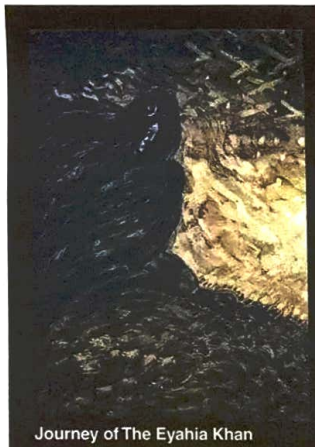


# Radical strokes

'Stranger Forms' brings back G.C. Chakravarty's socio-politically charged work

Not much is known about Gopesh Chandra Chakravarty, who painted through much of the 20th century, much like Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher-Gil. If the organisers are to be believed, the Sylhet-born artist's last major exhibition happened in 1981, around a decade before he died in 1993. Largely self-taught, with formal training at the Government School of Art in Calcutta, Chakravarty's work is remarkable for its socio-political themes, spiritual and literary inspirations, and techniques that spoke strongly of the Bengal School of Art.

Chakravarty's retrospective, 'Stranger Forms: The Forgotten Art of G.C. Chakravarty', on view until June 28 and brought together by Dwija Gallery, a prominent cultural space in Rajkot managed by the Dwija Conservation Society of Art and Cultural Heritage, at the Birla Academy of Art and Culture, brings into focus the oeuvre of the artist. He seems to have returned not like a ghost but as a voice, an idea that refuses to die and



Journey of The Eyahia Khan

resurfaces when the time is right. The relevance of Chakravarty's work was strongly felt as we walked through the gallery. For instance, his 'Shikkha Somoshya' (The Education Problem) and 'Future of Education' bring to mind the burning issue of examination paper leaks. His 'Hypocrisy in Religion' makes direct references to self-styled



National Problems



Political Problems

godmen who are often in the news for cheating and scams. Similarly, 'Political Problems', featuring a gaunt man holding the Indian emblem and surrounded by people of all faiths, alludes to contemporary political crises, while 'The Present Day Economics', the first work



Present Day Economics

we encountered during our walk through the exhibition, depicts a mythical creature preying on a deer and evokes thoughts of present-day realities. Most importantly, his 'Sonar Bangla', featuring the large face of a woman — perhaps symbolising the motherland — surrounded by scores of people, including Rabindranath Tagore, speaks of Bengal's search for an anchor. Chakravarty's honest and bold subject matter makes him not just an artist but also an activist.

His works in watercolour wash, ink and charcoal were highly political, and one of the highlights for us was his portrayal of Yahya Khan, who imposed martial law during his presidency in Pakistan and presided over the civil war that led to the creation of Bangladesh. The shadowy black figure with spiteful eyes, set against a backdrop of turmoil in 'Journey of Eyahia Khan', reflects the artist's own anger and unrest. This tone of darkness and grotesque imagery continues in 'Death' (1927),

which, had it been larger in scale, might well have overshadowed 'Journey of Eyahia Khan'.

Inspired by the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Chakravarty's oeuvre also carries mystical and enigmatic undertones, employing the wash technique extensively. His inspiration was not limited to the realities of a nation transitioning from colonial rule to independence; literature also played a significant role in shaping his artistic vision. His untitled works in ink and gouache on paper mounted on board, as well as watercolour on paper, featuring cleaner and more refined figures, seem to have emerged directly from the pages of European literature.

Mit Vyas of Dwija Gallery, who intends to take Chakravarty's work to other parts of the country, said: "More than a historical recovery, Stranger Forms reintroduces an artist whose significance extends beyond the established narratives of Indian modernism. During his lifetime, Chakravarty exhibited alongside notable contemporaries such as Jamini Roy, Gopal Ghose and D.P. Roy Chowdhury, yet his legacy gradually receded from public view. Equally important was his role as an educator and cultural activist."

Chakravarty worked across regions including Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland and the wider Northeast. His work was recognised by the late Rajendra Prasad, S. Radhakrishnan, noted art critic Kalidas Nag and art historian O.C. Gangoly.

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Pictures courtesy: Dwija Gallery