

# Rabindranath Tagore's Paintings: A Grotesque Outlook

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**Abstract:** *This paper highlights the Rabindranath Tagore's works on various dimensions of grotesque perception and tries to develop the several stages of his life hurdles: his philosophical and psychological approaches in his drawings that can be easily understand. An appropriately understood of Rabindranath artworks, which represented a mystical stance to the people and an outlook of grotesque connection. He was familiar from the world and perceives a unique gratification by Indian culture and nature, grotesque is the main aspect of his works, though it is not easy to describe inappropriately in language because of only an eerie simplification of enormous varieties and qualities of the multi-dimensional world into a linear pattern like mystical, hybrids, exaggerating, doodling, sarcastic caricaturing, frightening, and absurd. In that case, I am trying to convey the ideas and concepts of his art works; we found a hazard of getting into confusion and conflict. So there is a limitation of the language for the writer in its description and judgment, particularly when it deals with paintings and visual aspects.*

**Keynotes:** *Rabindranath's grotesque, doodling, painting and psychology.*

## INTRODUCTION

It would be difficult to exaggerate the word grotesque in the significance of Indian art representation. The word grotesque originated in 15<sup>th</sup> century in Rome first can be seen in the Domus Aurea, a Nero's Imperial Palace. In this palace we find strange figures of various grotesque elements like distorted, weird and unnatural figures in shape or size; abnormal, ludicrous and hideous representations.<sup>i</sup> The grotesque images of such heroic figures as that of Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali poet, dramatist and musical composer: for nations in proportion as their poetry, painting and music are destroyed or flourish. Rabindranath Tagore's paintings have seen in the essence of Indian sentiment and forms, but it may be objected that there is a hybrid art; it is at the same time modern.<sup>ii</sup> His many sided genius and his almost missionary zeal to the development of Indian arts, whether it be dancing or music or painting or the handicrafts, his appreciation of the indigenous folk arts and his fostering of both the classical and the folk traditions in his School at Shantiniketan provided a stimulus and a prestige to these arts which has enabled them to survive and to flower.

Rabindranath Tagore is a unique case to be distinguished; his works are classified into five different elements of the grotesque that has masterfully appeared in his paintings.<sup>iii</sup>

- 1- Frightened Face and absurdity in head with luminous eyes done in a shorthand manner. (Fig-1)
- 2- Dramatic Landscape and Still life (Fig-2)
- 3- Mystic Drawing is a main component of bewildering cornucopia of his imagination. (Fig-3)
- 4- A menagerie of beast, turn into grotesque, like a caricature flabby, lugubrious and a mystical combination of real and unreal. (Fig-4)
- 5- Nude images are extraordinary appearance in their blunt eroticism. (Fig-5)

In the beginning of Rabindranath Tagore art can be traced grotesque to the doodles and eager deletions. He made it, while he was writing verse, he had beautiful calligraphic erasures, embellished rhythmic that made a distinct origin of his anthropoid form. But only in his later mature, he arranged his lines and drawing on a page in an unconscious pattern. Often he crosses out lines or words not required and joined these together in a strange way. These figurations did not represent anything, but they soon came to have caricature, animated, textures and other qualities of art make in a little detail of eyes, beaks, tails that related them to life.

In his writings on art Tagore talks of the principle of rhythm as being that which gave his work's significance. He also opposes the need for representation.... Lines and colors in art are no carriers of information; they seek their rhythmic incarnation in pictures. Their ultimate purpose is not to illustrate or to copy of other facts or inner vision, but it is above all meaning. The poet here enunciates a theory of art which was certainly not known among his Indian contemporaries; he is linked to such European painters as Klee and Kandinsky. His work, however, continues to be connected to writing, first by his predilection for lines and again by these rhythmic forms and in the late stage even by certain literalness. It is necessary to notice that the chief source of his art is unconsciousness. His forms seem to rise and appear from long buried distant memories. His hand is merely the instrument that records the scenes and creatures of those depths. Klee mentions the importance of this source. But chosen are those artists who penetrate to the region of that secret place, where primeval power nurtures all evolution.<sup>iv</sup>

Tagore's grotesque animals described the restrains of traditional social restrains and the struggle of their bodies. His strange portraits and animal depiction might be, it is a portrait of the British leaders, who want to change in India, but Rabindranath Tagore has loved the country and didn't want to change in their traditional style of living, and anti-British to against the westernization, unless he became frustrated by its inner strife. His attitude about art was different. He says that I do not know what I have done and what did I want to do? Perfect shape and form have not importance to him, but an expression of inner feeling, which he includes, is a major and a compulsory aspect of him. His aimless activity in painting created the senseless figures; even these figures were not to explain. An artist, who has no formal training of drawing and painting, accepted that people impress with my pictures but these are not impressive.<sup>v</sup>

*'People after asking me about the meaning of my pictures. I remain silent even as my pictures are it is for them to express and not to explain. They have nothing ulterior behind their own appearance for the thoughts to explore and words to describe and if that appearance carries its ultimate worth, then they remain, otherwise they are rejected and forgotten even though they may have some scientific truth or ethical justification.'*<sup>vi</sup>

In 11 July 1939, Rabindranath Tagore said, *'I make pictures as my fancy pleases. Paper and pigments are before my spirits willing. So, his presto! The mind has its play with, brush and paints. That is how my pictures are made'. When I draw a nice picture, that is when other people call it a 'Beauty', I forthwith manage to spoil it. I spill ink on it or scratch haphazard lines after it is thoroughly spoilt, I start salvaging it until it assumes some other aspect.' In my creativity my psychological thought has no part to play on canvas or not try to paint deliberately. But most after, my doodles drawing can be assume some mystical form.'*<sup>vii</sup>

A Bengali art critic, Prithwish Neogy has stated that in a striking words that his art contains: *"...unfurling animated ribbons, composite flower-birds, nameless archaic beastliness, ambiguous sardonic imps, contorting primitive reptiles, proliferating monster-vessels, oddly sensuous nudes on extravagant furniture, improbable protagonists in a mysterious melodrama, distraught angular pilgrims on an unknown quest eternal, romantic dream houses, illustrations to lost stories, lovers, silhouetted incandescent evening landscapes, murderous enactments, peaceful promenades, familiar types, characters and portraits, masks of sarcasm, masks of terror, sentimental pubescent girls, heads of power and glory, delicate oval moon-faces with silent lips and eyes to transfix, all freshly formed, rampant, iridescent."*<sup>viii</sup> Would you call such one an artist? You are flatterers one and all of you look at this now-just a number of faces. Some with mustaches, some clean-shaven, some twisted out of shape; some grotesque –in the sense of unreal fear-isn't this sheer nonsense!<sup>ix</sup>

Rabindranath say that there is no connection between his work as a poet and his work as a painter. As a poet, he has before his eyes a vision which he describes, or as he calls it, mental representation. He sees a landscape, a golden or a face; he imitates, as a painter imitates, this model impressed upon his mind. His verses communicate images seen or created. On the contrary, when he becomes a painter (and this is the strongest part of the story), exactly at the point at which others begin to copy, he ceases to copy. *His doodling images were not stand for a scheme of pre-conceived that was in his mind. So far from seeing them beforehand, he actually does not know, while he is doing them, what they are going to be, he nearly in the realm of somnambulist way.*<sup>x</sup> So, in producing his poetry, he worked as a painter, now that he is a painter. Works like a poet. The whole of this new work is on the borderline of two sciences or two arts.

It was the period of the Renaissance in Bengal. Including the tenants of East and West of Art, many painters were experimenting for a new art. Rabindranath, who was pensive for Indian cultural movement, was generally strait drawing and painting in 1925. His fantasy and mediums of picture were different. By personal technique, he produced many pictures and perceived that expression of rhythm was only real facts for painting. Some time, the method and the technique of Tagore were new experiments in which he did not clear the form of figures and used rough colors, called modern. Having wherever, blank space, lack of finishing, spots of ink, linings of pen, pencil and crayon, his painting called Childish.

The lack of formal training and painterly skills eventually had a great advantage for Rabindtanath. There was no problem for him of conscious ridding himself of conventional mannerism or realistic chiaroscuro. There was also no question of picking up styles, of weighing one style with another. Rather, he discovered the techniques and media through the course of his years of painterly activity and the practice gave him control over them so that the initial handicap of technical skill became actually an advantage. In this he was guided by his instinct and the force of his creative intuition which was truly avionic. Watching his growth is fascinating indeed. It is only out of inhibitions that some of the critics call to him a child-artist. Croce says that every intuition is also expressed at least appears true with regard to Rabindranath. Famous art critic Archer said that Tagore's pictures were related to abstraction and were modern as well as influenced by Paul Klee. He exempted, was influenced with his contemporary Picasso, Dali, Van-Gogh, gauging etc. Even though he had not seen much pictures of these European painters. It is also assumptive that his pictures are influenced by primitive-art, folk art and child-art.

Well known fact for the critics is that Tagores painting have not pre-conception similar with child art. He expressed about his pictures that my picture is to express not for explaining as a child does. Similarly a child can produce a picture by rubbing the pencil or colors on the paper-sheet, but he has lack of explaining that. A child has no possible intellect and awareness about the world while Tagore had thousands memories in his mind. He produced figures more purely clearly rather than a child. Mulkraj Anand said about his childish work: if the comparison with the impulses of a child painter be significant, to any extent, the paintings of Rabindranath Tagore may be called sophisticated child art, much more accurately than the work of the many advanced artists who have surrendered themselves to the methods of child art.

It is said that Rabindranath's work of painting belongs to child workers. As if you give a pen or pencil and sketch- pad to a child, he will throw away or rub the pencil on the sketch pad and produce any shape or form without any consciousness. This production will define child art. While Rabindranath also has not pre-idea about his pictures, methods and basic knowledge of drawing and paintings have developed, and it is enough to him that colors, pen, pencil which he uses, creates a painting.

An example of his twelve doodling series of drawing used in twelve different colors, he depicted himself in a transmogrified bearded face that looked like a monster, which was an strange comprehend, no one can noticed his mercurial complexity and myriad psychology. At the same time he made duality of birth and death together, he made beauty and ugly which accompaniment to each other and pleasure and sorrow together make a life complete.<sup>xi</sup> He clears that his pictures are of a mad man. He does not know what he creates. He says that whenever, he will appeal to create something, he gathers some materials, uses and produces something. Tagore's work has often been explained by giving the analogy of child art. Through this point will be discussed again later, it may be noted here that a careful analysis of Tagore's evolution will reveal that Mulk Raj Anand's theory characterizing it is from 'scribble to expression' parallel to as happens in child art, does not quite fit in with the actual course of his development as a painter. Tagore beings out imaged while scrabbling, the doodlers also delineate at the same time, whereas the child has to grow to be able to pass from the scribbling stage to image making stage.' That kind of growth does not take place in Tagore.

The scope of his art is therefore very wide though some themes recur as constant motifs. Among these should be mentioned the faces of women often enfolded in the simple hooded sheath of a sari they seem not types, but individuals, their presence haunts us, they are given dignity but are always alone with brooding eyes and quit unsmiling lips. The faces of men are more varied; some are grotesque marks, other arrangements of pure pattern. Other themes are landscapes with a predilection for the somber and moody. His trees are shaggy or tossed and the

paintings with their dark foreground and light sky seem to be lit from within. Another subject is his fantastic animals and birds. These are stylized into motifs and are creatures of an entirely imaginary world.

Because of no proper preparation he didn't developed his style, but his artistic adventure began with doodles and doodling with dexterity that twisted strife off typography and lines into a representations, which take for granted expressively strange and sometimes grotesque forms.<sup>xii</sup> His masks looked in distorted charcoal drawing or thin washes, that all are unlike his other works, but some of them are grotesquely appeared and other may have been influenced by the similar head studies by Rabindranath Tagore. But the self portrait, unflattering, a trifle wistful but not unreconciled, reveals introspective psychological unsightly and impresses with its suggestion of quiet, grave brooding.<sup>xiii</sup>

He seemed to start work without preconceptions, allowing the forms to materialize and then emphasizing or dramatizing their shapes with lines. There is a motif consciousness and a decorative sense which plays their part, but is unable to subdue the inner life which animates the pictures. Tagore's art is important in announcing a new freedom to the artist. Perhaps the poet was able to abandon all formal limitations because he was not a professional painter. The steps taken by Klee and Kandinsky are echoed unconsciously in his work. His unrestrained creations gave painting a new autonomy.<sup>xiv</sup> It is strange that he had no immediate followers; the artists of his time may have believed it was only he who could claim such liberty, being already accepted as a great poet; perhaps they did not have the taste to accept the style, the vision to foresee its possibilities. The poets work he painted a very large number of pictures, is very miscellaneous; but it focused attention on a hitherto unexplored aspects of art, especially the unconscious.

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- <sup>ix</sup>) *Ibid.* Roy, Kshitish. p. 48
- <sup>x</sup>) [www.indranathchoudhuri.com/.../Paintings%20of%20Tagore%20and%20his%20Noti](http://www.indranathchoudhuri.com/.../Paintings%20of%20Tagore%20and%20his%20Noti)
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- <sup>xiv</sup>) Appasamy, Jaya. *'Abanindranath Tagore and the Art of his Time'* pub: New Delhi, Lalit Kala Academy, 1968, p. 92.

## APPENDIX



Figure-1, Face, Ink on paper, 30 x 46.3 cms, (Acc. No.1282), National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Source: [http://indiapicks.com/Indianart/Main/R\\_Tagore\\_Gallery.htm](http://indiapicks.com/Indianart/Main/R_Tagore_Gallery.htm)



Figure-2, Landscape, 240 x h167 cm, Pastel on paper, 1935, National Gallery Modern Art, National Gallery of Modern Art, Source: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&ved=2ahUKewia8v-m7cXbAhWPfn0KHew0DBMQjxx6BAgBEAI&url=https%3A%2F%2Fartsandculture.google.com%2Fasset%2Flandscape%2FwxHzeL3rUYL7GA&psig=AOvVaw0xMXeusEmATvzhnNGgPmpz&ust=1528606012672021>

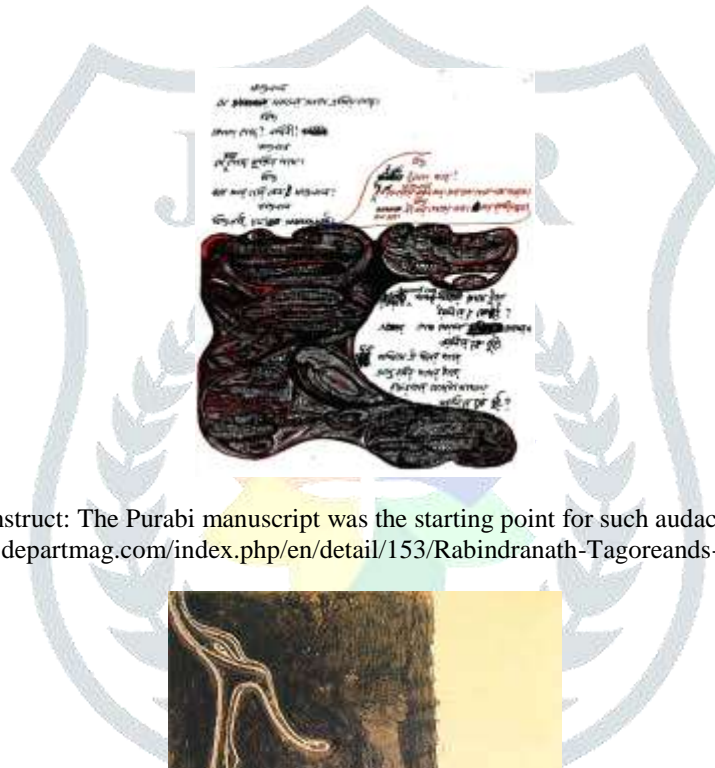


Figure-3, Beasty construct: The Purabi manuscript was the starting point for such audacious imagery. Source: <http://www.departmag.com/index.php/en/detail/153/Rabindranath-Tagoreands-Manuscripts>



Figure-4, Bird Fantastic, Ink on paper, 16.9 x 22.2 cms, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Source: [http://indiapicks.com/Indianart/Main/R\\_Tagore\\_Gallery.htm](http://indiapicks.com/Indianart/Main/R_Tagore_Gallery.htm)



Figure-5, Nudity surfaces in its primal characteristics. Source: <http://www.departmag.com/index.php/en/detail/151/Paintings-of-Rabindranath-Tagore>

