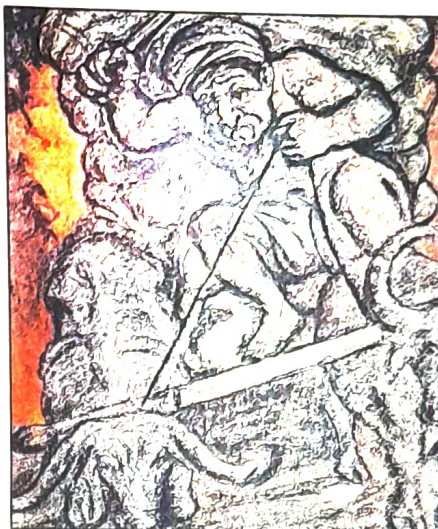




Turbulent style

VISUAL ARTS

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Strange were the paintings and illustrations of the all-but-forgotten artist, Gopesh Chakravarty (1905-1993), who was self-taught. Dwija Gallery of Rajkot held a retrospective of the artist at the Birla Academy of Art & Culture for an assessment of his work in the context of the Indian modern art movement. The exhibition, *Stranger Forms: The Forgotten Art of G.C. Chakravarty*, traced his career as an artist. Chakravarty was born in Sylhet and, after a brief stint at the Government School of Art in Calcutta, he was on his own. Today it seems surprising that Chakravarty's art was once deeply appreciated by people of eminence. The exhibition was well-displayed and the wall texts were informative. A catalogue with an essay on Chakravarty's career by Ankan Kazi came as a bonus.

Chakravarty did not confine himself to a single subject or style. He conjured up a dark, gloomy and, at times, sinister and nightmarish world that existed

in his imagination but was also a reflection of the turbulent times in which he lived — wars, famines and the struggle for Independence. His social commentary in certain satirical works was sharp and incisive. In this, he was inspired by Gaganendranath Tagore and his targets, such as problems that beset India and religious hypocrisy, were similar to those of Tagore. Chakravarty had done some wonderful drawings and illustrations of translated texts where the Western influence is quite obvious. He was fascinated by Hollywood and a drawing of a flapper provides evidence of his captivation. His literary interests were evident from the monochromatic watercolour of Edgar Allan Poe's famous photograph.

He conjured up a shadowy world with dimly-lit city streets, looming buildings, glowing gaslights, cloaked figures keeping vigil at night, pilgrims trekking perilous mountain paths (picture, left), murky figures, grotesques, and fantastic situations that could only have emerged from the subconscious. His airy drawing of *Gandhiji* is in direct contrast to his stygian portrait of Yahya Khan like a huge bird of prey.