

Abstract

The Discourse of Resistance in Hemendranath Mazumdar's Paintings, Critical Essays, and Poetry (1919-1948)

In my thesis I have attempted to examine Hemendranath Mazumdar's consistent discourse of resistance against the dominant ideology of 'Indianness' propagated by Abanindranath Tagore and the other neo-Bengal School painters: I have explored in detail how this discourse is framed by closely studying his art, and also his writing— both his poetry and critical essays. In almost everything that he had written or painted (apart from some of his poems), there had always been this underpinning of resistance against this monologic entitlement of 'Indianness'. Mazumdar was principally concerned about pointing out how this particular category was both illogical and ahistorical. In most of his paintings women are seen, instead of the customary objects of desire, as desiring subjects, exploring their own sexuality. In case of his wet-saree paintings (the *Siktabasana* series) the familiar reality is rewritten, with hints of a deeper dimension, privileging the viewers thus with a glance at not only what is hidden by clothes, but also by the veneer of social identity, mores of respectability and reserve. I have also examined how, in contrast to the Bengal School landscapes, Mazumdar's intent of place-making is clear and unwavering. His landscapes, to a considerable extent, engage in the art of 'place-making'—encoding markers relating to the identity of a particular region, both the topographically real and the perceived. In his poems as well I could trace a clear opposition to the contemporary political and cultural climate, be it the patriotism-themed poems, devotional poems, or poems the main focus of which are women, even transgressing women. There is, almost always, an oppositional selfhood that the poet erects within the space of poetry: be it the indignation at the state of a subjugated, bereft motherland, or trying to correct the misconceptions of people about the true value of art, or even scathing criticism directed at iniquity in social transactions, and social hypocrisy as well. In a sense he was opposed to all schools of thought that contradicted dialogism in art; one could say that his opposition, under the garb of being directed at the shortcomings of the Bengal school, was really against all kinds of impositions upon the free expression of art, and the artist's right, too, to choose his own way.

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