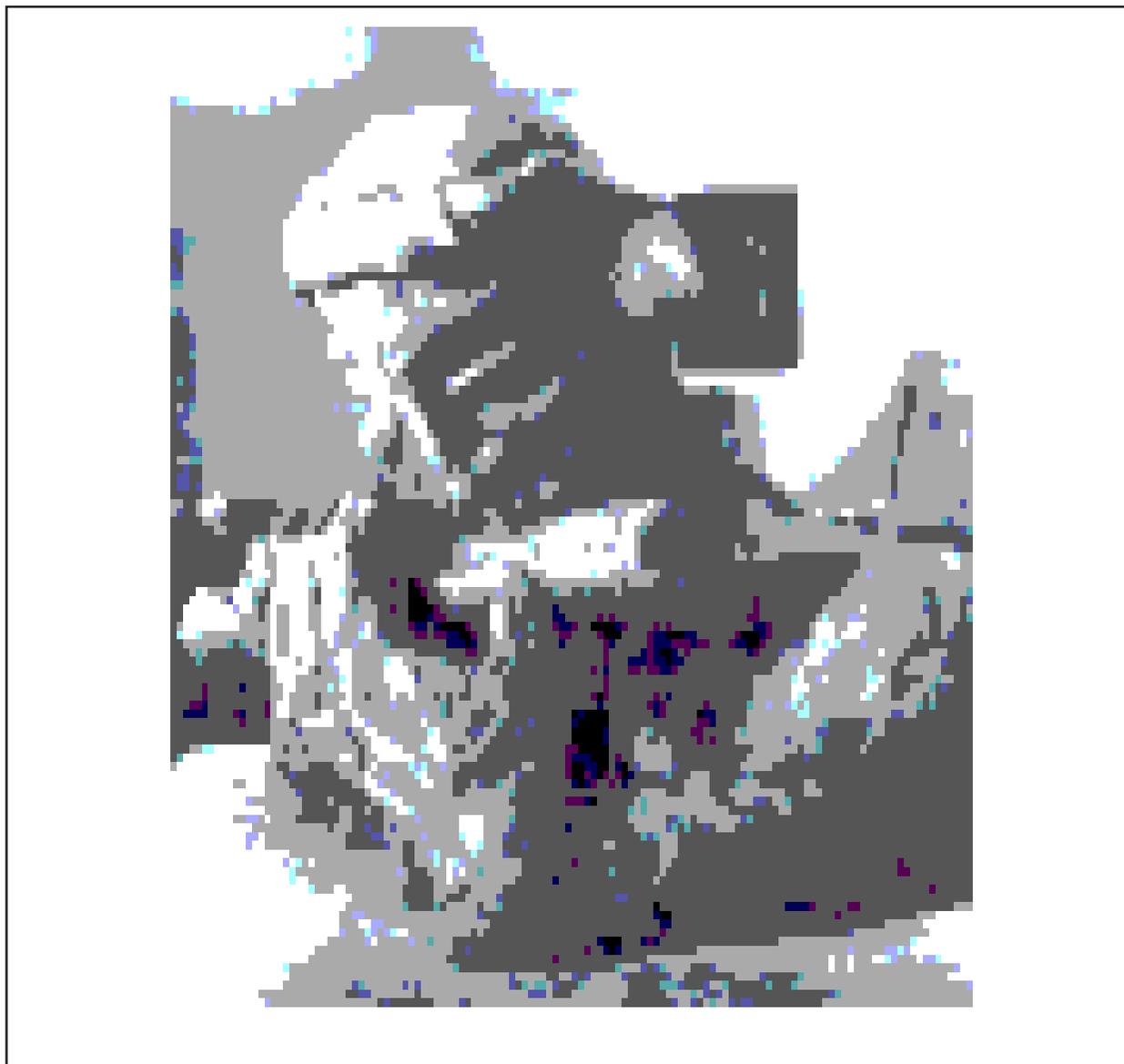


A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sukhdev Khastgir". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

24 September 1907 - 27 May 1974



SUDHIR KHASTGIR

MYSELF

and Other Writings

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Myself and Other Writings

This book was first published as a part of the programme
to commemorate the life and works of
Sudhir Khastgir on his birth centenary year.

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My Father

It's certainly the most difficult task to write about somebody so dear. I don't know whether I can explain properly or not in words which sum up my memories mixed with my experience and realisation. My father was a very introvert type of person by nature. Neither deep emotion nor cheerfulness of his mind were ever expressed. Only anger used to spilt out easily. It seems that his personal losses, sorrows or pains have merged with the rhythms of life, with the touch of the infinite through paintings and sculptures.

It is specially to be noticed the sense of speed and rhythm in his paintings. My father was not used to draw such paintings which are popularly known as *people's art*. In his autobiography in Bengali, he had written about taking his students to witness the famine of Medinipur. A number of sketches drawn at that time were published in different magazines.

Most of which convey the sufferings of the starvation stricken people, as he saw it. He must not have tried to express his realisation through his entire work only by painting the grief and disaster of life but where happiness and sorrow merge into each other, where this mortal life can identify itself with the rhythm of the entire world. Perhaps he had succeeded also in this regard. Though his paintings didn't impress the renowned art galleries and art critics, they had influenced the common people rather. For example, recently I saw so many paintings in different places at the Anandaban Leprosy Hospital of Baba Amte, most of which belonged to my father. Sri Abinash Sathe works in that hospital. He was infected with the dreaded disease and after his recuperation he contemplated to give something to the Ashram. I had this strong confidence in him when I saw his emotional expression of realisation in front of those paintings. May be I would have thought these things. But I was compelled to do this after hearing some derogatory comments by some of my progressive painter friends on some paintings of dancing by my father. I should confess that I am also grateful to them.

I remember my father mostly as a teacher. He used to say that his studies in Kala Bhawan was

not only to be an artist but his main goal was to be a teacher. He had complete faith in the ideologies of Rabindranath and his *Guru* Nandalal Bose which helped him to fight against all adversities in his life. He had no doubt that Santiniketan was not only for the alternative education but an exercise and way of alternative life as well. My father distinctly informed me that Aryanayakanji, Ashadevi, Debiprasadji etc who were the pioneers of the basic education of Gandhiji, came and stayed at Santiniketan. Once I was rebuffed by him when he heard that I had got a chance of 'Montessori' training which came in my way. He was too disheartened when he felt that I was interested in other degree without utilising and honouring what I have got from Kala Bhawan.

He had firm ideas about war and armaments. He didn't like to keep social contact with arm dealers or persons whose livelihoods were depended on war. He believed that affinity with those superfluous and wealthy lifestyle at a young age could destroy the sense of differentiating between good and evil and that it was a crime to earn money by unfair means. It is perhaps for this reason he used to visit fewer homes, though he remained to be a perfect host for all sorts of people. His logic was that people used to come to see his paintings, not

only to see him. It was against his nature to socialise with people just for the sake of passing time. Perhaps for this only he could have done such huge volume of works.

He was too astonished when I went abroad. Today I realise that my way of life at that time had pained him so much. I had got my lesson from my father how to be a human being by art education, to visualise nature and realise that we are a part of nature. Of course, my father had received this teaching from his *Guru* Acharya Nandalal Bose. Throughout my life I saw him as a preoccupied person. But it is hard to believe as he became so reclusive after the floods at Lucknow which devastated his mind and physique and after he was inflicted with Parkinson's disease. It was very painful for him to see that after my marriage I was enjoying my life abroad like other people, ignoring my own conscience, and that I was not doing the right thing. We even argued with each other about this the day before his demise on 27 May 1974 after suffering from a two days fever. His opinion was that if I wanted to make my son Ananda a good human being then he should learn at Santiniketan in India. He had keen disrespect for the western education, specially the social environment of North America. When I reminisce in different conditions



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after his death I find that he must have accepted self-death to awaken me. He had tried to say so many things through many small events and works. Isn't it to reminisce their ideology and way of life that he had painted and sculpted so many portraits and figures of Gandhiji and Rabindranath?

This is the year of my father's birth centenary. He was born in the year 1907, on 24 September. This collection of autobiographical writings by my father alongwith the photographs of some of his paintings and sculptures is going to be published as a part of the programme commemorating his life and works on his birth centenary. It is not possible to supply every detail of the works presented, the

fact I regret. *Monfakira* has taken all the responsibilities to bring out the book. Sri Rakesh Sahani has contributed a lot. Some of the articles written long ago could never have been retrieved without his cooperation. The bibliography also has been compiled by him. This reminiscence was originally written as an introduction to his autobiography in Bengali, a part of that has been translated by Chitrabhanu Chakraborty for this volume. I acknowledge the efforts of all other concerned persons who have contributed immensely to bring out this book.

Shyamali Khastgir
Palash, Santiniketan,
September 2007