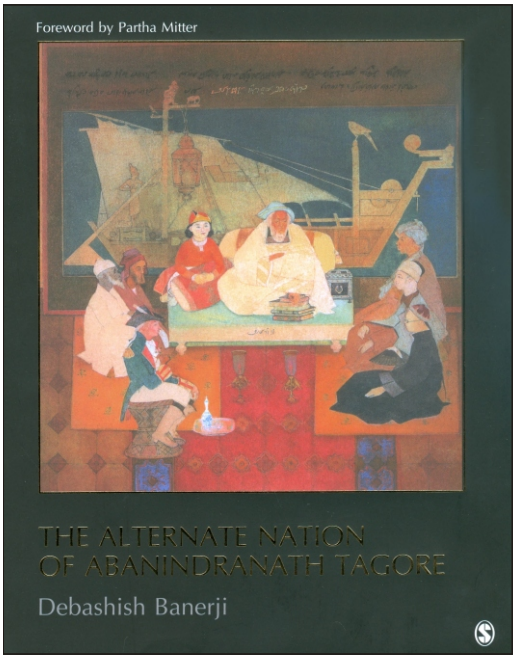

THE ALTERNATE NATION OF ABANINDRATH TAGORE

DEBASHISH BANERJI

December 2009 | **180mm X 250mm**
228 Pages | **Hardback**
978-81-321-0239-7 | **£ 47.50**
Includes 33 colour illustrations

The Alternate Nation of Abanindranath Tagore provides a revisionary critique of the art of Abanindranath Tagore, the founder of a 'national' school of Indian painting, popularly known as the Bengal School of Art. It categorically argues that the art of Abanindranath, which developed as part of what has been called the Bengal Renaissance in the 19th–20th centuries, was not merely a normalization of nationalist or orientalist principles, but was a hermeneutic negotiation between modernity and community, geared toward the fashioning of an alternate nation, resistant to the stereotyping identity formation of the nation-state. It also establishes that his art—embedded in communitarian practices like kirtan, ālponā, pet-naming, syncretism and storytelling through oral allegories—sought a dialogic social identity within the inter-subjective contexts of locality, regionality, nationality and trans-nationality.

This book is well-illustrated with many of Abanindranath's creations. It will be a rich reference work for students, researchers and academics from various subject areas such as arts and humanities, sociology and cultural studies, and would be precious for artists, art collectors, connoisseurs, museums and art galleries.

Contents

About the Author

Debashish Banerji is a great-grandson of Abanindranath Tagore and holds a Ph.D in Art History from the University of California, Los Angeles. He is a professor of Indian Studies and the Educational Co-ordinator of the University of Philosophical Research, Los Angeles. He also serves as an Adjunct Professor of Art History at the Pasadena City College and at the department of Asian and Comparative Studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco.

He has curated a number of exhibitions including, "Divine Carriers: Recent Art from India and Nepal," at the Laband Art Gallery, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA (1998); "Contours of Modernity: Contemporary Art of India," at the Founder's Hall, SOKA University, California (2005); "Yamato-e: The Journey of Japanese Painting," at the Kala Kendra, Auroville (2006) and "The World of Ajanta," at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Art Gallery, Puducherry (2008).

SAGE Publications Ltd
1Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP, UK
T: +44 (0)20 7324 8500
F: +44 (0)20 7324 8600
W: www.sagepub.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

ABANINDRANATH TAGORE (1871–1951) IS RECOGNIZED IN MAINSTREAM HISTORIES AS THE FOUNDER OF A "NATIONAL" SCHOOL of early 20th-century Indian painting, known more commonly today as "the Bengal School." The "national" basis of this art, in its turn, has been read by several modern scholars as derived from Orientalist constructions of an Indian art history by figures such as E. B. Havell (1861–1934) and Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947). In this work, I have argued against such a perception, drawing a distinction between stereotypical and alternate forms of cultural nationalism in the process. My contention is that the central concern in the art of Abanindranath Tagore is not the normalization of nationalist or orientalist principles, but a critical engagement with post-Enlightenment modernity as the underlying paradigm behind colonialism and nationalism, anticipating the objectification and fragmentation implicit in its order and countering these with a seeking, on the one hand, for transcendence or individual autonomy and on the other, a creative communitarian intersubjectivity.

In this, I take the fragmented subject of modernity as constituted by a variety of distinct discourses corresponding to lived and imagined communities. Modern capital's teleology, progressing toward globalism, establishes its regime institutionally through nation-states and symbolically through the modern metropolis. Calcutta, the earliest urban seat of British colonialism in India was the site of a number of such coexisting discourses with their specific trajectories during the late 19th and the early 20th century and within this contested territory, Abanindranath Tagore made his art practice into a variety of negotiations between modernity and community. These discourses, brought into engagement by Abanindranath in his person and his art work, included his Jorasanko family community, Bengal regionalism as exemplified through the Bengal School of

Art and the complex movement of cultural politics today known as the Bengal Renaissance, Indian nationalism, pan-Asianism and international Orientalism.

Post-colonial cultural studies on turn-of-the-century India have tended to conflate these domains, prioritizing a hegemonic Orientalism as determinative in the production of homogenized models of nationalistic resistance. Thus individuals, local schools and regional, national and transnational movements have all tended to be reduced to stereotypical collusive agents of Orientalism. Though the imbrication and entanglement of these domains is undeniable, I believe they need to be viewed as distinct discourses, mediated through individual and creative choices of self-identifying acceptance and rejection.

Looking at the different stylistic and thematic periods of Abanindranath Tagore's painting, this study locates the artist as a creative agent within these intersubjective contexts of locality, regionality, nationality and transnationality, engaged in a process of hermeneutic negotiations between modernity and pre-modernity. Through an investigation of these phases, I show that Abanindranath's art practice yields a variety of strategies for producing a hybrid dialogic space and an ongoing transformative praxis which I theorize as an alternate nationalism. Thus, this study is equally about the creative production of this cultural space and attempts to develop the theoretical tools to make visible the liminal negotiations involved in the production of this space along with the strategies and conditions for its creation and maintenance; and indicates the necessity of its dialectical co-existence with the institutional space of the nation-state as a corrective to nationalistic stereotyping and a critical force toward the continuous revision of the national identity construct.

A BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY

Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951) was an artist who lived in the colonial urban center of Calcutta, at a time when India was under British rule. As part of a widespread manifestation of Indian cultural politics around the turn of the 19th/20th century, Abanindranath Tagore is well known as the founder of an art movement, later to be called the Bengal School. Rising to prominence in the early decades of the 20th century, largely through the dual promotion and patronage of British Orientalist and Indian nationalist interests, Abanindranath and his disciples came to exemplify a "national style," closely related to the popular establishment of the discipline of Indian Art History.

As a matter of fact, the art of Abanindranath Tagore was a selective engagement with modernity through strategic and performative choices based on modern constructions of an "Indian classicism," a pan-Asianism of Japanese origin and a regional and local cultural history. A strong individualist and subjectivist

sensibility characteristic of modern authorship was made the center of a somewhat arbitrary stylistic identity construct, miniature watercolor paintings based on the "wash" and the rhythmic line, which came to characterize the Bengal School. As a polemical construct, the Bengal School came to represent a break from the prevailing norms of Western academic naturalism, and espoused alternate subjective and spiritual standards of aesthetics and art-creation. In this, the claims of national authenticity were made for its art and it was appropriated by the Indian nationalist struggle for liberation from British rule.

Even during its ascendance, however, controversy surrounded the issue of the legitimacy of its principles, and public debates raged regarding its desirability. The art of the school was castigated for its revivalism, its subjectivism and its "effeminacy." A medley of powerful forces were in its favor and by the 1920s, most of Abanindranath's students had been appointed heads of art colleges all over the subcontinent, thus effectively establishing the national hegemony of the Bengal School of Art. But this hour of glory was short-lived, as the entry of Western avant-gardism from the 1930s brought its own Euro-American subjectivist canons of form and taste and critical opposition to bear against the attempts of the Bengal School. The rhetoric of this new internationalist and modernist idiom was soon instrumental in ushering a period of artistic experimentation throughout the country. The pejorative evaluation of revivalism, traditionalism, effeminacy, spirituality, sentimentality and preciosity were reinvoked against the Bengal School and it was effectively marginalized.

However, Abanindranath's premier student, Nandalal Bose (1882–1966), was exceptionally influential as the head of the Kala Bhavana (Art House) at the artist's uncle, Rabindranath Tagore's Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan. Through the protean work of Bose, and his tutoring of many students, the Bengal School lived on and continues to influence contemporary artists in India, particularly in Bengal. These artists, though, are mostly isolated to localized domains of practice, and find little voice in the dominant concerns of the contemporary mainstream. Post-modern expressions, focused mainly on material, social, political, sexual and religious oppressions within the contemporary post-colonial nation, have replaced the modernist avant-gardism of the mid-century. From the intellectually privileged vantage of these more immediate and worldly discourses, the Bengal School, with its "traditional," mystical and aesthetic concerns, seems impossibly distant, conceptually and temporally, an aberrant instant of colonial history, fated for obsolescence and oblivion.

Part of the intention of the present work is to stimulate a critical revisioning of the art of Abanindranath Tagore. Though I do not view creative or subjective agency as a qualitative essence outside of the social constructs which are its bounding and expressive contexts, I also do not believe that such bounding contexts can be identified with agency. In the case of Abanindranath, I have tried to

isolate agency from the concerns of orientalism, nationalism, pan-Asianism and regionalism (Bengal Renaissance, Bengal School) and local or domestic cultures, and study the strategic and performative choices of such agency in fashioning a dialogic intersubjective and intercultural communitarian space. In doing this, I question the prevailing locus of post-modernism, drawing on the importance of situated histories and their engagements with lived and imagined community constructs as part of a continuous reworking of accumulated collective subjectivities.

The stylistic stereotype characterizing the Bengal School forms only a temporary phase in this engagement, one marked by specific subjective and strategic concerns, which I try to explore. The identification of this stereotype with Abanindranath Tagore is shown to be a reduction, though its existence and furtherance is not denied. Here also, the canons of taste applied to castigate and marginalize this production demands our critical assessment. A virile heterosexual masculinity as the defining aesthetic of the realized nation, as expressed in the dominant temporality of India's hour of independence has no absolute merit. Historically, it may be compared to British Victorian norms, against which late pre-Raphaelitism developed its vocabulary of cherubic adults or to post-Song China, which consistently devalued the melancholy productions of the Southern Song court, which, in turn, inspired the 'national' aesthetic of *mono-no-aware* in Japan. These historical analogies are not without relationship with the Bengal School. Both the late pre-Raphaelitism of Burne-Jones and his descendents and the modern adaptations of *mono-no-aware* of the Japanese nationalist *Nihonga* school played their part in the fashioning of Abanindranath's artistic subjectivity and consequently, that of the Bengal School. "National taste" is a relative and temporal matter of rhetoric and politics. Qualitative judgements on art are the stock-in-trade of the art critic who is blind to the historically constructed nature of his/her own preferences of taste; the art historian is more interested in the social conditions and semiotics of aesthetic production and thus in dislodging the absolutist *doxa* of prevailing taste.

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS: BENGAL RENAISSANCE, ORIENTALISM, NATIONALISM

Over the last two decades, much critical attention has been turned to a consideration of the anti-colonial cultural politics associated with the turn-of-the-century struggle for Indian independence, particularly in what has been termed the Bengal Renaissance, within which Abanindranath and his school have been categorized. This attention has followed in the wake of the application of Foucauldian anti-foundationalist thought to colonial and national

culture studies, in critiques such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983). The rising specter of religious neo/ultra-nationalism in India has added urgency to these considerations, its roots being sought in representations of the nation fashioned at the turn of the century in the "Bengal Renaissance." Prime examples of such representations have been identified as the Neo-Vedantist inclusivism of Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Neo-Tantrik invocations of unconditional surrender at the altar of the nation envisioned in the image of the Mother Goddess.

Indian nationalism itself, ideologized culturally in a certain strand of the Bengal Renaissance and its political extension, revolutionary extremism, has been viewed by a growing number of scholars following Said as an introjected form of Orientalism—the Western anthropological mythology of an eternal and essentialized India, the spiritual opposite of the material West.[1] Other-worldly, exotic and idealized, this India is seen as an ahistorical substantialized agent, monolithically unified by the totalitarian doctrinal structures of Hinduism, a zoological preserve of colonial fantasy, incapable of historical change or structural rupture initiated by indigenous individual agency. Seen in this light, the so-called anti-colonial cultural resistance of the Bengal Renaissance (and its constituent parts, such as the Bengal School of Art) becomes, in reality, a compliance with colonial goals by a swallowing of the epistemological opium-bait of its most advanced disciplinary agents, the Orientalists.

Of course, not all scholars view the cultural phenomenon of the Bengal Renaissance in this light, and many variant interpretations and emphases continue to complexify this broad narrative. Specifically, a number of Indian post-colonial scholars have questioned the essentialized wholesale projection of Orientalism on the phenomenon of nationalism, denying all creative agency to Indians in their reception, assimilation and transformation of Western thought.

Without going into detail, I may mention here the work of Partha Chatterjee (1986, 1993) and Sudipta Kaviraj (1995), both of whom have dwelt with some attention on the novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who has been considered one of the literary founders of the Bengal Renaissance, and whose novels were highly influential in subsequent national liberation movements in Bengal. Partha Chatterjee devotes a chapter to Bankim Chandra as the exemplar of the nationalist "moment of departure"[2] and Kaviraj presents a full-length critical study of his writings in the book *The Unhappy Consciousness* (1995). In Chatterjee's work, Bankim's ironic mimicry of the British categoric net of exclusive social definitions is compared with the indigenous "fuzzy" potential of words,[3] as an example of alternate forms of consciousness present in early nationalist thinking. Kaviraj's defence of Bankim's reformist tendencies is aimed at showing how post-Enlightenment positivism has been selectively incorporated into Hindu religious ideology by Bankim, so as to make it adaptable to

modernization, while yet retaining its transcendental bias. However, both these scholars become apologetic when considering Bankim's last novels, where explicit images of war and revolution accompany an ideology of the nation seen as the Mother, to whom her "children" are asked to sacrifice themselves.

This image is particularly significant for our consideration, since it becomes one of the keynotes of political activity in turn-of-the-century Bengal, Bankim's poem *Vande Mataram* (Hail, the Mother) becoming the anthem of Bengali revolutionary extremism. Significant too, since as part of the anti-partition movement of 1905, Abanindranath's iconizing of the figure of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India, Plate I.1)[4] and the utilization of his painting in a political rally, has been held as a sign of his complicity with the project of Hindu nationalism. This form of unthinking monolithic Hindu inclusivism would leave the Muslim alienated and disenfranchized, it is argued, leading inexorably to communal confrontation and national fragmentation.

However, Sugata Bose, a contemporary historian of modern India, has drawn attention to the local and regional conditions of iconic creations such as those of Bankim and Abanindranath.[5] In both cases, Bose points out; it was not *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) that was originally invoked, but *Banga Mata* (Mother Bengal), the representation of a unified regional linguistic community. Originally serving local cultural and political needs, it could be extended as a voluntary "gift" to the national cause as a federalist, not an uniformitarian gesture. Moreover, the cultural consciousness of Bengal prior to the appearance of nationalized communal politics was one in which the image of the Mother Goddess had a strong emotional charge to Hindu and Muslim alike. Powerful poems to the Mother Goddess were written by the leading early 20th century Bengali Muslim poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and the more recent struggle for liberation of Bangladesh revived the entire turn-of-the-century corpus of patriotic Bengali songs, including the large number of those visioning the region as the Mother. The political ideology of the leaders of the revolutionary extremism that accompanied the Bengal Renaissance, such as Aurobindo Ghosh and Bipin Pal, has also been shown by Bose to be uncompromisingly pluralist in conception, following ideas of localized autonomy in the structuring of pre-modern Indian subcontinental empires.[6] One may draw the conclusion from Bose's work that the forms of cultural and revolutionary politics that constitute the discourse of what has been called the Bengal Renaissance, are to be read more carefully, in their regional and communitarian contexts as *distinct* from national ones, their innovative adaptations to the exigencies of Westernization and their selective care in the constitution of heterodox identities.

Another scholar who commends himself by his resistant readings of Orientalism in the modern Indian context is Wilhelm Halbfass. Though his work on

turn-of-the-century Bengal is primarily addressed to aspects of its philosophical and religious thought, he sees the selective acceptance of Orientalist ideas by Bengali Hindu thinkers, such as Vivekananda, as dialogic strategies aimed at a mutually transformative enterprise of survival through innovation. In this, however, he warns of the inequalities of the dialog, tracing Said back through his forebears to Heidegger and his idea of the inexorable "Europeanization of the earth." On the Indian side, he disagrees with the followers of Said who believe that the notion of a Hindu "tradition" was a 19th-century Orientalist construct, a reification internalized by Indian Hindus for nationalistic reasons. For him, this (mis)understanding reveals an inadequate study of the history of self-identification in India. Although Halbfass rejects the notion of Hinduism as an ahistorical essence, he nevertheless affirms a continuous tradition or "cluster of traditions" which share(s) an identity that has persisted through historical transformations. Referring to his major historiographical and hermeneutical treatise, *India and Europe* (1988), he says:

> I have tried to record and understand how people who called themselves *arya* and identified themselves as guardians of the Veda and legitimate residents of *bharata* (or, earlier, *aryavartha*) responded to others, outsiders, both within "South Asia" and abroad, how this ancient sense of identity and otherness was transformed and yet reaffirmed through the vast array of intersecting traditions which we call Hinduism, and how it lives on even in the radical reinterpretations of modern Hindu thought.[7]

This understanding of religion and philosophy can be extended to the cultural representations of the Bengal Renaissance. To do this, a disciplined avoidance of monocultural readings, privileging an Orientalist or other Eurocentric discourse and its methodological replacement by a hermeneutics of hybridity, based on an identification of intersecting domains of culture is necessary.

In the field of Indian Art History, approaches such as those of Bose or Halbfass, which might be termed post-Orientalist, are not so readily in evidence. Particularly, in the study of the Bengal School, two major and comprehensive works in the English language that have appeared in the last decade are Tapati Guha-Thakurta's *The Making of a New "Indian" Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, 1850–1920* (1992) and Partha Mitter's *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850–1922* (1994). These narratives have viewed Abanindranath and his students principally as a school of nationalist artists, in whom the polarization between a "material west" and a "spiritual east," typical of Orientalist thought, became the major issue. Mitter, in his Prologue, acknowledges most of the reductionist concerns I have outlined above. He cautions against the reliance on universal standards in the analysis of art and against the neglect of context and agency in favor of external narratives. In his words:

> The limitations of concentrating solely on western influence, whether viewed as a civilizing or a destructive force, lie in relegating the artist to a passive role. It simply fails to take into account the complex and discriminating relationship between an artist and his intellectual sources. Therefore, until and unless one goes beyond western representations as such and turns to the colonized themselves, they will continue to be deprived of an authentic voice.... I prefer to focus on the relations between western art as a specific source in the colonial era, and its cultural transformations by Indian artists—while accepting that the options before the Indian artist existed within the confines of colonial hegemony.[8]

However, in his treatment of the Bengal School, though he marshals an impressive and encyclopedic store of information on the period and the interactions among artists, critics and patrons, the subjective topography of the art as a creative negotiation remains largely sketchy and limited to Orientalist and Victorian motivations. This happens, I believe, because the local and traditional conceptual histories of the art remain concealed and untheorized. This approach is even more pronounced in the work of Guha-Thakurta. Moreover, in both these works, but particularly the latter, the emphasis has been placed on a historical study of the politics of promotion and patronage whereby an invented Orientalist taste was normalized as nationalist culture and hegemonically inscribed into the public consciousness.

Whereas I do not discount the importance of Orientalism and nationalism as motivating influences in the work of Abanindranath and his disciples, I feel that an exclusive reading along these lines is overly simplistic and does not capture adequately the locus of Abanindranath's subjectivity or the importance of his work. This locus is constituted by a number of distinct domains—mainly an indigenous discursive field of heterodox Bengal mysticism filtered and modernized as part of a Jorasanko Tagore culture, extending itself into engagement with discourses of national identity, international Orientalism and continental pan-Asianism and marked by a striving toward the fashioning of a communitarian dialogic space within the discourse of modernity. My contention is that this discursive space was also the locus of an alternate nationalism, existing in creative and performative social choices outside of and alongside the institutional space of the emerging nation-state. The representations of such subjectivity were deliberately ambiguous, resisting reduction through a shifting deployment of personas, expressing transcendence and hybridity.

By paying close attention to these performative choices in the art and life of Abanindranath, and by developing the necessary theoretical tools, I have tried to bring to light this otherwise concealed dimension of an alternate cultural nationalism. In the context of Orientalism and nationalism as determining forces in the representations of Abanindranath, my aim has also been to question the limits of the prevailing descriptions of these paradigms, to reprioritize a regional discourse, to explore the untranslatable liminalities and refractions arising from

the dialogic collision of prefabricated alien ideologemes and to return agency to the artist in the fashioning of a (post)-modern subjectivity.

COMMUNITARIAN CONCERNS

To accomplish these aims, it is necessary to disengage the contextual focus from the nationalist moment of Indian history and extend it both forward and backward—toward its post-colonial future and its premodern past. A paradigmatic post-Enlightenment modernity, impacting India via colonialism, had already initiated radical changes in art theory and practice as a disciplinary subset of a system of civilizational changes. Calcutta, being the earliest center of colonial power, had been at the vanguard of these changes, with the emergence of a Western-educated native elite, the *bhadralok*, and its entry into the educational, administrative and commercial circuits of the colonizers. The objectification of civil society, with its characteristic subject-formation and the division into private and public spheres was well on its way to subsuming the native population. In the field of art, annual art salons, changes in patronage and the presence of European artists and art teachers had given birth to the artist as a new elite professional, imbued with the aura of genius; and a culture of connoisseurship with the art critic, historian and collector as its high priests. This was in marked contrast to the practice of art in precolonial India, where the artist, *chitrakar*, had a subjugated social and economic status, belonged to a caste-based often hereditary community, underwent a tradition of oral tutelage and was professionally employed. In this light, Tapati Guha-Thakurta has rightly pointed out that Raja Ravi Verma (1848–1906) can very well be thought of as the first modern Indian artist,[9] marked by individuality of choice and social elitism. But it is really the emergence of cultural nationalism in Bengal at the turn of the 19th/20th century that awoke a critical consciousness in the Indian artist and a need to engage with the cultural dichotomies of an alien civilization.

This, in its turn, is to be perceived as part of a larger culture of social questioning and creativity, that has been termed the Bengal Renaissance. Forming that liminal layer of native society, sandwiched between modernity and premodernity, the *bhadralok* sector characterizing this culture found itself at the critical and creative cusp of a discourse marked by specific concerns and dialectics rooted in a living regionality and an emerging (trans-)nationality. It is important to recognize at the outset that what goes by the name of the Bengal Renaissance is not a monolithic substantialized subject, nor a conspiracy. Further, as a discourse we cannot treat in isolation its indigenous constitution. Even if we try to locate its origins in the dialogic mix of colonialism, Orientalism and nationalism, we must recognize that each of these convenient categories are not

in themselves unfrgamented and carry a variety of orientations and attitudes with echoes and dissonances making up the multi-stranded and hybrid nature of the discourse constituted by them.

Following Dipesh Chakrabarty, what I find interesting in this mix is a strand of communitarian culture seeking to adapt a traditional village sociality into urban and modern terms.[10] Intervening between the pre-modern and the modern, this aspect of the cultural constitution of the Bengal Renaissance, while acknowledging the inevitable isolation of the individual as the subject-citizen of the nation-state, sought to ground individualism in the intentional choices and practices of a living communitarian habitus, so as to socialize a liminal state of praxis between modernity and pre-modernity.[11] By locating Abanindranath Tagore's art practice within this strand of the Bengal Renaissance, I see him as a modern agent seeking local and communitarian homologies for the larger emergent discourses of region, nation, continent and world, thereby aiding in the worlding[12] of these abstract discourses. Thus, such practices can be seen as resistant to nationalism, even while constituting it and from this vantage, post-modern and post-colonial.

The modern artist in the West, if one is to periodize cultural modernism by the awakening of a radically critical consciousness turned on the ontology to teleology of post-Enlightenment modernity by the mid-19th century, shares with Abanindranath, the cultural conditions and consciousness of art production. The engagement of such a critical consciousness may lead to a very large variety of approaches, as evident in the continuing manifestations of modern and post-modern art. The rapid and unending succession of forms and movements of modern and contemporary art is itself an aspect of this engagement and points to the operation of a dynamic, whose engine propels the engagement. At least one understanding of this restlessness of the spirit of art in modern times is its need to operate dialectically with modernity by remaining on its periphery. Art thus becomes a critical praxis which sidesteps its co-optation by the intellectual bastion of modernity, the academy, powered by capital and the nation-state, through a refusal to be defined/identified/classified. Movements or concerns of contemporary art are, therefore, strictly temporal, co-constituted by criticism and creativity as political gestures confronting the established order of modernity and erasing themselves as soon as they become assimilated through academic normalization, art critical or art historical journalism, collectorship or museology.[13] Art production here can be seen as performative and programmatic, and the printed or spoken word that often accompanies the image as part of the self-declaration of the artist or movement must be read as inseparable from it and co-constituting it. Manifestos, explanations, annotations and commentaries are an endemic part of the production of a modern artist and have to be seen in this polemical and performative context. Abanindranath's body of work is symptomatic of this, both in terms of the repeated reinvention of form

and meaning in his art and the large body of text produced by him, in its varied relation to his art.

Moreover, mid 19th-century Europe presents an initiatory moment in the critical engagement of art with modernity, the optimistic beginnings of modernism, where the artist assumed the self-assured stance of prophet and believed in the power of creativity to constitute an alternate modernity. At the same time, this heightened sense of individual mission has often co-existed with an awareness of the destruction of community and the alienated objectification of the, individual with the consequent need to redefine the social ontology of the artist and the social role of art. An example of an early modern (some would say proto-modern) art movement sharing these concerns is that of the Pre-Raphaelites and their more wide-ranging successor, the Arts and Crafts proponents of late 19th-century England. In both these movements, there is both a looking-back and a looking-forward—the nostalgia for a bygone European medievalism with its spiritual and communitarian ground and a will to refashion modernity through the creation of integrated environments, resistance to mass production, and the incorporation of natural forms and shared meanings and ideals into everyday objects. Such concerns also surface later, in the first quarter of the 20th century, in creative communities, such as the Bauhaus in Germany, where an acknowledgement of individualism and the ubiquity of technology is combined with the seeking for a non-ethnic and non-symbolist functional aesthetic of form and material designed by and put at the service of communitarian societies fashioned metaphorically as modern adaptations of medieval social forms.

Critical concerns of this kind are also to be found in the communitarian strand of the Bengal Renaissance and in the field of art, throughout the work of Abanindranath Tagore and some of his followers. In fact, ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement were from the outset powerfully present in Abanindranath's artistic expression through his intimate connection with E. B. Havell, principal of the Government College of Art, Calcutta and other prominent Indophile collaborators of the Arts and Crafts movement, such as Ananda Coomaraswamy, considered by many as the father of the academic discipline of Indian Art History; while Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Abanindranath's uncle and one of the key figures of late 19th-century Bengal Renaissance, founded a creative and educational community at Santiniketan for which he found affinities at the Bauhaus. This is to say that nationalism and its engagement with colonialism or Orientalism cannot be an exhaustive or even adequate frame for the understanding of the work of Abanindranath, which must be assessed more rightly in terms of its broader engagement with modernity for its post-modern or post-colonial agency.

A number of other attributes of Abanindranath's art, now explained in terms of nationalism or Orientalism, can also be viewed in these broader terms. That

art is representation and not imitation is an argument rehearsed repeatedly in the debates accompanying both Western modernism and the art of Abanindranath and the Bengal School.[14] Art as imitation of nature or naturalism/illusionism was born as a canonical form during the European Renaissance and in this prefigures the systematic objectification of reality that forms the epistemic shift of the Enlightenment and the age of modernity which has evolved from it. Illusionism places the viewer in the vantage of the subject and presents the world as the object of his conquest and enjoyment. The truth of the world is therefore a truth of surfaces and distances, perceived in its three-dimensionality and represented as perceived through the principled use of chiaroscuro, modeling and perspective. The third or depth dimension, in this case, projected onto the two-dimensional picture surface, serves the function of both distance and time, since it invites the fantasy of the duration of traversal. Disappearing into the receding mists of the perspectival vanishing-point, such duration evokes the teleology of the Enlightenment, the dream of an eventual omniscience and omnipotence and the colonial/Orientalist romance of infinite tourism, adventure and conquest.

In pre-Reniassance medieval Europe, art was held to be representational of a truth of religious ideas, iconic and eternally present. To the art history of the mid-19th century, fashioned in the shadow of Enlightenment evolutionism as part of its disciplinary apparatus, this art of medieval Europe marked an immature stage in the linear progress of civilization, which reached its perspectival or panoptic fulfillment only in the art of the Renaissance. In the totalized map of world history, the art of "non-western" peoples took their place alongside medieval European art, at various primitive stages of the flowering of the powers of artistic expression (as of human consciousness), adequately and canonically represented only in the Renaissance. Such a program of mapping essences in a teleology of progress prefigures and projects the political world conglomerate of nation-states hierarchically arranged with Europe (now Euro-America) at the civilizational summit of modernity, destined bearers of the omniscience and omnipotence of the "future" as the perspectival vanishing-point of a Hegelian "end of history."

From the late 19th century, art practices in Europe, whether through the exaggerated stylizations of Rosetti or Burne-Jones or the distortions of form and space in the works of the French post-Impressionists, set about to demolish the notion of art as natural illusion or truth as objectified reality. In England, *ideologues* connected with the Arts and Crafts movement, following William Morris, countered the trajectory of modernity with a call for an engagement of handicraft with the machine, a demolition of the distinction between arts and crafts, and for an integration of art into the built spaces of a communitarian context, as against its auratic isolation in art museums and galleries, the secular cathedrals of the modern world. Influential in determining art pedagogical policy in India, some of these thinkers espoused a revisionist art history, which decentered the

art of Renaissance Europe. The two most important figures, in some sense responsible for the construction of an Indian art history and close influences on the art of Abanindranath Tagore (at least in its early stages) were E. B. Havell and Ananda Coomaraswamy. In Havell's revisionary scheme, published in his *Open Letter to Educated Indians*, European art was categorized into three phases: spiritual (Middle Ages), intellectual (Renaissance) and material (post-Renaissance). Artistic decline came in the 17th century, heralding the "insincere art" of the 18th and finally, the "materialist" art of the 19th century. But the origin of the decline was to be found in the Renaissance, when art ceased to be communal. Havell berated the British-educated Indian for having succumbed to the Renaissance-centered values of "connoisseurship," thereby losing sight of the "spiritual" in Indian art.[15]

These views of thinkers like Havell and Coomaraswamy, though acting in opposition to the canonical art history of the West and the trajectory of modernity implicit in it, were nevertheless not unproblematic. We have already touched on the connotations of Orientalism which they lend themselves to—*(a)* the construction of India as a "spiritual" Other of the "material" West, an ahistorical essentialized mythical subjecthood constitutive of the abstract nation-state and *(b)* the effect of a principled exclusion of India from the possibilities of modern progress, thus leaving it vulnerable to both material and cultural exploitation by colonial powers. I agree that such a charge can, to some extent be brought on these thinkers, though it is arguable to what extent their "India" is ahistorically spiritual or devoid of materiality. Be that as it may, my concern here is to point to the affinities or homologues, outside of the categoric constraint of Orientalism, between the art practices of modern Europe, critical of the trajectory of modernity and those of Abanindranath and his students, fueled by similar concerns of cultural, epistemological and ontological resistance to and engagement with modernity. In both cases, we find an acknowledgement of the fragmentation of the individual and the homogenizing forces of nation and world and in both, an attempt to humanize these abstract spaces through communitarian innovations.

ALTERNATE ONTOLOGIES

The emphasis on the flatness of the image in the case of Abanindranath and the Bengal School, for example, has been construed as traditionalism or nativism, subserving a national interest. The art of Abanindranath is not unequivocally "Indian," nor unequivocally "flat." It certainly, however, poses a challenge to perspective and three-dimensional modeling and in this sense, may be thought of in alignment with similar conscious challenges being invented in the art

practices of European modernism. Similarly, the influence of a *Japonisme* in Abanindranath's art from 1904 is so pervasive and prominent, that I believe it would not be wrong to say that his work is more "Japanese" than it is "Indian." This Japanese influence has been recognized as emanating from Okakura Kakuzo's visit to India in 1902 and has been identified as part of a larger Orientalist pan-Asianism, projecting in this case a continental "spiritual" identity for "Asia" as "materialist" Europe's Other. Though a good case has been made for this to which there is no doubt merit, the diversity and range of stylistic and technical incorporations from Japanese art in Abanindranath's *Japonisme* invites viewing in terms aligned more closely to the seeking for an archive of alternate ontologies of seeing resistant to modernity in the pervasive *Japonisme* of Western modernism.

I would like to address at the outset in this introduction, three other specific characteristics of Abanindranath's art practice and a point of social ontology—the miniature format of most of his work, its textuality, its cultural eclecticism/hybridity and his subjective location as an artist.

MINIATURE FORMAT

From Abanindranath's painting of the "Krishna Lila" series in 1896, considered his moment of departure as an artist, almost all his paintings are made in a miniature format. Miniature paintings in India, associated with text illustrations, go back to Buddhist and Jain manuscripts of the 9th century and continue through the Mughal period into colonial times. Originally part of a religious context, they come to serve a courtly interest during the Mughal and post-Mughal periods. Since a distinction between the religious and the secular has little basis in South Asian history prior to its subsumption into world history after colonization, to speak of this courtly art as "secular" is liable to misunderstanding, unless we understand the term in the popular Indian sense as including the religious, but prioritizing the pleasure and entertainment of aesthetic engagement over sectarian devotional practice. In this sense Mughal art or even the post-Mughal Hindu art of the Garwhal hills (Pahari) can be called secular. Whereas the Buddhist and Jain manuscripts were primarily religious texts and even, in the case of Jain manuscripts, treated as sacred objects, Mughal painting, from Akbar's (r. 1556–1605) time begins to lose it subservience to text, moving from a domination of the pictorial page by text, to a dispensing of textual material and a collation into stand-alone picture albums for viewing pleasure by the time of Jahangir (r. 1605–27). Miniature painting during Mughal times, however, was not restricted to the courtly domain. The popularity and patronage of courtly art from Akbar's lifetime spawned a parallel economy of popular or "bazaar" art, which brought painting to mainstream population. From the above, it can be

seen why Abanindranath's choice of the miniature format along with his predisposition for texts has been taken as a sign of blind nationalistic revivalism, the fabrication of stylistic norms as part of an essentialized definition of "Indian" national art.[16]

Once again, though superficial stylistic features can be and have been taken by political nationalists, nationalist art historians and more recently, critics of nationalism in art, as markers of the construction of a homogenous nation-state, and though it is true that the entry of Abanindranath's students into positions of power in art pedagogical institutes throughout India by the 1920s tended to normalize such stylistic features into "national" markers, a closer investigation into the roots of such stylistic choices in Abanindranath may reveal the working of other concerns. Particularly in the light of the critique of modernity assimilated as a part of the communitarian strand of the Bengal Renaissance as well as the Arts and Crafts interests of Havell and others, the selection of the miniature format and the engagement with text points in the direction of a practice of viewership resistant to the objectification and connoisseurship implicit in the spectatorial gaze of galleries and museums. The painting as a wall object, bestowing the temporary illusion of the power of subjecthood to the spectator as part of modernity's panoptic mechanism is sought to be challenged by a non-perspectival art which invites a different kind of interaction based on community participation. As I will argue later, the agentive power of Abanindranath's paintings lies in their possession of a variety of potentia—so that while lending themselves to the viewership of art galleries and salons, they simultaneously invite a hand-to-hand interaction of intimate shared spectatorship.[17] The textual and folk-theatrical context of many of Abanindranath's paintings along with his choice of making found-wood toys presented in a performative context in the last decade of his life lend credence to this view of his art as calling for communitarian participation.

TEXTUALITY

On the issue of textuality, this factor seems ubiquitous to Abanindranath's art. Abanindranath was also a writer of children's fiction and neo-folk drama in a dense imagistic style,[18] creating fables and allegories that often retell standard historical and mythological tales in variant versions, and his paintings are often related to popular texts and/or carry textual inscriptions within them. Abanindranath telescopes this embedded textuality in his images from a variety of traditions—the narrative art of India, the haiku-doubled Japanese literati painting, the Pre-Raphaelite medievalism of Rossetti and Burne-Jones and the storytelling Mughal and Persian miniatures. This intimate transaction between text

and image (as also performance) works against the grain of the isolated specialization of art as object of visual connoisseurship that arises out of the European Renaissance and is further crystallized in the disciplinary boundaries of the academy rooted in the Enlightenment, and more specifically, the disciplines of art pedagogy, art history and art criticism. Thus, expectedly, this textual or literary quality was castigated, even in its time, for being "unpainterly." Even Coomaraswamy, earlier very sympathetic to the artist and his Bengal School, disassociated himself after the negative charge of "illustrative quality" was brought against their paintings by Roger Fry.[19]

Apart from this multi-sensory or anti-disciplinary quality of Abanindranath's "art" and its challenge to categorization, there is also the challenge to factual history posed by the interpretive ambiguities of allegory and fable. Benodebehari Mukherjee quotes the artist—"If words are pictures spoken, where sounds weld themselves into form, then painting is story in form (*rup-katha*) told by color and line."[20] The word *rup-katha*, which the artist uses in Bengali, can be better translated as fairy-story, fable or allegory. Thus the textual serves, for Abanindranath, less the function of the monumentalization of a standardized nationalist canon than an open-ended exploration of allegorical and untold possibilities within the mythic terrain, still wrapped in ambiguity and inviting the viewer to extend them in new directions. In this, we may recognize the difference between history as national myth as against history as fable or allegory. National myths populate the national imaginary with crystallized images which impress themselves through repetition into the canonical fixity of facts; fables and allegories belong to a popular or communitarian fluidity which appropriate the "facts" of history into lived spaces and times in the collective experience of locality, infusing them with a creative ambiguity which lends itself to reconstitution with changing experience. Thus, allegories, in this sense, are stories which are not patented, not authored or authorized, and which yield themselves to change in the retelling. Abanindranath often uses canonical texts of Orientalist or nationalist discourse, juxtaposing these with images and thereby setting up a dialectic between the two, which effects a commerce between imagined and lived communities, humanizing the abstract spaces of Orientalist or nationalist stereotypes.

LOCATING THE SUBJECT

Since the eclecticism or hybridity of Abanindranath's art is at the center of this present work, I will address the question of elitism before considering that of eclecticism/hybridity. Marxist art historians such as Krishna Chaitanya have theorized the art of Abanindranath in terms of bourgeois elitism.[21] More recently, one of the founders of the subaltern studies group, Partha Chatterjee, has dealt

at greater length with the elitism of the Bengal Renaissance, seeing its members in Gramscian power terms as occupying a middle ground between the ruling colonizers and the vast subject population of India, and the cultural politics of the Bengal Renaissance as motived by the need to construct a hegemonic domain of difference from which to wrest power and constitute a new hierarchic control over the "national" population. Of course, both Marxist and subalternist positions (I am loath to reduce the "subalternist" position to a unitary one, so I should perhaps restrict my attribution to Partha Chatterjee and others of the group who follow him in this ideological orientation) are committed to a teleology of emancipation based on stages of class oppression (whether such classes be understood in economic or cultural terms).

While it is impossible to deny that most members of the Bengali Renaissance, the Bengal School of Art and Abanindranath as a person, all belonged to the *bhadralok* class of elite/educated Bengalis, it should also be recognized that elite and subaltern classes alike are subject to modernity and its civilizational malaise and that the critique thereof must be launched from a position of its acceptance and an understanding of its epistemological and teleological biases. Chatterjee has characterized the *bhadralok* as occupying a position of subalternity relative to the British and a position of elitism relative to the uneducated Indian masses.[22] Following Homi Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty, I see this middle ground as a liminal hybrid zone and the cultural politics of figures such as Abanindranath as made up of dialogic negotiation and the constitution of hybrid identities in-between the modern and the communitarian. Such resistant social and cultural identities based in an ongoing praxis of mutually transformative hermeneutics cannot be restricted to a nationalistic power struggle achieving its end with the birth of the nation-state, but should be understood as a critique of the nation-state, viewed as a prime institutional site of modernity, and persisting in its resistance to such institutional hegemony.

An openness to this possibility of the cultural politics of Abanindranath could render visible a post-colonial or post-modern praxis coexisting with and in some sense undercutting a national and modern one. It would also allow us to recognize post-colonial cultural possibilities and practices opened up by the Bengal Renaissance which spill over its mutable class boundaries and create the conditions for a larger culture of liminal engagement with modernity, which may be thought of as an ongoing alternate nationalism. The possibility of such (an) alternate nationalism(s) and its/their characteristics is one of the aspects of the Bengal Renaissance I explore through the work of Abanindranath. In this, I would like to acknowledge the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty, another founder member of the subaltern group, who has taken some bold steps in this direction.[23]

The question of elitism relates to the larger question of individualism and the subjecthood of the modern artist. Modernity itself may be premised on the

birth of the individual subject (or vice-versa) and the individuality of the artist is ascribed a privileged value within it—that of genius, that incalculable immanent substitute for the Divine, corresponding to the art work as substitute icon and the art gallery or museum as cathedral in a godless secular world. This, at least, is modernity's ascription at its initiation or nascence in the Renaissance and part of its canonical and institutional apparatus, even while its forces press to flatten the individual into homogenous anonymity. The unity of the subject as rational ego is the philosophic definition of the human spawned by the Enlightenment and explicit or implicit in the thinking of its philosophers.

In modernism or what has been called the avant-garde in Western art we find a preservation and exaggeration of subjecthood resistant to homogeneity, but enabling a magnified idea of genius or prophet, constituting modernity from a position of self-styled exile or peripherality. At the same time, late 18th century philosophy begins questioning the autonomy of the individual and correspondingly, the world as factual object. This is particularly so in the thought of Nietzsche, for whom "there are no facts, only interpretations" and the truth of the individual subject is replaced by a universal will-to-power which fabricates fictions in the name of truth. However, though this undermines the rational autonomy of the subject, it leaves the human will prey to a biologism or vitalism which again gets prioritized in the case of the creative artist, site of the gigantic hubris of the superman.

Late 19th- and 20th-century philosophy has been in many ways an engagement with Nietzsche's revolutionary death-dealing to the primordial being of god and man. This has been accentuated by Freud's discovery of the power of the Unconscious and the further development of these ideas by post-structuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida. The individual subject is seen now as the fragmented site for a multiplicity of discourses, each with their own histories, epistemologies, fuzzy boundaries and linguistic ontologies. Moreover, individuality cannot be construed in isolation and is always relational and intersubjective. This shift in the understanding of the subject becomes the basis of what may be called post-avant-gardism or post-modernism in the cultural field. This constitutes a radical critique of post-Enlightenment modernity and the radical art practice which corresponds to it dismantles the privilege of the isolated genius of the artist and consequently the aesthetic aura of the stationary art object, replacing these with a notion of anti-art or art as a shifting temporal site of semiotic awareness and critique in the intersubjective field of colliding discourses.

Such a transition in the field of culture (in the present case, art) has been facilitated by the failure of modernism in the late 20th century, with the accelerating pressure for the erasure of differences and alternatives through the swiftly globalizing circuits of world capital. The reconstitution of the individual

in terms of intersubjectivity has had the effect of reintegrating him/her within community, not the pre-modern relatively closed community, whether tribal or rural but the post-modern habitus of rapidly changing localized space–times in a global world. Intersubjectivity however does not mean loss of agency but the dynamic negotiation of mutual choices in collective contexts. Recognition of intersubjectivity as the basis of identity is a transformative practice which wrests subjectivity from post-Enlightenment modernity and brings it to reside in collective interpretive negotiations, critiques and innovations, thus enabling a human inhabitation of modernity's space and time. Such a communitarian orientation carries within it an implicit creation of community through ontic practice, whether this is a widening community of choice, intentional community or the shared locality of anonymous modern neighborhood. In terms of art practice this has meant a turn away from the privileging of stand-alone aesthetic objects for individual spectatorship/connoisseurship in galleries, museums and collections to a variety of alternate temporal and often participatory practices such as installation, video, performance or interactive cyber arts.

In writing of Abanindranath as a subject we find a dialogic coexistence of modern and post-modern conceptions in his case. Located socially as a privileged *bhadralok* subject of colonial/national modernity, he exhibits the modernist traits of artist as hero or prophet, while simultaneously occupying a discursive position of regional subalternity, stemming from Bengali rural community life, where individuality is best seen as relational and intersubjective. This internal dialectic between the modern and the pre-modern also translates itself into an ongoing traversal of and negotiation between lived and imagined community spaces, dialogically tending toward a post-modern liminality.

Jorasanko

I have already touched on such negotiations as forming one strand of the Bengal Renaissance. Largely an urban cultural movement based in 18th/19th-century Calcutta and arising out of an engagement of the western educated *bhadralok* with colonial modernity, this communitarian strand of the Bengal Renaissance was socially located in houses where Bengali extended families settled to make a living for themselves with one foot each in modern and pre-modern worlds. Such families were often traditionally unstable and found the plurality and social uncertainty of the new urban space to be a creative advantage. Segregated into the "black part" of the town, Bengali families that prospered under these conditions felt free to proliferate, opening their doors to and extending their settlements with relatives, friends, marriage partners and servants from their rural homes. At the same time, their habitations often accommodated visits, official

and unofficial, from the white population of the town. Though these two worlds were often kept as separate as possible in the lives of many such *bhadralok* families, there were those who were enabled by this social condition to engage critically with both worlds, fashioning for themselves hybrid identities and alternate social formulations of modernity.

A prominent late 18th-century *bhadralok* family of this kind were the Tagores of Jorasanko. The Jorasanko Tagores could be said to have ascended to their highest *bhadralok* status during the time of Dwarkanath Tagore (1794–1846), great-grandfather of Abanindranath, whom a modern biographer Blair Kling has characterized as a "partner in empire" for his collaborative mercantile acumen.[24] The Tagores of Calcutta were outcaste Brahmins who had come to the city almost at its inception in the late 16th century as a trading post of the British to seek their fortune under its new social conditions, where their traditional stigma would offer no disadvantage. They had gradually risen into prominence and by the early 19th century, the Jorasanko branch of the family, headed by Dwarkanath, had become very socially and economically conspicuous in both white and native *bhadralok* circles of the city. Dwarkanath made himself at home in both worlds, using his wealth and prestige to cultivate contacts at the highest levels of white society, both in Calcutta and Europe and to employ Europeans in his service. At the same time, the extended family at Jorasanko, densely in-bred due to Brahmin ostracism, grew into an increasingly complex community of relations occupying two large three-storied wings or structures of the family house.

By the time of Abanindranath's childhood and youth, this community of Jorasanko Tagore relations had increased and diversified into a variety of attitudes toward modernity, which constituted a local habitus. Taking in its scope both the male and female populations of the house and ranging in response from orthodox denial to full-fledged acceptance, this habitus came to include a variety of creative and critical heterogeneous approaches to modernity which voiced themselves in an informal and quasi-formal dialog through conversation, recreation, social rituals, cultural performances and literary and artistic expression in house magazines, journals, books and exhibitions. Thus the extended family at Jorasanko could be seen as operating along both registers of the public sphere of modern civil society marked by individualized opinions and social contracts and the communitarian sphere of Bengali village sociality characterized by affective negotiations and communitas.[25] This internal transaction between modern and communitarian discourses within the Jorasanko house disseminated itself into the sphere of larger urban *bhadralok* culture through its journals, performances and exhibitions, helping thereby to co-create a social discourse on the threshold of modernity, challenging its progressivist universalism and the monolithic myths of nationhood through criticism and regional and communitarian allegories.

Rabindranath

In my study of this social phenomenon, I have drawn on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his theories of habitus and *doxa*.[26] *Doxa*, according to Bourdieu, are the unquestioned and unarticulated assumptions of a society, coded into its habitus as part of its cultural economy. In the case of the collision of cultures, such as with colonization, confrontation with alterity forces into consciousness the arbitrary nature of *doxa*, releasing them from conditioning agents into choices. In social practice, *doxa* then transform into the choices of orthodoxy, where they are now policed and made normative and/or of heterodoxy, where they are creatively handled and become sources for innovations in culture.[27]

Jorasanko family culture in the mid 19th century offers an interesting example of the operation of Bourdieu's theory of doxic practice. Subjective autonomy, critical consciousness, and democratic openness to the "other," Enlightenment constructs of liberty in the public space of modernity were pressed into close relation with the affective density and the dialogic and dynamic co-constitution of taste, fantasy and understanding characteristic of Bengali village community.[28] From the viewpoint of intersubjectivity, this provided fertile social conditions for creative agency within the family community, seen not as a closed traditional pre-modern formation united by clan ties of blood and matrimony but a net of relations constantly renewing itself through its cultural exchanges with widening outer circles of modern discourse. Initiated during Dwarkanath's lifetime, this was particularly the case around the turn of the 19th/20th century, when the cultural movement known as the Bengal renaissance could be said to have been at its peak and a political regional and national critique of colonialism was at its initial stage. A number of members of the Jorasanko household played prominent public roles in the cultural nationalism of this period, undoubtedly most important among whom was Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath's uncle. Already a leading figure in Calcutta literary circles by the end of the 19th century, Rabindranath was active in establishing institutions and instruments of cultural distribution and exchange relating the home and the world. In many ways, he could be seen as one of the founders of regional and national cultural identity while assimilating these into lived communitarian contexts. Apart from the Jorasanko house, where he set up clubs, magazines and performative spaces, he also established Visva-Bharati, an educational and creative residential community at Santiniketan in 1924.

Rabindranath's views and practice regarding nationalism are instructive in trying to arrive at an understanding of Abanindranath's attitude and subjectivity. Rabindranath, who actively participated in the cultural politics of Bengal and India during the Swadeshi period (1905–12), is said to have been disillusioned

with nationalism as a result of this experience, and wrote a number of anti-nationalistic essays.[29] Partha Chatterjee represents Rabindranath's "post-Swadeshi" view on Indian nationalism as being one that:

> …denied the centrality of the state in the life of the nation and instead pointed to the many institutions and practices in the everyday lives of the people through which they had evolved a way of living with their differences.… The true history of India lay not in the battles of kings and the rise and fall of empires but in the everyday world of popular life whose innate flexibility, untouched by conflicts in the domain of the state, allowed for the coexistence of all religious beliefs.[30]

Ashis Nandy acknowledges this view and points out that Rabindranath accepted the historical reality of nation as a sphere of shared cultural self-identification but opposed the nation-state.[31] In Chatterjee's view, Rabindranath's emphasis on the "everyday world of popular life" while treating the state as marginal leaves this life-world vulnerable to "the overwhelming sway of the modern state" or else must construe it to be an essentialized transhistorical reality.[32]

I do not believe Rabindranath was blind to the power or ubiquity of the nation-state, nor that he construed the everyday life-world (what I am calling the communitarian) as transhistorical. Well after the Swadeshi period and in spite of his anti-nationalistic articles, he kept a close watch on India's struggle for political independence and participated in Congress meetings. Rabindranath saw the emergence of the modern Indian nation-state as inevitable and necessary, simply since without it the Indian people would continue to be vulnerable to subjection by other nations. Through his poems, songs, plays and novels, he played an important part in formulating a cultural nationalism, knowing full well that national myths (including himself as the mythical author of these myths) were fated to an idealized existence projected by the exhibitionary apparatus of the nation-state to produce citizens subject to an essentialized history and identity. But at the same time by grounding these cultural productions in the specific intersubjective space–time of Jorasanko or Santiniketan communities, he made them part of living local histories, open to dynamic dialogic mutation and resistant to the monolithic histories of the nation.

This doubleness is further reflected in Rabindranath's self-representation. As a modernist subject, Rabindranath stood apart in a larger than life image of the poet as prophet, and yet in both his relationship to community and nation, he sought an alternate self-definition which escaped this isolated modernist self through alignment with relational cultural models which grounded the self in community. Accepting modern India as the hybrid site of Hindu, Muslim and European inscriptions and reading these histories as specific transactions in his own personal and communitarian history, he sought a self-representation through which he could locate himself critically at the confluence of all these

worlds—analogs that would be telescoped in his person. Rabindranath's prophetic self-image cultivated through physical appearance and costume referenced the pre-modern Hindu trope of the guru in his *gurukula* (he was widely referred to as *gurudev* and his community at Santiniketan termed by him an ashram or *gurukula*), as equally that of the master Sufi mystic with his disciples (his dress and appearance most strongly reminiscent of the *fakir*s of Bengal) or the medieval European *meister* with his apprentices (a model not unfamiliar in modernist Europe, for example at the Bauhaus). Admittedly, this relational self-definition, though made in the name of intersubjectivity and community, presented a pre-modern form of privileged hierarchy but given its historicity, the modern subject, not autonomous but hybrid and embedded in a communitarian social form, sets up a dialectic which prefigures the subject position of the individual sans privilege in post-modern community.

A similar conception for art and self could even more justifiably be claimed for Abanindranath, who was younger by 10 years to Rabindranath. Living in the shadow of Rabindranath, and promoted by Orientalist art critics/propagandists such as Sister Nivedita, E. B. Havell and Coomaraswamy, the artist along with his students, was recruited into the efforts of cultural nationalism during the Swadeshi period. His productions in the name of national culture, however, are not thematically obvious, as few of his paintings deal with mainstream Hindu myths, Hindu history or other themes of majoritarian national interest. The Swadeshi period paintings are also complicated by the fact of the influence of Japanese art historian and ideologue Okakura Kakuzo, his pan-Asian ideas and the influence of *Japonisme* as a set of new ontologies of seeing into the practice of Abanindranath and his students.

But the art historical construction of nationalism in Abanindranath's art, spearheaded by Havell and Nivedita, had rested more on a stylistic construction of Indian classicism than on thematic grounds. For Havell, the promotion of nationalism was closely tied to the revisionist project of contesting the Renaissance canon. A standard Orientalist reading may see this as the construction of a spiritual Orient to stand in as the "other" of a materialist Occident,[33] but we must not forget that Havell, with his Arts and Crafts roots, was part of Europe's own self-critique and his construct of an Indian art history was part of an attempt to restructure modernity. Nevertheless, as with all nationalist constructions, its aim was also in establishing stylistic standards for an "authentic" Indian art based on idealist principles. Abanindranath aided him ably in this project, drawing on Sanskritic knowledge to establish stylistic and ontological grounds for a national art practice. But as in the case of Rabindranath, this constitution of a national sphere must be seen in his case as coexisting with a communitarian drive which worked to translate the national essentialisms in terms of lived experience. The communitarian interest, in fact, arises in Abanindranath prior to his contact

with Havell or Okakura, with the first series of paintings based on the Krishna Lila done by him in a new style, which may be called his point of departure. These paintings may be seen to be in alignment with what I have called the communitarian strand of the Bengal Renaissance.

The paintings done after his contact with Havell and Okakura, which may more properly be called nationalist/Orientalist, betray a different kind of subjectivity and accordingly, a different location for the subject. The subject here is most often alienated and isolated, in keeping with the conditions of subjection to colonialism and modernity, but the artist seeks common resources within Indian and Japanese practices of seeing to turn this alienation into a strength, that of a transcendent liberation of the self, forming a dialectical polarity for autonomy and creative agency to the immersion of self in community and its affective order. The communitarian interest returns shortly afterwards, in a post-Swadeshi phase, with a variety of regional folk and family related themes. Thus Abanindranath's art can be seen to move between the subject positions that I have outlined as constituting Jorasanko familiality—that of degrees of autonomy corresponding to a variety of lived and imagined intersubjective domains dialectically related with an *advaitic* transcendental liberation at one pole, and a *Vaishnavic* anti-structural ecstasy of communitas at the other.[34]

Regarding lived and imagined communities, by the first I am referring to the communitarian shared domain of practices and present pasts of family and to some extent an extended regional community; while the imagined communities include the burgeoning discourses of regionality, nationality, continental identity and an international Orientalism. The artist as fragmented subject finds himself circumscribed by all these distinct yet intersecting discourses, negotiating his intersubjective agency at all these levels and bringing these negotiations to bear on his life and his art practice. Thus, the multivocality of his paintings both challenge any unitarian view of the imagined communities of nation or continent and ground these intersecting discourses in the lived affective and dialogic space-time of community. Moreover, contrary to the progressivist and evolutionary notion of the artist and his "work," Abanindranath's paintings touch a variety of concerns, often retracing their steps, and are marked by major discontinuities throughout his life as an artist; so any consideration of the artist's work in chronological fashion cannot but be frustrating if one is looking for an art historical progression.

As in the case of Rabindranath, the intersubjective and communitarian basis of Abanindranath's concerns extends not merely to his paintings or other "works of art" but to his self-representation (or following Foucault, to his self-creation as a work of art).[35] Though Abanindranath did not start a residential creative community or educational institution as did Rabindranath, he envisaged something similar and, outside of the Jorasanko community, existed within

a communitarian domain of artist–disciples. Here, like Rabindranath, he sought alternate hybrid models which would establish his subjectivity in relation to a creative community of artists, and found these in ancient Indian, Mughal, Japanese and medieval European sources. Thus, he too fashioned himself in terms of the Indian *gurukula* of artists as a master artist, *shilpaguru*, as a Mughal master artist or *ustad* as from Akbar's *karkhana*, as a Japanese literati or Zen artist-master and as an European *meister* in a medieval guild, utilizing all these pre-modern models to ground the individual practice of modernity in an inter-subjective and post-modern dynamic of self-creation as the creative play of autonomy and immersion. Records of at least two of these self-representations are to be found in portraits of the artist done by his students—as a *shilpacharya* or *shilpaguru* in the ancient Indian tradition by Mukul De and as a Japanese master artist by Nandalal Bose.

HYBRIDITY

This discussion of the location of Abanindranath as subject leads into the issue of the eclecticism or hybridity of his art works (as of his "self-creation"). Hybridity in colonizer–colonized relations has been introduced by Homi Bhabha to address more adequately its dynamics and effects. Challenging straightforward Orientalist readings, Bhabha reevaluates these relations through the invocation of psychoanalysis, as not coherent but conflictual in nature.[36] In Bhabha's analysis, this conflicted quality of Orientalism arises from the constitution of the "otherness" of its object analogically to the fetish. Thus, the Orient is approached on the one hand, through systematic acquisition of knowledge for its mastery, but on the other, as paranoia and fantasy in its irreducible alterity. In the fulfillment of its purpose, the eradication of the marks of difference through the reproduction in its own image of the colonized, it is haunted most strongly by anxiety in its otherness. Thus, the general act of imitation or mimicry on the part of the colonized becomes an anonymous destabilizing agent for the colonizer.[37] This pathology of Orientalism opens up, for Bhabha, the possibilities of anti-colonial resistance. If imitation haunts anonymously with its otherness, hybridity explicates the source of subversion by estranging identity through the sunken or denied aspects of the other. "When the words of the master become the site of hybridity … then we may not only read between the lines but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain."[38] Thus, according to Bhabha, the destabilization of identity in the colonizer is inherent to colonialism and further exacerbated through strategic usage by the colonized. Mikhail Bakhtin precedes Bhabha as a modern theorist of hybridity and its political implications. In Bakhtin's terminology, Bhabha's subversive hybridity was classed

as "intentional". In contrast to this, Bakhtin identified another type of hybridity, which he classed as "organic."[39] Developed on a linguistic model, "organic hybridity" was the unconscious basis of change in languages, a natural process of translation and assimilation between cultures. Though seemingly anonymous, such changes nevertheless could possess profound cultural implications—"they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world in words."[40] I would contend that Bakhtin's "organic hybridity," as a general dialogic phenomenon, originates in specific creative choices of intersubjectivity and therefore is not as unintentional or "organic" as it seems, though it may pass anonymously, by seepage into general discourse.

In the case of Abanindranath, we find the palimpsest of fractured histories—Aryan, non-Aryan, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, British and various variants and specters thereof—which constitute the emerging nation, implicated in a variety of comfortable and uncomfortable relations in each other, intentional and organic, and engaged in projects of transgression, translation and dialog. These pasts of the nation are nevertheless present in the intersubjective realities of both imagined (nation, continent, world) communities and lived (home, region) ones, coexisting and converging in the late 19th-century urban sites like Calcutta and in specific locations within them, such as Jorasanko. Thus the Orientalist interests of Havell, the pan-Asian interests of Okakura, the regional Tagore tradition of Vaishnavism, the neo-Transcendentalist Brahmo Hinduism of Debendranath and Rabindranath, the mark of Islam on the history of the Tagores, the technological innovations of modernizing Calcutta and the subaltern cultures of rural Bengal are all present in the lived everyday intersubjective order of Abanindranath's Jorasanko and form the multivocality of his own subjectivity as that of the Jorasanko household, the regional culture of *bhadralok* Calcutta, and beyond that, of the larger cultural spaces of Bengal and of India.

Abanindranath's paintings and art works become hybrid dialogic sites of this multivocality, expanding the viewer's critical awareness of their relationships of similarity and difference in the process. In Bakhtin's description, the stratified diversity of a nation, coexisting in an unintegrated but related plurality of cultures, *heteroglossia*, competes for survival and self-expression against the "posited unitary language" of the nation.[41] In art, such a unitary national voice is constructed most effectively through the discourse of a national art history. I have already pointed to the project of constructing an alternate classicism which the Indian art histories of Havell and Coomaraswamy attempted. This classicism saw its apogee in the Gupta period of the 5th century, where the canons of an "Indian" taste were crystallized. This canon was supposed to rest largely on Bharata's spiritual aesthetics of mood (*rasa*) and an idealist metaphoric order of expression. Though it is true that Abanindranath, particularly during the Swadeshi period mined the sources of Sanskrit classicism for a normative knowledge to inform

his art practice and that of the nation, and though some of these principles are at work even in his cultural borrowings and appropriations, these uses are seldom tied to an unitary national history and draw attention to varied practices of seeing coded into living cultural ontologies. Moreover the problematic of autonomy and intersubjectivity within modernity subsumes these stylistic concerns and the presence of the communitarian, drawing nationalized canons into lived and mutable contexts is seldom absent.

Beyond affective, metaphoric and stylistic canons, the art history constructed by Havell and Coomaraswamy could be said to have another more insidious element—that of an incipient Aryanism centering Indian culture within a classical Buddhist and Hindu orbit. I have dealt with Havell's Aryanism elsewhere,[42] and Coomaraswamy betrays a similar bias by completely dismissing Islamic culture in his *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*. As pointed out earlier, Abanindranath avoids this unitary racial or ethnic reading, his national intersubjective space being more a hybrid *heteroglossia* of related cultures with different histories attempting to unite at the communitarian level through dialogic creative agency and affective communitas.

NARRATIVE OUTLINE

This book consists of five chapters which look at the art of Abanindranath Tagore as sites of hybrid cultural production where the creative agency of the artist negotiates subjectivity between home, region, nation, continent, and world within the dialectic of modernity and community. The first chapter addresses Abanindranath's point of departure as an artist, drawing a connecting thread with the communitarian strand of the Bengal Renaissance and exploring the visual tropes he utilizes to achieve his ends. Most of the primary concerns which he was to carry with him throughout his life as an artist make their appearance from this very inception. These include performative engagements with textuality, hybridity and the seeking for a liminal space of resistance between modernity and community, which could provide the conditions for an alternate nationalism.

The second chapter addresses Abanindranath's nationalism and Orientalism and deals with his art production under the primary influence of E. B. Havell and Okakura Kakuzo. Here, a density of emotion and metaphoric representation become the new primary concerns in Abanindranath's paintings, considered an attempt to stylistically abstract and essentialize ahistorical features of an "Indian art." But as I point out in the first chapter, this density of emotion has other roots in the ontic strategies of resistant engagement with modernity, relating to the Bengal Renaissance and its isolation of a "body of feelings" and

the positing of a "feeling ordered rationality." Moreover, as discussed by Dipesh Chakrabarty, these devices, based in *rasa* aesthetics, relate to living habits of social practice coded into the language of popular regional culture, which determine imagination, seeing and being and to invoke them preserves these aspects of the cultural economy against the objectifying effects of modernity.[43] Though in this nationalist/Orientalist phase, Abanindranath's paintings seem to veer away from the communitarian emphasis of his "Krishna Lila" series toward a more modernist stance of the artist and art work as isolated entities, a recognition of the time-experience of modernity driven by the accountability of capital production yields an intersubjective autonomy of transcendence, which enables creative agency in both modern and communitarian contexts. By transcendence here, I am referring to practices which allow some ability of escape from determining discourses. Such practices could be ontic or phenomenological but in Abanindranath's case, they are often adaptations of diverse homologous cultural practices, thus enabling creative innovations extending traditions. The chapter looks at the formation of a national stylistic order under the influence of Havell and its complexification through hybridity and the fusing of visual habits of transcendence after contact with Okakura and his students. The popular Orientalist Persian text, the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, translated into English by Edward Fitzgerald, was illustrated by Abanindranath through the meat of the Swadeshi period (1906–11). I look at this series as a mature example of Abanindranath's Orientalist/pan-Asian/nationalist phase of painting in this chapter.

The third chapter turns to look at Abanindranath's engagement with regional subalternity and in a sense returns to some of the issues of performance and communitas introduced in the first chapter. In the case of the Krishna Lila, however, the theme, as discussed in the first chapter, carries both pan-Indian classical and regional classical and subaltern histories, which lend themselves to differences of reception and a dialogic interplay. But Abanindranath also addressed a number of themes of more specific regional and subaltern experience, which are explored in this chapter. The earliest of these is the "Actors and Actresses of Bengal" series done in the period 1911–20. This is followed by a brief consideration of his text *Bānglār Brata* (1919) which discusses the patterns made in female folk rituals and is considered the determining text for the popularization of these designs as a regional identity marker; and finally, the two late series of paintings *Kabikankan Chandi* and *Krishna Mangal* (1938), which illustrate folk religious texts of Bengal in a neo-folk style.

Primitivism has been a controversial aspect of modern art and these paintings of Abanindranath are open to criticism on these grounds. An elite aestheticization of the subaltern often parallels an internal orientalization of colonized bodies as a romantic exoticism which constructs the subaltern through the ideal of

its own optic, thus denying him/her self-representation. Alternately, the appropriation of subaltern/folk aesthetics by elite artists to fertilize the national imaginary with the fascination of its alterity has been read as another form of cultural capital, that of the other which the self consumes as "strange meat" and against which the self is defined. Abanindranath's representations of the subaltern must be read instead as part of the living intersubjectivity of his unsettled cultural constitution, a parodic subaltern self of Bhabha's mimicry which constitutes the middleness of the Calcutta *bhadralok* of the 19th/20th century as much as the civilized classicism, whether of the West or the East.

The "low" modernity and its enjoyments referenced by these paintings are a living part of the Jorasanko household in which Abanindranath participates though the aesthetic pleasure he takes in it now is internationally amplified through the lenses of the *Japonisme* of Heian *otoko-e* or "floating-world" prints and *Japonisme*-influenced French post-Impressionsim, such as that of Toulouse-Lautrec. Like the Baudelairian *flaneur* of 19th-century Paris or the *ukiyo-e* artist of early 19th-century Edo, who represents the masculine separated witnessing pleasures of modernity and whom Michel Foucault adulates for his distillation of eternity in the fleeting present, Abanindranath's representations of the folk-worlds of Bengali Calcutta betray a pleasure in the eccentric which captures the roving gaze and grounds the disappearing ephemerality of the modern floating world. But whereas the early nationalistic paintings are mainly concerned with the seeking for transcendence and autonomy within modernity's regime, these paintings represent the subject of modern urban Calcutta as both witness and participant, individual subject of modernity seeking liberation through the practices of phenomenological transcendence and subaltern performer of the collective immersion of communitas.

The fourth and fifth chapters theorize intersubjectivity as a meaningful construct embedded in Abanindranath's art practice and its communitarian implications. The fourth chapter begins with a consideration of another "Islamic" series of Orientalist interest, *The Arabian Nights* (1930), which foregrounds the theme of intersubjectivity within the modern urban sphere, and reads the text as an allegory of subversion of modernity's progressive teleology through a tangled plurality of intent. This is followed by a consideration of dynamic and creative practices of (post)modern intersubjectivity, which operate from an acknowledgment of the inexorable drift toward fragmentation and isolation implicit in modernity and seek to reconstitute community intentionally through such performances. Here, instead of drawing on a living pre-modern layer to constitute an ongoing dialogic hermeneutics of post-modernity, innovational creative practices are invoked to posit the relational self and invite a response in kind. Thus these art works come closest to the performative and assume the fullness of their meaning only in that cultural dimension.

I deal with these practices in the fifth chapter. Here, I look at Abanindranath's Mask paintings (1929–30) and his last artistic production, the found-wood toys or "relatives-in-wood," *kātum-kutum* (1940–50). Abanindranath painted portraits, mainly of family members and friends, from an early phase and by 1927 developed a unique Western-derived impressionistic style of portraiture. The portraits attempt to represent not so much the traditional Western norm of human character through realistic physiognomy, but some impression of subjective "essence" through the use of oil pastels on cardboard. The "gold" of the cardboard, shining through the pastel surface provide a "glow" to the portrait, rendering it in effect, not dissimilar from portraits by Renoir. This curious plenitude of essence in the subject of modernity is another means to reveal sources of internal autonomy and transcendence, But from 1929, Abanindranath's practice of portraiture shifted from the subjective self-sufficiency of his earlier portraits to a caricatured surface which he characterized as a "mask." A perusal of these masks reveals a tradition of Japanese Noh masks behind them and the performance of typal behaviors which they imply. This brings to mind at once the repetitions of intersubjective response through which modernity classifies humans and fossilizes subjecthood in them as well as the potential for alterity in unexpected and creative responses or name-calling that may form the praxis of intersubjectivity within intentional communities. The masks also recall Picasso's and high Modernism's interest in African and other aboriginal objects and fetish practices which Abanindranath was undoubtedly familiar with by this time, through the art postcards and prints sent to him from France by Andre Karpeles and others.

As evident in his essay on Bengali folk-rituals (*Bānglār Brata*), Abanindranath was aware of practices of "sympathetic magic" which inform folk-rituals and was interested in their consciousness-altering possibilities in the face of modernity. The masks thus form a deliberate alignment with something in the aboriginal imagination which is at the same time a modern strategy for pushing the constructed limits of reality through creative communitarian practice.

Adhering even more strongly to the sphere of sympathetic magic and to the creative performance of intersubjectivity are the last art productions of Abanindranath, his "relatives-in-wood" or *kātum-kutum*. I turn last to a consideration of these found-wood toys, as the magical props in collective rituals of a community that has disintegrated. These small sculptures, produced in the last 10 years of the artist's life, when he had all but stopped painting, are marked by a tragic consciousness which tries to recover through magic the world of relations it has irrecoverably lost. These last 10 years of the artist's life coincide with the fall of the Jorasanko house, the dispersal of all its members and the move of the artist to a rented house in the suburbs of Calcutta with his personal nuclear family. The found-wood friends belong to this period and arise out of a personal practice of sympathetic magic in which the artist translates his intersubjective

world to an animistic non-human domain of disintegrating natural and artificial discarded objects, establishing a relationality with these through a recognition of resemblance and a bestowal of relational meaning. In this sense, the found-wood friends are similar in operation to the masks, with the exception that the masks imply a living human wearer who can respond unpredictably to the bestowal of meaning by the artist, while here the response is assumed through an animistic telepathy which the artist intuits and counters in the ongoing performance of relationality. This relational world of the artist and his toy-friends was further expanded through willing human participants, usually children, who visited the artist in his rented house in Calcutta or at Santiniketan, where he was stationed for a few years as a vice chancellor of the university after Rabindranath's death in 1941. Along with this art went a theory of creation which he explicated in some of his lectures on art at the Calcutta University. According to this theory, the artist was not a solitary genius who projected his fantasies on some dead medium, but the work of art emerged through the interplay of artist and medium, behind which some animistic principle of nature is always seeking for "players with form."[44] This theory can in a sense be retrospectively applied to much of Abanindranath's life and work as an artist.

NOTES

1. See for examples, David Ludden, "Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge", in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, (eds), Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 250–78 and Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India", *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 3, (Cambridge University Press, 1986): 401–46.
2. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 54–84.
3. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 220.
4. RBS: Abbreviation for Rabindra Bharati Society, 5 Dwarkanath Tagore Lane, Kolkata, India. Henceforth RBS will be used for this archive.
5. Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (eds), *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 50–75.
6. Ibid.
7. Wilhelm Halbfass, "Research and Reflection: Responses to my Respondents", in *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and its Impact on Indian and Cross-cultural Studies*, (eds), Eli Franco and Karin Preisendanz (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), 153.
8. Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850–1922* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 7.
9. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Lineages of the Modern in Indian Art", in *Tryst with Destiny: Art From Modern India, 1947–1997*, exhibition catalog, Singapore Art Museum, 1997, pp. 31–34.

10. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 180–213.
11. My use of the term "habitus" throughout the text follows its usage by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) to refer to the totality of learned habits, bodily skills, styles, tastes and beliefs that might be said to "go without saying" for a specific society.
12. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* Albert Hofstadter, trans., (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 180.
13. Of course, on the flip side of this understanding, particularly in the postmodern context, is the gluttonous hunger for novelty and originality which propels capital to pressure increasingly accelerated turn-overs in the production of new self-identifications for art.
14. Mitter, *op. cit.*, pp. 370–74.
15. Mitter, *op. cit.*, p. 251.
16. Mitter, *op. cit.*, pp. 258–59.
17. Conversation with Abanindranath Tagore's youngest son, Manindranath Tagore, January 22, 1995, where he claimed that his father thought of his painting as a "lap object" (in Bengali, *Koler Shishu*, literally "child of the lap").
18. Abanindranath has a character in one of his stories refer to him as, "Aban Thakur who writes pictures." Abanindranath Tagore, "Budo Angla", in *Abanindra Rachanabli* (Collected Works of Abanindranath), Volume III, Calcutta: Srijukta Uma Mukhopadhyay, Prakash Bhavan, 1976, 1988), 155.
19. Roger Fry, "Oriental Art", *The Quarterly Review* 212, no. 422–23, (January–April 1910): 237.
20. Benodebehari Mukherjee, "The Art of Abanindranath Tagore", *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* VIII, no. I & II, (May–October 1942): 118.
21. Krishna Chaitanya, *A History of Indian Painting* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1976, 1994).
22. Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, 35–36.
23. Chakrabarty, *op. cit*.
24. Blair B. Kling, *Partner in Empire: Dwarkanath Tagore and the Age of Enterprise in Eastern India* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1981).
25. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969, 1995).
26. Pierre Bourdieu, Chapter on "Doxa, Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy", in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 159–71.
27. Ibid.
28. Habermas' "ideal speech situation" in J. Habermas *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, T. McCarthy, trans. (London: Heinemann, 1979).
29. Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Kessinger Publishing, 1917).
30. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 112.
31. Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).
32. Chatterjee, *op. cit*.
33. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a "New" Indian Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal*, c. 1850–1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 154.
34. In the chapter on the Krishna Lila paintings (Chapter 1), I elaborate on the Vaishnav end of this relation while in the next chapter on nationalism and orientalism (Chapter 2), I introduce the Advaitic domain.

35. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power", Afterword in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 216.
36. Homi K. Bhabha, "Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism", in *The Politics of Theory*, (eds), Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iverson, and Dianna Loxley (Colchester: University of Essex, 1983), 199–200.
37. Ibid., 127–32.
38. Homi K. Bhabha, (1984). "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817", in *Europe and its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature*, July 1984. Vol. 1. (eds), Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen and Diana Loxley. (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985), 89–106.
39. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 358–59.
40. Ibid., 360.
41. Ibid.
42. Debashish Banerji, "The Orientalism of E. B. Havell", *Third Text* 16, no.1, (2002): 53–56.
43. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *op cit.*, pp. 149–79.
44. Abanindranath Tagore, *Bageshwari Silpa Prabandhabali* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1941, 1999), 252.

Plate I.1: **Bharat Mata** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1905)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

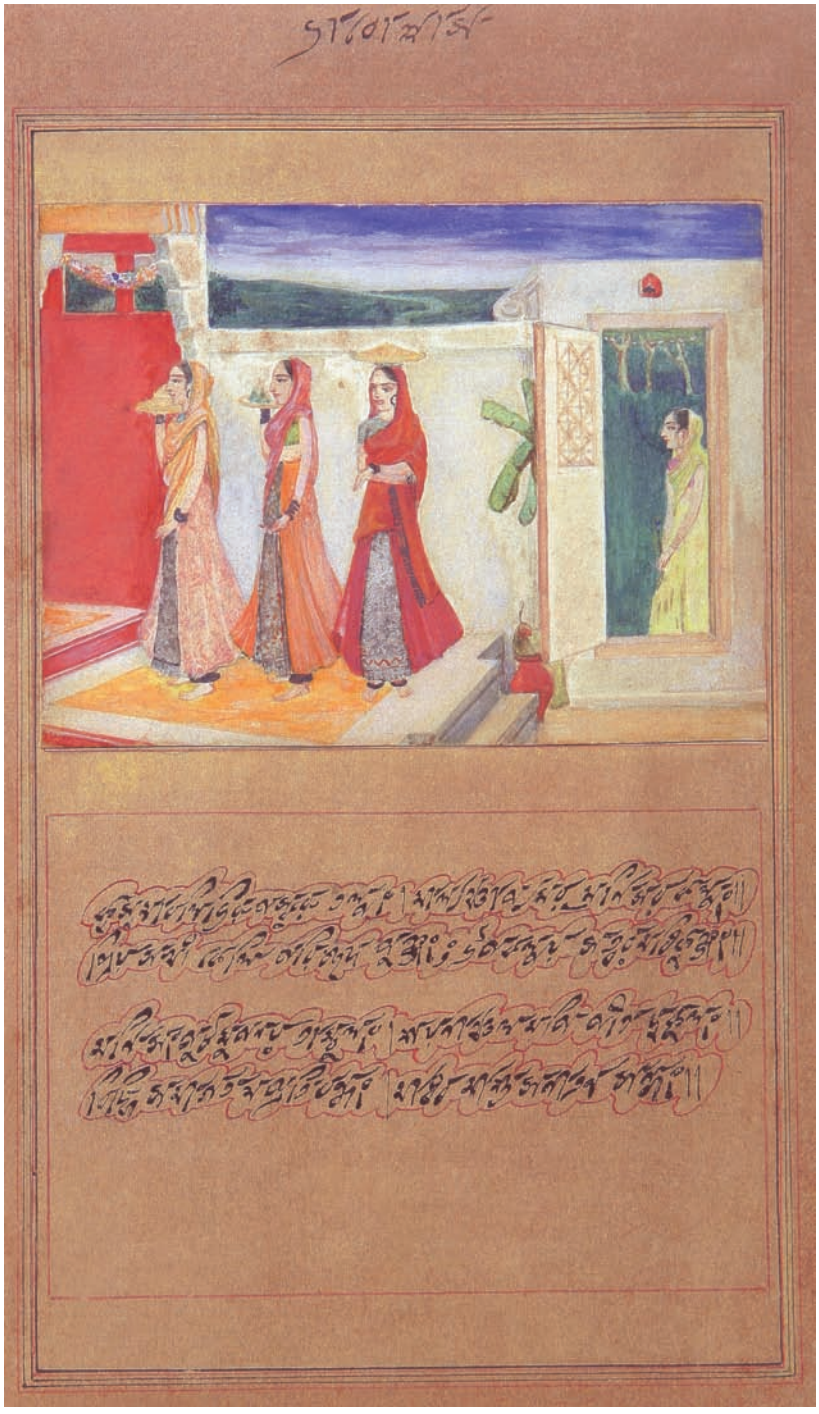

Plate 1.1: **Krishna Lila—Bhabollasa** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1897)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

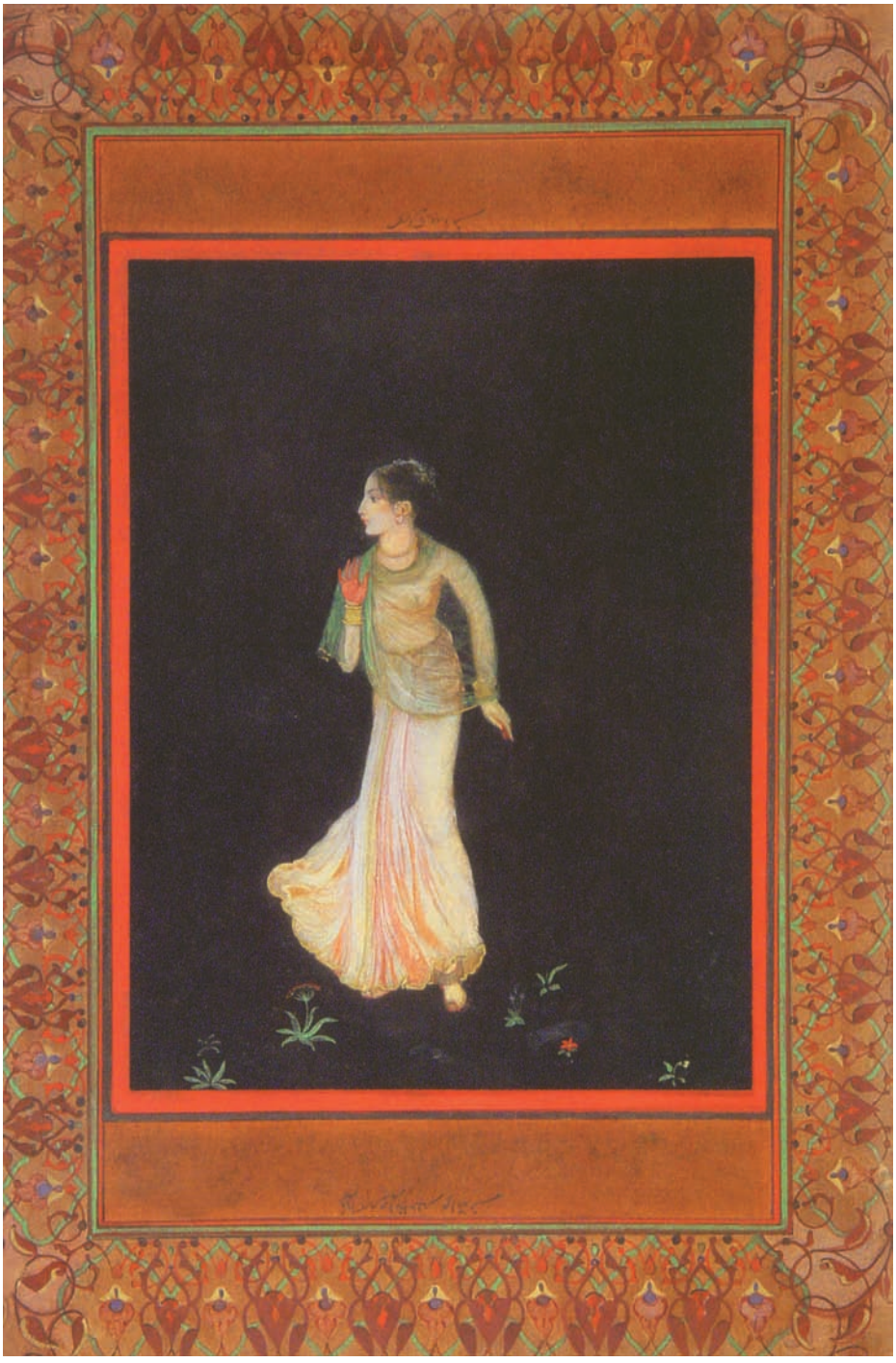

Plate 1.2: **Abhisarika** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1897)
Source: Indian Museum, Kolkata.

Plate 1.3: **Krishna Lila—Nau Bihar** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1897)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

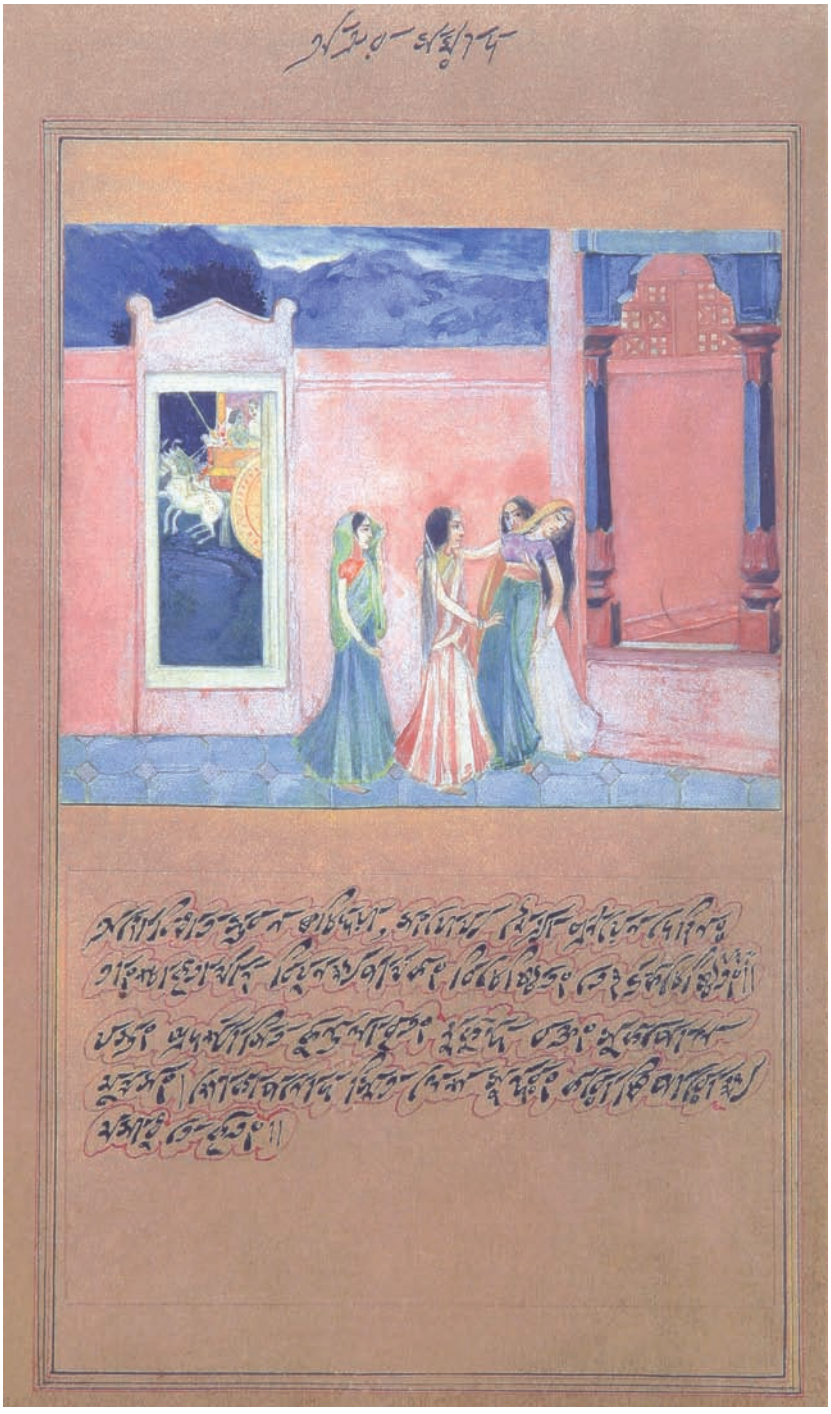

Plate 1.4: **Krishna Lila—Akrur Samvad** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1897)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

Plate 1.5: **Krishna Lila—Ras** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1897)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

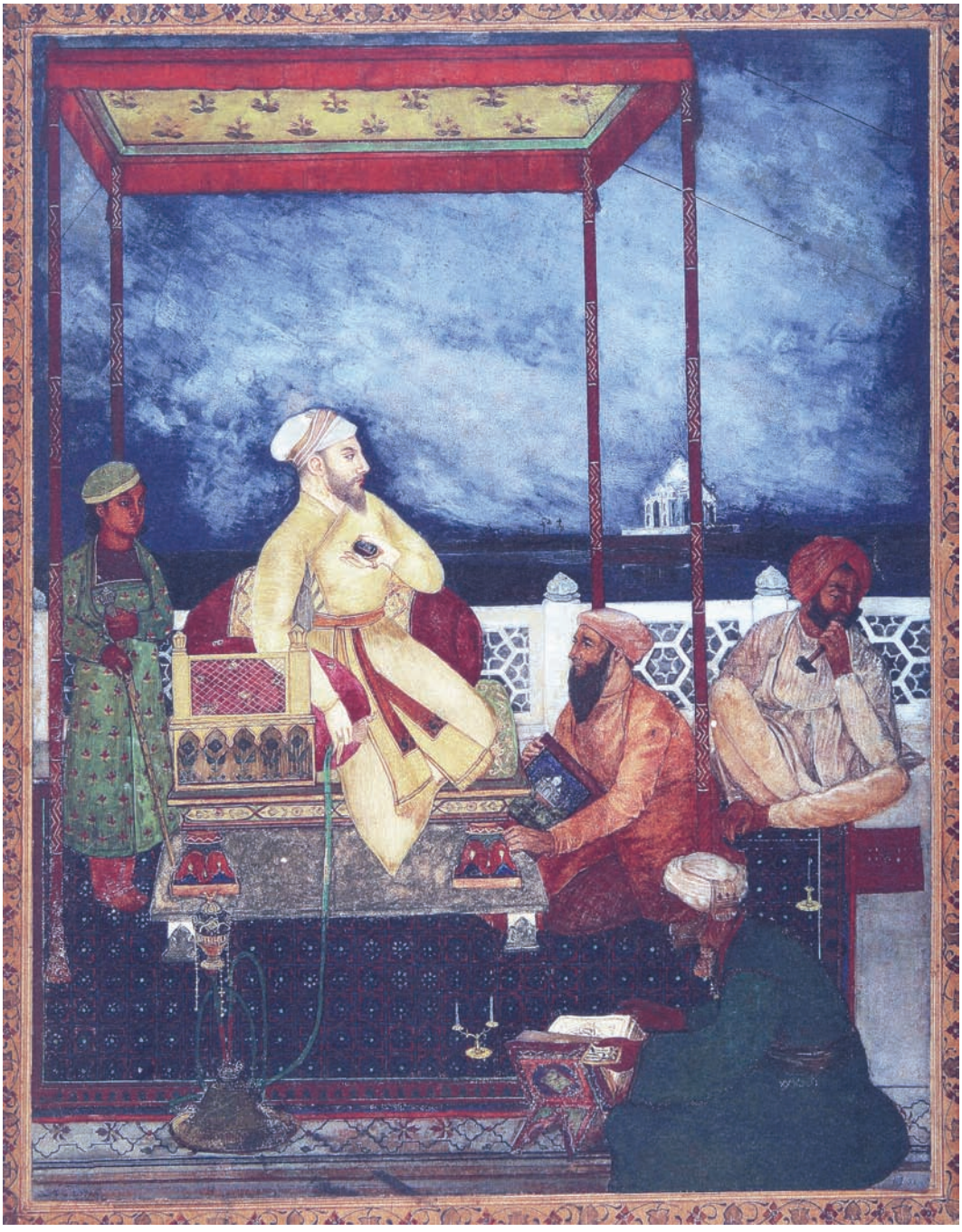

Plate 2.1: **Building of the Taj** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1901)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

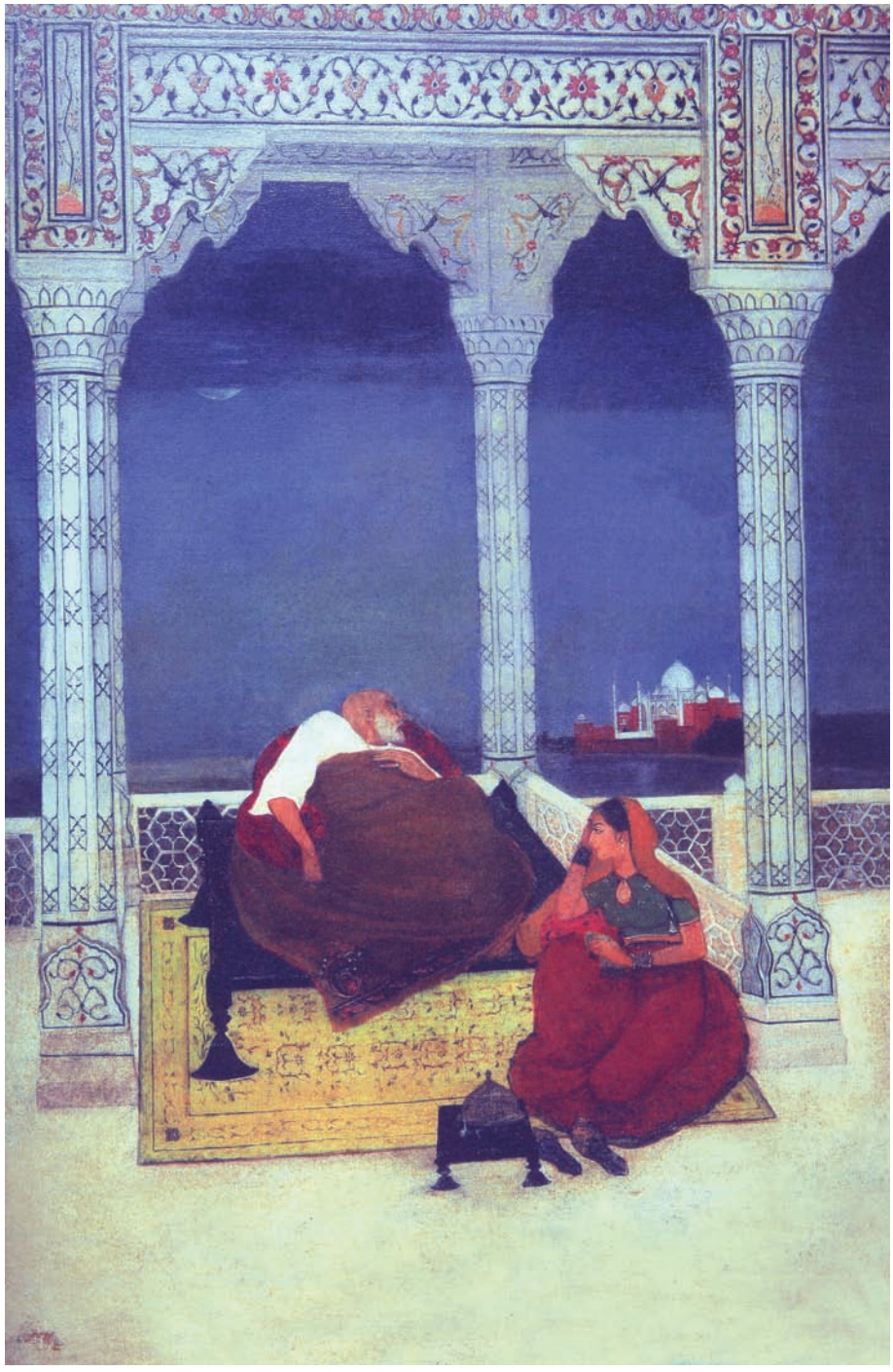

Plate 2.2: **Last Days of Shah Jehan** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1902)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

Plate 2.3: **Forest in the Evening** (Hishida Shunso, 1904)
Source: Iida City Museum, Japan.

Plate 2.4: **Teardrop on Lotus Leaf** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1912)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

Plate 2.5: Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* Verse 2 (Abanindranath Tagore, 1907–09)
Source: Vishva-Bharati University, Santiniketan.

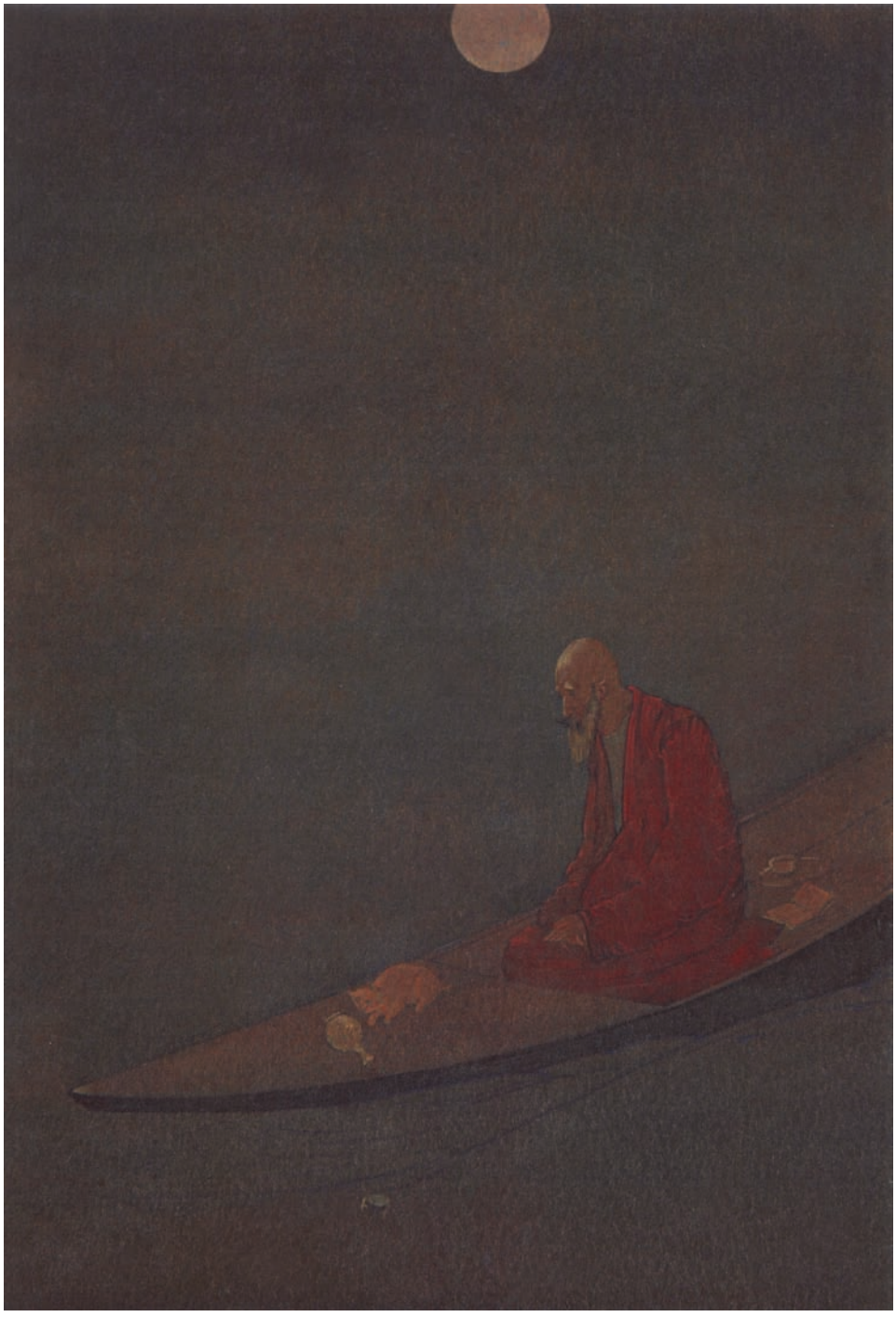

Plate 2.6: Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* Verse 50 (Abanindranath Tagore, 1907–09)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

Plate 3.1: **Popular Theatre** (from left to right)

Ukiyo-e print of Otani Oniji III as Edohei (Toshusai Sharaku, 1794)
Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The Lover from Actors of Bengal Series (Abanindranath Tagore, 1914)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

Poster Advertising La Goulue at the Moulin Rouge
(Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, 1895)
Source: musée d'Orsay, Paris.

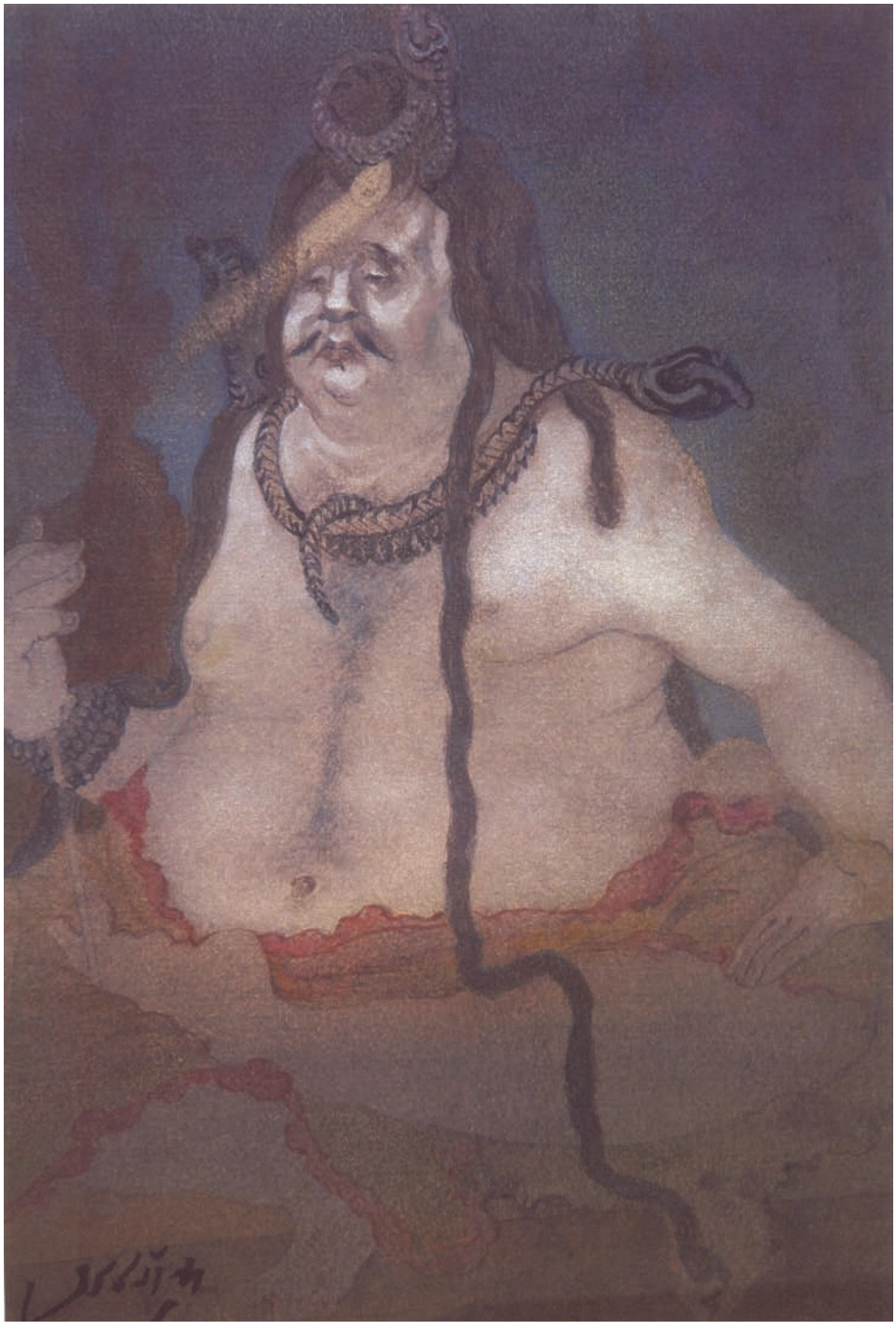

Plate 3.2: **Actors of Bengal—Mohesh** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1914)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

Plate 3.3: **Actors of Bengal—Rati Vilap** (Abanindranath Tagore, 1914)
Source: Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

Plate 3.4: **L'Etoile** (Edgar Degas, 1876–77)
Source: Musee d'Orsay