

## SOMNATH HORE: ANXIETY IN EXPRESSION

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### ABSTRACT

Somnath Hore, the name is synonym with Famine, war, wounds and poverty. In various stages of his creative journey and on various medium his expression of art reflects one subject matter that speaks of hungry, rejected and helpless people around him. The inhumanity and devastation of war, the horror of the communal riots of 1946 and the wounds of 50's famine (Bengal Famine of 1943, popularly known as Fifty's famine as the Bengali calendar of 1350) quite unbeknownst all these were inscribed themselves into his work. His heart remains about the memories of wounds that would not heal. With deep observation and understanding he inputs the desired emotional reaction in his works that rise above the subjectivity. It is visible that his work connects him to the thoughts and feelings of his surroundings; and that sensitivity reflects on each medium and materials with desire emotion across his artistic journey. This paper looks at the artistic journey of Somnath Hore and various events on his lifelong experiences that shaped his creative endeavours.

Keywords: Famine, Wounds, Anxiety, observation, sensitivity.

### INTRODUCTION

To evaluate the artistic expression of Somnath Hore we need to trace back to his life journey and various events and experiences he had been come across; that part of his life deeply fused with his artistic life. Somnath Hore's first artistic engagement at initial days with hand written poster for the then banned communist party of India. Those posters were black and white done by ink and brush that was neat and legible, which impressed the senior leaders of the party. They encouraged him to making poster for the party and he used to do it as less concern with the political intricacies. Hore came to then Calcutta for studies but because of turmoil of the time, he had to leave Calcutta during war time around 1941 and took shelter in the village joining with other friends, who were active worker of the communist party. Hore was then making posters for the party, incidentally during this time he mate the communist painter ChittaPrasad Bhattacharya. With him, Hore travelled various places for visual documentation of harsh reality of famine and war. Those places were hospitals, Roads etc, where Chittaprasad demonstrated him with ink on paper and how to portray the ill, starving and famine affected people. Those drawings, they used to exhibit in the villages that involved him in a new movement. <sup>1</sup>

As his paintings were good and legible some of his paintings were published in 'people's war' (the then famous communist magazine). Meanwhile the state committee sent him to Calcutta and helped him to get admission in the Government college of Art for formal training. At college he had the opportunity to study under the guidance of legendary artist Zainul Abedin and also had the opportunity to meet many well-known contemporary literary and artistic figures. This time Somnath was deeply influenced by the various socialist leaders and personalities. As he stated "I used to find one of Mao Zedong's comments very meaningful: 'During wartime concentrate all your efforts on the anti imperialist (Japanese) struggle. Let fine art be reserved for peacetime'."<sup>2</sup>

The German Wood-cut printmaker Kathe Kollwitz's technique inspired Somnath a lot. Somnath later converted many of his sketches into wood cut prints from his Tebhaga Diary

1 My concept of Art – Somnath Hore.

2 My Concept of Art, P-13.

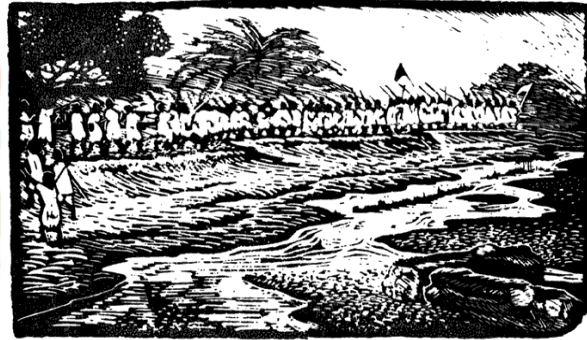
of 1964. At this time many viewers had taken notice of his works such as wood-cut prints, subject as teacher's movement, communal harmony, the tea garden worker's movement etc.



*Night meeting, from Tebhaga Diary, Wood Engraving.*



*At the Night meeting, From Tebhaga Diary, Wood Engraving.*



*A procession bound for Satibari in protest against Jotedar Tyranny, From Tebhaga Diary, Wood Engraving.*

He was fortunate to be affectionate by several great artists, before joining the art college it was Chittaprasad, at art college Jainul Abedin and in Santiniketan the artists like Binodebehari Mukherjee and Ramkinkar Baj and ofcourse friends like Dinkar Kausik and K. G. Subramanyan. Improving the humanistic and cultural sensibility; in this context Somnath Hore's appearances is like comet, who wanted to knock into human mind to arise a different aesthetics of humanistic sensibility.

Art and society is very much interconnected, Art cannot be just for luxury, and sensitive people cannot remain silent in social disorder. Somnath Hore travelled across the Bengal and feels the reality, the condition of peasant, misery of poor people and understood the necessity of portraying social realism as in his believe art is not just the elements to decorate house it has greater responsibility towards humanity; and to create significant work of art one has to enter into the problem, showing hope and ability of renunciation. Creative people are the mirror of society; they display the bitter truth to us, judge the good and bad in it and protest against evil. An artist who doesn't bound himself in any rituals and lit the light of hope even in the extreme darkness; as his greater goal in life is to wellbeing of humanity.

### **WOUNDS**

According to him, his creative works are what connects him to his thoughts and feelings that evolved from the happening surroundings, the inhumanity and devastation of war, Tebhaga movement, the horror of the communal riots of 1946 and the wounds of 1950s man made famine, quite unbeknownst all these were inscribed themselves into his works. In his works there are innumerable cuts and burns marks; When he chiselled the wood for woodcuts, burn marks on wax sheet or marked on the metal with acid, all these innumerable cuts and marks which receded into the memory of past that left enormous impression of 'WOUNDS'

that of moral of deep sense; which intimations of only one subject matter that speaks of the hungry, rejected and helpless people around us; his heart remains about the wound that would not heal. Those experiences of suffering set a missionary focus of his art that reflects through various medium which he had chosen like (wood, paper pulp, and of wax plate). With the deep contemplation and understanding of aesthetic he inputs the desired emotional reactions in his work of art that transcend the subjectivity and heightened the sentiment to delineate the emotional theme. His work reflects the greater emotion from heart that shows us the images of pain, wound and death and expected to be compassionate to mankind.

### CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Suffering is more real and visible in his experience and thus suffering iterates through various mediums and genres. Interestingly his work on each medium goes beyond the conventional bounds. And In each mediums he releases his experiences of past and discover himself as an artist all over again. The medium he took each time and the expressive outcome has their antecedents in its own way. Somnath Hore's experience, engagement, observation and internalisation of events implies obsessive thematic continuity that relives through memory, thus he did not have to discover his visual language, to him that aesthetic and sensibility evolved spontaneously within the process. His dialogue making through art is the perfect symbiosis of his personal innovative techniques which he used for various mediums and the making of a language that communicates in a sensuous way.

### PAPER PULP PRINT



*Wounds-54-variation-proof pulp-print, 38.1-x-42.55cms, 1983.      Untitled (Wound Series) Cast on handmade Paper, 1972.*

His 'white on white' Paper pulp works began in 1969 poses a common ground of sculpture and printmaking. These are the immediate perception of 'WOUNDS' resembles to the injuries on the human body. Somnath Hore used handmade paper and its surface has its own degree of tension, the material quality resultant the intensity of biogenic feelings that poses very sensitive feelings of wounds that seems visual explication of inflected suffering; though at immediate perception these works are abstract. The medium itself is his own discovery; that represents the wounds of human skin and suits the sensitivity of his works.

### SCULPTURE

In Sculpture, their bodies are recognizable through all its distortion form, and their rendering judge by our experience is very much descriptive. In each medium, his work goes beyond the conventional bounds. In sculpture, he introduced the notion away of mass and volume which has its own expressive aura. His sculptures have a special kind of characteristic that is experiential realism.

VIETNAM (Mother and child): It is one of his largest remarkable sculptures in bronze; a mother and child figure, mother holds her child against her battered chest, the child is looking upward at his mother and the mother's head held high is holding the child in a sense of confident; symbolizing Vietnam a country that resisted an unequal enemy triumphantly. The struggled between unequal enemy exhibits only brutality, such incidents troubles



Somnath deeply; that echoed constantly in his works. And this sculpture is not a symbol of victory but human's natural assertion of resilience and dignity. The creation, though it is silent and lonely but the message is immense powerful, poses a sense of iconic poignancy and an image of tragic grandeur.

### CONCLUSION

In Somnath's Understanding politics are personal idea and understanding of individual and artist can create works motivated by them. He himself was highly influenced by politics and his early works have political undertone but in his later works he puts forms and relation above the political overtones as his believe of great art, that outlives its historical moment. His artworks too live beyond its historical moment.

Art and society always remain connected together, it is artist's responsibility to influence and inspire society towards positive life force. But In contemporary art practice artists find their place within four walls detached from the society; personal emotion and expression become important, artists are more concern for money and gallery-space; they are finding there their shelter in hard-shell. In this time Somnath is among few odd, he is different in art; it is his greater emotion from heart for common people that is respectful. His early life journey and visualization of ground reality of rural Bengal became the leitmotif of his understanding to portray social realism and his works leave no room for romantic excesses. In his life long journey Somnath Hore's artistic leaning went through various mediums and personal technology of making. He developed rare kinds of visual language of communication that speaks of human suffering; those engraved in his consciousness. His work contains gracefulness along with poignancy and the expression of suffering in varying degree; symbolizing universal human affliction and of larger social malaise. His subjects stand at a point to understand the rudiments of human suffering and his works live in a tension between the ideal and real.

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