

## **Transcending the Barrier: Reading the Native Folk-Art, Culture, and, Painting During the Colonial Rule**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of the present paper is to take a look at the condition of indigenous folk-art, song, and dance along with the paintings produced by renowned painters during the British colonial rule, to understand the impact of near about two hundred years of colonization on them. It is an obvious fact that folk-art, or, folk-song/dance is a quintessential/integral part of one's own indigenous culture, language and literature; and, paintings too evoke the smell of one's own rootedness in his/her native culture; but the important question is, if the interior space of indigenesness is disrupted by a foreign colonizing power, which not only unsettles but also dominates the indigenous people, by displacing/uprooting them from their very roots as well means of existence; then how does that impact the folk-culture and painting? Does the psychological impact of colonization make the folk art and paintings dwindle into insignificance? Or, do they somehow manage to survive, usher in new hopes, and, break fresh grounds? Can they retain that primal and local base after this long colonial onslaught? But, this is also true that there are many benefits of the English language and education which we have obtained; especially in terms of being aware and self-conscious, and getting connected globally to various contemporary events in the world. So, how can we sustain this duality? Also, the conception of folk-art and painting needs to change with the passage of time, failing which it would become static/stagnant. So, how much does English education become help in this regard?

**Keywords:** Indigenous, Folk-Art, Colonizing Power, Unsettle, Rootedness, Self-Conscious, Contemporary, Change, Static, English-Education Etc.

Just as the root of a tree is connected with the soil and its peak has spread towards the sky, like that the lower part of literature/literary work is connected with the soil of our own native land hugely to remain hidden; and that is exclusively, narrowly indigenous, local. That is only accessible and enjoyable to the common folk of our country; the outsiders do not get entrance there. That part of literature which is universal, stands upon this local/provincial lower part. (<https://banglasahitya.net>, translation mine)

While talking about native art (folk-art, including song, dance and literature) and painting, one can possibly argue, following the same line of thought as Rabindranath Tagore, that they are precisely those local/provincial/indigenous roots which are deeply connected with the soil of one's own, and, to which only the native inhabitants of a land/region can have a privileged access. They are the primal/regional base upon which the superstructure of a particular culture, and literature stands. It is undeniably true that folk art, culture, dance, and, paintings have always been considered integral; indeed quintessential parts of any culture. The ritualistic performances, accompanied by a folk song, and, dance smack of an original indigenoussness, which is specific to a particular culture. India, with its history of a long and rich social and cultural fabric; has always had different folk arts, dance, song and painting cultures; which bore the typical sign of Indian heterogeneity, or, a heterogeneous, and, pluralistic culture. It allowed different races, ethnic groups, religious people, and cultural crowds to enter into its body, and, mix and assimilate in such a way that they became one; almost like the flow of an ocean which goes on in a smooth uninterrupted way, carrying the waters of five different streams, mingled into its watery body at different times:

To take an example from only one level: the cultural history of India has been a constantly dialectical movement of a many-streamed flow of various groups of people at different stages of development, with different traditions, and merging at different times. The aboriginal tribes, the Dravidians, the Aryans, the Sakas, the Huns, the Mongols—all these people had joined in making the pattern of cross-currents, that is, the great river of our history. We were not afraid to learn lessons from China, Iran and Arabia. (Dey, *In the Sun and the Rain: Essays on Aesthetics*, 3)

Even the several forms of native folk arts can not only be a source of nourishment for our souls, but also a rich source of knowledge and learning, and a source of reconstruction of our lives during crisis times:

In our reconstruction of life and culture, our folk-art can thus help us in a major way. It can help us with its humanism because it has been only in the world of our folk-

culture, that men and women have tried to triumph over the gods and goddesses. It can help us with its beauty of design and form, as it tried and still tries to tackle the needs of human life, the moment of play as well as the moment of fulfilling the demand of a social occasion. It can teach us how beauty helps work to be better and easier. (Dey, *In the Sun and the Rain: Essays on Aesthetics*, pg 42-43)

And, that is why, as responsible citizens of India, we should be careful and concerned about our folk-art and culture; and, think of preserving and protecting it as much as possible, because they are the source of our pride, and cultural integrity. Also, they are the source of our community spirit:

It is true, however, that the number is increasing among us of persons who consider it their duty, or, at any rate, follow the fashion of their social set, to pay some attention to their country's culture. Drawing rooms do have now examples of our village art, textiles or clay or wood, displayed, sometimes, along with photographs of relations and even of film favourites. It is true that this sense of form or design has grown out of the functional work of generations of men and women during their integral community life with its total pattern. (Dey, *In the Sun and the Rain: Essays on Aesthetics*, 41)

But what happens to the integrity, underlying unity, coherence, and, symphony of these folk arts or cultures, when a foreign settler suddenly comes from outside, and not only usurps the new land (by uprooting the indigenous people from their natural habitat and all the available resources), but also colonizes them for a prolonged period? In a colonized country like India, which has been dominated, exploited and subjugated by the British colonial power for nearly two hundred years; can the folk art, culture (which includes folk song and dance) and indigenous painting tradition remain unchanged from the earlier pre-British times till now, or, are they rather supposed to undergo a sea change, or, expected to dwindle into insignificance, in worst scenario, due to the perilous effects of colonization? For, despite the positives of English education, the British primarily came to India for trade and commerce; to become rich by exploiting us from every possible corner:

..and, since, unlike their predecessors, the British came to India merely to despoil her and not to find a home here, their cultural indifference, in certain cases even interference, was injurious to our essential unities, with the unavoidable result that the exploited inhabitants, in their panic, forgot the unendemic basis of their ethnic

integrity and began emphasizing only such points in their ethos as were parochial. (Datta, *The World of Twilight*, 98)

The same has been echoed by Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore in his essay *The Crisis of Civilization*, where he says how he was forced to change his opinion about the English influence on India as one of utter disillusionment, by witnessing the numerous evils that the British did plunge the Indians into:

Born in that atmosphere, which was moreover coloured by our intuitive bias for literature, I naturally set the English on the throne of my heart. Thus passed the first chapters of my life. Then came the parting of ways accompanied by a painful feeling of disillusion when I began increasingly to discover how easily those who accepted the highest truths of civilization disowned them with impunity whenever questions of national self-interest were involved.

There came a time when perforce I had to snatch myself away from the mere appreciation of literature. As I emerged into the stark light of bare facts, the sight of the dire poverty of the Indian masses rent my heart. Rudely shaken out of my dreams, I began to realize that perhaps in no other modern state was there such a hopeless dearth of the most elementary needs of existence. And yet it was this country whose resources had fed for so long the wealth and magnificence of the British people.

(Tagore, 'The Crisis of Civilization',

<http://specials.rediff.com/news/2007/aug/o6slide1.htm>)

As a matter of fact, Rabindranath was startled to see the extent of greed that British imperialistic forces possessed, and, his heart bled for the hapless Indian people, who were laid dead under the sheer weight of the British colonial masters:

Thus, while these other countries were marching ahead, India, smothered under the dead weight of British administration, lay static in her utter helplessness. Another great and ancient civilization for whose recent tragic history the British cannot disclaim responsibility is China. To serve their own national profit the British first doped her people with opium and then appropriated a portion of her territory. (<http://specials.rediff.com/news/2007/aug/o6slide1.htm>)

As a matter of fact, the English education which was introduced to colonized India was nothing but a tool to prolong the British stay; to exert complete administrative control and command over it; and, not some beneficial/benevolent motive to educate

and enlighten the common Indian masses. Also, it is because of the English education, that there also came a sharp/acute class division among us-- the English-educated, salaried *bhadralok* 'babus'(who aided the British people in their administrative and other activities), and, the common non-English educated mass/proletariats. This bifurcation caused much unrest and tension in the then-Indian society, which was already fraught with so many problems. Despite the numerous benefits of English education, one gets shocked at the degree of exploitation which the English-educated aristocratic Indian elites meted out to the common people by taking the place of the white colonizers:

But, already in 1870, the elite inclination for monopolisation of learning was discerned by Lord Mayo: "The more education you give them", Mayo wrote to a friend, "the more they will try to keep it to themselves and make their increased knowledge a means of increased tyranny. It has been rightly pointed out that "In no other country did the educated middle class oppose the introduction of mass education at government expense as they did in Bengal", although it is true that most of the prominent public figures supported, in principle, free and compulsory primary education in 1906. The alien Government, interested in the maintenance of the Empire and not in the development of the character of the subject people, took advantage of this attitude of the leaders of the indigenous society. (Ray, *Western Colonial Policy*, pg. 60-61)

So, English education alienated us, widened the class divisions based on wealth, and, made us cut off from the vast majority so much, that it made us wonder whether it was beneficial for us at all:

There was a time when things of beauty, made by our own village people, used to be looked down upon by educated city-bred men, *bhadraloks* as they were called by patronising Englishmen. The reason can be understood quite well, now, by us. Our fathers and grandfathers were India's sacrifice to history. Like our common people, though differently, they too were martyrs to a foreign rule and exploitation, to the self-alienation which the foreign brought about in its unnatural hold. Even the nationalism that grew out of it in reaction could not undo the fact that they were aliens in their country, with some knowledge of Europe no doubt, but cut off from the majority of the people of their backward country, which passed through the most awful confusion and decay, due to the very greedy nature of the foreign occupation. (Dey, *In the Sun and the Rain: Essay on Aesthetics*, pg. 40-41).

The ordinary countrymen (which included agricultural labourers, slaves, backward castes etc) were the worst victims of several forms of colonial exploitation; for whose welfare/upliftment the British did very little:

The net result of the British taxation policy was the steady impoverishment of the people. Those who were affected most adversely were the small riots. The latter existed among several castes of the Tamil Nadu population, while the landless agricultural labourer belonged generally to what we call today the 'scheduled castes' and the 'backward castes'. The British Government in Madras did very little to improve the condition of the landless agricultural labourers in rural areas....In times of famine which became chronic in the area during the British period these landless labourers perished in thousands periodically. Those among them who survived the famines saw an escape from their misery in the indentured labour system which took them away from the country to work almost as semi-slaves in the far-off British colonies, such as Kenya, South Africa, Fiji Islands, East Indies etc. (Ray, *Western Colonial Policy*, pg. 156-157)

So, the important question is, how can we expect large-heartedness from such cruel mercantile people, who came here, and remained committed to, fulfilling their own selfish economic ends? How can we expect nobility, generosity, and greatness from such people, whose show of benevolence was filled with a vested self-interest? Indeed such were the debilitating effects of British colonization, that the native artists were forced to copy/imitate exotic/outworn fashions in the hope of attracting the eyes of moneyed collectors:

For, as I have already pointed out, the British had so upset our society that artists, finding themselves deprived of their corresponding public, had renounced their utilitarian function entirely and taken to copying exotic or outworn fashions, in the hope that they would thereby appeal at least to the acquisitive instinct of a few moneyed collectors. (Datta, *The World of Twilight*, 111)

Such were the effects of British colonization, that it hit the tradition/world of native painting also, which got imbued with its inescapable colour:

Every honest painter should, therefore, indicate, whenever possible, how much in a picture was his own property and to what extent he was indebted outside. This the uneducated artist did by making the man he respected bigger than the one he disliked, although he saw them both as nearly equal (Datta, *The World of Twilight*, 109).

So, the British contact with our culture, society, and civilization was harmful in many aspects as it was primarily a foreign/alien colonizer's culture, which was not our own, and, hence, not congenial to our native spirit. And, its impact on the Indian folk culture, tradition, and, songs etc was also extenuating naturally. When the aim and purpose of a culture is to exploit others and get enriched in the process, how can it be wholesome for people? But, having said that, Indian folk art and culture were lying in a moribund situation at that point of time; being filled with 'dead conventionality' only, with no scope of any widening, or, renewal of outlook:

In literature, if we turn to our popular extra-British period, to our folk literature, we find the same lust for life, despite oppression, the same earthliness with its daily interests, mixed though it is, with a great deal of dead conventionality and also face-saving religiosity. (Dey, *In the Sun and the Rain*, 4)

And, we can see through the English critical writings of Bishnu Dey; that folk-art was slowly losing its vitality and social function by becoming outdated:

The question may be raised whether folk-art which is losing its social function may continue to have its original vitality. We have seen how articles of folk-art show marked deterioration in taste and technical mastery, year by year. How can craft flourish, when the myth where its roots are fed is in a state of collapse? (Dey, *In the Sun and the Rain*, 43)

Also, we can see that the Indian society was then completely lying in a state of collapse from every possible aspect, and, a crumbling society certainly cannot inspire the native folk-art, culture, and paintings with much ideal:

Moreover, the disintegration of Indian society has recently reached its climax; and the economic condition of the masses is so miserable that we have not had a class war to this day. Even among the middle classes, there is no tradition of hereditary prosperity; and where there is no prosperity there is no incentive to improve things. (Datta, *The World of Twilight*, 241)

Also, Indian society was then submerged into a quagmire of meaningless superstitions and beliefs in several ways that needed cleansing/purgation:



About one hundred miles south-west of Cuttack is the country of the Kunds. They worship a goddess called Bhuenee. To secure her blessing upon the soil they cultivate, they deem it important at certain times to offer human sacrifices upon her altars. The victims, who must be in the freshness and bloom of youth, are procured by stealing children from distant villages and rearing them until they become large enough to be acceptable to the goddess. At the time of sacrifice, the victim is tied to a post; the sacrifice, with an axe in his hand, slowly advances towards him, chanting to the goddess and her train. (Wright, *India and its Inhabitants*, pg. 81)

So, inevitably the indigenous folk arts and culture needed a change in such a situation; and, felt desperately for a breath of fresh air. And, if that air was coming from the colonizing culture and civilization, then, it was not possible for Indian folk-art, and painting to shut the doors of Western impact completely and stay indoors, in order to preserve their own individuality, uniqueness and sacred identity. For, then the possibility of those art and cultural practices getting simplified and diluted would have arisen with those things even becoming extinct with time. Even though folk arts and culture have always tended to foster certain 'community feeling', and, identity spirit, but could she allow herself to fall back into mere provincialism, or, narrow sentimental regionalism, or, easy formalism to such an extent?

In other words, although art is esoteric everywhere, in a cohesive community it is an indispensable occupation and not an amusing luxury nor a kind of anti-social self-sufficiency; and even if in this surrounding all men are no artists, yet, art here being a necessary part of an organic system, everyone is enjoined to acquire an insight into its aspects and aims. Thus it came about that in our towns and villages every little girl had to learn drawing, not because she was expected later on to make a living as a designer, but because at our numerous feasts and festivals, the floors of mansions and huts alike had to be covered with appropriate arabesques, sketched in chalk and austere coloured vermilion powder, tamarind paste and juice of the bean-leaf and, since these decorations were occasional, universal and compulsory, they were formalized to the extent of becoming almost a craft, so that they could be repeatedly reproduced with the least expenditure of skill and the utmost economy of time. (Datta, *The World of Twilight*, 36)

So, the integrity of the community life might remain intact while rolling towards the change which could take some time to arrive:



It will take some time, perhaps, for fresh good taste to grow. And what exists of our folk-art can contribute to that, with its innate sense of form, of design, of pattern. This sense of form or design has indeed grown out of the functional work of generations of men and women amid their integral community life with its total pattern. (Dey, *In the Sun and the Rain*, 41)

But, whatever the case may be, the change towards the 'new pattern of life' was inevitable:

It may be argued that nothing can prevent the march of industrial development and the pattern of community life cannot be protected from the inevitable change into a new pattern of life. But the culture which is not dead can save us from a lot of waste and can help us towards a new pattern. The old habits will then become conscious choices and the new life will be enriched by the art and culture of our people. The split may be healed at a minimum cost. (Dey, *In the Sun and the Rain*, 41)

So, the basis of regeneration of the native folk art and culture had to be 'our people', or, the ordinary folks, and, certainly not the foreign people and an alien culture from outside; but, still the spirit of liberation, the wind of modernization could easily come (and indeed it came) from outside, through the help of English education, which was a certain gift of the colonizers to us. And, we needed to remember that our simple artless rural folk, and, their life and culture were our ultimate strengths so that no outsider could actually harm us, or, damage our internal unity and sense of integrity, and, we could rather improve/enrich our own culture and civilization (as we did) by meticulously gleaning from the alien shore. If one is guided by one's conscience and remains conscious while borrowing, and assimilating from an alien culture, then there remains no possibility of that person turning into a foreigner; a sahib or a mem. There remains no question of cheap imitation. Only the immense possibility of modernizing/contemporizing our thought and mindset precisely through that foreign beckons from outside the door. There only lie the chances of opening our eyes to so many things in the contemporary world through the benefit of English education. And, as a matter of fact, any folk art and culture (including song and dance) naturally inheres that fluid, heterogeneous, and, yet interconnected space across time and place; making it look like a 'hybrid' form so that it, can be connected with other kindred cultures, arriving at a pan-realization of cultures:

For in Mr Chaudhury's writings, the occasional is more important than the eternal; and so he is relatively bolder in gleaning from English according to his needs. Despite

this, his genius is guided by his tastes and is even the product of tradition. That is to say, when slanderers, noticing the good use made of acquired learning in Birbali writing, preach that that mode of writing is foreign, they forget that even Bharatchandra Ray had made the traditional language conform to the current culture with the help of foreign phrases;..(Datta, *The World of Twilight*, 240)

As a matter of fact, foreign domination was good for us in many cases, as noted by Rabindranath too in his English writings; like in getting rid of our own internal social obstacles, our dead social systems, and, in filling us with a new vigour and vitality (which was but congenial to the British people):

I know I shall be told that foreign dominion is also one of the things not conducive to the free growth of manhood. But it must be remembered that with us foreign dominion is not an excrescence the forcible extirpation of which will restore a condition of normal health and vigour. It has manifested itself as a political symptom of our social disease, and at present it has become necessary to us for effecting the disposal of all internal obstructive agencies. For we have now come under the domination not of a dead system, but of a living power, which, while holding us under subjection, cannot fail to impart to us some of its own life. This vivifying warmth from outside is gradually making us conscious of our own vitality and the newly awakened life is making its way slowly, but surely, even through the barriers of caste. (Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, pg. 732-733)

The British subjugation of India, despite its numerous ills and evils, did become a potent aid/assistance in the process of rebuilding India, and, in disposing of her dead burdens. The East had to meet with the Western spirit of enfranchisement in the process of regenerating India, and, only then the 'leaves dead' could be driven along with the 'Pestilence-stricken multitudes':

Her first effect was spent in the arrangement of vast materials, and in this, she has attained a perhaps somewhat dearly bought success. Now has come the time when she must begin to build, and dead arrangements must gradually give way to living construction, and organic growth. If at this stage vital help has come from the West even in the guise of an alien rule, India must submit—may welcome it, for above all she must achieve her life's work.

She must take it as a significant fact in her history that when on the point of being overcome with a torpor that well nigh caused her to forget the purpose of what she

had accomplished, a rude shock of life should have thus burst in upon her reminding her of her mission and giving her strength to carry it on. It is now manifestly her destiny that East and West should find their meeting place in her ever-hospitable bosom. (Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, 733)

As a matter of fact, had we become reluctant about accepting the influence/impact of the West during the colonial times, then there would have roused the possibility of our own culture and civilization turning stagnant, as is also taken note of by Rabindranath:

I say emphatically that we must accept the truth when it comes from the West and not hesitate to render it our tribute of admiration. Unless we accept it our civilization will be one-sided, it will remain stagnant. Science gives us the power of reason, enabling us to be actively conscious of the worth of our own ideals.

We have needed this discovery to lead us out of the obscurity of dead habit, and for that we must turn to the living mind of the West with gratefulness, never encouraging the cultivation of hatred against her. (Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: A Miscellany*, 672)

One of the major modernist prolific writers, poets, novelists, short-story writers, and founder of the Department of Comparative Literature in Jadavpur University, Mr. Buddhadeva Bose, was also of the same opinion that, to see and personally experience the Western world/Europe could be a net profit for one, because it enables one to develop an idea about the wide world, which can be useful for self-enrichment/enhancement, through a method of comparing and contrasting the standards and measures of two different cultures. In a letter written to his younger daughter Rumi on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, 1962, we find Buddhadeva Bose making it quite obvious that to see the Western world through one's own eyes, and, to partake in their everyday life could be a lifetime experience for an average Indian, (without however copying the western style and manner blindly) of which he did not want his daughter to miss out; even when he sent her there for study purpose:

There lies no USA opposition in whatever you have written about the mechanicality of the education system; it is but veritable truth. That dull and inanimate erudition which is obstructed with mere information, dates, and, footnotes; I would have felt saddened rather if you had liked it. But last of all you will get some amount of nutrition from that even—you'll get to read new books, hear new words, and acquire

command over the English language; that is not bad either. But the net profit is that you are seeing the Western world through your own eyes, and, taking part in their lives—precisely this. You may say that you are not able to see much due to study pressure—but that is not correct; because our minds suck everything unknowingly to us, and, in the walk of our daily life, that much which we can see, learn and feel, our memory accurately saves their substance. Moreover, you have your vacations as well—you can go to Chicago, and New York; and if you find the occasion advantageous, you can also travel to nearby places sometimes—and you’ll see Europe while returning—it is only because of that your other efforts are meaningful. My plentiful encouragement for sending you to America is not to increase your bookish knowledge; but rather to increase your life experiences. (Singh, Damayanti Basu, Buddhadeva Basu Chithi: Kanishtha Kanya Rumike, 12, translation mine)

Further we find the same tone of the British usefulness getting echoed in the tone of another major modernist Bengali poet Jibanananda Das, who, like Buddhadeva Bose, had been a student of English literature and also a full-time teacher of the same later on, in several prestigious institutions of the then Calcutta and Delhi. He, along with the other luminaries of Bengali modernism existing at that point in time (like Buddhadeva Bose, Sudhindranath Datta, Bishnu Dey etc.) understood the significance of English education in modernizing and revolutionizing the average Bengali mind, by connecting it with the outer world; and, at the same point of time felt the necessity of remaining rooted to one’s own soil avoiding drastic westernization:

But far from being a reprehensible thing, perhaps nothing more honest could have possibly happened in the history of our country than the introduction of English education....Our literature and the various sections of what we call culture—the subject of our thought and the process/method of thinking—have the opportunity to become more pure as a result of English education; the consciousness of an average Indian has become more clear about the truthful and untruthful aspects of the indigenous tradition than earlier times; more realization has dawned upon us regarding the fact that one can remain attached to the honest works and thinking of the world while remaining truthful to the pure indigenous tradition. (Das, Samagra Prabandha, 350, translation mine)

In various other places, in his critical writings, Jibanananda became vocal about the beneficial aspects of English education:

We have got many good things in this country during the British rule; in the British age the Bengali mind got the leisure/luxury to become conscious from various sides; by realizing the consequences of the French Revolution and the Western civilization with more or less clarity, we have got more chances to apply them in life; a Bengalee can now understand the meaning of democracy, independence, and personal comfort much better than earlier; by regaining the use of reason in society and life, it seems to me, that nineteenth-century Bengal and the Bengal of this century benefitted. As a complete vehicle of all these, Bengalees have been enjoying such a big thing as the English language for near about one hundred and fifteen years; as a result, the Bengalee has not only been able to enlarge the Bengali language and literature by arranging and renovating it; he has been able to connect with the thinking of the world, and, realize how important true thinking is, in a man's life. (Das, Samagra Prabandha, 344-345, translation mine)

So, how could it be possible that the indigenous folk-art and culture would remain unaffected/unfazed by the tide of the British/European civilization, which swept everything native? :

The emergence of folk art is natural in this situation, for folk art everywhere serves conventional needs; and material for artistic creation was so scanty in this land, that had not the foundations of the British empire been laid in it, the connoisseurs of the place would have probably been still content to ruminate over already threadbare topics. (Datta, *The World of Twilight*, pg. 237-238)

Probably that is why the tradition of painting in Bengal in the hands of the master painter Jamini Roy underwent a tinge of Europeanism:

And, since Jamini Roy's present problem was to make concrete the generalities that constitute an event rather than the metaphorical presentation of some Crocean experience that is immutably self-expressed the moment it comes into existence, he occupied himself during the next couple of years with pictures that, avoiding all reportage was still convincingly factual. This he seemingly accomplished by marrying expressionism to naturalism, with post-impressionism acting as the matchmaker. (Datta, *The World of Twilight*, pg. 113-114)

Due to this reason probably other forms of art and architectural designs during colonial India bore strong European influence like that of the famous French Post-Impressionist painter Paul Cezanne's:

In the graphic arts, this tendency has manifested itself in a naturalism purified of its adventitious elements; and, apart from the work of village artists whose treatment of the invisible in terms of the visual world I have already described, even in such courtly plaques as have been excavated in profusion at Paharpur and Mahasthan, the ideal has been strangely Cezannesque, in so far as the principle of composition was arrived at not through the so-called 'seedless' contemplation but by way of a complete surrender to nature. I mean thereby that the whorls and arcs into which these sixth-century terra cottas reduced birds and beasts, the arabesques they formed out of human couples were not imposed from above by introspecting artists, but obtained in the process of objective analysis in much the same way as the cylinders, cones and spheres of Cezanne who later on synthesized them into an unprecedented arrangement that corresponds to his organic vision..(Datta, *The World of Twilight*, pg. 118)

one may not miss the unmistakable source/origin and inspiration of the oriental art in modern European art, and, how that can produce far-reaching effects in our soil despite being foreign:

It made no difference that the masters he was copying were not those whose lineage, like that of the Mughals and Rajputs, had become extinct. Nor did it matter that it was in modern European art that the Oriental tradition was still alive and productive, still capable of inspiring work which, without blasphemy, could be compared to the glories of the Renaissance. The important fact was that European art was not an isolated phenomenon, but the branch of an ancient tree which could not be transplanted into a foreign soil and still be made to yield nourishing fruits. For instance, oil colours, the chief medium of expression for a Western painter, were never manufactured in India, and that precluded the possibility of our playing with them (Datta, *The World of Twilight*, pg.102-103).

Likewise, we would not have got the *pats* of Chandernagore and Kalighat without the British/European influence in India:

Hence our 'popular' artists resembled the Italian primitives—even Giotto—more than they did the central Asian nomads whose handiwork Soviet archaeologists have lately been unearthing in the snow-bound caves of Siberian mountains and in the indigenous art of Bengal, in particular, the feeling for volumes had predominated for such a long time that, with the advent of the British, European influence found here a ready welcome and produced the *pats* of Chandernagore and Kalighat. There was,

then, no conflict between the two traditions, but only a difference in vision. Or perhaps it was another instance of the meeting of opposites (Datta, *The World of Twilight*, 109).

Therefore, we can see that the tradition of native folk-art and culture definitely got transcended and uplifted due to the effect of colonization and our interaction with the British/European other. They received the much-needed refreshing boost, a new direction and pattern of thinking during the British period, which they welcomed with both hands, but which ironically, could not rid them of their internal fissures in many cases. Like, in case of the Sunderban's, British/European influence failed to inspire the folk religion to be included/incorporated into the mainstream of the Bengali culture, as any superior foreign culture would encourage the native inhabitants to know and learn the colours of one's own:

This literature catered to and arose from the mental requirements of the lowest and the most marginal elements of the population. Their beliefs stood apart from the mainstream Hinduism and Islam of the higher classes. Folk religion here, as represented by local syncretic cults, had a distinctive aura of its own. The deities worshipped in the Sunderbans had a standing below the Bengali pantheon. They were the gods and goddesses of woodcutters, honey gatherers, beeswax gatherers, boat builders, and the most desperate cultivators. Consequently, the literature gives us a view of a mental world which is not accessible from other historical sources of the period.

It needs to be noted here that settlements in the Sunderbans go back to a long antiquity. Traditions of lost civilizations that once flourished in this inhospitable terrain are still current. The nineteenth-century British authorities rejected these notions, but Bengali authors clung to them tenaciously. (Ray, *Mind Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal*, pg. 425-426)

Also, could the British/European influence on the native/indigenous folk culture find a solution to the seething caste and religious problems running in the Indian society and the class difference, which was created due to English education? :

The Bengali *bhadralok*, claiming superior knowledge and higher intellect, were contemptuous of the obscure cults that flourished among the Muslims and low-caste villagers. The religious, cultural and economic cleavages in Bengali society set the



confines of the new ideas and feelings. (Ray, *Mind Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal*, pg.13)

Was it possible for us to eliminate the serious religious factions to spread the notion of peace, mutual harmony and co-existence instead among us by embracing the spirit of liberalization and emancipation, derived from the Western culture and education? :

No sooner did the Faraizis under Dudhu Mian issue the first injunctions against the singing of devotional songs during service than the 'Darbeshi Bauls' (the Lalan Shahis of Seuria in Nadia and the Panj Shahis of Harishpur in Jessore) and the 'Murshid Fakirs'—the dargah of Pir Shah Lal at Nurullahpur in Dacca, the dargah of Pir Ahmadullah Sahib at Maij Bhandar in Chittagong and the house of Maulana Jan Shariff at Sureshwar in Faridpur) flooded the villages of central and eastern Bengal with devotional songs of exceptional intensity. The fact that these songs celebrated the love of Radha and Krishna did not endear the Darbeshi Bauls and Murshid Fakirs to the Maulanas, Maulvis and Mollas; they mutually called one another Nerar Fakir and Kath Molla, which were both epithets of abuse. (Ray, *Mind Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal*, 21)

So, we can say that the native folk art, culture and tradition during the British rule were under the simultaneous impact of needing to forsake the age-old, dead and decrepit practices, and at the same time felt the stimulus to stick to its indigenous/native roots/base. But, given the diversity of the Indian folk-art, culture and traditions, it can be well argued that the impact of Western education was diverse on them; and, although in many cases, it was liberating, enhancing and progressive; still one cannot possibly homogenize the experiences across India.

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