

**The Journey in My Head:
Cosmopolitanism and
Indian Male Self-Portraiture in
20th Century India –
Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Bhupen Khakhar, Raghbir Singh**

Shanay Jhaveri

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Abstract

Between 1890 and 1948, Umrao Singh Sher-Gil (1870–1954) a philosopher, Sanskritist, Persianist and father of India's greatest modernist painter Amrita Sher-Gil, produced a remarkable body of photographic self-portraits. The photographs, usually very small were always of himself in aristocratic-bourgeois settings, which ranged from Paris, Budapest, Simla and Lahore. These images prove to be the starting point for my own research into self-portraiture and a re-appraisal of the term 'cosmopolitanism'. Central to my re-figuring of 'cosmopolitanism' is a refutation of the Kantian ideal of the self-identical, self-sufficient, immune and transcendental subject. I intend to map out how the term has been re-claimed and recalibrated by myriad postcolonial academics and scholars in contemporary critical and cultural theory. My own participation in the on-going re-evaluation of 'cosmopolitanism' is done through the detailed study of the lives and works of my three case studies: Sher-Gil, the painter Bhupen Khakhar (1934-2003), and photographer Raghubir Singh (1942–1999). In my discussion of their respective oeuvres, place and location are foregrounded, taking into account physical movement, but more crucially modes of affiliation and belonging.

In my research, a rethinking of 'cosmopolitanism' rests on the assertion that a 'cosmopolitan self' evolves from correspondences between disparate parties and places. Community, friendship, networks of affiliation and interpersonal exchange are critical to study and acknowledge. The other fundamental concern of this thesis is an emphasis on emotion, and emotional connections to spaces. Geography *can* and *should* be read as being populated by emotions, and the narratives of lives can be told through the emotional connections to certain places and spaces.

With this research I do not wish to establish a definition or a model of a South Asian cosmopolitan or cosmopolitanism, which is a dangerous and limiting gesture. With the aid of Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh I hope to make apparent that for a cosmopolitan sensibility to be formed, physical travel, affluence, and privilege are not necessities. Neither is relinquishing an attachment to place or, inversely, claiming multiple attachments to places, but rather advocating for a recognition of the connection between space and emotion, and how the affects produced from these lived conditions and experiences are manifested, materialised and should be appreciated. Another aspect of this research project is an engagement with a mode of heuristic inquiry, where there is an emphasis on the researcher's internal frame of reference, the researchers present. Thus, the temporal frame of the thesis produced by my selection of case studies, spans from India's transition as a colony to an independent nation, but continuing on consciously to my own locatedness, at a moment when it is emerging as a global capitalist power led by a Hindu nationalist government. All of which prompts a continued consideration of the tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. It begs the question, how has and can one continue to arbitrate between local attachments and the world at large?

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It is fitting that a thesis, intent and invested in mapping personal, emotional cartographies, has been written between two cities, two homes, two libraries, two beds, sometimes in airport lounges, and other times in mid-air.

The players, who supported and ensured its completion, span this geography of movements, and some more. Recounting my time with each of them, I am reminded of all the ground that has been covered - literally, ideologically, metaphorically, psychologically – a journey at times enlivening, and others more despairing and dispiriting.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my supervisor Ros Gray for sticking it out with me, being gently encouraging, and emboldening me to be more ambitious in my thinking. The support and guidance Mark Nash has offered this project, not only in its initial free associative years, but also in the final stretch, has been indispensable.

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Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Shanay Jhaveri

July 2016

You want to travel? To travel you simply need to exist. In the train of my body or of my destiny I travel from day to day, as from station to station, leaning out to look at the streets and the squares, at gestures and faces, always the same and always different as, ultimately, is the way with all landscapes.

If I imagine something, I see it. What more would I do if I travelled? Only extreme feebleness of imagination can justify anyone needing to travel in order to feel.

‘Any road, this simple road to Entepfuhl, will take you to the end of the world.’ But the end of the world, once you’ve exhausted the world by going round it, is the same Entepfuhl from which you set out. In fact the end of the world, and its beginning, is merely our concept of the world. It is only within us that landscapes become landscapes. That’s why if I imagine them, I create them; if I create them, they exist; if they exist, I see them just as I do other landscapes. So why travel? In Madrid, in Berlin, in Persia, in China, at the North and South Poles, where would I be other than inside myself, feeling my particular kind of feelings?

Life is whatever we make it. The traveller is the journey. What we see is not what we see but who we are.

Fernando Pessoa¹

Boonmee:

What’s wrong with my eyes?
They are open, but I can’t see a thing. Or
are my eyes closed?

Huay:

Maybe you need time for your eyes to adjust to the dark.

Boonmee:

This cave, it’s like a womb, isn’t it?
I was born here in a life I can’t recall. I
only know that I was born here,
I don’t know if I was a human or an animal, a woman or a man. Last
night, I dreamt of the future.
I arrived there in a sort of a time machine.
The future city was ruled by an authority able to make anyone disappear.

¹ Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet* (Serpent’s Tail, 1991), pp. 75–76

When they found “past peoples” they shone a light at them.
That light projected images of them on to the screen from the past until their arrival in the future.
Once those images appeared these “past peoples” disappeared.
I was afraid of being captured by the authorities because I have many friends in the future.
I ran away, but wherever I ran they still found me. They asked me if I knew this road or that road.
I told them I didn’t know and then I disappeared.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*²

*Among the men and women, the multitude,
I perceive one picking me out by secret and divine signs, Acknowledging
none else – not parent, wife, husband, brother, child, any nearer than I
am;
Some are baffled – But that one is not – that one knows me.*

*Ah lover and perfect equal!
I meant that you should discover me so, by faint indirections; And I,
when I meet you, mean to discover you by the like in you.*

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*³

True enough, said Mrs. Copperfield, bringing her fist down on the table and looking very mean.

I have gone to pieces, which is a thing I’ve wanted to do for years. I know I am as guilty as I can be, but I have my happiness, which I guard like a wolf, and I have authority now and a certain amount of daring, which, if you remember correctly, I never had before.

Jane Bowles, *Two Serious Ladies*⁴

² See Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), 114 mins. ³ From the poem *Among the Multitude* by Walt Whitman (1819–92), first published in *Leaves of Grass*, eds., Richard Maurice Bucke, Thomas R. Harned & Horace L. Traubel (New York: Doubleday, 1902).

⁴ Jane Bowles, *Two Serious Ladies* (Ecco Press, 2014)

INTRODUCTION

From wherever he was in the world, and whether on his personal letterhead or on hotel stationery in Paris, New York or Moscow, the letters always began in the same way: “My Dearest Sarla” or “My Loving Sarla”.

My pedantic and literal translations do not convey the warmth evident in the original Gujarati. Perhaps they project the repeated salutations in terms of a clichéd grand affection. The letters were written by Ratilal Manilal Nanavati, my paternal great grandfather, as he crossed oceans and continents on business over four decades of the twentieth century, in and out of colonial times, to his wife Sarla, who stayed behind in Saroj Niwas, their Art Deco bungalow in Vile Parle on the outskirts of Bombay.

By 2008, however, Saroj Niwas sat firmly in the centre of greater Mumbai, and Baa, as I was brought up to address my great grandmother, had passed on, at the age of 99. As her suite was being cleared out, a box containing the aforementioned letters emerged from a locked mahogany cupboard. Meticulously penned in Gujarati – Baa did not know a word of English – their ordered nature clearly, I am told, represents Ratilal’s personality. He died 11 months before my birth.

Limited reading skills in Gujarati rendered the content mostly indecipherable and unavailable to me, the faded blue and black words transformed into abstract tapestries. It was the journeys, the various stops from which the letters were written and sent that were more easily transmitted to me through hotel stationery and stamped envelopes. Ratilal also wrote his autobiography, its title *Mara Jivan Smarno* embossed in gold on the red leather hard cover. The retelling of his own life is similarly unattainable for me, his remembrances locked away in another language, in a script that I cannot read. On each visit to Mumbai from London, I fret that I have not yet had it translated.

The closest I am able to get to him, physically, literally, is through a set of silk pyjamas that was found in a suitcase tucked under a bed in Saroj Niwas. The aged cream-coloured fabric is

somewhat stained, but I slip into the pyjamas and they fit. I notice a label on the shirt that states: 'Made in Occupied Japan'. Instantaneously, this simple little label places my great grandfather's travels within a larger historical narrative, the geopolitics of a fraught and divided world stitched into his pyjamas. What must it have been like to find himself travelling around the world for this gentleman, born in 1897 to a humble family in the small town of Vaso in Gujarat, educated in Baroda, staunchly vegetarian and with an abiding interest in Jainism? Besides his business interests, he was deeply committed to philanthropy, establishing the charitable Dr Balabhai Nanavati Hospital in Bombay, inaugurated in 1951 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. Ratilal also founded Sarla Sarjan, a model institute offering classes from Montessori to Arts and Commerce at junior-college level, as well as several non-academic courses.

The few exhumed artefacts bring Ratilal closer to me, and prompt me to consider my own familial legacy and what would be at stake in claiming and knowing this legacy. This recalled another biography, endlessly beguiling for me, and defined by the circulation of the person through many assorted spaces, generating a very personal and peculiar geography of experience.

Back in 1994, when I was in Standard IV at school, we were given an assignment to trace the life history of any one of our grandparents, keeping the division of the South Asian subcontinent as a backdrop, an exercise, it would seem, to personalise at some level the magnitude of the event. All my grandparents were then alive and I chose my paternal grandfather Shantilal Jhaveri. Born in 1922 to a Gujarati diamond-merchant family in Antwerp, he was immediately named Isadore by his Jewish nurse until his parents found a more appropriate name. Through the unfolding decades of the early twentieth century the class of Indian to which the family belonged were unknowingly living out their last days of privilege. Isadore meanwhile grew into Shantilal. Groomed at St Paul's, London, as an exemplary public-school boy, Shantilal was a meticulous mathematician and an agile fencer

with a fluency in Latin. Handsome and dapper, he summered in India and the South of France, traversing the distances first by ship, and then by aeroplane, making pit stops in Egypt and Palestine. With his crisp accent he participated wholly in the worldly rituals common to his rank, but the Indo-European world he inhabited ceased to be because of two cataclysmic events. First, World War II prevented his return to Europe from a sojourn in India, and so he completed his education in Bombay. India's independence from colonial rule followed in 1947. Shantilal changed professions by dismantling the family business based in Antwerp to set up instead a groundnut-oil extraction plant in Gujarat. He married Ratilal's daughter Saroj and they had two children – my father was born in 1955. In due course Shantilal became a devout follower of the philosopher J. Krishnamurti.

Extremely disciplined, with an almost inviolable routine that inclined to seclusion, Shantilal was living his 78th year as the new millennium began, its transmogrifications taking a firm hold of Mumbai and, indeed, India. When home in Mumbai I would dine with him almost every other evening at precisely 8:30 p.m., picking his still alert mind for memories, mostly commonplace. Governed by a desire to be moved by his recollections, I did not want them slipping or sliding away. There was pleasure in knowing the name of the cook specially deputed by his mother to travel from Antwerp to London for a week each month to alleviate the young Shantilal's hunger. Additionally, with the aid of family albums I get a feel of those days that he knew; they appear as passages "from a warehouse of living, shadows to the reality of a dead life".¹ But this process of recollection must not be pushed too hard. It is marked by pauses and trepidation because that which has faded away for him, but resonates in me, may not resonate with him in the same way. Certain subjects are not touched upon and perhaps it is better that they remain unknown to me.

Consequently, I found my imagination grappling with Ratilal's and Shantilal's histories, their biographies and their lives, aided by letters, the pyjamas, and my school project. Why was I so preoccupied by their lives? What is at stake in this dialoguing with the past? During

¹ Adam Zagajewski, *Another Beauty* (Farrar, Straus Giroux, 2000)

the process of this research referring to the writings of certain authors, both Indian and Western, has been helpful. Particularly persuasive and reassuring was the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh and his novel *In An Antique Land* (1992). Deftly weaving together fact, fiction, autobiography, history, anthropology, ethnology and the travel book, Ghosh's book provided a perfect reference point and ideal starting place to begin integrating ideas of personal biography with history. For Ghosh, an Oxford-trained anthropologist, history "is not notoriously about the past",² he believes that it firmly weighs down and has implications on the present. He continues: "One of the paradoxes of history is that it is impossible to draw a chart of the past without imagining a map of the present and the future."³ *In An Antique Land* it is the generic borderlines that Ghosh crosses that capture my imagination. Through the book he lays out the ethnographic fieldwork that he has undertaken in the Egyptian villages of Lataifa and Nashawy, leading onto research about the medieval trade routes of the Indian Ocean. Through his process of research, Ghosh tries to transcend temporal difference by connecting the medieval with the contemporary, with two narratives, one of his own personal experiences of living with Egyptian families and village communities in the 1980's, dovetailing with a historical attempt to trace and search out the identity of the 'slave of MSH.6'. The dialectics of *In An Antique Land* begin with medieval documents Ghosh is studying in the present day, letters that mention the slave of MSH.6. Reflecting back on these letters that make note of the slave, Ghosh writes with a curious fascination that in history, "those barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world happen to have been preserved. It is nothing less than a miracle that anything is known about them at all".⁴

Ghosh's own personal commentary is confined to a preface and an afterword, but chooses to give them the novelistic titles of 'Prologue' and 'Epilogue', distancing himself

² Amitav Ghosh, *The Imam and the Indian*, (Ravi Dayal Publishers, 2002), p. 102

³ *Ibid.*, p. 317

⁴ Amitav Ghosh, *In An Antique Land*, (Ravi Dayal Publishers, 1993), p. 17

from the scholarly, and making room for a personal imaginary. The Prologue concludes with the following few sentences, that explicitly bind Ghosh to his research:

...the next year, 1980, I was in Egypt, installed in a village called Lataifa, a couple of hours journey to the south-east of Alexandria. I knew nothing then about the Slave of of MSH.6 except that he had given me a right to be there, a sense of entitlement.⁵

Throughout *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh is simultaneously a narrator and a historian, who uncovers for his reader the forgotten histories of a medieval, cosmopolitan world that predates many discussions and definitions of cosmopolitanism. I admire Ghosh's endeavours to break down certain established categories and modes of inquiry, especially those of the anthropologist. Ghosh completely dismantles the self/other distanced posturing of anthropology, relinquishing any position of superiority of the observer, inserting his own personal limitations as both an individual and a researcher into the discussion and transforming it into a dialogue. The past is inflected through desire – personal, political, ethical.

The British ceramic artist Edmund de Waal's approach to his own familial inheritance in *The Hare with Amber Eyes* has been another encouraging and helpful book. De Waal had been an invited speaker during my first year at the Royal College of Art in 2009–2010. Attending his presentation, I was intrigued by how he had transformed a family inheritance into a creative project that eventually resulted in a book. I was inspired when I finally read his work in 2011:

How objects are handed on is all about story-telling. I am giving you this because I love you. Or because it was given to me. Because I bought it somewhere special. Because you will care for it. Because it will complicate your life. Because it will make someone else envious. There is no easy story in legacy. What is remembered and what is forgotten? There can be a chain of forgetting, the rubbing away of previous ownership as much as the slow accretion of stories.⁶

⁵ Ibid., p. 19

⁶ Edmund De Waal, 'Preface', *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance*, (Vintage, 2011), p.17

De Waal was meticulous in his work; uncovering and tracing the history of the 264 *netsuke* he had inherited; sketching out in precise detail the social and historical contingencies that delivered them from one owner's hand to another. I, on the other hand, am fixated on the itineraries followed by my two chosen ancestors, and how their movements differed. My own investigation of legacy is slightly different from that of De Waal, but I realise that Ratilal's and Shantilal's biographies contain not just a singular story, but are in fact complicated by many stories. A scattered set of impressions and details, randomly remembered, following no chronology, is all I have – since the written autobiographical account is unintelligible to me. I do not want to pen biographies that tend to totalise narratives, but neither can I abandon my legacy. I searched then for ways to connect Ratilal and Shantilal: to draw from their legacies and to discover the manner in which their distinct sensibilities formed in India and abroad.

However, being preoccupied with familial legacy is not enough and in returning to Ghosh I am reminded through his writings, not only of *An Antique Land* but also in *The Shadow Lines*, that the present shapes our perspective of the past. The looming catastrophe of Indian Hindu nationalism and the Iraq war significantly impacted how Ghosh is drawn to, and interprets, the historical moment of medieval cosmopolitanism ruminated on *In An Antique Land* and *The Shadow Lines*. The tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is something crucial to my thesis as well, and my attitude chimes with Ghosh's position, calling for a more complex understanding of the self in relation to the local and the world.

During the course of writing this thesis, circumstances in India changed, specifically with the election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister in May 2014, and my investigations into cosmopolitanism took on a charge and relevance that was unexpected. Over the year and a half that Modi has held office Hindu supremacists have become more visible and increasingly active, targeting certain groups of individuals and organizations. When Modi made a much-publicized visit to the UK in November 2015, Pankaj Mishra noted that,

Modi was a symptom, easily identified through his many European and Asian predecessors, of capitalism's periodic and inevitable dysfunction: he was plainly the opportune manipulator of mass disaffection with uneven and unstable growth, who distracts a fearful and atomised citizenry with the demonization of minorities, scapegoating of ostensibly liberal, cosmopolitan and 'rootless' people, and promises of 'development', while facilitating crony capitalism.⁷

The presence of a boorish anti-intellectualism and bellicose nationalism predates the arrival of Modi that Mishra elaborates on, but now under his leadership it has taken on a more brazen and more brutal dimension. This can be made no more apparent than through the massive protests that were staged in February 2016 at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) following the arrest of Kanhaiya Kumar, the president of the student union, on charges of sedition. Authorities arrested Kumar after a student faction linked to the BJP filed a police complaint that a demonstration that was held to mark the anniversary of the 2013 execution of Afzal Guru, a Kashmiri man convicted of an attack on India's parliament that left 10 people dead and was blamed on a Pakistan-based Islamic extremist group, was anti-Indian. The reaction of the authorities is commensurate with the growing atmosphere of intolerance that is being fostered under Modi's BJP government. The Home Minister, Rajnath Singh tweeted: "If anyone shouts anti-India slogan & challenges nation's sovereignty & integrity while living in India, they will not be tolerated or spared."

The government's actions are a clear indication that it will not tolerate any kind of dissent, setting up a divide between nationalism and liberalism. Romila Thapar in a public lecture weighed in on the JNU row, made the necessary point that efforts are being made to "obfuscate" the existing definition of nationalism, which is based on "reliable history" and not just on "anyone's fantasy about the past." She would continue to crucially elaborate that,

⁷ Pankaj Mishra, 'Narendra Modi: The Divisive Manipulator who Charmed the World', 9th November, 2015 available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/09/narendra-modi-the-divisive-manipulator-who-charmed-the-world>

By the late nineteenth century there was an established middle class in India, the colonial economy was tied into British capitalism, and much of the middle class, largely upper caste had emerged as professionals managing the administration of the colony and its colonial economy. The idea of nationalism began to emerge from this group, so once again it is a particular historical situation in modern times that leads to the emergence of nationalist ideas. At first the nationalists requested greater representation, then governance and then gradually as we all know it grew into a mass movement that finally ended with them saying that they demanded an independent nation that is the logical outcome of certain types of nationalism. Anti-colonial nationalism then comes to be established and it endorses the idea of a nation saying that such a nation should be a democracy with a secular egalitarian society. The primary identity of this nationalism, anti colonial nationalism was Indian, the person, the citizen was to be called Indian. It had an over arching inclusive identity that incorporated people of all religions, castes and languages on an equal basis, with equal rights. ...this was a new identity...Nationalism has a lot to do with understanding your society and finding your identity as a member of that society. History is essential to a national ideology, but it has to be a shared history. It cannot be a history based on one identity, but has to be all-inclusive.⁸

An inclusive nationalism, as Thapar emphasises, as part of India's socio-political history is essential – where no single citizen or group can claim primacy over others – and this has implications on any consideration, including mine of cosmopolitanism, which will be elaborated upon further in Chapter One. We have to think of a cosmopolitanism that is inherently secular, where secularism is a mode of being worldly; rejecting exclusionary forms of belonging as propagated by ethnic nationalism and religious fundamentalism. It seems untenable that these present-day realities taking place in India can be ignored, and even though I have been residing in London and Mumbai, after being an undergraduate in America, there remains an enduring connection to India, which inflects my appraisal of cosmopolitanism.

The question of cosmopolitanism can of course be approached from the vantage point of my current lifestyle; living between two cities, two homes. The retracing of my own familial legacy is not in isolation: my internal frame of reference while being foregrounded in the

⁸ Romila Thapar, 'History and Nationalism: Then and Now' public lecture delivered on the 6th of March, 2016 available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdJKIIRE5ro>

research is as impacted by personal history as it is by conditions of the moment, by what is happening in India now. A historical evaluation of nationalism in the Indian context is bound up with the idea of cosmopolitanism where a connection to the nation remains, and is not free from that attachment or, conversely, it has acquired multiple attachments. When picking through the biographies of my forefathers, the work and lives of my case studies, and reflecting upon my own life, this cannot be disavowed, as made apparent throughout the thesis.

Arriving at this understanding has been gradual, played out while I was attempting to clearly define my research for this PhD from London's Royal College of Art, where I had enrolled in its Curating Contemporary Art programme. My initial proposal, which had gained me acceptance to the programme, was completely revised by the end of my first year. I had managed by the end of that year, however, to identify three Indian male artists whose lives and works captivated me and who, in my estimation, called for closer review and readings. The three case studies would be Umrao Singh Sher-Gil (1970–1954), Bhupen Khakhar (1934–2003) and Raghubir Singh (1942–1999). Articulating how my interest in these three men connected to my familial legacy presented the main area of struggle: I set about retracing how I had become aware of the artists and their works, hoping to shed some light on the reason for my fascination, and also to discern relationships between the various strands of my research.

Expecting little in the balmy languidness of a mid-March afternoon in 2008, I bounded up to the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai, with my friend Oliver to see 'The Photograph: Painted, posed and of the moment'.⁹ Startlingly, the exhibition introduced me to much that I did not know. In this largely, in my opinion, moribund museum, the viewer had effectively to work through a selection of works from five photographers – Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Pablo Bartholomew, Nony and Dayanita Singh – as well as

⁹ Running from 5 March to 26 March 2008, the show was to precede an initiative by the Alliance Française de Bombay and the Embassy of France for a multi-faceted festival, 'The French Touch', with more than 30 partners.

some from the private Alkazi Collection of Photography, in addition to a projected exhibition culled from the Magnum Photos archive. Opening in Delhi, the show was somewhat reconfigured for the Mumbai presentation with the addition of Bartholomew and the two Singhs. I left clutching a copy of *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: His Misery and His Manuscripts*, momentarily enchanted by his elaborate self-portraits, taken in France, Budapest and India during the first half of the twentieth century. I then shelved it, and would only return to it after two years.

As March 2008 drew to a close, I was in New York visiting old acquaintances, renewing friendships and sauntering around the Armory. I stayed at the home of Alexis, a friend from Brown, lodged in her younger brother's room in an apartment that soared above the city. His bed was oriented towards a white wall on the centre of which hung a photograph of a red Ambassador car, an iconic image by the Indian photographer Raghbir Singh from his album *A Way into India*. Alexis's father and Raghbir had been good friends. The photograph watched over me as I slept through that week in Alexis's brother's room. I knew little about Raghbir and his output at the time, but by the following year, after an e-introduction, I was in correspondence with Devika, Raghbir Singh's daughter. Several meetings later we had become friends, and over a dinner of rustic Tuscan fare, she mentioned a body of self-portraits her father was working on when he passed away.

With regard to Khakhar, I really cannot with certainty educe my first awareness of his practice, though I do remember my cousin, Kaunteya Shah, showing me a book of Khakhar's paintings, at some time between the late 1990s and the mid 2000s. Khakhar, and a particular aspect of his work that explored homosexuality within the Indian context, was probably lodged in a corner of my mind, returning to the forefront when I realised that alongside Sher-Gil and Singh, I wanted to explore other Indian artists working with self-portraits in my PhD research. It may have been my aunt Amrita Jhaveri who suggested Khakhar's name to me as a possible case study for this thesis.

As I have already indicated, late into my first term at the Royal College of Art I had substantially reworked my initial proposal, from a planned examination of the physical being of the translator, who could facilitate revelations, to a new emphasis on the self-portrait. This was possible because of the guidance, support and extended dialogue with my then supervisor Mark Nash, as well as the intellectual milieu fostered by him in the department of Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art. Jean Fisher a tutor on the M.A. course at that time provided valuable insight, especially with regard to understanding the contours and problematic of postcolonial thought and the address it made to the idea of cosmopolitanism. Her intervention was instructive for my research and how these discussions applied to my case studies. Through David Batchelor, another tutor on the course, I was able to garner a greater appreciation of history of colour and colour theory, which proved invaluable when I began looking at Raghubir Singh's work. The department nurtured my then slightly free associative and open-ended thinking, setting me on a course of inquiry that has congealed into this thesis.

The transposition from my initial to the newer proposal cohered in the consistency of the accent afforded to my personal configuration in my chosen projects. In the earlier proposal the collusion between the figure of the translator and myself emanated from a filmic work, *Symptom Recital*, that I had completed in 2006 at Brown University when an undergraduate under the tutelage of Leslie Thornton and Ben Russell. The piece is 16 minutes and divided into three sections: the first section comprising Super-8 footage taken by me in Mumbai; the second an 11-minute run of me translating a Hindi film song from the 1980s line by line; and finally the third, family-holiday footage shot by Shantilal on 16mm film between 1960 and 1980. It was the second section, essentially a performative self-portrait, which absorbed me. In those 11 minutes I stressed the role I assumed of translator, the self, my self, rather than involvement in the sheer presentation. I forcefully inserted myself in my work, making myself the subject, embedding myself in where I live, (Mumbai) and reviewing my familial legacy

(the holiday footage shot by Shantilal) into the work. *Symptom Recital* seemed to become an expression of the continuum in which I found myself; a stream of lived experiences and instances of remembering.

At the end of the first year of the programme, I had identified three Indian male artists whose work and lives I was keen to research. Each one of them had produced large bodies of work in which 'the Self' played an integral part, either literally as in the case of Sher-Gil and Khakhar, or obliquely as in Singh's. This, coupled with my interest in placing myself squarely within my research and work, a tendency epitomised in *Symptom Recital*, suggested a process of self-knowing as a serious preoccupation. I happened to relay my interest in our forefathers' legacies, and the difficulty I was having in articulating how they relate to myself and my research, to my sister Sonera, six years older, and a trained psychotherapist. She informed me that my research and approach could be viewed as being heuristic, and gave me a copy of *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications* by Clark Moustakas. In the introduction Moustakas explains:

...the word *heuristic* comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or to find. It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge.¹⁰

This clarified for me that in heuristic research there is an emphasis on the researcher's internal frame of reference. Self-searching, intuition and inner dwelling are at the core of such a process of inquiry.

Moustakas also revealed that,

¹⁰ Clark Moustakas, 'Introduction: Resources and Inspirations', in *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications* (Sage Publications, 1990), p. 9

...heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social – and perhaps universal – significance.¹¹

Thus, it would seem that the first step would be to identify the 'question' or 'problem'. What draws me to these particular three artists, and what is the significance of my forefathers' legacies? Perhaps I see myself or want to see myself in their work, in their lives, in their misgivings and failures, in their limitations and achievements. It cannot be denied that I do not, in varying degrees, identify with the focus of my inquiry, which is all these men. My steadfast interest in clothes, fashion and craft, in highly choreographed self-representation, seems to be aligned to Umrao Singh Sher-Gil's attention to self-fashioning; Bhupen Khakhar's sensitive handling and depiction of same-sex love from a Gujarati Indian context is close to my own experience of finding or feeling love; and I harbour a deep admiration for and a desire to emulate Raghubir Singh's commitment to learning about the artistic traditions of India.

Such "identification with the focus of the investigation" has been termed the "inverted perspective".¹² This notion of the inverted perspective finds a corollary in a point clearly articulated by the writer and dramaturge Rustom Bharucha in his book-length study *Another Asia*, on the friendship shared between Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and Okakura Tenshin (1862–1913). In it, when discussing the field of cultural theory and certain non-western intellectuals' interest in cosmopolitan subjects, he queries in that regard the selection of these case studies, particularly when addressing 'cosmopolitanism'. Bharucha asks "about the theoretical desires of global postcolonial intellectuals in figuring out their own, perhaps insufficiently acknowledged need to settle scores with the privileges of their own cosmopolitan locations... who is including whom in the domain of the cosmopolitan, and

¹¹ Moustakas, 'Heuristic Concepts, Processes, and Validation', in *Heuristic Research*, op cit., p. 15

¹² Ibid.

for what reasons?"¹³ This awareness that Bharucha calls for aligns with Moustakas's 'inverted perspective', or the necessity of subjectifying the self in relation to the research topic.

In my research and this thesis I have always desired to consider and imply the need to pay attention to not only the tale being told, but to *how* it is told. I am less interested in a manner of enunciation that happens in the third person, with no hint or allusion to the position of the enunciator. Statements are made as if they come from nowhere, presenting themselves as being neutral and authoritative, denoting a kind of general omnipresence and omnipotence. It emphasises a transparency, refusing to admit into the conversation anything that is lacking or needs seeking out. Conversely, I tend to those conditions in which the subject speaks, foregrounding the space of enunciation. Hence the meaning produced is contingent and contextual and each utterance is inscribed within a specific set of relations that differ from another. My research strives to operate from the I/you relation; it accepts lack and leaves behind the universal. The distinction between these two models of enunciation shows that narrativity can assume two different forms, each with its own implications. In the former mode it is not that no one is speaking: it is that the speaker has been effaced. In the latter the illusions of transparency are smashed with someone speaking from somewhere under certain conditions with full acknowledgment of their own fragility and particularity.

Donna Haraway's proposition of 'situated knowledges' borne out of a feminist position, might seem pertinent to consider at this point, and a possible tool to aid processes of self-inquiry and self-positioning. For Haraway situated knowledge is knowledge that is embedded within a context, and this could range from the anthropologic to the intellectual and cultural. While a situated point of view may not have the widespread range of an external disembodied objectivity, it does accrue a depth from collating and being responsive to

¹³ Rustom Bharucha, 'Cosmopolitanism', *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin*, (Oxford India Paperback, 2006), p. 119

information that constitutes the context and the environment from which that point of view is oriented. Moreover, a situated knowledge promotes a connection to other persons that have a particular point of view, and sharing and recognition of these perspectives effects greater understanding: absolute and external objective points of view do not allow for such enquiry and dialogue. Haraway is passionately

arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard, to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.¹⁴

Thus, the recognition and reckoning with my own positioning while pursuing any train of self-inquiry especially with regard to my interest in rethinking 'cosmopolitanism', or some articulation of the term is crucial.

Going beyond simple travel – I do not lay claim to the established notion of cosmopolitanism based on the ideation of the global citizen who belongs nowhere: something I will explicate in further detail in Chapter One – re-evaluations of the term cosmopolitanism are on-going and this thesis seeks to participate in that conversation: its primary proposition is not to regard cosmopolitanism as a universalist subject position or a particular subject exilic condition, but rather a cosmopolitanism that is committed, by which a connection, attachment to place, state, region, nation is not refused or denied. I seek instead to understand and investigate these connections, and to understand cosmopolitanism as a dialectical process between a particular commitment and other worldly affiliations.

It is not the artist as '*homo viator*' that Nicolas Bourriaud describes in his 'Altermodern explained: manifesto', a "prototype of the contemporary traveller whose passage through

¹⁴ Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledge's: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), p. 589

signs and formats refers to a contemporary existence of mobility, travel and trespassing”.¹⁵ Bourriaud’s formulation and 2009 Tate Triennial, very much ratify that the globetrotting flâneur is still very much present in contemporary curatorial practice and discourse. What I am aspiring to fathom are Sher-Gil’s, Singh’s and Khakhar’s sensibilities, formed by actively arbitrating between many disparate sources and lived conditions – sensibilities that are cosmopolitan, but formed from within, and in relation to, a very specific national art context. Homi K. Bhabha’s description of the Indian art world further sketches out broadly the contextual framework in which to situate Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh. He has said:

India’s art world, as I can recall it, was experimental and left-leaning. Its progressive politics were not nationalistic, but they were inspired by a project of national representation and recognition. There was a desire to establish *a zone of translation* in which the language of contemporary art could be used to signify historical forms and contemporary figures that had a local and regional resonance. This translational sense of the many dimensions of ‘nationness’ – rural, urban, symbolic, archival, figurative – did not constitute a nationalist agenda or aesthetic...The emphasis on nationness made possible an *open field of intercultural experimentation*; and effectively resisted cultural or territorial closure. This sense of *the nation as a force and a form of cultural mediation* reaching out towards larger international or cosmopolitan perspectives has been largely ignored, both historically and theoretically.¹⁶

Therefore, the focus of my inquiry is to map from their biographies without divorcing the place of the nation, the greater socio-political conditions that impacted their lives and their artistic production, contributing to what I believe are bi-focal sensibilities; this is only possible by identifying the key engagements and interactions; friendships, journeys and works of art that had an impact on them, linking them together. Such an appreciation of their sensibilities is congruent with what Edward Said has described as acts of ‘affiliation’. Said has distinguished ‘filiation’ as referring to naturalized bonds, lines of descent made through nature, from ‘affiliation’ in which processes of identification are made through culture. For him the notion of affiliation can be defined as,

¹⁵ Nicolas Bourriaud, ‘Altermodern explained: manifesto’ available at <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/altermodern/explain-altermodern/altermodern-explained-manifesto>

¹⁶ Homi. K. Bhabha in conversation with Susan S. Bean, “India’s Dialogical Modernism,” in *Midnight to the Boom: Painting in India after Independence* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2013), pp. 25–26

the implicit network of peculiarly cultural associations between forms, statements and other aesthetic elaborations on one hand and, on the other, institutions, agencies, classes, and amorphous social forces.¹⁷

Said has also directly connected the notion of 'affiliation' with the concept of 'worldliness' explaining that,

'Affiliation' is a rather more subtle term {than worldliness} that has to do with mapping and drawing connections *in* the world between practices, individuals, classes, formations... above all affiliation is a dynamic concept; it is not meant to circumscribe but rather to make explicit all kinds of connections that we tend to forget and that have to be made explicit and even dramatic in order for political change to take place.¹⁸

Thus, I believe that Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh's sensibilities all invoke Said's notion of 'affiliation', in that they did not produce their work by rejecting those artistic practices rooted in the West or slightly reformulating Western forms for a non-Western artistic milieu. They were very much tethered to a national context – as will be demonstrated in the subsequent individual chapters devoted to them – but simultaneously conjoined to the international; challenging those propositions that set up the East and West as oppositional entities, and the notion of the Indian artist caught in-between having to take sides. They worked to transcend limitations imposed or inherited through descent or heritage on their own lives, shaping and reshaping their own identities while negotiating multiple interactions between East and West.

Their own national identities were sought through critical conversations with the international, as well as their own national context: it is being in the world where the world is as Pheng Cheah has alluded is "a dynamic process with a practical-actional dimension instead of a spatio-geographical category or only in terms of global flows, even if the latter

¹⁷ Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1983), p. 174

¹⁸ Edward Said in conversation with Bruce Robbins, 'American Intellectuals and Middle Eastern Politics: Edward. W. Said' in *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 145

constitutes an important material condition of a world.”¹⁹ The participation in such a world order is evident by those lives and artistic practices that during colonial and postcolonial times, firmly dismissed the idea of identifying with a fabricated ideal of an timeless national culture, and rather opted for a cosmopolitan stance where relations between East and West are reconfigured and refashioned.

These sensibilities clearly challenge Ulrich Beck’s ideation of a cosmopolitan outlook where disassociating from a singular national consciousness is possible, and recognizing that a productiveness lies in a post national scenario. He seems to fairly suggest that cosmopolitanism does not simply mean having a cosmopolitan awareness. Beck writes:

...global sense, a sense of boundarylessness. An everyday historically alert, reflexive awareness of ambivalences in a milieu of blurring differentiations and cultural contradictions. It reveals not just the ‘anguish’ but also the possibility of shaping one’s life and social relations under conditions of cultural mixture. It is simultaneously a sceptical, disillusioned, self-critical outlook.²⁰

The progressive conditions put forth by Beck are however undermined, as highlighted by Jean Fisher, in that his position does not take into consideration:

...of animal and indigenous lifeworlds. In contrast to neoliberal ‘globality’ as well as most views on cosmopolitanism, we might attend to how the indigenous maps the world through a cosmological perspective that *includes all our relations*. As I understand it, it follows a contrapuntal spatiotemporality based on the dynamics of continuity and change. As such it follows a trans-gressive and transformative rather than a now discredited progressive (linear) modernity.”²¹

Fisher’s point, it seems, is that while the neoliberal ‘universal’ constitutes itself by eradicating difference, the indigenous cosmopolitanism she speaks of is a practice of mediation between the particular and the universal. Fisher’s call to be more attentive to

¹⁹ Pheng Cheah, ‘What is a World? On World Literature as World-Making Activity,’ *Daedalus* 137, no. 3 (2008), p. 30

²⁰ Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Visions* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 3

²¹ Jean Fisher, ‘Thinking, Weaving: Another Approach to Cosmopolitanism’ available at <http://www.jeanfisher.com/thinking-weaving-another-approach-to-cosmopolitanism/>

practices of mediation chime with Bhabha's earlier cited proposition of paying closer head to the "the nation as a force and a form of cultural mediation reaching out towards larger international or cosmopolitan perspectives."

Fisher clarifies that:

Cosmopolitanism has re-entered the vocabulary in part to characterise global interdependency and in part to identify alternative pathways to the unpalatable choice between neo-liberal globalisation and ethno-nationalism. The new formulations of cosmopolitanism do not mean elite globetrotting flâneurs, belonging everywhere or nowhere, but globalism with responsibility. They counter the complacent metropolitan postmodern and globalisation myth that we are now liberated from belonging to anywhere in particular, but concede that we may have multiple belongings. Some versions, perhaps prematurely, speak in terms of a post-nation, global civil society and solidarity, which seems unrealistic whilst human identity remains a construction of particularised cultural memories. Others see cosmopolitanism as a social practice rooted in the particular but responsive to shared global realities, irrespective of nationalist agendas – i.e. not an ascetic detachment, but reattachment, or multiple attachment.²²

I return to the fact that I am a writer and curator of Indian origin, operating within the contours of the contemporary art world, and one whose research particularly involves the tracing of the more complex personal and intellectual and artistic relationships of certain colonial and postcolonial conditions. As such I feel a responsibility to stake a claim as to why I am interested in cosmopolitanism, since my research, writing, and curatorial activity contribute in some manner to the larger discourse, in which there is an active re-appraisal of how the West is relating to the non-West. The place and position from where I write and express myself creatively, and that my transactions with cosmopolitanism are very much preoccupied with trying to dismantle some of the presumptions that are associated with being cosmopolitan does need to be accounted for here.

I fully acknowledge my position of privilege that has provided me the ability to move between various geographies, but also with a specific kind of tutelage – all of which has

²² Jean Fisher, 'The Other Story and the Past Imperfect', *Tate Papers*, Tate's Online Research Journal available at <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/7273>

combined and factored in formulating the position I seek to occupy in this thesis and my practice in general. My endeavour is not to be limited by my privilege, and to use my agency and practice to make suggestions, detailed later in this introduction, about emotional attachment and belonging that are generally less acknowledged in such conversations; as Fisher has identified, and emphasises, the critical importance of thinking of cosmopolitanism beyond the exclusive domain of the *élite* globetrotting *flâneurs*. Through my research I am not interested in legitimising a certain way of living that I have lived, and easy recapitulations of privilege and wealth in discussions about cosmopolitanism. Even as a beneficiary of privilege I want to be able to demonstrate an active negotiation with it and, hopefully, even beyond it.

Such an inquiry, that involves the heuristic as well as situated knowledge, offers me the possibility of forging my own research methodology, while also enabling a way to take responsibility for my own privileged position, social context and experiences, and fully acknowledge them as mine. As Hannah Arendt has expressed, there is a certain ‘courage’ required to insert oneself into the world and appear before others in action and speech. She writes “the connotation of courage, which we feel to be an indispensable quality of the hero, is in fact already present in a willingness to act and speak at all, to insert one’s self into the world and begin a story of one’s own”.²³

As I have contended earlier, it can be suggested that in and through their own work, Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh literally make a world of emotion and affect visible. How do they detect their own awareness of how their bodies move through space, how do they sense it? As Henri Lefebvre has written “Space – *my* space...is first of all *my* body...it is the shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body on the

²³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (University of Chicago Press, 1958), p 186

one hand, and all the other bodies on the other”²⁴. Lefebvre alludes to an idea that space is produced: it is constructed by its lived user; space is borne out of one’s lived experience.

To appreciate more clearly how affect can be made visible, and what is at stake in doing so, I turn to Giuliana Bruno and her book *Atlas of Emotion*. A term that is key to understand and to fully value Bruno’s study is the word ‘haptic’ and how she defines it. For her the haptic functions to shift emphasis from the exclusive focus on vision, and includes other senses and their relations to space, “the haptic realm is shown to play a tangible, *tactical* role in our communicative ‘sense’ of spatiality and motility, thus shaping the texture of habitable space and, ultimately, mapping our ways of being in touch with the environment”.²⁵ It is the emotional space that is located in ‘sites’, not merely ‘sights’. It is a “haptic dynamics, a phantasmatic structure of lived space and lived narrative; a narrativized space that is intersubjective, for it is a complex of socio-sexual mobilities”.²⁶ So, for Bruno, visiting or seeing a site is not an inert and isolated study of landscape and buildings, but of places as they come to be emotionally inhabited. Conceptions of geography are being expended to include those sites and places that are experienced through *sensational* movements. It calls on us to think about how affect gets associated with spaces, and places, which could range from houses, museums, gardens, artworks, to even colour. Bruno seems to convey an importance of a sensor-motor understanding of affect.

What Bruno seems to imply is that cognitive and bodily experiences cannot be thought of or analysed in isolation from one another, challenging the Cartesian impulse where mind and body are seen as split or separated, and exposing a division between our rational thoughts and more physical impulses. Bruno’s line of inquiry posits that it is in the power of affect, where body and sense can be fused. Here it must be clarified that ‘affect’ is being used as a verb, where it is understood as to impress the mind and move the feelings of.

²⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 184

²⁵ Giuliana Bruno, ‘Prologue’, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (Verso, 2007), p. 6

²⁶ Giuliana Bruno, ‘A Geography of the Moving Image’, *Atlas of Emotions* op cit., p. 65

In her introduction Bruno discusses a map published in 1964 by Madeleine de Scudéry in her novel *Clélie*:

Her Carte du pays de Tendre – a map of tenderness – pictures a varied terrain comprised of land, sea, river, and lake and includes, along with some trees, a few bridges and a number of towns. The map, produced by a female character of the novel to show the way to the ‘countries of tenderness,’ embodies a narrative voyage. That is, it visualizes, in the form of landscape, an itinerary of emotions, which is, in turn, the topos of the novel. In this way, the Carte de Tendre makes a world of affects visible to us. In its design, grown out of an amorous journey, the exterior world conveys an interior landscape. Emotions materialize as a moving topography. To traverse that land is to visit the ebb and flow of a personal and yet social psychogeography.²⁷

Landscapes literally show up in Khakhar and Singh’s work. Singh spent his entire career shooting, as he calls it, the “geographical culture” of India; “the people, animals, religion, tradition, myth, manners, history and climate... inseparable from one another and the vast land of rivers, mountains, plain, and plateaus”²⁸. Khakhar’s paintings also depict real landscapes and places, in which he would expand “the pictorial field beyond his subjects and constructing a genre about everyday life in a provincial city where the townscape shades into the farmer’s field”²⁹. He would even paint and draw when he travelled, and eventually his works would enter, what other art historians have marked as the realm of the fantastical. Sher-Gil’s photographs rarely depict the geography of the cities he visited or towns in which he lived; they do however capture another landscape, that of his homes, of the domestic dwellings of an Indian family at the turn of the twentieth century, in Europe and India. Each of my case studies lived at a different social and historical moment of the last century, and there are differences between each of them and their affective responses to perceptions of space and time.

²⁷ Giuliana Bruno, ‘Prologue’, *Atlas of Emotion*, op cit., p. 2

²⁸ Raghbir Singh, ‘Photography and the Geographical Culture of India’, *Asian Art*, Vol. II, No. 4, Fall 1989, p. 7

²⁹ Geeta Kapur, ‘Bhupen Khakhar’ in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, September 2002), p. 30

The paintings, drawings and photographs all become the embodiments of Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh's respective narratives; they become itineraries of their emotions. They become the passages through which to chart the emotional beings of these three men, that is, as they pass through these variety of terrains, which could be their own home, the street on which they live, the town in which they grew up, a foreign city, or even an imagined realm, how they are transformed. These transformations are made visible, as in the case of Sher-Gil through his clothes, his own self-fashioning in his own homes; with Singh through his unrelenting documentation of the actual geography of a nation; or with Khakhar through the implied transgressions that happen, not only through the sexual act, but through the simple act of loving. What is evidenced is that as they moved through these different spaces, at home or abroad, the external topography becomes connected to the internal topography, through a series of 'haptic dynamics'. However, it is not only that the outer world impacts the inner, but also the inside empathically projects back onto the outer. Furthermore, it is not a single emotion that persists as they move through these landscapes, but they run an entire gamut of emotions. What Bruno stresses is that Scudery's map suggests that motion produces emotion, something that we see quite clearly in Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh's lives and work. Each of their movements and the corresponding transformations is discussed more thoroughly in the following chapters, with particular attention to specific works.

For Bruno:

Scudery produced a spatial mapping of emotions, inscribing affects onto an architectonics that was a social map. In this respect the power of her vision can be inspirational today, not only for the political assertion of desire in its discourse, as has been noted, but because it allows us to remap a politics of affects, by putting affects back on our map, and thus to change our own navigational charts... By showing how this tender map works and assuming tender cartography as a methodological vehicle, my intent is to reclaim this intimacy as a place of interpretation"³⁰

³⁰ Giuliana Bruno, 'An Atlas of Emotion', op cit., p. 224

I tend to agree with Bruno about the need for the reclamation of intimacy as a place of interpretation. I believe that the works of Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh can be seen as tender cartographies. Certain works enact, as in the case of Khakhar through the playful and painful mechanics of love, or with Singh who sensuously works with geographic imagery, or Sher-Gil who revels in the intimate space of the home, narratives of emotional 'transport'. Speaking of emotional narratives of transport, Bruno in the *Atlas of Emotion* assumes a highly self-reflexive stance, stating that:

...this map of tenderness has accompanied me for years, and as an emotional journey, has done more than just propel the writing of this book. As a manifestation of my own sense of geography, it has come to embody the multiple trajectories of my cultural life, punctuating my inner voyage. Because it constitutes an important site of the book's own mapping, it will return at several points, not only as subject of investigation but as a cartographic model and itinerary.³¹

Such an explicit location of herself in relation to her research, finds itself very much in line with what I have detailed in the first half of this introduction and compliments the manner in which I have attempted to evolve my own research methodology, which is one of situatedness or speaking from a particular position. The way in which the writing of her book becomes not only a manifestation of her geography, but the multiple trajectories of her cultural life, is similarly reflected in the writing of this thesis: more than the sum of my geographical movements, it is a map of my own inner emotional and intellectual journey.

At this juncture, I need to state that while my case studies for the purposes of this thesis are men, I by no means wish to suggest that there were, and are, no women from India and the South Asian region who were, and are, not cosmopolitan. Also, there are other men from the region who could very well be inducted into this study of cosmopolitanism; an obvious example would be Richard Bartholomew, a Burmese émigré who came to India in 1942. I

³¹ Giuliana Bruno, 'Prologue', *Atlas of Emotion*, op cit., p. 2

have in *frieze* magazine, written about Bartholomew, reviewing the book *Richard Bartholomew: The Art Critic* (Bart, 2012) that was assembled by his elder son, the photographer, Pablo Bartholomew. Bartholomew was a poet, painter, photographer and art critic, and left behind a vast archive of material, which it has taken Pablo nearly three decades to work through. From a corpus of 17,000 negatives, Pablo made a selection of images that were scanned, restored digitally, re-converted to film and printed as silver gelatin prints. I quote from my own text:

Dedicated research into the archive will undoubtedly yield many more riches, yet reviving Bartholomew's archive also highlights a significant issue. For his partisan views and assured criticality, which were widely shared in the public domain through print media, now draw attention to the limited space currently being offered by Indian newspapers to serious critical writing, the lack of a regional art journal, and how little is yielded in terms of scholarly and analytical writing in new art publications. Yet, somehow, while acknowledging such deficiencies, Bartholomew's commitment and spirit to nurturing a field of art criticism advocates a confrontation with absence, and a strong need to continue to try and grow out of that context.³²

Thus, Bartholomew's legacy is not unrelated to the concerns of this thesis, he too made self-portraits which show him as a "dreaming, delicate youth sitting at his typewriter" which – in the words of Geeta Kapur... [position] "him like an archetypal writer, and his career is that of a determinedly Modernist art critic with immense influence but leisurely pace".³³ Yet it is of another kind of significance that I am able to draw from him and his work, and by focusing exclusively on Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh in this thesis, I want to assess a certain kind of masculinity, one that connects, celebrates and at times is consumed by affect. It is a study of emotion, and intimacy as sites of interpretation as stated by Bruno, that have been traditionally ascribed to women. I want to consider these emotions in relation to these three men, who in themselves offer a cross-section of masculine 'types' and behavioural patterns.

³² Shanay Jhaveri, 'Time Regained', *frieze*, Issue 154, April 2013, available at <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/time-regained/>

³³ Ibid.

Their relationship to emotion, affect, sexuality, sensuality varies considerably, as do the haptic routes found to be taken and enacted by them in their works. Perhaps it is a 'queering of cosmopolitanism' and by which I mean not only in terms of sexuality, but also that all my case studies involve exploring forms of masculinity and nationality that embrace affect and emotion.

Furthermore, other research and curatorial work I have done has exclusively focused on non-western women, including Indian women, and their cosmopolitan realities. Returning to my 2013 show 'Companionable Silences' at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris as part of their Nouvelle Vague exhibition. My presentation focused on a group of non-western female artists – Amrita Sher-Gil, Tarsila Do Amaral, Saloua Radoua Choucair, Zarina Hashmi, Etel Adnan – and the individual relationships they had with the city of Paris. Starting with the 1920s and extending itself to the 1960s, the show examined through various art works and archival material, the manner in which these women found, or rather situated themselves, within the artistic communities of Paris, and how they staged self-conscious arbitrations with not only the pedagogy some of them received, but with the general prevailing artistic currents. The show went further in emphasising their negotiations with the paradigms of a Western Modernism, by reflecting on their reception back home, how the journeys back to their native countries affected their work, but also their own persons, sartorially, physically and emotionally.

Beyond this exhibition, I have researched and was invited to publish an extensive essay for the catalogue for the Reina Sofia and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York's retrospective on the life of the Indian female artist Nasreen Mohamedi, who formed her own artistic sensibility across a series of different geographies, and socio-cultural contexts³⁴. She received her formal education in the 1950s in London, spent time in the Persian Gulf, and Paris, and eventually lived out her entire life in India, but would continue to travel, with

³⁴ Due to complications this essay remains unpublished, but had been instrumental in furthering my own thinking.

Japan and its aesthetic systems exerting a great deal of influence on her. A similar methodology was followed when looking at Mohamedi's life and work, as the one I pursue in this thesis. The sense of an active agency, one guided by an innate intuition in Mohamedi became manifest through my findings, as I conclude that:

Clearly, the journeys made by Mohamedi in her life, and the numerous social interactions she had, provided her with a wide range of artistic, as well as, intellectual reference points. Nevertheless, this charting of a life in motion is not adequate, but what is essential is recognising at every stage, Mohamedi's own active responsiveness, and its distillation into strong preferences... a sensibility that forms itself while in transit, a sensibility that is led into, by the experience of being present in and to the world. It is the formation of an emotionally imaged geography, the formation of a perspective that is inimitable, the myriad details and aspects of which cannot be easily reconstructed into a single narrative. Through her writing, photographs and drawings, Mohamedi demonstrates a fitful knowledge, of having lived, lived through certain time, places, and locations, but simultaneously appreciating the distance between her own oeuvre of being and that of simple greater, existence. It is a gap that is felt, and which brings Mohamedi to herself, the friend, the daughter, the sister, the teacher, the companion, the artist, the person for whom:

"The abstract is so important real + clean
It is a fine thread which sews a unity"³⁵

The co-mingling of the cosmopolitan realities of men and women has taken place elsewhere in another exhibition of mine, 'In Dialogue: Amrita Sher-Gil and Lionel Wendt'. In this show at the Jhaveri Contemporary Gallery in Mumbai, which opened in September 2014, I brought into close proximity the corresponding life narratives of Sher-Gil and Ceylonese photographer Lionel Wendt, and how there were marked similarities in their personal choices and art works, but yet a necessary difference existed between them. The exhibition became a platform to think of corresponding modernist art practices that were evolving in the region through the 1920's and 1930's, while simultaneously emphasising the multitude

³⁵ Shanay Jhaveri, 'Living by Intuition: Nasreen Mohamedi', unpublished. The last two lines are by Mohamedi from a letter she sent to her friend Nina Sabnani, which is undated and unpublished.

of approaches and divergent aesthetic approaches playing themselves out at the time. When considering the lives and works of all these artists, and attending to the particularities and specificities of each of their individual narratives, what becomes apparent was that there may be moments of resonance, or even actual encounters and friendships, but nevertheless it is crucial to avoid forcing them, despite these meeting points, into literal comparisons, genealogies of descent, and submitting their works to morphological readings. It is marking, announcing and respecting the differences between them, and hitherto allowing for them to sit side-by-side in not complete and whole concord, that is most necessary. It is here where the late Martiniquan cultural theorist and poet Édouard Glissant's conceptions about opacity and transparency guide my practice as writer, researcher and curator.

Glissant has claimed that it was as early as 1969 at a congress at the National Autonomous University of Mexico where he first spoke about the idea of opacity. Glissant has written that:

If we examine the process of 'understanding' people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with the grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments.³⁶

It is this need for transparency, which I remain most alert to and aware of, when building the profiles of the artists that I research, and whose work I choose to write about or programme, or present in an exhibition. It is an acceptance and foregrounding of difference that is essential, and which ultimately disrupts established hierarchies of judgment. Glissant continues:

Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can co-exist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its

³⁶ Édouard Glissant, 'For Opacity', *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 190

components. For the time being, perhaps give up this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of nature...³⁷

It is precisely this, paying attention to the 'weave' and not the 'nature', that I am striving to achieve with this thesis, and my handling of Sher-Gil, Khakhar, Singh and even myself and my forefathers. The consideration provided to building up a social history in which to place these men, and myself, thinking of biography, relating back to the work, but never over determining it, and submitting it to a culturally reductionist reading. I am attempting through this research to follow how a sensibility might have formed, without fully ever conclusively knowing how it congealed. There must be an acceptance of a certain 'unknowability', an opacity, which actually draws one closer, and from which one can take inspiration and direction. It is the 'subsistence within an singularity', where singularity might suggest what D.N. Rodowick explains as, "there is no singular or self-identical subject because we think, exist and live in time; subjectivity is becoming, change, deterritorilaization, repetition becoming difference, the singular becoming multiple".³⁸ This appreciation of singularity also bears a great affinity with Hannah Arendt's thinking, and the way in which Leela Gandhi uses it to think of friendship, both of which I will consider in detail in Chapter One.

Glissant's defense of opacity, in a 'transparent society' as termed by the philosopher Byung-Chul Han, where "trust is only possible in a condition between knowledge and ignorance. Trust means building a positive relationship with someone despite this state of unknowing about them"³⁹ is incredibly pertinent. The lack of transparency is fundamental for Glissant, where it is the differences that cannot be fully navigated or circumvented which make all relation feasible. A person's right to be opaque does not preclude the fact that they cannot participate and be engaged, "the opaque is not obscure, though it is possible for it to

³⁷ Ibid..

³⁸ D.N. Rodowick, Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 140

³⁹ Byung-Chul Han quoted in Henriette Eva Kiernan, 'Beyond the Transparent Society' available at <http://www.sturmunddrang.de/beyond-the-transparent-society/>

be so and accepted as such. It is this which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence”.⁴⁰

This is a mode of thinking and operating that, while applicable to how I build an understanding of my own case studies, could also be used to imagine a method of knowledge construction for this thesis: the evolution of a methodology that is a kind of chaotically resonating opaque whole, where different modes and strategies of inquiry come up against one another without being obscure. The thesis moves between various registers of thought and consideration, conscious of what could be termed a theoretical promiscuity, and, by choosing to do so, attempts to avoid the dictates of a prescribed methodological approach. The locating of this thesis within a programme of Curating Contemporary Art at The Royal College of Art, and my citing of my other curated exhibitions, takes as its cue Jean Paul Martinon and Irit Ragoff’s proposal that ‘the curatorial’ can be:

a disturbance, an utterance, a narrative, and within this disturbance, works of art can no longer be a process of interpellation, a conscious or unconscious hailing by some internalized mode of knowledge. Instead, they engage in another process, that of precipitating our reflection, of encouraging another way of thinking or sensing the world. From being reactive to the world to precipitating another reflection on the world (and inevitably sparking ways to change the world), works of art reflect the myriad ways of being implicated in the world, not just as passive recipients, but as active members of a world that is never one with itself, always out of joint, out of place, but always intrinsically ours – of our making.⁴¹

So while building from ‘the curatorial’, it would seem that by drawing into its ambit modes of inquiry such as a heuristics, an insistence on biography, exhibition history, specific art-historical analysis, literary texts both fictional and non-fictional, post colonial theory, feminist theory, film theory – some that appear to contradict one another – the methodology of this thesis suggests that what might be cultivated through its research and writing is perhaps a proposed ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’. The phrase ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ as coined by Paul Ricoeur is indicative of a way of thinking that circumvents

⁴⁰ Édouard Glissant, ‘For Opacity’, *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 191

⁴¹ Jean Paul Martinon and Irit Ragoff ‘Preface’, *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (Bloomsbury Press, 2013), pp. ix-x.

obvious and self-evident meaning in order to draw out that which is less apparent. It is a task animated by a double motivation, a willingness to listen, as well as a willingness to suspect. It is not interested in internalized worlds of knowledge, bringing various disciplines together without privileging one or another, and creating a hierarchy.

The thesis is suspicious of, and is unwilling to defer to the authority of a prescriptive historical methodological forbearer, attempting to create conditions for itself, instead focusing more on the processes of making decisions as the revelation of thinking. To narrate in this way, more freely thoroughly and even provocatively, is it perhaps a way of building a different kind of genealogy, one that emboldens the asking of questions outside of the well-defined Western art historical tradition.

The thesis is trying in its own polyphonic way to find a new method of thinking about certain bodies of artwork and how they, and the conditions that prompted their production, can influence and instruct notions of cosmopolitanism. As mentioned previously, biography does indeed play a substantial role in helping to elucidate how I aim to attempt to understand the artworks and the cosmopolitanism of my three case studies. The ardent use of biography is done while fully appreciating the danger of slipping back into old-fashioned art history that is overly reliant on the biographical, and in turn being reductive to the categories of gender, class and sexuality. In fact, it is for this very reason that biography is a focus and cause of exploration within the thesis; to stave off the reductiveness that it traditionally prompts, instead using it to highlight difference and further to reveal what might be the artistic aims of individual works.

Biography as a tool that prompts further examination, to uncover, unmask, to expose, reveal, reflect, illustrate and even comment on. Biography becomes the conduit to depart from a prescribed manner of reading a work of art and to perhaps think about all that remains opaque, those 'opacities' that are denied by representation, the artwork while autonomous is also linked to everything else and is just as much part of the world as it is a

picture of it. It is striking a fine balance between claiming specific aesthetic values for the artworks that are discussed and insisting on the artworks as evidence of something else, another kind of significance.

As Glissant has very poetically articulated:

As far as my identity is concerned, I will take care of it myself. That is, I shall not allow it to become cornered in any essence; I shall also pay attention to not mixing it into any amalgam. Rather, it does not disturb me to accept that there are places where my identity is obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes me does not mean I relinquish it. Human behaviors are fractal in nature. If we become conscious of this and give up trying to reduce such behaviors to the obviousness of transparency, this will, perhaps, contribute to lightening their load, as every individual begins not grasping his own motivations, taking himself apart in this manner... I thus am able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him. It is not necessary to try to become the other (to become other) nor to 'make' him in my image...⁴²

My approach to these curious, courageous, compassionate, but flawed men is by no means final and definitive; it is a particular advance that may lead to further research and investigations with similar sympathies. In no way do I want to fix them, but rather draw connections among their lived experiences – I am eager to assemble differing points of view, and unsettle the differences among them. Implicit in such an approach is perhaps a new set of social relations in which the study of the subject is undertaken with empathy, where the presence of a certain opacity proposes a 'relation' that is as an "open totality evolving upon itself... the force that drives every community: the thing that would bring us together forever and make us permanently distinctive".⁴³

Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh in their own ways strove to transform and disable certain social categories, through their own journeys, both publicly as well as privately. Through their journey's I believe them to be committed to representing personal lived experiences

⁴² Ibid., p. 193

⁴³ Édouard Glissant, 'For Opacity,' in *Over Here: International Art and Perspectives on Art and Culture* ed. Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 254–256

and the affects they produce, however minor and common. It is this journeying, a journeying of their own, which forms the bedrock of this thesis, and is underscored by my choice of title for this document 'The Journey in My Head': it also reflects back on the heuristic component that is embedded in my research, locating me, and my 'I' as the space of enunciation. The title, in fact, comes from an entry from the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet*, which he was engaged in writing in a fragmentary form, from 1912 until his death in 1935. The first complete Portuguese edition of the book appeared only in 1982. The entry I am referring to reads:

The journey in my head

In the plausible intimacy of the approaching evening, as I stand waiting for the stars to begin at the window of this fourth-floor room that looks out on the infinite, my dreams move to the rhythm required by long journeys to countries as yet unknown, or to countries that are simply hypothetical or impossible.⁴⁴

It would seem apt that the title for a thesis that squarely places at its heart, the self, the changing self, should have Pessoa as a kind of talisman. Pessoa, throughout his life wrote under a number of 'heteronyms', imaginary authors who were given complete biographies, who wrote in specific styles, and expressed philosophies and attitudes greatly different from his own. He attributed *The Book of Disquiet* to Bernardo Soares, who was only a "a semi heteronym because, although his personality is not mine, it is not different but rather a simple mutilation of my personality. It's me minus reason and affectivity"⁴⁵. With such a pronouncement, we have in and through Pessoa an arrangement, and acknowledgment that room needs to be made for the self as it moves through space and time, and with this onward motion develop newer emotions, some of which might contradict and even seem incommensurate with those that have come before. This movement does not require a physical shift in geography, which also holds its own significance, but dreaming,

⁴⁴ Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet* (Serpent's Tail, 1991), p. 1

⁴⁵ Margaret Jull Costa, Translator's note, *The Book of Disquiet*, op cit., unpaginated.

contemplation and tedium – all provide enough room for revelation, affects produced through *sensational* movements. Sometimes its is journeying to the ‘hypothetical and or impossible’ that is most transforming. There is a need to appreciate and be empathetic to one’s own unravelling, in containing the multitude that comes with exploring one’s own identity, and even the frightful possibility of going to pieces. It is through such empathy that one can permit an exploration of self, to allow one’s own sensibility to form, at different moments and points, while not relinquishing local affiliations; to remain attached to place and space, to object, things, and even people.

In the thesis, with the aid of my three case studies, their biographies, and their work, I will endeavour to establish that for a cosmopolitan sensibility to be formed, physical travel, affluence, and privilege are not necessities. It does not require relinquishing an attachment to place, or, inversely, claiming multiple attachments to places, but rather advocating for a recognition of the connection between space and emotion, and how lived conditions and experiences borne from such situatedness and particular positioning should be appreciated. As Pessoa writes so succinctly: “Give to each emotion a personality, to each state of mind a soul.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, op cit., p. 9

CHAPTER 1

Re-thinking Cosmopolitanism: Friendship and the Intersubjective Nature of the Imaginative Act

How did it begin? I propose to counter this simple question with another, more pertinent one: '*when* did it begin?' Reorienting the question is crucial to the way in which I chose to think about the lives and works of three Indian male artists: Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Bhupen Khakhar and Raghbir Singh. These artists form the core of my thesis, providing three very different conduits for a reappraisal of the term 'cosmopolitanism'. The '*when*' in my countering question takes one straight to the heart of the matter: when considering these artists and the formation of their cosmopolitan sensibilities *when* exactly did the process of their cosmopolitanism get initiated? Did it begin *when* they travelled for the first time, leaving India to visit foreign lands, or *when* they first encountered a work of art in the flesh, or *when* they had a conversation with a friend? A conventional understanding of cosmopolitanism would situate the '*when*' squarely at a certain moment, the one in which these men became citizens of the world, untethered to a particular place; but through close analysis of their biographies, works, and the various socio-political factors that played out around them, I would like to recommend that the placement of that '*when*' could be shifted. In fact, in a lifetime, there are perhaps a host of possible moments where the '*when*' could be placed.

My decision to re-frame the question with a 'when' is directed by the Indian art critic Geeta Kapur, who has played a decisive role in the active unbinding of modernism from being exclusively the domain of the West. Kapur's intervention is concerned with examining "the place of the modern in contemporary cultural practice in India and the third world" by establishing a point to "view modernism along its multiple tracks".¹ She is very clear in rejecting modernism's spatial narratives of the centre and the periphery, which have failed in their orientation of the non-Western world. Instead she trenchantly proclaims that "we should see our trajectories crisscrossing the western mainstream and, in their very disalignment from it, making up the ground that restructures the international"². Kapur looks to various forms of difference and discrepancy as essential in aiding to formulate some appreciation of the complex manner in which modernism formulates itself in India. She is very vocal about her engagement with the modern, stating that it is,

...my vocational concern and commitment. Even as it is hammered down as a vestige of the last century, the stake in it has to be secured...[the] modern is not an identical narrative in reckoning across nations: it has to be held in place in India by a more contextualized and critical stance.³

I take solace in Kapur's affirmation about the need for a more "contextualized and critical stance", something I aspire to establish through my findings and analysis in this thesis.

¹ Geeta Kapur, 'Preface' in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, (Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2000), xiii

² Geeta Kapur, 'When Was Modernism in Indian Art?', in *When Was Modernism*: op cit., p. 297

³ Geeta Kapur, 'Preface' in *When Was Modernism*, op cit., xiii

Yet Kapur also comes from, and is part of, a grander teleology where certain individuals have effected decisive shifts in the contours of intellectual thought – which have historically been unrelentingly Eurocentric. Kobena Mercer in his authoritative introduction to *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* reminds us of the postcolonial turn in cultural studies that was inaugurated by Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). It is necessary to acknowledge he states that:

How we have arrived at the current state of play with regards to understanding cultural difference, not as an arbitrary irrelevance that detracts from the ‘essence’ of art, nor as a social problem to be managed by compensatory policies, but as a distinctive feature of modern art and modernity that was always there and which is not going to go away.⁴

As Said writes, postcolonial revisionism emphatically exposes previous ‘identity thoughts’ maintained by imperialist cultures, where subjectivity was divided as an exchange between Europeans and others are exposed to be completely fictional and illusory:

...gone are the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise... new alignments are rapidly coming into view, and it is those new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of identity that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism.⁵

Keeping this new realignment in mind, Kapur with great urgency (and taking her cue from Raymond Williams’s 1989 essay *When Was Modernism?*) simply asks the question “when was modernism in India?” By framing such a direct question Kapur suggests that the modern should not be seen “as a form of determinism to be

⁴ Kobena Mercer, ‘Introduction’, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (INIVA and MIT Press, 2005), p. 9

⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993), xxiv-xxv

followed, in the manner of the stations of the cross, to a logical end”.⁶ She emphatically calls for a re-periodisation, one that locates the modern in terms of India’s own historical and social experience. It is this consideration of differing sets of conditions and circumstances that intersect but do not align with the western mainstream, which allows for a reimagining of the international. What emerges from Kapur is an account of Indian modernism that can “also be told as a series of experimental moves where ideology and practice are often at odds and force unexpected manoeuvres. Indian artists still go riding on the backs of paradoxes... turning this into an original act of self-definition”.⁷ Acknowledging and establishing this shift in optics that comes from just posing a question of periodicity – when should the ‘when’ be applied? – assumes a significant role in my discussions of cosmopolitanism.

A rethink of cosmopolitanism rests for me on the assertion that a cosmopolitan self evolves from correspondences between disparate parties and places, sometimes willed, sometimes not. It is important to take note of the many provisional whens for these correspondences to possibly congeal. The way in which an artist’s work embodies individual consciousness reveals a series of conveyances and a complex network of personal, social, political and intimate interactions. These need to be drawn out. It is not the literal bridging of distances, connecting a here with an elsewhere that is important, but making visible the various lines of connection that the self undergoes, as well as the lived conditions that make those connections possible.

⁶ Geeta Kapur, ‘When Was Modernism in Indian Art?’, in *When Was Modernism*, op cit., p. 297

⁷ Ibid., p. 147

Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Bhupen Khakhar and Raghubir Singh were all three born in colonial India. However, it was only Sher-Gil who was swept up as a young adult in the anti-colonial movement. Khakhar was 13 when India gained Independence, and Singh was only four. So, while the conditions of imperialism and its implications had a direct impact on Sher-Gil, for Khakhar and Singh the colonial legacy seemed less of a concern than navigating the uncharted waters of the post-Independence consciousness. In each case, the conditions that made the various connections possible diverge greatly, and it is precisely the timing, of *when* they took place, that influenced my selecting them as case studies. When, and the way in which they each came to their chosen mediums – photography for Sher-Gil and Singh, and painting for Khakhar – is dissimilar, and for none of them was it through a studied academism and formal induction into the visual arts. Labelling Sher-Gil an amateur, Khakhar as self-taught, and Singh an autodidact, succinctly conveys how their artistic manner was formed but it does not fully reveal the multifarious conditions and connections that surrounded them and informed their sensibilities.

Each artist occupied vastly different geographies – Khakhar situated in the Gujarati town of Baroda (now Vadodara) – and though both coursed across the world at very different moments of the last century, Sher-Gil was confined mostly to Europe, while Singh's itinerary extended from Hong Kong to New York. Yet, as earlier stated, charting their physical movements, though a part of re-envisioning who or what is cosmopolitan, is not the most defining aspect of the process. While contemplating how to articulate, to bring alive, the elaborate weaves of their lived conditions and the connections, which help so substantially in placing the when, I request the indulgence of a slight detour. I will briefly introduce other Indian male

figures, the writer and scholar Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri and the novelist, art critic and editor Mulk Raj Anand, rendering a broader canvas from which to set my intended approach to Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh in the chapters devoted to each of them.

In 2001, The New York Review of Books, as part of its 'Classics Original' series, reprinted Nirad Chaudhuri's first book, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, published in 1951. For the cover they used a photo by Raghubir Singh. When I first came across a copy, I was struck by the dynamism of Singh's photograph, 'Man Diving and Swimmers, Banaras, 1985' [fig. 2.1]. The cover reveals a detail from the original image, taken from the left side of the frame. There is a man in mid-air, leaping straight as a rocket, head-first into the river Ganges. It is hard to take one's eyes off the image, to stop marvelling at Singh's mastery. Singh's writings mention Chaudhuri with admiration as he found in his work a meaningful interlocution. To me, it is appropriate that Singh's image adorns the cover of Chaudhuri's tale of the self. Leaving Singh and his diving man behind, I began to read about Chaudhuri's life, as Chaudhuri had written it.

Chaudhuri wrote *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* when he was 50 years old. Dying in 1999, three months before his 102nd birthday, the book marked almost precisely the halfway point of his life. An upper-caste Bengali born in 1897 in the small town of Kishoreganj in the district of Mymensing, now a part of Bangladesh, Chaudhuri's life witnessed a flourishing empire, its decline, the birth of a 'new' modern nation, its initial socialist incarnation and then its eventual transition into a capitalist behemoth, living a century "completely, the whole run of the clockface,

from imperial high noon to postcolonial midnight”.⁸ Very productive throughout his life, penning several polemical books, Chaudhuri moved to Oxford, England, in 1970 and never returned to India to live. He was 57 years old when he made that journey, and he had prepared for it his entire life. However, he never truly left India behind.

A small, frail man, a mere five feet tall and weighing just about 43 kilograms, Chaudhuri took himself and his experience of life as his primary subject. In journeying from a provincial Bengali town to the citadel of Western high culture, he courted a distinctly ‘cosmopolitan’ reality, and stated that: “It comes from self-assertion through writing. Otherwise I should be dead, or living on a clerk’s pension in some foul Calcutta slum.”⁹ *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* is a ground-zero account, evident almost from the very first pages, of how an ordinary citizen of India interfaced with the British Empire, physically, emotionally, as well as intellectually. Chaudhuri, when writing the book, was literally the unknown man of his title, living modestly in Delhi, writing scripts for All India Radio as it transited from British hands to Indian. What makes the book so distinctive and of great historical import is that Chaudhuri wrote with no literary model or precedent. The life of the common Indian, unacknowledged in any sphere, had not until the middle of the twentieth century been scripted on a page. Recording one’s life had been the domain of public figures such as India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, or Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, or the great leader and thinker Mahatma Gandhi. Not being born to privilege, or granted its advantages, Chaudhuri assembled his knowledge of all things European at Calcutta’s Imperial College and by purchasing

⁸ Ian Jack, ‘Introduction’, in Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (New York Review of Books, 2001), ix

⁹ Ibid.

books at tremendous personal cost. He identified closely with Bengali Babus, the Anglicised cultured men of the so-called Bengal Renaissance, a vital and creative cultural movement initiated by Ram Mohan Roy (c. 1774–1833).

Precise and highly descriptive of his early years, as well as the current turmoil in India *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* leads with the following dedication:

To the memory of the British
Empire in India
Which conferred subjecthood on us
But withheld citizenship;
To which yet every one of us threw out the challenge:

‘Civis Britannicus Sum’

Because all that was good
And living within us
Was made, shaped, and quickened By
the same British rule.¹⁰

Hugely controversial at the time, Chaudhuri courted the notoriety, but beyond the public performance of the polemicist, his underlying suggestion warrants attention:

To my mind, the most decisive indication of the essentially foreign character of the culture of modern India is the attitude of the general body of Indians as much towards it as to its creators and exponents. By far the greatest majority of Indians rejected the idea of a synthesis of the civilizations of the East and the West on which this new culture was based, even when the synthesis was a living historical force. Today the concept stands wholly discredited. What Indians in the mass want is nationalism,

¹⁰ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, op cit., n.p.

which does not, however, preclude a wholesale and uncritical acceptance, or to be more accurate, crude imitation of western habits of living and economic technique.¹¹

Made at a time when nationalist sentiment was at an all-time high, Chaudhuri's pronouncement that the "underlying nature of India might ultimately bear more responsibility for the Indian condition than British imperialism. Or that the British quit out of their own weakness rather than Indian strength"¹² is an acknowledgement of a condition that goes beyond simple binaries and oppositions. Allowance is made for ambiguity and contradiction, and affinity and rejection coexist as simultaneous currents of experience and feeling. Chaudhuri was the embodiment of such incongruities. His identity seems to be a fitful example of Said's assertion of the "new alignments" coming into view "that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of identity".¹³

Committed to cultivating his intellect and learning all things European, Chaudhuri consciously shed certain traits and habits. For instance, once he began to live in Delhi he gave up writing in Bengali (it is completely absent from *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*) and, for the first time in his life, started wearing Western clothes and eating non-Indian food. The 1972 documentary by Ismail Merchant and James Ivory *Adventures of a Brown Man in Search of a Civilization* vividly and unapologetically captures Chaudhuri in England, living out his western affectations. But he was no apologist for the British, frustrated as he was by British resistance to Westernised Indians and to their participation in European ways of living. On the

¹¹ Nirad C. Chaudhuri quoted in Andrew Robinson, *The World's Best-known Unknown Indian: The Autobiography of an Indian* available at <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/books/the-worlds-best-known-unknown-indian/158986.article>

¹² Ian Jack, 'Introduction', in *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, op cit., x

¹³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993), xxiv-xxv

other hand, alongside racism, he shared with the British little enthusiasm for nationalist leaders and Indian nationalism, for post-independence Bengal and the Indian middle class. His views on India were often unpleasant, at times unjustified and plainly wrongheaded. Clearly, Chaudhuri was not writing for the fallen Empire, nor was he addressing the new nation: neither he nor his prose fell into a particular political or national regime. As the writer Amit Chaudhuri declares, "*The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* presents, on the other hand, a startling variation, even inversion, of the theme of disowning and recovery, exile and homecoming."¹⁴

Though Chaudhuri wilfully and steadfastly courted the West, he was not embraced by it and he articulated his sadness about this condition, this straddling of two worlds, caught in transition between them. He displayed a certain courage in addressing the alienation of a postcolonial intellectual who chose to interface with the West while maintaining a critical relationship with India. Shuttling between the two worlds and recognising their common insubstantiality, he confronted an abysmal emptiness. Beyond the posturing and positioning, it is this confrontation with emptiness that is truly moving. His journey began with the Empire, but ended with emptiness.

My childlike faculty of wonder at the beauty of Nature became suffused with a very vivid awareness of another world, infinitely more happy, joyous and serene than ours. In my boyhood I often lay on a mat in the courtyard of our house at Banagram looking at the sky through a pair of opera glasses, professedly studying the stars but perhaps trying really to locate that unknown and unseen world, and I was filled with an

¹⁴ Amit Chaudhuri, 'Poles of Recovery: From Dutt to Chaudhuri', *The Hindu*, Sunday, 29 July 2001, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2001/07/29/stories/1329046c.htm>

unbearable homesickness mingled with awe... Even to this day I have not been able to shake off this feeling, this conviction of the material world around me being insubstantial, although I have completely lost all religious conviction and faith in the other world. Therefore, I find myself at times in the curious position of being a denier of this world without having anything to put in its place... And this happens to me not only in regard to the world which is of the world worldly, the world of far-stretched ambitions and maddening vices, but even with the world which is made up of the wild loveliness of the face of the earth; of the grace of animal forms; of light raining down from heavens – the light of the milky sprays of the stars which illuminates only when the universe is composed to rest by vast darkness. The feeling seems to cut the ground from under my feet and throw me down from the only country I know into a dark abyss.¹⁵

Chaudhuri's literary style and personal-professional positions are not the subject of my thesis, nor are my concerns his defence or the reception of his work. He is not for me a paradigm or an exemplar, a model against which to stack up my three case studies on Sher-Gil, Khakhar, and Singh. His lifestyle, and in some ways his cosmopolitanism, resonate somewhat with their lives, but I would not submit to a literal comparison. Chaudhuri's single life spanned the lives of all three, but his was a specific trajectory, neither quintessential nor epitomic.

Rather Nirad Chaudhuri forms a point of orientation for situating the self in relation to material lived conditions, to provide subtler inflections and an understanding of that self, of how it forms and functions, and how this approach can be the working methodology for conducting research and drafting its findings. As he writes:

¹⁵ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, (Jaico Books, Mumbai, 2005), pp. 248–249

It came in this manner. As I lay awake in the night of May 4–5 1947, an idea suddenly flashed into my mind. Why, instead of merely regretting the work of history, you cannot write it, I asked myself, do you not write the history you have passed through and seen enacted before your eyes, and which would not call for research? The answer too was instantaneous. Quietened by the decision I fell asleep.¹⁶

The other literary figure that I would like to mention, as a counterpoint to Nirad Chaudhuri is Mulk Raj Anand, who was born in Peshawar in 1905 to a family of civil servants, and would as a teenager set himself apart from the other boys of his milieu by demonstrating a deep interest in Urdu, Persian and English, especially poetry. In 1918, Anand got swept up in the growing rebellion that was burgeoning in the Punjab, and this would mark his life long commitment to political activism. He would be arrested twice before he left to pursue further studies in London in 1924, where he would concentrate on philosophy at the University of London, while also attending lectures by G.E. Moore and C.D. Broad. Spending time in London, he would come into contact with Leonard and Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, T.S. Eliot and other members of the famed Bloomsbury literary circle [fig. 2.2]. It was also at this time that Anand would be:

...drawn into London's Fabian-socialist and anarchist circles...in 1939, he enlisted in the international brigades fighting on the side of the beleaguered left-wing republic in the Spanish Civil War. While being nourished by the various philosophies of the Left in the 1930s and 1940s, Anand gradually moved towards what he called a 'humanist' position. Likewise, Berger's Marxist position informed his writing on politics and

¹⁶ Nirad C. Chaudhuri quoted by Ian Jack, 'Introduction', in *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, op cit., vi-vii

aesthetics, but he did not turn a blind eye to Stalinist Russia's instrumentalist use of art as propaganda.¹⁷

Anand would start writing fiction in 1922, after reading James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. He would write in his collection of essays *Conversations in Bloomsbury* that as a young student at university Joyce spoke to him, he "recognized himself in the hero of the Portrait...the portrait is a good model for me, if I want to stage the recovery of self...in the novel".¹⁸ This explicit statement on Anand's part is intriguing, as it places an Irish writer as a model for an Indian writer who is committed to his nation, and would further in his life write politically-engaged fiction about India's marginalised, as most evident in his famous novel from 1928, *Untouchable*. The association between the two writers if researched further provides ample room for a kind of progressive transnational assessment of modernist writing, but also political action. Anand, by declaring that he will pattern himself after Joyce, brings an experimental modernism to an Indian context through his writing, a gesture that can be seen as constitutive of a complicated cosmopolitan sensibility, which while arbitrating in with the West, remains rooted back home in India. There is not an easy alignment with a simplified internationalism, but a conscious choice to transact between India and Britain, and not erase the differences. Also, the connection between Joyce and Anand should be read more broadly, thinking of modernism along global lines and the role Anand plays within such a realignment.

¹⁷ Nancy Adajania, 'Globalism Before Globalisation: The Ambivalent Fate of Triennale India', in *Western Artists and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design* (The Shoestring Publisher and Thames and Hudson, 2013), p. 172

¹⁸ Mulk Raj Anand, *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 7

While writing *Untouchable*, which follows the day in the life of an untouchable boy named Bakha, Anand raises complex questions about the ethical and political dimensions of modernity in colonial India. Throughout the book having Bakha interact with others Indians and his immediate environment is one of Anand's great successes, as it locates him empathically within the material conditions of an evolving Indian modernity. In his well-known published lecture *Roots and Flowers* Anand declares that he wanted to write a novel that was distinctly modern within an Indian context, while acknowledging the "imbibed lessons of style and construction of the contemporary novel" from Joyce. Nonetheless, Anand affirms that his novel was deeply Indian:

I do not think, as against the chauvinists, the influences exerted by European technique has made the Indian novelist less Indian. The richness of content, the ideas and the actions of our struggle to be human, to remain alive and grow in our Gandhian time, keeps them unmistakably Indian.¹⁹

Anand's self-awareness, about combining his learnt lessons in prose with material lived conditions, offers a way of thinking about being located in a place and enunciating from there, rather than needing to escape from it.

Speaking later about the formation of the modern novel in India, Anand contends:

The English writing intelligentsia of India was...a kind of bridge trying to span, symbolically, the two worlds of the Ganga and the Thames through the novel... Their roots lay in the local landscapes of North and South India. But they seem, along with

¹⁹ Mulk Raj Anand, *Roots and Flowers* (Dharwar: Karnatak University Press, 1972), pp. 21-23

quite a few others to have done something which is not generally admitted – to have brought roots from abroad.²⁰

Clearly Anand was unlike Chaudhuri (who wrote in the first person as his work is autobiographical, and uses a particular stylised literary prose), in that he was a fiction writer and remained a political activist returning to India, and committing himself to the building of the post-Independent nation in many ways, especially in the shaping of the Indian art world. He was the editor of the art magazine *Marg* which was published a year before Independence, and also the founder of India's first Triennale of Art in 1968 to which John Berger and Octavio Paz sent messages of affirmation and support. What brings Chaudhuri and Anand together for me, especially in the remit of this thesis, are aspects of their biography, and less their professional actions and associations in later life; it is how they as colonial subjects formulated a kind of cosmopolitanism for themselves that is of import. (This is not to say the work that they did was not important, they are major intellectual contributions, and other scholars have done masterful studies in attesting to their significance.) From the two, Chaudhuri is of course, the more extreme example, but Anand is a necessary variant and counterpoint that needs to be acknowledged. The reason I have prefaced my consideration of 'cosmopolitanism', with these two men is because they establish the lived realities of Indian men as they arbitrated the complexities of the early twentieth century, as well as India's transition into modernity beyond my case studies and beyond the well-known narratives of political figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Their politics and ethics are not

²⁰ Ibid.

the focus of my study, but they, as active figures of a kind of personal arbitration, are vital for my research and approach.

My case study chapters are not to be considered speculative; nor are they creative writing. I have chosen to focus on biography and to place these three men within the material conditions of their lives while simultaneously looking as closely as possible into the development of their artistic practices, highlighting certain works in which they represented themselves. This representation of the self in one's work, known as self-portraiture, is a category whose boundaries are tested in my selection of works, moving from the overtly staged conventional self-portraits to thinly veiled ones, and finally to a place where the self is marked through affect and affection instead of physical presence.

To convey a sense of the affective experience, borne from situated experiences, I have attempted to avoid examining these Indian artists, their lives and their works in exclusively Western terms. In effect, I have refrained from relying upon, or deploying theoretical approaches that are only largely Western in format. Though each man had a relationship with the West and each acknowledged a gaze to the West, I do not focus solely on this and its effects on them. While not denying or limiting myself to their westward gaze, I attempt instead to interweave that condition with their situation among figures, intellectual thought and cultural expression within the South Asian region. Simultaneously, I factor in their own agency and voice, explicitly through their published writings, public interviews, or their private letters and correspondence with friends. In this way we may in some measure enter the realms of their own imaginaries, though their mystery still is not fully revealed. What we can glimpse is how they situated themselves in relation to their lived, material

conditions. Their realities were informed by real journeys from one place to another, nationally or internationally, but also by journeys imagined to places never seen or touched.

Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge and Dipesh Chakrabarty acknowledge the modulation between realities of experience in the opening paragraph of their introduction to the collection of essays *Cosmopolitanism*:

For one thing, cosmopolitanism is not some known entity existing in the world, with a clear genealogy from the Stoics to Immanuel Kant that simply awaits more detailed description at the hands of scholarship... Cosmopolitanism may instead be a project whose conceptual content and pragmatic character are not only as yet unspecified but also must always escape positive and definite speculation, precisely because specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitely is an uncosmopolitan thing to do.²¹

I agree with the editors in their emphasis on several kinds of cosmopolitanism, and encourage thinking in terms of the non-definitive and non-exclusive. According to Amit Chaudhuri the term 'cosmopolitanism' has a very different meaning in India, its inscription and operation is constitutional; that is,

...it relates to a governmental guarantee that heterogeneous faiths, communities and cultures might cohabit peacefully, even vibrantly, within a visible space – usually, the city – in the nation. In this, it is not unlike 'multiculturalism', or the special Indian post-Independence version of the 'secular': not a domain outside of religion, but a constitutionally protected space of inter-religious, inter-communal co-existence.²²

²¹ Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge and Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Cosmopolitanisms', *Cosmopolitanism* (Duke University Press, 2002), p. 1

²² Amit Chaudhuri, 'Cosmopolitanism's Alien Face', *New Left Review*, 55, January–February 2009, p. 96

In emphasising the vernacular reality of India when defining ‘cosmopolitanism’, the constitution is suggesting a kind of multiplicity; accommodating plural ways of being, something which is deeply antithetical to the Hindu fundamentalism so prevalent in the country at this moment. What is apparent to me is that the twentieth-century Indian nation’s aspiration to embody ‘cosmopolitanism’, to embody a plurality, evokes an openness that rubs against the trajectory of the present with its increasingly mono-cultural vision of globalisation on the one hand, and its ossification of cultures into dogma on the other. I agree with the editors of *Cosmopolitanism* in their emphasis that cosmopolitanism cannot be seen as just a philosophical project; it is an *attitude* and one that cannot be positively defined. As such I do think it is of import that all three of my case studies were citizens of India, and I feel it necessary to study these specifically Indian examples of a cosmopolitanism for the reasons cited above.

This clearly indicates that in different cultural spheres the term takes on different meanings and attributes. This forcibly pushes for a continued engagement with the term ‘cosmopolitanism’ and its historically well-defined characteristics of class, hierarchy and affluence, rather than a rejection of or disassociation from it. The task is to fully acknowledge and accept the inherent complexities of cosmopolitanism itself, not expanding a pre-existing field to include these Indian cosmopolitans, but to assert that cosmopolitanism does not exist without certain ways of living, certain *attitudes* and certain sensibilities. As the editors of *Cosmopolitanism* have sensitively summarised, “this ultimately suggests that we already are and have always been

cosmopolitan, though we may not always have known it. Cosmopolitanism is not just – or perhaps not at all – an idea. Cosmopolitanism is infinite ways of being”.²³

My transaction with the term cosmopolitanism needs to be further qualified. While looking at these three men and their lives, I introduce into the broader conversation about cosmopolitanism new archives, geographies and practices. Yet, with the increased range of material available for examination, what is to be stressed is, first, “how radically we can rewrite the history of cosmopolitanism and how dramatically we can redraw its map once we are prepared to think outside the box of European intellectual history? And the second is, how manifold is the range of practices that allow for new and alternative theorization?”²⁴ However, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has stated about regionalism, “showing the Europeans that there were lived cosmopolitanisms in Asia and theorizing them... That gesture legitimizes Euro-teleology by reversal. As a result, people will patronize you and not take you seriously when you are not there”.²⁵ She talks of:

...some kind of cultural thickness, politico-cultural, linguistic thickness, multidisciplinary thickness. This is the beginning of a good thinking of regionalism. I want to go beyond this... In addition to thickening mere economic regionalisms, what I want to suggest here is that we must also correct the tradition of the Enlightenment, even as we recognize its power.²⁶

The “tradition of the Enlightenment” that Spivak refers to is the classical origin of cosmopolitanism, leading back to the Stoics and Immanuel Kant. It is from here that

²³ Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge & Chakrabarty, ‘Cosmopolitanisms’, *Cosmopolitanism* (Duke University Press, 2002), p. 12

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11

²⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Foreword: Cosmopolitanisms and the cosmopolitical’, *Cultural Dynamics*, July/November 2012, vol. 24, no. 2–3, p. 108

²⁶ *Ibid.*

the idea of the cosmopolitan figure or world citizen was birthed. In the Stoic philosophy of *kosmopolitês* the citizen's fundamental allegiance is not to a single state government or ruling power, but to a moral community committed to a respect for humanity. It was actually Diogenes the Cynic who first proposed that all men of knowledge belonged to a single moral community, which he labelled the "city of the world".²⁷ The Stoic concept of the world citizen differs slightly, in that *kosmopolitês* demands "strict allegiance to humanity where the primary loyalty of all citizens was to their fellow human beings. From this perspective, local, regional and national group loyalties enjoyed no special priority over those afforded to cultures and individuals from outside these groups".²⁸

The second chapter of Immanuel Kant's essay titled 'Perpetual Peace' articulates his thoughts on cosmopolitanism aligned with the growth of capitalism, the aggressive colonisation of the Americas and Africa as well as a surge in international trade in commodities that stretched as far as Asia. In such circumstances Kant dealt with the generation of conditions such as would ensure perpetual peace, which for him was a regulative idea of practical reason needed in politics to avoid violence and strife. Faced with rapid industrial development, he emphasised the necessity for establishing a universal order to enforce a set of fundamental human rights based on reason, untethered to the dictates and concerns of individual nation states and regardless of whether these nation states would recognise them. Kant asserted that "the right of nations shall be based on a federation of free states" and "[that]

²⁷ Robin Cohen and R. Fine, 'Four Cosmopolitan Moments', in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 138

²⁸ M. Ayaz Naseem and Emery J. Hyslop-Margison, 'Nussbaum's Concept of Cosmopolitanism: Practical Possibility or Academic Delusion?', *Paideusis*, vol. 15, 2006, no. 2, p. 52

cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality”.²⁹ In other words, for Kant, a federation of states with universal hospitality at its core can alone provide the only insurance for perpetual peace.

This Right of Hospitality as vested in strangers arriving in another State, does not extend further than the conditions of the possibility of entering into social intercourse with the inhabitants of the country. In this way distant continents may enter into peaceful relations with each other. These may at last become publicly regulated by law, and thus the human race may be always brought nearer to a cosmo-political Constitution.³⁰

The rights of the cosmopolitan, the stranger travelling between states, are crucial for perpetual peace. In Kant’s approach people are equal and free not only as citizens of the state but also as citizens of the world. Moreover, he said that, “the social relations between the various peoples of the world, in narrower or wider circles, have now advanced everywhere so far that a violation of right in one place of the earth is felt all over it”.³¹

Spivak unapologetically states that,

Kant’s generation of European intellectuals felt as we do, as a result of the network society attendant upon capitalist globalization, that they had access to a world.

Goethe talks about *Weltliteratur* – world literature. Kant trumps Plato, who only knew the city-state, because his contemporary Europeans had the world. From *politheia* we advance to *cosmopolitheia*, from mere constitutionality to world governance. Kant’s

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace’, in *Kant – Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 102

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105

³¹ *Ibid.*

idea of cosmopolitheia could really not go beyond the nation-state having its own colonial states.³²

Spivak highlights the dogged Euro-centricity of this way of thinking. Its universalist foundations have been increasingly critiqued since the 1990s, and so, while still a “major reference point in modern philosophical thinking on the subject”, Kant’s conception of cosmopolitanism “has been questioned and reframed in the light of the evolving nature of political and economic structures as well as that of social and cultural contexts around the globe”.³³ This desire for a reformulation is most evident in the numerous proposals offered from across the various disciplines of philosophy, sociology, political theory, anthropology and cultural studies: “rooted cosmopolitanisms” (Cohen, 1992), “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Bhabha, 1996), “working class cosmopolitanism” (Werbner, 1999), “discrepant cosmopolitanism” (Clifford, 1997), “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Nava, 2002), and “banal cosmopolitanism” (Beck, 2002).³⁴ There is now, as Rustom Bharucha writes,

A more robust questioning, whether apparent universals such as cosmopolitanism can ever be extricated from the vested interests of specific national and transnational contexts. It is now more widely accepted that all universals are grounded in the particularities of the history in which they are imbricated and from which the constructions of the universal are invented.³⁵

While there is a general moving away from the old ideal of cosmopolitanism, there is concurrently another uncritical and rather optimistic premise advocated by

³² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Foreword: Cosmopolitanisms and the cosmopolitical’, *Cultural Dynamics*, July/November 2012, vol. 24, 2–3, p. 107

³³ Sharmani P. Gabriel and Fernando Rosa, ‘Introduction: Lived cosmopolitanisms in littoral Asia’, *op cit.*, p. 115

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 115–116

³⁵ Rustom Bharucha, ‘Cosmopolitanism’, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (Oxford India Paperback, 2006), p. 115

the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, in which cosmopolitanism is “an orientation, a willingness to engage the Other... an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences”.³⁶ Bruce Robbins is wary of such a stance as it allows for cosmopolitanism to become

...an autonomous, unforced appreciation of coherence and novelty among distinct cultural entities... it is this aestheticism, with its presumption of inequality and its spectatorial absence of commitment to change that inequality, which disqualifies the essay from representing the new transnationality of international work. What we have to object to, in other words, is the particular position that the essay tries to legitimate, and not the effort of self-legitimation itself.³⁷

Ackbar Abbas also cautions against Hannerz’s ideal, stating that while it is admirable,

...it is only sustainable in metropolitan centers where movement and travel are undertaken with ease and where the encounter with other cultures is a matter of free choice, negotiated on favorable terms. But what about a situation where these conditions are not available – where ‘divergent cultural experiences’ are not freely chosen but forced on us, as they are under colonialism?... Could cosmopolitanism be one version of colonial imperialism?³⁸

Abbas’s stance on cosmopolitanism, a version of colonial imperialism, while highly provocative is also indicative of how far the discourse has shifted regarding the evaluation of cosmopolitanism. Bharucha notes that it raises its own questions “about the theoretical desires of global postcolonial intellectuals in figuring out their

³⁶ Ulf Hannerz, ‘Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture’, in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* (SAGE Publications, 1990), p. 239

³⁷ Bruce Robbins, ‘Comparative Cosmopolitanism’, *Social Text*, no. 31/32, Third World and Post Colonial Issues (1992), p. 177

³⁸ Ackbar Abbas, ‘Cosmopolitan De-scriptions: Shanghai and Hong Kong’, *Cosmopolitanism* (Duke University Press, 2002), p. 211

own perhaps insufficiently acknowledged need to settle scores with the privileges of their own cosmopolitan locations... who is including whom in the domain of the cosmopolitan, and for what reasons?"³⁹ This call by Bharucha for a self-reflexive intent on the part of academics, scholars and art-historian critics to introduce newer personal narratives to the large colloquy on and about cosmopolitanism is necessary, and finds a response in me. I have already dwelt more keenly on the heuristic aspect of my own research in the introduction of this thesis.

Nonetheless, we are again at the point of introducing new narratives into an already established repertory, but with added claims of ethics and agency. In his essay 'Travelling Cultures', James Clifford discourses on marginalised individuals – servants, helpers, guides, companions, translators, who remain on the periphery of most discussions because of their economic status – professing that they, because of the terms of their livelihood, must travel across borders and traverse various geographies, and so could be regarded as cosmopolitan. He proclaims that:

Anthropologists are in a much better position now to contribute to a genuinely comparative and non-teleological cultural studies, a field no longer limited to "advanced" "late-capitalist" societies. Diverse ethnographic/historical approaches need to be able to work together on the complexities of cultural localization in post- or neo-colonial situations, on migration, immigration and diaspora, on different paths of modernity.⁴⁰

Clifford, however, neglects to speculate on whether these individuals are accepting of such a descriptive term, whether they would wish to identify with it, and whether they can imagine that their identity could encompass a self-

³⁹ Rustom Bharucha, 'Cosmopolitanism', *Another Asia*, op cit., p. 119

⁴⁰ James Clifford, 'Traveling Cultures', in *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 104

understanding beyond the impositions of class, hierarchy and affluence. It is not that they are lacking in imagination, but that their imaginary could be different. Such an individual is,

...thrust within a cosmopolitical field of conflicting national and global forces, which he ostensibly entered by choice. However, his possibilities of exit... are hypothetically, far more determined by the economic realities of his savings, family responsibilities and his particular aspirations for his future. None of this can be readily assumed.⁴¹

The above to some extent maps the reclamation and recalibration of cosmopolitanism within contemporary critical and cultural theory and to extend beyond its very European genealogy. It would seem that the 'original' privileged cosmopolitan figure has several new counterparts and counterpoints. To these are added my case studies, Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh. At first it is Sher-Gil who seems to most closely to follow in the footsteps of the European cosmopolitan, having been born and accustomed to privilege, but Khakhar and Singh prove interesting and necessary variants. Singh was born to a landowning family in Rajasthan whose lands were confiscated following India's independence and the government's reforms. Hence his relationship to privilege was less amplified than Sher-Gil's, who, on the contrary, had to negotiate with the circumstance of his own privileges being taken away by the British government. Khakhar stands apart from them both as he was born to lower-middle-class Gujarati parents. However, none of them fell into the category of the marginalised individuals Clifford and Abbas discuss in their essays. The lineaments of their relationship and association to privilege are more finely drawn out in the chapters that I devote to them. None adhered strictly to the

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 122–23

bourgeois cosmopolitan of Western thought and philosophy, but each formed, in my opinion, intriguing and distinct affiliations and manners of expression beyond the local, while not rejecting or even partially disengaging with local affiliations.

As outlined before, Rebecca Walkowitz explains that,

Late twentieth century theories of cosmopolitanism rely on three somewhat different traditions of thought: a philosophical tradition that promotes allegiance to a transnational or global community, emphasizing detachment from local cultures and the interests of the nation; a more recent anthropological tradition that emphasizes multiple or flexible attachments to more than one nation or community;... and a vernacular or a popular tradition that values the risk of social deviance and the resources of consumer culture and urban mobility.⁴²

These various strands differ from one another not only in what constitutes the idea of allegiance, but also in understanding how the “local” is defined. Today, we have a melding of elements from the philosophical tradition with aspects from the anthropological and vernacular. My analysis operates from within such a field where the ideas of the local are transient and changeable. It allows for a methodological approach that takes account of the local, of situated experiences, and how they are enhanced by being placed within a larger transnational network of associations, and also how that transnational network of associations is effected by local experience, making room for ways of thinking and feeling that lie mostly outside the domain of much critical and cultural theory.

⁴² Rebecca Walkowitz, ‘Introduction: Critical Cosmopolitanism and Modernist Narrative’, in *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 9

Having mapped the terrain of discursivity regarding cosmopolitanism, as well as the way present-day formulations have pushed against its historical tropes of exclusivity, my submission does not fully account for the manner in which my case studies behaved and operated; transforming and disabling certain social categories. There is no discernible productive schema to apply to them, and none of them ever chose to overtly claim for themselves in their own words a cosmopolitan character, but this does not preclude the unspecified cosmopolitanism at the heart of their projects. My interrogations are all historical in nature: all three case studies are deceased, Khakhar the last to pass away in 2003. Consequently, my discussion therefore does not so much follow the politics of cosmopolitanism as it develops to the present day, as rather considering how these historical conditions bear upon the analysis of cosmopolitanism, which suggests new problematics in need of investigation. The aim is to produce valid contributions that decentre a focus that has been trained too long on the West, as also provide instances of attachment and belonging while still in transit. The term 'transit' does not necessarily refer to physical travel; I use it more to refer to travel across time and space, unless specified. It should be remembered that,

...a certain kind of logic teaches us a law of the excluded middle: an object may be here or there, but not in both places at once; something may be x or not-x, but not somewhere in between; a predication can only be true or false. Whether this logic holds in all possible worlds or not is for others to say. But the application of its dualism in the realm of cultural and political action is decidedly modern. Indeed, it constitutes a core project of modernity.⁴³

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 11–12

My case studies would appear to be dynamic and productive navigators of this excluded middle. They transit between multiple poles of reference and belonging, but never relinquish their attachment to the local, in whichever way that may be demarcated. Their conditions of national and transnational affiliation are wedded, in my opinion, to their individual patterns of attentiveness, perception and recognition, which leads closely to Michel Foucault's definition of modernism as an "attitude", a "consciousness of modernity", or "a type of philosophical interrogation – one that simultaneously problematizes man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject".⁴⁴ I favour Foucault's understanding that modernism's salient features cannot be essentialised or periodised, thus loosening its bonds with European artistic and literary movements since the early twentieth century. This means that my case studies, their respective art practices, and their cosmopolitanism is enmeshed in their modernism. As I have already discussed earlier Kapur has boldly stated,

...it is crucial that we do not see the modern as a form of determinism to be followed, in the manner of the stations of the cross, to a logical end. We should see our trajectories criss-crossing the western mainstream and, in the very disalignment from it, making up the ground that restructures the international.⁴⁵

Kapur is theorising on the postcolonial, the period of both Khakhar's and Singh's practice. Kapur further stresses that, "it means being self conscious through an art historical reflexivity; that is, through overcoming the anxiety of influence by

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, 'What Is Enlightenment', in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 39

⁴⁵ Geeta Kapur, 'When Was Modernism in Indian Art?', in *When Was Modernism*, op cit., p. 297

overcoming the problem of originality itself".⁴⁶ This is something that is unambiguously seen in both Khakhar and Singh, though their approaches differed, related somewhat to their preferred mediums of painting and photography respectively, but also to individual temperament. An interesting point of convergence is to be found in their mutual interest and admiration for Indian miniature painting.

For Sher-Gil, who worked primarily in the colonial period, we need to turn to Partha Mitter, who says that during this time there was:

...a whole elite who are proficient in their own language and who had no lack of confusion in tackling the whole world of the intellect, while, of course they were aware of being colonized. Many of these intellectuals travelled to the West mentally, critically engaging with western thought, to the extent of embracing continental philosophy and contradicting English ideas and systems of thought associated with the British. So that is an interesting window, and that's how the non-West responded to modernism.⁴⁷

While Mitter does not discuss Sher-Gil directly, I believe that the transaction that he describes above is manifest in Sher-Gil's photography, especially in his self-portraits.

Thus, modernism, a constellation of attitudes, actions and aesthetics occasioned by particular scenarios of economic and social modernity, allows for vibrant relationships, practices and engagements. Empirical attention to the practices of the three case studies reveals, in Frederic Jameson's words, that modernism "must be seen as a project that re-emerges over and over again with the various national

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 299

⁴⁷ Partha Mitter, 'Reflections on Modern Art and National Identity in Colonial India: An Interview', in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (INIVA and MIT Press, 2005), pp. 38–39

situations as a specific and unique national-literary task or imperative, whose cross-cultural kinship with its neighbours is not always evident".⁴⁸ In each of my case studies I attempt to make such kinship known, especially when direct and formal lines of influence and communication are absent, keeping in mind local and transnational contexts. Transnationalism should be thought of as a part of the cosmopolitan makeup, through which persons are interrelated, and also, more panoramically, as a way of looking at links. I am not alone in the endeavour to extend the understanding of the term beyond travel, influence and allegiances, while recognising the affective conditions of such travel, influence and allegiance.⁴⁹

Sher-Gil might have developed his remarkable body of self-portraits across Lahore, Budapest, Paris and Shimla, but it is not this list of locations that makes him, or his work, transnational. Conversely, Khakhar painted almost only in Baroda, and though Singh had lived in Hong Kong, Paris, London, Cyprus and New York, he only shot and worked in India. This does not disqualify them and their work from being regarded as transnational. It was their participation in spaces of exchange, alongside their committed representation of lived experiences tethered to India, which made them transnational. Their work does not have to be overtly preoccupied with displacement, the exilic, or the itinerant to function transnationally. Even if it is determinedly 'local' or connected to 'the nation', it may continue to illuminate, connect and interlink with other modernisms in the world through gestures of feeling, sentiment and emotion, which constitute affective affiliations.

⁴⁸ Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (Verso, 2002), p. 180

⁴⁹ Jahan Ramazani, 'A Transnational Poetics', *American Literary History*, 18, no. 2 (2006), p. 339

A book by the proactive champion of affective affiliation, Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, has been my fundamental reference when considering the affective dimension of my three case studies' lives and works. According to Gandhi:

In Kant's canonical rendition – readily absorbed within the coercive universalizing logic of former and current colonialisms – cosmopolitanism, we might recall, was privileged as the stable political zone of “perpetual peace”, a prescriptive “being-in-common” bearing the promise of immunity to the psychic contagion of cultural difference. In its affective mutation, however (as a form of anti-communitarian communitarianism, as a variation on “guest-friendship” as *cosmophilus*), cosmopolitanism may well be the means to puncture those fantasies of security and invulnerability to which our political imagination remains hostage. It might, for instance, teach us that risk sometimes brings with it a profound affirmation of relationality and collectivity. “Let us say yes,” Derrida writes in this spirit, “to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is a citizen of another country, a human animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female.”⁵⁰

This trope of friendship and relationality applies to all three of my case studies, but is most clearly apparent in Khakhar, whose sociable nature has often been remarked upon. It is in the largeness of his sociality that affect is really detected, and is most clearly represented in his works. Khakhar, a trained accountant, took to painting in later life, and though he pursued painting and its social milieu, benefiting from it personally as well as professionally, he did not neglect or forget those outside the art community. Not only did he include men of other socio-economic classes in

⁵⁰ Leela Gandhi, ‘Introduction: Affective Communities’, in *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 31–32

his pictures, but he vocally identified with them as well, choosing his partners from among them. (These transactions are more fully considered in the chapter devoted to him.) Khakhar's may be the most legible of the three cases to relate to Jacques Derrida's pronouncement of "let us say yes", but Singh also maintained a remarkable social network and it had an impact on his work. His network straddled India and the international and comprised artists, filmmakers, art historians; a cultural elite of transnational thinking, and their effect on his thinking is acknowledged in his writings as well as in the numerous occasions he invited them to contribute to his books. Neither Khakhar nor Singh was solipsistic, but both constantly sought to know themselves through friendships and informal social interactions. It needs to be stated that Khakhar's and Singh's social networks were built not solely on the basis of solidarities of class, gender, race and sexuality. Similitude was not the price of admission into their communities, which becomes apparent when the details of their associations are revealed.

Throughout the thesis, I intend to think of and consider friendship broadly, across several categories – the extended family, professional networks and sexual liaisons – keeping the idea of the relational in mind. Foucault, in an April 1981 interview with magazine *Gai Peid*, speaks about friendship, with regard to homosexuality. He says that he notices that a certain ambiguity hovers around friendship, asking how,

...can a relational system be reached through sexual practices? Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life? This notion of mode of life seems important to me. Will it require the introduction of a diversification different from the ones due to social class, differences in profession and culture, a diversification that would also be a form of relationship and would be a 'way of life'? A way of life can be shared among

individuals of different age, status and social activity. It can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized⁵¹.

It is this notion of a “mode of life” that Foucault invests in, arriving at it through thinking queer relations, that appeals to me and most obviously applies to Khakhar, but I believe it may also be extended to both Sher-Gil and Singh. They both pursue, as I lay out in subsequent chapters, dedicated ‘modes of life’, Sher-Gil through his anti-Imperialism, but also his self-work, and Singh in his dual rejection of the postmodern and nationalism, firmly acknowledging his connection to India, and admitting to drawing inspiration from both the West and East.

This emphasis on friendship also makes for a forceful suggestion of how sensibilities and consciousness are allowed to form alongside and beyond prescribed forms and patterns of thinking and hierarchy, in casual and informal circumstances. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s account of the *adda* – “the practice of friends getting together for long, informal and unrigorous conversations”⁵² quite commonplace in early twentieth century Calcutta, seems apt to consider, when thinking about friendship in these terms, where sensibilities can and do develop alongside one another. Chakrabarty describes the *adda* as an attempt to “find a struggle to make a capitalist modernity comfortable for oneself, to find a sense of community in it, to be... at home in modernity, is an ongoing ceaseless process for all”.⁵³ So while the *adda* was a Bengali practice, Chakrabarty also sees in it “a space for the practice of literary

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, ‘Friendship as a Way of Life’. R. de Ceccaty, J. Danet and J. Le Bitoux conducted the interview from which this quote is taken with Michel Foucault for the French magazine *Gai Pied*. It appeared in April, 1981. The interview is available at http://commoningtimes.org/texts/mf_friendship_as_a_way_of_life.pdf

⁵² Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Adda: A History of Sociality’, in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 181

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 180

cosmopolitanism by members of the middle and lower middle classes”⁵⁴ where books from South Asia, as well as Europe and America could be read and exchanged, “to be a literary person now – even if one were unemployed – was to be someone respectable, as literary activity was now by definition of cosmopolitan and global relevance”.⁵⁵ The adda was a space where “a democratic and cosmopolitan vision of the world can be nurtured and sustained”⁵⁶ and it “provided for many a site for self-presentation, of cultivating a certain style of being in the eyes of others”.⁵⁷ Khakhar’s famed and raucous gatherings (which are recalled in more detail in the subsequent chapter on him) at his home in Baroda could be thought of as being in the spirit of the ‘addas’.

For Chakrabarty the adda was not a utopian space, nor was it an ideal nor an experience, but “an arena where one could develop new techniques of presenting oneself as a character...through the development of certain mannerisms (meant for the enjoyment of others), habits of speech and gestures”⁵⁸. So what those texts become in the adda are not models from which to learn behaviours, but rather the tools to fashion ones own attitudes. At the adda what seems to manifest itself as Gandhi says is,

...subjecthood that sees the theme of ‘individuality’ gradually replaced by one of ‘singularity’: the former always amenable to perpetuation, extension or generalization; the latter marked by an irreducible difference which renders it

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 198

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 198

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 199

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 187

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 206

inassimilable within the system of resemblance... 'Friendship', I suggest, is one name for the co-belonging of non-identical singularities.⁵⁹

Though Sher-Gil as a young man, and through the first years of his stay in Europe and marriage with Hungarian Marie Antoinette Gottesmann, was sociable and developed strong friendships, with the passing of time he retreated to become a solitary figure, interacting ostensibly with his family alone. How can one account for this gradual withdrawal? For Hannah Arendt even the solitary self exists within a community, a community of itself: "the presupposition is that I live together not only with others but also myself, and that this togetherness, as it were, has precedence over all others".⁶⁰ It is this "togetherness" that is essential because, as she continues,

...we can say that the more people positions I can make present in my thought and hence take into account in my judgment, the more representative it will be. The validity of such judgments would be neither objective and universal nor subjective, but intersubjective or representative.⁶¹

It is Arendt's proposition that through the intersubjective nature of the imaginative act there comes an expanded mode of thinking, which makes room for potentialised and even political action. This 'enlarged thinking' or 'enlarged mentality' is one that makes room for the perspectives and opinions that exist around us; it is a way of thinking that forms a profound *sensus communis* or 'common sense', from where begins that movement towards politics. However, for Arendt:

⁵⁹ Leela Gandhi, 'Introduction: Affective Communities', in *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought*, op cit., p. 26

⁶⁰ Hannah Arendt, 'Collective Responsibility', in *Responsibility and Judgment* (Knopf, 2009), p. 153

⁶¹ Hannah Arendt, 'Responsibility', in *Responsibility*, op cit., p.141

...every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story...it is because of this already existing web of relationships...in which action alone is real, that it, 'produces' stories with or without intention... These stories may then be recorded in documents and monuments, they may be visible in objects or artworks, they maybe told and retold and worked into all kinds of material.⁶²

Therefore, it is in the act of creating stories, and including those to be found in objects and artworks, that hold potential and are, for Arendt, crucial in allowing for political action in the human sphere. There is a foregrounding in Arendt's position about the company one keeps or the community they choose to join, whether real or fictitious. Arendt lays stress on an inter-subjective nature that is cognisant of difference.

This thesis, as prescribed by Arendt, searches for stories: looking for them in objects; artworks; the telling of other stories; and in the process creates it is hoped new ones as well. It wishes to be a place-holder for many subject positions and discourses, without subsuming any of them into a prescribed commonality, but constantly calling out to their difference. It is also only in the telling of stories of a life that they take on meaning with a significance that endures the fragility of human affairs. Thus, it seemed urgent that the respective legacies of Chaudhuri and Anand be called up in this chapter. Across the thesis many other individuals will be referenced, either having been in immediate contact with my case studies, or alive and active at the same time – in an attempt to be more representative of the various subject positions that existed, and not to proffer that my case studies were singular in their quests and being, but to think of the intersubjective more broadly and

⁶² Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 184

widely. I believe it is in such thinking that true potential lies, reminding us inversely of the limitations of Kant's ideas, which laid stress on a subject who was:

...singular, self-identical, self sufficient, immune and transcendental – it also simultaneously releases into liberal ethical and political thought an influential bias against what we might call 'hybridity': the mongrelisation of subjectivity viewed in the body of Kant's work as the unwholesome by-product of the affectivity which attaches either to desire or prayer, and which springs from the perils of relationality either with other beings in the world (human, animal) or with God. We might say that in its implicit discourse against hybridity Kantian thought establishes a strange kinship between empiricism (the realm of desire, inclinations) and metaphysics (the realm of prayer, unknowable reality), insofar as it treats them as similar types of threat or temptation to the integrity and agency of the ethico-rational subject⁶³

Gandhi draws attention to the range of anti- or contra-Kantian thought that claims the potential of the plurality of the self, derived from the self that exists in relation to others; a web of relationships, all of which are contingent on one another, none is self-complete, self contained. She specifically mentions Michael Sandel's critique of Kant, in which Sandel argues for in:

...'certain purposes, the appropriate description of the moral subject may refer to a plurality of selves within a single, individual human, as when we account for inner deliberation in terms of occluded self-knowledge' or through 'intersubjective' self-understanding, namely the recognition 'that in certain moral circumstances, the relevant description of the self may embrace more than a single individual human being, as when we attribute responsibility or affirm an obligation to a family or community or class or nation.'⁶⁴

⁶³ Leela Gandhi, 'God: Mysticism and Radicalism at the End of the Nineteenth Century', in *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought*, op cit., p. 127

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Gandhi continues extending Sandel's critique, connecting it to the queer theory work of Judith Butler in which the subject "eschews in favour of a 'fragmentation in the rank' all appeal to a pre-emptive or prescriptive politics of 'unity.'"⁶⁵ She also mentions Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy and the discourse they initiate around a "subjective moment in politics, which emanates from the body as a seat of desires and from the rich nexus of interpersonal relationships".⁶⁶

Summarising these anti-Kantian positions, there is clear support for an understanding and appreciation of the impact that lived circumstances have on personal existences and lives. In the following chapters I strive to establish that Sher-Gil, Khakhar, and Singh, all aspired to achieve the intersubjective nature of the imaginative act, and succeeded in doing so rather affectively in their work. When considering their networks of association, and the connections between my case studies and other persons and groups of people, nationally as well as internationally, it must be reiterated that there is nothing of unilateral influence. The multi-directional flow of global thought in their encounters and meetings, and their ideas, opinions and feelings, even in colonial times, had unexpected and unaccountable back-and-forth patterns of movement. By exposing this inter-textuality, modernism can be reorganised according to global lines, and there can also be a reconsideration of certain Western artistic positions and outputs. My mind harks back to Singh's 'Man Diving and Swimmers, Banaras, 1985', the image on the cover of Nirad C. Chaudhuri's autobiography. Caught in mid-air, the man is held in a state of constant suspension, in a moment of complete transit, neither on land nor in water, just

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

hovering in-between. In this leaping man I cannot help but see Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh, whom I have brought together and related, owing to certain consonances, congruences and compatibilities, but who also remain necessarily distinctive.

CHAPTER 2

Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: Anti-imperialism, Self-fashioning and a Practice of the Self

It was only in 2007 that The Umrao Singh Sher-Gil Estate was established in conjunction with the first ever-retrospective exhibition of Umrao Singh Sher-Gil's photographs at the Les Recontres d'Arles photograph festival in France. The Estate's holdings comprise of 1,536 vintage prints, 308 glass plate negatives, 245 film negatives and 16 autochromes, besides diaries and letters written by Sher-Gil. A publication, *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: His Misery and His Manuscript* in which 141 photographs from the archive are printed, was readied and released, with an extended essay by the art historian Deepak Ananth. These efforts constituted the first attempts to present Sher-Gil and his photographic practice in its own right, and allow for his achievements and innovations as a photographer to be recognised and studied in more detail. This partially has to do with the fact that during his lifetime, Sher-Gil the scion of a noted Sikh family of Punjab, who married the Hungarian Marie Antoinette Gottesmann Baktay, never chose to exhibit his work or position himself as an artist. The other factor is that it was his daughter, Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–1941), who was the artist in the family, and now stands at the apex of Indian Modern art. Regarded as a potent signifier of the transnational avant-garde, Amrita, who was strikingly beautiful and remarkably self-possessed, has captured the imagination of scores of art historians, curators and artists, as well as the merely curious; dominating all the scholarly and critical attention the Sher-Gil family has

received. Her short life of 28 years was unbelievably well recorded in the photographs, all taken by her father, and complemented by an extensive correspondence and Amrita's own writings. Amrita, the elder of Sher-Gil and Goltzmann's two daughters, was born in Budapest in 1913 and schooled in Paris at the *École des Beaux-Arts*. Eventually, as a young adult in 1935, she made the affirmative decision to return to India.

Amrita's best paintings reflect an active engagement with modernism. The Indian art critic Geeta Kapur, has asserted that she reacted to "modernism as a formalist ideology... She brought herself into an equation with the crossed romantic-realist leanings of early modernism and adopted the modernist universalism of aesthetic affinities to embrace oriental painting".¹ Amrita also "made an irreversible social space for the woman artist within Indian art and she did this on an expressly romantic brief: a libertarian brief learned in bohemian Paris".² She was preoccupied with investigating her personal sense of cultural dislocation, of a fragmented self, which adds to her allure. Throughout her short career she articulated positions that she believed in, reflecting a growing maturity and testifying to the assimilation of knowledge borne of exposure, friendship and experience and moving beyond the academism that she knew in Paris in the late 1920s and early '30s. There was a very self-aware establishing of an agenda to be pursued through the practice of painting.

However, it is not only her work that remains a constant source of fascination, but also that of Amrita, the person. Sher-Gil's photographs of his daughter have been used to contribute immense verisimilitude when endeavouring to understand who

¹ Geeta Kapur, 'Body as Gesture: Women Artists at Work', in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2000), p. 7

² *Ibid.*, p. 6

she was, vividly animating her development as a painter as well as her search for identity:

...manifested by her decision to assume a visibly Indian persona, notably in her dress. This was not role-playing but, rather, the reflex of a divided subject who was nevertheless at ease with her Indo-European extraction: the photographs capture her flamboyant presence in sumptuous saris and Indian jewellery that she had taken to wearing.³

Though Sher-Gil's photographs form a significant part of the Sher-Gil Archive that has been attended to with great care and attention by the artist, curator and political activist Vivan Sundaram, and his sister, the documentary filmmaker Navina Sundaram (children of Indira Sundaram, Sher-Gil's other daughter and Amrita's only sibling), they, nor Sher-Gil himself as a cosmopolitan colonial subject, have received any dedicated scholarly and academic appraisal. Until 2007, Sher-Gil and his work were resolutely embedded, instrumentalised and consumed by the narratives of his famous daughter. Sundaram himself has on various occasions used Sher-Gil's photographs for his own work, significantly the installation 'The Sher-Gil Archive' (1995), and a series of 56 digital photomontages realised in 2001–2002. Titled 'Re-Take of Amrita', Sundaram has spliced together numerous photos from Sher-Gil's portfolio for these manipulated images, using Photoshop, and has weighed in on issues of simultaneity and similarity. Most heady are the confrontations and suggested narratives between father and daughter, in which there is a "playful transference of their bodies... compressing both in the same frame, charging filial

³ Deepak Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', in Vivan Sundaram and Devika Daulet-Singh, eds., *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: His Misery and His Manuscripts* (New Delhi: Photoink, 2008), p. 232

affection with a strange eroticism and an undertow of melancholy”.⁴ Conflating generations, Sundaram extended the analogous thought processes of the father (his grandfather) through this exercise, recognising similarities in the daughter: “the antimonies of the divided subject are brought together in these ‘stills’: their pastness is brought face to face with the present in which we gaze at them”.⁵ For Sundaram, using these photographs constitutes what he calls his open or inclusive field where the personal and the social and political can coexist.

In 2007, the Tate Modern in London held a retrospective of Amrita’s work, also showcasing Sundaram’s ‘Re-Take of Amrita’ Series and a selection of Sher-Gil’s photographs of Amrita. The presentation firmly entrenched Sher-Gil’s portfolio in the familial narrative, as underscored by Kapur in an essay for the 2010 exhibition catalogue accompanying ‘Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh’, a show curated by Kirsty Ogg at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, and later taken to the Fotomuseum Winterthur in Switzerland. It was clearly stated that ‘Where Three Dreams Cross’ meant to provide an alternate history of photography particular to South Asia, one that did not reiterate “a western view of the east, but celebrates how successive generations of photographers from the subcontinent have portrayed themselves and their eras”.⁶ The show was organised thematically rather than chronologically, and divided into five sections: The Portrait, The Performance, The Family, The Street, and The Body Politic. Sher-Gil was placed within The Performance section, next to the works of

⁴ Vivan Sundaram, ‘Foreword’, in *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil*, op cit., ix

⁵ Deepak Ananth, ‘An Unfinished Project’, in *Amrita Sher-Gil: An Indian Artist Family of the Twentieth Century* (New Delhi: Photoink, 2007), p. 29

⁶ Iwona Blazwick and Urs Stahel, ‘Preface’, *Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (Whitechapel Gallery and Winterthur Museum, Steidl, 2010), p. 8

contemporary artists such as Sonia Khurana and Pushpamala N. because of their engagement with masquerade, role-playing and adopted personae. Between Kapur's text, which dwelt on the familial, and the exhibition's emphasis on the heavily staged orientation of Sher-Gil's photographs, almost all the differing aspects of the pictures were spoken for, unlike the treatment of several of the other artists in the exhibition.

'Where Three Dreams Cross' however, failed to underscore the historical relevance of Sher-Gil's photographs. Sundaram was more astute, rightly suggesting that when considered in an exclusively Indian context Sher-Gil was unique: "one of the 'invisible' pioneers of modern Indian photography",⁷ a postulation that is convincing in view of a series of 1923–1924 autochromes, (colour-glass-plate positives), produced at a time when very few autochromes are known to have existed in India. Sher-Gil's photographic practice was predated by just one conversational counterpart: that of the Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II of Jaipur (1830–1880). The maharaja's archive comprises over 2,700 collodion glass-plate negatives that date from between 1850 and 1880 and are stored in 54 custom-made boxes, over 7,000 albumen prints, and hundreds of photo albums. His studio is presumed to have been located in the premises of Chandra Mahal within the Jaipur Palace. As in the case of Sher-Gil, the sheer volume of surviving images ratifies the maharaja's commitment to photography and its apparatus. The maharaja did not make only the men and women of his court the subjects of his photographs, but also himself: "portraits – self portraits and those taken by others – wherein he assumes different

⁷ Vivan Sundaram, 'Foreword', in *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil*, op cit., xi

identities that serve as an index to his complex personality”.⁸ Though they both recognised the potential of photography⁹, the maharaja’s process differed from Sher-Gil’s in that for him the studio was the core facet, “a site that blurred the private and the public, the definitions of pure and impure within mid-19th century India”.¹⁰ Sher- Gil practiced exclusively within his home, and the private nature of his output “throws into relief the role of personal agency in the construction of a modern proto-postcolonial subject”.¹¹

An exercise involving the listing of photographers active in the subcontinent from the nineteenth century onwards – Raja Deen Dayal would be the best known – to place Sher-Gil in the chronology is not an end in itself. It is productive, however, to identify others experimenting within the medium at the same time as Sher-Gil, and hence make mention of the Jaipur Maharaja. Also, as “the history of modern Indian photography spanning the twentieth century is scarcely documented”,¹² the building of links between figures seems necessary. Charged with a comparable intent is the reference of Lionel Wendt (1900–1944), a prolifically active photographer in Sri Lanka from 1932 to 1944.

Wendt was born on the island, then known as Ceylon, and belonged to the Burgher community, descendants of Dutch and Portuguese colonists. Educated in

⁸ Gayatri Sinha, ‘Performance in Photography: A Bridge between Ram Singh II of Jaipur and Contemporary Photographers’, in Gayatri Sinha, ed., *Art and Visual Culture in India: 1857-2007* (Marg Publications, 2009), p. 288

⁹ This preoccupation of photographing the ‘Self’, in a rather elaborate manner, could at the turn of 19th century be ascribed to a certain class of wealthy man even in the West. A suitable example would be Henry Paget, the Fifth Marquess of Anglesey, known as ‘Topsy’ who as a result of his excesses squandered his family’s wealth, but left behind a remarkable set of self-portraits. Some of these images are highly oriental, and offer a rather feminised male appearance, yet their currency and circulation were for vastly different purposes than that of Sher-Gil’s photographs and even, to an extent, the maharaja’s.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 287–288

¹¹ Deepak Ananth, ‘The Gaze of the Amateur’, *op cit.*, p. 233

¹² Vivan Sundaram, ‘Foreword’, in *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil*, *op cit.*, xi

England to be a lawyer, he also trained as a classical pianist. In 1924, he made the conclusive decision to return to Sri Lanka. He barely practised as a lawyer, rather committing himself to raising an awareness of the visual arts by curating exhibitions, publishing numerous writings, and setting up a photo studio. Wendt, an autodidact, committed himself to photography in 1932, and the range of subjects he covered was vast. It included the architecture, rituals and traditions of Sri Lanka, as well as nude studio portraits of men and women, and, in a series of highly accomplished experimental images he investigated techniques such as photomontage, photo collage, solarisation, paper negatives, relief printing, brom-etching, rayographs, and transparencies in monochrome and colour. The commitment to exploring the possibilities of a modern medium relates Wendt and Sher-Gil, however vast the difference in their choice of subject matter.

In fact, there are more points of similarity between Amrita Sher-Gil and Wendt, which I explored in the 2014 exhibition 'In Dialogue: Amrita Sher-Gil and Lionel Wendt'. They shared biographical resonances and parity in subject matter, such as the focus on the bodies of native men and women. Recommended is a

...sustained individual investigation into period, style and biography, noting the variances and the interplay amongst all, and emphasizing any transversal connections. Though the movements and schools of aesthetics that formed reference points for both artists might be incompatible, it is through a study of how each played out the double binds of influence and self, without forcing literal visual comparisons or submitting the works to morphological readings, that such a pairing can be recognized. It is through this approach that we might begin to appreciate the kind of cultural modernity that was emerging in the region.¹³

¹³ Shanay Jhaveri, 'Relating Amrita Sher-Gil and Lionel Wendt', in *In Dialogue: Amrita Sher-Gil and Lionel Wendt* (Jhaveri Contemporary, 2014), no pagination.

I think it is imperative to extend a consideration of Sher-Gil beyond, but not disassociate him from, the optic of the family. One should locate him within the region's history of photography, but more pressingly take full notice of his cosmopolitanism. To achieve this I will in this chapter refer particularly to the self-portraits produced between 1890 and 1948. In them is a man "becalmed in his study, ruminatory, absorbed in his reading and writing, savouring spiritual solitude",¹⁴ slightly removed from the world around him. To understand his particular sensibility and place within the wider social history of cosmopolitan male figures of the time, it would require dwelling on "his political sympathies, whose repercussions probably reinforced the reclusiveness",¹⁵ of the latter years of his life.

Born in 1870, Sher-Gil¹⁶ met and married his Hungarian wife in 1911. Only a half-dozen self-portraits remain from the period before 1910, or the time when he was husband to an aristocratic Punjabi woman, who died in 1907. Married to her at the age of thirteen, they had lived in Lahore and had four children. It was during those years that Sher-Gil,

...used his inherited wealth to develop various scholarly and artistic interests... By the early 1890s Umrao Singh had learned a fair amount of Sanskrit, as evidenced by the maximum number of entries in the catalogue he made of books bought. Persian was another language he mastered. There is a record of over forty books on photography bought between 1898 and 1908... The list also includes hundreds of books on poetry and literature, the authors ranging from English Romantics to Tolstoy – the Russian

¹⁴ Deepak Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', op cit., p. 224

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 224

¹⁶ For a detailed family history of the Sher-Gils refer to Vivan Sundaram's excellent 'Prologue' in *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Self-Portrait in Letters and Writings* (Tulika Books, 2010), xxiii–xxix.

writer was a model. Other diverse subjects of study and interest were the natural sciences, astronomy, phonetics and carpentry.¹⁷

Sher-Gil's library and his array of pursuits indicate that he was formulating a kind of confluential thinking, drawing from Eastern and Western traditions. While Sher-Gil might not have been part of the established literary groups of Punjab, he counted among his friends in the early 1900s the future editor of the 'East and West' magazine, Joginder Singh, and philanthropist and educationist Jalaluddin Mirza. He also developed a close camaraderie with the philosopher poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal, which commenced in 1908 on the poet's return to India from England and continued until his death in 1938. This association is of note because, though Iqbal is most remembered for his involvement in the formation of Pakistan, the "dominant motif in Iqbal's thought was the pan-Islamic global community or *umma*, rather than a regional Muslim state".¹⁸ Iqbal was a modern thinker, who, when spending time in the German universities of Heidelberg and Munich, familiarised himself with the various philosophical traditions of Europe. Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson in particular dominated his imagination, and their respective concepts of *amor fati* (the embracing of one's fate again and again with courage, fortitude and improvisatory energy) and *élan vital* (the life force that animates individuals as well as societies). Regardless of where Iqbal's political vision led in the 1930s, his notions of universalism and the nation state, articulated in beautiful poetry,¹⁹ bear affinity with some of Sher-Gil's sentiments in later life.

¹⁷ Ibid., xxvii

¹⁸ Ranjit Hoskote, 'The Universal Islamist', in *Open Magazine* (14 November 2014), available at <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/books/the-universal-islamist>

¹⁹ Hoskote writes: "In an essay, Iqbal once asked rhetorically: 'What is patriotism but a subtle form of idolatry?' ... Iqbal's greatest poems cannot be separated from his politics, as some have

In the 1930s, when Sher-Gil was living in Europe, he was able to open doors for Iqbal. Zafar Anjum's biography of Iqbal states that in 1932, when Iqbal travelled to Paris, intent on meeting Louis Massignon and Bergson, he was received at the train station by Sher-Gil and his wife and daughters. Sher-Gil was present at Iqbal's meeting with Massignon and was instrumental in his meeting with Bergson, as Anjum notes:

...in the first week of January 1933. Iqbal's friend Sardar Umrao Singh sets up this meeting for him. He acts as the interpreter during the meeting. Iqbal was a forceful exponent of Bergson's concept of time, which was similar to his own views. Later on he had discarded his thesis after Professor McTaggart criticized it.²⁰

Sher-Gil's was obviously an active intellectual curiosity as he grew older, and he had staked a place within the large community of western scholars and philosophers, away from India.

The tremendous paucity of photographs that survives from the early phase of Sher-Gil's life lies in direct contrast to what would come next, which was an almost obsessive documentation of his family life, and himself, over 40 years; leading Sundaram to question whether the earlier photographs had been destroyed: "Or did Umrao Singh become the complex photographer we now know him to be only when

suggested. His greatest poems emerge from, and express, his political convictions. And here we must face a moment of reckoning. In his account of a universal Islam whose promise of inclusive solidarity overrides local and regional affiliations, Iqbal shares an affinity with the Tablighi and the Salafi visions. In this sense, he must take his place as one of the foundational thinkers of present-day Islamism, alongside Maulana Maududi and Sayyid Qutb. This may be bitter medicine for nationalists, whether Indian or Pakistani, to swallow, but it must be considered. The visceral reality is that we may be deeply moved by the poetry, if it is beautiful, enigmatic and tapestried with plural strands of sense and cadence, of an individual whose political vision we might not share." (Hoskote, 'The Universal Islamist', in *Open Magazine*, 14 November 2014, available at <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/books/the-universal-islamist>).

²⁰ Zafar Anjum, 'Paris and Spain', in *Iqbal: The Life of a Poet, Philosopher and Politician* (Random House India, 2014), p. 173-74

the young Hungarian Marie Antoinette Gottesmann-Baktay came into his life ... bringing with her that peculiarly European sense of anxious selfhood?"²¹ While this is certainly a possibility, it is not one to which Sundaram is fully committed. He moves on to an analysis of a family portrait authored by Sher-Gil in 1889/1890 [fig. 3.1], a conventional group portrait of his clan, but in it Sundaram already detects the artistic distinction of Sher-Gil:

...the camera is placed off-centre and, as if by the sleight of hand, Umrao Singh is brought nearer the lens, foregrounding him in a highly mannered pose. A dandy – he is without his turban, his torso is bare, he shows his bare legs and feet shod in white socks... Umrao Singh shoots his family and the retinue to show his *difference*, his *attitude*. His younger brother sits stiffly at the centre of the group... in later life he will be knighted by the British for his success as an industrialist and politician, while the older brother, Umrao Singh, will live the modest life of a scholar-photographer.²²

Along with this family portrait, a close appraisal of the few self-portraits that survive testify to Sher-Gil's definite awareness of his own persona and the tendency towards a specific kind of self-representational project. The origins of the dignified, noble, cultivated self that is more exuberantly seen in his later self-portraits can be found in four self-portraits dating from 1892 to 1908. The image from 1892 [fig. 3.2] is one of the earliest in the archive, and "shows the twenty-two-year-old youth in a voluminous dressing gown, seated at his desk, engrossed in the book he holds in his hands".²³ Elaborate clothing, books, and a pose of deep attention are all signalled and will reappear more prominently and persistently after his time in Hungary; albeit in higher octane, definite markers of his interest in projecting a persona of erudition,

²¹ Vivan Sundaram, 'Foreword', in *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil*, op cit., x

²² Ibid., xi

²³ Deepak Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', op cit., p. 225

learning and serious scholarly intent. It is the most conventional image of the group, which means its roots are legibly drawn from the colonial West as he attributes to himself the scent of a gentleman. The more striking and interesting self-portraits are *Moods of metaphysical emotion I: self portrait* (1908) [fig. 3.3], *Moods of metaphysical emotions II: self portrait* (1908) [fig. 3.4] and the bold *After a bath: self portrait* (1904) [fig. 3.5]. In all three Sher-Gil consistently divests himself of the turban “that is the distinctive sign of the Sikh community.”²⁴

In *After a bath: self portrait* Sher-Gil frames himself firmly in the centre of the frame, directly looking back at the camera, shorn of all clothing apart from a loincloth, and runs his fingers through his waist-length hair. The image emanates a strong sensuality; a celebration of the male body. Sher-Gil is self-fashioning perfectly, but without clothing. Ananth reads the image within a long lineage of “countless nineteenth-century orientalist paintings... except that what we see is not the stereotypical nubile Circassian girl”.²⁵ This is certainly valid art-historical reading but, apart from being a self-conscious retort to prevailing forms of Orientalist representation, what significance can be read into his manner of so inscripting himself? By electing to focus on himself, and his individualities, Sher-Gil stepped away from the then typical colonial use of photography to picture and generalise other ethnic communities. With these early images, Sher-Gil is engaged in raising and positioning the Indian subject, and according it a respect and status it had hitherto not been granted in colonial photography. He does so with great self-possession and confidence. They are not overtly defiant images, but operate as personal declarations of intent, announcing that ‘I’ as a subject *can and need* to be

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 226

taken seriously. He approaches the task of representing the self with self-awareness and an admirable gravitas. It would seem at this juncture that Sher-Gil was already arbitrating an identity that in choice stood apart from the other men of his family, and the distinction was unequivocally proclaimed, but more subtly, in the two *Moods of metaphysical emotion* images. Here he sits in a garden, in image I on a wicker stool, his left leg raised and resting on his right; his hair cascades down his right shoulder while he looks down at a book. In image II, also taken outdoors amidst nature, his hair is bundled up on the top of his head and he looks straight into the camera.

Together these few images seem to lead one through the stages of Sher-Gil's exploration with the camera to "discover the aesthete in himself".²⁶ It is likely that Sher-Gil's relationship with his Hungarian wife had a burgeoning effect, providing a larger canvas on which to play out latent inclinations and self-beliefs rather than initiate a sense of the self. Such a companionship of a transnational nature, with fabulous homes in Lahore, Shimla, Budapest and Paris, would easily become for Sher-Gil "the *mise en scene* for 'performances' of hybrid identities of staged masquerades in the mid-twentieth century style of the waning bourgeoisie".²⁷ However, Sher-Gil had already been exposed to the West, having travelled to London in 1895 with his first wife. The early images make clear that Sher-Gil was adept at announcing and perhaps even revelling in his alterity, founded on strong social and political differences with his family, which became perhaps the motivation for such imaging of the self. His intellectual and political affiliations need to be read

²⁶ Ibid., p. 225

²⁷ Geeta Kapur, 'Familial Narratives and their Accidental Denouement', in Kristy Ogg, ed., *Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (Germany: Steidl, 2010), p. 46

in relation to the self-portraits, and while they might not announce themselves literally in images, they do contribute patinas of emotion that are irrefutable, especially when circumstances shifted and changed with the move to Hungary and the outbreak of World War I.

While formulating his ideological understandings and preferences, charting a cartography of the self with multiple affiliations, Sher-Gil was also deciding on how he would fashion himself. As a colonial subject arriving in Hungary he discarded his Indian *kurtas* to don Western garb, all of his own accord. For his wedding to Marie Antoinette in Lahore, Sher-Gil has a beard, a turban and a three-piece suit [fig. 3.6]. The Sher-Gil's Budapest home [fig. 3.7] is well documented as having been lavish, filled with furniture and accessories from the 'Orient' – much of it brought over from Lahore – and in these images we find Sher-Gil with his wife in their domain, literally 'well at home', provisioned to host the rituals of the sophisticated and refined. In other self-portraits from 1913–1914 he is divested of his turban with a European-style haircut [fig. 3.8]. Sher-Gil is again with a book [fig. 3.9] or seen in profile in calm repose, his hands at his chest clutching a shawl, his eyes closed in deep thought [fig. 3.10]. His sartorial decisions and posed countenances unequivocally aspire to indicate or function as expressions of a cultured man, who easily transitions between different fields of knowledge and language, and has "made his entry into the world of the Central European bourgeoisie, focusing his lens on the trappings that furnished a certain idea of the decorum of the enlightened classes".²⁸ It was only in 1916, after three years in Hungary, that he would again return to dressing and photographing himself in Indian clothing.

²⁸ Deepak Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', op cit., p. 226

Yet on arriving in Budapest, Sher-Gil continued to pursue his Sanskrit studies and interacted with numerous Hungarian Indologists, such as Sandor Kegal, the eminent Iranian studying the Bhagavad Gita and Amir Khurso's poetry; Gyula Germanus, who was invited by Rabindranath Tagore in 1929 to Shantiniketan to establish the Islam Department; and, of course, his brother-in-law Ervin Baktay, on whom he had an indelible influence. Baktay, initially a painter, would later be known as an Indologist, and would write several books on Indian culture and art, including one on Tagore, and an abridged Hungarian version of the Mahabharata. "[In] the preface of these books Baktay thanks Umrao for his help, for his contribution to the proper understanding of the Indian text and mythology. Later he published the selected writings and speeches of Gandhi."²⁹ Sher-Gil not only interacted with these scholars but before the war he and his wife, "led the upper class life of the Gottesmann family in Hungary, they used to go to soirees and liked to invite guests to their tea-parties ... Probably on such an occasion he met Mari Jászai, the famous Hungarian

²⁹ Ágnes Pape, 'Umrao Singh Sher-Gil's Hungarian contacts and scholarly activities – in particular respect to the correspondence between Sher-Gils and Mari Jászai', available at (<http://www.delhi.balassiintezet.hu/attachments/article/105/The%20correspondance%20between%20Umrao%20Singh%20Sher%20by%20Ágnes%20Pap%20with%20pictures%20-%20F~.pdf>). For more details on Sher-Gil's involvement with Baktay, see Pape's paper, page 3: "Baktay translated also some rubáis by Omar Khayyam, which were published in Nyugat. He wrote a short introduction to his interpretation, in which he explained, why the Rubáiyat concerned him closely and why he tried to make his own rendering in contradistinction to the lately published Rubáiyat-translation by Lőrinc Szabó, a famous Hungarian poet. Szabó made his rendering from English by Edward Fitzgerald, but according to Baktay, neither the English translation by Fitzgerald nor the Hungarian one by Szabó, could reproduce the original content, although he admitted that their renderings had poetical value. Baktay wrote that his was such a favourable position, that he could access closer to the original poems of Khayyam with the help of an expert of the Persian language, and that's why he was able to make a more authentic translation of some rubáis, and to reproduce the original Persian metrical form too. Of course this expert, whose name Baktay didn't mention, was Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, who also explained to him the philosophical background of the poems. Baktay translated a book on Omar Khayyam written by Harold Lamb, and in the epilogue of the book he added some remarks to Lamb's text in connection with the symbolical sense of the Rubáiyat. According to Lamb, Omar Khayyam didn't use the hidden allegories of the contemporaneous Sufi mystics, whereas Baktay claimed that the Persian-cultured Indians mostly knew by heart the rubáis and they always attributed deep symbolic sense to them – as he could had heard from Umrao Singh."

actress”,³⁰ and developed a friendship that lasted until her death in 1926. The correspondence sustained by Jászai and Sher-Gil, and brought to light by the art historian Dr Ágnes Pape in 2013, is extremely illuminating.

Besides these vibrant scholarly and social interactions, Sher-Gil also found himself attending to his anticolonial sympathies, which he had probably been cogitating over for a while and described as “socialistic, anarchistic and Tolstoyan”.³¹ It was through Har Dayal, then the leader of the Ghadar Party in Berlin and with whom he made contact in March 1915, that these political views found an outlet, but later had consequences for Sher-Gil and his family. A substantial correspondence between Sher-Gil and Dayal exists in the political archives of the German Foreign Office in Berlin, vividly revealing Sher-Gil’s engagement with the Ghadar Party and the Indian Independence Committee (IIC), and finely illustrating his thinking and political orientation.

A revolutionary organisation established in 1913 by a group of Indians living in America, the Ghadar Party’s aim was to overthrow British imperial rule in India. The University of California, Berkeley, issued a paper titled *Ghadr* from which the party drew its name, the word defined as ‘revolution’ in English. Har Dayal, the founding member of the party with whom Sher-Gil corresponded, was extradited from America in 1914. When World War I broke out on 25 July of that year, the party sent a number of its members to India and Germany to continue its activities. Dayal was posted to Germany where he would establish the Indian Independence Committee (IIC) as a front organisation with Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh and the revolutionary

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Vivan Sundaram, ‘Prologue’, *Amrita Sher-Gil*, op cit., xxxiv

poet Harindranath Chattopadhyay among its members. Dayal proposed that Sher-Gil become a member of the IIC in Berlin, and wrote a letter dated 30 September 1915 to a Baron von Wesendonck saying,

Sirdar Umrao Singh has considerable literary talent. He has translated Urdu and Persian poems into English verse, and has contributed some excellent articles against England to the *Continental Times* (Berlin). He is very simple in his habits. He is a strict teetotaler and vegetarian, and does not smoke.³²

A letter of 8 October 1915 spoke of “suggestions with regard to Sirdar Umrao Singh’s plan of work, as we desire to enable him to use his social influence and literary talent for the furtherance of Indian Nationalism and of German culture and influence in India”.³³

Enthused by Dayal’s invitation, Sher-Gil wrote to him on 15 September 1915, assuring him that he would visit Berlin to explore the possibility of being associated with the party but, slightly delayed his departure curiously citing the reason that he would “not be able to get my suits of clothes ready in such a short period. *I have been over economising in clothes.* [Italicised text handwritten.] All the same I shall try to come as soon as possible”.³⁴ However casual an aside, it does bear witness to the care and attention Sher-Gil devoted to his appearance and its perceived relevance

³² Quoted from the Har Dayal/Umrao Singh Sher-Gil/German Foreign Correspondence, shared with me by Navina Sundaram on 14 November 2014., BN: R 21089-FN3 (Seite Page 000215) Berlin, den 24. Sept.1915 (handschriftlich – ein Telegramm?)
Generalkonsulat Budapest, no. 157, Bitte Sirdar veranlassen Abreise aufzuschieben und Brief Har Dayals abzuwarten. U:H.S.i.v., BN: R21089-FN3 (Seite Page 000267) Har Dayal’s handwritten note to Wesendonck, 30 September 1915. Unpublished.

³³ Ibid., BN: R21089-FN4 (Seite Page 000319) Har Dayal’s handwritten letter to Wesendonck 8 October 1915. Unpublished.

³⁴ Ibid., BN: R 21089 FN3 (Page 000242) (typed – neutral letterhead). Unpublished.

when conducting his affairs, the sartorial a necessary component of his self-projection. He further articulated his thoughts for Dayal:

You are right in thinking my soul is free. I would add that all freedom of any kind can only proceed from a previous inner freedom. If we have not that, we are slaves, however free we may seem to be otherwise. I do not know if you realize how free I personally feel even concerning the hard and stubborn fact of living, especially in Europe; were you to realize, it would almost seem to you recklessly suicidal. The reason is a kind of faith in the sublime majesty of LIFE which is equally the basis of Hinduism and Christianity, not in their dogmatic, but real spirit... I am not only willing to cooperate with anyone to the best of my abilities for the overthrow of the unrighteous power of England...³⁵

This passage makes clear the moral motivation driving Sher-Gil's anticolonial thought, a clear rejection of nationalism, which he eloquently reiterated in a letter to Baron von Wesendonck from the Hotel Adlon, Berlin, on 17 October 1915:

In the past or rather passing history of this our earth we note the rise and fall of Empires, the path which their growth has taken and apart from minor differences one constant tendency is true in which the race feels its strength. This tendency towards aggression and enslavement... at the expense of other countries. Then enrichment, then decay and fall and dissolution. This is the end of all power which becomes selfish. The inevitable corollary of materialism. Well it is for a nation if it realize the vanity of this short lived greatness and base its ideals on something more permanent, whose aroma can linger and persist for ever in the cosmic dust cloud of our planetary system, living as a seed in the spirit of the world to germinate and grow again and again into noble deeds in the ages to come. Well it is for nations and rulers who can keep such ideals before their minds not to enslave other races but to succour and help the weak and take their hand and lead them to freedom. Thus alone can freedom grow and live in a land. Otherwise like England the higher aspirations of the nation are swallowed

³⁵ Ibid., BN: R 21089 FN3 (*Page 000242*) (typed – neutral letterhead). Unpublished.

up by the tendency of slavery over others and the nation finds itself infected and eventually in the power of that very slavery which it imposes on others.³⁶

Sher-Gil's rhetoric belies his Tolstoyan sympathies and fierce criticism of the economically exploitative conditions of Imperial rule, which he publicly decried in an article for the *Continental Times* and a piece published in the Hungarian newspaper *Magyar Orszag*.

Sher-Gil, well aware that his association with the Ghadar Party could have an adverse impact on his life, wrote to Har Dayal at the outset of their exchange:

For the sake of my wife and children I wish that I could do some work which could bring me even a third or fourth of my previous income which I count as already lost if the English retain possession of India, but were it not for my family, I would in pursuance of the principles I have loved and admired for so many years, far far prefer to live as a very poor man.³⁷

Sher-Gil seems convinced of the need to correct power as it starts to trespass, and is himself prepared to relinquish power and privilege, suggesting an outlook and a world view that encompass a concern for others. Sher-Gil eventually decided against the move to Germany, remaining Hungary-based because of his family. Dayal conveyed this information to Baron von Wesendonck in a letter dated 14 October 1915: "Sirdar Umrao Singh has decided to live in Budapest for the present. He will of course be in touch with us and do literary work for the Movement. He will also send messages to his Indian friends and relatives through our Agents."³⁸ Sher-Gil's

³⁶ Ibid., BN: R21090-FN2 (Page 000157). Unpublished.

³⁷ Ibid., BN: R 21089 FN3 (Page 000242) (typed – neutral letterhead). Unpublished.

³⁸ Ibid., BN: R21090-FN1 (Seite Page 00057). Unpublished.

correspondence with Har Dayal and support of the Ghadar Party continued until 1918.

While Sher-Gil was not officially involved in the sweep of the Ghadar Party's revolutionary activity, he was steadfast in his anticolonial thought, but his brother Sunder Singh "was positioned on the other side of the political fence. He held a key position in the Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD), which organized prayers for the victory of British 'benefactors' and condemned the Ghadarites as 'fallen' Sikhs; the CKD even collaborated with the rulers to help track down revolutionaries".³⁹ Even though Sher-Gil was more of a friend and ally of the Ghadar Party, and not working directly for it, the British Government raised objections. In a letter dated 9 July 1919, Sir E.O. Maclaghan, a British Officer, wrote to Sir William Vincent on the question of passage to England for Sher-Gil and his family. It also discussed the issue of permission for remittances from his estates in India:

I know the hero of this file quite well and speaking quite briefly, I look on him as guilty but harmless and have gone through these papers and our own files – and I think it would be fair to let him receive a sufficient remittance to keep him from starvation. I would look on £40 per mensem as more than is necessary, but if you suggest £20 I would agree.⁴⁰

Sunder Singh, Sher-Gil's brother, was put in charge of administering the prescribed allowance to Sher-Gil, which, along with their political differences, put a strain on their relationship.

Sher-Gil's sentiments were expressed outside official lines of communication, and concern over the war recurred in the letters he shared with Jászai. In a letter of 22

³⁹ Sundaram, Prologue, *Amrita Sher-Gil*, op cit., xxxv.

⁴⁰ Gurnam Singh Rekhi, *Sir Sundar Singh Majithia and his relevance in Sikh politics*, p. 21

August 1914, predating his contact with Dayal and the Ghadar Party, Sher-Gil was already voicing his apprehensions, especially with regard to the mechanised nature of warfare:

I feel deeply sorry for any nation that takes part in war, especially in these days of highly destructive machinery and most expensive war expenditure, when even the chance of displaying personal bravery of a hand to hand fight is reduced to a minimum, when men fall dead like flies in a cold wind not knowing whence wholesale death is dealt out to them.⁴¹

In the same letter he philosophically quotes a passage from Rabindranath

Tagore's *Sadhana*:

I was reading the lectures of our Indian poet and came across the following passage which I should like to quote to you: 'Civilization must be judged and prized not by the amount of power it has developed, but by how much it has evolved and given expression to, by its laws and institutions, the love of humanity. The first question and the last, which it has to answer is, whether and how far it recognizes man more as a spirit than as a machine.'⁴²

A very early letter to Jászai, written at the start of their friendship and when Sher-Gil had only recently moved to Hungary, followed her performance in the play 'Savitri' produced by Árpád Pásztor:

Yesterday afternoon both of us went to Budapest to see you in 'Savitri' and in spite of a few un-Indianisms of name and dress and gesture and sentiment on the part of

⁴¹ Ágnes Pape, 'Umrao Singh Sher-Gil's Hungarian contacts and scholarly activities – in particular respect to the correspondence between Sher-Gil and Mari Jászai', available at (http://www.delhi.balassiintezet.hu/attachments/article/105/The%20correspondance%20between%20Umrao%20Singh%20Sher%20by%20Ágnes%20Pap%20_with%20pictures%20-%20F~.pdf), p. 7

⁴² Ibid., p. 7

some of the characters, I could not keep back the tears from rising to my eyes throughout the performance. Strongly you recalled to my mind the noble idealism of my people from across the centuries and through the shroud of seeming death of our present – which I hope – sleep only, for I believe, that although early greatness and power of a nation can die, its spirituality must live and make it live.⁴³

One detects in this excerpt Sher-Gil's deep love for India.

The outbreak of World War I prevented the Sher-Gil family from returning to India, and documenting his family and himself became Sher-Gil's preoccupation. In September 1916, the Sher-Gil family left Budapest for the popular holiday resort of Dunaharaszti, where Marie Antoinette's family had a home. Material conditions were limited in Dunaharaszti compared to the life they had led in Budapest, but Ananth notes that Sher-Gil's wife and children "were the cynosure of his eyes, and the Magyar chapter of the family chronicle records the enchantment of the newly minted *pater familias* in the presence of so much *Gemutlichkeit*".⁴⁴ Pape reports that in Dunaharaszti Sher-Gil,

was interested in everyday problems, e.g. he repaired the church-clock, and he also took part in catholic ceremony. He walked a lot with his daughters and a white dog in Glázer-forest, as was mentioned by Miklós Losonczi on the basis of verbal communications of Sher-Gil's neighbours.⁴⁵

Sundaram also suggests that "it is likely that he met André Kertesz, who went on to become a world-renowned photographer, and who made a poetic series of

⁴³ Ibid., p. 5

⁴⁴ Deepak Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', op cit., p. 226

⁴⁵ Ágnes Pape, 'Umrao Singh Sher-Gil's Hungarian contacts and scholarly activities', op cit., p. 8

photographs of his brother and of the village of Dunaharaszti during the summers of 1919 and 1920".⁴⁶

An image from 1917 pictures Sher-Gil fully immersed in the rituals of rural, pastoral life and carries the inscription, 'How I fetched water from the well' [fig. 3.11]. In this photograph Sher-Gil is performing the role of peasant, not the only guise he would assume during this period as is evident from a family portrait taken in a field in 1916 in which Sher-Gil is in a suit [fig. 3.12]. Other images, from 1917 [fig. 3.13], and 1916, see him in Indian dress [fig. 3.14], reclining on a divan. There is even a picture of Sher-Gil in a one-piece swimming costume [fig. 3.15]. Collectively, these multiple photographic incarnations – a hybrid Russian intellectual, a Tolstoyan peasant, an Oriental sage lounging on a divan – “suggest that the person Sher-Gil projects is that of a pictorial being issuing from a tableau”.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, there is a forthright attentiveness to the productive instability of multiple intellectual and philosophical affiliations, and the implications of co-inhabiting these conditions. Even after living in Europe, Sher-Gil never could, nor wanted, to liberate himself from being Indian. Writing to Jászai in a letter dated the 25 October 1916, he states that he sometimes wished he

...were an English man and not Indian, whose nation is oppressed by the English, for then I might have had a better time in Hungary, as all the English have even in this war time, but I loath to belong to a nation of oppress and I am after all content to remain an Indian in spite of what has come. The more I see of life in Europe, the better I like my own country.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Vivian Sundaram, 'Prologue', *Amrita Sher-Gil*, xxxvi

⁴⁷ Deepak Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', op cit., p. 227

⁴⁸ Ágnes Pape, 'Umrao Singh Sher-Gil's Hungarian contacts and scholarly activities', op cit., p. 9

The Sher-Gil family returned to India in 1921. His nine years in Hungary had matured his sense of self at both the intellectual and the physical level. He was living with a greater sense of self-realisation and self-understanding. There now appears to be a quest for connections between the self and the world at large, something that comes through in the range of subjective choices he made with regard to his personal politics and self-presentation. Here we start to see some correspondences with Tagore, who likewise operated from a highly subjective position, something that Grant Watson notes when discussing Shantiniketan. Watson writes that

Almost everything at Santiniketan can be traced back to Tagore, because it was after all predominantly his vision made manifest...Perhaps his genius was to construct a world from his own subjective choices and link these choices together to produce a singular vision. ..Artistic license gave him the largesse to bring somewhat discontinuous fields into relation, and so for example within his world view, nature and culture are synthesised, and modernity is produced out of tradition which was for him itself 'a notional category allowing infinite extension of its own nurturing body through poetic allusion and metaphor.'⁴⁹

Already apparent in Sher-Gil is a similar emphasis on the inner subjective life, on the path of inquiry and its radical potential, which became ever more pronounced through the 1920s and '30s. However, Sher-Gil functions in a slightly different register than Tagore: his practice of life was not grand in scale; it was intimate, even minor. Sher-Gil's opposition to Empire was routed not through a revolutionary party or a public programme, but through his lifestyle, his way of life. He never joined the

⁴⁹ Grant Watson, 'Moderate Modernism: On Tagore, Le Corbusier and Nasreen Mohamedi', *Metropolis M*, No. 6, December/January, 2007 available at <http://metropolism.com/magazine/2007-no6/gematigd-modernisme/english>

Ghadar Party, nor did he ascend to becoming a public figure in the mould of Tagore or Iqbal.

The overt role-playing of his Hungarian days is no longer present in the images realised in India, primarily Shimla, where the family was based. In a letter to Jászai written on the 28 July 1921 from India, he mentions a conscious decision to adjust his self-presentation: “I have grown a hair [*sic*] and grey beard [fig. 3.16] to my family’s disgust and even my friends are not in favour of it but I keep it for comfort, and to not hurt my brother’s feelings, who is very orthodox.”⁵⁰ This suggests that rather than capitulating to convention or conforming to orthodoxy, there is a maturation of self in Sher-Gil in which the need to dramatise his alterity at a most visceral level has diminished. Though the appeal to cultivate the self is constant, self-work is now to be done through, and explored in, other ways.

In the range of self-portraits from these years Sher-Gil is seen mostly with his turban and in a kurta that is belted at the waist, the buttons done up on the right-hand side. Books recur in these portraits, and modern gadgetry makes an appearance. We can see Sher-Gil repairing a camera in 1926 [fig. 3.17], surrounded by a host of musical instruments in 1922 [fig. 3.18], or busy at a typewriter. One of the photographs that picture Sher-Gil by his typewriter carries his handwritten inscription, “A primitive typist” [fig. 3.19]. It succinctly raises the stakes of the image from a mere document of the self to an articulation of the awareness of a colonial subject’s staged confrontation with modernity, his own enactment and embodiment of that condition rendered through a proximity to objects and techniques. It was during these years of 1923–24 that Sher-Gil produced the aforementioned 16

⁵⁰ Ágnes Pape, ‘Umrao Singh Sher-Gil’s Hungarian contacts and scholarly activities’, *op cit.*, p. 6

autochromes (colour glass-plate negatives), which were barely known in India at the time [figs. 3.20; 3.21; 3.22]. Sher-Gil's experimentation and process can be observed in another portrait from Shimla, in which he is seated in a chair clutching strings that are probably for the photographic apparatus. It captures his countenance, and the inscription reads thus: 'A sweet holy mood' [fig. 3.23]. The rest of the albums from this period repeat the rhythms of the Hungarian ones, documenting the growing up of his daughters and the grand beauty of his wife.

While immersed in the domestic, Sher-Gil did not abandon his commitment to anti-colonial thought despite the British government's reprimand. He initiated a dialogue with Tagore and, in one of the letters, detailed his experience of an Hungarian commune:

Two things I have observed there: first that each movement of organised violence which followed the one before had to fortify itself with still greater violence... Secondly, what could be seen in a very few individuals as an idealistic tendency and a wish for the betterment of the condition of the masses became in the case of the masses or the majority of those affected by the idea, neither more, nor less, than enhanced selfishness, a desire not to share but only to take from others and to stop there... I have seen for example families living round a fine park helping to demolish the decaying walls and after they had cut down and removed the trees, they very gladly built a wall between their house and the park – the very wall which they had helped to disappear sometimes previously.⁵¹

When Tagore visited Hungary in 1926 to deliver a series of lectures, Sher-Gil and his brother-in-law Baktay were in India. The Tagore and Sher-Gil association, calls for a more sustained consideration. Suffused with admiration, though their actual

⁵¹ From Imre Banga, *Hungry Tiger: Encounters between Hungarian and Bengali Literary Cultures* (Sahitya Akademi, 2008), pp. 124–25

exchanges were limited, resemblances and consonances can be detected. Ananth has already dwelt substantially, and justifiably, on the links between Amrita Sher-Gil and Tagore, but her father should also be drafted into the conversation. With Umrao Singh Sher-Gil the interrelation with Tagore operated more obviously on the level of biography, both being transnationally scholarly men with confluent ways of thinking. But, alongside their affiliations of sensibility and philosophical outlook was the practice of the fashioning of oneself, rather forcefully and consistently articulated in the domain of the sartorial – a correlation less ostentatious but as crucial.

The writer and critic Rustom Bharucha has very astutely remarked on Tagore's politics of dress, describing his self-fashioning as coming,

...out of a deeply personal critical introspection, in direct response to the politics of culture at home. Tagore, one could say, choreographed his appearance, not only for the Western audience, but for his own personhood, and the dignity, self-respect and grace attached to it. Like his poetry, this attire was a distinctive invention; a highly subjective sartorial signature in which he could distinguish himself, and yet feel at ease. Rejecting the Gandhian choice of khadi to affirm swadeshi politics, Tagore arrived at a more complex form of hybridizing a Hindu-Muslim sartorial style through the use of the *chapkan*, a loose overcoat worn over the *jubba* (tunic).⁵²

Evident from Bharucha's assessment is Tagore's awareness of the role played by clothing and the way it can contribute to a projected image for circulation in the public domain, but he was right to emphasise that apparel for Tagore was not simply a symbolic tool for public instrumentalisation; it was also very much part of a personal practice of the self. Tagore and Sher-Gil intersect where the self is

⁵² Rustom Bharucha, 'Cosmopolitanism', in *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (Oxford India Paperback, 2006), p. 131

cultivated beyond the public arena. Both conceived of garments that did not seek to nativise, but rather to be reflective of confluential thinking. Like Tagore, Sher-Gil's kurta was bespoke, and akin to the tunic in which Tolstoy was photographed. Both men negotiated a global consciousness in their clothing, not through an assertion of foreignness, but rather the importance of making a choice; of having an inner life, accentuated by the creation of a specific kind of garment, an intimate indicator of self. It stressed that the interconnection of the self and the world can be actualised in subtle ways, pertinent, significant and suffused with potential.

By the time the family returned to Europe, to Paris, in 1929, Sher-Gil's self was firmly entrenched [figs. 3.24; 3.25; 3.26]. No longer was he grasping at alterity through various costumes and, fittingly, the domestic dwelling became the ready repository for a man of various enthusiasms. Quoting from a section titled 'The Interior, The Trace' in Walter Benjamin's unfinished *The Arcades Project*, Ananth says that,

...the nineteenth century, like no other century was addicted to the dwelling... it conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling's interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lay embedded in deep, usually violet, folds of velvet.⁵³

Sher-Gil continues to pose tinkering with his telescope, seated at his Remington, or with a magnifying glass in hand, or, in another image, books scattered all about [fig. 3.27] and, much as in the pictures taken in Shimla, committed in these interiors to his own diversions. At the time of these self-portraits, Sher-Gil was in tremendous

⁵³ Deepak Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', op cit., pp. 227-28

company; August Strindberg, Émile Zola, George Bernard Shaw and Robert de Montesquiou, the arbiter of taste in the Belle Époque and model for the Baron de Charlus in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, were all occupied with similar projects, but it seems that he was not aware of their presence.⁵⁴ The images he was building of himself reveal the processes of self-work, the medium of photography becoming central to this private art of living.

He was curious about the latest inventions and eager to try his hand at them. He consulted manuals and guidebooks, but, strangely enough, there is no mention in his letters or in any of the other documents he left behind, of the work of any individual photographers or photographic albums that he might have seen. Perhaps his avidity for taking photographs shielded him from the evolution of the art in the world at large. He was absorbed in his own world – the one captured in images.⁵⁵

It needs to be highlighted that Sher-Gil's peculiar ways of working on himself were motivated not by a moral perfectionism, but by the enthusiasms of the amateur, eschewing rank, priority, excellence, worth, affluence and exclusivity, and undercutting the fascism that comes with perfectionism. Leela Gandhi eloquently articulates the consequences for such self-work, and its relevance in the context of late nineteenth-century utopian socialism:

These twinned beliefs about the contagious nature of individual and collective co-existence were of course strongly influenced by the revolutionary and popular Darwinism of the time, with its hypothesis of the entangled web of life, an argument that highly specific or localized actions... say a woodpecker's pecking of a troublesome bark protecting a forward thinking carpenter ant, has evolutionary consequences for

⁵⁴ For a closer analysis of these connections, see Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', op cit., p. 231

⁵⁵ Deepak Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', op cit., p. 228

species, life itself, that is to say, to use the technical term all ontogenesis is phylogenetic or my personal gestation is somehow inextricable from world consciousness, which is why you have to care for the self.⁵⁶

This is palpable in a suite of images from August 1930, *Before the fast of fifteen days: self-portrait* [fig. 3.28]; *After fifteen days of fasting I: self portrait* [fig. 3.29]; and *After fifteen days of fasting II: self portrait* [fig. 3.30], in which Sher-Gil poses as an ascetic in a loincloth, with his arms above his head. Accompanying annotations indicate that the images do indeed depict the before and after of a 15-day fast. Har Dayal had mentioned Sher-Gil's vegetarianism to Baron von Wesendonck and, in fact, vegetarianism and physical self-preservation were fixations of Sher-Gil. They were "an integral part of the life of a scholar-ascetic that he carved out for himself, quite in contrast to his aristocratic and affluent origins and upbringing".⁵⁷ The choice of vegetarianism, a hidden part of self-work, is no less relevant than his sartorial choices when appreciating Sher-Gil's practice of the self. These characteristics and choices, played out through lifestyle, were together reflective of an anti-Imperial thought process, and reiterated a concept of life that fell beyond and outside the accepted norms and definitions of the times. The desire and effort motivating such practices of the self need to be given their due.

The before-and-after fasting images immediately remind one of the 1904 self-portrait, *After a bath: self portrait*. There is indeed a similar choreography of the staged body, stressing an abiding interest in his physical being, but unmistakable also is the advancement in Sher-Gil's self-cultivation. While the 1904 image is a potent

⁵⁶ Leela Gandhi, paper presented at Practice International: Stockholm Assembly, Iaspis, Stockholm, October 2013, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElGKSj9AX-M> ⁵⁷ Vivian Sundaram, 'Prologue', *Amrita Sher-Gil*, op cit., xxiii

announcement of his difference from his clan, a direct performance, the 1930 self-portraits, which are set within the elegant surroundings of his Paris home, visualise not only the physical journey Sher-Gil has made beyond the geographic boundaries of India, but also the progression in his thinking. The portraits are important records of a process of disciplined behaviour, a continuing practice of the self, with no more role-play or theatrics. The choice to frame the self so explicitly within the terms of the body, of such self-discipline, was vital to a way of being. Sher-Gil's self-discipline is not about world negation, penitence or salvation, but a way of affirming life in the world. Gandhi once again is instructive on this matter while quoting the writer Arthur Koestler, who, in 1942, called it 'the path of the yogi' as opposed to that of the commissar – the latter a figure striving for perfection and open to any course that follows revolutionary ideals. The yogi is more a self-endangering subject, the more willing to sacrifice a revolutionary ideal, the more willing to maintain the connections between the self and the world:

...the *yogi* believes that each individual is alone, but attached to the old one by an invisible umbilical cord and that his only task during his advisedly earthly life is to avoid any action, emotion or thought, which might lead to a breaking of the cord. The avoidance has to be maintained by a difficult elaborate technique, the only kind of technique he accepts.⁵⁸

Gandhi further notes that: Koestler's yogi ethics belonged very much to the scene of transnational reparative collaboration. He insists that full realisation of the yogi way requires collaboration between East and West: "Yogi-ethics... survives only in the East and to learn it we have to turn to the East; but we need qualified

⁵⁸ Leela Gandhi, paper presented at Practice International: Stockholm Assembly, op cit.

interpreters and...reinterpretation in the terms and symbols of Western Thought”⁵⁹.

Sher-Gil’s historical decision to not move to Germany and fully assume rank with the Ghadar Party, is indicative of where his own sensibility was pitched.

My contention is that Sher-Gil operated from a basis of knowledge that was synthesised from diverse sources and engagements, refined across a lifetime. His self-portraits are testaments to his shifting, progressing sensibility, to self-existing in a continuum. By the end of the family’s ‘Paris chapter’ in 1934, both daughters, Amrita and Indira, were no longer children, and back in India Sher-Gil remained deeply involved with matters of the self and the practice of the self, the inherent difficulty of his undertaking bestowing a brooding, melancholic quality to many of his later tableaux.

Through the various stages of self-work, his *askesis*, Sher-Gil seems to have reached a new threshold of negotiation in which it was through “our affects rather than our cognitive faculties that our mortality is disclosed to us,”⁶⁰ and which needed to be accepted, and not disowned. He seemed to be moving beyond a self-work, explicitly concerned with simple aesthetics. Undoubtedly, Sher-Gil took up the very difficult task of releasing himself from himself, coalescing with the notion of being aware of being and becoming, of being between two moments, the past and the future. He was as if stranded between watching himself and gradually coming undone, or, as Roland Barthes terms it, recording “the moment that is past (pastness in the evidentiary sense of *that has been*), of a moment that is anticipated (the

⁵⁹ Arthur Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945) quoted in Leela Gandhi, *The Common Cause: Postcolonial Ethics and the Practice of Democracy, 1900-1955* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 204

⁶⁰ Kaja Silverman, ‘All Things Shining’, in *Flesh of my Flesh* (Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 111

spectre of imminent death), and, in between, the temporality of ‘becoming’ that offers a two way reciprocity in this ontological continuum”.⁶¹ Sher-Gil accepted that he was infected by a certain melancholy, explicitly referring to it on occasion, such as in a letter to Amrita on 27 June 1938: “I am sick of the soul, but that is my usual condition, though your departure etc. has made it much worse than usual, as happened when Indu left and in fact long before you or Indu left. But that can’t be helped till true wisdom comes...”⁶² While Sher-Gil retreated to spend more and more time with himself, and pictures like *Typing on his bed* (1935) [fig. 3.31], *Pretending to think over what he has read* (1937) [fig. 3.32], *Stargazing in the Study* (1939) [fig. 3.33], *The Photographer surrounded by his equipment: self-portrait* (1938) [fig. 3.34] conform to that reality of contemplation and isolated study, he did not disassociate himself from his family, or even from the struggle for Independence and the figures engaged in it. A letter to Amrita dated 14 October 1940 says,

By the way, I managed to see Gandhi in spite of Rajkumari’s barrage, and gave a good scolding to Mr. Desai, his secretary, as he asked not to talk to him, and THIS AFTER I HAD MYSELF ASKED FOR A SILENT INTERVIEW AS I DID NOT WISH TO TALK TO THE MAHATMA OR HEAR HIM.⁶³

While Sher-Gil did not understand or always appreciate Amrita’s unconventional lifestyle, talent and tempestuous approach, they remained connected: “the camera eye/I discerned only what was within the familial realm, perhaps this realm, in actual

⁶¹ Geeta Kapur, ‘Familial Narratives and their Accidental Denouement’, in *Where Three Dreams Cross*, op cit., p. 46

⁶² Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, letter to Amrita Sher-Gil, in Vivan Sundaram, ed., *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Self-Portrait in Letters and Writings*. 2 vols. (New Delhi: 2010), vol. 2, p. 502

⁶³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 684

fact, was in the process of being breached".⁶⁴ In Amrita's letters is a fascinating combination of arrogance and humility, attempts to equalise with her parents. She consistently refers to them as *Muci* and *Duci*, which are terms used in Hungarian to address children, so enacting a role reversal. In conversation with me on 23 March 2011, Vivan Sundaram testified to the fact that Sher-Gil perhaps did not totally grasp what Amrita was doing creatively. Nor did he fully understand her bohemian lifestyle; he allowed for it, though with some contention. A point of discord was Amrita's marriage to her cousin Victor Egan. Referring to the tension between them, Sher-Gil wrote to his daughter on 20 December 1939:

So I am writing to show you things as they are and were and as you should see them, and thus change your outlook... There is another aspect of this matter. Namely, modern children do not feel under any obligation to be nice to their parents either, I can quite see that, but then modern children should in sheer justice not expect any goodness or affection from their parents either. But unfortunately neither your mother nor I can become modern parents, and I am sure that in spite of your being born in the twentieth century you cannot be so modern as to be utterly indifferent to your parents.⁶⁵

Sundaram hints that Amrita owed much of her artistic temperament to her mother, but there was also a very deep connection to her father, not necessarily articulated in dialogue. The motivation to return to India was clearly provided by him, rather than her mother. He was progressive ideologically, but less progressive with regard to his daughter's unconventional personal lifestyle. Amrita was sexually quite active, it has been speculated that she pursued relationships with men and women, and Sundaram has also confirmed that she had two abortions. Sher-Gil's

⁶⁴ Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', op cit., p. 232

⁶⁵ Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, letter to Amrita Sher-Gil, in Vivan Sundaram, ed., *Amrita Sher-Gil*, op cit., vol. 2, p. 610

intellectual pursuits were founded upon his connection to India, and that impacted Amrita. Despite a few personal differences, Amrita held her father in very high regard. In 1937 *The Indian Ladies Magazine* published her essay titled 'Amrita Sher-Gil – The Talented Artist', in which she announced herself as the daughter of Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, who, she wrote, "I hardly think... needs an introduction, for, although of retiring temperament, he was well known as a philosopher, a student of comparative religion, and a pioneer of social emancipation, particularly the emancipation of women."⁶⁶ Amrita's very succinct evaluation of her father's progressive thinking affirms what was at stake in his cultivation of the self, and it appears to have transmitted itself to the daughter and consequently to impact the course of Indian modern art.

Amrita passed away prematurely and suddenly in 1941, and then, after several attempts, Marie Antoinette shot herself in 1948 in Sher-Gil's room with his revolver. Sundaram believes that the "later portraits of Marie Antoinette, taken in Shimla in the 1930s and 40s, capture her signalling an impending death",⁶⁷ the most poignant shot being of her "black silhouette on a snow covered terrace",⁶⁸ [fig. 3.35] while Ananth suggests that portraits taken of Amrita in the 1930s "disclose a lingering disquiet in her expression... she appears nevertheless wistful, somewhat withdrawn, and gravely beautiful".⁶⁹ [fig. 3.36] Sher-Gil's own late self-portraits find him cloaked in sadness and marked by death: left mostly in darkness, vulnerable, recognising in

⁶⁶ Amrita Sher-Gil, 'Amrita Sher-Gil – The Talented Artist', in *The Indian Ladies Magazine*, reprinted in Vivan Sundaram, ed., *Amrita Sher-Gil*, op cit., vol. 1, p. 319

⁶⁷ Vivan Sundaram, 'Foreword' in *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil*, op cit., x

⁶⁸ Ibid., xi

⁶⁹ Deepak Ananth, 'The Gaze of the Amateur', op cit., p. 234

the inability to transcend such vulnerability and understanding what it means to be mortal.

His emotional state is clearly revealed in a self-portrait from 14 November 1946, in which Sher-Gil sits against a neutral background and, looking straight into the camera, clutches in his hand a book with a Sanskrit title. On the reverse the inscription in his hand reads, 'His misery and his manuscript' [fig. 3.37]. Yet, it is images such as *After Snowfall: self-portrait* (1944) [fig. 3.38] and *In the bedroom: self portrait* (1949) [fig. 3.39] that fully reveal Sher-Gil's remoteness and emotional sadness. The depths of existential loneliness are seized in the wintry Shimla environs of the snow-covered family home pictured in *After Snowfall: self-portrait*, with Sher-Gil appearing as a small figure deep in the frame, roaming alone, a guiding stick in hand. It is an image that could be a companion to, or forerunner of, the 1956 pictures of the dead Robert Walser, found lying face down in a snowy field. These Robert Walser pictures,

...have been widely (and shamelessly) reproduced in the critical literature on Walser that has burgeoned since the 1960s. Walser's so-called madness, his lonely death, and the posthumously discovered cache of his secret writings were the pillars on which a legend of Walser as a scandalously neglected genius was erected.⁷⁰

As painfully poignant is the hazy but less dramatic *In the bedroom: self portrait*. Again, Sher-Gil is not clearly discernible in the frame with light pouring in through the windows around him, blurring out some of the details of the picture and heightening the sense of his isolation. Following Amrita's death and Marie

⁷⁰ J.M. Coetzee, 'The Genius of Robert Walser', in *The New York Review of Books* (2 November 2000), available at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2000/nov/02/the-genius-of-robert-walser/>

Antoinette's suicide, Sher-Gil was left to rely on his inner resources, lost to compulsive constant contemplation.

Yet, he did make one final gesture of solidarity with the newly independent nation, Sher-Gil, along with his other daughter Indira, donated 61 of Amrita's paintings to form the nucleus of the newly formed National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi. Sher-Gil was actually very instrumental in ensuring that this transaction did happen. Vidya Shivadas in her well-researched essay on the history of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, pieces together the entire exchange around the Amrita paintings. It was Amrita's husband Victor Egan who initially offered 33 of her paintings for sale to the Indian government. After internal deliberations, the official response from the government was that it did not have the adequate expertise in the field of modern Indian painting, and would have to turn down his offer. They also found the price Egan quoted for the paintings high. However, Sher-Gil was very keen to remove the paintings from Egan's possession, and offered to gift a large body of Amrita's works to the nation, as leverage, on the precondition that the government would acquire the paintings in Egan's collection. Sher-Gil wrote, and I quote from Shivadas:

Most of her earlier juvenile work, when she was at [the] School of Art in Paris, is with us. We wish to give them freely to the nation, along with sketches and studies which Amrita had intended to destroy. They serve along with her early works to show the development of her art and talent... But if her later works are not actually acquired by our nation, then what good will the old style of work, which she herself did not value, be?"⁷¹

⁷¹ Vidya Shivadas, 'Museumising Modern Art: National Gallery of Modern Art, the Indian Case Study', *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia* (Routledge India, 2015), p. 159

Eventually Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru stepped in to ensure that Amrita's paintings were acquired, writing "I think it desirable for [the] government to acquire her paintings as a whole. Just a few chosen ones would not be good enough."⁷²

This entire episode makes plain that for Sher-Gil this negotiation was personal, but also much wider in its social and political implications as well. This cache of paintings "would determine the course of the institution"⁷³. By allowing for Amrita's paintings to form the core of the institution's collection "the nationalist cultural discourse in art was set aside for a more metropolitan modernism that Sher-Gil and the subsequent generation of artists from the 1940's and 1950's represented"⁷⁴. Thus, Sher-Gil in ensuring their placement, unequivocally positioned his daughter at the apex of Indian modern art, yoking her, and through her himself, to the nation. It marks within Sher-Gil a responsibility to act not only on the behalf of his daughter, through whom it could be proposed that he did live vicariously, but also to a larger community, to the newly independent nation of India: a contribution he had strived for, but was unable to realise until now. So while Sher-Gil's last years might have been solitary, with the case of these paintings, a contention can be made that he was still was part of a social and national network.

As Hannah Arendt makes clear "I am only with myself or the self of another when I am thinking, whereas I am in the company of many when I start to act. Power for human beings... can only reside in one of the many forms of plurality."⁷⁵ This chapter,

⁷² Ibid., p.159

⁷³ Ibid., p. 157

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 161

⁷⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (Knopf, 2009), p. 106.

by deliberating on Sher-Gil's life and friendships, by placing him at a slight distance from his family, looks to provide evidences that through political affiliations Sher-Gil *did* act. Sher-Gil disclosed himself to others, and chose to consciously embed himself within the inter-subjective field of human relations and discourse, especially those staged around the struggle for Indian liberation.

Sher-Gil's was a cosmopolitanism that engaged directly and unabashedly with national identity and colonial subjectivity, and his move to Europe did not liberate him from the subcontinent, but drew him closer to his own sense of being Indian. The value of such interconnection and action can be extended to the more transgressive aspects of his lifestyle; to the realm of his imagination, which would allow him to literally enact multiple forms of plurality. The self-fashioning and numerous staged self-portraits are Sher-Gil's own laboratory of actions, where he, from the initial assuming of hybrid identities, to the later more melancholy personages, demonstrates his commitment to achieving awareness through personal choices and decisions, through a practice of the self. Such self-work submits that intimate correspondences with the self, self-discipline and each action, are as valid in ways of participating in the order of the world. Sher-Gil's self-portraits were not fictions that were composed to shield him from mortality, but serviced an instinctive appreciation of his finitude.

CHAPTER 3

Bhupen Khakhar: Performing the Self, Love and the Priceless Dignity of Alterity

The tenth anniversary of Bhupen Khakhar's death was marked in 2013. Since his passing his reputation has systematically grown and been celebrated, but he was renowned even at the time of his death. Khakhar had been the subject of a retrospective at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in 2002, curated by Enrique Juncosa; and was also included in 2001 in Geeta Kapur and Ashish Rajadhyaksha's curated section on Mumbai for the Tate Modern's inaugural exhibition, 'Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis'. Posthumously, he was honoured with a retrospective curated by Usha Mirchandani at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai, while 'Bhupen Among Friends', a commemorative show organised by Gallery Chemould in 2005, made palpable his influence on the Indian art fraternity and the goodwill he had generated.

In the March 2014 issue of *Artforum*, the Indian art critic Zehra Jumabhoy made note of the further feting of Khakhar's legacy in exhibitions in 2013, one at the Grosvenor Gallery, London, comprising a selection of drawings and watercolours drawn from the Anthony Stokes collection, and two presentations in Mumbai. One of the latter was again at the Gallery Chemould, this time titled 'Subject of Death' and curated by Geeta Kapur, to mark the gallery's 50th anniversary. Khakhar's work from the last two decades of his life was shown alongside that of nine other contemporary Indian artists. At the Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, the show

titled 'Touched by Bhupen' was a group exhibition of contemporary artists, most of them younger Indian artists, who were inspired by Khakhar and his practice.

Jumabhoy noted that "although such exhibitions offer ample evidence of the extraordinary range of Khakhar's impact, they do not fully explain it", and asked, "Why are so many gallerists, curators, and artists still so eager to claim solidarity with Khakhar's celebration of the everyday and the extravagant alike?"¹ The article mentions a planned retrospective at Tate Modern for June 2016, however, she does not discuss the strong commercial results Khakhar's paintings have consistently delivered at auctions in recent years; nor the rise in demand by collectors for his works.

Conversely, Jumabhoy's article does cogently list the already established reasons for the relevance of Khakhar and his work, especially within the context of Indian art history, announcing him as one of the founders of the narrative figuration tradition of painting that was advanced and practised at the Baroda Faculty of Fine Arts in India in the mid 1980s. It also notes his consciously wide range of reference that included "'60s' American Pop, Bollywood posters, and the nineteenth-century works known as Company School paintings, popular during the Raj, which merged the iridescent detailing of traditional miniatures with Western perspective."² The text concludes with the fair, but not unsurprising suggestion that it is the subject of the "formation of identity – specifically those new identities that seem to transgress their cultural milieus: the postcolonial and the postmodern, the gendered and the queer, the localized and the mass mediated"³ that is at the heart of Khakhar's

¹ Zehra Jumabhoy, 'Bhupen Khakhar', *Artforum*, vol. 52, issue 7, March 2014

² Jumabhoy, 'Bhupen Khakhar', *Artforum*, op cit.

³ Ibid.

practice, and continues to perpetuate his legacy. More than her lucid conclusion, it is the implied finer point of Jumabhoy's earlier question that should be considered now; that is, more than *why* there is this unequivocally pronounced interest and investment in Khakhar's work, the focus should be on *how* it manifests itself. Behind such burgeoning enthusiasm for his work has there been the development of any new lineaments to deepen the appreciation of the artist and his work? Or is it all simply a convenient and easy love-in?

Khakhar's work found critical champions throughout his life, and the body of writing that was generated around him stands testament to this support. Geeta Kapur, a close friend, has written consistently on his work, beginning with her first published book, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, in 1978.⁴ This she followed with numerous texts that have been reprinted numerous times. Her writings form the strongest formal basis with which to approach Khakhar's work. Along with Kapur's essays, and inclusion of Khakhar in the shows she curates, an essential reference point is the 1998 monograph authored by Timothy Hyman and supported by Gallery Chemould. Hyman had been a friend of Khakhar's since 1976, when the two met during Khakhar's first visit to London. Acknowledging Hyman's debt to Kapur, the monograph is divided into two parts, the first biographical, and the second engaged in work-specific analysis.

⁴ Khakhar himself dated his first association with Geeta Kapur to 1968–70, recalling seeing her speak at a seminar organised for Clement Greenberg, who was accompanying the MoMA's show, 'Two Decades of American Painting', that toured India in 1967. He was impressed by her "acute mind", as found in a written exchange between Khakhar and Timothy Hyman at <http://bhupenkhakharcollection.com/interview-with-timothy-hyman/>

Personally, it is Kapur's first text, 'View from a Tea Shop',⁵ that grabs my fullest attention, rather than her later, more authoritative and theoretical assessments. Hyman's monograph concurs, stating that it is "written from a standpoint at once intimate and objective, this Vasri-like account of a close contemporary is a classic of post-war art writing. Her creation of a wonderful living *character* will never be superseded".⁶ Chock-full of long descriptive passages, Kapur set the scene very effectively, evoking clearly the early world of Khakhar. It is striking from today's perspective that the text dates to just before Khakhar embarked on a period of artistic exploration in which his homosexuality became a prime point of focus, and which then tended to dominate most writing on his work. Reading Kapur's text now helps to substantiate and also locate many of the moves Khakhar would make aesthetically in the future, in his more renowned works.

In fact, Hyman, having provided profuse factual detail in the early chapters of his book, began his evaluation of Khakhar's work with the now iconic 1981 painting *You Can't Please All* [fig. 4.1], which he declared as the instant when "the meaning and compass of Khakhar's art were raised and expanded"; it is the painting where he "performs his coming out".⁷ By virtue of its printing date, Hyman's monograph did not include the final episode in Khakhar's practice, in which his attention was trained on the ageing, ill, decaying male body – something Kapur tackles. This period began in 1999, coinciding with Khakhar's illness and trips to multiple hospitals. Hyman's monograph is preoccupied with Khakhar as a narrative painter, and places him in the

⁵ Geeta Kapur, 'A View from the Tea Shop', in *Indian Contemporary Artists* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 1978).

⁶ Timothy Hyman, 'Preface and Acknowledgements', in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Mumbai: Chemould/Mapin, 1998), vii

⁷ Timothy Hyman, 'Introduction: He Will Show You the World', in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Mumbai: Chemould/Mapin, 1998), pp. 2–3

company of Western painters such as Pierre Bonnard, Max Beckmann and Philip Guston. Kapur, on the other hand, strives to delineate Khakhar's place within the postcolonial South Asian context, announcing that he set up "radically different representational modalities in relation to the existing tendencies in twentieth-century Indian art. It also establishes a different set of equations between Indian and contemporary Western art".⁸

Written from close proximity, and thoughtful and thorough, this received information is vital for younger art historians, critics and curators. It also covers an incredible amount of ground. Both Kapur and Hyman shared an amity with Khakhar, which perhaps inadvertently provided glimpses of the artist in transition. The interstitial junctures that they flag but do not dwell on appeal to the present-day researcher striving to reclaim a part of Khakhar's practice that has so far not been overtly evaluated. The currency of the experiments he conducted, which seemed less urgent then, take on a different relevance in today's climate of contemporary art and need for fresh historicisation. A noticeable example is Beth Citron's recent article in the *Art Journal*, 'Bhupen Khakhar's "Pop" in India, 1970–72'. As the title announces, Citron limited her investigation of Khakhar to a very precise early moment in his practice, focusing on his "previously unstudied multidisciplinary and performative works in relation to the contemporaneous assimilation of Pop in India".⁹ The article rightly suggests that Khakhar's experiments "critiqued modernist production and exhibition practices" that were current at the time, and marked "a

⁸ Geeta Kapur, 'Bhupen Khakhar', in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, September 2002), p. 26

⁹ Beth Citron, 'Bhupen Khakhar's "Pop", in India, 1970–1972', *Art Journal*, vol. 71, issue 2, 2012, p. 43

rupture in Indian art... particularly contesting the predominance, aura, and autonomy of oil-on-canvas painting".¹⁰

This evaluation had already been affirmed by Kapur when she noted that,

...in the early 1970s, Khakhar posed for photographs in absurd roles; wrote mischievous texts in catalogues; donned fancy dress; and held fake salon parties at his exhibitions. Uturning the cultural assumption of modernist art, he also cocked a snook at the Western avant-garde.¹¹

Building her argument from Kapur's statement, Citron examined in detail the following archival material: a poster, the invitation and press reviews of Khakhar's February 1970 show at the Kunika-Chemould Gallery, New Delhi, which particularly noted the event he organised for the opening; and a set of staged photographs in which Khakhar appears as a host of different characters, posing with a French woman, Marianne Nicaise, then visiting Baroda (now officially known as Vadodara) [figs. 4.2 and 4.3]. These photographs were reproduced in a self-designed and self-produced catalogue that accompanied his March 1972 show at the Gallery Chemould in Bombay under the title *Truth is Beauty and Beauty is God* [fig. 4.4].

Looking at this cited range of material Khakhar's innate self-consciousness, palpable early in his artistic career, is made evident. The use of differing modalities, such as staging "happenings"¹² at his openings, parodying masculine stereotypes in

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 44

¹¹ Geeta Kapur, "The Uncommon Universe of Bhupen Khakhar", in *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures*, ed. Kobena Mercer (MIT Press, 2007), p. 102

¹² See Richard Bartholomew's review 'Khakhar's One Man Show of Paintings', *Times of India*, 20 February 1970, reprinted in *Richard Bartholomew: The Art Critic* (Bart, 2012). Bartholomew wrote: "The event [was] a kind of happening. The author of the exhibition, Bhupen Khakhar [sic], posed holding a mike before his own composition 'Old Man with a Transistor' and Husain expended some footage on Jeram Patel seated before Khakhar's painting called 'M.F. Husain near a tonga after visiting the Darga'. Nasreen Mohamedi and Geeta Kapur, painter and art critic

theatrical photographs, and spinning fantastical and farcical narratives about his own biography,¹³ point to the need in Khakhar to expand the parameters of how his 'self' could be regarded, and how this 'self' could be changed by transacting with other veracities, without denaturing or destroying itself. These exercises clearly demonstrate Khakhar's need to align himself with realities other than the one to which he was societally expected to subscribe, but also, as Kapur and Citron show, they formed a significant critique of prevailing modernist practices. However, lurking beneath the seeming playfulness of such transactions are deeply felt tensions and complexities. Khakhar would only come out as a homosexual a decade later, and admitted in later interviews to the shame, guilt and internal turmoil he had experienced.

Concurrent with my own understanding, it is Citron's evaluation that Khakhar was playing "multiple roles" while directing "attention away from himself as an individual 'artist' and from the product of his paintings". Additionally, the "layered self posturing", Citron says, "was critical to his artistic persona and its reception".¹⁴ She also made it a point to read these experiments and interventions as related to the language of mainstream Pop art of the time, stating that they helped to "reconcile the disjuncture between his critical engagements with Pop and the limited simplicity with which his interventions with Pop were received in India".¹⁵ She made a direct comparison between the images in which Khakhar poses with Nicaise and those of Andy Warhol with Edie Sedgwick dating to 1965–66. Her contention that Khakhar

respectively, were dressed in costumes of a past generation... Then it was over. It was brief and intense, and the public (curious as people are) walked in."

¹³ In *Truth is Beauty and Beauty is God* he would write: "As I had done bad deeds and was unfaithful I was born as a butterfly in my next birth."

¹⁴ Beth Citron, 'Bhupen Khakhar's "Pop" in India, 1970–1972', *Art Journal*, op cit., p. 61

¹⁵ Ibid.

was plainly trying to emulate the poses and postures of Warhol and Sedgwick seems over-determined and her literalism could be contested. These images should be regarded as Khakhar's adaptation of Pop's general strategies, with full awareness of his own particular context, rather than as an exercise in stylistic quotation. This position chimes with Kapur's: as she has said, Khakhar "also establishes a different set of equations between Indian and contemporary Western art".¹⁶

Citron limits her reasoning by stating that Khakhar did not further cultivate performance and such experimentation in his practice, though these interventions provided him with the ability and confidence to move between different registers. He listed pointedly toward an interfacing of the elite art world with popular lower- and middle-class cultures, and this would crucially influence the 'trade' series of his paintings which he began in 1972. It can be contended that the tropes mentioned by Citron were developed as tools by Khakhar: self-fashioning; writing self-authored commentaries; overt performance. In fact, they can be seen to persist, literally as well as in other more conjectural forms, as his practice grew through the 1980s and '90s, and are strikingly manifested in Judy Marle's 1983 film made for the Arts Council, *Messages from Bhupen Khakhar*, which was screened at two of the three 2013 Khakhar exhibitions (at the Grosvenor Gallery and at 'Touched by Bhupen'). The film was important for me to get an embodied sense of Khakhar. Thirty-seven minutes long, and shot in Baroda, the narration is by Khakhar himself. The opening remark, "A man labelled Bhupen Khakhar, branded as painter", accompanies images depicting Khakhar's Baroda home and studio – the choice of words evoking two distinct roles for Khakhar's person: that of being labelled and branded. The

¹⁶ Geeta Kapur, 'Bhupen Khakhar', in *Bhupen Khakhar*, op cit., p. 26

implication is that though he performs and inhabits everyday the role of a painter, 'artiste', he does so from a knowing distance.

As the film continues, a British male voice provides biographical information on Khakhar, and the audience learns that he was born to a Gujarati middle-class family that were originally artisans. Marle films Khakhar's family home in Bombay, and these images¹⁷ are the visual equivalents of Kapur's tactile description in her 1978 essay of the family's living conditions, which she says were,

...determined to an extent by such domestic acquisitions as their status demanded: rexine-covered sofa set, dining table, radiogram, and so on. These were complemented with decorations – plaster casts of the various gods, the Air India 'Maharaja', souvenirs from tourist sites – displayed in tip-top fashion in glass show cases.¹⁸

Kapur stated that middle-class Gujaratis have entirely urban mentalities, progressive when it comes to money-making and adaptability of life style, and that,

...though later in life Bhupen may have rejected the values of his class he has not thought it necessary to scorn the taste. And though he has disposed of their material ambitions, his eye still rejoices in the extravaganza of objects and images which are a consequence of that materialism.¹⁹

Quite quickly, as the Marle film progresses, it becomes evident that Khakhar was not only its subject and that this was a documentary on him in daily life, but also that

¹⁷ The voice-over in Marle's film also states that "mock leather, mock chandeliers, rexine and formica furnish Bhupen Khakhar's paintings and his family home in Bombay. This is the world from which he has come, and to which he still feels he belongs. He loves it, and he hates it."

¹⁸ Kapur, 'A View from the Tea Shop', in *Indian Contemporary Artists* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 1978), pp. 149–50

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 150

he played an active collaborative role in the making of the film. As his paintings appear on screen, filmed in close-up, Khakhar's voice gives us their titles, alternating with the voice-over, which continues to deliver details of the artist's collection of posters and images of mass culture. Seen are the posed photographs discussed by Citron, reproduced in the 1972 catalogue *Truth is Beauty and Beauty is God* and described as amalgamations of visual clichés from the West and East, sending up the art-world gurus who claim to 'know all'. Khakhar is filmed at the local printer discussing paper textures and colour and overseeing the printing of what may have been a catalogue. Khakhar's inscription is unmistakable when the title of the film appears: it is in an ornate font and surrounded by an elaborate border that recalls the aesthetics of Indian wedding cards. What follows is a staged tableau in which Khakhar plays the flute, surrounded by coloured lights, probably in imitation of the Indian god Krishna. None of this is contextualised by the voice-over; nor is it explained later. It is a direct moment of Khakhar assuming another role, that of performing for the camera. Four more similar tableaux punctuate the film with Khakhar in other cheap guises.

The numerous intertitles through the film use the same font as the main title. They state platitudes which come openly from Khakhar, such as "Good taste can be very killing", "Human beings in their local environment, climate, provincial society: this should be the ultimate goal of the artist", and "An artist should not preach, talk philosophy, try to reform society, because he constantly revels in illogicality, sensuality and vulgarity." Others are more indicative of his aesthetic predilections and intellectual knowledge: "Diffidence and modesty in the works of urban 'primitive' painters is an endearing quality suggesting a struggle otherwise absent in

the works of Expressionists whose work boasts of superiority”, and “Why are all my reactions to art polluted by history, culture and friends?” The last phrase is followed by the shot of a book, open at George Seurat’s *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884–1886), intercut, without comment, with scenes from a Baroda street fair.

The most riveting and revealing sequence of the film begins with Khakhar explaining that he chooses to write for his catalogues because these passages offer a way to understand his work. Having announced that he is most comfortable writing in Gujarati, his mother tongue, he starts to read from a text, which is then translated and read by him in English. (According to Kapur’s 1978 essay, Khakhar’s family spoke primarily in Gujarati, not in English, but had a degree of fluency in Marathi and Hindi. Hyman notes “their Gujarati was a specifically Bombay dialect or patois, broken with ‘impurities’, encrusted with phrases out of American and Hindi films, and heaven knows what else... For Khakhar, this hybrid speech summons up a whole world”.²⁰)

The passage Khakhar shares in the film is the following:

I am lying in bed at Shiv Kashi hotel. The ceiling fan makes circular gestures as if the afternoon heat has gone in its head. The window, the wind, thrown off from the fan makes the curtain move. I think if I have to paint this room, what would I do? The first thing is to make a list of all the objects I want to paint – chair, table, knob of the door, carpet, electric bulb, colour of the wall, fan, etc. I select things out of this list, let us see how this works. There is one window in the room, and the curtain is attached to the window. The curtain moves because of the wind. The colour of the curtain is yellow and brown. Because the curtain moves, I see the railings of the window. There are folds in the curtain, where the folds comes up... how can one paint a curtain? If the curtain is painted with great care and precision, it would look like Persian or

²⁰ Timothy Hyman, ‘A Qualified Accountant (1934–61)’, in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Mumbai: Chemould/Mapin, 1998), p. 8

Mughal miniature. If painted with spontaneity, it would remind one of Matisse... Curtain moves, part of it is dark, another part light, if the borders of the curtain is done quickly with dark colour, and the inside is left out with white portion, it would look like Kalighat painting, but if it is painted like a stone then it would remind one of Fernand Léger. The curtain moves a little and is lifted because of the wind... I see the clear patterns of the cloth. One is reminded of early Italian paintings, Grandma Moses, Henri Rousseau. The curtain moves like a cloud, the speed of wind increases, it reminds me of Gericault's painting of rafts in the ocean or Renoir's woman running with her clothes like a sail in the ocean.

Khakhar's words are complemented by Marle's restrained and elegant shots of a balmy, lazy, warm afternoon in which Khakhar is seen lying in bed in his white sleeveless vest, contemplating a room with painted pink walls and, of course, a window with its gently moving curtain. As Khakhar lists what he is reminded of, Marle inserts shots of books together with the referent painting or artist. The simplicity and honesty of Khakhar's prose and narration is disarming; citing and placing an incredibly wide range of references next to one another, bringing them together because of his own need and apprehension. Replying to film-maker Ein Lall, who pointedly asked in a 2001 interview which artists had had an influence on him, Khakhar said, "One can't paint that way in a lonely situation, but whenever I wanted something to be done I refer, it depends on my necessity, I may refer to Bruegel, Bosch, all these artists or even to our Indian artists... so all these works they are there."²¹

It was a perceptive move on Marle's part to show footage of books, because Khakhar's familiarity with the material he mentioned came to him initially not through direct contact but through pedagogy, and the community of artists and

²¹ Interview found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmZkKgETgZs>

intellectuals in which he was immersed. Khakhar made his first trip abroad in 1976 when he was 42 years old. The eve of his departure is immortalised in a black-and-white photograph in which we see Khakhar clad in a jacket and trousers, a bag slung over his right shoulder, standing next to his mother Mahalaxmi, who, in a white sari, seems to be holding a floral garland in her hands. Two young children, part of the extended family, are also present. On this first tour he visited the USSR and Yugoslavia as part of a cultural exchange programme of the Government of India. In Moscow he saw the icons of Andrei Rublev, while later in Italy he saw for the first time the works of a number of Sieneese masters and other Renaissance artists. He felt a kinship with them, stating that they “faced certain problems which I face also as a painter: how to include the narrative aspects in a painting without destroying its structures”.²² The journey concluded in England, where he stayed with Howard Hodgkin²³ and came into contact with the London art world. The exposure this trip, and a subsequent visit in 1979, again to England – this time for an exhibition of his work – generated a series of revelations: “after my visit to England in 1979, I saw that homosexuality was accepted. People lived together...”.²⁴ These journeys and new friendships, along with his mother’s death in 1980 and his long-standing association with Vallabh, his partner, seem to have been the catalysts that led to his ‘coming out’.

²² Hyman, ‘Vulnerability, Diffidence; Narrative (1975–79)’, in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Mumbai: Chemould/Mapin, 1998), p. 52

²³ For more details about when Hodgkin first met Khakhar see Shanay Jhaveri, ‘Howard Hodgkin’, in *Western Artists and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013).

²⁴ Hyman, ‘Sexuality and the Self (1981–95)’, in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Mumbai: Chemould/Mapin, 1998) p. 68

Though Khakhar grew up in the cosmopolis of Bombay, it was at Baroda's Faculty of Fine Arts that he was truly exposed to the world.²⁵ Khakhar became an active painter in the mid 1960s. He joined the Faculty of Fine Arts in 1962,²⁶ but enrolled in the two-year Art Criticism programme instead of the five-year Fine Arts course as he could not afford the latter's fees. Khakhar had his first solo exhibition at Gallery Chemould, Bombay (now Mumbai), in 1965, showing a group of works that could be considered collages. Composed of images of gods cut out from oleograph prints and calendars, temples and home interiors, all clustered together, his collages were then painted over with bright enamel colours. By dripping paint over his carefully organised compositions, he gave them the appearance of unfinished posters: a reaction *to* and a conscious move *away* from conventional "painterliness".

It was only in 1966–67 that a meticulous quality manifested itself in his canvases, such as in *White Palace on Hill Top* (1967), *People at Dharamshala* (1967) [fig. 4.5], *Parsi Family* (1968) [fig. 4.6] and *American Survey Officer* (1969). In current writing, his practice up until the 1972 exhibition is viewed mostly as exercises in referentiality. Hyman remarked that:

...there is a sense of Khakhar rather desperately ransacking Indian traditions, so that each picture is partly pastiche. The sources may be extremely various. Mughal court miniatures; romantic landscapes... nineteenth century Company paintings... faded old colonial photographs: all these could be pressed into service... Their ostensible subject

²⁵ While in Bombay Khakhar remained curious and engaged. Kapur describes the beginning of his career as "ridiculous", mentioning the drawing classes he attended and the admiration he had for the work of Walter Langhammer. In addition, Khakhar regularly visited the Asiatic and British Council libraries to peruse their collections and went to all the art lectures he heard about.

²⁶ Images of Khakhar's works from 1962, his earliest, can be found at <http://bhupenkhakharcollection.com/watercolors/>

– the figures, the world – counted for less than their parodic reference. The mask of style is impenetrable.²⁷

Though agreeing to the layering of reference, Kapur suggests that while Khakhar is “mucking up the lucidity of something so precious as the miniature”,²⁸ almost “as though he is spelling out a sordid version of a lyrical sensibility”,²⁹ it is “a game of parody with the various pictorial modes of representation [that] thus gains Bhupen a language, then a readymade subject-matter, and finally, a very specific and personalized content”.³⁰

Also in these works, I believe, is a conscious performance by Khakhar, made explicit by the fact that he would list the sources and points of reference employed in developing a painting, as in ‘Notes on the Visual Sources in my Paintings’ (*Lalit Kala Contemporary 10*, undated), which lays bare the various inspirations behind the conception of his works from that time. An image of the painting *Landscape with Canon* (1969) [fig 4.7] appears alongside the text.³¹ It is a veritable laundry list that extends from plaster relief in Jain temples to advertisements of Badshahi soap, and further. Some references can be easily spotted in the painting, while others are more oblique. Khakhar’s strategy of making transparent his “sources of inspirations” is evident throughout the 1972 catalogue *Truth is Beauty and Beauty is God*, in which he refers to this as ‘Explanations of the Paintings’. Works such as *Portrait of Shri Shankerbhai V. Patel Near Red Fort* (1972) [fig. 4.8], *Tiger and Stag* (1972) and *Mrs. Nilima Sheikh Looking at Orange Flower* (1970–71) [fig. 4.9] each have an

²⁷ Hyman, ‘The Baroda Connection’, in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Mumbai: Chemould/Mapin, 1998), p. 15 ²⁸ Kapur, ‘A View from the Tea Shop’, in *Indian Contemporary Artists* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 1978), p. 166

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ From <http://bhupenkhakharcollection.com/notes-on-the-visual-sources-of-my-paintings/>

accompanying description, a symbolic interpretation, a formal interpretation and sources. A relevant insight into Khakhar's actual working process at this time comes from Gulammohammed Sheikh who recounts that the basis for *Mrs. Nilima Sheikh Looking at Orange Flower* is actually a photograph he had taken of her. Sheikh still has the photograph on which Khakhar drew a graph, in order to accurately replicate Nilima's visage.

Evident is Khakhar's incredible knowledge in these acts of over-explication, Ashish Rajadhyaksha describing such listing as,

...the very history of the world as though on an à la carte menu, for the Indian artist to choose from in order to define his/her lineage; to choose, further, to be either influenced by those items or to improvise from them, to quote them, to reclaim them, or to theorize them.³²

Khakhar's act of listing becomes a performance of knowledge that has been garnered through tutelage and through informal channels of communication such as his myriad friendships, all in a form synthesised by him. More than the end product the listings are an assertion of an active and very local sensibility being formed as it sees the world, from its own home, its own place. This makes me look upon Khakhar's work *Man Leaving (Going Abroad)* (1970) [fig 4.10] anew.

Painted six years before Khakhar first ventured to the West and, as the title conveys, depicting the scene on the eve of a man's departure abroad, it has a group of five men neatly placed in the foreground under a U-shaped topiary. A man in a blue suit and another in a black jacket, white *kurta*, Nehru cap, and carrying a

³² Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'Bhupen Khakhar's List', in *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency* (Tulika Books, 2009), p. 300

walking stick, hold hands and look into one another's eyes. Two other men look upon them while a third, his face partially obscured, is seated. Behind this group a vast landscape opens up, comprising trees, an antique automobile car, and an expanse of ocean in which sails a steamliner and two older vessels. This picture, a work built up of several different references, now appears as a staging of Khakhar's own departure abroad without his actually leaving. He journeys before actually journeying.

As Khakhar's career and recognition grew, his travels abroad became more frequent. His observations were noted in works such as *Frist day in New York* (1982) [fig. 4. 11], *British Rail* (1983), *Times Building* (1986), *Landscape in Bali* (1992), *Man from Thailand* (2002) and a series of watercolours in which the cotton mills of Manchester are depicted. The art critic Richard Bartholomew reviewed a show of Khakhar's watercolours, done during and informed by his first trip abroad:

They are small, quiet in theme and in treatment. Bhupen's naïve and casual style of portraying figures and landscape lends itself well to the interpretations of scenes he came across, the picture of winter in the USSR, an MRA meeting in Hyde Park, a café in Italy, or a snack bar in London. In Bhupen's work these images of people and of a sketchy landscape appear light and airy as the compositional elements are freely arranged almost casually and the motifs are all set against a white ground.³³

Khakhar made sketches on his travels and his 102 surviving sketchbooks are in the custody of his estate, each bearing a label on the front cover with his destination details. At times he would be precise in identifying his subjects and the location and time: *Jaisalmer drawings for camels*; *Bombay Khetwadi drawings*; *Ameet's Place*;

³³ Richard Bartholomew, 'Bhupen Khakhar's 26 Watercolours', *Times of India*, 26 October 1976, reprinted in *Richard Bartholomew: The Art Critic* (Bart, 2012), p. 565

Kasauli drawings; Nathdwara, 22nd November to 29th November, 1999; Kumarakom Cochin Nov. Trip 1998; Agra April 1991; Orchha and Bhimbetka; Manipur, March 1991; Tim's Portrait and Visit to Race Course in U.K.; Mauritius; Canada Feb–March 1997; America 1996; Agra 1998; Shatabdi; drawings of illness of my prostrate.

Khakhar would sketch in museums and galleries, making notations on the works of artists he admired. One of his sketchbooks is titled *Bosch, Bruegel*; another is *Picasso's nose*; and then there are *Sculptures at National Museum, Delhi; Drawings from Angels; Flying Figures; Vishnu from Ind.*; as well as *Mini Catalogue*. It appears these drawings have been executed quite quickly, in either pen or pencil, and are mostly black and white observations. Some are more resolved than others.

Most obviously, these sketchbooks offer us his itinerary, his movements being quite frequent and far-flung in the 1980s and 1990s as well as after. But the sketches also provide an insight into what caught his attention, the specific points of reference and interest. An intriguing example is *Glass painting, Gandhi and portraits inspired by Kwanju Biennale Exhibition* [*sic*; the reference is to the Korean town, Gwangju]. The existence of such sketchbooks substantiates a methodological inquiry behind the development of some of Khakhar's paintings, including his watercolours. A book from October–November 1995 is titled *Sketches for W. colours done in Delhi*; another is *drawings for Salman's book*; while yet another is *Drawings for Akho Paintings*, which has "many pages vacant". Flipping through the sketchbooks Khakhar's active and evolving sensibility comes alive, while his working process becomes more transparent, his mode of apprehension somewhat clearer. Some of the sketchbooks carry notes he had written to himself, and today they make plain a

critical disposition towards his own work and the standards he expected of himself: one reads “Not Good”, another “Misc. (not v. good)” [fig. 4.12].

Nonetheless, the tutelage he received when on the two-year Art Criticism course broadened his knowledge and contributed vastly to a very obvious sense of journeying. It was supplemented by his many deep exchanges with fellow students and visiting artists from America and Europe. A whole set of communications, vital to the development of his aesthetic language, became possible for Khakhar through friendship. He always liked to be surrounded by people. Kapur attests to this facet of his personality when plotting his daily routine in Baroda:

In the morning he spends time with his office colleagues... he like to visit assorted friends in their homes where he will sit for hours with their family and discuss all sorts of subjects suitable to their class and category... Bhupen finds himself as fully involved with the melancholy life of his aging friend as that of his office colleague... artist friends have a definite but limited share in his life while for the most part he prefers more mundane friends... all those known and unknown people, belonging to so many strata and styles of living, constitute an emotional reserve for his survival. As he survives, he converts this material into images.³⁴

Marle’s film also faithfully illustrates Khakhar’s routine, filming him at the accountant’s office where he works in the morning and on his visits to “mundane friends”, which show his attachment to the “underdog – not only the down-and-outs but the most decrepit, the physically weak and mis-shapen among them”.³⁵ They comprise the men rendered in the paintings *Barber Shop* (1972) [fig. 4.13], *Janata Watch Repairing* (1972) [fig. 4.14], *De-Lux Tailors* (1972) [fig. 4.15], *Assistant*

³⁴ Kapur, ‘A View from the Tea Shop’, in *Indian Contemporary Artists* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 1978), p. 151

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

Accountant – Mr. I.M. Shah (1972) [fig. 4.16] grouped as the ‘trade series’. Of the “underdogs” that Khakhar befriended Hyman makes specific mention of two: Ranchodbhai, a man 20 years older than Khakhar and an illiterate ex-porter turned bootlegger, also seen in Marle’s film and memorialised in Khakhar’s painting *Ranchodbhai Relaxing in Bed* (1977) [fig. 4.17], and Shankerbhai, to whom Khakhar was greatly devoted, a widower from East Africa who had lost an eye. Along with *Portrait of Shri Shankerbhai V. Patel Near Red Fort, Man in Bed*, a painting from the 1970s, is believed to be a portrait of Shankerbhai because the central figure lying on the bed wears dark glasses. Shankerbhai died in 1975, leaving Khakhar racked with grief. As Sheikh remembers “to Bhupen he was closer than his own heart. He almost changed the destiny of that man with his relationship”.³⁶ Clearly, two groups of friendships informed Khakhar’s art. He could synthesise the knowledge received from artist friends with the observations of his “mundane friends”. Yet, Khakhar’s friendships were not formed only to find subjects for his art; he shared a genuine affinity with each of these individuals.

A significant interaction took place between Khakhar and the British painter Jim Donovan, who shared Khakhar’s apartment for eight months in 1962.³⁷ It was through Donovan that Khakhar became aware of Pop. Khakhar himself admitted to “his dialogues with Donovan, and the ‘dose’ (Donovan’s own words) of Pop he then received as ‘the foundation’”.³⁸ Their conversations probably aided Khakhar in reconciling himself to the attraction of the gawdy tawdryness of Indian streets,

³⁶ Sheikh, quoted in Timothy Hyman, ‘The Baroda Convergence (1964–72)’, *Bhupen Khakhar* (Chemould/Mapin, 1998), p. 20

³⁷ Kapur describes it as a “turning point... Donovan ... who sparked off Bhupen’s latent sensibility for the bizarre by pointing out to him the spectacle of images in the Indian city streets.” in Kapur, ‘A View from the Tea Shop’, p. 154.

³⁸ Timothy Hyman, ‘Training in Baroda (1962–64)’, *Bhupen Khakhar* (Chemould/Mapin, 1998), p. 12

leading him to collect bazaar images as well as oleograph prints, feeling less wedded to the painterly conventions of previous generations. His predilections excluded him from the Group 1890 exhibition that presented artists considered at the time as being up-and-coming painters.³⁹

Khakhar also absorbed and learned from fellow Indian artists, particularly Gulammohammed Sheikh, who returned to India in 1966 after studying at London's Royal College of Art. He appears in some of Khakhar's paintings, such as the melancholic *Sheikh, Flower pot and the Moon (1969)* and *Untitled (Gulammohammed Sheikh with Tom Hancock)*, which was painted in the early 1970's. Sheikh and Khakhar shared a room and attended informal weekly lectures by K.G. Subramanyan, who was then professor of painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts. Here Khakhar became close to Suresh Joshi, a Gujarati writer, who prompted him to read Rainer Maria Rilke and Franz Kafka. In a written exchange with Hyman dating to 1995, Khakhar confirms that "K.G. Subramanyan's teaching was very useful. He used to conduct a class on every Saturday. He talked at length about 20th Century Western painters Cezanne, Matisse, Bonnard, etc. It made me see the modern art in a different way."⁴⁰ In a moving essay 'Bheru' translated into English as 'Buddy', Sheikh recalls that Khakhar had bored of Pop collages by 1966 and was looking for a new direction. Together they made two journeys of significance:

I had written a longish essay on Kota paintings for my final examination at the Royal College of Art. So I was dying to visit Kota. I asked Bhupen and Chhatpar, and the three of us set off to Bundi-Kota via Udaipur and Nathdwara. We devoured the visual

³⁹ For more details see Kapur, 'A View from the Tea Shop', p. 155.

⁴⁰ Correspondence available at <http://bhupenkhakharcollection.com/interview-with-timothy-hyman/>

feast of frescoes and miniatures there. Around this time, a vacancy for the post of lecturer in art history at Chandigarh College of Art was advertised. Bhupen and I decided to apply because I was unemployed and Bhupen was fed up of his job as an accountant. Neither of us expected to land the job (and neither of us did), but we were keen to see Corbusier's architecture, and also to relish the visual bonus of Chandigarh Museum's famed collection of miniature paintings! So off we went to Chandigarh. During the four-hour bus journeys between Delhi and Chandigarh, we exchanged ideas and both of us admitted to being bored with the Expressionist and Tantrik trends and sought to articulate our quest for a new direction against the backdrop of miniature paintings. I thought of painting contemporary themes using elements of this traditional pictorial language, while Bhupen was fascinated by the pictorial language of Company paintings, a mixed and somewhat reviled genre of 19th century Indian art. I remember he had quoted examples of the Company School in his M.A. dissertation on Art Criticism.⁴¹

Sheikh's account provides a fine inflection of Khakhar's innate curiosity, and reveals how his artistic consciousness was developing, looking to references ranging widely from Corbusier to Kota painting. Khakhar and Sheikh co-founded a journal they named *Vrishchik* (Scorpion) in 1969, which solicited contributions from artists, intellectuals and poets. Khakhar claimed that he did very little and that the work was mostly Sheikh's. It would not be wrong to assume, however, that Khakhar, an accredited co-editor, read and became familiar with the rhetoric and ideas floated within the journal.

Sheikh, who had looked initially to European artists and their historical utilisation of panorama, had an indelible influence on Khakhar. Sheikh, nevertheless, also, spoke to a reappraisal of indigenous traditions of depiction. In the catalogue for the seminal 1981 exhibition 'Place for People', Sheikh wrote:

⁴¹ Gulammohammed Sheikh, 'Bheru' (Buddy), trans., Naushil Mehta, in *Touched by Bhupen* (Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, 2014), pp. 155–56

Living in India means living simultaneously in several times and cultures. One often walks into “medieval” situations and runs into “primitive” people. The past exists as a living entity alongside the present, each illuminating and sustaining the other... As time and cultures converge, the citadels of purism explode. Traditional and modern, private and public, the inside and outside are being continually splintered and reunited.⁴²

Sheikh’s own pictures resonate with this. In them he sought to “embody (in structure, in zoning, in what Sheikh called ‘the geography of thought’) the multiplicity of experience. In *Revolving Routes* (1981) for example, Sheikh’s own self-portrait is the nexus or pivot around which circle vistas of entire life”.⁴³ Hyman’s monograph circles back to the question of ‘Self art’ and its position in the canon of twentieth-century painting, referring to Jean Clair’s exhibition, for the 100th anniversary of the Venice Biennale, a significant portion of it devoted to ‘the self’. Clair pondered on whether it was the moment of the self-portrait rather than abstraction that had marked the twentieth century. Hyman took the opportunity to “locate Khakhar’s later works within this broad twentieth century area – alongside, for example, late Guston, late Bonnard, late Beckmann, and late Stanley Spencer. Khakhar’s achievement is to have made a convincing picture-of-life, that integrates the Self with the World”.⁴⁴

Though armed with the breadth of knowledge so apparent in his works, Khakhar remained timid and unsure of himself as an artist. At a seminar held in Delhi in 1970 he admitted, “I felt very inferior; not able to speak English; not so erudite... My

⁴² Sheikh, quoted in Timothy Hyman, ‘Panorama and Plenitude (1979–82)’, *Bhupen Khakhar* (Chemould/Mapin, 1998), p. 56

⁴³ Hyman, ‘Panorama and Plenitude (1979–82)’, op cit., p. 61

⁴⁴ Timothy Hyman, ‘To Bring Back the Lost Reality of the World’, in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Mumbai: Chemould/Mapin, 1998), p. 81

painting, I felt ashamed of it.”⁴⁵ Kapur added that, “Bhupen is far from romanticizing the creative process or elevating himself on the account of his vocation.”⁴⁶ I would contend that Khakhar was quite aware of his place amongst a community of professionally trained artists, and consciously took on the role of an interloper. As Hyman notes, by the mid 1980s Khakhar had been “widely shown in Europe and elsewhere in the West... recognized as one of the leading Indian painters, and had a solid following among patrons, as well as young painters”, he maintained his practice as an trained accountant working for a Baroda engineering firm. Hyman felt that this was because of Khakhar’s desire “to remain in contact with the ‘ordinary’ world; and that particular tribe – the middle-class business community – from which he sprung”.⁴⁷ Khakhar gave up his accounting job only in 1985, after working at it for 27 years.

Khakhar’s social interaction was remarkable. A vivid account of him as a party animal is provided by Sheikh, who recalls that, “the partying routine lasted till the very end. Every night, Paramanand [Khakhar’s home] would be transformed into a party zone. Local friends mingled with out-of-town visitors in the revelry”.⁴⁸ Khakhar through his hospitality, and the range of his friends and social acquaintances, can be seen as quite clearly flattening accepted conventions of socialising. There is extraordinary openness with regard to his social life, an ‘absolute hospitality’ one such, as Jacques Derrida writes, “requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner... but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, without asking of

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 20

⁴⁶ Kapur, ‘View from the Teashop’, p. 156

⁴⁷ Hyman, ‘To Bring Back the Lost Reality of the World’, in *Bhupen Khakhar*, op cit., p. 73

⁴⁸ For more details see Gulammohammed Sheikh, ‘Bheru’ (Buddy), op cit., p. 152

them either reciprocity”.⁴⁹ Such total openness, does proffer a kind of indeterminacy, where nothing is predetermined, and thus carries the promise of something else. Might it be possible that Khakhar used his sociality to work through a better sense of himself; that in interacting so openly with the other, and his own self, his own suffering becomes more known to him? Perhaps these social gatherings at Paramanand can be thought of as *addas*, where as Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests, for Khakhar they provided a site for “self-presentation, of cultivating a certain style of being in the eyes of others”.⁵⁰

In my own experience, while the index for *Western Artists and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design* was being compiled, my copy editor e-mailed me the observation that references to Khakhar were very frequent throughout my book. The sheer number of entries under his name drew my attention to how well-connected Khakhar had been to scores of international travellers to India, and particularly to Baroda, ranging across such artists as Howard Hodgkin, with whom he shared a renowned friendship, as he did also with Timothy Hyman, Lynda Benglis and Richard Long. In fact, there are a number of artworks by these friends that overtly reference Khakhar⁵¹ as, for example, Hyman’s 2009 large-scale group portrait titled *Around Bhupen* [fig. 4.18]. About this portrait Hyman has said:

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 25

⁵⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Adda: A History of Sociality’, in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 187

⁵¹ Refer to the two exhibitions, *Bhupen and Friends*, and *Touched by Bhupen*. Also, taken into account Atul Dodiya’s 2007 solo exhibition *Shri Khakhar Prasanna*, which pays explicit tribute to Khakhar.

From 1980 onwards I became involved with a loosely-affiliated group of Indian artists, whose enthusiasms and aspirations often converged with my own. The painter Bhupen Khakhar was the central linking figure between us all. But he'd died in 2003, and it seemed that these ageing friendships might become more tenuous. In February 2007, when I briefly revisited India after a 12-year gap, I experienced a renewed surge of comradely affection – not least in our shared grief at Bhupen's loss. The idea came to me then of a commemorative group portrait.⁵²

Nevertheless, the two-metre canvas, along with 16 preparatory works, gestures to something beyond just nostalgia. *Around Bhupen* can be placed alongside Vivan Sundaram's work *People Come and Go* (1981) [fig. 4.19], a painting exhibited in 1982 at the Royal Academy and described as "a work of the crossroads: awkwardly intersected picture planes, edgy surfaces, a burst of mottled pointillist light flooding one corner, while another corner emphasizes the heavy glare of Indian sunlight, flat, overturned illumination reminiscent of a Hodgkin canvas".⁵³ Pictured on Sundaram's canvas are two men, an artist squatting on the floor, clad in dhoti and kurta, and behind him a lavender-suited foreigner, both gazing intently at a canvas that is turned away from us. The two men are Bhupen Khakhar and Howard Hodgkin at Khakhar's studio in Baroda. *Around Bhupen* and *People Come and Go* cannot be read as merely celebratory of friendships that overcome cultural borders and boundaries; I detect in them an acknowledgement of movements and shifts between places and people and, importantly, a back and forth of ideas and thoughts. Interestingly, Marle's earlier film on Howard Hodgkin, *In Conversation* (1981), also records an extended episode of the two friends in conversation in Khakhar's Baroda home. Khakhar is discussing the plans for his largest painting, *The Celebration of Guru*

⁵² Hyman, 'Around Bhupen', in *Timothy Hyman: The Man Inscribed with London* (London: Austin/Desmond Fine Art, 2009), p. 26

⁵³ Homi Bhabha, 'Halfway House: Art of cultural hybridization', in *Artforum* (May 1997).

Jayanti (1980), while inquiring about Hodgkin's working methods. Comparing the two Marle films, it is evident that Khakhar was far more involved in the production of *Messages from Bhupen Khakhar*. Hodgkin, on the other hand, when in India, is filmed stiffly in conversation, quite unlike the playful and intimate manner in which Khakhar is filmed.

Hodgkin, Kapur and Sundaram played integral roles in making Khakhar's solo exhibition possible at the Hester van Royen Gallery and Antony Stokes Ltd. It opened on 20 June 1979. The catalogue for the show that the Grosvenor Gallery organised in 2013 carried my contribution detailing how that earlier exhibition had come about, and the Antony Stokes Archive yielded material that corroborated my earlier claim that Khakhar continued to engage with self-allied experiments well after the early 1970s. I begin by quoting from a letter Khakhar wrote to Stokes, dated 28 October 1978:

Since the last three days I am going through all the "Quotable Quotes" books to begin a letter. In the school our English teacher taught us that when you write a letter or an essay the reader should be impressed by the very first sentence. He taught us all the proverbs, metaphors, idioms from Wren and Martin grammar book. Is it possible to address you a letter like this? All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand or Why, man, if river were dry, I am able to fill it up with tears. I think I will give up the idea of writing you a letter the way Mr. Godbole taught us in X standard. So I begin –⁵⁴

At the time when Khakhar wrote this to Stokes, they had never met in person, though on a trip to India in 1978 Stokes had acquired one of Khakhar's works.

⁵⁴ The entire correspondence between Khakhar and Stokes is at the Anthony Stokes Archive, including also letters written after Khakhar's return to India, as well as one in which Stokes informs Khakhar that he has closed his gallery, and that he should now make inquiries at the Kasmin Gallery in London.

Khakhar's address was unusual, not very poetic or baroque, but in a somewhat confessional mode. While it made no dramatic revelation, it did make a play at exposing Khakhar's naiveté, to foreground his lack of exposure and erudition. It also hinted that in certain cultural contexts such sophistication was thought of as possibly enacted, inconsistent with Khakhar's earlier paintings and performative experiments, in which he consistently sought to establish his remove from the elite art world as well as his own internal struggles.

The works Khakhar exhibited at the Stokes gallery, which included the paintings *The Weatherman* (1979) [fig. 4.20] and *Man in Pub* (1979) [fig. 4.21], were made in England, while he lived at Hodgkin's family home in Wiltshire, teaching a day each week at the Bath Academy of Art. I contend they "occupy a special place within Khakhar's oeuvre, considering they are amongst his first painted outside India, and they have him negotiating directly with matters and social relations drawn from contexts unfamiliar to him".⁵⁵ A glumness dominates these works. Tariq Ali, who bought *Man in Pub*, said to Hyman that Khakhar would go to the pub just as an observer,

...and what he found really strange was guys who would come in when the pub opened and sit on their own at the bar, drinking non-stop and often not saying a word to anyone... Bhupen was so shaken by the sight of these isolated people. When I was with him, his house was never empty. His private house was very public – here, in contrast, you have a 'public house' that's very private.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Shanay Jhaveri, 'Bhupen Khakhar', in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Grosvenor Gallery, 2013), p. 6 ⁵⁶ Hyman, 'Vulnerability; Diffidence; Narrative (1975-79)', in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Mumbai: Chemould/Mapin, 1998), p. 55

Khakhar always demonstrated a need for social communion. While on an exchange programme in Holland, Khakhar had a visit from Sebastian Lopez, the art historian. Lopez later included a telling passage in the catalogue for the exhibition 'The Other Self', detailing Khakhar's thoughts on his "lack of contact and productive dialogue with artists in the Netherlands who might have made his stay more enjoyable, and his work more bearable".⁵⁷ The manifest isolation felt in *Man in Pub*, reprises itself in a future painting done in Baroda in the late 1980's called *Man in Restaurant* [fig. 4.22]. Again, we have a glum figure sitting by himself, and while in *Man in Pub* the accompanying tableaux of daily routine unfurl in a strip by the left side of the painting, *Man in Restaurant* presents a wider panorama of life taking place outside the restaurant. The figures are seen in illicit trysts, outdoors, indoors, and a figure covering his modesty is seen within a temple. The important difference between the two works is that while the figures in *Man in Pub* are squarely on their own, singled out, and sequestered in individual frames, in *Man in Restaurant* there is a merging of the outside with the inside of the restaurant, and a simultaneity of life being led and experienced is depicted.

Man in Pub is perhaps the British inflection of an earlier well-known work *Man with Bouquet of Plastic Flowers* (1976) [fig. 4.23], painted in India, in which smaller vignettes or tableaux of quotidian life surround a large central mournful figure. As Kapur writes, these works ratify a paradox that while Khakhar is drawing attention to marginal lives there is,

...an ironical convention for presenting the man without subjectivity, without face and without the privilege of evolutionary intent or backing... we would do better to see

⁵⁷ Catalogue, *Other Self*, p. 18

him as laying the ground for a counter class culture, one rebuking the very class of viewers to whom high art is addressed and to whom at any rate it is accessible and available.⁵⁸

Khakhar's perceptions of British life were further dramatised in a humorous piece of writing titled *About England* [fig. 4.24], in which he organised his impressions in tabular form, explicitly stating at the end that "If I extend my stay I may be able to find the other best things of Britain about which I am ignorant at present."⁵⁹ The entire exercise places him firmly as looking in from the outside, - which is reasonable enough – but Khakhar did not correspondingly posture or want to position himself as a knowledgeable, cosmopolitan Indian.

Khakhar used Stokes's announcement for the show as space to share his thoughts and reflections, generating the little text, *Parable about Painting* [fig. 4.25], the writing in which harks back to the mode he displayed in the 1972 catalogue *Truth Is Beauty and Beauty Is God*. Again, it was a humour-filled account and, set in the town of Varanasi, it told of a pandit, who after six months of deliberation, finally gives in to his obsession and fixes his head in between a buffalo's horns. The frightened animal throws him to the ground. The villagers laugh and ask the pandit how a learned man like him could have been so foolhardy, paying no heed to the consequences. The pandit replies that he had been thinking about it for six months. Khakhar ended his text with the following statement: "painters are like the pandit.

⁵⁸ Kapur, 'Bhupen Khakhar', in *Bhupen Khakhar*, op cit., p. 30.

⁵⁹ The original handwritten note *About England* by Bhupen Khakhar is in the Antony Stokes Archive, and a version of it is reproduced in the Timothy Hyman monograph on page 53.

They have to have an obsession of putting their heads between the horns to suffer the consequences of getting hurt and receiving sneers from the people around”.⁶⁰

The parable shares Khakhar’s vulnerabilities and fears as a painter, as well as the needs that are associated with the role. His interaction with Stokes, the subsequent presentation at his gallery, as well as Marle’s film, could be looked at as platforms for Khakhar to relate and present himself to an international audience. Was Khakhar being savvy, manipulative and calculating when sketching himself as simple-minded and aloof? I believe his art-making was hyper vigilant and well observed, and he indulged in a fair degree of foil and parry. The casualness and naiveté ascribed to Khakhar’s rendering are red herrings; that he consciously sets up. They are plays Khakhar makes, knowing that he does not have the same tool-box as the more formally-trained and skilled artists, and so chooses to indulge in more conceptual manoeuvres. He constantly needed to “perform”, whatever the register, hovering between professional strategy and cathartic modes of self-address and his distinctive vision lay in the agile move between the two polarities. Sheikh avows that Khakhar was,

...an inveterate prankster and practical joker, he loved play-acting... Pulling off a new prank or posturing as a new character was a daily affair. Every morning, he would start with a phone call to a friend; and the festival of mockery would kick off for the day. A new play with new characters would unfold before friends.⁶¹

From 1980, when Khakhar’s sexuality became prevalent in his work, subjective representation can be detected in another set of varying terms. With direct,

⁶⁰ Khakhar, quoted in Shanay Jhaveri, ‘Bhupen Khakhar’, in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Grosvenor Gallery, 2013), 7.

⁶¹ Gulammohammed Sheikh, ‘Bheru’ (Buddy), op cit., p. 151

confrontational sexual imagery high in evidence, the work moves away (but does not abandon) a performative, distanced identification and portrayal of a particular social type, into an “existential rendering of gender identity; and a re-classification of subjectivity in peculiar terms, where the maleness of the figure is crucial and heavily (dis)qualified”.⁶² In a conservative Indian context Khakhar’s coming out and making his sexual preference so plain in his paintings was significant. In an interview from 1998, titled ‘My Life as a Gay Man’, Khakhar’s boldness and self-possession, something which he only gradually grew into, and that I discuss later here is apparent. In the interview he proceeds to declare:

My life as a gay-man is entirely natural. It has been a driving force ever since I had the courage to speak up on gay related issues. It was in 1979 in London that I met gay artists. From then on, I have been attending many gay meetings and discussing the problems and social stigmas attached to being called gay or lesbian. The forthcoming Gay Games in Amsterdam, where I am an invitee, will focus on the expectations of homosexuals. They too want to have a family, marry their male companions, and have equal rights. I’m gay. I’m a voyeur and as an artist I need to be voyeuristi... Noted critic T. Richard Burton wrote ‘I’m insistent upon lyrical naturalness of what gives meaning to my life in a society which has traditionally only been able to accommodate sexual diversity through rejection or ridicule.’ This sounds very correct to me. As a crusader, I only would like to say through my paintings, I have sent across this message⁶³

A certain immediacy does become apparent in the 1980s’ and 1990s’ work, and it is as if Khakhar’s paintings are as Michel Foucault has articulated in the interview ‘Friendship as a way of life’ tried to move beyond a “neat image of homosexuality” of two men engaging in a sexual act, but rather wanted to explore the “possibility of generating unease”, because such an image of two men pleasuring each other,

⁶² Kapur, ‘Bhupen Khakhar’, in *Bhupen Khakhar*, op cit., p. 32.

⁶³ Ravi S. Jha, ‘My Life as a gay-man’, *Newsmakers*, The Sunday Review, 6 December 1998

...responds to a reassuring canon of beauty, and it cancels out everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship things that our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force...to imagine a sexual act that doesn't confirm to law or nature is not what disturbs people. But that individuals are beginning to love another – there's the problem. The institution is caught in a contradiction; affective intensities traverse it, which at one and the same time keep it going and shake it up.⁶⁴

Rarely through the 1970s would overt self-confession and self-representation be found in Khakhar's paintings, the notable exception being *Mukti Bahini Solider* (1972). In the work *You Can't Please All* (1981) and those that followed, Khakhar began to actively integrate himself, "thinly camouflaged", within his narrative landscapes; engaging in various kinds of coupling, at once the lover and the loved. Dexter Dalwood, who spent two years in Baroda and was a friend of Khakhar, found the naked figure in *You Can't Please All* as "internally separate from the society depicted, and yet at the time, absolutely a part of often complex life which makes up the contradiction which is modern India".⁶⁵ Ratifying this reading, Hyman says that along with declaring his homosexuality and vulnerability, Khakhar's work encompassed a wide range of other issues: "the individual and society; the fable; the ambience of the small Indian town; the echo of Siena, and Brueghel".⁶⁶ The scholar Shivaji K. Panikkar concurs that in these pictures:

⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life' R. de Ceccatty, J, Dante and J. Le Bitoux conducted the interview from which this quote is taken with Michel Foucault for the French magazine *Gai Pied*. It appeared in April 1981. The interview is available at http://commoningtimes.org/texts/mf_friendship_as_a_way_of_life.pdf

⁶⁵ Hyman, 'Sexuality and the Self (1981–95)', op cit., p. 67

⁶⁶ Ibid.

...the self is always juxtaposed with the world; the self interrogates, and is interrogated by, the world. Here, figure and setting, the individual and society, are brought together with equal status, and in such a way to enhance one another's meaning.⁶⁷

In *Two Men in Benares* (1982) [fig. 4.26],⁶⁸ which follows on from *You Can't Please All*, the left side of the canvas is dominated by a Khakhar-like figure, his face partially concealed, naked, penis erect, in full embrace with a male partner. The two figures are painted much larger than the Banaras (Varanasi) landscape that fills the rest of picture. It is with great dignity and subtleness that Khakhar integrates the lovers into the quotidian reality of the sacred Hindu city. A certain baseness starts to be detected in the 1984 work *In A Boat* [fig. 4.27] where, along with the embrace, there is masquerade, a jolliness of the romp. The anomalous black and white *Party* (1988) [fig. 4.28] is a further depiction of men at sexual play with one another, but this time they are close up, and occupy the entire canvas. This group is not located within a landscape, but on a simple white background. It is a group tryst that, while less aggressive and furtive, is still fully rampant; a precursor to those witnessed in the early 1990s works (*Caves*, 1991; *Ghost City Night*, 1991 [fig. 4.29]; and *Pink City*, 1991 [fig. 4.30]), where a sense of violent groping and animalistic abandon dominates in a universe of absolute polymorphousness. Such feral sensations are heightened by the fact that the cruisers are not clearly defined; rather, they merge in

⁶⁷ Shivaji K. Panikkar, *Inter-Subjectivity/Intervisuality – Bhupen Khakhar among Friends and Foes: An Inquiry into Homophobia*, available at <http://queer-way-art.blogspot.com/2010/03/inter-subjectivityintervisuality-bhupen.html?zx=fcf8a919bb21d519>

⁶⁸ "The image that conjoins genital excitement and a religious setting marries the sacred with the profane, is Khakhar's ringing proclamation of his own homosexuality. Critics lash out at him for his lasciviousness. Proprietors of the Chemould Gallery, Bombay, stash away the painting in the storeroom two days after the exhibition opens in the face of protests from the Cottage Industries authorities on whose premises the gallery is located." <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?200402>

with the landscape, the field and the cities. The gestures and strokes are bold and rough, emanating a sense of unease, terrifying and tantalising. These works could be thought of perhaps as unfinished. The anonymous encounters, the figures giving and receiving pleasure (fellatio and anal sex), are all organised around the edges of the canvas, with a large colour field holding most of the painting's remaining space.

Such organisation of space also characterises *Green Landscape* [fig. 4.31], executed by Khakhar in 1995. Within a black border he depicted a litany of sexual assignations and couplings, some lived and reminisced, others invented, the real conjoined with the fabulated. It is slightly more refined than the 1991 works, and more discernible is the burlesque choreography of kissing, embracing, observing, displaying, languishing by fountains or in the shade of trees and huts. Glimpses of Khakhar can be detected amid these figures. Interrelated, these corporeal experiences lead into an open pastoral expanse of oceanic green. Khakhar depicted the various versions of himself as somehow connected to other people, but with no distinct chronology the brew of memories and sense impressions were called upon at random when needed, all integral to the fluid, changing self.

The 1993 work, *Gallery of Rogues* [fig. 4.32], could almost be considered a memorial to, or a police board assembly of, his past lovers. Khakhar included a self-portrait amidst the other heads, all mainly in blues and greens. The work recollects his consummated experiences; he seemed to be caressing them into his present, declining to let them fade away. It is almost as though he was getting them to stand trial regarding the selves that were transformed through touch, unpinned by geographic locations, conventions and rules of community. Laid out in plain sight, there is no hiding from the shared remembrance of those surreptitious embraces in

the dark. The layered self-portraits evince an earnestness, an absence of irony, similar to his earlier works. They corner us “by making the vulgar appear so vulnerable”.⁶⁹

Khakhar was not preoccupied with the virulent and the beautiful. Referring to David Hockney, he said, “Hockney is concerned with physical beauty. I am more concerned with other aspects, like warmth, pity and vulnerability, touch...”⁷⁰ Khakhar being attentive to elderly fragile men goes as far back to the earlier mentioned paintings of Shankarbhai and Ranchhodbhai. Khakhar’s paintings in which men of noticeably different ages are pictured seem to ask the question Foucault’s proposes,

...what code would allow them to communicate? They face each other without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of that movement that carries them toward each other. They have to invent from A to Z, a relationship that is formless, which is friendship: that is to say, the sum of everything through which they can give each other pleasure.⁷¹

Khakhar, operating in such a mode, of how to invent these relations, tends to gentleness, beheld in the oils on canvas *Seva* (1986) [fig. 4.33], *My Dear Friend* (1983) [fig. 4.34], and *Next Morning* (1999), when the lovers realise they may never see each other again; as well as in watercolours such as *How Many Hands do I Need to Declare My Love to You?* (1994) [fig. 4.35], *Grey Blanket* (1998) [fig.4.36] and *Morning* (2000). Kapur sees in these works, “a shared stigmata” which is “worn with

⁶⁹ Kapur, ‘View from the Teashop’, op cit., p. 177

⁷⁰ Khakhar, quoted in Hyman, ‘Sexuality and the Self (1981–95)’, op cit., p. 71

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, ‘Friendship as a way of life’, op. cit.

pride” by the lovers, two men painted into scenes of “singular devotion”.⁷² Hyman identified *Seva* as a:

...key image... it tells of the relation between master and disciple, through the medium of touch... what passes between them is both a surrender, and a bestowal of power, this passing of energy... the image marvellously embodies Khakhar’s own transaction with his older partners.⁷³

The haunting *Yayati* [fig. 4.37] from 1987 reprises the image of two men in an embrace, but with mythic overtones. The title relates to a myth drawn from the Mahabharata, wherein an ageing king asks his sons to give him his youth. We could also add to this list the already discussed *Man Leaving (Going Abroad)*, which depicts a couple holding hands at its centre: the painting exuding a mood both plaintive and melancholic. It is among those of his earliest works that portray a same-sex couple sharing a moment of quiet, non-sexual intimacy in public. The image of two men embracing is strewn across Khakhar’s entire practice, and on visiting his home in Baroda, I noticed a single slightly damaged, beautiful Indian miniature painting, where at the centre of the image two men are in full embrace. However, I agree with Sheikh that *Embrace* (2001) [fig 4.38] is the most amazing,

...depicting two men looking into each others eyes. Just observe it carefully – it is sheer love with which these two men engage with each other. These characters who we see in our daily lives... do we ever think of love when we look at these men? Such a portrayal is for the first time in Indian art.⁷⁴

⁷² Kapur, ‘Bhupen Khakhar’, in *Bhupen Khakhar*, op cit., p. 32

⁷³ Hyman, ‘Sexuality and the Self (1981–95), op cit., p. 69

⁷⁴ Shiekh, ‘Panel Discussion: Sudhir Patwardhan, Aweek Sen, Gulammohammed Sheikh and Ranjit Hoskote. Moderated by Gieve Patel’, in *Touched by Bhupen* (Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, 2014), p. 179

Religion and its social function and the manner in which it organises and brings masses of people together, particularly men, had always fascinated Khakhar. Across Khakhar's work references are made to both the sacred and the profane, especially when the scenario is religious – most legibly so in the miniaturist *People from Dharamshala* (1968); which continues to *The Deity* (1982); and more expressionistically in *Satsang* (1995) [fig. 4.39]; with great irreverence in the watercolour *Leader* (1999), where the group leader has multiple penises; but most disquietingly in *Lost Souls* (1993), in which ill-defined figures are set afloat between what looks like a temple on the left side of the work, and a mosque on the right. The curator, poet and cultural theorist Ranjit Hoskote, makes a full-bodied argument about the importance of the religious within Khakhar's imaginary and practice. He contends that Khakhar's other achievements have overshadowed,

...his profound engagement with religious culture, symbolism and expressivity. In a climate of opinion characterized by a secularism that is defensive against the depredations of an aggressive politicized religiosity, and deeply discouraging of any interface with the sacred, this revolution [in the representation of religiosity] has rarely been remarked upon and never been recognized as such; it lies buried in plain sight.⁷⁵

Such an interpretation of Khakhar's engagement with religion could be valid, but for the scope of my research there is just the one point that Hoskote makes which is noteworthy, which is that towards the end of his life Khakhar portrayed himself within a religious context. He painted himself, as Hoskote describes, as a

⁷⁵ Ranjit Hoskote, 'A Crazy Pair of Eyes: Remembering Bhupen Khakhar', in *Touched by Bhupen*, op cit., p. 24

...questor, turned towards a horizon of approaching closure. That horizon seems to mark the limit between the obvious finitude of life and the untested, uncertain possibility of infinity or dissolution lying beyond it. I think, here, of the haunting splendour of *Golden Rain* (2002) and *Golden Cave* (2003), both inspired by the cave complex of Dambulla in Sri Lanka, dedicated to the dying yet eternal Buddha, reclining, delivering his final teachings, assuring his disciples that he will live on, not as a physical presence but as his teachings, the Dharma... Having played the outrageous clown, trickster, voyeur and restlessly transgressive provocateur in deceptively bourgeois costume, Khakhar appears to have made the transition to a later self- presentation as beatific celebrant of a hymnal illumination, melancholy witness, recipient of grace, and clairvoyant.⁷⁶

Hoskote's proposition is fair, and quite unique, charting a very different trajectory of how Khakhar conceived and represented the self, his self. However, for me there is another set of terms within which to describe the evolution of Khakhar's depiction of himself and his surroundings, which will be elaborated on as this chapter comes to a close.

Inescapably, the men Khakhar painted with disarming honesty, the men he desired, were older, uglier, pallid, frail, simian, snarling and misshapen. There is an overwhelming pathos in works such as *Next Morning*, in which two aged lovers, their bodies and flaccid penises on full display, gather themselves after a night together – a curious doubling of shame and exhibitionism. These are complex longings that concede to the brutalities of sheer, plain living. We are shown the spectacle of the withering, homosexual, male body, the abjection of which was pushed to the hilt in a series of paintings done when Khakhar was diagnosed with the cancer that, despite treatment, eventually claimed his life. The towering scale of *Beauty is Skin Deep Only* (1999) [fig 4.40] and *Bullet Shot in Stomach* (2000) bursts with rage; the body is a

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 29–30

battlefield, mortality is confronted and accentuated, death is stared in the face.

Tackling these works head on in the commemorative show cited earlier, Kapur related them as work in which Khakhar:

...offers himself as (a) reluctant subject in the province of death... Because death came so rapidly to Bhupen, he addressed it every which way – with rage, with pleas for compassion, with unconcealed terror. What he also confirmed is that disease ignites desire. Bhupen's 'late style' releases images cathected in the figure of death and yet bestowed with such erotic power that they produce a contrarian affect: refusal and sublimation, each equally uncompromised.⁷⁷

An intriguing co-mingling of performance with self-portraiture had been witnessed in 1992, when Khakhar became the first Indian artist to be included in a Documenta. At Documenta IX, curated by Jan Hoet, Khakhar presented the group of paintings *Caves* (1991), *Ghost City Night* (1991) and *Pink City* (1991), which have already been discussed, along with an installation that gave him a platform to assume a particular character, to actually perform. The installation was titled *Paan Beedi Shop* [fig. 4.41] and comprised a life-scale replica of a street-side kiosk that in India would sell cigarettes and paan (betel-nut leaves). On the walls of the kiosk Khakhar had rendered a few drawings as well as phrases such as "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" and "West, cigarettes sold here". The installation was not well received, and Hoet had these remarks:

Earlier Bhupen Khakhar painted booths. And now he combines reality with painting: he constructs the booths of his paintings and now one really can buy cigarettes there – however, western-like. Many people do not like it. I think it is a possibility to

⁷⁷ Geeta Kapur, 'Aesthetic Bind: Subject of Death', Exhibition Note, available at <http://www.gallerychemould.com/exhibitions/chemould-prescott-road-mumbai-gallery-contemporary-art-oldest-fort/>

experience the other world, to reflect one's own world. Khakhar does not place his booth as irrevocable statement, but questions our complacency. Our position has to be examined: are we right, are we wrong? His vision of the world is different from ours as his colouring from our usual way of perceiving: this certain illusionism of colours turns around, as it were. The blue indicates distance – and it is on top and bottom of the painting, a connecting cycle is achieved.⁷⁸

Looking at the paintings and installation together brings the entire breadth and aspirations of Khakhar's performative tendencies into view. Not only did he take on the role of the street vendor he had affectionately painted in the 1970s, but he did so while forcefully imagining a way in which the artist could possibly reformat his relationship with his social and cultural surroundings. The installation at Documenta should not be regarded as a complete aberration. Consistent with his earlier experiments with performance, it was done at a time when he had just finished mounting a full-length theatrical stage production by the name of *Mojila Manilal*. He began developing this comedy in 1988, devoting his time to it almost exclusively, and not painting as prolifically. His investment in theatre could be regarded as a way to expand on his preoccupations with performance and narrative construction. In the early 1990's Khakhar painted a set of curtains that were to be part of a backdrop or stage for a book launch. The imagery was simple enough, each curtain was a plain white, and Khakhar neatly renders two men, one wearing a Nehru cap, the other clutching a *tasbih* in his hand. Khakhar's interest in theatrical mise en scène would continue, as he is credited with doing the production design (painting the interior sets) for the 2002 film *Kali Salwaar* (directed by Fareeda Mehta) that is based on several short stories by the famous Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto.

⁷⁸ 'Documenta als Motor', *Kunstforum International*, vol. 119, p. 486

By 1989, Khakhar's eyesight had been compromised and he had had a cataract operation, which had an impact on the way he would work, or rather on how he chose to work. The trouble with his eyesight did preoccupy Khakhar; this is evident when one goes through a sketchbook of his in which there are a number of drawings that relate to his cataract operation. The sketchbook is titled *Eyes-Mathura-Agra* and is dated 23 December 1989. The seemingly unfinished nature of the Documenta paintings could be attributed to this condition, but I would also contend that there was a conscious decision to shift his manner of painting, which is consistent with how he had until that point evolved his practice; with distinct and considered shifts in style. In fact the 'messy' quality of these paintings was already apparent in his earlier 1988 work, *Still Life With Shirts*. Sudhir Patwardhan, a friend of Khakhar's, concurs, attributing intentionality to the shift:

Take *Ghost City Night*, made in 1991. This change in the mode of paint application became pronounced in the early '80s. One can see how light still creates interacting planes in the landscape but the margins of the planes and the outlines of the figures are no longer sharp or neat; they are smudged. One reason for this change was probably the deterioration of Bhupen's eyesight, but this can only be a partial reason. Bhupen was consciously changing his mode of painting. He said that he was interested in doing 'loose' painting and in typical Bhupen style added that it was because that mode was in vogue at that time. But, there is much more to it, of course... What is interesting in the paintings of this period is that Bhupen is able to give light in the painting a new function... Bhupen makes it seem as if the light is illuminating individual objects and figures from the inside. From being a means to define form, light seems to have become a thing in itself.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ This quote is from my notes taken at the Patwardhan presentation. An edited version of Sudhir Patwardhan's talk is reproduced in 'Panel Discussion: Sudhir Patwardhan, Aweek Sen, Gulammohammed Sheikh and Ranjit Hoskote. Moderated by Gieve Patel', in *Touched by Bhupen* (Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, 2014), p. 166.

Concurrently, the movement of the 1980s' works into these 1990s' canvases has been labelled as confessional, and uniformly valorised as brave. Khakhar was working to confront the shame and discomfort of being homosexual. His work visualises forcefully the occasional violent disassociation from prescribed puritanical value systems. In self-reproachment and anguish, Khakhar was vocal about his guilt:

I told lies. I did not have the courage to confess I was going to see and meet my boyfriend. I could not say: "Look, I feel attracted to Shankarbhai" ... But Gandhi spoke truth; I told lies. He was fearless; I was, and am still, a coward. Now slowly at the age of sixty I have summoned up the courage to speak about my preferences, about my boyfriends...⁸⁰

Writing from a friend's perspective, Sheikh relates how skilfully Khakhar managed a "double life" until finally coming out:

All day he played "straight", like everyone else around him, but he nurtured a secret world within. In the early sixties, it was difficult to declare one's homosexuality – it would mean making an enemy of everyone – so he had no choice but to lead a double life. I was unaware of this until 1963, when Vivan Sundaram alerted me to it. While I was away in England for the next three years, Bhupen shared a flat with Nagji Patel and Krishna Chhatpar. That is when they became aware of it. Once when they walked in on him while he was in the embrace of a stranger, Bhupen called out, "Thief! Thief!" and cued his lover to abscond.⁸¹

It would take Khakhar much struggle to make such a public statement in 1998 like the following one, asserting: "I have chosen homo-eroticism as a theme because I am a gay. What is happening in India – social rejection – did happen once in

⁸⁰ Hyman, 'Sexuality and the Self (1981–95)', op cit., p. 68

⁸¹ Gulammohammed Sheikh, 'Bheru' (Buddy), op cit., p. 148

countries like United States, Australia and Europe.”⁸² I have been told that Khakhar wanted to ‘come out’ on national television, but was dissuaded by his friends. Khakhar did grow to appreciate the resonance his work would have in a conservative society like India, where the taboo around homosexuality is palpable, it is not uncommon for men who are both married and, within certain circles, practically open in their homosexuality, or even young men who are quite openly gay, intend to get married according to their families wishes. Khakhar lived in a time before online social networks provided outlets for queer people to meet others, either simply for sex, but also in their capacity to operate as forums for them to express their own desires and fears.

Sheikh nurses some regret that he,

...had failed to understand Bhupen’s homosexuality. Despite my knowledge of it, I had not changed my behaviour to accommodate his needs. He once wrote to me from England, castigating me for failing to accept his sexual preference wholeheartedly. It rattled me and I became conscious of his concerns, but it was a while before I could act accordingly.⁸³

Khakhar’s negotiations should reasonably be read as having larger implications, especially within the landscape of India. Hyman offered an uncomplicated reading of these works within the imaginary of the nation, stating rather unequivocally: “I think it very likely that his sexual imagery will become (as Hockney’s once did in the west)

⁸² Ravi S. Jha, ‘My Life as a gay-man’, *Newsmakers*, The Sunday Review, 6 December 1998

⁸³ *Ibid.*

emblematic for a generation of homosexuals in India, and perhaps beyond.

Khakhar's self-exposure has a social function that should not be underestimated."⁸⁴

Kapur congruently, but with finer inflection, suggested that through such image-making, Khakhar maintained the status of the "outsider", but also thereby powerfully created room for an image for such a self within the nation: "Indeed Khakhar, like other members of the gay community today, reclaims his place in the material and spiritual universe in his own terms as an 'outsider'. This may also be something of an Indian contribution to the gay discourse: where permissiveness flourishes in the default mode, where rights are never won."⁸⁵ It is deeply dispiriting that years after Khakhar's coming out that the Indian state is still unable to afford equal rights to homosexuals. In 2009, in a landmark judgement the Delhi High Court repealed Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, the colonial-era injunction against "carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal". However, in July 2013 the Indian Supreme Court overturned that judgment and recriminalised homosexuality in India. Such an act, I believe, has an implication that goes beyond simply penetrative anal sex, but it brings us to very basic questions of citizenship and how we live as *people*: male, female, gay, straight; thinking, breathing, *ethical* beings. There is a grave danger in such a reality for a younger questioning youth, where not even the State, which traditionally grants one their ontological status, can validate one. How can one love freely and compassionately, when one is not even acknowledged?

From within such a fraught contemporary context an immense charge is felt when relating to Khakhar's representations of the self, his self, the pleasure-seeking self,

⁸⁴ Hyman, 'Sexuality and the Self (1981-95)', op cit., p. 72

⁸⁵ Geeta Kapur, 'Bhupen Khakhar' in *Bhupen Khakhar*, op cit., pp. 42-43

the sexual self, the vulnerable self, the fragile self, and its immersion within a social-national landscape. It is in Khakhar's rendering of the spatial environment, which surrounded him and his lovers that a move is made of crucial import. I believe this is quite forcefully depicted in the oft-overlooked paintings from 1991, *Caves*, *Ghost City Night* and *Pink City*. 'In the realm of fantasy' is the common classification of these spatialised geographies, with Khakhar attesting that "with old people, whose sexual capacity has withered, fantasy plays a greater role".⁸⁶ The confederacy of bodies cavorting in unfurling fantastic panoramas have already been committed to the nation, but one could propose that they be the passageways through which the cosmopolitan is rethought. What is it that demarcates the field in which cosmopolitanism does not merely exist but flourishes? Can there be a redefinition of how one may inhabit the world?

As early as 1969, with the painting *Man Leaving (Going Abroad)* Khakhar set the scene of an imminent departure without ever having left India himself, but he had built up a picture up from various sources – some seen in the flesh, others only observed in books or described in conversation, local, international, real, fictitious – which suggests that for him the act of looking replaced the act of travel. This sense of depicting a place without visiting is witnessed again in the painting *Caves* through a story Sheikh narrates:

Around 1991, we saw an amazing flare-up of Bhupen's envy. Saeed Akhtar Mirza was making a film on the paintings of Ajanta. He had obtained permission to illuminate the cave paintings with artificial lights. On receiving an invitation to view the illuminated paintings, Nilu and I left for Ajanta with Geeta and Vivan. When we returned, we realised that Bhupen was upset at not having been invited. During our Ajanta sojourn,

⁸⁶ Hyman, 'Sexuality and the Self (1981-95)', p. 71

he had finished a large painting with sculptures in caves on hills, as if to settle scores with us! As his jealousy found creative expression, I am tempted to quote his own favorite expression, 'All is forgiven'!"⁸⁷

Thus, *Caves* is revealed to be a painting about a place, Ajanta, which Khakhar painted, without actually visiting, but from his own imagination, fired by his own petulance.

Finally, decades later, in November 2002, when Khakhar, in the final stages of his battle with cancer, travelled to Sri Lanka with a group of artists and critics, he could not ascend the hills to visit historical sites, and remained in the bus. His final accordion book of Sri Lankan watercolours was done from books and postcards that he consulted after the trip to Sri Lanka. Thus, ironically, while though he had physically travelled, he remained distant, imaging Sri Lanka through the lens of his home, rather than through the act of travel. As the book opens up, the images are mostly moody landscapes in rich hues of colour, with strong cloud patterns: the rock formation and steps leading up to Sigiriya can be made out; the sleeping Buddha from Dambulla makes an appearance; as well as a cluster of elephants. The book is not entirely complete; there is a section with two pencil drawings. The images are evocative, and a sense of Sri Lanka, its landscapes and historical sites is discernible, leaving one to wonder, did it make a difference that they were created back in his home, from postcards? Did it matter that he had actually travelled to Sri Lanka, but never left the tour bus? Through these acts of aesthetic replacement, in *Man Leaving (Going Abroad)*, *Caves*, in the Sri Lankan watercolours, in his writings, in *Messages from Bhupen*, in fact throughout his practice, Khakhar was declaring what

⁸⁷ Gulammohammed Sheikh, 'Bheru' (Buddy), op cit., p. 161

he wanted – everything at once and to live without limits. This is how he attempted to inhabit the world.

In his paintings and watercolours there is an expression of love, but love in which difference proliferates; there is no destruction of difference. Khakhar is, as Foucault rightly states using “one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships”.⁸⁸

The men: old and ageing; amorphous; ambiguous; tortured; gentle; fierce; odd; pained, are not merging into a sublime unity, rather, in these fantastical spaces they are constructing constellations of difference among social difference. This is most clearly evident in *Image in Man’s Heart* (1999) [fig. 4.42], in which Khakhar’s lovers as well as other men are seen within and around him. They look at, and away, from one another. They are contained within one another, but are also distinct and separate from one another. Khakhar’s utilisation of space, his imagination of it, allowed for a suitable site for such love, helping to usher in a generation with a less restrained concept of love and what it means. His concept of love was not as a site of fullness of embrace and positivity, but of emptiness and loss, and the mutual recognition of something lacking. This suggests that when in love, something is being given that doesn’t necessarily *have* to be given, and it is being given to someone who does not *want* it. It is about recognition, not about fulfilment.

There is transformative collective power in recognising this condition. It pushes the understanding of love beyond modern concepts that are exclusively limited to the bourgeois couple and the nuclear family. There is a pervasive claustrophobia that dominates the appreciation of love, deeming it as private, confidential and

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, ‘Friendship as a way of life’, op. cit.

restricted. By curbing and checking love, its potential is limited. After all, joy and happiness have not been declared private property, nor is sadness an individual stigma, but one to be shared collectively. Khakhar's works seem to emphasise love of the different, and revolt against any insistence on extremes such as racism, fascism and nationalism, all which are so integral to the extreme right, and Hindu fundamentalism. It is not that one should not love one's family or immediate community; love is, rather, an emotional experience that transcends the personal to embrace something more, another understanding of society and how it can be inhabited. It is a space where not only is sexuality protean, but also narrative, time, identity and space itself. It becomes the way through which one yokes themselves to the world.

As Leela Gandhi – whose own thinking of filial affiliation has been informed by Derrida's notion of hospitality, discussed earlier in the chapter – proposes, such an ethics-as-hospitality, which involves 'opening the door' to the stranger, foreigner, absolute other, is 'existentially profound' and involves a great degree of 'agonising' risk. Derrida writes "crossing the threshold is entering and not only approaching or coming... it is as if the stranger or the foreigner holds the keys".⁸⁹ It is through the opening up to the foreigner that one opens up to oneself. However, Derrida continues that this opening up is possible "without... having to give up singularity, idiom, and even a certain at-home, at home...projects and image... of closedness, of selfish and impoverishing and even lethal isolation,... is also the condition of

⁸⁹ Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, op cit., p. 123

openness, of hospitality, of the door”.⁹⁰ Derrida is alluding to a community that practices a politics of difference that is constituted through free gift-giving and of hospitality. His is a description of a potential community, where “it is better to let the future open – this is axiom of deconstruction, the thing from which it always starts out and which binds it, like the future itself, to alterity, to the priceless dignity of alterity, that is to say justice”.⁹¹

The question now is: Do Khakhar’s paintings and watercolours actualise such love? Do they signify the priceless dignity of alterity? Perhaps Khakhar’s rendering of the space in which such love is enacted, in all its excesses, can return us to contexts in which such engagements would be prohibited, making them dangerous if not near impossible. What Khakhar appeared to do in his works is evolving a space in which the self, his self, strives to inhabit a world; not only through physical travel, and pedagogy, but also haptically, through sensory interactions, where the oppositions between mobility and immobility, inside and outside, private and public, are reconsidered. Khakhar, throughout his life, was both personally and professionally able to make others present in his thoughts, and it is having this capability that Hannah Arendt notes, the way “we insert ourselves into the human world”⁹² as that which is most important, and truly representative of an intersubjective way of being. Khakhar’s paintings and his lifestyle are cosmopolitan because they are suffused with ‘togetherness’, and are self-journeys at the same time through the real and the imaginary, all congealing into topographies of affect. Layered, dense, real and fantastical, his pictures are what Giuliana Bruno refers to as being a ‘touching-

⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, (Polity, 2002), p. 81

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21

⁹² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 176

moving geography', and it is this risk of such striving to re-image the 'world', again and again, in Khakhar, that I find wholly inspiring.

CHAPTER 4

Raghubir Singh: Colour, Haptic Relations and a Transforming Geography

In 2012, Raghubir Singh (1942–1999) was included in the group exhibition curated by Kate Bush, ‘Everything Was Moving: Photography from the 60s and 70s’, at the Barbican Art Gallery, London. The presentation, in the curator’s own words, explored “how artists and photographers intersected with their historical moment, and the world they inhabited, during the 1960s and 1970s”.¹ The exhibition endeavoured to “open up a space to consider photography from an international perspective”² because, as Bush states,

...photography histories are few and far between, and the standard ones tend to focus on the industrialised world: the USA, Europe and occasionally Japan. But photography did not just happen in the West and this account sets out to rewrite one chapter by comparing and contrasting the work of photographers across diverse political and cultural contexts during the same period.³

The inclusion of Malick Sidibé from Mali, Li Zhensheng from China, and Singh, the only photographer from India, ratified to an extent Bush’s claim to an ‘international perspective’. (She admitted that Latin America and the Middle East remained blind spots at the exhibition.) Singh was represented at the exhibition by 28 prints and an

¹ Kate Bush, ‘Everything Was Moving’, in *Everything Was Moving: Photography from the 60s and 70s* (Barbican Art Gallery, 2012), p. 6

² *Ibid.*, p. 10

³ *Ibid.*

excerpt from his essay 'River of Colour: An Indian View'. Setting aside the overall limitations of 'Everything Was Moving', Bush's selection of Singh was notable. A glance at his prior exhibition history reveals that his work had been seen alongside a range of international peers in large group shows, but the emphasis and considerations had been different. He would be grouped casually with other photographers, presenting a broad and general theme, the most prevalent being 'The City'. At the Barbican gallery, however, many substantive aspects of Singh's practice were underscored. Simply having his photographs shown alongside those of William Eggleston and Boris Mikhailov made his pioneering commitment to colour photography plain and incontestable, given the region and context in which he worked: Kodachrome 35mm, his medium of choice, was neither sold nor processed in India in the 1960s and '70s.

Singh shot only in colour, and this insistence was borne out of an implicit belief in the importance of colour within the Indian ethos. His awareness of its cultural specificity was honed and refined through his entire career, but it was most forcefully, and with incredible sophistication and intellectual rigour, articulated in the essay 'River of Colour: An Indian View', from which Bush reproduced a quote in her exhibition. This essay accompanied the book *River of Colour: The India of Raghbir Singh* produced for a retrospective of his work at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999. Singh wrote throughout his career and his writings are, I would like to propose, as much a representation of himself as are his books and photographs. His writings play a prominent role throughout this chapter, and I will return to them on numerous occasions, drawing on them to illustrate Singh's first person voice as expressions of the self. Recognising and acknowledging the interplay between

Singh's writing and photographs is crucial when studying his oeuvre. Bush, by including an extract from the 'River of Colour' essay at the entrance of Singh's section at the Barbican seemed to appreciate the critical connect that lay between words and images for Singh. In the essay Singh candidly discussed his individual negotiations as an Indian artist, drawing and borrowing from the West, finding modernism, and attempting to develop a bifocal vision while fixated on the geography of India:

Before colonialism and before photography, Indian artists did not see in black and white, though they made delicate drawings filled in with colour. The medium of drawing, as it is known in the West, has never existed in India – neither aesthetically nor technically. India has never had a Leonardo, Rembrandt or Goya. Even the exquisite drawings of the Moghul court are far different from the drawings of the West in that they are heightened with colour, or with tan washes known as *nil kalam*... Unlike those in the West, Indians have always intuitively seen and controlled colour. Our theories, from early in antiquity, became a flowing and rhythmic entity of India's river of life – its river of colour. According to the nine *Rasas* which guide India's classic aesthetics, the human imagination is detached from earthly bondage and attached to a flight of fantasy, interlocking the magical, the marvellous and the mystical. These conditions, of which colour is an intrinsic part, have forever fired the mind of India.⁴

Singh's appreciation of colour, his inventory of how intrinsically embedded it is within an Indian cultural ethos, is a kind of approach that can be related back to the late art historian John Gage who, theorist Natasha Eaton writes,

...discussed the difficulty of tackling colour from a coherent and satisfactory methodological standpoint. His contingent solution is to grasp the epistemic and

⁴ Raghbir Singh, 'River of Colour: An Indian View', in *River of Colour: The India of Raghbir Singh* (Phaidon 1998), p. 8

maybe the material tools of the ethnographer. For Gage, colour may be a globalising force but it is also local and it must be historically grounded... this position is also informed by a wider anthropology of the senses whereby colours act as social agents to produce a connectivity of persons and things. When approached in this manner, colour can be seen as a form of action intent on mobilising the world rather than merely representing or symbolising human relations.⁵

It can be advocated that Singh does intentionally assume the mantle of the ethnographer, but not simply as someone who wishes to identify the place of colour within an Indian art history, and its symbolic value, but as an artist who is also profoundly concerned with exploring its efficacious potentialities. As Eaton puts it, Singh is committed to “the urgent need to rescue colour from its trivial status, to free colour from universalist versus relativist approaches and to re-evaluate the relationship between physiological experience, language and affect.”⁶

London’s Whitechapel Gallery had mounted an ambitious show in 2010 titled ‘Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh’. Curated by Kirsty Ogg,⁷ it later travelled to the Fotomuseum, Winterthur, Switzerland. As is clear from its title, the exhibition attempted to set out a history of photography that was not tethered to Europe and the United States. Rather, it communicated “the untold story of an equally significant history, as rich and as formally innovative, yet embedded in the culture and politics of South Asia”. Not reiterating “a western view of the east, but celebrat[ing] how successive generations of photographers from the subcontinent have portrayed themselves

⁵ Natasha Eaton, ‘Introduction’, *Colour, Art and Empire: Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation* (I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 11

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The original concept for the show was proposed by Sunil Gupta, and was further developed with curatorial assistance from Shahidul Alam, Hammad Nasar, Radhika Singh and Anthony Spira.

and their eras” was the stated intention.⁸ The show was organised thematically rather than chronologically, and divided into five sections: The Portrait, The Performance, The Family, The Street, and The Body Politic.

Singh was included in the ‘Where Three Dreams Cross’ exhibition, where five of his prints and seven of his books were displayed in the ‘Street’ cluster. However, no emphasis was made in the accompanying catalogue or exhibition display of his embrace of colour, unique in the subcontinent in the 1960s and onwards, or of the deployment of modernist pyrotechnics in his later works; all of which would have improved the exhibition’s attempt to tell “the untold story of an equally significant history, as rich and as formally innovative, yet embedded in the culture and politics of South Asia”.⁹ Instead Singh was inscribed and historicised within a tradition of Indian photography that “used a traveller’s gaze to photograph everyday life through lyrical photo essays”.¹⁰ I consider this statement to be inaccurate and reductive of his practice. While centred on photographing the geography of India, and initially guided by the street-photography dictates of Henri Cartier-Bresson and William Gedney (who became a close friend, and to whom he dedicated his book *Calcutta: The Home and the Street* [1988]), Singh ascended to record in colour a transforming country over the latter half of the twentieth century, and also engaged in a dialectic with Western modernism.

In Singh’s own words,

⁸ Iwona Blazwick and Urs Stahel, ‘Preface’, *Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (Whitechapel Gallery, Winterthur Museum, Steidl, 2010), p. 8

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Sabeena Gadihoke, ‘Journeys into Inner and Outer Worlds: Photography’s Encounter with Public Space in India’, *Where Three Dreams Cross*, op cit., p. 34

When one takes a creation of the West, such as the camera, and is influenced by the concepts of the West, from Marxism to neo-realism to magic-realism; or if one takes the concept of street photography, from Kertesz to Gary Winogrand, and transforms it through one's own voice, the standard of excellence always remains vision and vision alone. Vision is rooted in one's own culture and upbringing, however much it might have borrowed from other cultures... The Indian photographer stands on the Ganges side of modernism, rather than the Seine or the East River side of it.¹¹

Girish Shahane, an Indian critic reporting on 'Where Three Dreams Cross', made special mention of Singh's work, and stated that,

Raghubir Singh managed consistently to produce pictures that are fascinating artifacts without being manifest propositions. The fact that his work... while invariably well regarded, has been virtually ignored by post-colonial theorists indicates to me that these theorists don't really desire what the curators of ['Where] Three Dreams Cross' want to highlight, namely a *different* way of seeing, so much as an *opposed* way of seeing, though such an approach is doomed to fall into the same pattern of clichés as that which it contests.¹²

Shahane's point about 'a *different* way of seeing' was manifest in the two group exhibitions with particular regard to the way Singh was presented. His way of seeing, while not fully acknowledged in 'Where Three Dreams Cross', stood apart within a national and a regional context, and its significant transactions with international positions and ideas became clearer in 'Everything Was Moving'. The movement between national-regional and international-global is instructive in the way Singh developed his "seeing".

¹¹ Raghubir Singh, 'River of Colour: An Indian View', op cit., p. 11

¹² Girish Shahane, 'Shoot First, Mumble Later: Where Three Dreams Cross' (18 June 2010), at <http://girishshahane.blogspot.in/2010/06/where-three-dream-cross.html>.

The most recent group exhibition to include Singh's photographs was 'Intractable and Untamed: Documentary Photography around 1979', curated by Barbara Engelbach at the Ludwig Museum, Cologne, in June 2014.¹³ All 22 of Singh's photographs in the presentation were drawn from his work on the city of Calcutta (now known as Kolkata). The selection was sensitive and refreshing, not only because it had a tight focus, but it also acknowledged aspects of Singh's practice that are rarely discussed. For example, included were a number of portraits Singh had made of the Bengali intelligentsia of the time, as well as shots of the interiors of people's homes. Engelbach astutely recognised that Singh had gone beyond building a record of a city from personal memory to a multi-faceted and complex representation. The material ranged from some his earliest images made in 1971–72 to work of the late 1980s, and maps quite clearly the shift in Singh's practice as also his way of seeing. As Engelbach observed, "Singh's photographs are the homage of a cosmopolitan person to a cosmopolitan city rather than an ethnographic or sociological record of an observed change."¹⁴

Essential to tracing the evolution of Singh's way of seeing is the manner in which he built his chromatic eye. How did he make these relations and propositions, so eloquently summed up in the text 'River of Colour: An Indian View'? Can the American art historian and critic Max Kozloff's description of Singh as "a cosmopolitan artist with an exclusively regional investment"¹⁵ or friend and fellow

¹³ I contributed the text 'Raghubir Singh: Calcutta 1968–88' to the accompanying catalogue.

¹⁴ Barbara Engelbach, 'Intractable and Untamed: Documentary Photography around 1979', in *Intractable and Untamed: Documentary Photography around 1979* (Museum Ludwig and Snoeck, 2014), p. 18

¹⁵ Max Kozloff, 'A Certain Sweep: The India of Raghubir Singh', *Asian Art*, vol. II, no. 4, Fall 1989, p. 27

photographer Ram Rahman's definition of him as a "provincial intellectual"¹⁶ be regarded as fully persuasive? In the hope of grasping, however fleetingly, his way of seeing, my consistent endeavour in the essay 'Raghubir Singh and the Geographical Culture of India' that I contributed for the *Everything Was Moving* catalogue and the earlier 'The Infinitude of Free Play: Raghubir Singh' (in the volume *Mutations: Perspectives on Photography*, edited by Chantal Pontbriand) was to glean how his self interacted with the larger topologies of India and the world, and this was attempted through an examination of Singh's own writings, his biography, his photographs and books.

By Singh's own admission in his writings, certain encounters, friendships and associations played decisive roles in his development as a photographer. The contributions made to his books by others in the manner of design, essays, and conversations, attest to not only the importance of these affiliations for Singh, but also the conviction and belief these other individuals had in him and his work. Notice should also be taken of Singh's dedications and acknowledgements, as they further flesh out his social network, and the support and guidance of those persons, without whom his books would not have been realised. In my research, I found going through his archive extremely helpful, as well as speaking with some of his friends and associates that have survived him. Singh's writings, as I have earlier averred, such as the introductions to his books *Kashmir: Garden of the Himalayas* (Perennial Press, 1993) and *Rajasthan: India's Enchanted Land* (Thames and Hudson, London and New York, Éditions du Chêne, Paris, and Perennial Press, Bombay, 1981), as well as other printed texts such as the 1989 'Photography and the

¹⁶ Ram Rahman makes this proposition in his memorial lecture on Singh at the 2013 Delhi Photo Festival.

Geographical Culture of India' in *Asian Art*, are a vital resource for understanding not only his own work and approach, the subject(s) he was photographing, but also the affective dimension of his practice. Densely researched and packed with art historical references, they support the claim that Singh was "that rare photographer who became deeply interested in art history and sought to educate himself in both Western and Asian art, and the history of photography".¹⁷

Singh never received formal training in the fine arts. While still a student in Jaipur in the 1960s he was gifted his first camera by his brother. Singh soon dropped out of college, and started work as a freelance photojournalist, garnering assignments from *Life*, *The New York Times*, *Stern* and *National Geographic*. The photographs he turned in for these publications were governed by the parameters of his assignments: standard narrative pictures and telephoto lens work, which "by its flattening of imagery in abbreviated depth... tends to assume a kind of statement favorable to graphic layout and quick reading."¹⁸ The picture editors of these mainstream photojournals were not the ones who had any enduring impact on him. The work was really a source of income for Singh: "They did stories, I illustrated them."¹⁹ But working with the *National Geographic* provided him with rolls and rolls of colour film, with which he could build a bank of images of personal value to him and which found their way eventually into his first few books. Writing of the *National Geographic* and Singh's images, Kozloff said:

¹⁷ Max Kozloff, 'A Certain Sweep: The India of Raghubir Singh', op cit., p. 27

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ameena Meer, 'Tales from the Riverbank' in *frieze magazine*, issue 15, March–April 1994, available at http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/tales_from_the_riverbank/

In *National Geographic* and other publications that specialize in picturing far-off folk to us, daily, low-tech routines are rehearsed and folk are made to impersonate our notions of them, as human types that are as poised, vibrant and picturesque as possible. These subjects are illustrated as being in an exotic condition... Singh's Indians, to the contrary, have very little in common with these examples or media alter egos. They are much too absorbed with their own workaday doings to speak on behalf of any of their fellows or to exhibit 'traits'. His course of action has always been to swim among them as his compatriots.²⁰

One of Singh's earliest commissions, dating to 1967 for *The New York Times*, was imaging a story on communism in Kerala [fig. 5.1], authored by Joseph Lelyveld, the then bureau chief in India. The two men would continue a meaningful affiliation, Lelyveld writing the accompanying, very vivid essay for Singh's second book *Calcutta* (Perennial Press, 1975). Lelyveld went on to become the executive editor of *The New York Times* from 1994 to 2001. Singh forged another connection of immense relevance through his freelance work in the late 1960s. He was still working mostly from Jaipur when he received an assignment from Stuart Cary Welch, the Boston-based art historian and connoisseur of Indian miniature painting, to photograph objects and paintings in the Jaipur Museum, particularly Mughal painting. It was this initial link and the ensuing friendship that aided Singh in formulating a deep comprehension of Indian art history. Singh was particularly invested in Kota painting, a style that was native to his home state of Rajasthan. He became acquainted with a number of Welch's students – Milo Beach, Glenn D. Lowry and Clark Worswick. A testament to the deeply transnational character of the Indian art world of the 1960s and 1970s, these relationships were of great benefit to Singh.

²⁰ Max Kozloff, 'A Certain Sweep: The India of Raghubir Singh', op cit., p. 26

Being surrounded by professionals engaged in active research in the field was very instructive. In a memorial lecture on Singh that he delivered at the Delhi Photo Festival in 2013, Rahman said that Singh “had the chance to go into Cary’s offices in Harvard, and actually hold the paintings and see them”.²¹ Such intellectual tutelage certainly informed Singh in the making of his images and also affected his conception of what he was doing as a photographer. There are few direct references to particular miniature paintings in his work, but the rare example of *Craftsman Ghulam Hussain Mir and his grandson, Srinagar, Kashmir, 1980* [fig. 5.2] bears echoes of the seventeenth-century drawing *The Dying of Inayat Khan* (1618) [fig. 5.3]. Rahman drew attention to another work, *Elephants and Pilgrims, Sonapur fair, 1988* which he labelled Singh’s “most miniature like work”,²² due mainly to the very flattened quality of the composition achieved by Singh shooting downwards from the back of an elephant. It needs to be clarified that Singh never tried to mimic miniatures or make pictures that looked like them. Instead, he looked at the strategies employed by the painters of miniatures, absorbed their cues and lessons, translated them, and applied them to his own work and to the way he viewed his own surroundings; with particular emphasis on colour. His passion and knowledge for the miniature tradition would inform the way he would look, but not define, or limit it.

While the relationship with Welch and his students assisted Singh in developing a strong art historical knowledge to provide depth to his practice and his person, the formal basis for his work can be traced to, as cited earlier, the influences of, first,

²¹ Ram Rahman, ‘Reintroducing Raghubir Singh’, lecture delivered at the Delhi Photo Festival, 2013. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRIC03gfls0&noredirect=1>.

²² Ibid.

Henri Cartier-Bresson, and then, later, to a lesser extent, William Gedney. Singh recounted his first meeting with Cartier-Bresson in great detail:

I met Cartier-Bresson in 1966, in Jaipur, my home town, when I was invited by Marilyn Siverstone, a Magnum photojournalist, who lived in India. Cartier-Bresson was on a self-assigned mission to photograph a country in the process of slow but steady change. A remark he made that evening stuck in my mind. "It is boring to be successful," he said in reference to a major magazine photojournalist who had told the French master of the money he had hoped to make through photography. With Cartier-Bresson's liberating remark in mind I watched him work for a few days in Jaipur. I could see that he was far from being a photojournalist. He was an original! I saw first hand his quickfire intuition attached to a clarity of eye and surety of stance. I have never forgotten the champagne headiness of those days. I still possess *Beautiful Jaipur*, a little-known book that Cartier-Bresson published in 1949. In my high school years, I had found it at home on a bookshelf. It was poorly printed and bound in Bombay, yet it stoked the youthful fire in me.²³

Along with the Bressonian "decisive moment",²⁴ an enduring representation captured by a fixed-lens camera with a precision impossible to apprehend by the human eye, it was Cartier-Bresson's approach to India as a place that most captivated Singh's attention. He stated that, "Cartier-Bresson's photographs of India on the occasion of its independence offer the Indian photographer a variety of visual connections to the Western world,"²⁵ such as,

...laying the first visual bridge between East and West... for laying a photographic bridge between the pictorialism of Europe and the pictorial life of Asia. Cartier-

²³ Raghbir Singh, 'River of Colour: An Indian View', op cit., pp. 13-14

²⁴ Henri Cartier-Bresson, quoted in Clément Chéroux, *Henri Cartier-Bresson* (Thames and Hudson, 2008), p. 96.

²⁵ Raghbir Singh, 'River of Colour: An Indian View', op cit., p. 13-14

Bresson blazed a modernist pictorial route through the Indian subcontinent, which the Indian photographer was free to restructure according to his own needs.²⁶

In the working methods of the American photographer William Gedney, who came to India first on a Fulbright fellowship in 1969 and then again in 1979, Singh found a resonance with Cartier-Bresson. He went as far as to say that Gedney's photographs of India "rivalled" those of Cartier-Bresson's. The cover of *What Was True: The Photographs and Notebooks of William Gedney*, published in 1999, bears Singh's eulogy:

William Gedney, what a strange man! Yet the strangeness of alienation and loneliness deeply informed his art. Loneliness and the sensuality of the human figure, tied to the sublime, were his true subjects. In this context, he was a master with few peers. He coiled his controlled hysteria into poetry through a sure knowledge of self... His best art is a dirge to loneliness.²⁷

Gedney, who lived in Brooklyn, New York, never worked for the press, managing to support himself as a teacher of photography; an option which would have been rare if not impossible in the India of the 1960s and '70s. He operated by the dictates of street photography, always looking to expand the possibility of the frame. Through a common friend at Time-Life Books, Gedney wrote to Singh before embarking on his first trip to India. Singh knew nothing about Gedney although in 1968, the year before his journey, the latter had had a one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Singh wrote back advising Gedney to bring film with him, but to rely on local sources for certain chemicals and printing paper. They

²⁶ Ibid., p. 13–14

²⁷ Raghubir Singh, *What Was True: The Photographs and Notebooks of William Gedney*, ed. Margaret Sartor, co-ed. Geoff Dyer (Lyndhurst Norton, 2000), dustjacket.

met in person for the first time in the second half of 1969, and Singh recalled that Gedney “came armed, with a knowledge of Satyajit Ray films, R.K. Narayan novels and Indian miniature painting”.²⁸ Gedney spent this entire first trip in Banaras (now Varanasi), where he comprehensively photographed the life and patterns of the city. Gestures, bodies and their interactions fill his images, each conveying an incredible detail of visual information. Most of his second visit was spent in Calcutta, where he ventured into middle-class Indian homes and also photographed the artists, poets and intellectuals of the city. Singh was impressed by the graceful ease with which Gedney, like Cartier-Bresson, could engage two kinds of aesthetic systems:

Behind the documentary aesthetic of William Gedney lies not only hard work but a methodology of making that leaps from Brooklyn to Benares – from the lonely edge of Western culture to the populous centre of Hinduism. It is a journey from one kind of literature and art to another, from one kind of visual sensitivity to another. It is a journey of the American documentary aesthetic to the aesthetic of the pictorial-physicality of Benares... How many visiting photographers have successfully entered into the physicality and communality of India? To do so helps the photographer make that mental leap from the mindset of alienation of the West, to the mindset of touch and feel of India, where privacy has an eloquently different meaning. To absorb that meaning is to obtain a talisman to our life.²⁹

Singh elucidates Gedney’s ability to relate Brooklyn and Banaras more precisely and perceptively by noting that,

²⁸ Singh wrote the essay titled ‘From Brooklyn to Benaras: The India of William Gedney’ in 1997, but it was never published. His daughter Devika shared the article with me, and when I was invited to make a contribution to the third issue of the journal *Convolution*, I took the opportunity to publish this text along with Gedney’s never-published *Benaras Nights* book. All excerpts of the Gedney essay are taken from *Convolution*. Raghbir Singh, ‘From Brooklyn to Benaras: The India of William Gedney’, *Convolution: The Journal of Conceptual Criticism*, no. 3, 2014, p. 71.

²⁹ Raghbir Singh, ‘From Brooklyn to Benaras, op cit., pp. 72–73

...in Benares, Bill had found something of home, and something that was not available at home: the overt and homoerotic sense of the city tied to the male and female duality of Indian art and life. And yet in its erotic-spirituality and in its very spirit, Benares was far from home. Therefore a tracking shot can be made from the bare-bodied Eastern Kentucky men to the bare-bodied Benares men in Bill's photographs. The homoeroticism of the springtime Holi festival delighted Bill – those photographs have yet to be seen. Unlike Mapplethorpe's gallery-governed photographs, Bill's homoerotic photographs spring from life.³⁰

This passage makes clear that Singh was able to intuit from Gedney's work a kind of back-and-forth, a continuum enacted between the familiar and unfamiliar, between West and East, and this probably stayed with Singh, because he too, in his own way, was working towards relating different experiences back to a place of personal reference.

At an empirical level, to take a parallel look at Gedney's and Singh's portfolios to find direct correspondences and instances of mimicry that would demonstrate Gedney's "influence" on Singh would be, and is, reductive. There were, of course, instances of certain sites and occurrences, particularly in Banaras, that both men photographed, but the emphasis when looking at their bodies of work together should be an investigation into a conversing photographic language, as opposed to the aerobics of emulation.

Gedney and Singh's photographs of India had never been exhibited together before the little presentation I organised at the Esther Schipper Gallery in Berlin in September 2013, titled 'Raghubir Singh and William Gedney: A Project by Shanay Jhaveri on Invitation by Matti Braun' [fig. 5.4]. The exhibition took place in the gallery's ground-floor space, and showed only a very small selection from their vast

³⁰ Raghubir Singh, 'From Brooklyn to Benaras, op cit., p. 71

bodies of work on the subcontinent. The Gedney works were predominantly from his time in Banaras, with only two images from Calcutta.³¹ The group of Singh's images was less focused, by which I mean that they were not from a particular book; they spanned instead the breadth of his career, the earliest image being from 1968, which predated his meeting with Gedney. The endeavour was to highlight how Singh drew in certain aspects from Gedney's practice to evolve his own distinct way of seeing. Their shared affinities did become apparent, but care was taken to underscore and respect the individual accents of their respective practices. It was possible to include six of Singh's images in the exhibition, all installed in a single line across the gallery wall. Gedney's images were unframed and placed in a vitrine at some distance from Singh's images. It was a conscious decision on my part not to intersperse the two bodies of work, but to present them individually. I believe this allowed viewers to engage with each artist's practice independently, and then, after they had experienced both sets of images, perhaps begin to think of them in relation to one another. As I pointed out, "what is crucial is the detection and appreciation of how influence is transposed, the operation of subjectivising – the 'making it personal' in effect. It is about building associations through observation, *a posteriori*, and not being obliged to arrive at conclusions".³²

Another vitrine displayed archival material, comprising Singh's 1988 book on Calcutta dedicated to Gedney; a letter from the critic and writer R.P. Gupta to Singh discussing, among many other things, Gedney's presence in Calcutta and Satyajit

³¹ This show was put together with a few constraints, the greatest of which was that the William Gedney Estate, which is entrusted and managed by Duke University, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, could not lend material because an extensive re-digitisation of their holdings was under way. Hence, I had to work with a very small selection available through the Howard Greenberg Gallery in New York City.

³² Shanay Jhaveri, 'William Gedney and Raghubir Singh', *Convolution: The Journal of Conceptual Criticism*, no. 3, 2014, p. 44

Ray; and Matti Braun's book on Ray. This collection of material sought to evoke the real nature of the human networks that the exhibition addressed. This served to animate in tangible terms the depth and association between Singh and Gedney, while carrying meanings beyond the exhibition itself. The show was not an archival exercise, but very much about how their practices can be, and are being, thought of today, and the ways in which they are being engaged from art historical and curatorial perspectives. This was further emphasised by the artistic interventions that Braun himself made to the exhibition space. He had the ceiling corners, edges, and transitions dusted in colours drawn from the colour gradients found in the gutters of my second book, *Western Artists and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design* (Thames and Hudson and The Shoestring Publisher, 2013). As I recall,

Braun's ceiling work added a charge ever so slightly to the space, linking the explorations taking place in the exhibition to the book, and vice versa. It positions them both as being in dialogue with one another, each a separate but intertwined effort, with each format offering a new mode of learning in which new associations and relationships can be formed.³³

Braun's intervention gestured towards my friendship with him, and towards my book, which discusses Gedney's friendship with Singh. In fact, the important emphasis of *Western Artists and India* is the transmission and exchange of ideas through informal channels of communication.³⁴

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ I continue this exhibitionary model of pairing Singh with friends and associates in a new show that will open at the Jhaveri Contemporary Gallery, Mumbai, in August 2015. For the first time Singh's work will be seen alongside that of his protégée Ketaki Sheth, as well as work by Sooni Taraporevala and Ram Rahman.

The friendship between Singh and Gedney continued beyond Gedney's first visit to India, and through Gedney, in the 1970s and 1980s, Singh gradually acquainted himself with core members of the New York photo community, striking a friendship with Lee and Maria Friedlander [fig. 5.5] and Thomas Roma, Lee Friedlander's son-in-law and a fellow photographer. Singh also met the critic Max Kozloff and Michael Hoffman, the publisher of *Aperture* magazine and director of the Aperture Foundation. Rahman, too had a loft in Manhattan, where Singh interacted with, among others, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, who shot in colour, and Vicki Goldberg. His work came to be regarded seriously by them. Conversely, when Gedney returned to India in 1979, it was through Singh that he was able to acquaint himself with Calcutta society, meeting Ray and staying in the home of R.P. Gupta. Personal photographs from Gedney's archive dating to 1978 picture Singh with friends at a Parisian café and in the apartment he shared with his wife (Anne de Henning, whom he first met in Hong Kong in 1972) [figs. 5.6-5.7] Coupled with photographs from Rahman's archive capturing Singh in spirited conversation at loft parties [figs. 5.8 – 5.9], these images convey the growing international dimension of Singh's life, one that was populated by a fulsome network of people and places.

A degree of caution must be exercised when charting and considering the impact of these associations on Singh; the question of influence contemplated with circumspection. His interactions and exchanges with these prominent figures need to be regarded alongside his own awareness and agency as well as the cultural context from which he operated. Attention must be paid to the choices Singh made in what he adopted and in what he rejected from his cross-cultural encounters. While evolving his own aesthetic and intellectual consciousness, a convincing

negotiation with the West and modernism becomes apparent, but this was not a simple linear flow of knowledge and ideas that Singh unconditionally absorbed.

Rather, his decisions reflect what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as a “dialogic” process:

The dialogic nature of consciousness, the dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human existence is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.³⁵

Rahman contends that Singh and his practice had an impact on his peers, mentioning explicitly Lee Friedlander as revealed by the photographs comprising *America by Car* (exhibited in 2010 at the Whitney Museum of American Art). But Friedlander’s work, albeit in a different format, came years after Singh’s *A Way Into India* (Phaidon, 2002), in which Singh bequeathed the frame of his camera almost wholly to the companion who had journeyed with him through India over 30 years – his Ambassador car. This was the one thing that could “be singled out to stand for the past fifty years of India and its closed economy”.³⁶

Singh, who worked in an Independent India, unambiguously declared: “I have borrowed a lot from the West, as well as from independent-minded Bengal, the same Bengal which was the first place in the subcontinent to attempt a fusion of the modern arts with the centrifugal force of India that has forever sustained the

³⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans., Caryl Emerson (University of Michigan Press, 1984), p. 293

³⁶ Raghubir Singh, ‘Introduction’, *A Way into India* (Phaidon, 2002), p. 4

land.”³⁷ This statement suggests Singh was undaunted by the reactionary nationalism and nationalist attitudes of the immediate postcolonial moment. His indication that Bengal was the site of such synthesis is not erroneous; in fact the art historian Partha Mitter has said:

The Bengali intelligentsia negotiated cosmopolitan modernity largely through the printed medium, since few of them had any direct physical contact with Europeans. Yet they were deeply imbued with Western literature and Enlightenment values.

Modernity created a globally “imagined community” based upon print culture, whose members may never have known one another personally, and yet shared a corpus of ideas on modernity. To explain this community’s critical engagement with modern ideas, I propose here the concept of the “virtual cosmopolis”. The hybrid city of the imagination engendered elective affinities between the elites of the centre and the periphery on the level of intellect and creativity.³⁸

Such ideas were revealed to Singh with his move to Calcutta in 1961, where he was able to look comparatively and critically at Western thought and formulate his own responses. A vital role in this process was his meeting and friendship with the filmmaker Satyajit Ray, who Singh has described as one of the “Grand Indians” who were “not afraid of borrowing from the West”.³⁹

Assimilating both Western and Eastern influences, Ray has brought our tradition of geographical culture to contemporary fruition. In film after film, the master has shown us that an ancient tradition can produce a modern artistic vision. The fundamental truth of India – how the people are inseparable from religion, monsoon, rivers, the forest, the mountain, and the plain – is evident in almost all his work. And he has added modernity through music, story, cutting and cinematic perception...

³⁷ Raghbir Singh, ‘River of Colour: An Indian View’, op cit., p. 12

³⁸ Partha Mitter, ‘Prologue’, *The Triumph of Modernism: India’s Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922– 1947* (Reaktion Books, 2007), pp. 11–12

³⁹ Raghbir Singh, ‘River of Colour: An Indian View’, op cit., p. 12

One of the most important lessons for me has been that if sensibilities have emerged from the geographical culture of India, one need not fear being overwhelmed by foreign influences. Whatever is acquired from afar will simply be covered over by the artistic floodwaters of India, as in the case of Satyajit Ray.⁴⁰

It has been reported that when Singh first showed his photographs to Ray, the response he got was “no guts”,⁴¹ words Ray would take back a few years later. A long association then commenced. Singh photographed Ray on a number of occasions: some of these images finding their way to Singh’s *Calcutta*, his first book on the city, for which Ray designed the cover typeface. Ray wrote the foreword for Singh’s third book, *Rajasthan: India’s Enchanted Land*. Their continuing rapport can be tracked through the exchange of scores of letters, all carefully preserved by Raghubir Singh’s estate.⁴² Along with the letters is an extensive dossier of international reviews, press clippings, magazines such as *Cahier du Cinema* and *Sight and Sound*, all featuring Ray, and collected by Singh. I was also shown a remarkable image taken by Singh’s photographer wife Anne de Henning during one of Ray’s visits to Paris when the couple had arranged a trip to Albert Kahn’s mansion in Boulogne-Billancourt. The de Henning picture has Ray standing in Kahn’s garden holding a photograph of Rabindranath Tagore, who had been pictured standing in the same spot in 1921. Not only does it have Ray pay homage to the world-

⁴⁰ Raghubir Singh, ‘Photography and the Geographical Culture of India’, *Asian Art*, vol. II, no. 4, Fall 1989, p. 7

⁴¹ This anecdote about the first meeting of Singh and Ray is referred to in the essay ‘Raghubir Singh’ written by H.Y. Sharada Prasad, and reproduced in his *The Book I Won’t be Writing and Other Essays* (Chronicle Books 2004), and in Singh’s *New York Times* obituary published 20 April 1999; at <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/20/arts/raghubir-singh-photographer-who-depicted-a-vivid-india-dies-at-58.html>

⁴² Among the extensive correspondence is a letter written by Singh providing a review of the 1989 Alain Corneau film *Nocturne Indien*. This was of personal interest to me as the first book I edited, *Outsider Films on India: 1950–1990* (The Shoestring Publisher, 2009), includes an essay on *Nocturne Indien*. The letter ratifies Singh’s abiding interest in world cinema, also attested to in his writings, most explicitly in the introduction to *River of Colour*.

renowned Tagore but the image is, from today's vantage point, a celebration of the elective affinities that bind figures such as Tagore and Ray, despite the separation of time and space.

Singh, like Tagore and Ray, was deeply invested in his own country, and announced that his voice was “essentially that of someone who spent his formative years in Rajasthan”. It was thus his stated intention to photograph the geography of India, presenting in full colour its “people, animals, religion, tradition, myth, manners, history and climate... inseparable from one another and the vast land of rivers, mountains, plain, and plateaus”.⁴³ He aptly quoted the lines Tagore inscribed in the teenage Ray's diary: “I have spent a fortune travelling to distant shores and looked at lofty mountains and boundless oceans, and yet, I haven't found time to take a few steps from my home, to look at a single dewdrop, on a single blade of glass.”⁴⁴ And so, Singh continued:

The India that I set out to photograph, however, was not the India reflected in the lenses of the British colonial photographers but the India in the dewdrop that Tagore talked of, the dewdrop which mirrors India's geography... to be a photographer I had to dive into the depth of the dewdrop in order to know not only the ecological and moral foundations of India, but also that other important aspect of the inner source: the art and culture of the country. Simultaneously, I had to dive into the history of photography – which is wholly Western... But wherever I have dived and come up for air, the breath I take is deeply Indian because all my working life I have photographed my country.⁴⁵

⁴³ Raghubir Singh, 'Photography and the Geographical Culture of India', op cit., p. 7

⁴⁴ Raghubir Singh, 'River of Colour: An Indian View', op cit., p. 12

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 12-13

His approach to the ideologies and absorptive outlook of Tagore and Ray was however unambiguously Singh's own, even while he extolled their cosmopolitanism and ability to meld Western and Eastern effects seamlessly. To photograph exclusively in colour and in India was Singh's choice, or rather his true conviction. At this juncture I would return to Eaton and a term she coined, the 'nomadism of colour'. For Eaton:

...to be nomadic is not merely to reflect on the world but it also to be immersed in a changing state of things – it is to take/make method as *flux*... it is pressing, I think, to read the nomadic *qua* the pictorial... All pictorial relations issue from colour so as to create a tactile, haptic space...nomads...wander over undulating surfaces to put pressure on space to the extent of its capabilities (*puissances*). The smooth, non- pulsed time of the smooth space they occupy (musical by analogy) is determined by interrelations that are heterogeneous and rhizomatic, which are irreducibly plural and affective.⁴⁶

Singh's insistence on the use of colour and decision to shoot only in India, to be totally committed to its geography as it shifted and changed are, I believe, more than a notable elucidation of Eaton's proposition. Singh was exceptional in the way he worked, given that a mentor such as Cartier-Bresson and respected peers such as Gedney photographed only in black and white. The haptic relation to space Eaton mentions is in evidence throughout Singh's photographs, something which is ruminated on at length in the latter sections of this chapter. Building off Eaton's suggestion that "all pictorial relations issue from colour", I find, similarly, writing in 1989, Max Kozloff attributed Singh's use of colour as resonating with "a feeling of the present":

⁴⁶ Natasha Eaton, 'Introduction', *Colour, Art and Empire: Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation* (I.B. Tauris, 2013), pp. 3-4

At this stage in the history of photography, black-and-white inevitably speaks of the past, matrixed in a material associated with history. It has a kind of automatic seriousness particularly conducive to the outlook of photographers wishing to 'document' the lot of those whose future is highly uncertain. For his part, Raghubir Singh ingests and realizes color as a form of national consciousness. Not only do photographs express cultural leanings, they also record them; and here so much of India's elaborate chromatics is brought out by virtue of Singh's generous openness to them.⁴⁷

Kozloff's assessment came on the heels of Singh's second book on Calcutta, published in 1988. Before Singh died in 1999 he had published five more books: *The Ganges* (Thames and Hudson, 1992), *Bombay: A Gateway to India* (Aperture, New York and Perennial Press, 1994), *The Grand Trunk Road* (Aperture, New York and Perennial Press, 1995), *Tamil Nadu* (DAP, 1997) and *A River of Colour: Raghubir Singh's India. A Way into India* came out posthumously. The decade before his death was a remarkable window of time: the Berlin wall collapsed in 1989 and the socio-economic and political landscape of India saw unprecedented change within the country, once a leader of the non-aligned movement, realigning itself with the United States of America and then, in 1991, liberalising its economy.

With such changes afoot, Singh, always alert to the mechanics of transformation, had his own responses,⁴⁸ given that he was born into an upper-class Jaipur landowner family, whose feudal way of being came to an end with the post-Independence reforms instituted by the Indian government. The bucolic in

⁴⁷ Max Kozloff, 'A Certain Sweep: The India of Raghubir Singh', op cit., p. 30

⁴⁸ Three other texts of mine on Singh emphasise this point: 'The Infinitude of Free Play: Raghubir Singh', in *Mutations: Perspectives on Photography*, ed., Chantal Pontbriand (Steidl, 2011); 'Raghubir Singh and the Geographical Culture of India', in *Everything Was Moving*, op cit.; and 'Loaded Vehicle', in *frieze magazine*, issue 168, available at <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/loaded-vehicle/>

Rajasthan: India's Enchanted Land, a book about his home state, should not be misconstrued as a nostalgic romp. Rather, it is the work of a consciousness that views the present with the knowledge that it will soon slip into mere memory. He writes in the introduction to the book:

Like Rajasthan, I too have changed. In the storied forts, the magnificent palaces and the walled cities I have been enticed by history and art. At home, seeing my mother light an oil lamp and pray, I have been touched by her devotion. Yet alongside Kumbha, Pratap and Jai Singh, I now uphold Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru, the architects of modern India. Through their endeavours education, emancipation and industry have grown. In Rajasthan, we now have a zinc-smelter, an electronics factory, textile mills and a nuclear power plant. Cars and scooters have found their way into the lives of the middle class. The refrigerator and television set are monuments in the living room. In the villages, the transistor, the bicycle, the electric bulb, the occasional tractor and the water-pump have a permanent place.⁴⁹

Singh's catalogue until the late 1980s was filled with nuanced images that illustrated how the modern experience was being absorbed and translated across the length and breadth of the country, and presented varying configurations used by Indians, Singh included (and implicated), to view one another, all palpably on display in *Below the Howrah Bridge, a Marwari bride and groom after rites by the Ganges* [fig. 5.10]; *Dr Karni Singh, ex-Maharajah of Bikaner; Lalgarh Palace, 1974*; and *Employees, Morvi Palace, Gujarat, 1982* [fig. 5.11]. Singh, in fact, was one of the first photographers to make portraits of India's elite, to venture into their homes and subtly picture conditions of class. It is an aspect of his work that remains little recognised or discussed, but his watchful gaze is apparent in his words from 1989:

⁴⁹ Raghubir Singh, 'Introduction', *Rajasthan: India's Enchanted Land* (Thames and Hudson, 1981) pp. 31–32

It is as much from the quest of the new urban India, which has cut itself loose from our traditional geographical culture. India has never been resistant to change. And even if it could be done, there is no reason to turn the clock back on the fun and adventure that this India is enjoying through its discovery of videos, computers and electronics, and lasers. It is an unconscious attempt to obliterate East and West and join the culture that is loosely called the international. My only reservation is that in the rush to be international, our new society has cut the umbilical cord connecting it to our geographical culture.⁵⁰

This sensibility is affectingly conveyed in *A Way into India* through the recurrent presence of the increasingly obsolete Ambassador car, “a measuring rod for end-of-century India, inching into a new millennium... a metal monument that slides into history... a part of India’s long journey”.⁵¹ It is an album whose images, like *Pilgrim and Ambassador Car, Kumbh Mela, Prayag, Uttar Pradesh, 1977*, [fig. 5.12] date back to the 1970s, indicating the consistent evolution and standing of Singh’s considerations and enthusiasms.

A conversation between the writer V.S. Naipaul and Singh functions as the introduction to Singh’s *Bombay* book published in 1994, and in it Naipaul perceptively notes that after a close study of his publications he had come to realise that Singh had not simply assembled catalogues of well-lit, formatted and organised photographs, but had exercised the “power” available to photographers “to do unique descriptive studies not simply of places but of civilizations”, and that it had “crept up” on Singh “as he practised his art”.⁵² In response, Singh honestly admits that initially he was guided only by intuition and, melding the various learnings

⁵⁰ Raghubir Singh, ‘River of Colour: An Indian View’, op cit., pp. 7–8

⁵¹ Raghubir Singh, ‘Introduction’, *A Way into India*, op cit., p. 5

⁵² Raghubir Singh, ‘Conversation: V.S. Naipaul and Raghubir Singh’, *Bombay: Gateway to India* (The Perennial Press, 1994), p. 5

drawn from Western and Eastern sources, it was with only his last two or three books that he became aware of being able to accommodate his “own point of view, a visual and emotional relationship to India,”⁵³ as well as other intentions and objectives that had become sharper.

The last two or three books Singh alluded to can be identified as his second efforts in photographing the river Ganga (1992) and the city of Calcutta (1988). The earlier efforts had become Singh’s first two books, published in 1974 and 1975 respectively. When comparing or rather relating the earlier works with the later, the conscious distance Singh travelled in his image-making is very evident. The vertical formats of the former volumes have been replaced by horizontal orientations, but beyond the cosmetic physicality of the books, it is in the actual form and nature of the images that Singh’s evolving awareness is reflected. Easily detected in both *Ganga: Sacred River of India* (Perennial Press, Bombay, 1974) and *Calcutta* (Perennial Press, Bombay, 1975) are the journalistic techniques that Singh employed to shoot stories for *Life* and the *National Geographic*; most prevalent when looking at the printed feature in the *National Geographic* of October 1971, ‘The Ganges: River of Faith’ [figs. 5.13; 5.14; 5.15], and April 1973’s ‘Calcutta: India’s Maligned Metropolis’ [figs. 5.16; 5.17; 5.18] alongside Singh’s books. Not only are some images exactly the same, but a fair number of them are decidedly narrative, concerned with detail, and shot with a telephoto lens.

A careful study of the spreads in the later books reveals the unmistakable modernist pictorial language strikingly missing from the earlier works. No telephoto lens was used, Singh having settled down to using lenses ranging from 28mm to

⁵³ Ibid.

35mm and 50mm, which provided for the close wide-angle proximity seen in many of his pictures. During a lecture that walked through the 1992 *Ganges* book, Rahman paused at the image *Ganges from Malaviya bridge, Benaras, Uttar Pradesh, 1987* [fig. 5.19] to point out that it sat very comfortably within the vocabulary of the modernist photography practised in America at the time. The river Ganga is to be seen through the field of a railing: the image is imbalanced, there is an awkward cutting of the frame. A visual construct, the image represents a moment in which Singh plays with form, and it is not its intent to provide additional information or have a narrative thrust. The 1988 Calcutta book is also filled with images such as *A rickshaw puller and his passenger pass a Bombay film poster about to be put up* [fig. 5.20]; or *Raj Bhavan, residence of the Governors of West Bengal, formerly of the Governors-General and Viceroys. Built for Marquess of Wellesley in 1803* [fig. 5.21]; or *Balloon sellers and Durga images being unloaded for immersion in the Ganges*.

Two images of a particular statue of Subhas Chandra Bose, but taken almost two decades apart, provide a revealing evaluation. In the 1975 Calcutta book the image is *Movie hoardings and the Subhas Chandra Bose statue at Shyambazaar* [fig. 5.22], and in the 1988 volume the image in question is *A stalled bus at Five-Point-Crossing, below the statue of Subhas Chandra Bose, the Bengali hero* [fig. 5.23]. Singh remarked of the later image:

I had photographed around this statue in Calcutta as early as 1968. This was made in 1986. The man was tinkering with the engine. He's almost blocked out by the truck door. A hand leads into the picture and a thumb acts as a pointer. The bit of yellow seen through the door is almost arabesque. These are the elements of abstraction occurring in daily life brought to the fore through the signs, the people, the bus, the

truck. But you don't think about these as elements. It's your intuition, your sixth sense that takes the picture.⁵⁴

The straight-on, direct shot of the statue from 1968 is replaced by an image filled with disparate elements, lacking a coherent unity, overlapping and nudging against each other, plunging the viewer into the visual density of the city. Kozloff believes that while in such photographs "the imagery works closely with effects of modernist fragmentation and incongruity, it avows its emotional and even its political detachment from such Western practice".⁵⁵

Kozloff's perception is true. These images are not encountered in isolation, but rather within books that are methodical and organised with incredible conceptual and intellectual rigour. Singh himself has contended that he conceded no control to his publishers or, in fact to anyone, when assembling his books. Much was at stake in the process of the layout for Singh, he himself admitting: "I don't allow a publisher to edit my pictures or to do the layout of a book, because the total visual statement has to come from the photographer. The photographer is the *auteur*."⁵⁶ Such a statement makes Singh's self-conviction clear, but also signals his ambition. He realised that his books were his primary platform to make his own artistic vision known to a wide audience; thus they were to reflect not only his aspirations for his craft, colour photography, but his chosen subject, the 'geographical culture' of India. I would further propose that Singh was aware that by having well-known and internationally acclaimed writers and experts contribute essays to his books, through such association, his books might benefit from more visibility, and perhaps

⁵⁴ Herbert Keppler, 'The Fantastic Compositional Eye of Raghbir Singh', *Popular Photography*, March 1999, p. 67

⁵⁵ Kozloff, 'A Certain Sweep: The India of Raghbir Singh', op cit., p. 28

⁵⁶ Raghbir Singh, 'Conversation: V.S. Naipaul and Raghbir Singh', op cit., p. 9

wider circulation. He was cognisant of the bearing such texts would have on the reading of his work, also placing himself as part of a tradition where photographers like “James Agee, Walker Evans, Langston Hughes with Roy DeCarava, and Eudora Welty and Wright Morris”⁵⁷ considered the use of text as far from redundant, but rather integral to the conception of a book. This is not to suggest that Singh built his social network solely to support his practice and advance his profile, but he did demonstrate an appreciation of the disadvantages he would face firstly, as a colour photographer practicing at time when black and white was still uniformly valorised, and secondly as a post colonial, Indian artist, trying to establish a reputation from himself both locally as well internationally.

Through the 1970’s, 1980’s and most of the 1990’s photography did not have the same market currency or omnipresence that a hyper-capitalist digital era has bestowed upon it. For Singh, finding venues to present actual prints of his work, in India and abroad, was seriously limited. Singh did print images, but it was not done as systematically as photographers do today, working in editions and with gallery representation. He printed erratically, and gifted images to friends. He was more focused on developing and formulating the configurations and flows of his books; screening slides and spreading out prints on the floor, mulling over them for hours. He built his books up as if they were exhibitions, with meticulous attention and precise order. Across all 14 of his books, images are placed side by side or amidst spreads that indicate the larger patterns of thought that preoccupied Singh. His books never literalise their subjects, but ascend to consider them as part of greater imaginaries that involve the historical, the cosmic and the present, together viewed

⁵⁷ Ibid.

in a single sweep. Singh's was an active, self-aware process of working with a modernist pictorial language, but firmly entrenched, anchored and immersed physically and emotionally within a rapidly moving local landscape.

These unmistakable modernist transactions assume a particular potency in Singh's study of Bombay (now Mumbai), especially in the following plates:

Churchgoers and balloon strings, Bandra; Bandra from a Shivaji Park apartment; Street scene, August Kranti Marg; and Mother and Child, Dharavi to list a few.

Nonetheless, when training his gaze on Bombay, Singh found himself having to confront other modalities and conditions, which did not endure in Banaras or Calcutta, the other two cities in India that were the subjects for his books. Amit Chaudhuri precisely notes of the Bombay book that there is a,

...shift in sensibility... one that represents a conundrum, a moment experienced by all artists formed by modernity and Modernism who now found themselves faced, in their backyards, by the globalised world. Singh's previous major work on a metropolis had been a book on Calcutta, where his pictures show the influence and the quirky humanity of Cartier-Bresson, Satyajit Ray and, indeed, the sort of aesthetic that Calcutta itself had represented for a century and a half, one concerned with uncovering, through a Modernist paradox, the intimate and the natural in urban disrepair and industrial decay, with recuperating the secretly familiar and quickening in the shabby and inhospitable.⁵⁸

The metropolis that Singh pictured in 1994 was not the city he captured for the July 1981 *National Geographic* feature 'Bombay: The Other India' [figs. 5.24–5.25].

The shift (as already charted with the Calcutta books) is apparent when Singh's pictures revisit places and occasions already photographed by him, such as the

⁵⁸ Amit Chaudhuri, 'A View From Malabar Hill', *London Review of Books*, vol. 28, no. 15, 3 August 2006, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n15/amit-chaudhuri/the-view-from-malabar-hill>

home of architect Charles Correa or the Ganesha festival or something as elemental as the monsoon. There is a fairly direct journalistic portrait in the *National Geographic* by Singh of Correa sitting on the floor talking to his wife Monika [fig. 5.26], but in his own book the image he uses of the Correa home is one of a party. *Birthday party, Malabar Hill* [fig. 5.27] was shot from the end of a dinner table, and we see the head of pig and a guest helping himself to salad, while on the opposite wall is a 'mood board' filled with images ranging from Mao to Islamic motifs, a subtle marker of the vast array of cultural referents being contemplated. Correa himself is nowhere to be seen. It is not a study of him; instead it is a glimpse of the texture of social exchanges in the city. Astutely, the next image in sequence is titled *Intermission during a music concert, Kilachand House*, another moment of elite feting.

Three images of the Ganesha festival close the Bombay catalogue: *Ganapati immersion, Chowpatty*; *Ganapati festival, Chowpatty*; and *Bathing a baby, Ganapati festival, Chowpatty*. Once again, they are incredibly distinct from the image used in the *National Geographic* to picture the festival, an elevated shot of people surrounding the idol, a basic document of the mass of people, the crowds. The suite of three images in the Bombay book carries other interfaces. In *Ganapati immersion, Chowpatty*, which is the cover image of the Bombay book, the idol of Lord Ganesha occupies the centre of the frame. Engulfing him is a forbiddingly gloomy monsoonal sky, threatening to erupt, while behind him is the uneven skyline of skyscrapers and defunct neon signs. Clustered around him are scores of men, their bodies charged with excitement, and partly obscured by splashes of water. This vivid scene is placed next to another image from the festival, in which three plastic effigies occupy the

foreground and are thronged by scores of bodies. There is an absence of judgement and comment; all the elements are pictured in co-inhabitation. Singh confesses that:

...there are several forces working in Bombay. These have to come through in one's pictures. It is a go-ahead city. There is tremendous movement and energy. People come to it from all parts of India to make a living and a future. So there is this optimism. At the same time, seeing people in Dharavi, the famous great slum of Bombay and other desperate places, seeing the people on the pavements, one feels and questions. How much can the city provide? How can it cope? What will happen to these people? Will many of them be pushed out? You can't ignore these aspects of Bombay, the *Mayanagri*, the City of Wealth.⁵⁹

It was in trying to capture this energy, the incongruities of a modern, commercial, growing city held under the sway of capital, that Singh intuitively "alighted on this idea of reflections", in Naipaul's words.⁶⁰ Throughout *Bombay: A Gateway to India*, glass is a recurrent element. It generates and makes room for visual play as beheld in *Kemp's Corner from a leather goods shop* [fig. 5.28]; *In a bakery, Warden Road* [fig. 5.29]; or *Zaveri Bazaar and jeweller's showroom* [fig. 5.30]. These images also attest to the apt use of glass as a metaphor for the city because it,

...introduces an element of surface and polish, which skews the photographer's image by producing its own, which at once separates and gives access. It's not quite possible to feel "at home" in the city of these pictures. Glass invents the city it encloses, reveals and reflects also the photographer taking the picture... [Singh] was quite content to become part of the frame, his outline and flash contained in the glass.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Raghubir Singh, 'Conversation: V.S. Naipaul and Raghubir Singh', op cit., p. 9

⁶⁰ V.S. Naipaul, 'Conversation: V.S. Naipaul and Raghubir Singh', op cit., p. 5

⁶¹ Amit Chaudhuri, 'A View From Malabar Hill', *London Review of Books*, op cit.

The image Naipaul had queries about was *Kemp's Corner from a leather goods shop*. In it Singh's reflection is almost imperceptible, but his presence is recorded as part of the landscape of Bombay.

A glance through Singh's entire portfolio reveals no instances of direct, overt or staged self-portraits. On finer scrutiny, what does materialise are occasions when Singh's reflection, a fragment of himself, is detected, and which he has allowed to remain within the frame, as in *Pavement mirror shop, Howrah, West Bengal, 1991* [fig. 5.31]; *Employees, Morvi Palace, Gujarat, 1982*; *Siva as rider of the bull, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, 1993* [fig. 5.32]; or in the driver's window of an Ambassador car as a monkey plays with the car's radio antenna (*Agra, Uttar Pradesh, 1999*) [fig. 5.33]; and in the shadow at the bottom of the frame (*Jaipur, Rajasthan, 1997*). Singh was a fastidious photographer, and so none of these appearances can be written off as mere accidents or casual additions to the images. It is clear that in *Pavement mirror shop, Howrah, West Bengal, 1991*, an image in which a mélange of mirrors: some square, others rectangular, a few circles; stacked in, on and by each other, reflect the passers-by. Singh allowed himself to be a part of the image: "Seeing these mirrors and people at the beginning of the Grand Trunk Road in Howrah, I reacted to the visual dynamics, even putting my own reflected image in the picture."⁶²

That the camera is never invisible is a concept unreservedly implied in Singh's pictures. It is made more categorical through the reflections, these representations of intervention. He was not merely an observer, but a part of the event, part of the life and colour of India. Nothing was staged just for the benefit of Singh's camera,

⁶² Keppler, 'The Fantastic Compositional Eye of Raghbir Singh', op cit., p. 65

and “no matter how eye-catching its point of view, the vantage of Singh’s photographs, however, is curiously selfless. It implies a viewer often caught up in the thick of things, but it does not characterize that viewer or render any moral judgment on a scene.”⁶³ Singh’s inscription into his images was watchfully modulated and decidedly self-conscious, and was leading to another book project, titled *Mischief* [fig. 5.34], but he died while still working on it. The album comprises a collection of over 45 self-portraits, shot over several years.⁶⁴

The dummy for the book⁶⁵ was prepared by Singh in the last few months of his life, though his daughter Devika feels that he would probably have made changes right up to the point it went to press. However, there is a handwritten text that runs alongside the photographs, which means that Singh probably viewed the project as being close to the final stage. For the first time he included photographs that he himself took outside India, which were not commercially commissioned for a photojournalist assignment. The book travels a cross cities and spaces that Singh inhabited in the course of his life, from the family *haveli* in Jaipur and the building in Hong Kong where he and Anne de Henning lived in the early 1970s to Paris, London, Cyprus and New York. The aforementioned text, in Singh’s hand, traced his movements chronologically, but was also anecdotal; filled with memories and details that prompt much from their ordinariness. The only section, according to Devika Singh, that seems to have been left less than fully resolved occurs towards

⁶³ Kozloff, ‘A Certain Sweep: The India of Raghbir Singh’, op cit., p. 28

⁶⁴ It was in large part Devika Singh’s unbridled generosity and kindness in sharing her father’s unpublished work with me that made this undertaking possible. Had she not in passing mentioned the existence of *Mischief*, my research would have taken a radically different direction.

⁶⁵ The dummy is in itself a window into the late 1990s, when Singh was assembling his own books with glue, scissors and pen, and a reminder of an earlier age of book design and publishing.

the end of the book and concerns Singh in New York. There are also a few instances of repetition in the photographs.

The photographs in *Mischief* bring Singh up-close, his face blocking half the image and perspective; allowing for just a peek at his environs, and sometimes there is just a blur with a shoulder or cheek jutting into the frame; only a sliver, a flake or slice of him, signifiers of him, affirming that he was there [figs. 5.35; 5.36; 5.37; 5.38]. Only two shots present his reflection and one has his shadow cast on the idol of the Hindu goddess Sree Mahisha Buramadini [fig. 5.39]. Never witnessed is his full figure; he is seen predominantly from his shoulders up. The photographs were taken with the help of a small mirror given to him by his friend Tom Roma. It slid into the space on the camera where the flash normally clicks on. The group of images is certainly curious, experimental, spirited and at times humorous and witty, but never devoid of skill. It is a book of selfies made before the age of the iPhone.

Singh declares forthrightly on the fourth page of the dummy that the book is “for Hippolyte Bayard, Ilse Bing and of course Lee Friedlander, but most of all Diego Velázquez” [fig. 5.40]. The dedication to the three men and one woman is telling and directive. Together with the complexity of Bing’s *Self Portrait with Leica* (1931) and Bayard’s *Self-Portrait as Drowned Man* (1840), one wonders if the explicit dedication to Velázquez implies that Singh was also inspired by the Spanish painter’s prodigious work *Las Meninas* (ca. 1656) as well as the structures of representation employed by him on canvas, which include himself in the final picture. Friedlander’s seminal 1970 photo book *Self-Portrait* appears to be an equally relevant touchstone. United in concept, personal, but varying in approach, both Friedlander and Singh are grasped as intruding into their photographs – Friedlander quietly, predominantly seen in

shadow, and Singh almost the opposite, assertively staking his claim to the landscape of the shot.

By annotating the images and guiding us through them, Singh presents his own self, experiencing and changing across geographies, charting his individual negotiation with cosmopolitanism. The photos are his witnesses, conjured up in moments, not pre-planned, to a worldly life, the primary protagonist in *Mischief*. What is evident is the freedom Singh experienced with his move to Hong Kong (unbridled access to foreign exchange, cameras and film), the enduring and enriching impact of the 15 years in Paris, and the interchange of ideas he enjoyed in New York, a city that became his home. He, his own body, his shadow and reflection become definitive elements that fracture the frames of his images, harking to not only the incongruity – so much a part of modernity – but also the fragmentary, divided nature of leading a life across borders.

So, is Singh's *Mischief* pure homage? An exercise in formalism? Not really. It seems to operate in a register of its own consistent with Singh's attitude, and draws on an assortment of sources and referents, translating their effects into a personal and emotional geography, which, eventually, remains tethered to India.

Singh's last public lecture in March 1999, at the International Centre of Photography in New York, further confirmed his awareness of how he had worked, his self and its arbitrations of physical space and intellectual tutelage. He unequivocally articulated his apprehensions of the prevailing notions of postmodernism, which proposed a condition of utter liberation, of a people being released from any sort of belonging. Other photographers he mentioned during this talk whom he regarded as being able to bridge the gap between the local and the

metropolis were Alfredo Jaar and Seydou Keita. Despite his life abroad, Singh rallied against being the modern alienated intellectual with a lack of centre. Singh's firmness in being bound to India, despite his global meanderings and influences, led Kozloff to declare that, "the artistic mind that discovers homelessness and alienation wherever it searches is more familiar to us than an equally artistic vision that is based in community".⁶⁶ In this statement may lie the possible answer to Shahane's question of why Singh is routinely ignored by postcolonial theorists. It also ratifies as incorrect the assessment of Singh as having "a traveller's gaze to photograph everyday life through lyrical photo essays".

A clear ideology is at play within Singh's practice. His images cannot be accused of being devoid of emotion or social commitment, for, in exercising his modernist eye, he does not abandon his own emotions and sympathies. His learnt 'modernist' sensibility transacts with his emotional intensities, and is undismayed by their power. Singh operates in a manner resistant to the historical modernist preoccupation of separating form from emotion. As Rochelle Rives says:

[The] ideal of impersonal poetic emotion brings us once again to the modernist critique of humanism, as exemplified by [T.E.] Hulme's distrust of the 'new psychology... or anthropology'. Martin Jay has offered a provocative historical account of this widespread modernist distrust of 'psychologism' – and its 'unprecedented preoccupation with the interior landscape of the subject' – tracing it through the work of Kant, Husserl, Hulme and finally to Eliot, arguing that the poet most fully incorporated this suspicion into his aesthetic modernism in his ardent promulgation of 'anti-psychological arguments'.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Kozloff, 'A Certain Sweep: The India of Raghbir Singh', op cit., p. 30

⁶⁷ Rochelle Rive, "Modernism" and the Escape from Personality', *Modernist Impersonalities: Affect, Authority, and the Subject* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 12

Singh very assuredly oscillates between a distanced vantage point and highly private one. With *Mischief* he sought to stand apart from his life and, simultaneously, speak deeply from within it – a rare feat. Singh unfailingly returned to the locus of the nation, and more specifically to the countryside of Rajasthan, a self-defining gesture. Attentive to its transformations, he does express a private and restrained melancholy, but with no clawing sentimentality. It is the ability to have emotion work alongside his formal skills, occasioning thereby a personal vision that is entralling. Singh's books and photographs are as much treatises on India's cities, rivers and geography, as they are his own haptic routes, constitutive of the reciprocal contact between himself and his environment. It is through such sensory dynamics or, as Giuliana Bruno has termed, '*sensational movements*' that he apprehends space and place; where affect and space are connected, where sites *do* bear and contain emotion. This sensory interaction with place and site becomes most evident to me when Singh writes very movingly in the final paragraph of his *River of Colour* essay:

Imprinted in my memory is another picture of pain: a tunnel-like corridor in my Jaipur home, connecting two courtyards of our *haveli*-house. A veiled sweeper-woman flattens herself against the wall, along with her broom and metal pan in which she collects garbage, to let me and my family members pass untouched by her polluted self. In spite of her poverty, she wears faded but colourful clothing. The yellow and red sari she wears is lightly spotted with silvery tinsel, whose sheen is dulled by use. This is a memory from childhood. The woman has disappeared from our lives – as if she was ever part of it. Through what V.S. Naipaul has analysed in *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, we have changed more in this century, than perhaps in three thousand

years. Against this backdrop, I sometimes think of that woman. The thought gives me pangs.⁶⁸

What Singh articulates in this paragraph is a frankness that Naipaul in his conversation with him has termed the 'pitiless eye'; that is, Singh does not flinch when photographing a changing India and the inequity that it breeds. Singh, by being direct, provides respect and dignity to those that modernising India marginalises. They are not exoticised, nor are the images themselves that Singh makes intended to be hyperbolic protests of poverty and violence. Those who he pictures – at times in tough images – he sees as people: he looks to their reality, without making any presumptions about them. There is an exchange of looks that I have alluded to earlier. Those photographed look directly back at him and his camera, and he is bound in that exchange. Singh's intensely local attention to material situations, recall the success of Mulk Raj Anand and his novel *Untouchable*, in which Anand takes notice of his primary character, the untouchable boy Bakha's material conditions and connects them with India's on-going immediate colonial encounter with social and political modernity. E.M. Forster notes in his preface to *Untouchable* that the book "could only have been written by an Indian who observed from the outside"⁶⁹ because Anand throughout the novel steadfastly avoids sentimentality or an Orientalising perspective. Singh similarly, in his photographs, exercises a particular kind of ethics by insisting on the human, material world as the sphere of activity, where struggle and conflict play themselves out. Singh by recounting the sweeper woman from his childhood, remembers her,

⁶⁸ Raghubir Singh, 'River of Colour: An Indian View', op cit., p. 13

⁶⁹ E.M. Forster, 'Preface', *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand (Penguin, 1940), vi

puts an ethics into play in his work, responding to social relationships. Singh's ethics are not encountered as a theme, but occur as an event in the process of taking the photograph, of living life in India. He recognises the less fortunate and their place within Indian society, their pain, and is empathetic.

In *Mischief*, one of the images, we see Singh upfront, occupying the left side of the frame, the shadow of his hand holding up the camera to take his picture, obscuring a fair portion of his face, behind him a street with some cattle, a motorcyclist and the white ridge of a home [fig. 5.41]. Below it Singh has scribbled, "In my Jaipur home, I wear a 'blue' tea shirt and the maid washes in a blue plastic pan. And yet, so many traditions have crumbled. The veiled women of my childhood are gone." In these few lines, Singh situates himself and the world he knew amidst the changes postcolonial India is experiencing, and is connecting himself to his home and his memory through colour; reinforcing Eaton's point about "all pictorial relations issue from colour so as to create a tactile, haptic space"⁷⁰. It is this emotion that connects and binds him to his *haveli*-home in Rajasthan, and to India, which prevents him from releasing himself to the world, and assuming the status of a 'postmodern artist' a label he vocally rejected in his last public lecture. Eaton, in her further discussion of artists' postcolonial negotiation with colour in India, unsurprisingly, quotes Geeta Kapur who has written:

Extant texts on the art of the painting and evidence of still current techniques show that the fabulous daring of the Indian artist in his use of colour is not merely a matter of instinct. There is both a formal and a symbolic understanding of it at the most sophisticated level. Colour is regarded as the very substance of form: the word *rupa*

⁷⁰ Natasha Eaton, 'Introduction', *Colour, Art and Empire: Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation* (I.B. Tauris, 2013), pp. 3–4

itself has been used to signify colour in Indian aesthetic texts. Dr. Niharrajan Ray suggests the Indian artists regards even the sky as a substance which makes itself visible in colour: 'Space is this felt substance, solid and compact.'⁷¹

Keeping Kapur's words in mind, the strong experiential dimensions to Singh's practice need to be paid attention to in equal measure, along with his formal achievements, as it grounds him, it connects, him to India. He is not immune or transcendent to any attachment, nor does he profess to multiple attachments. For him personally, he is connected to India, and more specifically to his native state of Rajasthan. He too needs to confront change, and is grappling with transitions and shifts that he observes around him. As he writes:

If some fruits of the twentieth century have reached the city and the countryside, it does not mean we have substantially absorbed the modern experience. We will do that only when we begin using with ease and grace the products of our century, not merely for commerce and comfort, but also our artistic aspirations.⁷²

It is this transaction and being aware of making the move to and fro, between the emotional and experiential, the formal and the modern, which makes Singh more than a 'provincial intellectual' and a 'cosmopolitan artist with an exclusively regional investment'⁷³ and instead, someone with an inimitable sensibility that was truly his own.

⁷¹ Geeta Kapur quoted in Natasha Eaton, 'Postscript', *Colour, Art and Empire*, op cit., p. 295

⁷² Raghbir Singh, 'Introduction', *Rajasthan: India's Enchanted Land*, op cit., pp. 31–32

⁷³ Max Kozloff, 'A Certain Sweep: The India of Raghbir Singh', op cit., p. 27

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters of this thesis, I have chosen to transact with the term ‘cosmopolitanism’, in an attempt to review its specific Western and Eurocentric teleology that has defined its more general use and understanding today. In Chapter One I have appraised how the word has been reclaimed and recalibrated by myriad postcolonial academics and scholars in contemporary critical and cultural theory. It is through the introduction of the detailed narratives of the lives of the artists Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Bhupen Khakhar and Raghubir Singh that I seek to make more clear how I have intended to participate in the on-going engagement and re-evaluation of ‘cosmopolitanism’. Foregrounded in my appraisal of their lives, in each of the chapters devoted to them, I have demonstrated how crucial place and location was, and the impact it had on their sensibilities and subjectivities. I take into account physical movement and travel, as that cannot be discounted, but more importantly how their ‘cosmopolitanism’ was instructed and influenced by their modes of affiliation and belonging.

Central to my refiguring of ‘cosmopolitanism’ is a refutation of the Kantian ideal of the self-identical, self-sufficient, immune and transcendental subject. By emphasising difference and thinking of the subject in relation to others I place myself at some distance from Kant and more in the company of theorists like Leela Gandhi who has forcefully declared:

In Kant’s canonical rendition – readily absorbed within the coercive universalizing logic of former and current colonialisms – cosmopolitanism, we might recall, was

privileged as the stable political zone of “perpetual peace,” a prescriptive “being-in-common” bearing the promise of immunity to the psychic contagion of cultural difference. In its affective mutation, however... cosmopolitanism may well be the means to punctuate those fantasies of security and invulnerability to which our political imaginations remain hostage. It might, for instance, teach us that risk sometimes brings with it a profound affirmation of relationality and collectivity.¹

Community, friendship and interpersonal exchange are critical, and as Hannah Arendt states, “the more people positions I can make present in my thought and hence take into account in my judgment, the more representative it will be. The validity of such judgments would be neither objective and universal nor subjective, but intersubjective or representative.”² It is the recognition of this intersubjective nature of the human being which, I believe, decisively and necessarily binds a person to the world (to family, class, nation, community), and where the contradictory impulse to a conventional appreciation of the ‘cosmopolitan’, who proffers no attachment to a single place or, conversely multiple attachments to many places, is to be found.

Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh each led unique lives, and it is in paying close attention to their biographies and their artistic output in equal measure – the story their lives tell, but equally the story their work tells – which together indicate to some degree how their distinctive sensibilities were formed. There is a necessity to discover and share the story, their stories, and it is through the act of telling that one’s perspective is broadened: to think of the ‘other’, and of their difference. It is essential to acknowledge the verisimilitude of their lived experiences, the various

¹ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 31–32

² Hannah Arendt, ‘Responsibility’, *Responsibility and Judgment* (Knopf, 2009), p. 141

material conditions they encountered and transacted with, the departure and meeting points of their lives and loves. In my introduction I strongly advise against the expectancy of a total transparency when recounting their lives. We can have great respect, affection, and feel a sense of solidarity for the ‘other’ without a ‘total understanding’: I recall Édouard Glissant and his conceptions about opacity and relationality. As he elegantly articulates:

The poetics of relation presuppose that each of us encounters the density (the opacity) of the Other. The more the other resists in his thickness or fluidity (without restricting himself to this), the more expressive his reality becomes and the more fruitful the relation becomes.³

Hence, relationality protects the difference of the ‘other’, and accepting their opacity means that there are no truths that can be applied universally and permanently. It is this ‘poetics of relation’ that Glissant speaks of, the ‘intersubjective’ that Arendt speaks of, which I have committed to understanding through my study of Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh, and which instructs my reframing of ‘cosmopolitanism’. For me, it has been the encounter with the density of their lives and works, which has truly been meaningful. It has led me to propose – as I have tried to make apparent in each chapter on the three artists – that *when* these sensibilities start to form is uncertain (by which, I mean that throughout a life, there are many moments when one can start being ‘cosmopolitan’). This suggestion is rendered valid only because of the intersubjective nature of these lives, which is also reflected in their works. It is not a condition that is inhabited at a single instance, and remains constant; it shifts and changes as life continues to be lived. The material

³ Édouard Glissant, *L’Intention poétique* (Paris, Seuil, 1969), p. 24

conditions of our lives alter, but these changes are not always necessarily bound to physical travel or to a precise moment of encounter. Ideas, enthusiasms, and sympathies seed themselves at a particular moment, and might congeal at another, in different circumstances and situations. What triggers it, and the manner in which they formulate can never be determined, and to try and over-determine that process of a sensibility's formation is erroneous and ungenerous.

The other significant concern which is fundamental for me when rethinking 'cosmopolitanism' is emotion, and emotional connections to spaces; the emotion that is contained in sites, the emotion generated by sites. This is intimately related to the idea of the individual being yoked to the world, to certain places, to certain spaces. It is Giuliana Bruno's writing that has been instrumental to my thinking, informing my methodology. Bruno talks about the haptic, and about "haptic dynamics, a phantasmatic structure of lived space and lived narrative; a narrativised space that is intersubjective, for it is a complex of socio-sexual mobilities."⁴ What she posits is a new reading of geography as being populated by emotion. The narrative of life can be told through the emotional connection to certain places and spaces. So what one has is not a simple moving through place, but a sensational movement through place, external topographies become connected to internal topographies through sets of 'haptic dynamics'. These emotional connections to places are paramount for me in my assessment of cosmopolitanism. Bruno's suggestion that intimacy needs to be reclaimed as a site of interpretation is one that I find an inordinate kinship with, and have utilised when approaching Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh. As I have substantiated when evaluating their work and their lives, their

⁴ Giuliana Bruno, 'A Geography of the Moving Image', *Atlas of Emotions: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (Verso, 2007), p. 65

emotional attachments to certain places and spaces becomes clear, for example the repeated refrain of Rajasthan in Singh's writings, or Sher-Gil's commitment not only through his anti-imperialism, but his choice of dress and scholarly pursuits, to India.

As stated previously my goal is not to set Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh up as paradigms or standard-bearers of a regional or rooted cosmopolitanism, one that can be strictly followed or applied to others. I am not working towards establishing a definition or a model of a South Asian cosmopolitan or 'cosmopolitanism', - a dangerous and limiting gesture. Rather what I want to participate in is conversations that concern the building of 'thickness' that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has alluded to, as I mentioned in Chapter One, or what she describes as being part of the social-text,

...a network, a weave – you can put names on it – politico-psycho-sexual-socio, you name it... the moment you name it, there's a network that's broader than that... we are effects within a much larger text/tissue/weave of which the ends are not accessible to us.⁵

I have very consciously throughout the thesis tried to populate it with as many players, characters and actors as possible, to find the weave, that is, considering my case studies in relation to other men and women who were active at the time when they were alive, who were their friends and acquaintances. The task at hand to which I believe my thesis contributes is:

...to fracture and to pluralize cosmopolitanism into cosmopolitanisms – subaltern, privileged, amiable, bloody, coerced, port-city, upland, rooted and mobile. These fragments represent the non-totalizing spaces and subjectivities produced in, by and

⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Post Colonial Critic*, p. 25

through specific conditions under different historical moments of the local-global encounter.⁶

Through an accretion of detail about lived conditions and networks of exchange, both national and transnational, the point that I am making is that these men were cosmopolitan and cosmopolitanism cannot be understood without them. It is not about interjecting a narrative into an already established discourse, but stepping back and realising the discourse is much wider and thicker than has previously been regarded.

In fact, I have extended this methodology to go beyond simply their narratives, but also to reflect in the framing and contextualisation of my discussion of 'cosmopolitanism'; hence in Chapter One I reference Nirad Chaudhuri and Mulk Raj Anand, both men who formed their own inimitable sensibilities while being colonial subjects. The position Chaudhuri occupies with regard to my approach is noteworthy because he really is perhaps the first individual from the subcontinent, who is not a politician or a public personality, to narrate his own life in the form of his autobiography. Anand offers a counterpoint to Chaudhuri, he having led a more transnational life – being involved with the Bloomsbury set, but remaining politically dedicated to India, and returning to the subcontinent – while Chaudhuri makes a committed and final departure from it. The formation of their sensibilities take divergent paths, but it is instructive to keep them in mind, as they highlight key features, primary to a kind of cosmopolitanism I see in my three case studies. These are the elements of speaking from, and about, ones life; being attentive and

⁶ Sharmani P. Gabriel and Fernando Rosa, 'Introduction: Lived cosmopolitanisms in littoral Asia', *Cultural Dynamics*, July/November 2012, vol. 24, no. 2-3, p. 124

responsive to the material conditions that surround one, and that cannot be abandoned or neglected. A pledge to the subcontinent, either as subject as in Chaudhuri's writings – though he lives out the final decades of his life in England – or in a physical embodied manner as in the many numerous art initiatives Anand institutes in the country, are essential and need to be noted. In both Chaudhuri and Anand a fierce suspicion of nationalism can be detected, something Sher-Gil and Singh articulate, and which is implicit in Khakhar's work. For them, while there is an investment in the nation, it is important to note that they were critical of 'nationalism'.

Also, Chaudhuri and Anand serve another function, in relation to one of my other case studies. They were both alive and operative at roughly the same moment as Sher-Gil, and though their paths never overlapped (there is no known knowledge or documentation of interactions) the possibility of Anand and Sher-Gil being in touch, or having known each other is fairly likely because of the reputation of Amrita Sher-Gil. So while, they are not mentioned in my chapter on Sher-Gil, they do animate differing ways of living as a colonial subject, and cultivating a sensibility of one's own, at the time Sher-Gil was living. Though there are complimentary impulses across all three of the narratives, there are, simultaneously hugely dissimilar attitudes and opinions. Sher-Gil and Anand's interest in actual anti-Imperial activity do not find any mirror in Chaudhuri's life, but all three shared abiding literary interests. Anand's active role in nation-building is neither to be seen in Sher-Gil nor Chaudhuri; however Sher-Gil does donate his daughter's paintings to the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. By thinking of them, or placing them next to one another, we get a series of different subject positions, different points of orientation,

responding to a particular cultural moment in the history of India, and concurrently how three different sensibilities and ways of inhabiting the world come to be.

Thus, considering Chaudhuri and Anand briefly in the context of my thesis is a deliberate act of pointing towards the fact that many other lives were being lived in parallel to those of my case studies. The individual chapters on my case studies closely delve into their own social networks, examining precisely how certain connections and associations were formed, avoiding wild speculation. The friendships, interactions and exchanges that are cited and assessed come either from direct mentions by Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh, or are based on reliable and verifiable archival sources or first-person conversations, all of which are duly footnoted and recorded. What happens in each chapter is that these connections, previously dismissed or noted as casual asides, are reviewed and reconsidered to elucidate and expose an avenue to how each of their mind-sets and conditions were changing and growing. When researching Sher-Gil, I thought it was imperative that his connection to Muhammad Iqbal be acknowledged, and similarly with Singh his rapport with Stuart Cary Welch, as both these associations impacted their intellectual thinking in very significant ways. Equally, I held for Khakhar, it was necessary to mention the tutelage he received informally from the Saturday lectures of K.G. Subramanyan.

The social worlds which Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh inhabited and constructed for themselves was for me important to examine; to know the way and manner in which they came to inhabit their intensely intersubjective lives. My motivation with this part of my research was to mark out to some extent the contours of these social histories, without over-determining them, or fixing them as having to represent

something specific. For each of my case studies, I want to highlight the larger weaves of their lives, where each thread is knotted and tethered to the next, sometimes more seamlessly and fine, and at other moments more undone and untethered. Each one of them played active roles in how they chose to project themselves socially, which would inevitably have professional impacts: Singh's very precise selection of international and prominent authors who would write the introductions to his books, which would through association give his books visibility; Khakhar's direct correspondence with his dealers about his exhibitions and work; or Sher-Gil's decision not to move from Budapest to Berlin to join the Ghadar Party as he was leading a comfortable life amongst the Hungarian intellectual elite, are among the few instances I narrate in the chapters which define their social and professional aspirations and allegiances. Their ambition is something I believe is not to be judged, but acknowledged, and does not diminish their achievement in any manner.

This also, however, does not preclude that these men had friendships, platonic relationships and allegiances with people, which did not have any bearing on their professional mobility and prominence, but were based on and derived from mutual affection, admiration and compassion. The breadth of their social camaraderie is most evident of course in Khakhar, as witnessed from his selection of partners, to friends who were neither artists nor party to any kind of intelligentsia. Singh, in the attention that he focuses on the poor and underprivileged in his works, in his pictures of figures of domestic help in middle class homes throughout the subcontinent, as well as his bolder pictures of poverty – seen particularly in his bodies of work on the cities of Calcutta and Mumbai – mirror perhaps less an identification with, but more a recognition of another class of individual. I have

elaborated on this at length in my chapter on Singh, quoting not only from his writing, but it is also evidenced in specific images, like *Slum dweller, Dharavi, Bombay, Maharashtra, 1990*. Such consideration could, and should also be extended to Sher-Gil, the seemingly most privileged and elite of all three case studies, in his own personal rejection of his social class by refusing to subscribe to his family's colonialist loyalties; choosing to involve himself with some anti-Imperial rhetoric – the consequences of which he and his family would have to withstand.

I have stringently avoided writing hagiographies in which each subject is uniformly valorised, but have aimed to reflect on their struggles, limitations and failings as well. Recognising these facets of these men's personalities – that conventional art historical narratives tend to elide and where artists are unvaryingly celebrated and their frailties and emotional realities are repressed – does provide another set of indicators as to how to better appreciate them and their work. The frailty and emotions to which I allude does not serve, or intend to serve to pass judgement or to vilify them, but rather to provide a more full-bodied sense of who these men were, and how they came to create the work that I admire. In my chapter on Khakhar I have frankly discussed his struggles with his own coming to terms with his homosexuality, and how that was to impact the work he made, but also the way in which he conducted himself socially. His guilt, and the fear he experienced, reveal him to be vulnerable and human. Sher-Gil's complicated and fraught relationship with his daughter, not endorsing or supporting her personal decisions, especially her engagement to her cousin, divulge that he may not have been as open-minded and progressive as some of his more intellectual and political declarations would suggest. There is no equal balance between all three case studies, no algorithm to be applied

to understanding their lives, with the expectancy of uncovering some kind of parity in their experiences. Their emotional and physical responses to their own material conditions remain their own, yet sometimes correspondences can be seen and felt.

I have endeavoured throughout this thesis, and here in this conclusion, never to set my three case studies up against each other, or outwardly compare them: none is the substitute for the other. My approach has been to think of Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh as analogous to one another. In an analogy the terms are ontologically equal, neither taking priority over the other, instead corresponding *with* rather than corresponding *to* one another. It is a methodology to acknowledge the affinity between certain peoples, to affirm not an estrangement (a condition our current moment accentuates), but a connection to a totality to which we all belong that prompts transformations within ourselves, rather than stasis: to think analogically, in which analogy brings together two or more terms on the basis of their lesser or greater resemblance. Thinking analogously has been a career preoccupation of Kaja Silverman, who very succinctly places analogy within a larger theoretical framework stating that:

In spite of the fact that it has been discredited by Russian formalism, Saussurean semiotics, structuralism, post structuralism, and most of the Frankfurt School writers analogy has also been embraced by an impressive group of later writers and artists... A number of these figures also think of it as a kind of "flesh," and see this ontological kinship as the starting point for another kind of human relationality. Analogy has lived on in this way because it is the structure of Being, and it gleams with promise because it does indeed have the power to save us.⁷

⁷ Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of my Flesh*, (Stanford University Press, California, 2009), p. 4

When re-reading my chapters on Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh I was struck by a curious resonance, which made me realise that the way in which they can be related, moving beyond literal comparisons and didactic assessments, is to think of them as analogous; sharing certain affinities and similarities while still acknowledging their differences. Each of the artists had vastly different ways of living and methods of negotiating with the larger world around them, yet a consonance can be detected. This mode of thinking does not seek to flatten or homogenise their lives and the material conditions they experienced, but exposes a kind of link to a structure of being, where they can be connected to one another through another set of recognitions, and I have discovered this consonance in two areas, the first is in their use of language and the other in their relationship to finitude.

In each of my chapters on Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh, I have, when assessing their work and in trying to learn more about their lives, repeatedly returned to their own words: I found very clear articulations of their feelings and opinions in their writings. I don't mean personal correspondence – which in the case of Sher-Gil is quite essential to parse through when stitching together his relationship with the Ghadar Party, for example – but texts, essays, short notes, that have been published and circulated by each of these artists not merely as compliments to their work, but also as distinct engagements with the written word. From all three it is Singh who most relied or utilised the written word to firmly express his intent and position with regard to his photographs, in the most powerful way. All of his photo-books begin with a text, either with an authoritative appraisal of the subject by an expert or a densely researched and exhaustive essay written by himself. Singh's essays are more than extended notes as to how he covered terrain and made the images in that

particular book, becoming personal treatises on the chosen subject, where he agilely moves between his own individual memories and recollections (most forcefully and evocatively felt in the Rajasthan and Kashmir books), elucidating substantial practical facts and vital historical information. Singh's fierce and poetic articulations, which I have quoted and explored in the chapter on him, might be seen as being part of a slightly performative gesture. Having constantly being dismissed for using colour, and relegated to being thought of as a pictorialist, Singh's magisterial deployment of learnt information, not through the academy, but through his own enthusiasm and curiosity, becomes the most persuasive and convincing retort to the criticism he received. Through his essays he performs with the power of knowledge, looking to silence his detractors.

So while Singh's approach to using the written word is legible and direct, Khakhar's practise of language is more complicated. Khakhar, unusually, for an Indian artist in the 1960s and 1970s, paid great attention to his exhibition catalogues, invitations and announcements. As I deliberate in my chapter on him, he uses them strategically to play out, project, and also perform a certain role for his audience. Khakhar was keen to be perceived in a particular way, baiting to be thought of as more naïve and vernacular than he actually was. I have affirmed this from some of his personal correspondence, where he is less guarded and more candid about his ambition, but in a public forum it is most visible in the Judy Marle film that I examine in detail. Khakhar is not only the subject of Marle's film, but becomes a collaborator, using her film as a platform to project himself to a Western audience. He does the voice-over, inter-titles, very craftily using words and phrases to communicate a slightly innocent, simple, and fanciful artistic persona. It was a

kind of ruse he engaged in strategically to position his work and practice, but also at a personal level, it provided him some distance while he was working through his own issues around his sexuality. It should also be noted here that Khakhar was credited as co-editor of the art's journal *Vrishchik*, but he did maintain that it was Gulammohammed Sheikh who took a leading role in the editorial content of the journal. Khakhar also wrote fiction, and his most well-known short story titled *Phoren Soap* was published bilingually in 1997. *Phoren Soap* humorously recounts a middle class family's use of a soap brought back to India from abroad. The family desperately tries to preserve the soap, maintain it, because of its 'foreign-ness'. Khakhar is wryly commenting on the talismanic power objects from abroad would have in his milieu, and the absurdity of their treatment as overtly precious because they come from abroad.

Unlike, Khakhar and Singh who were practicing artists in their lifetimes, Sher-Gil never exhibited his photographs or even attempted to project himself as an artist. Nonetheless, Sher-Gil was very preoccupied in presenting a kind of cultivated, erudite persona of himself, which of course is strikingly evident in his photographs, but he also took to delivering lectures and writing in public forums to make known these plural intellectual inclinations. This is most apparent during the time he spent in Hungary, where even though he had moved away from India, he still wanted to publically stake a claim to India as a scholar. In 1914, Sher-Gil delivered a public lecture on Indian modern poetry in Budapest, and when the family moved to Dunaharaszti he would meet the writer Antal Szirbik who shared an interest in Oriental philosophy, and would write forewords for his booklets. Sher-Gil also translated the poems of the Hungarian poet Petőfi for the Indian magazine East &

West, established by his friend Joginder Singh. We also know from a letter he sent to his friend Mari Jászai that in India he was asked to speak publically about his experiences in Budapest, relaying that:

Some months ago I was asked by some friends to deliver a lecture about the evils of Bolshevism, and the East & West circle founded by my friend Jogendrasingh was keenly interested to hear my personal experiences of those times in your country. The circle consists of Indian and English people who are sympathetic to one another.⁸

Sher-Gil, used lectures and texts to demonstrate his confluential thinking, with active interests and knowledge of Hungarian and Indian cultures simultaneously.

Hence, I find that Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh all used language, beyond their visual art practices, analogously, to either locate a position for themselves in a broader conversation, as well as to project a certain kind of ideal of themselves that complimented in Khakhar and Singh their artistic practices, and for Sher-Gil a more social persona. Their use of language in public forums assisted in the wider dissemination of their work or the output of people they believed in, but also provided sometimes, as in the case of Singh, a necessary context to argue for the work's relevance, or a more crafted framework, as with Khakhar, for it to be perceived. Furthermore, their mindful use of language firmly placed them all within networks of exchanges and debates, further binding them to the intersubjective. Through, their relationship to language Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh are attempting to take the world and bring it back to oneself, "a gesture of enclosure, if not

⁸ Ágnes Pape, 'Umrao Singh Sher-Gil's Hungarian contacts and scholarly activities – in particular respect to the correspondence between Sher-Gils and Mari Jászai', available at (http://www.delhi.balassiintezet.hu/attachments/article/105/The%20correspondance%20between%20Umrao%20Singh%20Sher%20by%20Ágnes%20Pap%20_with%20pictures%20-%20F~.pdf).

appropriation”.⁹ In articulating for themselves, they are making known their exclusion from the dominant discourse visible, they no longer remain invisible. This can be viewed as an act of resistance: where now that they make themselves visible, through their exclusion, their place is affirmed and they cannot be simply appropriated by the dominant discourse; their opacity has to be recognised and respected.

Their attitude towards finitude provides another analogous relationship I find. Again, there is no parity in their deaths; Singh passes away suddenly off a heart attack, Khakhar has a prolonged and painful battle with cancer, while Sher-Gil ages and dies an old man, though losing his mental faculties, as his nephew Vivan Sundaram recounted to me. Having died in different circumstances, each of them in their lifetimes did indeed confront mortality. These confrontations might have been brought on by external circumstances, such as in the case of Sher-Gil’s the premature death of his daughter and the suicide of his wife, for Singh the rapid transformation of his native state Rajasthan in post-Independent India, or by individual physical deterioration, as for Khakhar with his cancer. Khakhar most obviously had a challenging time negotiating with his illness, as made palpable in the violence of his later paintings. Sher-Gil for his part retreated away from communal life following the deaths of his daughter and wife, but at this stage I am less concerned with what prompted the confrontation, and more attentive to their recognition of mortality, their perceptions of finitude. For me, the analogy lies in *how* they thought about and related to finitude.

⁹ Édouard Glissant, ‘For Opacity’, *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan, 1997), p. 206

Both Silverman and Arendt, who have been central to some of the theoretical formulations advanced in this thesis, share close intellectual affinities with the work of Martin Heidegger, who in his 1929–30 lecture course *The Basic Concepts of Metaphysics* discussed three key concepts: the world, individuality and finitude. A major contribution that he makes during these lectures, when conferring on finitude, is in offering up a substantial critique of Kant, and his appreciation, or lack thereof, of finitude. Heidegger states that,

Hegel's step from Kant to absolute idealism is the sole consistency of the development of Western philosophy. This development is possible and necessary through Kant because the problem of human Dasein, finitude, did not become a real problem for him and thus not a central problem of philosophy because Kant himself – as the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason shows – encouraged the path of working his way out of an uncomprehended finitude to appeasing himself with infinity.¹⁰

What Heidegger intones is that for Kant finitude was not the priority, but it was infinity, infinite self-extension. For Heidegger, however, it is precisely the grasping of finitude that is crucial because as Silverman, who is indebted to Heideggerian thought explicates:

...finitude is the most capacious and enabling of the attributes we share with others, because unlike the way in which each of us looks, thinks, walks and speaks, that connects us to a few other beings, it connects us to every other being. Since finitude marks the point where we end and others begin, spatially and temporally, it is also what makes room for them – and acknowledging these limits allows us to experience

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *The Basis Concepts of Metaphysics* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), p 306

the expansiveness for which we yearn, because it gives us a powerful sense of our emplacement within a larger Whole.¹¹

The matter then that arises is whether, and how, would individuals be willing to face mortality and embrace their limited nature, extending beyond their self, without gesturing towards transcendence, to make allowance for the proposition that “we do not have an ‘identity’ because we are constantly changing, but we also do not break into a million pieces because each of our 'shapes' resembles the others”.¹² It is here where Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh can be analogously related; they do not deny finitude, they recognise the potential in and of their finitude. It is through their finitude that they see how they are connected to others, how they are yoked and bound to the world.

Khakhar makes the most obvious demonstration of transacting with his mortality in works like *Beauty is Skin Deep Only* (1999), *Blind Babubhai* (2001), *Manilal with Measles* (2001) and *Bullet Shot in Stomach* (2000). While they show the withering, scarred, wounded, diseased human body, I am more drawn to other paintings where the emphasis is perhaps less on physical corporality – evaluated in the chapter on him – than on a commitment to understanding finitude at a more interpersonal level; where acknowledging limits becomes the conduit to grander, more profound connections. The resurgence of the simple embrace, in works ranging across his practice, communicate this for me but it is the 1987 painting *Yayati* [fig. 4.37] where I see most powerfully the *mêlée* with finitude.

¹¹ Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of my Flesh*, op cit., p. 4

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2

Against a backdrop of shocking pink, towards the bottom of the imposing, large, almost six-foot square canvas, we see two near life-size male figures in a partial embrace, looking into each other's eyes. The younger figure on top has wings on his back, with his left hand he reaches out to the older-looking figure at the bottom who holding softly onto his right hand, cradles his erect penis. As it is known the painting is a restaging of a myth from the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, where the king who grows old and impotent, asks his son to give him his youth. Khakhar's retelling of the myth is less straightforward and reductive; it is not simply the giving of youth from son to father, a gift of the embodiment of youth, but rather a strong rumination on facing death, and what is generative in such a confrontation. Khakhar has acknowledged that the picture is 'about me', and the figure with the wings, is a very recognisable self-portrait. Painted when Khakhar was 53, and before he was diagnosed with cancer, *Yayati* (fig. 4.37) is really about the touch, about embrace, and the potency in these connections. Of course, it is a painting filled with lust, and while the myth speaks of a desire for youth, Khakhar, but I sense a shift in emphasis to a yearning for the other. In the tryst between these two figures, in their embrace, is contained a recognition of finitude; they are both connected by death, aware of it, and the attendant transience of life. The location of the two figures, trading less in youth and more in a shared recognition of finitude, is set within the context of a larger whole; as is conveyed by the depiction of a town landscape in the upper half of the canvas above the prone figures. *Yayati* is not salacious work, but one that is truly gentle and affecting.

Again, with Singh, I am not focused on his photographs that either literally picture death or dead people, like *A young mahout killed by his elephant gone musth*,

Sonepur, 1967 or *A body burning, Holika burns, Rajiv Gandhi posters, Benaras, Uttar Pradesh, 1983*. Singh has also photographed the aftermath of death in *A mourning, Bharatpur, Rajasthan, 1975*. There are also those instances in his catalogue, that are highly suggestive of what comes with someone's passing, either in terms of the future a country – as emblematised by the picture *Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's funeral, New Delhi, 1984* where it is not Indira Gandhi's dead body that is pictured, but instead a man reading the newspaper; the image telegraphing the impact and symbolic value of the death, rather than fixating on the dead body itself. What I find more affecting, is how he too, like Khakhar, relates to mortality through physical, human, and in his case, specifically familial connections.

In *Mischief*, the book that he was working on when he passed away, Singh writes [fig. 6.1]

The green of the hills and the trees and the blue of the sky and the rivers are essential to our lives. But in my Jaipur home we never used the word: green. Green was always blue. Because my grandfather, a grand patriarch, was named Hari Singh or Green Singh. Hari stands for Krishna, the God of the green pastures. His skin is blue, therefore to honour not only my grandfather, but our very own tradition we used blue instead of green. Therefore we asked for and cooked and ate green blue vegetables.

When I go back home for visits, I slip back to the tradition of calling green blue, even though my grandfather died in 1942, six months after I was born. When I am dead and gone, my daughter will not longer use be a part of the above tradition because she was born and lives in Paris. I have seen the hills and the trees and the rivers of many lands, but the house where I was born truly shaped my life.¹³

This passage is accompanied by an image of Singh [fig. 6.2] occupying the right side of the frame; he is out of focus, wearing a green polo shirt. Behind him, is a

¹³ Singh, *Mischief*, Dummy book, p. 6

courtyard of a Rajasthani *haveli*, in complete focus. The passage and the photograph decidedly locate Singh in India, in Rajasthan, as he confronts finitude. He does so through colour, which is unsurprising as colour was his lifetime preoccupation, along with the subcontinent of India. Singh ruminates on a familial practice, in which there is a slippage in the use of blue for green. In the recounting of this custom, as it has passed down from generation to generation, Singh places himself as part of a tradition, but also binds himself to a place, specifically his family home in Rajasthan where such a ritual is permissible. He reveals his emotional connection to the place, and how he cherishes the ability to share in this play of calling green blue. Yet, as he indulges himself and his sentiments, he recognises its limits, his own limit, and speaks of his death. It is ironic, this was written not under spectre of death, Singh passed on suddenly, while working on this book, but it intuits his cognisance about life, and *his* life in particular. He does not shy away from thinking about the natural conclusion that would come with his passing, and how his daughter may not have the same attachment to place, and partake in a custom to which she has no relationship: nonetheless, it does tell off Singh's desire to remain tethered to a world, a way of life, even if it is slipping by in front of him. He prefers to remain attached, bound and trussed to place, to people, and to some personal, idiosyncratic tradition, a way of being not isolated or removed, and hopes that his daughter will find that for herself in her life, perhaps elsewhere. It won't be part of his tradition, but one, a new one can be formed and set in motion.

For Sher-Gil, it was losing members of his family that forced an unavoidable confrontation with mortality, but what I believe is that Sher-Gil was already thinking about finitude, as advocated by the before and after fasting images taken in Paris in

1930. He was testing, pushing and learning about the limits of his body, through discipline and abstinence. It was a kind of self-work, that takes squarely in its view the corporeal limits of the human body. His entire body of self-portraits, the initial more theatrical presentation of the self, along with his more melancholic later images, where he openly signals to his sorrow – as in the self-portrait from 14 November 1946, in which Sher-Gil sits against a neutral background, looking straight into the camera, holding in his hand a book with a Sanskrit title, on which the reverse inscription reads, ‘His misery and his manuscript’ – can be understood as a lifetimes arbitration of finitude. In constantly, photographing himself as he changed, at every stage and step, he concedes a little to his own mortality.

Every image, every piece of clothing, each location, reveal his life as he was living it to himself. The intent of the images was not to escape his life, but ground him firmly within it, within the domestic realm of his homes in Budapest, Paris, Simla, and Lahore. The constant documenting of his family’s life, bound him to them. He was not seeking transcendence, but rather fully immersed in the physical life he was living. It was the passing of his daughter and wife that provoked a further understanding and appreciation of finitude in Sher-Gil. Again, like Singh, there was something about legacy and tradition that Sher-Gil was attentive to. He ensured that his daughter would have a legacy, and though in those later years of his life he had removed himself from publically socialising, he still saw the need to have a connection to the world, even if it was through the donating of his daughter’s work to the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi. It bound her, of course, to the modern nation, as her work would form the nucleus of the country’s National

Gallery of Modern Art, but it also bound him, not only to her but also in this gesture to an entire nation that lived beyond him.

Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh in my estimation, expose themselves as being deeply connected to the worlds around them. They betray nothing when making this known: it is evident in their work; it is evident in their writing; and it is evident in how they relate to life itself, and admitting to its limits. They are not self-identical, self-sufficient, immune and transcendental, but immersed and embedded within human relations. The three artists led deeply intersubjective emotionally full lives, and they are in no way inimitable in doing so, there are many men and women who have lived and continue to lead such lives, and it is recognising these ways of living that is cosmopolitan. As Rainer Maria Rilke, another man of letters and language, an isolationist, said:

Though we are unaware of our true status our
actions stem from pure relationship.
Far away, antennas hear antennas and
the empty distances transmit...¹⁴

Finitude becomes the segue to an expanded universe.

This research, for me, as I have stated in the introduction, is a sincerely personal undertaking. The heuristic component of this thesis, has insistently forced me to reflect back on myself, and why have I chosen to this as my subject. As Robert D. Romanyshyn has written about the research process:

¹⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Sonnets to Orpheus', Part 1, Sonnet XII, in *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Stephen Mitchell, trans., (New York: Modern Library, 1995), p. 433

Research with soul in mind is re-search, a searching again, for something that has already made its claim upon us, something we have already known, however dimly, but have forgotten... a researcher is claimed by a work through his or her own complexes... it is that in re-search with soul in mind the topic chooses the researcher as much as, and perhaps even more that he or she chooses it.¹⁵

I do agree that the topics of research of this thesis, 'cosmopolitanism' and the evolving self, are not incommensurate with my own daily life. It seems reasonable that this would be an area of interest for me, particularly my need to think through and about my forefathers, and their lives, being fascinated by their choices and ways of living. In choosing them, and Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh, I bound myself not only to them, but also to the research. Having reached the end of this course of study, I do profess to a feeling of sadness. A reverie is felt when looking back at all that has been brought to light, and all that has been uncovered, but there is a slight sorrow. "The mourning that attaches itself to our knowing has a sweetly bitter quality that comes from yearning for something that, while never attained is always with us"¹⁶. Perhaps "research is the difference between the fullness of experience and the failure of language to say it, and the sweetly bitter sense of this knowledge".¹⁷

At the conclusion of this thesis, I feel confident in claiming that I have made a substantial contribution to the scholarly work and research on my individual case studies' works and lives. In hindsight, it is easy to get caught up in smaller details, but what I have attempted to emphasise in my examination is not only their vital contributions to the fields of paintings and photography: Singh in his exclusive use of

¹⁵ Robert D. Romanyshyn, 'Towards a Poetics of the Research Process', in *The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind* (Spring Journal Books, 2007), p. 4

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 5

¹⁷ Ibid.

colour photography; Sher-Gil's pioneering experimentation with autochromes, nevertheless also and more importantly, lavishing a seriousness and dedication to the Indian subject, unseen in colonial photography; and Khakhar's ground-breaking representations of the common man and queer love in postcolonial India – but also the affective dimension of their outputs. The emotional content of their work needs to be unequivocally acknowledged, and it is dwelling on this aspect of their practices that substantially contributes in my estimation to a reappraisal and reconfiguration of cosmopolitanism. By recognising the complex 'affective geographies' of colonial and postcolonial worlds, by parsing through networks of affiliations and friendship, and appreciating emotional connections, I trust a better understanding can be proffered of how the local intersects and relates to, and with, the global.

Conducting this research under the auspices of the Curating Contemporary Art programme at the Royal College of Art, as a non-Western curator, I am clearly attempting through my study of Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh, but also with my interjection into the broader discourse on cosmopolitanism, establishing a practice, with certain kinds of geographical, aesthetic and conceptual coordinates. I have approached Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh and how they have been positioned and presented in recent international exhibitions, noting the relative successes and misgivings of how they are situated historically and the manner in which their practices are appraised. After establishing such a foundation for how they and their work have been circulating within an international contemporary context, I have chosen to return to primary art historical research into their biographies, looking to fathom how they navigated local and transnational networks of friendship, pedagogy and influences while evolving their own distinct sensibilities. This was complimented

by looking at the actual photographs and paintings, and laying bare more fully the oeuvres, drawing attention to lesser-known works that had not formerly received serious critical engagement.

I am keenly interested in trying to follow the evolution of an artistic sensibility, and in how that can be reflected not only in art historical writing, but in exhibition-making as well. Not to prioritise discourse, by excluding the art object: How can these transnational and local interconnections learnt through conversation and research be made present in a show? Is it through supporting works that offer an indication of a historicity? How can work by friends be presented alongside one another without promoting didactic and mimetic readings? How can work be exhibited as to chart the unfolding of an artistic process, and not submit it to a cultural reductionist or specific readings? These are questions I have tried to raise in the exhibitions that I have already curated, and continue to ruminate on for future projects. I suggest taking stock of the international is necessary, that is, how these artists and their practices are being understood and approached in the West, today, but contemporaneously one has to reflect back on the development of parallel expositions and discourses in their local contexts. This is fundamental, and what we need to aspire to is a balance of exchange, where a certain thickening of discourse locally, those parallel developments in the regions inform and effect shifts in understandings of the international and how it is constituted.

I hope this is apparent in my approach to Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh, revealing that this is in some way possible by factoring in the necessity of working with biography and exhibition history as a valid methodology when evaluating a particular artist's output and life. Furthermore, I believe that in relating case studies in an

analogous manner – the way I have with Sher-Gil, Khakhar and Singh – is beneficial, as it recognises each as an equal, sharing parity with one another and not prioritising a certain kind of work, or certain way of living, which I consider to be remarkably unforgiving. It is a process of review that has taught me to try and be more empathetic to not only those around me, and those I study, but also to those parts of me that are obscure and incomprehensible, to try and be more empathetic towards and in relation to myself.

What remains most clear to me at the end of this thesis, this course of study, is that there are still many lives and bodies of work that deserve and demand attention. Without even trying to admit and perceive those people's *attitudes* and sensibilities, any understanding of cosmopolitanism will remain deficient. There is a charge to this course of inquiry, where our awareness needs to remain active and constantly responsive. As Foucault has recommended at the end of his interview 'Friendship as a way of Life' that,

...the idea of a program of proposals is dangerous. As soon as a program is presented, it becomes a law, and there is a prohibition against inventing...the program must be wide open. We have to dig deeply to show how things have been historically contingent, for such and such reasons intelligible but not necessary. We must make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity. We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. To make a truly unavoidable challenge: What can be played?¹⁸

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life'. R. de Ceccaty, J. Danet and J. Le Bitoux conducted the interview from which this quote is taken with Michel Foucault for the French magazine *Gai Pied*. It appeared in April, 1981. The interview is available at http://commoningtimes.org/texts/mf_friendship_as_a_way_of_life.pdf

This is a fair proposition, a real prompt, which generates for itself a certain degree of urgency. There should be no 'program of proposals' when discussing cosmopolitanism, or for that matter, people's lives, works, friendships, affiliations and relations. Continual advances need to be made in such matters of study recognising the incredible repository of these lives and works, and allow them to affect us emotionally, luxuriate in their beauty, grant them their crudeness and inelegances, and conceding finally to not knowing their each and every detail. Our understanding of them is provisional and will never be fully formed, perfect and complete. And, perhaps, it is in these lingering mysteries that will charge our imaginations.

APPENDIX



Fig. 1.1 Still from *Symptom Recital*, 2006



Fig. 1.2 Installation view, *Companionable Silences*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2013



Fig. 1.3 Installation view, *In Dialogue: Amrita Sher-Gil and Lionel Wendt*, Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai, 2014

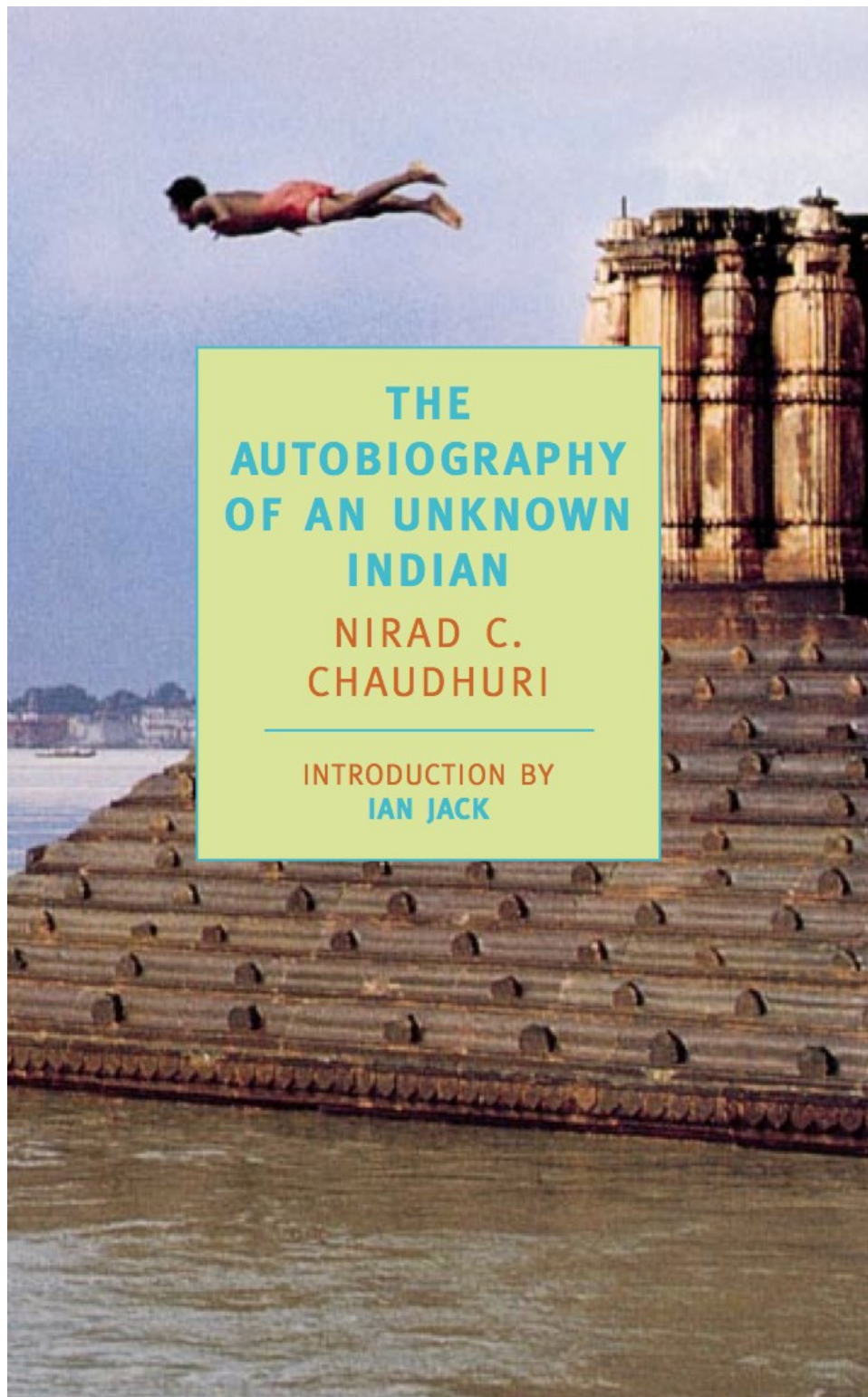


Fig. 2.1 Cover of Nirad. C. Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* with Raghubir Singh's image *Man Diving and Swimmers, Banaras, 1985*, published by the New York Review of Books, 2001

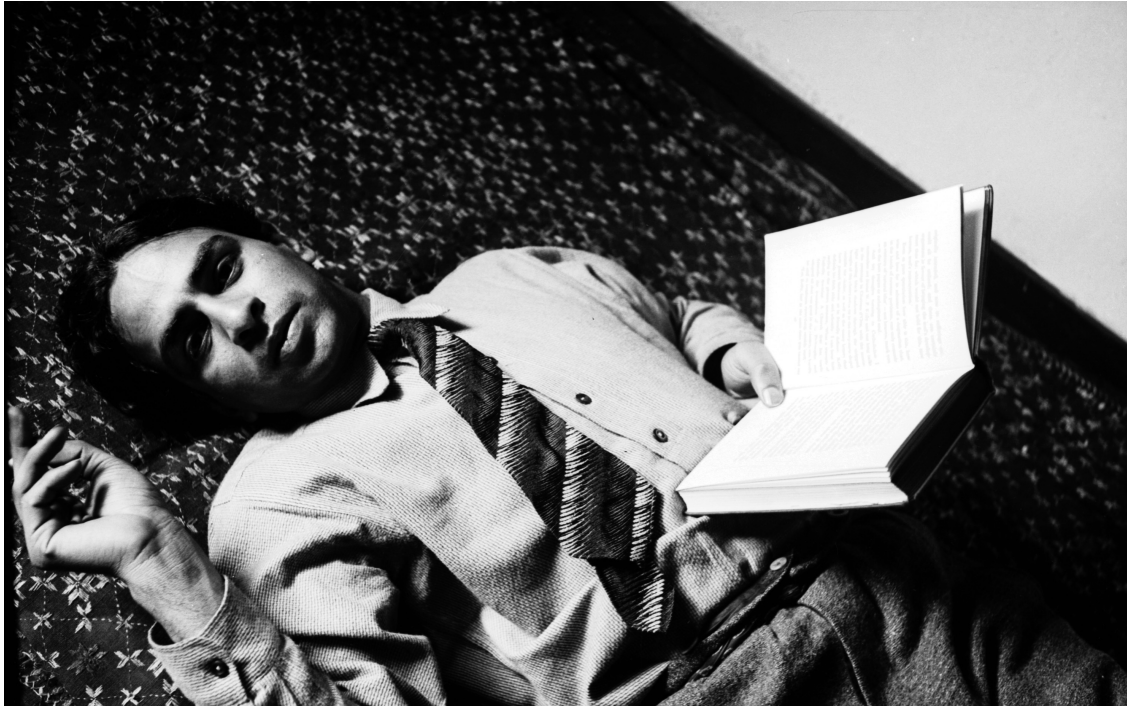


Fig. 2.2 Mulk Raj Anand relaxing in London, 22nd June, 1935



Fig. 3.1 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil with family and retinue, 1889/1890, Lawrence Road house, Lahore, India, Vintage print*



Fig. 3.2 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, 'Study in a vase': self-portrait, 9 February, 1892, Lawrence Road house, Lahore, India, Vintage print pasted on board, Inscribed by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: Study in a vase. 9th Feb. 1892. Umrao Singh. Photo by flash light, Bromide Print by Self. U.S 9th Feb:1892. Lahore

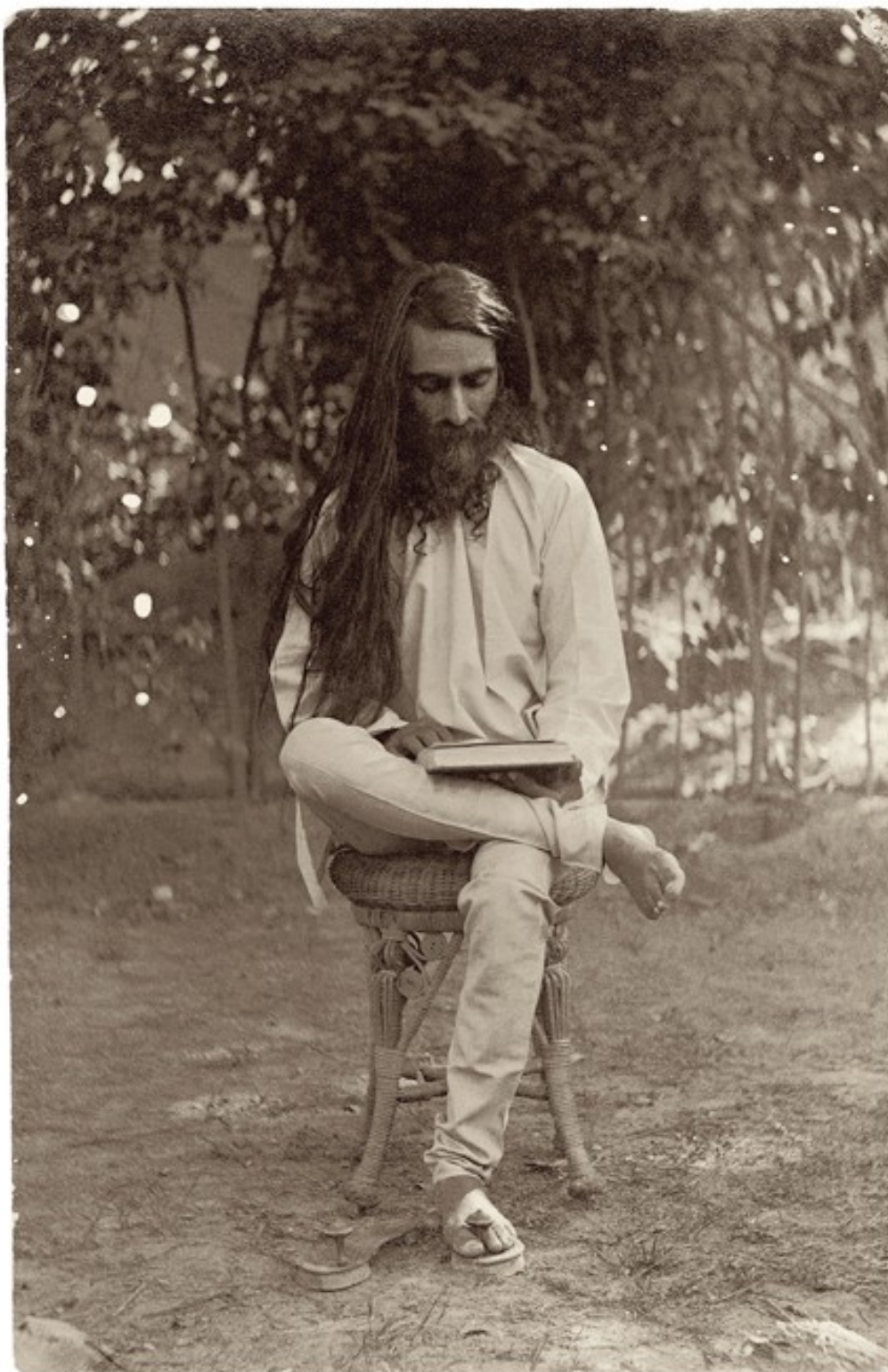


Fig. 3.3 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *'Moods of metaphysical emotion I': self-portrait*, 1908, Lawrence Road house, Lahore, India, Vintage print

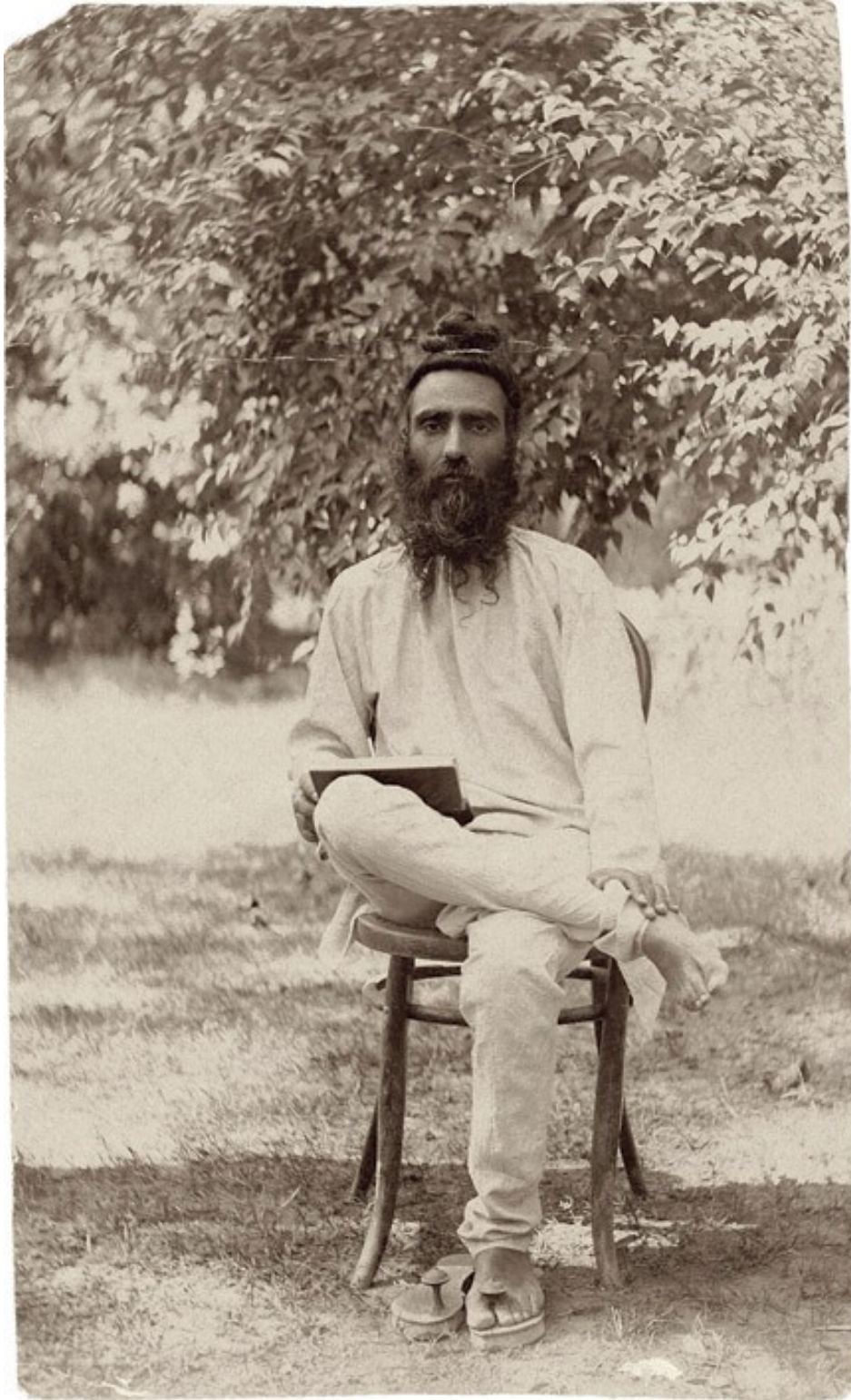


Fig. 3.4 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Moods of metaphysical emotions II: self-portrait*, 1908, Lawrence Road house, Lahore, India, Vintage print



Fig. 3.5 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *After a bath: self portrait*, 1904, Lawrence Road house, Lahore, India, Vintage print



Fig. 3.6 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Wedding Portrait, February 1912, Lawrence Road house, Lahore, India*, Marie Antoinette and Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Vintage print, Inscribed on reverse by Marie Antoinette: 1912 Lahore Febr. My good dear husband and I



Fig. 3.7 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Marie Antoinette and Umrao Singh Sher-Gil in their study*, 1913, 4 Szilágyi Dezső Tér, Budapest, Hungary, Vintage print

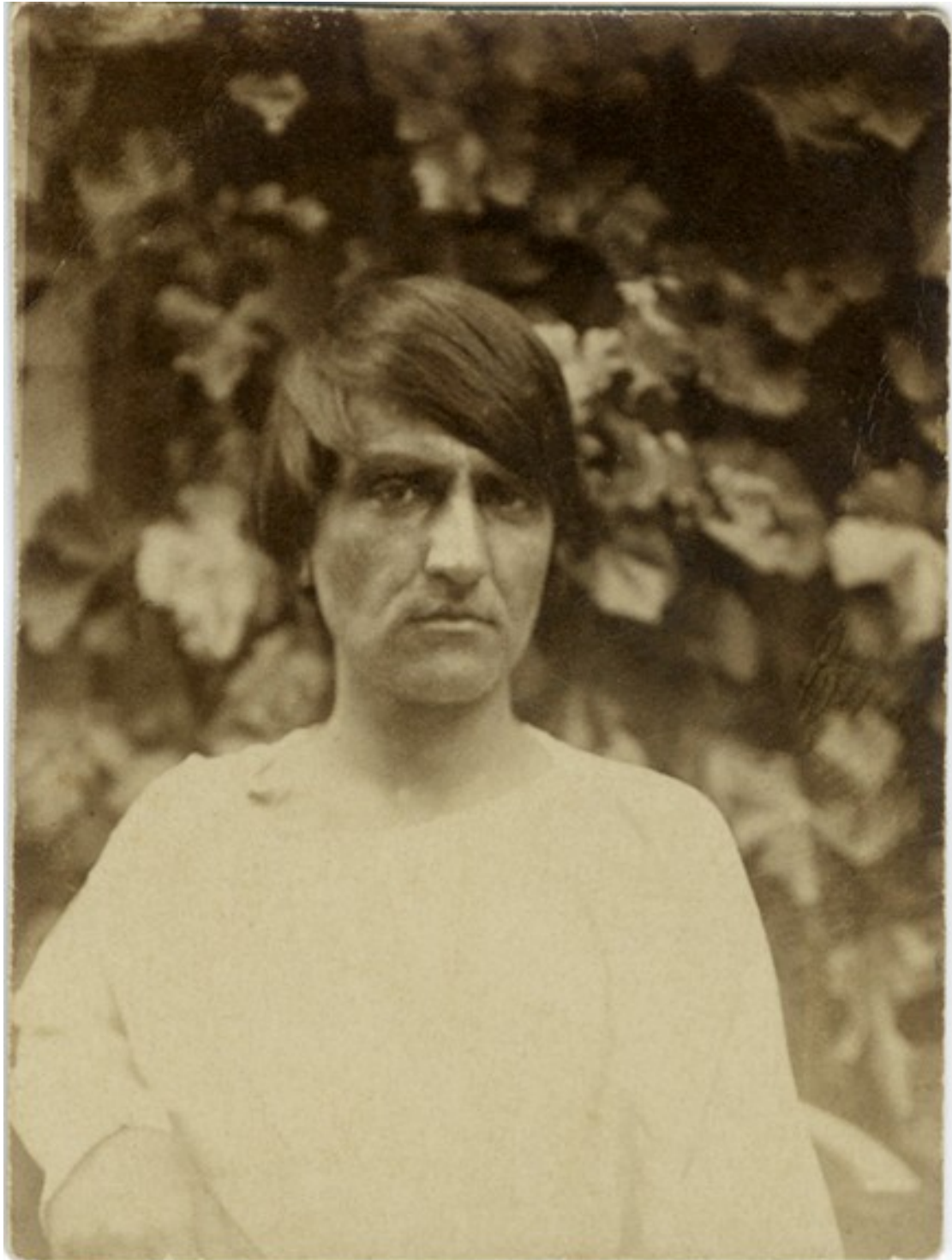


Fig. 3.8 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *New Haircut*, 1913, 4 Szilágyi Dezső Tér, Budapest, Hungary, Vintage print



Fig. 3.9 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Reading in the library: self-portrait, 1915/1916, Rath George Utca House, Budapest, Hungary, Vintage print*



Fig. 3.10 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Profile: self-portrait*, 1913/14, 4 Szilágyi Dezső Tér, Budapest, Hungary, Vintage print



Fig. 3.11 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *'How I fetched water from the well': self-portrait, 1917, Dunaharaszti, Hungary, Vintage print*



Fig. 3.12 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *'In the Fields'*, c.1916, Hungary, Left to right: Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Amrita, Indira, Marie Antoinette, Vintage print, Inscribed on reverse by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, In the fields away from the house to find relief. US



Fig. 3.13 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Reclining on divan: self-portrait, 1917*, *Gottesmann House, Dunaharaszti, Hungary*, Vintage print, Inscribed by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: 1917



Fig. 3.14 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Self-portrait on divan, 1916, Gottesmann House, Dunaharaszti, Hungary, Vintage print*



Fig. 3.15 *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil in a Swimsuit, Hungary, c. 1916-17, Vintage print*

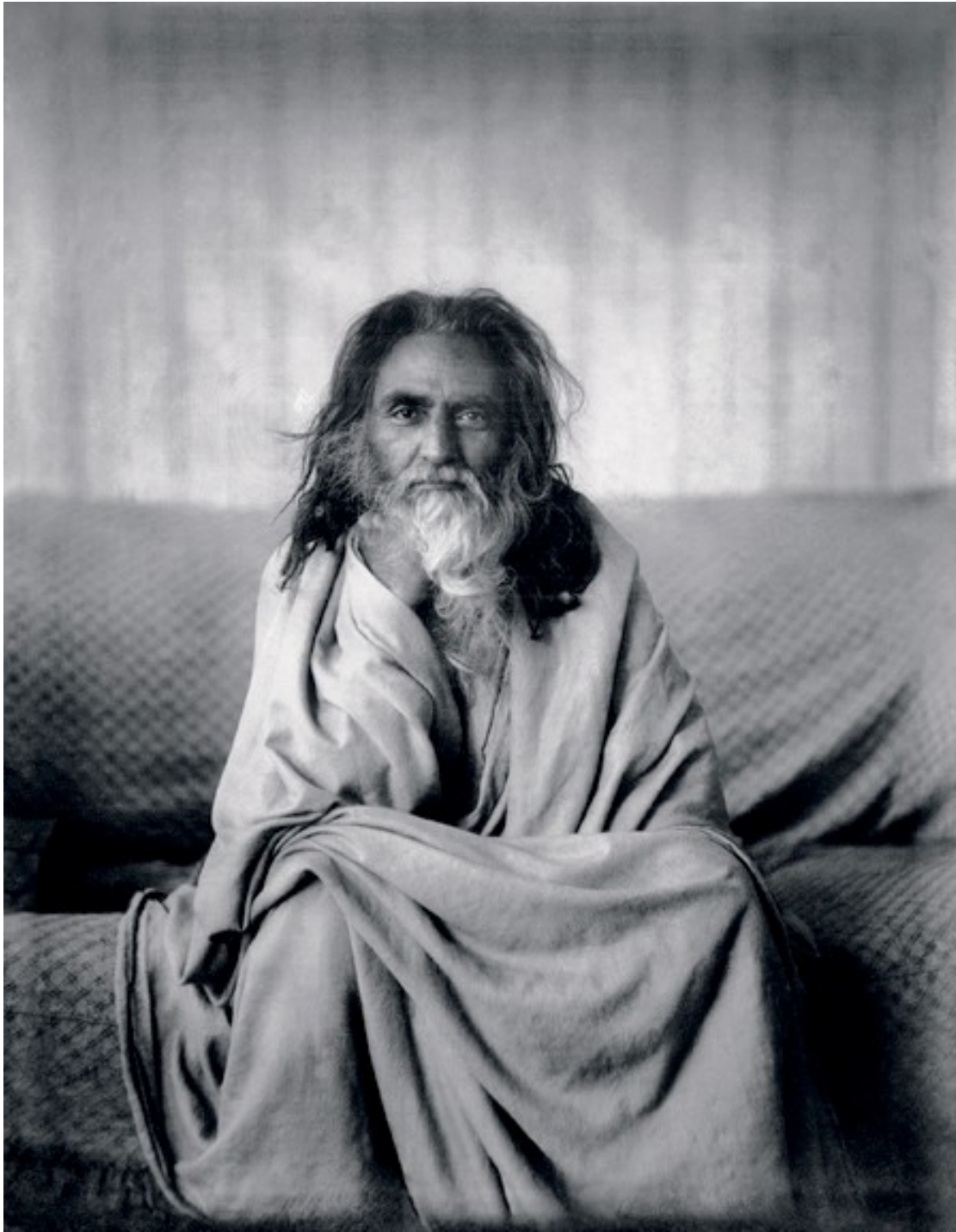


Fig. 3.16 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Draped in a shawl: self-portrait, c. 1925, place unknown*, Glass plate negative



Fig. 3.17 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Repairing a camera: self-portrait, c. 1926, place unknown, Glass plate negative*

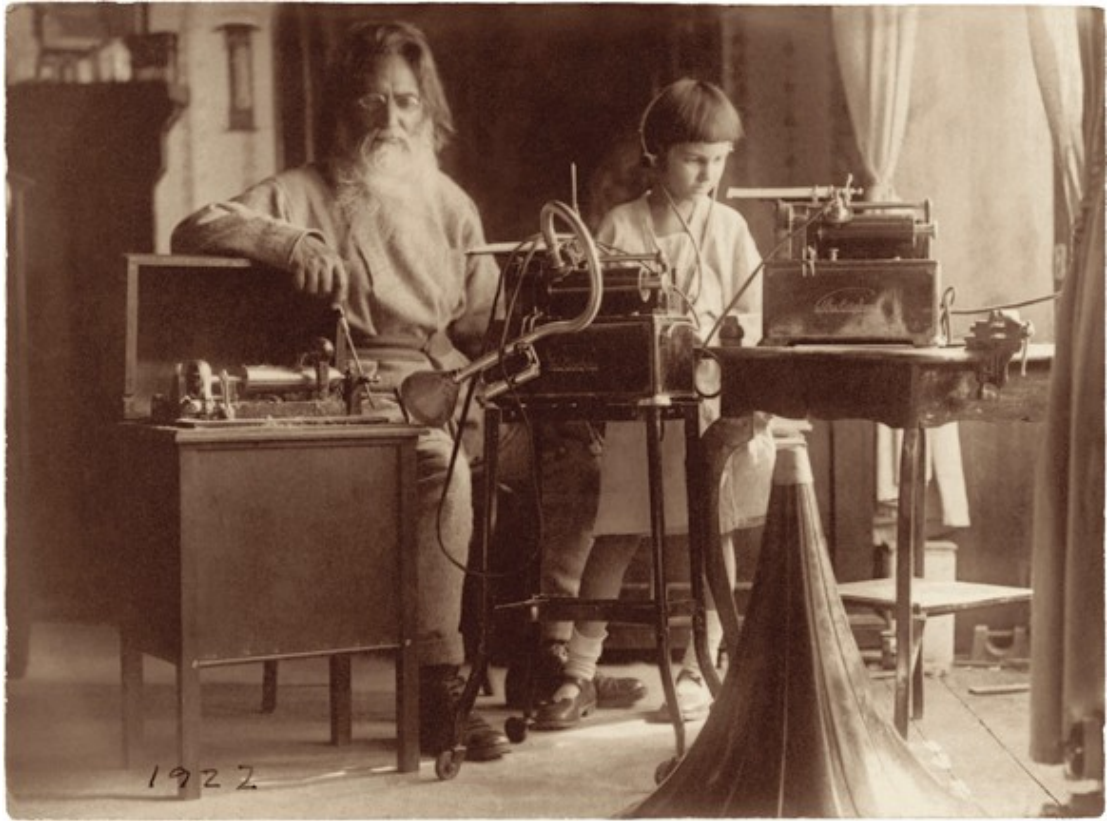


Fig. 3.18 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil and Indira surrounded by his musical instruments, 1922, L'Holme, Simla, India, Vintage print, Inscribed on the print by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: 1922*

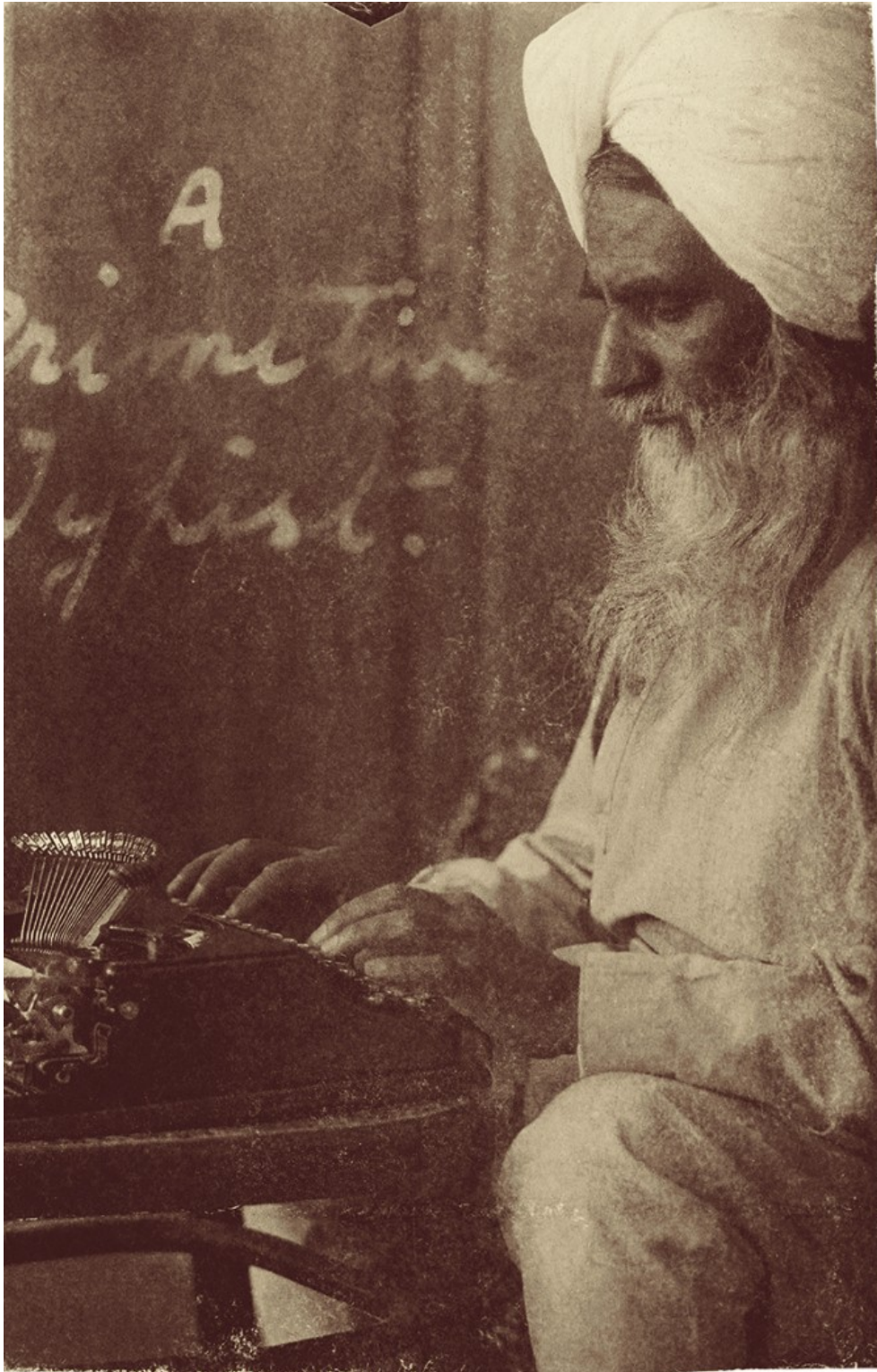


Fig. 3.19 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *'A primitive typist': self-portrait, 1926, L'Holme, Simla, India, Vintage print, Inscribed by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, A Primitive Typist*



Fig. 3.20 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Indira*, c. 1923, *L'Holme, Simla, India*, Autochrome



Fig. 3.21 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Amrita*, c. 1923, *L'Holme, Simla, India*, Autochrome

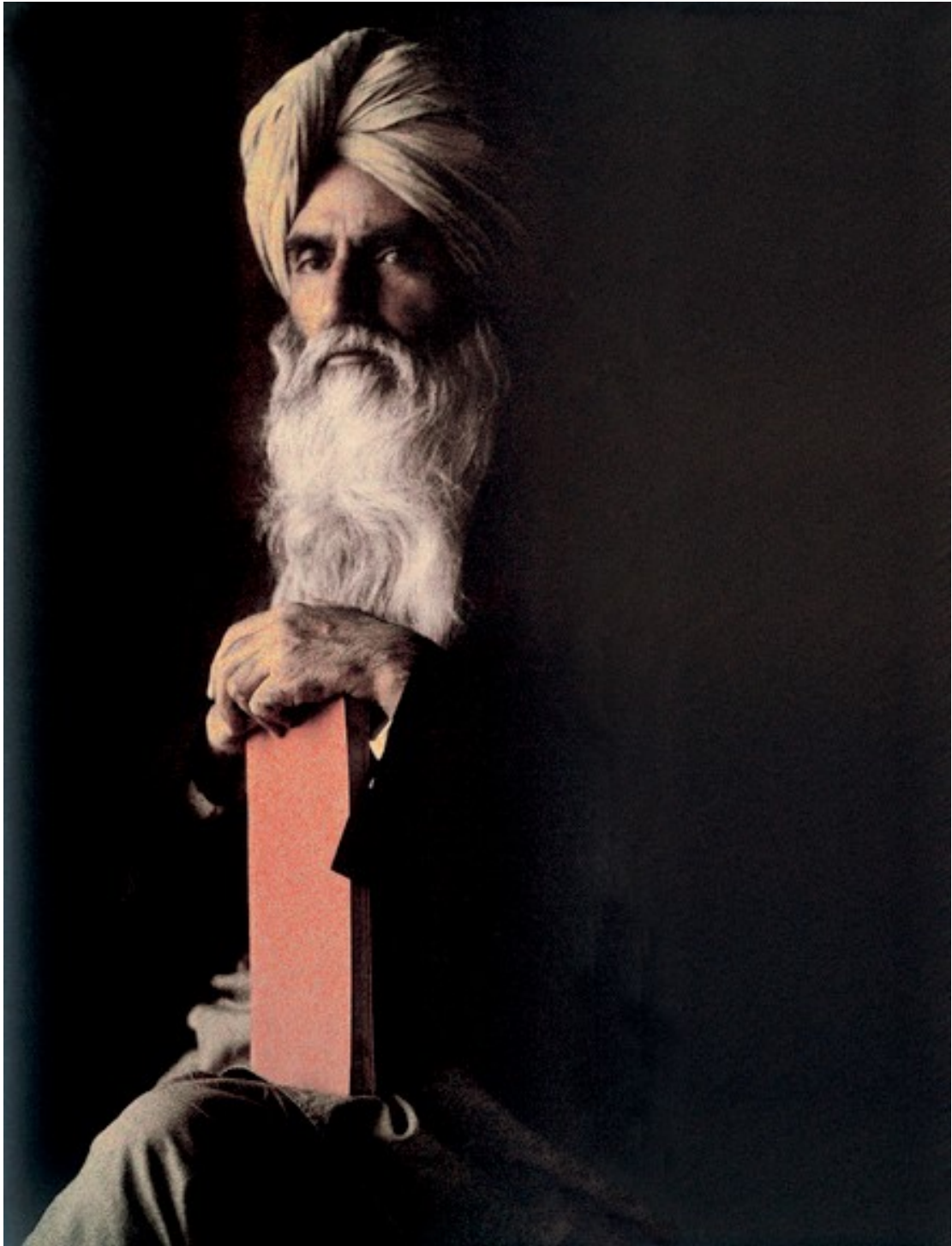


Fig. 3.22 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: self-portrait*, 21 June 1924, *L'Holme, Simla, India*, Autochrome, Inscribed on autochrome by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: 21.VI 24 ... Exp 7 secs



Fig. 3.23 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, 'A Sweet Holy Mood': self-portrait, c. 1925, L'Holme, Simla, India, Vintage Print

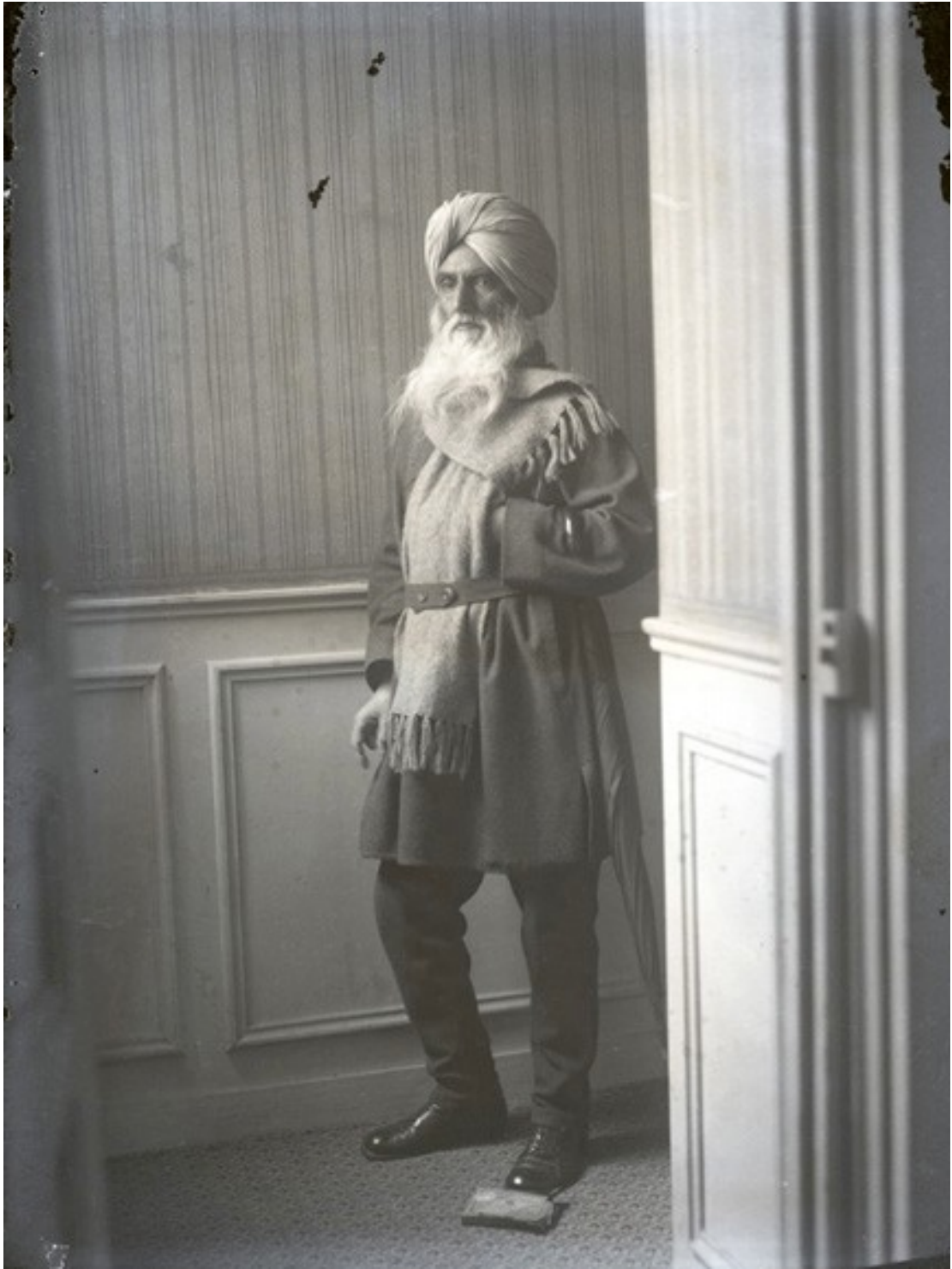


Fig. 3.24 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Standing in the hallway: self-portrait*, c. 1930, 11 Rue Bassano, Paris, France, Vintage Print

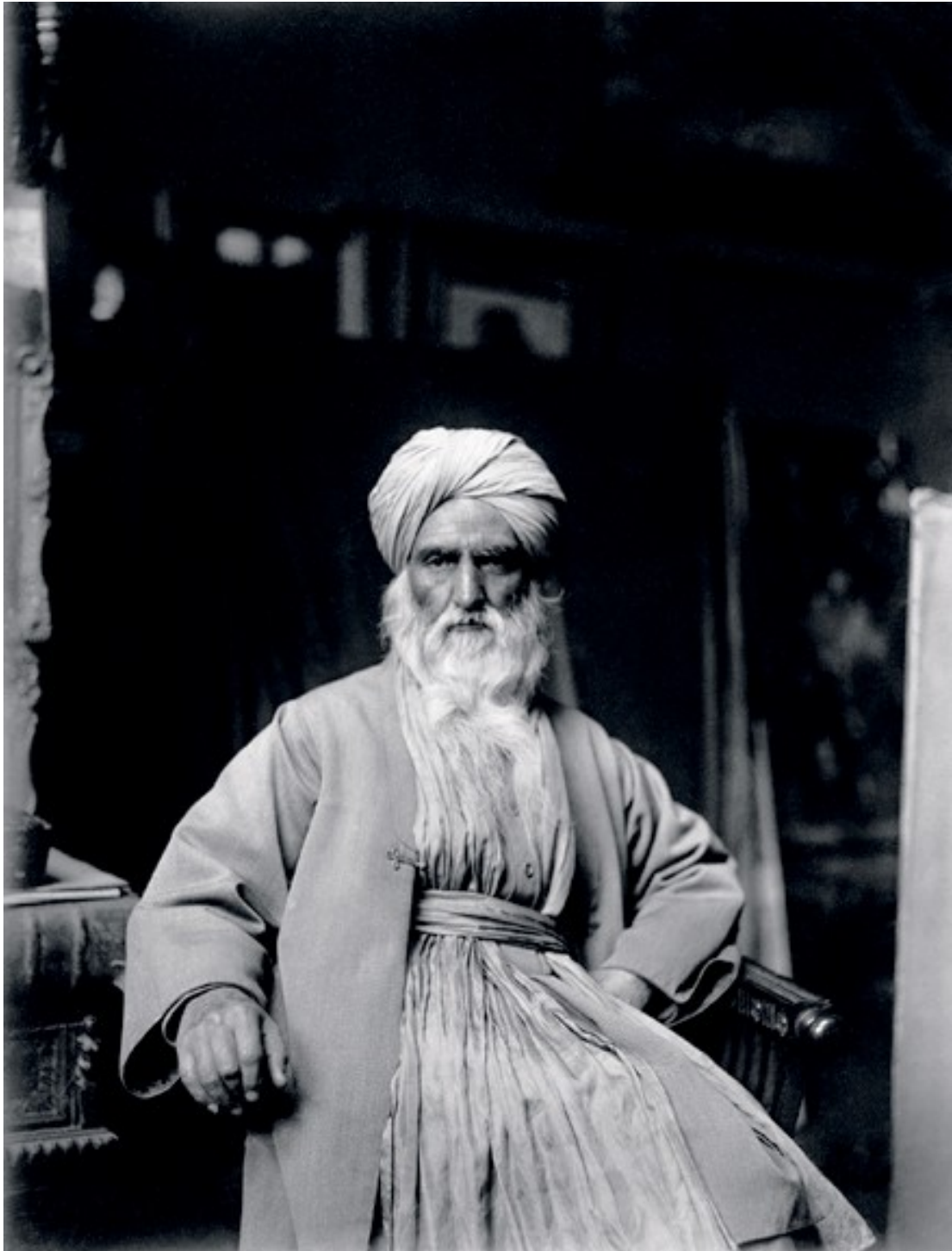


Fig. 3.25 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Seated in an armchair: self-portrait, c. 1932, 11 Rue Bassano, Paris, France*, Glass plate negative



Fig. 3.26 *Umrao Singh Sher-Gil out in Paris, c. 1932, Vintage Print*



Fig. 3.27 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *At his study: self-portrait*, c. 1933, 11 Rue Bassano, Paris, France, Glass plate negative



Fig. 3.28 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Before the fast of fifteen days: self-portrait*, July 1930, 11 Rue Bassano, Paris, France, Vintage Print, Inscribed on the reverse by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: USG, Paris, 1930, Before the fast of fifteen days



Fig. 3.29 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *After fifteen days of fasting I: self-portrait*, 11 August 1930, 11 Rue Bassano, Paris, France, Vintage Print, Inscribed on the reverse by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: USG, Paris, 1930, After 15 days fast



Fig. 3.30 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *After fifteen days of fasting II: self-portrait*, 11 August 1930, 11 Rue Bassano, Paris, France, Vintage Print pasted on diary page, Inscribed by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: Photo taken on 11th August 1930, after 15th day of fast



Fig. 3.31 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Typing on his bed: self-portrait*, 1935, L'Holme, Simla, India, Glass plate negative

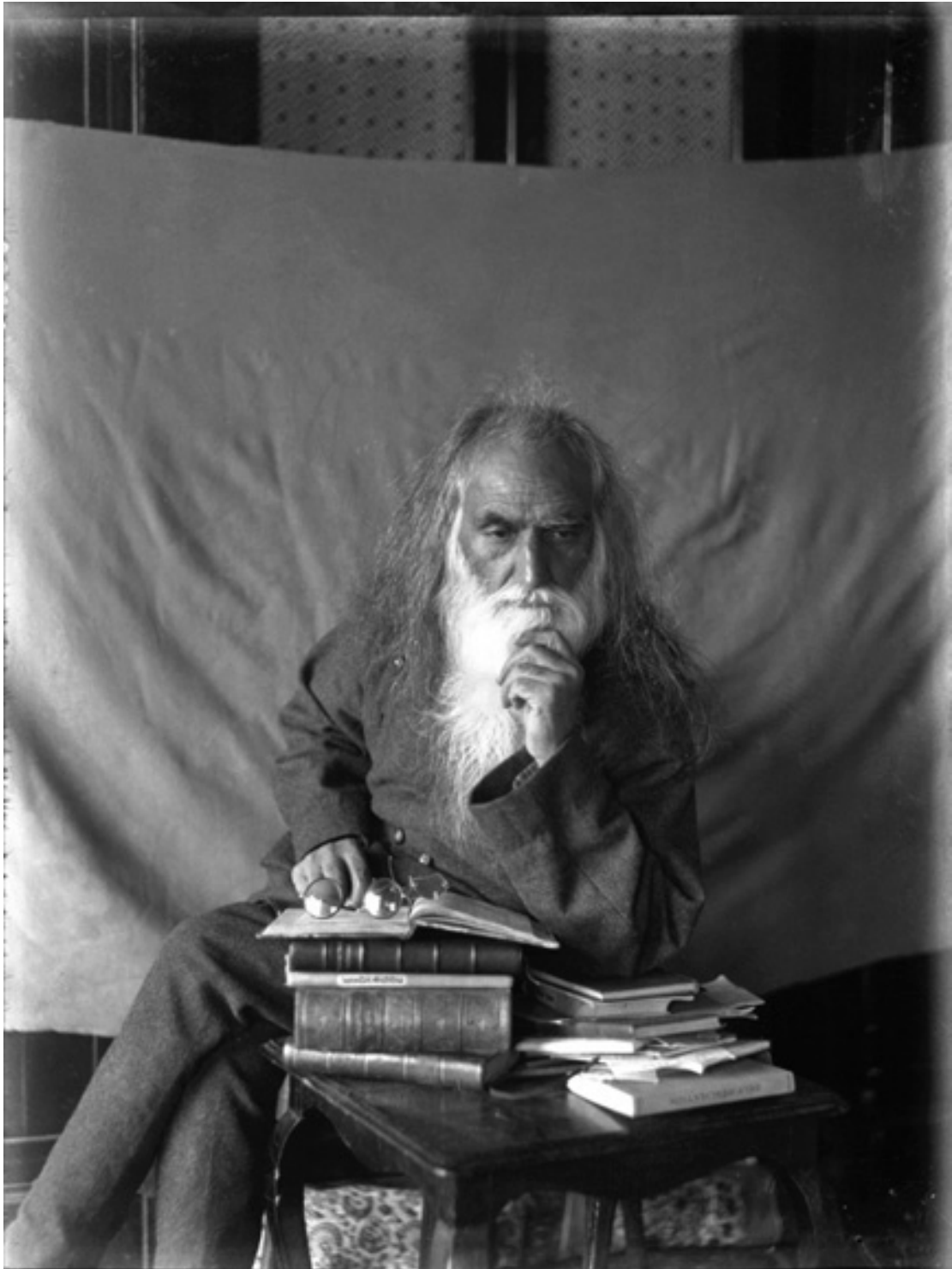


Fig. 3.33 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Stargazing in the Study*, c. 1939, L'Holme, Simla, India, Marie Antoinette and Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Glass plate negative



Fig. 3.33 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Stargazing in the Study*, c. 1939, L'Holme, Simla, India, Marie Antoinette and Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Glass plate negative

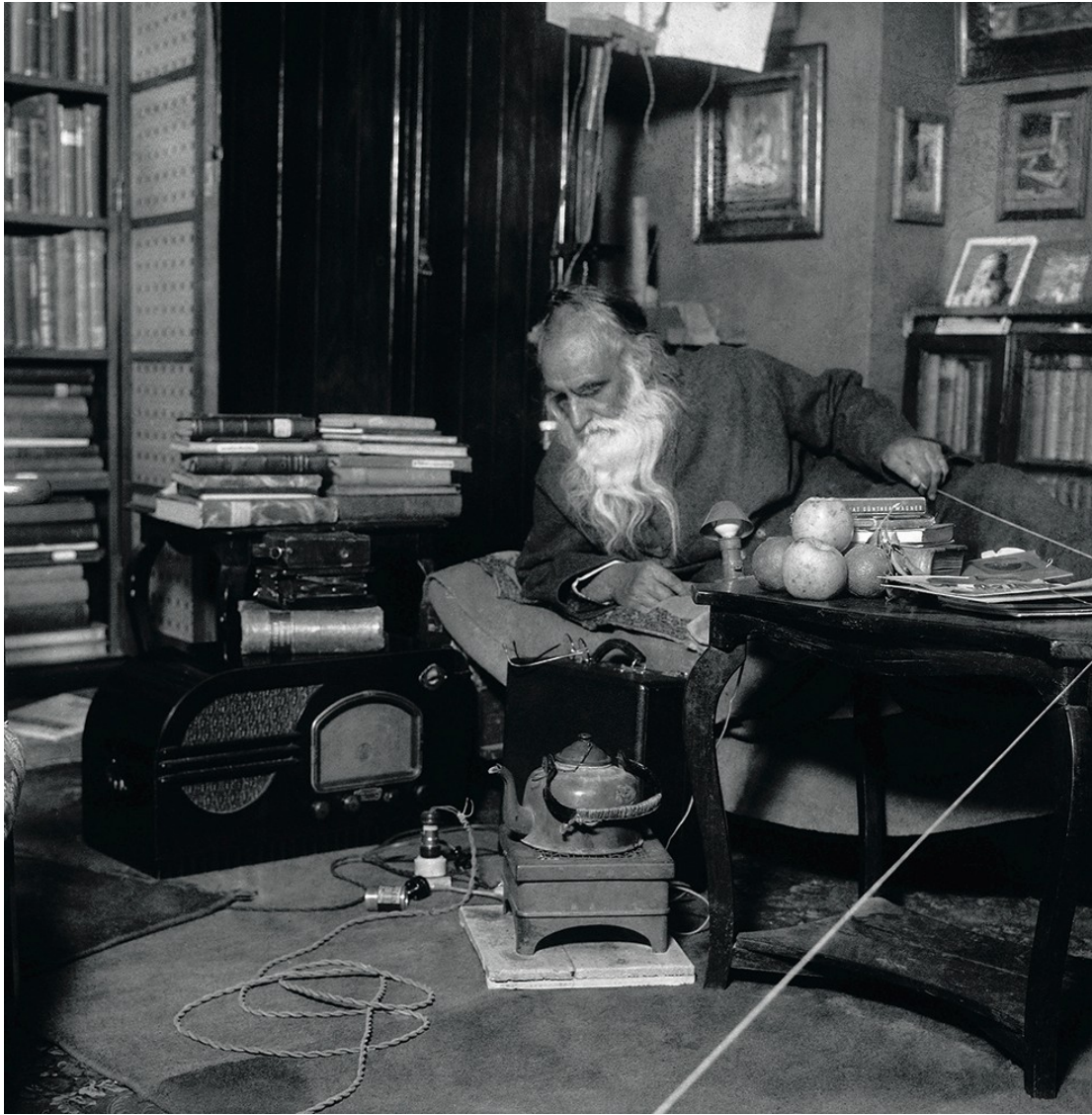


Fig. 3.34 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *The Photographer surrounded by his equipment: self-portrait, February 1938, L'Holme, Simla, India, Glass plate negative*



Fig. 3.35 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *Marie Antoinette on the terrace in winter, 1937*, *L'Holme, Simla, India*, Vintage print



Fig. 3.36 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *The last portrait of Amrita*, 1941, Simla, India, Film negative

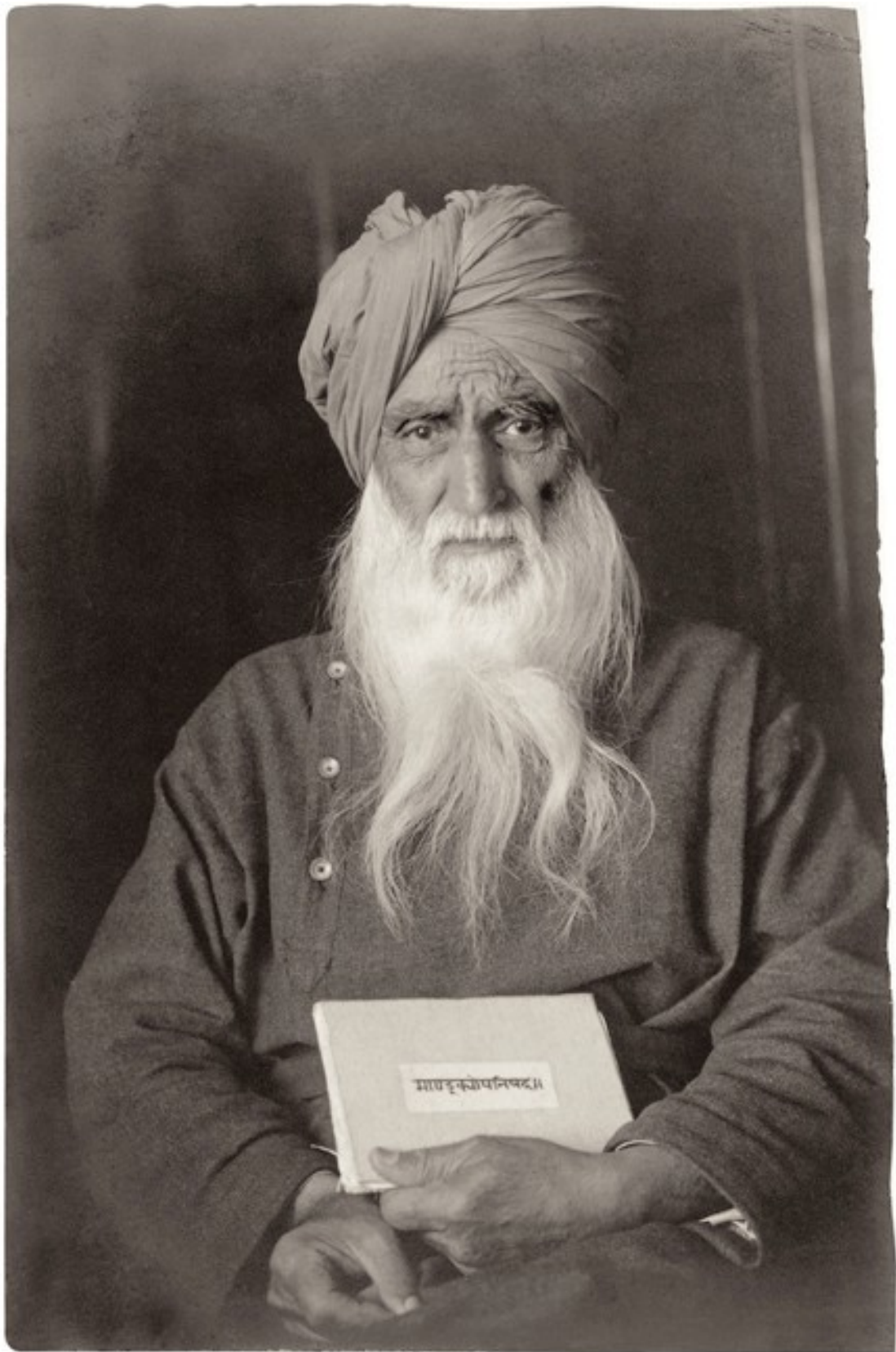


Fig. 3.37 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *'His misery and his manuscript': self-portrait, 14 November 1946, L'Holme, Simla, India, Vintage print, Inscribed on the reverse by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: His misery and his manuscript 14. Nov – 1946 by USG*

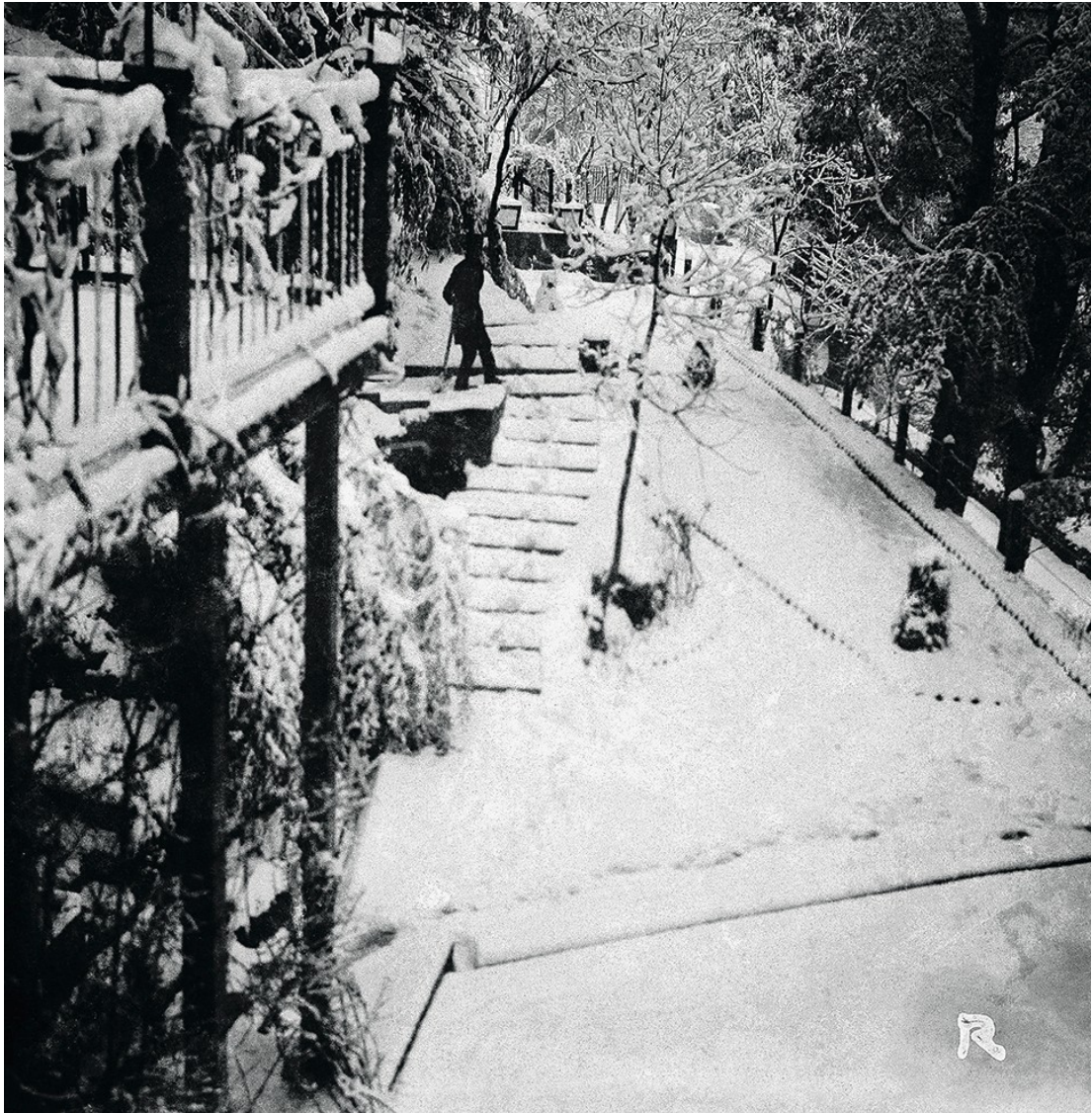


Fig. 3.38 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *After Snowfall: self-portrait*, c. 1944, L'Holme, Simla, India, Stereographic film negative (right), Inscribed on negative by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: R



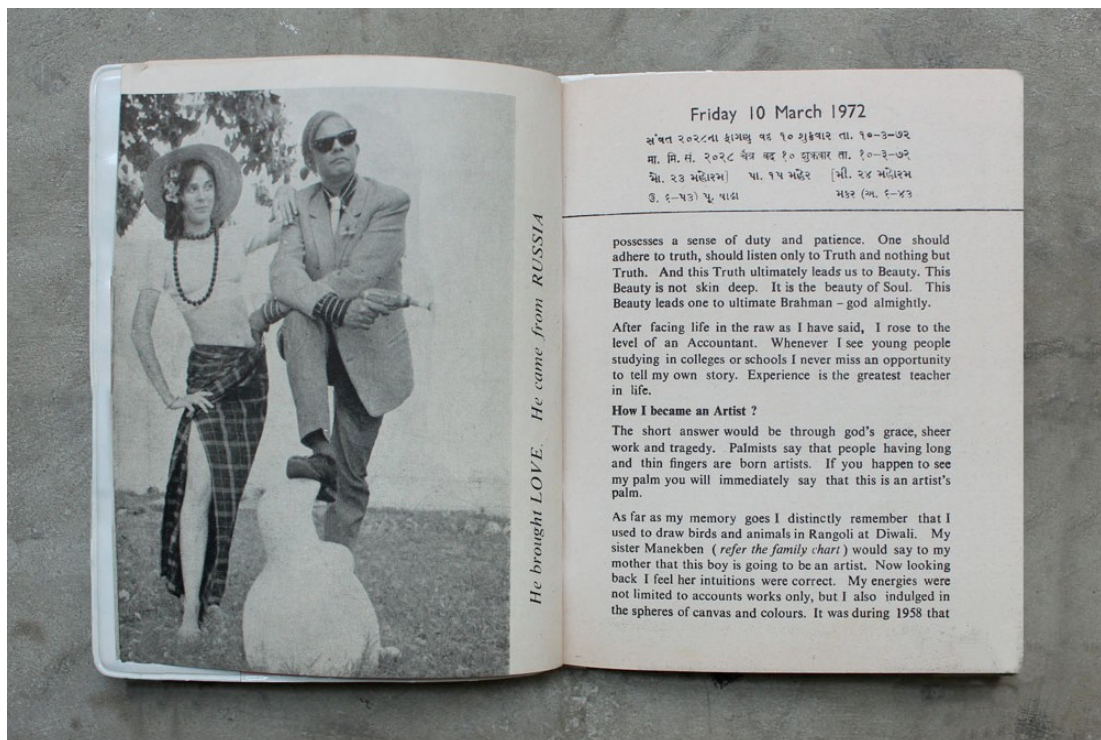
Fig. 3.39 Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, *In the bedroom: self-portrait*, 1949, *L'Atelier*, Simla, India, Film negative



Fig 4.1 Bhupen Khakhar, *You Can't Please All*, 1981, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.2 Spread from *Truth is Beauty and Beauty is God*, Exhibition Catalogue published by Chemould Gallery, 1972



4.3 Spread from *Truth is Beauty and Beauty is God*, Exhibition Catalogue published by Chemould Gallery,



Fig. 4.4 Opening spread of *Truth is Beauty and Beauty is God*, Exhibition Catalogue published by Chemould Gallery, 1972



Fig. 4.5 Bhupen Khakhar, *People at Dharamshala*, 1967, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.6 Bhupen Khakhar, *Parsi Family*, 1968, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.7 Bhupen Khakhar, *Landscape with Canon*, 1969, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.8 Bhupen Khakhar, *Portrait of Shri Shankerbhai V. Patel Near Red Fort*, 1972, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.9 Bhupen Khakhar, *Mrs. Nilima Sheikh Looking at Orange Flower*, 1970–71, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.10 Bhupen Khakhar, *Man Leaving (Going Abroad)*, 1970, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.11 Bhupen Khakhar, *First Day in New York*, 1982, Oil on Canvas

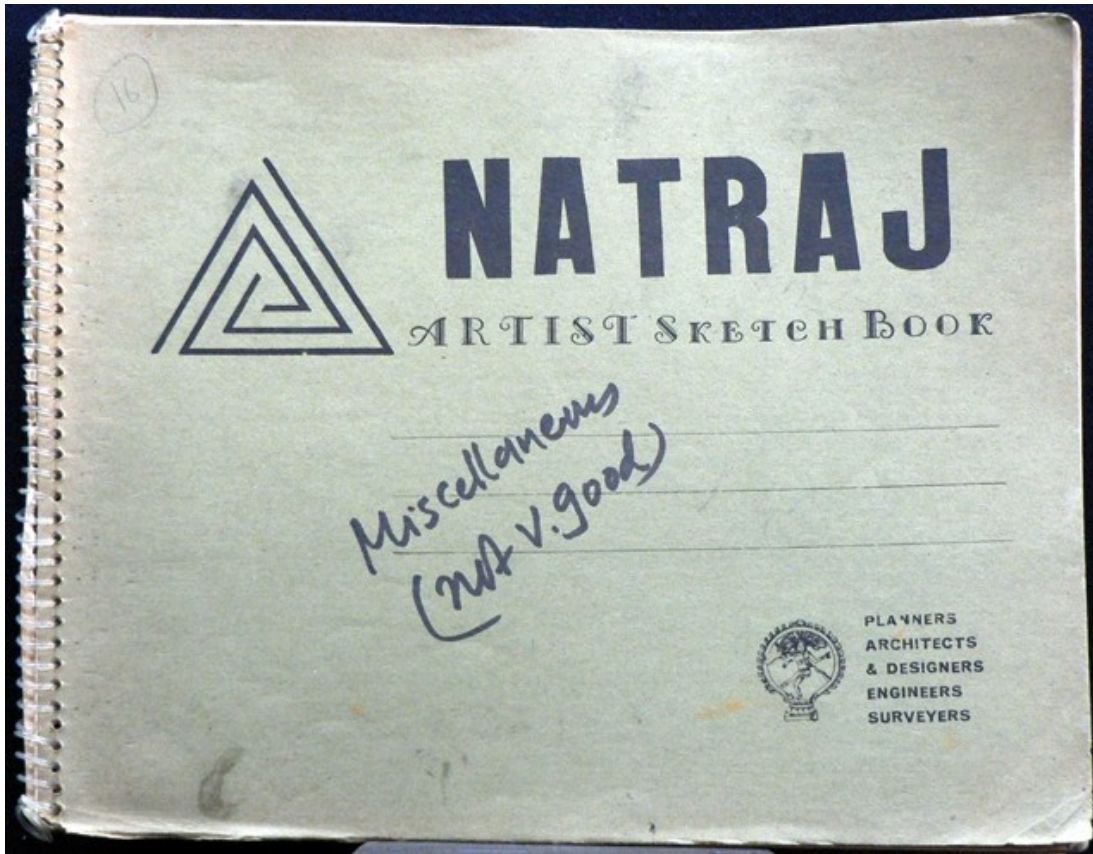


Fig. 4.12 Bhupen Khakhar sketchbook



Fig. 4.13 Bhupen Khakhar, *Barber Shop*, 1972, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.14 Bhupen Khakhar, *Janata Watch Repairing*, 1972, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.15 Bhupen Khakhar, *De-Lux Tailors*, 1972, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.16 Bhupen Khakhar, *Assistant Accountant – Mr. I.M. Shah*, 1972, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.17 Bhupen Khakhar, *Ranchodbhai Relaxing in Bed*, 1977, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.18 Timothy Hyman, *Around Bhupen*, 2009, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.19 Vivan Sundaram, *People Come and Go*, 1981, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.20 Bhupen Khakhar, *The Weatherman*, 1979, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.21 Bhupen Khakhar, *Man in Pub*, 1979, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.22 Bhupen Khakhar, *Man in Restaurant*, c. late 1980's, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.23 Bhupen Khakhar, *Man with Bouquet of Plastic Flowers*, 1976, Oil on Canvas

⑦ About England's

Many friends asked me as to what I liked in England. What are my impressions? I will try to put ~~Best things I liked~~ ^{the things I liked best} in England with a qualification that this includes only the things I have seen in England. I would like to put them in tabular form.

| Best | Name | Reasons. |
|----------------------|--|---|
| 1) Exhibition | 9 deal Home Exhibition at Earls court | It is democratic, eliminates class differences and emphasises that only middle-class taste prevails in Britain. |
| 2) Man of the Year | Jack Scott Weatherman on Television | His predictions made my life possible in this part of the world. He never deceived me in the promises which were never kept. Conversation with total strangers was made possible. |
| 3) Woman of the year | Mrs. M. Thatcher | You know ^{why} the reason . |
| 4) English Artist. | Lord Landoer Sir Edwin | He charms all English at ladies with human element in pet dogs. Like John Lubbock ^{not only} he invests them with human emotions but can make them talk in English. |
| 5) Town | St. Ives in Cornwall | Native and summer tourists are greater than are produced at St. Ives. |
| 6) Qualities | in Englishman's character | Total distrust for foreigners. |

Fig. 4.24 About England, Handwritten Note by Bhupen Khakhar

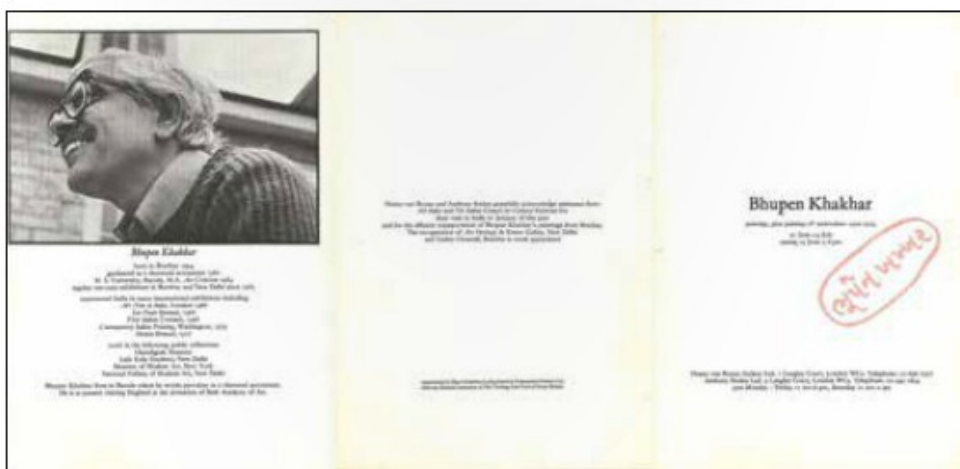


Fig. 4.25 Invitation card for Bhupen Khakhar's solo exhibition at Hester van Royen Gallery and Antony Stokes Ltd, 1979



Fig. 4.26 Bhupen Khakhar, *Two Men in Benaras*, 1982, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.27 Bhupen Khakhar, *In A Boat*, 1984, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.28 Bhupen Khakhar, *Party*, 1988, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.29 Bhupen Khakhar, *Ghost City Night*, 1991, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.30 Bhupen Khakhar, *Pink City*, 1991, Oil on Canvas

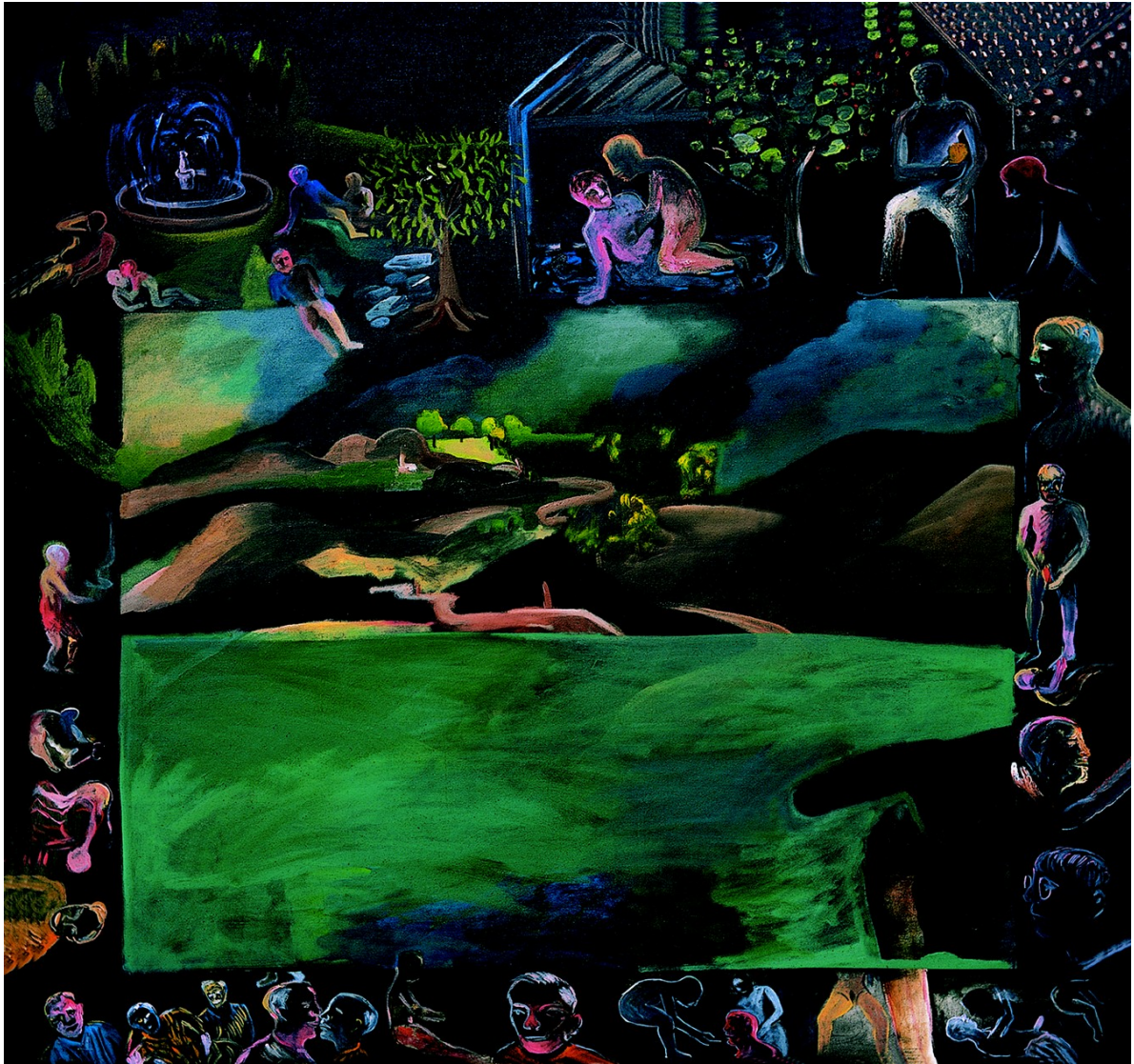


Fig. 4.31 Bhupen Khakhar, *Green Landscape*, 1995, Oil on Canvas

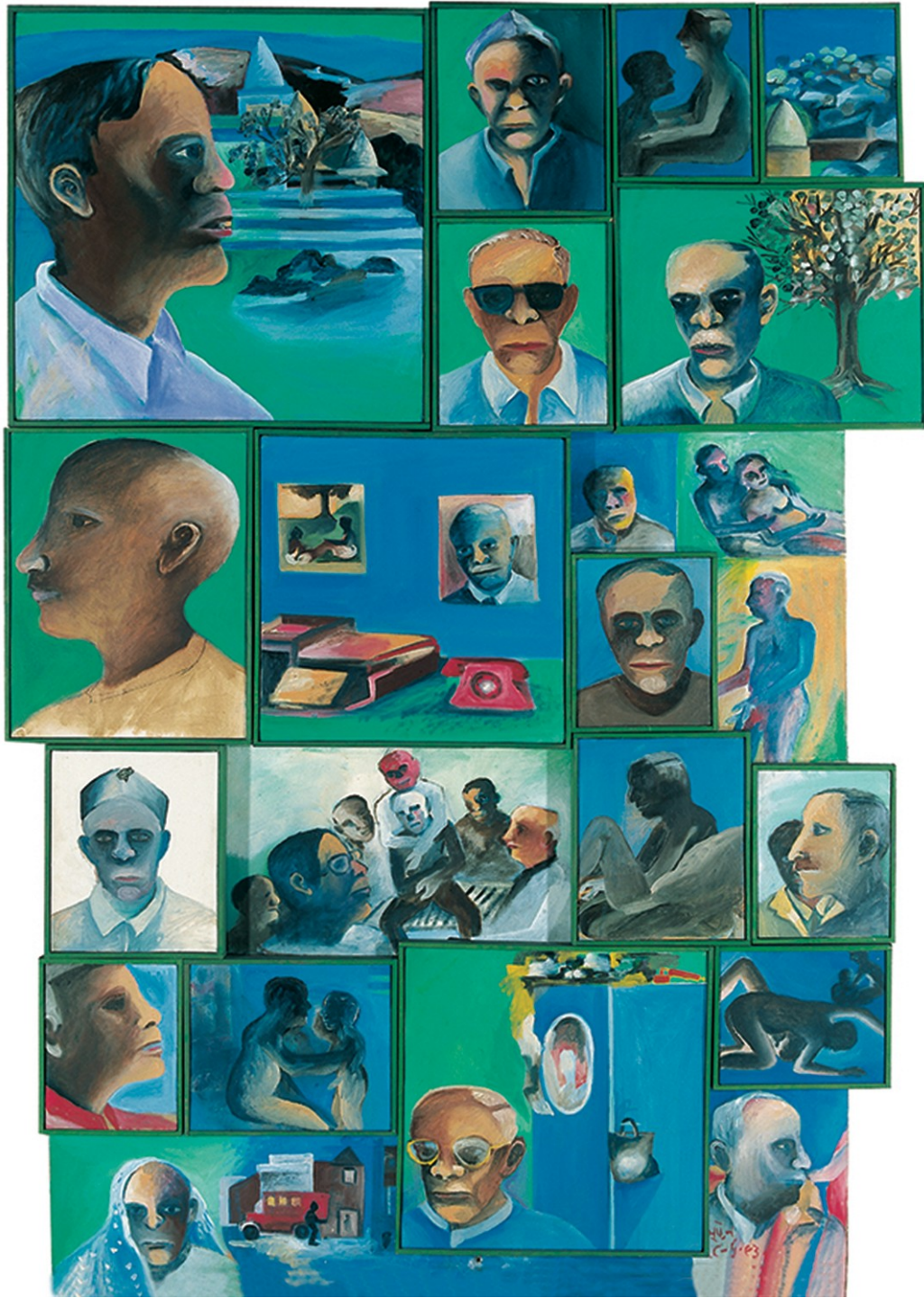


Fig. 4.32 Bhupen Khakhar, *Gallery of Rogues*, 1993, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.33 Bhupen Khakhar, *Seva*, 1986, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.34 Bhupen Khakhar, *My Dear Friend*, 1983, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.35 Bhupen Khakhar, *How Many Hands do I Need to Declare My Love to You?*, 1994, Watercolour on Paper



Fig. 4.36 Bhupen Khakhar, *Grey Blanket*, 1998, Watercolour on Paper



Fig. 4.37 Bhupen Khakhar, *Yayati*, 1987, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.38 Bhupen Khakhar, *Embrace*, 2001, Watercolour on Paper



4.39 Bhupen Khakhar, *Satsang*, 1995, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.40 Bhupen Khakhar, *Beauty is Skin Deep Only*, 1999, Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4.41 Bhupen Khakhar, *Paan Beedi Shop*, 1992, Installation, Mixed Media

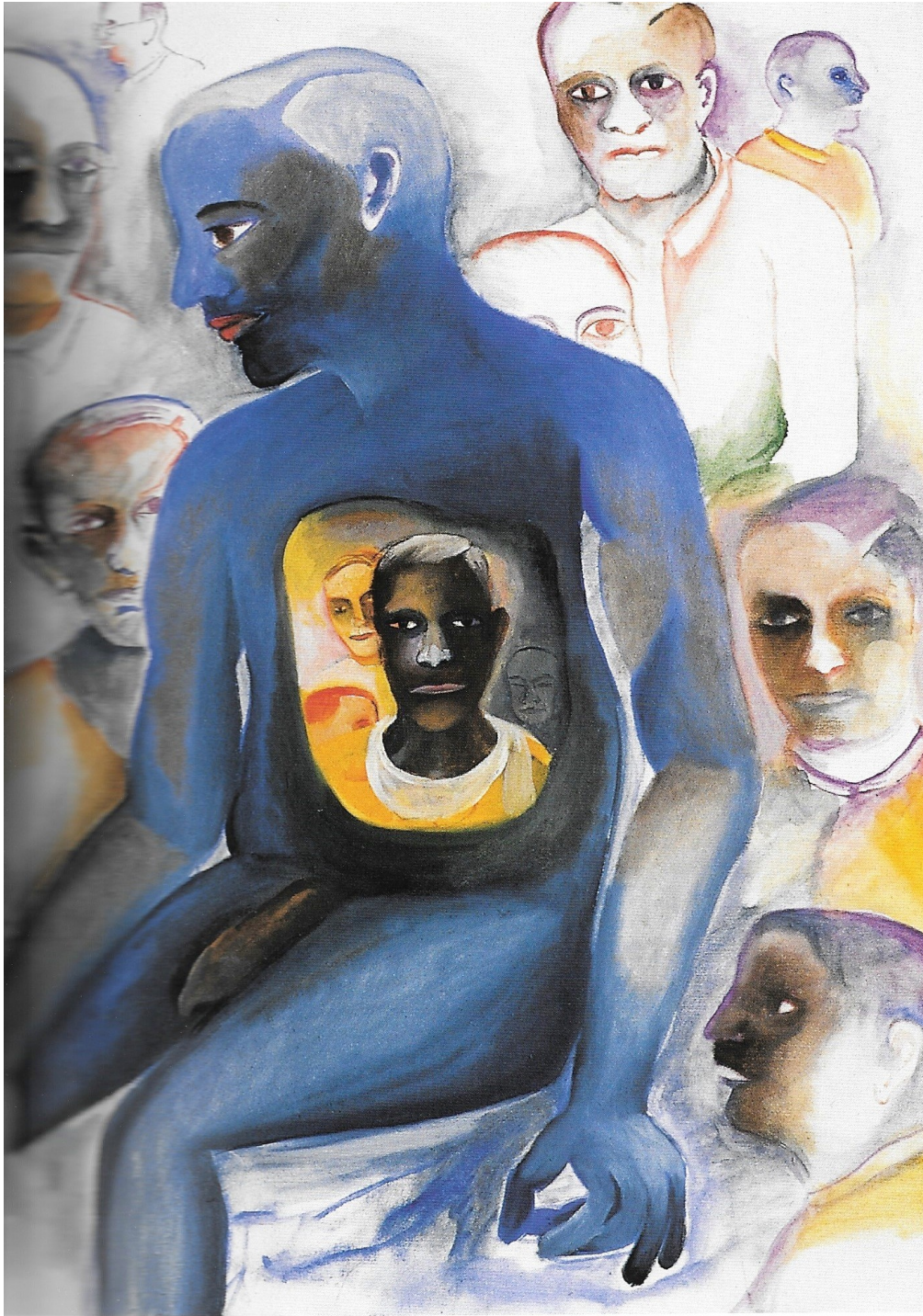


Fig. 4.42 Bhupen Khakhar, *Image in Man's Heart*, 1999, Oil on Canvas

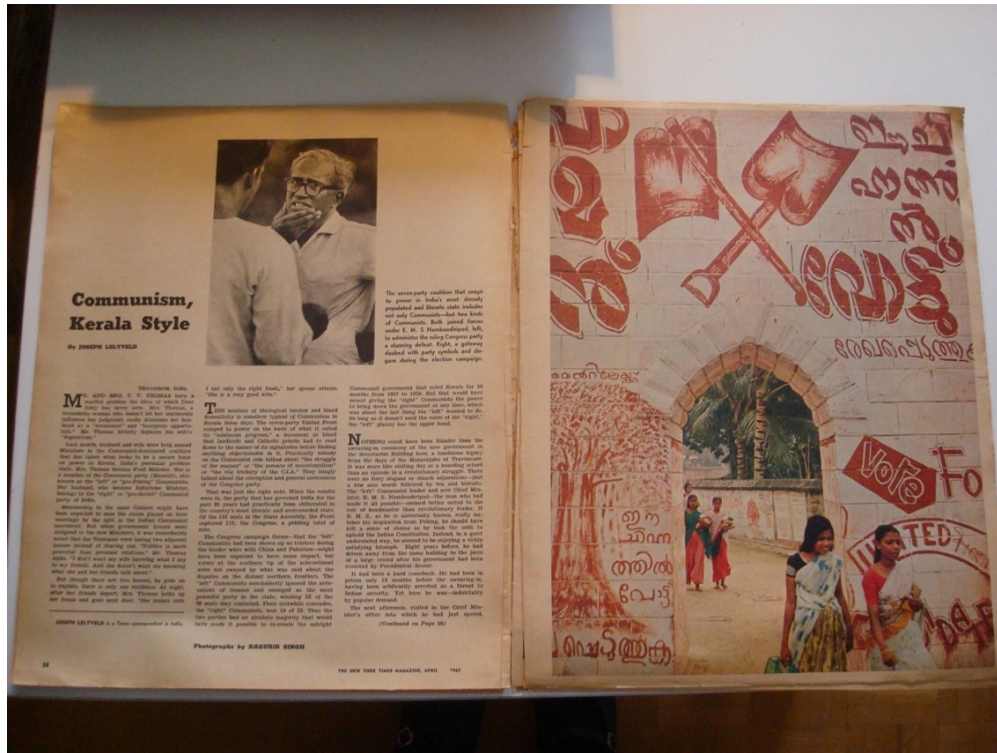


Fig. 5.1 *New York Times Magazine*, 'Communism, Kerala Style', story by Joseph Lelyveld, photographs Raghubir Singh, 1967



Fig. 5.2 Raghubir Singh, *Craftsman Ghulam Hussain Mir and his grandson, Srinagar, Kashmir, 1980*



Fig. 5.3 *The Dying of Inayat Khan,*



Fig. 5.4 Installation shot of the exhibition Raghbir Singh and William Gedney: A Project by Shanay Jhaveri on Invitation by Matti Braun at Esther Schipper Gallery, 2013



Fig. 5.5 Raghubir Singh with Lee and Maria Friedlander in New York, photograph by Ram Rahman



Fig. 5.6 Raghubir Singh in Paris at a Café, 1978, photograph by William Gedney,



Fig. 5.7 Raghubir Singh in Paris with his wife Anne de Henning, 1978 photograph by William Gedney,



Fig. 5.8 Raghubir Singh with Vicky Goldberg and Shashi Tharoor at Ram Rahman's loft in New York, 1990, photograph by Ram Rahman

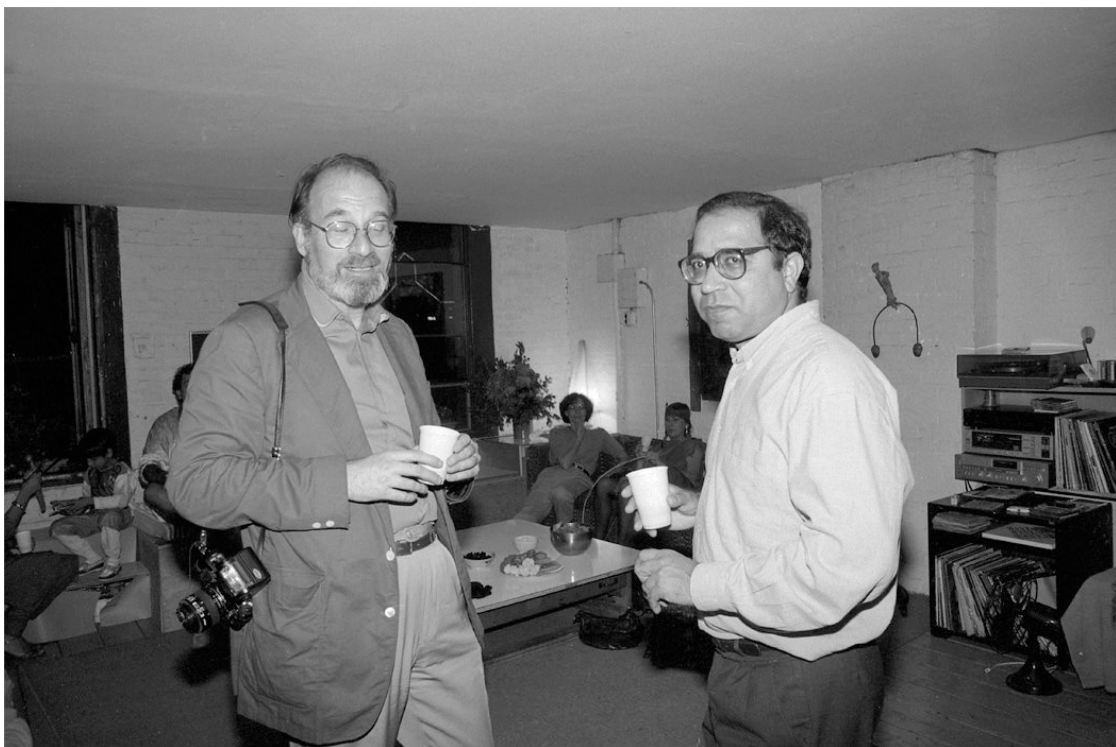


Fig. 5.9 Raghubir Singh and Max Kozloff on Halloween at Ram Rahman's loft in New York, 1990, photograph by Ram Rahman



Fig. 5.10 Raghubir Singh, *Below the Howrah Bridge, a Marwari bride and groom after rites by the Ganges, 1968*



Fig. 5.11 Raghbir Singh, *Employees, Morvi Palace, Gujarat, 1982*



Fig. 5.12 Raghubir Singh, *Pilgrim and Ambassador Car, Kumbh Mela, Prayag, Uttar Pradesh, 1977*

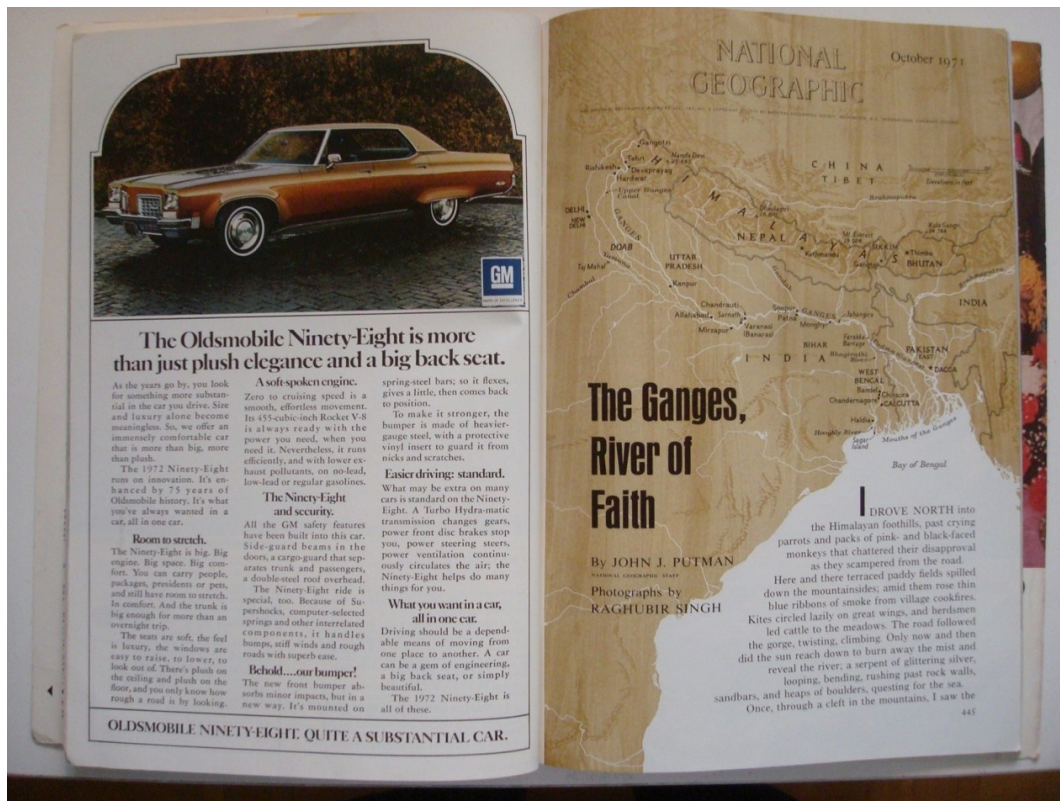


Fig. 5.13 *National Geographic*, "The Ganges: River of Faith", photographs by Raghbir Singh, October 1971

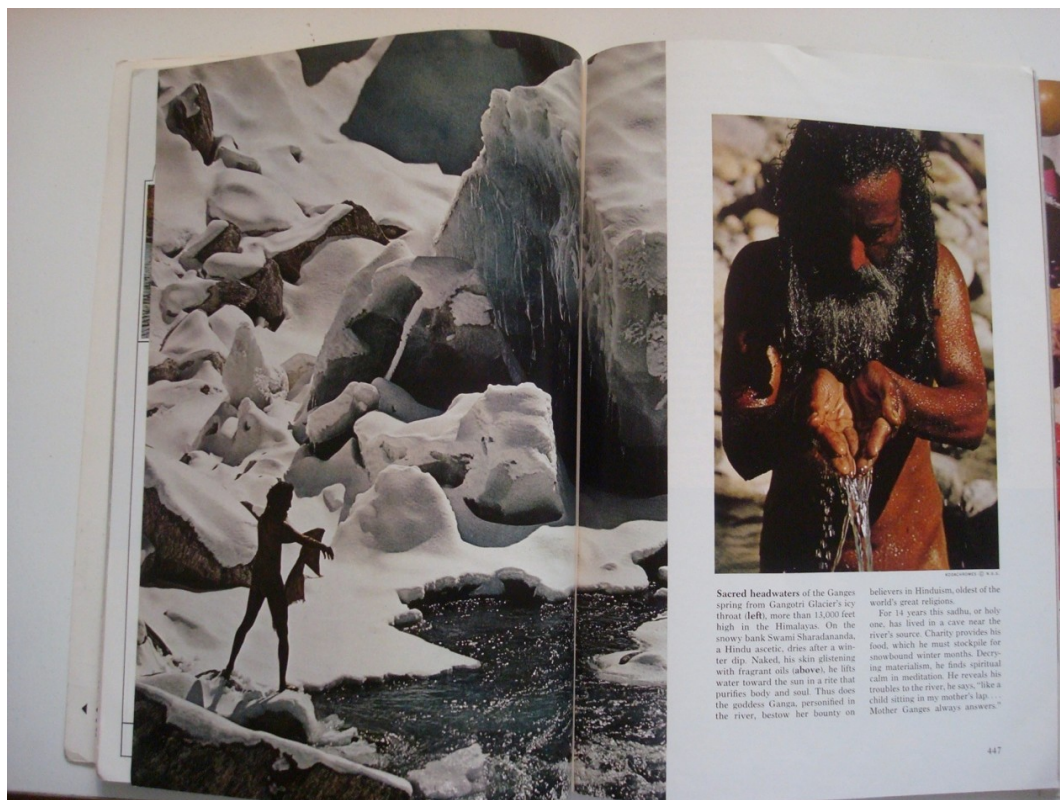


Fig. 5.14 *National Geographic*, "The Ganges: River of Faith", photographs by Raghbir Singh, October 1971

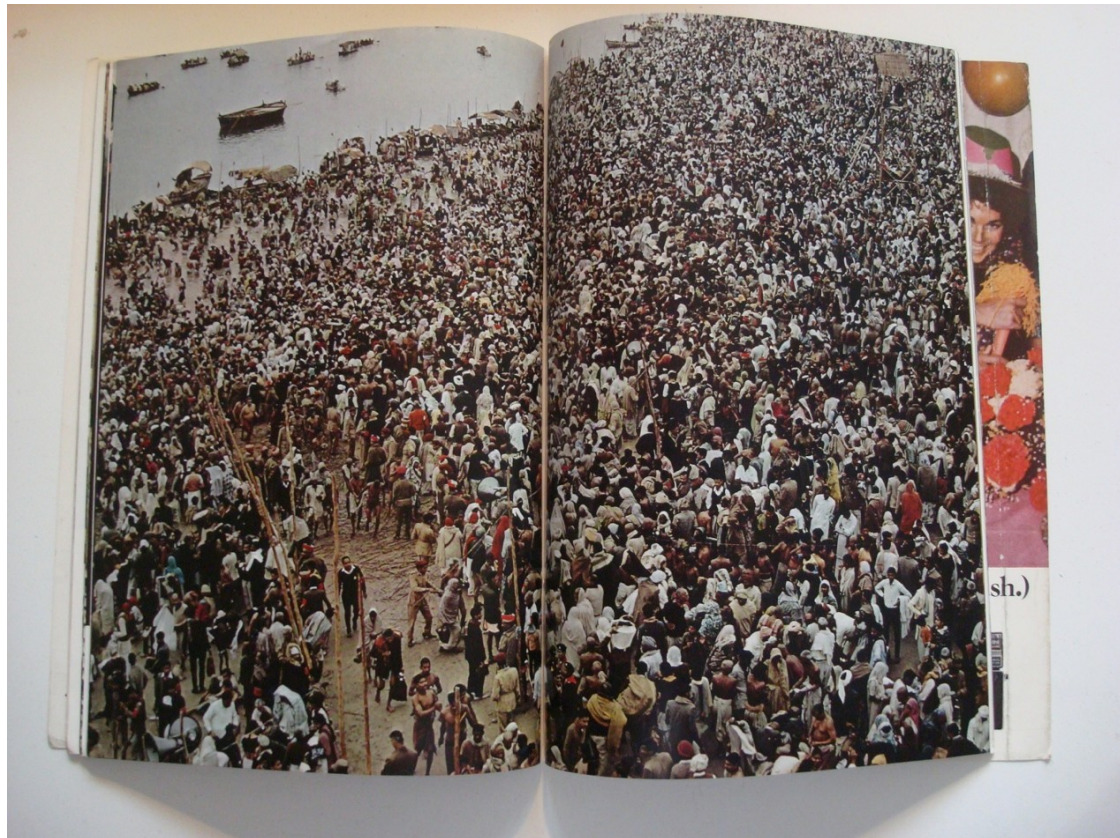


Fig 5.15 *National Geographic*, 'The Ganges: River of Faith', photographs by Raghbir Singh, October 1971

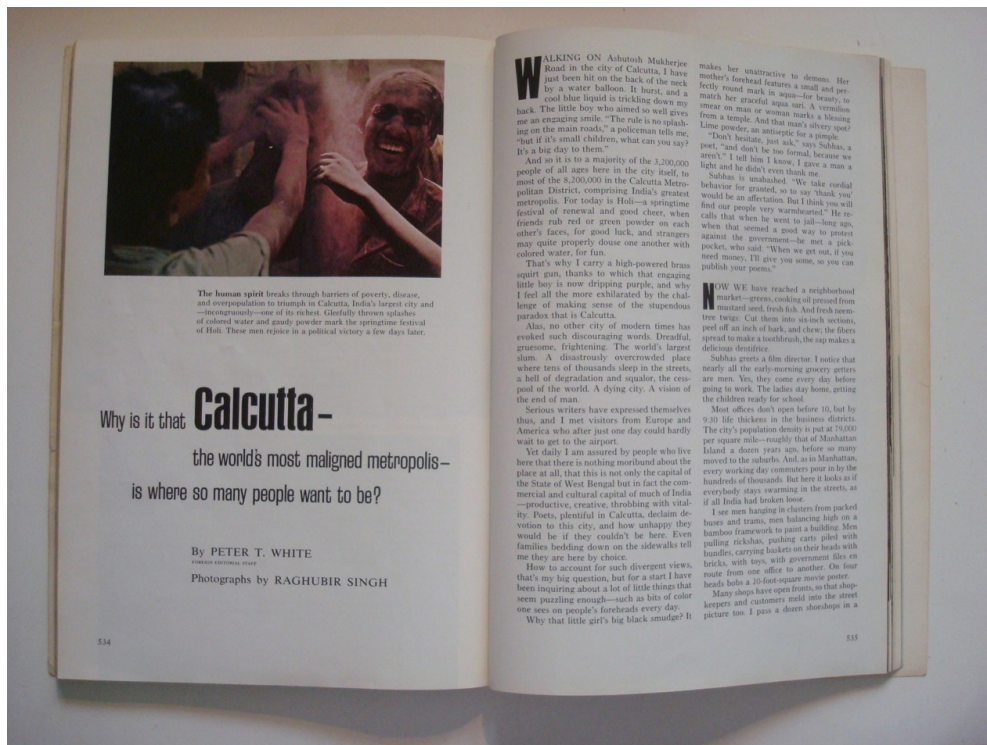


Fig. 5.16 *National Geographic*, 'Calcutta: India's Maligned Metropolis', photographs by Raghubir Singh, April 1973

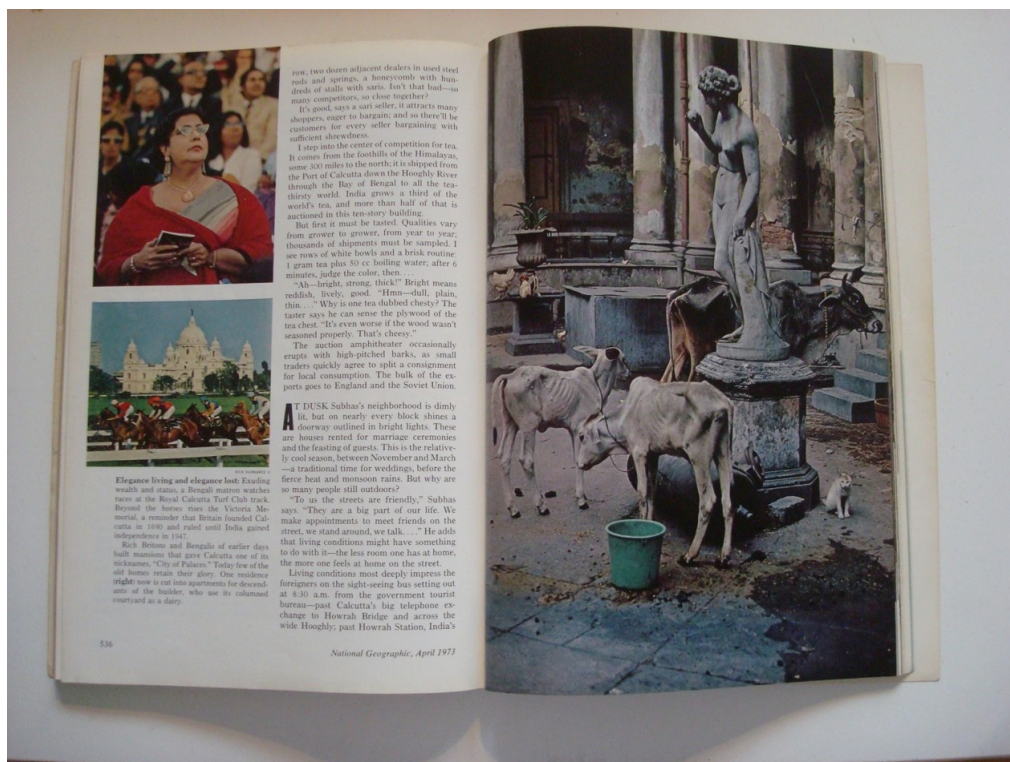


Fig. 5.17 *National Geographic*, 'Calcutta: India's Maligned Metropolis', photographs by Raghubir Singh, April 1973

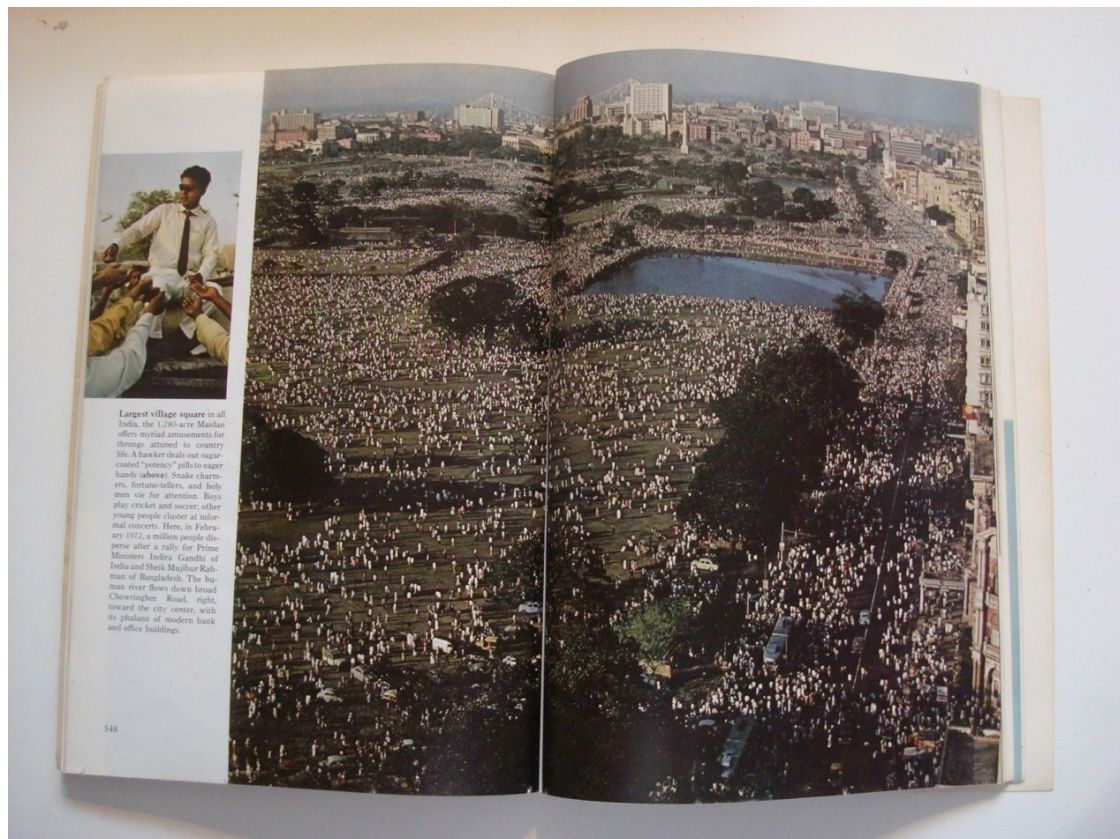


Fig. 5.18 *National Geographic*, 'Calcutta: India's Maligned Metropolis', photographs by Raghubir Singh, April 1973



Fig. 5.19 Raghbir Singh, *Ganges from Malaviya bridge, Benaras, Uttar Pradesh, 1987*

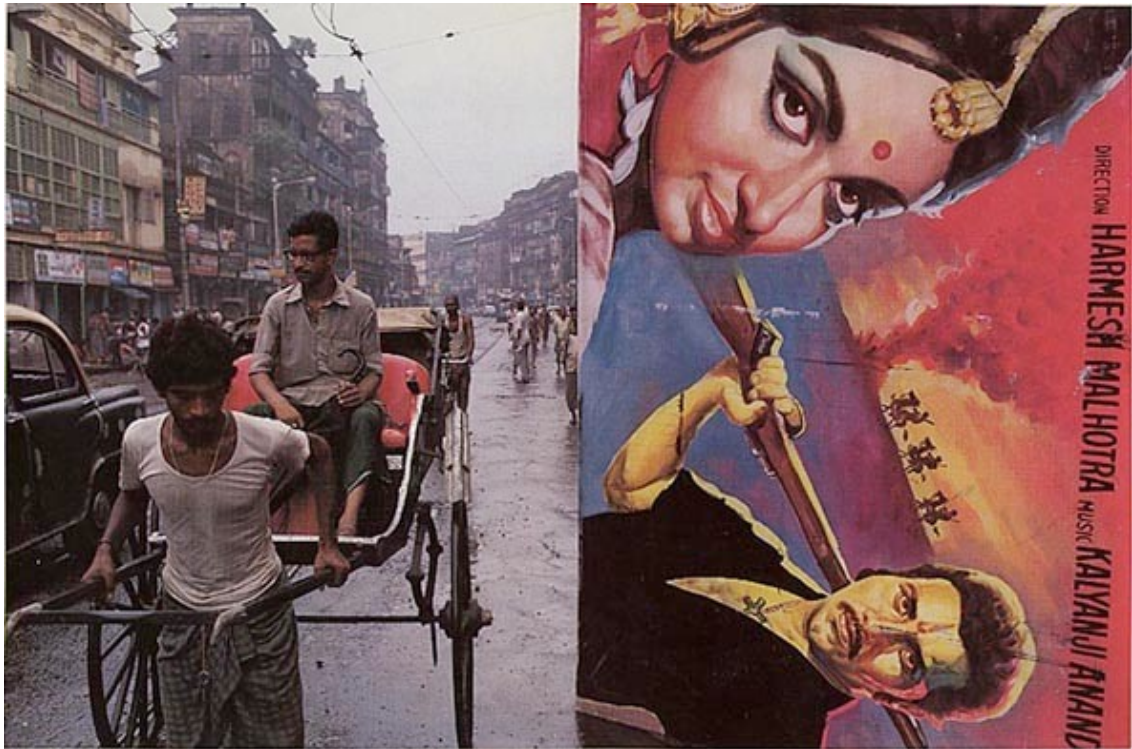


Fig. 5.20 Raghbir Singh, *A rickshaw puller and his passenger pass a Bombay film poster about to be put up*



Fig. 5.21 Raghubir Singh, Raj Bhavan, residence of the Governors of West Bengal, formerly of the Governors-General and Viceroys. Built for Marquess of Wellesley in 1803



Fig. 5.22 Raghubir Singh, *Movie hoardings and the Subhas Chandra Bose statue at Shyambazaar*



Fig. 5.23 Raghubir Singh, *A stalled bus at Five-Point-Crossing, below the statue of Subhas Chandra Bose, the Bengali hero*

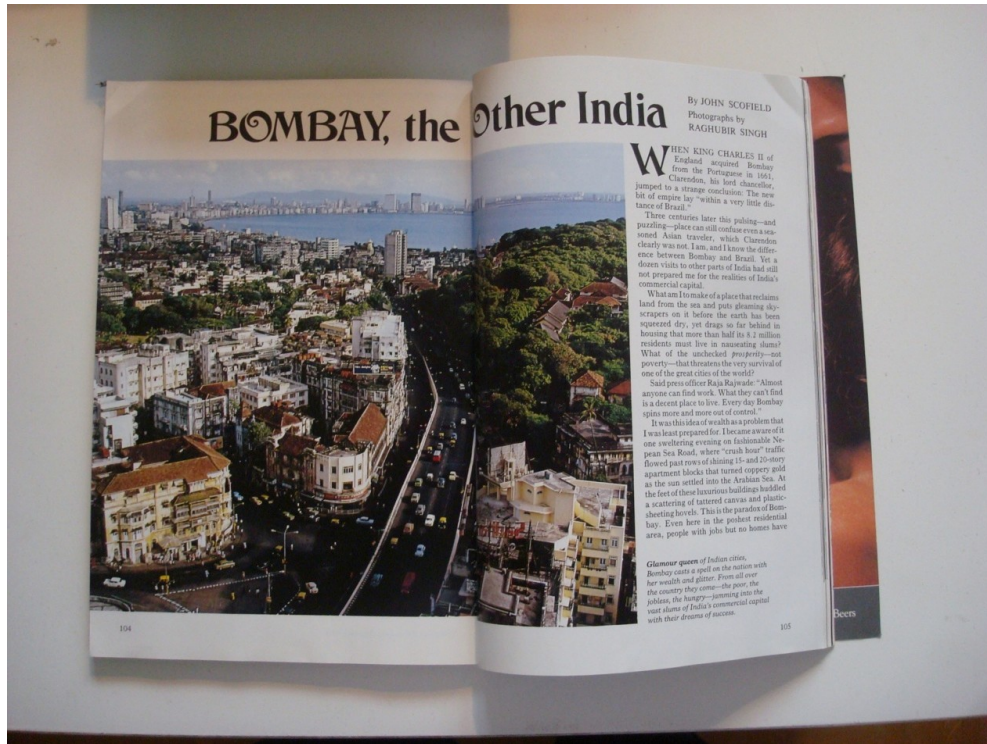


Fig. 5.24 *National Geographic*, 'Bombay: The Other India', photographs by Raghubir Singh, July 1981

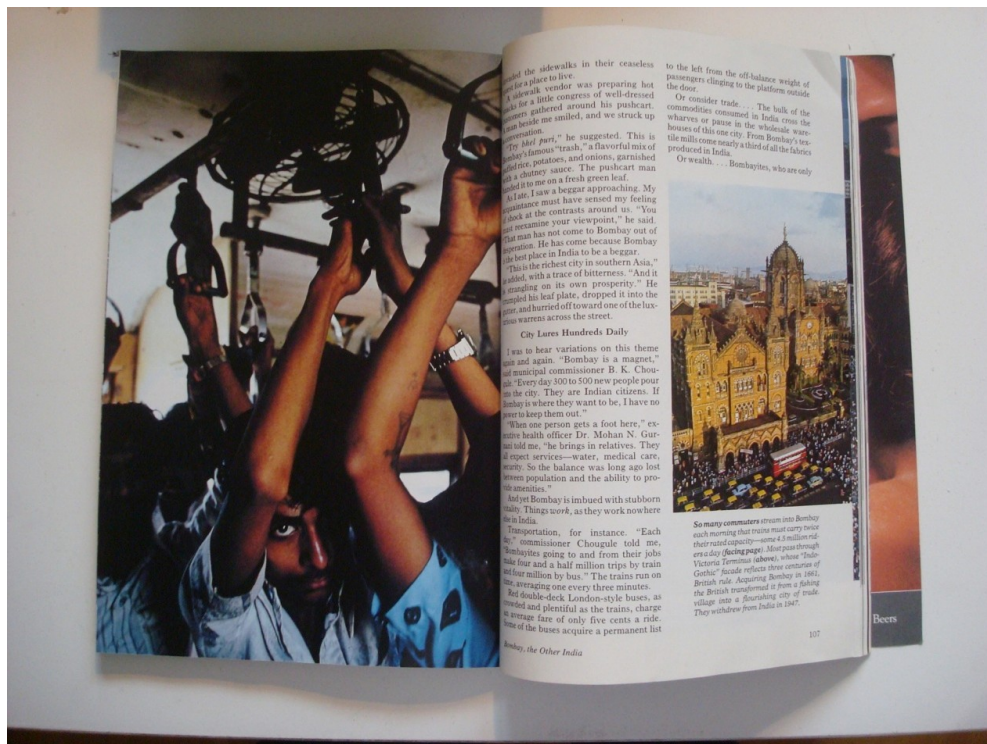


Fig. 5.25 *National Geographic*, 'Bombay: The Other India', photographs by Raghubir Singh, July 1981



Fig. 5.26 A spread from *National Geographic*, 'Bombay: The Other India', photographs by Raghubir Singh, July 1981



Fig. 5.27 Raghubir Singh, *Birthday party, Malabar Hill, Mumbai, Maharashtra, 1990*



Fig. 5.28 Raghubir Singh, *Kemp's Corner from a leather goods shop*



Fig. 5.29 Raghubir Singh, *In a bakery, Warden Road, Mumbai, Maharashtra, 1990*



Fig. 5.30 Raghubir Singh, *Zaveri Bazaar and jeweller's showroom*



Fig. 5.31 Raghbir Singh, *Pavement mirror shop, Howrah, West Bengal, 1991*



Fig. 5.32 Raghbir Singh, *Siva as rider of the bull*, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, 1993



Fig. 5.33 Raghubir Singh, *Agra, Uttar Pradesh, 1999*

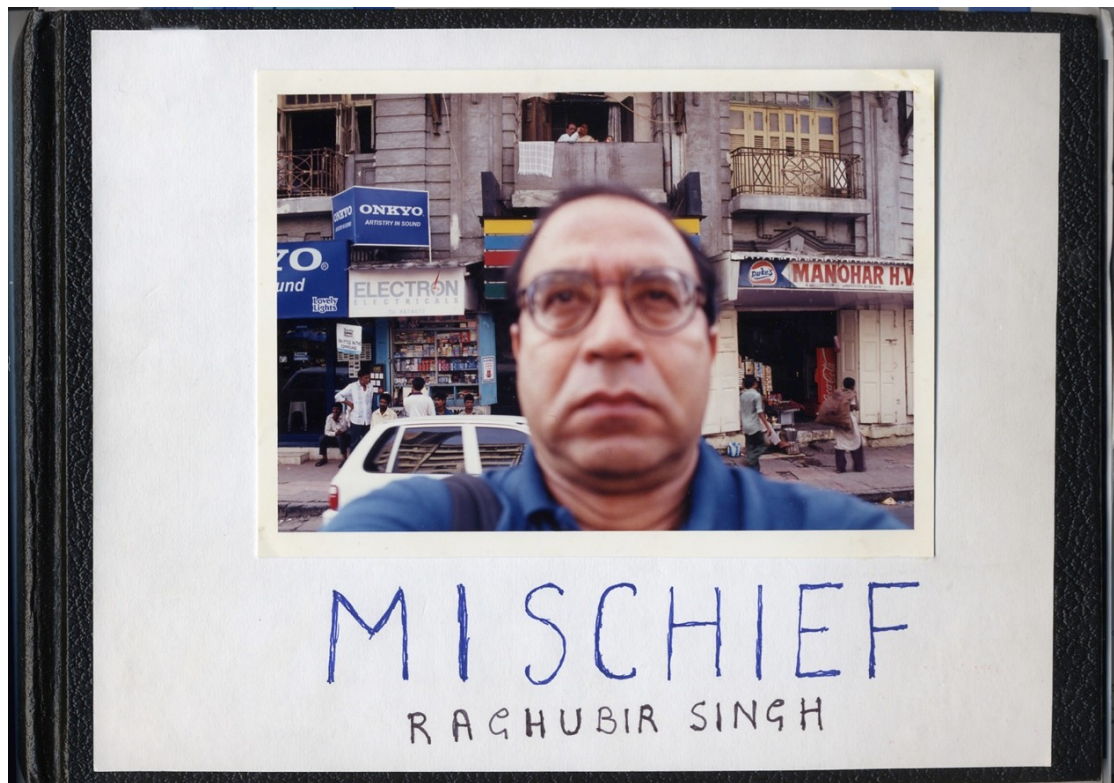


Fig. 5.34 Cover of the dummy for *Mischief*, unpublished



Fig. 5.35 Page from the dummy of *Mischief*, unpublished



Fig. 5.36 Page from the dummy of *Mischief*, unpublished



Fig. 5.37 Page from the dummy of *Mischief*, unpublished



Fig. 5.38 Page from the dummy of *Mischief*, unpublished



Fig. 5.38 Page from the dummy of *Mischief*, unpublished

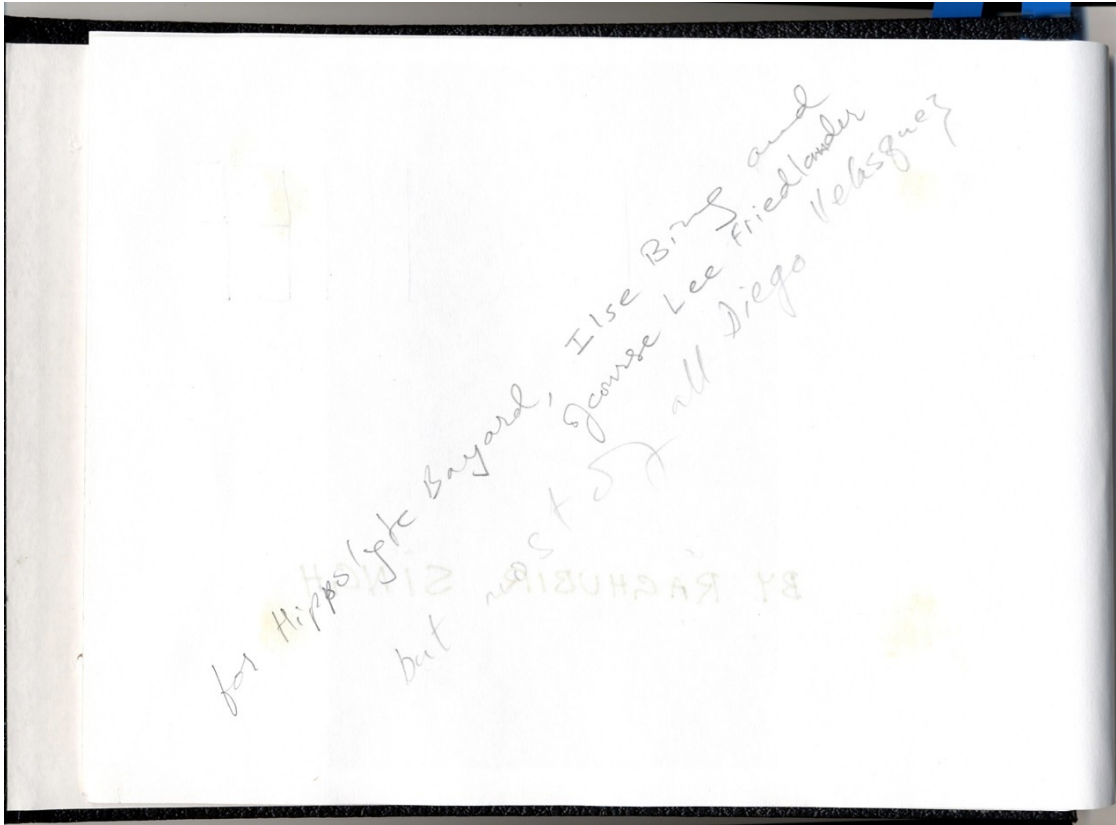


Fig. 5.40 Dedication page in Raghubir Singh's own writing from the dummy of *Mischief*, unpublished



In my Jaipur home, I wear a 'blue'
tea shirt and the maid washes in a
blue plastic pan. And yet, so many traditions have
crumbled. The veiled women of my childhood are gone.

Fig. 5.41 Page from the dummy of *Mischief*, unpublished

The green of the hills and the trees and the blue of the sky and the rivers are essential to our lives. But in my Jaipur home we never used the word: green. Green was always blue. Because my grandfather, a grand patriarch, was named Hari Singh or Green Singh. Hari stands for Krishna, the god of the green pastures. His skin is blue, therefore to honour not only my grandfather, but our very tradition we used blue instead of green. Therefore we asked for and cooked and eat ~~green~~^{blue} vegetables. When I go back home for visits, I slip back to the tradition of calling green blue, even though my grandfather died in 1942, six months after I was born. When I am dead and gone, my daughter will not ~~longer~~ be a part of the above tradition because she was born and lives in Paris. I have seen the hills and the trees and the rivers of many lands, but the house where I was born truly shaped my life.

Fig. 6.1 Page from the dummy of *Mischief*, unpublished



Fig. 6.2 Page from the dummy of *Mischief*, unpublished

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