

Personalities :: Painting



Abanindranath Tagore

Regarded as the father of India's modern art, Abanindranath was born at Jorasanko on 7th August, 1871 at the Jorasanko residence of the Tagore family. He is the youngest son of the late Gunendranath Tagore and grandson of Girindranath Tagore, the second son of Prince Dwarkanath Tagore. His eldest brother Gaganendranath was also an artist of repute, and the next brother is Samarendranath Tagore who is of a studious and retiring disposition. Girindranath, Abanindranath's grandfather, was himself a painter of considerable merit and used to paint portraits and landscapes after the European style.

Abanindranath made use of his father's paint-box to paint rural scenes with cottages and palm trees. He gradually acquired considerable skill in drawing similar interesting pictures with his father's red and blue and other colored pencils. He was then about nine years of age. His beloved father died when Abanindranath was only ten years of age.

While at the Sanskrit College (1881-1890) Abanindranath took a few lessons in Art from his class-mate, Anukul Chatterjee of Bhawanipur whom he still remembers clearly and the beautiful pencil outline drawings that he used to make. Although he was not very strong in his English, Abanindranath somehow managed to get promoted to the first class, being exceptionally well for his age in the Sanskrit language and literature.

In 1889 he married Srimati Suhasini Devi. At this time he left the Sanskrit College after nine years of study and studied English as a special student at St. Xavier's College, which he attended for about a year and a half. At this institution he greatly enjoyed lectures of Father Lafont on scientific subjects.

About the year 1897 when Abanindranath was about twenty-five years of age, he took private lessons from Signor Gilhardi, an Italian artist, (then Vice-Principal of the Calcutta Government School of Art) on cast drawing, foliage drawing, pastel and life study. Later he began to attend the studio of Mr. Charles L. Palmer who had arrived from England. After undergoing a severe training under Palmer for three or four years Abanindranath attained such a proficiency in portrait painting in oils that he could finish a picture within two hours. During this period he painted many subjects in oils.

Abanindranath devoted his life to painting and he was the Guru to a number of artists. He was the Vice-Principal of the Government Art School and was working under E. B. Havell. Havell freed Abanindranath from European influences. He drew his attention to Moghul and Rajput styles. The influence of these styles can be seen in his later work. Later on, Abanindranath learnt about Japanese art from Okakura. Okakura was a great Japanese artist and art-critic who had come to India with Swami Vivekananda. Okakura declared that the spirit of a nation expresses itself in its art. He also said that from the point of view of art, all Asia is one. After he returned to Japan, Okakura sent to India two other Japanese artists, Taikoan and Hilsida. Abanindranath studied Japanese art under their guidance.

Painting and Sculpture are but two of the many attainments of this versatile genius, Abanindranath Tagore. His manifold and valuable contributions to literature in some of its important branches would rank him as one of the greatest litterateurs of the time. Children's literature specially has received his devoted and affectionate attention. The more important of his works on juvenile literature are "Raj-Kahini", "Sakuntala", "Kshirer- Putul", "Bhutapatri", "Nalaka", "Nahush" "Buro-Angla" which please the old and the young alike.

Abanindranath's paintings were exhibited in London and Paris in 1913, followed by another international exhibition in Japan in 1919. His appreciative audience included Rodin and Rothenstein. The influence of Abanindranath on modern Indian art is profound and under his guidance a new generation of painters- Nandalal Bose, Asit Halder, Kshitindranath Majumder and Jamini Roy - brought about a revival in Indian art. The largest number of paintings by Abanindranath- over 500 - forms a part of Rabindra Bharati Society's collection at Jorasanko, Calcutta.

Abanindranath Tagore died in 19