

COMPRADORISM,
TIMES OF INDIA
AND M.F. HUSAIN.

VINAYAK PUROHIT

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to

Kishor Thakkar,
lifelong enemy of comprodorism in every sphere,
bosom friend,
comrade-in-arms,
internationally reknowned strongman and gymnast,
world-tour-cyclist of 1930s,
Subhash Bose's youth activist,
trained pilot of the Japanese Air Force,
founder of "Peoples' Mobile Hospitals," Bombay,
my cellmate in Worli DD Chawls Jail in 1943.

How dearly I wish
Kishor were alive to day
to read this humble dedication
to the indomitable spirit
of an unsung hero of
our national liberation movement.

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To,

21/10/88

Shri Samir Jain,
Executive Managing Director,
Times of India,
Bennett, Coleman & Co.,
Dr. D.N. Road,
Bombay - 400 001.

Dear Shri Samir Jain,

As your organisation is lavishly and pompously celebrating 150 years of its largely imperialist-controlled criminal existence, when suppression and distortion of nationalist truth were the guiding parameters, it is not at all surprising that true traditions have been shamelessly trampled upon.

Whilst a big bash involving Indian Classical Music, was organized at the Brabourne Stadium, I who had been your first Classical Music critic, from 1956, for several years, was not invited, or in any way contacted.

I know that compradors cannot possess a sense of history and also that the Times is the comprador newspaper par excellence of India. Yet I must place on record my chagrin and contempt.

The first concert that I covered for the Times, way back in 1956, was by Gangubai Hangal. It was possibly August 1956. I still remember her Maru Bihag.

The Times had already changed hands. The white masters had gone and the brown banians had taken over several years ago. But such was the stranglehold of comprador culture on the middle-classes that whilst Western Music was journalistically covered, Indian Music was looked down upon as a "native phenomenon" and not considered worthy of notice.

Naturally, I didn't do it for money (the magnificent rate then was two and a half rupees per inch), or even name (there were no by-lines then). I did it as a nationalist and as a music-lover. Incidentally, I am a freedom fighter. That, of course, is a severe handicap in this highly commercialized comprador world.

I am attaching a little flier about my recently published book, "The Arts of Transitional India: 20th Century" (2 Vols, 1378 pages, Rs. 750/-, Popular Prakashan), which reproduces a part of the post-script, that deals with our wretched neo-colonial compradorist ambience.

I am rather old (all of 61 years). But I am neither weary nor have I become cynical. I still hope for a better India, for a better life for the masses of my countrymen and for the day when military regiments and civilian institutions would begin to be ashamed of celebrating their criminal imperialist pasts and frankly commence to avow and repudiate their shameful colonial records. After all, how long will truth remain hidden and how long will true nationalist traditions remain cynically overlooked?

You are but a child of the total malaise. I have merely attempted to make you aware of this malaise and to elicit, if possible, an admission of guilt and complicity.

Yours sincerely,

(VINAYAK PUROHIT)

Enc : A booklet

Copy to : i) Mr. Darryl D'Monte (Resident Editor, Times)

ii) Mr. Pritish Nandy (Editor, Illustrated Weekly of India)

with a request to publish this letter in their columns

21/11/88

Dear Shri Samir Jain,

I thank you for your invitation to the opening of the latest exhibition by Anjolie Ela Menon and am happy to note that I am now included at least as an occasional invitee to your 150 Years Celebrations.

I urge that you allow Darryl and/or Pritish to publish my earlier letter of 21.10.1988 in their columns. They can make minor editorial changes, provided the precise flavour of the original is exactly reproduced, especially in the substantive matter of condemnation of the current comprador practice of celebrating centenaries of institutions, when India has been free for merely 40 years or so.

Can you not imagine how deeply it hurts us, the older generation of genuine freedom fighters? I am horrified to read in the papers, that certain military regiments "valourously" attacked Tipu's armies, "courageously" invaded areas in the NWFP, and "fought all over the world" in service of imperialism, in Mesopotamia, in Ethiopia, in the Sudan, in Burma, in Malaya and so on. I have actually read with shock and shame that the participation by Indians in the sack of Beijing in 1860, was a cause for a national celebration! Whilst lip-service is being paid to nationalism, it is astounding that the activities of degenerate Indians who helped the Dutch to reconquer Indonesia, the French to reoccupy Indo-China, and the British to re-infest Burma and Malaya are actually being loudly proclaimed and applauded !!

I know that it is impossible for the Times of India alone to stem the comprador tide. I also know that having spent so much money, time and effort to organize the 150 Years Celebrations, it is not possible for the Times to precipitously withdraw. But at least, three things can be done :

- i) Kindly play down, almost to zero, the criminal activities of the pre-1947 period;
- ii) Please highlight the real achievements of the post-1947 period. For instance, the efforts made by the Times Group to provide coverage to Indian Arts, whilst slurring over the long delay upto 1956, can be sincerely praised for the post-1956 period and
- iii) Times was not always pro-government and pro-Congress. There were times when the Times protested against oppressive laws and measures, foisted upon the nation by the infamous Nehru Dynasty and by the disreputable Congress regime, as in the case of the recent Defamation Bill. Surely a selective stress on such "protests" by the Times to protect Indian democracy, is not entirely dishonest.

Anyway, it is a terrible blow to the sense of self-respect of an old freedom fighter, when civilian bodies like the Times, join in the hypocritical hysteria promoted by Kali Panchvi and such other disgusting, scoundrelish comprador organisations.

What is the frantic hurry? Could not the Times have waited another nine years or so, and celebrated 50 years of Independent Times?

Why are the *Kala gumastas* of India so hell-bent on insulting the memory and deeds of India's freedom fighters, in which group I include Mangal Pande, Vasudev Balwant Phadke, the Chaphekar Brothers, Ram Prasad Bismil, and so many many others? I am so sorry to have lived to see the day when all that they stood for is being desecrated and *burra khanas* are being given in honour of their murderers!

I strongly urge you personally to dissociate yourself from the mindless tribe which is trampling underfoot our dearest traditions. You are young enough to distance yourself completely from this set of ridiculous rascals.

I missed the Anjolie opening due to an oversight. I will try to make a more careful note of the day and the date next time, should the occasion arise.

Yours sincerely,

(DR. VINAYAK PUROHIT)

To,

The Editor,
Illustrated Weekly of India,
Times of India Building,
BOMBAY - 400 001.

Dear Sir,

I have been truly exasperated, angered and disgusted by the nadir of ditorial frivolity reached by the Weekly Cover Story "The Return of R.K. Dhawan" spread over ten pages in the issue of March, 5, 1989.

It is unbelievable that the induction of an emergency-tainted personal aide R.K. Fawan or the relative eclipse of another non-entity, M.L. Dotedar, could be blown up into an earth-shaking political "non-event".

R.K. Dhawan is not even a minister, of whom more than 90 have already been rotated; another 30 or 40 Congress (I) Party top functionaries have been shunted around by the same Rajiv, whose total of close personal aides will probably exceed, through the four years, another hundred or two.

Nothing can possibly save the man whom the gods are making mad preparatory to destruction. If he is going to be further tolerated by the electoral system devised by *kala gumastas*, since 1951-52, for the survival of scoundrels, than surely the reprieve will be quite independent of the comings and goings of such disreputable minions as R.K. Dhawan, whose advice after all is to be sought, modified and discarded or accepted by the same man, known by now even to illiterates as habituated to putting his foot in his mouth and placing his head, almost certainly resoundingly empty, in the service of the utterly corrupt, the incurably wasteful and the criminally depraved, precisely because the mouth and the head themselves belong to the identically birth-marked comprador elite of this current Indian Cultural ambience of *kala gumastagiri*.

Yours faithfully,

(DR. VINAYAK PUROHIT)

Drastically edited version
Published in issue of April 2/8/1989.

TIMELESS MINDLESS TAMASHA

It was great fun watching the mindless display of one-upmanship at the auction self-advertised as timeless by the city's premier time-bound comprador institution, *The Times*. It was hilarious fun witnessing the *kala gumastas*, and especially *kala gumastins*, vying with each other sartorially, culture-culturally and financially. Naturally, true to the banian-dubhash-dalal-broker-pimp timeless tradition of our comprador culture, the white masters were forcefully present in the shape of the Sotheby's. It was nice seeing the English trio led by the V.P. Thompson pulling the strings and the brown marionettes willingly and joyously dancing to each tug of the string as "lady on my left" was thrown at the "gentleman on the right" or "he in the front" being juggled against "she at the back". The *kali gumastins*, who had crowded against the rails, pushed forward their figures cheerfully and clapped in shrill delight at the high cultural jinks.

It was heady stuff. After the sun set on the British Empire it was delightful to see the Englishman pronouncing every Indian name and Sanskrit title correctly. The impossible tongue-twisters, which used to tumble the white Briton till 1947, are no longer a problem. The brown *sahibs* may be contemptible creatures objectively but to the current tenth-rate Englishmen they are highly respectable and have to be correctly addressed.

The links between the *kala gumasta* business houses and Congress (I) state and central governments were clearly visible. The Jain monopoly house was forcefully present in the shape of Samir, Neerja and Shikha with of course, a frontman or a lap-dog or two. A cultural czar from Delhi was hanging about the V.T. Station, time-on-hand, and also on the deck of the auction ship, timelessly. The State CM was present and the intention of the biggest buyer at the auction, a 167-crore-turnover diamond merchant, was anything but straight, for he gave a Hebbur to Pawar, who gifted it back to the auction to be picked up at a lesser price by Samir Jain. It may be recalled that Pawar recently conferred special favours on diamond merchants and the gesture at the auction was probably in part payment thereof.

Compradorism was openly proclaimed. The catalogue pinpointed the timely point "The Indian Art situation can now sustain a number of options which cut across the conventional polarity of Indian and Western, rather than tying ourselves in knots about the question of identity. What makes the

show interesting is the hybridization of sensibilities." Thus the knotty problem is resolved by a passionate embrace of the black and the white to produce brown mindlessness without any identity. The highest price was paid for a Husain at Rs. 10 lakhs, for a work that was aggressively bogus. A painting originally dated 20.11.88 was conveniently postdated to the time after the killing of theatre activist Safdar Hashmi by Congress (I) goons. Why the establishment spokesman Husain chose the subject was explained by the auction setting. The symbolic ship - on - shore was being deserted by the rats as Rajiv's star went asinking. Husain obviously wants to build a bridge with the opposition group in the same manner as after the post-emergency Janata Victory in 1977 he prostrated himself at full stretch at the feet of Raj Narain. Husain now claims that his support to Indira as "Tigress Durga Emergency" was uncategorical and ambiguous. Husain is certainly talented. He discovers new meanings in his old paintings, and also makes paintings which foretell tragic murders by the ruling party. In other words, Husain knows the past and the future. What he does not know is the present in which he continues to practise his old profession of the cheap hoarding painter.

As the Bid Folder proudly proclaims, all the thirty four auctioned works were in varying degrees inspired, influenced, and promoted by the West. e.g. "empathy with the French pointillists", "puts Rouault to an Indian palette", "a protagonist of Robert Matta", "depiction of a Greek legend" "that which won praise from a blase British painter David Howkney" "stylistically influenced by R.B. Kitaj", "inspired by Russians, Romanesque and Byzantine art", etc. etc.

A total of Rs. 44.29 lakhs was mulcted from the arty-tarty¹. Only four works fetched less than the indicative guidelines given in the Bid Folder, all by women. Perhaps, Meera, Mrinalini, Madhavi and Pushpalata have not learnt to flatter the nouveau riche as expertly as the men. Generally, the works fetched a little more than twice the starting bid. The best work in the show, Himmat Shah's terracotta "Double Head", went for the third lowest price.

Jocularly apart, the Times was celebrating its hundred and fifty years's record of largely criminal colonial achievements. That was infamy enough, but why should such a record be made even more disgusting by display of

1. Despite President Hebbbar's attempt at cover-up, Bombay Art Society's Secretary, Advirekar has already accused Times of deducting all but about Rs. 5 lakhs as "expenses". Thus the grand charitable auction is likely to end up as a fraud, as fraudulent as its contents. See *Indian Express*, Bombay Edition, 16.4.1989.

vulgar one-upmanship and pure cultural mindlessness? When the highest price and value is being attached to a bogus ruling party stooge hoarding artist's trite and false statement, and a mockery of a tragic death is being made, what is there to comment on individual works?

After all, the artists have impeccable comprador credentials. Four of them are the beneficiaries of J.D. Rockefeller III Foundation largesses. A few others have been beneficiaries, of West German, French, British and similar free enterprise grants. Is it suggested that such sources promote good or great art in India?

Times are truly out of joint. It is not possible to have great art done by identityless *kala gumastas* at a time when the compradores are unable to take Indian society forward.

TWO REACTIONS

My friend Shalil Ghose sent *Timeless Mindless Tamasha* to some of his friends, out of whom two reactions are worth noting.

From Prithish Nandy

April 3, 1989

Dear Salilbabu,

Thank you very much for your letter and the delightful article which you enclosed. I enjoyed reading it very much.

Sd/-
PRITHISH NANDY

From Mulk Raj Anand

April 28, 1989

My Dear Salil,

I feel inspite of all his eccentricities and acceptance of high prices, Husain remains an important painter.

I had nothing to do with the auction. I did not go there. I agree with Dr. Vinayak Purohit entirely about the auction and the whole TOI racket.

But I cannot refrain from my genuine appreciation of Husain's works. I do not agree with his money making.

Sd/-
Uncle Mulk

POSTSCRIPT

My comments on the two reactions from Pritish Nandy and Mulk Raj Anand are as follows:

Pritish finds my article **Timeless Mindless Tamasha** "delightful" and says that he "enjoyed reading it very much." This is a typical compradorist attitude. Pritish was himself at the Tamasha and was very often on the mike. How can he be "delighted" at part-compering the mindless show and also be "delighted" at my indictment of the same senseless tamasha?

This self-contradictoriness is characteristic of our Indian compradors. They want to be on all sides of an issue. They are pro-British and anti-British at the same time. Very often they are simultaneously rabidly pro-Imperialist and virulently anti-Imperialist. They would condemn British rule and praise their "discipline"! And so on. It is entirely in the style of a notation on an official file. This kind of notation means approval of the proposal, its rejection, its acceptance with modifications and its disapproval on certain conditions, all four attitudes at the same time.

Basically our compradors suffer from a terrible guilt complex. That is why they act like masochistic flagellants. They have collaborated with evil and they wish to appear virtuous at the same time. But this is absurd. They cannot have the cake and eat it too.

What our compradors need is a backbone. It is anathema to them if they are asked to observe: let yea be yea and let nay be nay! Singular pursuit of mean and narrow careerism leads them to supporting and stooging for British Imperialists, for their successors, for the brown sahibs and the *kala gumastas*; for the MRTP houses; for the Nehrus, the Gandhis, the Tatas, the Birlas and the Jains. Once you have chosen the path, you just keep on plodding to the hateful and miserable end.

Mulk's reaction is of the same sort. Utterly and incorrigibly compradorist. He does not intend to be evil himself, but he supports evil tendencies.

Why does he consider Husain to be an important painter? Why does he have to "genuinely appreciate Husain's works"?

To me it is very obvious that Husain is a third-rate hoardings decorator. The simplification of figures and forms achieved by him are not well thought-out generalisations and "abstractions", but merely labour-saving mass production devices, designed for quickie applications. There is no tension in Husain's works. **His technique is poor because he does not**

wish to perceive. It is simply stupid gimmickry and childish shock technique.

Consider his vigorous support to the Internal Emergency declared by Indira in 1975 - 77. Was that entirely accidental? He decorates Congress party's souvenirs and mass meeting pandols. Is this merely money-making? He paints Indira as Durga and Rajiv as the lotus-eye darling of the Indian people. Is this just money-making? Or is it merry-making at the cost of the Indian people?

For a moment, let us say that I am wrong. For the sake of the argument, let us assume that Mulk is right and Husain is a great painter. Several problems arise.

i) How does Mulk explain the non-stop adulation showered on Husain by the comprador State? From where does this state acquire the ability to spot genuine and original talent? I and Mulk both know the kind of society in which we are living.

Crores of rupees are being minted by Rajiv or his family or his Italian connections or his cronies like Bachchan Brothers, Lalit Thapar, Lalit Suri, Satish Sharma, Win Chhadda, Balam Jakhhar and so on. Not a single person has been arrested, not a single penny has been recovered. Press Defamation Bill is forcefully introduced, and when protest turns into a cyclonic storm, a humiliating retreat is quickly beaten. In the mean time, drastic constitutional measures are passed, whereby virtually a state of internal emergency is created. Official killings, i.e. killings by authorised agents of the state, go on endlessly in Punjab, in Gorkhaland, in Bodoland, in Assam, in Manipur, in Mizoram, in Tripura and in Eelam-Ceylon. Thakkar Commission Report is one day suppressed, on the second day sixty three MPs are expelled from Parliament, and on the third day the report is published in part.

No young virgin can enter a police station anywhere in India, particularly after dusk, without virtual certainty of defloration. If per chance she escapes molestation, such a rare occurrence would merit celebration. Lower caste homes are regularly burnt by upper caste hired goons. Forty to sixty percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

Look at the painting allegedly highlighting Safdar Hashmi's murder. There are two legs swinging on the top right corner apart from the body lying down. What do they represent? Obviously a second body has nothing to do with the Hashmi killing! The whole picture is a generally placid depiction of some vague terrorist activity in some corner of the country. It is post-facto converted into a shameless tribute to Hashmi! And this fetches one million rupees from a comprador millionaire, at an auction held by

Times - Sotheby! And we are not to protest at this parody of values!

Will Husain stop painting canvases which glorify Ruling Congress activities after the Hashmi killing? Can he paint anything at all which exposes the true state of our economy, our society, our politics? How can he be a significant painter when he lacks both the capacity to conceptualize and to technically express truths about our current state of socio-political existence?

2. Thus it is impossible to assume that I am wrong. But I should like to raise a still further question. Some aspects of our terrible national condition have been listed above. I cannot even enumerate all of them here. But I shall assume that Mulk knows about most of them. Now my question is clear. This is the state of our society and this is the comprador state which is suppressing and exploiting us. Now who are the artists which this rotten state is promoting? There are bound to be some artists who are officially favoured, isn't that so? I want Mulk to name them. Who are these fellows who are receiving Padmashrees and Padmabhusans from the Government of India? Who are the artists who are made to perform like acrobats and paint simultaneously four giant canvases at the inauguration of Apna Utsav at Delhi? Who are the artists who decorate the diases at Rajiv's meetings? Is it the same Husain and his ilk?

3. Apart from the negative and positive points made above, I want Mulk to take the trouble of thinking out a few thoughts to the end. Ours is a **partitioned and compromised independence**. The workers and peasants of India did not receive power in 1947. Ours is not a socialist society. **How can it and why should it possess prestigious art expressions that are genuine, that are truthful, that are honest and that are significantly great?** How can every period in society produce great art or important works of art? **How can an art which is non-revolutionary and which flatters the status quo be "important"?**

As I have said, "times are truly out of joint". This comprador society of today's India, this dynastic Nehru - Gandhi leadership, this Congress (I) ruling coterie, is unable to take Indian society forward. How can such a society, led by such an exhausted and bankrupt elite, project art that is significant and important?

It is like saying that fascists and racialists can produce great works of art that will take humanity forward. Is this possible? Then how can Husain produce works which are anything but worthless?

He may fetch high prices. In fact only he, and a few others of his sort, can fetch high prices. He richly deserves the high prices. He has turned a tragic

event like the Hashmi killing successfully into a joke. He is the Establishment Artist, the Official Portraitist, the Travel Companion, the Padma Bhushan! The Hashmi fiasco is a case exactly parallel with the film *Piravi*, which won the national award just a few weeks ago. The Rajan case, one of the most tragic murders committed by Indira and her minions during the last emergency of 1975-77, was transformed into a non-political "human saga and sentimental document" by an arty-tarty Kerala film-maker. What sort of humanism did *Piravi* express?

I shall sum up:

1. If Husain is an important painter then the problem is: how does our horrible comprador *kala gumasta* state succeed in identifying genuine talent? How can it?
2. Who are the ridiculous, parvenu, sold-out, sycophantic artists, which our rotten regime is promoting?
3. What is the state of art in our comprador society? What sort of art can thrive in this society?

Naturally, I am not talking about the revolutionary or rebellious minority. Husain does not belong there. I am not talking of art that is derided and condemned. I am not dealing with underground art. I am not talking of the street theatre that Hashmi was trying to promote and that Rajiv's goons ensured would remain unpromoted. I am only talking about Husain and his ilk, who are money-making and merry-making at state expense and with full comprador, *kala gumasta*, rich bania support. Hussain and his sort are the true enemies, the real destroyers of values, the contemptible upholders of the status quo. Husain is only a social symptom of our sick society.

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VINAYAK PUROHIT

b. 1927; freedom fighter 1942 Movement (compound fracture of the skull due to imperialist police atrocity; thrice arrested, once on charge of trying to burn a policeman alive, followed third time by preventive detention without trial) graduation B.A. (Hons.) with History, Economics and Politics, Bombay University, 1948; trade unionist 1948-52 (Gen. Secy., Bombay Press Employees' Union); art, architectural, music, dance, drama, film and literary critic from fifties; art advisor to a major industrial group from late fifties to seventies; playwright (*Byalis* and *Steel Frame*) from late sixties; designed monumental *Gitai Mandir*, Wardha, seventies; Ph.D. 1976 for "*Arts of Transitional India: 1905-75*", 2 Vols; Senior Fellow, ICSSR and UGC, 1976-82; Visiting Professor, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1980-82; Visitor, Arts Council of Great Britain, sponsored by ICCR, 1982; Visiting Professor, Chalmers Institute, Gothenberg, and Royal Technical Institute, Stockholm, 1982; Visiting Scientist, CSIR, 1980-82; Visiting Professor, University of Philippines, Manila, 1984; Consultant, ILO Project, Maharashtra, 1984-85; at present writing a novel "*Parodh Pahelano Andhkar*" (Gujarati, *The Darkness Before the Dawn*). At the same time he is also writing "A New History of Indian Art: A Marxist Reappraisal".

COMPRADORISM,
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and M. F. HUSAIN.

Purohit-09

VINAYAK PUROHIT

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