Pan-Asianism and East-West Politics in the Bengal School of Art

by Dr. Debasish Banerji
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Home of Matra & Raj Mashruwala – 450 Melville Avenue, Palo Alto, CA
Free Admission; Limited seating; Refreshments will be served
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The Bengal School of Art was founded by Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) and his students at the start of the 20th century in Calcutta. Its early expression emerged in the British administered institution of the Govt. Art College, Calcutta (now Kolkata). The Govt. School trained its artists in western style techniques. In contrast, the Bengal School artists drew on a distinct “Indianness”, as they merged with the cultural politics of the Bengal renaissance and the nationalist ‘Swadeshi’ movement.

What is often overlooked is its strong investment in the continental solidarity of a Pan Asianism, seen as a cultural response to colonial expansion. This talk will look at the themes, methods and ideas of some of the principal artists of the Bengal School in examining this inclusive and dialogic dimension of their nationalism.

Debashish Banerji earned his PhD in Art History from UCLA. His thesis centered on art and nationalism as seen through the life and work of Abanindranath Tagore, founder of the Bengal School of Art. He has authored a book based on his dissertation, titled “The Alternate nation of Abanindranath Tagore.” Banerji lives in the Bay Area and is presently the Haridas Chaudhuri Professor of Indian Philosophies and Cultures, Doshi Professor of Asian Art and Chair, East-West Psychology, the CIIS, San Francisco (www.ciis.edu).