

HOUDHURY

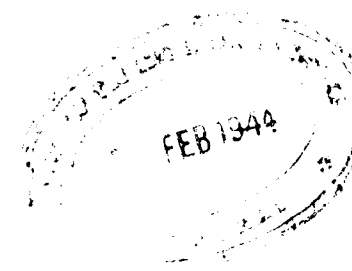
AND
HIS ART

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By
P. R. RAMACHANDRA RAO.

CHOUDHURY AND HIS ART



THE AUTHOR

Born on July 24, 1912 at Nandalur in the Cuddapah District of the Madras Presidency, Mr. P. R. Ramachandra Rao has had a varied career. He is a Master of Arts in English Language and Literature, and also in History, Economics and Politics, graduating from the Presidency College, Madras, with distinction. He is also a Bachelor of Laws and is a practising lawyer. For some time he was Lecturer in English in the Hindu College, Masulipatam and was also Professor of English in the Indian Women's University, Bombay. For nearly four years he was Education Editor of *The Times of India*. His earlier book, "Decay of Indian Industries," had a brilliant reception. Mr. Ramachandra Rao is a well-known contributor to the Indian and Overseas Press. He has travelled widely and his cultural interests are extensive. The present book, which has been acclaimed as an outstanding effort, will, it is hoped, in the words of Sir S. Radhakrishnan, who contributes the Foreword, find a wide circle of readers.

CHOUDHURY

AND

HIS ART

By

P. R. RAMACHANDRA RAO

FOREWORD

By

SIR S. RADHAKRISHNAN, Kt., M.A., D.Litt (Hon.),
Vice-Chancellor, Benares Hindu University.

AND

APPRECIATIONS

By

The Maharajah of Jeypore, Sir C. R. Reddi, Dr. Kalidas Nag,
Mr. Ashoke Chatterjee, Mr. Hironmoy Roy Choudhury, Mr. Nandalal Bose,
Mr. Bireswar Sen, Mr. G. Venkatachalam, Mr. Asit Kumar Haldar,
Mr. Tarasankar Banerjee, Shrimati Rukmini Devi & Mr. Karl Khandalavala.

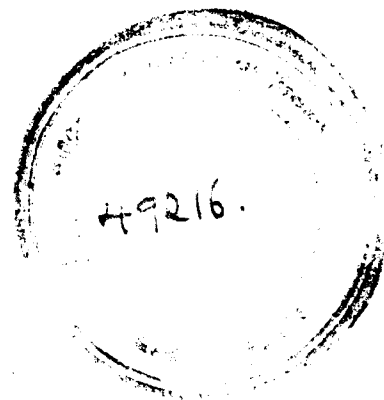
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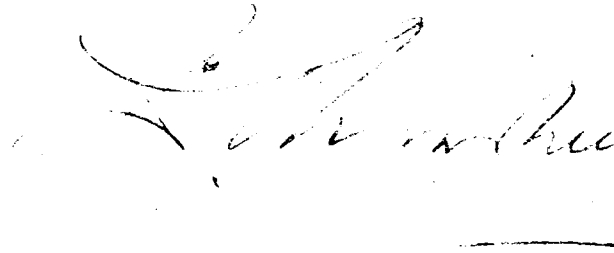


Printed in India by
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To
SAROJINI,
my wife

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FOREWORD

Some years ago a judge in South India remarked: "A subject nation has no politics," to which the answer was given: "A subject nation has nothing else than politics." The present condition of India in which all our energies are absorbed by the one task of winning political independence has led to an appalling waste and misdirection of our mental and spiritual resources. I do not deny the corruption of the soul, the moral degradation, the morbid social condition which foreign rule has produced. I do not deny that there is a good deal in our country of human wrongs that could be diminished, of human sufferings that could be remedied by political action. But this foreign rule which attempts to humiliate, divide and corrupt us is successful only in so far as its domination is based on spiritual disintegration. Things take place in the soul before they occur in the body. India's prostration goes deeper than politics and politics by themselves would not achieve India's resurrection. The task before us is to change the spirit of the people, rescue it from apathy and despair, give it legitimate pride in its past and ardent hope in its future. Those who work for a mental and spiritual revolution through literature and philosophy, art and religion, science and education have a title to our recognition.

One of the chief leaders of the Renaissance in Art is Abanindranath Tagore and among the foremost of his pupils is Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury. Mr. Ramachandra Rao in his pen picture of this great artist tells us that he is gifted with insight, insight that makes him see more deeply into things than the common herd. The function

of the true artist is to stamp indelibly and for ever every moment in which we are deeply aware, every moment in which our perceptions are clear and intense. His function is not to entertain or instruct but to create, and thus raise humanity to a high level of grace and wisdom. How far Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury has succeeded in his task through his impressive work in Sculpture and Painting, Mr. Ramachandra Rao discloses in these pages with a rare enthusiasm for his subject, and wistful understanding of his work. Mr. Rao's discerning and sympathetic account of this strangely gifted personality will, I hope, gain for this book a wide circle of readers.

29-9-'43,
Madras.

S. RADHAKRISHNAN.

PREFACE

This prologue, paradoxically, is written last. Looking back, it has been enjoyable work. As it always happens, this tome has grown from smaller beginnings. I set out to write a monograph on Choudhury; it struck me, while I wrote it, that it would be fine to have my subject, in the sculptor's idiom, viewed from different angles—through different eyes. That was the genesis of the Appreciations appended to my monograph—a somewhat rare arrangement, but, as I see it now, eminently satisfying. Curiously, the several estimates did not differ on the worth of the artist—rather, they were unanimous on his unquestioned eminence. The Appreciations fit into an organic pattern which I have evolved; they are a distinguished continuation of my effort. This work is by no means a book of testimonials—Choudhury has no need of such. It is a competent commentary on the artist's deserving, a synthetic summing-up of a many-sided genius.

Choudhury has a significance beyond art galleries and drawing rooms; he has a message for you and I, a message that must influence our understanding of life. I have not written—nor have the others in here—for the student or dilettante; I have addressed primarily the common man for whom it is intended. I have, therefore, rigorously eschewed all artists' jargon, sacrificing perhaps a popular artifice of erudition. I have told an eminently human story, the story of the struggle of genius. I have described the matrix of that now-applauded endeavour—it required a Choudhury to battle through to fulfilment. And I have placed the man in the context of his achievement and essayed an estimate of his import.

In this task Choudhury has naturally been of great assistance—he is responsible for the biographical details—and Mrs. Choudhury has helped with precious records of her husband's

career. Choudhury has approved of the contents and his co-operation in this undertaking has been inestimable.

I am grateful to Sir S. Radhakrishnan for writing the Foreword to this work, for launching it under his distinguished auspices.

To Kalaprapurna Sree Vikramadeo Varma, Maharajah of Jeypore, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Sir C. R. Reddi, Dr. Kalidas Nag, Mr. Nandalal Bose, Mr. A. N. Chaudhuri, Mr. Ashoke Chatterjee, Mr. Asit Kumar Haldar, Mr. Bireswar Sen, Mr. G. Venkatachalam, Mr. Tarasankar Banerjee, Shrimati Rukmini Devi and Mr. Karl Khandalavala my grateful thanks are due for readily contributing the Appreciations.

My learned friend, Mr. Burra V. Subrahmanyam has given me the benefit of his penetrating criticism.

To my wife I am indebted for much sympathetic collaboration.

Brindavan,
Mylapore, Madras,
October 1943.

P. R. Ramachandra Rao.

CONTENTS

	PAGE.
DEVI PRASAD ROY CHOUDHURY: A PORTRAIT By P. R. Ramachandra Rao	1
THE STORY OF A STRUGGLE: EVOLUTION OF ROY CHOUDHURY By P. R. Ramachandra Rao	21
THE MAN CHOUDHURY: A STUDY IN PERSONALITY By P. R. Ramachandra Rao	35
DEVI PRASAD ROY CHOUDHURY: APPRECIATIONS PREFATORY NOTE By P. R. Ramachandra Rao	41
DYNAMIC ARTIST By The Maharajah of Jeypore	43
ARTIST OF GENIUS By Sir C. Ramalinga Reddy	45
CHOUDHURY, THE FIGHTER By Dr. Kalidas Nag	47
BOLD EXPLORER By Mr. Ashoke Chatterjee	49
A TEACHER'S TRIBUTE By Mr. Hironmoy Roy Choudhury	51
UNDOUBTED MASTER By Mr. Nandalal Bose	57
VERSATILE TITAN By Mr. Bireswar Sen	59
VIRILE STYLIST By Mr. G. Venkatachalam	60
UNCHALLENGED ACHIEVEMENT By Mr. Asit Kumar Haldar	61
CHOUDHURY AS WRITER By Mr. Tarasankar Banerjee	66
GREAT PORTRAITIST By Shrimati Rukmini Devi	69
DECORATIVE ARTIST By Mr. Karl Khandalavala	71
	73

LIST OF PLATES

PLATE.	TITLE.		
1.	Mr. and Mrs. Roy Choudhury and Son	To face page	1
2.	Choudhury at the age of 23	To face page	21
3.	The artist aged 27	To face page	35
4.	Choudhury now	To face page	44

(The following plates are gathered loose in the paper jacket at the end of the volume.)

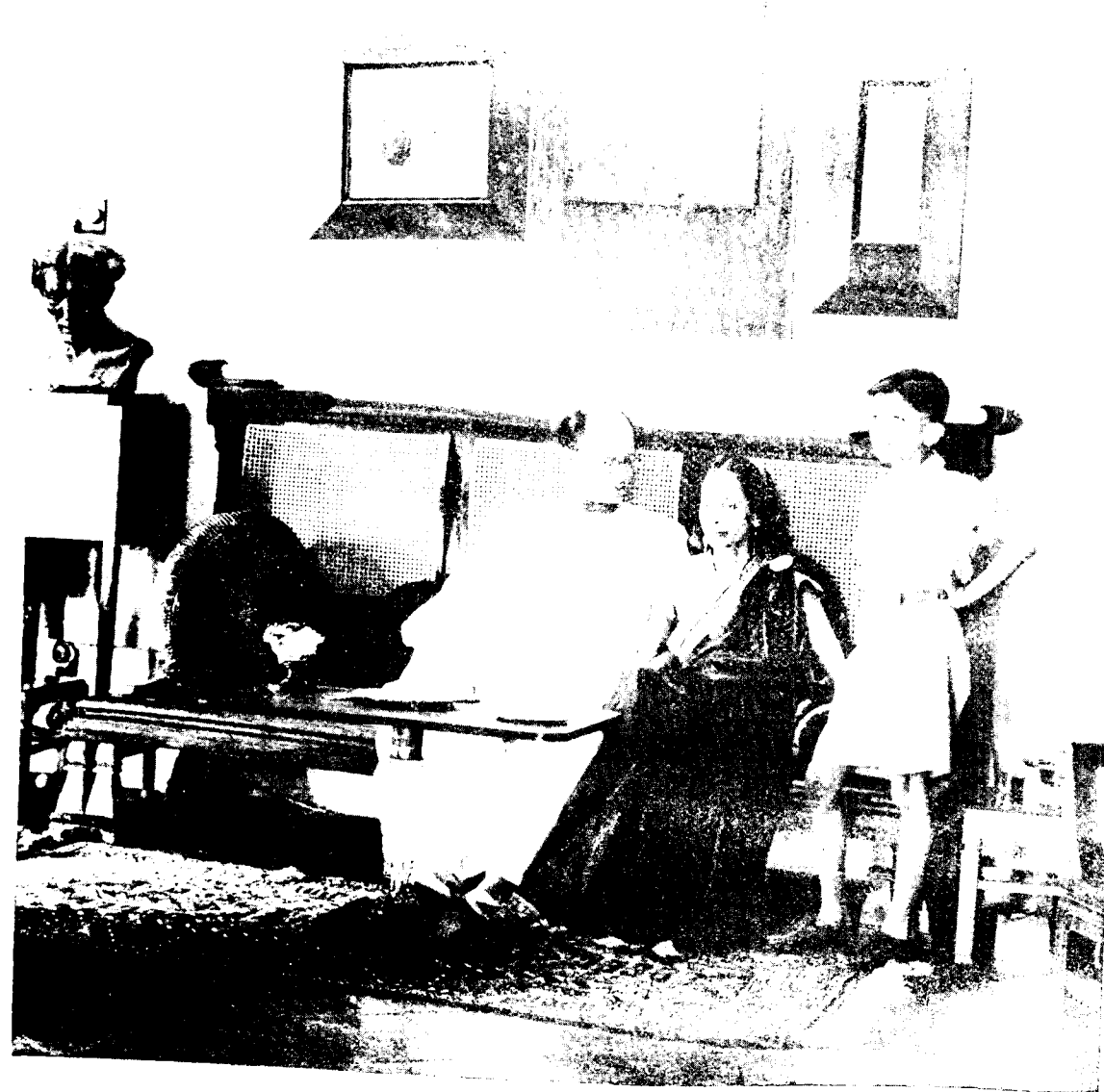
PAINTINGS

5. Nirban
6. The Road-makers
7. Harris Bridge, Madras
8. Arati
9. Waves
10. Mother
11. The Mist
12. The Land of the Dead
13. The Village Maid
14. Romance
15. After the Storm
16. Sumatra Birds
17. The Death Messenger
18. Musafir
19. The Dreamer
20. Padi
21. The Palace Doll
22. Sandhya Jyoti
23. Sarad Pratima
24. Nivedan
25. Jivan Sandhya

SCULPTURES

26. My Father
27. Maharajah of Travancore
28. Travancore Temple Entry
29. " " " details
30. " " " details
31. " " " details
32. The Evacuees
33. The God of Destruction
34. The Maharajah of Jeypore posing for his full-size statue
35. Dr. Annie Besant
36. Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar
37. Nawab Abdul Hakim
38. " " bust view
39. Sir C. R. Reddi
40. Babu

CHOUDHURY AND HIS ART



Mr. and Mrs. Roy Choudhury and son

DEVI PRASAD ROY CHOUDHURY

A PORTRAIT

There is none so very much alive among Indian artists today as Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury. Among the first inheritors of Dr. Abanindranath Tagore's noble art-heritage, he has outdistanced his compeers. The early resplendent glow of modern Bengal art is all but spent out. Abanindranath, at the twilight of life, stands on the summit of a matchless art endeavour—almost canonized. Among his missionaries, once so full of promise, Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar, Khitindranath Mazumdar and Bireswar Sen have alone achieved solitary eminences; the rest have acquiesced in past reputations, hastily made. The gospel of Abanindranath, with the less gifted, became a mannerism of hazy colouring and languid outlines. Art degenerated into technique. A vague sentimentalism and laboured eccentricity became the hall-mark of the new imitators. The deep spiritual art of the master was ritualised. Abanindranath paid the penalty of

genius; he was parodied. The Bengal art renaissance, like the Brahmo Samaj, was cathartic in origin and purpose, very welcome and very necessary. But it soon achieved its purpose. It swept away the vulgar banalities of the Ravi Varma tradition; it resuscitated Indian art. But like all reforms, it suffered from over-emphasis and became stereotyped in the process. The worst tragedy that can befall any art is to become stereotyped.

Roy Choudhury has for long careered far and away from this school of mannerism, with large, rapid strides. An essentially dynamic artist, he set his face sternly against the competing eccentricities of his pious comrades. Originality, he pointed out, does not consist in eccentricity; it lies in a sincere perception of artistic truth. Modern Bengal art was, like a lost child rediscovered, much indulged and that did it no good. It grew up a spoilt child, vain and opinionated. It simply messed up colour and line,

and derived childish joy from its fantastic designs. It distorted form and gloried in its superior artistic culture. Art was not expression, nor interpretation; it became a mystery, with an unexpressed glossary. It mystified. In time, it became nonsense.

That was because the Bengal school functioned away from the rational appearances of things, away from reality. Their imagination bodied forth vague, unreal shapes, "neither on the land nor on the sea." They strove professedly to idealise art, to spiritualise it, and thought to achieve it by an escape from reality. It is an unfortunate fallacy. The artist works in line and colour and mass, and is severely circumscribed by the limitations of his media. There is no escape from them. There is no escape from form, structure and the *chiaroscuro* of colour. The poet is severely limited by the demands of prosody. But the very rigidity of his verse pattern throws the metrical syllables into harmonious combinations. Form, design, line and colour are the skeleton of art, its rigid foundation. The artist accepts them as the poet must accept metre. Of course, he might take occasional liberties, as the poet might drop a syllable or eke out a foot for the sake of effect. Even so the artist might occasionally, but for good reason, depart from his artistic norm to achieve an effect. An elongated

nose in a certain context might denote a certain facial dignity and repose, or an eked-out eyelash a drooping languor sometimes; but elongated noses and eyelashes become a positive nuisance when made the undeviating rule.

But, one might ask: if the artist is thus severely handicapped by the limitations of his media, how is he to express the artistic truth as he conceives it? The answer is: even as the poet invests the mere word with a meaning all his own and charges it with inextinguishable thought, so must the artist invest the mere line and colour with a beauty and message all his own. Note, the artist idealises the line and colour, the reality that is, accepting its truth. In other words, he transcends reality; he does not distort it. You cannot idealise anything except the real. This is by the way.

II

Roy Choudhury realised early that the classical Indian artist had of course a thorough knowledge of anatomy, on which were founded all the laws of painting and sculpture; but unlike the Greeks, he ennobled spiritual beauty rather than physical. In this emphasis on the soul of man, Choudhury is in complete agreement; but he has not forgotten that the soul, to attain its beauty, must be fittingly

housed in a perfect body. The human body, the lodgment of the soul, must itself be beautiful, well-proportioned. The great ancient Indian sculptures are marvels of anatomic perfection. So Choudhury broke early with the prevailing Bengal tradition and looked west for inspiration—indeed, he has not crossed the seas. The rebel seeker that he is, he left Abanindranath after an inchoate schooling and turned to masters in western art. He was lucky in his teachers—Boiess and Hironmoy Roy Choudhury. They taught him perspective, proportion, design and *chiaroscuro*—disdainfully neglected by the Bengalschool. Choudhury mastered the technique of painting and sculpture, minutely, laboriously. He learnt the "expressive laws" of art.

Meanwhile, the modern Bengal school, at the very vortex of a creation mania, deliberately set out to shun correct drawing and perspective, and tortured the human figure into fantastic shapes, misconceivedly after the Abanindranath fashion. They went grotesque. Art was no longer a spontaneous expression of the artist's vision; it became a crude footnote to a preconceived theory of the new art function. An irresponsible, but much vaunted novelty, disfigured the artist's canvas. Art became vague, anaemic and idiosyncratic; it lacked bones and flesh and blood.

But the Bengal school at its highest

and purest, with Abanindranath, Gogonendranath and Nandalal, had soared to unattained idealistic heights in painting. Their superb culture had 'x-rayed' the soul of art and transcended the merely incidental skeleton of physical accuracy. Art ceased to be just imitative; it became a visualisation of the artist's emotion, plumbing the appearances of things. Physical exactitude was adventitious, almost irrelevant. Nature was no longer the *sine qua non*: the artist revealed a deeper and more innate truth, far beyond its visible manifestations. His appeal was more fundamental and to an ageless future, unbothered by mechanical accuracy or verisimilitude. Thus the best of the Bengal idealists distilled the quintessence of artistic truth and achieved a sublime simplicity, so pitifully caricatured by their slavish emulators.

It was to this superb idealism that Roy Choudhury returned after his western apprenticeship, not penitent indeed, but chastened, complemented and mature. He came back to Abanindranath. He discovered his inner artistic self and communed with it in a full-fledged knowledge of his mission and destiny. Blind traditionalism he was deadly against, nor was he taken up with the sentimental adulation of our conventional classicism. His return to the Bengal school did indeed, paradoxically, connote a

phenomenal departure from it, for he was to achieve that most rare synthesis of western craftsmanship and Indian idealism in the finest art. It was a daring experiment, extremely dangerous, and called for exceptional art knowledge and culture. A lesser man than Choudhury might have degraded the western technique and the Indian idealism, and conceived a hybrid monstrosity. He developed a singularly felicitous and individual style, adapting western art science to Indian conceptions. He discerned the truth and beauty in both. He is our first modern eclectic, our reformer in art. He suffers indeed from no western-phobia; he adopted the western science as the basic foundation of his artistic achievement. His cent-per-cent Indian themes are executed in the most faultless style that is fundamentally western. The composition, the colour sense and the design are all typically western; yet no western artist can attempt to paint his pictures. There is no casteless, Anglo-Indian atmosphere in his art.

III

It is so symbolic of Choudhury that he should indefatigably nurture the body of his art, almost to muscular build, to make it a fit carriage of the soul. His own expansive figure, naturally massive, is cultured to a wrestler's physique—broad-chested and

broad-shouldered, with brawny hands supporting each a generous, ample palm. Choudhury is a wrestler in his own right—as he is other things besides—and heartily enjoys a fight. It is strange how this massive man, with thick, heavy fingers can fashion the most delicate and refined miniatures in Indian art! His colossal sculptures, rugged and craggy epics in stone, virility and nerve every inch, are eloquent registers of his rough-hewn mould. The determined, square face, strengthened by a powerful nose—reported strikingly handsome and of many conquests once—has lost none of its genial good humour, and the mouth involuntarily breaks off in a disarming smile. The luxuriant hair that once capped his broad receding forehead has thinned greatly—age has told on Choudhury; but the eyes sparkle still with a knowing intelligence. He goes through life with a native aristocratic nonchalance.

IV

Choudhury's range is versatile; his genius is many-faceted. He is, as Stella Kramrisch has said, the classic of the new generation of Indian artists. As a wizard of water-colour he has a solid continental reputation, and his mastery of the medium is unequalled in this country. Water colour is to him a romantic dreamland where he frolics, *Comus*-like, for the sheer joy

of it and conjures up visions of powerful and impossible splendour. His subtle colours sing and dance in opalescent harmony; each hue is masterfully distilled to its deepest glow. The subdued colour magic is compelling; it haunts. His water-colours have the depth and luminosity of oils, without their attendant heaviness. He ceaselessly experiments, ever seeking newer ranges of colour symphony. The tints blend and coalesce in perfect unison in deliberate compositions of rare originality, shuffled and reshuffled in his inventive brain.

Choudhury has no *one* style nor *one* technique; every picture is a class apart. Soul-destroying repetition he abominates; art is a creative, not a re-creative, function. So, he does not pause and look back and around in bloated self-esteem; he rather, with pursed lips, scans the yet vast unaccomplished future. Art is not to him a thing of medals and prizes and exhibitions; it is a register of broken ambitions, of unattained ideals and frustrated emotions. It is a *sadhana* and he is driven forward by the demoniac urge of self-fulfilment. He does not stagnate; he is not ossified. Art-realisation to him is an adventure, a very personal devout adventure—an intense, soul-centred *tapasya* in the search for artistic truth; not a leisurely pilgrimage in motley company.

From his adolescent, astounding "Dotana", lauded sky-high, to his present maturer endeavour, maturer and sadder, Choudhury has run the almost entire gamut of human experience in indelible colour. Art is the Man, registering his many facets and moods. Even if all we now know of Keats's personality were impossible to obtain, we should yet have pieced out a fairly accurate picture of the love-sick boy from his tell-tale poetry. Endymion is Keats. One of Choudhury's first exhibited pictures, acclaimed at the time of exceptional merit, shows a wistful Juliet in just the right expression of romantic visualisation. It is familiar psychology that the adolescent male fondly pictures an expectant, sadly dreamy female to whom his awaited approach should bring delectable light and cheer. Choudhury then was at that period of his life when rhymesters compose love-sonnets and artists picturise sweet and seventeen in wasteful fragrance. But the marvel is that this early picture was at once a masterpiece—not a timid, school-boyish effort of psychological rather than aesthetic interest.

Years later, Choudhury returned to the theme in "Abhisarika". The wistful Juliet is a woman now, not disconsolately sad, but with the maturer expectation of hopeful love. There is light in her eyes, the luminous faith

in love's consummation. She knows that her Prince Charming will never fail her. She is immaculately dressed; the ornamented drapery is thrown into beautiful folds which, like their wearer, seem to lie in proud, self-conscious expectancy. The atmosphere pulsates with hope and desire, yet not too harshly; the subdued tonal values effectively render the indefinable result.

And, Choudhury painted yet another picture, "Pratikshamana", but how! Here too the woman waits for her man, but it is for a man who does not come. The proverbial Hindu wife, meek as a cow, impossibly, insufferably patient, who must needs stand by the window-sill all night long in a ceaseless vigil, still hoping that *he* might yet come, even as the shadows of the night melt cruelly into pitiless day. Yet that miserable statuesque woman will keep an eternal vigil, with not a harsh thought nor a shadow across her love. Note, the woman herself, is, like her soul, plunged in darkness while without her is light, but it is a light that does not shine within, not in her life. This is Choudhury at his best, but it is a sadder Choudhury, to whom life, revealed in full circle, has shown up the darker shades a little too insistently.

Beautiful "Dotana", Choudhury's earlier picture of the year, has a

subtler, soberer enchantment. The insouciant girl is desparately torn between worldly pleasures, viciously sweet, and the intangible duties of temple worship. The secular and spiritual pulls are held in delicate balance; the girl stands on the top of the life-wave that neither way inclines. Yet we feel, and the artist is too palpably anxious to draw his pet moral, that the struggle does not avail. We already sense the heretic unconventional Choudhury, and his hand has learnt a subtler colouring, a firmer composition.

In the "Lepcha Maid", the first of his celebrated portraits of Himalayan maiden-hood, Choudhury leaps into the very front rank. This remarkable picture of a Lepcha girl—you almost feel the warmth of her soft perfectly modelled flesh—peering at you through those squinted, saucy, passionate eyes, drunk with life, is the wildest dream of youth come tantalisingly, surprisingly true. It is the picture of a woman whose every nerve has vibrated with a wild, flaming passion and the swelling blood, pounding away at the heart, has induced a mild intoxication. It is a fierce passion, yet self-subdued by its very ferocity, and—mark this—the compelling colour magic is appropriately subdued and disposed in a delicate symphony, the very ornamental patterns harmonising with the

greater beauty of the Lepcha maid. Choudhury's companion-picture, the "Bhutia Maid", a sweet mountain lass attired in quaint finery, has the same enchanting treatment of warm, full-blooded, young female flesh. It was exhibited at the Imperial Gallery, London, and was widely admired.

Another of Choudhury's portrayals of saucy maidenhood is "Curiosity", rendered with a subtle inflexion of theme and artistry. An Indian girl of noble lineage has strayed, boldly to some forward point in her closed-up garden, and looks out with all the irrepressible stealthy curiosity and relish of a prisoner on holiday. Of that outside world, so inviting and desirable, snatched at in shy glimpses, she has had no notion; yet, the native hauteur and restraint of her aristocratic stock hold her curiosity in proper check. That saucy, challenging face lightly resting on the graceful arm that has embraced an incidental branch; the ample curves of the decorative drapery, severely classical, enwrapping her in a queer majesty; the supporting foliage, done with a brilliant economy of touch—these impart a composite beauty to the picture, defying analysis. Of equal merit is Choudhury's "Kshattriyani" a gem of water colour, another study of insouciant beauty. In skill of composition and delicacy of colour design, the picture ranks among

Choudhury's best; yet it is a class apart, having neither precursor nor successor.

To Choudhury the love-sick woman is of almost pathological interest; he has pictured her in the several moods of her familiar malady. Classical Indian literature is the grand repertory of love-lorn damsels, sweetly suffering love's delays, and Choudhury has done to Indian art what the Sanskrit poets, in a different sphere, have done to Indian literature. Of such is Choudhury's famous "Lotus Pond", exhibited at Wembley. This great picture of a love-sick girl by the conventional lotus pond, symbolising the inexpressible agony of unrequited desire, won for Choudhury international fame. The beautiful maid is drawn in an attitude of delicate boredom, the weak limbs sag softly to the ground, her very attire is in a sweet disorder, the drapery lying about her in loose indifferent folds. The eyes are heavy and tired, for so is her soul. In the lotus pond beside her the inflorescent flowers are budding in painful contrast; she looks at them wistfully, because her petalled heart, now so sore and crumpled, was gloriously fresh and renascent like the mocking, budding flowers. You look at the picture and are amazed by its psychological finesse. The colour scheme is demure like the subject, reposing in quiet undertones.

Choudhury, like Browning, is a master in the art of significant suggestion, achieved with marvellous economy; only the grammar of his art is more perfect.

Choudhury's women may be drunk with love; they know another intoxication—of music—because music is the food of love. The Rajput maid in Choudhury's "Surer Nesha" (Lure of Music) is deeply drunk with melody, listening, and yet not listening, to the hoary master-musician playing celestial music. The aged man is entranced too, but by the sheer excellence of his song that perhaps stirs forgotten melodies, some soft recess in his gnarled life. He seems transported, carried far away from his material environment, unmindful even of his fair listener. On this twilight background of flickering life is contrasted the girl, young, fresh and luscious, with hope on her youthful brow. The music has sunk into her soul; it has stirred in her immortal longings. The picture is an exquisitely balanced piece, balanced in theme and pattern, a poem in colour.

Choudhury's is a strong man's conception of woman—frail, delicate, pensive, yielding and fragrant—because she is his psychological converse. His men are, like himself, studies in aggressive manhood—lone, gaunt, elemental and rugged. Choudhury's "Musaffir" is a brilliant portrait of a

too too common type; he seems to speak with the voice of all the religious mendicants to whom life is one eternal pilgrimage. This sturdy figure, this more than man, is drawn in bold expansive line; the bearded face, furrowed and weathered, has a characteristic dignity, at once compelling attention and respect. This gaunt wayfarer on life's highway seems just to have paused for a moment while the picture holds him in check, and then you know he will resume his unending travels. The picture is a cross-section of life on the march; you feel as if you entered and saw a high-tension drama in climax, plunging into *media res*. That old mendicant, you tell yourself, you have seen somewhere; indeed, you seem to know him intimately; he is charmingly interesting, and when you turn and move off that brave supplicant face is indelibly printed on your mind. That is the sign of great art; Choudhury's Musaffir, like Shakespeare's Lear, you will never forget.

Choudhury's mendicant puts you in mind of his greater picture—"Kumarajiva's China Yatra". This historic theme the artist renders with unique mastery. The celebrated monk, followed by his Buddhist disciples, is scaling the dizzy heights of the towering Himalayas, in his journey onward to China. It is a long, arduous journey that these

tireless figures, silhouetted against the snow-topped peaks, have undertaken. A vague, indeterminate mist overhangs the mountains and the whole background is one sheet of snow. On this journey Kumarajiva is bent, undeterred in the pursuit of Buddhist lore. It almost seems another world—the terrain is left below and past; there is a grim determination, a sublime resignation, in this perilous undertaking. The tortuous track is dangerously furrowed and beset with rocky perils; so terrific is the prospect that the youngest of the company, not yet inured to spiritual hardships, looks lingeringly on the familiar scene behind. There is in the picture a sense of infinity, of vast and wild conception, transcending reality, yet vividly portrayed, that you find in Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound". I do not know of another picture more intellectually satisfying.

Choudhury's "Nirvana", his other essay of a Buddhist theme, is of different texture. This excellent composition in frankly western technique has a touch of Rembrandt and is incidentally a fine example of Choudhury's strongly individual style, of the application of western art technique to Indian subjects. The Buddhist devotees are under the great shadow of the Lord's passing, and the light, fringing the mourners, merely accentuates the enveloping gloom. Note

the composition, the tier of mourners disposed against massive pillars, slightly emerging from the background, and the bold vertical columns of light on the extreme right, deftly holding the balance of illumination.

Choudhury, strangely for all his aristocratic antecedents, is a socialist on canvas. His striking pictures of the labouring proletariat are at once a challenge and an appeal. They are monuments of dignity and strength. Man is stripped of the accident of social calling and presented in his native majesty. Choudhury's "Road-makers" are not just labourers at work displacing a tough boulder; they are indomitable men wrestling with nature, doggedly, determinedly, powerfully. The craggy shaft of rock, jutting to the right, is the simple platform of the struggle; its indented 'rockiness' is amazingly brought out. On the slender edge of the shaft is poised the unshapely boulder which the taut, springy men are attacking with redoubtable energy. Soon that ugly rock will have lain over and the men emerged triumphant. They are of the like who forge mighty highways for the conquest of nations. The "Road-makers" are the forgers of Man's empire, his extending dominion over elemental forces. The picture vibrates with a superhuman strength and every face of the rocky crust scintillates vitality. The composition

is a-piece and the figures, disposed, like so many full-drawn bows, are held in difficult balance. The slightest error and this powerful picture would have come crashing down in ruins.

Choudhury's remarkable "Labour", designed for the *Madras Mail*, has a similar motif. This difficult tempera shows a group of labourers at work, toiling in the noon-day sun, the scorching rays lighting up the backs of the men and women in powerful illumination. This nicely balanced piece recalls Choudhury's "After the Day's Work", also in tempera. A fisherman, exhausted in every limb and weighed down by the dripping net, is plodding homeward his weary way. This simple picture of the unambitious villager, resigned to his humble lot and going through life in a manly uncomplaining way, has a primary appeal.

V

But it is as a portraitist that Choudhury excels and he is first and foremost a sculptor. His portraits are magnificent pictures—pictures first, in the best Dutch, Italian and French traditions. Their pictorial quality will endure long after their accidental subjects are gone and forgotten; they will live through the years. A portrait by Choudhury is a brilliant commentary on character, delineated with astounding psychological insight; it is a spotlight on

the soul of the man. The man is idealised, stripped of the incidental trappings and presented in all his unabashed and rugged nakedness of heart and soul. He stands out of the mere vesture of his being. Choudhury's men are men of heroic stature, virile, Titanic and imperative. His women have a severe strength in their very decorative delicacy. They have an imperious angelic quality—their personality exudes in bold comprehensive sweeps.

Choudhury's portraits are historic records—monuments of his sitters, whose every characteristic is sublimated and rendered with a compelling idealism. He recreates the whole man, with a rare mastery of the physical dimension; but the mere man seems to step out, transmuted by the artist's touch, and stand forth into Time. Choudhury's men and women are untrammelled by mere circumstantial environment; they are universal and speak with the voice of all humanity. His subjects, like Shakespeare's characters, belong to no period or age, albeit they are harnessed to the immediate human drama against an accidental local environment. Choudhury's art, like poetry, is without epoch; like life, his art is primeval—a cross-section of humanity.

The plastic clay is violently torn into breathing imperative life; the

slave pigments are splashed about in aggressive vital strokes till the impregnated canvas yields the ultimate ineffable result. On the vast arena of his creative brain are marshalled every stroke and the merest touch of colour; like one possessed, you see him advance with thick deliberate strides to the canvas; the heavily charged brushes move, rapier-like, inlaying the broad masses in seemingly indifferent fashion; and then suddenly, inevitably, the beauteous vision takes shape and springs before you with astounding alacrity, as some impossible delectable dream come true. In that wild splash of colour every hue is ranged, the delicatest and the subtlest, rendered with superb sympathy and insight.

I have seen Choudhury execute with the artistic fever on and perform the miracle. I have followed the hungry brushes tease the willing pigments and throw them masterfully on the canvas in patterns of predestined perfection; I have seen colour blend into colour and mass into mass by some secret volition, and then the picture rose and stood out complete, ultimate and perfect. I have often asked Choudhury how he did it; he did not seem to know!

This superabundant vitality sweeps through his brush and functions furiously in clay, hungering for the plastic form, in bold audacious designs.

But in his very riotous audacity there is restraint, the conscious deliberate restraint of a master artist whose fingers are taught the vital "no further". His leaping faculty is held in powerful check; a gigantic strength reposes in his Promethean sculptures. The subject is thoroughly overhauled; the heart is torn out, and the sculpture is impressed with the very soul of the personality, captured and transfixed in clay or bronze. The senseless metal is invested with soft and delicate inflexions of flesh and colour, and the subject vibrates with amazing mobility, as if the vital blood coursed through it and the nerves tingled at every touch. The man 'lives' in every limb—only that language on the lips remains unspoken; even the eyes seem to revolve in their sockets and peer at you with unaccountable vision. Here is a master who has voyaged far beyond the mere grammar and syntax of his art; he has almost attained the very bourne of artistic achievement by some subtle, inexplicable, psychic divination. For the artist, like the poet, is a prophet and a seer and baffles the ordinary processes of mechanical attainment.

Choudhury dwells apart; he is not just another link in the continuity of the Indian sculptural tradition. His portraits have nothing to do with the Indian archetypes; he is wholly unrelated to our ancient religious

sculpture. He is typically modern and very western; the age has sprung him upon us, a freak of a genius. His terrible 'God of Destruction' is not just another lineal descendant of the impossible Nataraja; it represents rather an epochal break in convention, the advent of an unsuspected power, functioning with rare originality. Our great religious sculpture was deliberately impersonal; even the 'portraits' of a bygone age treated physiognomy with refreshing disregard and just gave us historic types, void of emotion or personality. The mere vessel of man, so frail and ephemeral in its voyage through life, was scarcely a subject for artistic refinement or embellishment; our ancient artists perceived the inner man and registered more than the outer eye can comprehend. Each sculpture is thus a testament of spiritual discernment and of a glowing faith in the ultimate immortality of the soul of Man. In the secular portraiture indeed of the Moghuls, flaunting their regality, the mere outward man was fastidiously delineated, in stereotyped convention. Man was no longer the plaything of the gods, content to recede into his infinitesimal lot in a limitless universe, unhonoured and unsung; he was now a ruler of fellow-men; he was a demi-god, a colossus astride the earth, in new-won importance of blinding dominion. He craved immortality

and had his exterior person punctiliously set down, every muscle in every limb. The fleeting soul, indeed, departed from this physiognomic record.

Roy Choudhury is not of this tradition. He is like a swan that has strayed into an unaccustomed pond and scintillates radiance. He has forged his own incomparable destiny. His eye has a rare transmuting prowess; it recreates as it sees. The man is not seen and *then* translated into clay or pigment; he is portrayed outright and straightaway, "with the vital spark that we call life." Choudhury's portraits are not portraits of an expression or a fleeting movement; they set down the basic stamp of personality—that cumulative impress of a lifetime, the resultant of a hundred impulses and characteristics that go to the making of man. So conceived, every outward characteristic appears but as the visible index and symbol of an immense inner drama which is taken in all at once, comprehensively and decisively. It is a superb psychological feat, staggering in its complexity. A portrait by Choudhury is not just one snapshot visual likeness which any senseless camera can achieve; it is a composite impression which is itself made up of multitudinous snapshots of the subject in varying mental attitudes. His virile mind achieves this alchemy with an uncanny facility.

Choudhury, superb miniaturist as he is, is never lost in mere detail. All the while, from the beginning to the end, you are in the presence of a great organic composition, of line as well as of colour, that evolves with an unerring structural exactitude. The great masses are marshalled into their appropriate positions in the design; the nice touches are automatically rendered and the general total effect is at once sweeping, composite and comprehensive. Every life-imparting touch of his fingers, it is true, builds up the final impression; but it is as each brick that must inevitably take its place in the complete edifice. For all his broad, splashing, general effect, Choudhury's portraits are intense, executed not merely by his sharp intellect, but felt and understood with that keen human sympathy and feeling which transcends intellect. It is thus that Choudhury builds up his subject, out-doing life in every detail and you almost stretch your hand to stroke that mobile cheek, transfixed in bronze, seek to return the winking salutation of the eyes and watch, as you think, the delicious fall and swell of the ripening bosom.

Roy Choudhury, like Rodin, is rugged, original and virile; his sculpture has the same elemental fury and strength. He has also the Frenchman's ardour and endurance. His genius, for all his great achievements

on the canvas, is essentially and pre-eminently three-dimensional; his affirmative and direct talent ultimately and quite naturally sought the sculptural medium. His modelling is rough, swift and decisive—energetically and ruggedly impressive—accomplished with the disconcerting cocksureness of genius. The sculpture becomes at once a rare monument of plastic vision and dignity, impressed in broad and simple planes, until the subject stands out massive, compelling and alive. Choudhury has learned and combined the lessons of Rodin and of the Indian sculptural archetypes; his works are statuesque epics of fecundity, strength and delicate idealism.

VI

Choudhury's scientific portraits, painted or modelled, have a delicate Oriental flavour; just a touch of impressionism. The subtle blending of the Western and Eastern styles, of the realistic and the decorative, is so natural, so inevitable. His portraits certainly are speaking likenesses—they delineate the outer man with unerring precision—yet they are not just coloured photographs. A portrait by Choudhury is a composite picture; the very existence of the man, his thoughts, his moods and his idiosyncracies.

One of his earliest portraits, of Mrs. Percy Brown, is revolutionary; Choudhury does away with the familiar

artifices of portrait painting and gives us a picture of singular charm. The subject is done simply in elementary colours, yet the effect is at once brilliant and rich. There is no outside 'atmosphere' in the picture. The same reticence of colour and economy of artistic suggestion is evident in his other early portrait of Miss Buckland. So severe is the colour scheme that the picture appears as being done in monotone; bold, clever touches over sweeping colour masses, structurally exact, bring to life a subject of classic dignity and repose. Choudhury's celebrated portrait of Rabindranath Tagore, in the Treasurywalla collection, is a unique experiment in gold and silver; for sheer live brilliance there is nothing like it and the artist outclasses himself.

But Choudhury is a sculptor first—therein lies his abiding title to fame. His sculptured portraits are a brilliant galaxy; the Maharaja of Travancore's in heroic size, a masterpiece of forceful characterisation, life springing from every bit of the metal; the massive bronze of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, in vice-chancellor's robes, commanding, imperative and forthright; Sir George Frederick Stanley's, executed in the rough and incisive style so eminently suited to express that firm gentleman of Nordic features; Nawab Abdul Hakim, philanthropist and public man, rendered faithfully even to the charac-

teristic twist of his lips; the exquisite busts of Dr. Annie Besant and Bishop Leadbeater, fine pieces of decisive modelling, with the flexibility of flesh; Lord Erskine's in which the artist has captured the familiar geniality of his gubernatorial subject—these are among Choudhury's many sculptural triumphs. His portraits have a certain 'Greek' effect: by a rare arrangement of the enwrapping drapery, Choudhury achieves, with Sir J. C. Bose and Sir C. R. Reddi, an expansive effect which enhances the academic dignity of his subjects. The loose generous folds are a part of the composition; they almost become an integral part of his men. Among his earliest efforts in clay with which Choudhury leapt into fame is the great portrait study of his own father, Uma Prasad Roy Choudhury, a poem of sheer devotion and depth of feeling, an elegy in clay. Others who adorn Choudhury's distinguished portrait gallery include Sir Surendranath Banerjea, illustrious son of Bengal; Sir C. V. Raman, Nobel Laureate, and Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Dewan of Travancore. And there is a head of a blind girl, a beautiful head from which the eyes look out no more, a tragic piece of human clay, pitifully noble—among Choudhury's best.

VII

The highest art, like the highest poetry, is a *criticism* of life—the

revealing, profound and ennobling criticism of a powerful mind at high emotional tension, living life intensely but *differently*. The story of Othello is the sordid human commonplace of a jealous husband smothering an innocent, unsuspecting wife to brutal death; but Shakespeare made of it a tragic epic of unsurpassed dignity and pathos, viewing it differently. The Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation was severally hailed as an act of rare political sagacity and religious righteousness, but Roy Choudhury symbolised in his famous bas relief the powerful spectacle of India's untouchable humanity thronging to view their unbeheld God with uplifted souls for almost the first time in our social history. This is the artist's criticism of life, a monumental criticism that probes the very springs of human impulses. That piece of bronze is a hymn of deliverance, a paean of thanksgiving, a charter of religious equality. The artist has viewed life differently, fundamentally; his criticism of it has been different. That is because his outlook of life, his understanding of it, his philosophy is different.

Now an artist's philosophy of life can be studied from two aspects, inductively and deductively; firstly, as the intellectual and emotional foundation of his work, the sum-total of his *experience*, that is to say, from

which his art is born; and secondly as also his commentary on life, his attitude and reaction to it, revealed and deducible from his work. Both these aspects are complementary and are but the two facets of a whole. Of course, great art, like great poetry, is not didactic; it does not deliberately set out to preach. But, nevertheless, it is inspired by a subconscious high purpose and mission, without which it would cease to be great. The artist is, as it were, the high-priest of the Temple of God, awakening the world to a realisation of His grand design. He reveals, he interprets; he does not justify, because that is not his business.

Roy Choudhury's philosophy of art is not merely a theory of aesthetics. He is concerned not with the interpretation of objective beauty so much as with life in the raw, with the surge of elemental emotions, with the gamut of human experience—relentless and unabashed. There is a grand beauty in the solemn solitude of an angry ocean lashing the craggy shores, in the foamy surge and in its deep withdrawing roar, rolling like thunder. Choudhury's art has the same rough, elemental onrush—a naked and incisive penetration of the *reality* of things. The daring forms of his art are fetched from this world of reality, more original than the laboured forms of exhausted imagination. Truth, even in art, can be stranger than

fiction. The matrix of Choudhury's art endeavour is the rough-hewn universe, the rigid, unseemly facts of reality. But what *is* beautiful is his transmutation of them, of the ugly, the fierce and the ordinary, just as the beauty of 'Macbeth' lies in Shakespeare's treatment of a horrible, cruel tale of murderous dynastic intrigues. Beauty is not, as often thought, immanent in the subject-matter of art; it is a subjective attribute imparted by the artist.

Yet, the artist, Choudhury knows, is a creature of his age, a product of his social environment. Indeed, his mind might soar inwards to uninfluenced heights, but his very solitary mental altitude exposes him outwardly to the clashing currents of the times. Political man is a social animal and not less so is emotional man. He is buffeted by the ideology and the traditions of his age, compulsorily; they enter the marrow of his being. He cannot run away from them, hermit-like, and brood for ever on an artistic long-ago. Art, by its very nature, cannot lie in a sentimental revival of ancient tradition, hugged at pathetically, devotionally; it is a full-blooded and spontaneous adventure in pursuit of ever newer art forms, of ceaseless experiments with forms of beauty. The fashion at one time was all out for what was vaguely termed Oriental Art, and the merest

tyro who ever disgraced canvas with the hieroglyphics of an ill-digested tradition, was blindly acclaimed a pandit. No wonder in this country pandits are born, not made.

In the theocracy of art, the new pandits reign supreme and appropriately design impossible gods and goddesses with ponderous self-esteem. Kartikeya, the war-lord of the Hindus, is quaintly invested with a Swiss wrist-watch and pumps of European make; the hoary Maheswara, Lord of Kailasa, is refreshingly clean-shaven and he who created the *Thandava Nritya* appears Falstaff-like, in flabby and sotty immobility. Oriental technique has become a patent, an infallible brand of art advertisement, and no one bothers to examine the articles, to scrutinise them by the real elevating standards of their prototypes. It is, therefore, tragic, says Choudhury, that these miserable caricatures should evoke hyperbolic and undiscerning praise from critics who should know better. It is a mad, raging, raving tradition and all artistic discernment is thrown to the winds, and as one looks back upon this more-than-quarter-century of self-deluding and futile endeavour, of gross imitative repetition of supposed art forms, one is overwhelmed by this vulgar and flaunting frustration. It is a vulgar and unrepentant fashion; it can be ugly and irritating.

VIII

The present is living, emphatic and urgent; its impress is mandatory. For soon the present will become past and we shall not let it pass away barren and sterile, without some new contribution to art progress. We simply cannot rest shabbily copying the past, scrawling antique designs on the canvas of world art. There is a sense in which art now has become an international endeavour, functioning across the insular frontiers of so-called national cultures. Art is like love; its language is understood everywhere. It is not denied that its accent differs, as it should, with the divergent racial experiences of ages; the national manner must be different. The artist's primary business is to create the beautiful; his means, the provincial mode, by which he gets about it, is hardly relevant. There has been an irresistible commingling of Occidental and Oriental cultures, in art as, indeed, in every sphere of human expression; the East and West have overflowed very much into each other, the twain have more than met. There is an Asiatic 'influence' in European art as undoubtedly there is a progressive westernisation of Indonesian art. Practically, it has meant the application of the Western, because the more scientific, technique to Indian motifs, and conversely, the adaptation of

Oriental technique, because the more aesthetically satisfying, to European art. There are some who decry these very healthy trends as de-nationalised hybridism; they are those, says Choudhury, who must needs cling to decaying and dying traditions, and reject a life-giving drug simply because it is foreign. The boycott is suicidal.

Art is not archaeology, nor is it connoisseurship or collecting. Schools and periods of painting and sculpture are chronological cross-sections, and it is absurd to treasure a work, says Choudhury, irrespective of its merits, just because it belongs to some one school or period. It is perverse dilettantism, the idle, silly extravagance of the undiscerning rich, to whom the label of the painting is the guarantee of perfection. An art gallery is not a museum; their functions are defined and different. Ill-informed and nose-led patronage is mischievous and degrades art; the supply of it, by the inexorable law of economic existence, is commercialised to feed the fashionable demand. It is a pernicious dictation; the dictation both of a dead tradition, whose formal laws have been inflexibly fixed, and of the insistent living patron who will buy his pictures no otherwise. Patronage or criticism really is the corresponding mental altitude to the height of artistic genius; the artist must raise his audience to his own

CHOUNDHURY AND HIS ART

high level—otherwise he sinks disgracefully. He must create, by sedulous education, the taste by which he must be appreciated; the artist must be in a position to dictate. He must, if necessary, be prepared for self-annihilation in the process; only that way is great art created.

The anonymous artists of Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta did not reiterate a dead past; their glorious paintings and sculptures are superbly original, conceived in a red hot mind with all the joy and spontaneity of creation. Indeed, they were bound by conventional classical formulae, of form and design, but with the same compulsive force and reason by which anatomy and perspective bind the modern artist. The one created the ideal beauty, the other delineates the actual; their standards are different.

But the modern artist, for all his preoccupation with reality, is not a slavish copyist of Nature. The mere structural facts do not make the picture, Choudhury knows; the artist's is a severely selective faculty, choosing, from among the crowding irrelevancies of his subject, just the life-giving touch or expression. Thus, even modern art is decorative rather than realistic. Indian art is perhaps more deliberately, because intrinsically, decorative; it is founded on the primary facts of structure and form, ignoring the incidental inflexions of

flesh in light. The disposition of light in a picture is clearly accidental; the tones of shades it throws on men and things are shifting values. Laboriously, meticulously, to set down the changing tones is to pursue a mirage. But the ultimate and changeless facts of a picture are the basic structural outlines, stripped of any incidental play of shade and light, and the Indian artist expressed the delicate nuances of flesh and colour by the very depth and volume of the mere line. He abstracted the heart and soul of the subject and recorded it simply, fundamentally, in broad, imperative lines.

Again, Nature is to the Western artist an immanent, benevolent, all-pervading power in the Wordsworthian sense; she is a presence and a vision. Hence the dominance of, what Choudhury calls, absolute landscape in European art. To the Oriental, God in his myriad forms dominates the universe. He is the central-piece of the picture. The artist is content to depict the Lord in the awful majesty of classical tradition severely disciplined, and all else is dissolved in the effulgence of that radiance. Man himself, God on earth, he moulds in the image of his Maker. Landscape, the sky, mountains, trees and rivers recede in worshipful awe.

Choudhury's earlier landscapes have a touch of Whistler; forthrightly

western, they have a slight Chinese idiom. Of such is "Thiruvottiyur", delightfully restrained in the selection of nature, while "After the Storm", a large panel of a weather-beaten crow, securely perched on a trailing branch, bespeaks strong Japanese influence. The storm is over-past, yet it has left indelible traces in the ruffled feathers of the fluttering bird. But for sheer delicacy of colouring and faultless treatment of the atmosphere, Choudhury's "Through Foul Weather" and the "Approach of Mist" must remain unsurpassed. Out-

CHOUNDHURY: A PORTRAIT

standing in conception, the pictures have an uncanny breadth of atmosphere.

Choudhury's exquisitely drawn "Romance" is a technical masterpiece, a gem of art. The lively waterfall has yet a note of sadness; this mood is pronouncedly transformed into an eerie feeling in his "Land of the Dead." There is in it a sense of desolate vastness—undulating masses of colour balanced against gaunt towering trunks that reach beyond the picture's confines, each structural part suggesting an other-worldly effect.

P. R. Ramachandra Rao.

THE STORY OF A STRUGGLE

EVOLUTION OF ROY CHOUDHURY

Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury has some of the bluest blood of Bengal coursing in his veins. He comes of an aristocratic lineage; his ancestors were celebrated noblemen. His grand-father in the fourth degree was a prince, Raja Keshabeshwar Roy of Mudagacha; Choudhury's great grand-father was renowned throughout Bengal, while his son, Choudhury's grandsire, Hari Prasad Roy Choudhury was a noted Sanskrit and Arabic scholar.

Umaprasad, Choudhury's father, was simply an affectionate and understanding parent; he was the making of Devi Prasad in every way. Choudhury's portrait of him is a classic piece of severe modelling, devoutly rendered. The clay is masterfully impressed with the undulating planes of that broad forehead, furrowed by knitted brows; the powerful nose beneath, supporting strong heavy cheeks, is pierced by shaggy moustaches, almost covering

the parted lips; while the dimpled chin rests on an ample chest, modelled vigorously, aggressively, the fingerprints lying anyhow, everywhere, creviced. It is a powerful head and belonged to one who bore an imperious character. Umaprasad was no spoon-feeding father; he wanted his boy to grow up to be a man, fearless and straight. A great king of Macedon set to his greater son, Alexander, the wild task of taming an unruly steed: Umaprasad, in a humbler way, risked his son to ride an unbroken mare to prove his mettle. Devi Prasad did not break his limbs. The Zamindar was a sport and indulged the boy's love for wild game; proudly he would admonish his son, "if you must shoot, shoot tigers, not birds."

Choudhury has since developed into a first-class shot and, while he can tear himself away from his art, he is up in the woods shooting big game. For nights on end he has lain in watch for his unfortunate

victim, waiting and watching, heedless of food; the beast would come prowling, with eyes flashing in the darkness; then Choudhury would bear down the startled animal, turned at bay, crashing to the ground, groaning and growling, in bloody and close encounter. He has not killed an animal unawares. I have asked him why he goes to hunt, killing mute, unoffending beasts; he has simply answered—in *kreedā*. Once he shot a wild, raving boar; the poor thing came rolling towards him, with big, pitiful eyes, challenging and dropped dead at his feet. That, look has burnt itself into his soul and pierced his heart; it returns to him agonisingly, upbraidingly, like some wailing sound from the depths of despair. Yet, his hand returns to the trigger; it snaps and the shot whizzes to pierce the target in a crack aim. I have watched Choudhury, after darkness has fallen, aim lead-shot at tin discs tied to distant trees in the wide open space, and the metal resound to every unfailing shot. But some day again it will not be just a tin disc, but a mute, unoffending beast. I have never been able to understand.

This man is simple and kind as a child; there is in his upstairs garden a little tree that he has nurtured these thirteen years with a father's care, tending its every pigmy leaf; it is strange how heartlessly he can go

out into that greater garden of the Maker of us all and destroy that he can never after revitalise. I have never been able to know.

Choudhury's mother, like all Indian mothers, shaped him unobtrusively; she put the benevolent touch to a reckless nature. He recalls how, when he had gifted a beggar a four-anna piece, his mother upbraided him, saying it was too little—"why that would not feed him! Pay him at least a rupee." Choudhury seems literally to have taken her advice to heart; a native generosity has endowed freely, until sometimes he beggars himself by unregulated extravagance.

Choudhury's aristocratic ties are far flung; the Rajas of Rangpur are related to him through his mother, while the Raja of Gouripur and the Zamindars of Lakshmipur are among his kin by marriage. Quite naturally, the zamindari system enters not infrequently into the Byronic themes of his plays and short stories, and, by a severe introspection, he is its unsparing critic. For all his influential connections, Choudhury has carved his own destiny from the humblest start, shunning the onerous advantages of his kinship. The landed aristocracy of Bengal will not easily let their scions engage in the 'common' occupation of bread-winning; it is too proletarian a business. Eyebrows were lifted when

Devi Prasad chose to be an artist; his noble kinsmen were outraged at his mad enterprise. They laughed at him.

II

As a boy Roy Choudhury must have been a nuisance to his teachers, because he infringed all scholastic discipline and was extremely unmanageable. Self-willed, he cared for none; only his father could keep him a little under control. He read but little, but played and fought most of the time; he broke doors and furniture and jumped over six-foot walls. It was not an enviable record, as school records go, and he made little progress in his studies. Education, as it went, signally failed to interest him; indeed, Choudhury belongs to that distinguished band of intellectuals, like Tagore, who have never been to a university. He is wholly self-taught and self-cultured; he has a refreshing, but understandable, contempt for academic degrees. If he had gone to college it would most certainly have wasted his time and destroyed, perhaps, a spontaneous intelligence accustomed to rove at will. The assimilation of much unwanted knowledge, laboriously practised in our universities, consumes valuable energy which an original mind can turn to creative use: to have put Choudhury on the intellectual regimen of an

academic diet would have been to flatten his mind to a dead level of uniformity—one lost soul more on the altar of education. Yet Choudhury was privately tutored by European gentlemen of refreshing sympathy and ability; his range of knowledge, indeed, is astonishingly wide. He has read at will and with avidity, and all his reading and study has not blunted a virile mind.

Lacking the sub-conscious spurs of a graduated intelligence, his imagination is apt sometimes to course wildly, with a revolutionary fervour. This is especially so in his literary efforts, which border on the macabre, treating sex with almost continental frankness. An unsatisfied emotional sensibility conceives Strindbergian themes in reckless abandon; it is a psychological blowing-off of repressed vitality. There is in him, however, no sex-worship as in D. H. Lawrence, the ennobling, passionate, unquenchable urge for the body beautiful, spiritualised in the process; to Choudhury sex is a disturbing hunger, motivating all human impulses, which must be fed at any impossible cost, or the current of life will turn against itself in a whirlpool of rank disaster. On a Freudian base, Choudhury has developed a pragmatic sex-theory of brutal reality, so nakedly outspoken that the union of the sexes is robbed of all delicate idealism and grossly degraded

into a carnal rite. This unholy emphasis can sometimes be fulsome.

It is a tragic commentary on educational systems that original minds have developed rather without their trammels. Shelley was driven out of a university; Shakespeare was innocent of any; Tolstoy was repelled by it and Maxim Gorki was a wonderful tramp. Scholarship is the laborious consignment of unproductive knowledge into a dead sink; the creative mind recoils from this progressive dementation. Genius knows no laws; they are deduced by industrious scholarship from the works of genius. The Professor of Poetry at Oxford can write little poetry perhaps, although he may be wonderful at explaining how poetry comes to be written. The poet lisps because the numbers come; a rose just cannot help being beautifully fragrant. Genius is wild, ebullient and forthright; it does not fit the clean-cut pattern of critical reason.

The motifs of Choudhury's plays and stories are staggeringly original; life is unmasked and presented in grotesque vicissitudes. A drunkard is not the less human; weakness is not villainy. A much be-womaned man is not the less a lover; sex, the physical impulse, reaches across the land of the dead. Indeed, the marvel is not that Choudhury should conceive so powerfully, but that he should

write as vigorously. Raphael once wrote a sonnet and Dante painted a picture; Rossetti was not a lesser artist than poet. The great Polish dramatic poet, Stanislas Wyspianski, it was discovered, was an original painter of rare excellence, the most universal artistic genius since Leonardo da Vinci. Whether Choudhury's literary work will rank equally with his great art I cannot say; but he is certainly the most eclectic Indian mind functioning.

III

The child Choudhury was father of the man; his original drawings at the age of nine had a quaint architectural quality. Without the school confines, the chafing boy sensed the rumblings of a momentous art renaissance that was sweeping over Bengal. The new art cult, like the Indian National Congress itself, was inspired by an Englishman; E. B. Havell, the famous Principal of the Calcutta Art School, then stood at the threshold of his noble task of reconstructing India's cultural tradition. Our magnificent art galleries, Ajanta, Ellora, Elephanta, Karle and Bagh, lay hidden in ignorant or indifferent obscurity; the West had made powerful inroads on our cultural province and a Eurasian art flooded the country, glibly mouthing western artistic jargon. The cultural malaise was not less injurious than our sartorial

mimicry; the new impact, brought in its first onrush, much muddy water, the flotsam and jetsam of an alien tradition. The idol of this new rush was Raja Ravi Varma; his Indian gods and goddesses, fancy-dressed, reigned in every home and showered strange blessings. Classical Indian art was elbowed out in cruel apathy.

When Havell, with revolutionary catholicity and foresight, launched his campaign of art revival, he was assailed by a self-destroying prejudice; the public, newly proselytised, kicked out with astonishing fervour. But the wheel had come full circle. The partition of Bengal had lashed an emotional people into strong resentment; the 'Swadeshi' cult, fatefully stirred up in the political sphere, invaded art's peaceful domain. The national soul, new-born, yearned wistfully for a storied past, embellished and re-decked in colourful glory. Havell seized the hour. But the new movement was to be 'Swadeshi' to the core; it demanded indigenous leadership. Then, by one of those fortuitous accidents that make history, an original genius of unspoilt virility swam into Havell's ken. Abanindranath Tagore, the Poet's nephew, not yet thirty, with imagination on his aristocratic brow, visionary and pioneer, dreaming powerful dreams of India's rebirth and steeped in her lore, was just the right collaborator to Havell. Jorasanko, the Tagore home,

in Dwaraknath Tagore Lane at Calcutta, was a clearing-house of culture, the very spring and fount of the national renaissance. There, day by day, the cultural history of modern India was being written.

IV

When, at the request of Havell, Abanindranath went to teach at the Calcutta Art School, he was openly sneered at. His magnificent fresco, Kach-Devyani, which adorns the school today, was simply jeered by his unseeing colleagues. His classes failed to draw despite freeships and scholarships, so fierce was the apathy. The old order of ensconced tradition was loath to yield its place to the new. Tagore retired, but not beaten. At Jorasanko he gathered around him a brilliant band of pupils—famous names now in Indian Art—among them, Gogonendranath Tagore, his greater brother, Nandalal Bose, Surendranath Ganguli, Asit Kumar Haldar, Samarendranath Gupta and Khitindranath Mazumdar. The Indian Society of Oriental Art, established under their aegis, enlisted much enlightened support, chiefly European; among them Mr. Percy Brown and Sir John Woodroffe. The guiding star of the new movement, however, was Lord Ronaldshay, Governor of Bengal, as the Marquess of Zetland then was; in his "Heart of Aryavarta" he recounts,

a little sadly perhaps, his distinguished connection which was much misunderstood. The Government, the ultra-national Press averred, was seducing the creative mind of Bengal from its high political destiny to innocuous artistic pursuits, buying it off with dubious patronage. All this of course was rank nonsense; Lord Ronaldshay was, after Lord Curzon, the high curator of our artistic past—at its resurgence his sensitive mind welled up and he gave his blessings unstintedly, unequivocally.

Abanindranath was self-taught, self-disciplined and self-cultured; he was no product of the soulless, grinding curricula then practised in our art schools. Yet it is a mistake to think that he despised western technique; indeed his early training was under Mr. Palmer and Signor Gillardi—European masters both. Abanindranath, it is true, is intensely and deliberately Indian, but the fine draughtsmanship of his exquisite paintings bespeaks a fundamental western technique, broadly assimilated. He is a great eclectic and, like Shakespeare, he has borrowed freely, adorning all he borrowed. To Japan he owes his almost spiritual washes of water colour—a technique since imitated without his subtlety and compelling artistry. He was tremendously influenced by Okakura Kakuzo. There are too his Chinese mood, his

Tibetan and Javanese moods, throwing surprising reflexes in his art. To our own classical art, to the Moghul and Rajput schools, his debt is immense. With a superb imagination, he re-lived those glorious times in testaments of unsurpassed excellence. Never once at the Taj Mahal, he conceived the building of it in an eternal poem of a picture; his masterpiece, "The Passing of Shah Jahan", was forged in his fine inventive mind, innocent of the historic fortress that overlooks the Jumna at Agra. His Buddha gallery is a glowing leaf from legend and history, not less authentic than its celebrated parallels at Ajanta and Bagh. His animals possess the transmigrated souls of men; his studies have a startlingly human appeal. As a landscapist, he displays unsuspected prowess; nature, sentient, speaks with a voice and a conscience.

Abanindranath Tagore is our *magnum opus* in art; this, however, is no place to detail his undisputed eminence. He has attained the very dazzling heights; his precepts have achieved the sanctity of dogmas, and his writings, "Indian Artistic Anatomy" and "The *Sadargas* of Painting", have become the Bible of the new movement. Yet he was a most unobtrusive teacher; he did not impose his methods on his 'chelas'; they, rather developed in the sunshine of his genius, inspired and uplifted.

It was a brilliant and distinguished tutelage. Like the mighty *Ficus Bengalensis*, distending roots which grow in strength and bulk in the shade of their giant mother, around her and about, Abanindranath's disciples attained full statures in their own right, transmitting the message and impulse of their master.

Surendranath Ganguli, a Chatterton of an artist, was taken away in the full prime of an abundant promise, scarcely twenty-one. Nandalal Bose is the greatest of them all—revivifying Ajanta's potent tradition, indulging now and again his Japanese manner, superb painter of mythology, great interpreter of the cosmic Siva, refreshingly original each advancing year. Asit Kumar Haldar, lyrical, sensitive and refined, celebrated for his Rubaiyat pictures, gracefully tender in every unerring line; Khitindranath Mazumdar, unexcelled in the decorative drawing of "figurative creatures"; Bireswar Sen, severely intellectual, of impeccable taste, breathing the old-world air of Moghul miniatures—these of the very first disciples are vigorously alive today. Gogonendranath Tagore, the most original genius perhaps of the Bengal renaissance, even surpassing his famous brother; dashing, versatile, idealist, impressionist, cubist and caricaturist; functioning in all media and in all styles—he is not with us. Samarendranath Gupta,

quaintly allegorical, skilful in colour washes, and Mukul Chandra Dey, of fine early promise, have languished somewhat in their exacting administrative functions. Sarada Charan Ukil, a poet of an artist, adept in graceful line and soft colouring and of prolific output; Sailendranath De, decorative technician; Promode Chatterjee, blossoming late, but pleasantly effective; Roop Krishna, experimentalist and individualist—in these the flame burns steadily, not in any glowing spurt nor dimmed and murky. Hakim Mahomed Khan, Durges Chand Sinha, Surendra Nath Kar, O.C. Gangoly and Charu Roy, once sincerely bent on creative art and of much expectant promise, now function in other more prosperous fields, abandoning their first love; Pulinbihari Dutt, a Gray of a painter, polished and intellectual, now expounds the unsuspected delights of children's art, while Durgashankar Bhattacharya and Aswini Kumar Roy have paused in their careers, brightly launched. Last did go to Abanindranath, the adolescent Ekalavya, barely twenty, Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury.

V

When first Roy Choudhury showed his paintings to Abanindranath, the great artist pronounced them worthless. The 'misguided' youth was

urged, as a corrective exercise, to copy the traditional 'Patha Chitras' of Bengal. Choudhury, piqued, simply refused and walked out. He went forth to learn under Boiess, that versatile Italian painter and sculptor. The pupillage was portentous; Choudhury today has achieved a rare mastery in the two arts. Boiess tamed the Bengali cub—patting him father-like. Choudhury loved the Italian with an almost filial devotion, cleaning his floors and his eight revolvers. Boiess did what Abanindranath did not—he understood Choudhury. He nurtured his distinguished pupil in the severest classical art, in form and in technique. The seed, so intensely sown, has merely borne maturer fruit today. Boiess's studio was the opposite pole to the Indian Society of Oriental art at Samavaya Mansions; the Italian functioned in a rigorously scientific style, unbothered by 'isms' or art fads. The greatest art scorns commentary; you really need a theory of art to bolster up weak achievement. Boiess was a master of the human form, studied and perfected in every limb and line; he was a profound technician. He gave of his best to Choudhury, unsparingly. Devi Prasad stayed three years with him—three grateful years recalled with sincere devotion.

Meanwhile, the annual exhibitions of the Oriental Art Society, patronis-

ed by authority, had compelled an ever-widening public to evaluate the new movement; even the clumsy colour prints bespoke an intrinsic artistic quality. It was as if a timid moon, rising in strength, had bathed dark hidden places in a silvery effulgence; the art caverns were new-lit with an unaccustomed light. Roy Choudhury sensed the profound import of the new light. The Bengal art revival, viewed through the lenses of his scientific training, took on a new aspect. He longed to be back, to return to Abanindranath and share in his glorious adventure.

But Abanindranath would not have him. For days he turned out the beseeching Ekalavya. Then something happened; the Acharya scrutinised Choudhury's paintings and changed his mind. But the prodigal had to be humoured; he was directed to paint just as he wished, after his heart's desire. From the marriage of Oriental motif and western technique was born the unique child of Choudhury's art; the precocious off-spring was dearly fondled. Soon Choudhury became Abanindranath's pet pupil; the cloud was lifted and the elder man forgave the juvenile excursion. Yet, the reclaimed runaway clung with persistent faith to western technique; Choudhury openly proclaimed it superior to the contemporary art teaching at Samavaya Mansions. He annoyed

Abanindranath by this blasphemy and again lost favour. But the great man paid Choudhury back in his own coin—with an appropriate retributive vengeance—Devi Prasad was appointed to teach Western art at the Society's school.

VI

Now Choudhury was seized with a burning desire, common to Indian young men, to cross the seas for 'superior' training at the Royal Academy. His aristocratic kinsmen were scandalised at Choudhury's turning professional artist; born female, he might with equal effect and propriety have elected to turn professional dancer, so far as they were concerned! Had he wished to qualify for the learned profession of the law, they were of course willing to finance the calling of dignified nothing-doing. But art was the gipsy of the professions; you liked the colourful beggar maid, attired in quaint finery and then you flung across the meagre coin of cultured patronage. But the gipsy starved, under-fed and under-clothed—Choudhury smarted. Then began for him a life of struggle and want, of hunger and poverty. Proudly, he threw away a handsome allowance in self-elected privation.

Unfriended, looked down, he paced the streets of Calcutta, that asylum of wasted talent, on the soul-destroying mission of job-finding. His proud, unrelenting will flourished in adversity.

There comes a time in the life of many a young man when, notwithstanding the encumbrance of influential connections, he desparately prefers to go through life's battle alone, braving its buffetings. He draws sustenance from some unsuspected strength within his inmost being. Life then becomes a glorious, reckless adventure and each adverse phase is saluted with a sweet relish. Then any job will do; anything to carry the physical man onward, to keep him in good repair, lest the soul, weighed down by suffering, should be arrested in its flight.

Choudhury cheerfully accepted the unromantic position of a scene painter's understudy at the Corinthian Theatre, Calcutta. He ground colours for his chief. That brusque dignitary, however, was innocent of the refinements of art; he functioned in a bold, broad, blundering way. Choudhury's artist fingers itched to draw and paint. Sometimes the unfinished scene would betray some jarring defect, some discordant composition, and young Choudhury would, stealthily, without the chief's knowing it, rectify the drawing and put it into shape. His talents were too urgent to be hidden; soon the studio was talking of the uncanny accomplishments of the strange colour-grinder. Some of the highly-paid elder artists came to learn of the young Raphael, recompensing him for his pains.

Art, like murder, will out, and presently the chief caught his unpretentious understudy finishing a gorgeous scene from the Ramayana with a facility that is only Choudhury's. In the first flush of appreciative surprise, the chief gave Choudhury quite a lift—as much as Rs. 90; but his defensive instinct of self-preservation naturally supervened and Choudhury was asked to get out.

So, back again in that cruel human condition—joblessness. So imperative is the urge of the physical man that the greatest among us is miserably helpless; you cannot, standing on prestige or ideals, lay down your own conditions or bargain; you just, while the stomach pinches, accept any odd short-term makeshift job and call it a day. Such is the vicious circle of talent; the poor, grovel in the slough of want, lacking the means to get out, almost it seems eternally. The struggle does not avail; sometimes the eternity of want and poverty is broken by a short luminous spell of a pittance and then again darkness and despair and miserable want.

Choudhury's life then was such. Once his job lay in colouring monochrome steel-engravings, sold in any picture shop, and his daily wages never exceeded eight annas. That was not all; Choudhury had to carry the framed pictures tied down his back and hawk them in the public streets, past the

imposing porticos of his noble kinsmen where the amazed sepoys '*salaamed*' obeisance to the toiling youth who passed unheeding by, a lone traveller on life's rough highway, sometimes foodless and scantily attired.

One miserable day, arrived at the tether of his resources, Choudhury went desparately to that noble son of Bengal, Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee. Simply and frankly, Choudhury begged for a job, not revealing his connections, because the Zamindars of Bhowanipore were well-known throughout Bengal. Strangely, Choudhury did not offer to teach art, that Cinderella of professions; he told Sir Ashutosh: "I can teach drill and physical exercises scientifically." Mukherjee smiled and asked if Choudhury was any relation of his famed grandfather and added good-naturedly: "Have you had a quarrel both?" The next time he called at Sir Ashutosh's a post was created and kept waiting for him—a drawing master's job at Mitra's institution at Bhowanipore, on an enviable salary of Rs. 40 per mensem, with the excellent prospect of a eight-rupee increment at the end of five years! Choudhury's connection with the greater Bengali has an artistic sequel; years later he was to sculpture Sir Ashutosh in heroic mould—a thanks-giving in bronze, a unique public monument of personal devotion.

During all these years of travail,

one kind friend supported Choudhury's drooping spirits—Bhawani Prasanna Chatterjee who predicted eventual fulfilment for the indigent artist. "Success only comes to those who dare and act"; it did to Choudhury eventually, inevitably.

There is a picture of Choudhury as a teacher in the Oriental Art Society—a romantic young fellow, fastidiously dressed in customary Bengali apparel, like some youthful sculpture of Michael Angelo turned to life, with glitter in his lascivious eyes. The Calcutta Press hailed him as Bengal's most promising artist and success followed swift—rather too swift. Indeed, nothing succeeds like success. Some of the most discerning art critics—Dr. Stella Kramrisch, Dr. Kalidas Nag, Mr. Percy Brown and Mr. O. C. Gangoly—lavished unstinted praise on the new arrival. A new comet had swum into the artistic ken of modern Bengal and there was an uproarious welcome. Superlatives were hurled at young, proud, self-conscious Choudhury. He held aloft the sacred torch of art and was trusted to carry it forward. Art enkindles art. Mere academic recognition was plentiful; Choudhury carried off every coveted prize at all exhibitions, unspoilt. He was already established as a powerful exponent of a sober and intimately modern portraiture. A galaxy of notabilities sat for him—Dr. Abanindranath Tagore, Mr. W. I. Keir,

Mr. A. N. Chaudhuri, Rabindranath Tagore, Mrs. Percy Brown and Sir J. C. Bose. His studio was at once the rendezvous of tourists, dilettantes and celebrities. There he fashioned his immortal sculptures with all the unsettling fervour of renascent genius.

The then Director of Public Instruction in Bengal was a frequent visitor at Choudhury's studio; so taken up was he with a bust of Sir J. C. Bose which the artist was making that he loved to acquire it. Now, it fell among his duties as Director to inspect Mitra's institution where Choudhury was part-time instructor. There the teaching staff was drawn up in descending order according to status; Choudhury stood last, waiting to be inspected. The Director, surprised, came up to Choudhury and asked: "Why are you here?" "Because," replied the chafing artist with bitter pride, "you do not appreciate art." The words cut deep; they stirred up authority and it was not long afterwards that the junior master at Mitra's was appointed to direct, indeed, revolutionise one of the foremost art schools in the country, at Madras.

VII

Choudhury is proud of this struggle, this war against adversity. There is no period of his life that he loves to contemplate more than these hard, bitter years of striving, penury and

despair. The crowning fulfilment of his life is painfully, yet solidly, founded on these bleak years. There are those who in the plenitude of success and achievement forget too facilely the not-so-very-successful past. The newly prosperous have an inveterate habit of enlarging on the delicious present and glossing over, too palpably, the unsavoury past. You are merely conducted across the dazzling footlights on the stage of their life; the curtain is hung heavily on the past. Not so Choudhury. While I wrote this part of his life he has been anxious that I set down each ugly, indelicate detail without fear or mitigation. Perhaps, my not-so-meticulous pen has touched up, quite unconsciously, a detail here or there. Choudhury, had he written up this part, as he threatened to do if I did not do justice, might have given a more threadbare, transparent account. Perhaps; but there is the danger that an autobiography, re-living the receding past intensely and vividly, is apt to be too subjective and throw the contents a little out of focus, out of proportion. I, at least, may have avoided that. Yet, I have not forgotten that the rose, blossoming ever so beautifully and sweetly, is sprung from a soil that it must not be ashamed to acknowledge.

VIII

Two wholly unrelated circumstances brought Choudhury to Madras in

his present official capacity as Principal of the School of Arts. The Madras Government under Viscount Goschen—the Viscountess was skilful with the brush—had decided to re-introduce Fine Arts in the School which was too pronouncedly one of crafts. This laudable reform naturally called for a reputed artist to direct the revived section, and who else more eligible than Roy Choudhury whose unique pictures at the Madras Exhibition created such an unwonted stir? “His outstanding merit was obvious even to the lay observer.” But objections were raised that he belonged to another province by those who had a bigger pull in the quarters that count. But a sober Press supported Choudhury. Art, like music, it was pointed out, knows no bounds of time or place; besides, Roy Choudhury had shown himself capable and willing to experiment in many styles and would certainly not be indifferent to the atmosphere of South India. The choice was, therefore, straight and inevitable, it was urged if the education of the future artists of the province was not to be entrusted to some dabbler in the arts, some pretentious mediocrity or some imitative bookworm.

But quite another factor, more imperative and personal, wafted Choudhury to Madras; he was in love and he wanted a fixed, unprecarious income. The fortunate lady of his

attentions came of a distinguished Bengali family. Miss Charulata Banerjee, Mrs. Choudhury that is today, has been the making of Devi Prasad in many ways. She is Choudhury's third wife, two earlier having successively predeceased her. The first Mrs. Choudhury, Sushila Burman, daughter of a Zamindar of Khulna, lived but two years; the second Mrs. Choudhury, Chapala Choudhury, daughter of the Zamindar of Lakhimpore, survived her marriage just eighteen months. The present Mrs. Choudhury fills her difficult position admirably. She knows she is wedded to genius and knows her obligations and rewards. Choudhury makes a difficult husband; he certainly is not the ordinary sort who go by their wife's aprons and are so handy and delightful to manage. A high-pressure genius, absorbed in his twin occupations of art and literature, he is lost to the domestic routine in a cultural *tapasya*. He must not be disturbed.

The yoke of the family falls, therefore, unevenly, almost entirely, on the weaker partner and it is astounding how frail, delicate Mrs. Choudhury bears the brunt of it all to meticulous perfection. A lady of culture herself, she is the spur and incentive to Choudhury's efforts; many a canvas and story flung away in severe introspective dejection have been taken up, at her persuasive bidding, and fashioned by Choudhury into now-famous masterpieces. She suffers his silences as patiently as his high-tension monologues. Withal, she is simply imperative and holds her fearless husband in wholesome awe. She is the central and pivotal force in Choudhury's life, as it should be, albeit functioning, in the manner of Indian wives, stealthily, unobtrusively. The life of Choudhury is, in a very real sense, the life of his partner behind the scenes, uplifting the greater career of her unique husband.

P. R. Ramachandra Rao



Devī Prasād Roy Chowdhury at the age of 27

THE MAN CHOUDHURY

A STUDY IN PERSONALITY

The almost scandalous interest the world evinces in the personal affairs of its men of genius has had a reaction in criticism; we painstakingly discover the man apart from the poet or artist, as if the two entities are separable. It is of course impossible to abstract the man as it is equally impossible to isolate the artist, because the two act and react upon each other in infinite complexity. Yet, industrious research has dutifully exhumed the juvenile misadventures of Shakespeare, the amours of Wordsworth and Tolstoy's conjugal infelicity, as if, indeed, the 'new light' would show up some unsuspected recesses in the soul of genius, thus revolutionising its estimate. This line of critical labour has been pushed to ludicrous extremes. Really, I do not care that Wordsworth was fooling about a French girl while "France stood on the top of golden hours." I am looking out for Wordsworth, the poet, and not for Wordsworth the casual amorist; my

evaluation of his genius is singularly unaffected by his cordial aberration. I have no more interest in the sexual excursions of men of genius than in their other natural calls. I suppose it is pre-eminently their business.

But there is, perhaps, quite another context in which the man becomes material and accessory to the appreciation of the poet or artist: "Don Juan" and "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" are perhaps better understood against the background of Byron's supersexuality. Because, sex like hunger, is a soul-disturbing force; you cannot write poetry on an empty stomach, neither can it be written under the torment of an unsatiated lust. Man is caged by passion; he loathes its degrading restraints. Desire is hateful, because canker-like, it destroys the soul; by attempting to overcome it you consume yourself in an agony of suppressed vitality. The problem is not solved; it is driven underground by an overload of virtuosity and is left there

festering and sore, like a pent-up volcano. The more natural way is to satisfy desire and be done with it; so you have washed off the itching impulse and are fresh and ready for other better things. Virtuous man is his own foe; he takes arms against a sea of sex and goes under disastrously clutching the straw of morality. Life becomes an emotional suicide perpetrated in all flamboyant righteousness; the struggle is simply not worth it. Sex is like steam; it must blow off. The morbid mind, nursing the imperative urge, bashfully, stealthily, is consumed by wasteful perversity; or, your virtuous man, sex-whipped, goes off and writes a sickly, mawkish, love sonnet and longs wistfully to be "pillowed on fair love's ripening breast." He too has blown off his sex-steam; but differently—by a pathetic process of sexual inversion.

Therefore, sex, we are told, is the motivating force of all creative output. The artist, plagued by sex, produces art; the poet torn by it writes poetry. In effect, thus conceived, art or poetry, is the translation of the sexual disturbance into intellectual language, sublimating it. This psychological conversion may be direct or indirect. The sculptor, sex-driven, may caress, in the very modelling, the voluptuous contours of a luscious nude; even a Shakespeare when the devil stirs his blood, goes off to write, unabashedly,

the "Rape of Lucrece" or "Venus and Adonis." But certainly the transmutation of the sex-urge is not always so direct; else how shall we explain the sublimating and a-sexual poetry of Milton's "Paradise Lost", or the very basis of landscape painting, by no means sexual. It is answered that the motivating impulse in these is still sex, but its repercussion is not sexual; indeed it is, by deliberate effort, non-sexual—a psychological dope overriding the imperative urge. It sometimes happens that a constitutional misadjustment in an organ of the system shows up somewhere affecting some other organ, with no apparent relation; yet the malady certainly belongs to its fundamental origin.

Let me put it differently, reversing the argument. You look at the softly heaving bosom of the Brahmaputra, sailing along it, under a silvery moon which every ripple of the river mirrors in iridescent flakes; from the summit of Darjeeling you view the receding tiers of the Himalayan peaks, clothed in fleecy snow, the mighty Kanchanganga reposing in stately grandeur, across bedewed stretches of enchanting verdure; you stand before the Ajanta caves, rock-hewn in a magnificent arc, dipping lazily into the mountain-stream that rushes below and past, while the stupendous sculptured Buddhas, transfixed in immortal stone, contemplate in serene meditation;

and you see a beautiful, lovely woman. What is the emotion which is excited in your heart at each of these sights? It is fundamentally, at bottom, the same disturbing, swelling emotion that calls out for a *mate* to share the glorious experience, for a heart that will throb with yours, for a human angel to whom you can sweetly whisper the welling melody of your soul. In a word, it is the sexual emotion. Thus art and poetry are simply the manifestation of this sexual impulse. So you are told.

II

There is about Roy Choudhury something of Somerset Maugham's Charles Strickland. He has the same capricious unconventionality, the same brusque forthright exterior, the super-sexual materialism, the staggering self-conscious importance and mission, the utter gaunt loneliness, the same intellectual and emotional high pressure compelling prodigious endeavour, the infinite yearning for an undiscovered goal of final release as Maugham's artist. To Choudhury the philosopher women are the instruments of pleasure, and desire a festering, tormenting thirst which must be quenched. Lust he understands better than love for which he seems to have little time; lust is normal, healthy and invigorating, releasing his spirit for his high purpose. He does not ennoble woman; he is

not a worshipper at her shrine. He does not waste himself in the sentimental nonsense of woman-adulation. He does not make a fetish of this gross materialism; he is frank and unashamed. He is sublimely conscious that he is a completely normal man. His restless troubled spirit soars entirely without the encircling snares of woman's comforting dominion. He is like the importunate butterfly that urgently enters the life-giving trance of sexual embrace and then emerges disdainfully, pitilessly, fluttering its colourful wings, loathing the very chrysalis that gave it its new-found life. Like the butterfly, Choudhury has no more use for the crumpled mate of his glorious adventure.

You will say it is a sordid, ungrateful philosophy. Choudhury, I suppose, cannot help it. In comparison with the fulfilment of artistic creation, the sexual impulse must seem to him brutal and loathsome. He is a fiery, tortured spirit, striving all the time for that something, stirring his inmost soul, that he, of the earth, is powerless to express. He is very much alone, as if shut up in some lofty tower, imprisoned by this illimitable power. There is an ocean of emotion in his mind and he ceaselessly strives to express it in the tardy symbols of pigment and language. When we think of it, how inadequate and worthless are the circumscribed media of

human communication—what infinite treasures lie hidden in the human mind, unburdened on account of the sheer inadequacy of expressive media! For every painted picture of Choudhury, there is a vaster, far greater, unpainted picture on the canvas of his mind, and the artist is all the time making the superhuman and well-nigh impossible effort to throw this sublime mental picture on to the canvas on the easel. The miserable pigments are made to gallop with his seething mind; they retire hopelessly tired and done up, and settle down in fragments of the grand unexpressed design.

There is this compelling sense of an ideal vastness, of the infinite, ever present in Choudhury's art; his accomplished work is thus a promise, rather than an achievement. This the artist will unhesitatingly acknowledge after a quarter-century of outstanding activity. This people will never understand, because, no genius functions that he may be applauded, but because he is under an intolerable necessity to express himself. For this purpose, he will choose the symbols which will best express him, and it is most unlikely that his language is all understood. But human nature is so purlingly self-important that it needs must measure up genius with the stupid, conforming standards of its own vulgar mediocrity. So, the men of genius go lonely in the world, un-

comprehended by their fellows. Sometimes, in weaker moments, Choudhury has spoken to me of this utter tragedy, in bitter resentment. But he knows better; he knows that the meed of his deserving is not the measure of contemporary praise—that difficult task may well be left to posterity.

I have sensed this astounding conception, powerless to be expressed, in Choudhury's writing also. His mind conjures up a stupendous imagery which mere words cannot express; they are thrown about in odd formations, leaving powerful gaps that give you profound glimpses of his tortured thought. An artist, his literary style is pictorial—not indeed decorative, but broad, sweeping and empirical like his sculptures. You can feel the rough finger-prints on his style laid anyhow; it is not polished, because there is no need. Because, language, like clay, is merely the vehicle of thought; so long as it can carry, what matters it if it is a palanquin or a stage-coach? The rough texture of Choudhury's style is also eminently suited to his craggy conception; it is naked like his thought. Sometimes the racing mind does not leave its foot-tracks on the style; therefore there are obvious gaps. You are not led on by measured steps; you are hustled by an impetuous mind anxious to let you see its own ungoverned working. The same un-

bridled mind designs terrific conceptions, outrageous and ghastly to common human experience; but Choudhury is not bothered, because he is intent upon expressing an intolerable inner experience, however repugnant to accepted values. When he feels it he cannot withhold it; he simply must out with it.

III

Choudhury is tremendously hard-working. Up at four-thirty, he is at his grotesque stories till day-break, driving the slave words to express his impossible conceptions; the sentences roll like some sombre clouds out of the enveloping darkness on to the page and lie huddled and mixed. With the rising of the sun he is ready for the studio, like a warrior roused to battle, plying every brush-stroke, as if it were the piercing arrow of thought, rapidly and swiftly building up the final result with unabated vigour. At ten, he is the busy Principal of the Madras School of Arts. Hoary records and emergent memoranda file in and out; relentless clerks ask for audience; students throng for instruction; curious visitors press to view the storied artist and his famous pictures upstairs. So day in and day out. It is a soulless routine, naturally distasteful and irksome to a creative artist. Evening come, Choudhury is again the dreamer of powerful and violent dreams. Mostly alone,

he scans the pageant of humanity pass and repass the viaduct opposite, while the eye of imagination rolls in an impetuous frenzy. His restless spirit has voyaged to other spheres and there is something pathetic in his solitary, chained existence. He rarely goes out. Sometimes a dull acquaintance might drop in and whip out precious platitudes or laborious commonplaces; he listens good-humouredly, absent-mindedly. But when he has met his match, he is roused and engages in a fierce wordy battle, pressing to service a surprising armoury of dialectic and philosophy. He is overbearing in argument, sometimes inclined to be Sir Oracle and would have no dissenting barking. And as the shadows darken, he will perhaps, as a relaxation, shoot at tin discs, substituting imaginary wild game, unerringly or he will bring out his flute and play an old-time air with all the refreshing abandon of a school-boy on holiday. Then the curtain is drawn on a busy day; it is almost nine in the night.

It is almost inevitable that Choudhury should affect different persons very differently. To some he is the supreme artist, the great dreamer of greater dreams. They look upon him on this side idolatry. I have watched the glowing adulation in the eyes of his impossible visitors who lavish on him all the more superlative epithets in total self-effacement. For such he

has a mild contempt. There are others to whom Choudhury is impossible. Measuring him by their lay, normal standards of decorum and propriety, they pronounce him disappointing. They are shocked at his brazen self-estimation, at his naked language and generally by his brusque manners. Indeed, Choudhury can, on occasion, don the manners of a courtier. People go to him expecting decorous sentiments and normal emotions; they come away outraged, scandalised and disappointed. They are filled with dismay. He is more difficult because he will not compromise with the world, and that is what we do ourselves in our superior worldliness.

Unrelenting, dogged, determined Choudhury some will not stomach; they turn away as if his fixed uncompromising purpose were an insult to their personal good-natures. Of course, Choudhury will have none of this auntyish decorum. He is a relentless self-critic; he cuts himself until he bleeds. Of course, he tears his unsatisfying canvases, dearer to him than himself. He is capable of tremendous abstinence when he wills it; a copious drinker of brandy, I have seen him totally renounce the beverage in a fit of self-questioning. But perhaps he may, on an impulse, get into the habit, as suddenly and decisively as he got out of it. There is no knowing; he is so unpredictable.

Choudhury will acknowledge this total picture of himself unabashedly, without remorse or regret; he will scorn to be glossed over. He disdains to be virtuous, pious—an anchorite, a *tapasi*. He will account it sanctimonious humbugging. His faults, if you so deem them, are an essential part of himself, of the complete picture that is to say; they are the necessary shadows which throw into relief the admired high lights. Ingenious adulation would fain weave legends and fables of his life and assure itself of the artist's immortality. Choudhury has no need of such. He is not bothered about reputation or fame; he is urgently concerned about delivering himself. It is enough to him if he can disturb you, arrest you, conveying his message—he does not attempt to fascinate you. He does not want you to fall in love with him. He is content to be authentic, even if riddling and mysterious and he leaves you to unravel the fascination of his personality. Taken in all, it is a strange personality: tortured, imperative, complex and curious. He wants you to take him for just what he is. In the history of Indian art his career is a romance, an unprecedented efflorescence of artistic genius. Choudhury is conscious of it—who would not be? And can you blame him for it?

P. R. Ramachandra Rao

DEVI PRASAD ROY CHOUDHURY

APPRECIATIONS

PREFATORY NOTE

Choudhury's emergence in Indian art created an unprecedented stir; he was famous from the start. Calcutta, proud of the new arrival, gave an uproarious welcome, decking him with prizes and medals and superlative praise. Dr. Stella Kramrisch, a very discerning critic, hailed him as "the classic of the new generation of Indian painters." His pictures were notoriously first-rate, outstanding in every exhibition. He was "versatile and extremely talented"; he was a "born sculptor" risen above the mere "mastery of grammar and technique"; his fine achievements in portraiture "put to shade the banalities of fashionable portrait-painters," and he was much else in similar strain. Catholic critics applauded his "already noteworthy achievement," but sensed a "still greater promise." His distinction as an artist was of course that he was both a painter and a sculptor; in the words of Mr. Percy Brown, Choudhury "excelled in both the arts." All this was said some twenty years ago and Choudhury has since voyaged much farther on the ocean of art; his deserving, if anything, is the brighter today.

The following appreciations of Roy Choudhury, as artist and as man, were contributed at my importunity and are reassuringly unanimous in their estimates of Choudhury. The contributors are a representative galaxy; a few distinguished signatures that might have adorned these pages have, however, been denied me for very imperative personal reasons.

Mr. PERCY BROWN was "too shaken to undertake any work" as his good wife, an artist in her own right and incidentally Choudhury's early patron, had died quite recently. As for my undertaking, Mr. Brown wrote, "it has my warmest support."

CHOU DHURY AND HIS ART

Dr. J. H. COUSINS, for long "an admirer of Devi Prasad's painting", vouchsafed that "everything (Choudhury) paints has a distinction that places it among the highest achievements of the art."

Sir C. P. RAMASWAMI AIYAR, Dewan of Travancore, wrote of Choudhury: "He is a many-sided artist and a person full of original and constructive ideas."

Mr. A. N. CHAUDHURI sent in the following note: "My wife and I have always been great admirers of his work. In fact, my wife was so afraid that his picture "The Chinese Doll" which she had bought years ago and which he wished her to lend for his exhibition in England, would be lost or spoiled in transit, that she did not send it, thus depriving the English public of a great deal of pleasure. Roy Choudhury has made a bronze bust of myself which is considered a good likeness and a pleasing study."

P. R. Ramachandra Rao.

DYNAMIC ARTIST

By

Kalaprapurna Sree Vikramadeo Varma, D. Litt.,

Maharajah of Jeypore

Mr. Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury is one of the brilliant products of the art renaissance led by Abanindranath Tagore and Havell. Early in life he made his mark as a fine artist by his excellent paintings. His keen eye for 'significant form' and his fine sense of "beauty" liberated him from all trammels of narrow dogma, and very soon he evolved a rich and dynamic style all his own.

It is very fortunate that India should produce a Roy Choudhury just at a time when the glorious traditions of Indian sculpture were being forgotten and the families of *shapathis* and *maharanas* were taking to other professions for want of encouragement and patronage. With his characteristic courage, Mr. Roy Choudhury took to sculpture and his art creations at once earned the admiration of all art lovers. His impatience of every form of pseudo-art makes him very fastidious and restless.

I saw this clearly when I sat for my statue which is presented by the public to the Andhra University. He was in search of what a statue of me should be and was satisfied only when he formulated a clear idea of it. A lesser artist would have merely copied my features either from life or from photographs of me taken from various angles. A bust of Sir C. R. Reddy, which also adorns the Andhra University campus at Waltair, is another example of the creative genius of the sculptor. This work not only preserves the familiar features of the Vice-Chancellor but also gives an interpretation of his character and abilities. The inspiration



The Artist
At the age of

CHOUDHURY AND HIS ART

his paintings. All of them breathe originality, a rare power of technique and expression. They are revelations in plastic interpretation. But all of them are not, of course, equal in merit or regarded as equally good by the artist himself. He is a severe judge of himself. To my knowledge he has destroyed many pieces which a good many people would have strongly felt were worth preserving. In his own field Roy Choudhury is bound to leave a name that will live in the annals of Art and of India.

CHOUDHURY, THE FIGHTER

By

Dr. Kalidas Nag

General Secretary, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.

Nature sculptured Devi Prasad as a wrestler. His broad shoulder and massive muscular build suggested the career of a fighter and a fighter he turned out to be in the realm of form. With him it was not a dainty courtship with, but violent and virile struggle for, Beauty Ineffable. Like a Rajput lover he fought his way up to the Beloved, enshrined in the Palace of Art. That Beloved beamed to him through many tantalizing veils and variegated forms: a Bhutia girl, a Persian lady or a mountain maid—each evoking, from the artist, his supreme homage of gorgeous lines and colours. At first it was a case of imagination run riot; but, with deeper research for *technique*, the artist gained his equilibrium and repose, in his famous pictures like the "Lotus Pond", the "Musafir" and others.

In the pictorial tradition he remained a heretic in the so-called Neo-Indian school; for he freely utilized the experience of the western artists and of the masters of Persia, China and Japan. Whatever is strong and convincing, whether in the East or in the West, ancient or modern, attracted his attention. Roy Choudhury could thus help in bridging the imaginary gulf between Eastern and Western Art.

His innate sense for plastic quality in painting provoked him to try his hand at sculpture; and one of his earliest studies, the portrait-statue of the artist's Father, showed the great promise in that line as well. His studies of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, Dr. A. N. Tagore, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Dr. Annie Besant,

CHOUDHURY AND HIS ART

in the face, the pose and the dress are so ably sculptured that the portrait bust reminds us of some of the famous orators and teachers of the classical ages of Greece and Rome. A patriot, an educationist and an orator—that is what Sir C. R. Reddy is—and that is what this piece of art symbolises.

Mr. Roy Choudhury's group compositions exhibit the same high and rare artistic qualities. The synthesis of the fundamental meaning of things which this artist gives us as works of art is always interesting and impressive.

The Madras School of Arts and Crafts, which was a factory for producing drawing teachers for employment in our middle and high schools, is now drawing out and developing the artistic capabilities of its pupils under the able guidance of Mr. Roy Choudhury. I sent a boy to him and, with characteristic insight, he at once saw that the boy will do best as a sculptor, and in the course of three years trained him into a sculptor-artist with great potentialities for the future.

The Almighty God placed the sculptor Mr. Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury in South India—a land which is famous for its bronzes, and may He spare him to us for a long time and give him greater opportunities to further enrich our national life and culture.

ARTIST OF GENIUS

By

Sir C. Ramalinga Reddy, Kt., Hon. D. Litt., M.L.C.,
Vice-Chancellor, Andhra University.

Mr. Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury, M.B.E., Principal, Government School of Arts and Crafts, Madras, is amongst the four or five artists of genius in India. As a sculptor he has few equals. Wordsworth, the great poet, declared that a man of genius may have to create the taste by which he will be enjoyed. This is to some extent true of Roy Choudhury. His best works are an interpretation of the personalities he is figuring. They are not physical portraiture. They are intended to reveal character, personality, the very soul of the sitter as interpreted by the artist. It is, therefore, not surprising that some people, finding that the physical features are not as they would be in a mechanical portrait go away disappointed. Interpretative expression is bound to suffer from another drawback, namely, the artist's interpretation may not be the interpretation put by the critics, or it may not appeal to all as the best possible of the subject.

Allowing for these two essential reservations, which are unavoidable in all works of original genius, one could honestly feel that Roy Choudhury's work, both in technique and in expression, belongs to the highest class. His life-size statue of the Maharajah Sahib of Jeypore is an absolute, astounding success. There are no two opinions about it. The bust he made of me out of love and which he presented to my daughter—a replica was purchased for the Andhra University by the Committee which organised the celebration of my *Shashtibadapurthi*—is by many regarded, from every point of view, as a masterpiece. I have seen other works of his in sculpture and also a good number of

CHOUDHURY AND HIS ART

Mrs. Roy Choudhury, and others, have convinced us of his quick mastery of sculptural technique and his firm grasp of human psychology.

Roy Choudhury has not only produced great works but inspired a generation of artists to explore ever new forms and to revive the fountain of artistic inspiration with the assimilation of the ever-renewing rhythms of Beauty and Harmony.

BOLD EXPLORER

By

Mr. Ashoké Chatterjee

It is rather difficult to take a detached view of the personality and artistic genius of a man whom one has known intimately since boyhood as a very dear friend. Yet, I believe, to know an artist really and truly is to know his soul; and who can successfully look into that melting-pot of elemental emotions without close intimacy with, and constant opportunity of studying, the moods and reactions of the owner of that soul?

I have known Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury for nearly thirty years and have shared his hopes and disappointments, joys and sorrows; have watched him struggle and tussle with his clay and canvas during the long years preceding his recognition as a great artist. I have also seen him going ahead arduously into the pathless heights of his inspiration, where, as he topped one peak, he found yet others higher up, urging him, challenging him to continue in his never-ending task of spiritual mountaineering. Visions, creative possibilities, unrolled themselves before his imagination like a cosmic kaleidoscope and, as he grappled with some to "hold it" for ever in colour or contour, this ceaseless play of *Maya* continued at fever-heat to drive him into a frenzy of action, so that he could cut larger slices out of this gorgeous unreality and give them material shape to make those glorious moments stand still for all eternity.

The artistic emotion is a state of spiritual unrest in which the artist is for ever thirsting after a perfect visualisation of his creative idea and the true artist is seldom, if ever, satisfied with his inner image and is even less satisfied when he gives material

or outward shape to this mental picture. The image may be incomplete or hazy or it may just flash in and out without leaving a detailed and lasting impression on the mind which is so essential for the purpose of objective reproduction. Then there are the limitations set by instruments, technique and media. The artist has to battle with his imagery to make it take perfect and detailed shape, and he has to struggle with his fingers and his material to force a correct and truthful reproduction of what he sees inwardly.

I have seen "artists" at work in my time. Revivalists grimly reciting the grammar of ancient technique and convention; futurists shooting up into impossible heights of fancy; master-builders covering yards of canvas or chipping away at gigantic chunks of marble; romantic souls pecking at beauty with the shy hesitation of inexperienced lovers; gamblers plunging ahead in the hope of achieving something not yet fully conceived; talented salesmen who paint or model what the buyers dream of; craftsmen who execute art according to specification: I may go on through the whole list, but it is hardly of any use. Devi Prasad is an artist but not one of them. He is an artist in the real sense of the term. If one look well into his tool-box one will find a very large collection of assorted technique, convention, decorative stencils, pieces to complete the entire zig-saw puzzle of "isms" and many a colourful fragment from a sensualist's dream. But I am not describing the contents of his tool-chest. I am going to tell you about the man.

Of medium height and heavy muscular build, he will at once strike one as a man with a remarkable forehead, an even more remarkable span of shoulders and a pair of highly critical eyes. Nothing dreamy about those eyes, you can take it from me. Nothing of doubtful beauty or excellence will ever bluff its way into the forehead through those wide-awake and scrutinising eyes. All sham artistic appeals get a rude shaking as soon as detected and are thrown back into the dust-heap whence they usually come. Equally competent are those eyes to discover the beauty and fascination of things however well camouflaged they may be in their assumed garb.

He is a fighter and bold explorer. The most commonplace objects will yield up their secret peculiarities, their hoarded wealth

of charm or appeal when Devi Prasad wades in to discover the truth. Apparently uninteresting faces have had to come out fully exposed in their glory of form and expression under his careful observation and masterly modelling. A dark corner in a squalid *bustee*, a wave breaking on the beach, an indolent bird preening its feathers or a withered tree on a hill-top; all will have to shed their outward colourlessness and show up in their true colours when Devi Prasad wields the brush.

Long ago, it may be twenty-five years back, he painted a picture mainly in shades of blue, of a back alley in the poorer quarters of North Calcutta. A few human figures in a dismal setting of jumbled brick-walls, almost cutting out the sky. But the outstanding humanity of those pitiable figures and the glory of that tiny bit of sky turned into a song what would otherwise have been a death-rattle. It had the glory of a confession of sin. "I love thee, infamous city" as Baudelaire said, or

"With heart at rest I climbed the citadel's

"Steep height, and saw the city as from a Tower,

"Hospital, brothel, prison and such hells,

"Where evil comes up softly like a flower."

A bit of rock, a stretch of sand and a foam-crested wave in its dying spurt. What a subject for a picture post-card or the coloured cover of a tourist brochure! But, no, Devi Prasad has made the rock a symbol of lonely strength, the little patch of sand a crying desolation and that wave a frantic and exhausted messenger from the farthest corners of the endless ocean. It has become too big for a sea-side resort. It reminds you of great storms raging over thousands of miles and the utter futility of bathing caps and that sort of things.

That picture he painted of an entire rock shaped in the likeness of the God *Siva*, a glorious full moon in the sky and veiled women coming to offer *Puja* to the God through a forest of tall trees, exuberant in colourful foliage! Magnificent and virile, yet sweetly fragrant, like *Sappho's* lines on the Full Moon.

"Off in the twilight hung the low full moon,

"And all the women stood before it grave,

"As round an altar. Thus at holy times

"The Cretan damsels dance melodiously
 "With delicate feet about the sacrifice,
 "Trampling the tender bloom of the soft grass."

When he was quite young Devi Prasad did a head-study in clay for which he took his own father as model. It was a fine piece of character-study and had some very difficult and intricate modelling of extreme delicacy. One could feel the living presence of the dear old man when one looked at it. Not only that, but one could also feel that the father was enjoying the nearness of his beloved son. I do not think a cast was ever taken from that clay original, but we used to see it in the studio for many years. His father, who was an aristocratic old man of very settled habits, was deeply fond of his son. Devi Prasad had lost his mother, but his father practically spent all his time attending to his son's well-being and comfort, and it was his unbounded faith in his son's genius that enabled Devi Prasad to come through into his own. A quiet and courageous soul who believed wholeheartedly that his son would be great and met all sorrow and suffering with a smiling face.

One of the first portraits that Devi Prasad ever painted was that of his cousin. She had the face of a martyr and the portrait brought out vividly an intensity of character which one would hardly expect from the brush of a young man of immature years. I believe all women painted by Devi Prasad, without a model, have something of that intenseness in their expression and stance. In his water colours he has always used drapery, decorative touches and colour scheme to heighten that effect of mystery and enigma. They keep you guessing and you would give something to know the beginning and the end of their story. Others have imitated those little mystery women, but they have usually looked more like Javanese dolls than embodiments of suppressed emotions.

About fifteen years ago Devi Prasad started a picture on a canvas measuring about 24" x 18". Vague mountainous formations, half hidden in mist, began to take shape with a foreground showing a dry and thorny slope across which strode a row of Buddhist monks; ardent and determined spirits who crossed and recrossed the Himalayas for hundreds of years to carry the mes-

sage of Gautama the Buddha to the peoples of *Maha-China*. The formidable nature of the obstacles faced by the monks and the deathless spirit that enabled them to achieve the impossible task were clearly portrayed in the picture; but Devi Prasad thought it was not good enough. One day I found him ripping up the picture in disgust and when I remonstrated with him he said it was not any good. I however, persuaded him to patch up the picture from behind and touch it up to repair the damage. This picture, when exhibited, earned the highest praise of critics and, as far as I remember, won the best award of the season for a water colour. It was reproduced in well-known journals in colours on more than one occasion and Devi Prasad very unwillingly admitted that although he did not consider it much of an achievement there perhaps was some merit in it after all.

This incident clearly shows the character of the man. He never falls blindly in love with his own work to be carried away by self-admiration to the point where one ceases to look at one's own performance critically. This habit of self-criticism has enabled him to improve all the time and arrive at a perfection of technique comparable with the greatest masters. He has handled some very massive sculpture during recent years, but he has gone over them inch by inch for days and weeks to detect any fault, and that is why he has never been undaunted by the magnitude of his task and been able to reflect his innermost feelings in clay with a masterly clearness of expression. Just as a great poet or writer expresses his thoughts precisely and with infinite accuracy in language which rings true to his emotions and moves in sure-footed grace of grammar and diction, Devi Prasad has always projected his artistic images in colour or clay with faultless exactitude of technique and an almost galvanic liveliness born of a superabundance of the true aesthetic substance.

When I visited Madras in 1938 I stayed with him for a few days and had the opportunity to watch him at his work and to study some of his latest paintings and sculptures. I found he was working on a larger scale both on canvas and in clay. He always had that urge for shaping things on a grand scale and gave an impression that he would like to fall on an entire rock with a

CHOUUDHURY AND HIS ART

hammer and chisel and carve something out of it. This aggressiveness of outlook did not signify any lack of delicacy of touch; for his art abounds in subtle touches. It merely showed an impatience with limited material and an unwillingness to be fettered down by restrictions.

The classical artists of Egypt, Assyria, Greece and India have persistently shown an eagerness to reach the sky, and in substance it is the same epic urge that we find in Devi Prasad. All expressive emotion is expansive. From the secret corners of the heart out into the limitless open spaces. In conquerors it surges from Carthage to Rome or Macedonia to the Indus; in poetry it goes from Ayodhya to Simhala or through Purgatory and, thence from star to star; in a religious outburst it tries to embrace the earth; and in Art it struggles with the crude bulk of shapeless material and attempts to bring order and beauty into a chaotic jumble. There is room for delicate tracery and embroidery in art, but the fundamental thing is this vital struggle with the mute and meaningless material and to force it into articulate beauty. In this work technique is merely the means to an end and eclectic experiments and creative innovations are not only welcome but highly necessary.

Devi Prasad has proved himself a faithful fighter in the field of Art. He has creative genius and the courage to use his powers freely and wholeheartedly. He is by no means a spent force; I should rather say, he is just about properly started. If he keeps it up, he is sure to leave a number of landmarks in the world of art.

A TEACHER'S TRIBUTE

By

Mr. Hironmoy Roy Choudhury, A.R.C.A. (London).

Our knowledge of the material world is three-dimensional. In plastic art this knowledge seeks creative self-expression in concrete forms that represent our mental vision of beauty.

It is now close on a quarter of a century that a living statue of Apollo appeared before me in the person of Devi Prasad, a young sculptor who moulded himself in the great gymnasium of Nature. His clay-modelling started with his own body on the wrestling ground, for he was then a keen wrestler as he told me smiling, in reply to my admiring questionings regarding his splendid physique. He was at that time engaged in working on a statue of the great artist Abanindranath Tagore, at whose suggestion he came to me for such guidance and help as my technical knowledge might render. Thus commenced our relation of pupil and teacher which continued for sometime in my private studio at Calcutta.

Like Rabindranath and Abanindranath, Devi Prasad was a truant from school. He educated himself by following the guidance of the urge that comes from within, working with indefatigable energy and gathering the full harvest of his labours in powerful hands.

Devi Prasad's genius is versatile. His self-expression was not confined to sculpturing only. He was an athlete, musician, painter and sculptor. Later on, he extended his excursions into the field of literature.

In accordance with the old custom of India, the young sculptor, at the end of his period of pupilage, gave me *gurudakshina* in the shape of two exquisite water-colour paintings, one of which was awarded the Governor's prize. They were the first contributions to a rich endowment that was in store for me. The fulfilment

VERSATILE TITAN

By

Mr. Bireswar Sen, M.A.,

Government School of Arts and Crafts, Lucknow

I have had the pleasure of knowing Devi Prasad ever since the happy days of our youth when we were both pupils of Abanindranath Tagore at No. 5, Dwaraknath Tagore Lane, Calcutta. I have watched with admiration his meteoric rise from a budding young artist to a full-fledged master in water colours, oils, pastels and clay-modelling. His literary achievements are also of a very high degree of excellence and I wonder if he has given up his old hobbies of flute-playing and wrestling.

Versatility is the keynote of his genius and he touched nothing that he did not adorn. He is indeed a veritable Titan in the midst of a race of pigmies and head and shoulders above any other artist I know, with the exception of our Guru.

Long may his art flourish and shed abiding lustre on our Motherland!

VIRILE STYLIST

By

Mr. G. Venkatachalam

It was Dr. Stella Kramrisch who first introduced me to the art of Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury. Dr. Stella herself was new to the country then, having arrived in India only about a year back, and was staying at Adyar as the guest of the late Dr. Besant. That was her very first visit to the South and she was full of enthusiasm for the ancient culture and virile art of the Tamils, and South Indian sculpture, especially of the Pallava period, was her special subject of study and chief attraction.

It happened that I too was living at Adyar then and was a student of Pallava history, and this common interest not only brought us together but took us frequently to the centres of Pallava art like Conjeevaram and the Seven Pagodas. And it was during one of these visits to Mahabalipuram that she spoke to me enthusiastically about Roy Choudhury's paintings and sculptures. She thought him to be a remarkably gifted artist with a great future.

Though I was familiar then with the works of Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Venkatappa and others, Roy Choudhury's art had, somehow, escaped my attention. And, as often, the unexpected happened. I met the artist, not long after and even before I saw any of his works in the original, and we soon became friends. I do not exactly remember now the circumstances which brought him to Madras, but when I met him at Ooty that year (it was the summer in 1925, I think) he was staying as the guest of the late Mr. S. V. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, who was then his only patron and admirer in this part of India, and was in quest of fresh fields for his artistic adventures, and incidentally in search for a job.

I saw a lot of him those few weeks he was there and went out frequently for drives and walks together and thus came to

of my dreams of his future success and our lifelong friendship and love comprise a perennial *gurudakshina* for the preceptor of his early days, who went but a few steps with him as a guide at the outset of his career of triumphal march on the fields of art.

The young sculptor is now a veteran all-round artist. The Madras Government was not behind-hand in appreciating his worth. He was offered the Principalship of the Government School of Arts, a distinguished position for which both the institution and its administrative head are to be congratulated. The Madras Presidency is a repository of monumental works of classical Indian art. Its magnificent temples and statuary and the beauties of land and sea combine to make it an artist's paradise. These happy surroundings must have formed a stimulating environment and source of inspiration for his vital and responsive mind.

Modern Indian art has found a true and vigorous exponent in Roy Choudhury. I would like to point out here that his works bear the genuine stamp of originality. No signs of lame imitation are discernible in them. They represent the self-expression of a creative mind which combines the heritage of the past with modern influences in a harmonious blending. Among modern Indian artists Devi Prasad stands unsurpassed in strength and force of expression which accentuate his consummate technical skill.

It is needless for me here to give an inventory of his outstanding contributions to sculpture and painting. But I must record my appreciation of the magnificent bust of his father, which was one of Devi Prasad's earliest handiwork. The heroic-sized statues of Sir Surendranath Banerjee and Sir Ashutosh Mukerjee in the Curzon Park and Esplanade of Calcutta proclaim the vigour and fine execution of the artist. My great joy in his successful career and attainments, in the plastic art in particular, could only be expressed by that ancient verse: "सर्वत्र विजयमिच्छेत क्षात्रात् पुत्रात् पराजयम्." The teacher's or the father's victory lies in seeking defeat at the hands of his pupil or son.

I conclude with the prayer that the contributions of his mature manhood may reveal still higher possibilities or creative excellence as he forges ahead with flying colours and the vigorous steps of a conquering hero in the realms of art.

UNDOUBTED MASTER

By
Mr. Nāndālal Bose
Santiniketan

As it is brush and not fountain-pen which is easier for me to use, a few words will suffice.

I know Sriman Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury while at the Indian Society of Oriental Art at Calcutta in the formative period of the artist's life when he had the extreme good fortune of learning at the feet of our great master, Sri Abanindranath Tagore.

Since then Devi Prasad has proved himself to be an undoubted master in European art technique, equal to any one in India or abroad. His achievements in statuary or modelling are very remarkable, no doubt. He is still young and his future is full of further promises.

I sincerely wish that he may fully understand and appreciate India's great, glorious and unique tradition in the past, carved in stone, cast in bronze or brass, and thereby enrich our degraded present with noble creative works.

know a little of his qualities as man and artist. I found him a strikingly handsome young man with a fine physique and chiselled features, almost a Greek in appearance (I have still with me an autographed photo of his of those days); always dressed immaculately in the graceful Bengali kit of a loose-flowing *choga* over a *kurta* and *dhotie*; often amusing himself with playing on his flute when he was not sketching or hunting for models (the gypsies and beggars in the streets ever fascinated him); very reticent and retiring and a man of few words. He has changed, of course, and has changed very much since those days, and few indeed can recognise in the proud, Roy Choudhury of today the silent, strong, sensitive youth of those days. That was, at any rate, my first impression of him.

He was, of course, proud even then; proud of his aristocratic birth and the extravagant ways of living of his people; proud of his trained muscles and physical strength which were ever ready for games or wrestling; proud of his skill as a *shikari* or a painter. He was very individualistic even then I found; he never felt himself inferior to anybody and in any capacity; he refused to take the second place in anything and thought himself to be as good as the best either as man or artist. He never believed in humility or cared for modesty.

I found he was of a family of the Zamindars in Bengal which, owing to its 'false' notions of prestige and expensive habits of living, was on its decline; that he had had a rich and romantic life as an artist till then, and that his immediate ambition was not so much to become a world-famous artist as to work and earn. That was a noble dream indeed for one who was so young and so gifted as he was. His friend, Mr. S. V. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, promised to do his best; and, as luck would have it, the chance came sooner than expected in the prospective retirement of the then head of the Government School of Arts in Madras, and it struck some of us that the chance was too good to be missed and that Roy Choudhury should step into the place of Mr. Haddaway, the retiring English head of the school. In spite of vested interests and local opposition, and thanks to the efforts of the late Mr. S. V. Ramaswamy Mudaliar and Shrimati Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Roy Choudhury became the Principal not long after.

My own acquaintance with his art began first with the now well-known "Lepcha Maid", the only painting of his then owned by his friend, the Mudaliar. Its rich colouring and superb technique gripped me. A certain geniality and warmth was visible in that picture. It was full of human qualities: passion, flesh and sex. It had not the "other-worldly" aspects of the art of his other fellow painters of Bengal. No mysticism, no exuberance of emotionalism, no "artistic anatomy", no wishy-washy weak caricaturism of human form or face. It was a matter-of-fact art, a direct realistic study with just a touch of decorativeness, albeit, a fine imaginative work, almost a synthetic portrait.

Having been familiar with the Himalayan hill tribes and having only recently met the artist himself and been impressed by his personality, I was greatly intrigued by this straightforward colour study of his. I loaned it from the owner for an exhibition, the first of Choudhury's to be exhibited in South India, and later tried to get his other works for exhibitions in other parts of India. Thus came I to know his art at first-hand and to appreciate in an ever-growing measure his unique genius, his great skill and his unquestionable place among the front-rank artists of the world.

In a monograph on Modern Indian Painters I wrote at that time (and which is now out of print), I recorded my reactions to his art thus: "In his paintings Roy Choudhury combines harmoniously and very ably the technical features of both Eastern and Western art, and produces a type very aesthetical and full of sensitive feeling. He is still very much influenced by his master Abanindranath Tagore in his technique; in fact it is at times difficult to choose between his pictures and those of Tagore. Yet, behind the apparent similarity lies the individuality of his work. In his figure studies, some of which are from models, he holds the qualities of Oriental and Occidental Art in a subtle and accurate balance.

"While few painters have succeeded in portraying the almost elusive charm of the daughters of the Himalayas—the Lepcha maid, the Nepalee girl, the Bhutia woman and the Tibetan lass—Roy Choudhury has marvellously succeeded in capturing the fleeting beauty of these women in his paintings, and thus immortalised

CHOUDHURY AND HIS ART

them and himself as well. His "Lepcha Maid" (in the collection of Mr. S.V. Ramaswamy Mudaliar) is full of the warmth and glow of full-blooded young life, and the small squinted eyes are full of wild passionate feeling. His "Bhutia Maid", selected last year for the Imperial Gallery in London, has the same virile qualities. "Lotus Pond" (in Treasuryvala's collection) represents him at one of his best. This was exhibited at Wembley and was much admired by the public there. The languorous pose of the love-sick maiden is very vividly drawn; her thoughtful look, tinged with sad disappointment, gazes vacantly at the budding lotus flowers. They agonise her all the more; she is even careless of her dress and draperies. The whole picture is done in subdued sombre colour of light-green, light-blue and light-yellow, suggestive of the mood of the moment.

"Roy Choudhury's portrait studies are very different from those of other artists. Though done in water colour they have the depth and solidity of oils. He uses a secret fixative which gives that effect, but it is not tempera technique. His portrait of Rabindranath Tagore (with Treasuryvala) is very refined in colouring and richly decorative; his other portraits of Mrs. Percy Brown, O.C. Gangoly, A.N. Tagore, Miss Buckland and others are in the same excellent manner. There is a delicate perception of the character of the individual through the mask of the personality painted by the artist. He is also a great landscape painter, very clever in painting misty mornings on mountain-tops."

Since the above was written, some eighteen years ago, Roy Choudhury has experimented in many other interesting techniques and has richly contributed to Indian art. His virile style has even been a sort of corrective to the weak effeminate character that was slowly creeping into modern Indian painting in the name of idealised form and subjective art. His own tendencies, in later years, were for a more realistic and true-to-life form of art, in the accepted academy way, and this resulted in his painting a series of magnificent landscapes and nature studies. But he is still the supreme artist in delightful decorative studies of Indian women after the Oriental manner, as witness one of his latest, "A Study in Green", painted a couple of years ago, which for mere technical

APPRECIATIONS

skill and aesthetical excellence is as good as any painted by Rembrandt or Titian. The technique of it is interestingly intriguing and uniquely his own; a perfect example of his pictorial art.

No less great and gifted is he in the art of sculpture; in fact, he is more widely known these days as the greatest sculptor of modern India. Ever since he came to Madras he has been prolific in this kind of art; and a series of "busts" in plaster and bronze have made their appearance from his studio and have now adorned public institutions and private houses. And what a galaxy of heads! Annie Besant, Bishop Leadbeater, Sir C. V. Kumaraswami Sastri, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Sir C. R. Reddi, Sir R. K. Shanmukham Chetty, the ex-Principal of the Madras Women's Christian College, Governors and Judges. Even before he came South he was Bengal's foremost sculptor, though another Roy Choudhury was his master in the art, and his portraits of his father, Principal Percy Brown, architect Keir, artist Chanchal Banerjee and others were hailed by critics as very fine examples of modern sculpture by an Indian artist. And when Roy Choudhury made that ambitious attempt, a large-scale statue of the late Sir Asutosh Mookerjee for the Calcutta University, and succeeded in making it so well, he was acclaimed as India's Sculptor No. 1. His latter attempts of similar-sized statues of the rulers of Cochin and Travancore added considerably to his reputation. For originality, individuality, strength and expressiveness, his sculptural works are easily the best in this country. Even his Rodinesque touch, which characterised his earlier studies, especially those of his father and Chanchal Banerjee, was only superficial. Roy Choudhury's art is definitely and distinctly his own.

It will, of course, be interesting to compare his art with that of his other two great contemporaries, Nandalal Bose and K. Venkatappa. But it will be neither advisable nor desirable; for one thing, it is a delicate and difficult task, as all these three are pupils of the same master and belong to the same school; and for another, I know what Choudhury himself would think of such an attempt. "Ignorant impudence", he would call it, and he is not the one to mince words!

CHOUDHURY AND HIS ART

or verse. There lies the uniqueness of the artist's soul. When the critic has no sympathetic understanding of that soul, he blunders. While Roger Fry could not understand the Hindu-Buddhist art of a coloured-race, Sheldon Cheney has not only tried to understand it but has brought out the inner significance of the cosmic ideals of the Hindu-Buddhist outlook on which their art is mainly based.

The art critics of our country, while criticising works of contemporary artists, are either carried away by the personality of their subjects or else give themselves patronising airs. They have seldom got the power of discrimination and always find shoddy examples to illustrate their essays which only bring out their poverty in understanding æsthetic ideals. The artist cannot await the arrival of sincere art critics with the proper outlook, but he should work because he would love to. The *Bhagavat-Geeta* directs: "Ma falesu kadachana"—'work without giving thought to worldly success.'

Devi Prasad is actuated by this noble ideal and outlook. He worked on canvas and stone to achieve that end. His healthy body has got a vigorous mind. We notice in his works not only a high standard of creative zeal but also a proper understanding of art forms whether they originated from Asia, Europe or America. His example is full of hope for the future generations of artists. In praising him we pay respect to the art of our country and to the renaissance of Indian art which was started by our 'Guru', Dr. Abanindranath Tagore. Blessed are those who create and those who understand the creative activities of others.

CHOUDHURY AS WRITER

By
Mr. Tarasankar Banerjee

I had the privilege of coming into direct contact with the literary phase of the celebrated sculptor and painter, Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury, from the very start. The incident that brought me close to him has a story and I remember it quite distinctly. I had a glorious time with him. It was "Jalsha Ghur," a short story written by me. It served the purpose of the 'introduction.' Devi Prasad expressed his desire to meet me, and the message was communicated to me by our common friend Sjt. Sajanikanta Das, Editor of the *Sanibarar Chithi*. We went to his hotel at the appointed hour. I have stressed upon the time just to show how unusually disciplined he is—a strange trait in a highly emotional temperament such as his. As we stepped into the room we were cordially received by him, and I found to my great surprise that he was impatiently waiting with an ecstasy of emotion to express his appreciation of my story. His outburst followed in a train of complimentary comments, without any consideration for the formalities of introduction demanded by the current code of good manners. I should have been very sorry indeed if those nice words intended for me and pitched in such superlative key missed their legitimate claimant, because he never bothered to inquire who he was speaking to! He gave no time to disclose my name until he had quite exhausted himself.

He was greatly impressed by his frankness which was completely free from the defensive diplomacy of the accommodative conversationalist. I was charmed by his dominating personality which had all the qualities a gentleman would wish to be proud of. He seemed to me a living symbol of inexhaustible energy and unfailing vigour. He loved to assert because that was his inherent

UNCHALLENGED ACHIEVEMENT

By

Mr. Asit Kumar Haldar.

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It is indeed a great pleasure to record my views on the works and achievements of my colleague, Mr. Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury. In the sphere of our country's art Devi Prasad's place can never be challenged. There is a Bengali proverb which runs: "As many men so many minds". It is therefore practically impossible for people, who do not find time or opportunity to study art, to have any 'say' in the matter. The difficulty is enhanced by the fact that artists also do not think alike. They are themselves busy in finding individual expression in their creative activities. Luckily, however, it is different in the case of the present writer who happens to belong to the same school of thought with which Devi Prasad identifies himself.

Art has its spontaneous urge. It can hardly await critical opinion to mould itself accordingly. It is nothing but creative experiment, with freedom of thought and action. Artistic creation is not factory discipline or routine. In the matter of the selection of subject-matter, technique, medium or treatment, the artist is the final authority. This authority the artist enjoys in all his activities.

Only recently a learned professor, while opening the annual show of the Lucknow School of Arts, asked if one could make a selection of the best specimen amongst the poster designs exhibited in the commercial section. An English lady who happened to be there came to the professor's rescue and blandly told him that it would depend upon individual taste—the one he selects she might reject.

Therefore, generally speaking, art criticism can be real only when it helps to understand the significance of individual achievement. A distinguished scientist once asked the writer whether the work of the artists of our country in the past, of Ajanta and Ellora, could still be improved upon by correcting their detail drawings of the human figures or their modellings. The obvious answer was of course 'no'. But that would not satisfy the mind of the scientist, because in science every research improves the former defects.

So a lawyer or a doctor would also think while viewing an object of art, each in his own way. A doctor would certainly try to find the anatomy faithfully adhered to in drawing the human figure according to his own standard of judgment. Similarly, a literary man would very much like to see his own vision translated into art, instead of finding out what the artist himself wanted to depict.

Art cannot depend upon the 'literary' criticism of the art critics; they can only help to create interest and better understanding amongst art lovers, and also sometimes to revalue the achievements of the art of the past. We therefore welcome Ruskin, Walter Pater, Roger Fry and others who not only opened new vistas for the better understanding of art, but put the study of art on a high pedestal.

Art is nothing but the cultural expression of a nation and therefore requires time to understand. Even in pre-historic days the primitives never lacked in such creative expression. Even to understand their work or the work of children, it is essential to have some sympathy and understanding. The literary critic must come down from his high pulpit of aesthetics to judge their work rightly. Then only will he appreciate the primitiveness of the creative urge and its sincerity. Thus he will realise that art brings out the dynamic energy into that rhythmic play on a static canvas which is the order of the life and universe.

In life we love, build and invent in rhythmic cycles which can only be appreciated by intuition that is beyond all sense perceptions. The artist has this sixth sense. He not only perceives the rhythm but records it in his creation on canvas, stone, clay, music

characteristic. I had of course a deep reverence for his contribution to the plastic and graphic arts long before I came to know him personally. There was a time when I often felt inclined to pick up an acquaintance with him, but I was reluctant to take the initiative because he was then at the zenith of fame and I was just struggling to establish myself. The restraint was of course dictated by my diffidence; his paintings and sculptures ever haunted me with their mysterious influence. The colour-scheme of his paintings had an awe-inspiring effect on me—most delicately harmonised, yet vigorously executed works.

When I was thus admiring his art in the obscurity of my position I had the good fortune to meet him. In course of time our acquaintance developed into friendship which gave me facilities to know the man more intensely. I began to pay frequent visits to his studio. One day in the course of conversation he said: "I wish I could express myself through *your* medium. I love to explore new channels of self-expression." I could never persuade myself to believe that he was quite serious, and that he meant what he said until I read the manuscript of his "*Dust Bin*". Its merits were applauded by Sjt. Sajanikanta Das, the well-known merciless critic of Bengali literature. Then, after an interval, followed "*Ballavpurur Mart*" and "*Pisach*." Then many others in quick succession. It gave me immense delight to find that he was equally at home with the pen as with his brush or a lump of clay. The dominating quality of his literary achievement is again vigour and an unflinching sincerity, as pronounced as in his paintings and sculptures.

There is no room for doubt that in no remote day he will establish himself a distinguished contributor to the treasure-house of literature.

GREAT PORTRAITIST

By

Shrimati Rukmini Devi

I have had many opportunities of coming into close contact with the art of Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury, which is so versatile and alive. He is primarily a sculptor, but his temperament enters into the fields of many other arts as well. He is among the few artists in India who have studied under European masters; yet his early paintings were absolutely 'Indian,' and their beauty and fineness are at once striking. The sense of colour, the detail and the design are peculiar to India, and the artist has successfully captured the Indian spirit.

Many of our Indian paintings and sculptures, according to ancient principles, are idealistic and spiritual. The human form, when it transcends the physical, is more beautiful to the Indian eye, for we prefer to see what we should be if we were divine, rather than what we are. It is this factor that has helped to make such wonderful sculptures and bronzes as Sri Nataraja, where fineness and delicacy exist without losing the splendour of the ideal man. It was this genius of Indian art which relieved the horror and ugliness of daily life and yet showed beauty even in an old woman, a beggar, or an evil *rakshasa*.

But the older type of western artist does not understand portraiture in this way. He does not desire to produce what we ought to be, but shows what we are, and therefore to him the study of anatomy, physiology and the human form, as it is found in everyday life, has the greatest attraction. It is because of this that he shines in portraiture, for, without a knowledge of the human form, it is impossible for real portraiture to exist. Choudhury, having studied from a westerner, is fascinated by the 'life' of the human body, and he is one of the few really good portrait artists in India to-day.

CHOUDHURY AND HIS ART

The modern artist says: "Do not merely express the beauty of form as you see it, do not transcend the physical, but feel the power and the force in the physical without adding to it any sentimentality or false idealism." In this sense also Choudhury shines equally and displays great power in his art. In my view modern art is force and not beauty, and although I myself am not a modernist, I cannot help but admire Choudhury for his wonderful genius in entering into the spirit of anything which he takes up. There is no doubt that Choudhury is no ordinary artist, for he is bound to evoke either admiration or dislike for his art.

I also admire him for knowing what he wants and for his courage in expressing it, for courage is essential for every creative artist. There is bound to be a further phase in Choudhury's art, of which I have no idea, but he is one whose art cannot be stationary; it must evolve.

We need such people in India. Artists do not necessarily agree with each others' points of view. But every true artist always sees the reality of another and I am sure that every artist in India recognises Choudhury as one who has made a very outstanding contribution to the art-life of our country. I wish him many years of life and success.

DECORATIVE ARTIST

By

Mr. Karl Khandalavala

Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury is known to the art world of India as a painter of decorative pictures, as a portraitist and as a sculptor. He belongs strictly to the older generation of artists, loosely called the Bengal School, who did so much to revive an interest in contemporary painting. They were all experimenters, and necessarily so, because they were pioneers. Each struggled with his own problems, dictated by his own predilections. Nandalal Bose was seeking to unravel the secrets of Ajanta; Jaimini Roy turned to the old folk art of Bengal; Gogonendranath Tagore plunged into the "isms" of modern European art with the outlook of an Oriental, and Venkatappa revived the spirit of the late mediaeval miniature schools.

Devi Prasad also went his own way. He was intrigued by the decorative qualities of painting and was not averse to Chinese and Japanese influences if they aided his purpose. His approach to decorative art was a correct one. It was pattern, colour, design, and pure visual appeal which he sought to achieve. He had no allusions. He did not attempt the emotional approach and peter out into sickly sentimentality. If his women were decorative they were meant to be so. They were not his *theme* but a motif in a larger design. They were not intended to be manifestations of a spiritual ideal, but to frankly convey their human charm.

In this wise Devi Prasad adopted the traditions of Mediaeval sculpture. The *madanikas* of Hoysala art or the "hetaera" of the Solanki temple pillars of Gujerat were statements of physical beauty worked into an elaborate design—while the spiritual quality of Gupta and post-Gupta art had no such. Devi Prasad remained true to this outlook and though his later pictures have

CHOUDHURY AND HIS ART

taken on new decorative tendencies and adopted more forciful colour schemes, their primary appeal is still to the senses.

As a portraitist also Devi Prasad has made a valuable contribution to modern Indian art. Faithful likenesses and yet a departure from academic methods. The secret, I think, lies in his colouring. His portrait of Tagore in the Treasuryvala collection, Bombay, is one of the very finest achievements in modern Indian portrait-painting. He has shown that even in portraiture it is possible to develop a style and technique which need not bear the impress of Western art and be capable of expressing the different aesthetic and mental outlook of an Indian artist.

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