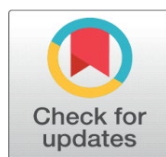


# A HISTORICAL CRITIQUE ON GRAPHIC ART THROUGH MODERNISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BENGAL DURING PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

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## ABSTRACT

This article was examining the emergence of woodcut as a primary medium of modern art during the pre-independence period, dubbed "the woodcut revolution in Bengal" by Manindrabhusan Gupta. In graphic art history, the resurgence of antiquated media like lithography, etching, and woodcut was a significant feature that distinguished modernism, challenging the notion of progress and the techno-economic constraints that governed the creation of visual images. Halftone had totally overtaken lithography as a popular commercial medium by the time Gaganendranath released his lithographic album, *Atvut Lok*, in 1917. Rather than opting for lithography, he could have opted for halftone printing, a strategy he had previously employed for his popular cartoon album *Birup Bajra*, which saw widespread distribution. This drove him to build a new studio setup in his home and hire a lithographer with experience to assist him. His costly and time-consuming choice to print the record in lithography demonstrated his modernism and his preference for the medium's aesthetic value over its practicality. In this article, a historical critique on graphic art through modernism with special reference to Bengal during pre-independence period has been discussed.

**Keywords:** Graphic Art, Modernism, Bengal, Pre-Independence

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1927, Prabasi published an illustrated essay by Nirad C. Chaudhuri and Sajanikanta Das on the modern woodcut. The essay, likely the first on the subject in Bengali, defined woodcut as a new modern art form, focusing solely on the creations of Western artists. The essay suggested that more sophisticated pictorial reproduction processes, like halftone, only marginally supplanted woodcut from a functional standpoint, not an aesthetic one. Despite the exquisiteness and visual appeal of a halftone or calotype, its mechanical creation with a process camera disqualifies it as art. Therefore, a modern artist's primary concern when selecting woodcut was not the medium's technological effectiveness but rather its artistic potential. The main goal of the essay was to persuade more Bengali artists to use woodcut as a creative medium, just like Western artists did. The authors also appealed to writers and publishers to use woodcuts as illustrations in their books because they demonstrated sophisticated aesthetic sense rather than a lack of practicality or commercial acumen. Despite demonstrating his exceptional graphic skills in the cartoons in *Atvut Lok*, Gaganendranath never pursued a career in graphic design, and his interest in lithography remained limited to *Atvut Lok*. Mukul Chandra Dey, a renowned artist from the Bengal School, was the first modern Indian artist to embrace graphic art as a career. He traveled to America with

Rabindranath Tagore in 1916 and studied etching at the Chicago workshop of renowned etcher James Blanding Sloan. Even though he received his professional etching instruction overseas, he had previously completed his first etching in Santiniketan. Tagore's close friend and British botanist William W. Pearson sent him an etching needle and a copperplate piece he had taken from the Survey of India Office in Calcutta. He learned the fundamentals from Pearson, who had some experience with etching and had his plate printed by the Survey Office. It was an engraving of a Ganga scene with boats and people taking baths on the bank. Mukul Dey first came across the etchings of renowned English etcher Sir Muirhead Bone in Pearson's collection. In particular, his portrait engraving of Rabindranath drew his attention and sparked a passionate interest in the medium for the first time. Pearson had brought the etching materials from the survey office specifically to pique his attention. Mukul Dey, like Bone, worked directly on the plate next to the river instead of first sketching the Ganga scene on paper and then transferring the drawing to the plate. Muirhead Bone was a close friend of Pearson's, and he received the first etching plate of Mukul Dey via mail in England. When Mukul Dey traveled to England later in 1920 to pursue further education at the Slade School of Art and then the Royal College of Art, he got the chance to study etching in private at Muirhead Bone's studio.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative research is one type of exploratory market research methodology based on semi- structured or unstructured data collection. Qualitative research is a research methodology that deals with understanding human beliefs, behavior, values, and perceptions of certain social or non-social issues within their own environmental contexts. The secondary data was e- resources, publications, websites, reports, journal articles, internal organization records, and censuses etc. In this research, qualitative research and secondary data was used.

### **ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION**

An art historian carried out the analysis, dissecting the formal elements or styles of the imaginative imagery. The challenge lay in the close connection between the process of creating the images and the evaluation of their worth. In many areas, attempts may be found to comprehend the goals of the artists—how they might get over an aesthetic, technical, or other visual obstacle to create works that will pique the interest of and inform the intended audience. However, it is possible to reject formalism and disregard the social and historical background of the development and application of photography. Despite its education in art history, historians and sociologists who approach art from diverse perspectives. Additionally, it appropriated far too many of their ideas and insights for its own ends. Instead of scrutinizing the historical and sociological contexts that shaped the images, the belief was that the images were integral to that history. Sometimes profound art, popular or not, does more than merely reflect the dominant ideology; sometimes it creates it.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Rabindranath supported Karpeles' Santiniketan initiative. He never disregarded the practical benefits of mastering technical arts or skills and always appreciated learning them. Students were said to have been taught "small cottage industries, useful arts of every kind, and handicrafts of various descriptions" at the Bichitra Studio at Kalikata, which was established in 1915. In Santiniketan, functional art held an important position in the educational system, equally as significant as the traditional arts of painting and sculpture. Rabindranath, however, had no intention of bringing an industrial art curriculum similar to that of the colonial art schools to Kala Bhavana. He acknowledged the fundamental distinction between Karu Kala, or functional art, and Charu Kala, or fine art, but rejected the academic pedagogy of the art schools' aesthetic hierarchy between the two. Rather than simply elevating the status of functional art to about the same level as fine art, he altered the conceptual underpinnings upon which the values of the hierarchical academic system of art were based. Let's quickly examine the key distinctions between the academic pedagogy of the colonial art schools and Rabindranath's modernist approach to art education. Bauhaus and Santiniketan had one thing in common despite their clear differences. In both cases, the focal point of the educational concept was creativity rather than skill. Unlike talent, which only a few exceptionally talented students possessed, everyone shared creativity. Every student possessed the qualities of an artist. Therefore, the goal of modern education was to completely develop pupils' innate creativity rather than to teach them some specialized information. Santiniketan, like Bauhaus, allowed its foundation-level pupils to explore all types of art, both functional and fine, to uncover their true interests and broaden their visual vocabulary through the mastery of diverse techniques. Academic education primarily viewed method as a traditionally reinforced

means to an aim. On the other hand, every technique in modernist teaching had the potential to be a medium, a way to communicate the artist's unformalized creativity, which was seen as an energy source similar to life itself. There was a small but significant distinction between technique and medium, despite the fact that we frequently use the terms synonymously. We could learn technique from the past and refine it through practice; it was associated with skill. On the other hand, the medium was associated with language and necessitated continuous exploration. We might accept technique, but we need to discover a medium of expression. For this reason, every notable Santiniketan School master, ranging from Nandalal Bose to K.G. Subramanyan, employed a diverse array of techniques, be they artistic, mechanical, technological, traditional, or otherwise—not as predetermined processes but rather as adaptable approaches that might be changed to suit the latest aesthetic requirements. Rabindranath freed Santiniketan's artistic community from the oppressive regime and rigid value system of the colonial art education system by establishing a connection between creativity and medium. If this is the only explanation for Rabindranath's interest in the various forms of functional or applied art—he valued creativity over specialization—it is because he wanted students and artists to be well-versed in a variety of skills. However, there was another, more significant reason: he wanted art to be an essential part of campus culture on a daily basis. Santiniketan saw a significant artistic dispersion through the stage designs, ornamental arts, outdoor sculptures, murals, architecture, and illustrated pamphlets, books, and periodicals issued by Visva-Bharati. It seemed that Nandalal Bose was equally prolific and imaginative in the fields of creative and functional arts. Rabindranath predicted that music and art, which are generally neglected in the Indian educational system, will take center stage in Visva-Bharati in Kala Vidya, his well-known essay on the functions of art in Santiniketan, which was published in 1919 in Santiniketan. Of course, his intention was not to elevate music and art above other subjects but to emphasize their crucial role in shaping the unique aesthetic culture and community that Visva-Bharati genuinely embodied. Kala Bhavana enthusiastically carried on with woodcutting and linocutting when Karpeles left in 1923. Aside from Binodebehari and Manindrabhusan, Ramendranath Chakrabarty was among Karpeles's initial pupils who took her woodcutting instruction seriously. In actuality, he had a greater interest in graphic art than the others. He remained in touch with Karpeles and frequently contacted her from Paris, asking for information and technical assistance on his latest color woodcut efforts. Nandalal himself created some amazing masterpieces and was also particularly interested in the new woodcut and lasercut mediums. If the artwork of Karpeles and her pupils drew him in, his 1924 trip to China and Japan stoked even more of an interest. His woodcuts and linocuts, on the other hand, demonstrated his distinct creativity and style without any evident ties to Karpeles or Far Eastern art. Nandalal made a name for himself early on as a graphic illustrator. He illustrated Abanindranath's children's book *Bhutpatrir Deshe* (The Country of Ghost) in 1915. His illustrations, which were primarily halftones of his paintings, included two black and white line block pictures that showcased his graphic prowess in fusing his freely drawn visual imagery with the cursive Bengali texts he took from the book. The visuals and text blended together to the point where they were practically one, signifying the imaginary realm of the ghosts, where the line separating sight and sound was undefined. The Society for the Promotion of National Education in Madras published Rabindranath's lecture on the educational principles of Visva-Bharati as a book in 1919. The book featured seventy-one small brush and ink paintings by Nandalal, depicting the birds, animals, dry landscape, and river that are typical of Santiniketan's rural surroundings. The drawings were copies of the several outdoor sketches that Nandalal had completed in Santiniketan. Teaching science at Tagore's school in Santiniketan, Jagadananda Roy was a prolific writer who wrote several scientific books for young readers, many of which had illustrations by Kala Bhavana pupils and professors. Many of his books' covers and drawings are the work of Nandalal. In 1924, Nandalal released his book *Banglar Pakhi* (Birds of Bengal), featuring his small pen and ink sketches of several local birds. From a distance, Nandalal quickly drew them in their original positions. Nandalal's perspective on the birds differed from that of an ornithologist, who focuses on specific details. We created the book with a lighter tone and less emphasis on specialization, aiming to pique young pupils' interest in science and foster an awareness of their surroundings. Nandalal's illustrations only depict the birds in their native habitat from a distance. Nandalal used an image of a folding wooden toy with strings fastened to its wings instead of a real parrot to create the book's cover. If the image suggested that the young readers should play with birds, it also hinted at Nandalal's increasing fascination with folk art. He and Asit Halder drew Gurusaday Dutt's Bengali translation of English rhymes, *Bhajar Bansi*, in 1922. Despite the absence of signatures on the images, one can easily recognize their works by comparing their various styles. Nandalal is undoubtedly the artist of the poem *Buri O Bheri* (The Granny and Her Sheep), which showcases his astute observation and deft, quick brushstrokes. He illustrated a woman performing *Alpona* on the cover and full page of Bireswar Sen's Bengali art magazine *Ayan*, which was published in 1923–1924. They were line-block reproductions of pen and ink drawings, but based only on look, one may mistake them for woodcuts. Given the magazine's affiliation with the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Nandalal appears to have selected the stylized figuration of the women as a nod to his previous, pre- Santiniketan Bengal School style. *Anusthan Patri*, a pamphlet

honouring a cultural occasion, featured a linocut of a symmetrical vegetal pattern on its front page in 1925, the same year that Santiniketan hosted the first public performance of Rabindranath's opera *Sunder*. On the cover of his book, *Ornamental Art*, Kala Bhavana replicated Nandalal Bose's first linocut. Renowned author Rani Chanda, the sister of Mukul Dey, claims that female students at Kala Bhavana in the mid-1920s, including herself, Anukana Dasgupta, and Jamuna Sen, Nandalal's daughter, were enthusiastic about lino cutting and woodcutting. Nandalal, who frequently visited them at work, inspired them. After receiving a request to illustrate Rabindranath's *Sahaj Path* (easy reading), he chose linocut as his medium blocks, according to Anukana Dasgupta. After drawing the design in black ink on the wood or lino blocks, he assigned his female students the duty of cutting it out. Anukana Dasgupta showed her proficiency and confidence with the cutting tools by cutting most of the linocut blocks in *Sahaj Path*. She also cut the block of his famous woodcut from 1930 that shows Gandhi's Salt March to Dandi. However, Nandalal's most famous woodcut was probably from one of the processions of Briksharopan, the tree-planting event in Santiniketan, which he attended shortly after Rabindranath established it in July 1928. In 1930, Nandalal provided illustrations for *Sahaj Path*'s first and second volumes. His linocuts were in the first volume, and his line drawings for children to color in were in the second, which was designed to look like a contemporary colouring book. Significantly, Nandalal initially rejected the linocuts, regarded as his greatest achievement in the history of Bengali book illustrations and modern Indian art. He finished the lipsticks in early 1928 and sent them to Rabindranath for his blessing. Rabindranath replied that his father was completely uninterested in them. In distress, Nandalal displayed the prints at Kala Bhavana, where Abanindranath was ecstatic and convinced Rabindranath of the images' unique artistic merit. Nandalal created twenty large linocuts to accompany the short two-line poems on the Bengali alphabets, and numerous smaller linocuts to illustrate the longer poems and prose in the rest of the book. In order to minimize the book's price, which would have otherwise been far higher than the going rate for a Bengali primer on the market, the authority decided to make the pictures smaller. Nandalal was once again incensed by this decision because it was costly to print so many photos. After learning about the decision, Rabindranath himself got involved. He made it plain in a letter to Prasanta Chandra Mahalanabis that increasing sales could not come at the expense of the photographs' beauty, which was worth more than the book's price. In a letter to Prasanta Chandra Mahalanabis, he defended Nandalal, stating that he would have been equally incensed if they had deleted part of his writing for the same reason. Rabindranath believed it belonged to both Nandalal and his book, so he gave Kala Bhavana the entire share of *Sahaj Path*'s royalties. As stated by K.G. According to Subramanyan, the linocut illustrations in *Sahaj Path* did not supplement or subordinately adorn or clarify the text. Both in relation to and separate from the narrative, the linocut illustrations were an active aspect of the book. Despite serving as a primer, Rabindranath considered *Sahaj Path* to be a work of literature because it was entertaining rather than obscenely instrumental or didactic. Nandalal's artwork brilliantly depicted the central premise of the text. The artworks maintained an exquisite appearance while sharing the texts' simple structural form. While the woodcut of Briksharopan and the linocuts in *Sahaj Path* used similar techniques, the latter's composition was more plain, showcasing Nandalal's unique talent for transforming seemingly simple forms into attractive compositions that heavily emphasize minimalist details. In addition to making cutting the blocks easier, Nandalal neatly divided them into cut and uncut areas, or black and white voids, which gave the images a powerful effect. Unlike the larger linocuts in the books, the smaller ones featured heterogeneous styles and treatments. Some resembled academic works, while others were simple and beautiful. *Sunderban*'s idea inspired the first verse's depiction of the tiger in a reclining position. For the *Anusthan Patri* of Barshamangal, Santiniketan's monsoon festival, in 1929, Nandalal printed the last linocut of *Sahaj Path*, a boat loaded with paddy harvests. It served as a potent example of Nandalal's talent as a master artist-designer and showed how he could combine the visible and the essential—or, more precisely, the empirical and the essential—into one image. Unquestionably, the popularity of *Sahaj Path* rekindled interest in the woodcut and linocut traditions of Santiniketan. First published in July 1931, the *Visva-Bharati News* was a monthly journal that mostly featured news from Santiniketan. Each issue included a large woodcut or linocut on the front cover, along with a bit of Tagore's prose. Occasionally, a photograph also shows up inside the magazine. The *Visva-Bharati News* undoubtedly houses the largest and most reliable collection of woodcuts and linocuts created by Kala-Bhavana's teachers and students. The first editions of the news included Nandalal's linocuts, which were remarkably similar to those in *Sahaj Path*. The lettercut that featured in the September 1931 issue bore a striking resemblance to the cover of *Sahaj Path*. Apart from Nandalal, the news featured woodcuts or linocuts by a number of other well-known painters, including Binodebehari Mukherjee, Biswarup Bose, Satyendranath Bishi, Kesava Rao, Ram Kanai Samanta, Banabihari Ghosh, Ramendranath Chakrabarty, and Manindrabhusan Gupta. The monthly also included a wonderful deal of work by women artists, perhaps even more than by men. Numerous renowned writers regularly published their works, including Jaya Appasamy, Nivedita Ghosh, Anukana Dasgupta, Jamuna Bose, and Rani Chanda (née Rani Dey). Rani Dey became well-known as a graphic designer and published a folio album with 25 lithocuts in 1932. Her older brother, Mukul Dey, published it after Nicholas Roerich wrote the foreword. Rabindranath

wrote the album's introduction note. Most of the prints are based on her studies of rural life and the landscape of Santiniketan. She showed a particular interest in documenting the daily woman's private life, whether she was lounging, spending time with her child, or doing household tasks. One of the two portraits in the album was of C.F. Andrews. The manner of Rani Dey's prints varied; some were realistic, while others resembled the powerful, straightforward appearance of Nandalal's linocuts. The writings of Nivedita Ghosh and Jamuna Bose also showed some maturity, although they were quite similar to Nandalal's approach and style and lacked Rani Dey's diversity. In 1930, Biswarup, the son of Nandalal Bose, studied chromo-xylograph or colored woodcut techniques at the Kokka printing company in Japan for three years. He also learned how to make brushes and mount pictures in Japan. He taught contemporary Japanese woodcutting techniques at Kala Bhavana after returning from his international trips. In 1933 and 1934, he created a number of black-and-white woodcuts for the *Visva Bharati News*, demonstrating his unique approaches and creative use of technique. Using a range of cutting blades and black and white areas to produce eye-catching visual effects, the artist displayed a comprehensive command of the woodcut medium. As a trained artist in the Japanese woodcut tradition, he was proficient with a wide range of tools. It is simple to identify several of his prints in the *Visva Bharati News* because of his creative and skillful use of the cutting knives. The December 1933 issue featured this type of woodcut on its cover. He chopped the wood block precisely so that it resembled a picture negative. He likely depicted a scene at night. Binodebehari was a masterful woodcut artist in addition to being a painter and muralist. His numerous woodcuts, featured in the *News* and numerous other *Visva-Bharati* journals, marked a significant departure from the intricate Nandalal style and left a lasting impact on his students. It's already clear that Nandalal didn't cut his own blocks. He drew the pattern on the blocks, and his students cut them. Nandalal gave the design of his works precedence above the unique characteristics of the graphic medium, even though he viewed the cutting of the block as a mechanical stage in the process. Binodebehari's modernism, which rejected the division of work, regarded block cutting as a vital part of the creative process. He saw it as an expressive and basic act rather than a mechanical one. Unlike Nandalal, he worked methodically, adding details and getting feedback, rather than creating the final image from the initial concept in a single bound. The *Visva-Bharati News* published Binodebehari's woodcut, depicting a woman in a sari standing on a balcony, in July 1936. The print lacked the simplicity and neatness of prints by Biswarup Basu, Rani Dey, or Nandalal, instead consisting of several white cut marks and cut lines. Perhaps Binodebehari's best-known piece is a woodcut he made of a palm grove in Birbhum that appeared in the new *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* series in 1935. In addition to Binodebehari's woodcut, this edition included full-page linocuts and woodcuts by Nandalal, Rani Chanda, Gita Roy, Govardhan Panchal, and Sutan Harhap. Numerous tailpieces, many printed from the same old blocks used for *Visva-Bharati News* or the *Sahaj Path*, were present. This special edition of *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* likely made a substantial collection of graphic works by Santiniketan artists available to a wider audience of well-educated readers for the first time. The palm grove was one of Binodebehari's most favored motifs. He painted the woodcut's subject in tempera at the same time. The two pictures, one depicting a long view and the other a close-up of the landscape, also expressed two different moods. The calm atmosphere of the painting was absent from the woodcut, which depicted the roughness of the Birbhum's laterite soils and the sturdy palm trees. Rather, it made extensive use of cut lines and patterns that resembled Vincent Van Gogh's vibrant brushstrokes. Binodebehari appeared much more raw when he was using cutting tools to make woodcuts, but he appeared more calm and reserved when he was painting. However, Siva Kumar argues that unlike the Expressionist artists, he always maintained a careful balance and avoided exploiting emotional sentiments to damage the representation of the outer world. The palm grove woodcut maintains its forms and the authenticity of the landscape, even though the entire image is tense with emotions expressed through the sharp cut marks and lines. "Binodebehari's woodcuts sit between the modern Expressionist and Shiko Munakata woodcuts, highlighting the conflict between emotion and restraint in his work," K. G. Subramanyan once said in passing during a conversation. Two publications later reprinted the palm grove woodcut, depicting the landscape of Bhuban Danga, a nearby town of Santiniketan: the book *Praktani* (1936) and the *Visva-Bharati News* (1937). Because the block was too long, Binodebehari cut it off from the right side. Then he removed some of the cut marks from the shrunken block to make it look a bit nicer. While he altered the print's expression, the composition mostly stayed the same. Manindrabhusan Gupta, Satyen Bishi and Ramendranath Chakrabarty contributed woodcuts and wood engravings of scenes from Santiniketan's natural surroundings and campus life to *Praktani*, an anthology of Rabindranath's speeches to the Alumni Association of Santiniketan edited by Pulinbehari Sen. Ramendranath Chakrabarty's wood engravings of Chhatimtala and Sahitya Sabha were based on early sketches he created while he was a student in Santiniketan in the early 1920s, around the time he gave some of the talks. A unique, highly developed print culture emerged in Santiniketan as a result of the renowned artists' woodcuts and linocuts appearing in the university's internal publications, which ranged from pamphlets to books and journals. The overall visual presentation of *Sundar* and *Visva Bharati News'* *Anusthan Patri*, including the careful choice of fonts and typefaces and the arrangement of the body text, continues to

attract our attention in addition to the images. The dedication, honesty, and cooperation of the staff members in all departments contributed to the distinctive character of the Visva-Bharati publications in spite of the obvious and ongoing financial constraints. Visva-Bharati's unique print culture flourished thanks to the Santiniketan Press, the city's internal printing division. The people of Lincoln City, USA, where Rabindranath had delivered a speech on nationalism in 1917, gifted a printing press to the Santiniketan students. In July 1917, Sukumar Roy, a writer and expert in contemporary printing, traveled from America to Santiniketan to set up the press. Early Santiniketan Press products, such as the monthly periodical Santiniketan, lacked a wide range of images. The ongoing financial issues made it unfeasible to consistently depict them using halftones and line blocks that were imported from Calcutta. The introduction of woodcut and linocut as book illustration media virtually solved the problem in the middle of the 1920s. By scanning the photos from the original artist-prepared blocks, a number of Anusthan Patri and Visva Bharati newspapers were able to print them quickly and affordably. Because the materials are soft, wood blocks—and particularly lino sheets—do wear down after a certain number of impressions. However, since the blocks were mainly used for internal publications printed in small quantities rather than for extensive commercial purposes, this was never a significant problem. The Santiniketan Press regularly electrotyped the wood block during the nineteenth century, when woodcut was the most widely used commercial medium for book images. The Santiniketan Press did not produce the line blocks of Sahaj Path, where Nandalal published his linocuts. Reducing a woodcut or linocut to an identically sized line block alters the support rather than the image. Therefore, even if it is technically incorrect, calling the line block images in Sahaj Path Nandalal's linocuts is not as serious a mistake as calling an electrotpe a woodcut. With Karpeles' Vichitra in mind, Nandalal proposed the idea for the artist guild Karusangha in Santiniketan in 1930. However, it's possible that his primary concern was not the revival of craftsmanship. Rather, he wanted to build an artist's cooperative where Kala Bhavana's former students could earn a living by producing commercial art, such as murals, books, posters, crafts, and other commissions. He believed that this idea would greatly benefit the students, who were struggling to find jobs or earn a living as artists by selling their work, a task that was nearly impossible at the time. In contrast to Vichitra, the "Karu Sangha" was an independent organization not formally associated with Kala Bhavana. According to the Visva Bharati Annual Report, "Some of the older students formed a guild known as 'Karu-Sangha' to publish artworks and provide the general public with various artistic works, such as designing, fresco painting, terracotta, embroidery, and batik." With this arrangement, we intend to maintain some of the active relationships between Kala Bhavana and the older students. Nandalal led Karusangha, while Prabhatmohan Bandopadhyay, a prominent commercial artist with strong ties to Calcutta and other publishing houses, served as its secretary. Manindrabhusan Gupta, Banabihari Ghosh, Hiren Ghosh, Indusudha Ghosh, Sudhir Khastgir, Ramkinkar Baij, Binayak Masoji, and Surendranath Kar were among the other competitors. Despite sharing the others' financial need, Binodebehari, whose picture appeared in the cooperative's brochure and who supported the idea, decided not to join. According to Prabhatmohan, Binodebehari, who created numerous woodcuts for Visva Bharati's numerous publications and had nothing against popular art, was ill-equipped to create work that would satisfy the demands of the clients. Nandalal performed numerous business activities for Karusangha, yet received no share of the profits. Book illustration was the most lucrative of the numerous business projects Karusangha's painters worked on. Prabhat Mukhopadhyay gave a thorough description of the business activities in his article on Karusangha; however, he left out important information regarding the books and other publications that Karusangha artists illustrated. Gurusaday Dutt's Chander Buri was one of the important pieces they illustrated. They reported that Ramkinkar Baij completed some of these illustrations. In general, Karusangha forbade its artists from signing their own works and only allowed its name and mark to appear on publications it commissioned. In contrast to the descriptive nature of his earlier Bichitra Studio logo, Nandalal's design was bold and simple. Karusangha has authored various publications, including Sibani, a book on embroidery written by Indusudha Ghosh. An advertisement in the Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1933 states that Karusangha, in addition to his regular commercial work, offered the woodcuts of Santiniketan's famous artists. Despite selling their woodcuts as single-sheet prints, we remain uncertain about the regular commercial use of their linocuts and woodcuts as book illustrations. The custom seems to have been unique to Santiniketan. Karusangha may or may not have been the subject of Nandalal's famous linocut of Gandhi's Salt March to Dandi. In 1930, he created a woodcut of the same image and another painting that echoed Gandhi's sophisticated character. The well-known Gandhian activist Satish Dasgupta initially published a linocut, or drawing, of Gandhi in the political publication Satyagraha Sambad. Rumors circulated that Nandalal had secretly sent the print to Prabhat Bandopadhyay in Calcutta for publication in the newspaper. Prior to his incarceration, Prabhatmohan, the principal printer for Satyagraha Sambad, was a major participant in the Mahisbathan civil disobedience movement. Despite being an ardent admirer of Gandhi and his Satyagraha movement, Nandalal did not participate in active politics like Prabhatmohan did. Instead, he kept secret correspondence with Congress organizers. Using vibrant brush and ink, he produced a series of powerful political cartoons that sparked opposition to the British

government. These illustrations served as linocuts for political campaigns in the Calcutta-area villages of Bhangor and Rajarhat. One of the cartoons that gained widespread recognition was Jhanda Uncha Rahe Hamara. Among these was a three-stepped podium composed of human skulls, atop which the Indian national flag, with its insignia of a spinning wheel, was flying. A man and his wife were holding the flag from opposite sides, with a child positioned in the middle. Many people, both inside and outside of Bengal, have seen this poster. Prabhatmohan claims to have seen it in the New Market in Patna. None of Nandalal's posters are still in existence. Along with other documents pertaining to sedition, Nandalal set them on fire. We may compare him to other well-known Bengali political cartoonists who came before him, such as Gaganendranath Tagore, if they were still living today. Another famous linocut by Nandalal showed Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, a well-known politician who visited Santiniketan in 1934. Nandalal made the 1936 linocut, most likely in response to Wardha's concern for Gaffar Khan. To Rabindranath's joy, it was based on a drawing he finished in 1935. Similar to his Gandhi linocut, which featured white lines on a black backdrop, he made this one. But the lines were now flowing, more elegant, and varied in thickness. Farsi-Arabic (or Pashto) phrases inscribed in Islamic calligraphy compose the lines of the curtain, with only the word "Allah" clearly readable among them. Satyajit Chawdhury notes in his book on Nandalal that Maulana Ziauddin, a lecturer in the Islamic Department of Visva Bharati, penned the song's lyrics. Nandalal then blended the folds of the draperies with their numerous calligraphic components. Instead of affirming Gaffar Khan's Muslim identity with religious language, Nandalal presented him as the leader of Khudai Khidmatgar, God's servant, committed to Gandhi's principles of nonviolent resistance. The letters, which were clearly created by a skilled woodcut artist, most likely Anukana Khastgir or Biswarup Basu, were more prominent in the layout design than in the linocut, where they were reversed and blended in with the beautiful flowing lines' overall rhythm. With their powerful, iconic attitudes, the two linocuts of Gandhi and Gaffar Khan showed off Nandalal's obsessive creative ability. His graphic media language skills were also shown. Ramendranath wrote and painted Pathure Bandor Ramdas, also known as Ramdas the Stone-Monkey, for his instructor Asit Halder in 1926. Manindrabhusan Gupta claimed that his full-page black-and-white illustrations in the book were important pieces of art that showcased his distinct graphic talent rather than just being simple illustrations. In October 1931, Our Magazine released its first issue, showcasing a small signed woodcut of Ramendranath on the front cover. As a quarterly magazine, it featured the commercial and graphic artwork created by the art school's instructors and students. While the majority of the graphic works were the original creations of the artists, the commercial art pieces were halftone reproductions. A multicolored woodcut created in seven blocks was published in the same issue. Indu Rakshit, a renowned artist then enrolled in the art school's teachership program, made his debut as a litho artist in the magazine. Upendra Maharathi produced an etching of Nalanda village in the same issue as Sribash's colored lithograph. The journal served as a valuable repository for researching government graphic design practices. The 1930s Art School. The lecturers published their technical and aesthetic analyses of graphic and commercial art in written works, in addition to the artwork. Unlike Santiniketan, the government did not widely use linocut, which seemed to have a somewhat lower aesthetic value than woodcut. School of Art. Manindrabhusan claims that linocut was widely employed by Santiniketan painters because, in comparison to woodcut, it was more suited for letterpress printing for book illustrations because of its uniform thickness and pliable surface. The application of graphic arts in government was widespread. Compared to Santiniketan, Art School was more professional and intellectual. In Santiniketan, artists created prints to decorate internal publications instead of advertising their work to attract outside commissions. Even seasoned artists such as Nandalal Bose and Binodebehari did not distinguish prints from their original artwork. Former Ramendranath pupil Pramatha Kumar Bose wrote Kather Chaper Chhobi (Woodcuts), a Bengali book, and published it in 1932. The book included his twenty-two woodcuts, while Manindrabhusan and Ramendranath wrote the introduction and forward, respectively. Typically, artists produced folios and books in English to cater to a broader audience of art enthusiasts. However, Pramatha Kumar primarily wrote her book—possibly the first in Bengali—to educate the general Bengali reader or spectator about the unique aesthetic qualities of woodcut. Each print featured a title and a brief description of the information presented on the previous page. The woodcuts shared his instructor Ramendranath's looser, more sketchy style, but they depicted a wide range of subjects, including both urban and rural life and landscapes. The book cost one and a half rupees, significantly less than the folios containing the Artist Proof prints. Even without the artist's signature, every single woodcut in the book was a reproduction directly from the original blocks. In 1926–1927, Sudhansu traveled to Musalipatnam to receive training under Ramendranath at the Andhra National Art Gallery before enrolling as a student at the Indian Society of Oriental Art. In the early 1930s, while he was a teacher at the Saroj Nalini Dutt Industrial School in Calcutta, which Gurusaday Dutt had created, he became a highly influential woodcut artist. Famous historian and woodcut enthusiast Nihar Ranjan Roy examined the works of Sudhansu Roy, Pramatha Kumar, and Ramendranath in his 1931 Municipal Gazette essay on contemporary woodcuts depicting Calcutta's urban settings. Despite his attention being on Ramendranath, he did not overlook the two young painters' developing skills. He perceived Sudhangshu Kumar's excess

of details and mechanically uniform lines as a barrier that kept him from fully expressing his originality in his works. In 1933, O.C. published Sudhansu Kumar's book of fifteen woodcut and linocut illustrations. Gangoly and Nihar Ranjan Roy's introduction. O.C. praised his paintings in this volume for their simplicity and ornamental urge, which counterbalanced the flaw Nihar Ranjan had pointed out. The preface by Gangoly facilitated his acquaintance with Ramendranath and the artists of Santiniketan. The book includes his morning in Bowbazar, Linocut, which earned him the first prize at the 1931 Calcutta University Institute Exhibition. He won first place for his woodcut in the same exhibition the following year as well. In 1938, he edited and published *The Journal of Arts and Crafts*, featuring his small linocut on the cover page. It bore a striking resemblance to the linocuts by Nandalal, seen in the *Sahaj Path*. His developing affinity for the straightforward and ornamental shape may be attributed to his growing interest in folk art. Working as a teacher at the Saroj Nalini Dutt School allowed him to get to know Gurusaday Dutt better, and his love of folk art greatly influenced him. An artwork cannot become current through practice alone; it also needs theoretical underpinnings. In 1927, Prabasi published Nirad C. Chaudhuri's first critical article on the modern woodcut. Following this study, which exclusively focused on western woodcut artists, Prabasi and other locations published several essays on contemporary Indian woodcuts. A small catalogue of Ramendranath's artwork was included in the 1929 publication of an article by Kedarnath Chattopadhyay, which was richly illustrated with his own works. Manindrabhusan also wrote extensively on the subject, setting Bengali modern woodcutting in the broader historical context of modern European and Indian art. Surprisingly, despite his extensive knowledge of the works of the renowned Santiniketan artists, he left them out of his tale with the exception of a few brief observations. In addition to artist-writers, notable academics like Suniti Kumar and Nihar Ranjan Roy wrote in popular publications about contemporary Indian woodcuts. Suniti Kumar positioned Ramendranath's works within the extensive history of woodcutting in both the east and west in her 1931 *Modern Review* article, *The Art of the Woodcut in India*. Throughout practically all of these early texts, Ramendranath was the most discussed artist. The *Chitrashala* section of the monthly Bengali magazine *Bichitra*, which began publishing linocuts and woodcuts by contemporary artists in the 1930s, typically featured renowned Indian artists Abanindranath, Rabindranath, Nandalal Bose, Asit Halder, and others. Rani Dey included her paintings here shortly after the release of her folio album. In a similar vein, a few pieces by Sudhangshu Kumar from his upcoming book album were also released. The fact that they received special recognition as contemporary woodcut artists in addition to painters and sculptors is significant. *Desh* magazine launched a dedicated section in the 1940s to feature the woodcuts and linocuts created by Santiniketan artists on a regular basis. In contrast to Rani Dey, Ramendranath, and the other painters, Nandalal and Binodebehari were prolific graphic artists who frequently published their linocuts and woodcuts in books and journals and displayed them in shows. However, they did not produce any folios or book-albums containing their artwork. The previous examination of the literature on modern Indian woodcuts likely overlooked their works due to this lack of attention. Compared to illustrated books, folios and book albums were new, more formal venues for graphic art exhibitions. A folio or book-album containing one's works was required to become a professional woodcut artist. Notable woodcut artist Haren Das, who worked in the subsequent generation, is also considered to have adhered to this tradition. In 1950, he published *Bengal Village*, an album-book of wood engravings, with an introduction by renowned Bengali graphic designer L.M. Sen and a preface by his teacher Ramendranath. Sen studied in the Govt. School of Art & Craft, Lucknow, where she subsequently worked as a teacher. Not only did distinguished academics and artists publish papers, but their book-album and folio introductions significantly contributed to the formation of the theoretical debate around Bengali woodcut modernism.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Rabindranath was ecstatic to watch Mukul Dey's etching development at Sloan's Chicago studio. He promised his son in a letter that Mukul Dey, a skilled etcher, would bring a whole new art form to India when he returned. Rabindranath always promoted intercultural dialogue and education because he believed that these aspects were crucial to a modern art education. For this reason, he encouraged and sometimes actively assisted Indian artists to travel overseas to acquire new forms of art and techniques. He also welcomed international painters to the *Bichitra* Studio in Calcutta and Santiniketan. He brought Kashinath Debal to England before Mukul Dey so that he could receive sculptural training at the Royal College of Art. In order to familiarize himself with the Far Eastern art and culture that Rabindranath much adored, Nandalal Bose travelled to China and Japan in 1924. He sent Surendranath Kar to the County Council School in England to study modern bookbinding and lithography. In a letter to Santiniketan School teacher Kalimohan Ghosh, Tagore expressed his belief that in order to properly implement a new pedagogy—which was undoubtedly necessary—suitable teachers with fresh perspectives and knowledge were required beforehand. When Mukul Dey returned to India, he brought an etching press from America to the *Bichitra* Studio, where Nandalal Bose and other artists hired him to teach art. He taught the *Bichitra*

Studio's pupils and artists how to use the new medium while also creating several etchings and drypoints of Calcutta's skyline. However, he did not create a notable body of etchings at the time, nor did other artists show a strong interest in this new medium. The importation of all etching supplies likely hindered the process's popularity in India, as Indian artists could not easily or affordably obtain them. The legendary etcher Ramendranath Chakrabarty did not be born until the 1930s. During that period, Nandalal Bose also produced a sizable body of etchings and drypoints, the most famous of which was his depiction of a goat in a drypoints featured in Rabindranath's book *Chhadar Chhobi*. Since Kala Bhavana lacked an etching press at the time, Nandalal most likely completed his etchings and drypoints in Mukul Dey's Chitrakala studio in Santiniketan, which he established in 1928 after moving his etching press from the Bichitra Studio. The goat's etching demonstrated Nandalal's distinct drawing technique, which combined decorativeness, astute observation, and mastery of the new media. However, the reproduction of the image in halftones for the book lost much of its visual energy. Following his return from England, Surendranath Kar began working as a lithographer at Kala Bhavana. To begin the program, he employed the lithopress that Kala Bhavana received as a present from Gaganendranath. The Bichitra Studio had not utilized the press for a long time. At first, teaching lithography proved to be successful, drawing in both instructors and pupils. Rumors circulated that exhibition both inside and outside of Santiniketan featured the students' lithographs. However, Surendranath could no longer find the time to continue teaching lithography since he was so occupied with Visva-Bharati's administrative and infrastructural accomplishments. Indeed, the lithographs from Atvut Lok were technically far more advanced than those from Santiniketan. However, unlike Gaganendranath, Surendranath was also a mechanic and an artist for his own works, making him, along with Mukul Dey, one of the early pioneers of modern graphic art in India. Artists developed a new type of craftsmanship, defined as an intimate, undifferentiated creative union between the head and hand, when they began to train themselves in graphic design instead of relying on experts for technical assistance. During the pre-independence, woodcut and linocut emerged as two strong modern art mediums that equally dominated academic and popular venues. On the other hand, etching and lithography developed slowly and irregularly, and artists primarily used them as private arts, similar to painting. The woodcuts and linocuts, used as commercial book illustrations and on exhibition hall walls alongside paintings, largely erased the traditional line separating popular and cloistered art activities. These were the unique creations of the artists, not mere copies like the halftones. These were explored the connections between commercial art and pedagogic modernism, specifically focusing on the significant collection of woodcuts and linocuts produced by the government and students of Kala Bhavana at Santiniketan, Delhi School of Art.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

None.

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