 1925 meeting at Kanpur further brings into sharp focus the growing importance of artistic and aesthetic discourses within Congress politics. Organized by the art historian and museologist Rai Krishna Das with objects from the Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum at Varanasi, this exhibition attempted to present a chronological history of Indian art through sculptures, paintings, and photographic representations of monuments. The Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum had enjoyed the support of Gandhi. Founded by Das in 1920, the Museum positioned itself against the politics of the more orthodox Hindu-centric Benaras Hindu University founded by Madan Mahan Malaviya.[113] In this, Das received support from Gandhi himself, who later openly differed with Malaviya on the issue of building a temple inside the Benaras Hindu University premises.[114] The Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum, through its display and collections, underscored a history of Hindu-Muslim unity in the region. For example, Das very strategically displayed a 17th century order by

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[112] For example, see James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1876); Ernest B. Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (London: John Murray, 1908); Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* (London: T. N. Foulis, 1913).
[113] Ironically, in 1950, the Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum had to integrate with the Benaras Hindu University – the institution which it had opposed at the time of its founding – due to a lack of resources.
[114] Amaresh Misra, "Benares: The Many Splendoured City," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 28, No. 45 (1993), 2448-2453, 2451.

the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb urging his officials to protect the temples of Varanasi. It was this politics of syncretism that framed the 1925 Congress exhibition organized by Das.[115]

This interest in pre-modern art was paralleled by an increased participation of artists in the Congress meetings. As we already know, the interiors of the pavilions had been reorganized in an "Oriental style" at the 1921 meeting at Ahmedabad and, for the first time, the gateways marking the site mimicked pre-colonial architecture of the city. It was also here that portrait busts, photographs, and oil paintings of nationalist leaders were first introduced within the Congress precincts. This meeting then marks a dramatic shift in the visual culture of the Indian National Congress. While the public circulation of photographs of nationalist leaders had begun by the late 19th century, it was only in the 1920s that this trend transformed into a minor industry churning out thousands of images each year.[116]

Paintings and sculptures displayed in the Congress pavilions were now routinely reproduced and circulated through postcards and posters. For example, in 1922 a photograph of Gandhi by the Bombay-based photographer C. Nageswar Rao was displayed in the Congress pavilion. In the very next year, the artist converted this photograph into an oil painting. This life-size portrait, "especially painted for the occasion," was given the "place of honor" during the 1923 Congress session in Kakinada,

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[115] It is perhaps not a coincidence that this exhibition took place at a time of intense Hindu-Muslim conflicts across the country. See Sarkar, *Modern India*, 233-237.

[116] For an overview of late 19th-century circulations of political photographs, see Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (London: Reakton Books, 1997), 72-101. Although Pinney notes the increase in popularity of postcards and prints of nationalist leaders in 1920s, he does not account for this transformation.

Andhra Pradesh.[117] While it is now impossible to locate either the original photograph or the oil painting, Rao's representation of Gandhi was repeatedly reproduced in texts and published by the various printing presses across the country. Similarly, a 1927 photograph of Gandhi by D. B. Mahulikar, an artist associated with the Gujarat Vidyapith was widely disseminated in the form of a chromolithograph published by the Poona-based Chitrashala Press (Figure 2.12).

Similarly, Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal (1901-2003), an artist we will encounter in Chapter Three, traveled to Lahore to produce a portrait bust of Lala Lajpat Rai, an eminent Congress leader who had only just passed away (Figure 2.13). Placed at the center of the Congress site during the 1929 session at Lahore, Sanyal's sculpture became "a place of pilgrimage, the shrine."[118] Even as visitors paid homage to the revered nationalist leader at the "shrine," the sculpture itself simultaneously occupied an entirely different domain of Fine Arts. Even as it functioned as a pilgrimage site, reviews published in contemporary newspapers analyzed the artistic merits of the sculpture. It was also during the Lahore session that the photographer Rao received national fame for his portrait of Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964). Here, Motilal Nehru handed over charge of the Congress Presidentship to his son, Jawaharlal, who rode to the pavilion on horseback while thousands of spectators thronged the route, showering flowers.[119] Rao photographed this much-described event. Although Rao himself was not associated with

[117] Zaidi and Zaidi, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 8, 153.
[118] Zaidi and Zaidi, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 9, 563.
[119] For a vivid description, see Dinanath Gopal Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan: Faith is a Battle* (New Delhi: Popular Prakashan, 1967), 62.

any printing press, the photograph "of which thousands of copies have been printed" became a template for a number of popular prints.[120]

Simultaneously, the Congress itself started publishing souvenirs and photographic albums in conjunction with the Indian Album Publishing Company to commemorate its annual meetings. The Madras-based Indian Album Publishing Company was best known for its monthly art journal, *Indian Album*, which not only reproduced the work of artists but also included, "illustrated details of Agricultural, Industrial and Material developments of India […] Photographs of Governors, Lieut. Governors, of the Ruling Princes and Chiefs of India, the portraits of their illustrious ancestors and their Palaces, besides the views of important Temples, Mosques, Churches, Public Buildings, Architecture, and places of interest of the different States of British India and of Zamindars, Noblemen and Women of India, officials, Non-officials, Members of the Indian Imperial and Provincial Legislatures and Public Bodies and of Fine Art Color Insets, Photogravures, Drawings, etc."[121] It was this eclecticism that the Indian Album Publishing Company brought to its 1928 *Congress Album*.

Images reproduced in these albums ranged from bird's eye views of cities that had been popularized by the late 19th-century photographer Deen Dayal (1844-1905), photographs of monuments that resembled postcards and stereoviews aimed at tourists, as well as portraits of nationalist leaders and reproductions of popular prints of Gandhi with Hindu deities (Figure 2.14, 2.15). The great demand for these albums led to the

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[120] K. Rama Rao, *The Pen as my Sword: Memoirs of a Journalist* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 53.
[121] Advertisement published in *The Congress Album* (Madras: Indian Album Publishing Company and the Indian National Congress, 1928), unpaginated.

production of similar albums by other publishing firms, for example the 1928 *Congress Number* by the Bombay Chronicle. Unlike the eclecticism of the Indian Album Publishing Company, the Bombay Chronicle focused more specifically on modern and pre-modern art. As the Bombay Chronicle declared in an advertisement for its *Congress Number*: "The Art Section is its most striking feature."[122]

Art had become so integral to the Indian National Congress that artists, for instance the Madras-based sculptor M. S. Nagappa, began using the Congress souvenirs and albums as an appropriate venue to announce their presence to a middle class public. Nagappa's advertisement, couched between photographs of nationalist leaders, first appeared in *The Congress Souvenir 1917: An Album Containing over Eighty Portraits with A Life Sketch of Mrs. Annie Besant and A Short History of The Indian National Congress*. The full-page advertisement with an image of a life-size sculpture of the Congress leader Anne Besant, rather innocuously blended in with the other photographs (Figure 2.16). The format of the announcement, however, betrayed its status as an advertisement for the sculptor. Following an already established culture of citing testimonies from nationalist leaders endorsing commercial products, the announcement stated: "The work executed as a labor of love has been inspected by the undermentioned Ladies and Gentlemen, and their opinion is to the effect that the Statue, is the living image of Mrs. Besant herself only without life, with every detail admirably displayed to

[122] Ibid.

exactitude the posture assuming being that of addressing a thoughtful theme to an audience."[123]

This statement was followed by the endorsement of a number of Congress leaders, including Anne Besant herself. Thus, even as Besant supported the "Indian style" of the Bengal School and critiqued Ravi Varma's purported imitation of Western artistic repertoires, she simultaneously endorsed Nagappa's academicism. Nagappa, very strategically distinguishing his own announcement from a million others selling commercial products, inserted an excerpt of a review of his sculptures titled "An able Indian Sculptor" published in the journal *New India*. Concurrently, Nagappa not only participated in numerous fine art exhibitions and salons across India but was also, by the late 1920s, was one of Madras' best known artists responsible for a number of public sculptures in the city.[124]

Perhaps in keeping with the artist's reputation, Nagappa's center spread announcement in the 1928 *Congress Album* did away the advertising format. Instead, the announcement merely reproduced the artist's best-known sculptures. While the first page reproduced portraits of Congress leaders, the second page contained a Neo-Classical style sculpture of the goddess Saraswati as well as imaginative representations of mythological themes (Figure 2.17). Stylistically, Nagappa's work fits well within the larger sculptural repertoire prevalent in 1920s India – a style that was characterized by realistic precision

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[123] Advertisement published in S. Subramania Aiyer and B. P. Wadia, *The Congress Souvenir 1917: An Album Containing over Eighty Portraits with A Life Sketch of Mrs. Annie Besant and A Short History of The Indian National Congress* (Madras: Congress Souvenir Agency, 1917), unpaginated.

[124] The memoirs of W. S. Krishnaswami Nayudu, an eminent Judge at the Madras High Court and part of the city's cultural elite remains the best source for an understanding of Nagppas's career. This, and other texts by Nayudu on the social and cultural ethos of early 20th-century Madras offer a glimpse into Nagppas's prominence in Madras. See W. S. Krishnaswami Nayudu, *My Memoirs* (Madras: Krishnaswami Nayudu, 1977); W. S. Krishnaswami Nayudu, *Old Madras* (Madras: Solden, 1965).

along with an idealization of form. Visually, his dramatic staged compositions are similar to the south Indian artist Ravi Varma's tableau-like history paintings. Of course, given that Nagappa was based in Madras, it is likely that the sculptor was all too familiar with Varma's works. Nagappa's academic realist sculptures, placed alongside portraits of Congress leaders, photographs of Congress pavilions, and reports of the exhibitions where Nagappa's works were also displayed thus became embedded in the larger visual culture of the Indian National Congress.

Thus, rather anachronistically, in spite of the Congress's self-professed commitment to *swadeshi*, explicit interest in pre-modern art, and the reordering of the Congress pavilions as an expression of *khadimindedness*, the visuality of the Congress – the photographs, paintings, and sculptures displayed at the pavilions and reproduced in albums and souvenirs – continued to function well within the clichés of academic, Neo-Classical, and history painting genres propagated by the colonial art schools. The disjuncture between *khadimindedness* and visual practices perhaps becomes most obvious in a hand-colored photograph of Gandhi published in the 1928 *Congress Album*.

Here, Gandhi is shown wearing a *khadi* wrap, sitting cross-legged on the floor (Figure 2.18). In the painted background are conventional markers of opulence symptomatic of elite houses in colonial India – an ornate winding staircase, heavy satin curtains, and a lavishly carved European-style pillar. Keenly aware of the slippage between Congress ideals and practices, Gandhi boycotted the 1928 Congress exhibition. As a correspondent for the *Khadi Patrika*, a monthly supplement to Gandhi's *Young India*, wrote in 1929: "The Congress Exhibition last year was more of a *tamasha* [farce]

than an exhibition in the real sense of the term. And it was quite in the fitness of things that Gandhiji should have boycotted the thing."[125]

Gandhi's own views on art are perhaps best summarized in a 1931statement to the London-based journal *The Island*. Here Gandhi quite eloquently critiqued notions of "art for art's sake," which he called "a lamentable aberration of the human mind." To be socially relevant, art had to become a conduit for "moral and spiritual elevation."[126] This idea of art as a conduit for moral and spiritual elevation was a trope well ingrained in nationalist art historical and aesthetic discourses. In the 1909 text *Essays in National Idealism* – a text Gandhi was familiar with, having first read it in 1910 – the art historian Coomaraswamy had powerfully asserted spiritualism and idealism as the basis of Indian art.[127] For Coomaraswamy, the decline of artistic traditions mirrored a larger cultural, moral, and spiritual decline. A regeneration of artistic traditions, then, was tantamount to a symbolic recovery of the nation as well.

His ideas resonated with his contemporary Havell's privileging of art in delineating the moral, spiritual, and ethical lives of communities. For Havell and Coomaraswamy, the transformation of art into a commodity for display and collection by a select elite had resulted in the dystopia that marked 20th-century colonial metropolitan cities in India. Both contrasted this urban disfunctionality with a utopian rural, where art was intrinsic to the everyday lives of village communities. The rural was thus produced as an idealized space "where every carpenter, mason, potter, blacksmith, brass-smith, and

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[125] Author Unknown, "Notes: Gandhiji and the Exhibition," *Khadi Patrika* No. 6 (1929), 1.
[126] M. K. Gandhi, Statement to *The Island*, London 1931.
[127] CWMG, Vol. 11, 162; Ananda K. Coomaraswamy *Essays in National Idealism* (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries Co., 1909).

weaver is an artist, and the making of cooking pots is as much an artistic and religious work as the building of the village temple."[128]

This utopian rural – a space where discourses of art, aesthetics, ethics, and morality converged – would become central to nationalist politics in the 1930s. Resigning from Congress leadership, Gandhi established the All India Village Industries Association in 1934 under the aegis of the Indian National Congress. In the 1920s, the Congress had calibrated its politics to a larger urban audience as a result of which rural India remained marginal in the program of the nationalist movement. [129] The 1934 All India Village Industries Association resolution aimed to redress this by shifting the focus of the Congress from the urban to the rural.

The 1930s valorization of the rural demanded yet another aesthetic shift, one that produced the figure of the modern artist as an interlocutor. In effect, the space of the Congress exhibition exceeded the confines of the meeting pavilion to encompass the entire Congress site – a site that was also a temporary space of habitation, the space of/for politics in a very literal sense. The entire Congress site thus became an Object Lesson in *swadeshi*. Artworks – paintings, sculptures, and murals – installed across the site served to insert art into spaces of everyday habitation, aestheticizing the everyday. Aesthetics is in essence politics, much like politics is in essence aesthetic. I argue that this aesthetic sensibility carried within it the potential for reordering the everyday, binding art praxis and political praxis in an intricate relationship of mutual imbrications. This is an

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[128] Havell, *Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival*, 99.
[129] For the 1920s politics of the Indian National Congress, see Garima Prakash, *Indian National and Political Awakening in 1920* (New Delhi: Gyan Books, 2004).

argument that I will continually return to at various junctures in the course of this dissertation. I turn to the 1930s in the following section.

Aesthetics, Everyday Rituals, and Modern Art Praxis: The 1930s

Within one year of establishing the All India Village Industries Association, Gandhi invited the artist Nandalal Bose to decorate the Congress pavilions and curate the Congress exhibition at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and subsequently at Faizpur, Maharashtra. At this time, Bose was a teacher at Rabindranath Tagore's (1861-1941) art school Kala Bhavan in Santiniketan, a village approximately hundred miles from Calcutta. In 1902, at the age of twenty, Bose had first started painting in secret during his years as a student of Commerce at the Presidency College, Calcutta. Subsequently, he started taking lessons from Atul Mitra, a student at the Government School of Art, Calcutta. Given that Mitra was a student at the Draftmanship division, it is likely that Bose's early training under Mitra was restricted to figurative and still life painting in the academic realist style. Indeed, Bose's early paintings, for instance a copy of Raphael's *Madonna*, reflects this academicism, as Kamal Sarkar has pointed out.[130] It was only in 1905, at the height of anti-Partition *swadeshi* movement in Bengal and the public display of Abanindranath Tagore's *Bharat-mata*, that Bose discovered his mentor. In the same year, Bose sought out Tagore and enrolled himself at the Government School of Art as a student in Tagore's advanced design class. This was the beginning of Bose's formal art training. Bose's paintings produced between 1905 and 1910 bear testimony to the profound impact Tagore had made on the artist.

[130] Kamal Sarkar, *Bharater Bhashkar O Chitrashilpi* (Calcutta: Jogamaya Prakashani, 1984), 88.

However, it was Rabindranath Tagore's art school Kala Bhavan at Santiniketan that became the critical ground for Bose's experiments with the ideals of Gandhian *swadeshi* in art and education. The institution had first begun as a primary education center in response to the *swadeshi* impetus for indigenous education systems in 1901. In 1919, Tagore set up the art school Kala Bhavan and invited Nandalal Bose to direct the school. The institution gradually expanded to include Sriniketan, the Institute for Rural Reconstruction, in the neighboring village of Surul in 1921. In certain ways, the education philosophy of Santiniketan anticipated Gandhi's ideals of indigenous education and rural revival. For Tagore, the founder of Santiniketan, proactive communitarian action, mobilization of indigenous knowledge systems, and judicial use of natural resources far overweighed the imperatives for immediate political sovereignty of the nation. This idea shaped the pedagogic impetus at Santiniketan.[131] At Santiniketan, Bose's art praxis was thus aligned with Gandhi's ideals of indigenous education and rural revival. Gandhi was intimately familiar with the pedagogic ideals of Santiniketan, having visited the institution a number of times. While I will discuss Bose's art praxis at Santiniketan in Chapter Four, here I want to specifically focus on Bose's aesthetic engagement with the space of the Congress exhibitions in the 1930s.

In 1938, Gandhi called upon Nandalal Bose to design and construct the entire township for the Congress session at Haripura, a village approximately six hundred and twenty miles from Ahmedabad, Gujarat. In preparation, Bose immersed himself in the everyday rituals of the Haripura village, recording everything he saw in quick sketches.

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[131] See Rabindranath Tagore, *The Centre of Indian Culture* (Madras: Society for the Promotion of National Education, 1919); Rabindranath Tagore, *City and Village* (Santiniketan: Viswa-Bharati, 1928).

These sketches became the basis for four hundred tempera panels painted on paper. Out of four hundred panels, Bose himself painted eighty. His students then copied these panels. Stretched over straw-woven boards, the panels were displayed across the entire site – sometimes in niches in the temporary mud architecture constructed for the Congress session, sometimes placed like banners or billboards. Thematically, most of the panels focused on various facets of artisanal labor. In each panel, the figure of the artisan was placed on an almost monochromatic background. The figure of a Muslim (marked by attire) embroiderer is a good example (Figure 2.19). Framed by an arch, the embroiderer is placed on a predominantly gray background. While the flatness of the colors creates a two-dimensional surface, the sinuous linearity of form gives a sense of movement.

Much has been written on Bose's Haripura panels. Scholars have been quick to notice the visual similarities between these panels and Bengal *pata* paintings. It has been argued that Bose appropriated both the simplicity of form and flatness of colors from the Bengal *patas* – a folk idiom Bose was intimately familiar with, having painted a number of *patas* himself (Figure 2.20). Thus, in contrast to the innumerable colonial representations of the Indian craftsmen, Bose mobilized the language of the folk to represent the rural. Simultaneously, scholars have compared the visual vocabulary of the Haripura panels to Bose's mural paintings at Rabindranath Tagore's art school at Santiniketan.

According to R. Siva Kumar, the Haripura panels should be "considered not only as the culmination of his interest in folk paintings but also as the next stage in his

experiments in murals."[132] Further, according to Mitter, "the strong sense of formal design in these panels suggests his apprenticeship to Ajanta rather than the amorphous wash technique of oriental art."[133] Along with a group of Abanindranath Tagore's students, Bose had visited the 5th-century Buddhist caves at Ajanta in 1910 to copy the frescoes. His subsequent works bear testimony to the deep impression these 5th-century mural paintings had made on the artist. According to scholars, Bose's experience at Ajanta finally allowed the artist to break from the "Oriental style" wash paintings of his mentor Abanindranath Tagore and the Bengal School. The overarching scholarly impulse, then, has been to map the Haripura panels within Bose's oeuvre to recuperate a genealogy of the artist's stylistic evolution.

This art historical strategy has led to a specific kind of oversight: a disacknowledgement of the local. The visuality of the Haripura panels went beyond the Ajanta murals and Bengal *patas* to engage with the local of Haripura itself. Note the arch that frames the figure of the Muslim embroiderer (See Figure 2.19). If, on the one hand, this framing device visually alludes to miniature shrines commonly found in rural domestic architecture, on the other hand, it draws on the well-known preexisting painting practices from Nathadwara, a pilgrimage site in Rajasthan, approximately four hundred and fifty miles from Haripura (Figure 2.21; Figure 2.22). It is likely that Bose became familiar with Nathadwara paintings through his student Goverdhan Joshi, who came from

[132] R. Siva Kumar, "The Santiniketan Murals: A Brief History" in R. Siva Kumar, Jayanta Chakrabarty, and Arun K. Nag, eds. *The Santiniketan Murals* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1995), 5-78, 24.
[133] Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, 83.

a family of traditional painters from Nathadwara and joined Santiniketan in 1936.[134] This allusion to Nathadwara paintings situated the Haripura panels well within the larger visual practices of the region.

Art historians have repeatedly discussed the Haripura panels as autonomous works of art, disjointed from the actual physical space that they inhabited. Yet, as murals they were conceived as integral to the space of the Haripura Congress. If the panels drew their style from the painting traditions of the pilgrimage town of Nathadwara, architecture and decorative practices at the Haripura Congress session also reflected Bose's interest in the local. The entire site of the Haripura Congress had been designed and constructed by Bose using local material – mud, straw, wood, bamboo, terracotta, and handspun fabric.[135]

However, this engagement with the local was not merely restricted to the use of locally produced material. Everyday rituals of the region inspired the structural component of the site's architecture. For instance, drawing on local building practices, the fifty-one gates marking the Congress site were constructed out of wood and bamboo. Each gate was then capped by inverted earthen pots of various shapes and sizes (Figure 2.23). This architectural strategy derived from the pre-existing tradition of placing earthen pots at the threshold of villages to ward off evil spirits – a practice Bose had

[134] Joshi was one of the students involved in replicating the original eighty panels painted by Bose for the Haripura Congress session. For a brief biography of Goverdhan Joshi, see Radhakrishna Vasistha, *Art and Artists of Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Abhnav Publications, 1995), 90-91.
[135] A vivid description of the Haripura Congress site has been provided by Subhas Chandra Bose, the President elect of the Haripura Congress session. See *The Selected Works of Subhas Chandra Bose, 1936-1946*, Vol. 3 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1992), 40.

encountered when he visited Bardoli, Gujarat, to meet Gandhi prior to the Haripura Congress.

Tassels of straw hung in rows, bamboo baskets, and decorative woven cane screens replaced the Neo-classical sculptures and academic oil paintings that had become so integral to the Congress visuality in the 1920s. Harvested extensively in Gujarat, bamboo had traditionally been put to various uses in rural Gujarat. While woven bamboo blinds offered shade, the same material was used to create mats, vessels, and baskets. It is likely that Bose had encountered these objects during his travels in the region. Similarly, while stacked terracotta pots served as decorative pillars, embedded earthen pots embellished the mud pavilions. The Haripura panels, with their representation of artisanal labor, were embedded in the walls of these mud structures, alongside terracotta pottery, straw tassels, woven baskets, and bamboo screens. What resulted was a space of habitation where art was almost seamlessly inserted into everyday lives, aestheticizing the everyday.

Laid out on a grid-like pattern with streets intersecting each other at right angles, the Haripura Congress' Vithal Nagar was complete with residential quarters for delegates, parks, and bazaars. The temporary township was named "India's Washington" by the *Life* magazine (Figure 2.24). A photograph of the township at Haripura carried the following caption: "India's Washington is what these rows of new bamboo huts are expected to grow into. […] Gandhi has declared that the great city he wants around this 3,000 acre nucleus will not be industrial. Its people will farm, herd and spin. Its new name is Vithal Nagar, after the late brother of the great landlord Patel who gave the

land."[136] Using the rural as a point of reference, the site thus functioned much like an Object Lesson in urban planning. This temporary space of habitation was also, very literally, the space of/for politics.

Model townships were a familiar phenomenon in colonial South Asia. From the late 19th century onwards, the British Government had established a number of townships and colonies, for example Lyallpur in contemporary Pakistan.[137] Unlike the prison or the asylum, where discipline was extracted and habit inculcated through surveillance and punishment, model settlements were premised on the assumption that the act of inhabiting an exemplary space would non-coercively facilitate transformations in habit, behavior, sentiments, and world-view, eliminating the need for more obviously regimental modes of control. Model townships, then, were a product of a specific kind of colonial governmentality, one that was "concerned above all with disabling old forms of life by systematically breaking down their conditions, and with constructing in their place new conditions so as to enable – indeed, so as to oblige – new forms of life to come into being."[138] "The material environments of everyday life were considered to be among the most important 'conditions' enabling those 'old forms of life,' and their systematic rebuilding was the focus of a wide range of colonial projects," as Glover has noted.[139] It is in this backdrop – and not within an imagined autonomous domain of modern art – that the nuances of Bose's aesthetic project at Haripura become legible. If *swadeshi* was to

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[136] Author Unknown, "The Camera Overseas: Gandhi at the Indian Congress," *Life* March 14, 1938, 55.
[137] Established in 1880, the town was renamed Faisalabad in 1977. For a discussion on model townships in colonial India, see William J. Glover, "Objects, Models, and Exemplary Works: Educating Sentiment in Colonial India," *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 64, No. 3 (2005), 543-544.
[138] David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 26.
[139] Glover "Objects, Models, and Exemplary Works," 541.

become synonymous with *khadimindedness*, it required new conditions and new spaces to engender it. Haripura was an imagination of such a space. Thus, the act of positing the Haripura panels as a purely formal engagement with folk styles, as has been usually done, obfuscates their radical political potential.

At Gandhi's insistence, a number of these panels were also strategically placed in locations where the residents of the Haripura village could encounter them during their daily activities. Inserted within the familiar spaces of everyday life, the panels served as a new kind of civic ritual, one that simultaneously prompted identification and affirmed identities. This strategy, however, was not exceptional. One year prior to the Haripura Congress, during the first rural Congress session held in 1936-1937 at Faizpur, Maharashtra, the pavilions were modeled for the first time on rural architecture. Bose had constructed Faizpur Congress pavilions using mud and bamboo in collaboration with Baburao D. Mhatre of the Bombay-based architecture firm Doctor, Mhatre, and Desai. Assisted by the Ahmedabad-based artists Ravishankar Rawal (1892-1977) and Kanu Desai (1907-1980), Bose also curated an exhibition of objects collected from the Faizpur village. As Gandhi put it in his inaugural speech, "the whole Tilaknagar is an exhibition in itself."[140]

The objects displayed in the exhibition were neither unique nor exemplary. They were everyday objects – simple iron tools, grass bags, earthen vessels – routinely used by the villagers. However, when segregated within the space of the exhibition, the objects transcended their mundaneness, exceeding their status as common and ordinary. Today, it is impossible to discern with any certainty the effect the exhibition might have had on the

[140] CWMG, Vol. 70, 212.

Faizpur villagers. But it is likely that the performative act of encountering everyday artifacts as objects of exceptional beauty transformed not only the way in which the objects were perceived but also the space of the everyday. When repeatedly encountered within the spaces of everyday rural life, the objects carried within themselves the possibility of affirmation and empowerment. Bose, Rawal, and Desai organized a similar exhibition at Haripura.

Such instances of artistic interventions in the anti-colonial public sphere produced a different model of artistic praxis, one that exceeded the immediate confines of the modern art world. The trajectory that had begun with Faizpur in 1936 continued well into the 1940s, with increasing numbers of artists participating in the sessions. One such artist was Upendra Maharathi (d.1981). Following his training at the Government School of Art, Calcutta (established 1854), Maharathi set up an independent art practice in Darbhanga, Bihar in 1931. In 1940, the artist volunteered to decorate the site for the rural Congress session in Ramgarh, Bihar. Here, along with artists such as Dinesh Bakshi, Mahabir Prasad Verma, G. S. Kapadia, and Kartik Chandra Pal, he designed the Congress pavilions and gateways. The thatched mud pavilions resembled the domestic architecture of rural Ramgarh.

The mud structures were then lined with *madur*, a specific variety of woven grass mat produced in the region (Figure 2.25). While the mats provided protection from heat, traditional motifs woven into the *madur* with strands of dyed grass created a decorative surface. This novel use of an everyday object brought the artist public attention, and, in 1942 Maharathi was appointed a special Designer in the Department of Industry, Bihar.

Inspired by Bose, the artist became increasingly involved in local artisanal practices. Taking seriously Gandhi's ideals of rural self-sufficiency, he executed a number of projects in Bihar. For example, in 1944, he helped the villagers of Vaishali decorate the entire site for the first annual Buddhist Vaishali Festival with local material.[141]

Simultaneously, Maharathi continued to function as an independent artist. Painted for the Ramgarh Congress, the painting *Ashoka Sending Sanghamitra with Bodhi Tree Sapling to Ceylon* is symptomatic of the artist's visual language (Figure 2.26). In Maharathi's watercolor painting, the scene is placed in what appears to be an urban setting – perhaps an allusion to Ashoka's capital at Pataliputra (contemporary Patna), a site approximately hundred and twenty miles from Ramgarh. Medallions from the 3rd-century BCE Buddhist monument at Bharhut housed at the Indian Museum, Calcutta seems to have been the source for this panel. It is likely that the artist had the opportunity to closely study the Bharhut railings as a student at the Government School of Art in the 1920s, an institution adjoining the Indian Museum. Using representations of architecture on the Bharhut reliefs – horseshoe shaped arches, buildings capped with barrel vaults, and stone railings – Maharathi recreated an imaginary Pataliputra (Figure 2.27). The bare-bodied bejeweled turbaned male figures were also drawn from the Bharhut medallions. Although Maharathi cited pre-modern Buddhist art, stylistically, his works fit well within a certain visual language that had evolved during the 1920s. Characterized by flat application of colors, sinuous lines, and an illustrative quality, this artistic repertoire had evolved out of the Bengal School visuality.

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[141] J. C. Mathur, "Upendra Maharathi: A Shilpi in the Old Tradition and New," *Roopa-Lekha* Vol. 37, No. 1-2 (1967), 67-73, 71.

In a certain way, this idiom was emblematic of a nationalist political consciousness. The Allahabad-based poet, artist, and political activist Mahadevi Varma's (1907-1987) rejection of academic realism in the 1920s points towards the connections between the Bengal School idiom and *swadeshi* politics in this period. Like many among the Anglicized native elite, Varma too had received an English language education and as an added accomplishment had been trained to paint with oil in the academic realist style. In the 1920s, influenced by Gandhi, Varma embraced *khadi* and made a conscious decision to speak and write only in Hindi.[142] Rejecting Western illusionism in art, she began painting in the Bengal School style. Thus, even as the Bengal School doyen Abanindranath Tagore distanced himself from both nationalist politics and the aesthetic repertoire of the Bengal School in the 1920s, the idiom itself permeated into a larger domain of nationalist culture, standing in for *swadeshi*'s aesthetics.[143] It was also in this period that artists such as Maharathi turned to this style.

Maharathi's paintings, along with Nandalal Bose's sketches and the Calcutta-based artist Prafulla Chandra Lahiri's (1900-1975) cartoons were reproduced in a souvenir published to commemorate the Ramgarh session.[144] Maharathi was responsible for the planning and layout of the souvenir. The frontispiece of this souvenir, depicting a bird's -eye view of the 1940 Ramgarh session, was painted by Bose (Figure 2.28). His sketches, interspersed throughout the text, offered vignettes of rural Ramgarh (Figure

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[142] See Karine Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma and the Chhayavad Age of Modern Hindi Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[143] However, academic realism remained the favored mode of expression for a large section of artists across India. Even in Calcutta, artists, for example Annadaprasad Bagchi and Abani Sen continued to explore academic realism, using oil painting as the preferred medium.

[144] Prafulla Chandra Lahiri is better known under the pen name Piciel. For a biography of the cartoonist, see Sarkar, *Bharater Bhashkar O Chitrashilpi*, 112.

2.29). Lahiri's ironic cartoons, on the other hand, introduced an element of political satire and a stringent critique of (elite) nationalist politics. A cartoon captioned "Now it's your turn" depicts Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Azad, the president elect of the Ramgarh Congress, stands on a jetty labeled Ramgarh (Figure 2.30). At a distance, in the middle of the river, is a post marked 1940. Azad is separated from the present by a wide river, which he cannot cross without the help of a boatman who rides the "Destiny of India." Satirically, Lahiri points to the complete disjuncture between Congress electoral politics and everyday reality. The "Destiny of India," then, is in the hands of the common man. In yet another cartoon, two villagers, bent double with the weight they carry, struggle towards a signpost marked 1940. Lahiri's cartoons, rather innocuously inserted in-between essays by Congress leaders, disrupted the otherwise celebratory rhetoric of the Indian National Congress's rural reconstruction programs.

Critique: Another Modern

Of course, Prafulla Chandra Lahiri was not the only artist to critique the official nationalism of the Indian National Congress and the failure of its rural reconstruction programs. Nandalal Bose's student Ramkinkar Baij (1906-1980) articulated the most stringent critique from within Santiniketan itself. Interestingly enough, Baij had started his career as an artist for the Indian National Congress. During the early 1920s Non-Cooperation movement, Baij joined the *swadeshi* National School that had been established by the Congress leader Anil Baran Roy in his native village Jungipara, Bankura. Concurrently, a local Congress office was set up by Roy, which, along with the National School, became the locus of anti-colonial politics in the region. During this

time, Baij painted a number of portraits of nationalist leaders, which were carried in *swadeshi* processions.[145] In 1925, his watercolor paintings, displayed at the *Swadeshi Mela*, a local *swadeshi* fair organized by the Congress, caught the attention of the journalist Ramananda Chatterjee.[146] At Chatterjee's insistence, Baij joined Kala Bhavan at Santiniketan in 1925, under the mentorship of Nandalal Bose.

While academic realism had been his preferred medium of expression, Bose inspired the artist to turn to wash painting. Baij's wash paintings from the 1920s, for example the ca. 1925 *Birbhum Landscape* clearly demonstrates the profound influence Bose had on the artist, both in terms of visualization and technique (Figure 2.31). This fascination with wash painting was, however, short-lived. Baij became familiar with the trajectories of modern Western art through lectures delivered by the Austrian art historian Stella Kramrisch, subsequently turning to the medium of oil in the 1930s.[147] Although the visiting French artist Andree Karpeles had introduced oil painting to art students at Santiniketan in 1921, no one in the institution had taken up this medium. Indeed, Baij was one of the first artists to seriously engage with this medium in Santiniketan. Well conversant with trajectories of the Western modern through books, journals, and prints, Baij was especially inspired by Auguste Rodin, Henry Moore, and Paul Cézanne, among

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[145] Ramkinkar Baij, *Mahashaya, Ami Chackhick, Rupakar Matro* (Alipur Duar: Monchasha, 2002), 28. Translation mine.
[146] Prasanta Daw, *Eminent Indian Sculptors* (Calcutta: Mahua Publishing Company, 1980), 12.
[147] The Austrian art historian Stella Kramrisch also joined Kala Bhavan in 1921. Rabindranath Tagore had made Stella Kramrisch's lectures mandatory for all students and staff of Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan. Beginning with 17th-century European art, Kramrisch's lectures concluded with contemporary artistic practices in Europe. For a more detailed discussion, see Pulak Dutta, "Santiniketan: Birth of an Alternative Cultural Space" in M. D. Muthukumaraswamy and Molly Kaushal, eds. *Folklore, Public Sphere, and Civil Society* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2004), 157- 167, 165.

others. But, by his own admission, Baij was most inspired by Pablo Picasso.[148] At a time when most Santiniketan artists, for example Nandalal Bose and Surendranath Kar, were invested in exploring indigenous material and forms, Ramkinkar Baij turned to monumental concrete sculptures, oil paintings, Cubism, and abstraction.

Much has been written on Baij. Siva Kumar, who has extensively written on artistic practices at Santiniketan, has noted that Baij's approach to the rural was distinctly different from that of Bose and other Santiniketan artists.[149] While one finds a romantic idealization of the rural in Bose, Baij's representations of rural labor are grounded in social realism. Mitter, on the other hand, has attempted to contextualize Baij within larger national and international modernist sculptural movements. Discussing the rugged materiality of Baij's figures, Mitter points towards Baij's contact with the British sculptress Marguerite Milward (1873-1953) during her brief tenure at Santiniketan in the early 1930s.[150] A student of Emile-Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1928), Milward presented a sculpture, the *Hunter*, by Bourdelle to Kala Bhavan's museum. Incidentally, Bourdelle himself was inspired by Rodin. The sculpture's rough surface must have appealed to Baij, for he produced a figure based on this sculpture in 1935. Baij's 1928 clay figure, *Man Walking with a Sack* bears a startling similarity with Bourdelle's 1906 *The Sculptress at Work* as Anshuman Dasgupta has pointed out (Figure 2.32; Figure 2.33).[151] The sculpture

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[148] Baij, *Mahashaya*, 50-51. Translation mine.
[149] R. Siva Kumar, *Santiniketan: The Making of a Contextual Modernism* (New Delhi: National Gallery of Modern Art, 1997), unpaginated.
[150] Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, 95-96. For a discussion on the impact of Marguerite Milward on Santiniketan's pedagogy, see Jaya Appasamy, *Modern Indian Sculpture* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Cultural Relations, 1970), 12.
[151] Anshuman Dasgupta, "Ramkinkar and Modernity: A Photo Essay" in Grant Watson ed. *Santhal Family: Positions Around an Indian Sculpture* (Bruges: Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, 2008), 20-33, 26.

also bears close resemblance to Rodin's 1898 *Balzac* (Figure 2.34). In terms of subject matter, however, Mitter finds a parallel in Deviprosad Roy Chowdhury, Baij's contemporary, who had also begun representing laboring bodies in the 1920s.

Baij's stylistic inspirations, then, is well charted. However, although the unconventionality of choice is noted, the artist's use of concrete for his monumental sculptures remains inadequately theorized. According to Siva Kumar, "[t]he technique was innovative and in the Santiniketan tradition of employing local materials advantageously."[152] This appropriation of concrete as a "local material" well in keeping with the "Santiniketan tradition" of localism is ingenious, especially given the fact that, in this period, no cement factory existed within two hundred and fifty miles of Calcutta.[153] Given the prohibitive cost of land transport, Calcutta was heavily dependent on the import of cement until the establishment of the Chhatak Cement Factory in 1943. Thus, contrary to Siva Kumar's assertion, Baij's use of cement was distinctly antithetical to Santiniketan's localism.

In fact, Baij created his first concrete sculpture, *Sujata*, in 1935, at the precise moment when Nandalal Bose was preparing designs for the 1936 Congress meeting at Lucknow (See Figure 3.22). During this time both Bose and Surendranath Kar (1894-1970) had been engaged in evolving a new repertoire of mud architecture in Santiniketan. In 1934, Bose and Kar built Chaiti, a small structure constructed entirely out of mud. The success of Chaiti led to the more ambitious Shayamali, built as a residence for Gandhi, and the mud hostel called the Black House in 1935. In both cases, the structures were

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[152] Siva Kumar, *Santiniketan*, unpaginated.
[153] For an early history of the cement industry in India, see Kumar B. Das, *Cement Industry of India* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1987).

designed keeping in mind the sculptural murals that would embellish it. It is this very concern with mud architecture, localism, and the integration of art within inhabited spaces that led to Bose's structuring of space at Lucknow, Faizpur, and Haripura.

During the summer of 1935, Rudrappa Hanji, then a student at Santiniketan, sculpted a figure of the Buddha on the walls of the Black House using clay reinforced with cow-dung and tar – materials abundantly found in rural Santiniketan. Baij himself had used the same material in his 1935 reliefs of the two Santhal door-guardians that flanked the main entrance of Shayamali. Indeed, given Bose's commitment to Gandhian politics of localism, public sculptures in Santiniketan were usually made from such material in this period. Hanji's *Buddha* or Baij's door-guardians were then not exceptional, but rather, integral to Santiniketan's larger politics of environmentalism and privileging of the local. Yet, reflecting on Hanji's use of clay, tar, and cow-dung, Baij wrote: "Outdoor sculpture in clay and cow-dung? Childishness. I laughed. I desired to work with cement and gravel [ferroconcrete]."[154] The decision to use ferroconcrete, then, may well be read as a reaction to Santiniketan's politics of localism.

This ironic dismissal of clay and cow dung was followed immediately by his first concrete sculpture – *Sujata*, a eight and a half feet elongated figure of a walking girl made of refractory concrete reinforced with iron bars (See Figure 3.22).[155] This was also the first monumental sculpture in Santiniketan. Subsequently, in 1938, the year of the Haripura Congress, Baij produced the fourteen feet *Santhal Family*, perhaps his best-

[154] Baij *Mahashaya*, 20. Translation mine.
[155] See Chapter Two for a discussion of this sculpture.

known reinforced concrete sculpture (Figure 2.35).[156] At the time of its creation, the monumental sculpture would have been visible from a great distance, dominating the rural landscape. Unlike Bose's Haripura murals that attempt to represent the rural for the rural in the familiar language of the folk, Baij's *Santhal Family* makes little attempt to offer the indigenous Santhals an image of themselves. The image that is offered, instead, is both heroic and iconic.

An anecdotal conversation between the sculptor and a Santhal man may help elucidate my point. As Baij narrates:

> One day I saw a [Santhal] fisherman looking at my sculpture with acute interest. Sometimes he came forward, sometimes he stepped back and came forward again, circling the sculpture as he gazed intently at it – people usually don't do this. I was working on a scaffold. Eventually he came close and asked, "Babu, what are you doing?" "I am trying to make a fisherman just like yourself," I responded. The man laughed and said, "Yes, you may call it that, but actually you have created an image of god."[157]

Although the *Santhal Family* is placed on a very low platform, is of the earth so to speak, the sheer monumentality of the sculpture serves to pedestalize its subject. A heroic image of the Santhal is thus produced, an image in which the Santhal fisherman cannot see himself reflected.

However, the question that still remains unanswered is this: why reinforced concrete? Mitter suggests that the artist's "own modernist approach found closer affinities with Jacob Epstein…The sculptor's primitivist works and his incorporation of

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[156] This ensemble was enlarged from a small clay maquette that Baij had made in 1932, prior to his departure for Delhi for a brief stint as an art teacher at the Modern School.
[157] Baij, *Mahashaya*, 22. Translation mine.

'non-aesthetic' machines like the rock drill in his sculpture may have prompted Ramkinkar [Baij] to use unconventional materials like cement."[158] It is likely that Baij was familiar with Epstein's *Rock Drill*. Indeed, Baij's 1944 reinforced concrete *Harvester* bears a very close resemblance to Epstein's 1913 drawing for the *Rock Drill*. In 1913, Epstein purchased a used drill upon which he mounted a robot. The work was produced during Epstein's brief association with the Vorticist movement, a short-lived but pivotal early 20th-century British movement in art and literature that mobilized the language of abstraction to convey the industrial dynamism they associated with the "vortex" of the modern city.[159]

The *Rock Drill*, however, was an aberration in Epstein's otherwise conservative career – both materially and stylistically. The artist's preferred material was stone and never again did Epstein reference the machine. In 1914, following the violent excesses of World War I, the sculptor removed the drill, cut the figure in half, and cast it in bronze. Thus mutilated, the menacing figure was rendered impotent symbolically. Epstein later described the figure as the "sinister figure of today and tomorrow. No humanity, only the terrible Frankenstein's monster we have made ourselves into."[160] A critique of the "machine age" is thus implicit in the *Rock Drill*. One does not find a similar critique of the machine in Baij. For instance, incorporating technology within its form, Baij's 1940 abstract reinforced concrete sculpture *Lamp Stand* was originally meant to have

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[158] Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, 96.
[159] See Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age: Origins and Development* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).
[160] Jacob Epstein, *Let There Be Sculpture* (London: Reader's Union, 1942), 70.

embedded light bulbs.[161] Similarly, Baij's *Harvester*, which probably adapted its form from Epstein's drawing for the *Rock Drill*, was certainly a critique, but it was not a critique of mechanization. A response to the "man made famine" of 1944, a famine that was produced by the British wartime economic policies, *Harvester* can at best be read as a critique of Empire.[162]

While there has been a general art historical tendency to read Baij's works as a critique of industrialization and a valorization of pre-mechanized forms of labor, there is little in his sculptures that corroborates this reading. For instance, the 1956 three and a half feet reinforced concrete ensemble *Koler Banshi* (Call of the Machine) depict two women striding forward, as if in great haste (Figure 2.36).[163] A child follows them, tugging at their clothes. One of the women turns back, as if to disengage herself and admonish the child. While the two rather stoic figures in the *Santhal Family* are weighed down by the baggage they carry, the women of *Koler Banshi* seem mobile, almost carefree, in comparison. The posture of the two bodies, smiling faces, and wide-open eyes convey excitement, urgency, and speed. This interest in motion and speed is also directly foregrounded in the 1954 abstract reinforced concrete sculpture *Speed* (Figure 2.35). In yet another sculptural ensemble – the monumental stone *Yaksha* and *Yakshini* figures flanking the entrance to the Reserve Bank of India, New Delhi – Baij alludes to industrialization. This was Baij's last monumental sculpture, one that took the sculptor

[161] The light bulbs were not finally embedded, perhaps due to a lack in technological proficiency. See Devi Prasad, *Ramkinkar Vaij: Sculptures* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2007), 31.
[162] The 1944 Bengal famine was caused by a number of reasons. Some of the primary causes of the famine were the appropriation of food grains for British soldiers, export of grains to feed the British army, and rumors of food shortage leading to hoarding. See Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 156-164.
[163] *Koler Banshi* has usually been translated as *Mill Call* by art historians. Yet the word Bengali word *kol* merely translates as machine. My translation of *Koler Banshi* as *Call of the Machine* is premised on reading *kol* as machine.

twelve years to finish. Following a number of small versions in plaster, Baij ultimately constructed the (Kubera) *Yaksha* – a demi-god with protective powers – holding in one hand a bag of coins and in the other the cog of a machine, the symbol of industry. Interestingly enough, Baij had started producing maquettes for this ensemble from 1954 – the same year *Speed* was completed.

Given this interest in industry, speed, and motion, Baij's rejection of mud for reinforced concrete becomes symptomatic of a desire for the emancipatory possibilities of modernity. As Marshall Berman reminds us, the greatest dream of modernity was mobility – for Berman it was to "get out" of Bronx.[164] Of course, the Bronx of Berman's youth was not Baij's idyllic Santiniketan. To "get out" of what Santiniketan stood for, to "get out" of the hegemonic localism of Gandhi and Bose, was therefore to seize concrete – the absolute antithesis of Santinketan's pastoralism. As Baij himself wrote in 1951: "Today, those who make sculptures of Gandhi are considered to be important artists. Do I have to repeatedly portray Gandhi to be considered an artist?"[165] For Baij, the project of emancipation became associated with the revolutionary destiny of the laboring class – the *Harvester*, the *Santhal Family*, leading to *Koler Banshi*. I then propose we read Baij's sculpture as the site through which an alternative modernity was articulated in 1930s India, a modernity that moved away from, exceeded, and resisted the polarities of colonial modernity and Gandhian localisms. Baij's modernism, in its anti-Gandhian

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[164] Brenan writes: "He laughed as he bellowed in my face: 'You want to know the morality of the Bronx? '*Get out*, schmuck, *get out*!' For once in my life, I was stunned into silence. It was the brutal truth: I had left the Bronx, just as he had, and just as we were all brought up to, and now the Bronx was collapsing not just because of Robert Moses but also because of all of us. It was true, but did he have to laugh?" Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 327.

[165] Baij, *Mahashaya,* 32. Translation mine.

localism, was embedded in a desire for modernity as a conceptual possibility, a form of liberation. I turn to the aesthetics of this modernity in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two

Speaking Metaphorically: Reinforced Concrete and the Aesthetics of Progress.

Reinforced Concrete as a Metaphor of Progress

There is an almost overwhelming presence of reinforced concrete in the early post-Independence visual field. In spite of this abundance of visual citations, we are yet to ask: What was the valence of reinforced concrete in post-Independence India? Given that the nationalist resistance to the colonial state was emphatically articulated in its economic critique of the British rule, it is hardly surprising to find economic planning emerging as central to the imagination of India as a sovereign nation. With Independence, the newly liberated economy was "enshrined as the very essence of the emergent nation," as Satish Deshpande has pointed out.[166] "For obvious reasons giant steel plants, dams, and power stations are the most privileged sites where the [Independent] nation emerges onto our consciousness."[167] If for Gandhi *khadi* was a potent symbol of India's economic self-sufficiency that simultaneously participated in a language of commodity resistance, in post-Independence India the valence of this *lingua franca* was displaced by symbols of industrialization and development. Romesh Chandra Dutt's stringent critique of British economic policies, the founding of the National Institute of Science in 1935 by Meghnath

[166] Satish Deshpande, "Imagined Economies," *Journal of Arts and Ideas* Nos. 25-26 (1993), 5-35, 13.
[167] Ibid., 24.

Saha, and the formation of the National Planning Committee under the Chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1938 are some of the other moments in this trajectory.[168]

The vocabulary of "nation-building" dominated political discourse in India, as Srirupa Roy has rightly noted.[169] Scholars, including Deshpande and Roy, have argued that labor undertaken both by the citizens and the state emerges as a primary site through which both patriotism and the idea of the new nation was articulated in 1950s India. The two were interlinked. As Deshpande states, "The nation is not only the locus of all this work, but it is also the end towards which this work is moving: patriotism is quite literally the act of building a nation."[170] Indeed this is true. During the first two decades following Independence, the act of nation building translated, very literally, into a physical act of construction – the construction of heavy industries, the construction of new planned cities, the construction of hydroelectric projects. In effect, the laboring body became a much valorized site that powerfully marked post-Independence nationalism.

While most scholars have primarily focused on the politics of the nation-state and its projects of industrialization and modernization, I am interested in a different question. In this chapter, taking my clue from the 1953 text *Building New India*, published by the Indian Planning Commission, I want to engage with the idea of *building* the nation.[171] The text itself is replete with references to the state's planned construction projects. This

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[168] For this history, see Prakash, *Another Reason*; Deshpande, "Imagined Economies;" Robert S. Anderson, *Nucleus and Nation: Scientists, International Networks, and Power in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
[169] Srirupa Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 105.
[170] Deshpande, "Imagined Economies," 24.
[171] Indian Planning Commission, *Building New India* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 1953).

is perhaps understandable, given that the word *building* brings to mind either the physical act of construction or an image of a constructed space.

Given the monumentality of the state's building projects – from the modernist planned city of Chandigarh to the second highest dam in the world on the rivers Sutlej and Bhakra – the word also readily brings to mind concrete, a composite construction material composed of cement and other cementitious materials such as fly ash, slag cement, aggregate, water, and chemical admixtures. It was this material that sustained the state's project of nation building. Needless to say, in order to undertake the project of building the nation, the state required immense amounts of cement.

Yet, with Partition, the state lost five of its twenty-four concrete producing factories. The nineteen factories, which remained in India, produced only two million tons of cement, which met less than half of the country's requirements. The wide gap between the total requirement and total production capacity forced the government to begin a cement expansion scheme in 1948. Between 1948 and 1951, six new cement factories were established, increasing the total cement production by one million ton. With new construction initiatives, the consumption of cement rose rapidly. Understandably, the cement industry had an important place in the government's Five Year Plans for economic development and by 1956 India was producing more than five tons of cement. By 1960, production had increased to almost eight million tons.

How was this new India experienced and how was this new experience negotiated? Given the state's large-scale construction projects, concrete was inherent to the vocabulary of "nation-building." In a certain way, the very project of nation building

was centered on the availability of cement, and an as extension, the availability of concrete. One encounters detailed discussions on India's concrete producing capacities and measures being taken to increase the production of cement and concrete in newspaper reports from the 1950s. Simultaneously, one finds concrete asserting an obdurate presence in the early post-Independence visual field through artistic and cinematic practices. From sculpture to cinema, from photography to advertising, the visual worlds of 1950s and 1960s India is saturated with imagery that alludes to reinforced concrete. What then was the relation between modernization, the rhetoric of progress, modes of experience, and aesthetics?

Through visual practices, concrete emerged as a powerful metaphor of progress in 1950s and 1960s India, I argue. Metaphor, writes George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action."[172] Our conceptual system – the system that provides the very framework for thought and action – is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. If in principle we agree that metaphors allow us to navigate the unfamiliar and the unknown in terms of the familiar and the known, we can also agree that metaphor constructs the way we negotiate, perceive, conceptualize, and comprehend our world. Metaphor, then, does not merely belong to the words that we speak, is not purely literal as Donald Davidson has suggested, but belongs to thought itself.[173] Indeed, metaphors are so pervasive in thought and action that they become transformed, are naturalized, and rendered normative through constant repetition. It is through this normativization that the metaphoricity of metaphors is ossified into

[172] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 3.
[173] Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," *Critical Enquiry* Vol. 5, No. 1 (1978), 31-47.

something so "solid, canonical, and unavoidable" that we cease to see them as such.[174] This chapter then focuses on one such metaphor – concrete, a metaphor of progress in 1950s and 1960s India.

In spite of the obdurate presence of concrete in the post-Independence visual field, there remains a lack of scholarly engagements with the materiality of concrete. Perhaps the naturalization of concrete into an everyday visuality has made us insensitive to the visualization of concrete as a metaphor in itself. Here, one is reminded of Ramkinkar Baij's use of reinforced concrete in 1938. Although much has been written on Baij's oeuvre, the sculptor has either been absolved into tropes of "indigenous romanticism combined with the canonical aesthetic of Ananda Coomaraswamy and the artisanal basis of Gandhian ideology" or has been claimed as tribal himself and therefore an authentic subaltern voice.[175] While in the previous chapter I have discussed the ways in which Baij critiqued tropes of indigenous romanticism and Gandhian ruralism through the use of reinforced concrete, the artist himself has offered us the most vociferous denial of his status as tribal. As Baij states: "The last name Baij is peculiar. It derives from *baidya* [doctor] […] Many people think I belong to the Santhal [tribal] community. This

[174] As Friedrich W. Nietzsche writes: "What is truth? A moving army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms, in short a summa of human relationships that are being poetically and rhetorically sublimated, transposed, and beautified until, after long and repeated use, a people considers them as solid, canonical, and unavoidable. Truths are illusions whose illusionary nature has been forgotten, metaphors that have been used up and have lost their imprint and that now operate as mere metal, no longer as coins." Friedrich W. Nietzsche cited in Ernst Behler, *Confrontations: Derrida/Heidegger/Nietzsche* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 84.

[175] Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism*, 203. For example of Baij being seen as an authentic subaltern, see Shanti Singha, *Jibanshilpi Ramkinkar* (Kolkata: Rajya Charukala Parishad, 2008).

is not right. Those who write this, do they not care enough to do some more research?"[176] Ramkinkar Baij was not tribal and neither did he claim subalternity.

In this conundrum of competing claims made by scholars on behalf of Baij – on the one hand, elite "national cultural discourse"[177] and, on the other hand, subalternity based on "a lower class/caste identity"[178] – the materiality of reinforced concrete as a possible site for the articulation of a modern subjectivity in 1930s India is lost. This subjectivity exceeded the polarities of colonial modernity and Gandhian localisms. Of course, by 1938, reinforced concrete was already well established in the global arena as *the* material for building a modern world.[179]

It was also in 1938 – the year Baij created his first reinforced concrete sculpture – that a significant portion of Golconde, the reinforced concrete dormitory of Aurobindo Ghosh's ashram in Pondicherry designed by the Japan-based Czech architect Antonin Raymond (1888-1976), was completed (Figure 3.1). Well known for his combination of traditional building practices and modernism, Raymond was one of the early advocates for the use of reinforced concrete in Japan. While the plan for Golconde was executed by Raymond, the Japanese American architect George Nakashima (1905-1990) and Francois Sammer (1888-1976), a Czech architect who had worked for Le Corbusier before joining Raymond, were in charge of the actual construction.[180] Constructed entirely out of

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[176] Ramkinkar Baij, *Mahashaya*, 31. Translation mine. The word Baij derived from the Bengali word *baidya*, or doctor. *Baidyas* were a learned group of professionals who commanded significant social status.
[177] Kapur, *When Was Modernism?* 203
[178] Santosh S., "Towards an 'Anti-history' of Indian Art: Nationalism and Modern Art," *Nandan* Vol. XXVI (2006), 18-27, 27.
[179] See Amy E. Slaton, *Reinforced Concrete and the Modernization of American Building, 1900-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
[180] With the imminent threat of war, Antonin Raymond closed his office in Tokyo and left Japan for India in 1937. After spending a few months in Pondicherry, he returned to the United States entrusting the

reinforced concrete, Golconde was the first building in India with an exposed concrete exterior.

Although Raymond, Nakashima, and Sammer introduced a distinctive aesthetic through the use of exposed reinforced concrete, Major Stokes-Roberts, an engineer for the British Government, had first used the material in India in the 1870s. By the first two decades of the 20th century, reinforced concrete had gained popularity, especially in colonial metropolitan cities such as Calcutta and Bombay. In Calcutta, a number of reinforced concrete buildings, for example the United Service Club (1905) and the Bengal Club (1927), were constructed in the early 20th century.

Reinforced concrete as a construction material gained further prominence with the rise in the prices of building stone and teak wood. According to a report published in the journal *Concrete Cement Age*, in 1913 the use of cement rose by thirty-four percent in quantity and fifty-four percent in value. Reinforced concrete was "seen in many sections of Bombay and likely to be the base of all new structures such as tenements, warehouses, etc."[181] Indeed, in 1913 a reinforced concrete low-cost tenement building had been erected in Maniktala, Calcutta. This was the first building in India to be constructed entirely out of reinforced concrete.[182] The completion of this building led the *Concrete*

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completion of the project to Sammar and Nakashima. A significant section of Golconde was completed between 1937 and 1939. Indeed, most of the reinforced concrete construction was completed by the time Nakashima returned to the United States in 1939. Along with Udar Pinto, an Indian aeronautical engineer, Sammer stayed on to design furniture for the hostel, completing the entire project in 1942. For a history of Golconde, see Pankaj V. Gupta, Christine Mueller, and Cyrus Samii, *Golconde: The Introduction of Modernism in India* (New Delhi: Urban Crayon Press, 2010).

[181] Author Unknown, "The Use of Reinforced Concrete in India," *Concrete-Cement Age*, Vol. 4 No. 1-6 (1914), 68.

[182] Author Unknown, "Notes on Building Construction in India," *Concrete-Cement Age*, Vol. 3 No. 1-6 (1913), 269.

Cement Age to ceremoniously proclaim: "reinforced concrete is *the* building material" in India. [183]

This was, of course, overstating the case. In the first three decades of the 20th century, the use of reinforced concrete was still largely restricted to architecture by and for the British. Thus, although reinforced concrete was, by this time, a familiar material, Golconde itself was an exception rather than the norm. In 1930s India, a number of journals focusing on art, architecture, and culture discussed Golconde in detail. It is likely that Baij too was familiar with the building, especially given the intimate relationship between the Bengali revolutionary turned mystic Aurobindo Ghosh and Bengal's intelligentsia. While it would be simplistic to directly correlate Baij's use of reinforced concrete to the use of the same material by Raymond, Nakashima, and Sammer in Ghosh's ashram, it is nevertheless hardly farfetched to suggest that, by the 1930s, reinforced concrete had begun to accrue a metaphoric currency as a symbol for a new modern India. When placed within this context, Baij's use of reinforced concrete takes on a new significance.

While Ramkinkar Baij continued to explore the possibilities of this medium, a number of sculptors such as Dhanraj Bhagat (1917-1988) and Sardari Lal Parasher (1905-1990) started experimenting with this material in the 1950s. Bhagat's works were primarily displayed within the rarified spaces of art galleries and museums. Parasher's monumental public sculptures and murals, on the other hand, reached out to a much broader audience. Simultaneously, concrete asserted an equally powerful presence in the cinematic imaginary. Take for example *Shree 420*, a 1955 film directed and produced by

[183] Author Unknown, "The Use of Reinforced Concrete in India," 68.

Raj Kapoor (1924-1988), which depicts in its closing scene a modernist concrete planned city. In contrast to the film's representation of old Bombay, this new concrete city functions as a metaphor for a brighter future.

What was the politics of this metaphoricity? And what might be at stake in recuperating concrete as a metaphor in itself? If concrete is indeed a metaphor of progress, as I argue it is, then this metaphor both arises out of, and attempts to come to terms with, the experience of inhabiting a modern post-Independence India. Metaphors, after all, are articulated in response to everyday experiences. However, it is not the experience of modernity but rather the experience of progress that interests me here. Progress, I argue, is experienced in spatial terms. The very word conjures up an image of moving forward through time and space towards a certain kind of future. The idea of progress is thus intrinsically linked to a vision of the future. Let me turn to the film *Shree 420* to further explicate my point.

Seeing Through Concrete: The Politics of Hope

In the recent past, much has been written on *Shree 420* (Mr. 420), a film that traces the journey of a naïve rural boy, Raju (played by the actor-director Raj Kapoor) who migrates to the city of Bombay in hope of a better life (Figure 3.2). In Bombay, Raju is befriended by a group of street dwellers. The urban dystopia and poverty that he encounters here draws him into the world of corruption. Corruption thus becomes a physical experience as the audience follows Raju down the dark alleys of Bombay. Set in early post-Independence Bombay, this film now stands in for a 1950s experience of the metropolis in scholarly discourses. For example, while Rajni Bakshi reads the film as a

political satire that critiques "the unfulfilled promise of Independence," Ashis Nandy has read the film as an attempt to recover rural modes of community formation within the space of the urban fabric.[184] A number of scholars have also posited *Shree 420* as making visible a difficult negotiation between an alienating urban and a utopian rural, between the traditional and the modern.[185]

Raju, however, ultimately renounces the world of crime towards the end of the film – good triumphs over evil. The government will surely help the poor find a home in the city, Raju declares to his adopted family of disenfranchised slum dwellers. This desire for home becomes especially poignant when read in context of the opening section of the film. After a failed attempt at hitchhiking, Raju sets off for Bombay on foot. As the camera tracks Raju, the film abruptly brings into the frame a large group of migrants – men, women, and children – making their way across the desert. Framed against an arid desolate landscape, a long pan shot gives the group an epic monumentality (Figure 3.3).

For the film's contemporaneous audiences, this scene would have immediately brought to memory the displacement of millions following the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.[186] Indeed, the scene bears a startling resemblance to the numerous photographs of migration, for instance photographs of the Partition by Margaret Bourke-

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[184] Rajni Bakshi, "Kapoor: From Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai to Ram Teri Ganga Maili" in Ashis Nandy, ed. *The Secret Politics Of Our Desire: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 92-133, 108; Ashis Nandy, "Indian Popular Cinema as a Slum's Eye View of Politics" in Nandy, ed. *The Secret Politics Of Our Desire*, 1-18.

[185] For example, see Sudipta Kaviraj, "Reading a Song of the City – Images of the City in Literature and Films" in Preben Kaarsholm, ed. *City Flicks: Indian Cinema and the Urban Experience* (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2007), 60-81; M. Madhava Prasad, "Realism and Fantasy in Representations of Metropolitan Life in Indian Cinema" in Kaarsholm, ed. *City Flicks*, 82-98.

[186] Raj Kapoor himself had migrated to Bombay from Lahore only a few months prior to the Partition. For Kapoor's biography, see Ritu Nanda, *Raj Kapoor* (Mumbai: R.K. Films, 2007); Bunny Reuben, *Raj Kapur, The Fabulous Showman: An Intimate Biography* (New Delhi: National Film Development Corporation, 1988).

White, an American documentary photographer, which were routinely circulated through newspapers and popular magazines (Figure 3.4). Given that *Shree 420* was released in 1955, this reference could have been hardly abstruse for the film's contemporaneous audiences. All too familiar with the violence of Partition, audiences would surely not have missed this indexical allusion to migration and displacement. In the 1950s, the post-Independence government was still striving to rehabilitate its new citizens.[187]

Raju's grand declaration of faith in the post-Independence government towards the end of the film has been read by a number of scholars as a mark of the actor-director Raj Kapoor's own commitment to the Nehruvian nation-state.[188] Indeed, the first three decades following Independence are now well known as "the era of rapid change" – the era of Nehruvian socialism, secularism, industrialization, and modernization.[189] Through Raju's speech, Kapoor's commitment to Nehruvianism can be read easily. Following his grand declaration, Raju attempts to leave the city but is cajoled to return by his beloved, Vidya, a roadside teashop worker. As Rebecca Brown writes: "Ending on this oratory and with the ambiguity of departure and a partial return over the hill, Kapoor showcases the ambivalence towards the city characteristic of 1950s India."[190]

This may well be true. Yet the city that Raju returns to is hardly the unplanned squalid city of Bombay, a vestige of colonial urban planning. Taking Raju by hand, Vidya leads him not into Bombay, with its meandering alleys and overcrowded slums,

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[187] For a history of the Government's rehabilitation programs, see Indian Institute of Public Administration, *The Organization of the Government of India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1958).
[188] For example, see Rashmi Varma, "Provincializing the Global City: From Bombay to Mumbai," *Social Text* No. 81 (2004), 65-89, 68.
[189] I draw this phase from the title of a lavishly illustrated text published by the Government of India in 1968 to commemorate progress achieved in the two decades following Independence. Government of India, *Era of Rapid Change, 1947-1967* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1968).
[190] Rebecca M. Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 139.

but into a concrete modernist planned city. The camera zooms out as Vidya takes Raju's hands. Along with Raju and Vidya, we, the audience, move through a winding path in a long tracking shot. Upon reaching a hillock, with Raju and Vidya we too gaze down at a modernist planned city, enveloped in a white haze (Figure 3.5). Nestled in the valley below, the city of the future lies ahead of us, shrouded in an ethereal light. In *Shree 420*, it is this concrete modernist planned city that becomes a metaphor for a better life that modernity could make accessible to all. Shrouded in a white glow, this concrete city, then, also functions as a metaphor for the bright future that awaits the new modern nation-state and its citizen subjects. This metaphor for the future – an assertion that the future will be brighter – also becomes an articulation of the idea of progress. The city of the future, then, is one where everyone, including Raju, Vidya, and the disenfranchised slum dwellers, can find a home.

Visually, the concrete planned city in *Shree 420* cited Chandigarh, the new capital city of divided Punjab (Figure 3.6). It was Nehru's hope that the city of Chandigarh would become for Punjabis the home that they had lost in Pakistan. Designed by Le Corbusier (1887-1965), the city's primacy in the national imaginary was inevitable from its very conception. The master plan for Chandigarh had been developed in 1949 by the American town-planner Albert Mayer (1897-1981) and his associate architect, Matthew Nowicki (1910-1950). Following Nowichi's sudden death in 1950, the French architect Le Corbusier, along with Pierre Jeanneret (1896-1967), Edwin Maxwell Fry (1899-1987), and Jane Beverly Drew (1911-1996), was handed over the contract for redesigning and executing the plan for Chandigarh. A group of Indian architects were also associated with

the actual execution of the city. The grand narrative of the coming into being of Chandigarh has been narrated too frequently to repeat here.[191]

As Lawrence Vale writes, "if Imperial Delhi was to have been a capstone of British colonial rule, then Chandigarh," Punjab's modernist capital, "was to be a symbol of Independent India."[192] Although the city itself was completed only in the 1960s, its master plan, architectural drawings, and photographs were repeatedly published in newspapers, journals, and government publications from 1951 onwards. For instance, in June 1953, *MARG*, a journal of architecture, visual, and the performing arts, invited Le Corbusier to write the editorial, foregrounding the principals on which the city of Chandigarh was organized.[193] The subsequent issue of the journal, yet again, devoted significant sections on the city, reproducing a number of elevation drawings, ground plans, and photographs of the few residential quarters that had already been constructed out of brick and reinforced concrete (Figure 3.7).

Corbusier designed the principal government buildings in the capital and the cultural complex. Jane Drew, Maxwell Fry, and Pierre Jeanneret were responsible for developing the neighborhood sections, schools, shopping plazas, and government housing. While buildings in the capital and the cultural complex were constructed primarily out of reinforced concrete, the buildings in the neighborhood sections combined brick and reinforced concrete (Figure 3.8; Figure 3.9). The combination of brick and

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[191] For a history of the making of Chandigarh, see Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: In Search Of An Identity* (Carondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier: The Struggle for Modernity in Postcolonial India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Norma Evenson, *Chandigarh* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966).
[192] Lawrence Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 121.
[193] Le Corbusier, "Editorial," *MARG*, Vol. VI, No. 3 (1953), 1-4.

concrete created an entirely new aesthetic. As Norma Evenson writes: "It is the government housing which gives Chandigarh its definitive character, not only because of its extent, but also through the effect which it has had on private building, an influence sufficiently pervasive to have produced what may be termed a 'Chandigarh style.'"[194]

By 1954, the government housing of Chandigarh had become a model for affordable low cost residential structures. To address the intense housing crisis of the 1950s, the Government had organized a number of exhibitions, the most elaborate of which was the International Housing Exhibition held in New Delhi in 1954. During the Exhibition, as many as seventy three model structures were erected at the exhibition site on Mathura Road, New Delhi. Over the following two years, the sustainability of each structure was examined. The state appointed Comfort Survey Committee investigated the relative merits of each model.[195] Alongside newspaper reports, a number of texts containing detailed drawings and construction methods for low cost house were also published. In these texts, the low cost housing of Chandigarh was featured prominently. One such text was the 1954 *Low-cost Housing for Industrial Workers*, published by the Ministry of Labor.[196] Featured prominently in this and other such texts, the low cost housing of Chandigarh held forth the promise of amicably resolving the housing crisis that had occurred with the displacement of millions in the aftermath of the Partition. It was this "Chandigarh style" that *Shree 420* cited.

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[194] For a detailed discussion, see Evenson, *Chandigarh*, 49.
[195] See Comfort Survey Committee, *Report on Low Cost Housing* (New Delhi: National Buildings Organization, Ministry of Works, Housing, and Supply, n.d.).
[196]Ministry of Labor, *Low-cost Housing for Industrial Workers* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1955).

Cityscapes, Landscapes, and the Everyday: The Photographic Frame

It was through a complex interplay of the politics of hope and the politics of aesthetics that concrete emerged as a metaphor of progress. If Chandigarh's low cost residential structures held forth the promise of shelter for one and for all, the very materiality of concrete took on an aesthetic dimension through the medium of cinema and photography. Along with *Shree 420*, the aestheticization of reinforced concrete is perhaps most visible in the work of the Hungarian photographer Lucien Hervé (1910-2007) who accompanied Corbusier to India. However, although Hervé accompanied Corbusier to India, interestingly enough, he was not a well-known figure in India. He did not participate in photography exhibitions and neither does his name appear in the annals of photography in India. In spite of this anonymity, his photographs of Chandigarh were repeatedly reproduced. Indeed, it would be hardly far fetched to claim that in the 1950s and the 1960s Lucien Hervé's distinctive visual language was the primary mode through which Chandigarh was framed for contemporaneous audiences.

Hervé, who started his career as a photographer in 1947, is best known for his photographs of Corbusier's architecture. Inspired by photographers such as André Kertész, Germaine Krull, and László Moholy-Nagy, Hervé sought to represent architecture not as monumental mass but as a fragmentary experience of space, sharply delineated by the play of light and shadow, volume and void (Figure 3.10). Fully comprehending the difficulty of capturing the essence of built spaces through a frontal wide-angle shot, Hervé jettisoned the wide-angle lens. While most architecture photographers in the 1950s tended to use frontal wide-angle shots in effect flattening out

the tactile three dimensionality of built space, Hervé utilized fragmentary angular frames to foreground both the tactile nature of architecture and the materiality of concrete. It is this strategy that produced Hervé's distinctive aesthetic in a period when architectural photojournalism was expected to be "purely informative and strictly limited to frontal views."[197]

In Hervé, the modernist architect found his ideal photographer. According to Corbusier, Hervé's photographs "reflected the soul of his building."[198] Hervé had taken hundreds of photographs of Corbusier's Unite d'Habitation in Marseille in 1949, which he then sent to the architect. In an oft-cited letter, Corbusier complimented the photographer for having "the soul of an architect."[199] This was only the beginning of Hervé's long collaboration with Corbusier, a collaboration that lasted until the architect's death in 1965. From 1949 onwards, Hervé not only chronicled each one of Corbusier's buildings but also photographed the architect's rough drawings, sketches, and plans. The last three volumes of Corbusier's *Oeuvres Completes*, which documented the architect's oeuvre from 1946 to 1965, reproduced Hervé's photographs extensively. Hervé's photographs thus became synonymous with the architect's buildings, bringing to life their "subtle, accurate and magnificent play of volumes assembled in light," to use Corbusier's own words.[200]

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[197] Olivier Beer, *Lucien Hervé: Building Images* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2004), 22.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Letter from Le Corbusier, dated December 15, 1949. Cited in Beer, *Lucien Hervé,* 22.
[200] Corbusier cited in Rémi Rouyer, "Exhibition Review: Lucien Herve Architecture Photographique Hotel de Sully, Paris 18 January-17 March 2002," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 61, No. 4 (2002), 559-561, 559. As Rouyer writes: "Le Corbusier particularly appreciated the way Hervé succeeded in photographing architecture as a 'subtle, accurate and magnificent play of volumes assembled in light,' a definition the architect presented in *Versu ne architecture* in 1923."

In the 1950s, essays published on Corbusier in journals such as *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Domus*, and *Jardin des Arts* also almost exclusively used Hervé's photographs as illustrations of the architect's oeuvre. These essays were often cited in Indian journals such as *MARG*, *Design*, *Art in Industry*, and the *Architect's Yearbook*. Perhaps most importantly, Hervé's style itself had a wide purport in India with a number of photographers adopting Hervé's aesthetic in their own photographs of Chandigarh. Such photographs were ubiquitous in 1950s India. Take, for example, two photographs of residential quarters for the Member of the Legislative Assembly, Chandigarh reproduced here as Figure 3.11 and Figure 3.12. While the former was published in 1957 in the art journal *Design*, the latter was reproduced in a 1959 tourist guidebook published by the Department of Tourism, Government of India. In both cases, the Indian photographer responsible for the photograph remained unidentified. Hervé's own photographs were also reproduced, albeit anonymously, in the 1959 guidebook (Figure 3.13).[201]

The startling compositional resemblance among all three photographs merely points towards the deep influence Hervé must have had on the visualization of Chandigarh. Like Hervé's own works, the two photographs of the residential quarters for the Member of the Legislative Assembly also avoids the frontal frame. Instead, the building is framed through a three-quarter angle – an oblique angle often adopted by Hervé to create a sense of continuity of space. The 1953 photograph of the peon's quarter published in *MARG* also adopted a similar oblique three-quarter angle, clearly bearing

[201] The negative for this photograph is now housed at the Getty Research Institute. Lucien Hervé: Photographs of the Architecture and Artworks of Le Corbusier, Special Collections 2002.R.41, Dossier 14, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (Henceforth GRI).

signs of Hervé's aesthetic imprint (See Figure 3.7). The photographer of this image remains unknown.

Similarly, the focus on the linear geometric grids of the structure brought to the foreground by photographing the building at a very close range is also reminiscent of Hervé's own strategy of foregrounding the geometricity of lines by closely cropping the image. A number of Hervé's negatives, now housed at the Getty Research Institute's archives, still bear the photographer's pencil marks, altering the framed image to bring to the fore the linear geometry of Corbusier's architectural forms. A comparison between Hervé's original negative and the photograph of the Secretariat reproduced in the travel guide also reveal the same technique. This strategy produced a modernist aesthetic, more akin to the abstract geometry of Piet Mondrian than to the genre of Indian pictorialist traditions, documentary photography, or even the work of contemporaneous Indian photographers such as Sunil Janah (1943-1963) (Figure 3.14).

One encounters a similar aesthetic intervention in photographs of Chandigarh by Jeet Malhotra. As a junior architect in Corbusier's team, Malhotra had the opportunity to closely interact with both the architect and his photographer.[202]Although Malhotra is now better known as the erstwhile Chief Architect of Punjab, he was also responsible for some of Chandigarh's most iconic images. Along with Hervé, many of Malhotra's photographs were published in a 1961 issue of *MARG*. In Malhotra's images, the photographic plane is almost inevitably punctuated by stark shadows, powerfully off-setting the materiality

[202] Malhotra was part of the group of Indian town planners who worked with Corbusier. The other members of the group were J. S. Dethe, Narindra Lamba, and A. R. Prabhakar. Principal architects included U. E. Chowdhury, B. P. Mathur, Piloo Mody, and M. N. Sharma. Most of the Indian members of the team, including Malhotra, were trained at the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi.

of concrete and the geometric lines of Chandigarh's buildings (Figure 3.15). Projecting pillars are transformed into lines cutting across the photographic frame. Buildings are transformed into a geometric play of forms. Or, in some cases, buildings are framed through architectural fragments. For instance, a window in the ramp of the Secretariat becomes a frame through which the building itself is viewed (Figure 3.16). Fully exploring the play of light and shade on the rough exposed concrete surfaces of Corbusier's buildings, Malhotra transformed his architectural photographs into lyrical, often abstract, aesthetic meditations on concrete itself.

In Malhotra or Hervé's photographs, the city only emerged as a fragmented conglomeration of images, stark darkness setting off, even heightening, form and texture. The photographs offered no knowledge, no comprehensive view of Chandigarh so to speak. They did not reveal the secrets of the city, did not present the unmasked face of Chandigarh for easy consumption. Yet, these photographs became synonymous with Chandigarh, the city that had come to stand in as a symbol of progress. The city exemplified, according to the 1959 guidebook, "modern India's spirit of adventure and the determination of the people to achieve progress quickly."[203] Jawaharlal Nehru put it succinctly when he stated: Chandigarh "hits you on the head, because it makes you think. You may squirm at the impact but it makes you think and imbibe new ideas."[204]

Malhotra or Hervé's modernism provided a frame to see the new modernist reinforced concrete city of Chandigarh – the city unlike any other in India, the city of the future, the city for which there existed no parole of comparison. The monumental

[203] Government of India, *Bhakra-Nangal and Chandigarh* (New Delhi: Department of Tourism, 1959), 5.
[204] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Inaugural Address" in *Seminar On Architecture, March, 1959* (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1959), 8.

architecture of Chandigarh – residential blocks that filled up entire segments of the city or the bold structures in the capital complex framed by acres of empty space – formed a corpus so vast, so new, and so different, that they could perhaps only be assimilated through miniaturization. An overview, a view from above, would have placed the viewer outside the city. The view from above remains a view from elsewhere, standing not within the city but outside it. Malhotra and Hervé's photographs, in contrast, offered a view from within the city, a view that was always partial and fragmentary. This is perhaps only appropriate. As Walter Benjamin tells us: "Everyone will have noticed how much easier it is to get hold of a painting, more particularly a sculpture, *and especially architecture*, in a photograph than in reality."[205]

That this miniaturization could only be achieved through capturing the city as image seems to have been implicitly understood by Kodak. In the years immediately preceding World War II, India had come to constitute a large market for photographic supplies manufactured by international companies such as Kodak. The institution in 1940 of a photography journal, *Kodak Indian Magazine* (later renamed *Tropical Photography*), by the same corporation points towards the importance the company placed on the Indian market.[206] Well known for its aggressive marketing strategies, Kodak emerged as one of the primary distributors of still and motion picture supplies in 1950s India.[207] A 1961

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[205] Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography" in Michael W. Jennings, ed. *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927-1934* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 507-530, 523. Emphasis mine.
[206] For a more detailed history, see G. Thomas, *History of Photography, India, 1840-1980* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh State Akademi of Photography, 1981).
[207] For instance, in the 1930s, the radio did not have any forum for broadcasting advertisements. In an unprecedented move, Kodak broadcasted a weekly program on photography. This program served as an advertisement for Kodak. See Arun Chaudhuri *Indian Advertising: 1780 to 1950* (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing, 2007), 226.

advertisement for Kodak's Kodachrome and Ektachrome films published in *MARG* carried the caption: "Its Kodak for Color and Black-&-White, too!"[208] Photographs of Chandigarh accompanied the advertisement, illustrating for consumers the superior virtues of the product (Figure 3.17).

By the 1960s, Kodak advertisements across the globe had begun to use the vocabulary of progress, perhaps to associate the company with the image of technological advancement. Kodak's popularization of the term "high tech" is a case in point. As Robert S. Anderson writes: "Derived from 'high technology,' and referring primarily to new electronic technology and new design, this term 'high tech' appears to have been first mentioned in the journal *Social Forces* in 1955. This is the same year that the verb 'automate' appeared in English. Derek de Solla Price used the distinction between high and low technology in *Science Since Babylon* in 1961, and quickly the *New York Times* (1961) and then a Kodak ad in the journal *Science* (1962) began to popularize 'high technology.'"[209] In India, the company's citation of Chandigarh was then in keeping with Kodak's larger interest in the technologies of progress. In the 1961 advertisement, Chandigarh's architecture was, yet again, visualized through an overt emphasis on geometricity and linearity. This is precisely how Malhotra or Hervé would have framed the city, in effect aestheticizing it. The use of Chandigarh in an advertisement for

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[208] Advertisement published in *MARG: A Magazine of Architecture and Art* Vol. XV, No. 1 (1961), unpaginated. Kodachrome was a type of color reversal film manufactured by Eastman Kodak from 1935 onwards. It was produced in formats suitable for both still and motion picture cameras. While Kodachrome involved a complex developing process and was often slow, Ektachrome, first produced in the 1940s, allowed both professionals and amateurs to process their own films. For the history of photographic material and Kodak's role in popularizing photography, see Charles E. K. Mees, *From Dry Plates to Ektachrome Film: A Story of Photographic Research* (Chicago: Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 1961).
[209] Anderson, *Nucleus and Nation*, 395.

photographic supplies should not astound us. The aesthetics of reinforced concrete, after all, was a practice of the eye.

The advertisement for Kodak was part of a larger 1950s and 1960s moment when the rhetoric of culture was repeatedly mobilized to market consumer products and services. For instance, with "For Art's Sake" as its tagline, a 1953 advertisement for the Associated Cement Companies Ltd. published in *Art in Industry*, a journal of fine and commercial arts, featured the newly constructed Cowasji Jehangir Art Gallery in Bombay (Figure 3.18). Formed at the initiative of the industrialist F. E. Dinshaw, the Associated Cement Companies Ltd. was a cement manufacturers' cartel. Its formation in 1936 had given a great boost to the cement industry. By the 1950s, the group was the foremost cement manufacturer in India.[210]

The Associated Cement's evocation of the Jehangir Art Gallery is perhaps strategic. The architecture of the Gallery had powerful resonances for the history of modern architecture in India. Designed by Durga Shankar Bajpai and G. M. Bhuta of the Bombay-based architecture firm Master, Sathe and Bhuta, the gallery was constructed with reinforced concrete columns, beams, slabs, and portal frames with steel trusses. While the use of reinforced concrete portal frames made possible the creation of a large exhibition hall unobstructed by any columns, the entrance boasted of the first cantilevered portico in India – considered a remarkable architectural feat for its time (Figure 3.19).

The Gallery had equally powerful resonances for the 1950s art world. As one of the first commercial exhibition spaces, the Jehangir Art Gallery had assumed an almost

[210] For this history, see Das, *Cement Industry of India*, 36.

iconic stature in the 1950s modern art world. With the sole exception of the Silpi Chakra Gallery, a small commercial art gallery founded in 1948 by the Silpi Chakra artists collective in New Delhi, exhibition spaces in India were almost inevitably associated with art institutions such as the Bombay School of Art, the Government College of Art and Craft in Calcutta, and the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (established 1928) in New Delhi. Exhibitions were either organized by the institutions themselves, as was the case with the annual exhibitions of the Bombay Art Society formed under the aegis of the Bombay School of Art or had to be approved by the institution's executive committee, as was the case with the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society. For instance, in 1944, the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society refused to exhibit the works of Ramkinkar Baij claiming that his visuality was "too modern."[211]

At the insistence of a number of Bombay-based artists and critics, Cowasji Jehangir (1879-1962), a prominent Parsi philanthropist, founded the Cowasji Jehangir Art Gallery in 1952. The Gallery, "a non-profit organization registered as a public trust" is "inextricably linked to the development of the art movement in Bombay" as Rahul Mehtotra and Sharada Dwivedi have noted.[212] Understandably, avant-garde artists and intellectuals in India saw the opening of the Jehangir Art Gallery as a move towards the democratization of the field of modern art. By evoking the Jehangir Art Gallery in its advertisement, the Associated Cement not only revealed an awareness of the politics of the art world but also participated in its discursive vocabulary.

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[211] Interview with K. G. Subramanyan, May 11, 2007.
[212] Rahul Mehtotra and Sharada Dwivedi, *The Jehangir Art Gallery* (Bombay: The Jehangir Art Gallery, 2002), 23.

Placed on the very top of the page, two photographs of the Jehangir Art Gallery, followed by the caption "For Art's Sake" in a large bold typeface, provided the immediate context for the advertisement (See Figure 3.18). While the smaller photograph depicted the façade of the Gallery, the interior space of the exhibition hall was clearly foregrounded in the larger photograph. Thus placed, this image summoned the reader's attention. In it, the reader encountered audiences – both men and women – contemplating paintings displayed at the Gallery. The photograph could easily be read as an innocuous documentary photograph faithfully recording an art exhibition that had taken place at the gallery.

That the photograph is coded becomes obvious when the image is read alongside the accompanying text: "India's most modern Art Gallery emphasizes the unique advantages of Reinforced Concrete for all types of construction. Beauty is wedded to strength in this modern structure which contains Reinforced Concrete rigid frames spanning a spacious hall and projecting canopy at the entrance. Built to last with ACC cement."[213] Drawing into a tight constellation notions of beauty, modernism, modern art, and reinforced concrete, this text "loads the image" to use Roland Barthes' words, "burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination."[214] The reinforced concrete ribs spanning the roof of the exhibition hall become overtly visible when one returns to the image having read the text.

Although the text anchored meaning and directed the reader, the imagination of reinforced concrete in relation to notions of modernism was not arbitrary. It drew on

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[213] Advertisement published in *Art in Industry* Vol. 4, No. 1 (1953), unpaginated.
[214] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 26.

preexisting iconographies that offered a ready template for signification. Indeed, the production of the advertisement was premised on the availability of such iconographies and templates, the absence of which would have rendered the advertisement irrelevant.

As an inherent part of the "culture industry," advertisements provide an iconography of the present – an idea that scholars have only just begun to explore.[215] The medium of advertising then also becomes a particularly powerful location to tease out the eruption into the domain of the popular the metaphor of reinforced concrete as an aesthetics of progress. Signification is possible, Barthes writes, only when there is "a stock of signs, the beginnings of a code."[216] In this case, of course, the existence of a stock of signs or the beginnings of a code bears a double innuendo – it suggests that, in 1953, there existed at least a tentative association between ideas of aesthetics, modernism, modern art, and the image of reinforced concrete.

Miniaturizing the Gigantic: Sculpted Narratives

While Chandigarh offered certain preexisting iconographies, the available templates for signification, needless to say, exceeded the immediate vocabulary of architecture, urbanism, and architectural photography. While in the previous section I have mapped Chandigarh through a complex interplay of the politics of hope, the politics of aesthetics, and metaphors of progress, in this section I will focus on the oeuvre of Dhanraj Bhagat, a sculptor who produced his first reinforced concrete sculpture in 1953.

Histories of modern Indian sculpture have recuperated Bhagat as marking an important transition in the trajectory of modern sculpture in India. For instance,

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[215] For example, see William Mazzarella, *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
[216] Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 21.

beginning her discussion with Ramkinkar Baij in a section titled "Sculpture of the Period of Transition," Jaya Appaswamy – the first scholar to write on modern Indian sculpture – posited Bhagat as part of the first generation of modernist sculptors in India. According to Appaswamy, "sculpture of the period of transition" is characterized by the rejection of academicism, the use of unconventional materials, an interest in abstract forms derived from figurative sources, and a parallel engagement with the language of the international modern.[217] That subsequent scholarship has also tended to map Bhagat's artistic career through precisely these defining modalities should not be surprising.[218] As the first book-length study on modern sculptural traditions in India, Appaswamy's text not only provided the first history of modern sculptural practices but also significantly shaped subsequent scholarship on modern Indian sculpture.[219]

Needless to say, although Bhagat experimented with reinforced concrete through the 1950s and the 1960s, his engagement with concrete has been subsumed under the larger logic of the use of unconventional material. Yet, the sculptor's decision to experiment with reinforced concrete at this specific historic juncture can hardly be a matter of pure coincidence. Moreover, reinforced concrete was hardly an unconventional material in 1950s India. As I have argued in this chapter, reinforced concrete had already

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[217] Jaya Appaswamy, *An Introduction to Modern Indian Sculpture* (New Delhi: Vikas Publications 1970), 13-14.

[218] For example, an abridged version of Appasamy's text was reproduced as the introduction to a 1983 survey of modern Indian sculpture published by the Jehangir Art Gallery. See Jaya Appasamy, "Indian Sculpture Today" in Ram Chatterji, ed. *Indian Sculpture Today -1983* (Bombay: Jehangir Art Gallery, 1983), 9-12. Also see Josef James, "Contemporary Indian Sculpture – The Madras Metaphor" in Josef James, ed. *Contemporary Indian Sculpture – The Madras Metaphor* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1993), 12-41, 19; Ratan Parimoo, "Modern Movement in Indian Sculpture" in Josef James, ed. *Indian Art Since the Early 40s – A Search for Identity* (Madras: Artists' Handicrafts Association, 1974), 36-46, 40.

[219] For example, see Ratan Parimoo, "Modern Indian Sculpture" in Gayatri Sinha, ed. *Indian Art: An Overview* (Calcutta: Rupa, 2003), 164-184, 172.

asserted its presence in the visual and textual worlds of post-Independence India through newspaper reports, photographs, advertisements, and of course, the post-Independence state's construction projects. Using this topography as a background, here I want to consider the materiality of reinforced concrete, complete in its form, texture, allegories, and metaphors. I propose we see Bhagat's works as a symptomatic site that marks a coming into being of a post-Independence subjectivity, both authorial and spectatorial.

Bhagat began his artistic career in colonial India. In late 1920s, Bhagat joined the colonial Mayo School of Art, Lahore (established 1872) where he was schooled in the language of academicism. However, the Mayo School's orientation changed in the 1930s, albeit temporarily, with the induction of the artist Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal into the School's staff as an instructor for the commercial painting and modeling departments. At this time, Sanyal was well known as one of the more progressive artists in Lahore. As one of the two pupils in Sanyal's sculpture class, Bhagat developed a close relationship with the artist.

Sanyal's association with the Mayo School of Art, however, was short lived. In 1937, following a conflict with the then principal Samarendranath Gupta, Sanyal resigned from his position to set up an independent art school. Sanyal's Lahore School of Fine Art, a school I discuss in my concluding chapter, would soon exceed its role merely as an art center to become a nucleus for the progressive, anti-imperialist, and leftist intellectuals of Lahore, as Swatantra Prakash, one of the early students of the School, indicated.[220]

[220] Interview with Swatantra Prakash, November 15, 2007.

Following a brief stint at the Mayo School as an instructor for its commercial modeling class, Bhagat also joined Lahore School of Fine Art in 1942.[221]

This symbolic rejection of both colonial pedagogic structures and institutions simultaneously translated into a rejection of academic realism. It was during his association with the Lahore School of Fine Art (1942-1945) that Bhagat moved away from the academic realist tradition of plaster casts and marble busts that had defined sculptural practices from the late 19th century onwards. Inspired by the architectural woodcarvings that he had encountered during a visit to Rajasthan, Bhagat began experimenting with wood in the mid-1940s.[222] Taking as its source the human anatomy, Bhagat's early wooden sculptures have a remarkably lyrical quality, with highly polished smooth glossy surfaces. As the art critic and historian Charles Fabri wrote: "Bhagat delighted in these liquid steam-like forms. His sensitive and lyrical wooden figures flowed like music, and melted forms one into the other, with soft undulating lines."[223] These highly polished surfaces, however, soon became textured, bearing the marks of the sculptor's chisel. In the 1947 wooden sculpture, *Reunion*, chisel marks stand out almost like scars – open wounds on the sculpted surface (Figure 3.20).

"The times were harsh," writes Fabri. "In the Punjab man had become the wolf of man, wild fanatics rushed down the streets yelling wicked words of hatred against the other religion, knives were swished out from under cloaks and caftans, blood spluttered

[221] Apart from Bhagat, some of the other artists who conducted art classes at the Lahore School of Fine Art included Sanyal, Roop Krishna, and Mary Krishna.
[222] See Charles Fabri, *Dhanraj Bhagat* (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1964), unpaginated.
[223] Ibid. Charles Fabri had been closely associated with both Bhagat and the Lahore School of Art. Given that Bhagat's sculptures made during the early part of his career in Lahore is now lost, descriptions such as these are invaluable in recuperating the artist's oeuvre.

the streets. Women and children lay massacred in heaps, the crackling laughter of monstrous fires leapt up from houses, rape and murder danced hand in hand to the sinister tune of shrill shrieks."[224] It was on the eve of Partition, a time marked by incessant violence, that Bhagat left Lahore for New Delhi. Subsequently, with the division of Punjab in 1947, Bhagat lost his ancestral home in Lahore. From 1946 onwards, themes of loss and a longing for return entered the sculptor's vocabulary, both in terms of treatment of surfaces and subject matter. Bhagat's treatment of wood prefigured his interest in the rough textured surfaces of reinforced concrete – a material the artist began experimenting with in 1953.

Appasamy's positioning of Bhagat as the inheritor of Ramkinkar Baij's modernist visuality is of course understandable. Baij's influence on Bhagat is obvious in terms of subject matter, material, and style. For instance, one of Bhagat's first reinforced concrete sculptures, *Burden*, takes as its subject a female figure struggling to balance a child with one hand and a heavy load with the other (Figure 3.21). The rendering of the sinuous muscles of the legs seen through the form of the drapery is almost startlingly similar to a number of Baij's sculptures. Like Baij's 1935 reinforced concrete sculpture *Sujata*, this figure too is depicted with a simplified elongated body and rounded limbs (Figure 3.22). The posture of the figure is also reminiscent of Baij's *Sujata*, who stands tall, with one leg forward, as if frozen in the act of walking. While *Burden* lacks the sense of rhythmic motion captured in Baij's1938 *Santhal Family* (See Figure 2.35), the drooping shoulders of the figure weighed down by the heavy weight she carries is nevertheless reminiscent of the *Santhal Family*.

[224] Ibid.

However, unlike Baij's monumental over life-size sculptures, Bhagat's *Burden* makes no attempt to dominate the landscape. Barely three and a half feet tall, the figure reaches the viewer's eye level only when placed on a pedestal. While this sanctions the possibility of identifying with the figure, the act of pedestialization simultaneously produces the female body as an icon bearing the marks of anguish. Although resolute, the icon with its head bowed low is hardly heroic. Neither is there any hint of robust strength or disarming candor. It is in this lack of the heroic that Bhagat's oeuvre remains distinct from that of Baij. Indeed, the experience of Partition and the communal violence that followed it may have made it impossible to imagine a heroic human form.

In the subsequent decade, however, the human form all but disappeared in Bhagat's vocabulary to be replaced with abstract forms of an architectonic nature. The sculptor's new interest in the play of volume and void is clearly visible in the 1962 sculptural ensemble *Rajasthani Women* (Figure 3.23). Here, using a cementitious composition of plaster, water, iron filing and a reinforcing iron frame, the sculptor generated a voluminous but hollow form. The cementitious form – course, grainy, and striated – visually retained an affinity with exposed concrete. The shape of the ensemble had an immediate architectural referent – Corbusier's 1956 concrete tower of the Legislative Assembly at Chandigarh (See Figure 3.8). Given his numerous visits to Chandigarh in the late 1950s and the 1960s, the sculptor would have been intimately familiar with this structure. Bhagat was closely associated with the Chandigarh project, both as an advisor to the committee for the establishment of the Chandigarh Museum of Art and the Department of Fine Arts, Punjab University, Chandigarh.

Indeed, the *Rajasthani Women* had been created for the Punjab University in whose collection the sculpture now resides. Purchased in the early 1960s, the *Rajasthani Women*, along with a number of Bhagat's works, formed a part of the core collection of the Museum of Art associated with the Punjab University's Department of Fine Arts.[225] Was Bhagat's image then a celebration of Chandigarh's modernism? The tension between volume and void in the sculpture makes difficult such a reading. The sense of volume is starkly counterpoised by gaping holes located where the face and arms should have resided. The work thus makes overtly visible a dehumanizing and alienating contrapuntal tension between the shape of the hollow core and the exterior of the resultant form. It is only through the act of naming – through the title of the sculpture *Rajasthani Women* that the figures are returned to their anthropomorphic origins.

Human figures continued to recede to the background making space for minimalist architectonic forms that dominated Bhagat's oeuvre in the 1960s. Between 1962 and 1963, Bhagat produced a number of life-size sculptures that bore a clear resemblance to architectural spaces. For instance, a 1962 sculpture, also in the collection of the Punjab University, is composed of box-like shapes enclosing a hollow form (Figure 3.24). The tubular base is capped by a rectangular compartmentalized structure. Although an abstracted figure can still be discerned through the architectonic form, the sculpture bears more similarities to Chandigarh's architecture than to the human body. The title of the work, *Man*, yet again withdraws the figure into an anthropocentric vision. Reducing Chandigarh's monumental architecture into a human scale, Bhagat appears to

[225] R. R. Sethi and Jarava Lal Mehta, *A History of the Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1947-1967* (Chandigarh: Punjab University, 1968), 265.

repeatedly resist the dehumanizing rationality of Western modernism. Bhagat's mobilization of both the language of abstraction and the materiality of concrete into a vocabulary of resistance also simultaneously makes possible a powerful authorial claim to this modernism. A similar strategy is evident in other works from this period, for example *Third Eye* (1962), *Cosmic Man* (1962), and *Man* (1963). This claim is thus asserted repetitively – over and over again.

Bhagat's claim to modernism becomes more complex when one takes into account Bhagat's *Construction* series (1962 -1964) (Figure 3.25). This series takes on an imperative when contextualized within the early post-Independence rhetoric of nation building, progress, and programs of heavy industrialization. Interestingly, the *Construction* series is made of wood rather than concrete. Attached to a low wooden base, the totemic sculptures are nearly five foot in height. Each totem in the *Construction* series is similar in shape and form but none bear identical markings. The frontal carvings on the totem addresses the view in a language the view does not know. The cryptic iconography marked, pierced, etched, and carved onto the totems point to no preexisting referent. No tribe, group, or clan could claim the totem as their own. Yet, by virtue of its form, its authority as a sacred marker of community, the totem demanded that the viewer keep it inviolate.

It is unclear whether Bhagat was familiar with Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, a text that insistently associated the "primitive" practices of totem worship to structures of modern societal relations. Bhagat's familiarity, or the lack of familiarity, is perhaps quite irrelevant. Given his interest in African sculpture, Bhagat would surely

have been aware of the ways in which totems served to mark, regulate, and provide a frame for social structures. Through his visit to the United States in 1952 and his intimacy with the U.S.-based Ukrainian Cubist sculptor Alexander Archipenko (1887-1964), Bhagat would have also been aware of Western modernism's engagement with "primitivism."[226] Bhagat's 1963 *Self Portrait* based on an African mask clearly demonstrates this awareness. The title of the totems series – *Construction* – however, securely locates the totem in post-Independent India's present. On the one hand, the series performs the work of fabricating entirely new iconographies for the present. On the other hand, it performatively negotiates the new techno-rational India in terms of the old. Through this complex maneuver – the act of setting up a dialogue between the art object and its mode of address, the image and the text – Bhagat mediated relations between modernization, progress, modes of experience, and aesthetics.

Narratives of Progress: The Public Mural

Dhanraj Bhagat's mediation of the relations between modernization, progress, modes of experience, and aesthetics found a close parallel in Nehru's own vision of a "scientific humanism." For Nehru, industrialization and modernization signified an alliance between "the temper and approach of science" and philosophy "with reverence to all that lies beyond."[227] It was this approach that Nehru called "a kind of scientific humanism," where science and progress was guided by a code of ethics, morality, and

[226] For a history of Western modernism's engagement with "primitivism," see Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Gillian Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
[227] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 50.

common good.[228] For Nehru, India was the ideal location to articulate this scientific humanism, for this scientific humanism was well in keeping with India's own traditions. After all, India has always professed a spirit of renunciation and unity for common good. It was this perception of an Indian value of common good that allowed Nehru to make a powerful claim for a new universality based on science and Indian philosophy.[229]

This was not, however, Nehru's hubris. A similar argument was made in 1936 by Bhim Chandra Chatterjee in *The Hydro-Electric Practice in India*, one of the first full-length studies on hydroelectric projects written in India.[230] Extensively quoting from the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Puranas, Chatterjee began his treatise on the construction of hydroelectric schemes by arguing for the Indian origins of hydropower. "Let us briefly review," Chatterjee wrote, "how far ancient India was advanced in Hydraulic Engineering. We may briefly notice the hydraulic works of the great sages and kings of Ancient India; after four generations of strenuous effort of the kings of Ajodhya, our great Bhagirath brought down the Ganges from the Himalayas, and directed the course of this river to the Bay of Bengal."[231]

Chatterjee then traced the story of hydraulic engineering in India through the interjections of the Hindu god Vishnu's incarnation Parasuram and the constructions of dams by the mythological sages and kings of Puri. In spite of such an illustrious lineage, India is "poorest in the World" and its people lacking the basic amenities such as food,

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[228] Ibid., 559.
[229] For a more in-depth reading of Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, see Prakash, *Another Reason*, 201-226.
[230] Bhim C. Chatterjee, *The Hydro-Electric Practice in India* (Benaras: Shiva Narayan Chatterjee, 1936).
[231] Ibid., 2.

water, and electricity, Chatterjee wrote.[232] Only science, Chatterjee argued, could restore India's place in the world and elevate the poverty of her people. This then was the promise of progress, plentitude, and equality. It is this promise that was echoed by Nehru's "scientific humanism."

In a certain way, then, scientific humanism is also a way of thinking modernity in relation to a pre-existing philosophical tradition. The artist Sardari Lal Parasher's *Vidyavalanj* (States of Knowledge) steel mural for the Government College for Men at Chandigarh perhaps best summarizes this impulse (Figure 3.26). Commissioned by Corbusier in 1960, the mural was completed in 1964. Composed of a conglomeration of basic geometric shapes – the square and the triangle – the mural appears to be a composition of abstract forms, rational and ordered. A closer look, however, reveals figures enmeshed within the geometric forms. At its very center is the schematic figure of a bull. Yet another figure, alluding to the Hindu goddess Durga, is perched atop a triangle. The figure holds a trident and rides a lion. The mythic Garuda, the god Vishnu's vehicle, with his arms stretched upwards is perched on the opposite end of the composition. A snake in the center completes the mural.

For Parasher, the mural stood in for a vision of education, one that was premised on an integration of science and spirituality. As the artist wrote in his notebook:

> I have tried to symbolize an ancient Indian theory of knowledge: of the education process involved in knowing, meditating, and acquiring true transcendental wisdom. It was [the 5th-century Buddhist philosopher] Nagarjuna who described these three stages in his Pragjaparamita. In my sculpture I have interpreted them through five firm composites. The triangles thrusting out into space symbolizes

[232] Ibid., 4.

> accumulated facts of knowledge [objective knowledge, empiricism, scientificity]. The snake is the ancient symbol for those laws that support the variegated facts of perception. The goddess riding over the lion with a piercing trident in her hand represents the basic yearning of the human soul for piercing beyond nature and its laws. The fifth form, the Garuda represents final release of man from the limitations of all those forms of knowledge into a state of superconsciousness without which the education process remains incomplete and stunted.[233]

Together, the snake, Durga, and Garuda maintains the compositional equilibrium, as if directing the force of science and rationality. An entire narrative is thus interwoven onto the surface of Corbusier's modernist structure, conjoining modern notions of scientificity and rationality with a pre-modern iconographic schema. The buoyant geometricity of the design and the monumentality of scale serve to energize the entire façade of the structure, throwing powerful shadows onto Corbusier's reinforced concrete building. The mural thus encompasses not just its immediate physical space but claims the entire surface of the building.

The very materiality of the mural referenced steel and concrete. Shadowing architecture, the black painted steel thus enters into a dialogic relationship with reinforced concrete. Yet, transforming each time with the movement of the sun and the changing of seasons, the shapes and lines of the hundred feet by sixty feet mural *Vidyavalanj* changes constantly. The mural's iconographic narrative along with its lack of a central point of focus further underscores the artist's playful yet conscious engagement with movement – a process of becoming rather than being. In refusing to comply with the

[233] Sardari Lal Parasher's private papers. S. L. Parasher Archives, New Delhi.

static grandeur of Corbusier's imposing architecture, the mural encompasses within itself a sense of movement and change, a quality that may well be read as a symbol of progress. Reflecting on art, modernity, and progress, the artist wrote: "It is my firm conviction that modernity is first and foremost a matter of consciousness, not of style, style is born of the consciousness."[234] It is this consciousness, a modern consciousness that embraced progress while being grounded in the philosophy of Nagarjuna, that the mural attempted to visualize.

This mural marked a turning point in the artist's career. As the artist writes:

> Early in my career I built upon the trends that were current and on the various movements that rose and fell in the contemporary art of the modern world. The preoccupation of those movements and trends was with mannerism, or formalistic problems of painting and its language. I and many of us in India were concerned by those attitudes…I, who had inherited the art, insights, and impulses of this ancient land, was at that point a stranger to them.[235]

Indeed, Parasher was well versed in the trajectories of Western art. As a student of English literature at the Foreman Christian College, Lahore Parasher had begun taking art lessons from Muhammad Abdul Aziz Din (1875-1931), an artist best known for his academic realist portraits, in the 1930s.[236] At this time, Roop Krishna (1922-1968), a Lahore-based modernist artist who had received training at the Royal College of Arts,

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[234] Ibid.
[235] S. L. Parasher, "My Credo" in Sandy Sterner and Prajnaparamita Parasher, eds. *S. L. Parasher 1904-1990: Time Space Light Consciousness* (New Delhi: SarNir Foundation, n.d.), iv-vi, iv.
[236] For Muhammad Abdul Aziz Din's biography, see Musarrat Hasan, *Painting in the Punjab Plains 1849-1949* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1998), 159-160; K. C. Aryan, *Punjab Painting* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1975), 27-28.

London in 1927, introduced Parasher to modern Western art.[237] It remains unclear whether Parasher received formal training from the artist, but the Impressionist quality in Parasher's early works probably owes much to Roop Krishna, given that the artist himself was deeply influenced by Impressionism in the 1930s. Although Parasher became interested in Indian artistic traditions after joining the Mayo School of Art in 1936 as the Assistant Principal, his engagement with European art was deepened during his brief training at the Bombay School of Art in 1936-1937.

Given that his entire body of works was lost during Partition in 1947, it is difficult to gauge Parasher's engagement with Indian visual traditions in the 1930s and the early 1940s. The few charcoal sketches and line drawings that survive from the late 1940s, mostly produced at a refugee camp in Ambala, Punjab, bear testament to the violence of Partition captured through quick and dexterous lines (Figure 3.27). His paintings from the 1950s, on the other hand, clearly demonstrate a continued engagement with the visual language of Impressionism (Figure 3.28).

It is only with the *Vidyavalanj* mural at Chandigarh, then, that the artist begins to develop a language conscious in its engagement with an Indian tradition. But, of course, Parasher's visuality was hardly akin to the traditionalism of Abanindranath Tagore and the Bengal school. It was not the formal components of pre-modern Indian art that the artist attempted to recover. Rather, Parasher attempted to unravel indigenous notions of empiricism, science, and rationality to develop a language of modernity that was rooted in Indian philosophy yet was modern in its form. That the materials emblematic of

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[237] For Roop Krishna's biography, see Hasan, *Painting in the Punjab Plains*, 234; Aryan, *Punjab Painting*, 30-37.

India's post-Independence modernity – steel and concrete – would be marshaled to claim both science and progress for India is perhaps quite understandable. Indeed, no other material would have lent itself adequately to Parasher's purpose. A student of literature and a prolific writer, perhaps the artist was keenly aware of the metaphoric potency of concrete and steel.

Over the subsequent decade, Parasher executed a number of reinforced concrete murals and public sculptures in New Delhi and Chandigarh. A sixteen feet monumental reinforced concrete public sculpture was Parasher's last large-scale public project (Figure 3.29). Completed in 1968, the sculpture was imagined as a eulogy to undivided Punjab. In a certain way, then, this was the artist's memorial, a cathartic remembering of Partition. Embedded within the reinforced concrete form, lines of poems by the popular Punjabi mystic saint Puran Singh, along with fragments of folk songs, recalled the pastoral beauty of pre-Partition Punjab. This remembering was sharply counterpoised by fragments of names, both of people and places in undivided Punjab, etched within small square frames as if recovered from the smoky depths of memory. The texts, inserted somewhat erratically alongside verses of poetry and songs, did not allow Parasher's remembering to slip into a purely nostalgic remembering of the Punjab that once was. The fragmentation of the text – incomplete names, partial sentences – reenacted the fragmentation of the geographic space of Punjab. Memory was continually recalled, keeping intact the fragmentary nature of memory itself.

That the memorial was constructed out of reinforced concrete was surely not coincidental. What then was the relation between modernization, the rhetoric of progress,

modes of experience, and aesthetics? Placed in Chandigarh's Leisure Valley, a public park amidst acres of empty space, Parasher's sculpture dominated the visual horizon. Its architectonic form provided a counterpoint to the imposing architecture of Chandigarh, an architecture of the new, an architecture that attempted to erase the memory of violence. By the 1950s, Chandigarh had already asserted itself as a symbol of progress, a symbol of hope, a symbol of a new modern India. Simultaneously, the hollow interior of the sculpture invited the viewer to enter into its form, interact with and thus physically inhabit the inner hollow space of the reinforced concrete sculpture. Memory was thus embodied.

If the text on the sculpture, albeit partial and fragmentary, cited pre-1947 Punjab, the form of the sculpture – three distinct and separate architectonic forms – pointed towards yet another partition that was in process of unfolding. Following the demand for reorganization of Punjab along linguistic lines, Punjab was divided once again in 1966. While the Hindi-speaking areas were integrated into Haryana, the Kangra region was made part of Himachal Pradesh, and the Punjabi-speaking areas remained with the state of Punjab.[238] The division of Punjab was not an isolated incident. Such fragmentation had threatened the geo-political imagination of the nation-state from its very inception, as I discuss in Chapter Three. The form of the sculpture then referenced this fragmentation.

Yet, even in the face of this impending fragmentation, Punjab remained conjoined in Parasher's memorial. Thin bands of concrete, which simulated the supple texture of fabric, irrevocably united the three discrete forms. In this form, Parasher's sculpture

[238] For this history, see Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of the Punjab* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

mimicked the nation-state's rhetoric of unity in diversity – a theme I take up in the next chapter. That the memorial was constructed of reinforced concrete – a symbol of strength and permanence – was surely not coincidental. That a strictly modernist visual language and the metaphor of reinforced concrete were mobilized to visualize a symbolically united multi-lingual Punjabi community should not surprise us either. Indeed modern technics of vision and construction made possible the expression of such a unity. "The progress of science and technology was knitting the world together more tightly than before, demanding that particularist loyalties and identities expand their perspectives and find a common horizon," as Prakash has noted.[239] Articulating a notion of unity in explicitly spatial terms, Parasher's reinforced concrete monument did precisely this. Arising out of a circular pool, the sixteen feet monument must have been imposing in its impassioned declaration of an essential bond of unity among the multi-lingual fragments of Punjab. I turn to the politics of this unity in the next chapter.

[239] Prakash, *Another Reason*, 211-212.

Chapter Three

The Making of a Museum and an Art Academy: A History of Art for the Nation-State.

New Delhi (1556)

Title of film: *New Delhi*. Director: Mohan Sehgal (b. 1921). Year produced: 1956. Anand Khanna (played by Kishore Kumar), a migrant from a small town in Punjab, arrives in New Delhi, the capital of the new nation-state (Figure 4.1). Looking for rental accommodation, Anand is repeatedly asked: are you a Bengali, Maharashtrian, or Gujarati? Resisting regional affiliations, Anand persistently introduces himself as Hindustani (a citizen of Hindustan/India). But this identity is not sufficient to procure Anand a home in the city. He is finally forced to masquerade as a Tamil to obtain accommodation with a Tamil landlord. Almost immediately, he meets Janaki, a young Tamil girl. A series of events, including a street brawl, forces him to seek refuge at the Kala Niketan (academy of art), an institute of the visual and performing arts (Figure 4.2). Anand enrolls as a student at the Kala Niketan where Janaki teaches music and dance. Romance begins without much ado. The plot becomes complicated when Anand's family migrates to Delhi and the Bengali painter, Dilip, also affiliated with the Kala Niketan, charms Nikki, Anand's sister. Nikki, herself an amateur painter, joins the academy.

The romantic liaisons between the two couples are disrupted by parental objections and the public discovery of Anand's "real" Punjabi identity. Nikki is forced to accept a Punjabi suitor while Janaki attempts suicide. However, following a logic of chance that seems to drive much of popular Hindi film narratives, the director of the Kala Niketan intercepts Janaki's suicide attempt. Similarly, Nikki's wedding is disrupted when

the suitor's family demands an exorbitant dowry, which Nikki's father is unable to pay. When the Punjabi community refuses to help Nikki's father, Nikki's Bengali artist lover offers his family heirlooms. The superficiality of regional and parochial bonds is thus exposed. This is a turning point in the film. Kinship based on regional communities is then replaced by "deeper" kinship structures of the larger national community.

That the director Mohan Sehgal would choose a contemporary moment of political unrest – the regional/linguistic movements of the 1950s – as the theme of *New Delhi* and that the threat of the fragmentation of the imagined national community would reach a happy resolve in the film is entirely predictable.[240] What interests me, however, is the mode through which national integration is achieved. In the film, regionalism is mitigated not by the usual suspects – the anthem, the flag, public parades, or Republic Day celebrations.[241] Rather, *New Delhi* calls upon art and artists to unite the conflicting fragments that comprised the nation. In the film, Kala Niketan emerges as the space for community formation. In contrast to urban New Delhi, where community formations hinged on regional, linguistic, and caste-based affiliations, the academy of art, a progressive democratic space of culture, paves the way for the forging of a new and ideal

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[240] After Independence, the 1947 Linguistic Provinces Commission had rejected all propositions of linguistic reorganization of states, arguing that states divided on linguistic lines would encourage linguistic nationalism and destabilize the unity of the nation-state. Demands for Telegu-speaking Andhra Pradesh began in 1951 with non-violent protests, gradually accelerating into public violence, which continued unabated until Andhra Pradesh was formed in 1953. Similar, often violent, linguistic nationalist movements also developed in other states. The States Reorganization Act, with linguistic affiliations as the primary basis for reorganization, was finally passed in 1956 – the year *New Delhi* was released. *New Delhi* belongs to the genre of "national" cinema – a genre that, especially in the 1950s, largely revolved around issues of citizenship and national belonging. Its director Mohan Sehgal had long been associated with the Indian Progressive Theatre Association and had directed numerous plays that critiqued the social inequalities and political machinations that had overwhelmed the democratic processes of post-Independence India. With *New Delhi* as his directorial debut, Sehgal establish himself as one of the key directors of the 1950s and the1960s. For a larger history of "national" cinema, see M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[241] For example, Roy, *Beyond Belief*; Pinney, *Photos of the Gods*.

national community. Anand, Janaki, Nikki, and Dilip – who belong to a larger artistic community – not only challenge, but also transform, older traditional kinship networks.

It is worth noting that the film was released in 1956, only two years after the state-sponsored National Gallery of Modern Art (the first and only museum of modern art in India) and the Lalit Kala Akademi (academy of art, the principal state sponsored national institution for promoting the visual arts) had been established in New Delhi (Figure 4.3; Figure 4.4). While the National Gallery of Modern Art, through its collection and display, produced, for the first time, a narrative of modern art in India, the Lalit Kala, through its national and international exhibitions, archival projects, and publications, widely disseminated an awareness of Indian art, both in India and abroad. But this was the work of the two institutions at its most obvious. The Lalit Kala and the National Gallery of Modern Art played an equally important role in producing a vision of the nation. The space of the Kala Niketan in *New Delhi* was then as "real" as the regional and linguistic conflicts that serve as its social-political backdrop. This chapter rethinks this space of/for art – symbolic, notional, as well as real – by focusing on two of the key art institutions of the new nation-state: the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Lalit Kala Akademi.

The Idea of a Museum and an Academy of Modern Art: 1930s

The few scholars who have examined the history of the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Lalit Kala have read the formation of these two institutions as marking an abrupt break from colonial art worlds – a product of a radical post-colonial

consciousness articulated at the moment of Independence.[242] The institutions themselves have narrativized their own histories in these very terms. As the first *Guide to the National Gallery of Modern Art* states: "With the dawn of Indian Independence the need for a National Gallery of Modern Art was felt for the first time and in the Art Conference held in Calcutta in 1949, the idea was first mooted and recommended. As a result, the National Gallery of Modern Art was inaugurated on March 29, 1954, at Jaipur House in New Delhi."[243]

In scholarly accounts, the trajectories of the twin institutions of the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Lalit Kala – from the exuberance of their birth to their ultimate failure to stand with the avant-garde – appear to merge with the biography of the nation-state itself. This marking out of a moment of rupture has within it a certain willful forgetting of a long and messy history – a history that began in the 1930s, a decade when artists such as Nandalal Bose responded to Gandhian *swadeshi,* aligning artistic praxis with anti-colonial politics. Such a beginning is perhaps appropriate for a project such as mine which has at its core a desire to trouble art history's mythologies of a triumphant unfolding of modernism in India, typically mapped through a canon of a few select artists. And what could be a better place to begin than through rumors and ruse haunting the house of art?

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[242] For example see Ella Datta, *Treasures of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi* (New Delhi: Mapin, 2009); Vidya Shivadas, "National Gallery of Modern Art: Museums and the Making of National Art" in Shivaji Panikkar, Parul D. Mukherji, and Deeptha Achar eds. *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2003), 400-409; Brown, *Art for a Modern India*; Anshuman Das Gupta, "A House for Modernism: Art in its Institutional Aspects, 1950s and '60s" in Gayatri Sinha, ed. *Art and Visual Culture in India 1857-2007* (Mumbai: MARG Publications, 2009), 162-175; Karen Zitzewitz, *The Perfect Frame: Presenting Modern Indian Art* (Mumbai: Chemould Publications and Arts, 2003).

[243] Author Unknown, *A Guide to the National Gallery of Modern Art New Delhi, India* (New Delhi: National Gallery of Modern Art, 1966), 4.

It was in the 1930s that the Bengali artist Sarada Charan Ukil (1890-1940), a student of Abanindranath Tagore and the founder of New Delhi's first modern art school, asked the colonial government for funds to establish a national art gallery and an academy of art near the recently completed Capital Complex in New Delhi (Figure 4.5; Figure 4.6; Figure 4.7).[244] Following the transfer of the imperial capital of British India to New Delhi in 1913, the British architects Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) and Herbert Baker (1862-1946) had designed the new Capital Complex. A number of Indian artists, including Ukil, M. V. Dhurandhar (1867-1944), and Samuel Fyzee-Rahman (1880-1965), had been commissioned to decorate this new Complex. Ukil's proposal was indeed well timed. The mural decorations at the new capital had just been completed.[245] A series of public petitions and letters published in national newspapers in 1928, during the extended controversy between Indian artists and the British Government over the execution of these murals, had already established Ukil as the voice of Delhi's art world.[246] The praise that he had received at the 1929 *Exhibition of Indian Art* at the Imperial Institute, London further consolidated his reputation as Delhi's leading artist.[247]

In 1926, Ukil founded Delhi's first art school, the Sarada Ukil School of Art. The success of the School encouraged Ukil to form the Fine Arts and Crafts Syndicate in 1927, an adjoining art society that attempted to display and popularize artistic traditions

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[244] Sarada Ukil's Proposal, Department of Education, File 31, Part B, 1930, CC Records, Delhi State Archives, New Delhi (Henceforth DSA).
[245] For a discussion on the murals, see Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, 177-210.
[246] For example, "Letter to the Editor," *The Chronicle* March 17, 1928; "Letter to Sir B. N. Mitra, Member, Department of Industries and Labor, Government of India, New Delhi," Name of Newspaper Unknown, December 10, 1928. Accessed from Mukul Dey's scrapbook, Mukul Dey Archives, Santiniketan (Henceforth MDA).
[247] For example G. Venkatachalam, "Sarada Ukil: Master Mural Painter," Name of Newspaper Unknown, 1928; "Indian Art in London: Striking Paintings and Sculptures," *Englishman* April 5, 1929. Accessed from Mukul Dey's scrapbook, MDA.

of rural Bengal. In 1930, following the completion of the new Capital Complex, the Ukil School moved from old Delhi to New Delhi's Queen's Way, the arterial road which connected the city's commercial and residential areas to the new administrative complex (Figure 4.8).[248] Immediately after relocating, the Fine Arts and Crafts Syndicate was renamed the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (henceforth AIFACS), suggesting a shift in the organization's focus. The Society had clearly transcended its regional affiliations. Illustrious names such as Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Maharaja of the princely state of Patiala, Edwin Lutyens, nationalist industrialists and art collectors Kedarnath Goenka and L. N. Birla became the Society's early patrons. As a volume of *Roopa-Lekha*, New Delhi's first art journal published by the AIFACS, states: "The chief objectives of the Society are: (i) to foster knowledge and love of art among the people of India and ultimately, (ii) to establish a National Art Gallery, and (iii) an Academy of Indian Art in the Imperial city of New Delhi."[249]

It was in 1930 that the AIFACS, under the guidance of Ukil, submitted a plan for a National Art Gallery to the Chief Commissioner of New Delhi. The AIFACS suggested the construction of a new building in Queen's Way to house this Gallery. The proposed building comprised of a large circular central exhibition hall with smaller rooms clustered

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[248] Lawrence Vale's rather vivid description of the area very appropriately describes the prominence of the Queen's Way: "The official visitor would approach the raised trio of government buildings [the two Secretariats and the Government House] alongside Queen's Way cross axis leading south from a new railway station. […] At the junction of the King's Way and the Queen's Way, to be marked by four large edifices containing the Oriental Institute, National Museum, National Library, and the Imperial Record Office, the visitor would turn towards the west and proceed along the Central Vista of the King's Way, ascend past the plaza known as the Great Place, pass between the massive Secretariats, and, finally, reach the wide steps, portico, and dome of the Government house. […] To the architects this spatial progression was deliberately symbolic: 'The imagination is led from the machinery to the prime moving power itself.'" Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 108.

[249] Author Unknown, "An Appeal for Public Support for a National Art Gallery," *Roopa-Lekha* Vol. 1, No. 2 (1940), 2.

around it. While the central hall was envisaged as a space for temporary exhibitions, the rooms were to house permanent displays of regional artistic traditions. Each room was to be dedicated to a particular province or a state and placed under the curatorship of regional committees. Rather than creating a hierarchy between the various regional artistic traditions, this circular format was intended to highlight as well as foreground the multiplicities within the field of modern Indian art. However, the production of a fragmented narrative was hardly the intention of this strategic foregrounding of regional diversity. The proper functioning of the display was premised on the assumption that in spite of stylistic diversity, an overarching "Indianness" – a shared commonality – unified the regional articulations. The viewer was expected first to walk into the circular hall, view the temporary exhibition, and then proceed to examine in greater detail regional artistic traditions. Taken as a whole, the display was to function as a survey of modern art.

If the structure and display of the proposed National Art Gallery offered a paradigm through which contending and conflicting regional moderns could be framed as a unified whole, the Academy of Indian Art, a residential institution of higher education, was conceived as a platform where regional artists would meet. Apart from courses conducted by veteran artists, carefully chosen from different regions, the Academy would also function as a research and documentation center, creating a visual archive for the use of practicing artists and researchers.

While the Gallery's display was intended to make visible the "invisible order of significance," that united the various regional artistic traditions in creating an

"Indianness," the role of the Academy was to nurture, nourish, and further make explicit this imagined national character of the country's art.[250] In keeping with the overall trope, the planned central governing body of the two institutions would be composed of a committee consisting of one elected representative from each region. The long history of the colonial government's disinterest in modern Indian art, the repeated and summary dismissal of Indian art as merely decorative, and finally, the bitter struggle of artists for national and international recognition in the early 20th century were some of the political imperatives that shaped this proposal.

The planned building for the Gallery and the Academy was designed to blend perfectly with the architectural style of the Capital Complex (Figure 4.9). Much like the Capital Complex structures, a sloping, continuous *chhajja* (projecting eaves) surrounded the proposed building. The two small domes on top of the projecting *iwan* (vaulted space with an open side) replicated the dome of the Viceroy's new residence (later renamed Rashtrapati Bhavan) in New Delhi. Like the Viceroy's house, this building too was set amidst a *char bagh* (four-quarter garden) modeled on Mughal precedents (Figure 4.10). Intended to be "a clear reminder of British hegemony," the style of the Capital Complex buildings had been strategically chosen to function as visible signs of "quiet domination."[251] By symbolically merging with this iconography of power, the AIFACS sought to establish the Gallery and the academy as an indisputable part of the new

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[250] Tony Bennett argues that museum display is a way of seeing through objects an "invisible order of significance" that they have been arranged to represent. The domain of the invisible is thus mediated to the viewer. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 165.
[251] Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 92.

capital's cultural horizon. By its very presence within this landscape of power, the AIFACS and Ukil wished to legitimize and authorize the Gallery's discourses.

Needless to say, a national gallery or an academy of art was not among the colonial government's immediate list of priorities. Ukil's proposal, submitted on behalf of the AIFACS, was repeatedly discussed in official circles to be ultimately rejected in 1933.[252] The AIFACS then began a fundraising campaign through public meetings, printed pamphlets, and advertisements in various newspapers and journals. The Society's membership fee was reduced to encourage greater participation and funds were actively solicited. B. C. Laha, a Bengali merchant agreed to fund the construction of the Bengal wing of the museum, and by 1939, the Society had already raised a significant part of finances required for the construction of the building. With Sarada Ukil's death in 1940, his brother, Barada Ukil, then Secretary of AIFACS, took up the campaign.

While the colonial government rejected Ukil's proposal for a museum and gallery of modern art, it was simultaneously giving serious consideration to the establishment of a National Museum of Indian Archaeology, Art, and Anthropology in New Delhi.[253] The question of establishing the National Museum was taken up at the insistence of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. In 1944, the Society submitted a series of proposals for what it termed the "cultural reconstruction of India." "There will doubtless be a strong movement to provide India with a suitable War Memorial to commemorate the share which she has taken in the cause of freedom [during World War II]. It is difficult to

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[252] "Letter from Hoare to Willingdon, dated 8 December 1933," Willingdon Papers, European Manuscripts E240/3, IOR.

[253] "Establishment of a National Museum of Indian Archaeology, Art, and Anthropology – Selection of Site for Building and Securing of Temporary Accommodation," *Report of the Ministry of Education* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1950).

suggest anything more suitable as a War Memorial than a National Museum at New Delhi," the Society argued.[254] The Society also suggested the formation of a National Cultural Trust to act as an advisory body to the government.[255] A committee, under the chairmanship of Maurice Linford Gwyer, the first Chief Justice of the Indian Federal Court (1937-1943) and the Vice Chancellor of Delhi University, was appointed to work out the organizational and administrative frameworks for the National Museum. Yet another committee was appointed to examine further the proposal for a National Cultural Trust. Gwyer also served as a member of this committee.

The AIFACS very strategically appointed Gwyer as the honorary Chairman of the Society, a position he held till his departure from India. Even as he created the blueprint for the National Museum, in his simultaneous role as the Chairman of AIFACS, Gwyer was quite familiar with the campaign for a museum of modern art and a national art academy. The National Museum Committee, or the Gwyer Committee as it came to be known, submitted its report in 1946. In its report, the Committee very categorically excluded modern art from the National Museum's purview arguing that "a National Gallery of [Modern] Art will eventually be established."[256] By negating the space for modern art within the National Museum, the *Report*, in effect, reaffirmed Ukils' proposed museum of modern art. Thus, even though the colonial government had declined support

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[254]"Proposal for the establishment of a National Museum at New Delhi," Proposals Made by the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in Connection with Cultural Reconstruction in India, Part I, 1944, Archaeological Survey of India Records Room, New Delhi (Henceforth ASI RR).
[255] "A National Cultural Trust," Proposals Made by the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in Connection with Cultural Reconstruction in India, Part II, 1944, ASI RR.
[256] *Central National Museum of Art, Archaeology and Anthropology (Report of the Gwyer Committee)* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1946), 2.

for this museum in 1933, Ukils' museum, rather insidiously and quite persistently, kept reappearing in official reports – almost like a ghostlike apparition.

The National Cultural Trust Committee also submitted its report in the same year. This Committee urged the government to establish three academies – the Academy of Letters (Sahitya), the Academy of Arts (Lalit Kala), and the Academy of Music, Drama, and Dance (Sangeet, Natak, and Nritya). Much like Ukil's academy of art, these state-sponsored academies too were imagined as schools of art, music, theatre, literature, dance, and drama, serving as a platform for bringing together various regional cultural forms to manufacture a new national culture. Through these repeated citations of Ukils' original 1930 proposal, the idea of the national gallery and academy of modern art became an integral part of the government's 1940s discussions on art and culture.

The eventual establishment of the museum and the academy of art were inevitable. Along with the colonial administrative structure and the Indian Penal Code, the post-Independence government also inherited the Gwyer Committee's blueprint for a National Museum, the National Cultural Trust's proposal for a National Academy of Art, and Ukil's idea of a museum of modern art. By 1947, the idea of a museum and academy of modern art had become so well-entrenched within both the larger art world and the state's bureaucracy that the post-Independence government's decision to form an Indian Cultural Trust, similar to the colonial National Cultural Trust, as an advisory body to direct its programs of cultural development triggered a rumor across the art worlds of Bombay, Calcutta, and Delhi. As rumor had it, the government had accepted Ukils' proposal and the AIFACS was to become the central organization managing, advising,

and implementing state policies that directly affected the modern art world. This would of course make AIFACS a uniquely powerful organization.

Although rumor by definition is unverifiable, its power is undeniable. Within the Indian art world, the response to this rumor was immediate. In 1947, a rival artists' association, the All India Association of Fine Arts was established with the Bombay-based art critic Govind Venkatachalam as its first President. With a membership of forty, the All India Association created a network of regional committees with an intricate labyrinth-like administrative structure.[257] Critical of AIFACS for being bureaucratic and contradicting AIFACS' claim to be representative of the Indian art world, the All India Association asserted this position for itself. However, like the AIFACS, one of the primary aims of the All India Association was "to propagate and assist in the establishment and development of a National Art Gallery."[258] Members of the All India Association, for instance the Bombay-based art critic Manu Thacker and the art dealer Kekoo Gandhi, started a signature campaign to prevent AIFACS from "assuming national leadership" of the Indian art world.[259] Apart from gathering forty signatures from its members, the group also organized a series of art conferences through which it solicited support for its cause.

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[257] The idea of forming the All India Association came about on March 25, 1947, at the All India Art Conference convened by AIFACS. Proposed by the Bombay art world, at its conception, the All India Association was envisaged as a coalition of the various regional art institutions and societies across India. These institutions and societies included The Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, Youths' Art Circle, Bombay, Art Society of India, Bombay, among others. However, the core administrative group of the All India Association remained dominated by Bombay and many of its activities centered on the promotion of Bombay-based artists through exhibitions organized in Delhi and other parts of India.
[258] The All India Association of Fine Arts, 8/20/1948, 1948, ASI RR.
[259] Zitzewitz, *The Perfect Frame*, 34.

"The process of embellishment and exaggeration is not at all random," as James C. Scott has noted. "As a rumor travels, it is altered in a fashion that brings it more closely into line with the hopes, fear, and worldview of those who hear it and retell it."[260] The formation of All India Association and its conflict with AIFACS says much less about the state of the Indian art-world in the years following Independence than it does about regional modernisms claiming for themselves the national modern. If the All India Association accused the AIFACS of "being completely dominated by Bengali residents in Delhi and Calcutta who aimed to promote Bengal School art over any other,"[261] AIFACS viewed the very existence of All India Association as an attempt by the Bombay artists to control the post-Independence art-world.[262]

This discord between Bengal and Bombay had a long history beginning in the late 19th century and escalating in the 20th century. The Western academic realist and illusionist style nurtured at the Bombay School of Art and the "Oriental style" painting practiced at the Calcutta School of Art by Bengal School artists led by Abanindranath Tagore had formed the visual spectrum within which artistic praxis in India largely operated in the early 20th century. For example, Abanindranath Tagore's rejection of oil painting and academic realism in favor of tempera and the Japanese wash-style is best exemplified in the 1904 painting *Bharat-mata* or Mother India (See Figure 2.10). A translucent background, creating a hazy dreamlike surface, frames *Bharat-mata*, the young ascetic dressed in saffron. On the other hand, *Devi* painted by the Bombay-based

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[260] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 145.
[261] Zitzewitz, *The Perfect Frame*, 34.
[262] Interview with Bandita Ukil (Barada Ukil's daughter), January 3, 2008.

artist M. V. Dhurandhar, is an illusionist oil on canvas painting of a bejeweled goddess standing on a lotus (Figure 4.11). The tactile materiality, the textures of the jewelry and fabric, and the sheer presence of the female body in Dhurandhar's *Devi* stands in sharp contrast to Tagore's ethereal goddess, making obvious the two distinct visualities of the Bengal and Bombay schools. It was through the migration of Abanindranath Tagore's students including Sarada Ukil that the Bengal School idiom transcended its regional affiliations to spread to various parts of India. Ukil's rather romanticized wash and tempera painting *Tune Eternal* clearly demonstrates his artistic genealogy (Figure 4.12). The competition between the Bombay and the Bengal School for producing the mural paintings at the administrative buildings of New Delhi and subsequently the India House decoration project in London had brought the two groups into open conflict in 1920s and 1930s.[263] This conflict had entered the public domain through letters and essays published in national dailies and art journals, including AIFACS' *Roopa-Lekha*.

By the late 1930s, Bombay had also emerged as the center for a new engagement with an international modernist visual repertoire. The presence a number of German Jewish émigré intellectuals and art critics such as Rudy von Leyden, Walter and Kathe Langhammer had generated a critical discourse around modern art in the city. Artists, for example M. F. Husain (b. 1915), F. N. Souza (1924-2002), Tyeb Mehta (1925-2009), and S. H. Raza (b. 1922) experimented with Cubism and abstraction (Figure 4.13). The Bombay Progressive Artists Group had been formed in 1947, with Souza famously declaring in 1949:

[263] For a detailed discussion, see Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, 177-225.

> Today we paint with absolute freedom for content and technique almost anarchic; save that we are governed by one or two sound elemental and eternal laws, of aesthetic orders, plastic co-ordination and color composition. We have no pretentions of making vapid revivals of any school or movement in art. We have studied the various schools of painting and sculpture to arrive at a vigorous synthesis.[264]

Yet, in spite of this burgeoning world of international modernist art, the Bombay Art Society, the bastion of academic realism established in 1888 under the aegis of the Bombay School of Art, remained central to the city's art-world. The Bombay Art Society's annual exhibitions were the sole venue for the display of modern art in the city until the formation of the Jehangir Art Gallery in 1952.

Strategically, the All India Association developed a close collaboration with the Bombay Art Society with Kekoo Gandhy, a founder member of the All India Association, becoming the Joint Honorary Secretary of the Society. The ideologically divergent modernists and academic realists of Bombay thus came together to oppose the AIFACS and the Bengal School. Simultaneously, the All India Association also became a new platform which allowed the Bombay artists to seek coalition with the various progressive artists' collectives that had formed across India in the 1940s, for example the Delhi-based Silpi Chakra (artists' circle) and the Calcutta Progressives. Even as they strategically allied with the Bombay Art Society and the other progressive groups, one of the key functions of the All India Association remained the promotion of the Bombay Progressive Group. And, it is in this context of battling factions, competing styles, and

[264] F. N. Souza in *Progressive Artists Group*, Exhibition catalog, July 1949, Artists' Center, Bombay.

claims to the national that the rumor of AIFACS being asked to form the National Gallery of Modern Art and Lalit Kala takes on a new significance.

Given the fact that both AIFACS and All India Association very diligently submitted transcripts of the groups' committee meetings to the Ministry of Education and the Archeological Survey of India, the government could not help but become aware of the desires, aspirations, and expectations of the art-world. Compelled by that rumor, Humayun Kabir, the Minister of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs, wrote in a brief note to the Ministry of Education: "The establishment of a National Gallery and a National Academy is now inevitable. I think the Government has to agree to this in principle."[265] In August, 1948, following a prolonged deliberation on the National Cultural Trust Committee's suggestions, the government took up the work of actually setting in motion a National Cultural Trust by organizing three conferences through which it sought to finalize the frameworks of the Trust. The first of these Art Conferences took place in Calcutta in 1949.

1940s Dilemmas: What Constitutes Modern Indian Art?

The 1949 All India Conference on Arts convened in Calcutta by the Government of India to formulate a systematic program for the support and development of modern art signaled the birth of the Lalit Kala. With Humayun Kabir, the Minister of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs, as the moving force behind the Conference, the question of tradition was the central focus. A number of artists, critics, and art administrators from across the country were invited to participate at this convention. One of the main themes discussed was the possibility of appropriating traditional arts and indigenous techniques

[265] National Art Gallery, Department of Education, File 27, Part B, 1948, CC Records, DSA.

to articulate a visual language that would be modern yet quintessentially Indian. A distinction had to be made from the Western modern, the *Resolutions* of the conference asserted.[266] The Indian modern was posited, not as a complete break from tradition, but rather a way of re-working tradition. Rathindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore's son, in his observations regarding the conference, thus stated: "Traditional Indian art in relation to modern developments … is a perplexing problem and the opposing groups have expanded a good deal of vehemence in dealing with it. That in itself is not a bad thing. It shows that the problem is at any rate of vital interest."[267]

The role of art in creating a national culture and producing a civilizational value for the erstwhile colony perhaps motivated the urgency with which the participants debated the place of tradition in scripting the post-Independence modern. The *Resolutions* passed at the Conference began by asserting the spirituality inherent in modern Indian art. As the *Resolutions* stated:

> This conference considers that contemporary Indian art in its contrasts of styles and modes of expression is a true mirror of Indian life today, which ranges from orthodoxy to extreme modernism. It realizes that an index of a people's greatness lies in the art of their country. In India, art has been the vehicle of the country's spiritual experiences, and no art which is devoid of spiritual content can be a true expression of the genius of India. This conference, therefore, feels that the future of Indian art lies in the ability of its artists and craftsmen to revive and maintain those spiritual values which have inspired the art traditions of India in the past.[268]

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[266] Art Conference 28/38/49, 1949, ASI RR.
[267] "Suggestions made by Sri Rathindranath Tagore" in Art Conference 28/38/49, 1949, ASI RR.
[268] "All India Conference on Arts: Draft Resolutions in Art Conference," 28/38/49, 1949, ASI RR.

By rehearsing 19th-century tropes that marked India as spiritual and therefore distinct from a materialist West, the *Resolutions* claimed both "traditionalists" and "modernists" as equal inheritors of the country's spiritual traditions. Art was upheld as a marker of civilizational values. "The index of a people's greatness lies in the art of their country," the *Resolutions* stated.[269] A modern art that is appropriately Indian must engage with this heritage of spiritualism and "maintain those spiritual values which have inspired the art traditions of India in the past."[270]

Rather predictably, the *Resolutions* noted "with regret the progressive deterioration in public taste in the country," arguing that the most "effective way of promoting civic sense among the people is to make them aesthetically conscious so that they react against inartistic surroundings."[271] Good taste and aesthetic awareness was upheld as imperative for a moral, civic, and ethical citizenship. If a holistic national culture was to be forged and an aestheticization of the everyday was to be achieved, artists would need to be adept craftsmen. Artists would thus not just create objects for aesthetic contemplation but also design utilitarian objects for the everyday, the *Resolutions* stated. The rhetoric of the Conference was very similar to early 20th-century imaginations of an anti-colonial art practice.

By the 1910s, E. B. Havell and Ananda Coomaraswamy had already articulated a definite role for the artist in the imagined life of the nation that was to be. The rural had emerged in this discourse as an idealized topos unmarked by Westernization, where art

[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid.

still had a definite role to play in the community's life.[272] It was this very trope that had become central to nationalist politics in the 1930s. In Chapter One, I read Nandalal Bose's curation of the Indian National Congress exhibitions to argue for an artistic praxis that attempted to recuperate rural aesthetic practices. It was precisely this strategy that was foregrounded once again at the 1949 Conference.

Much like Bose's exhibition at the 1936-1937 Congress meeting at Faizpur, Maharashtra, the participants at the 1949 All India Conference on Arts wished to document traditional techniques and tools, ritualistic art, and folk styles in hope of marshaling indigenous knowledge for imagining a post-Independence modern. Thus, it was tradition that allowed for the articulation of a pedagogic role for the artist, producing the figure of the modern artist citizen of a newly formed nation-state. Nandalal Bose's art pedagogy and practice became the model for imagining post-Independence art praxis in the 1940s. The decision to convene the Conference in Calcutta, rather than in New Delhi, was thus strategic. The Conference commenced with a day trip to Kala Bhavan, Rabindranath Tagore's art school at Santiniketan.

The *Resolutions* of the Conference became a crucial document that defined the functioning of the Lalit Kala. As the head of Lalit Kala's Constitution Committee, the imprint of Bose's pedagogic ideals governed the functioning of the Lalit Kala in its formative years. Interestingly enough, and perhaps also strategically, the rest of the Committee was composed of members who held conflicting visions for the post-Independence art world. While Barada Ukil brought to the Committee AIFACS's

[272] For example, see Ernest B. Havell, *Essays on Indian Art, Industry and Education* (Madras: G.A. Natesan & Co., 1903), 99.

aspirations, AIFACS's opponents were represented by Govind Venkatachlam, the Bombay-based art critic and founding member of the All India Association, and art collector V. V. Oak, the Honorary Secretary of the Bombay Art Society. Artists were represented by Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal, the founder member of the Delhi-based progressive art collective Silpi Chakra and Nicholas Roerich. Other members of this Committee included Ordhendu Coomar Gangoly, the artist editor of the Calcutta-based art journal *Rupam*, the art collector K. D. Ghosh, and art historians Karl Khandalawala and Rai Krishnadasa. By thus bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds with conflicting ideologies, the state hoped to provide an inclusive space through which the nation's art policies could be formulated.

The Constitution framed by this Committee began with a preamble which clearly defined the role the Lalit Kala was to play in manufacturing the nation-state: "It is considered expedient to establish a national organization to foster and co-ordinate activities in the sphere of visual and plastic art and to promote thereby the cultural unity of the country."[273] While the phrase "cultural unity of the country" may suggest an attempt at producing a homogenous national culture, the terms of the Constitution indicates otherwise. Rather than producing a homogenous national culture, the Lalit Kala was categorical in its intention to promote inter-regional dialogue through art conferences, the establishment of regional academies, and traveling exhibitions.

This emphasis on the regional and the local served to bring into sharp focus the multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-ethnic national, underscoring India's "unity in

[273] "Draft constitution of the Indian Academy of Art" in Establishment of National Art Gallery and Amendment of Constitution, Ministry of Education/H 2/16-5/1953, National Archive of India, New Delhi (Henceforth NAI).

diversity."[274] In keeping with this larger concern, the Lalit Kala's managing committee was to include one representative from each state, nominated by the state governments. At a time when linguistic nationalisms and demands for states formed on the basis of linguistic affinities threatened to fragment the nation-state, the universalism of visual language and the easy translatability that it offered was seen as a especially potent mode of achieving national unity.[275]

If this was one *raison d'etre* for the formation of the Lalit Kala, the other was the encouragement of "artistic standards and motifs in the day to day life of the people and to elevate the public taste in art."[276] Affordable publications, art portfolios, posters appropriate for framing, and exhibitions became the modes through which Lalit Kala attempted to reform "public taste." The institution also encouraged and was willing to support the organization of art camps and workshops in smaller towns in the hope of making art accessible to significant sections of India's population who would otherwise have no access to modern art. The Lalit Kala was poised to become the new custodian of public taste.

While this Constitution had embedded within it Lalit Kala's pedagogic task as the upholder of taste, it simultaneously demarcated a space for a post-Independence art praxis. Apart from organizing juried annual art exhibitions, the Lalit Kala was to extend

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[274] "Unity in diversity" was "the sacred mantra of Nehruvian nationalism," as Srirupa Roy has put it. Roy, *Beyond Belief*, 169. This master-narrative of the nation was also repeatedly played out through cultural pageants, educational charts for school classrooms, as well as state-sponsored radio and television programs.

[275] As C. P. Mathen, a member of the Parliament stated in a public speech in 1954, "I have discussed the subject with several persons, and the general opinion is that everything should be done to prevent the country from disintegrating. This is the reason why a National Unity platform has been set up led by Mr. S. K. Patil. The agitation for linguistic States is a great danger to our country." *The Hindu* January 12, 1954.

[276] "Draft constitution of the Indian Academy of Art" in Establishment of National Art Gallery and Amendment of Constitution, Ministry of Education/H 2/16-5/1953 NAI.

financial assistance to non-government art institutions and to support new initiatives in the field of art. Young artists and art collectives would be encouraged through annual stipends and awards and veteran artists acknowledged through honorary fellowships. At the same time, the organization also took on the responsibility of producing an archive of Indian art. From the late 19th century, the colonial government had amassed an enormous archive documenting native habits, customs, arts, and architecture. It was now the task of the post-Independence intelligentsia to un-make the imperial archive, to remake it in the image of the nation-state.

A part of Lalit Kala's agenda was to catalogue, document, and produce an archive of Indian art. To this end, the Lalit Kala was to not only create an archive of folk arts and crafts, traditional techniques and media, but also produce dossiers on modern and contemporary artists. For example, the images of Dhanraj Bhagat's (1917-1988) sculptures reproduced in Chapter Two are drawn from this archive (See Figure 3.20; Figure 3.21). By thus placing the urban modern with the traditional folk in an apparently seamless conversation within the purportedly democratic space of the nation-state's official archive, the Lalit Kala was to simulate an inclusive national modern. It was expected that the folk would transform the urban, and in turn, the urban would revitalize the folk, thus aestheticizing the space of the national together. Or at least this was the hope.

An Accidental Genealogy: 1940s-1950s

If the 1949 *All India Conference on Arts*, Calcutta, signaled the birth of the Lalit Kala, a controversy over the purchase of thirty-three paintings by the Paris-returned artist

Amrita Sher-Gil, rather inadvertently, marks the formation of the National Gallery of Modern Art. In 1947, the Central Government instituted an Art Purchase Committee and, in spite of severe financial crisis, an Art Purchase Fund for collecting objects for the National Museum at New Delhi was sanctioned by the Parliament.[277] Given that the National Museum was intended primarily as a repository of pre-modern art, modern art was beyond the purview of the Committee and neither did the Fund authorize purchase of objects created after 1857. Scholars have argued that by highlighting exemplary objects produced between 2500 BCE to 1857 as standing in for the nation's cultural heritage, the government curated a vision of inheritance untouched by the colonial encounter.[278] The modern had no space within this vision of national inheritance. This strategy gave visible form to an invisible idea – the idea that the nation always already existed in a hoary past. The present then became the unfolding of a predestined future. As Nehru put it in that unforgettable speech delivered on the eve of Independence in 1947, "long years ago we made a tryst with destiny. And now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge."[279]

Yet, this idea of a national inheritance was challenged even at its moment of construction. In April 1948, Amrita Sher-Gil's (1913-1941) Hungarian husband, Dr. Victor Egan, offered the government, through the Ministry of Education, thirty-three

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[277] "Memorandum for the Standing Committee of Parliament on Education: Establishment of a National Museum of Art, Archaeology and Anthropology," *Report of the Ministry of Education* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1950).

[278] For example, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), Chapter 6; Kristy K. Phillips, *The National Museum of India: A Museum to and of the Nation*, Paper read at NaMu, Making National Museums Program, Setting the Frames, 26–28 February 2007, Norrköping, Sweden, Linköping Electronic Conference Proceedings, Linköping University Electronic Press http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/022/009/ecp072209.pdf (Accessed September 14, 2008).

[279] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Independence and After: A Collection of Speeches, 1946-1949* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1949), 3.

paintings by the artist in exchange for Rs. 50000 and permission to practice medicine in India.[280] By this time, Sher-Gil, the Paris trained artist of Indian and Hungarian descent who had returned to India to settle in Lahore in 1934, had already become a legend.[281] Her numerous admirers and intimate friends included Jawaharlal Nehru. Following Sher-Gil's death in 1941, Egan "was at a loss where to go," as Yashodhara Dalmia, one of Sher-Gil's numerous biographers, writes.[282] Registered as a foreigner in Lahore, Egan had been asked to report to the political prisoner's camp for internment, for his Hungarian identity had rendered him suspect as a Nazi sympathizer. Independence and Partition had further rendered precarious his position. Migrating to Uttar Pradesh, Egan then used Sher-Gil's paintings as a bid to clear his name, gain resident status, and secure rights to practice medicine in India.

Egan's offer came at a time when the state was making a serious effort to purchase antiquities from private collectors to be preserved as national art treasures at the National Museum. Sher-Gil's paintings did not quite fit the category of antiquities and no modern artworks had yet been heralded as national art treasures (Figure 4.14). Except for a few paintings by Elizabeth Brunner (a British artist who worked in India), the

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[280] "Note by Ashfaque Husain, Secretary, Ministry of Education dated 23/4/48," Purchase of Paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil, 27A/19/48, ASI RR.

[281] Between 1937 and 1947, as many as four scholarly texts had been published on the artist. Karl Khandalavala was her first biographer, producing two biographies and one *catalog raisonné* within eight years. For example, see Karl Khandalavala, *The Art of Amrita Sher-Gil* (Allahabad: Roerich Centre of Art & Culture, 1937); Karl Khandalavala, *The Art of Amrita Sher-Gil* (Allahabad: Allahabad Block Works, 1943); Karl Khandalavala, *Amrita Sher-Gil* (Bombay: New Book Co., 1945); *The Usha: Amrita Sher-Gil Special Issue*, Lahore, August 1942. Recuperated as the first modern woman artist, and often compared to the Mexican artist Frieda Kahlo, Sher-Gil fascinates scholarly imagination and continues to be the subject of numerous biographies, monographs, and dissertations.

[282] Yashodhara Dalmia, *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Life* (New Delhi: Viking, 2006), 184.

government had not purchased modern art. In fact, no provision existed for the purchase or preservation of modern art.

The Ministry of Education sought advice from the Art Purchase Committee. However, with the sole exception of Karl Khandalavala, the Committee was composed almost entirely of experts specializing in pre-modern art.[283] Quite understandably, these members did not feel competent to advise the government on this matter.[284] At any event, the fund available to the Committee was designated for purchase of pre-modern art for the National Museum and Sher-Gil's paintings were therefore well beyond this purview. The government must form a separate committee and allocate a new budget if it wished to purchase modern art, the Committee suggested. But before this special committee could be convened, the required finances for the purchase needed to be secured.

The Ministry of Education then approached the Ministry of Finance, arguing that "Amrita Sher-Gil is considered to be one of the greatest exponents of modern Indian painting and her work is widely recognized in other countries. It would be a great pity and would reflect on the nation if her works were allowed to go out of the country without any efforts being made to retain them."[285] The argument was guised in terms of national pride rather than national inheritance. Nonetheless, citing a directive from the

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[283] The Art Purchase Committee comprised of Karl Khandalavala (a lawyer by profession and an expert on modern art), Rai Krishnadas (an expert on pre-modern painting and an art collector), Muhammad Habib (historian specializing in Islamic history, affiliated with the Aligarh University), Stella Krambrisch (art historian, affiliated with the Calcutta University), R. R. Divarkar (state representative, Minister of Information and Broadcasting), Bhalchandra Pundlik Adarkar (political scientist), the current Director General of Archaeology, and the Superintendent of the Museum's Branch, Central Advisory Board on Museums.

[284] "Note from the Director General of Archaeology to the Ministry of education dated 4/8/48," Purchase of Paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil, 27A/19/48, ASI RR.

[285] "Note from Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Janak Kumari Asghar to the Ministry of finance dated 19/8/48," Purchase of Paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil, 27A/19/48, ASI RR.

Prime Minister to "avoid all unnecessary expenditure," the Ministry of Finance refused to allocate finances for this purchase.[286] For the Ministry of Finance, Sher-Gil's paintings were not a priority given other and more pressing concerns facing the new nation-state. The ensuing argument between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance revealed much regarding the ambiguous status of modern art as national treasure.

This rather convoluted conflict came to an abrupt closure and a special committee to examine Sher-Gil's paintings never convened. Bypassing the state's bureaucracy, Nehru himself privately concluded the negotiation with Egan, promising to pay Egan a sum of Rs. 50000 in exchange for the paintings. Neither of the warring ministries was informed of this negotiation. Nehru's letter to Eagan never reached either of the two ministries. Now, according to the Prime Minister's wishes, it was decided that a national gallery of modern art should be established. The money required to purchase Sher-Gil's paintings was withdrawn from the Nation Museum funds, almost reducing in half the Museum's budget for the year. Much like the arbitrary encounters between Anand, Janaki, Nikki, and Dilip in the film *New Delhi*, the National Gallery of Modern Art was thus born of an equally arbitrary encounter between Nehru, Eagan, and Sher-Gil's paintings. Modern art thus staked its claim through Sher-Gil, for the very first time, as national heritage and Dr. Victor Egan set up a hospital in Saraya, Uttar Pradesh.

The purchase of Sher-Gil's paintings was the beginning of systematic acquisitions of modern art works for the National Gallery of Modern Art. When categorized, organized, and framed by the Museum's authoritative narratives, this body of works

[286] "Note from Ram Gopal, Ministry of Finance to Janak Kumari Asghar, Secretary of the Ministry of Education dated 20/9/48," Purchase of Paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil, 27A/19/48, ASI RR.

would become central to the formation of a canon of modern Indian art. For example, while the thirty-three paintings that the government acquired from Egan, along with another thirty-three paintings donated by Sher-Gil's father, formed an important part of the Museum's collection, Sher-Gil's prominence within the Museum's core collection was challenged by precisely the same number of works by the Bengal School artist Abanindranath Tagore, acquired between 1950 and 1954 (Figure 4.15).[287] Among the one hundred and sixty one paintings handed over to the National Gallery of Modern Art at the time of its inauguration, Sher-Gil and Tagore's paintings would comprise more than half of the Museum's collection. In contrast, other artists were represented by a few representative works indicative of their oeuvre and visual preoccupations.[288] Among them, Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1899-1975) was represented by ten paintings while Jamini Roy (1887-1972) and Nandalal Bose by eight paintings each.[289]

However, given the financial crisis that the nation-state faced in its early years, the construction of a new building for the two national art institutions was deemed impossible. Therefore, in 1950, shortly following the 1949 All India Conference on Arts, the Government decided to house the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Lalit Kala at the Jaipur House in New Delhi, a palace belonging to the erstwhile princely state of Jaipur. Although a matter of convenience, this decision tacitly

[287] Acquisition of art objects – paintings of Abanindranath Tagore in possession of Alokendranath Tagore and Pratima Tagore, Ministry of Education/H2/5-49/1954, NAI.
[288] "List of paintings in the gallery" in National Art Gallery, Archaeology G Section/25/7/53, ASI RR.
[289] For example, in 1949, at Nehru's behest, the government purchased ten paintings on "Indian themes" by the Lahore-based artist Abdur Rahman Chughtai. Acquisition of art objects – purchase of paintings of Chughtai, Ministry of Education and Culture/D-I (A)/5-14/1949, NAI.

brought to the foreground the interventionist aspirations of the state in the realm of culture.

Conceived as a part of Lutyen's original plan for New Delhi and designed by the British architect C. G. Blomfield, the Jaipur House, along with residences of the other princely states, was aligned with the Central Vista that led to the Viceroy's residence (today called Rashtrapati Bhavan). Symbolically, this created the central axis of power, with the Viceroy at one end and the princely states at the other end. In post-Independence India, appropriating almost all the buildings in this area, the state continued to inhabit this space, in effect preserving the spatial and hierarchical rationale embedded in the very conception of the imperial capital.

The Central Vista, along with the National Museum and the National Gallery of Modern Art, became a routine part of guided tours of the city. From the late 1950s onwards, tours of New Delhi would begin with the capital complex, stop at the National Museum, and conclude with a visit to the National Gallery of Modern Art at the Jaipur House.[290] The tourist would thus pass through the nation-state's locus of power, then, traveling back in time, view an elaborate unfolding of its history at the National Museum, finally coming face to face with the contemporary at the National Gallery of Modern Art.

Sher-Gil's works remained the central focus of the National Gallery of Modern Art in the 1950s. On entering the Museum, the viewer would be immediately accosted by Sher-Gil's canvases. As William G. Archer (1907-1979), Curator at the Victoria and

[290] For example, see Author Unknown, *Delhi: A Guide for Tourists* (New Delhi: Tourist Association of India, 1959); Author Unknown, *Guide to Delhi* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958); P. B. Roy, *Delhi Visitors' Guide: A comprehensive Guide to Delhi Past and Present* (New Delhi: K.M.N. Publishers, 1958); Kanwar Lal, *Delhi: Your Latest Guide* (New Delhi: Asia Press, 1958).

Albert Museum and an advisor to the National Gallery of Modern Art, describes his first visit to the Museum in 1955: "And then we went to see the pictures – room after room filled with superb, magnificent Sher-Gils. The forms had a sharp decisive grandeur. The blacks, browns and whites, the slate-blues and grays, the dark greens – the human form intensely correct, the human body magnificently understood, not a single failure in anatomy, and through them all a sense of moral grandeur."[291]

Passing through rooms filled with Sher-Gil's "bold" canvases, the unsuspecting viewer rather abruptly entered into a room where some paintings by the Bengal School artists were arranged, only to be lead into yet another room of a very small selection of Jamini Roy's paintings. Thus, the viewer very rapidly passed through Sher-Gil's monumental works to Bengal School's romantic watercolors concluding with Jamini Roy's 1930s simplified adaptations of folk paintings. This rather disorienting trajectory culminated in the first floor, where more recent acquisitions, primarily from the annual exhibitions of the Lalit Kala, were haphazardly arranged, as if suspended in time, beyond narrative, beyond history. Yet, in the 1960s these paintings would become central to the construction of a genealogy of the Indian modern. In the 1960s the National Gallery of Modern Art's collections and display, as well as its strictures and closures, engendered, framed, and powerfully reinforced a lineage for modern Indian art. It is this lineage that still informs the paradigms of scholarly engagements with the Indian modern. But how did this lineage come into being and what were the politics of this becoming? Rather than writing a chronological history of the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Lalit Kala,

[291] Entry in W. G. Archer's diary, 12 Jan - 5 Feb 1954. W. G. Archer Papers, European Manuscripts F236/116, IOR.

I demarcate the key spheres – traveling exhibitions, museum displays, and publications – through which these two institutions asserted their presence in the postcolonial public sphere.

The Museum, the Academy, and Art Historical Discourse: 1960s

Scholars, for example Carol Duncan, have argued for the modern (Western) museum as a ritual site where the performative movement of the viewer's body through the museum's display serves to fabricate, sustain, and disseminate an elaborate and historicist account of a nation's history and culture.[292] Nehru echoed this idea of the museum as a pedagogic space in 1950 when he stated: "India has no proper museums, which is especially detrimental for children because it is here that they receive their ideas on beauty or the lack of it."[293] While scholars are equally aware of the discursive failure of the museum, the space of the museum nevertheless remains an enchanted site capable of generating narratives *ad infinitum*.[294] Academies of art have been known to play a very similar role. For instance, the Royal Academy of Art in London "shaped not only the production and consumption of specific images but also contemporary conceptualization of the national and patriotic role of the arts more generally."[295] If the role of the museum was to fabricate ideal citizens of modern nation-states, the role of the academy was to device an appropriate aesthetics for this nation.

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[292] Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
[293] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches: 1949-1953*, Volume 2 (New Delhi: Government Publication Bureau, 1963), 356.
[294] For example, see Douglas Crimps, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).
[295] Holger Hoock, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the politics of British culture 1760–1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 4.

It is hardly coincidental that the emergence of the National Gallery of Modern Art as a valorized space for art was simultaneous to the emergence of modern Indian art as a field of enquiry within the discipline of Art History. To legitimize itself, this new field of enquiry called for new methodologies, terminologies, categorizations, and criterions of evaluation, which were then negotiated through debates in the Lalit Kala's publications, for example the art journal *Lalit Kala Contemporary*. Eventually, the biography would become the dominant mode of narrating the nation's modern art practices. As the study of modern art evolved from within the field of art history, the authorial function – read through artists' biographies and mapped onto the canvas – gradually became central to the linking of art objects to the unfolding of the modern nation-state itself.[296]

W. G. Archer's 1959 *India and Modern Art* was the first text to construct a lineage for modern Indian art. Identifying the Bengal School movement as a false start "which was, by itself, not of great importance," Archer then proceeded to map the Indian modern through disjointed biographical accounts of three artists: Rabindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, and Jamini Roy.[297] Carefully interweaving a formal analysis of artworks with biographical studies, he posited their works within the global modern. While Archer found in Tagore's forms a close parallel to Paul Klee's symbolism, he placed Sher-Gil in conversation with Gauguin (Figure 4.16, Figure 4.17). Sher-Gil's engagement with pre-modern painting traditions was thus filtered through a Post-Impressionist lens. Similarly, Archer saw in Roy's engagement with folk paintings of Bengal a reverberation of

[296] Certainly, the genre of artists' biographies was not a 1960s invention. Ravi Varma's biography was published as early as 1904, while the artist was still alive. Amrita Sher-Gill too was the subject of numerous biographies published soon after her death. However, in was only in the 1960s that this genre became the standard mode of engagement with the contemporary.
[297] William G. Archer, *India and Modern Art* (London: George Allen, 1959), 9.

Picasso's fascination with African masks (Figure 4.18). The beginnings of the Indian modern were thus mapped through the trajectories of Western modernism. What distinguished Tagore, Sher-Gil, and Roy from the Bengal School, then, was this: "Modern art rather than India was their starting point."[298] The modern artist, Archer stated, was one who stood outside tradition, occupying an autonomous space marked by individualism. "The style must be a man," he polemically declared, thus uniting the figure of the artist with the physical surface of the artwork.[299]

Scholars have usually read Archer's text as "charting a genealogy of influences and drawing a ledger of European sources used by the Indian artist."[300] In scholarly accounts, Archer thus becomes symptomatic of a (Western) tendency to mark modern Indian art as derivative, a mere reflection of European and American modernisms. Thus, scholars see Archer's reading of Sher-Gil through Gauguin and Jamini Roy through Picasso as exemplary of a Euro-centric model of mapping trajectories of Indian art through the key movements of Western modernism. This reading of Archer's *India and Modern Art* is, however, simplistic.

For Archer, the successful modern Indian artist was one who "unconsciously" blended "both modern and Indian art."[301] As he very perceptively asked in a 1962 essay titled *Pictures from a Wider World*: "Is modern art a closed ring, a private club, a preserve for Europe and the United States? Can artists from other countries break in? If

[298] Ibid., 100.
[299] Ibid., 47.
[300] Shivadas, "National Gallery of Modern Art," 404. Also see Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 4.
[301] Archer, *India and Modern Art*, 47.

so, what kind of contribution can they make?"[302] Archer repeatedly argued that modern Indian art must be Indian in the same way as the art of Picasso and Miro is vividly Spanish. "Yet just as these pioneers of modern painting are part of one world, a world, which far transcends national frontiers," the modern Indian artist is "more than Indian."[303] "Just as Nehru has made an Indian impact on world ideas, we must expect more and more artists from India, South America and the East to join the private club," he concluded.

Archer's ideal Indian artist was modern yet irredeemably India – defined through an unconscious affinity with Indian visualities. He would therefore actively promote Avinash Chandra (1901-1993), a young Indian artist who had migrated to London in 1956. As Archer noted, "in Avinash Chandra there is a quality of a different kind, a national, a Hindu identity, a style of pattern that is of his country and has an attraction of its own. One might almost regard him as a Paul Klee of India, a certain affinity appearing not only in such painting as his 'City of Churches' but also in some of his sensitive drawings which harmonize the west with an eastern graphic tradition" (Figure 4.19).[304] In contrast to Chandra, Archer found F. N. Souza's Cubism to be "insincere," and the artist "lacking in true feeling," "prostituting his talent" by "painting not what he feels but what will sell."[305] Thus, Souza was merely modern, but not Indian enough.

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[302] William G. Archer, "Pictures from a Wider World," *The Sunday Telegraph* April 15, 1962. W. G. Archer Papers, European Manuscripts F236/132, IOR.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Exhibition review titled "Indian Paintings at Molton Gallery" cited by Archer in his handwritten notes on Avinash Chandra. W. G. Archer Papers, European Manuscripts F236/160, IOR.
[305] Working notes, articles, exhibition brochures and some correspondence on Francis N Souza 1961-65. W. G. Archer Papers, European Manuscripts F236/164, IOR.

Archer's cosmopolitanism was in keeping with the cultural and political internationalism of the Nehruvian era. Rabindra Bhavan, the new building for the Lalit Kala, also reflected this politics. In 1959, Jawaharlal Nehru commissioned the architect Habib Rehman (1915-1995) to design the Rabindra Bhavan to house the three state-sponsored academies – Sangeet Natak Akademi, Sahitya Akademi, and the Lalit Kala. Trained under Lawrence Andersen, William Wurster, and Walter Gropius at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rehman had been deeply inspired by the functionalism of the International Style. Much of his work in India, first as the Senior Architect of the Government of West Bengal (1947-1953) and subsequently as the Chief Architect of the Central Public Works Department (1953-1974), reflected his commitment to the Bauhaus design philosophy. However, it was the 1949 Gandhi Ghat, a memorial to Mahatma Gandhi in Barrackpore, which had first brought Rehman to Nehru's attention. At Gandhi Ghat, Rehman's articulation of a "critical regionalism" was already discernible in the use of Mughal latticework and the blending of a stark modernist style with a Hindu temple superstructure capped by an Islamic dome (Figure 4.20).[306] It was this "critical regionalism" that was further developed in the final design for the Rabindra Bhavan.

Although strictly functionalist, by drawing from pre-modern Islamic architecture of Delhi, Rabindra Bhavan indeed significantly departed from the International Style. Islamic architectural elements were not merely incorporated as decorative patterns but

[306] "Critical Regionalism," a term theorized by Kenneth Frampton, signifies a critical adaptation of the progressive values of international modern architecture in conversation with specific local requirements and architectural traditions. See Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" in Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Washington: The Bay Press, 1983), 16-30, 26.

also served specific functional uses. For example, while the extended *chajjas* protected the building from Delhi's harsh summer sun, the *jalis*, latticework, resembling Mughal water channels covered the façade of the building providing ventilation (Figure 4.21).

Although provisions were made for air conditioning, it was Rehman's hope that the building would never require artificial cooling. Similarly, extending *chhajjas* and *jalis* on the windows not only protected the double-storied pentagon-shaped open plan exhibition hall from dust but also ensured natural light. While Islamic architectural devices were put to functional use, the exposed brick exterior of Rabindra Bhavan visually referenced the red sandstone architecture of pre-modern Delhi. As Rehman put it, "Rabindra Bhavan was the first building where I could free myself from the influence of Walter Gropius and Oscar Niemeyer. This building belonged to India."[307] Yet, to use Archer's parlance, Rabindra Bhavan simultaneously belonged to the International Style in its global incarnation. It is thus perhaps fitting that Rehman has entered the annals of Indian architecture as one among the first modern Indian architects, a key figure for the unfolding of modern architecture in India.[308]

Archer's influence on the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Lalit Kala was significant. In his role as the advisor to the National Gallery of Modern Art, Archer favored mapping the Indian modern through few key artists and artworks. Apart from Avinash Chandra, other artists recommended by Archer for inclusion in the National Gallery of Modern Art included Sailoz Mukherjee (1908-1960), Gopal Ghosh (1913-

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[307] Habib Rehman cited in Patwant Singh, "Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi, 1961," *Architecture and Design* Vol. 13, No. 2 (1996), 33.
[308] Jon Lang, *A Concise History of Modern Architecture in India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 43. Also see Lang, Desai, and Desai, *Architecture and Independence*.

1980), Shiavax Chavda (1914-1990), M. F. Husain (b. 1915), Dhanraj Bhagat (an artist I discuss in Chapter Two), and K. K. Hebbar (1915-1996), an artist I discuss in Chapter Four.[309] As he stated in a letter prominently cited in the second Five Year Plan, "it is probably better to represent a few artists with five or six works each. It has to be remembered that the actual number of living artists whose work really deserve to be mentioned is very small."[310] This approach not only guided National Gallery of Modern Art's acquisition policies but also directed Lalit Kala's project of publishing artists' biographies.

The first monograph in this series, published in 1957, focused on N. S. Bendre (1910 - 1992). This was followed by a monograph on Ravi Varma, India's first "gentleman artist," Bal Chavda, and K. K. Hebbar in 1960. These texts followed a set trope, opening with the artist's self-portrait or photograph. Almost inevitably, this Vasarian narrative began with the artist's childhood where the promise of artistic genius was clearly discernable. For example, Hebbar's monograph began with the artist's self-portrait (Figure 4.22). The reader was then informed: "As a child he showed precocious ability to express in paint village festivals and pageantry at once colorful and enriched with folk culture."[311] Similarly, we are informed that Ravi Varma, much to his mother's chagrin, filled the walls of his home with drawings while Sher-Gil's childhood doodles bore clear testimony to her nascent talent.[312] This promise, clearly discernable in

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[309] W. G. Archer, Letter to Ashfaque Husain, Ministry of Culture/F3-112/54-A2/1954, NAI.
[310] Ibid.
[311] V. R. Amberkar, *Hebbar* (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1960), 1.
[312] Krishna Chaitanya, *Ravi Varma* (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1960); Baldoon Dhingra, *Amrita Shergil* (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1965).

childhood, would of course be fulfilled by the artists' careers, as the narratives painstakingly demonstrated.

This narrative strategy could only lead to one conclusion: the emergence of the artist genius whose individualism was stamped onto the very surface of the artwork. As Amberkar notes in his conclusion to Hebbar's biography, "finally, he discovered himself as a painter with humanistic ideals expressed with an idiom which has now become easily identifiable as that of Hebbar."[313] Hebbar is then uniquely and absolutely himself. Often hovering between fact and fiction, biography and mythology, these monographs became the standardized mode of writing, at par with the modern genre of the novel. [314]

If Archer's *India and Modern Art* was the first moment in the historicization of modern Indian art, the publication of the art journal *Lalit Kala Contemporary* from 1962 was a second, but equally significant, moment. Using a biographical mode, the journal traced the development of modern Indian art through the life and works of a few selected artists. In a space-clearing gesture, as if setting the stage for an unfolding of the truly modern, the first volume of the journal devoted itself to the Bengal School artists – identified as the not-yet-modern precursor to the Indian modern. The evolution of the Bengal School was mapped through the oeuvres of Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Asit Haldar (1890–1964), Khitindranath Mazumdar (1891–1975), and the landscape paintings of Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938). This mapping leads us back

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[313] Amberkar, *Hebbar*, 6.

[314] In the 1960s, monographs on painters and sculptors including Jamini Roy (1961), M. F. Husain, (1961), K. C. S. Panikkar (1961), Ramkinker Baij (1961), Prodosh Das Gupta (1961), Ram Kumar (1961), Dhanraj Bhagat (1964), Krishna Hawlaji Ara (1965), Chintamoni Kar (1965), Binode Behari Mukherjee (1965), Amrita Sher-Gil (1965), Sailoz Mookherjea (1966), K. Sreenivasulu (1966), Gopal Ghose (1966), B. C. Sanyal (1967), Kshitindranath Majumdar (1967), K. Venkatappa (1968), and Gaganendranath Tagore (1968) were published by the Lalit Kala.

to the National Gallery of Modern Art. Rejected by Hermann Goetz (1898-1976), the first Director of the National Gallery of Modern Art, most of the Bengal School artists had been banished to the storerooms of the Museum. In the late 1950s, during his tenure as the Director, the artist Mukul Dey (1895-1989) had stumbled upon many Bengal School paintings at the National Gallery of Modern Art, "lying on the bare floor covered with dust and dirt," bearing "marks of dirty footprints."[315] At Dey's insistence, the paintings were restored and added to the National Gallery of Modern Art's newly created Bengal School room.

If the first volume of the *Lalit Kala Contemporary* provided a history of the Bengal School as the not-yet-modern, the second volume traced the unfolding of the Indian modern through Rabindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, Jamini Roy, and Gaganendranath Tagore. The inclusion of Gaganendranath Tagore among these first moderns was a significant departure from Archer's genealogy. Recuperating Gaganendranath's 1920s experimentations with Cubism and color theory, the *Lalit Kala Contemporary*'s narrative provided a genealogy for 1960s abstraction from within Indian art. The journal thus very strategically performed the gesture of remembering, narrativizing, and constructing a very specific past for Indian modern art while creating a genealogy for the present. Gaganendranath's 1920s *Magician*, in its modernist color scheme and the breaking of form, provided a key marker in this genealogy (Figure 4.23).

[315] National Gallery of Modern Art Progress Report No F 27/53/NGMA, MDA. In his memoirs, Archer writes: "'They are wanting me to give away all the Sher-Gils and fill the Gallery with this' said Goetz and he gave a gesture of helpless contempt. 'The Minister and the Secretary – they are both Bengalis. What can you expect?'" Entry in W. G. Archer's diary, 12 Jan - 5 Feb 1954. W. G. Archer Papers, European Manuscripts F236/116, IOR.

This act of historicization thus signaled towards a pre-ordained future. As Goetz stated in the opening essay of the first volume of the *Lalit Kala Contemporary*: "The past has become less interesting than the present, the dreams of an ideal world, in mythic or historical times, are being superseded by concrete plans for the future. […] But in this respect, modern Indian art is merely a step behind world trends. It has not yet reached that last stage of disillusion which retreats into the timeless beauty of abstract art."[316] The present, then, was but a step towards abstraction and a merging with the larger meta-narrative of the global modern. It was only in abstraction that the Indian modern would finally fulfill the promise of the telos of modernism. And it is only with abstraction that the modern Indian would finally "arrive" in the global modern. The *Lalit Kala Contemporary* thus very carefully constructed a possible history for this "arrival."

It was also in the 1960s that the authorial discourse of the National Gallery of Modern Art was made legible with the reorganization of the Museum's display by Pradosh Dasgupta, the third Director. The first guidebook to the National Gallery of Modern Art was published only in 1967, thirteen years after the opening of the Museum. By this time, a genealogy of the Indian modern, as charted by Archer and the Lalit Kala, was firmly in place. The National Gallery of Modern Art's display and first guidebook were products of this historicization. As the Museum's guide states, "the display has been arranged in two parts – one relating to the exhibits in the first floor starting with the [19th-century] Company period and ending in Bengal School. The other relates to the

[316] Hermann Goetz, "The Great Crisis from Traditional to Modern Art," *Lalit Kala Contemporary* Vol. 2 (1963), 10-14, 14.

contemporary works which are on view in the ground floor" (Figure 4.24).[317] It was as if the genealogy of modern art, as scripted in the pages of the *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, was given visual form.

However, the narrative was played out in reverse. The viewer entered the Museum through a display of contemporary sculpture and paintings that marked "a predominant note of simplification of form and a happy breaking off from convention into new and expressive forms of vital experimentation."[318] Then, as if journeying backwards in time, the viewer witnessed the gradual unfolding of this modern through Rabindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, and Jamini Roy. Beginning with Rabindranath Tagore, the "father of Modern Indian Art," the *Guide*, rather predictably, provided brief biographies of the three artists, drawing the viewer's attention to key works that marked the artists' aesthetic evolution. Some of Gaganendranath Tagore's 1920s Cubist works also found place in this illustrious lineage, reiterating the history of the modern as articulated in the *Lalit Kala Contemporary*.

As if chronologically charting a development of art, the Museum carefully separated out the not-yet-modern Bengal School from the fully modern. If the viewer followed the Museum's cues as narrated through the guidebook, he/she now traversed a majestic staircase to reach further into the recesses of history. Having observed the arrival of the modern in the ground floor, the viewer witnessed the "evolution of Modern Indian art" on the first floor.[319] The first floor display started with 19th-century traditional sculpture and manuscript illustrations to conclude with the Bengal School. While a part

[317] Author Unknown, *A Guide to the National Gallery*, 14.
[318] Ibid., 15.
[319] Ibid., 18.

of Gaganendranath's oeuvre had entered the canon of the moderns on the ground floor, his landscape paintings became truncated from his larger oeuvre to be subsumed within the not-yet-modern Bengal School. Similarly, while the contemporary artist Devi Prasad Roychowdhury's (1899-1975) sculptures were placed at the entrance of the Museum, his paintings were displayed along with the Bengal School artists. A number of artists working in the 1950s and the 1960s, for example Mukul Dey, who had supposedly derived their style from the Bengal School were also placed with the not-yet-modern, far removed from the progressive modern nation-state's present.

Thus, while the museum and art history, its ideological twin, produced a genealogy of the Indian modern, it simultaneously collapsed historical time. As Donald Preziosi writes: "Museums do not simply or passively reveal or 'refer' to the past; rather they perform the basic historical gesture of separating out of the present a certain specific 'past' so as to collect and to recompose (to re-member) its displaced and dismembered relics as elements in a genealogy of and for the present. […] The elements of museography, including art history, are highly coded rhetorical tropes or linguistic devices that actively 'read,' compose, and allegorize the past."[320]

Mobile Modern: Travelling Exhibitions and the Politics of "Unity in Diversity"

It was through traveling exhibitions that the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Lalit Kala transcended their actual physical location in the 1950s to participate in a larger national pubic sphere. By the time the two institutions were inaugurated, the nation-state had already instituted a culture of traveling art exhibitions. Beginning with

[320] Donald Preziosi, *In the Aftermath of Art: Ethics, Aesthetics, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 73-74.

the 1948 *Exhibition of Indian Art*, exhibitions of art had become a palimpsest for the state's curation, orchestration, and performance of a post-Independence national consciousness. Almost every exhibition of modern art organized by the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Lalit Kala toured multiple cities in India.

The first travelling exhibition of modern art took place in 1952, when the government, in conjunction with the Calcutta-based Rabindra Bharati University, organized an exhibition of Rabindranath Tagore's paintings. This exhibition was held in New Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. Simultaneously, local non-government art institutions, such as the Amritsar-based Indian Academy of Fine Art and the AIFACS, were given grants to organize traveling art exhibitions. These exhibitions were part of a larger culture of modernity that included new planned cities, development of infrastructure and public works, the establishment of heavy industries, and agrarian reform. Such state-initiated projects of development and modernization called for an aesthetic of modernity, as I have argued in Chapter Two. Along with exhibitions of modern art, film, literature, and theatre were an inherent part of this post-colonial "exhibitionary order" which sustained and normativized discourses of progress, history, unity, and national civilizational values.

Timothy Mitchell's idea of the 19th-century "exhibitionary order" is useful in unpacking this post-colonial culture of traveling exhibitions.[321] Mitchell suggests that the Empire's project of collecting and displaying the colony was a strategic apparatus of colonial governance that offered the non-West as an object for the European gaze. This

[321] Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in Nicholas Dirks, ed. *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 289-318.

representation or construction of "otherness" in turn affirmed the European self. If the 19th-century "exhibitionary order" objectified, organized, and produced the colony as the Other of the Empire, the persuasiveness and pervasiveness of this exhibitionary culture simultaneously allowed the colonized elite to appropriate the space of the exhibition for its own politics. As I indicate in Chapter One, the Indian National Congress had already identified the exhibition as a potent space for curating a national self.

Traveling exhibitions of modern art served a very similar function in post-Independence India. Specifically dispatched to regions of conflict, these exhibitions had an important role to play in sustaining often fragile political alliances between the center and the states. The travels of the *National Exhibition of Art* serve as a particularly good case study. Soon after its inauguration, the Lalit Kala began organizing an annual traveling *National Exhibition of Art*. In the first three years, the *National Exhibition* was displayed only in the four metropolitan centers of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, and New Delhi. However, from 1958 onwards, there was a shift in Lalit Kala's policy towards a more concerted focus on regional centers. In 1958, the *National Exhibition* was inaugurated in Delhi and subsequently sent to Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, Guwahati in Assam, Patna in Bihar, and Cuttack in Orissa. Undoubtedly, the decision to send the *National Exhibition* to Hyderabad, Cuttack, Patna, and Guwahati was strategic.

In Chapter Two, I suggested that Parasher's memorial to Partition was a response to the linguistic and regional conflicts that had marked post-1947 India. In 1947, Hyderabad, a large princely state with a Muslim majority, had not only refused to join the new Indian nation-state but threatened to "seriously consider the alternative of joining

Pakistan" if pressurized.[322] On September 13, 1948, the Indian army marched into Hyderabad and forced the state to join the new republic. Yet again, in the 1950s, the Hyderabad state became embroiled in demands for linguistic re-organization. In 1956, Hyderabad was divided between the newly created states of Andhra Pradesh, Bombay, and Karnataka – a move that the national elite saw as leading to a possible Balkanization of the nation. Similarly, separatist groups demanded autonomy and sovereignty for Assam only to be violently suppressed by the Indian army. In Orissa, one hundred and fifty villages were submerged by the 1956 Hirakud Dam and marginalized tribal groups in Bihar protested against state appropriation of natural resources, demanding a separate state for tribal people. State atrocities such as these were widely reported in the media. As one reporter stated, "the prosperity of Hirakud will be built on the sacrifice of such people who are now being destitute […] without compensation and rehabilitation."[323]

Given such threats of internal fragmentation, it was culture and the two institutions that produced it that were called to fabricate what Etienne Balibar calls a "fictive ethnicity" – an ethnicity that frames, forms, and institutes the nation-state's multi-cultural and multi-lingual community.[324] As Ashfaque Hussain, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Education, stated during the Republic Day parade in 1952: "Whereas other counties on similar occasions hold impressive military parades which are calculated

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[322] Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (New Delhi: Picador, 2007), 52. For a larger history, also see Paul Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[323] Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 224.
[324] The notion of national solidarity must necessarily account for and work with an idea of a shared ethnicity, for "no nation, that is no nation state, has an ethnic basis, which means that nationalism cannot be defined as an ethnocentricism except precisely in the sense of the product of a fictive ethnicity," as Balibar puts it. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 49.

to give the whole world an idea of their armed might, we have combined the ceremonial military parade with cultural pageants, which signifies that this young republic holds cultural progress no less than military strength."[325] Ironically, the *National Exhibition of Art* often followed in the footsteps of the Indian armed forces, suggesting a correlation between the new nation-states' acts of repression and the use of culture as a consolidating force.

Much like the artist Dilip in *New Delhi*, who without contradiction, produced academic realist, Bengal School, and modernist abstract paintings, the space of Lalit Kala's *National Exhibition of Art* too intentionally foregrounded a similar amalgamation of styles. Divided into three sections – Academic Realist, Oriental, and Modern – the *National Exhibition* of *Art* was imagined as a platform representing the diversity in India's modern artistic traditions.[326] By thus foregrounding diversity, these exhibitions produced an inclusive space that allowed for the imagination of a unity within this diversity. The space of the *National Exhibition of Art* then was a mirror image of the nation-state's ideal of unity in diversity. The nation-state's continually conflicting multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual community, required, indeed called for an elaborate staging of an imagined national community. Traveling art exhibitions became an ideal vehicle for such an imagination.

If, on the one hand, such exhibitions of modern Indian art created, sustained, and disseminated a fiction of a national community, it simultaneously facilitated India's

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[325] Cited in B. P. Singh, *India's Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 92.
[326] *Report of the Lalit Kala Akademi 1958-59* (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1959), unpaginated.

political alliances with the Non-aligned countries.[327] At the 1955 Bandung Conference, cultural exchange had been posited as a key mode of enabling a politics of peace and mutual understanding between the Non-aligned nation-states. The *Final Communiqué* of the Conference blamed Western imperialism for disrupting "cultural cooperation" among African and Asian nations and suppressing non-Western "national cultures."[328] In 1954, the Lalit Kala had organized a workshop with Indonesian artists in the year of its inauguration, a few months before the Bandung Conference. This was closely followed by an exhibition of Chinese handicrafts and prints (1955). Numerous such exhibitions, conventions, workshops, and festivals followed. These included several conferences of African and Asian writers in New Delhi, Tashkent, Cairo, and Beirut between 1957 and 1967, Asian film festivals, the first of which was held in Beijing in 1957, and the publication of *Lotus*, the journal of the Afro-Asian Writers' Movement. Contemporary literature was also translated into various languages: Pablo Neruda's poems (Chilean writer and politician), Lu Xun's short stories (Chinese author), and Mulk Raj Anand's novels being examples that found a wide audience across the Non-aligned world.[329] Between 1958 and 1959, a time when Indian and Chinese relations had become considerably strained over boundary disputes, the focus on cultural exchange among countries of the Non-aligned world received a new impetus. Between 1958 and 1959,

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[327] The Bandung Conference was the cornerstone of the Movement – a coalition of newly formed nation-states united against the bi-polar politics of the Cold War. Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the central figures in conceiving the Non-alignment as a political strategy. For a history of India's involvement in the Non-aligned Movement, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2008).

[328] George McTurnan Kahin, ed. *The Asian-African Conference: Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 79.

[329] For a history of the cultural aspects of Non-alignment, see Bret Benjamin, *Invested Interests: Capital, Culture, and the World Bank* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

numerous shows organized in New Delhi included an exhibition of Yugoslavian prints (1958) and Czechoslovakian glass (1959), among others. Similarly, in 1959, a retrospective touring exhibition of Indian art was dispatched to Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. It is likely that Nehru had hoped to find allies among the other Non-aligned countries during the late 1950s Indo-China crisis. Traveling exhibitions thus systematically constructed an idea of the nation and the national, making art and its institutions integral to the nation-state's politics.

By now we are all too aware of the deep interconnectedness between museological practices, exhibitionary orders, and the creation of an art historical discourse. Yet art historians continue to display a strange reticence towards a sustained examination of the interrelatedness of the normativization of modern Indian art and the unfolding of the post-Independence nation-state. Instead, art objects continue to be read as a national allegory – M. F. Husain's *Between the Spider and the Lamp* (1956) being a much-celebrated example (Figure 4.25).[330] As Yashodhara Dalmia writes:

> Husain reached his apogee with the masterly work *Between the Spider and the Lamp*. The three women stand against a swathe of passionate red bringing to mind the many Indias that exist together. Their large webbed feet and hand root them firmly to the earth. Their faces and forms reflect the classical, the folk, and the peasant in alternating rhythms where boundaries are blurred and yet in consonance with each other …The lamp burning brightly above, and the spider below denote humans trapped between superstition and new advances…The deep symbolic red of the painting, flanked by broad bands of gray, reminds one of the

[330] For example, Richard Bartholomew and Shiv S. Kapur, "The Art of Maqbool Fida Husain," in *Maqbool Fida Husain* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1972), unpaginated; Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni, *Husain: Riding the Lightning* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1996); Daniel A. Herwitz, "Maqbool Fida Husain: The Artist as India's National Hero," *Third Text* Vol. 20, No. 1 (2006), 41-55.

> passionate atmosphere often found in [18th-century] Basholi paintings…The painting contains multiple references, which in their complexity are a virtual metaphor for modern India.[331]

Although such readings are invaluable as an in-depth analysis of the artists' oeuvre, they leave us with little understanding of what modern art as a category might have symbolized, or stood for, within the larger social, cultural, and political ethos of post-Independence India. By bringing modern art, its histories, and its institutions into the debates on nation making, this chapter then produces a more nuanced understanding of post-Independence cultural modernity.

Governmentality, as Michel Foucault puts it, is: "The ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security."[332] Yet, as the film *New Delhi* reminds us, this unfolding of the modern nation-state was neither easy nor natural. It was a street brawl that led Anand to the Kala Niketan where he encountered Janaki. The director of the Kala Niketan happened to be passing by as Janaki attempted suicide. Nikki's wedding ceremony was abruptly disrupted, thus allowing Dilip to reclaim his love. It is through chance, unpredictability, and randomness that the four protagonists finally unite in one happy multi-ethnic multi-lingual national family. The story of the Indian modern is not very different, I argue. Unlike the mythologies of the heroic unfolding of modernism, this

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[331] Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art*, 104-5.
[332] Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 3: Power* (New York: New Press, 2000), 201-222, 219-220.

chapter foregrounds the coincidences, accidents, contestations, and negotiations that frame the paradigms through which modern Indian art is understood today were produced.

Chapter Four

Inventing the Mundane: Domesticating Politics, Domesticating Art.

What did modern art signify in early post-Independence India?

Many years ago, I discovered in my grandmother's closet a collection of 1950s and 1960s reproductions of Indian modern art torn from the pages of journals such as *Illustrated Weekly of India* and *Marg: A Magazine of Art and Culture*. Rummaging some more I found, in a matter of minutes, objects ranging from 1930s calendars to 1940s postcards, from newspaper cuttings announcing India's Independence in 1947 to 1950s soap boxes. The reproductions of modern art were carefully wedged between such odds and ends. My grandmother was a compulsive collector. She preserved carefully everything she found interesting. While I could easily understand the allure of all the other objects, the presence of abstract paintings – mutilated figures, Cubist still lives, women with many eyes – among her most precious possessions was somewhat surprising for me. My grandmother knew little about modern art and even lesser about the artists she had so carefully collected in her cabinet. She could not tell me why she liked these paintings. But, clearly, for her the reproductions signified something beyond their immediate appeal as image.

My grandmother passed away a few years ago. But even before her death, her precious collection of curiosities was disbanded to make space for life in a small Calcutta apartment. We will never know what attraction Indian modernism held for her, a Bengali middle class housewife with little formal education, someone who rarely traveled but knew the world only through the pages of books and magazines. Although my

grandmother's collection of reproductions is now lost, the central question that this collection raises still stands: What did modern art signify in early post-Independence India for audiences unfamiliar with its intellectual discourses and aesthetic virtuosity?

When questions such as this are inserted into the by now naturalized history of Indian modernism, the almost overwhelming presence of modern art in the cultural sphere of early post-Independence India becomes fairly obvious. One becomes overtly aware of allusions to modern art in unexpected spaces. Take, for example, 1950s advertisements for the Tata Oil Mills Company that prominently featured paintings by the artist K. K. Hebbar, an artist I discuss in Chapter Three. One such advertisement was published in the journal *Art in Industry*. The advertisement featured prominently a 1953 painting titled *Sunny South* by the artist (Figure 5.1). This painting had received immense critical acclaim during the Bombay Art Society's annual exhibition. The National Gallery of Modern Art purchased *Sunny South* for its permanent collection in the same year and the Lalit Kala Akademi published a biography of the artist only a few years later.[333] The Tata Oil's advertisement began by introducing the young artist: "Mr. Hebbar, whose home town is in Mangalore on the Malabar coast is a Gold Medalist of the Bombay [Art] Society and is well known throughout India." Then, associating the history of the company to the artist's biography, the advertisement stated, "Malabar is of special importance to this Company, for it is at Tatapuram in Cochin State that our first factory was founded in 1918. We have taken long strides since those days with a Factory in Bombay and fourteen sales offices throughout the country."[334]

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[333] "List of paintings in the gallery" in National Art Gallery, Archaeology G Section/25/7/53, ASI RR.
[334] Advertisement published in *Art in Industry* Vol. 4, No. 3 (1953), unpaginated.

With this statement, the Tata Oil brought together the career of the young artist with its own trajectory. Like Hebbar, the company originated in Mangalore, expanded to Bombay, ultimately achieving a national stature. Having first established this genealogy, this advertisement for beauty products then invited the reader to participate in this illustrious lineage by stating: "The people of Malabar have been good customers for all our products. Our popular products are Hamam Soup, 501 Washing Soaps, Tomco C. N. Hair Oil and Shampoo, Shaving Stick, Eau-de-Cologne and Eau-de-Cologne Soap, Nirvan Perfume, Cocogem and Pakav."[335] Although the citation of a modern artwork in an advertisement for beauty products may be somewhat surprising, this advertisement was part of a larger 1950s culture of domesticity. What then can the pervasiveness of modern art and its aesthetic discourses tell us about the early post-Independence cultural field? This is a question that this chapter aims to address.

This dissertation, thus far, has primarily focused on public spaces – the museum, the exhibition, and the city – to locate modern art and its aesthetic discourses within everyday spheres of habitation. Rather than seeing artistic praxis as functioning purely from within the designated frameworks of an "art world," the earlier chapters attempted to make visible modern art's participation in the practices of the everyday. Simultaneously, by drawing into my narrative purportedly disparate visual practices – artistic, architectural, photographic, and cinematic – I located both the experience of seeing and making modern art within an inter-ocular field of vision. The idea of inter-ocularity, as developed by Arjun Appadurai, Carol Breckenridge, and subsequently by Christopher Pinney, has been central to the conception of this dissertation. Appadurai and

[335] Ibid.

Breckenridge have defined the "interocular field" as a site where public practices and ocular experiences merge. "The interocular field," Appadurai and Breckenridge write, "is structured so that each site or setting for socializing and regulating of ocular experiences is to some degree affected by the experiences of other sites. The interweaving of ocular experiences, which also subsumes the substantive transfer of meanings, scripts, and symbols from one site to another." [336] This, Appadurai and Breckenridge propose, is a crucial feature of public culture.

On the other hand, writing about late 19th and early 20th-century chromolithographs, photographs, and theatrical productions, Pinney notes, "these different visual fields crossed each other through processes of 'inter-ocularity' – a visual inter-referencing and citation that mirrors the more familiar process of 'inter-textuality.'"[337] This idea of the inter-ocular then makes possible an understanding of modern art through an inter-textual and inter-mediatic network of meanings, scripts, and symbols that intersected with public practices and ocular experiences in colonial and post-colonial India. The aesthetics of concrete, for instance, spanned across multiple and purportedly disparate genres of image production, generating rhizomatic networks of beliefs, values, and desires in 1950s and 1960s India.

In Appadurai and Breckenridge's discussion on contemporary pubic culture in India, sports emerges as an exemplary site that foregrounds the volatile collision of notions of spectacle, entertainment, leisure, stardom, and nationalism. While, on the one hand, this experience is intensely public, on the other hand, it is simultaneously private. If

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[336] Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 12.
[337] Pinney, *Photos of the Gods*, 34-35.

discussions and discourses around sports are played out in street corners, cafes, and stadiums, they are simultaneously produced through television, newspaper reports, and magazines consumed in private. This intersection of experiences, reinforced through inter-ocularity, creates an interdependent and continually shifting relationships mobilized through the act of reading images, advertisements, magazines, newspapers, billboards, the act of seeing this world reflected on the silver screen and in art works, and the act of inhabiting this world. In this complex experiential field, an experiential field constituted through shared texts and images, everyday life becomes inseparable from public culture. Taking up Appadurai and Breckenridge's argument, in this chapter I suggest that the public and the private are thus constituted simultaneously.

Beatriz Colomina supports this argument when she writes: "the city, public space, can never be separated from domestic space. What goes on in the public square shapes the domestic space that seems detached from it, and vice versa."[338] Domestic architecture, Colomina proposes, is an inhabited space as much as it is a representation. Writing about modern architecture in Europe and America, Colomina suggests we see architecture not just through the careers of individual architects or singular buildings but also through its myriad representation in exhibitions, advertising, and photography. In this sense, the private space of the home is also public. But it is public in a way different than the public of the public forum or the cafe. "It no longer has so much to do with a

[338] Beatriz Colomina, "The Media House," *Assemblage* Vol. 27 (1995), 55–66, 56.

public space […] but with the audience that each medium of publication reaches, independent of the place this audience might actually be occupying."[339]

Modernity and its new technologies of vision, then, coincide with the making of the private as public. As Roland Barthes writes: "the age of photography corresponds precisely to the irruption of the private into the public, or rather, to the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private."[340] Indeed, the first irruption of the private into the public was in the form of photographs. In early 20th-century India, a new genre of photography appears – one that depicts the private space of the domestic. The colonial photographer Deen Dayal's albumen print of the Nizam of Hyderabad's drawing room in the Bashir Bagh Palace, Hyderabad is perhaps best known of this new genre (Figure 5.2). The display of objects in this space is worth noting. Neo-classical sculptures stand on marble pedestals, ornate mirrors, expensive fabric, and oil paintings embellish the walls. Scattered around the room are European-style seating arrangements – settees, high back chairs, center tables, and tea tables. On each table is placed a book, a painting, a sculpture, a porcelain vase, or a photograph, clearly intended for the attention of the visitor.

This room is then not a space of socialization but a space for the display of the Nizam's collection of art, rare books, and other curiosities. Carefully captured in Deen Dayal's photograph and reproduced through postcards and stereoviews, the display in the room exceeds its immediate space to reach a wider audience. Although the Nizam of

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[339] Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 7.
[340] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 98.

Hyderabad's drawing room is not the best example of a strictly private or domestic space, there is sufficient reason to believe that neither this mode of display nor the new genre of photography was restricted to the Indian royalty. An early 20th-century photograph of what appears to be the living room of a reasonably wealthy household shows precisely the same technique of display (Figure 5.3). Much like the Nizam's drawing room, the photograph shows objects, paintings, and books carefully displayed on tables, cabinets, and even on the floor. Rich drapery and scattered furniture orchestrates a space that resonates well with the Bashir Palace's interior. A handwritten text inscribed in pencil on the lower mount of the photograph states: "Our drawing room - Ambala."

Interestingly enough, this mode of displaying objects – paintings, sculpture, photographs, and other artifacts – was not restricted to the domestic space in colonial India. The display of art and crafts at the Madras Industrial and Arts Exhibition organized in conjunction with the 1903 Indian National Congress meeting at Madras followed a similar strategy (See Figure 2.6). Here, paintings by artists such as Ravi Varma and Abanindranath Tagore were displayed, alongside carved ivory chests, terracotta dolls, and brass plates, in a room which could easily be mistaken for a drawing room, no different than the living room of an elite residence in Ambala. If taken out of the context of the official catalog of the exhibition, the image can indeed be easily mistaken as a photograph of a private residence, much like the one in Figure 5.3. Yet, as part of a public art exhibition specifically organized by the Indian National Congress to encourage indigenous arts and crafts of India, the space of the Madras Industrial and Arts Exhibition was inherently different from the space of a private drawing room in Ambala.

These two images – one of a private residence in Ambala and another of the public space of the 1903 Madras Industrial and Arts Exhibition – are then paradigmatic of the publicization of the private, or conversely, the privatization of the public in the first decades of the 20th century. The subsequent transformation in the interior design and decoration of the pavilions at the 1921 Congress meeting is symptomatic of the ways in which 1920s Gandhian politics attempted to transform this space through introducing "Oriental style" seating arrangements with *khadi* rugs, mattresses, and cushions on the floor. Images of the Congress meeting, circulated in the form of photographs and prints permeated back into the domestic space, yet again integrating the public and the private.

It was also in the 1930s that artists such as Nandalal Bose started to articulate a new aesthetic through designing utilitarian art, furniture, and textiles for everyday consumption. The integration of these objects within 1930s middle-class interiors would make visible a new *swadeshi* domesticity. That the domestic space became a locus of art practice should be hardly surprising, given the mutual imbrication of the public and the private, the art exhibition and the drawing room. Beginning with this 1930s moment, this chapter examines the intersections between artistic practice and the production of domestic aesthetics in post-Independence India.

If, in Chapter One, I suggested that Gandhi's *swadeshi* made aesthetics a critical ground for the articulation of a new national political consciousness, in Chapter Two I argued that the displacement of this Gandhian aesthetics with symbols of development in 1950s India required a relocation of sense perception for the imagination of a new techno-rational India. This imagination of a new techno-rational India paralleled the rise

of a new domestic culture, with the organization of a number of architecture and design exhibitions along with a proliferation of design journals, architecture guides, and housekeeping manuals. The 1947 *Report of the Committee for Art Education*, the establishment of Design Centers for the collaboration of artists and artisans in 1954, the 1959 *Design Today in America and Europe*, a traveling exhibition organized for the Indian Government by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the 1962 Industries Fair, New Delhi are some of the key moments in this trajectory that I discuss in this chapter.

It is also at this juncture that an increasing number of artists such as Ratna Fabri (b. 1920s) and Pran Nath Mago (1923-2006) became involved in interior decoration and designing utilitarian art for domestic consumption. As the artist in charge of the Delhi Design Center, Mago's contribution to utilitarian art was significant. Mago's designs were not only sold through the Government's Cottage Industries Emporiums but were also routinely reproduced in journals such as the *MARG: A Magazine of Architecture and Art* and the *Design: Review of Architecture, Applied and Free Arts*. Similarly, in her role as one of the foremost interior designers responsible for a wide range of projects such as the interiors of the Cottage Industries Emporium, New Delhi and the Government Museum of Art, Chandigarh, Fabri's influence on the aesthetics of domestic interiors was palpable, as a number of popular magazines make obvious. This very same aesthetics of display, reflected in the exhibitions of her own artworks within the space of the gallery creates a kaleidoscopic image, one that renders inseparable modern art from a complex

visual world extending from the public to the domestic, from the elite to the popular in 1950 and 1960s India.

Domestic Aesthetics as Artistic Practice: 1920s-1930s

Writing on the notion of interiority in late 19th and early 20th-century India, Partha Chatterjee suggests that nationalist reform discourses made the inner domain of national culture a valorized space of sovereign authenticity. This inner domain of national culture was constituted in the light of the discovery of 'tradition.'"[341] In the concreteness of everyday practices, the dichotomy between an outer "arena of political contest" and the "inner domain of sovereignty" translated into a distinction between the "home," typically marked as an "inner" feminine space, and the "world," marked as an "outer" masculine space of political contestation. It was through this very "inner" space of the "home" that nationalism articulated its ideology, imagining an "inner" life of the nation that was sovereign much before political Independence was achieved. As Chatterjee writes: "No encroachments by the colonizer must be allowed in that inner sanctum. In the world, imitation of and adaptation to Western norms was necessary; at home, they were tantamount to annihilation of one's very identity."[342] In this inner domain, the colonized nation was already sovereign.

It is thus not surprising that the making of this inner domain of sovereignty, the space of the home, became a valorized site to articulate a nationalist subjectivity. If late 19th-century Indian interiors, for example the drawing room in Ambala, reflected European bourgeois tastes through the use of Victorian furniture, oil paintings, and

[341] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 117.
[342] Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 121.

Western-style sculptures, 1920s and 1930s nationalism made the transformation of this home a political imperative. The exhibitions of the Indian National Congress and Nandalal Bose's design pedagogy were key moments in this new ideal that would mark the home as an appropriate space of inner sovereignty.

The novelist Maitreyi Debi, for instance, describes her 1930s visit to Rabindranath Tagore's residence in Santiniketan where she first encountered what she identified as a *swadeshi* aesthetic, a new aestheticized space marked by low chairs or stools and hand-woven cotton curtains sparingly adorned by a single border drawn from traditional Orissan textile motifs.[343] Sixteen-year-old Maitreyi Debi then attempted to replicate this *swadeshi* space in her own room in Calcutta. As she writes:

> I had 'arranged' the room with low furniture. I had even cut short the legs of an old Victorian bed to make it look what they called 'Oriental.'[…] I liked to read poetry sitting in a properly decorated, tidy, and clean room. I also liked to hear the stories from my uncle […] because of my father's disapproval we could take no part in the country-wide enthusiasm that nevertheless stirred us to the depths. But we did what we could.[344]

Although apparently whimsical, this act of cutting off the legs of a Victorian bed is then clearly of profound significance. The act reasserts the power of the mundane – stools, chairs, beds – as making visible an inner space of sovereignty. It suggests the infinitely symbolic nature of utilitarian objects and the ways in which the symbolic aspects of social life are inseparably entwined with material objects of everyday use. Replicating "Oriental"' design, Maitreyi Debi created a space for her own political commitment.

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[343] Maitreyi Debi, *It Does Not Die: A Romance* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1976), 27-28.
[344] Ibid., 37-39.

The act of reordering the domestic as a political assertion has a long genealogy in India. It is through the writings of E. B. Havell that the materiality of the Indian domestic interior emerged as a powerful site of both artistic and political practice in the early 20th century.[345] Arguing against imperialist tropes that repeatedly marked Indian art as primarily artisanal and decorative, Havell asserted that not only did India have a fine art tradition but that the distinction between fine art and artisanal products did not exist in a "traditional" context.[346] By imposing a very different notion of art and a hierarchy within artistic production, colonial rule had brought about a disjunction within the urban art world. In this disjunction, art, reduced to merely an object of economic value to be displayed in elite homes, museums, and art exhibitions, had become disconnected from everyday lives. It was in this disjunction, in this urban dystopia, that Havell located a deterioration of public taste because of the lack of beauty in daily life and a simultaneous decline in India's indigenous industries.[347]

For Havell, the regeneration of Indian art and the re-instatement of economic self-sufficiency were inextricably connected. Both converged in the domestic spaces of the home. As Havell wrote: "The solution of the artistic problem is the solution of the industrial problem also; the key to both is *learning to live well*. And as life is first begun in the home, and not in the school or the workshop, so it is in the home that the

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[345] Havell's involvement with handloom revival and non-government craft co-operatives had brought him in conversation with the *swadeshi* movement that had erupted in Calcutta between 1905 and 1911. Bringing together his concerns regarding art practice, industrial rejuvenation, and everyday politics, Havell put forward his concerns in a series of essays addressed to an imagined nationalist audience. Many of these essays were republished in Havell, *The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival*.
[346] Ibid.
[347] This idea is repeatedly reiterated. See Ibid., 56, 98-99, 155.

foundation of India's industrial regeneration must be laid."[348] This notion of *living well*, a notion that allowed Havell to link the domestic spaces of the home to the public sphere of the colony, then emerges as central to Havell's argument. By imitating the domestic interiors of suburban England, the Indian elite served to reinstate, according to Havell, the hierarchy between the colonizer and the colonized that framed the public sphere of the colonial state. The act of decorating the home with "crude Brussels carpets, Brummagem chandeliers, tenth-rate European pictures, sculpture, and furniture" reproduced the hierarchies of the colonial state.[349]

Havell's interest in the home becomes obvious when read in light of colonial discourses on domesticity. As Sara Upton argues, the domestic was given prominence through the "ideological investment in both fiction and non-fiction at the height of colonialism that saw it given a central place in political and literary discourse."[350] In British colonial literature, the home became a metaphor for the colonial project itself, as Upton points out. In the aftermath of 1857, domestic objects became metonymic devices that stood in for British rule in India. Writing on domestic practices in the colony, Ann McClintock thus points out that "the cult of domesticity became a crucial arena for rationalizing emergent middle-class identity."[351] The domestic thus emerged as a space where the discourse of empire, the hierarchies between the colonizer and the colonized,

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[348] Havell, *The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival*, 139. Emphasis mine.
[349] Ibid., 141-142.
[350] Sara Upton, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 116.
[351] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 169.

were repeatedly enacted. The home was thus produced as a microcosm of the colony. Only the reversal of this hierarchy at home could produce a viable *swadeshi* politics.[352]

By his own admission, Havell's articulations had its most profound impact in the formation of Rabindranath Tagore's 1919 art school – Kalabhavan – at Santiniketan.[353] Here, Havell's call to domesticate both *swadeshi* and the colonial public sphere was taken up by Nandalal Bose. Bose, trained at the Government College of Art, Calcutta under Abanindranath Tagore, arrived in Santiniketan in 1919 at the invitation of Rabindranath to take charge of the art school. Among the key changes that Bose brought into art pedagogy was a move towards making art a part of the everyday. The school, under his direction, made crafts training, for example textile-weaving, leather embossing, and terracotta with a special emphasis on design, a compulsory part of art education. A successful artist must also be a craftsman, Bose repeatedly asserted.[354]

Bose's experiments with utilitarian design began in 1923, with the establishment of a crafts department, Vichitra, at Kala Bhavan. This focus on utilitarian art served a larger politics of transforming the inner realm of the "home" into a valorized space of anti-colonialism. To cite one example, Bose introduced the traditional practice of *alpana* (symbolic designs associated with rituals drawn on the ground at doorways by women using rice-powder) as a mode of instruction in hand-eye coordination, in effect linking domestic feminine practices to an outer mostly-masculine public life (Figure 5.4).

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[352] Havell was surely aware of nationalist discourses that repeatedly posed the inner, the spiritual, and the domestic as more authentic than the outer materialist spheres of the colonial state. It is to this very inner sphere of the home that Havell turned, in effect linking this inner life to the outer life of *swadeshi*.
[353] "Letters addressed to E. B. Havell from Abanindranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore," Havell Papers, European Manuscripts D736, IOR.
[354] For example, see Nandalal Bose, *Speaking of Art (Silpakatha)* (Calcutta: Visva Bharati Publishing Department, 1999).

Rabindranath Tagore's daughter-in-law Pratima Devi was recruited to impart lessons in *alpana*. Bose's positing of the inner, the spiritual, and the domestic as somehow more authentic than the outer, materialist sphere of colonial modernity led him to not only introduce *alpana* in art pedagogy but allowed him to aestheticize the everyday.

In 1912, Havell had already posited *alpana* as an emblematic practice that could seamlessly merge the public and the domestic as a political act. *Alpana* placed at the threshold (the doorway) of the home symbolically marked the transition between the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of the colonial state. *Alpana* could thus, Havell argued, easily transform the colonial public realm into an ideal *swadeshi* space. However, Havell's call to domesticate both *swadeshi* and the colonial public sphere did not receive an immediate response. Although a new interest in traditional ritualistic practices was part of a nationalist discourse in the early 20th century, material culture does not point towards an actual transformation in the fabric of the domestic space.

Abanindranath Tagore's publication of a collection of *alpana* motifs in his *Banglar Brata*, a text first published in 1919, is a case in point.[355] While this text spoke eloquently of the recovery of traditional rituals and local folk cultures as the site of an "authentic" India untouched by colonial modernity, Tagore made little attempt to recalibrate *alpana* as a living practice for early 20th-century India. *Alpana*'s transformation into a secular art form occurred gradually, in conversation with Bose's larger move towards making art a part of the everyday. The introduction of a pedagogy based on traditional ritualistic practices was thus a concrete attempt to articulate a

[355] Abanindranath Tagore, *Banglar Brata* (Calcutta: Visva Bharati Granthalaya, 1943).

modernism removed from the colonial art schools of Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, and Lahore.

The establishment of the crafts department, Vichitra, at Kala Bhavan in 1923 allowed for a more systematic engagement with design as a larger politics of transforming the inner realm of the home.[356] According to a 1923 report, objects produced at Vichitra were disseminated through exhibitions and displays at various local fairs in Calcutta and Santiniketan.[357] The activities of the Vichitra significantly expanded following Bose's visit to China and Japan in 1924. Bose was deeply impressed with what he perceived as a perfect synthesis of aesthetics and everyday practices. Subsequently, an invitation was extended to the Japanese carpenter, Kintaro Sakahara, to teach woodwork at Vichitra.[358] Kawai, yet another Japanese carpenter, arrived in Santiniketan soon after.[359] A carpenter from Goalpara, Calcutta, was also induced to join Vichitra to collaborate with the two Japanese visitors. The arrival of Sakahara and Kawai not only expanded the Vichitra's areas of concentration but also introduced a range of eclectic objects, designs, and techniques. Merely four years later, the Vichitra was integrated with the newly established Silpa Bhavan at the Sriniketan Institute for Rural Reconstruction, a twin campus housing Santiniketan's institution for rural development, to adequately respond to increasing demands for its products. And by the mid-1930s, utilitarian objects

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[356] This period is very well captured in Amita Sen, *Santiniketane Ashram Kanya* (Calcutta: Tagore Society Research Institute, 1976).
[357] Andre Karpeles, "Vichita," *Santiniketan Patrika* Chaitra (1923), 31-32.
[358] For Nandalal Bose's anecdotes on Shakahara's visit, see Panchanan Mondal, *Bharat Silpi Nandalal: As Related by Nandalal Bose*, Vol. 2 (Birbhum: Rarh Gabeshana Parishad, 1984), 163-164.
[359] For a list of Japanese visitors, see Geeta A. Keeni, "Study of Japanese Language at Viswa-Bharati, Santiniketan – Its Past, Present and Future Prospects" in P. A. George ed., *Japanese Studies: Changing Global Profile* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2010), 257-264, 259.

made at Silpa Bhavan found a wide market, with one hundred and fifty outlets across India.[360]

A 1933 catalog provides a fairly exhaustive list of the Silpa Bhavan's products.[361] Even a cursory survey of this catalog reveals a diverse and indeed novel range of objects. Designed by Bose in the late 1930s, the *mora*, a low stool made from jute and reed, was one such new invention that had no precursor in India (Figure 5.5).[362] Simultaneously, the form of the *alpana* was appropriated for textile designs. When imprinted in batik, a technique Bose adopted from Indonesia, upon a *sari*, the *alpana* was very literally embodied (Figure 5.6). Batik *saris*, which were hitherto unknown to middle-class consumers, became immediately popular, as K. G. Subramanyan noted in an interview.[363] Silpa Bhavan's products then created a new taste, a new domestic aesthetic in 1930s India.

Needless to say, Bose's own aesthetic influences and stylistic predilections also seeped into Silpa Bhavan's design aesthetics. In the 1930s, the rather eclectic "Indian" aesthetic of Nandalal Bose – an "Indian aesthetic" that articulated itself through citations of sources as diverse as Indonesian batik, Japanese furniture design, and pre-modern Buddhist art – become synonymous with a *swadeshi* domestic aesthetics. Take for instance, a leather handbag produced at Silpa Bhavan and purchased in Calcutta in the 1940s (Figure 5.7). Although it is unclear whether Bose was actually responsible for

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[360] Silpa Bhavan Report, 1935, Viswa-Bharati Archives, Santiniketan (Henceforth VBA). Also see Leonard Knight Elmhirst, *Sriniketan: Address Delivered at the Anniversary Celebrations at Sriniketan on February 6, 1955* (Santiniketan: Viswa-Bharati, 1955); Amitabh Chaudhury, *Santiniketane Shukher Baromashya* (Calcutta: Teen Sangi, 1981).
[361] Silpa Bhavan Catalog, 1933, VBA.
[362] Interview with K. G. Subramanyan, May 11, 2007.
[363] Ibid.

designing this bag, the figurative motifs embellishing the bag nevertheless bears a startling similarity to Bose's own visual repertoire. A round elephant emblem, an image that closely resembles similar figures in 5th-century mural paintings at Ajanta and Bagh, appears in the center. Similar elephant figures, painted by Bose, also appears in the 1940 souvenir published to commemorate the Indian National Congress at Ramgarh, a souvenir I discussed in Chapter Two.

Simultaneously, a female figure, placed right beneath the bag's sling handle, betrays stylistic affinities with Bose's own visuality. The linear form with its rhythmic rendering readily brings to mind a number of paintings produced by Bose in this period, for instance the 1941 watercolor *Saraswati*, now housed at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi (Figure 5.8). The elongated eyes, the stylized body, the linear rendering of drapery are stylistic elements common to both figures. The background, carefully constructed through floral motifs emanating from the central figures, is yet another visual marker which locates the illustrations on the handbag well within the larger frameworks of Bose's aesthetic repertoire.

It would not be farfetched to claim that Bose's aesthetic – marked by a linear decorativeness and an overt attention to compositional harmony – had become fairly popular by the 1930s. Paintings by a number of Bengal-based artists reiterated this visuality. Reproduced as illustrations in various popular literary journals, this visual language would have been very common, indeed quite familiar to literate audiences. A painting of the goddess Saraswati by Sunil Pal (b. 1920) published in a Bengali journal in the late 1930s is one such example (Figure 5.9). Pal had joined the sculpture department

at the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Calcutta, for an Art Teacher's Diploma in 1935.[364] Between 1935 and 1937, the young sculptor also worked as an illustrator for various journals and magazines. Pal's Saraswati was published in one such magazine. The intricately embellished figure with stylized eyes points towards the wide purport of Bose's aesthetic repertoire.

Yet another illustration by Pratulchandra Bandyapadhaya (1902-1974), also trained at the Government College of Arts and Crafts, suggests that this visually retained its popularity till as late as the 1960s (Figure 5.10). That neither Pal nor Bandyapadhaya were directly affiliated with either Bose or Santiniketan further corroborates the wide appropriation of Bose's visual language, at least within the realm of book illustrations aimed at popular consumption.[365] The images on the handbag then participated in this wider visual world composed of disparate genres of image-production. Thus placed on the surface of a handbag the conflation of art, utilitarian objects, and everyday aesthetics is perhaps complete.

How persistent or pervasive was this aesthetic awareness? Questions such as this cannot be answered with certainty. Yet, by 1951, it was Santiniketan's aesthetic that became synonymous with a quintessentially Indian domestic aesthetic for a global audience. Take, for example, the *River*, the French neo-realist director Jean Renoir's (1894-1979) 1951 Technicolor film shot in India. Based on Rumer Goden's 1946 novel, *The River*, the film revolves around the life of Harriet, the oldest daughter of an English

[364] For a more detailed biography, see Sarkar, *Bharater Bhashkar O Chitrashilpi*, 222.
[365] For a more detailed biography, see Ibid., 110.

manager of a jute mill, who lives in a colonial bungalow on the banks of the river Hooghly in suburban Bengal.

In essence, the rather sentimental film reiterated notions of the "mystic East," complete with its snake charmers, multi-headed multi-armed gods, and many religious festivals. The narrator's voice, strategically introduced, explicates for the viewer the myriad mysteries of "the East." Renoir's neo-realist cinematic strategies, for instance the inclusion of footage of Indians going about their daily lives, complements the narration, giving the film a documentary feel. It is precisely this that rendered the film convincing for audiences in Europe and America. As André Bazin writes: "Made in Hollywood with a simulated Indian décor, the film would have had a completely different tonality. What the geographic and human realism adds, however, is not a social dimension, but a religious and mystical meaning…Renoir's vision of India was neither naïve nor superficial, but rather that it went straight to the essential."[366] In effect, the *River* provided Western audiences with a glimpse into life in India, albeit from an Orientalist perspective.

The story unfolds in what appears to be 1930s or 1940s India. The narrative plays out in two very distinctive domestic spaces: Harriet's own bungalow, with its ballroom, Victorian dressers, cushioned armchairs, fainting couches, and her neighbor Mr. John's cottage (Figure 5.11; Figure 5.12). "Since the death of his wife, a beautiful Hindu woman, India had absorbed our neighbor completely," we are informed fairly early in the film. Mr. John whose house "is full of Indian books, Indian friends" had married an

[366] Andre Bazin, *Jean Renoir* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 113.

Indian woman, and has an Anglo-Indian daughter.[367] Marked by low *diwans*, woven bamboo screens, handspun cotton curtains with Orissan borders, terracotta flower vases, the drawing room of Mr. John's cottage, of course, corroborates his "absorption." Visually, the *mise en scène* brings to mind Maitreyi Debi's description of Tagore's house or even her own room in Calcutta.

When contrasted with the vast and opulent Westernized drawing room of Harriet's own bungalow, the distinctly different domestic aesthetic of Mr. John's house becomes particularly obvious. Mr. John's house, of course, does not carry specific *swadeshi* connotations. Instead, in the film this domestic space becomes an essential symbol of social and cultural difference. While liveried native servants serve refreshments in Harriet's bungalow, Mr. John entertains his Indian friends in his living room. Mr. John's living room then becomes symptomatic of an Indianized domestic space. Santiniketan's aesthetics thus becomes a sign of difference – a marker of alterity. This aesthetics is produced as *that* emblematic frame which renders visible and legible the Indianness of Mr. John's living room for Renoir's global audience.

Needless to say, the *River* is merely symptomatic of a larger cultural discourse that had already produced Santiniketan's aesthetic as a marker of Indianness. For instance, in the early 1950s, the artist Sukumar Bose was asked by Jawaharlal Nehru to redecorate with *alpana* the interior spaces of the Teenmurti Bhavan, the erstwhile residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in India. [368] It is likely that

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[367] Jean Renoir, dir. *River*, DVD, The Criterion Collection, [1951] 2004.

[368] As Sukumar Bose writes: "During the early post-Independence days banquets for foreign dignitaries used to be held in Tinmurti [Teenmurti] House, the residence of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He and his daughter Shrimati Indira Gandhi desired that on such occasions I should decorate banquet halls and dinner

alpana, as a symbolic mode of marking space, resonated well with the post-Independence nation-state's need to reclaim and reframe the official spaces of the erstwhile colonial government. Subsequently, intricate *alpana* patterns were ingrained onto the interior spaces of the building – walls, ceilings, and corridors – through frescoes painted by Sukumar Bose (Figure 5.13). This decision was surely strategic. The administrative buildings in New Delhi's Capital Complex were perhaps the most visible sign of the British Empire, a reminder of domination. Nandalal Bose's design pedagogy then allowed for a reversal, a paradigmatic undoing and thus reinscribing these very spaces of domination.

Aesthetic culture and Artistic Praxis: 1940s-1950s

If Santiniketan's pedagogy had a definite potency in the colonial context, 1940s and 1950s attempts to destabilize the hierarchies between the fine and the decorative, the artist and the craftsman, became an equally powerful metaphor to articulate a post-Independence modernism. On August 17, 1946, exactly one year prior to Independence, the colonial Department of Education set up a Committee for Art Education to address the new nation's "aesthetic culture" at the insistence of the Indian National Congress. [369] The Committee first met in Bombay on September 6, right after the Congress-dominated Interim Government was sworn in.[370] After a series of meetings, the Committee submitted its report in August 1947. Echoing Havell's arguments, the *Report* urged for a

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tables with floral and linear motifs in multicolored patterns after alpana." Sukumar Bose, "Art Works in Rashtrapati Bhawan,"*Roopa-Lekha* Vol. 53, No. 1-2 (1982), 61-71, 63.

[369] Resolution No. 6773, Proceedings of the Department of Education, 17th August 1946, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

[370] *Report of the Committee for Art Education, 1947* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1948). For a discussion on the political situation on the eve of Independence, see Sarkar, *Modern India*.

re-linking of artistic and artisanal practices. The *Report* suggested that if a holistic national culture was to be forged and an aestheticization of the everyday was to be achieved, artists would need to be adept craftsmen – not just creating objects for aesthetic contemplation but also designing utilitarian objects for everyday use conducive to the transformed realities of contemporary India.[371]

Submitted merely a few days after Independence, the *Report*'s focus on the utilitarian is indeed significant. It is precisely through utilitarian objects – the chair that we sit on, the cup that we cradle in our hand – that culture is incorporated into the body to be naturalized in the form of taste, demeanor, habit, and appearance. "The tasks which face the human apparatus at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation alone. They are mastered gradually by habit," Walter Benjamin writes.[372] The act of inhabiting, then, is a tactile act. Only through such an act of embodiment could post-Independence modernity become a cultural practice. After all, it is the mundane practices of the everyday that continually constructs us as we are, as we wish to be. A transformation in everyday spaces of habitation would be tantamount to a concurrent transformation in habit. It follows, then, that a transformation in habitation would engender an entirely different set of signs, tastes, and practices. The *Report*'s insistence on utilitarian design revealed this understanding.

The recommendations of the 1947 *Report* was directly instrumental in the establishment of Regional Design Centers. Set up in Calcutta, Bombay, Bangalore, and

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[371] *Report of the Committee for Art Education*, 4.
[372] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, eds. *The Nineteenth-century Visual Culture Rea*der (New York: Routledge, 2004), 63-72, 69.

New Delhi in 1957 as part of the first Five Year Plan, the Design Centers became a platform for collaboration between artists and artisans.[373] Modeled after Santiniketan's Silpa Bhavan, the Centers functioned as informal training schools for artisans. One of the key principles that governed the pedagogy of these centers was a focus on the simplification of form and a move away from excessive decoration that was seen to mark crafts produced under the erstwhile colonial government. Pran Nath Mago, who was given charge of the Delhi Design Center, was a prominent Delhi-based painter. Under his guidance, the Center produced a range of everyday objects including dinnerware, jewelry, and furniture. Mago's training at the Mayo School and his personal predilection for refiguring pre-modern manuscript traditions into a modernist visual language perhaps made him an ideal choice to lead the Center. The distinctiveness of the objects produced at this Center was illustrative of his interest in combining traditional arts with an international modernist repertoire. For example, while the Center's handcrafted sculpturesque ceramic jugs drew inspiration from the American ceramist Russell Wright's "American Modern" line of stoneware produced for the Steubenville Pottery Company, the cane handle incorporated indigenous techniques of cane weaving from Manipur (Figure 5.14; Figure 5.15). Designed by Mago, the ceramic jugs were produced by artisans apprenticed with the Design Center.

Design discourses at the Regional Design Centers were significantly influenced by a 1959 exhibition of European and American design that had toured nine Indian cities over a period of two years. In keeping with the larger 1950s move towards modernization and industrialization, the Indian government had requested the Museum of Modern Art,

[373] See Government of India, *Year of freedom* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1957), 69.

New York in 1958 to send to India an exhibition of exemplary modern Western design. Funded by the Ford Foundation, the exhibition *Design Today in America and Europe* opened in New Delhi on Februrary 16, 1959 (Figure 5.16). The exhibition, consisting of three hundred household objects including furniture, cutlery, glassware, and fabric by designers from thirteen countries, would remain in India as part of a permanent design collection.[374] According to Russell Flinchum, Russell Wright's "American Modern" series embodied MoMA's ideals of "the integration of function, technology, and form."[375] Its incorporation into the Regional Design Center's repertoire is then indicative of a certain appropriation of the notions of "a modernity of affluence, modeled and promoted by America as part of its cold war cultural strategy that sought to demonstrate a fantastic view of future domesticity before an Indian audience."[376]

Organized with funding from the Ford Foundation, the *Design Today* exhibition was part of American Cold War cultural diplomacy. The Ford Foundation's role in introducing American culture to developing countries in this period is by now well explored.[377] That the exhibition was presented in a mobile geodesic dome lent by the United States Information Agency, an organization established during the Cold War to promote American propaganda through cultural diplomacy, further supports this

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[374] MoMA Press Archives, 1959, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York (Henceforth MoMA Archives). The collection is now housed at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.
[375] Russell Flinchum, "Visuality and Ingenuity" in MoMA Design Series, *American Design* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 11-46, 25.
[376] Farhan Sirajul Karim, "Modernity Transfers: The MoMA and Postcolonial India" in Duanfang Lu ed. *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 189-210, 190.
[377] For the Foundation's investment in Cold War cultural politics and CIA operations, see Joan Roelofs, *Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism* (Albany: University of New York Press, 2003), 85-86.

argument.[378] How then do we read the Delhi Design Center's appropriation of American design, merely a few years after the formation of the Non-aligned movement? The arrival of the *Design Today* exhibition in India merely four years after the 1955 Bandung Conference, which marked the initiation of the Non-aligned Movement, is somewhat surprising. The *Design Today* exhibition was clearly antithetical to the politics of the Non-aligned Movement. Why then did the Indian Government seek out this exhibition?

The exhibition is perhaps best situated within Nehru's own vision for a modern India. In the wake of the sectarian violence that followed the Partition of India and Pakistan, Nehru had hoped that, as Vikramaditya Prakash puts it, "the newly independent Indian population would sufficiently identify itself with the idea of modernity, re-invent itself, and thereby avoid the continued specter of ethnic violence."[379] Given that the domestic space had already emerged a valorized locus of identity formation in pre-Independence India, Nehru's desire for modern design as a mode of re-inventing the self is perhaps understandable. The goal was not to reproduce the Western modern but to invent an Indian modern. Pupul Jayakar's statement, circulated along with the exhibition catalog reiterated this very idea. Jayakar, a member of the All India Handicrafts Board, is reported to have stated: "India is at the fringe of a technological revolution which may result in a loss of pride in craftsmanship and of traditional design standards, unless attention is focused now on problems as the nature of new materials and tools. The

[378] The architect Gordon Chadwick designed the dome. For a history of the United States Information Agency's activities in India, see Wilson P. Dizard, *Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).
[379] Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, 10.

solutions developed by the Western world […] should not be imitated but can serve as a guide."[380]

The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition, however, posited non-industrial crafts and artisanal practices as non-conducive for the contemporary culture of mass-production. As the Museum categorically stated in its concept note for the exhibition: "Western handicrafts have steadily diminished in importance until they are no longer the chief source of our common implements."[381] According to the Museum of Modern Art's ideology of mass production, "the prototypes for machine-made objects are first developed by the individual craftsman, particularly in such fields as textiles and glass."[382] Artisanal practices were thus at best subservient to industrialized production and the individual artisan merely a tool in this process. Pupul Jayakar's statement, circulated along with the exhibition catalog may well be read as a retort to the Museum of Modern Art's ideology of mass production. Jayakar wrote: "It is a challenge to democracy and industrial society whether or not within its contours a great artisan tradition can flourish."[383]

Almost as a corollary, the Government of India published a book on furniture and interior decoration in the same year. The 1959 text, *Simple Furniture and Interior Decoration*, contained step-by-step guides on how to decorate the home with reasonably priced furniture and utilitarian objects (Figure 5.17). Rather than focusing on industrially produced furniture and decorative arts, the text featured a range of hand-made objects.

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[380] MoMA Press Archives, 1959, MoMA Archives.
[381] VII.SP-ICE-17-57.8, MoMA Archives.
[382] Ibid.
[383] VII.SP-ICE-17-57.2, MoMA Archives.

Among these were furniture produced at the Regional Design Centers and the Silpa Bhavan, Santiniketan. A *mora* designed by Nandalal Bose and produced at the Silpa Bhavan is clearly visible in Figure 5.17. The objects reproduced in the text foregrounded a clear engagement with indigenous form, material, and technique. Yet, in spite of this commitment to the vernacular, the visuality retained the simplicity of form and attention to functionalism that characterized the designs exhibited at *Design Today*.

A combination of internationalism and traditionalism thus became the distinctive mark of 1950s design. Designs reproduced in the *Design: Review of Architecture, Applied and Free Arts*, a magazine for art, architecture, domestic and interior design discourses that commenced publication in 1957, allows us to recuperate the aesthetic concerns of this period. Furniture featured in a 1959 issue of the *Design* magazine included handmade low stools woven with jute strings, low wooden tables, standing lamps with cane lampshades, and an adaptation of a traditional charpoy, a bed consisting of a wooden frame strung with jute rope ubiquitously found in rural India (Figure 5.18).[384] These objects clearly retained an affinity, both in form and technique, with the furniture that had been popularized by Nandalal Bose and the Santiniketan school. Like Santiniketan's utilitarian designs, this furniture also drew heavily on Japanese design aesthetics, indigenous styles, organic material, and hand weaving techniques. The aesthetics of interior design that the illustration in the *Design* magazine depicts also finds a close parallel in the interiors of Rabindranath Tagore's own room in Santiniketan decorated with furniture designed at the Silpa Bhavan (Figure 5.19). This was the same room that had inspired Maitreyi Debi to cut off the leg of her bed to make it low.

[384] Author Unknown, "Furniture 2," *Design* Vol. 3 No. 1 (1959), unpaginated.

How do we read the eruption of Santiniketan's *swadeshi* aesthetics in the 1950s – the era of Nehruvian socialism, secularism, industrialization, and modernization? "In each of us," Bourdieu writes, "there is a part of yesterday's man; it is yesterday's man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result. Yet we do not sense this man of the past, because he is inveterate in us; he makes up the unconscious part of ourselves."[385] *Swadeshi* aesthetics thus remained as a trace, a trace that both disrupted and framed India's engagement with international modernist design. An Indian modern design aesthetic was thus articulated, one that was in conversation with global modernist design discourses yet retained traces of 1930s and 1940s *swadeshi* domestic aesthetics.

What is perhaps most interesting about *Simple Furniture and Interior Decoration* is that the text not only reproduced photographs of individual objects but that the objects were carefully arranged in a room, as if occupying the space of the home (See Figure 5.17). This strategy of carefully orchestrated display presented for public consumption the space of the interior. Of course, photographs depicting domestic spaces were not uncommon in the early 20th century, as I have discussed earlier. While such early 20th-century representations were restricted to a limited circulation, the proliferation of photographs of domestic space through journals and magazines in 1950s and the 1960s was an entirely new phenomenon. Through such strategies, the domestic emerged as a site of post-colonial politics. As Mohinder Singh Randhawa wrote in 1977, "the fundamental principles of the art of gardening, architecture, painting, interior decoration

[385] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2003), 79.

and music are the same – viz. rhythm, harmony, and balance. […] The main problem before us is to raise the quality of life."[386]

Interior Decoration as Art Practice: 1950s-1960s

The 1950s and 1960s interest in modern design paralleled the rise of a new domestic culture, with the proliferation of design journals, architecture guides, and housekeeping manuals. Given the vast amount of literature, it almost appears as if middle class domestic life had become the locus of a culture industry. It would be wrong, however, to dismiss these publications as either purely populist or a mere extension of mainstream market advertising. Well-known architects, historians, and cultural activists edited most of these journals. For instance, the journal *Art in Industry* was published by the Indian Institute of Art in Industry, Calcutta with art historians such as Ordhendu C. Ganguly on its editorial committee. Mulk Raj Anand, a novelist, historian, and art critic edited *MARG: A Magazine of Architecture and Art*, which commenced publication in 1946, just one year prior to Independence. *MARG* not only featured essays on modern art and architecture, but also covered utilitarian design.

Similarly, *Design: Review of Architecture, Applied and Free Arts* commenced publication in 1957. Its editorial team included international theorists, architects, and designers such as Marcel Breuer, Walter Gropius, Isamu Noguchi, Eero Saarinen, Sigfried Giedion, along with a number of Indian intellectuals such as the architect Habib Rahman and the art critic Charles Fabri. The magazine would become an important platform for art, architecture, domestic and interior design discourses over the next two decades. Simultaneously, journals for women carried features on modern art and

[386] Mohinder S. Randhawa, *Beautifying India* (Faridabad: Thompson Press, 1977), vi.

architecture, alongside essays on fashion and interior decoration. A 1963 issue of the bilingual journal for women *Angana*, published in Hindi and English, for example, carried essays on sex strategies, investment advice, interior decoration, modern art, and family planning.

A close examination of these publications reveals that by the 1950s a new economy of efficiency had emerged. This new discourse emphasized well organized, ordered domestic interiors as symbols of a new modern India. An essay in MARG's first issue summarized this impulse well. A ground plan of a modernist residential structure carried the following caption: "Architecture is the art and science of building. A structure grows out of function. True function in a building is the synthesis of definite and particular requirements *fulfilled efficiently*."[387] From Mulk Raj Anand's editorial, it becomes clear that "Planning and Dreaming" starts at home. [388] The title of the editorial, "Planning and Dreaming," of course drew on Nehru's Five Year Plans, further underscoring the connections between the public spheres of the new nation-state and the domestic sphere of its ideal citizens. In the subsequent section "Architecture and You," Anand clearly laid down the connections between domestic space, domestic objects, and progress (Figure 5.20). An image of a prototypical rural kitchen carried the following caption: "This is what we have."[389] The rural kitchen, with its clay oven covered in soot and a disorderly pile of dishes was juxtaposed with a drawing of a clean, orderly, well-organized modern kitchen. The plan and layout of this modern kitchen bears conspicuous similarities to the rationalized, ultra-efficient, almost laboratory-like kitchen designs

[387] MARG, "Architecture and You," *MARG* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1946), 7-15, 10.
[388] Mulk Raj Anand, "Planning and Dreaming," Ibid., 1-6.
[389] MARG, Architecture and You, 15.

produced in Germany, especially the much famed and repeatedly reproduced 1929 Frankfurt Kitchen by the German designer Margarete Schutte-Lihotzky (Figure 5.21). This clean, orderly, well-organized kitchen bore the following caption: "This is what we could have."[390]

It is precisely instances such as this that have led scholars to see design discourses in the 1950s and 1960s as marking a sharp break with Gandhian notions of localism. As Farhan Sirajul Karim argues:

> Gandhi's challenge to the material culture of the modern West soon became a challenge for his own countrymen when post-independence India recanted his ascetic way of living. Gandhi, with his ascetic material culture, resisted independent India's ambition to become modern. After a decade of independence, the century-long debate surrounding craft verses industrial production transformed into a debate over accepting a different domesticity forged on different material culture.[391]

Yet, post-Independence material culture clearly shows traces of earlier political imperatives. *Swadeshi* design aesthetics continued to inform design discourses in the 1950s and the 1960s. Reports published in *Design* are a good example.[392] In 1959, the journal published a series of furniture designs produced by the Design Service Institute for Small Industries, a department of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the Government of India (Figure 5.22). Functioning much like a do-it-yourself guide, each

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[390] Ibid.
[391] Karim, "Modernity Transfers," 201.
[392] The journal commenced publication in 1957, merely one year prior to the *Design Today* exhibition. With an international editorial team of theorists, architects, and designers including Marcel Breuer, Walter Gropius, Isamu Noguchi, Eero Saarinen, Sigfried Giedion, Habib Rahman, and Charles Fabri, the *Design* became an important platform for art, architecture, and design discourses over the next two decades.

report clearly stated the materials used, modes of execution, and approximate cost of production. The process of execution was further broken down through schematic diagrams mapped out in a way that would make it possible for artisans to replicate the design by hand.

In doing so, the *Design* magazine embraced the possibility of infinite reproduction by hand. A short text complementing the principals of design further corroborated this strategy. The emphasis on the artisanal was also a mark of aversion to industrial capitalism, a resistance to American cultural hegemony. As the reporter for the *Design* magazine stated: "The slanting arms of the chair on the right, besides being restful for the arms and upper part of the body, also allow for sitting with crossed legs."[393] Indeed, merits of this design – the possibility of sitting cross-legged on a chair, just as one would sit on the floor – may have been quite incomprehensible within strictly modernist frames. This then was a far cry from the Museum of Modern Art's *Design Today* exhibition and its rhetoric of industrial mass production.

The integration of the public and the private, the interior and the exterior, the *swadeshi* and the industrial, is perhaps most visible in the work of Ratna Fabri. Trained at the Lahore School of Art in the late 1930s, Fabri began her career as a painter and ceramist. Following a series of group exhibitions in the 1950s, Fabri's first solo exhibition took place at the Jehangir Art Gallery in 1960. Interestingly, it was through this exhibition that Fabri's reputation as an interior designer was established. Fabri herself was responsible for the plan and layout of the exhibition (Figure 5.23). Using a fabric stretched on board as a room divider, the artist reordered the vast exhibition hall of

[393] Author Unknown, "Furniture 2," *Design* Vol. 3 No. 1 (1959), unpaginated.

the Jehangir Art Gallery, transforming it into an intimate space. Departing from the conventional modes of exhibiting ceramics and sculptures on pedestals, the artist displayed most of her porcelain and earthenware along the central axis of the room. The porcelain and earthenware vases, bowls, cups, and animal figurines were either placed on low tables or put directly on the floor.

This space was then further broken up with the introduction of stools at regular intervals. Stools, scattered among the objects on display, made possible an engaged viewership that the conventional mode of displaying art objects on pedestals would not allow. Plants, potted in ceramic containers also made by Fabri, lent a touch of intimacy. The space thus engaged the viewer at multiple levels. Through such insertions, the public space of the art gallery was rendered familiar for the viewer. Oil paintings, interspersed at regular intervals, entered into a dialogic relationship with this lived space. In essence, Fabri simulated within the public art gallery the comparatively more private space of the home. The space of the exhibition reentered the private sphere of the domestic through reproductions of the exhibition's display in journals and magazines, for instance the 1960 issue of the *Design* magazine.

This rather novel mode of display brought Ratna Fabri to public attention, and, in 1961, the artist was commissioned to design the interior spaces of the Handloom Pavilion at the Indian Industries Fair organized in New Delhi by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry. Interestingly enough, the Pavilion was designed to simulate the home, yet again bringing together the public and the private (Figure 5.24). When displayed within the space of an industrial exhibition, the domestic space itself

became an object of consumption, along with textiles, apparels, and other utilitarian objects displayed in the Handloom Pavilion. This act of consumption however must be understood as a political act, not very different from Gandhi's espousal of *khadi* as a language of commodity resistance. It is this language of consumption that allowed artists such as Fabri to produce a modernism for the everyday.

The display at the Handloom Pavilion makes this politics obvious. A model living room created at the Pavilion featured low furniture with jute weaving, similar to those seen in Figure 5.22 (Figure 5.24). These were juxtaposed with wrought iron stools similar to those produced by the American designer Paul McCobb, cushions made from west Indian block-printed textile, and a chair based on traditional Gujarati stools with an abstract backrest designed by Fabri herself (Figure 5.25). Randomly placed ceramic tiles, also designed by Fabri, potted plants in terracotta potholders, handmade ceramic vases, framed modern art prints published by the Lalit Kala Akademi, and hand-woven fabric tapestries completed the *mise-en-scène*. Further, by using concrete slabs and wood, Fabri brought into her interiors the aesthetics of concrete that had by now become familiar metaphor of progress – a trajectory I trace in Chapter Two. The display at the Handloom Pavilion thus hinted at a multi-layered modernism – one that not only incorporated the minimalism of Euro-American internationalist design but also referred to the 1930s and 1940s domestic aesthetics. "The display is perhaps the best ever seen in this country," as an appreciative art critic commented.[394]

[394] Charles Fabri, "Artists at the Industries Fair," *Design* Vol. 6 No. 1 (1962), 31-34, 34.

Discussions on home decoration published in various women's journals suggest that Fabri's design aesthetics had a wide influence.[395] Repeatedly reproduced in popular magazines, Fabri's design aesthetics appears to have become an exemplary paradigm through which an aestheticized domestic space was defined for middle-class audiences (Figure 5.26). The recreation of a domestic setting within the commercial space of the Handloom Pavilion allowed for a tactile, sensorial, and immersive experience of modernism that a painting or a sculpture might not have made possible. Fabri's strategies of installation allowed the artist to create a space of modernism that the viewer could physically enter, walk around, and thus experience. The model living rooms not only allowed the viewer to see the products of the Handloom Pavilion in a domestic context, but it also invited them to touch the objects, perhaps even to sit on the chairs for a while.

In a certain way, this space functioned much like a theatrical stage, which the audience was then invited to participate in. If, at one level, this stage was spectacular, it was also simultaneously sensorial. Inviting viewers into space and demanding an active viewership, Fabri thus invented a practice of display that was in essence participatory and performative. Through the medium of installation, post-Independence modernism was thus transformed into a bodily experience. In this strategy lay the politics of Fabri's artistic practice. Fabri herself was keenly aware of the performative aspects of interior designing. As she wrote in a personal letter to Mohinder Singh Randhawa, "In India we

[395] For example, see Priti Tandon, "Interior Designing," *Angana* Volume and Number Unknown (1963), 19-21, 19.

take interior designing very lightly. But interior decoration is an art form in itself. I see myself as an artist who designs interiors as part of my art practice."[396]

Such interventions by artists then allow us to question the methodology of thinking modern art practice in post-Independence India. Scholars have usually discussed modern art as a "high" artistic practice in opposition to mass culture. This chapter, on the other hand, sees the systems of cultural production that is symptomatic of the 20th century – popular journals, mass reproduction, expositions, and manuals for better living – as equally important sites where the discourses of modernism were produced, received, and consumed. This approach does not mean abandoning the art object, but rather, looking at it in a different way. Situating artistic practices within the intersections of a number of systems of representation, my dissertation has thus not only argued for modernism as a larger cultural practice but has also attempted to situate debates on modern art and aesthetics as integral to a larger inter-ocular cultural field.

[396] Letter from Ratna Fabri to Mohinder Singh Randhawa dated August 4,1963. M. S. Randhawa Papers Volume 2, Government Museum and Art Gallery Archives, Chandigarh.

Coda

I began this dissertation with modern art and Gandhian *swadeshi* in 1930s India. If Gandhi's own anti-colonial politics provided a frame to imagine a socially engaged artistic practice in the 1930s and the 1940s, Gandhi's death posed another sort of ethical imperative for avant-garde artists in post-Independence India. Shortly after India's Independence, on January 30, 1948, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was assassinated. "And then came a bolt from the blue," as the artist Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal writes.[397] In Sanyal's reminiscences, the narrative of Gandhi's death is entangled with yet another narrative – the narrative of the formation of the Silpi Chakra, a Delhi-based artists' collective. Writing about Gandhi's death, Sanyal reminiscences: "It was not immediately known who had committed this foul murder. No sane man, Hindu or Muslim, could have gunned down this gem of a man. Day in and day out Gandhi preached non-violence and communal harmony. He was mentally hurt and wounded at the meaningless bloodshed that freedom brought to the subcontinent of India. So, who on earth had thought of such a stupid, mad act!" [398]

Abruptly, the text then moves to the formation of the Silpi Chakra, a Delhi-based avant-garde artists' collective, a collective that I briefly discuss in Chapter Two and Three. Sanyal writes: "Keeping this objective in mind we evolved a method of work […] The step we took was […] to make known the shortcomings of the system by contrast, through effective program and action."[399] Thus, if Gandhian politics had engendered a

[397] Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal, *The Vertical Woman: Reminiscences of B. C. Sanyal*, Volume II (New Delhi: National Gallery of Modern Art, 1998), 6.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Ibid.

specific kind of art praxis in early 20th-century India, one that exceeded the conventional strictures and closures of the modern art world, Gandhi's assassination in 1948 served as yet another ethical imperative. It was this imperative that led to the formation of the Silpi Chakra. Founded in March 1949 by Sanyal, an artist we first encountered during the 1928 Lahore Congress session in Chapter One, the Silpi Chakra remains marginal to histories of modern art in India. Yet, it is precisely through marginal avant-garde art collectives such as the Chakra that one can map the ideals of avant-garde art praxis as political action in the first decades following India's Independence.

If F. N. Souza, in the very first exhibition of the Bombay Progressive Artists Group, declared "Art" as inherently "esoteric," beyond the "utilitarian," and attempts to reach out to "the so-called 'people'" as "leftist fanaticism," the Chakra provided distinctly different notions of both artistic praxis and the role of modern art in a post-Independence public sphere.[400] Tacitly positioning themselves against the Bombay Progressive Artists Group, the Chakra rejected the ideal of "art for art's sake" as "a drug suitable only for the lotus eaters."[401] It is precisely this concern with the political that distinguished the Chakra from the Bombay Progressive, a group that is now demarcated as India's first true avant-garde.

It was not aesthetic concerns but a strong belief in using art to transform the social that brought the Chakra together, as Amarnath Sehgal put it in an interview.[402] The Chakra thus attempted to articulate a new model of avant-gardism, an art praxis that was not centered on a cohesive ideology of stylistic preoccupations, but one that was

[400] F. N. Souza in *Progressive Artists Group*.
[401] Sanyal, *The Vertical Woman*, 13.
[402] Interview with Amarnath Sehgal, November 5, 2007.

premised on political action. An understanding of the Chakra must then be located within the frameworks of political action rather than purely aesthetic engagements. The collective scripted a manifesto even before they managed to secure an address or funds to support their activities. Taking "Art Illuminates Life" as its motto, the Chakra declared:

> The group recognizes that art as an activity must not be divorced from life; that the art of the nation must express the soul of its people and ally with the forces of progress. The group recognized artists had to come together to work towards the progress of art and through art, help build a virile national culture and brighter life in the country. [403]

The signatories to this manifesto included Sanyal, Kanwal Krishna, K. S. Kulkarni, P. N. Mago (an artist I discuss in Chapter Four), Dhanraj Bhagat (an artist I discuss in chapters Two and Three), and Dinkar Kaushik. Very soon the group had over thirty members including Devayani Krishna, Harkrishan Lall, Jaya Appasamy, Amarnath Sehgal, Avinash Chandra (an artist I discuss in Chapter Three), Rajesh Mehra, Bishamber Khanna, Shankar Pillai, Satish Gujral, and Ratna Fabri (an artist I discuss in Chapter Four), among others.

With faith in the transformative powers of art, this group sought a wider audience beyond New Delhi's elitist art world through free lectures, exhibitions, and art demonstrations on the streets of the city, for example at Connaught Circus, Gole Market, and Karol Bagh. While Connaught Circus, with its wide-open arenas, parks, and promenades, was the heart of New Delhi, Gole Market and Karol Bagh, with their bustling bazaars and congested streets, had become home to the many dispossessed

[403] Pran Nath Mago, "Introduction," in *Delhi Silpi Chakra: The Early Years*, Exhibition catalog 1997 (New Delhi: National Gallery of Modern Art, 1997), 8.

during Partition. The Chakra's choice of "*mohallas* [neighborhoods] where art and culture had never penetrated" as appropriate spaces for the display of art was perhaps strategic.[404] Attracting a wide audience ranging from laborers, shopkeepers, and middleclass housewives to bureaucrats, intellectuals, and students, these public meetings in the early years of the Chakra were only the beginning of a long commitment to popularize modern art, making it accessible to a wider audience.

Sanyal, the force behind the collective, had been a staunch supporter of the 1930's and 1940's leftist cultural movements. The Bengal Famine of 1943 had already left an indelible mark on Sanyal. The displacement of millions by the Partition further compelled him to repeatedly portray the disenfranchised body to create an iconography for the new nation. Today, one can only imagine the effect of Sanyal's *The Worker* (1944), marked by its iconic laborer carrying a sickle framed by a menacing industrialist, jostling for space with shops selling automobile parts, cheap textiles, and vegetables in Gole Market (Figure 6.1). Inserting modern art into the space of the everyday, the *mohalla*, the bazaar, the Chakra thus attempted to transform modern art into a cultural form through which the community could visualize its own self.

Of course, the Chakra was not the first collective to engage with a larger public sphere. Sanyal, who had been closely associated with Jamini Roy, writes about Roy's attempts to popularize modern art by making his paintings affordable for a middleclass audience as well as his forays into stage design for public theatres in 1930s Calcutta.[405] A

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[404] Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal, cited in Pran Nath Mago, "Sanyal: An Art Pioneer from Lahore" in *Petals of Offering: An Exhibition of Paintings, Sculptures, and Graphics, Felicitating Prof. B. C. Sanyal on his Ninetieth Birthday*, Exhibition catalog, April 1992 (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1992), 13.
[405] Ibid., 117.

number of the Chakra artists had also been art students in Calcutta when Nandalal Bose was asked by Gandhi to design posters for the 1937 Indian National Congress session in Haripura. Over subsequent years, artists not only designed and decorated pavilions, but also created posters, pamphlets, and book illustrations in conjunction with the annual meetings of the Indian National Congress, as I have discussed in Chapter One. Thus, a close affiliation between modern art and political action was already established. The Chakra's public interventions need to be located within this very history.

This notion of artistic practice as a form of cultural activism ran like a leitmotif in the careers of many of the Chakra artists, beginning as early as 1937. The career of Sanyal is a good example. After a formal training at the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Calcutta, Sanyal had joined the Mayo School of Art, Lahore and was given charge of the commercial painting and modeling departments. However, in 1937, following a conflict with the then principal, Samarendranath Gupta, Sanyal resigned from his position to set up the Lahore School of Fine Art. Christened the "Lahore underground" by contemporary newspapers, the School provided an alternative support system to artists who functioned beyond the colonial patronage of the Mayo School. The School was inaugurated with an exhibition of Punjab art – the largest the city had seen.

Apart from classes taught by Sanyal and his colleagues, for example Dhanraj Bhagat, Roop and Mary Krishna, the School began holding exhibitions of artists from all over India as a move towards generating conversation among art practitioners across the country. Some of the artists displayed in the exhibitions included Sudhir Khastagir, Paritosh Sen, and Kanwal Krishna. Beyond the immediate world of practicing artists, the

many who frequented the School included art critics O. C. Gangooly and Charles Fabri, Marxist intellectuals Rajani Palme Dutt and Ajay Ghosh, Progressive writers Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Muhammad Abbas, as well as performing artists Uday Shankar and Norah Richards.

Needless to say, the intellectual ferment at the School was charged with Marxist ideals to the point that the Lahore branch of the Friends of Soviet Union (a radical leftist cultural organization) held its weekly meetings at the School's premises. Going beyond its role merely as an art center, the School had become a nucleus for the progressive, anti-imperialist, and leftist intellectuals of Lahore, as Swatantra Prakash, a student at the School in the 1930s, remembered.[406] Simultaneously, Sanyal encouraged workshops with school children and in his autobiography mentions the great joy he felt when Lahore's conservative families sent their daughters to his school.[407] It was here that Sanyal, Bhagat, and their colleagues first articulated the politics of what would later become the Chakra. By 1947, most artists associated with the School had moved to New Delhi.

The group's first formal exhibition took place at the New Delhi Freemason's Hall in November 1949. The Kailash Carpet Company, a neighboring carpet shop at Connaught Place, offered their carpets for the venue. Similarly, local merchants funded the exhibition screens and lighting equipment required to convert the Hall into a suitable space for a formal exhibition. This was indeed an extraordinary moment in the city's urban public culture. As Jyoti Hosagrahar in her recent study on the making of modern Delhi has argued, processions, public festivals, and religious celebrations were key to

[406] Interview with Swatantra Prakash, November 15, 2007.
[407] Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal, *The Vertical Woman: Reminiscences of B. C. Sanyal*, Volume I (New Delhi: National Gallery of Modern Art, 1998), 58.

community formation in the various neighborhoods and *mohallas* of the city. Such public displays challenged, subverted, and reconfigured the orderliness of colonial Delhi to suit the requirements of "indigenous modernities."[408] More often than not, the local business community sponsored such festivals and in turn gained prestige through such acts of benevolence. The act of sponsoring a modern art exhibition by this very same community who would have traditionally patronized local religious festivals is indicative of at least a partial success of the Chakra's public interventions.

In the same year, the Chakra opened the first commercial gallery in India when Ram Chand Jain, who ran a framing shop at Connaught Place, New Delhi, offered a part of his premises for a permanent gallery. In spite of limited commercial success, Jain's venture (now the Dhoomimal Gallery) filled a lacuna in Delhi's art world. Writing on the occasion of the inauguration of the gallery, Sanyal stated, "the Art Gallery should serve the dual purpose of educating public opinion on art and provide a means towards the artists' economic self-sufficiency […] The Art Gallery aims to serve the purpose of a link between art and the people."[409]

The Silpi Chakra Gallery functioned here until the Ministry of Rehabilitation offered the group a space at Shankar Market in 1957. Although not intentional on the part of the Ministry, it was perhaps appropriate that a group, which had strategically sought out the bazaar as a space for modern art, was given its own space in a bazaar best known as a wholesale textile market. Much like the Lahore School of Art, here the group started holding regular exhibitions, screenings of films, lectures, and cultural events, actively

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[408] Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).
[409] Sanyal, *The Vertical Woman:* Volume I, 8.

involving the city's intellectuals, such as the art critic and historian Charles Fabri, the architect Habib Rahman, and the dancer Indrani Rahman, among others. Simultaneously, a library was set up. To support itself, the Chakra provided art works on rent and also had easy installment plans for buyers who could not otherwise afford art. Such interventions in post-Independent Delhi's public sphere were attempts to "generate an art environment" conducive to making modern art a part of the everyday.[410]

The coming into being of the modern nation-state and its enfranchised citizenry perhaps required a reimagining of the self through a redistribution of sense experience – a redistribution of what could be seen, heard, named, recognized, and desired. Given that the very nature of political action rests on redistribution, reorganization, and reorientation of sense experience, aesthetics, as a way of seeing and perceiving the world, could then have a central role to play in producing the modern citizen. Artistic interventions such as the ones that I discussed in this dissertation – fleeting and transient in case of the public projects of the Silpi Chakra or mundane in case of Nandalal Bose – offer us a way of thinking avant-garde art practice in 20th-century India. Through such interventions, artists attempted to reconfigure what art meant and the ways in which it functioned within the space of the social.

It is through such aesthetic insertions in the social that artists attempted to reconfigure sensory perception. An anecdote related by Shannon Jackson in the introduction to her recent text *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* perhaps offers a close analogy to the point that I am trying to make here. Describing her first

[410] Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal, "Art and Life in India since Independence," in Joseph James ed. *Art and Life in India: Last Four Decades* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1989), 116-120, 120.

encounter with Samuel Beckett's play *Rockaby* twenty years ago in the theatre, Jackson writes:

> I waited, as we do conventionally in a theater, for something to happen, that is, for something to unfold in time. Accustomed as I was to that convention – one where my commitment to seated status is counterbalanced by the theatre's commitment to temporal movement – I found the piece to be in marked violation of my expectations. I remember the pauses between voiced-over texts; I remember the unimaginable slowness of the rocking and its persistent repetition. I remember feeling trapped by the pace and by the unending repetition and wanting to jump out of my seat.[411]

Jackson's next encounter with *Rockaby* twenty years later was as part of a performance and installation at an art gallery. This time, Jackson's experience of the performance was entirely different:

> I found myself quite at ease with the presentation of the stage image and with the staggered, delayed timing of its voice-over. But in this case, I found the chair rocking, quite frankly, too fast. […] I almost called out to have it slowed down, unnerved and undone by the excess of movement.[412]

What had changed? I believe, as does Jackson, that the rocking chair was not actually moving at a different speed in the two instances. What had altered was her perception of the event along with her exposure to and experience of art. Of course, the event itself had been transported from the context of the theatre to the space of the gallery. The physical context had changed, as had the physical reaction of the beholder. While this is only an evanescent example, I believe, as does Jackson, that this

[411] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3.
[412] Ibid.

transformation in perception points towards the contingency of perception or perceptual habits per se. I have tried to suggest that artistic insertions in the space of the social could bring about precisely such an alteration – in habit, perception, metaphor, and experience. Through strategic insertions into the space of the social – from Nandalal Bose's Haripura Congress pavilions to Dhanraj Bhagat's reinforced concrete sculptures, from Jeet Malhotra's photographs of Chandigarh to Ratna Fabri's interior decoration – the avant-garde continually attempted to reimagine and reinvent a new form of life. It is these insertions, mundane, everyday, and common, that this dissertation has attempted foreground.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1.1 Non-violent Protests Outside the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda (May 14, 2007)

Figure 1.2 Protesters Handing out Posters Outside the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda (May 14, 2007)

Figure 1.3 "*Hai Ram*," Installation Outside the Graphic studio, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda (May 14, 2007)

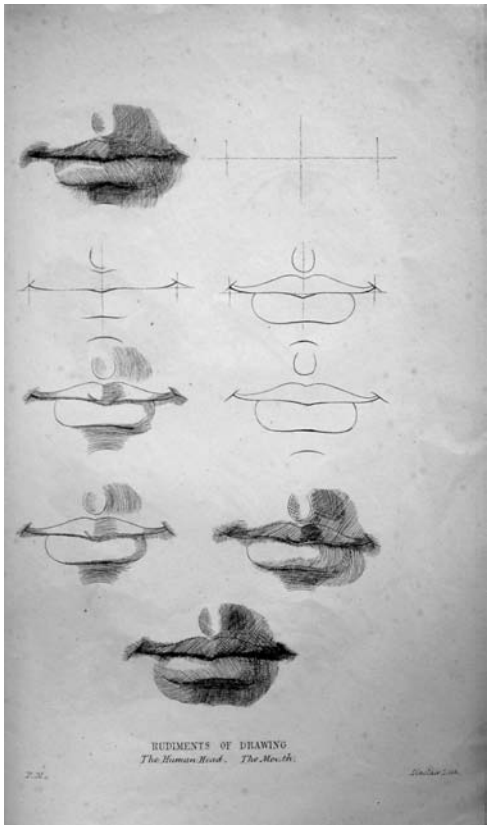


Figure 2.1 Artist Unknown, "Rudiments of Drawing: The Human Head The Mouth," Book Illustration (1851).

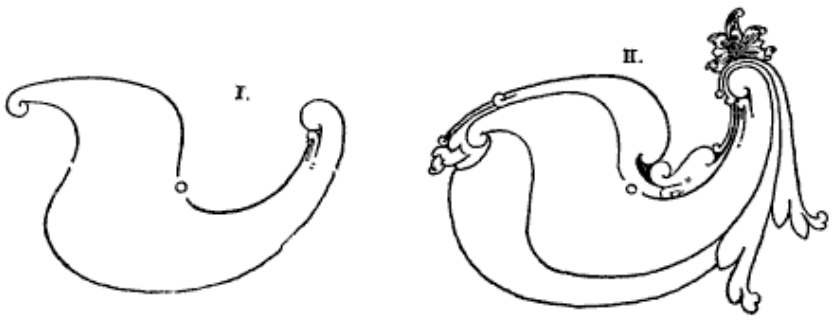


Fig. 1 *Waka deka*, Fig. 2 *Waka deka* with elaboration, (both × ⅓).
From a *padimakada pota* (modern).

* The words *mottakkaruppuwa* and *tiringi talai* are of interest as they are probably corruptions of Tamil *moddaik karukku* (blunt or round leaf edge), and *tiriku talai* (twisted blade); I have seen the latter word written *tirikit talai* on a Sinhalese drawing dating from about the end of the 18th century. It is, of course, well known that most or all of the craftsmen are of South Indian origin; this is proved by records of their immigration and settlement, some of their names, their family traditions, the use of technical terms of Tamil origin, and even of Tamil books (in Sinhalese characters), the reverence for and worship of Siva which is preserved in at least some families of craftsmen, and by the fact that the technical books are written in Sanskrit and not in Pali as would have been the case were they of local origin. There can be no doubt that the methods of teaching drawing are essentially Indian.

Figure 2.2 Artist Unknown, "Waka Deka," Book Illustration (1906)

Figure 2.3 Bourne & Shepherd, *The State Entry, Scene in Chandni Chauk* [Delhi Durbar], Albumen Print (1903).

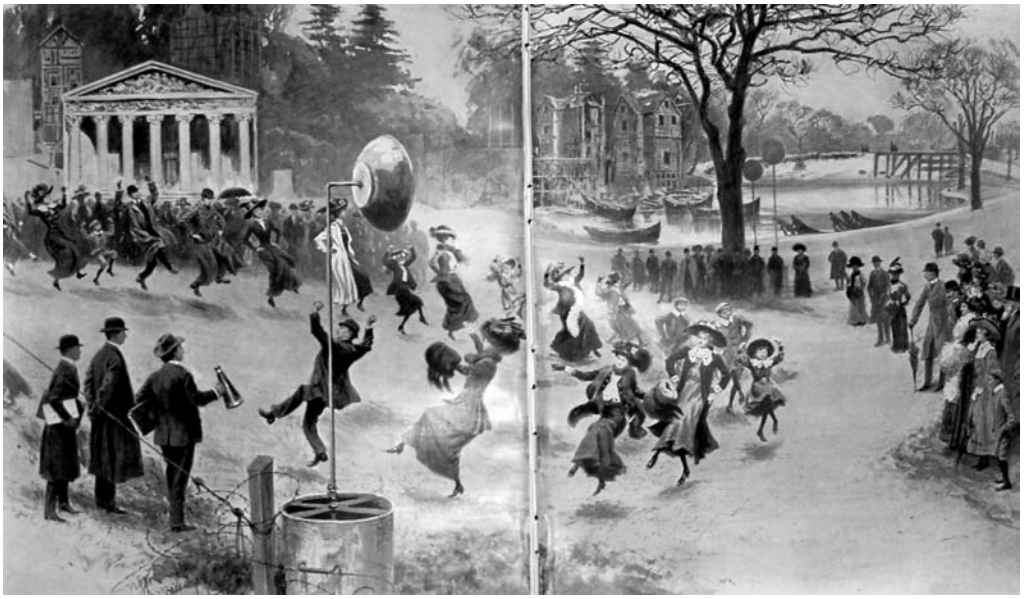


Figure 2.4. Artist Unknown, "Rehearsing the Greatest Pageant Since the Coronation Durbar at Delhi," Page from *The London Illustrated News* (1910).

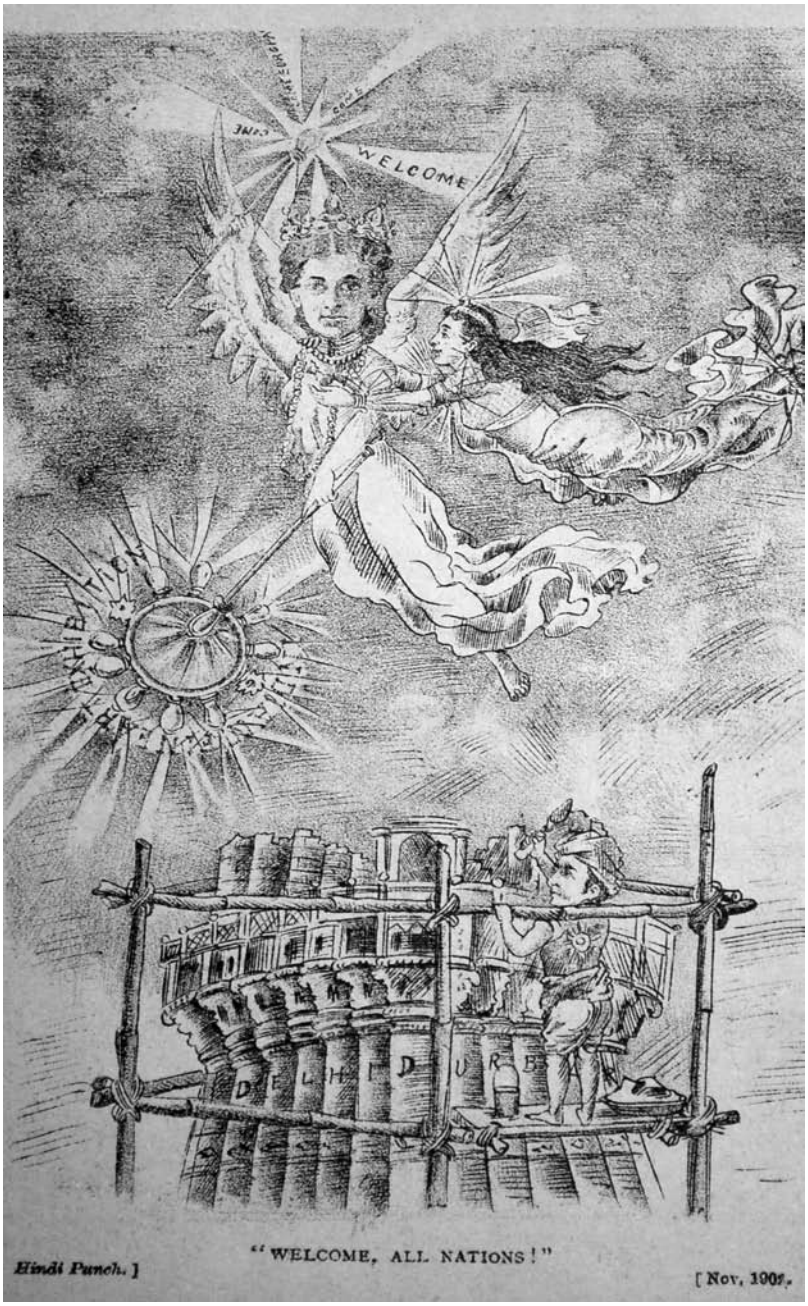


Figure 2.5. Artist Unknown, "Welcome all Nations," Page from Harishchandra A. Talcherkar, *Lord Curzon in Indian Caricature* (1903).

Figure 2.6. Display at the Fine Arts Pavilion, 18th Annual Meeting of the Indian National Congress, Madras (1903).

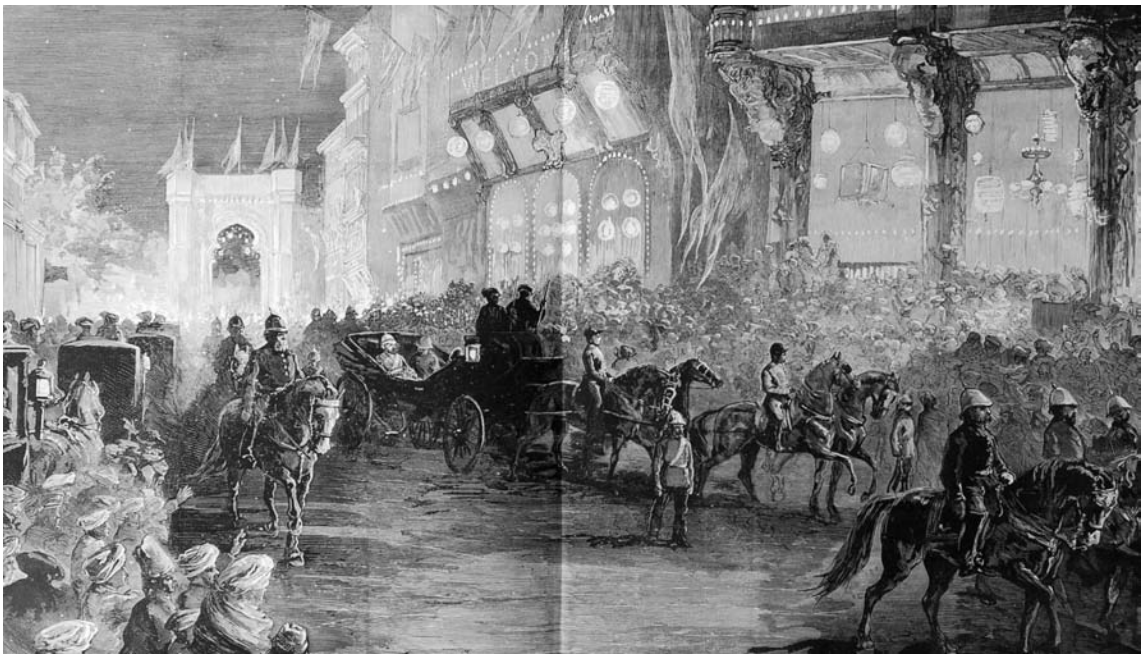


Figure 2.7. Artist Unknown, "Prince of Wales Viewing the Illuminations in Bombay," Page from *Extra Supplement to The London Illustrated News* (1875).

Figure 2.8. Fine Arts Pavilion, 18th Annual Meeting of the Indian National Congress, Madras (1903).

Figure 2.9. Ravi Varma, *Lady in Moonlight*, Oil on Canvas (ca. 1902).

Figure 2.10. Abanindranath Tagore, *Bharat-mata* [Mother India], Watercolor on Paper (1904-1905).

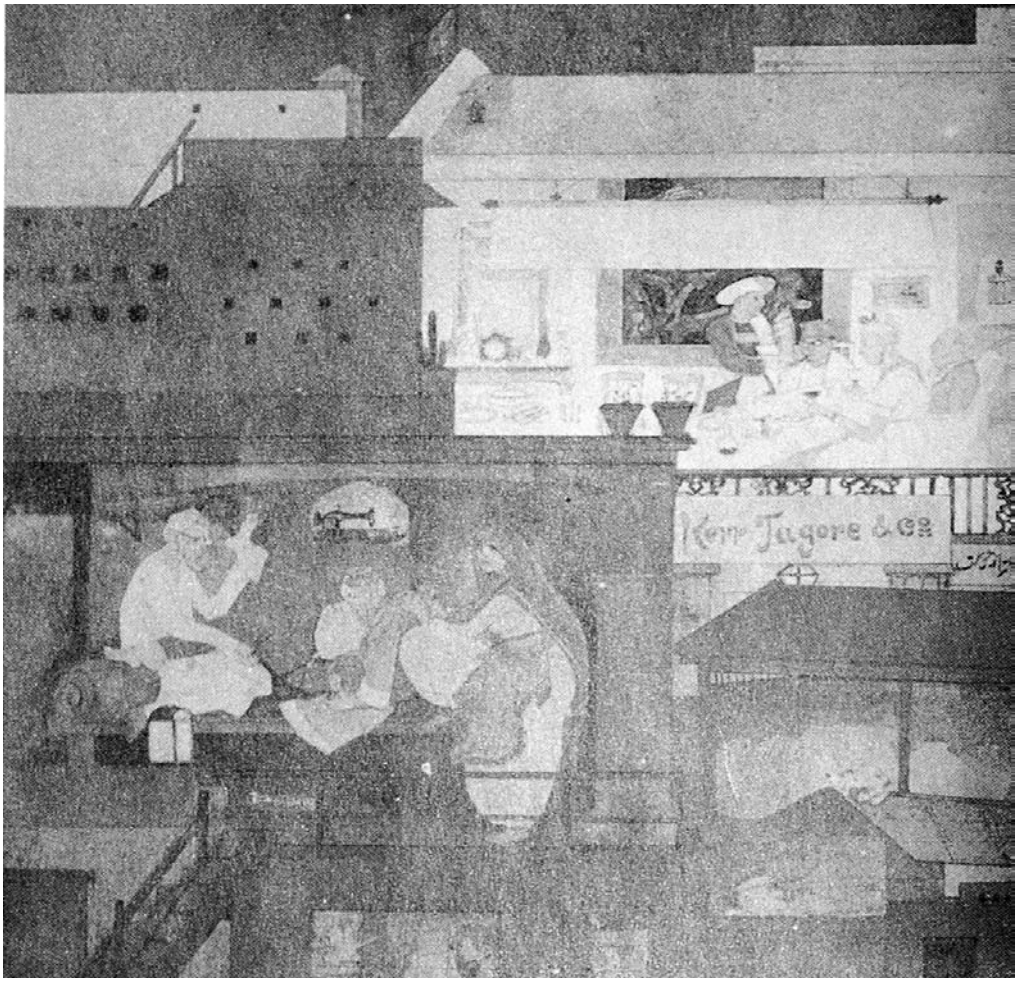


Figure 2.11. Abanindranath Tagore, *The Hunchback of Fishbone*, Watercolor on Paper (1904-1905).

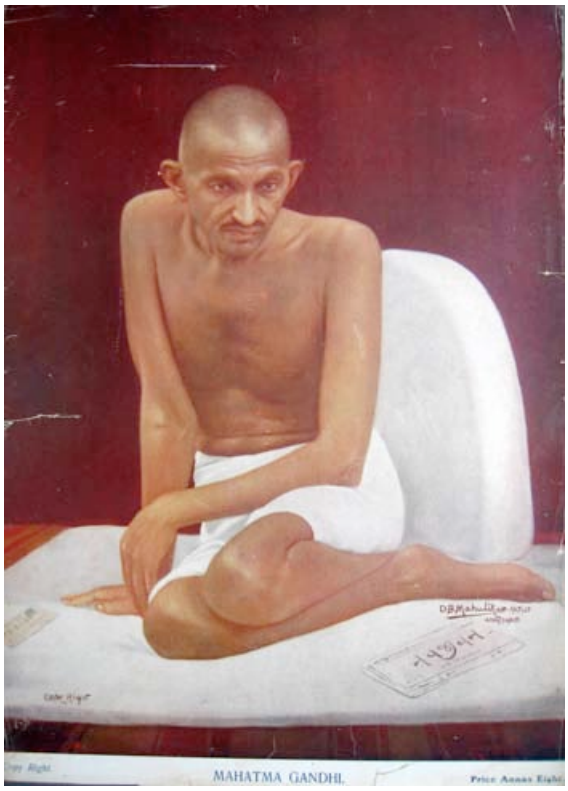


Figure 2.12. Chitrashala Press, *Mahatma Gandhi*, Chromolithograph (ca. 1927).


Figure 2.13. Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal, *Lala Lajpat Rai*, Plaster (1929).

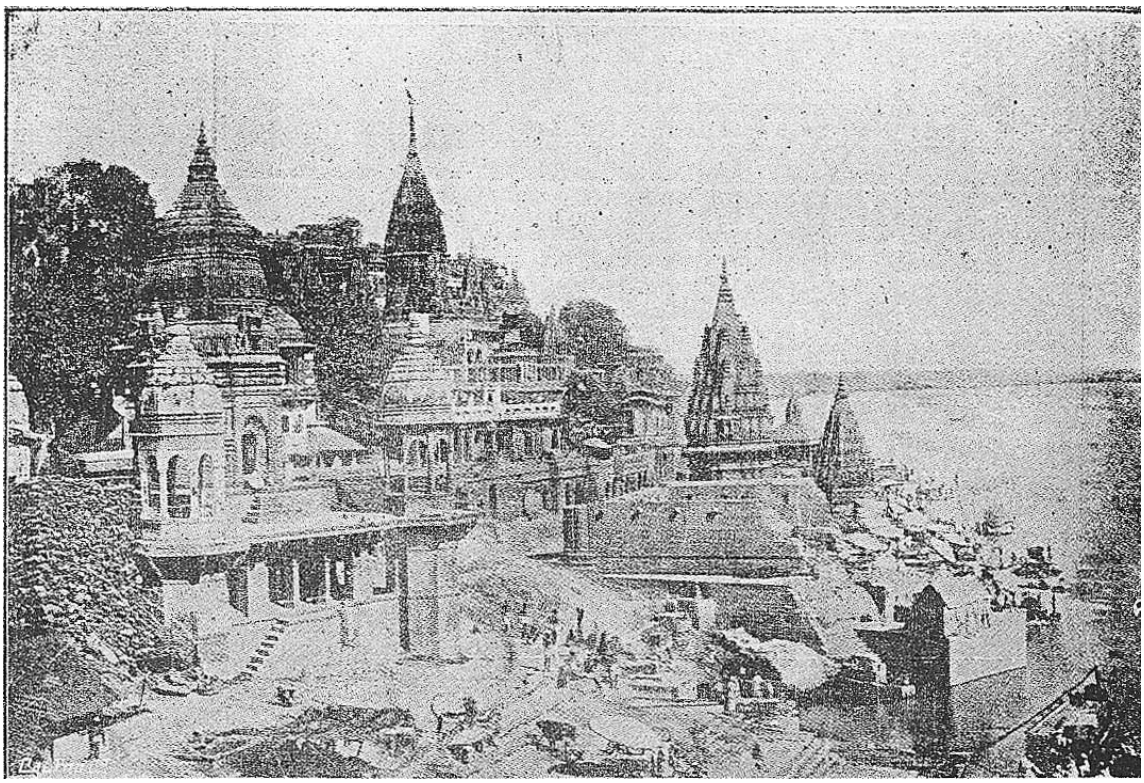


Figure 2.14. Photographer Unknown, "A View of Benares City," Photograph (1928).

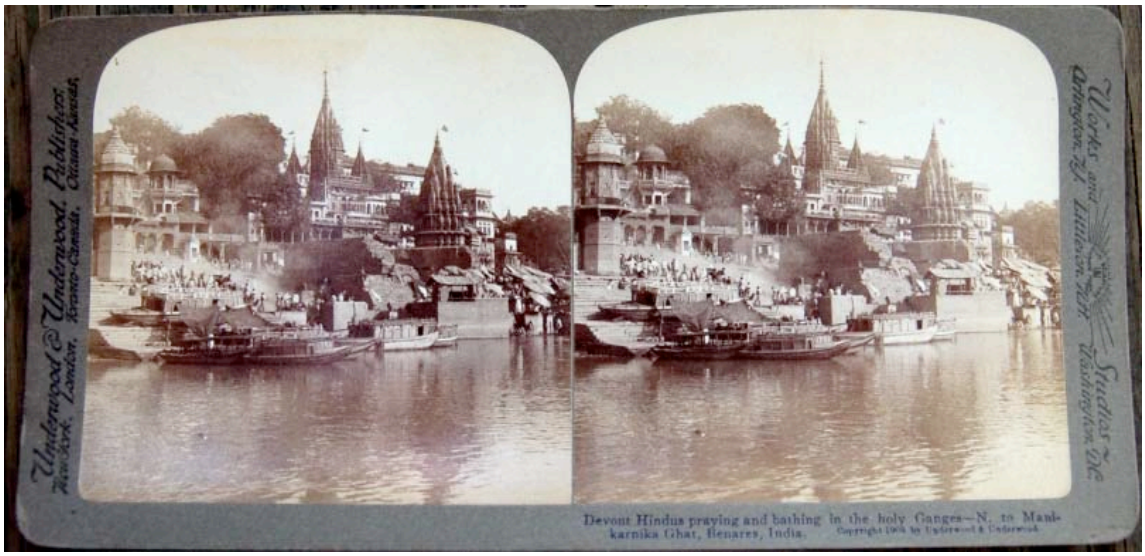


Figure 2.15. Wedgewood and Wedgewood, *Manikarnika Ghat, Benaras,* Stereoview (late 19th century).

Mrs. Besant Idolised in Madras

BY

M. S. NAGAPPA,

Artist and Sculptor.

The work executed as a labour of love has been inspected by the undermentioned Ladies and Gentlemen, and their opinion is to the effect that the Statue, is the living image of Mrs. Besant herself only without life, with every detail admirably displayed to exactitude the posture assumed being that of addressing a thoughtful theme to an audience in a determined fashion of a commendering spirit with studied zeal.

Mrs. Annie Besant.

Mr. B. P, Wadia.

Mr. G. S. Arundale.

Dr. Sir S. Subramaniam, B.A., B.L. Retired Judge.

Dewan Bahadur L. A Govindaragava Iyer, B.A., B.L.

T. Sadasiva Iyer Esq., B.A., A.L. Judge, High Court.

Mr. V. Srinivasa Iyengar, B.A. B.L. High Court Vakil.

S. Gopalaswami Iyengar Esq., B.A., B.L. High Court Vakil.

Dr. M. C. Nanjunda Row, B.A., M.D., M.B., F.C.S. and many others.

3, Narasingapuram Road,

MOUNT ROAD, MADRAS.

AN ABLE INDIAN SCULPTOR.

(FROM A CORRESPONDENT.)

I had the pleasure of visiting the studio of Mr. Nagappa at No. 3, Narasingapuram Street, Mount Road, opposite Hotel D' Angelis. The studio contains excellent specimen of his handwork chief among them being the clay model of Mrs. Besant in Indian dress. The posture is one we are all familiar with, viz. the posture which Mrs. Besant assumes when she begins to address before audience but then the hands are not placed one above the other; the right hand wearing the emerald ring clasps the silk sari right below the neck, while the left hand wearing the wrist watch is free. The fore arms uncovered and the edge of the inner jacket is visible at the right elbow. She wears no shoes of any kind and the natural beauty of the feet is exposed Intelligence is beaming in the face. The curly hair, the bright eyes the slight wrinkled cheeks, the small but prominent upper lip the little nose and the well formed ears are features peculiarly her own and are fully brought out in the figure. The aritist has put life and spirit into his work. The locket and the star are also visible on her dress. At first sight I thought Mrs. Besant was actually berore me. Soon I recovered from the surprise and admired the likeness of the figure and the genius of the artist. I wondered why Mr. Nagappa's artistic skill and indigenous talent had not been utilised by the public to very great extent.

We highly commend Mr. Nagappa's work to the influential public and trust that he would receive sufficient encouragement at their hands. We wish Mr. Nagappa long life and a much brighter career.—NEW INDIA.

Figure 2.16. Advertisement for M. S. Nagappa (1917).

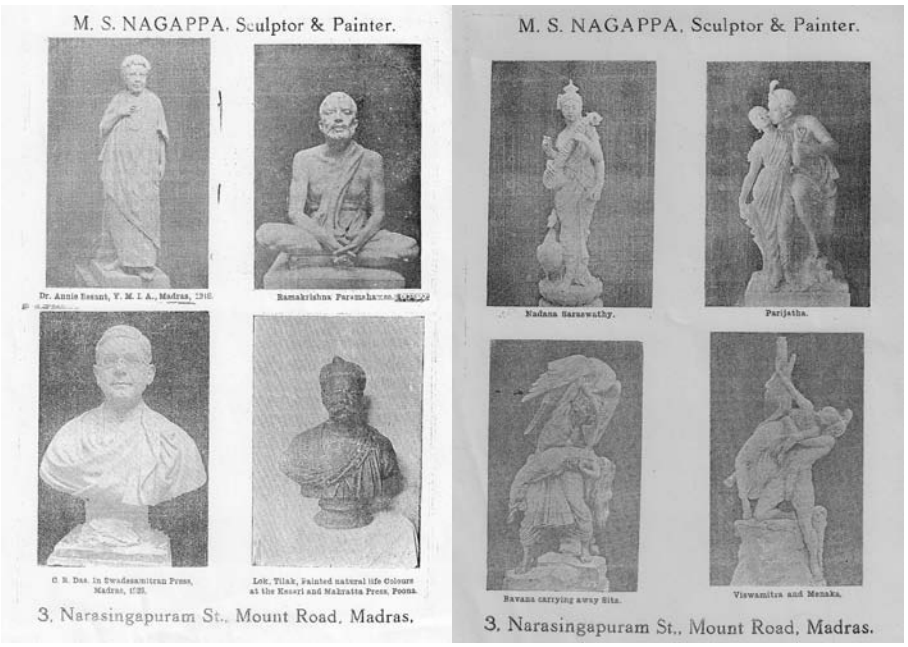


Figure 2.17. Double-page advertisement for M. S. Nagappa (1928).

Figure 2.18. Photographer Unknown, *Mahatma Gandhi: President, 1924, Belgaum* (1928).

Figure 2.19 Nandalal Bose, *Embroiderer*, Haripura panels, Tempera on paper (1938).

Figure 2.20 Nandalal Bose, *The Start of the Bridegroom*, Watercolor on paper (1928).

Figure 2.21 Nandalal Bose, *Bath*, Pencil on paper (1945). Note the shrine on the wall.

Figure 2.22 Image of Srinathji, Detail of Musician, Nathadwara, Watercolor on paper (19th century).

Figure 2.23 Gateway, 51st Annual Meeting of the Indian National Congress, Haripura (1938).

India's Washington is what these rows of new bamboo huts are expected to grow into. Nearby is the agricultural Exhibition Hall which shows Indians how to be good farmers, and a covered amphitheatre decorated with the swastika, non-Nazi symbol of good omen. Gandhi has decreed that the great city that he wants around this 3,000-acre nucleus will not be industrial. Its people will farm, herd and spin. Its new name is Vithal Nagar, after the late brother of the great landlord Patel who gave the land.

Figure 2.24 "The Camera Overseas: Gandhi at the Indian Congress," *Life* March 14, 1938, 55.

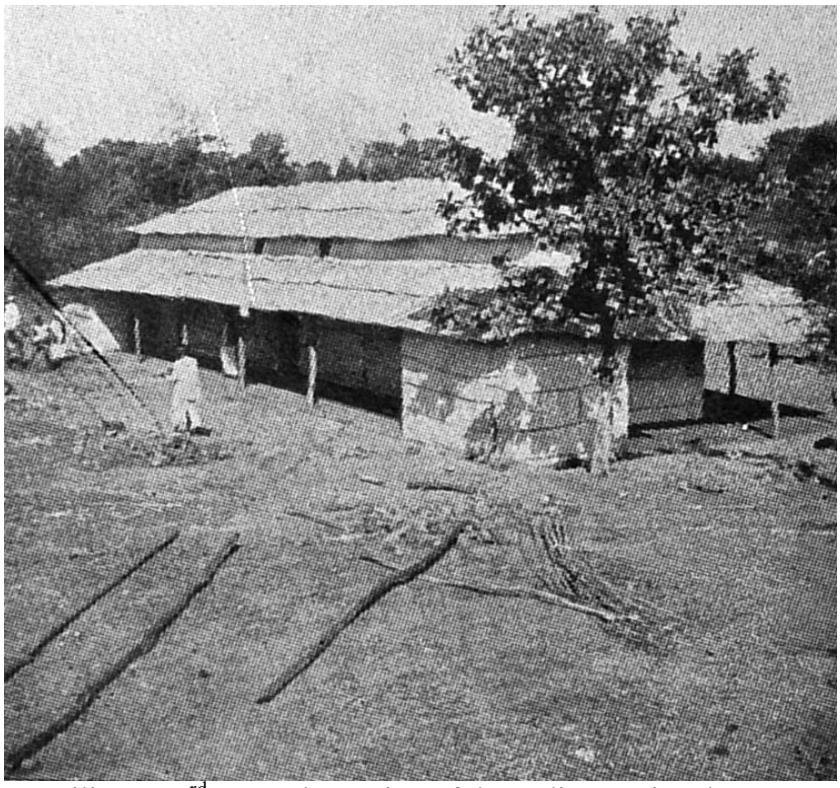


Figure 2.25 Pavilions, 53rd Annual Meeting of the Indian National Congress, Ramgarh (1940).

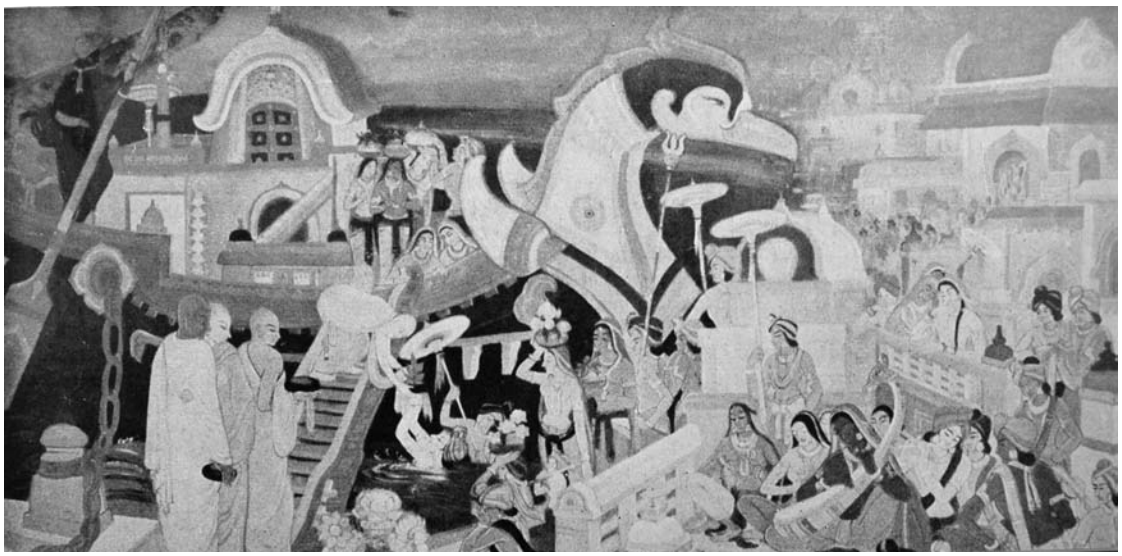


Figure 2.26 Upendra Maharathi, *Ashoka Sending Sanghamitra with Bodhi Tree Sapling to Ceylon*, Watercolor on paper (ca. 1940).

Figure 2.27 Vidhura Pandita Jataka, Railing, Bharhut Stupa (ca. 2nd century BCE).

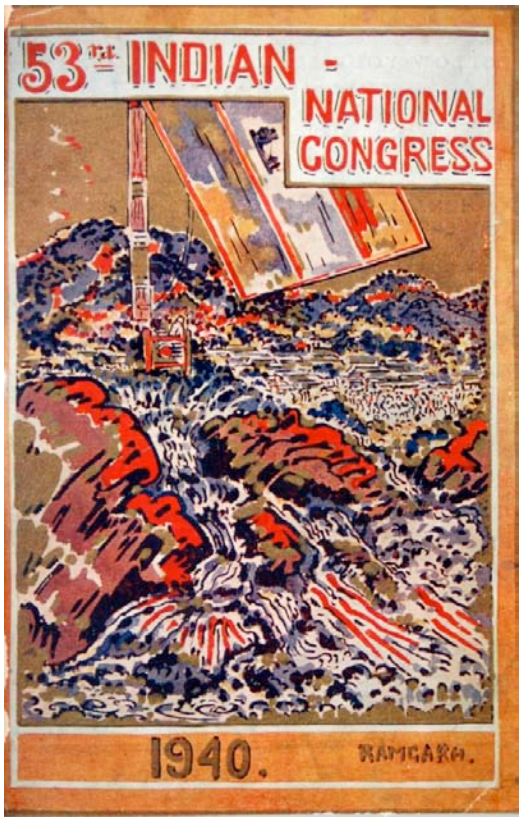


Figure 2.28 Nandalal Bose, *Annual Meeting of the Indian National Congress, Ramgarh Souvenir*, Cover (1940).

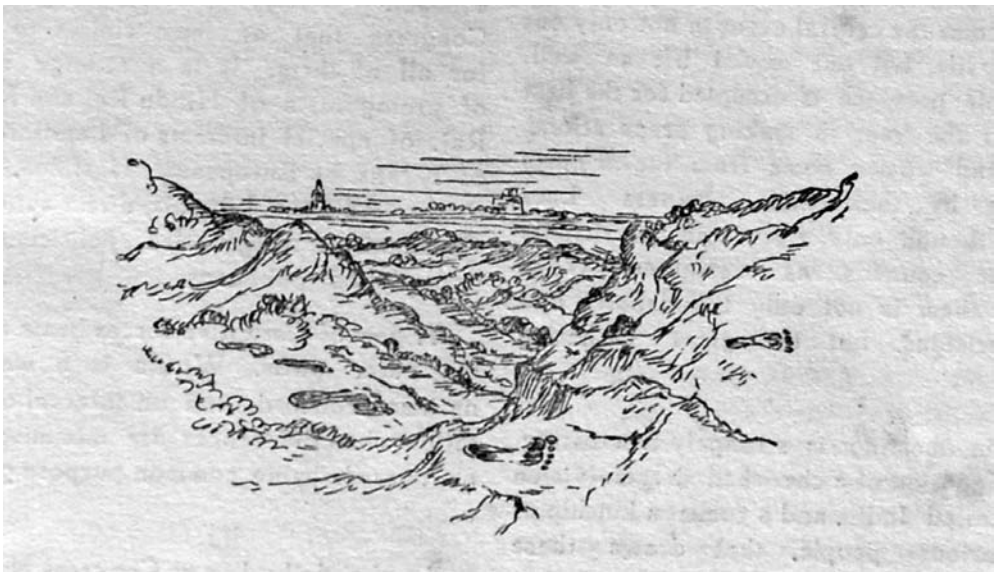


Figure 2.29 Nandalal Bose, *Untitled*, Sketch on paper (ca. 1940).

Figure 2.30 Prafulla Chandra Lahiri, *Now it's your turn*, Book Illustration (ca.1940).

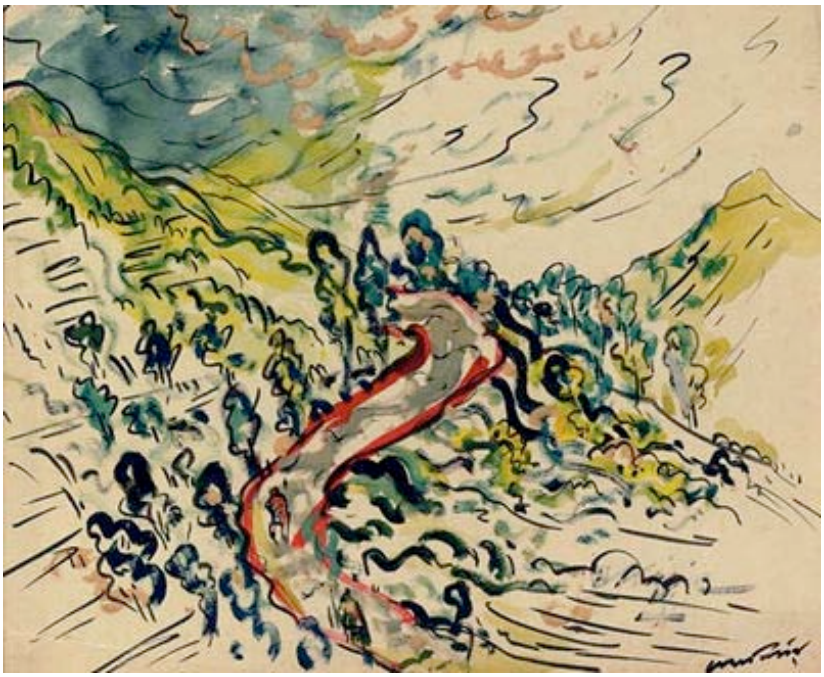


Figure 2.31 Ramkinkar Baij, *Birbhum Landscape*, Watercolor on Paper *(*ca. 1925).

Figure 2.32 Ramkinkar Baij, *Man Walking With a Sack*, Clay (1928).

Figure 2.33 Emile-Antoine Bourdelle, *The Sculptress at Work*, Bronze (1906).

Figure 2.34 Auguste Rodin, *Monument to Honoré de Balzac*, Bronze (1898).

Figure 2.35 Ramkinkar Baij, *Santhal Family,* Reinforced Concrete (1938).

Figure 2.36 Ramkinkar Baij, *Koler Banshi* [Call of the Machine], Reinforced Concrete (1955-1956).

Figure 2.37 Ramkinkar Baij, *Speed*, Reinforced Concrete (1953).

Figure 3.1 George Nakashima and Antonin Raymond, Golconde (1940).

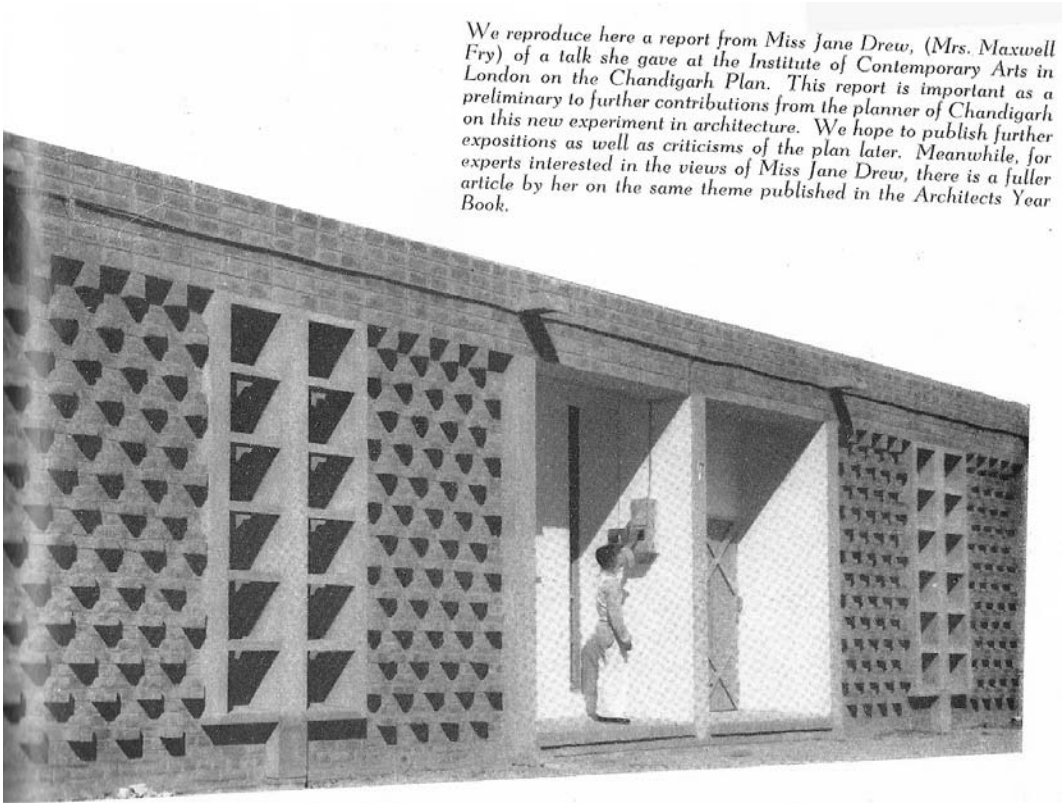
Figure 3.2 Raju entering Bombay, *Shree 420*, Film still (1955).

Figure 3.3 An abrupt pan shot brings into the frame a large group of migrants – men, women, and children – making their way across the desert. *Shree 420*, Film still (1955).

Figure 3.4 Margaret Bourke-White, Convoy of Sikhs migrating to East Punjab, Photograph (1947).

Figure 3.5 Gazing down at a modernist planned city, *Shree 420*, Film still (1955).

Figure 3.6 James Burke, *Residential section of Chandigarh, homes designed by architects of modern new capital city of Punjab*, Photograph (1958).



We reproduce here a report from Miss Jane Drew, (Mrs. Maxwell Fry) of a talk she gave at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London on the Chandigarh Plan. This report is important as a preliminary to further contributions from the planner of Chandigarh on this new experiment in architecture. We hope to publish further expositions as well as criticisms of the plan later. Meanwhile, for experts interested in the views of Miss Jane Drew, there is a fuller article by her on the same theme published in the Architects Year Book.

Figure 3.7 Photographer Unknown, Front View of the Peon's House, Photograph (ca. 1953).

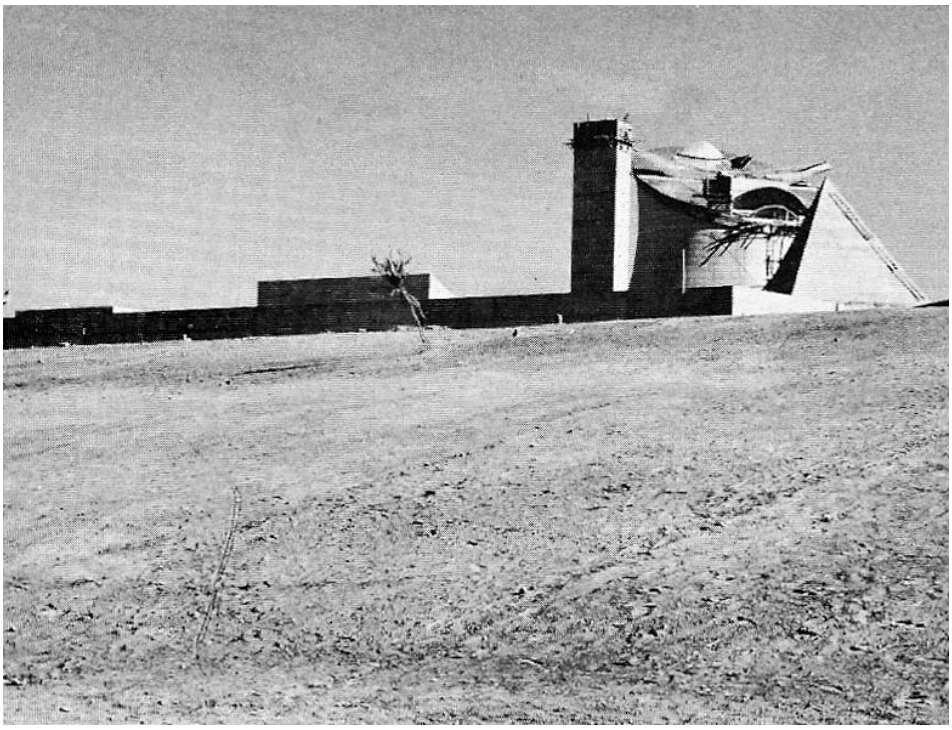


Figure 3.8 Le Corbusier, Legislative Assembly, Chandigarh (1956).

Figure 3.9 Jane Drew, Maxwell Fry, and Pierre Jeanneret, Government Housing, Sector 23, Chandigarh (ca. 1954).

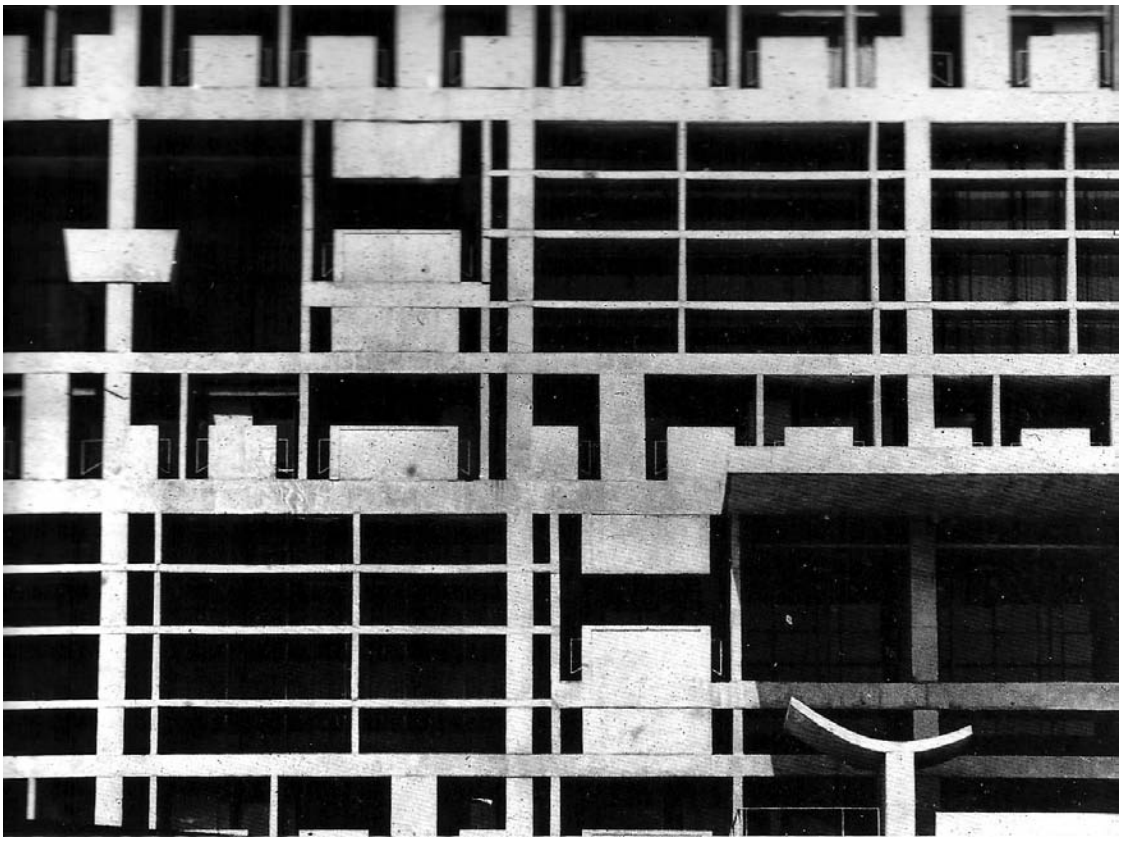


Figure 3.10 Lucien Hervé, Central Secretariat, Chandigarh, Cropped 6 X 6 Negative (1961).

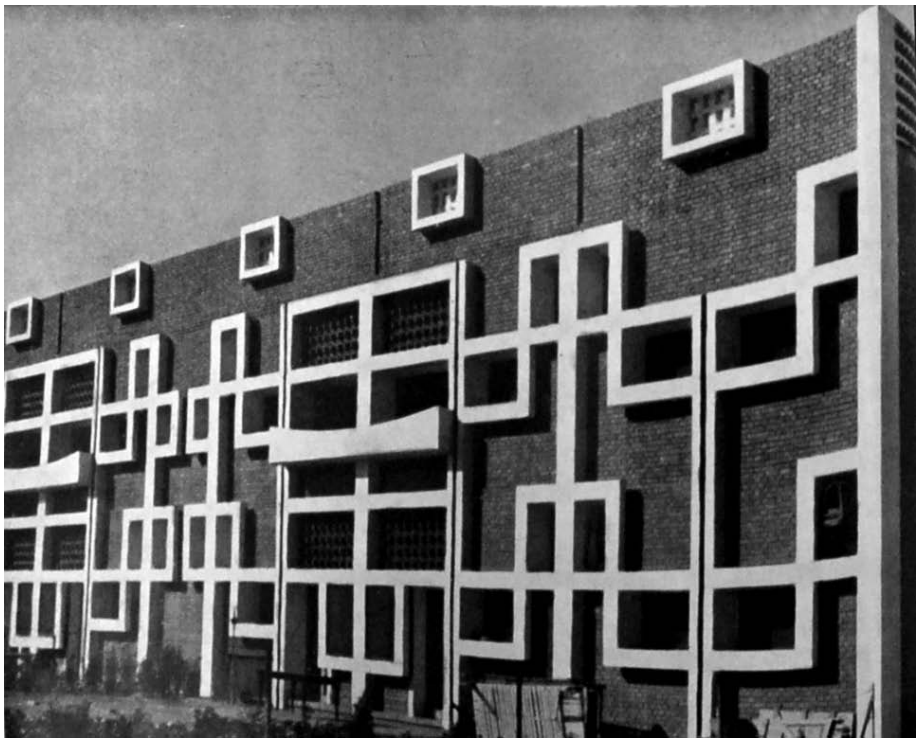


Figure 3.11 Jane Drew, Maxwell Fry, and Pierre Jeanneret, Residential quarters for the Member of the Legislative Assembly, Chandigarh (ca. 1956).

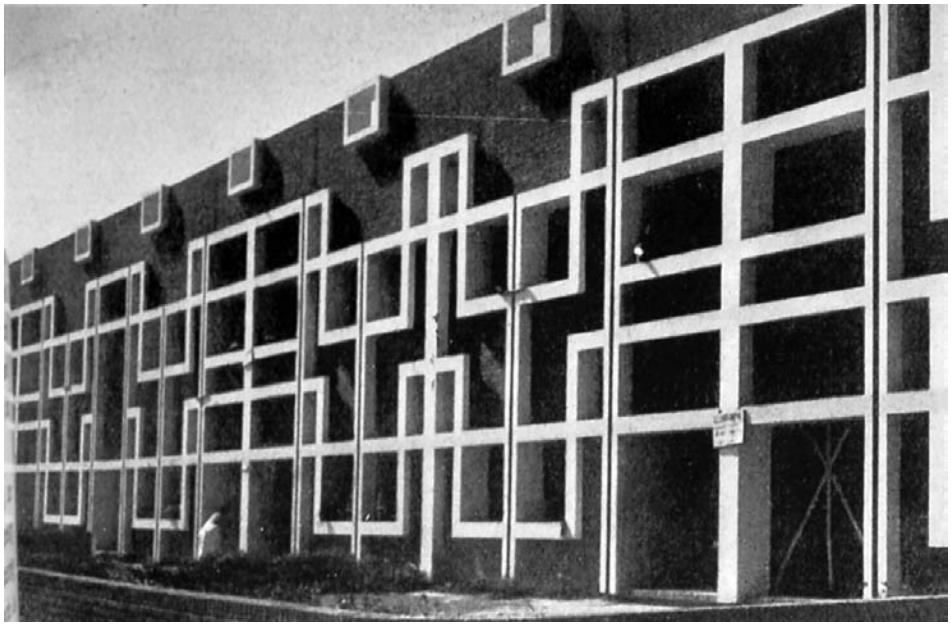


Figure 3.12. Jane Drew, Maxwell Fry, and Pierre Jeanneret, Residential quarters for the Member of the Legislative Assembly, Chandigarh (ca. 1956).

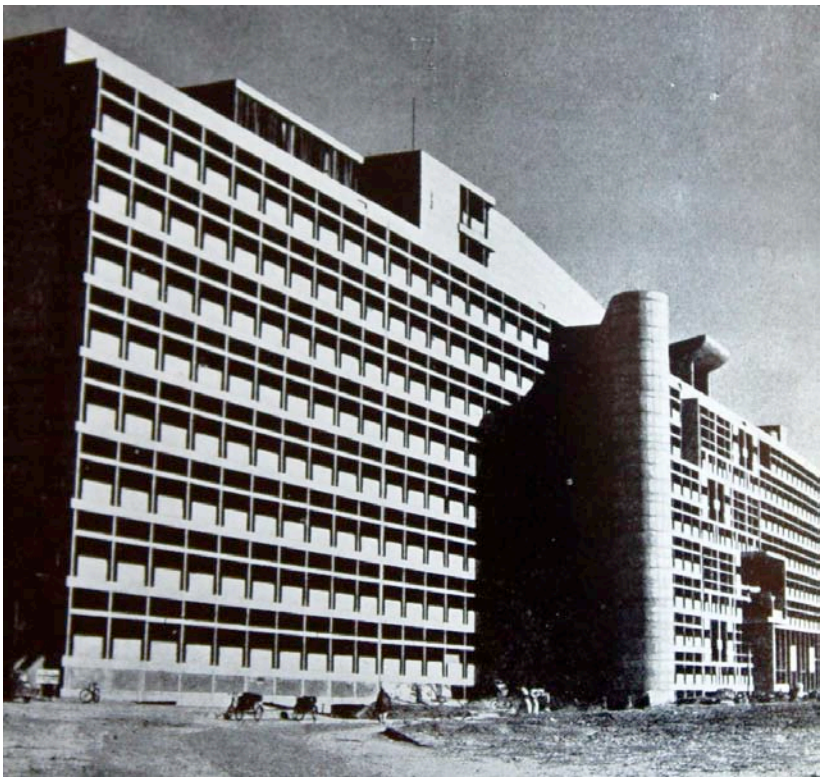


Figure 3.13 Le Corbusier, Punjab Secretariat Building, Chandigarh (ca. 1956).

Figure 3.14 Sunil Janah, *Children at a Village Pond, Bengal*, Photograph (1948).

Figure 3.15 Jeet Malhotra, *Balcony, Central Secretariat*, Photograph (ca. 1961).

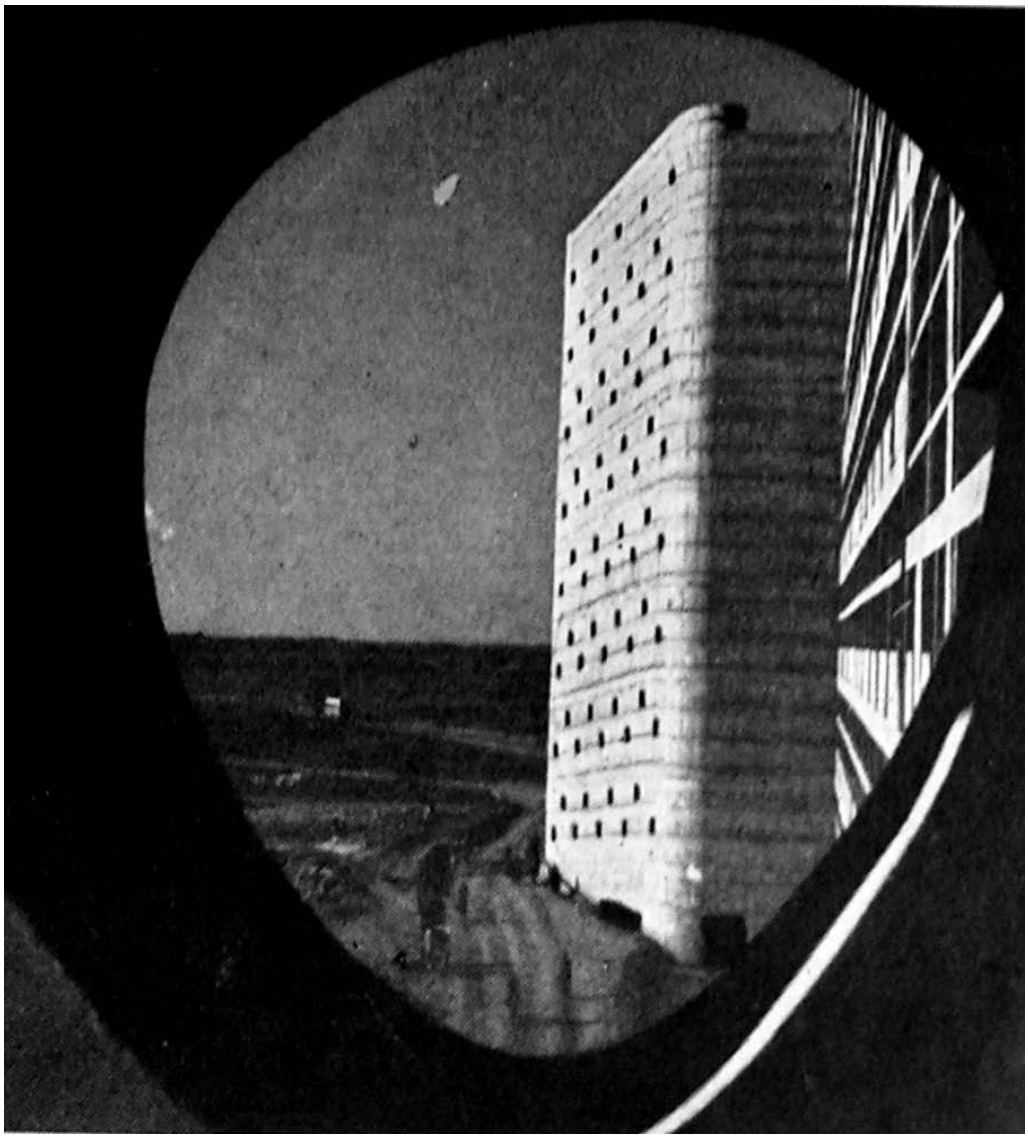


Figure 3.16 Jeet Malhotra, *Ramp, Central Secretariat*, Photograph (ca. 1961).

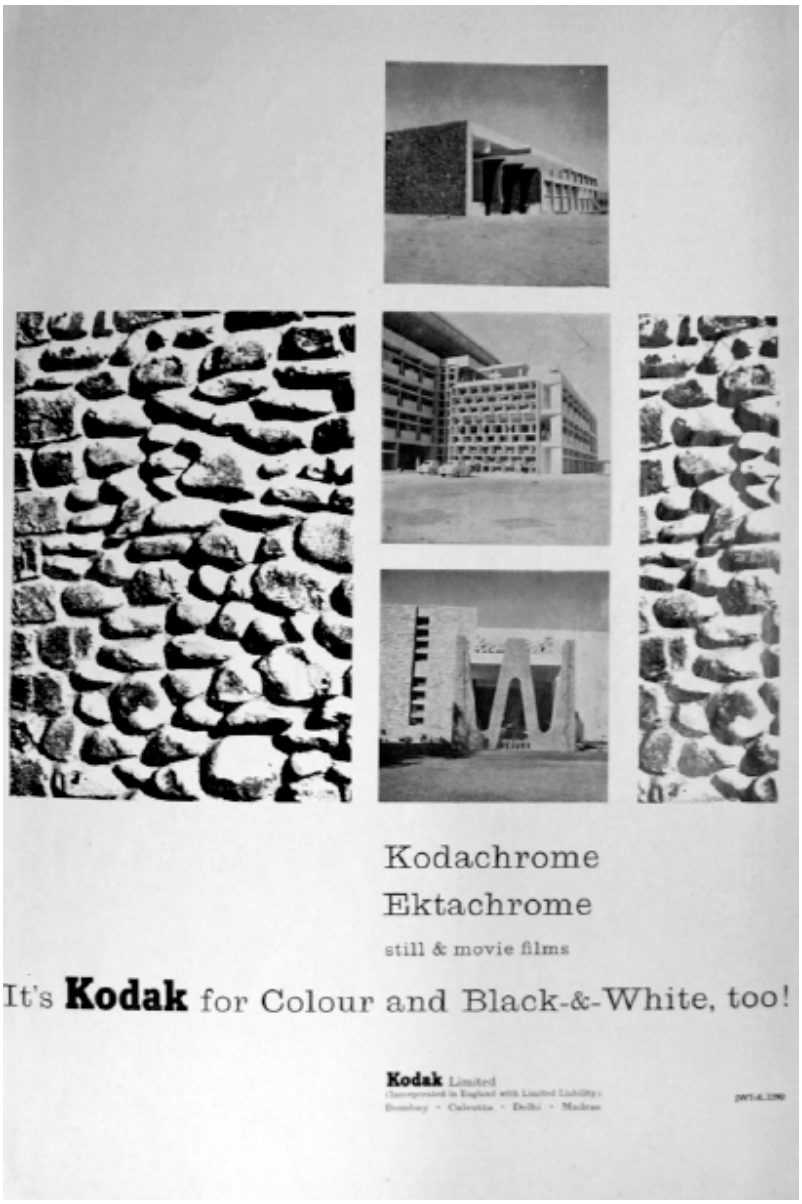


Figure 3.17 Advertisement for Kodak Kodachrome and Kodak Ektrachrome (1961).

Figure 3.18 Advertisement for the Associated Cement Companies Ltd. (1953).

Figure 3.19 Durga Shankar Bajpai and G. M. Bhuta, Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay (1952).

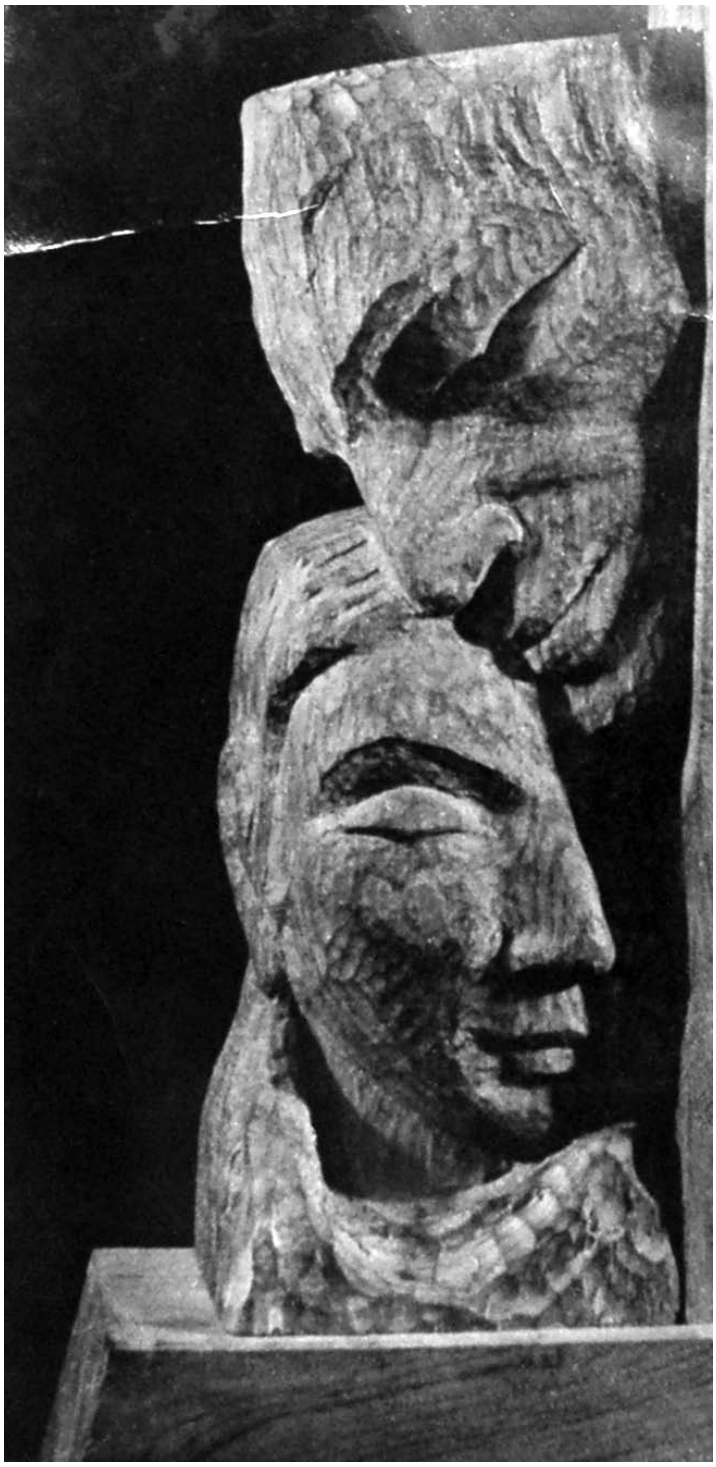


Figure 3.20 Dhanraj Bhagat, *Reunion*, Wood (1947).

Figure 3.21 Dhanraj Bhagat, *Burden*, Reinforced Concrete (1953).

Figure 3.22 Ramkinkar Baij, *Sujata*, Reinforced Concrete (1935).

Figure 3.23 Dhanraj Bhagat, *Rajasthani Women*, Plaster and Iron Filling (1962).

Figure 3.24 Dhanraj Bhagat, *Man*, Plaster and Iron Filling (1962).

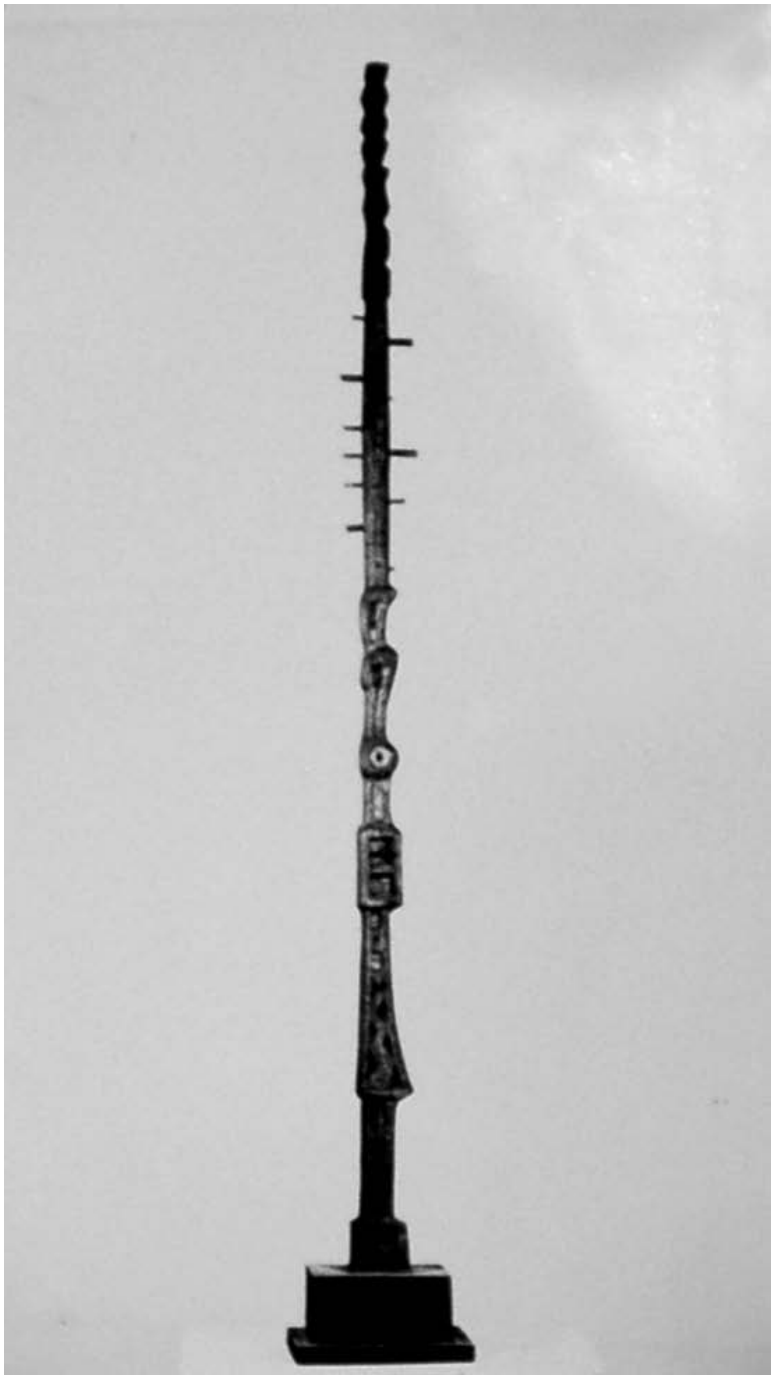


Figure 3.25 Dhanraj Bhagat, *Construction III*, Construction Series, Wood (1962 -1964).

Figure 3.26 Sardari Lal Parasher, *Vidyavalanj* [States of Knowledge], Steel (1964).

Figure 3.27 Sardari Lal Parasher, *Despair*, Ink on paper (1947-1949).

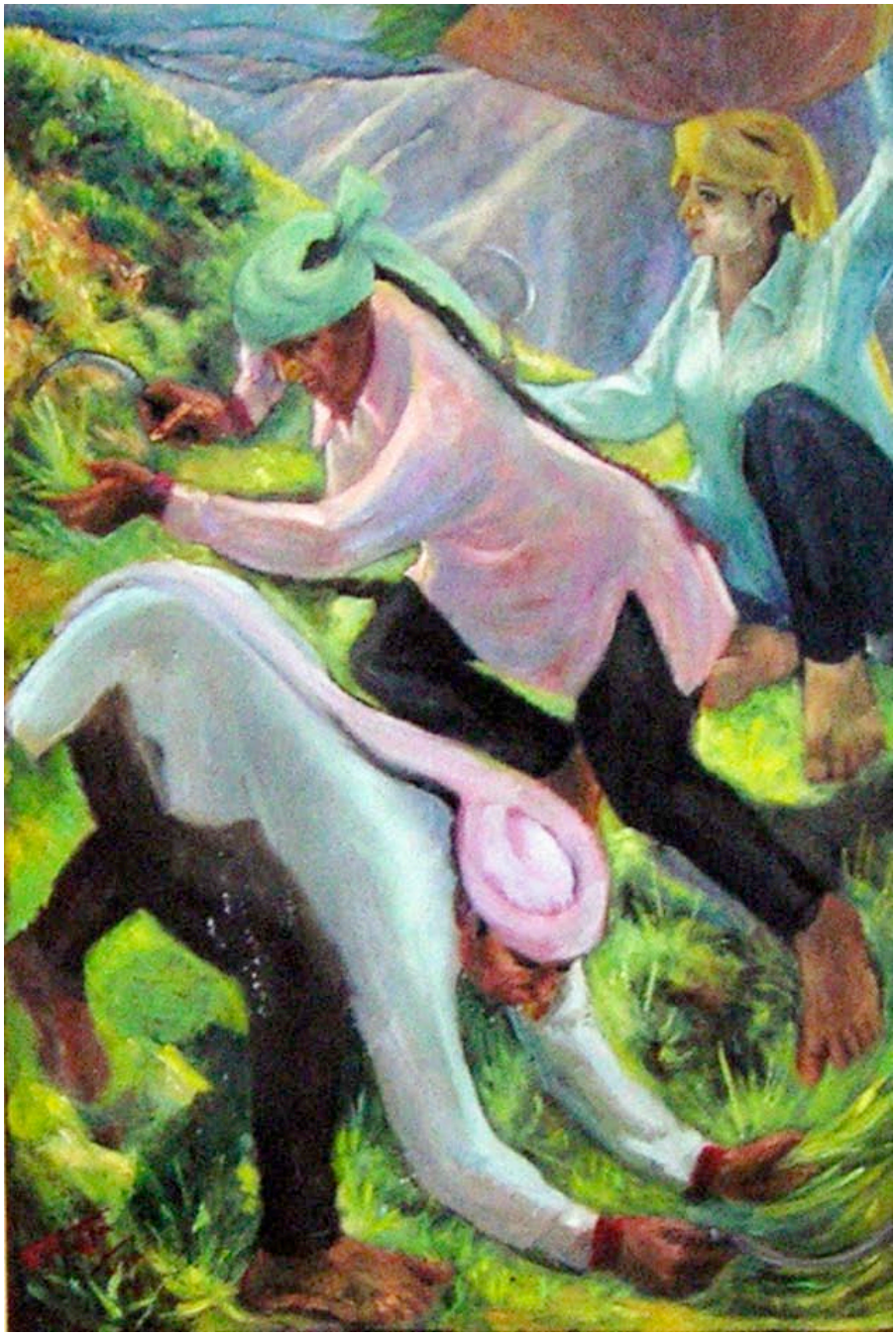


Figure 3.28 Sardari Lal Parasher, *Grass Cutters*, Oil on Canvas (1954).

Figure 3.29 Sardari Lal Parasher, *Undivided Punjab*, Reinforced Concrete (1935).

Figure 4.1 Opening shot, *New Delhi*, Film still (1956).


Figure 4.2 Kala Niketan, *New Delhi*, Film still (1956).

Figure 4.3 C. G. Blomfield, Jaipur House [later the National Gallery of Modern Art], New Delhi (ca. 1930).

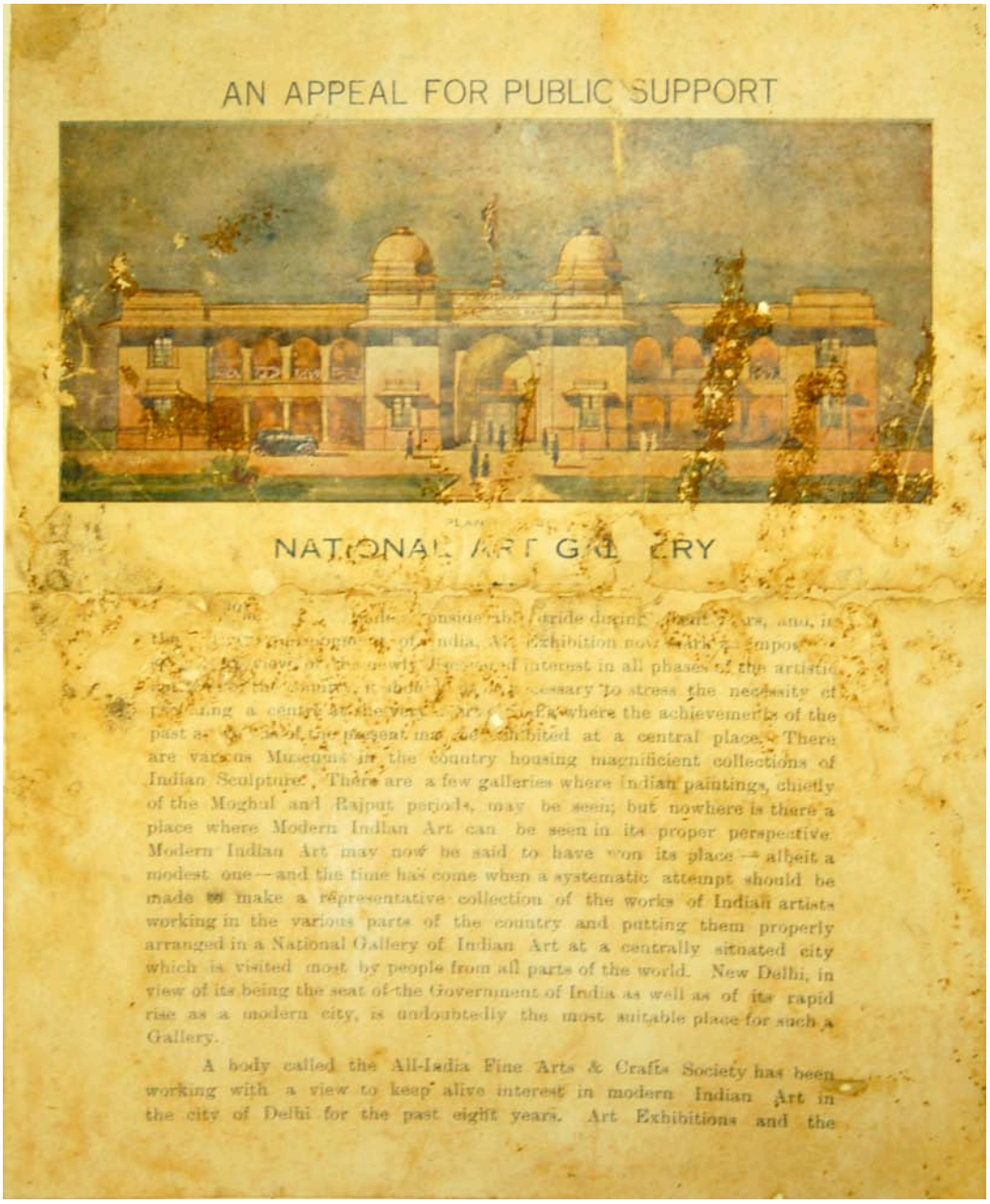
Figure 4.4 Habib Rahman, Rabindra Bhavan, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (1961)

Figure 4.5 Photograph of Sarada Ukil in his studio (ca. 1920). Note the Bengal School style paintings in the background.

Figure 4.6 Edwin Luytens and Herbert Baker, Capitol Complex, New Delhi (ca. 1930).

Figure 4.7 The Ukil School of Art, Esplanade Road, Old Delhi (ca. 1927).

Figure 4.8 The Ukil School of Art, Queensway, New Delhi (ca. 1930).



AN APPEAL FOR PUBLIC SUPPORT

NATIONAL ART GALLERY

[illegible] responsible pride during [illegible] years, and, in the [illegible] of India, Art Exhibition now [illegible] [illegible] of the newly [illegible] interest in all phases of the artistic [illegible] of the country, it [illegible] necessary to stress the necessity of [illegible] a central [illegible] where the achievements of the past as [illegible] the present may be exhibited at a central place. There are various Museums in the country housing magnificient collections of Indian Sculpture. There are a few galleries where Indian paintings, chiefly of the Moghul and Rajput periods, may be seen; but nowhere is there a place where Modern Indian Art can be seen in its proper perspective. Modern Indian Art may now be said to have won its place — albeit a modest one — and the time has come when a systematic attempt should be made to make a representative collection of the works of Indian artists working in the various parts of the country and putting them properly arranged in a National Gallery of Indian Art at a centrally situated city which is visited most by people from all parts of the world. New Delhi, in view of its being the seat of the Government of India as well as of its rapid rise as a modern city, is undoubtedly the most suitable place for such a Gallery.

A body called the All-India Fine Arts & Crafts Society has been working with a view to keep alive interest in modern Indian Art in the city of Delhi for the past eight years. Art Exhibitions and the

Figure 4.9 *An Appeal for Public Support: National Art Gallery*, Pamphlet (1930).

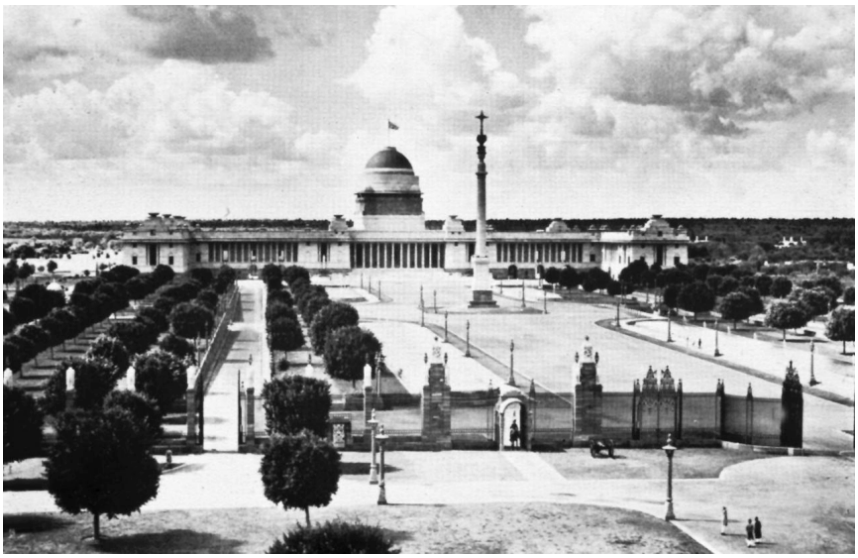


Figure 4.10 Edwin Luytens and Herbert Baker, Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi (ca. 1930).

Figure 4.11 M. V. Dhurandhar, *Devi*, Oil on board (ca. 1920).

Figure 4.12 Sarada Ukil, *The Tune Eternal*, Chromolithograph (1939).

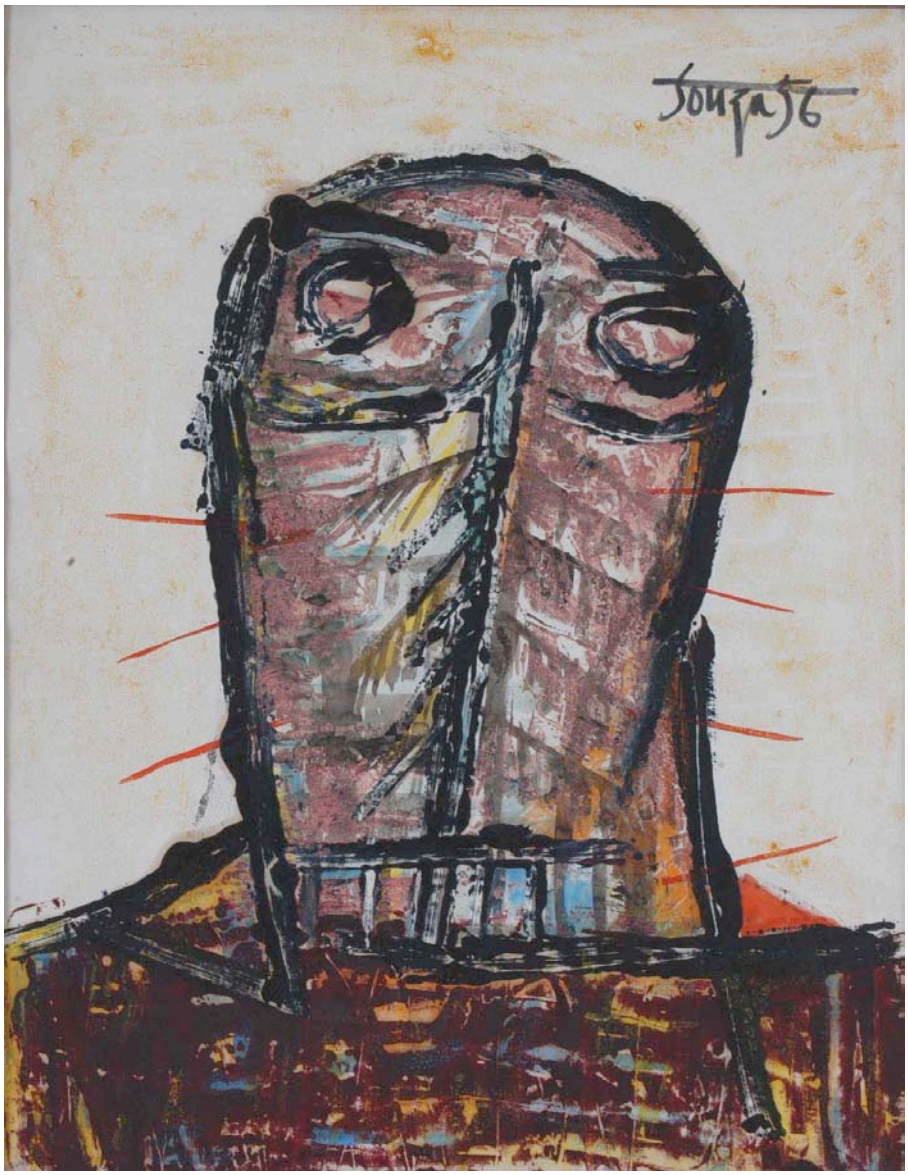


Figure 4.13 F.N. Souza, *Head*, Oil on canvas (1956).

Figure 4.14 Amrita Sher-Gil, *Three Girls*, Oil on canvas (1935).

Figure 4.15 Abanindranath Tagore, *The Journey's End*, Watercolor on paper (n.d.).

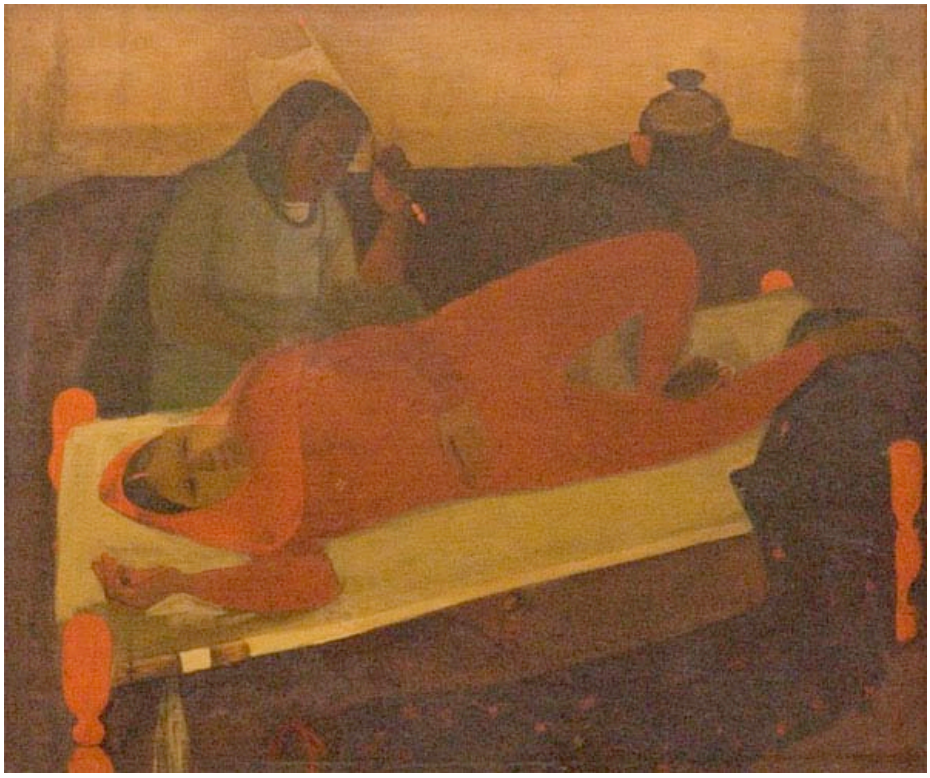


Figure 4.16 Amrita Sher-Gil, *Woman on Charpai*, Oil on canvas (1940).

Figure 4.17 Rabindranath Tagore, *Dancing Woman*, Ink on paper (n.d.).

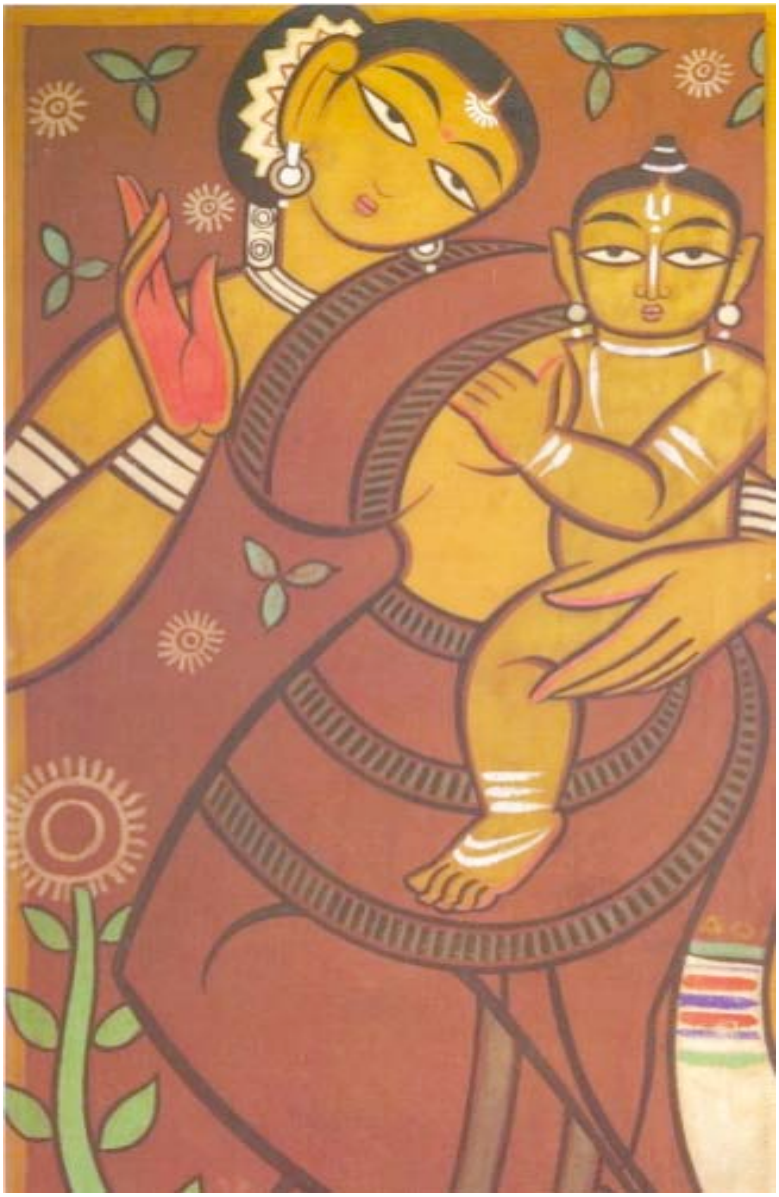


Figure 4.18 Jamini Roy, *Mother and Child*, Oil on board (n.d.).

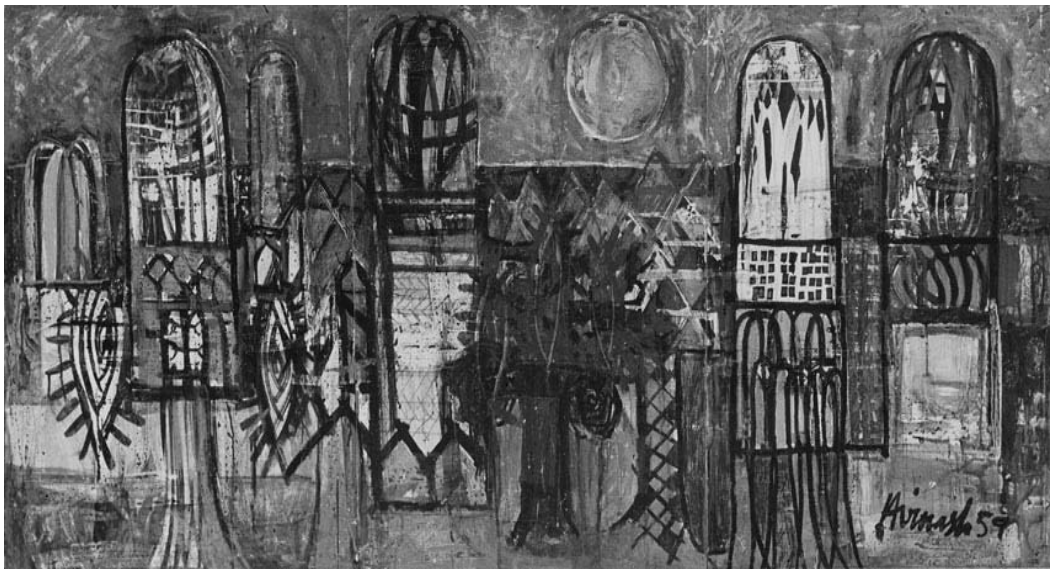
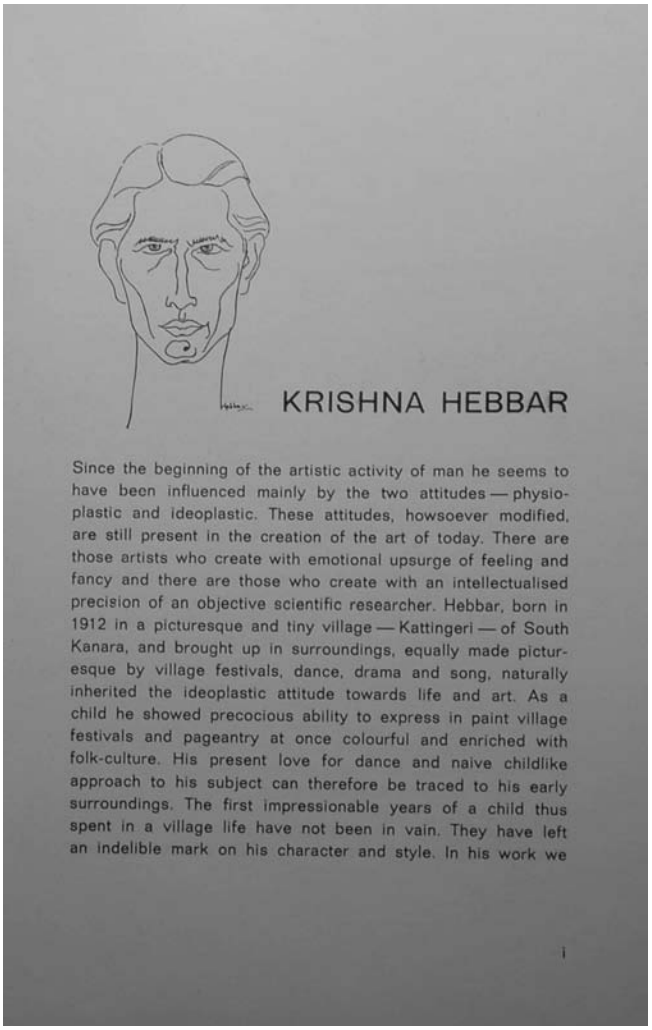


Figure 4.19 Avinash Chandra, *City of Churches*, Oil on canvas (1959).

Figure 4.20 Habib Rahman, Gandhi Ghat, Barackpore (1949).

Figure 4.21 Habib Rahman, Rabindra Bhavan, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (1961).



KRISHNA HEBBAR

Since the beginning of the artistic activity of man he seems to have been influenced mainly by the two attitudes — physio-plastic and ideoplastic. These attitudes, howsoever modified, are still present in the creation of the art of today. There are those artists who create with emotional upsurge of feeling and fancy and there are those who create with an intellectualised precision of an objective scientific researcher. Hebbar, born in 1912 in a picturesque and tiny village — Kattingeri — of South Kanara, and brought up in surroundings, equally made picturesque by village festivals, dance, drama and song, naturally inherited the ideoplastic attitude towards life and art. As a child he showed precocious ability to express in paint village festivals and pageantry at once colourful and enriched with folk-culture. His present love for dance and naive childlike approach to his subject can therefore be traced to his early surroundings. The first impressionable years of a child thus spent in a village life have not been in vain. They have left an indelible mark on his character and style. In his work we

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Figure 4.22 Page from Lalit Kala Akademi's book on K. K. Hebbar (1960).

Figure 4.23 Gaganendranath Tagore, *Magician*, Watercolor on paper (n.d.).

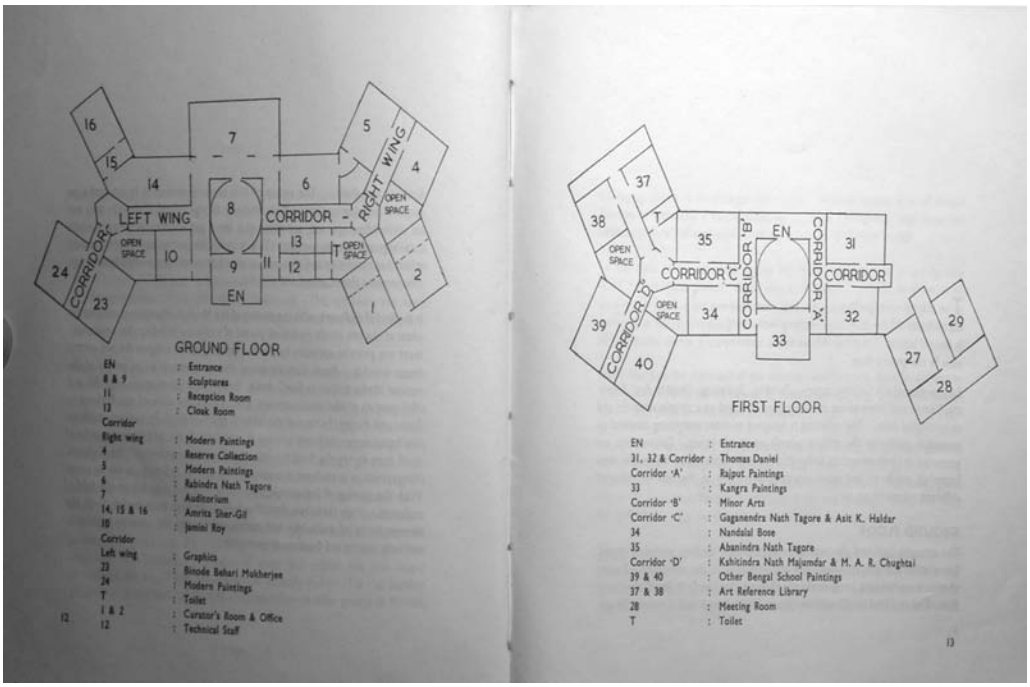


Figure 4.24 Ground Plan, National Gallery of Modern Art (1967).

Figure 4.25 M. F. Husain, *Between the Spider and the Lamp*, Oil on canvas (1956).

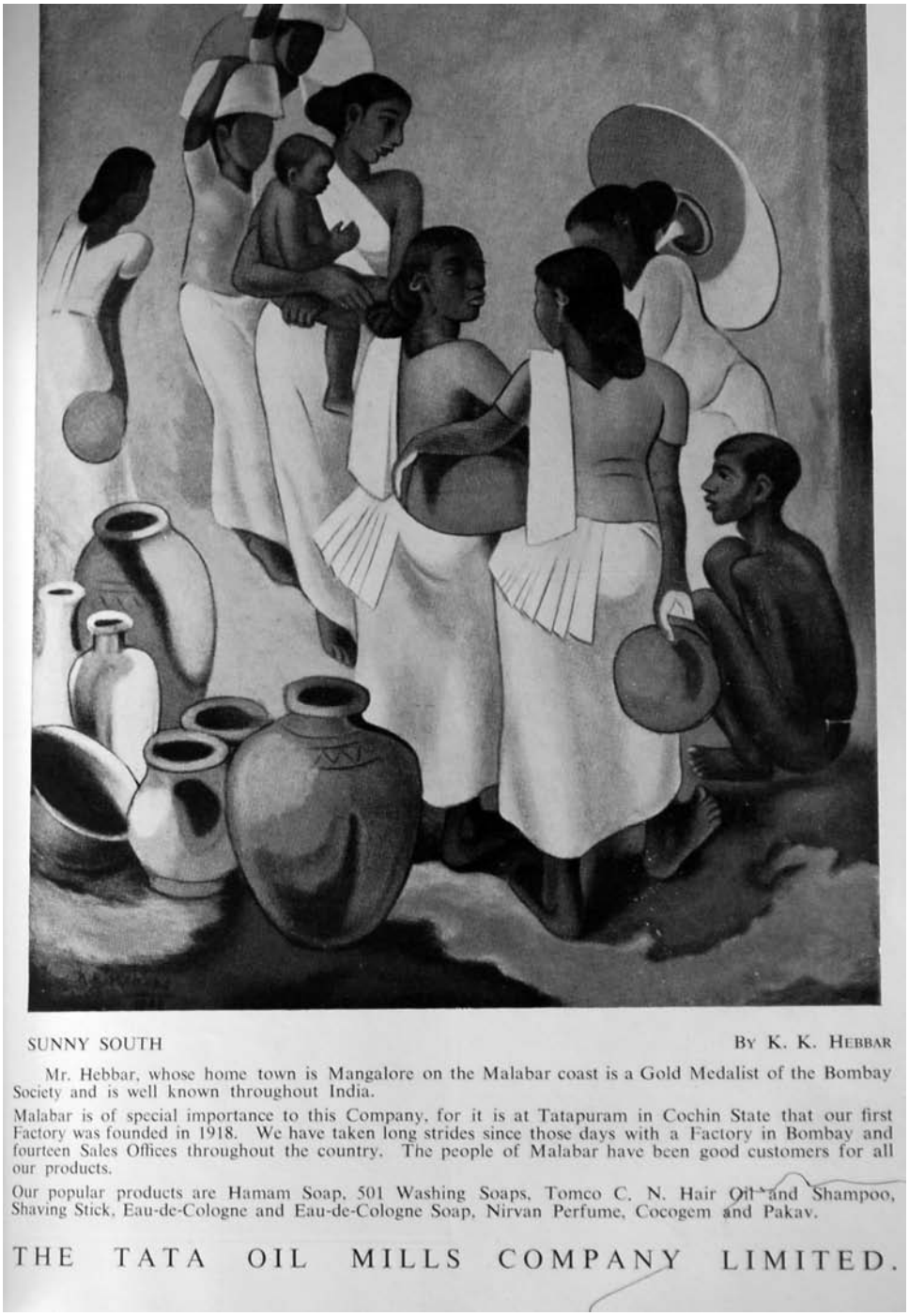


Figure 5.1 Advertisement for Tata Oil Mills Company Limited (1953).

Figure 5.2 Deen Dayal, Nizam of Hyderabad's Drawing Room in the Bashir Bagh Palace in Hyderabad, Albumen print (ca. 1880).

Figure 5.3 Photographer Unknown, Photograph labeled: *Our Drawing Room in Ambala*, Albumen print (ca. 1900).

Figure 5.4 *Alapna* decorations at Santiniketan (ca. 1930).

Figure 5.5 Pair of *Moras*, Woven reed (ca. 1930).

Figure 5.6 Nandalal Bose, Batik *Sari* (ca. 1930).

Figure 5.7 Santiniketan Handbag, Embossed leather (ca. 1940).

Figure 5.8 Nandalal Bose, *Saraswati,* Tempera on paper (1941).

Figure 5.9 Sunil Pal, *Saraswati*, Book Illustration (ca.1930).

Figure 5.10 Pratulchandra Bandyapadhaya, *Untitled*, Book Illustration (ca. 1960s).

Figure 5.11 Harriet's own bungalow, *The River,* Film still (1951).

Figure 5.12 Mr. John's cottage, *The River*, Film still (1951).

Figure 5.13 Sukumar Bose drawing *alpana* patterns at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi (ca. 1950)

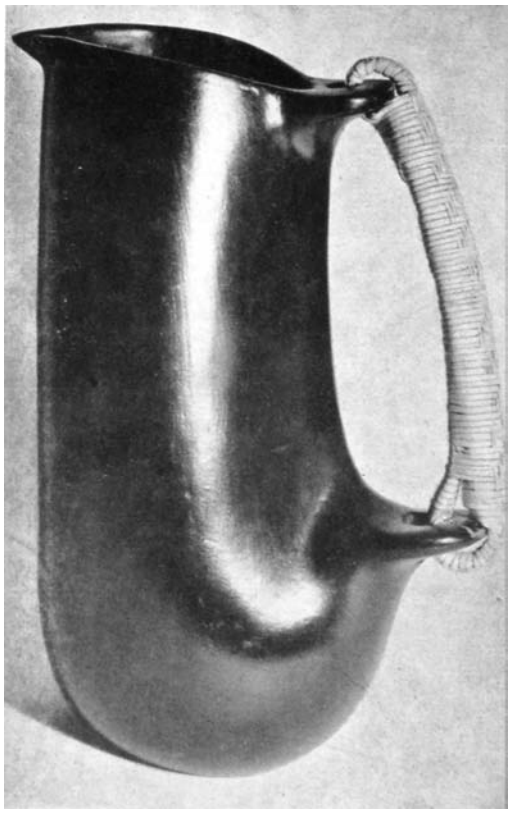


Figure 5.14 Ceramic jug with cane handle produced at the Delhi Design Center, New Delhi (1958).

Figure 5.15 Russell Wright, Ceramic Jug, American Modern Series, Steubenville Pottery Company, Steubenville, Ohio (ca. 1950).

Figure 5.16 Display at the *Design Today in America and Europe*, New Delhi (1959).

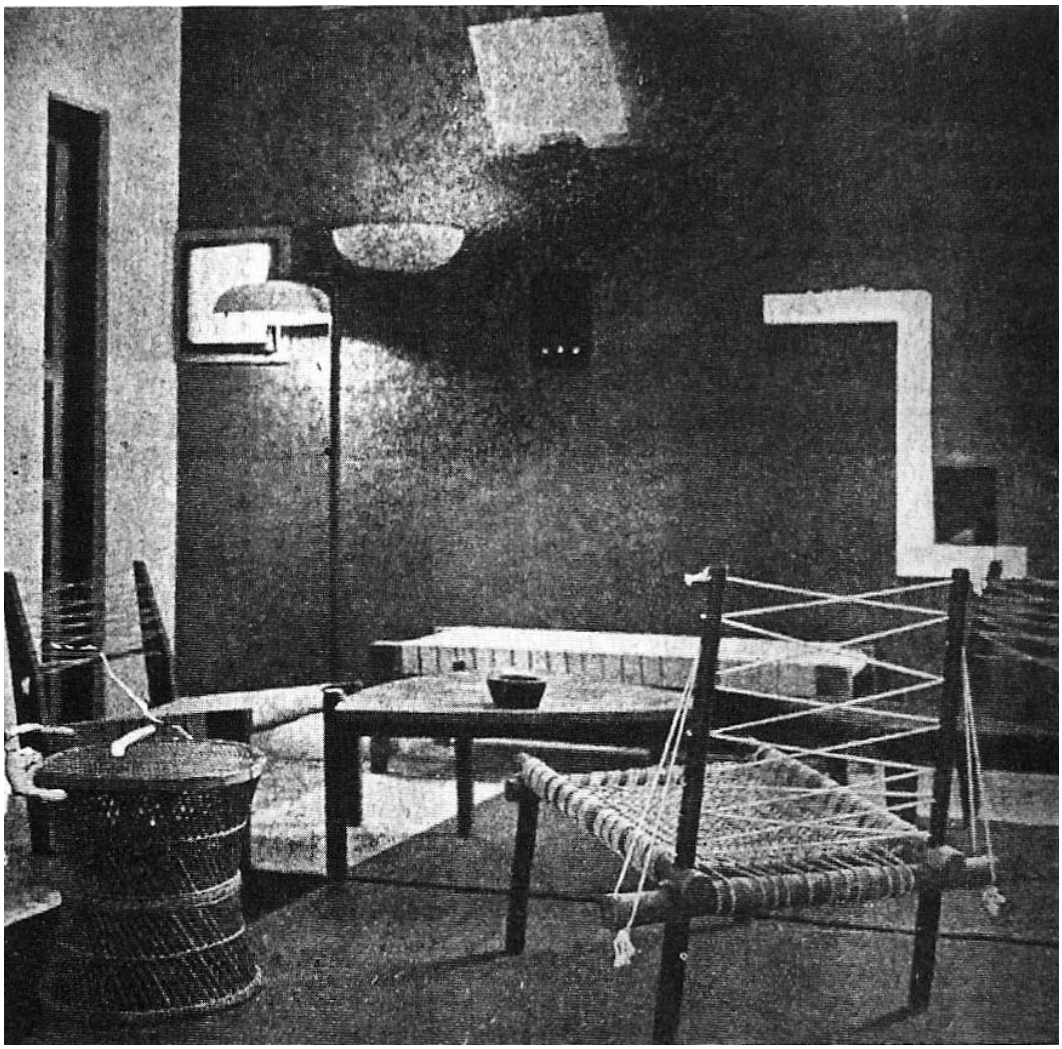
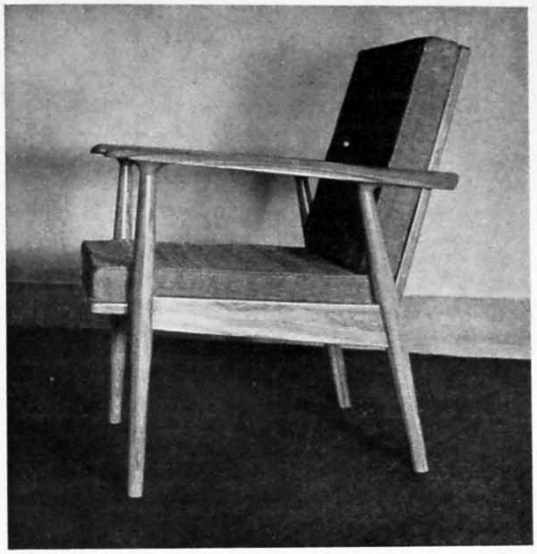


Figure 5.17 Page from *Simple Furniture and Interior Decoration* (1959).

Furniture-3



Designer—Gunter Eberle

Two chair designs are featured this month. The slanting arms of the chair on the right, besides being restful for the arms and upper part of the body, also allow for sitting with crossed legs. It can be used with 2" foam rubber cushions and should cost between Rs. 60—80. Plan given below is for the easy chair with straight arms. The frame can be woven either with cane or nivar and the cost is approximately Rs. 60.

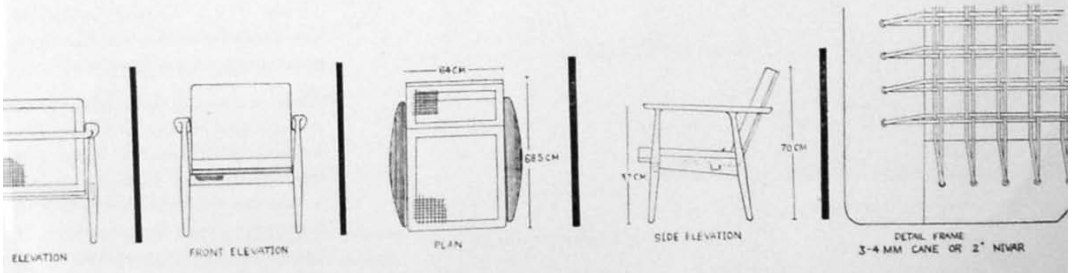


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Figure 5.18 Furniture featured in *Design* magazine (1959)

Figure 5.19 Rabindranath Tagore's drawing room, Udayan, Santiniketan (1921-1938).

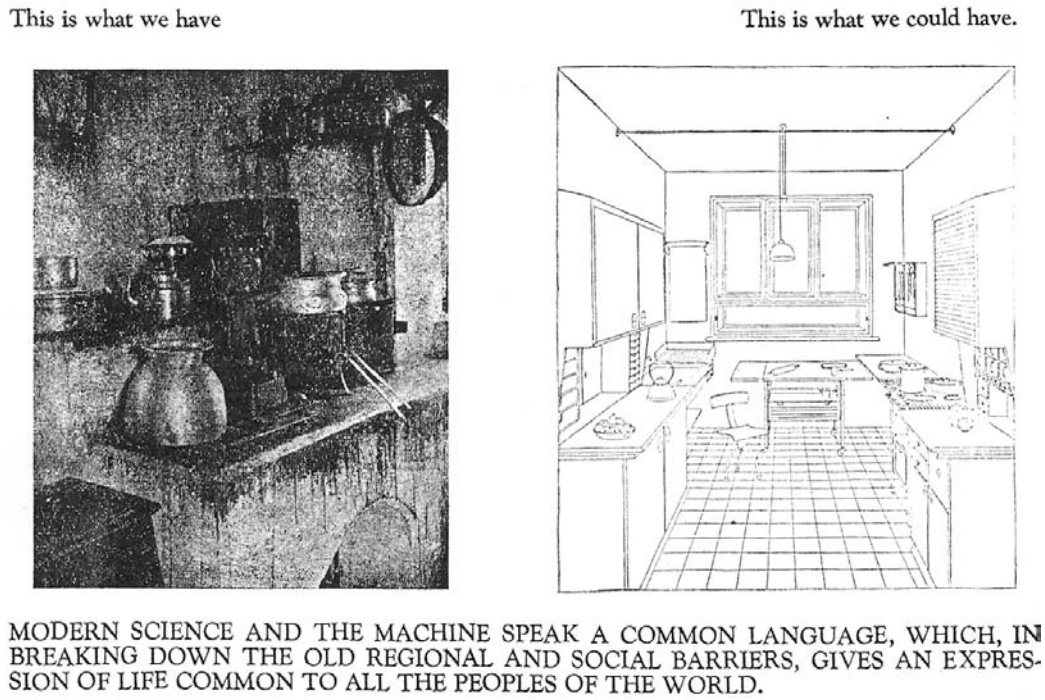

Figure 5.20 Page from MARG, "This is what we have…This is what could we have" (1946).

Figure 5.21 Margarete Schutte-Lihotzky, Frankfurt Kitchen (1929).

Furniture-2

This range of furniture by the Small Industries Service Institute at New Delhi, includes low stools with strings and loose cushions, a peg table, stand lamp and a charpoy. The weave of the cotton string for the low stools is in two separate layers, they are not interwoven. The new kind of weaving—in slots instead of holes—allows restringing or retightening in 15 to 20 minutes. Loose cushion can be foam rubber or cotton. The price without cushion should be approximately Rs. 8.75 nP. The bench with jute weaving—referred to as a charpoy above—is actually adapted from a normal charpoy design, with the difference that the size is made smaller and the design of the legs is changed. Approximate cost: Rs. 10.75 nP. The stand lamp has a cane shade of split bamboo and cane weaving, with a wrought iron stand of ¾" dia. It has two bulbs, one up and one down. Price is in the vicinity of Rs. 30. Unfortunately the stand lamp does not quite achieve the gracefulness, possible with the materials used; the shade appears on the disproportionate side when compared to the slender stand.

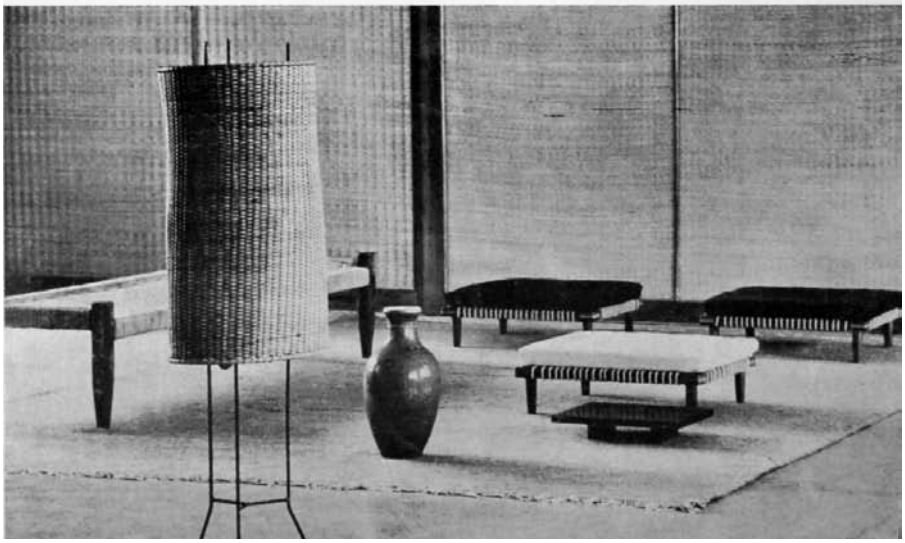

Figure 5.22 Page from "Furniture 2," *Design* (1959).

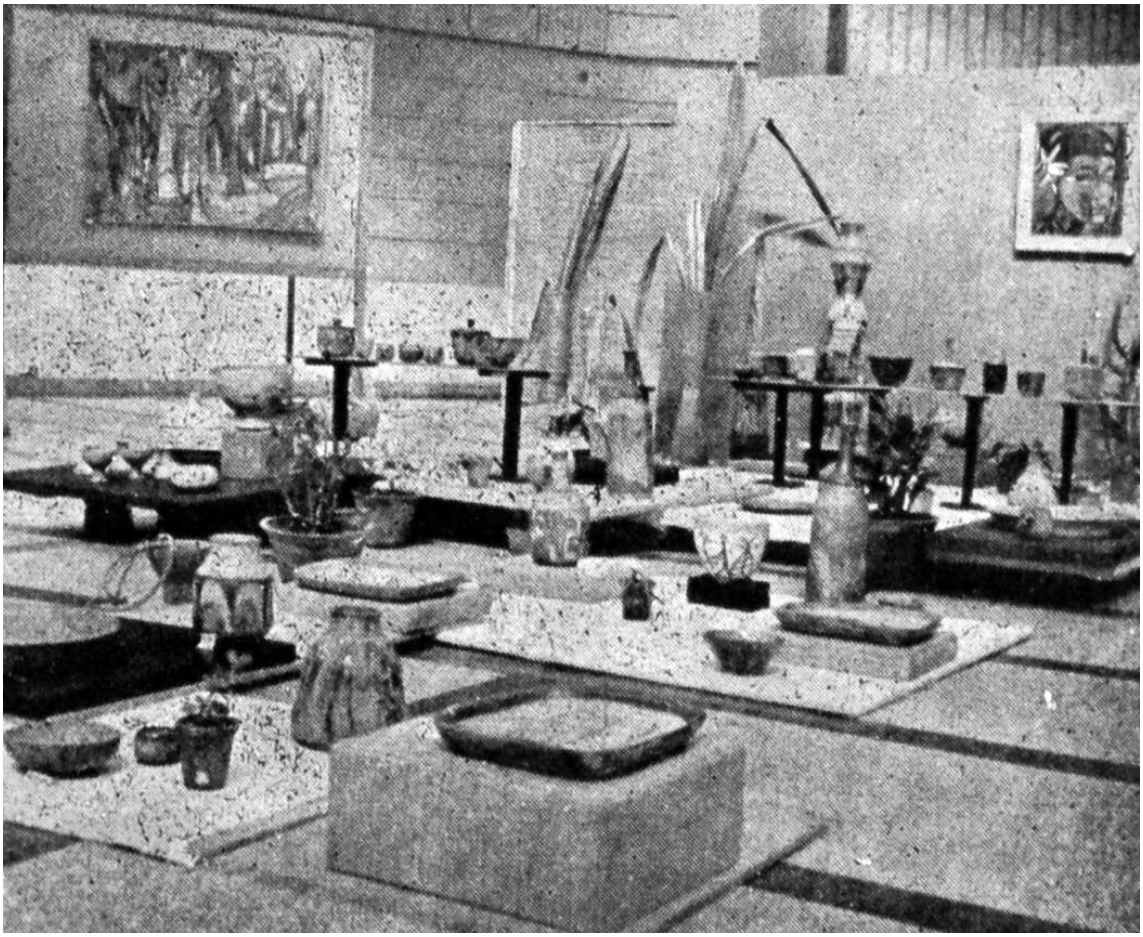

Figure 5.23 Exhibition view, Jehangir Art Gallery (1960).

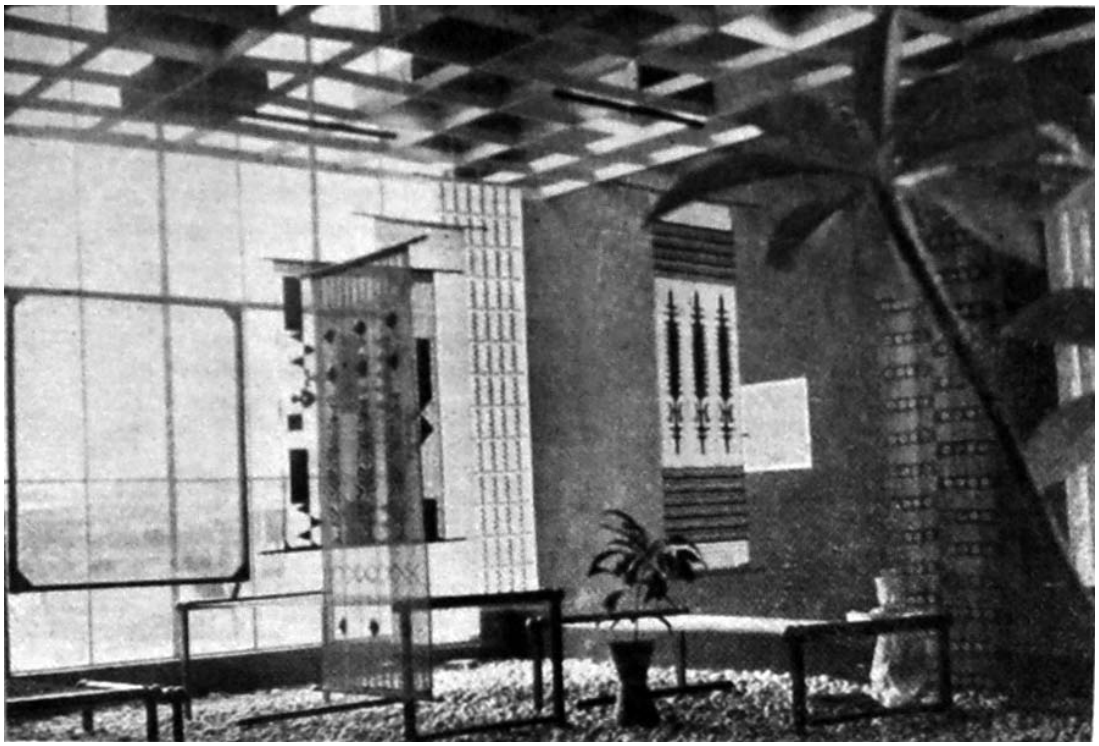

Figure 5.24 Handloom Pavilion, Indian Industries Fair (1961).

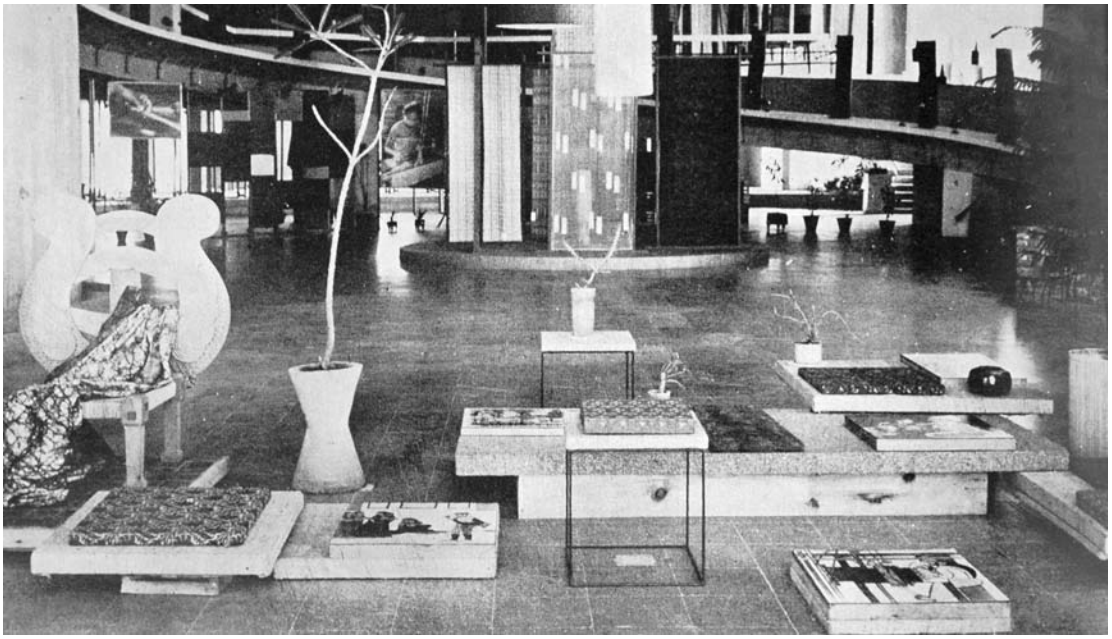

Figure 5.25 Handloom Pavilion, Indian Industries Fair (1961).

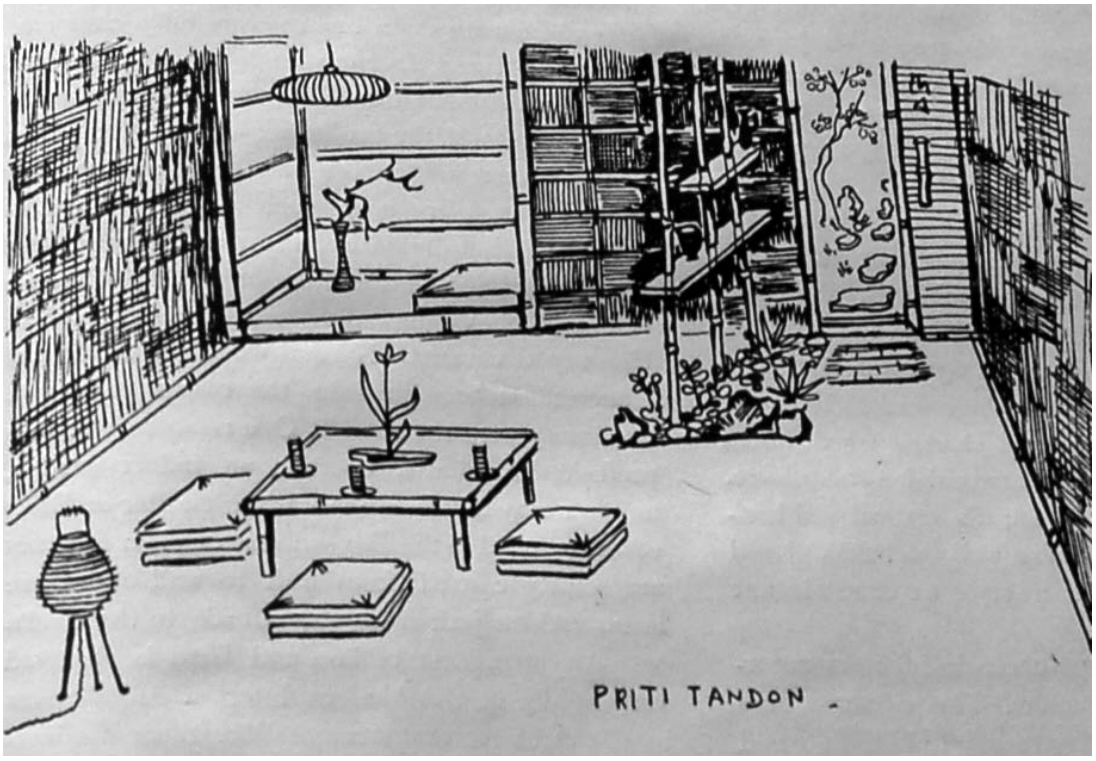

Figure 5.26 Page from *Angana* (1963).

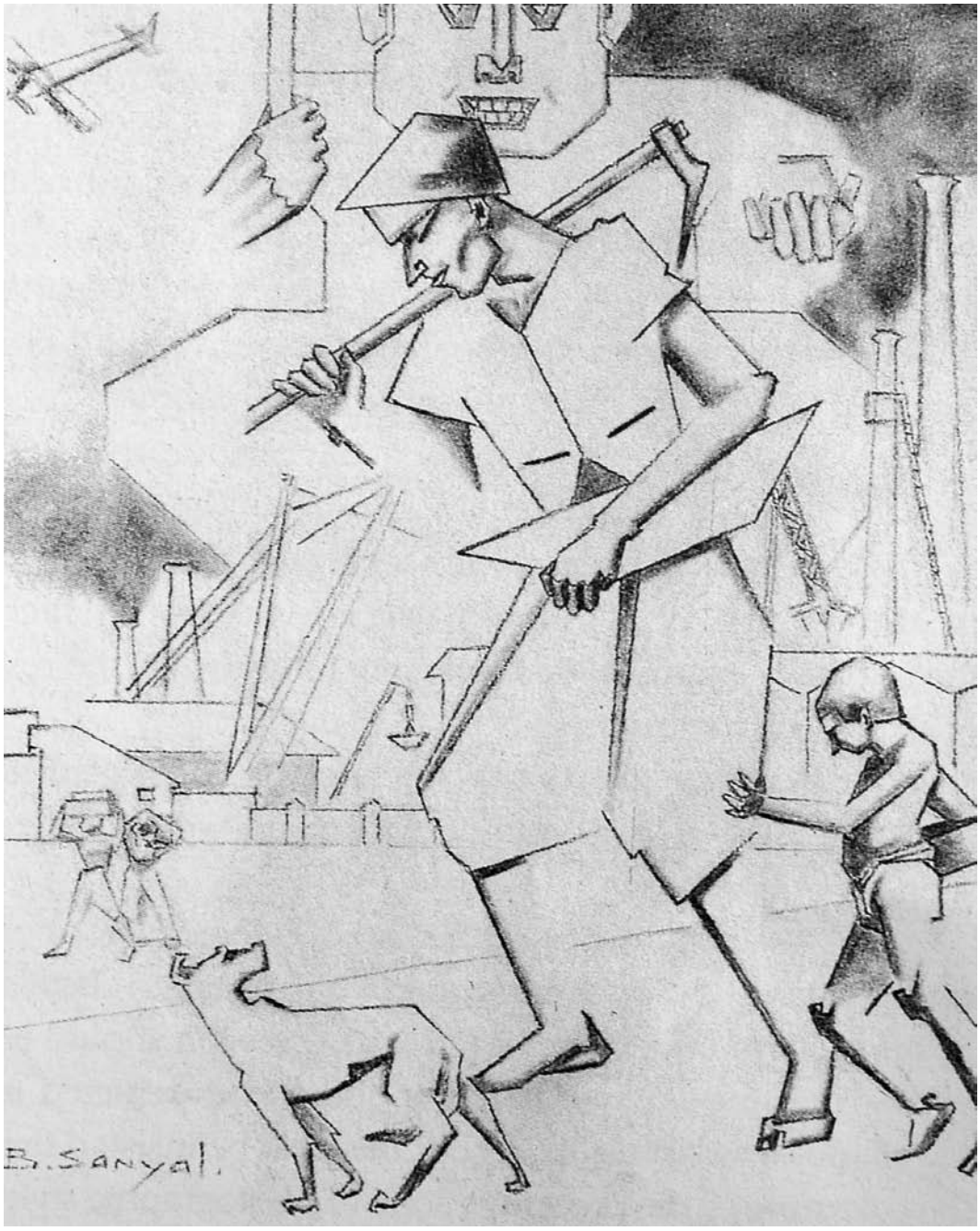

Figure 6.1 B. C. Sanyal, *The Worker*, Pencil drawing (1944).

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Interview with Swatantra Prakash, November 15, 2007.
Interview with Bandita Ukil, January 3, 2008.

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