

# THE SOCIAL SETTING OF INDIAN SCULPTURE

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to,  
the genius of Africa,  
whose so-called  
Primitive Sculpture,  
is probably  
the greatest the  
world has ever known.

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# THE SOCIAL SETTING OF INDIAN SCULPTURE

## I

### THE TRIMURTI FORM OF ART

Sculpture is a visual art. As such it is intimately related, at one end, to architecture, and at the other, to painting.

When architecture is miniaturised, i.e. in the form of triumphal arches, floats in processions, or fountain complexes, it is difficult to distinguish between architecture and sculpture. Similarly, when sculpture is giganticized or multiplied, e.g., as with the pyramids, the relief-encrusted Indian temple complexes, or the pollarded and shaped trees and hedges of a landscape garden, the borderline between sculpture and architecture again gets blurred.

Generally speaking, in architecture, masses and volumes are so organised that one can move within the art work and experience the manipulations of space, both internally and externally. Also, by the same token, architecture unfolds in time. It cannot be experienced in one instant or at a stroke. Architecture needs not only to be seen and felt, but to be walked around and explored from within.

Sculpture is to be seen and to be felt tactilely. When museums insist upon the untouchability of the objects displayed, they deprive the viewer of a vital and essential experience relating to sculpture. The feel of wood, ivory, metal, stone, wire, stuffing, wool, leather, fabric, plastic, ceramic, etc., is as much a part of the sculptural experience, as is its sight. Again, generally speaking, sculpture makes available for contemplation, a three dimensional view from the outside. One does not normally step into a sculpture. However, there are borderline cases like the Statue of Liberty, outside New York harbour, where one doesn't know whether one is dealing with sculpture or with architecture. Or, say, one of the gigantic "Mobiles" of Calder. To a limited extent, sculpture too, unfolds in time, since in order to see the work from many sides, it is necessary to spend time over the acquisition of its gestalt. In the case of Art Povera, all artificial distinctions break down.<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Art povera* falls in the category of conceptual art, i.e. art designed less to create an aesthetic object, than to involve the viewer in the contemplation of an aesthetic idea or in his participation in an aesthetic act, e.g., Christo's *Wrapping up the Coast of Australia*, a feat that was actually accomplished with vast quantities of plastic. See further below.

In the case of mosaic paintings, stained-glass windows, tattoo markings on human bodies, costumes and fashion designs, and so on, it is difficult to separate sculpture from painting.

But we need not go into minute details. Sculpture can be distinguished from architecture, by its relative smallness and from painting by its possession of three-dimensionality. Bourgeois art critics are fond of fetishistic excesses. For them minute hair-splitting is necessary and delightful. We are not interested in turning an art object into a fetish. For us broad distinctions are sufficient and all that is necessary.

Reality trifurcates. Any object can be viewed as an economic commodity, as a technological product or as an aesthetic artifact. In the latter case, it is an object viewed as a carrier of human expression.

An art object or an artifact is the creation of human labour. Art is a triadic system of vectors, i.e. an art object is created by an artist for projection before an audience. As soon as Man interacts with Nature, i.e., he seizes hold of a part of Nature and moulds or fashions it, he implants his wishes, desires, aspirations, frustrations, and sorrows upon the fashioned or moulded object. Human labour has the inherent capacity for expressibility. Man cannot help leaving behind his impression on the object on which he labours.

It is the same fetishism which compels the bourgeois critic to elevate the medium of expression into its end; whereby to realise the woodenness of wood, the stoniness of stone, the ivoryiness of ivory, and so on, becomes the goal of the sculptor. This is arrant bourgeois rubbish. The sculptor does not labour on the stone to liberate its stony potentialities<sup>2</sup> or to realise any kind of "pure form".

But labour is not performed anyhow, anywhere or at anytime. It has to be performed within a specific social context, at a particular moment of historic time, by a person who is undergoing an experience of existence within socio-historic limits. That is, under specific stages of development of forces, relations and modes of production.

Man labours socially in co-operation or in confrontation with other men. He cannot labour alone. Even when the artist sculpts alone in his studio, even when he thinks that he is lonely and is doing something unique, his thoughts bear a social dimension, the skills that he employs as an

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2. See Section 5, *The Fetishistic Artifact*, of chapter 2 in Vinayak Purohit, *Arts of Transitional India: 20th Century*, Vol. I; pp 154-63.

artist-craftsman are socially conceived and transmitted, and his bent of mind is socially determined.

Man is himself a social product. The language with which he marshalls his thoughts is a social tool. He is himself necessarily a brain-washed social being, brain-washed by his birth in a particular family, in a particular caste, tribe and community, in a particular language group of a specific region, within a particular income group, belonging to a particular time and nation.

The intensity of such expressions, the degree of stylization attained by the expressions and finally, the acuity, sharpness, comprehensiveness and consistency of the inner vision which gets crystallized as the expressive sculptural statement, all these factors may vary, thus setting up graded levels of expressions, some ardent, some casual; some deliberate, some careless; some that portend menace and threaten and are full of subtle innuendoes, and some that are merely ornamental. The "make believe" play with mud dolls by children certainly represents a level of sculptural expression, but stands at an entirely different level from the stylization achieved by an Imhotep, a Praxiteles, a Mallithamma, a Chaudayya, a Bamayya, or a Masaitamma. The child artist is merely dreaming and entertaining his tiny-tot friends, whilst the master sculptors are projecting alternative Weltanschauungs.

Every social formation projects art objects which correspond to the prevalent social climate. Not any kind of sculpture can be the projection of a specific society, nor can any type of society underlie a specific sculptural form.

A feudal society will necessarily project a certain kind of sculpture which is designed to flatter the king and the priest, since in such a society such are the principal patrons of the master-carvers. The *Manasara* and the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* propound the tenets of absolute loyalty to the king.

Contrary to popular notions, no art is eternal or everlasting. Like everything else created by human labour, sculpture is capable of becoming obsolescent and even dead. The films of Leni Riefenstahl are no longer inspiring or even relevant. They have become merely symptomatic of the sickness of German Society of the 1930s which produced the horrors of Nazism. The over-lifesize portraits of Imelda Marcos, the busts of Shah of Iran, the Voodoo music and dances favoured by Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvaliers, the monuments to Haile Sellasie and so on are all dying or dead forms of art. They may be kept in some corner of a museum or filmed and preserved in some archives, in order to make a detailed study of some infamous periods of political rule by these petty tyrants who were

American stooges to boot. But they are no longer pulsating forms of art which stimulate either adulation or hostility. They are nothing. The labour incorporated in such recollected sculptural crystallizations was real and therefore the same can be analysed as art. But real ideological life has departed from them. They no longer move. They remain works of art so long as we continue to look at them as ideological expressions of labour once wielded in the service of a ruling elite. But like Kipling's fantasies and idiocies, they no longer count as serious or profound works of literature, except to the lunatic fringe of surviving ex-nazis, ex-collaborators of fascism, ex-lovers of imperialism and the "Raj", and such other exes and discards of history.

To repeat, art has a triadic form - the artist, the art object and the audience - and is a tripartite dynamic system of vectors. All the three elements come into being and cease to be. Art not only dies, but it is subject to change. An art object may be mutilated as in a ruin, or a part of literary text of a bygone era may be lost. The resultant 'antique' has often to be fundamentally reinterpreted. The original painted athletic statuary admired by the homosexual slave-owners of Greece and Rome may get eroded into cold white marble figures that boastfully proclaim their pompous nothingness. Such was not their original impact and import, and as "painted dolls", they might have had a greater "naive" charm. They are today only slightly comic carriers of outdated ideological positions.

The sculptor must extract a living under specific constraints. And in order to extract such a living, he must think the thoughts which the ruling classes of the day have imposed upon him, his society and his times. If he does not conform, he may be ignored and bypassed or denounced and crushed. Under constant threat of continuance or withdrawal of patronage, he is compelled to adjust and compromise. The more sensitive, sceptical and rebellious he is, the more problems he will have in securing private support or state aid. Unless he serves the interests of his masters, flatters the state and its minions in a hundred different crude and subtle ways, it will be almost impossible for him to secure recognition and awards. The more true, self-respecting and sincere he tries to be, the more certain he can be of remaining an obscure member of a derided minority.

That is why the ruling ideas and the ruling forms of sculpture in every society, are the ideas and the sculptures of its ruling classes. Of course, at each stage, its negative i.e. the revolutionary form of sculpture too exists. But in normal non-revolutionary conditions, such revolutionary artists and their productions must necessarily remain the voices of a small neglected group.

A ceaseless class struggle rages in each nation and every society. This

struggle may be overt or covert, it may be relaxed or intense, it may be widespread or confined to a few pockets. Whatever may be its nature, extent or urgency, class society cannot exist without internal turmoil. It is impossible to criticise the politics and economics of such a society without commenting upon and denouncing the art works and the art performances through which such a society projects and protects its ideological and material interests. In their overwhelming bulk, the recognised artists and the applauded performances in each society, have been promoted and permitted to be created by the ruling classes of that society to embody their own interests and positions. Not to analyse and attack such ruling class prestige-symbols and message-transmitters is tantamount to abject surrender on the part of the critic.

Great art in the present context has to be revolutionary art. For men become conscious of their own interests, nay, become conscious of themselves, only through the congealations of ideological drives that are art works and art performances.

Men become aware of themselves and their surroundings as they battle. Art can be understood not in the abstract, not at all in class rooms or in ivory towers, but only in praxis, in disputations about ideological standpoints. Art is a weapon to be wielded before putting up the barricades and in the course of defending the barricaded positions.

Truth cannot be apprehended by those who are interested in lies and in perpetuation of exploitation, by a minority of the vast majority. Truth can emerge only from the point of view of those who are interested in exposing the upholders of the status-quo. Thus revolutionary art is not only necessary, but it is inevitable. If society is to progress, exploitation of man by man must end. If society is to be free, oppression of nation by nation must end. In other words, the two major urges of the present epoch are socialism or communism and nationalism. Art in order to be significant has to express these compulsions of our times.

If nation is to cease to exploit nation and if man is to cease to exploit man, the status quo must change and the elite must be overthrown. Unless the expropriators are expropriated, it is not possible to have peace, progress, civilization or general cultural upliftment.

Everything that is beautiful on earth has been created by man himself at labour. Unfortunately, in a class-society his creations bear the stamp of alienation and fetishism. Such dehumanization of art will disappear only when man, the artist, repossesses the creations of his labour collectively, unitedly, lovingly and inevitably.



## II

# THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF MODERN INDIAN SCULPTURE

1765 - 1989

As we have discussed, in great detail and with complete socio-economic data, in my *Arts of Transitional India: 20th Century*<sup>3</sup>, the so-called modern era of Indian sculpture falls into the following periods and phases:

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|--|---------------|
| I. - The Seeding of Comprador Culture          | : 1765 - 1860 |
| (i) Bourgeois Penetration                      | : 1765 - 1818 |
| (ii) Bourgeois "Overtum"                       | : 1818 - 1860 |
| II. - The Blooming of Comprador Culture        | : 1860 - 1905 |
| (iii) Imperialist-Princeling Phase             | : 1860 - 1875 |
| (iv) Imperialist-ICS Phase                     | : 1875 - 1905 |
| III. - The Disintegration of Comprador Culture | : 1905 - 1989 |
|  | (Ongoing)     |
| (v) The Zamindar Years                         | : 1905 - 1923 |
| (vi) The Bania Years                           | : 1924 - 1933 |
| (vii) The Karkhanedar Years                    | : 1934 - 1956 |
| (viii) The Naukarshah Years                    | : 1957 - 1966 |
| (ix) The Lumpen Bourgeois Years                | : 1967 - 1977 |
| (x) The NRI Bourgeois Years                    | : 1977 - 1989 |
|  | (Ongoing)     |

Obviously, cultural periods and phases are even more difficult to define exactly than social periods, themselves slightly blurred at the limiting lines. Furthermore, individuals linger on despite becoming outdated and despite their views becoming obsolete (especially long-lived artists and writers like Ravi Thakur or Umashankar Joshi). This complex process has been explained in our earlier work, the *The Arts of Transitional India: 20th Century* (already cited). Very often, when artists outlive their times, some of them are pushed forward to take new ideological positions, some retire into silence and inactivity, some try to work against the current and fail, a rare soul lingers on, and so on. In the meantime, another group is pushing forward, hungry for prestige and profits. Some of the latter might have

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3. Popular Prakashan, 1988, 2 volumes, particularly, Chapters 3, 4 & 8, and the Charts and Tables at the end of each volume.

struck out "too early", some might have arrived "too late" and so forth. It's a melee and for some time complete confusion prevails. Ultimately, things get sorted out and there emerges a new group that is "representative of their times", of those who speak confidently, who are prolific, who obtain the best response from their audiences, who corner prestigious awards and profitable commissions, who in short, "voice the ethos of their times." Thus, with human beings, there are always "slip ups" between the "cultural gears." However, in spite of all this, the general cultural and art trends of each period and phase are quite emphatic and distinctive.

Another source of confusion is the need for 'Orchestration' that arises in every class society. The masses are to be ideologically controlled, but the precise techniques of such social engineering have to be orchestrated.<sup>4</sup>

The masses are to be deceived, frightened, demoralized, titillated, excited, provoked, entertained and in a hundred different ways disoriented and frustrated. Different artists, therefore play slightly varied tunes and use different musical instruments. The masses would find it easier to see through the ruling class games, if all these games were identically monotonous. Therefore, different artists appear to be "contradicting and supplementing each other." For these various reasons, and since the ruling class coalition is in any case made up of different classes, whose perceptions of their own long term interests are always slightly at variance, partially contradictory and different within limits, art critics have a tendency to miss the wood, because of their preoccupations with individual trees. Actually, the socio-cultural pattern alone is of prime interest and is easily discernible.

Having recorded these few words of caution, let us plunge into an extremely brief description of each of the three periods outlined above in order to delineate the social history of Modern Indian Sculpture.

- |                                     |               |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| I. The Seeding of Comprador Culture | : 1765 - 1860 |
| (i) Bourgeois Penetration           | : 1765 - 1818 |
| (ii) Bourgeois "Overturn"           | : 1818 - 1860 |

Let us begin by describing the backdrop against which the events of the 18th and 19th centuries took place.

Since we are atheists, we are not sympathetic to the pseudo-logic that impelled Delhi Sultanate and the Moghul Empire to discourage sculpture as an art form, out of religious considerations. All that we can posit, are the mitigating factors, which prevented a total eclipse of sculpture in the iconoclastic period (13th to 18th centuries).

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4. Vinayak Purohit, *Arts of Transitional India: 20th Century*, op. cit, pp. 28 ff.

1. Large parts of India especially in the deep South, remained outside the area of Islamic control at one time or another, during these five centuries. As a result, the glorious Indian tradition of sculpture, stretching from the Yaksha figures of 6th century B.C., through the early schools of Sanchi, Sarnath, Mathura, Karla, Amravati, etc., of the last centuries B.C. and the early centuries A.D., to the great Gupta, Vakataka, Pallava, Chola, Hoysala, etc., periods of 4th to 12th centuries A.D., remained alive. Some attenuation was there, some falling away from the glorious standards set at Khajuraho, Konarak, Ellora, Aihole, Vijaynagar, Ajanta, and so on.<sup>5</sup> Let us recognize that Indian sculpture had been one of the glories of mankind and therefore, the five centuries, from 13th to the 18th, may be accepted as relatively a "dark period". Absolutely, the wood-carvers of Rajasthan and Gujarat, continued to produce magnificent work during these centuries, as did the bronze-casters of the extreme South.<sup>6</sup>

2. At the same time, directly under Islamic influence, pierced tracery, pietra dura, inlay, silver filigree, bidri, minakari, brass stamping and embossing, jade-carving, sandalwood, ebony-rosewood-carving, shell-work and a hundred other sculptural crafts, attained extraordinary heights of accomplishment.

3. Since in this paper, we shall be only dealing with what are conventionally known as statues, we shall not be concerned with the foregoing sculptural crafts in their immense and endless variety.

Coming down to the century 1765 - 1860, when British imperialism established its gradual political sway over India and managed to overthrow the feudal system and to supplant it with a colonial capitalist regime subject to the world market, we may note that the period has been very poorly documented. Although the sculptural activity in this century was almost entirely concerned with the execution of busts and life-size figures of Englishmen by Englishmen, nevertheless, it needs to be described, be it as a "horror story".

Apart from the British rulers, no doubt, some native princelings and zamindars, must have commissioned some portrait statues by the

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5. It is impossible to even suggest within the space available, the immense number of sources available for the study of the history of Indian sculpture. We may just mention a few, like Coomaraswamy's *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (1927), and Schwartzberg's *Historical Atlas of South-Asia* (1978), both of which carry extensive bibliographies, covering the subject.

6. We wish that some scholar would concentrate exclusively upon the centuries of Islamic ascendancy in India and produce a monograph on the sculptural work done during the period including in its purview the Sub-Himalayan Region (Kashmir, Nepal, Bhutan, etc.) as well as the other well-known zones in Rajasthan - Gujarat, and Tamilnadu - Kerala.

fashionable sculptors of those days. The completely dead and stereotyped Tirthankara figures must have continued to be carved in Jain edifices, but we have no easily accessible source for even a listing of such deadly dull work.

We can only surmise and state that some young researcher should take up this task and compile a periodized record of the gallery of frights,<sup>7</sup> left behind by imperialism in the churches, tombs, official mansions, and public squares of India. Generally, it has been contended that humour is either lacking or is inadequately represented in histories of art. The compilation that we have suggested would compensate partially for this general deficiency. The reader would be able to entertain himself and laugh heartily at the pompous and vacuous efforts of the predecessors and followers of imperialist sculptor-adventurers like the non-entities, Woolner, Noble, Bacon, Chantrey, Foley, Marchetti, Thorneycroft and Bolton.

## II. The Blooming of Comprador Culture : 1860 - 1905

(iii) Imperialist - Princeling Phase : 1860 - 1875

(iv) Imperialist - ICS Phase : 1875 - 1905

As has been noted by us elsewhere, this was the happiest period of comprador imperialist collaboration. Kala gumastas like the Tagores, the Parsi opium-dealers like Mr. Ready money and Mr Cowasjee Jahangir, and notorious land-grabbers like Maharaja of Darbhanga, all had their criminal likenesses carved in marble, emulating their white masters.<sup>8</sup>

The obverse of the coin of Indo-British collaboration was of course, terror, starvation and death for the masses. Famines repeatedly struck India, carrying away an estimated seven crores during the British period.<sup>9</sup> Whilst the Kala gumastas and their white masters were making merry, India was being de-industrialized and pauperized.

However, the comprador imperialist alliance was to have lasting

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7. Murray's *Handbook for Travellers - India, Burma and Ceylon, 1929*, notices many of these atrocious statues, but fails to provide accurate dating. From the architectural context some dates may be worked out but they would be guesstimates. Instead of dabbling in matters at a higher level, which do not concern them, one wishes that the hidebound imperialist pair of W.G. and Mildred Archer would perform this simple task of documentation of British Provincial Art in India.

8. The only use of this kind of statuary, sculpted by the ton, is to hold it for ransom and to offer England the alternative of either sinking it in the Indian Ocean or return to England against restoration of looted Indian Art treasures. Also some inducement may be offered to the Britishers to take back the statues of the *kala gumastas* as well. As a part of a package deal, the *kala gumastas* were rightfully, the creations of imperialism and deserve a gallery in London. They certainly have no place in India.

9. Wadia and Merchant, *Our Economic Problem*,. quoted in Vinayak Purohit, op. cit, p 507.

consequences. The British Neo-Classical and Royal Academy<sup>10</sup> manner became permanently fixed style for all "public" statuary in India to this date. Hundreds of busts and life-size statues are being made every year in India and all of them are rendered in the same inane, vacuous, lifeless, stiff, formal manner. In fact, for the common man today, sculpture means this kind of mockery. The overwhelming bulk of sculptural statuary being made in India today, comprises of such Royal Academy type of tom-foolery. As has been noticed by several observers, not only are Georgianism and Victorianism not dead in India, they are quantitatively speaking, flourishing with rare gusto.

### III. The Disintegration of Comprador Culture: 1905 - 1989 (Ongoing)

- (v) The Zamindar Years: 1905 - 1923
- (vi) The Bania Years: 1924 - 1933
- (vii) The Karkhanedar Years: 1957 - 1956
- (viii) The Naukarshah Years: 1957 - 1966
- (ix) The Lumpen Bourgeois Years: 1967 - 1977
- (x) The NRI Bourgeois Years: 1977 - 1989 (Ongoing)

In our paper on *Sociology of Indian Theatre*,<sup>11</sup> we have discussed with concrete examples, the problems that an investigator faces when he is attempting to pinpoint the class affiliations of individual artists and specific years. That is why, we have opted in this monograph, to take the entire period 1905 - 1989 together as one whole, leaving detailed phasization to some future date.

#### G.K. Mhatre

We may say that modern Indian sculpture, by Indians, virtually begins with the rise of the nationalist movement in the early years of this century. G.K. Mhatre's prize-winning, near-life-size marble *To The Temple*, exhibited at the Delhi Empire Exhibition of 1900 was probably the first notable translation in comprador terms of the Royal Academy manner. There is an attempt at naturalistic detail, though the right hand presses too hard, lies rather stiffly at the hips and the fingers clutch the sari rather awkwardly. The pose is conventional, the subject is conservative and traditional, and the achievement entirely lifeless. In fact, the woman expresses not even passive conventionality, she manages actually to express nothing at all. It is as though a British army colonel was

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10. Royal Academy was itself a product of Indian loot and was founded in 1765.

11. Vinayak Purohit, *Social Dimensions of Modern Theatre*, (in press), especially Section III: *Periodization and Phasization*.

conducting a modelling class and a student had performed a mechanical forced drill.

Along with Mhatre, for the first phase 1905-23 and continuing into the years 1924-33, and even later, the leading sculptors were in Bombay: Talim, Wagh, Goregaonkar, Yavalkar, Kamath, Arte, Jog, Sathe and Karmarkar; in Madras: Nagappa, D.P. Roy Choudhury and Venkatappa; and in Calcutta: Bose, H. Roy Choudhury and P. Mullik. All these sculptors were, like all compradors, Indians in name only. In spirit, they were all *kala gumastas*, initiating the naturalistic, lifeless, Royal Academy manner, with varying degree of exactitude. However, the winds of feeble nationalism did touch these sculptors. Mhatre did unheroic, but nevertheless idealised portraits of Ranade (1913) and Gokhale. B.V. Talim attempted bolder flights of fancy with *Daridra Narayan* (1930), *A Girl Spinning a Takly* (Bombay Art Society Gold Medal, 1937), and *In Tune with Almighty*. At the same time, lest the impression be created in reader's mind, that Talim was some sort of fervent nationalist, let us note that he was also known for his portraits of *Dadabhai Naoroji* (1925), *Lord Reay*, and *Sai Baba*. In short, Talim was just a simple sculptor, eking out a living, practising his craft to the best of his ability, and either he executed a commission, or picked out his subjects from the general politico - cultural climate. *Daridra Narayan*, *Takly Spinning*, and so on were "in the air", so to speak, in those days.

### R.P. Kamath

R.P. Kamath, was actually a student at the Royal Academy of Arts, in London and won an award, whilst there, for a relief *Expulsion from Eden*. He was also apparently caught up by the nationalist atmosphere to execute *Chhatrapati Shivaji* at Pratapgad, and *Rani Jhansi* at Jhansi.

### D.P. Roy Choudhary

Another peculiar zamindari type reaction was provided by D.P. Roy Chowdhury (1899-1975), whom the imperialists made the principal of the Arts School at Madras (1929-57).<sup>12</sup> He survived to head the Lalit Kala Academi as its first Chairman (1953-60) in his old age and also executed a number of extremely theatrical compositions for the comprador government, e.g. *The Triumph of Labour* (1954), *Martyrs' Memorial* (1956), *Gandhi* (1958). The lifesize figure of Gandhi is a grimacing caricature, a queer "athletic skeleton", thick-necked with jutting jaw,

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12. He has been discussed as a Bengal School Painter in Chapter 5 of our *Arts of Transitional India: 20th Century*.

skin-n-bones and yet muscular.<sup>13</sup> It is, in many ways, as three dimensional rendering of "a skinned or flayed" (*ecorche*) figure drawing. But for the eminence of the artist,<sup>13A</sup> any nationalist jury would have rejected this statue. The Martyrs' Memorial, illustrated in the Lalit Kala Contemporary Indian Art Series, (No. 19), shows seven figures, among which there is not a single woman, as though women did not participate in the freedom movement.<sup>14</sup> The figures are contorted by some unknown inner agony, but they certainly do not give the impression of joyous valour or of a triumphant aspirational certitude. This is not a work of art created by either a participant in the freedom struggle or even by a perceptive observer. It is a work by a Kala gumasta, who was "sab bandarka bepari" (flourishing trader at every kind of port) and who like Satyajit Ray in Film, Ravi Shankar in Music, M. F. Husain in Painting, Charles Correa in Architecture, have come to epitomise our current comprador culture. Everywhere we turn, in whichever direction we look, whatever be the art medium, the same sort of fellows are found to be flourishing. They are the quintessential kala gumastas. They have nothing to say, but are too guilt-ridden and egoistical to remain silent. They must assert themselves, whether they possess a will to challenge, a soaring idealism, a compassionate love for their fellow countrymen or not. The nation may suffer the terrible agonies of Partition (over 12 million refugees moved across the borders, apart from the innumerable cases of arson, mass murder, gang rape, abduction, and so on); the nation may pass through the transformation wrought by political freedom; the nation may pass through hundred such traumatic experiences, but our kala gumastas feel nothing. "Bile does not slosh in their bellies". Nothing stirs their dead bones. They just march along, reaping the fruits with both hands, making profits whatever happens, pursuing their solid and sordid careers without the slightest deflection.

### K. Venkatappa

Let us consider another kala gumasta. K. Venkatappa (b. 1887 - d.1970s?) who was a student of Abanindranath Tagore and attempted Bengal School type of line drawings as reliefs with the corniest of subjects, e.g. Shiva

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13. *The statue of Gandhi* bears an uncanny resemblance to *The Boxer*, a Roman bronze copy of a Greek sculpture by Apollonius of Athens, 1st Century B.C. in the Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome. Perhaps, Roy Chowdhury was copying a Royal Academy copy of the above Roman copy.
- 13A. Roy Choudhary received the "mark of Cain" when he was awarded the Padma Bhushan by our comprador government.
14. The text mentions that the Memorial was specially commissioned by J. Nehru and was to include eleven large figures. Possibly the commission was prematurely aborted and only seven figures were actually made.

**Tandava (1940) and Parting of Shakuntala (1928)**<sup>15</sup>. These are the most repulsive and inane works of an unimaginative mind. Literary and painterly, neither naturalistic nor symbolic, neither particularized nor generalized, they are too feeble even to deserve much criticism.

### **V.P. Karmarkar**

Another student of the Royal Academy in London was V.P. Karmarkar (1891-1962), who was earlier active in Calcutta and then settled in Bombay. Critic V.R. Amberkar has called Karmarkar a "Romantic Realist". Actually, the romance was merely in the titles, e.g. **Conch Blower, Flower Girl, Fisher Girl, Four Seasons**, etc. The works themselves were all uniformly done in the dreary, dull as ditch water, pedestrian, realistic style. Naturally, Karmarkar executed many portrait busts of many notable kala gumastas, including Sir D.N. Mulla, and Sir Visvesvarayya and many such notorious banians. Critic Jaya Appasamy remarks, "They were generally made for the government or civic bodies. The state oriented the artist's taste, toward an art which was designed above all to please them."<sup>16</sup>

Another early sculptor, F.N. Bose (b.1880 - d.1926), emigrated to settle permanently in Scotland.

Still another student of the Royal Academy was Hiranmoy Roy Choudhury (d. 1962), who became the Vice-Principal of the Lucknow School of Art. He did an official portrait of George V, as well as one of Mahatma Gandhi (9 1/2 ft.height).

Somehow, the Bengal School pushed Indian art into such a blind alley that sculpture did not make any headway in Calcutta. Not that painting did either, but comparatively speaking sculpture took a back seat. (Devi Prasad worked in Madras, Ramkinkar in Shantiniketan, Sankho Choudhuri in Baroda and Delhi, even Prodosh Das Gupta and Chintamani Kar, were active in Calcutta only for short periods in their careers). We do not know why Delhi, Bombay and Madras encouraged sculpture to a greater degree than Calcutta. We do not agree with Jaya Appasamy's speculation: "Firstly, there existed a traditional sculpture in clay (Durga icons, Krishnanagar toys). Bengal does not possess stone quarries in its vicinity and is a deltaic area. Secondly, the rise of a school of painting, called the

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15. The Lalit Kala Monograph, 1968, mentions that his plaster work was "reoriented" in 1948 - Does this mean that it was "remarked and replaced"?

16. *An Introduction to Modern Indian Sculpture*, 1970, p.11.



Bengal School, tended to nourish a delicate and painterly art. Perhaps these factors contributed to a general lack of interest in formal sculpture."<sup>17</sup>.

I think that the explanation lies deeper. The number of extremely servile *kala gumastas* was greater in Calcutta than the combined total of the rest of the Indian metropolises (Bombay, Delhi and Madras). This was due to the Europeans having made Calcutta the base of their investments in mining, engineering, plantations, jute, managing agencies, etc. The Royal Academy Style went bankrupt in England before the 1st World War and Calcuttans could neither think beyond the Royal Academy manner, nor could they give it up, for the colonial Englishmen was culturally even more conservative than the Londoners. Thus Calcutta was caught in an absolute *cul de sac*.

The influence of the degenerate Bengal School was certainly negative. But it was negative allround, not only for sculpture. And when feeble new beginnings were made, in turn, in Bombay, Baroda and Delhi, both sculpture and painting were able to move simultaneously forward, from the Royal Academic style to first, the Cosmpolitan, and later, the International style, from the '30s onwards.

Needless to add, there were other weighty sociological reasons as well for Calcutta's relative eclipse. The shift of India's capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911-31; the aftermath of the partition of the country in 1947; the spread-over exodus of Hindus from East Bengal, and the total collapse of the Bengali film market; the Bangladesh crisis of 1971; and several other socio-economic and politico-cultural developments affected Bengal and Calcutta adversely. *However, the major reason in our view was the heavy hand of utterly slavish compradorism that lay upon Calcuttan culture.* The International Style of architecture and of other arts itself appeared belatedly in India in the mid-'50s, but its appearance in Calcutta was still further delayed by another two decades.

It is the same story everywhere. The more backward, the more neglected and the more overlooked an area or a country is in a period, the more likely it is to overtake the previously advanced, on a sort of rebound. Possibly that is why, Calcutta is now ruled by the CPM, the most advanced of the reformist parties in India, whilst the rest of India is ruled by the extreme right-wing, represented by the Congress (I), at the Centre and by centrist parties like the AGP, DMK, TDP, and Janata in other parts of the country. Calcutta was so heavily compradorised that ultimately it broke away to

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17. *Ibid.*, p.10

take a slightly more radical garb than the rest of the country. The CPM, by no means, lacks *kala gumastas*, but they are a shade better than the utterly degenerate, criminalized, *goondas* of the ruling Congress. Just so, five decades ago, it was the Calcutta *kala gumastas* who were more servile and dirtier than the *kala gumastas* of the rest of the country. In art and culture the law of "reculer pour mieux sauter" applies with redoubled force.<sup>18</sup>

### B.C. Sanyal (b.1902/4)

Bhavesh Sanyal was a typical comprador. He was a college drop-out, though he claims to have joined the nationalist movement in 1921. Anyway, his friend Dinkar Kaushik writes: "But he secretly admired the British for their efficiency, their discipline and their civilized standards of living".<sup>19</sup> Anyway, whatever be the reasons for his loving the British, he adopted himself to them very successfully both as a student and as a teacher. We may again quote Dinkar Kaushik:

"Work, method, techniques, material were all determined by the English principals of the art schools. Percy Brown, headed the Calcutta Art School... as a teacher he would not change his methods of teaching from plaster casts, of life study from posed models, and of attaining a photo-oriented realism. The graded study, first in black and white, then in monochrome, and finally in colour was the accepted training in art. Landscape was a week-end occupation and compositions based on daily life were luxuries to be indulged in only by final year students. Such was the officially accepted pattern."<sup>20</sup>

A little later Bhavesh became the Vice Principal of the Mayo School of Art, Lahore (1929-36). Like D.P. Roy Chowdhury, Bhavesh Sanyal was another *kala gumasta*, who flourished in imperialist times and who flourished even more in comprador days. He became, in 1952, head of the Fine Arts Department of the Delhi Polytechnic and from 1960 to 1969 he was the Secretary of the Lalit Kala Akademi.

He had started as a member of the Bengal School, for he was a painter apart from being a sculptor.

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18. International analogies exist. Backward East-Europe embraced communism earlier and the longest-surviving Portuguese colonies are today projecting Marxist regimes. The CPM regime in Bengal is not a genuine communist regime, but like everything else, India echoes, and echoes farcically.

19. *Sanyal*, Lalit Kala Contemporary Indian Art Series, 1967, p.ii.

20. *Ibid*, p.iii

"The Bengal School too, had an indirect effect on his emotional character. Time and again one discovers in his early work an attempt at symbolism. He seems eager to draw attention to the Misery of the unfortunate. His paintings of beggars and despairing women embody his sympathy for the poor and lowly."<sup>21</sup>

Just as Bhavesh flowered with the Bengal School, when it was profitable to do so and which fetched him the Vice-Principalship of the Lahore Art School, he left the School in 1936 and set up his own studio "in the fashionable part of Lahore"<sup>22</sup>. Bhavesh again flowered with the times and hitched his cart to Amrita Sher Gill, whose Bohemian life and flamboyant postures were the rage of late '30s. Flowering with the current is the norm for banyans.

Bhavesh's work is outstandingly pedestrian and extraordinarily puerile. e.g. *Grief* (1959)<sup>22A</sup>.

**N.G. Pansare (1912 - 1968)**

Pansare also worked in London at the Royal College of Art and he is known for his equestrian statue of Shivaji at Shivaji Park and for the reliefs on the New India Assurance Building. All these works are in the undistinguished British style.

**Ramkinkar Baij (1910 - 1980)**

Possibly the best known Indian sculptor of the inter-war years was Ramkinkar, who was a teacher at Shantiniketan and appropriately executed a major commission for the Reserve Bank of India Building at Delhi in the last period of his life. Some of his works at Shantiniketan are truly disorganized, like the *Deepa Stambha* (1941), which has been unnecessarily praised for being semi-abstract. As we know, Abstractionism was a product of the pessimistic mood prevalent in Russian art circles after the failure of the 1905 Revolution. There is no special merit in being abstract, as Ramkinkar attempted to be belatedly after some 30 years, and that also without rhyme or reason, as in the abovementioned *Deepa Stambha* of 1941 and in *Composition* of 1948. This is exactly the trouble with the Indian compradors. They copy and ape the West, belatedly after many decades, and suddenly, without any rhyme or reason, i.e. without any connection with their own national conditions or their inner urges.

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21. Ibid. p.iii

22. Ibid. p.iv

22A. Illustration No. 14, in the Lalit Kala Series on Sanyal



**G. K. Mhatre,**  
**TO THE TEMPLE**  
Marble , 1900.  
(About Life Size)

**D. P. Roy Choudhry**  
**THE TRIUMPH OF LABOUR**  
Bronze, 1954 . (Over Life Size )

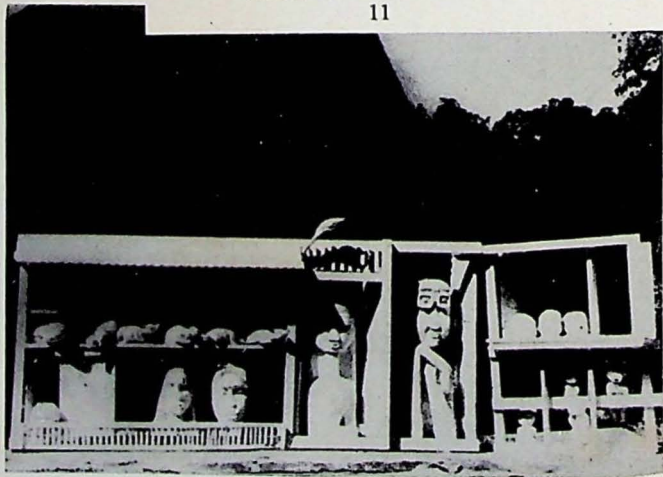


Ram Kinker Baij,  
HARVESTER,(Replica),  
43 x 24 cm.,Metal , 1943.

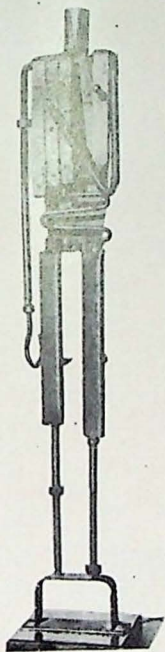


Mahendra Pandya,  
HOUSE No 513 360 x 120 cm. Wood ,n. d.

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A. M. Davierwala,  
MAN WITH HOOK  
123 x 24 cm. Scrap Iron, 1962.

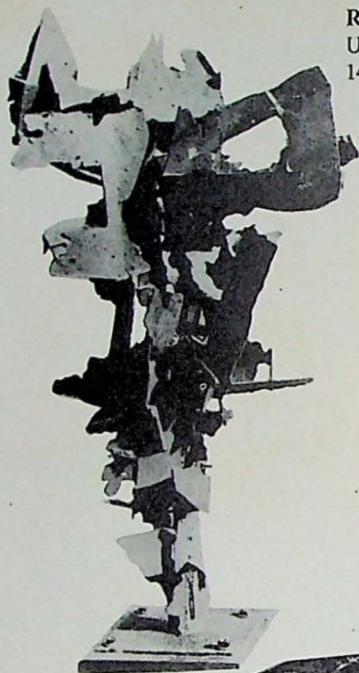


P. V. Jankiram ,  
HEAD 56 x 35 cm.  
Brass Sheet ,1982.

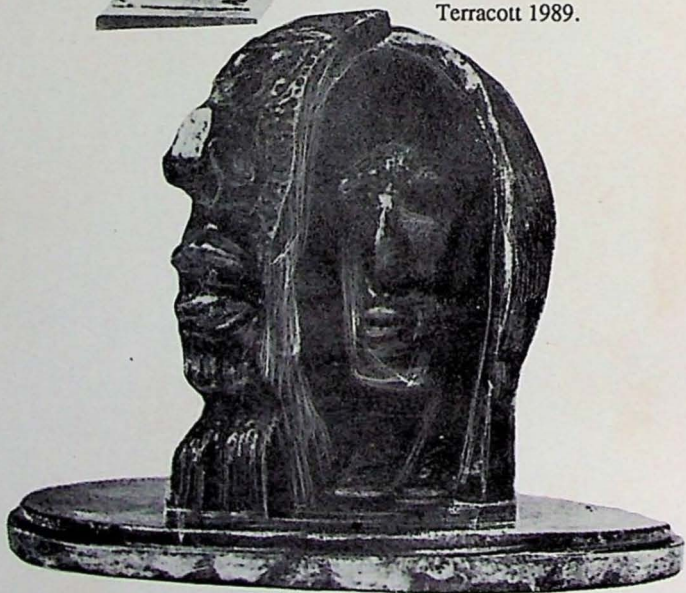


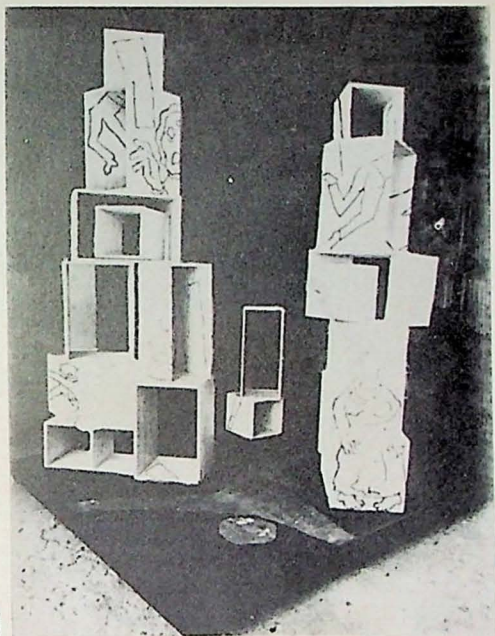
**Raghav Kaneria ,**  
**UNTITLED**

144 x 83 cm, ,Welded Sheet, c. 1963.



**Himmat Shah,**  
**UNTITLED 27 x 34 cm.**  
Terracott 1989.



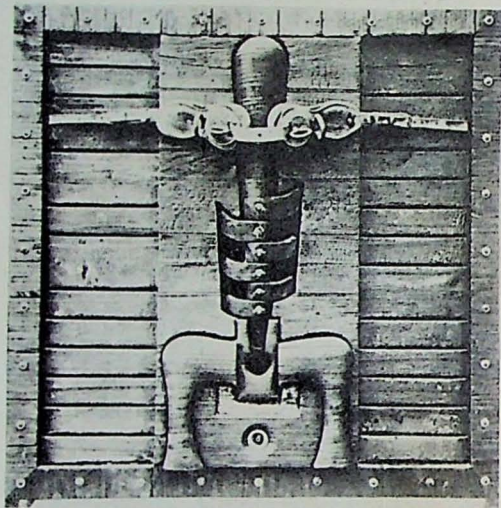


**M. F. Husain ,**  
**THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE,**  
Wood , 1982 .



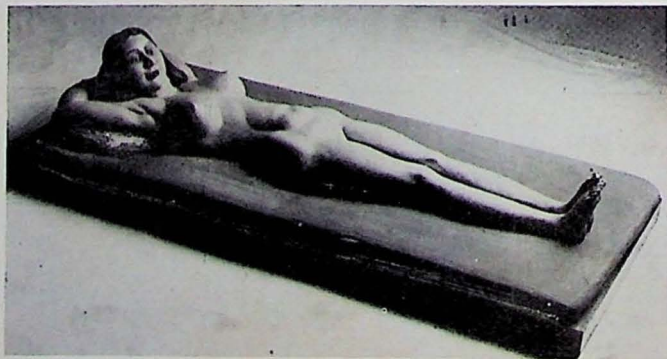
**Meera Mukherjee**  
**JAGAT**  
191 x 89 x 59 cm. Bronze 1989





Satish Gujaral,  
CRUCIFIXION 123 x 123 cm. Burnt Wood , 1979 .

G. Ravinder Reddy,  
RADHA 270 x 94 x 56 cm. Fibre Glass, 1989.



**Mrinalini Mukherjee**

**PRITHVI**

255 x 99 x 70 cm. Hemp Fibre, 1989.

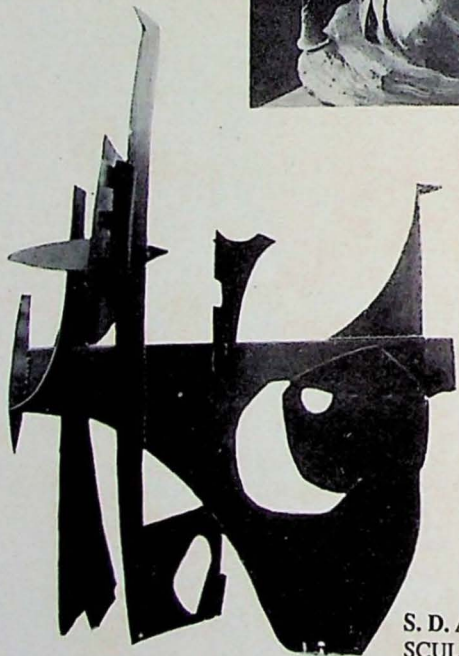


**V. R. Khajuria,**

**SMALL FORM,**

51 x 30 cm. Kashmir Marble, 1982

B. V. Talim,  
TAKLI,  
Plaster of Paris, 1932.



S. D. Arwade,  
SCULPTURE IN IRON 1973 -74.

**That is why, a vital art current of the West becomes in their hands a bloodless and senseless gimmick. They want merely to draw attention of the colonial audience to themselves by loudly shouting; "I can do it! Don't ask me why I have done it. For I have done it to show that I can do it. Don't question me about my country and my times. I don't know anything about them. But if you consider the West to have produced great art, then I have done the same and therefore my art is equally great." This is the tragedy of compradorism. Meaningless apeing becomes the *raison d'etre* for art creation!**

### **Prodosh Das Gupta**

Prodosh Das Gupta was a comprador of the spiritualistic sort. He writes as his credo:

"The undulating movements in gliding planes merging one into another create the energy in a continuum which is sculpture's life-giving force - the *prana* of the Indian Philosophy. So in essence it should be static, yet dynamic."<sup>23</sup>

Prodosh had impeccable comprador pedigree. He was a student of both Hiranmoy and Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury and finally of Royal Academy, London. His work, as illustrated in the L.K.A. Contemporary Indian Art Series, is as undistinguished as of any comprador. His inclination seems to be towards certain smooth, sweeping, curving lines, like Jamini Roy in three dimensions. They are so sentimental that we tend to agree with some of the remarks of Bishnu Dey:

"Some of these pieces may be guilty..... of emotional excesses."<sup>24</sup>

The spiritualist credo, no doubt, helped Prodosh to be on the same wavelength as the mass of Indian compradores, who always claimed a high level of spirituality for India. This naturally led to Prodosh becoming the head of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi from 1957 to 1970.

### **Chitamani Kar (b.1915)**

Chintamani Kar in his credo<sup>25</sup> very modestly traces his own professional

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23. Indian Sculpture Today, 1983, Jehangir Art Gallery Publication, p.13, from the *The Artist's View*

24. Prodosh Das Gupta, *Lalit Kala Contemporary Art Series*, 1961.

25. *The Artist's View*, p.17, in *Indian Sculpture Today*, 1983, op. cit.

ancestry on the one hand to the Renaissance and beyond, and on the other to traditional medieval Indian sculpture.<sup>26</sup> Having inherited only this much how he could inherit more is a moot point, yet he adds to his pedigree and lineage:

"Conceptually I strived for a rhythmic unity in my work which is in part at least, inspired by my love of music, Indian as well as European."<sup>27</sup>

There is really no limit to the pretensions of our *kala gumastas*. They just casually mention that they have inherited two of the world's greatest sculptural traditions and add to the legacy, casually two of the world's greatest musical traditions! In the same way our Congress leaders claim to have inherited the legacy of the Mauryan Empire, the Mughal Empire and British Empire. And the Nehru-Gandhi *dadal kala gumasta* family actually narrows down the legacy to themselves, on the grounds that Jawahar wrote something silly about the old emperors in his "Discovery of India"<sup>28</sup>.

Kar studied in Paris and settled in London. Then became a stooge of the Congress governments in India and West Bengal and headed the Calcutta Art School (1956-73). Kar then buttered up to the powers that be and secured Padma Bhushan in 1974.

What is one to say about such a sculptor? According to Jaya Appasamy, Kar is better with mini-sculpture of vitrified China than with bigger works. As far as we are concerned, Kar's entire oeuvre, big or small, is infantile student level work (See, *Skating The Stag*, 1948; *Part Figure*, 1953, *Caryatid*, 1959 etc. in the LKA Series, 1965).

It is not a question of inheritance, as *kala gumastas* claim. What you do with the inheritance and the pedigree, is the real issue. Unfortunately, India is a nation of compradors and not of true achievers. Compradors always claim double legacies and quadruple lineages. They are ideologically living in the feudal period and therefore they are instinctively inclined to claim blue blood ancestry and are habituated to claiming immense inheritances. *Instead of such dynastic claims*, if they were to concentrate on achieving something for themselves, right in the present,

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26. Kar was apprentice to one Giridhari Maharana, an Orissan traditional sculptor.

27. *Ibid*, p.18

28. "Discovery of India" is by itself a most apt comprador title. How can an Indian discover his own country? And why does an Indian have to discover his own country? The nation is in the air and the water around his being, how can he become an alien and "discover" it, unless he was a comprador?

our country might have made greater progress, economically, politically, socially, culturally and artistically.

#### A.M. Davierwala (1922 - 1975)

Davierwala was a Parsee pharmacist, who decided to plunge into sculptural activity at a relatively advanced stage. He was largely self-taught though N.G. Pansare and S. Bakre seem to have assisted and influenced him. The compradorised copying was of course there:

"The influence of Epstein and Henry Moore, of course, went deeper. No young sculptor of the times, especially anyone within the British sphere of cultural orientation, could escape this influence in the years between the war and later. The two giants had already grappled with a thousand different problems, offered by the disciplines of sculpting and carving. If Davierwala's early work has broad affinity with the thematic and formal preoccupations of Epstein and Moore, both distinctive interpreters of mass and material, this is but inevitable."<sup>30</sup>

D. Nadkarni who wrote the above lines, may feel that it was inevitable for Indians "living within the British sphere of cultural orientations" to be humble compradors. We disagree. It was entirely feasible for Indians to revolt against the British orientation and forcefully assert their Indianness. Just as they could overthrow British rule by the simple exercise of nationalist and revolutionary will, it is entirely possible for them to reject totally the influences of Epstein and Moore. Kala gumastagiri is not an inevitability in each individual case. Many, even most, may become Kala gumastas, but not everyone. Otherwise, there will be no future for India or for any individual sculptor.

The scrap-metal and plastic assemblages by Davierwala are simply clever. They do not move. *Man with Hook*, (1962), *Study In Light And Colour* (1968), *Circle and Cross* (1970), *Icarus* (1963), *Meghdoot* (1964), *She And Three Others Linear Analysis of A Striding Figure* (1970), *Suryadev* (1967), *Cosmic Balance* (1969), *Animated Suspension* (1970), etc., etc.,<sup>31</sup> are some of these superficial arrangements.

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30. Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni in *Indian Sculpture Today*, 1983, Jehangir Art Gallery Publication, p. 94.

31. Illustrations in *LKA Contemporary Indian Art Series*, 1971 and *Indian Sculpture Today*, 1983, op. cit., and *Modern Indian Sculpture*, op-cit.

There is no expression that is ardent. Occasionally, there is a kind of humorous suggestion (e.g. *She and Three Others*) but even here it is merely superficial wit. There is nothing under powerful emotional pressure, nothing that suggests that inner tensions were seeking explosive expression, there is nothing profound or even serious. It is just some *kalagumasta* making believe and playfully suggesting that he was sculpting to some purpose.

### Sankho Choudhuri (b. 1916)

Sankho is another sculptor who has received the black mark of Padmashree in 1971 from our comprador regime. Furthermore, for the last few years he had headed the Lalit kala Akadami, one of the premier institutions, which distributes bribes from the government of India to the artists. Sankho has been favoured by the state right from the beginning. He was made the head of Dept. of Sculpture, Baroda,<sup>33</sup>; and granted the prestigious commission Music for the A.I.R., both in 1957, made member of the Delhi Art Commission and the All India Handicrafts Board; given Padmashree 1971, Chairmanship of LKA in 1985; given 5ft. brass sculpture commission from World Bank through GOI 1976; and so on. In fact, right from the time he started as student of Ramkinkar at Shantiniketan, in the 1940s, Sankho has received state largesses right upto the present. He has also been supported by Indian industrialists. He executed a mural for Alembic, Baroda, in 1958 and a 12 ft. Stainless Steel Rotating Sculpture for Jyoti, Baroda, in 1967-68, etc. In other words, Sankho belongs properly to the transition between the Industrial Capitalist and State Capitalist periods of Indian Cultural history or to the 1934-56 and 1957-67 phases.<sup>34</sup>

Here let us pause and consider the situation of the state-financed, state-supported and state-elevated artists. Let us try to look at the world from the point of view of the artist who has for his entire active life has been employed by the state in various capacities. Naturally, the first thing that happens to him is that he gets habituated to total parasitism. It is of course privileged parasitism but parasitism it is none the less. Secondly, he is treated as V.I.P. by all around him. Thirdly, he is encouraged to think that he is something special. Even if he has no talent or ability, he is made so much of and is paid such sumptuous allowances, fees, commissions and salaries, that the parasite gets convinced that he is

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33. Probably this was the first Indian University to organise degree courses for the arts.

34. Problems of periodization and phasization, will be discussed separately in a later section of this monograph.

really something extraordinary. Fourthly, he is allowed to wield a lot of power over individuals and over financial allocations. By now the parasite has become thoroughly corrupted with delusions of grandeur and trained in the techniques of manipulation of money. In fact, he has become an operator, if not worse.

That is one side, the physical or the financial side. What about the ideological aspect? What does such a corrupt, power-wielding parasite think of his surroundings? What is his *weltanschauung*? We cannot be sure of all the details of such a worm's world view, but we can surmise the essential ingredients. One, he will be boastful. Two, he will be self-serving. Three, he will be sly and smooth. Four, he will be mercenary. Five, he will be ignorant, for you cannot spend a life-time after mean pursuits and acquire much knowledge. Sixth, he will be deliberately blind. Seven, he will be untruthful and lying. Truth cannot be perceived by those who are interested in preserving the status quo. Only those who are interested in overthrowing the present iniquitous system can perceive truth.

It is not a question of Sankho alone. The same goes for Kapila Vatsyayana, Ashok Vajpayee, Mansingh, Virendra Luther, Pupul Jaykar, Laxmi Sihare, Girish Kamad, B.V. Karanth, Gopi Arora, Martand Singh, and hundreds of other smaller and bigger fry. There is nothing personal about this criticism, though individuals have been named. It is a sociological phenomenon. If you serve a rotten comprador state for an appreciable part of your single life-term and if you defend by words and actions, this rotten exploitative system, if you do not protest or make any effort to change the system, what is going to happen? You are bound to become rotten yourself and do dirty deeds in defence of a dirty system. There is no neutral ground. If you serve the government and serve as its ideological tool, consciously or unconsciously is a matter of indifference, you are bound to defend the indefensible and attack the desirable, the hopeful and the aspiring. It is one or the other.

The proof is provided by the kind of work performed by such parasitic sculptors. Look at *Music (1956)*<sup>35</sup> done by Sankho for the A.I.R. It is a simplified figure of a seated woman holding a *tanpura*. Its a silly work and says nothing about either music or the woman supposedly producing it. Or look at, *Form (1965)*<sup>36</sup> which is nothing but the truncated lower end of a hockey stick. What is the point about this *Form*? It isn't like a

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35. Illustration No. 12 in *LKA Contemporary Indian Art Series, 1970*

36. Illustrated on p.21, *Indian Sculpture Today, 1983, op. cit.*



Gabo-Pevsner affair, which is a soaring, probing, disturbing matter. It is too small and cut-off into too small a "detail", to mean anything. It isn't even playful. It is merely a failure.

At times, Sankho's work, almost ceases to be sculpture and becomes two dimensional, for instance, *Mask* (1958), *Bather* (1951), *Music* (1966), *Head of a Girl* (1958), *Head* (1966), *Chemist* (1961), etc.<sup>37</sup>.

Again and again we come across an impersonal tragedy as of Sankho Choudhuri. It is the tragedy of our kala gumasta class. They have nothing to say. They are born to imitate and ape. The times are not propitious. They were born belatedly and have been dead from birth. History has no scope for kala gumastas. Their personal tragedy is, in fact, a hopeful sign that society will shortly move forward after discarding them on the dust heap of history.

#### Dhanraj Bhagat (b. 1917)

Bhagat may be said to belong to the cosmopolitan period of 1934-56, when the industrialists of India were rather influential. He was associated with Bhavesh Sanyal in the Delhi Silpi Chakra, a prominent artist group in Delhi.

His terracota *Bull* (1957) probably made him famous. There is an erotic strain in his work, *Tree of Life* (1954), *Kiss* (1957), which is, if not exactly original, or at least unobjectionable. In the latter part of his career (illustrations 22, 24, 27, 28 and 29 of 1962-1964) he has turned two dimensional under the impact of primitive African and Polynesian sculpture, which he seems to have employed as a kind of heraldic device.<sup>39</sup> He also seems to have had better understanding of the function of sculpture than most other Indian sculptors.

"Sculpture not only reflects the inner personality of the creator, but also his surroundings and the time in which he lives."<sup>40</sup>

#### Pilloo Pochkhanawala (1923 - 1985)

A rather over-rated sculptress hailing from a leading industrial bourgeois family, Pilloo more or less specialized in assemblages of scrap material. She imitated not only the Western sculptors but also their local comprador descendants (e.g. Davierwala and Kaneria).

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37. All these works have been illustrated in the LKA booklet.

39. All examples quoted from LKA Contemporary Art Series, 1964.

40. Artist's credo on p.24, *Indian Sculpture Today*, 1983.

### **Satish Gujral (b. 1925)**

Satish was trained in Mexico by Sequeiros, who made an attack on Trotsky's life as Stalin's agent. It seems that this horrible upbringing has left permanent scars on Satish's psyche. The sculptor who has made forays into painting, craftwork and building design, has in every sphere been an egomaniacal, flamboyant, eclectic showman. Politically influential, Gujral had been a lion in fashionable Delhi circles for a long time.

### **P.V. Janakiram (b. 1930)**

Janakiram is another state-supported creature and ceramics teacher at the Govt. Arts College, Madras. Janakiram's works are even more two dimensional than those of Sankho and Bhagat. This two dimensionality is illustrated in the LKA booklet at 1 Woman (1966), 9 King (1969), 10 Head (1970), 12 Crown of Thorns (1971), 15 Devine Child (1971), 23 Kaliyamardan (1965) and 24 Monk (1973).

### **Mahendra Pandya (b.1926)**

**V.R. Khajuria (b.1934)**

**Raghav Kaneria (b.1936)**

**Ramesh Pateria (b.1937)**

**Rajnikant Panchal (b.1937)**

All the five sculptors belong to the Baroda School and are very competent craftsmen in their different ways. Pandya has concentrated upon wood, Khajuria upon black stone, Kaneria upon scrap metal, Pateria upon marble and Panchal upon miscellaneous media. Taken together they expose the limitations of our comprador world and the even harsher constraints of the eclectic manner of teaching adopted at Baroda by Bendre, Sankho and others.

Naturally, in this brief survey we cannot cover in detail, all the sculptors of India. Some like G. Ravinder Reddy (b.1956) are just making their mark. His sexy, pop art drawings are intriguing. To mention another name, Balbir Singh Katt (b.1941) had an interesting piece, a kind of wooden jigsaw puzzle-like a giant flaming circle in a recent Bombay show. There are others like M.F. Husain who occasionally sculpt to produce atrocious wooden coloured toys. All these and the unmentioned ones are strictly confined within the ambit of mediocre comprador art.

### III

## THE CONTEMPORARY AMBIENCE

In the past Indian sculpture was one of the glories of mankind. The work of Indian sculptors at Mathura, Bharhut, Sarnath, Sanchi, Amravati, Mahabalipuram, Ellora, Elephanta, Badami, Bhuvaneswar, Konarak, Khajuraho, Kanchipuram, Tanjore, Madura and at a thousand other places in India, has never been surpassed and scarcely ever been equalled anywhere in the world.<sup>40A</sup>

Today, Indian sculpture is nowhere near this level of achievement. Our comprador climate is not conducive to creation. We have become miserable little imitators and copiers of the West.

There is not a single sculptor whom we can call great in comparison with either India's past or Euro-America's and Africa's present.

This is very unfortunate and sad. But the critic's function is to face the horrible and harsh reality of hybrid comprador Indian culture, in the hope that the identification and categorization of contemporary poverty will lead to a better future. Indian sculptors must liberate themselves, first of all from the shackles that comprador Congress State has imposed upon them. They must cease to be agents of the ruling class and party. Secondly, they must begin to understand and confront the ugly comprador society. There is no other way. Following Danton, we are forced to advise: "Audacity! More audacity! Still more audacity!"

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40A. See the Volumes of Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture by Meister, Deva and Dhaky, 1983-88.

## INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RULING CLASS COALITION PARTNERS

In the current series of monographs on the sociologies of Indian Music, Thumri, Indian Dance, Indian Ballet, and Indian Theatre<sup>41</sup>, we have repeatedly come across the problems of periodization, phasization, orchestration and class orientations.

Let us define the contours of the class-coalition which is ruling India at present. First, this is a comprador set up and as such the two basic coalition partners are the metropolitan imperialist bourgeoisies of Euro-America and Japan, including their multinational progeny and their local Indian agents, the *kala gumastas*, the *banians*, the *dalals*, the *brokers*, the *dubashes*, etc., of India. But each side of this partnership has to be analysed and examined in detail.

From the metropolitan imperialist side, we have the national bourgeoisie of USA, EEC, Japan and the White Dominions. Here again, the EEC, does not speak with one voice at all times but represents merely an occasional consensus amongst nine national bourgeoisies of UK, France, Benelux, West Germany, Italy, etc. Similarly, the White Dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have each their particular self-interest to urge. Apart from these bigger identities, there are the national bourgeoisies of Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, etc., who press forward with their own selfish games. Apart from them, there are the immense number of multinationals who mount neo-colonial pressures upon India. In addition to these, there are the interests represented by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which has suddenly emerged as a separate entity in world imperialist politics.

On the side of the brown *sahibs*, there are many distinct class-interests. There is the wide-spread *zamindar*, group which at one end of the spectrum fades into the ex-princelings, who received compensation for their privy purses; and at the other end they merge with the rich peasants or *kulaks*, who are often *benami* holders employing scores of sub-tenants, share croppers, and landless labourers on their holdings. Amongst these upper stratum *kulaks* are to be counted the new co-operative society bosses

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41. All published as companion studies between the years 1988 and 1989.

who control vast chunks of irrigated sugar lands. Apart from this upper crust of landed interests namely zamindars, kulaks and co-operator kings, there are the money-lenders, usurers, and big grain-merchants, who are all connected with agriculture. Then there are the normal factions of the industrial, commercial and financial bourgeoisies in the urban areas along with the top layers of state-capitalist bureaucrats and the wealthy professionals (doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc.) Attached to these bigger sharks are vast number of the middle classes, technocrats, engineers, top management specialists, advertising agency executives and such other miscellaneous riff raff. Naturally, the top architects, the big officials of the culture ministries, including the Information and Broadcasting Ministry; the high-salaried Directors of All India Radio and Doordarshan Stations; the better paid journalists; other award-winning artists and litterateurs and all such elements belong to the bourgeoisie.

In short, let us sum up in two columns below, the major classes represented in the ruling class coalition in power in India today.

### RULING COALITION

Abroad	Inland
1. U.S.A.	1. Zamindars
2. Japan	2. Kulaks
3. E.E.C. members, individually and collectively	3. Other Agrarian Bourgeoisie
4. Multinationals	4. Financial Bourgeoisie
5. White Dominions	5. Industrial Bourgeoisie
6. OPEC members	6. Commercial Bourgeoisie
7. NRI Bourgeoisie, with one foot inside the country and one outside the country.	7. Top professionals
	8. Big Bureaucrats
	9. Labour aristocracy
	10. Lumpen Bourgeoisie
	11. NRI Bourgeoisie, with one foot inside and one outside the country.

From the above chart, two lessons emerge:

1. There are a vast number of minute, sectional bourgeois interests, which can never coincide precisely at all times. The Japanese bourgeoisie may have some interests to pursue through their industrial partners in India, which are opposed to the interests of some multinational trading company which may have some commercial capitalist partners locally. That apart, the NRI bourgeoisie

is divided within itself, one section supporting the imperialist and another supporting national interests. All these various interests command the attention of journalists and technocrats, who are at logger-heads with each other.

2. In such a situation full of internal contradictions, the artists and writers do not know what they are supposed to do. They are agreed on only one thing, that they must oppose the rebellious and the non-conformist. They must fight tooth and nail the leftist, the militant, the dissident and the revolutionary. But apart from this negative agreement, they do not know how to reconcile the interests of free enterprise with the interests of the public-sector-corporation-chairmen-bureaucrats; the interests of the zamindar-kulak with the lumpen bourgeoisie; and the NRI bourgeoisie with the nationalist industrialists; that of the top trade union chief with that of the money-lender outside the factory gates; and so on.

Obviously, the situation calls for a most careful orchestration of the demands of the varied sectional interests of the bourgeoisie, as well as a most careful orchestration of the variety of appeals to be made to the oppressed and the exploited. Not only must the kulak's viewpoint be reconciled with that of the banker, the industrialist and the bureaucrat; but also the masses must be entertained and frightened, amused and terrorised, titillated and overawed, educated and benumbed, hypnotised and cajoled, provoked and satiated, uplifted and downcast, mesmerized and stimulated, enlightened and mystified, disheartened and confused, gladdened and saddened, and so on and so forth.

The orchestration has to appeal to not only the various ruling class constituencies; but also it has to prove its worth by enticing various sections of the oppressed, to a greater or lesser degree, in the service of singular or varied ruling class clients.

We have taken<sup>41A</sup> the concrete examples of Satyajit Ray, E. Alkazi, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sarkar, B.V. Karanth, Mansingh, Pupul Jaykar, Kapila Vatsyayana, Virendra Luther, Laxmi Sihare, etc.

In all the above cases, we found, that the state was the principal culprit and conduit. The state channelizes funds, subsidies, grants, contracts, fees and salaries to these individuals, more or less for their entire working lifetimes.

The second most consistent affiliation in their careers was the connection

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41A. In the set of companion booklets mentioned on back cover.

with the NRI bourgeoisie. They were married to the NRI in some cases; they were themselves for some years the displaced bourgeoisie; they had been hailed by the imperialist circles at one time or another; or they felt themselves to be aliens within the national stream. Apart from state support, NRI affiliation is the hallmark of this select kala gumasta group.

Thirdly, when the chips were down, they supported the ruling classes and their governments. When the British were fighting the nationalists, most of them stood by the British. After the "nationalist" compradors came to power, they generally favoured the status quo. Almost all of them supported Indira Gandhi, when she declared the emergency. Even today, when it is abundantly clear that Rajiv Gandhi is a national disaster, they either find excuses for him or lend their support to him on the specious ground that no other alternative is visible to them. Some of them at best whisper their doubts at private parties but quietly cover up their suspicions by pleading that any replacement of Rajiv would be for the worse.

The fourth characteristic which is common to all of them is that they claim not only their own personal neutrality, but also an autonomy for the arts from society. They sometimes pretend to take no sides, and they insist that arts stand above and distanced from the social turmoil. Politics is dirty, but art is great, because they practice art and avoid dirty politics. They believe that they obtain state support without compromising their "ideals". They do not explain why the state should be and is supporting them. They also claim that they do not know why the people identify them (the artists) with the regime. They claim state support as well as artistic independence. They serve the state and pretend to be radicals. They may not convince anybody about the absurdity of their self-contradictory positions but by constant repetition they create an atmosphere in which any attack upon them is perceived as personal and mean and politically motivated. **They are themselves always free from politics, but their critics are never un-political!**

In short, they have the following characteristics:

1. They are creatures of the state.
2. They are connected with the NRI.
3. In a crisis they stand-by their principal patron, the state.
4. They claim neutrality for themselves and autonomy for the arts.
5. They have multiple class affiliations (with the kulaks, the industrialists, the bureaucrats, the technocrats, etc.), especially with the power-brokers and the lumpen bourgeoisie.

In conclusion, it may be perceived that there are three aspects to the

relationships between coalition partners as far as the arts are concerned:

1. The artists are interested in multiple affiliations so that their works command the widest market and the demand is stabilized over time.
2. The coalition partners have competitive urges *vis-a-vis* each other. But being haves, in a crisis, they can always present a united front when confronting a revolutionary army of have-nots.
3. The artists and the writers are themselves experimenting and are 'sounding-out'. They do not know which are precisely the classes that form their ideological constituencies and who will ultimately and steadily uphold their works.

The economic classes of the propertied do not themselves know what they want, for the 'free market' of the bourgeoisie has expanded possibilities. But at the same time, by disrupting the old feudal certainties has created a situation in which a competition has been set up amongst ideologues. Thus on the one hand, the ruling class coalition partners, and on the other, the artist-ideologues are both groping in the penumbra and are tentatively projecting alternative *weltanschauungs*.

The whole ambience is sometimes rather confusing. Generally speaking, each artist and writer develops a predominant vein, a favourite style, a pronounced inclination. This is his chosen specific class constituency.

Concretely, let us take the example of fascist ideologues. There are not merely fascist writers and artists, who represent the lumpen bourgeoisie, there are also proto-fascists, who have not yet reached the logical anti-humanist conclusions, but are feeling their way towards such positions. There are also semi-fascists, who are sitting on the fence between the line that divides the lumpen and the non-lumpen bourgeoisie. There are also crypto-fascists, who would like to go the fascist way but are hesitant. There are also neo-fascists, who in spite of the historic reverses suffered by German nazism, Italian fascism, Spanish falangism, and so on, discover newer arguments to defend the indefensible. Furthermore, there are also super-fascists, who even at this late juncture believe that barbarism and civilization are separated by genetics and that the "superior races" have the inherent and eternal rights to rule over "inferior races". Thus the fascist spectrum divides itself into bands of proto-fascists, crypto-fascists, semi-fascists, pure fascists, neo-fascists, and super-fascists. There are artists and writers, who project the aspirations, joys and sorrows of each of these sectional groupings of fascists.

Like the fascists, a whole spectrum of interests distinguishes the multi-



layered agrarian bourgeoisie. At the top are the ex-princelings of 601 native states of pre-partition India,<sup>42</sup> and naturally amongst these 601 some were very small, topped by a select group of 15-25 big states (Hyderabad was equal to France in size), and another 50 or so middling in size and income. Whilst the states have disappeared, immense amounts of public properties in these states, were transferred into the private possessions of 50 to 60 families and thus even in 1989 they constitute a distinct segment of the agricultural bourgeoisie. Next group is that of the big jagirdars, zamindars, taluqdars, khots, and so on. They have survived into the present despite all the Land Reform laws. Together with them we must place also the trustees of the Big Temples and Maths (Tirupati, Guruvayyur, etc.). Next come the mass of kulaks and the directors of the big co-operative sugar factories. Next to them are grain merchants, oilseed millers, tobacco warehouse-owners, tendu leaf contractors, timber merchants, large scale horticulturists and so on. We also must not forget the bigger money-lenders who finance internal trade. In fact, the agricultural bourgeoisie is, in numbers, the largest section of the national bourgeoisie and could include many many thousands, if not a few lakhs. They have the most varied interests, though on the whole, they are led by the numerically insignificant urban bourgeoisie, which is largely connected with industrial and commercial interests in the cities. This has been the historical pattern. The urban elements, insignificant in numbers, are nevertheless so strategically placed that they dominate culturally the entire society.

As far as artists and writers are concerned, the task of representing the agrarian bourgeoisie is especially difficult. The agrarian bourgeoisie is highly confused, has an extremely wide-ranging set of aims and objectives, and is extremely labile in its views. The agro-bourgeois also has a love-hate relationship with his urban counterparts. He wants the least interference from the state and at the same time demands from the state a fantastic number of subsidies, grants and largesses. If a writer supports one segment of the rural bourgeoisie, 20 other segments will attack him. If he supports all the 20 sections of the rural capitalists, he may find that he is involved in impossible self-contradictions!

Anyway, whether we take the fascist group or the agrarian group, we are not suggesting that all the writers and artists, who are representing such complex class constituencies, are doing so consciously. We do not judge people by what they think of themselves nor by what they say about themselves. As Marxists, we judge people by what they do and by what their actions mean.

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42. J. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 1946/88, -p.307

This is a very careful distinction that can never be over-emphasised. Generally speaking, artists and writers are highly articulate individuals. They are usually very clever at disguising their fundamental inclinations and aims. They also want to avoid expression of unpopular sentiments. Thus they are fond, as a class, of dramatic radical populist gestures. Let us take the concrete examples of Satyajit Ray's films. After directing *Shatranj-ke-Khilari*, which took the horrible imperialist stance; after *Ashani-Sanket*, which again reiterated the imperialist position on the Bengal Famine and converted the famine into a private tragedy; after *Sadgati*, which refrained from disapproving the heinous sentiments of an upper caste murderer of a landless labourer; after *Ghare Baire*, which openly proclaimed anti-nationalist sentiments; after all these forceful reactionary statements, Satyajit Ray was cunning enough to appease middle class opinion by producing *Pratidwandi* and *Aranyer-Din-Ratri*, and *Jana-Aranya*, which pretended to understand the modern urban mind. Such non-sequiturs should not be allowed to camouflage Ray's main ideological thrust as a Brahmo, neo-imperialist, box-wallah, *kala gumasta*.

In sculpture, we have a parallel situation. Satish Gujral, Sankho Choudhury or any one of the others listed in *Indian Sculpture Today-1983* may make an occasional populist gesture. But the thrust of their works is to obtain awards and commissions from the comprador state.

That is why, fundamentally, artists prefer to deny ideological significance to their own works. They do not want their works to have any social meaning or significance or function. They want to proclaim that their works are autonomous and are concerned with the solution of formal problems. But what are these formal problems which are unconnected with the history of forms? As soon as forms are arranged historically they immediately acquire social significance and ideological meaning. It is impossible to avoid ideological significance. However hard the artist or the writer tries to be neutral, his works will reveal his ideology.

On the one hand, his own upbringing, education and career path have already resulted in implanting a sociological bias inside him. He is a brain-washed product of society, born in a particular socio-economic stratum and brought up to think the thoughts of the ruling classes of his times. On the other hand, there are unwritten and written laws of censorship to which his works are forced to conform. Furthermore, there are the temptations and incentives of the art market. His works and writings may remain unsold or the ruling class may decide to confer prestige and awards upon him and grant him or deny him state and private commissions. Thus the obverse of the coin is that his outlook is predetermined by his social setting. The reverse is that the society enforces

its own code of conduct and censorship law upon all artists and writers. From both sides, the result is the same. The art works and the writings, that the artists and the writers produce, are socially determined and are socially conformist.

This of course applies to only the overwhelming bulk of the art works and writings produced by artists and writers in a particular society at a specific time. An insignificant minority of works can and will be nonconformist and revolutionary. It is precisely because such works are produced by a revolutionary minority, that there is hope for the future. Otherwise, there would be no breakthrough. In a very broad historical sense, revolutionary breakthroughs are equally inevitable.

Let us hope that from within the plethora of mediocre comprador works, at the end of the line of myriads of absolutely conformist kala gumasta products, there will sooner or later arise an Indian sculptor, who will express the revolutionary will of our times and lead the way towards a socio-cultural and sculptural breakthrough.

**FIVE VARIATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

We have already noted in the first section of this monograph that the ruling concepts projected through sculpture are the concepts promoted and sanctioned by the ruling classes of the period in question. We have also noted that the elements of the ruling class coalition fluctuate and the dominant segments thereof take their turn to rise to the top.

There are five socio-political options available to Indian Society. Each option involves a choice of cultural projections. We shall briefly sum up these five alternatives in the form of a chart appended hereto.

It seems to us that the most likely course for India is going to be some combination of Degenerating Status Quo and Centrist Reformist Triumph (columns 1 and 3 of the chart).

## PROSPECTS BEFORE INDIAN SCULPTURE

Sr. No.		Degenerating Status Quo	Military Takeover	Centrist Reformist Triumph	Fascist Solution	Revolutionary Overthrow
1.	Main Thrust	Hypocritical Hysteria taken to an eclectic climax.	Revival of Royal Academic Style.	Avant- Gardism together with religious Revivalism will be promoted.	Glorification of Dynastic Ruler will be carried to extreme absurdity.	True flowering of all the visual, performing and literary arts. Socialist humanism will inform new cultural movements. All religious and revivalist tendencies would be curbed.
2.	Background	Mystic Existentialism and similar rubbish would flourish.	"Pissing Boys" and "Nubile Nudies" would be amongst the more popular infantile forms, along with glorification of military hardware.	Puritanical censorship will be reinforced.	Extreme forms of fanaticism and sycophancy will be encouraged.	All types of censorship would be gradually eliminated. True freedom will increasingly prevail in all the arts.
3.	General Ambience	NRI influence and compulsions of pimping for tourists will force bastardised ephemeral fashions. Imitation of the West will remain the central concern.	Folksy eroticism, infantile joviality, and iron-fisted imposition of a senseless code of conduct will assume dominance.	The art scene would be extremely volatile and near anarchic confusion and conflicts will prevail	The most perverse form of violent brow-beating will become common and the most senseless levels of flattery will be supreme.	The New Socialist Man will be the theme of a hundred manifestations of the New Society and the New Revolutionary Culture.

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