

38, Landsdowne Crescent,
London W.11. August 17th 1949.

My very dear friends, alphabetically, Ara, Bakre, Gade, Hussain and Raza,

^{if he has any,} character/along, if he goes to any corner of the world, but he never leaves it behind, nor loses it there. You must be awaiting this letter very eagerly. I was eagerly waiting to get to London. I had thought that life would change completely ~~to~~ on arrival here. And imagining such glorious pictures of the future in the city of Dick Wittington, I had painted such pictures about the possibilities of Europe and the opportunities for artists here, that I was quite disappointed with many of my imagined hopes. Of course I have not much to say for the 10 day I have been here, but I have learnt that life in London is a luxurious commodity to sustain, and elements like water need pennies to be dropped in, and necessities like lavatories need pennies to be dropped in. I was very fortunate to have my good friend Alkazi with whom I could share lodging otherwise I would get ~~into~~ financial difficulties. So, eagerness is a liability. I have learnt my bitter lessons. He who never hopes can never despair. But the change in my plans of staying here for long is on the whole due to my passport being Portuguese. Such difficulties will not arise in any of your cases, because you will have Indian passports, and Commonwealth citizens have more advantages. It may be even more difficulty for my wife to get here, on whose ^{earnings} was depending after my mother's money I had exhausted in about a few months. But I can't say about Maria yet. She may get here. There is always a loop hole somewhere. If she is clever, or if I am lucky. She must get here anyhow, or I'll be back there anyhow!

I had come with many pre-conceived notions, practically all of which have been shattered. First and foremost I had supposed that all painting materials, canvases and pencils, and papers would be cheaper here than in Bombay. Therefore I had planned to do a lot of work here. But my dear fellows, all the stories of artists starving and painting I feel are strange, because one can neither starve here ~~because~~ ^{since} it is so cold and the metabolism over proteins works faster, that one must eat or die. There is no middle-way, starvation. And one can't paint because colour and canvas costs more than food. But Europe has changed a great deal after this war, for the worse. Each nation is struggling to keep itself together. One of the means is to exploit the foreigner.

All the art dealers are racketeers. More and more books on Picasso and the same old Paris School, Matisse, Derain, etc round and round about, until I got disgusted. The younger painters are not given a chance. I have yet to confirm this but I don't see any new painter in all the latest art books I have seen here, or any young painter exhibited in the ~~numerous~~ galleries. There are a few however who are lost side by side with the same old Picasso, Matisse and Derain, which catch the eye because they have been previously widely reproduced.

I do wish to exhibit here anyhow, even if it is only one exhibition which I know will be lost in this great city. I have started painting. Ply wood is impossible to get. All wood is exported. I have bought two small bits of compressed cardboard for which I ~~have~~ paid 8 shillings! More than I paid for the large ply wood on which I had painted my self-portrait in Bombay. I have done some watercolours too. But an ordinary sheet of cart ridge paper costs 6 pence.

Rent of the room is the greatest problem, nearly Rs 100 a month, which is considered cheap!!! Yesterday I went to see the Tate Gallery, and it cost me 8 sh., for bus fare, lunch, and entrance fee. 8 sh. is about Rs 6.

But with all this tragic rumination over money, I ~~am~~ am glad I did get a chance of seeing this side of the world which seems so enchanting from where you are. And I would have always had a corroding regret if I had never taken the risk and seen Europe. You must do the same all of you. It is worthwhile even for three months. What I have seen in a week, you will never see in all your life in Bombay. And knowledge of how the old masters applied the paint, can never be got by seeing reproductions. I have seen 6 Rembrants, ~~which~~ which gave me an immense joy and understanding, which I didn't get by examining 500 of his reproductions in books. The museums are simply wonderful.... How excited Maqbool, Ara, Bakre, and I had got over the Baroda Museum, remember? The Baroda Museum is not even the back yard of one of these, to say nothing of our Bombay one. So all the money you can manage to secure is worth trying for to get here. The experience is unexplainable. However it was a fallacy of my mine to think of settling here. Even if I had the money I would never have done so, although I was determined never to return to India. Strange enough on arrival I had an acute nostalgia for my birth-place 5,360 miles away GOA. I felt an extremely lonely man here. I felt I should have never come. But all this home sickness is slowly disappearing as I am getting used to my exiled surroundings. Goa has always an attraction for me despite the fact that I could never live there for over a couple of months without getting bored.

I remember Legden's words vividly. "You artists are lucky here.... In Europe the painters are struggling for existence, and have to take up other work to maintain themselves". But every oriental painter must see ~~Western~~ masterpieces in the original, just as every occidental painter is acquainted with Eastern art. The reason why European painters don't visit India to study its arts is because the best representative collections of Indian painting and sculpture ~~are~~ in their own museums in Europe.

I have not met any young painters yet, and I don't think our ~~old~~ hypothesis of forming an International Group will materialise. But I would like suggestions from you. I must have your collective advice. Meet and decide. Are you all coming here? I know that all cannot come together because of different financial circumstances. Maqbool is most certain. Some letter I am informed he is coming in Oct. In another that he is coming in December ¹⁹⁴⁹, but that he wants to hold an exhibition in March 1950! I am sure Ara will be here before any one else.

It is much, very much cheaper living more than one person. But the rooms here are usually small, for one or two persons, and housing shortage is due to the bomb-damaged houses. The rooms are small because it is difficult to warm a big room in winter, and according to health regulations not more than one or two can stay in such rooms.

Gade must inquire about these "Gutterberg" paintings from Mrs. Voth.

What are the future activities of our group? I think you could work on an idea I have. My mother has a small room on Hornby Road, which I think can be converted into a suitable art salon. Of course if we were six together we could conduct ^{art} classes there which would bring us quite a ~~sum~~ of money in fees. But I am not sure of such vague propositions and I have always failed in the activities I have undertaken. But you must keep the group going. We had wanted to change its name. Why not call ourselves "The Progs" (rhymes with Frogs) as Simon Pereira labelled us. Were not the modern school of Paris painters called "Fauves" or the wild beasts in derision and ~~mockery~~ by a journalist, and then did ~~not~~ they ^{not} take this name for themselves in pride and make it famous? But of course Vauxcelles who invented the ~~words~~ ^{terms} "Fauves" and "Cubism" was a much cleverer man than Pereira.

The exhibition of the Vienna Masterpieces at the Tate Gallery, was superb. Tintoretto's "Susanna and the Elders" affected me very much, and the three self portraits of Rembrandt. I did not like Rubens much. Titian I liked too. Last night I went to the Open air Theatre at Regent Park, playing Goethe's "Faust". The theatre is situated in a garden, and the atmosphere is more pleasant than a built theatre. I also saw a few plays performed in the ~~very~~ beautiful little theatres here. "Tobacco Road" and "The Death of a Salesman" in which Paul Muni acts in person. But for the most part I am at home, cooking and washing and reading and painting. Roshni i.e. Mrs. Alkazi does the cooking, mostly, and alternately Elk i.e. Mr. Alkazi does the washing. But I have to do the reading and painting myself. No one can help me at that. "Landsdowne Crescent" is a very very quiet part of London suburb and I can't imagine I am in London when in my room. But the Great City is bustling away in the distance.

Sunday 21st August: I have not posted this letter because I wanted to write more in it. I met three painters. They came to see my works. They liked my stuff. Then I went to their studio. They paint more or less like Robert Colquhoun (pronounced: Cokoon) whose work you must have seen reproduced sometime. But I don't much like the 3 daubers work, although Colquhoun is good. Imitations are always bad. But the 3 guys gave me a tip or two on art-dealers. They charge 33% commission on sales!!! Framing is a terrible nightmare. ^{they said} One of the 3 painters has 3 children and ~~expends~~ his thin shrunken wife is expecting a fourth. ~~He~~ He has taken the two others because they have been haunted by their landlords for rent. Their whole day is spent doing I know not what, because only one at a time can paint in their small room. The night is looked forward eagerly to chat in the pub over a drink, they can manage to draw from anybody. They live in more misery than any one of us did in Bombay. We have invited them for dinner sometime this week. Ara for instance lives like a prince compared to these poor fellows.

Did the Bombay Art Society hold its Poona Exhibition? ~~When~~ When is Husain going to have his one-man-show? and Ara and Raza. Is Bakre

working on the small sculpture pieces with as much enthusiasm as he did for the P.A.G. Exhibition? And is he thinking of touring India?

I can't say how long I shall remain here, but most probably I shall return to India by next year if my wife finds it impossible to get a visa, because my stay in Europe depends entirely on her coming here.

I was much intrigued with Bakre's "letter" which he gave me only to be opened on board-the-ship. But I must say to him that I am not so lucky as Columbus, and that the formation of The International Group was a mere dream. I have not met any sculptors yet, I do intend to inquire about Bakre, and I shall also write him a letter, but at a later date when I am more informed about the sculpture here.

Raza's letter was full of kindness. Thanks very much for it. I have a true friend in you. What about your French Scholarship? Try very hard for it. It is no use coming on your own, unless you make a lot of money on your exhibition. i.e. if you want to stay in Europe for at least three years.

I was very ^{much} touched reading Magbood's letter. Such a small piece of paper and stamped with 12 annas postage. You could have written double that on an air-letter paper costing 6 annas. However, thank you very much for your letter, my best friend. I have not much to spend or I would have written to you separately. I hope your wife and children are well. You must have painted a few canvases during the past month, yes?

You will be surprised, but I ~~feel~~ feel very dull here.... Perhaps it is because I am just new to the place. But Keku Gaudhy had warned me about London being very dull in the beginning, and then later one comes to love it. One of the most interesting places here is the Hyde Park, where "orators" speak on all subjects and lovers make love in open air.

Don't think I have been discouraging. You must all come at all costs. ~~However~~ My disappointment is due to my passport. It is stamped on my passport that I should not engage in any profession, that is, if I have to exhibit my work, it is not as simple as in Hebbas' case. I have to get a permit from the Secretary of State, and you know how odious it is to deal with Government ^{serpents}. But none of you will have such passport troubles as I have. You are all very lucky.

With my love dear friends, Yours,

Meet, and write me a joint letter

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