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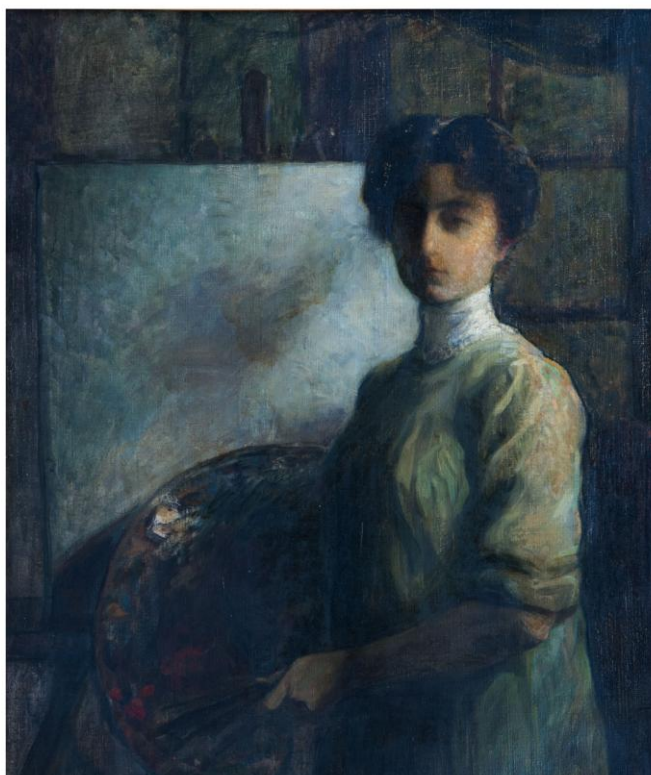
UDAYA NARAYANA SINGH
RABINDRA BHAVANA, VISVA-BHARATI

In a well-known Cambridge University Press book titled *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, edited by Krishna Dutta & Andrew Robinson (1997: 448), we come across a gross under-statement about Andrée Karpelès Hogman (1885-1956), which is as follows:

“During his long life, Tagore received devotion of many women, both Bengalis and foreigners. A few of them, such as Ranu Mookerjee and Victoria Ocampo were remarkable in their own right, but most were not; and the more devoted they were to Rabindranath, the less remarkable they were as individuals. One of the latter was Andrée Karpelès, a minor artist, French Jewish, who spent some time at Shantiniketan in the early 1920s and then returned to France and marriage to a Swede whom she had met in Shantiniketan. In 1930, these two acted as hosts to Tagore in Paris, while Ocampo organized the exhibition of his paintings. Karpelès remained in touch with Rabindranath in his last decade, and particularly with his son and daughter-in-law”.

In order to establish who this attractive painter (Andrée Karpelès) was, we may first look at her self-portrait gifted to Rabindra Bhavana Archive:

Insert Pic 1 ‘Self-portrait’



Then they go on to reproduce a 14th May 1935-letter of Tagore to Andrée Karpelès from Rabindra Bhavana Archive where “Tagore’s lifelong need for undemanding love from Women” is supposed to have been demonstrated. In the letter, Tagore says: “...though I have very Great love for your big Scandinavian I cannot forgive him for snatching you away from our neighbourhood. As my age advances, the longing in me grows in intensity for the near touch of those individuals whose love I can absolutely rely upon. The time has been long enough in my case for the process of elimination to have reached its finality and the few friends who remain as the best gifts of life become immensely precious.” This opening description actually establishes that Andrée Karpelès had a special relationship to the space called *Santiniketan*, and various individuals of the formative era of Visva-Bharati. That she was a part of making this historically important instrument of change in the cultural landscape of Bengal, namely Visva-Bharati a *viśva-nīḍam* ‘the world-nest’ was no doubt true because it was at that time in early 1920s that the world took so much interest in this new experiment of Rabindranath. In comparison, Dutta and Robinson (1997) write in their footnote the following:

Andrée Karpelès (1885-1956); Artist; Some of her paintings hang at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan. Her family lived in Calcutta in her twenties, where she knew the Tagore family, and then returned to France. She met RT in Paris in 1920 and came to Shantiniketan in early 1920s. Her sister, Suzanne Karpelès, was a student of Sanskrit, a pupil of Sylvain Lévi, and ... was less devoted to RT than her Andrée.

A few examples of Andrée Karpelès paintings gifted by her adopted daughter Flora Hogman to Ksitish Ray, the then Director of Rabindra Bhavana, could be exemplified here. In the Andrée Karpelès treasure brought by me from New York in 2011 (now in Rabindra Bhavana archive as important additions), we find Ksitish Ray writing to Flora the following¹:

“Dear Flora,

I should have written to you long ago – had it not been for the fact that the paintings arrived only lately. Our people here were not prompt enough to effect clearance, I now discover. I am glad to tell you, however, that all the seven pieces arrived safely. And they are so vivid, so fresh – they look as if they were done only yesterday.

I have now placed four of your mother’s ols in what used to be the music parlour of Gurudeva’s house. They are portraits of Dinendranath, Rabindranath (this we had with us before), Rabindranath promenading in the grounds of Santiniketan, and your mother’s self-portrait. How I wish you could see them for yourself. Only one of the pictures – the last named – will probably require the restorer’s attention. The rest are in a splendid state of preservation. You may rest assured we shall take every possible care of the collection.

Following your suggestion I have already written to our embassy in France to exert in our favour and obtain such of your mother’s paintings as are with them and as are of our interest. It was wonderful of Mr Elmhirst to have taken so much trouble in assuring that your mother’s work, symbolizing her great love for Gurudeva and for all that this institution stands for, should find their resting space in this repository.

I can quite understand that it may not be possible in the near future for you to send the books which, as you say, are safely tucked in the attic in France. I can certainly wait for them as also for any papers and documents that you may have on Tagore and Santiniketan. It was very nice of you to have sent the photographs. The Upacharya has made them over to us.

¹ Unpublished letter, dated April 9/10, 1961

As to the letters of Abanindranath, I shall be very grateful if you could send them to me on the distinct understanding that the ones you do not like to be made public, would be kept in the sealed cover for the present.

I consider it a pleasure and privilege that you allow me to call you by your first name. I shall be glad if you reciprocate and call me by my first name, which is Ksitish.

Suzanne Karpeles is in regular correspondence with me ever since her return to Pondicherry. I am also in touch with the Bibliotheque Nationale and Musee Guimet – both the organizations appear keen to celebrate the occasion of Gurudeva's centenary.

I shared your letter with Pratima Devi who sends you her love and greetings.

Cordially yours,

(Ksitish Roy)"

It would not be out of place to see the paintings referred to in this letter, beginning with Dinendranath Tagore (1882-1935) for having made it possible for the musician in Tagore emerge on the art scene:

Insert Pic 2 Dinendranath Sitting on a couch as his pet deer peeps in



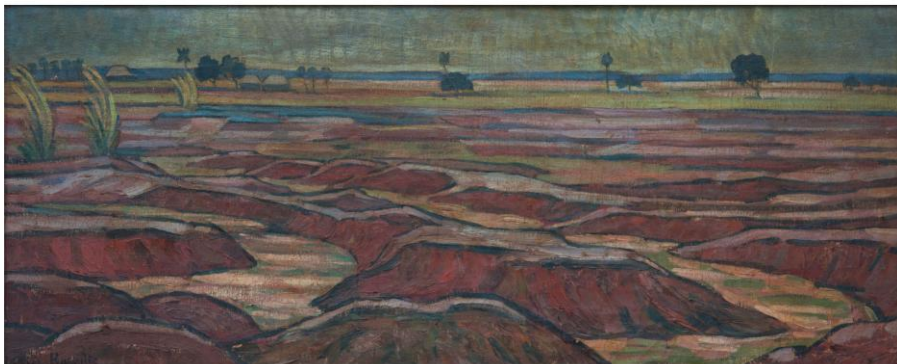
In fact, the daily *Ananda Bazar Patrika* specially covered the event of Andrée leaving Santiniketan with the following words:

“Kumari Andree Karpeles was a painter of France. The son-in-law of Rabindranth Pratima Devi established an "Art Institution" with her help for the welfare of women in Bengal. The maiden Karpeles visited from village to village and became pleased to see the necessity of forming art institution in villages of Bengal. She was trying to revive the wooden and earthen handicraft of Bengal in modern lines along with Nandalal Basu and Pratima Devi. Paintings and needle works on clothes was an old art of Bengal. She also wanted to develop that art. She is going to his [sic.] land before and will again come back to Santiniketan before the winter sets in. It was not possible for Andree to come to Santiniketan again.”²

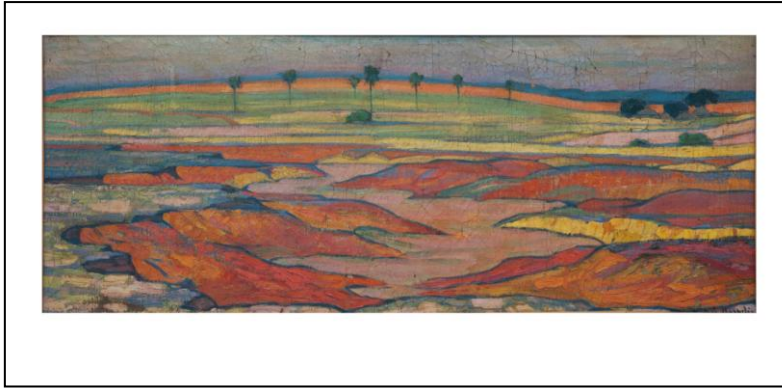
This rather shows that Andrée was a part of the inner circle of Santiniketan. What we plan to show with new sets of letters from the Flora Hogman Archive now brought by me from New York in 2011 that almost all major players of those days had a tremendous faith on Andrée – so much so that they could open their mind before her in the form of letters. We also know now that the Dartington Archive has a very important exchange between Elmhirst and Karpelès. Far from being a minor player in Santiniketan of 1920s, we are told by Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis in her book - *Kabir sange Europe* (literally, ‘*To Europe With the Poet*’) that just before Andrée Karpelès was leaving, she was given a memorable farewell as Tagore composed the famous song, *Bharā thāk smṛti sudhāy bidāyer pātrakhāni* “Let the parting bowl be filled with sweet memories” (published in *Prabasi*, Jyaistha issue). This description fits in my line of thinking, namely, that Andrée Karpelès played a major role in shaping up of the institution, especially the Art School here.

In my visit to Flora Hogman’s house in New York, I have seen some of the most astounding landscapes of Santiniketan of the initial years. Since we have been on regular discussion from that time onwards, we would perhaps be able to capture those images for our readers at a future date. But even in the gifts that already arrived here, we have two very vivid description of what was turned from a barren space into a lush green garden populated with trees and shrubs.

Insert Pic 3



² <http://sesquicentennial.blogspot.in/2012/07/good-bye-to-andre-karpeles-1885-1956.html>



Insert Pic 4

That Andrée Karpelès had numerous exchanges with Leonard Elmhirst, Tagore's find to initiate the Sriniketan experience is also evident in this web-information under the Dartington Hall site³ which says: "Extensive correspondence between Leonard Elmhirst and Andree Karpeles-Hogman, a Jewish painter and illustrator, living in India and France. Letters contain information about people associated with Visva-Bharati at Santiniketan. Includes one signed woodcut by Andree Karpeles presented at Christmas, 1937. Letters cease Jun 1940 and recommence Nov 1944. Other correspondents include Madame Romaine Roland and Gretchen Greene. Greene's letters include typed copies of two letters sent to Karpeles about 1924 discussing Santiniketan affairs". In fact, I found a similar example of gift of her works to the Hall as well as can be seen in the following acknowledgement:

Dartington Hall,
Totnes, Devon
Tel: Totnes 2311

August 6, 1960

Dear Flora,

May I thank you very much indeed, both on behalf of the people in India who will be welcoming the pictures and photographs, but especially on behalf of myself, and for all your trouble over my visit.

I hope everything has gone all right for you. My visit brought back many happy memories of Andrée and Dal, but especially gave me a feeling of your own capacity to cope up with life and its problems⁴.

³ <http://www.dartington.org/archive/display/LKE/G/21/F>

⁴ In fact, Flora was herself adopted by the artist as she resembled Rabindranath's adopted daughter, Nandini. The well-known Muse de Grasse (It was in Grasse that Andrée died in 1956 and Carl in 1958 and were buried there) to which the large portions of Andrée Karpelès archive was gifted was kind enough to have sent me excerpts from the 2007-Booklet titled *Rabindranath Tagore* which opened with the following statement that captures the details of this adoption: "People are not only ones who can lead adventurous lives. Sometimes objects do, too. This small book contains the thoughts and Poems of

I appreciate especially your tender care of myself. I shall not forget now the difference between new and old francs!

If you have time, do send me something of your own impression of Greece and Athens,

Yours affectionately,

Leonard K. Elmhirst.

Miss Flora Hogman
c/o S.A.S.
3, Avenue Gustava V.,
NICE, France.

The Dartington Hall Archive has also preserved Letters exchanged between Abanindranath Tagore and Andrée Karpelès (1909-1940) under [LKE/G/16/E/1](#) which again negates the chance meeting theory of Andrée Karpelès and the Santiniketan masters.

In fact by 1921, we even have an important 88-page book-length translation of Abanindranath by Karpelès published by Bossard from Paris titled *L'Alpona : ou, les decorations rituelles au Bengale /*

Rabindranath Tagore and members of his family. Among these are a hand-written poem by Tagore, who gave the book to Andrée Karpelès in 1923. Andrée Karpelès was an artist from France who spent Andrée Karpelès some years living in Santiniketan, where Tagore ran a school. It was there that both painted and translated Tagore's poems into French. After the close of World War II, Karpelès and her husband adopted a girl who had lost her father while fleeing from the Nazis and her mother in a concentration camp. The book later became the property of this adoptive daughter, Flora Hogman, who eventually settled in New York. When one of the Nobel Museum's staff, Margarit Wettstein, came into contact with Flora Hogman during the course of her research, Hogman offered to donate the book to the Nobel Museum. This booklet was given to the Museum in 2007." The other highlight of my friendship with Flora was her gift of the original sketch of Nandini to Rabindra Bhavana Archive created by Andrée Karpelès, who had told her adoptive daughter that another reason for her adoption was that she resembled Tagore's daughter Nandini. Here's the reproduction of the sketch:

Pic 5



traduction d'Andree Karpeles et de Tapanmohan Chatterji. Tapanmohan and Andrée Karpelès were also in constant exchanges. In the book, the illustration of Bengal's tradition of Alpana ('Aripan' in Madhubani tradition) was done by her. The same publisher published her extensive illustrations also in 1923 in the 165-page book on the Buddhist tradition which was actually a translation from Pali by Louis Finot titled *Les questions de Milinda – Milindapanha*. It was described by them as “*Les questions de Milinda - Milindapanha, traduit du pali avec introduction et notes par Louis Finot. Bois dessinés et gravés par Andrée Karpelès* [Les Classiques de l'Orient, publiés sous le patronage de l'Association française des Amis de l'Orient]”.

In 1925, Marquerite Ferte's book *Ghazels* was also illustrated by her on uncut card pages, brought out by Editions Bossard. With Amiya Chakravarty, Andrée also tried her hands in translation of Abanindranath's classic re-telling of tales for children titled *Kṣīrer putul* (English translation named 'The Condensed Milk-Doll') based on a never-published book of traditional tales by Mrinalini Devi (cf. Dasgupta, Riddhi 1992: 22-23⁵). In fact, it was perhaps she who had gifted the straw doll of Nils on a goose – the typical Swedish Christmas doll⁶ which - inspired by the Nobel Laureate Selma Lagerlöf story – resulted in creation of *Buro Angla* by Aban Tagore, an inimitable text (published first in Mouchak serially in 1920-21, and later in book-form by in 1941 from the publishers, M.C.Sarkar and Sons. Interestingly, even if it was an inspired retelling of a well-known traditional Swedish folktale in the Bengali setting, *Buro Angla* when translated (or, call it back-translated) and published in the French world thanks to Andre Karpeles and Amiya Chakravarty (also translated from French into Swedish as *Ostdockan* by Ella Myrin Hilborn), both editions had Selma Lagerlöf writing the introductions. Even though, the Swedish Libraries mistakenly identify Rabindranath Tagore as the author, through this transmigration of the tales story beautifully recollected by Chhanda Chakravarty establishes the role of Andrée Karpelès and her Swedish husband in the lives of those whom she left behind in Santiniketan. In fact, she wrote a few essays on his senior colleague Abanindranath also, which had later been translated into English⁷.

While describing the Tagore experiment with setting up of Kala Bhavana in 1919, much before the university is established, we find the following information: “Rabindranath, Gurudev of Santiniketan Ashrama founded Kala-Bhavana around 1919. The university of Visva-Bharati was established a couple of years after this. Rabindranath gave the study of art the highest priority at this International University. The Poet's Art school differed from the prevalent art schools of India since its inception...Rabindranath gave the charge of this Art-school to Nandalal Bose from Kolkata, one of the best students of Abanindranath Tagore, which is why Kala-Bhavana developed with an added dimension. From its early years, Rabindranath brought as teacher to Kala-Bhavana Andree Karpeles of Paris and Stella Kramische, the renowned art-historian of Vienna. A little later Margaret Millward joined to teach sculpture. From the very beginning, the art atmosphere was pervaded by ideas from the East and the West. Kala-Bhavana was enriched by the ideas of India and from the West, and on the other hand by the tradition and forms of the East. No other art institute in India had this kind of exposure to the different arts of the world”⁸. Nirmalendu Das (2012), in his *Art-Etc*-essay 'A Brief History of Print-making in Santiniketan' recalls the following:

When in 1921 Nandalal Bose took charge of Kala Bhavana, the newly established art college, the creative ambience received a new energy and an unprecedented chapter was added to the

⁵ Dasgupta, Riddhi. 1992. *Abanindra Sahitye Pracya o Pascatya upadanar vyavahar*. Calcutta: Dey Book Store. Also see Sircar, Sanjay (1998) 'Shashthi's Land: Folk Nursery Rhyme in Abanindranath Tagore's "The Condensed-Milk Doll"' *Asian Folklore Studies*, 57.1:25-49 (Nanzan Instt for Religion and Culture).

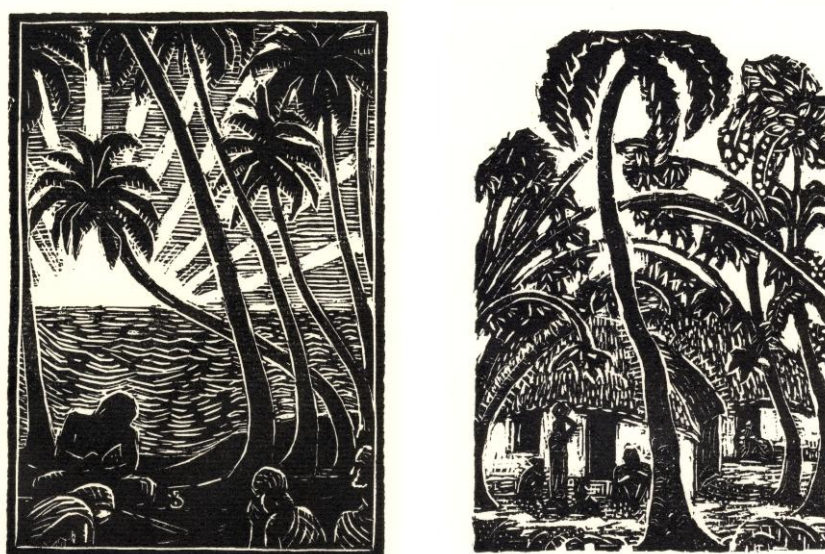
⁶ Chakraborti, Chhanda (2007) 'Buro Angla and Nils: A tale of transmigration of stories' (Cf. <http://www.parabaas.com/translation/database/translations/essays/pChhanda.html>)

⁷ Karpelès, Andrée (1942) (Tr. by Aronson, A). 'An Introduction to Abanindranath Tagore's Sadanga'. *Visva-Bharati Quarterly, Abanindra Number*, 8.1-2, May – October Nos:43-46, and Karpelès-Hogman, Andrée (1952). 'Abanindranath Tagore'. *Modern Review*, 91(4), April No, 328-30.

⁸ http://www.indiaart.com/exhibitions/The_Art_of_Santiniketan_The_legend_and_Contemporary_Artists%27s_painting_exhibition/Writeup%20-%20The_art_of_santiniketan.html

history of Indian art. Graphic art was introduced in the teaching program of Kala Bhavana right from the beginning. During 1921-22 French artist Madame Andre Karpeles visited Santiniketan. She was an expert in wood engraving and demonstrated the art at Kala Bhavana. Thus artists of Kala Bhavana became familiar with the **technique** of engraving, and for the first time engraving was practiced there. Andre Karpeles left Santiniketan after six months. It was during her visit that Ramendranath Chakravarty learned the technique of engraving...

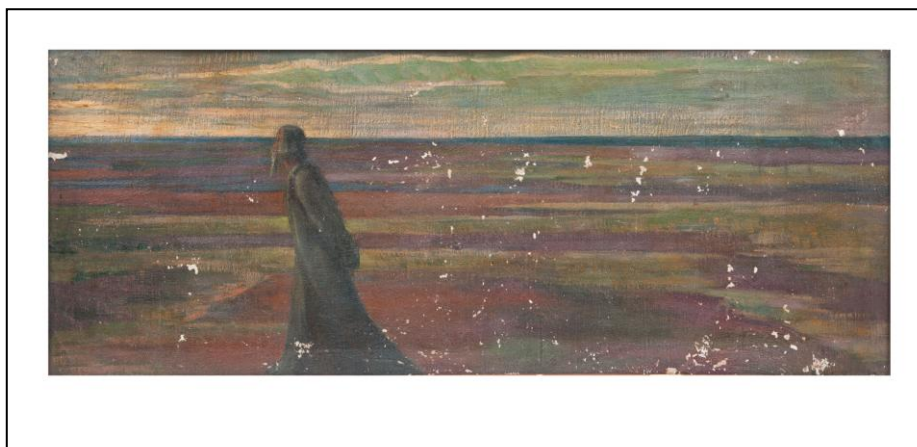
That again tells us of the involvement of Andrée Karpelès with the beginning of art education in Santiniketan. In fact, the place where and Carl settled after marriage – Dalkôta, in a large isolated farmhouse on the heights of Clavary, near Grasse had become a cultural hub. Many artists come to learn the technique of wood engraving. Two instances of the print from such engravings – once again showing the Santal villages from Santiniketan area could be reproduced here:



If we go back to the roots of the artist's family history, we find an Indian connection right from her father's days. Andrée (born 1885), Suzanne (born 1890) and Solange (who died young) were born to Sophie and Jules Karpelès, who was himself from Czechoslovakia but who lived in Paris. Jules Karpelès made his fortune by importing indigo from India to Europe⁹. The family is vacationed in India every year, and as a painting student, Andrée became attracted to this culture. There was this human side of both sisters as during the 1914-1918 World War I, Andrée mobilized for the benefit of soldiers while Suzanne who was to study Sanskrit later worked as a nurse. The privilege of listening to the family history from Flora in her New York home in 2011 also told me what intense love and affection existed between the two great artists, which is best exemplified through the following painting by Andrée showing Tagore promenading in the grounds of Santiniketan:

⁹ <http://www.ajpn.org/personne-Andree-Karpeles-7405.html>

Pic 8



The fact that Andrée was extremely popular among the topmost scholars connected with Bengal and Santiniketan can be seen in the excerpts from the unpublished letter of the doyen of Indian History to the artist complimenting her for the exquisite illustrations:

Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen, D.Litt (Hon.)
Rai Bahadur

Phone: SOUTH 1123
“Rupeshwar House”
Behala P.O.
Calcutta

26.4.39

“Dear Friend,

I have nearly finished reading the French recreation of the Ballads. They are beautiful in the French garb and my thanks are due to Mm. Rolland for her exquisite touches and short criticisms in the prologue. To you, dear friend, my gratitude is deep and sincere – your illustrations show a mastery over the Indian Style of Art and especially the decorative portions are perfect and faultless. When I saw some of them, I felt that they faithfully reproduced the Alipana paintings in the compound of Bengali homes.

This time is one of great unrest and political disturbance <2/6> and I cannot say that it is a fit time for appreciation of great virtues of renunciation, devotion and self-sacrifice as one of the prominent features of Indian literature. But the condition of a country oscillates like the pendulum of clock from one extreme to another and I am sure that after a great war, whatever the consequences may be, Europe will once more lack God’s grace and the blessings of peace. It will not take a long time for your country to be restored to a normal condition – 10 or 15 years at the most and then will come a time when the precious esoteric lessons, of truth, peace and the great virtues of human soul will be once more rightly appreciated.

<<3/6>???a text book in the Indian schools where French is taught. You may send a copy to Sj. Matilal Roy who is the head of a religious and doctrinal institution at Chandannagore. He has a large following of admirers and friends and works through support of . The book may have some sale – This leading journal is the Pravartak Patrika. They may write an elaborate review in the journal.

Besides these copies you may send me eight or ten copies, which I will present to scholars and friends from whom I would expect substantial help in pushing the fate of the book. In the mean time, after I have carefully read the book, I shall get a review written <4/6> by some competent critic...”

Equally important was her friendship with Rathindranath and Protima Debi. Here’s an excerpt from one of Protima Debi’s unpublished 1931-letter:

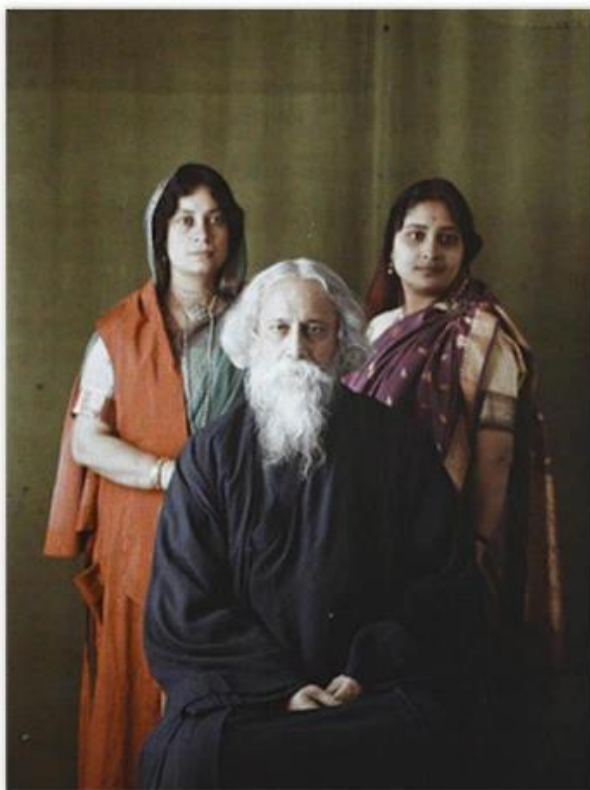
Dear Andree,

I send you and my brother Dal the best New Year's wishes and loving Greetings. Mother sends her affectionate blessings and the boys' their 'Namaskar'. I am better now [–] able to go about, Can walk on even ground, but up the Stairs is rather a trial, it makes me pant and I feel feeble. So I keep to the house and garden and go out for drives. I have bought a motor, nothing grand, just a new model Ford, very handy in every way and good enough for my requirements. The boys I have brought up are very good to[o] and [they] show their love, in loving action, and I am grateful. Mother too has to be looked after. She is getting on in years. It is a great blessing that she is in very good health. Otherwise, my troubles would have been doubled.

I have dreams too of going over to you, and hopes rise in me that they may not be futile, but can one feel sure of any thing? Specially when so many dreams and hopes have been laid low? But मा भैः, let us hope and march on.

This year we are having rather a [sic] severe winter, unusual for India. But flowers are not strangers in the garden, the Marygolds are blooming and annunciation Lilies have made their appearance. I walk about their immaculate white petals with the green heart cups make of the Virgin – Mother of God who bore all seasons and trails, with such rare courage – ever-green with a strange strength of youth, yet so weak and mild. Now I am not well and go out so very little and have given up what goes by the name of good work, I read a lot and write more too, where the mind wakes up to it. Don't you think rather feeble health adds to the strength of the mind and you can concentrate more on your art? Creation comes quicker, conception becomes a pleasure and the offsprings are neither feeble nor ungainly. When I went to the Hospital year before last, and last year, I thought it was the end of my mental life too, but it was just the contrary. It seemed to have a new growth and I wrote some of my best poems there. Some of them are rather [?]. So I have chosen best poems there and translated them and sent them to you with my love. If you care to translate them in French and publish them in some magazine you may do so. Have the baths in Pyrenees done you good? When are you sending me your photos ?

In fact, the family valued the photographs of the Tagores so much so that it has had a good collection. Let me reproduce one here showing Rabindranath with his daughter and daughter-in-law:



I would also like to include here a very important social commentary by Acharya J.C. Bose written in the form of a four-page letter to Andrée Karpelès reproduced here:

93 Upper Circular Road
Calcutta
2nd February

My dearest nieces

Just a few lines today to break my long silence. We are doing well and the Bose Institute is thriving but the political atmosphere in this country is at present hopeless. I do not understand ...moving a whole world. Utopia is very good as an ideal and there should be men like Gandhi to look up to and to aspire to, but to believe the whole world will be like Gandhi is to aspire to something impossible. Mass Civil Disobedience and such things may be possible only when the Governed and the Governor are of the same race and free. But when racial bitterness and hatred are rampant and there are two different races then repression assume a horrible aspect. To be shot by one's own nation is different from being shot by an alien Government. There is much unrest and bad feeling. The prince should not have been brought to India at this time when the people were so unhappy and starving. It was a great tactical blunder. Our mind is very gloomy now and work is going on amidst great uneasiness. My husband is still going on with his very interesting experiments. Sunyanies marble bust is very beautifully done. I will be very glad to have one done of my husband and hope to give the order directly if I have not lost the address you kindly sent. The girl's schools are quite full inspite of non cooperation. The movement inspite of its many drawbacks have done wonders for the country there is no doubt. There is a great deal of new life and spirit of sacrifice in the country but workers for sensational ... are many but workers for slow silent work are very few still.

I heard from somewhere that Sunyanne is going to Indo China. Then I hope she will come to India too. We are very eager to hear details of your With much love from ...

That Andrée had a special place in Rathindranath's scheme of things is also clear from one of his very important letters in the formative years of Visva-Bharati being converted into a Central university after independence, which could be reproduced below. The first page of this three-page letter is given here, and as we could see the first Vice-Chancellor of Visva-Bharati talks about the Jubilee celebrations (1901-51) here, mentions the steady inflow of international visitors to Santiniketan, passing away of the legendary Guru Abanindranath, the draft of the book that he was writing, and finally about the small experiment that Andrée and Protima Debi had started in promoting handicrafts in Santiniketan that had exploded into a very big establishment now. Let's read through this letter:

My dear Andree,

I have not been able to keep in touch with you and Dal for very long time. The consequent re-organisation following the recognition of Visva-Bharati as a University had kept me fully occupied. To convert a democratic and independence loving institution like Visva-Bharati into a University hidebound with ordinances and rules has been a difficult and unpleasant work. Although the framework of a constitution and the machinery for its working have been set up my worries are not ended by any means since difficulties and petty problems crop up every day. All this explains why I have not been able to write to you for so long. Fortunately since a few days I have been confined to my bed by a lumbago. This has given me the leisure I needed to write letters.

Our visitors are many and they come from every quarter of the world. Recently we received a group from China which particularly interested us. The new government in China sent a group of distinguished persons to this country on a goodwill mission. Of these about a dozen artists, writers and others who were mainly interested in promoting cultural contact with the two countries came here. We gave them a cordial reception. I am sure they returned with the feeling that a bond of fellowship between India had been renewed and strengthened by their visits to Santiniketan. This week we celebrated the Jubilee of the Institution. It was in December 1901 that father started the Santiniketan school with five students containing myself. It so happens that after 50 years from that date the University in inaugurated. So we celebrated both the events on the 24th December. Dr. Radhakrishnan delivered the Convocation address. Besides him there were two other important guests – the Governor of Bengal and the Governor of the Central Provinces. Protima had a hectic time to provide hospitality to all these guests. The Governors came with large retinues of officials so our resources were severely taxed. We had expected Elmhirst but he writes that he is again down with a lumbago. But he may be coming later on.

Dear Andree, I have now to give you a sad news, just as sad to you as it has been to us. Our beloved cousin and your Guru Abanindra passed away a few days ago on the 5th December. He was 81, he had reached the same age as father when he died. For him death came as a release from a life that must have been very painful during the last few years. Protima and myself, we find some consolation in the fact that we were able to give him a few months of happiness – the only spell of joyful living he had after break-up of the family – which he spent with us at Santiniketan. It was wonderful to see how his creative faculties immediately responded and brought forth innumerable paintings which were characterized by a style and technique quite different from those he had used before. For the first time a selection of these are being exhibited in the Kalabhavana. It would have gladdened your heart to see these paintings of his mature age- they have been done with such ease, with such abandon and almost carelessness, but every line and every daub of colour show the sure touch of the genius – but perhaps a genius at play.

I have not been able to send you sample chapters from my book yet because I had been going through it again and getting the MSS, retyped. It is taking me a very long time as I have now little leisure to devote to this sort of work. I am much afraid that there will be a lack of unity and difference in the quality and the style of the writing. All that I can afford to do is to snatch a few hours after long intervals to write. But for writing anything worth reading one must get into the mood of it and that requires considerable leisure. I am therefore very diffident about publication of the book. However I am sending you under separate cover some pages of the MSS. I shall expect that after reading you will kindly let me know whether in your opinion the subject matter would be enough interest to make it worthwhile to publish the book. You know I have the greatest regard for your opinion and you need not hesitate to let me know what you really think because I am not sure myself and will not take amiss any critical opinion. We have taken the opportunity of the Jubilee celebrations to bring out a number of publications. Of these the ones that will be of special interest to you are the two albums containing the reproductions of some of father's drawings and paintings and the third – the reproductions of a few paintings of Abanindranath. There are also albums of photo prints of father at different ages and those depicting the life at Santiniketan. More than a dozen books have also been published regarding the history and evolution of Visva-Bharati but most of them are in Bengali. I am sending you a few of the art volumes. They may take some time to reach you – but please accept them as New Year's gifts from Protima and myself.

You will be glad to know that the little experiment which you and Protima had helped to start years ago in the revival of handicrafts here has developed into quite a big organization now. It is now known as the Silpabhavana – the home of art and industry. Nearly a thousand men and women in several villages around us have been trained and become part of this organization producing woven fabrics of all kinds, batik, embroidery, leatherwork, woodwork, pottery, paper etc. The value of our productions last year was about 4 lacs of rupees – this year it will be much more. We are now exporting to foreign countries – even to the United States. Protima still takes interest but she cannot do more than look after the training of the village women. Under her guidance they are now able to make batik saris that fetch enormous prices or embroideries of Kathiawar and Kashmir. How she can manage all this in spite of her ill health is a marvel. Just now she is busy in opening a restaurant during the mela. Refugee women will manage it and share the profits. So you will see what a busy life we all have to lead here in Santiniketan.

Immediately after the festivities are over all the students (they number now over 600) will be taken out on excursions. I generally go to a hot spring in the midst of a dense forest which we discovered some years ago – but this time I am remaining here in order to try to finish my book. For a whole week there will hardly be anybody here and I am hoping that I will get sufficient leisure to do my own work.

With affectionate regards,
Rathi

There is no doubt that Santiniketan and its serene surroundings as well as the great human beings associated with the place, Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath, Rathindranath, Amiya Chakravarty, and Protima Debi always occupied a very special place for the French painter who did so much to popularize the brand Santiniketan. We end by reproducing two more drawings by Andrée Karpelès:



