



## GOVERNMENT SCHOOL OF ART AND CRAFT AT KHALLIKOTE: AN INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY ART MOVEMENT IN ODISHA

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### ABSTRACT

Odisha, a state though enriched with its art-tradition and rich culture, remained unseen in the national contemporary art scenario for a long time in the lights of the developments that had already been took place in the art scene of the nation even after a long period after the Indian independence. It took a decade to have an art institution on its own land and in this brief essay it has been tried to shed some light on how a modern movement took a shape in Odishan art atmosphere with the establishment of an art school in the year 1957 at Khallikote, a place near the bank of the Chilika lake in Ganjam district of Odisha.

**KEYWORDS :** Art, Modern, Contemporary, School, Institution, Movement

Though Odisha has a long and glorious tradition of its art and architecture but the story of contemporary art in Odisha started slowly as a reflection of Indian contemporary art movement little before India became independent. Contemporary or modern trend started in our country as an impetus from the west and therefore was divorced from the art heritage of this soil. Modern art came a little bit later to India. The Indian modern art movement peaking in the 1950s was a time for Indian artists to develop art beyond traditional and folk-art practices. Various Artists 'groups were formed which enabled the exploration of different styles inspired by the western styles of Impressionism, Expressionism and surrealism etc. Later they led the development of styles such as Symbolism and Tantric art during the 1960s and 1970s. The contemporary art scene of Odisha is bound to be a part of the national scene and it is difficult to search for local and regional identity in its style. Therefore, it is natural to analyze the contemporary art scene of Odisha in the lights of the developments that had already happened in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Bengal, Bombay, Madras and Lucknow. Precisely it is considered that modern Indian art has existed since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and first appeared in Bengal as a new style of imagery emerged in what was known as Bengal school of art spearheaded by Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose.

That was the time when there was no art institution in Odisha. Odia artists would travel either to Government school of Art, Calcutta or to Santiniketan to study art and a few of them had to study in Lucknow, Bombay and Madras. A numbers of Odia artists got art education from West Bengal during 1940s and 50s i.e., from Government School of Art and Kalabhawan, Santiniketan when art education in Odisha was really a far-off dream. Irrespective of being the products of Government Art School, Calcutta and Santiniketan we can divide these artists into two groups, the first one is of the group who adhered to the Western academic style and the other one is of the group adhering to the revivalistic trend. They are Basanta Panda, Gopal Charan Kanungo, Purna Chandra Singh, Bibhuti Kanungo, Upendra Maharathi, Gouranga Charan Som, Nityananda Mahapatra, Jadunath Supakar, Udaynath Rath, Durga Prasad Pattnayak, Laxmidhar Das, Muralidhar Tali, Uday Narayan Jena, Binod Routray, Rabinarayan Nayak, Durga Prasad Das, Shyamsundar Pattnayak and a few others.

It took another decade after Indian Independence to establish an art school by government of Odisha. We remember the year 1957 in the history of modern art of Odisha as the year of establishment of an art school at Khallikote in district of Ganjam of Odisha which is considered as an epoch in Odishan modern art history, because before that Odia artists had no scope and atmosphere to give a similar direction and shape to Odishan art in the light of the new art trend took place

in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras. Before independence Calcutta was said to be the real crucible where modern experiments were born in Indian art. But in the course of time as Bombay and Delhi became the commercial and political centre of India these metropolises also became the major centers of art and cultural activities.

In 1957 the long-cherished dream of Odia artists came true when the government set up an art school at Khallikote, a secluded place near the Chilika lake in the royal palace of a native king. In this school, in the beginning when the artists from different schooling conglomerated a fusion of a revivalistic and western style emerged as a form of a new trend. Principal Sarat Chandra Deo came from London after completing his art education from Heatherley school of Fine Art, Gopal Chandra Kanungo (in a short while he left the institution) from Government School of Art and Crafts, Calcutta, Ajit Keshari Ray came after getting art education from Kalabhawan, Santiniketan and Anglo- French Art Centre, London, Bipin Bihari Chowdhury from Government School of Art and Crafts, Calcutta and Royal College of Art, London, Bipra Charan Mohanty from Government School of Art, Calcutta, Rabinarayan Nayak and Ananta Kumar Panda, Binod Routray and Durga Charan Das joined as teaching staff from Kalabhawan, Santiniketan.

Though Gopal Charan Kanungo experimented with other styles like wash painting and tempera painting but his main thrust of style was western academic. Sarat Chandra Deo trying to assimilate the western and eastern style took an oriental theme and rendered it in the western style and technique. Bipra Charan Mohanty concentrated on commercial statue making. Binod Routray, Durga Prasad Das, Rabi Narayan Nayak's works portray a kind of oriental romantic atmosphere which show a revivalistic inclination which can be termed as the paintings of Bengal Renaissance on Odishan soil.

Though the new trend was not clearly visible in the beginning but later it was realized that a radical style was taking shape in this institution out of the wonderful fusion of various schooling and styles. A young group of painters who were trained in this institution took to the cause of contemporary art in the state. They are both teachers Ajit Keshari Ray, Ananta Panda and later followed by their students, Siba Panigrahi, Dinanath Pathy, Chandra Sekhar Rao, Jagadish Chandra Kanungo, Kashinath Jena, D. N. Rao, Chandramani Biswal, Ramahari Jena and others.

Ajit Keshari Ray, though a product of Santiniketan he was much influenced by the western art movements basically by cubism and in his paintings as a cubist, he focused on means of viewing objects from various perspectives through colour, line, and texture and his paintings are concerned purely with

pictorial space and composition

Ananta Panda also being a product of Santiniketan was not influenced by Santiniketan schooling. He would take the students on outings to Chilika lake where the atmosphere and the simple way of life that the local fishermen led, attracted him which have found expression in his painting and his combining skill of a modeler and carver gives the sculptural dimensions to his paintings. His works including the collages are highly bold and creative.

Siba Panigrahi obtained the Diploma in Fine Art from Khallikote Art School. Siba was a sensitive visual artist who formulated images from familiar tribal folk forms and symbolic forms of nature in his surroundings and blended dream and fantasy. In his Dream in the Sky series by adding textures, transparent and opaque techniques created by rhythmic manipulation of brush he expressed internal gradations of colour.

Dinanath Pathy obtained Diploma from Khallikote Art School and Ph.D from Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. Dinanath Pathy is well known for his contribution to the field of art, literature and research. His work shows artist's concentration on the immediate visual impression produced by a sense and use of flowing colours and lines to evoke subjective and sensory impressions rather than the recreation of objective reality.

Chandrasekhar Rao studied in Khallikote Art School tried to capture the essence of the traditional Odishi style of painting and sought inspiration from the folk art and craft tradition and incorporated it with his own modern sensibility. With his strong, simple form and colours in his paintings Rao brought a joy and elegance to the representation of village scenes and people reflecting the innocence and romanticism of his childhood upbringing in a rural environment.

Kashinath Jena got his Diploma in Fine Art from Khallikote Art School. Kashinath's paintings deal with pictorial depictions of popular Hindu mythological stories, gods, and goddesses such as Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Durga and Mangala, Sun, Moon and even some plants and flowers as well as his paintings depict daily village life, common customs and rituals.

D. N. Rao taking inspiration from tribal art styles, Rao aimed at intense simplifications. He ignored perspective and used colour for its own sake and for symbolic purposes and also freely distorted and modified the human form often depicting pleasant and quiet scenes from the tribal life.

Chandramani Biswal studying at Khallikote Art School has a good sense of composition providing new and fresh touches to structures and shapes beyond identical visuals in his paintings he distorts human bodies with soothing and matured colour tonalities.

Ramahari Jena also studied art in this School whose drawings capture speed, power and energy. They become symbols of energy, aggression and power of modern times and his youthful spirit. He is an artist with repertoire of technical and formal capabilities.

Baladev Maharatha, an established name in the field of book illustration and cover design, an alumnus of this school tries to tell a story with a revivalistic attitude through his drawings and his characters are often placed in stylized and romantic surroundings to depict a story based on an epic or a poem.

Other two prominent names as Odia painters in national contemporary art scene are Jatin Das and Prafulla Mohanty who do not belong to Khallikote school of art.

The group of sculptors who achieved a level of distinction are

Ananta Panda, Ramesh Chandra Mahanty, Fakir Mohan Mallick and Debraj Sahu. In the field of Print making Babla Senapati, Ajit Keshari Ray, Binod Routray, Bana Behari Parida, Mahendra Mahapatra were the prominent names. D.N. Rao and Prabodh Kumar Sahu were doing creative prints in the modern terminologies.

These artists were initially influenced by the experiments carried out elsewhere in this country and outside and tried to be away both from the westernize and traditionalism and in those initial days the art school at Khallikote played its role to generate kind of interest needed to lead such a movement. Two different groups of young artists of first, second and third batch students of Khallikote art school who passed out in the year 1961, 62 and 63 organized themselves into art associations. One is Utkal Charukala Parishadin Cuttack with other senior artists and other is Working Artists' Association in Bhubaneswar under the chairmanship of Ananta Panda to express and create an awareness for contemporary art and to support and recognize the experiments in the field of contemporary art and thus they started moving towards a modern movement.

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