

## Fairy Tales around

### My Beloved Elizabeth



*Elizabeth Brunner*

Stories out of the life of Elizabeth Brunner,  
*Eminent Hungarian Painter*

written down by Dagmar Barua

### Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to many people who helped me compile these stories.

First of all, of course, Elizabeth, who patiently talked into my little microphone on so many occasions and diligently answered all my questions.

But it was lovely Mary Samuel who saw to it that our stomachs were filled when we forgot about time. And Inder Bahadur who lifts and carries Elizabeth, transports her from place to place, who carried the heavy paintings (for photos, for viewing, or for what ever purpose), and who does many other odd jobs. And my lovely Laurence Bastit. Professor Dr. Géza Bethlenfalvy, eminent Tibetan scholar and, at the moment, Director of the Hungarian Information and Cultural Centre in New Delhi, who helped proof-read the manuscript. Lutoria Sahib, Anamika Sharma, Dr. and Mrs. Péter Hajtó, Monica Bincsik and so many more of Elizabeth's friends to all of whom I am extremely grateful.

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## Preface

*May this book be my humble contribution towards the realisation of Elizabeth Brunner's dream and of the mission assigned to her by Rabindranath Tagore: "Take two light to every nook and corner of world"*

*And to compensate for what could not be covered in this book we now have the **Sass Brunner East West Trust** that was formed according to her wish. It reassures me that more exhaustive information about the Brunners' and their paintings can be readily obtained from it, being located at her residence.*

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## Elizabeth Brunner and how I met her

*Elizabeth Brunner was born on the first of July 1910. Her mother, Elizabeth Sass Brunner, and her father, Ferenc Sass, were both eminent painters. In the small picturesque town of Nagykanizsa, some fifty kilometers from the famous Lake Balaton in Hungary, she spent the first years of her life in her grandfather's (mother's father) house.*

*The First World War had a disastrous effect on both her father and her mother. But, though, her mother eventually got a hold over herself and found meaning in life, her father was so utterly disillusioned that he could hardly paint any longer.*

*Elizabeth spent her teenage years in Budapest and went to the Academy of Fine Arts, under the guidance of Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl, to become a sculptor.*

*When her mother decided to go to India, Elizabeth joined her. They went via Italy, Egypt and Libya and arrived in India in 1930.*



Elizabeth's residence at Rabindra Nagar

*When I came to New Delhi in 1977 I was fascinated to read quite often articles in the newspapers about a Hungarian painter, called Elizabeth Brunner, her life, and her art. I cut these articles out and meticulously kept them. I searched for books on her in bookshops and libraries, but could not find any. It took me several years before I picked the courage and just walk into her house to meet her.*

*My first personal meeting with Elizabeth was in Rabindra Nagar, South Delhi. I was overwhelmed by the kindness she showed me straight away and has shown me ever since. We have developed an*

*understanding and trust which, I must admit, I have with very few people. Even in this old age of hers, she has an incredible gift to inspire people. Though she gets caught up sometimes in the day-to-day petty things, I always feel enveloped in love and kindness of a special order when in her presence. All this makes her so humane, and at the same time a very special person.*

*I can simply say - I have learned to love her very dearly. And what fascinates me most is her sweet nature, her utter gentleness and all embracing love for one and all, together with a firm stand on what she believes.*



Naga Boy

*Still, it is rather difficult to talk about Elizabeth Brunner. Although my heart goes out to her as a wonderful and precious person, I do not feel qualified to talk about her paintings. I will just say, she is a fantastic and accomplished painter, who painted the most beautiful, touching and wonderful paintings.*



Head of Buddha

*During the many meetings we had (and my little recorder was running), I noted down mostly her own stories, in her own words, and in the circumstances I found her.*



**Elizabeth with General Mahinder Singh at her exhibition "The Soul of Japan" at the Hungarian Culture Centre, New Delhi**



One of Elizabeth's Japanese paintings

**Saturday evening, the 16th of March 1996**

"Elizabeth is not all that well today," Laurence told me when I came in. "Please Elizabeth tell us," she asked, "is it just a muscular pain or was something crushing your delicate bones?" Elizabeth could not quite explain. She showed us where the pain was, on the left side above her breast. "I was put down in a wrong position", she said. "Who carried you?" asked Dagmar. "Bahadur," Elizabeth, "he must have had something in his breastpocket which protruded out and ..." "... pressed against you and hurt your delicate body," continued Laurence. "Yes, it stopped my breath for some time", answered Elizabeth.

"Yes," Dagmar, "I can see the wheelchair standing there". "The lovely Dutch lady, Anamika Sharma, brought it along", said Laurence. "Are you going out in it these days?" asked Dagmar. "Yes," said Laurence, "every day, since the opening of her exhibition, 'The Soul of Japan', at the Hungarian Cultural Centre, on 6th of March". "How does Bahadur get with you in the chair inside this room? Remember there is stairs front and back side of your flat", enquired Dagmar. "But I can't walk", Elizabeth. "Of course, we know! O yes, he must pull you in the chair up", thinks Dagmar aloud. "There was no-one today to help Bahadur. That little ... Munki-Punki ... also was not there. So Bahadur was pushing the chair up on the stairs. And it went wrong. It also hit the side of the door."

# The Soul of Japan

**First and everlasting impressions  
of two Hungarian artists, 1935-1937**

An exhibition of painting by

**Elizabeth Sass Brunner  
and  
Elizabeth Bruner**

**8 March to 5 April 1996  
I A Janpath, New Delhi**

**Presented by  
The Japan Foundation, New Delhi Office  
The Hungarian Information and Cultural Centre**

Laurence said, "we are talking and talking about this, but I believe this all should not be too difficult, if you make wooden counter stairs, (no, not just a piece of wood on which Elizabeth could slip in her chair), that should help make things easier." "It was difficult all along," said Elizabeth, "always two people had to put me down and put me up". "And only today there was not a second person around." said Dagmar. "Yes", confirmed Elizabeth. "Thanks the Almighty God that you both came." Only our presence seemed to give her so much joy and made her feel better.



Elizabeth with the Old General Sahib, Mrs. Singh and Lutoria Sahib

"Your exhibition is fantastic," Dagmar changed the subject: "Those people I brought along (Martina and Torsten from Berlin) they were absolutely touched by you. You know, I don't know how but they were speechless, kind of in wonder. So there you see, dearest Elizabeth, what 'aura' you spread all over the world. They have gone home taking your image along with them in their hearts."

Elizabeth beamed her delightful smile at us and narrates, "today the old general-sahib (General Mahinder Singh) came to the exhibition. He could not come for the inauguration. He was so touched, so touched. He said the whole atmosphere was vibrating. And then, after, he went into prayers. I also. And then I felt, not suddenly, but gently my chair was moving ... but finally, when I opened my eyes, I was still in the same chair and in the same place. It was very pure because they didn't bring in any bad current."

And Elizabeth continued, "This morning it was very beautiful to be outside. - I mean, it is a wonder how all these people can live on this earth. It still is a wonder with all these things going on. They have sharpened their so-called intelligence and it is used for ..." Laurence continued, "... meaningless things". Elizabeth, "mercilessly". Dagmar, "many people have realised that we have to do something to save our earth. Soonest".

## about Japan



After a long time Elizabeth had the wish to tell us a little about Japan: "We were in Bombay, when mother suddenly fell ill with a terrible fever and pains in the head. This affected her eyes and she could hardly see. We were told that this was 'Bombay fever' and the only way to get rid of it was to leave India immediately. So we booked ourselves on a ship which was leaving for Japan and we were very glad that this was to be our destination, as my mother had always wanted to go there.

A young Indian friend, whose family was in Kobe, gave a letter of introduction to us. When we reached the harbour to embark, I felt as we went up the gangway that my feet were dragging and wanted to go backward instead of forward. There I stood half way up, tears beginning to flow, when I noticed my mother's face appealing to me to come. Realising that we were sailing because of her illness, I pulled myself together and crossed on to the ship, with a strange feeling that I had left my life behind. I felt much better, though, by the time we reached Colombo, as my mother's fever disappeared within a very short time.

We went via Singapore, Hongkong and Shanghai and arrived in Japan in time for the cherries but not the cherry-blossoms. Landing in Kobe, our first experience was an astounding one. There we were with no knowledge of the language, in the customs shed with all our luggage around us, including about eight/nine large boxes of paintings. How were we to explain that they were only paintings. We need not have worried.



Japanese actor playing Buddha

A customs officer opened one case, and as soon as he saw what it contained, he began taking out the pictures, very carefully and delicately. His whole expression changed and he became very affable and attentive, as soon as we told him that they were our own work. 'Ekaki san!' He said to his colleagues, and to our great surprise in a short time the whole customs shed had become an art exhibition with all our paintings!

Everybody stopped working, including the porters, loaders, and dock hands, and gathered round the shed to admire the paintings. With such a keen interest. It really surprised us. Even the humblest worker seemed to be an art connoisseur."

## Elizabeth and her contribution towards the Hungarian Millecentenarium (1896 - 1996)

Sunday morning, the 5th of May 1996

*When I came that hot, sunny Sunday morning, Elizabeth looked rather well. Her sitting room seemed pleasantly cool because of its high ceiling. From the T.V. the 'Mahabharata' (a Television series) was loudly coming forth and Mr. Lutoria was partly watching it, partly reading the newspaper.*



"MUSUME" Nippon, 1935

*As no conversation could be taped until further notice, I fed Elizabeth the sweet melon Mary had cut for her. (Mary is the 'good soul' in Elizabeths' house, cooking, bathing her, sleeping next to her, helping Elizabeth in every way.) The two of us were happy, as always, just being together. I watched a tiny mouse coming from under her bed and peacefully eating the crumbs which were lying there. It could not have been more than three cm long, not to mentioned the fine long tail. It looked so 'well groomed' with its shining brown coat and was very much at ease. Animals are Elizabeth's friends. The birds are being fed (and the food is blessed) each time she takes her meal. Also her many dogs. Unfortunately, Elizabeth cannot take her dogs out for their walks any longer, and the people who do so are not very kind to her dogs. As a result, they are rather muddled and bark a lot when strangers come to the house.*



*Actually dogs (even stray dogs) are also my friends but one of Elizabeths' dogs, I detour when entering the house.*



Elizabeth with one of her pet dogs

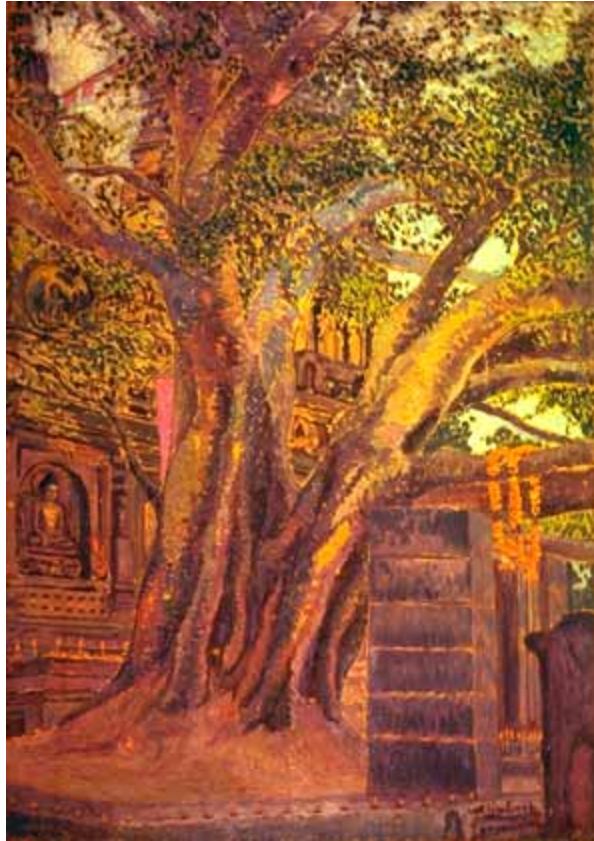
*The mice came in with the last monsoon and seem to remain. Though all the servants are angry about it, Elizabeth will not have anything nasty done to them. So they stay, and I have heard and seen them on various occasions sitting with Elizabeth. Once one had climbed up on the 'mala' (string of flowers) which was hanging around the beautiful painting of the Dalai Lama that Elizabeth painted in 1959. In India Gods (and other precious things) are being garlanded with 'malas'. In Elizabeth's house the Dalai Lama (who has been once again visiting her in December 1995), two paintings of her mother as well as one of Tagore are garlanded. I find it particularly touching.*



*It would be very difficult to describe her living room, in which she also sleeps. All the other rooms are full with boxes of her own and her mother's paintings. These paintings are Elizabeth's 'children', she has to look after and take great care of them. Coming back to her room, I like to say that it has occurred to me, sometimes during the many years I know her, to bring some kind of order into the various piles of things lying around, but I have finally decided that it would be of no use. Firstly Mary and the other servants would make a mess again and secondly somehow it's got to be this way. It belongs to Elizabeth's surroundings and the way I will always remember her! There are people who come and clean daily and strangely there is an order in the seemingly untidiness.*

The T.V. was finally switched off and Elizabeth started: "Yesterday it was the fifth of May and it was ..." "No the fifth is today," Dagmar butted in. But Elizabeth maintained, "but Lutoria Sahib when was 'Buddha Jayanti'?" ('Buddha Jayanti' is Buddha's birthday, always celebrated on full moon in May). "On Friday the third," replied Mr. Lutoria looking up at us from his newspaper smiling. "Yes, yes 'Buddha Jayanti' was on Friday, I am so sorry I could not go," said Elizabeth. "Where would you go, where did you go in olden days when you still walked, Elizabeth?" Asked Dagmar "May be 'Buddha Jayanti Gardens on the Ridge' which is very beautiful," Elizabeth. "Have you seen the new Buddha statue?" Dagmar. "Yes, yes, I went there for the consecration. But now it is difficult for me," continues Elizabeth. "Otherwise I also had the idea to make an exhibition on 'Buddha Jayanti Day' with all my Buddha paintings. But I was unable because of this weakness (patting her knee), although I felt that, for that, I will have the strength. But I asked the IIC (India International Centre), I asked some friends. And I did not want to do a big exhibition, just the Buddhas. To create an atmosphere, something of the reactions of my feelings that I have automatically buried into these paintings. That it should pass on a message to those who can take it. - So now, they have asked me to do it later in autumn. I don't know why," said Elizabeth.





Mahabodi Tree

"You just had a two-weeks exhibition of your own and your mother's Japanese paintings, 'The Soul of Japan' at the Hungarian Cultural Centre," said Dagmar. "The Japanese one, yes, and it took a lot of energy out of me," Elizabeth. "So it is perhaps wiser not to have another exhibition so soon afterwards," put Dagmar in.



Birth of Siddhartha, Ceylon 1956

"Yes," said Elizabeth. "And there is a demand for an exhibition from Hungary that I have to do a lot of selection for. That means I would need some help. Because Hungary has got the celebration of their 'Thousand and one hundred years of their arrival on the Hungarian soil' - And very cleverly they justified their way of conquest, we learned it from our school books. They used the 'oriental way of occupation'. I think it was the Moravians who then were the occupants. I should know more, but ... this will be available in books. It was so charming, as a child, I did not quite understand it all. But today I know it was the oriental way of approach. You know, according to the legend, the Hungarian envoy asked for this much - a hand full of earth. A glass full of water. And a bundle of grass. And with that he announced that this was his land now," narrated Elizabeth.

Dagmar asked, "who was it?" And Elizabeth retorted, "oh darling, I am such stupid girl; 75 years ago I learned it in school. But in any book you can read about it." And Dagmar said, "and in all the Hungarian school books also?" "Yes," said Elizabeth. "We had to learn it, in our time at least it was so. And we had to know it." "And you still do, lovely Elizabeth," Dagmar. "Yes, now I know it so much more because it was also an ancient custom here in India. I just saw it in the 'Mahabharata'! It's an ancient custom. Once the deed is done, no one can step on the other's land."

*Here is the story of the creation of the Hungarian nation in short (Courtesy: The Hungarian Information and Cultural Centre, New Delhi):*

*The ancient Hungarians came to be a separate people around 500 BC on the steppes of the West Siberian Plain. From this time on they changed over to nomadic stock raising, and started to call themselves "Magyar". This kind of life style based on wandering brought about their subsequent migration for thousands of kilometres.*

*First, around 500 AD, they moved to the area between the Mid-Volga Region and the Ural Mountains (this area was called Magna Hungaria by historic sources from the Middle Ages). Then, around 700 AD, the majority of the Magyars moved on to the area around the Volga and Don Rivers and Doniesk Basin. This area was called Lebedia after their first reigning prince Lebedias. Around 850 AD they put their abodes further south-west to the area between the Dnieper and Dniester Rivers. This area was called Etekköz "interriver area" by the Byzantine emperor. From 862 on, starting from this area, their raiding troops came to scour through the Carpathian Basin several times and finally - between 895 and 900 - it was occupied by them under the leadership of prince Arpad. The immediate cause which brought about the conquest of Hungary was the attack launched by the Pechenegs (Besenyös) on the Hungarian dwellings in Etekköz.*



French Rakoczi, a Hungarian national hero of the 18th century, painted by Elizabeth

*In 895 the Hungarians took possession of the areas lying east of the Danube, where they mainly found various people of the former Avar principalities. On the border areas of the Carpathian Basin*

*they found eastern Slavic people. Transdanubia and Southern Plain areas where, at that time, under the rule of the Bulgarians. In 900 their ally, Arnulf, the east*

*Frankish ruler, died, and it was this time when the Hungarians occupied Transdanubia, as formerly it was a Frankish borderland. In autumn 902 they overthrew the Moravian principality, lying north of the Danube. The Magyars set up their dwellings mainly on the plain areas. It was only in the 10th century when they penetrated into the mountains along the valleys.*



Elizabeth with her Hungarian friend Agnes Kirpalani

*Their incursions launched against Western Europe and Byzantium were organised on the basis of political considerations. During such raids they intervened into the struggles taking side of this or another monarch. In the majority of cases they interfered at the invitation of princes or landlords fighting against each other. Their raids abroad contributed even to the unification of some divided German territories. By these expeditions they kept off invaders from entering their own country and gained time for the establishment of the Hungarian state. After the raids to Western Europe had been stopped in 955, prince Taksony came into power (955 - 972) and strengthened the central power of the principality and established a firm basis for the state-organising work of prince Géza (972 - 996) and king Szent István, "Stephen the Saint" (997 - 1038), who finally established the Hungarian Kingdom in 1000 AD.*



*That is why the Hungarian Millecentenarium was celebrated in 1996 (896 - 1996).*

Elizabeth continued to tell Dagmar, "I am never looking at things lightly, they are very deep, let us say, in my heart. There are, for instance, many things which I like to explain in the book ('A Mystic Link With India' written by R.K. Raju) which are incorrect. And you see, paintings are not signed, and not dated! And now already I have to think, my goodness, when was it painted. I have a lot of work to do. All the paintings have to be signed. That after us, my mother and me, people cannot steal them and call them theirs. There are people like that. At least my mother's paintings should be in order," Elizabeth carried on. But Dagmar could not constrain herself and put in, "and your own, Elizabeth, your own paintings are just as important!"





"It is important," said Elizabeth, "because it is a historical period that was given to two young artists. She was also young then. Mother died young, only 60! And the whole family. That means my father is like the 'guru' behind it all. He was, his soul was destroyed, so wounded, by the First World War. The cruelty of the First World War. And I am a 'First World War child'. I grew up in that mess, with all those ideas in the air. Suffering! Seeing women with my mother. She did help, doing social work. All the men were in the war, women were left alone with the children."

"Yes, I understand you very well, dearest Elizabeth, I am a 'Second World War child' and so is Laurence," said Dagmar. - "Then we had to have that Second World War," Elizabeth continued, "and we were prisoners of war in India! Of course, our stay became finally beautiful, because the spirit of India is beautiful. But I as a stupid little girl, or still fairly young, I used to cover myself with a blanket at night and cry. And my mother was very angry with me. She thought I was not brave enough. She said, if you - although we have no Jewish relations, but friends we had - should have been taken to a 'nazi camp' then you know what you are crying for. That she said to me in the middle of the night when she realized that I am crying under the blanket."

## Elizabeth with bad weather and storms at Delhi

Thursday, the 16th of May 1996



'The dancing poppies painted by Elizabeth in Kashmir in 1940

*It was 'Christ's Ascension' and a day off from work for me. So, I took refuge from the heat in Elizabeth's lovely cool rooms at Rabindra Nagar. Normally, it is wonderfully quiet with her and a gamut of birds songs can be heard all around her house. I found her alone this time. Mary looked in and announced coffee for us. The event of the day was Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's election as Prime Minister of India and the swearing-in ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan.*

Elizabeth told Dagmar, "nowadays I get a kind of numbness here (pointing at her ears), because of this wretched ..." Dagmar asked, "the medicine you are taking, or the noise of the television?" "The medicine, yes. But I want to, if I can, discontinue with it," said Elizabeth, "only sometimes there is too much pain ... oh look at the beautiful roses!" Dagmar had brought the customary flowers along, "they are not roses, darling Elizabeth, they are some kind of poppies, cultured poppies, I think." "Lovely poppies", dreams Elizabeth, "yes, I remember times in Kashmir ..."



Mary bringing coffee, and Elizabeth

Elizabeth carried on, "a lot of things have happened the last few days. The storms. In the storm last Saturday, my men said, there were this size (showing her fist) hailstones coming down." "Yes", confirmed Dagmar, "I was sitting in my flat on the 5th floor engrossed in reading a book, when suddenly I heard the 'bang bang bang' against the windows, it sounded as if the panes would break."

In conspiracy with Elizabeth, Dagmar asked Mary (who brought the coffee) to bring a tiny piece of bread. The little mouse was scurrying around not finding anything to eat. Mary brought it along, surprised about it all but not getting an explanation. Dagmar mimicked as if she was eating it and (when Mary had left the room) she dropped it on the floor for the mouse. They giggled like little five-year-olds. Elizabeth said laughing, "no wonder your husband married you." "Why? I divorced him," Dagmar. "That is another story." Elizabeth carried on, "such a charming ... 'Hoozzlili' ... with such a devil in the neck." And Dagmar smiled, "its such pleasure to see you laugh dearest Elizabeth." "Yes, but to do the right thing at the right time, that's it," answered Elizabeth.

She carried on, "and then during storm two nights ago, the dog had gone crazy. The poor thing. The electricity went off, of course, and the dog was banging at the door. (That is the dog chained in the small little entrance which Dagmar fears.) Mary had to go and she dared to open the door. But I did not let the dog loose, because I was not sure that it might not have gone crazy and not know either of us. Poor thing, so scared" Dagmar exclaimed, "gosh the dog was scared, Mary was scared and you were scared."



"I was scared that the dog does not know what it is doing", said Elizabeth, "but then when the door was open, the storm also calmed down and it became 'shanti' (peace) again.

The Dutch lady friend visiting me, said, where they live in the 'Jinnah House', from the trunk of a very old tree in their garden the crown was just cut off and thrown to the ground." Dagmar remembered, "yes, I was in the middle of that storm in Kalkaji (South Delhi) and the evening traffic and kept thinking, either a tree, or an electrical pole or one of those many hoardings can just fall into the traffic, on top of my car and me. I was really scared, inching home as fast as the weather allowed me."



A Rajasthani couple painted by Elizabeth in 'Rajputana' (Rajasthan) in 1932

Lutoria Sahib came and brought lovely freshly ground coffee from the Coffee Board. The subject was changed. Mr. Lutoria mentioned, "the President of India, Mr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, is from Bhopal and the new Prime Minister of India, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is from Gwalior, both towns in the middle country (Madhya Pradesh - M.P.)." "Have you been in these towns Elizabeth?" Asked Dagmar. "Unfortunately not," replied Elizabeth, "so I cannot visualize them. We might have travelled through M.P. but we never stayed. I am sorry. Moving in these villages and cities, one does know the nature of these people much more. I used to always choose a very characteristic person in a new place where we went. I can talk much more about Rajasthan, but just now the topic is Madhya Pradesh. So I wish - although I can't afford it because of my illness, and leaving here at my place everything unprepared - otherwise I would run and spend a month in M.P. And then I could understand much better the nature of the people

over there. Automatically, even when they become 'bara sahib' (distinguished gentleman), the characteristic nature remains."

"In Bengal you have, of course, been," put in Dagmar. "Hm, and that also in a very special place," Elizabeth.



'Lillies - favourite blooms Gurudev' (Tagore) painted by Elizabeth in Santiniketan in 1931

"Santiniketan," piped Dagmar. And Elizabeth sang too: "Santiniketan. Where those people went and sent their children who were already influenced and agreed to the ideas of Gurudev (Tagore) and hoped that their children would pick up these thoughts and develop on those lines." "My ex-husband was there as a child," said Dagmar. "How could you leave him?" Asked Elizabeth. "Well, I did not see much of Gurudev's thoughts displayed," Dagmar. "You are a doer," said Elizabeth. "I am a doer, I am an action woman," laughed Dagmar. "Action woman," smiled Elizabeth, "that I appreciate because I am just on this bed." "But only since a few years, dearest Elizabeth, before that you were also an action woman." "Not very much," Elizabeth. "But in painting," put Dagmar forward. "In painting yes!" Said Elizabeth, "what I choose as my subject, I stood for. Somebody liked it or not liked it did not hinder me." Dagmar said, "yes, one sees that in your paintings."

"Yes," Elizabeth, "just as I started talking, I remembered Rajasthan. But I would have liked to go to Madhya Pradesh! Soon I would follow the mental process of those people. Mental and then it follows in the physical. And then this world becomes a theatre in front of you. And then it would remain like a

good play that you had seen twenty-thirty years ago. And you liked it. So even when you think of it now, it refreshes you."

"The other day I received an invitation to a Gwalior marriage." Said Elizabeth. "Whose marriage?" Asked Dagmar. "Gwalior married to Baroda", Elizabeth, "because of Baroda I was invited. I would have seen, I mean a marriage is also a theatre. An extraordinary perfect theatre at that".

But there is another point I want to make." Elizabeth continued. "Maybe illness and all these things make me sit down. So to gather things in my head and measure them also." "Weigh the pros and cons," put in Dagmar. "Yes," Elizabeth, "so it is not an empty sitting! It forces me to look at my life, to look at my health. It makes me point to and question things. And makes me go through everything carefully. ... It neither leaves me sorry, or over-happy! It is very important and a very interesting internment." "A what?" Asked Dagmar. "This," laughs Elizabeth, "is an internment camp for me." She means her incapability of moving.

"But at least I have my paintings around me, they talk and teach me! ... Who knows whom they will teach if they survive. The next hundred years. If they are carefully kept ... this is my worry that they should be carefully kept ... then automatically who communicates with them will find them ... because there is the magic that draws you ... You don't know why you go somewhere, someplace ..." We went silent for a long time.



Elizabeth and her 'children'



Local Woman

"Do you know", Elizabeth remembered and carrying on, "mother's techniques of painting were innumerable. Sometimes she would use only a fine brush and produce a lace-like, dainty effect. At other times she would have a strong sweep with broad brushes, producing a rugged landscape. As I learned from her, I used the same techniques. Whichever technique we used, we invariably drew the outlines with charcoal before beginning to paint. Then we would begin with the lightest colour and proceed to the darker ones.

Very often during the hot weather, we had much difficulties with certain colours. They melted on the palette but dried too quickly on the canvas. The result of this was that we were compelled to finish our paintings in a single day, very often."



## Elizabeth and her meeting Gandhiji

Sunday, the 19th of May 1996



Elizabeth looked and felt well when I came that Sunday to spend, for once, the entire day with her. She wanted not even a siesta. So we had a whole day session of talking about the past.

*Mother and daughter stayed for two years in Santiniketan, a small university town in West Bengal. They had been invited by Tagore. The mother mostly meditated and painted those beautiful visionary paintings. Elizabeth was more fascinated by the people and sites of the surroundings. She painted Tagore many a times. Also the various students and people in and around Santiniketan.*

*After those two years, Tagore advised mother and daughter to travel in India, which they did between 1932 and 1935. They travelled the length and the breadth of India, visited most of the holy places. They discovered and painted the enchanting natural beauty which is India, and the many varied people of the land.*



... It was the time when the 'Gulmohar' was blooming...

Elizabeth started off that morning, "I don't know what we should talk about. The early times, the middle times, the later times?" "Any time, any time", smiled Dagmar, "but I love to hear about your past, dear Elizabeth. Where were you and your mother after the Second World War?" "In Nainital, we were prisoners of war. - You see, well, you have seen the Japanese paintings?" Elizabeth asked. "Yes," Dagmar answered. "That was before the war. Was it before the war?" Elizabeth asked herself, "wait, I will work it out." Dagmar confirmed silently that, yes of course, Japan was before the Second World War.

Elizabeth started off again, "should I start a bit earlier? We were travelling in the South of India and we wanted to paint. What was the name of the town? Seringapatan perhaps. Anyway, a beautiful place. It was the time when the 'Gulmohar' was blooming. My mother painted. There were too many mosquitoes, though. I got malaria. During my first bout of malaria at a place called Sravana-Belgola I was given quinine injections. By the end of about a month I was sufficiently recovered to accompany my mother to Belur and Halebid. So because of my illness we went to Bangalore and there we met Gandhiji."



Gandhiji

Dagmar made sure: "Where did you meet Gandhiji?" Elizabeth said, "in Bangalore. But the South Indian trip was also very beautiful, picturesque, and my mother was in full ..." Dagmar, "action". "Yes," said Elizabeth. "But I had become ill with malaria. I had another bout of malaria in Pondicherry, and another one each in Chidambaram and Mysore. So mother decided with a sick girl it may be difficult to go anywhere. And we stopped in Bangalore where we had already some recommendation. The Theosophical Society got us a very beautiful bungalow to stay in, with a huge garden. So my mother decided to take this house and she said, 'you can rest and recuperate'. In Bangalore I had once again malaria. Three days and nights fever, the nastiest malaria I had.

Then mother first organized me and she organized herself. Locked herself in. She thought she can start painting from memory and from her sketches. Make her painting as she would like to have done," Elizabeth continued. "As if she were in nature," put in Dagmar. "Yes," Elizabeth, "she was always sketching. And she got into a meditative phase also. She locked the doors, nobody was allowed in. Only that one person from the Theosophical Society looked in and saw that we were alright, whether we need anything. Mother also got a person who taught me English, so that was my work. I also painted a little. But she locked herself into her room where nobody was permitted to go. And I did not know what she was doing.



Gandhiji

One day the news came that Gandhiji was released from jail and was making a tour of the South. So we became very excited, as his programme included Bangalore. People were permitted to receive him in a Girls School. The Girl's Schools and compounds in those days were surrounded by extremely high walls, because girls were not yet open to books. So we also went there. There was also a band to play, the same we have now in marriage times. There were some pillars outside the front veranda. So my mother said it would be better to go to the very end of this veranda and wait there and see what happens. She settled herself halfway visible halfway covered by a pillar. But I was standing outside. And, as time went by, more and more people came and the crowd grew. At the entrance of the veranda the dignitaries and officials were waiting. But the people were coming like a flood. So mother was half covering herself and I am standing in the middle of it all. Because I also wanted to see. And those coming people washed me ahead, pushed me towards the entrance. Only a little bit of space was there for the cars to arrive.





Gandhiji

The government had arranged for Gandhiji and his party to stay in that beautiful government guesthouse in a park in Bangalore. But here was the public reception." Dagmar asked, "in the girls school." "Yes, continued Elizabeth, "suddenly I am being pushed, but I could not fall down because of all the people. Otherwise my nose would have been on the ground. Everybody was blindly pushing forward. Stepping on my feet, they did not see. Finally the car arrived and, lo and behold, Gandhiji was sitting up on a chair in the car. So that the people could see him. He looked our way and got down, the band was playing. The dignitaries were walking to receive him.

But he looked at nobody and, very intensely, was only trying to push through the incredible crowd. He reached me and I was trying with outstretched arms to protect him, he was so ...

small! The crowd had not quite realised that he was in the middle of them. But somehow he managed to pass and reached my mother. He walked up to her and embraced her. Never seen before. And he said, 'I know you!' By the time I reached them, the multitude was still going, pushing to see him at the entrance of the veranda. The reception committee was not knowing what to do. On top of the veranda no public was permitted.

So, Gandhiji and my mother looked at each other for a few minutes. Then he turned and he gave me a huge lovable slap. And then he took each of us on one side and walked to the entrance." "Towards the reception committee," smiled Dagmar. "Yes," Elizabeth. "We all went, of course all the protocol and

dignitaries, went inside. By the way, that English lady was also in his party." "Annie Besant?" asked Dagmar. "No," Elizabeth and Dagmar asked Mr. Lutoria, "who was that English lady working with Gandhiji?" He mused, "Annie Besant, Mira Behn?" Elizabeth continued, "Mira Behn! (British Admiral Slade's daughter) I painted her also ... We went into inner courtyard. There was a dais for Gandhiji. The meeting was for women only and hundreds of them were seated in the compound. At the end of his speech (which we could not understand as it was in Hindi) he seemed to be making some kind of appeal, in response to which the women got up, taking off their ornaments and bringing them to him."

"At that time you got your opportunity to paint him Elizabeth, we all know it because we have seen the beautiful paintings," Dagmar started again. "O yes," continued Elizabeth, "a very special opportunity. Now for me the real Gandhiji comes. When he finished his talk, he came down from the dais and invited my mother and me to come to his prayer meeting that evening, which was held on the lawns of the government guesthouse. So we went. And, as my mother would always do it, we would sit at the very end of the multitude so that she could do her quick sketches. Gandhiji was sitting under a huge tree in that garden, on both sides three girls were sitting, who sang. He spoke in Hindi, then prayers and then singing. When it was all finished and people were dispersing, I all of a sudden realized that this was my opportunity.

He was going back with two escorts to the building. Suddenly I realized that this is the moment when I can request him. So I rushed through the crowd and just reached him when he was going through the door upstairs. Then I said, 'Bapuji, Bapuji?' He stopped and looked at me. I said, 'I have a request. I would like to paint you, please give me time.' He looked at me strangely smiling and said, 'why do you want to paint an ugly man like me?' I replied, 'but Bapuji, I want to paint your soul.' He said, 'how much time do you want?' I replied, 'half an hour.' He look at me doubtfully and said, 'do you little chick of a girl beg to say that you can paint my soul in half an hour?' I said, 'but Bapuji, can you prove that I can't?' So he looked at me quizzically and said, 'you will have that half an hour tomorrow afternoon'.

This conversation was overheard by a group of eager newspaper men who were accompanying Gandhiji during the whole tour. Seeing the expression on their faces, I realised what a challenge I had undertaken. They declared that they would all be there at the end of the half hour to see the result. For a moment I felt very nervous, but then my overwhelming joy at being able to undertake the portrait gave me fresh courage.

My mother accompanied me and when we arrived at about three o'clock we were told that this was Gandhiji's silent day. It was a Monday, the eight of January 1934. I was shown in and found him sitting on a veranda, sorting out some papers. Giving me a glance, he took out his watch and placed it in front of him. Then he returned to his papers. It was a damp, cold, grey afternoon and he was wearing a Kashmiri shawl, only. I felt chilly on the veranda and the thought of the thirty newspaper men waiting below did not make me feel any warmer. The possibilities of a good position were limited and every moment was precious. I must begin at once. As Gandhiji looked down at his papers, his face was hardly visible. Perhaps he sensed my dilemma, for he looked over his glasses at me as if to suggest that I should go ahead.



The portrait of the Mahatma, Elizabeth and her mother in 1934

This glance encouraged me and I began to work feverishly. At the end of the half hour, he wrote on a slip of paper, 'the thirty minutes are over!' I explained to him that I was due to paint another ten minutes, as the first ten minutes had been taken up with necessary preparations (the setting up of my easel, etc.). So he nodded in agreement and I continued to paint. When after the ten minutes the portrait was finished and I handed it over to him, his face lit up with approval, and he willingly wrote his signature. I was grateful beyond words and went down to face the newspaper men with confidence. So all over India the news was flashed, 'Hungarian artist paints the Mahatma in half an hour!'

*Gandhiji was one of those uniquely special men of our century. He was born on 02.10.1869 in Kathiawar as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and killed on 30.01.1948 in New Delhi as The Mahatma (Great Soul).*

*As a lawyer in South Africa, he called for the resistance of discrimination against black men. 1914 he came back to India and went, at the top of the National Congress Party, against the British rule in India.*

*He was an extremely religious and ascetic man, who, all his life, went by the ideas of 'ahimsa' (no killing) and 'satyagraha' (fight without weapons). He succeeded in the abolition of the so-called 'untouchables' cast. In defiance against the British*

*textile industry he advocated spinning and home spun textiles in India. He broke the British monopoly on salt production and walked through India on his famous 'salt march'.*

*He died in the attempt to leave a united motherland (which is now Pakistan, Bangladesh and India).*

Elizabeth continued with her story, "We met Gandhiji again the next day. And then he invited us to stay with him when he should be in Koonoor, as he would be staying there for two weeks and the change would be good for me. By the time we arrived in Koonoor, I was in the throes of another spell of malaria, which the chilly hills seemed to have aggravated. He himself came to our room to see whether we had all we needed, and was very concerned to see how ill I was. At his request, we were describing the course of the illness to him. Then suddenly he turned to one of his attendants and asked for a glass of hot milk. When this came, he took it in his hand and held it to my mouth. With feverish eyes I looked at him and asked to be excused from drinking it, as for eight years my mother and I had not partaken on any food or drink derived from animal sources.

Taking my face between his hands he said, 'please drink it for my sake', and I could not refuse. Within less than an hour my fever had left me. When he visited me later, he pressed me to continue drinking milk while I was in India, as he believed it was a necessity for my health.

Our fortnight at Koonoor with Gandhiji was extremely pleasant. We spent the days taking part in his daily routine and painting. Gandhiji worked practically all day, writing, reading, interviewing, and attending meetings. The morning and evening prayer meetings were attended by large crowds of people. Besides the singing of simple hymns, he would arrange for readings to be given from the Gita, the Bible, the Koran, and other holy books of different religions."

*After Mary's lunch, which Lutoria Sahib, Elizabeth and her animals and I enjoyed, we talked about the name Brunner and she told me that, as it was a German name, her father changed it into Sass.*

Elizabeth started, "you see it was not fashionable in Hungary to call yourself Brunner at that time because of the negative German influence all over Europe. So he took up an artist name. That was quite common at the time. He loved the birds in the sky that are 'sas', but he put the name with a double 's' Sass." Dagmar asked, "which bird?" And Elizabeth answered, "the eagle". "O, 'sas' means eagle in Hungarian?" Dagmar repeated. "Hm," Elizabeth, "and he became Ferenc Sass. But not by law. It was an artist name. And they called me 'Shash Baba' [Elizabeth's pronunciation]. Even when I grew up I was 'Shash Baba'.

We kept quiet for some time. But then Elizabeth carried on: "And at a party, or the place where mother learned conventional dancing, one of her friends mentioned, now you need not go to Budapest, there is a school of painting opened in Nagykanizsa [Elizabeth pronounced it Nochkonisha] and this is the artists' name and address.

My mother could not wait two minutes and registered herself in the school. Her family was debating and debating, and finally allowed her to join my father's studio. And she was so excited," Elizabeth's voice was quivering more than usual.

## the story how her father and mother met and married

**Sunday, the 19th of May 1996 ...**

"And one day, she announced that she would marry Ferenc Sass." Elizabeth threw her arms up with a smile. "The whole family must have been up in arms," Dagmar put in. "Yes, answered Elizabeth, "but mother insisted if they do not allow her then she will go." Dagmar asked, "run away with Ferenc?" Elizabeth confirmed laughing, "yes. And so my father went to my grand-father and asked for her hand. And grand-father looked at him saying, 'my dear son and what do you think you will support your family with?'" Dagmar mentioned, "I expected that question." Elizabeth put in, "but they did not think of money! They wanted to only paint and they were deeply in love.

So anyway, then the family wanted a proper marriage. The whole town was to know, grand-father being the police commissioner of Nagykanizsa. My mother said, she will marry in black!" Dagmar exclaimed in dismay, "o my gosh, in black?" Elizabeth confirmed, "she will not marry in white. I know because my mother told me all this. The whole family was shaking. And she will not go to church either. Now this might be in a way interesting to you, that she will not promise, that upto his death and/or her death they would be together ('Till Death Us Do Part', church marriage vows).

She would not promise that. Although I believe that they still love one another up there in heaven, I do not doubt it at all. Father could not be without her."

"But then ... how did your father allow her to go to India with you?" Dagmar asked. "He could not go, this is another chapter," carried on Elizabeth. "My mother was already living with me in Budapest." "And what happened with your father?" Dagmar. "Poor fellow kept on staying with my grand-father and aunt. He is dead now, but that is so very sad.

I mean, either it was the devil or the god ... She had to be alone. She just had to be alone. My father had to be alone also. He used to go to the forest. After the First World War he lost interest in humanity. My mother used to try ... eventually she went to Budapest. She kept on asking him to come, start a new life. But the war had crushed him too much, killed his soul. My mother used to write to him to come and start anew. Letters I have seen. But my father did not come. He stayed in Nagykanizsa. He had his friends. He used to go to the nature and then also closed himself up.



## the story on her own birth

Sunday, the 19th of May 1996 ...



...I remember sleeping in that room...

I remember sleeping in that room ( in Nagy Kanizsa) as a young girl, school times, five-six years old. And I saw all the paintings, his friends paintings, his new paintings. - And then I used to get high fever, 39-40o C in no time. So this darling Jewish doctor used to look after me. His name was 'Golabatshi' [phonetical from Elizabeth]. He saved my mother and saved me. And no transport at that time. He was already 70-80 then. He came on his own foot in rain and snow, he would come, night or day ... And I am ever grateful to him.

This lovely Jewish doctor respected my mother very much. He did not want to embarrass her and examine her after my birth. He asked the nurse to do this, asked whether my mother was alright, and whether the birth-line was clear, no problem. The nurse confirmed everything was alright. But something was broken inside my mother, I do not know what else, and within two days my mother had 109 F fever and for nine years she never picked up her normal health! That woman (the nurse) said that I was to be immediately christened. But the custom was that a child would only be christened on the 3rd/4th day or even a month or two later. She wanted to call the priest immediately.

And my mother made the mistake and said, my daughter will not be christened now. She will learn about all the religions of the world and then choose for herself." Dagmar mentioned surprised, "that is what I said to my children also." And Elizabeth queried, "Really?" Dagmar said, "yes of course, they have a Hindu father and Christian mother, how can I force Christianity on them? They have to choose for themselves." Elizabeth continued, "and this way the nurse got annoyed with my mother.

I was christened much later at the age of ten. I myself decided ... decided god-mother, god-father and they came with me, even mother came with me and I liked the priest also. The priest taught us catechism at school, he was a good man. I am sure he is no more." Dagmar asked, "and so you became a Catholic Christian." Elizabeth, "yes. But here in India I became everything. There is one thing which is in everything, what ever you call it. There are no two truths in this world. People keep saying what is true, but I feel what is true. I often went to temples to feel the atmosphere and paint.

"So there was a revolution! Mother in black," Elizabeth carried on and Dagmar continued, "marrying an artist who had no money! But the two had everything in common!" Elizabeth said, "yes." And Dagmar stated sadly, "only the war broke everything apart." Elizabeth emphasized, "yes, yes, yes. Evolution of life. And their paintings ..."

"Where are your father's paintings, dearest Elizabeth?" Dagmar asked. "Yes, that is what I want to know," Elizabeth spontaneously put in, "... so many things should be done. It should be advertised in the papers, whether Ferenc Sass' paintings are anywhere in private possessions. In Munich there must be several paintings because for six years he not only studied there but exhibited also."

## the story about a baby in a box

**Sunday, the 19th of May 1996 ...**

Elizabeth carried on, "he went with me and my mother ... shall I tell you another story?" Dagmar beamed, "yes! Please tell me."

She continued, "I was four or six months old. You see in those days you could not rent things, so you had to take on the train all the things you needed, even furnitures, and for mother and father specially their things for painting, the easels etc.

They had made from iron a folding bed and all the things they needed. In autumn already. Finally it came the problem of me. Mother was still nursing me. And mother did not know cooking. But father knew a little, because in his childhood he had to look after his baby brother. Mother never learned sewing either, but she cut material and put me into frocks etc. So, finally they reached with all this luggage (boxes, paint-boxes and brushes and what not) Munich.

But they arrived via Vienna. And in Vienna was the customs. The custom man opened everything one after the other, examined and passed it. And then the custom officer saw mother carrying the little box (all padded with cotton wool) in a sling across her shoulders with me inside. And what is in this, he demanded, expecting to find jewelleries in it. Mother was a little shy (although she was not a shy person), still, she could not say that there was a baby in it. So the officer grabbed the box and threw it on the floor. And then the child in it started howling. Nothing happened to me because I was so well wrapped-up. So the officer looked at the baby and laughed. Mother took it over her shoulder again. Then the officer took his stamp and put a huge stamp on the box. No customs for this, was his comment."

This made both Elizabeth and Dagmar laugh out aloud. "This story the whole family knew," said Elizabeth and she carried on:

"In Munich my father took always the same studio every year. It was in the Maria Theresian Strasse near the Pinakothek. First time as a baby, I stayed in Munich for six months. They used to go back home to Hungary in the summer, and be in Munich in the winter. His 'guru' had his school in Munich, the famous artist Simon Hollósy [Elizabeth pronounced the name Shimon Holoshy].

There were no lifts in those days, of course. Father's studio was six floors up. Very good light up there, of course, for painting etc. So there were those very hefty strong German men helping mother and father. These huge Germans carried all their things up to that 6th floor. When the folding bed was carried up, my mother was standing in the room with me in the box over her shoulders. To better tell the men were to place things, she put my box right in the middle of the room. The men had also become curious about the box. So my mother asked them to open it. And those Germans, they became like soft butter. Huge men with big bones, they all knelt down and spoke in German 'ein Kindlein, ein Kindlein'. My mother said it was alright to pick me up and those huge big people were so sweet and so gentle. - To my mother it remained a kind of a riddle after what happened later on and during the war in Germany.

Years later in India, I told my mother that we should do one more exhibition in Munich. After our stay in Japan, remember? My mother wanted to have an exhibition in England of our Indian paintings. So



after that exhibition in England, she wanted to show me Europe, show me all the museums and great works of art, of course." Dagmar asked, "that was in 1938 was it not?" "Hm," Elizabeth, "a strange thing happened on our way in the train to Munich. We were looking out of the window, all of a sudden our train stopped. Another two trains passed by. In one of them Hitler was going, in the other Chamberlain, in opposite directions. We did not see them, but we were told."



"And one day, the five boys (i.e. my father and his friends) had nothing to eat. So, they said, 'Ferry (that is what they called him) now you show us what you can do.' 'Well,' Ferenc said thinking, 'I have a very rich uncle near Budapest, I will go down to him and ask him for some food.' So he went on the train (a few hours away from Budapest) and he arrived in the nice time of the morning about ten o'clock. When he arrived, his uncle was sitting like this in the chair (pointing at herself), a doctor and a nurse were tending him. 'O my nephew,' he burst out, 'how sweet of you to have come to see me.' - My father never dared to say what he had come for. By the evening he went back on foot to Budapest, (yes, he walked all the way) as he had to be back at the academy," Elizabeth laughed into herself.

*The telephone was ringing. It took some time to get Mary from her afternoon siesta and for her to finish the call. Then Elizabeth and I could carry on peacefully again.*

"How did your father and your mother first meet?" asked Dagmar. "I'll come to that," Elizabeth carried on. "Those five darling friends of his, asked Ferry, when he eventually arrived back in Budapest, what have you brought? Then Ferenc told them what happened. - Then I don't know what happened. By chance," Elizabeth mused, "I heard this story.

But my father was really without money. Then he received a letter from 'Mishi Batshi' (his younger brother, you know), that he was transferred from Vienna to Nagykanizsa. And it would be very nice if Ferenc came to visit him. So Ferry thought it over seriously. Because to write to his younger brother that he had nothing and still would like to come, for an elder brother, that would not have been very stylish. So Ferry decided to go anyway, go somehow to Nagykanizsa, anyway. And he started walking again. He took to the road and during the day he walked and during the nights he slept in the dry grass of farms (it was summer time) you know?" Elizabeth asked and Dagmar came forward with "hay, hay-lofts on farms, super, hay smells good ... so he walked all the way from Budapest to Nagykanizsa? But that is very far!" (The distance is about 200 kilometer) "Yes," confirmed Elizabeth.

"That younger brother of my father (my uncle) when he was grown up he always had their father staying with him. He looked after the old man. This grand-father of mine, he always had dogs. And he smoked the pipe, you know the one with the long handle?" Elizabeth asked. "Yes, I know, my grand-father had one like that," Dagmar answered. "There is the picture in my mind which I remember," Elizabeth continued, "I would love to draw it! When coming back from school, I often used to drop in at my uncle's house and visit grand-father. At least as long as my uncle was posted in Nagykanizsa. The old gentleman used to sit in his big easy-chair. Next to him his dog with a Turkish cap on his head and a pipe in his mouth." Elizabeth grinned and Dagmar bursted out laughing, "that gentleman had a sense of humor!" Elizabeth carried on, "this was the picture every day, really. Even when he was in bed, all the cushions were put for the dog and he had the same Turkish cap on and a pipe in his mouth. The dog had a small pipe, grand-father a long one."

"So when your father visited your uncle, his younger brother, in Nagykanizsa," Dagmar asked again, "your father got stuck there, he met your mother?"

Elizabeth carried on, "he reached there. But he must have asked for some money after all from my uncle and immediately opened an art-school. Because he was requested and instructed by his 'guru'. The very famous artist Simon Hollósy, who had his own school in Munich. But he also had an open-air studio in Nagybánya and Técső (beautiful places) with at least forty students. He instructed my father saying, now you carry on with my work, and as you are going to a small town, you open a school. See for three or six months, then you can detect gifted students and encourage them to study further in Budapest or Munich. So, my father was instructed by his 'guru' you see. Hollósy was the man to give importance not to studio painting but to outdoors painting. And so we are all his students. Mother also and me, too.

From the age of fourteen my mother wanted to study art. After my father had opened the studio, there were already big discussions and co-discussions in the family and among friends but especially in my mother's family, whether they could let her go and study art or not. Because mother had no mother. My aunt was bringing up the children. My mother lost her mother at the age of three." Dagmar queried sadly, "at the age of three?"

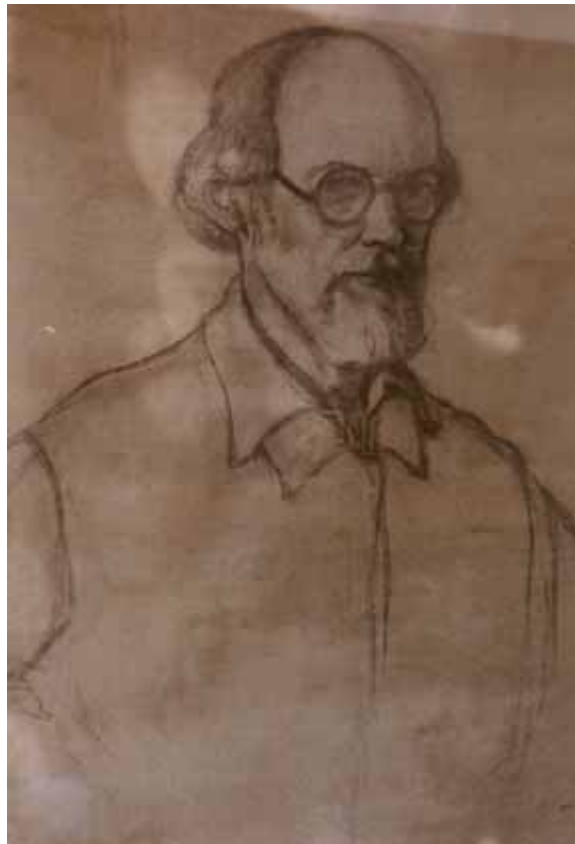
Elizabeth continued, "then till the age of eleven she had her grand-mother, whom she loved. She was also an intelligent woman." Dagmar repeated, "your mother's mother died when your mother was three. That means there were four children without a mother." Elizabeth, "yes and the fifth child died when she was only three months old." Dagmar asked, "so there was a fifth child. Your mother was one of five children." "Yes. Tettara ... Tettara," remembered Elizabeth, "Tettara was that baby's name." - Dagmar remembered that her own most beloved god-mother's name was 'Tetta' (for Meredine). So now she knew where the name came from: Hungary! - "When mother was nine her grand-mother also died. And even what I hold precious and strongly in my heart is from that grand-mother, and mother remembered her all her life."

"So your grandmother from your mother's side was that lady," Dagmar mused, "who was such a staunch Hungarian national, but still she married against the will of her family that military gentleman from the Hungarian-Austrian side, and was eventually stationed as wife of police commissioner at Nagykanizsa." Elizabeth confirmed, "yes, yes!"

## the story about dog's shopping in Munich

**Sunday, the 19th of May 1996 ...**

After some time Elizabeth started off again, "you know one of the sweetest thing my father had told me was this. He told me about the dogs in Munich. Every home had a dog, those long, low-legged ones." Elizabeth said. "Dackel", Dagmar helped, "Dachshund, badger dog." "Yes," Elizabeth, "and they put a chit of paper either in the dogs little basket or in its snout and it went down to the grocer. In the little basket was also the money and the person in the shop took it, put the goods inside the basket and the dog brought it home." "Yes lovely," said Dagmar, "I have seen this in films. But just imagine ... today you cannot do such a thing anymore ..."



Elizabeth's father self-portait (sketch)

"My father," Elizabeth continued, "was good enough to tell me things like this. You know, the dogs would stand in line." Dagmar, "your father must have watched the dogs in the shop." "Yes." Elizabeth, "sometimes the shopkeeper found that there was not enough money but still he put the correct goods inside the basket. In the meat shops the little doggies would get sometimes a piece of sausage for themselves. My father would speak with such love and affection.



## the story about grandfather's peculiarities

**Sunday, the 19th of May 1996 ...**

Hm, this is also a beautiful story my father told me: You see, his father's aunt became the mother-superior in a convent in Pecs [Elizabeth pronounced it Petsh]. - And, you know, some years ago a student came from Hungary to visit me here. And I was eager to enquire about that place: Pecs. In the gardens of the convent they used to bury their dead. And I was sure this lady was also buried there. My grand-father's sister. But that young man was a well trained communist because he said that place has been turned into a development camp / training institute.

Because my grandfather loved his sister very much. But once you go into that kind of convent, you cannot see your relations anymore. Anyway, he was so eager to see his sister once more." Dagmar asked, "was that the grandfather with the dog and the Turkish cap and the pipe?" "No no," piped Elizabeth, "this was my father's father. 'Gruss Batshi' was my mother's father in Nagykanizsa. So he (my father's father), in his young age, worked out a plan to rent a house near the convent. Where the windows of the house overlooked the garden of the convent, you see. He achieved this, (as they lived in Pecs anyway). The rule was that, to go into the compound of the convent, the consent of the mother-superior was needed. So very cleverly he trained a parrot in that way that he flew into the garden of the convent and remained there. So he had to go and meet the mother-superior to get his parrot back. Even though he could only talk to her via a screen, he spoke to his sister once again. I don't know whether they smiled in recognition at each other, or ...

I have never seen these people again and I am so far away, but somehow I feel connected to them. - Until now always my mother's family was important. - Now, I don't know, these people matter a lot. They come up in my mind many a nights." Dagmar said, "I am sure there must be still relations of your father's side alive." Elizabeth, "somewhere. But they may also think ... or they may not ... their own mistake. Because they have not quite thrown them out, but considered my mother, my father ... outsiders.

I am sorry, I don't know why I have to talk about these things." Elizabeth concluded. "But it is lovely to hear it all," Dagmar persisted. "And when I have typed it down, I will come to you and read it out, dearest Elizabeth, and you have to say, this is incorrect and this must be different." Elizabeth smiled, "but all this is all ... 'oolter-poolter' (helter-skelter) ... not at all in chronological order!" And Dagmar reassured her, "I do not want any chronological order. Are we not women! Are we not female enough to talk about things when they come up in our hearts? That is what counts. And that is full of life!"

## Elizabeth and the story about their arrival in India and meeting an old friend from Hungary

**Sunday, the 9th of June 1996**

*When I came to Rabindra Nagar that Sunday morning it thundered and rained once again as if the monsoon had started already. But, of course, beginning of June was much too early, the monsoon is due quite predictably around the beginning of July every year in our part of India.*

*Elizabeth carried a lovely thin blue and white cotton shawl around herself and looked queenly. She beamed at me. Unfortunately, though, she had bad tooth-ache. I could see her lower right cheek being swollen. As on and off Elizabeth had been complaining about slight tooth-aches, I was not very sure how serious it was this time. Generally speaking, I can feel that she aches more or less all the time all over her body. She is a sick lady. And it is unbelievable how she manages to disguise her aches by will-power, meditation, and sheer mental work.*

*Later that afternoon, when Elizabeth had thrown all her covers away (it had become quite warm again), I saw for the first time after many months her feet again. Their swollen-up disfiguration made me cry. No, Elizabeth will never be able to walk on them again ...*

*She was willing to be distracted from it all and turn to things which had been taken out of a box by Bahadur. I was looking with Elizabeth through a photo-album. Photos of Elizabeth (when she was beautiful, and young, and so utterly vulnerable to my eyes) with for instance Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, the second President of India, with Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and, of course, with the Dalai Lama when he was young. They passed through my hands as they had not been fixed into the album.*

There was a photo of a group of young people, all in swimming suits, near a lake. Dagmar could make out her mother, not her father, though. "This must be Hungary?" She questioned. "Yes. 'Vegetarians'. Parents' friends, they used to go around with them," replied Elizabeth. "And who is this gentleman?" Dagmar wanted to find her father ... "This is the ... O, did I tell you the story that the Britishers did not want to allow us to land in India when we first came? We had perfect travelling papers. But we wore chappals (sandals) and dresses made of hand-woven cloth." Dagmar asked indignantly, "because of your looks, your landing in India was jeopardized? You must tell me that story, please Elizabeth. I will put the album aside and listen only. Please tell me about your landing in India. And the gentleman in that photo."

Elizabeth started, "from Egypt - because we stayed in Italy for three-four months - we went by boat, an Italian ship. O, I did not tell you. We already had hand-woven cloth. A friend of mother's in Hungary was fond of weaving and mother disclosed to this friend (and this friend only) that we had intention to go to India. So the lady wove some cloth for us. Two lengths of cloth for dresses. 'You must wear my hand-woven cloth', she said. You remember those 'vegetarians' in the photo? Their were followers of nature, sandals in summer, bare feet, the same as the Franciscan fathers were wearing.

So, at Bombay port, two tall officers, ruddy complexions, looked us up and down. Our strange clothes caused extra suspicion. Then talked with one another in English. We did not know a word of English.

Before this, on board the ship, during our travelling between Egypt and Bombay, my mother followed her 'nature cure'. She continued her exercise at four a.m. on the roof of the ship, of course. So, the few Indians who were travelling on the ship (most of the travellers were English people) were mysteriously attracted to us white-robed figures. They would come up and put flowers at mother's feet, and say ... 'Gandhi, Gandhi, Gandhi.'

There was an Indian family travelling. An elderly, well-groomed lady, a very modern young lady and a Sardarji, who was the husband of the young lady. He was bringing her back from Paris where she had studied to become a doctor. Now for him my mother's behaviour (the early morning exercise, the hand-woven cloths, etc.) was also strange and he dared to introduce himself and talk with her. He spoke German, mother spoke German, so they could communicate. And by chance, mother showed him the letter Tagore had written to her, that we are welcome to Santiniketan.

Now in the line of people wanting to disembark through customs at Bombay port, this family was standing behind us. The Sardarji could hear the officers talking between themselves and understood, of course, because he understood English. Not to let them (mother and me) get down, keep them on the ship for two days and send them back to where they came from. You see, it was the time of Gandhi's salt movement.



So the Sardarji requested mother to speak on our behalf. We said 'yes', because we could not speak English. So he stood in front of us and told them, 'gentlemen these are not dangerous people, they are invited by Tagore, they are artists and, besides that, nobody can be sent back, who has valid travelling documents and who has a representative of his country in India.' Hungary had a Consul General in Bombay and we had Hungarian passports. The Britishers accepted this.

But then they said, how to contact the Hungarian Consulate, as the day was Saturday, the next Sunday. Only on Monday there would be a chance to do so. So where would they go, what would they do until then. Then the Sardarji said, 'I will take care of them.' Unfortunately, I have forgotten his name. He said, we would stay in the same hotel where he and his family would stay. Now, the work was left for immigration people to get in touch with the Hungarian Consulate General.

So, we were allowed to leave the ship. Yes, we also had to take our luggage. We did not have much luggage." But Dagmar was determined to find out about the gentleman in the photo: "How did it happened, though, that you took a photo of this gentleman?"

And Elizabeth cried: "the man was the Consul General! We followed the appointment on Monday at eleven o'clock the Sardarji had made for us. We were accompanied by one of his servants as a guard and to show us the way. The Consul General stayed in that old Hotel 'Majestic' opposite the Bombay National Museum. Between the museum and the hotel there was a large space (for parking and transport) which we had to cross. When we were coming towards the hotel building through the gate there was a gentleman standing on the steps of the hotel.

And as we were getting close, he came down the steps and walked straight towards us. Then he greeted my mother by her Hungarian name." Dagmar said surprised, "really? So he must have known her?" Elizabeth continued, "my mother was thunderstruck. Even I was shivering. She asked him, how do you know me? And he answered: O, I have seen your photo-graph. All in Hungarian, of course. But where could you see my photograph? Asked my mother. On my brother's dressing-table, he answered."



The Trimurti at Elephanta Caves  
(an island a few kilometres off the Bombay Coast)

Dagmar laughed incredulously, "so the brother of the Consul General of Hungary to India was an art connoisseur?" And Elizabeth said, "a writer and an art connoisseur. My father and that gentleman were friends. And even I remembered then suddenly that I was riding on his knees as a small child."

Spontaneously Dagmar came forth with, "so actually you were all kind of friends. This is what I call a beautiful coincidence!" And Elizabeth replied, "yes! - He immediately invited us to stay for five days in that hotel, and he would show us Bombay, and he would take us to the Elephanta Caves ..." Dagmar said, "gosh your life really is like a fairy tale."



## Elizabeth and her meeting Rabindranath Tagore

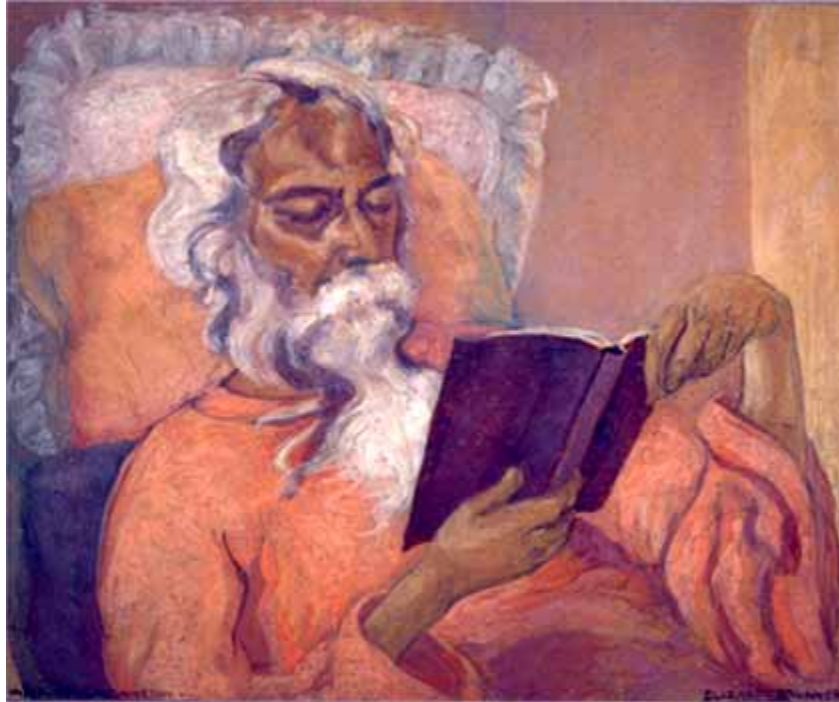
**Sunday, the 16th of June 1996**

*The workmen, who were suppose to come and work at my brandnew place, had let me down for the third weekend (weekends are the only times, when I am at home, they can work and repair all the water-marks in the rooms the last monsoon had left). So I decided to visit Elizabeth again. I had heard from Laurence that one of her trouble-tooth had been extracted and I wanted to see for myself how Elizabeth really was.*

*The weather is most surprisingly strange: No more 'burning dry 49o C', but either 'moist 35o C' or 'moist 40oC'. I had mentally decided that this was the monsoon, though much too early. It was too humid and it rained too much for the time of the year. The birds also behaved strangely, flying very low, and I often watched them coming from nowhere just missing my car when I drove. This had not happened before. The humidity was too high. I believed all, men and beast, were suffering from some kind of equilibrium-shock because of this unprecedented weather.*

*It thundered and rained all the way from Haryana to Rabindra Nagar. - Elizabeth sat on her bed, as usual, but her eyes where far away. She had only mild pain from the tooth-extraction at the moment. She told me that she believed, two more teeth would have to come out eventually. - Still, we enjoyed being together, once again, and I could watch how Elizabeth gradually became more lively in my presence.*

As Elizabeth was also willing to talk into the microphone, Dagmar asked her: "I would like to know how you caught Tagore that way, in that middle painting there, where he is reading a book. He looks as if he is in bed." But Elizabeth retorted, "in an easy-chair on the veranda of the 'small house'! - He would sit there and read and have a little nap. His hands would not move. He remained in the same position, he was not fidgity at all. And usually he dressed in a colourful kurta (an Indian gentleman's shirt)." Dagmar said, "how lovely. Sit a little and sleep a little. Just like you do these days."



..."Tagore looks as if he is in bed..."

*Sir Rabindranath Tagore was born on 06.05.1861 in Calcutta and died 07.08.1941 also in Calcutta. He was one of India's greatest writer, painter, composer and philosopher.*



*He founded the international university 'Visva Bharati' in Santiniketan(a few of hours train journey from Calcutta) where he tried to eternalize his ideals of a world citizenship.*



*Famous are his 'Rabindra Sangeets' and dance dramas. His songs and dances enchant the spectators with their free and flowing style (in comparison to conventional Indian music and dance).*



*He had three daughters and two sons. Unfortunately his wife Menalini passed away already at the age of 29, in the year 1902.*

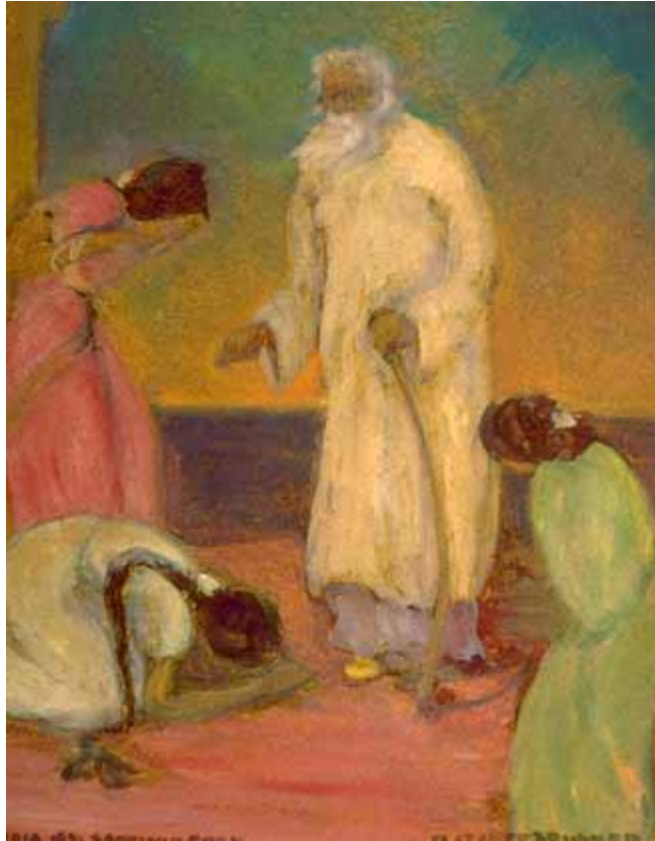




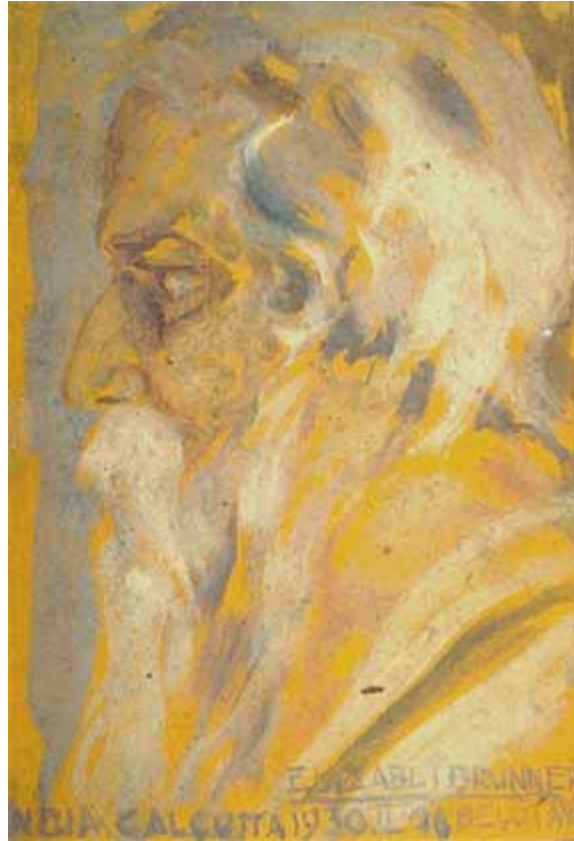
*He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913.*



*It is, perhaps, interesting to note that Tagore's birthday - seventh of May - was Elizabeth's mother's and father's wedding day.*











Tagore's brother Jorashankar Scenes in Santiniketan

## the stories about Santiniketan

**Sunday, the 16th of June 1996...**

Elizabeth smiled and continued, "I used to make a round in the compound of Santiniketan. Tagore permitted me to come and go even into his house whenever I wanted. So when I found him, I used to rush for my painting utensils, settle down somewhere near and paint.

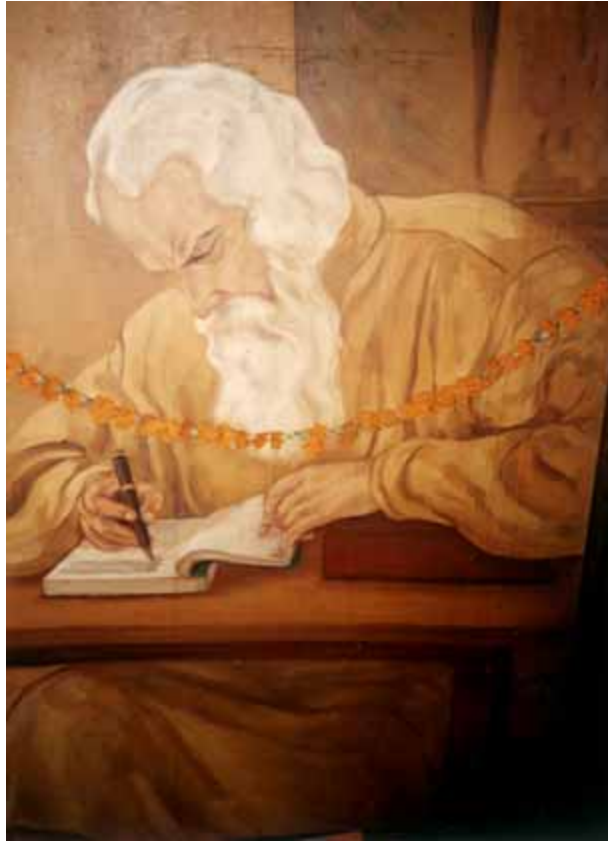


...'Tagore did not know I was there painting him'...

There is one painting I have given to the National Museum here in Delhi. I was seeing him from the front. He was always trying to find a little protected area, that people should not come up from behind and surprise him. That was on the first floor of the 'big house'. There I believe I caught him composing. When he was hiding like this and felt secluded, he used to create something special.

I remember, I went upstairs in the 'big house' going round the veranda. One window was open. He was sitting at the table. Sometimes picking up his pen. Sometimes just listening. His little grand-daughter was playing the piano downstairs. And some music waved up. Then he would pick up his pen and make notes on the paper. Maybe he was composing something. I don't know. So when I saw him like this I rushed for my things. (I am so sorry, but my paint box got lost later on in Nainital.)

I took off my chappals. Slowly went over the very low window-sill. There were some flower pots which protected me. Then I settled down crossed legs with my canvas and painted. I was very happy to see and paint him like this. Normally he was never alone, always visitors and students and many other people were around him. Of course, he met everybody very courteously. But here I had him being himself. I worked breathlessly so that he should not notice me."



...'Tagore did not know I was there painting him'...

Dagmar asked, "he did not know you were there?" Elizabeth answered, "no. Later on he lifted up his head and noticed me. But then the painting was already done. He had a shock when he realized that he was not alone in the room. And then he got up and came over. He seemed so tall to me there with my picture and paints on the floor, I thought a mountain was moving toward me. Then he stood and looked at my painting for quite some time. Then he smiled."

Elizabeth continued, "only when my paintings were finished would he ask to look at them. The beauty was that he allowed me to move freely around. I was only a girl of nineteen-twenty, rather childish and innocent. But I could go to the house and inside wherever I wanted to. I did not need to ask permission from anybody."



Gurudev's Buddha Statue (My first glimpses of Buddha)

After that day (when I painted him in his upstairs room), I took my utensils and went down to the lower part of the house and the reception room. A very beautifully designed and decorated room. Gurudev had also come down and he was standing near the table. His daughter-in-law was there, too, maybe arranging his five-o'clock tea. He turned around and looked at me saying, 'I have been painted all over the world by famous artists, but this chit of a girl caught me!'" Elizabeth was grinning and Dagmar laughed out.

She continued, "I had his permission to go anywhere I liked to go, but after this incident, he even said 'you can come anytime.' After this I did that painting in the easy-chair on the veranda of the 'small house'. We stayed two years in Santiniketan and whenever I felt like it, I painted him.



In the meantime he decided not to stay in that 'big house' any longer. That 'big house' was called 'Uttarayan'. Very fancily made up, all his own design. Everything noble. He used to sleep on the roof of that room where I painted him first. That was his bed room. In the hot season, his bed was taken up to the roof above. We all went to bed very late because the nights were more bearable than the days. Our little house was right next door to 'Uttarayan'. And looking up we could see, his bed was there, his table was there, his faithful attendant was there. - It was such shame that I could not talk to this man, because I did not know Bengali. - And Tagore was walking up and down and finally settling down. Watching the moon and the change of the colours. When, after an hour, I would look up again, he was not there anymore. If the wind came from an uncomfortable direction, the attendant had to shift everything to another part of the roof-veranda, for instance the opposite side. Very often, three, four times he changed."

Dagmar asked, "his wife must have died early?" Elizabeth said, "hm! His daughter-in-law cared for him, looked after him. He used to have his tea with his daughter-in-law ..."





"When did Tagore shift to the smaller accommodation?" Dagmar queried again and Elizabeth answered, "we were still there in Santiniketan. It seems, he suddenly asked his people to build him a small hut only from earth." Dagmar, "mud-house, very healthy and cooling." Elizabeth continued, "yes. I suppose the 'big house' must have become too noisy for him.

By the way, he planted a tree in his garden on everyone of his birthdays. And he visited each tree on each birthday, and also every morning. Then, they were just growing. Meantime I have seen photographs and now they have grown into beautiful big trees.

That 'small house' had only one bedroom and a veranda open towards the front. There, on the one side he had his easy-chair and on the other side a table and chair which was brought out every morning. His books were also put on the table."





...'The veranda-wall behind Tagore was painted by the artists who build the mud-house'...

Dagmar asked, "you must have painted him from the inside of the mud-house in that painting because behind him there is a landscape." But Elizabeth explained, "that veranda-wall was painted by the artists who built the mud-house. That is why there is a scenery behind him in my painting. - This little house was his dream house. Up to the last.

O yes, and Tagore had a 'self-operating' dog and two peacocks." Dagmar asked, "a what dog?" Elizabeth smiled, "a dog which choose to be with him and he loved these animals very dearly.

This painting was also my last painting of Tagore. The plastic got off and I have to replace it." (Paintings which are hanging in Elizabeth's room have see-through plastic covers so that the oil is not too badly affected by the weather.) Dagmar asked, "were you there when Tagore died?" Elizabeth shook her head in denial.

## her travels through America, England, Holland, Germany

**Sunday, the 16th of June 1996...**

*During the years 1935 to 1938 Elizabeth travelled with her mother around the world. The first two years they stayed in Japan. After that they travelled through America. They went to England, where they had an exhibition, and visited some of the most famous museums in Holland and Germany.*

*At the end of this period (1938), they stayed for three weeks in Hungary. This was the last time Elizabeth met her father again.*



Elizabeth continued, "we went from Santiniketan to Japan. And to America." Dagmar asked, "to America also?" Elizabeth said, "yes, we had our exhibition in New York. And then to England. But mother received a letter from Tagore in New York saying, if you want to see me again then you better hurry up and come back. The letter was meant for both of us. He treated us like sisters.

So we had to kind of hurry. We went over to Europe. Mother wanted to show me the European art. We went to Rembrand's House. Through Germany to Munich." Dagmar remembered, "where your train was stopped ..." Yes, Elizabeth, "and then we went for three weeks to Hungary. - After our exhibition in London, we packed our paintings and shipped them off with Thomas Cook ... And they were eventually stolen." Dagmar exclaimed, "what, they were stolen?" Elizabeth said, "yes, a hundred paintings."

*Mary interrupted us. She had made lunch. So we all enjoyed the lovely meal.*

## her meeting Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira

Sunday, the 16th of June 1996...



Nehru, painted by Elizabeth when in 'Constitution House' between 1951 and 1955

Later on Elizabeth was in the mood to continue the talk and she remembered, "in London I met Nehru for the first time." Dagmar asked, "in London?" Elizabeth continued, "he came to see our exhibition all by himself. I was on the stairs and saw somebody coming up. I could see it was not an English man and I recognized him and called mother. At that time I also asked him to pose for me. He said, 'alright, I have not much time, but I will give you half an hour tomorrow morning. In the Dorchester Hotel, at 9 o'clock.'

So we went there. Everything was arranged. Nehru was sitting in the room and I started painting him standing about a meter away from him at my easel. He was more or less looking down. He was wearing a Gandhi cap and a western dress. We both stuck to a half an hour, because he had appointments afterwards. That painting is now in the National Museum. - Then I also made friend with

Indira and asked her to pose for me. She said, 'tomorrow.' So the next day we went again. This time to her room at the Dorchester Hotel and I did her portrait. And mother made a photograph of both of us. (Dagmar had seen that photo the last time she had been with Elizabeth.) But I don't know now where is that painting of Indira. I have done another one here in India in her residence." Dagmar said, "yes, that one I have seen."

## her stay at Baroda, Gujarat

**Sunday, the 16th of June 1996...**

*Elizabeth and her mother had come back in 1938. In London they had met via Dr. Radhakrishna (whom they knew well) H.H. the Maharaja of Baroda. Although by then, they had planned and fixed appointments for exhibitions in Paris and Munich, the aged royal gentleman could persuade them to cancel their commitments. On his invitation they travelled on board an Italian vessel to India.*

*This ship was due to leave in three weeks time. Those were the three weeks Elizabeth and her mother used to travel through Germany, and stay in Hungary with their family.*

*As the old Maharaja of Baroda had died, Elizabeth and her mother were moved to an artist's guest house in the lovely Zoological Park of Baroda. True to their nature, both mother and daughter fulfilled the late Maharaja's wish. They painted people and place.*

But Dagmar carried Elizabeth back to England and asked: "how long were you in England?" Elizabeth said, "I believe, altogether in England and Europe we were for about four weeks. Plus those three weeks in Hungary." Dagmar, "so after about two months, you started your journey back to India?" Elizabeth, "yes, on the same ship as H.H. the Maharaja of Baroda was travelling." Dagmar asked, "and, when you came back to India, did you meet Tagore then?" Elizabeth, "yes." Dagmar, "so you went straight from Bombay to Santiniketan?" Elizabeth answered, "no. We had to stay in Baroda for some time."

Dagmar asked, "but why?" Elizabeth continued, "because His Highness had advised us to go straight to Baroda. He would follow. He had some work to attend to in Bombay. He would then show us personally the sights in Baroda which he wanted to have immortalised for future generations. The historical sights as well as the way people lived in and around Baroda State. They put us up in the Royal Guest House.

The next morning during breakfast we got the news that the Maharaja had had a stroke in Bombay. Now Baroda had signed a contract with the Britishers that we will be travelling and painting there. So once we knew that we would not be shown the sights of Baroda by the Maharaja, which we were supposed to be painting, mother looked all over and painted all the palaces and ancient places of Baroda." Dagmar asked, "did your mother ever paint the Maharaja of Baroda?" Elizabeth, "no. But I did." Dagmar, "where are all these paintings?" Elizabeth, "all in the Museum of Baroda." Dagmar, "ah, nice, that is where they belong."





Woman spinning, Patiala



Elizabeth carried on, "then my mother decided ... You see the Maharaja on his dying bed divided everything between all his children. He had five sons and one daughter from his second wife. And one son from his first wife, who would be the successor to the throne. And he said, 'I have brought along with me from Europe two ladies, and I am worried about them, look after them.' But he should have said something more definite. Because the first son had never been really interested in arts. - We attended his coronation, though.



Sister & child, Royputana



Young Rajasthani Girl

So we were given over to the Museum of Baroda and its Director and we no longer had anything to do with the Royalties. Mother enjoyed painting the old palaces, ancient temples, avenues and sights of the State of Baroda. They are now all in the Museum of Baroda." Dagmar put in, "what a wonderful reason for me to go to Baroda once again!" And Elizabeth carried on, "so, we stayed for about three and a half months in Baroda and then we passed over all our paintings to the Director. The agreement was that the ready paintings were handed over and the sketches remained with us."

## cordial warrant of arrest and stay in Nainital, UP

**Sunday, the 16th of June 1996...**

Elizabeth carried on, "then we also went to Santiniketan. And then, of course, it was a great thing to meet again, specially Gurudev (Tagore), and Nanda Lal Bose, his best student and a great artist himself.

Some time before we had arrived, Tagore had been really very ill. For three days he was so ill, he threw away all his clothes and lay bare in his bed to be in the direct connection and near His God. - But by the time we arrived, he would walk and talk again, he seemed alright.

Do you know, I would say that Tagore was a composition of great thoughts! You know, like those dolls made all of cotton? Every bit of cotton inside the man, a great thought!"

*In between, they also went back to Santiniketan. But the Second World War was looming high over everything and eventually started.*

### Surroundings of the idyllic hill resort Nainital

*It was two years into the war, when mother and daughter were rather cordially served a warrant of arrest by the British resident of Baroda and requested to move to Nainital (Uttar Pradesh). This happened to all 'hostile foreigners' stationed in India during that time, and the Brunners were Hungarians. Though the reason for being sent to this idyllic hill resort in the lower Himalayas was rather dubious, the Brunners eventually loved the place and stayed on. Elizabeth and her mother revelled in the wonders of nature, the mountains and the climate. The results are some of the most profound paintings of scenic beauty.*



## Elizabeth and the story about her mother's death

**Monday, the 8th July 1996**

*The early monsoon this year with its intense humidity together with physical strain had hit me once again with severe lumbago. A yearly, two-yearly occurrence if I did not take care, and this year once again, I had not. I went to meet my lovely friend after a rather long interval, always having in the back of my mind that Elizabeth was in a much worse condition.*

*Even Elizabeth birthday on the first of July I did not attend, but the Hungarian Embassy, the Cultural Centre and many friends of Elizabeths' had made a memorable event out of this special day for her.*



...'Mr Lutoria was sitting behind his newspaper smiling benignly'...

*Mr. Lutoria was sitting behind his newspaper smiling benignly. My lovely Elizabeth was busy and looked fine. Bahadur had found inside a tipped-over 'morha' (an Indian bast [raffia] stool) old shoulder-bags and plastic-bags full of letters, greeting and other cards, envelops with photos dating back to the 1950s. All this stuck in a big trunk. It was never opened ever since Elizabeth had moved to Rabindra Nagar. So now she was busy looking through and trying to sort out these things.*



*As I could not sit for long, my recorder was not on. So this will be my own account of what Elizabeth talked about that afternoon.*



...'My lovely Elizabeth was busy and looked fine'...

*During the winter 1949/50 Elizabeth and her mother were still staying in Nainital. It was a very cold winter, with snow piling up everywhere. It occurred during these days that in one room in their house, where the open-fire-place was not used, a big fat rat shot down the chimney. Her mother, being present in that room, was stunned and even frightened. She said to Elizabeth 'a bad spirit' had come down.*

*Later that same day, it so happened that a small baby rat was caught in their mouse-trap. Her mother insisted that the rat had to be freed outside at once. Elizabeth was warming her feet and getting ready for bed so she requested her mother to wait until the morning. But her mother was determined, she went out, without a coat, alone. The rat had to be freed quite a distance away from the house, as otherwise it would be back in the warm surrounding within a jiffy. So her mother must have stayed out for more than half an hour. Of course, she came back shivering. She refused Elizabeth's offer for a hot cup of tea with rum or a hot chocolate. Only later on that night she requested Elizabeth for another blanket as she could not get warm under her cover.*



*The result of this unhappy outing developed into pleurisy. But Elizabeth's mother would not accept that she was in a serious condition, instead she went on with her usual routine. Until she collapsed and was brought down to the hospital in Bareilly. There she stabilized a little.*

*Once the doctor was telling Elizabeth to give her an 'egg-flip'. Elizabeth, being herself in a rather shaky state, requested the nurse to administer the 'egg-flip' to her mother. Unfortunately, the liquid egg somehow got into her mother's windpipe. And Elizabeth watched in horror when her mother uttered her last two words ... "O no!" ... This is how the great painter Elizabeth Sass Brunner, mother of Elizabeth Brunner, passed away. It was about four/five days after she had gone out into that cold night.*



The grave of Elizabeth's mother at Nainital

*It was in 1950 that Elizabeth Sass Brunner died in Bareilly. She was only 60 years old. Her grave can still be visited in the old English cemetery on the hillside in Nainital.*

*I believe Elizabeth never really got over the death of mother.*

*Elizabeth stayed on in Nainital for about another month. Then she came down to Delhi. In Delhi all Elizabeth could think of was to contact the Nehru family as they had always been very friendly and generous to her. She was advised to take up a room in the government guest-house called 'Western Court' on Janpath.*



Satyajit Ray



Holyman resting with cow



*Elizabeth's wish to hold a memorial exhibition for her mother was also very much supported and Indira helped her personally a great deal in arranging everything, she even wrote invitation cards. There was no proper exhibition hall in Delhi at that time, so the exhibition was held in the 'Imperial Hotel' on Janpath (a lovely old British style hotel which is still there today). Lady Mountbatten was supposed to inaugurate the exhibition but was, unfortunately, called away. Before leaving though, she bought quite a few paintings of Elizabeth Sass Brunner and Elizabeth Brunner.*

*The Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (from the ruling family of Kapoorthala, and the then Minister of Health) was gracious enough to inaugurate the exhibition. The exhibition became, of course, an immense success.*



## Elizabeth's talk about her stay at 'Western Court' and 'Constitution House'

Saturday, the 27th July 1996

*There are six seasons in this sub-continent, I was told when first coming here to India and, I believe, this really is so. On and off, a few days, or sometimes continuous a few weeks are absolutely beautiful. They fall between the monsoon and the Indian autumn (which is quite different from the European autumn). When it is not overcast or raining the world around is dipped into such brilliant light that it is hard to behold.*



A way to Elizabeth's residence

*The crystal clearness and brilliance of the sky above has the most incredible cloud formations. One can sit and watch the wonderful ever changing white, the solid blue and the various shades of yellow of the sun. The earth beneath lies in delightful green lushness and soothing browns. Even the most shabby dwelling looks picturesque. The green, in particular, all around is so comforting that one almost forgets that the next day might be sticky and hot again.*

*The heavy and moist warmth had also crept into Elizabeth's rooms and it was no longer cool there. But the fan moved the air and it was bearable. Elizabeth was very lightly clad. This time the '96 Olympics' were presented on the T.V. and Bahadur and Mary were watching. Fortunately, they were kind enough to disappear into their quarters to watch T.V. So the little tape-recorder went into action again.*





Janpath today

Elizabeth wanted to tell Dagmar more about her stay at 'Western Court': "My next-door neighbour was Leelamani Naidu. She was the youngest daughter of Sarojini Naidu (whom I had met long before in Hyderabad, and whom I had also painted) and a very very dear friend of mine. She gave me some ideas about how I could go on without my mother, all alone. (Remember, I came to Delhi after the death of my mother.) I must admit that at that time I thought that Leelamani's recommendations were just some imaginations of her. But now, after years, I realised that she was giving me very sound, very sincere and very sensible advice for my future.

I used to go for morning walks. It was so different then around Janpath and India Gate! On one of these walks I saw a snake-charmer across the Janpath Road and I kindly requested him to come to the compound of 'Western Court' so that I could paint him and his animals. He agreed.



...'I requested a snake charmer to come to 'Western Court' so that I could paint him and his animals'

In the middle of my painting the snake-charmer, unfortunately, it started to rain. So we all moved to the veranda of 'Western Court' to be under cover. Leelamani came back for her lunch from office just then and saw us. She was very upset to see snakes at the 'Western Court'. Also, unfortunately, she didn't tell me about it but made directly a written complaint to the care-takers of 'Western Court'. And an official letter came to me that I should promise not to bring any such people and animals ever to the compound of 'Western Court' again. But how could I promise this? These were the themes and subjects that excited my creativity and made me able to paint again.

So it was decided that 'Constitution House' was perhaps a better place for me to be accommodated in. I shifted with all my things to that place and life started for me in 'Constitution House'. I remember even now, it was such a very pleasant time. Again I had a wonderful neighbour. A French lady, Mrs. Morand. We shared the bathroom and the veranda. She was a very cultured lady. She was the head of the French Broadcasting Service at the All India Radio. She liked animals, I mean there was no problem. I enjoyed staying there. And she loved the arts.

So I could start painting again in earnest. Again 'funny people'." (Elizabeth was referring to the snake-charmer ...)

"For British officers on leave 'Constitution House' (also called hutments) was built. So you had long buildings with each two big rooms, very nicely furnished, as well as a bathroom and a veranda. (In

the rooms different people lived but they shared the bathroom and the veranda.) And in-between these, shall we call them refined barracks, there was a stretch of lawn. So I started to use that open ground to paint." After Dagmar had quite understood the situation around 'Constitution House' and asked: "Anyway, whom did you find in the roads and bring in then? You called them 'funny people', remember?"

Elizabeth answered, "for instance , you know, those people who let the puppets dance." Dagmar, "puppeteers, puppet-players." Elizabeth, "yes, yes. And I painted that very long painting of only puppets.



...'I painted, for instance, you know, those people who let the puppets dance'...

And no neighbour complained. They came and looked at my paintings and they were excited that all those things were happening in 'Constitution House'. I also went out to paint some saintly people. I also painted Indira and Nehru again." Dagmar put in, "the zest to paint had come back to you. Thank God, it helped you to overcome the deep loss you had experienced in your mother's death." And Elizabeth replied, "yes, you could call it that."

*Later on that day Bahadur and Dagmar took out the enormous puppet painting and placed it into Elizabeth's sitting-room. It was a lovely, a delightful painting. Bahadur said it was the only one of puppets Elizabeth had painted.*

Elizabeth carried on about 'Constitution House', "I had my rabbits and parrots there. And when I went out, Mrs. Morand, the French lady, would look after them.

## about the first exhibition of her mother's Buddhist paintings

**Saturday, the 27th July 1996...**

You see in the hot season most of us would sleep on the veranda. So one morning the newspaper-walla (man) threw the newspaper on my bed as usual, and when I opened it, the news was that the ashes of Sariputra and Mahamaudgalyayana (names of two great Buddhist saints in the Pali language) were being brought to India to be installed in a newly constructed temple in ... Sanchi.



And all of a sudden the thought came to me that this is the time, I should open up my mother's paintings because she always kept her Buddha paintings closed up. I should go to that festival (when everybody from all parts of India and around the world would come) and exhibit mother's Buddha paintings.





So I went to Sanchi and many people saw mother's paintings in the exhibition.

There the impact of Buddhism really caught up with me. I always had it ... But in Sanchi it became kind of real to me.



As usual I would walk all over the place to know where I was. So one late night, it was full moon, I came wandering through the tents (which had been pitched up for the guests). In one tent there was still a light. And there was an old lama sitting teaching a child monk. I was watching them through the open tent door.





Elizabeth in the nineteen fifties

When they seemed finished, the old lama went onto his knees to wish the child a safe journey and bid him farewell. It was done with such moving respect, it touched me very much. The child, no more than four perhaps, was special, but I don't know who he was. It was then taken by his escort, another lama, to Darjeeling or some place near there.

The old lama saw me when they came out of the tent and blessed me. So all that atmosphere of the place inspired me very much and it remained with me life-long. And I also understood my mother much better. To face what is happening and let it happen.

And when I was back in Delhi, something interesting happened. I felt like going to the Birla Temple, which has also a small Buddhist shrine in its temple. There the old lama was sitting performing prayers, the same one I had seen that night in Sanchi. And then I asked him via the temple warden whether I was allowed to paint him. He agreed. Luckily I had canvas and paints with me. So I painted him. I don't remember where that painting is. I must find it, I don't know ... " Elizabeth went silent over the puzzle where the painting of the old lama could be.

## and always about Hungary

**Saturday, the 27th July 1996...**

"May I change the subject, dearest Elizabeth?" Dagmar asked. "You talked about an exhibition in Hungary some time ago." Elizabeth replied, "you mean the one, when the Bishop came from Hungary and requested me?" Dagmar said, "yes."

Elizabeth replied, "Mother had painted Christ. So I was asked to send that painting of Christ to Hungary. Also another forty paintings of mother and mine. The officers of the Hungarian Embassy and the Cultural Centre were very kind and helped me to pack the paintings and send them off to Hungary. The exhibition was in the 'Ráday Kollégium' in Budapest. I could not go, but I have photographs of that exhibition. Mother's Christ painting was hanging in the most beautiful place."

*Mary came with lovely tea for us and Elizabeth asked whether there were not some chocolates around. Mary went to the fridge and came back with a box of the most wonderful cherry chocolates from Hungary. Even I enjoyed them thoroughly, though I am not very keen on chocolates in general. But these were special. I watched Elizabeth relishing her piece. It was really magic (considering that these things generally were just not available in India.)*

After the tea Dagmar requested Elizabeth to speak a little more about her time in Hungary and she started, "at my time, German was the second language in Hungary. My grandfather did all his accounts in German. Perhaps not all the accounts, some very important things he must have done in Hungarian. But I remember that my grandfather spoke better German than Hungarian. Of course, this is not so any more." Dagmar put in, "I am sure this is no longer so. But I remember the lady, the Hungarian art historian, Dr. Lilla Szabó, who came for cataloguing your paintings, she could converse better in German than in English with me." Elizabeth said, "yes."

The place where I grew up was not so Germanised as some other places in Hungary. And mother was a nationalist if at all she had any political inclinations. She was a painter, really, she painted in the villages and all over. Just as she later did here in India.

My father studied in Munich under Simon Hollósy. Father knew German. And I suppose Hollósy choose Munich because the art scene was there then. In spite of never having seen any of Hollósy's paintings, some of my own paintings resemble his, so said Lilla when she was working here.

From about the age of four, I stayed in Budapest. Then the First World War broke out. They came back with the last train from East Hungary, where Hollósy had his school, to Budapest before the war broke out. And they stayed in that corner house in Budapest where the top floor was a studio.

I was four-four and half, and I was sick several times. Once, I remember, I overate at the birthday party of another child, you know, overeating chocolate, and I got really sick." Dagmar remarked, "you remember that? You were only four?" Elizabeth retorted, "of course." Dagmar laughed, "they must have made you vomit it all out." Elizabeth replied, "I suppose so. But I was sick, brhrh ..."

Dagmar asked, "and 1914 your father went into the war?" "No," answered Elizabeth, "my father never went into the war. He was in the revolutionary movements." Dagmar, "but he was so utterly upset, remember, you told me some weeks ago." Elizabeth answered, "yes of course, with the whole idea of

people being able to have wars and all the killings. Only his younger brother went into the war as an officer.

When the war escalated, grandfather wrote to us, 'during this time it is not good for a family to be scattered, so you should come home'. And so we went to Nagykanizsa." Dagmar asked, "and you and your mother left once again for Budapest?"

"Yes, but much later, when I was fifteen. Then I enrolled at the Academy of Applied Arts, studying sculpture", answered Elizabeth. Dagmar, "so between four and fifteen you stayed in Nagykanizsa?" Elizabeth mused, "yes, I suppose so. I had my schooling in Nagykanizsa. And by the age of ten, after school I also went to father's art school in the afternoons. When the war was over, they again went to the countryside to paint. By then they both were already exhibiting artists. But my father was famous before he came to Nagykanizsa. Anyway, every summer we went to Lake Balaton."



*After a short time in 1950 at 'Western Court' on Janpath, New Delhi, Elizabeth was given rooms at the 'Constitution House' on Curzon Road. No. 204, New Delhi. That was her accommodation for the next two to three years. I remember Elizabeth talking about the lovely old trees in the compound, some of them are still there. Curzon Road eventually was renamed Kasturba Gandhi Marg (Mahatma Gandhi's wife's name). And the old 'Constitution House' gave way to large multi-storied buildings which were originally build in the fifties for members fo the UNESCO conference (1956).*

*Elizabeth then was allotted the accommodation in Rabindra Nagar (near Khan Market) by the Government of India. In memory of Rabindranath Tagore, she choose this flat when it was offered to her. It is a spacious, pleasant flat, with servant's quarters and all. Many tall and beautiful trees are surrounding Elizabeth's ground floor flat, a corner house. And various birds have taken refuge around her quiet place. It is surprising to find these small quiet enclaves in the hustling, bustling city of Delhi.*

## Elizabeth and her paintings and 'Nag Panchmi'

Saturday, 3rd August 1996



Elizabeth with Avril and Advika

*I felt like helplessly surrendering into my fate during this day. The wetness and moisture around me was seeping under my skin. From about eight in the morning onwards it rained and rained and rained. With the occasional dry spell in between. I had spent the morning with my lovely daughter and granddaughter. And Avril said before going home, she would like to say 'hello' to Elizabeth. So the three of us went and met her for a short time. Elizabeth was thrilled to see the little girl of whom I had talked so much. While Avril went home with her baby, I stayed on with Elizabeth for the rest of the day.*

*Mr. Lutoria was also there. This time he was in a very talkative mood. He told us that this Saturday was 'Nag Panchmi' (the festival of the cobras). And Elizabeth got all excited and called Bahadur to please find her snake paintings. Bahadur went grumbling into one of the rooms and handed out three of the most beautiful paintings, one after the other.*

"This is the one because of which they have thrown me out of 'Western Court'", Elizabeth said. Dagmar laughed.





...'This is the painting because of which they have thrown me out of 'Western Court'...

*It was a painting which showed five snakes, coming out of their basket and dancing. It was painted on the veranda of 'Western Court' and I could almost feel what joy the snakes had dancing in the rain.*

*The next painting was the snake-charmer blowing his flute and the snakes in the process of coming out of their basket. This painting Elizabeth painted on the lawns in 'Constitution House'. The background was green and the rest in vivid colours.*

*The last one was a very big painting and stunningly beautiful. I could just sit in front of it for hours and meditate. It was fascinating. Snakes on the left side with a beautiful 'Uma' goddess coming out of one snake body and Elizabeth's snake-charmer, a most handsome man. Hovering above was an apparition of a manifestation of the eternal femal energy (Shakti) in form of a huge face with penetrating eyes.*

*The snake-charmer was the same one who came and visited Elizabeth often after she had painted him. The one with whom she developed a kind of a friendship over the years.*

"This was a vision, you know, and I painted it. In my room in 'Constitution House'. ... The man must be dead by now," Elizabeth sadly said, and she also mentioned, "two/three years ago it was reproduced in a paper, a French publication, by the Indian Embassy in Paris. A lady came and interviewed me and wrote a very nice article."



... And the snake-charmer in action ...

*We placed the three paintings with reverence on the floor together and Elizabeth requested a flower vase to be put next to the arrangement.*

"It is a blessing that we should all be sitting here together worshipping the snakes." said Elizabeth smiling. Dagmar thought, worshipping the paintings, rather. And Mr. Lutoria said, "perfect, very auspicious I would say." Elizabeth replied, "yes."

Mr. Lutoria had more to tell us: "You know, even if we have not the real cobra, we are painting a snake on the wall of the houses to guard against the evil things and hope that it lasts for the whole year. It is not celebrated so much in Delhi, but in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh. For instance, for wrestlers it is a specially auspicious day. But all people will worship this day, all casts, from Brahmin down to Harijans."





... 'This was a vision, you know, and I painted it'...

"What a pity, this morning a musician came ...," said Elizabeth. Dagmar asked, "this morning a musician came?" Elizabeth, "hm, this musician used to come every year. But by the time Mary came out and searched for some money, he had gone away. He was my favourite, and he would sing so beautifully."

Mr. Lutoria carried on, "nowadays there are restrictions. One cannot have these cobras anymore, they come under the wild life protection. These snake-charmers live outside in villages. Now they don't come anymore into town. Their snake-charmer's villages were raided, here near Delhi, I read this in the newspaper. All their cobras were taken away by the zoo authorities. And they cried and cried, this is our livelihood, our age old profession.

Those who are real snake charmers, they don't kill a cobra. They are talking to the animal saying, we are taking you for five months or one year or two months. They take out the poison and sell it. See, the poison is used for medicinal purposes. Different poison from different snakes. It is very precious. The venom is worth 3000/- or 5000/- Rupees for a tiny phial, very highly priced. So the snake-charmers are not really poor and they are dignified people, often the profession goes from one generation to the next.

And they are very highly respected also. Whenever somebody had a snake bite, they call the snake-charmer because he knows what to do against it. They know the medicine against snake bites and the mantra (prayers). They will call the snake which bit and make it talk. And in their trance they will ask the snake, why did you bite? And the snake will answer, well I was offended. And the snake-charmer will request the snake, take out your poison from the man who was bitten and make him free. So with a few

more mantras it is taken out. The real snake-charmers are respectful men. Now they are helpless and unemployed ..."

#### Gandhiji with the colourful circles

"Elizabeth," asked Dagmar, as she was keen to change the subject, "the other day you allowed me to go into that room over there and I saw that enormous and lovely painting of Gandhiji with those colourful circles around him. Would you remember when you painted that?" Elizabeth mused, "it might be 'Constitution House'. I think. It is true, that time I was so full of Gandhiji's thoughts. Day and night. But I believe, I painted this on the floor because the canvas is so big." Dagmar said, "that painting is most beautiful." Elizabeth, "the circles, they just appeared while I was painting.



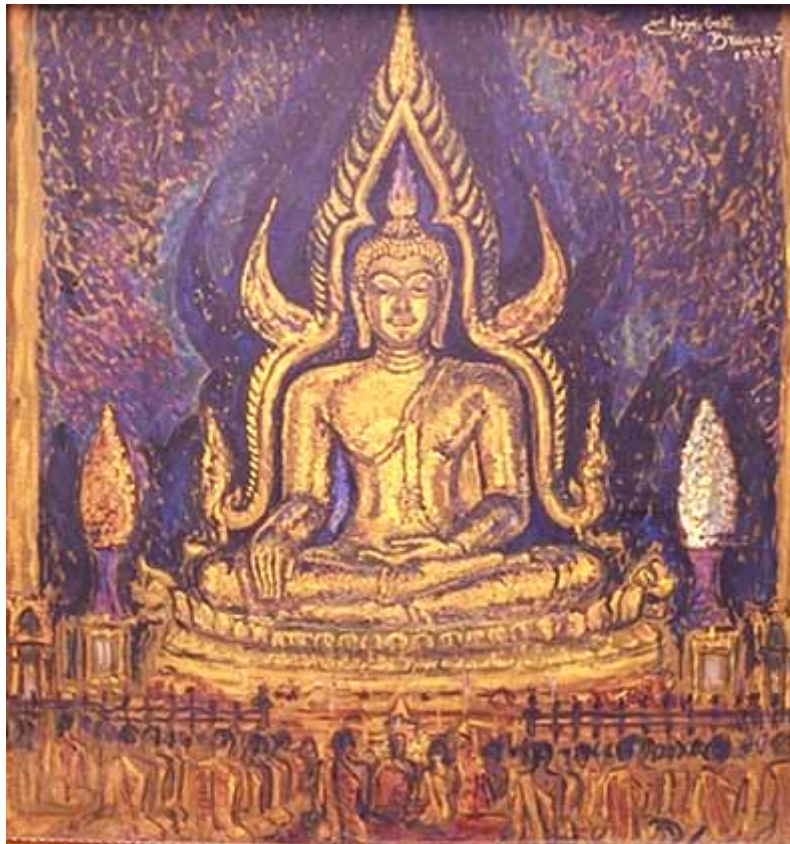
... 'There is one more of Gandhiji ... This and that painting belong together'...

There is one more. You could go and look at it. In the Blind Institut, in the big hall. This and that painting belong together. Gandhiji is sitting with closed eyes and listening to the songs of the blind

children. They made the children sit on the floor. And I could watch Gandhiji as he was enjoying the songs. Perhaps I finished them in my room in 'Constitution House', I don't remember."

"And that big Buddha painting over there, dearest Elizabeth, where did you paint that," asked Dagmar. Elizabeth replied, "in Thailand. In the temple while they were praying and reciting. And all my Buddha paintings I painted on my knees. In the temple, but on my knees, not on an easel, to show my respect. And not only that, but I painted with my fingers."

Dagmar asked, "why with your fingers?" Elizabeth explained, "because I wanted to give service with my body also!" Dagmar could not help stating, "I believe you painted in the most uncomfortable and awkward positions in your life." And Elizabeth smiled a "yes".



...'And all my Buddha Paintings I painted on my knees... and with my fingers'...

## her meeting the Dalai Lama

**Saturday, 3rd August 1996...**

Dagmar carried on asking, "and that beautiful painting of the Dalai Lama, dearest Elizabeth, when did you paint that?" Elizabeth answered, "I believe it was in 1959 in Mussoorie. In the Birla House over there. It belonged to Birla's mother-in-law and was given to the Dalai Lama for his temporary residence when he came. There he was gracious enough to sit for me."

*Just then our lovely friend Laurence came in to join us. It was so nice to be all together on this auspicious day. The atmosphere in Elizabeth's room and our talk made the day really special.*

Mr. Lutoria was in one of his rare communicative mood. He started again, "the Dalai Lama came to India after his escape from Tibet in March 1959. But he came before that, with the Panchen Lama, on an official state visit. That must have been in 1956. I came to Delhi in 1954. When the Dalai Lama came for the first time, I was here. I saw the Dalai Lama. They stayed in 'Hyderabad House', I remember." Elizabeth confirmed this, "that is when I had an exhibition of the Buddha paintings on the occasion of the celebrations of two thousand five hundred years of 'Buddha Jayanti'. Both His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, and the Panchen Lama inaugurated it and bowed in front of our paintings and felt blessed by them."





...'I believe I painted this Dalai Lama painting in 1959 in Mussoorie (Uttar Pradesh)'...

While Laurence looked through the book 'Freedom in Exile', Autobiography of the Dalai Lama, to get the dates right, Mr. Lutoria mentioned, "China had already started occupying Tibet, when the Dalai Lama came for the first time. And he was hesitant to go back to Tibet."

And Elizabeth said, "yes, yes. And there was a fear in my heart hearing that he would go back to Tibet. He knew what he would be facing when going back. And thank God he could escape safely." Mr. Lutoria said, "the credit for that goes to the 'Kampa' martial tribe of Tibet. They made it look as if they were celebrating the New Year at the Potala Palace, it was a misty, foggy day. And in-between and in disguise on ponies they escaped. The Chinese realised what had happened, then they chased them. And by the time they came to the Indian border, the Dalai Lama had crossed it already. And then the Indian authorities were informed. When they came to Delhi, the Tibetans were starving, hungry, all in rags. Elizabeth worked really hard and helped them a lot."







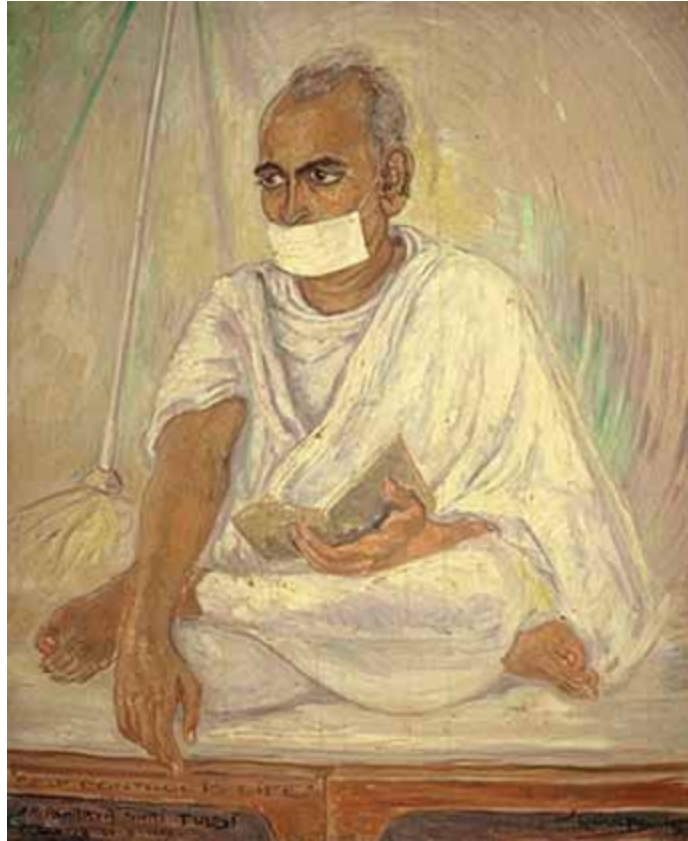
After a while, the conversation was changed completely. Elizabeth talked once again about Hungary: "My father had opened his art school and was working in it, while my mother was going through a very intense learning period. My mother was so fond of animals! She started to raise chickens. She was, in fact like a scientist, watching the eggs and how the chicks inside were growing. At that time it was not so easy to write to other countries. Yet, she asked eggs from several countries of different kind of hens, different types. She was carrying on serious studies in natural science. Already then she was searching for the essence of life. But I remember, grand-father once exclaimed, what is the point of being surrounded by fowl, if I never see even one on my plate!

My father, besides teaching arts, became crazy for hunting. You see, people will not understand. He had a neighbouring friend who was also a hunter. I mean his hobby was hunting. And some days he would go together with this friend to the forest, with rucksack and gun. So naturally they talked all day, being in the forest.

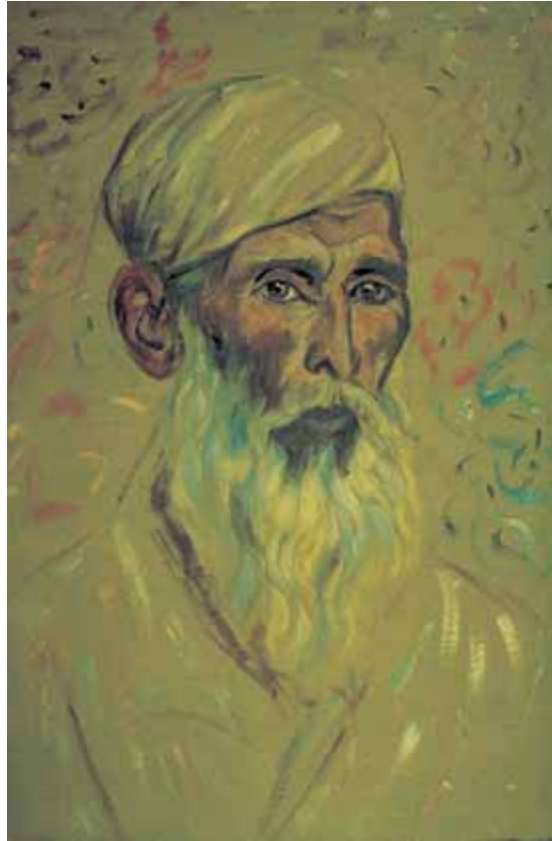
But the one thing I did not like in my father", continued Elizabeth, "is, that he became a hunter. He had that dog, Nero, which rarely crushed anything. Nero was a hunting dog, he would bring back whatever father shot. So once he brought back a rabbit which was still alive ... And the rabbit and I looked into each other's eyes ... I will never forget that. About that little rabbit ... after sixty or eighty years ... I still feel about him. That made an absolute, unchangeable resolution in me: to become a 'vegetarian' and never to kill.

I am sorry, it all came out just like a little 'pletka'. "'Pletka' means disclosing what happened at home." Laurence smiled, "letting out secrets, 'opening the cupboard' you know."

Dagmar changed the subject again, "you went into the beautiful forest also. I always imagine Hungary being a country of the most fantastic woods and forests."









Elizabeth replied, "sometime. After I was in Budapest doing sculpturing at the Academy of Fine Arts, then I would follow my mother some days. Although I did not paint, I watched her. She didn't mind my sitting about two meters away. Then I would walk a little and come back and see how far she had done. She didn't teach me, she didn't say, you should do it this or that way. My first paintings I did all on my own. In father's school we used charcoal and crayons. Very characteristic and very well proportioned ... My aunt used to collect all my childhood paintings. I suppose they all got lost.

But you should have put more ... " Elizabeth changed the subject " ... things like in the beginning. You put a few funny thing into the text." Dagmar laughed, "let's find a subject about which we can laugh. I think it is overdue.



## her talk about J. Krishnamurti

Saturday, 3rd August 1996...

Alright! Not laugh but, dearest Elizabeth, would you tell us about the saintly people you painted when you were in Delhi. Did it mean that you went out of your way to meet them in temples and mosques?"



Elizabeth with her Chinmayananda painting

Elizabeth replied, "yes. And, for instance, I met and painted Swami Chinmayananda. I also met Krishnamurti because I knew Pupul Jayakar and I used to go regularly to her meetings ... " Dagmar asked Elizabeth, "was J. Krishnamurti in Delhi before he went to America?" Elizabeth replied, "yes." Mr. Lutoria confirmed this, "he stayed with that lady in Green Park." Dagmar said, "I didn't know." And Laurence supplied the following:

*Pupul Jayakar was a very important person in the field of culture. Reviving the Indian traditional art forms, handicrafts, philosophy, etc.. She wrote many excellent books. She was a very towering figure, extremely scholarly, learned. As one of her last books, she wrote the biography of J. Krishnamurti. Pupul Jayakar was born on 11.09.1915 in Etawa (Uttar Pradesh) and she died on 28.03.1997 at Bombay.*

"So, you went to attend one of the sessions with J. Krishnamurti, dearest Elizabeth," asked Laurence, "and there you painted him?" Elizabeth answered, "no. He came to Bangalore when we were there. We were living in a rented house found through the Theosophical Society. There my mother painted her life-work. She closed herself up and practically fasted, eating only once a day. And there she painted those things which will remain a secret. Her whole realizations are in those paintings.

When she was completely alone ... I mean I lived there also ... But she was in her room and only painted days and nights, as I mentioned before. She painted her visions and realizations.

The fourth house from ours over there was occupied by Krishnamurti. So he came over to see us, came to see my mother's work. And mother painted him, his spiritual side. There might be a spiritual explanation to it. I painted him also, but as he really was. And one of these paintings was given to the Theosophical Society in Madras.

Dagmar asked, "is J. Krishnamurti linked to the Theosophical Society? Excuse my ignorance, but I have no idea." Elizabeth answered, "yes. Krishnamurti was taken into the Society when he was very young, as they saw in the boy the capacity of becoming a world teacher."



The Krishnamurti painting

Laurence carried on and said, "yes, there is so much to learn here in India. But you see, we Westerners have been trained to be approved of by what we do, not what we are. And most often we don't like ourselves, we don't want to be, hiding behind what we do. It is very difficult because we have been trained this way, to do this, or do that. How to feel in harmony?"

Elizabeth explained, "for instance, in Santiniketan.. You can imagine ... My mother had the same education as you two ... I am different because so many changes happened in my life. So, for instance, a lady could get angry because the table-cloth is not placed properly on the table and it will irritate her to the core. Why was it not put in the proper way? ... But the whole of Santiniketan moved on in its own way ... So, you had to accept it ... To be able to stay harmoniously together. And it is a big big job! Harmony."

Then Laurence stated, "the Brunner's, to my mind, came to India as learners, right from the beginning. That is what is so extraordinary. That is why I admire them so much. They have come in full humility. They have never taken pride in the great people who posed for their paintings and who have been among their closest. They thrived and searched for the highest, the most elevating here in India."



Elizabeth had more wise words for us about life, "let go of things ... let it go away ... and then there might be a beautiful flower opening. Don't grab, let it go ... then there might be a song ... or something like admiring a blooming tree." Laurence said, "yes, when we open up, we might experience something beautiful." Elizabeth, "or even strength." Dagmar asked, "action?" Elizabeth, "but action in its proper time. Otherwise action also creates confusion. Action uses its strength to hit you back. And you suffer. You want to save, and you suffer."

All I can say is, everything has its time. Let go of things. This world is now like this, earlier it was organized in some other way. People suffered then and now. These innocent people, they are not knowing the foundation of things, so ... Innocence has the gift to take things as they come, good or bad ... But being intelligent, everything is made difficult. That is what is the most difficult situation." And Dagmar remembered, "some years ago, when we lived in Udaipur (Rajasthan), and life was very difficult for us, I wished sometimes I was as stupid as a cow, to think limited and to know nothing."



Wasif Dagar singing with Laurance and Qamar on the tanpuras performing during Laurance new flat inaugural function

*A long time had passed. I had gone out of India for my annual vacation. I had seen Elizabeth several times before and after. Laurence had had her inaugural function for her new flat which was blessed by the presence of Elizabeth as well as Wasif, the son of the Dagar Brothers. Lovely people had come, particularly Dr. and Mrs. Péter Hajtó from the Hungarian Cultural Centre who made it possible for Elizabeth to be moved in the official van. That morning was a special delight.*



## Elizabeth tell us stories about some paintings going to the Hungarian Millecentenarium

Friday 27th September 1996

*Elizabeth was in her usual sweet mood this afternoon and visibly happy that we could be together for a little while. A lovely young lady, Ms. Monika Bincsik, had come from Hungary. She was to help Elizabeth to select the paintings for the big Hungarian festival 'Budapest Spring Festival of Arts'. Her own paintings as well as her mother's. I could see many paintings standing in the room, orderly placed in piles of paintings 'from Santiniketan', 'from Japan', 'from Hungary', 'from other places in India' etc.*



Elizabeth with Monika Bincsik

Elizabeth asked Dagmar to pick up one painting her mother had painted. "Your mother's painting, called 'A Room With Furniture', painted in 1914," Dagmar read out from the back of the painting, "and you were four years old." "Yes," replied Elizabeth, "you see, they gave us this room always when we stayed with grandfather in his house in Nagykanizsa. Two bed rooms, one of them the one in the painting. You can see the metal folding bed which my parents used to fold up and take with them to Munich, remember?" Dagmar remembered. Elizabeth carried on, "the sofa-chairs are from my mothers aunt. And my bed was on the right hand side of their bed, you cannot see it."



...'The sofa-chairs are from my mothers aunt. And my bed was on the right hand side, you cannot see it'...



The landscape on the back of the very same painting

Dagmar asked, "Elizabeth, you mentioned before that this was the time when your mother had already those terrible headaches?" Elizabeth said, "yes! Usually by eleven o'clock in the morning she had to have a rest.

So in the house everybody was busy somehow, nobody attending to me. So I went into the bedroom and I saw my mother sleeping. But my hands didn't reach her on the bed to wake her up (I was too small). So I went to the fire-place, there in front of it where some fire-irons. I got hold of one of the tongs. I went back to the bed and on my toes I reached mother and knocked her on the head with that thing. Poor mother, she woke up with a start and was surprised about her little daughter ..." And Dagmar mused, "... and here and now I can see the surroundings of your childhood in the painting."

"You see, in this painting there are so many things," Elizabeth carried on. "but I have forgotten the names of the painters of the paintings on the wall. You see, my father and his friends, same age artists, they always used to exchange each others paintings. So all those paintings are from various people. And on the table there is a sculpture of a monkey. By Imre Simay, the famous artist. The Austrian monarch purchased his monkey. Simay became very famous. By the way, they often painted on both sides of the

canvas, (I suppose because of shortage of money). Turn the painting over please." And Dagmar saw to her surprise another painting of trees on the other side.

Elizabeth carried on, "Simay was the Director of the Graphics Department of the 'Iparművészeti Főiskola' (School of Applied Arts), one of the best schools for art in Budapest. A friend of the family. Nagykanizsa was his birthplace also, and once a year he would come and spend a month or two there. Then they would sit evenings together. I would be in a corner ... and talk ... to my brother in heaven ... and then they would ask me what was his name. I did not know ... Imre Simay remained a friend even when I came to Budapest to study and he helped me.

Now the house is broken down in Nagykanizsa."

Dagmar gently asked, "your grandfather's house is no more?" Elizabeth confirmed, "the house and the whole area was broken down to make room for a new road."

Dagmar asked, "and who is the lady in nude?" Elizabeth answered, "my mother, painted by my father."

## about her very first painting

Friday 27th September 1996...

*I went to take photographs of the paintings. Then I asked Elizabeth about another painting. A sweet little girl, the painting standing right in front of a pile facing the room.*



Elizabeth's very first painting

Elizabeth got all excited and called, "this was my very first painting ever! There was a 'mela' (festival, fun fair) near Lake Balaton where we stayed and we all went to the 'mela'. Wondering around in the 'mela', I lost my family." Dagmar asked, "how old were you then?" Elizabeth, "seven or eight."

And on the back her father's unfinished portrait

*I just could not believe it, the painting of the little girl was so utterly beautiful! Painted by Elizabeth when she herself was but a little girl! And when asked to turn this painting over to the other side, there was the unfinished painting of a man by her father!*

Elizabeth carried on, "you see the law in our house was that none of us was allowed to touch my father's brushes or paints or anything he was working with! There was great fun in the 'mela', the various carrousel were going on, the music was playing everywhere and the multitude was moving this side that side. So somehow I was pushed from my family group. And as I walked, I saw this little girl and I thought, I must paint her!



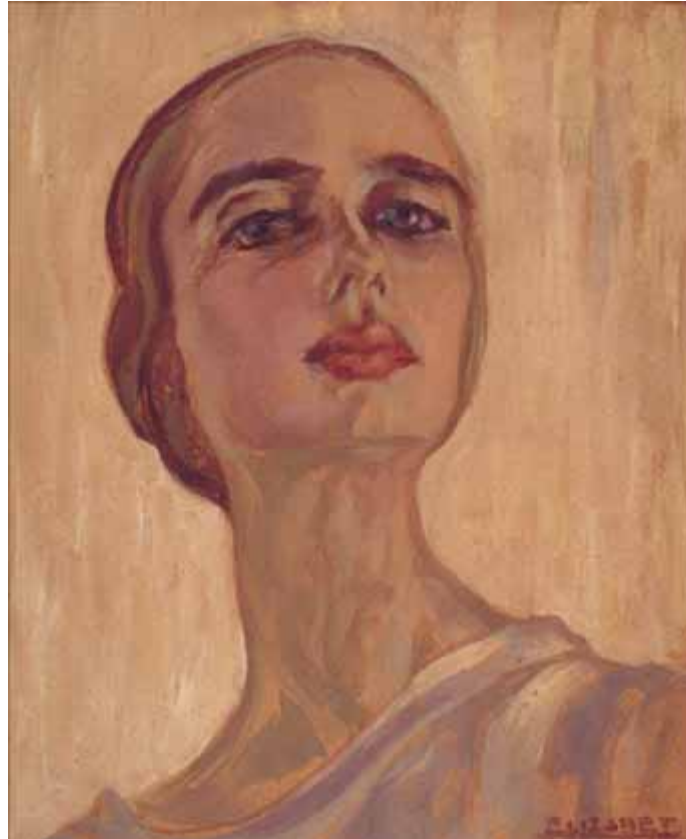
So, I just grabbed this little girl's hand, completely unknown by me, and took her out of the 'mela' and went home. In a second I decided. Something forced me. There was an open covered space in front of our house (kind of a veranda) where my father used to paint. His newly started painting was on the easel. There were his palette, his brushes, and his colours. I, with firm feet, went and turned over the painting on the easel. I took his palette and his brush and started painting and I painted this little girl. With full authority. And I loved it!

Now in between, and I didn't know about it because it happened in the 'mela', both the families were searching for their children. That family theirs, and my family me. And the town authorities were informed and the police people were searching every place. But nowhere the children could be found. And finally, at about seven thirty in the evening, broken, my father and my aunty and the others (I don't remember whether my mother was there or not), the family came home.

And then my father noticed me, because when entering the house, the open covered place in front of the house had to be passed. And I became frozen and I did not know what he would do with me. His eyes were wild seeing his brush in my hand. And he walked to his easel and stood there and looked. While he was looking, his entire stature became limp, his arms fell down and he said, 'this was not done by a child!' That was his only remark," Elizabeth said.

"After that he gave me a brush and colours ... You can see the back of the painting, that is the beginning of my father's painting." Dagmar could only breathe: "This little girl is incredible beautifully painted!"

*At the pile of paintings named 'Santiniketan' there leaned one of Elizabeth's self-portrait's, painted in Santiniketan in 1930. She could not remember the circumstances which made her paint it. It showed once again the incredible beauty of this lady in her youth!*



Elizabeth in Shantiniketan in 1930

But Elizabeth went on with another snip about another self-portrait. This one was painted on the Shikine Island in Japan in 1935. "You see, my mother had one of those looking glasses or mirrors, I don't know what you call it. We just had had a bath. I was passing, and seeing myself in the glass. So I thought I must paint this. The result is that painting with my hair hanging around my face. I look so relaxed, don't you think?"

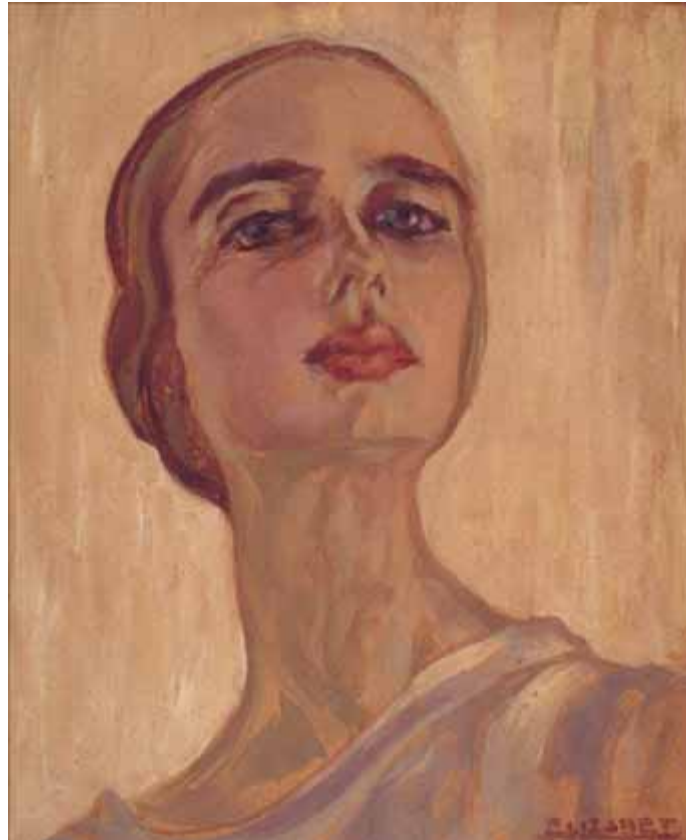


Elizabeth in Shikine in 1935

## Elizabeth talks about her father's last paintings

Wednesday 2nd October 1996

*When I came that afternoon to visit, Elizabeth seemed a little tired but cheerful. Second of October is an official holiday in India and my office was also closed for the day. The lovely young Hungarian lady, who helped Elizabeth to classify and arrange her paintings, was sitting with her. Elizabeth was determined to tell me the story of her father's last paintings. So I settled down and listened.*



"You have already quite a few stories about my father?" Elizabeth queried before starting. I confirmed this. "In the last period in Sümeg ... You know his younger brother 'Mishi Batshi', who was in the army, was transferred to Sümeg. So, as my grandfather had passed away, they thought it was better that they stay together." Dagmar enquired, "who was this 'we' dearest Elizabeth?" She replied, "my father and my aunt, 'Lala Neni' (my mother's sister) because she remained also alone after grandfather's death. My uncle had a good accommodation. He asked them to stay with him. There in Sümeg, my mother and I visited them, when we came for those three weeks from England. So, that was also the last time we have seen them.

My father devoted to his early longing, although he had not painted much lately ... music ... had come into his life. There was a neighbour, a lady, a music teacher. She allowed him to play her piano and other instruments, even corrected him when he made mistakes. And her desire was that my father should paint a portrait of all the great composers whom she loved. So my father obliged. He made a great study of all the composers. And painted a series of paintings of great composers of the last century. They were not alive but he painted them in oil, maybe from photos but also from his inner vision. So these compositions must have been very beautiful because they were my father's last works.

And when Géza (Professor Bethlenfalvy from the Hungarian Information and Cultural Centre in New Delhi) went to Sümeg, the son of that lady had already taken father's painting to Budapest. Then Géza went to Budapest and tried to discuss with the son to part with these paintings. But he would not. So we all feel that my father's last works are in the hands of someone who is not a real lover of art."



*Dear Mary had been hovering around us for some time, trying to serve us lunch, as it was almost three o'clock in the afternoon. We had a lovely lunch and, after that, carried on with our talk.*

Dagmar wanted to know, "that meeting in Sümeg, was that your last meeting with your father, Elizabeth?" She confirmed it. "Would you remember how old you were then, dearest Elizabeth?" Asked Dagmar, "perhaps around twentyfive?" Elizabeth said, "no, no, much more. thirty, forty, something like that." Dagmar mused, "yes, could be."



Elizabeth suddenly said, "not thirty! Because I was fifty when my mother died." But Dagmar spontaneously intervened, "you cannot have been fifty when your mother died. Because your mother died when she was sixty. She cannot have had a baby when she was ten! Sorry, sometimes my brain works," Dagmar smiled. But Elizabeth repeated, "I was fifty when my mother died." Dagmar asked, "how can that be?" And Elizabeth said, "I don't know." - And all of a sudden she realized!

*Elizabeth, Monika and I burst into peals of laughter. For me it was a special delight to see Elizabeth laughing so heartily. I recapitulated, Elizabeth was around forty when her mother died. So she must have been around twenty-eight when she last met her father.*

Dagmar carried on, "how much older was your father than your mother? He must have been considerably older." Elizabeth agreed, "yes. Because mother was only nineteen years old and father was ten or twelve years older."

After a long silence, Elizabeth pointed out, "there is a painting of Krishnamurti." Dagmar asked surprised, "this is J. Krishnamurti?" Elizabeth said, "yes. When he was around thirty years old."



Krishnamurti

*Jiddu Krishnamurti renounced in 1929 the messiah-hood the Chennai Theosophical Society had groomed him for since childhood. He settled in California which he used as a base for his decades of*

*writing books and travelling around the world lecturing on self-reliance. He described his work as a mission to set human beings 'absolutely, unconditionally free' from all conditioning, including that imposed by organized religion and spiritual leaders. In doing so, he was ironically regarded by millions as a spiritual leader. He described himself as 'sort of a philosopher'. His message is contained in his abdication speech, 'truth is a pathless land. You cannot approach it by any religion, any sect. You must look within yourselves for the incorruptibility of the self. Be free from all fear, from the fear of religion, from the fear of salvation, from the fear of spirituality, from the fear of love, from the fear of death, from the fear of life itself.'*

*Krishnamurti was born in Madanapelle, (Chennai), Tamil Nadu, India, on the 25th of May 1897 and he died in Pine Cottage, Ojai, USA, on 17th February 1986.*

*(Courtesy: "SPAN", the American Embassy Publication, New Delhi)*

## Elizabeth tells stories again about Hungary

Sunday, 16th February 1997



Elizabeth

*In-between I had been with Elizabeth but not often. I had fallen seriously ill in autumn the year before and then 'the long winter working days' had started in the Embassy, so I had little or no time to record Elizabeth's tales. But this Sunday I went with my tape-recorder once again and, to my delight, Elizabeth had nothing against carrying on our 'verbal walk through her life'.*

*She was warmly packed-up, as always in winters. She needed special quilts, cushions and blankets to wrap her up, only sitting. And, of course, her woolen headscarf. Elizabeth's puppies, newly born on Christmas day, created a racket. We eventually calmed all of them (mother and four puppies) and were able to talk.*

*I asked her once again to tell me how it came about that she and her mother went to India and how Tagore was involved in their coming to this country.*

*"You see there was no plan. Mother was painting near Lake Balaton the different lights, different parts of the days and the nights, different moods you know, like very soothing moments, very rough and nerve-racking moments. She had thoroughly solved the various aspects of this Lake. This probably gave a soothing effect to her own mind. Because, remember, the War had shattered all their ideals, naturally*

she was fed-up. ... But during the day, she could not get the effect of the storm so dramatic as she had seen it at night.

Where we stayed, we were surrounded by high mountains with some roads but mainly small rough ways, and narrow paths only. So one evening we saw her collecting all her painting utensils, brushes and saying nothing to us (my aunt, grandfather and my father) she went away. My father ran after her to find out where she was going. But she did not reply to him. So he was giving her a coat, as it was rather cold. And he wanted to accompany her. But she refused. She wanted to go alone. She just left. The whole family was feeling upset. What is happening. Where is she going. Is she doing something violent to herself because this was always hanging in the air.

So she went. - And finally in her writings - many years later - I found the answer to this in her diaries. - Mother had started on the trail up the Csúcshegy Mountain [Elizabeth pronounced it Tshutshedy]. But she did not reach the top of the hill, when the rain started with the terrible storm. There was a little light left and she saw on her left hand side something slightly higher coming out of the mountain. So she walked towards it and discovered that it was a cave. And she could go in, fix her easel and quietly sit, and face the storm from inside the cave. In that terrifying darkness she painted. She finished the painting, and the storm stopped. She walked down the hill in dry weather."

After Mary's nice lunch, the talk continued. Dagmar started, "You told me once, dearest Elizabeth, that your mother was already deeply involved in the spiritual world with like-minded friends around herself. She had also read books by Tagore you mentioned."

"Yes", started Elizabeth, "mother must have had some special experiences there in that cave in the hills, but she never used to disclose it.

A few years passed. Every summer we went to Lake Balaton. Among their friends, some were very spiritual. And also two friends were practicing fasting. One of them, Imre Simay, Director of the Graphics Department of the Iparművészeti Főiskola (School of Applied Arts), in Budapest, was a good friend of the family. He used to be with us at Lake Balaton. I knew him from the age of four. In the West there was this big movement of realisation through fasting and doing yoga. And Imre Simay was very much advanced and he would talk sincerely about his experiences. He had fasted for forty-one days and cured himself from his illness (I have forgotten what it was).

Mother was fascinated. She was having migraine from quite young age onwards, starting with half an hour and then one hour. And by the time she put me into the Academy at Budapest, she had sometimes three days migraine.

So mother decided it all by herself. And she fasted for twenty-eight days without disclosing it to anyone. One day when I came back from my classes, she could not speak anymore. She was just lying on the sofa. So I rushed to Simay and told him about mother. She had told me when she started to fast, 'can you promise me something?' And of course I answered, 'yes, yes, yes'. She said, 'even if your father comes, you don't open the door.' Because father was in Nagykanizsa and we were in Budapest. She did not want her friends to see her grow thinner and thinner. She had decided, 'either I will kill myself or I will get well with this exercise'.

Simay was very upset and said 'why did she not tell me that she would start. You don't fast like that. You fast for three days, keep two days normally, then you fast for five days, and slowly like this you go up. She must eat something immediately. Some fruit or some raw things.' - So I went to the market and bought all sorts of things. There were some fruits from Italy, and other fruits and vegetables.

And the shopkeeper put also garlic into the bag. But my mother never ate garlic because she thought she got her migraine from garlic. And garlic was never permitted to be brought to the house. So I washed all the things (carrots, apples, and the garlic ...) and laid them on a tray. And this I put on the table beside the sofa where she was lying. She did not see and took something from the tray - which happened to be the garlic, put it into her mouth, slowly chewed and swallowed it. Then she opened her eyes again. I don't know whether she knew what she had been eating. She had gone too far." Dagmar said incredulously, "so, by chance, she picked the garlic, ate it, and got well?" Elizabeth nodded, "yes, eventually she became alright again." Dagmar asked, "she never had any more headaches?" And Elizabeth said, "no."

Elizabeth continued, "her vision became clear again. She did that great Christ painting. And through all the discussions with her interesting friends, who were almost all influenced by the Orient, she must have decided to go to India. She continued painting those visionary motives. That means she was totally pure, physically and mentally."

Dagmar asked, "what were you doing then at that time and after your mother got well again?" Elizabeth answered, "I was still at that Academy of Fine Arts, wanting to become a sculptor."

You see, I never asked mother what she painted and what she was doing, but sometimes I watched her work. Yes, and then I got also very much affected by all the talk of her friends, because her friends were automatically my friends, no?

And perhaps I became a little like her. In those days - this was the time after the war - I saw horrible sights. I had to cross the bridge to go to the classes. We lived in Buda, the Academy was on the Pest side. Alway I saw those miserable people. So my heart is very soft and I started not be able to bear the world any more.

One day when I came back, I saw a gentleman, artist like, he had the usual beard, he was coming in front of me with bare feet in that cold weather. - Now this will look to you like the same action of my mother. - I went home after passing that gentleman and told my mother that from this day onwards, I would only walk bare-foot.

Then I collected all the collectable things in the house, went outside Budapest, where I had never been before, where all the poor people lived and distributed all the things to them. I thought if this man can do it, I can also do it.

But then I saw I cannot do it. Because I had only a handful and there were so many needy people. It was just like a drop in the ocean. So this shocked me terribly. Because I was hoping to feel happier after giving away all those things.



## about how the idea was born to go to India

**Sunday, 16th February 1997...**

We had a wonderful big tiled stove in the sitting-room. So I was sitting in one of the low seats, which mother had designed, near this ceramic oven to warm myself. Then mother walked through the room and sat on the sofa right in front of me and said 'I am going to India.' I was ...

Ah! Many things happened in-between. The exhibition came. She sent her Christ picture to the Autumn Exhibition at the 'Nemzeti Szalon'. But she was still very weak after that fasting, she could not go. So she sent me for the inauguration.

I was late by about fifteen minutes and the hall was already full of people. As I was standing near the door, I saw a big crowd of people at one side, in half a circle. So I also went to see. And just as I reached the crowd, a beautiful woman, you know one of those fashionable ones, turned around and exclaimed 'I had lost my God, but now I have found Him'. Then I squeezed myself through the crowd and discovered, they were standing around my mother's painting. So it created a revolution to art lovers and all in Budapest."

"How wonderful", said Dagmar, "but may I now come back to the moment when you were sitting near your tiled stove and your Mother came to sit opposite you and said 'I am going to India', dearest Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth continued, "I said, 'I am coming with you'. 'Nothing doing, your education is not finished, you will lose it if you go.' I answered, 'my education is not important, if you go and do not take me with you, I will go into a convent. And then nobody is ever going to see me again.' This shocked her. She thought for about fifteen to twenty minutes and said, 'well if you will be strong, then you can come with me.'" You see, the age of majority at my time in Hungary was 21 and I was only 18.

Dagmar started off again, "Elizabeth did she go to India for further education or did she have in mind to stay for good? Yes ... you said once to me, you both came to India for learning. And no ... staying on in India, developed while you both were actually here. You kind of drifted into it." And Elizabeth answered, "well although these are very straight questions, but I can only answer, these things happen like many things happen."

Dagmar smiled, "yes, you once told me also that your mother wrote a letter to 'Mr. Rabindranath Tagore, India'. It reached him and she got an answer also, remember?"

Elizabeth answered, "yes. But this was a little later. What happened, you see, the Christ painting became famous ... the talk about it reached Rome. There came an official invitation from the Pope to come and be his guest for two years and paint what she wants to paint." Dagmar exclaimed. "Wow, incredible! ... Ah, and that is why you both went to Italy first!"

"Yes," answered Elizabeth. "So the Italian Ambassador came and brought the invitation and arranged for the visas. And so mother thought, I can go to Italy and from there perhaps go on to India."

*As I listened to her tale, I got so excited that I forgot to change the tape and I only discovered it when she was almost finished with her story. That is why I am relating it now in my own words.*

*Elizabeth narrated the journey through Italy. They had gone a little earlier than the first of June (which was the date for her mother's appointment). They wished to travel in Italy before that. On their way from Palermo to Messina the train they travelled on stopped suddenly at a station. They had to get off with their luggage. They were told that the train would continue only the next morning at six. They were put up in a nice guest-house, given food and looked after well. The place was called Santa Agata de Militelo. The Mediterranean was only a few yards away, the rocky hills of Sicily, the olive and orange gardens formed a background: it was a paradise for painters! They did not continue on their journey until further notice.*

*During that night (it was the day before Elizabeth's nineteens' birthday) she had a vivid dream about Tagore. She dreamt of her old house in Nagykanizsa. She was walking down the stairs into the dark cellar. Halfway down the stairs, she saw sitting in the back of the cellar an old, venerable gentleman with long white hair and a long white beard. To the left of the gentleman her father was standing and to the right somebody else, whom she did not remember.*



Elizabeth's 'dream of Tagore' with her mother on the right and her father on the left.

*The old gentleman was holding an oil lamp in his hand and passing it on to her father. While doing this, the oil lamp flickered and was on the brink of going out. So Elizabeth dashed down the stairs and through the cellar. Her heart was crying 'this light must not go out'. She put her hand out and took the oil lamp into her hands and it glowed in full light again. The old gentleman said, 'take this my child. You must guard this light carefully and carry it to every nook and corner of the world.'*

Now my tape was on again and Elizabeth continued talking, "I woke up after that dream and sat up. My mother was already sitting up. I related the wonderful dream to her. She explained and said, 'you have seen Tagore.' Without a word she walked to the writing table and sat down and wrote that letter to Mr. Rabindranath Tagore, India, in Hungarian, because we knew no other language. And as time was passing, she said, 'this letter must be posted today.' So we managed to post the letter then and there.

After that my mother said, 'now we stay here for some time'. Within two months a letter came in reply from Tagore inviting us to come to Santiniketan. The letter was written in the Hungarian language because there was a professor who translated the letter into Hungarian. 'Come my children, and be my guests for two years', Tagore's letter said."

Dagmar asked, "that means, you did not go to Rome for the assignment with the Pope at all?" Elizabeth answered, "no." And she giggled, "it should be still open." Dagmar laughed, "yes, it should be still open."

Dagmar asked few more questions: "You mentioned to me that there are no sketches and no sculptures of yours anywhere?" Elizabeth confirmed, "No sketches of mine, no. But there are some sketches of mother's over there. (She pointed to some files on one of her shelves in the room.) Also I had only one sculpture ready at the Academy in Budapest and that my mother gave to a very dear lady friend before we left. She was a kind of god-mother to me. But when we went to Hungary those three weeks, she was no longer alive ... I remember sculptoring a little in the beginning of my stay here in Delhi. But I do not know where those figures are ..."

## Elizabeth's visit to Hungary in 1988

Monday 2nd June 1997



Elizabeth with Geza Bethlenfalvy

*Professor Bethlenfalvy told me the story about Elizabeth's one and only return visit to Hungary in 1988. When her body was already arthritis ridden, but she could still move around on her own and look after herself. She was accompanied by the Indian journalist, Ms. Sabina Sehgal. The duration of their stay was rather short.*

*Elizabeth was invited to inaugurate an exhibition of her father's, her mother's and her own paintings at the Thury Georgy Museum at Nagykanizsa. The museum, renamed in-between 'The New Painting Gallery', had been specially renovated to show the Brunner paintings in 1988. Now they are permanently placed together with the paintings of another Hungarian artist, Z. Soós István, in the new Painting Gallery of Nagykanizsa. Elizabeth is very happy to share the Gallery facilities with this gentleman, who is a very fine artist and still older than her.*

*Professor Bethlenfalvy had been requested to arrange the entire exhibition. Ten of her father's paintings were already in Nagykanizsa. Fifteen of her mother's and fifteen of her own paintings were shipped from India to Nagykanizsa. They are a present for museum from Elizabeth. The rest of the seventy paintings, which were exhibited, came from private sources and other galleries.*

*Elizabeth was received in Hungary with all honours. The Hungarian President himself, Professor Bruno F. Straub, presented her with one the highest Medal "Order of the Banner of the Republic of Hungary" in September 1988 at a function in the Presidential Palace at Budapest.*



The Thury Georgy Museum at  
Nagykanizsa

*She was accompanied by the Indian Ambassador to Hungary to Nagykanizsa. The exhibition was inaugurated together with her by the most renowned living artist of Hungary, Mr. Ernő Marosi, academician and Director of the Institute of Art History Budapest. Many people approached her and she met people who had known her father or other members of her family. Elizabeth was thrilled. The town of Nagykanizsa elected Elizabeth as a Honorary Citizen. After the exhibition she stayed on in Nagykanizsa for a while. The loveliest event that happened to Elizabeth in Nagykanizsa was to meet an old school-mate. The two old ladies could hardly believe their good fortune and had much to remember and talk about. They had met last in 1922.*

*Elizabeth also went to Sümeg. Where she had last met with her father in 1938. She visited the cemetery where her Mishi Batshi' (father's younger brother), her 'Lala Neni' (mother's sister) and her father lay buried.*

*It was a happy nostalgic journey for Elizabeth and she was greatly pleased by the honour the Hungarian Government bestowed on her.*



**Elizabeth's preface of the book 'Mystic India Through Art reproduction of paintings by Mrs. Sass Brunner  
Elizabeth Farkas and Miss Elizabeth Brunner, Published at the end of their stay in Japan in 1937**

**Sunday 6th July 1997**

*The first five years Elizabeth spend with her mother in India must have been the most educative, inspiring and informative years for Elizabeth. As I was privileged to look at and read the following book, which is no longer available, I would like to reproduce her talk about this time and her deep love for India. I believe these words are applicable for her entire life in India. In the Preface of the book 'Mystic India Through Art' reproduction of paintings by Mrs. Sass Brunner Elizabeth Farkas and Miss Elizabeth Brunner, published at the end of their stay in Japan in 1937, Elizabeth says:*

"I am writing in Japan, seven years after my mother and I left our homeland for India, the land of ancient philosophy and culture, where history has been written on stone, and where we spent five most interesting and fruitful years.

From childhood I have always been interested in different places, different things, different faces - in different persons, whose character reveals, through the sparkling of the eyes, spiritual depth. I have always sought for monumental strength, harmonious colour composition and dramatic power - the qualities in art which arouse in me that satisfying sense of ecstasy.

Trimurti by Elizabeth Brunner, Bombay 1930

I have spent many years in serious study. I have had many rich, unforgettable experiences which come in the life of a young artist whose heart burns with the spiritual fervour of life. And as I review those experiences in retrospect my heart unconsciously goes back to India, to my beloved Santiniketan, where, under the blooming mango trees which spread their arms towards the heavens, the great Tagore has made a home for students of art. Santiniketan, surrounded by a pure Indian atmosphere, - that is the place where my eyes were opened to the beauties of human love and compassion, where I found my life's guiding spirit. Santiniketan made me a devout admirer of India, so much so that words are not sufficient to express my admiration. I can only feel it, but I feel it so strongly.

The first portrait I made in India was that of Rabindranath Tagore. In studying his face and understanding his character, I watched him everyday for a whole year. He was the most interesting, fascinating character when I found him alone, concentrating, writing, composing or painting. There was something so indefinably great around his entire being that I felt keenly as I watched him and reached for my brush to draw his perfect forehead or the shade of his pale ochre skin.

Tagore's face was a profound study, for it was from him that I caught the true spirit of India. His keen, half-closed eyes, his curly hair and long, white beard inspired my hand, just as he would inspire the hands of all artists.

My first paintings of Indian ladies were also made in Santiniketan. Beautiful girls, most of them Bengali, with 'lotus eyes', dark, long hair, delicate features and lithesome figures, I painted them as they

studied poetry, painting, classical Indian music, drama or dance. I made a study of different types and selected the most typical faces for my various subjects.



Vimela

We travelled in India from one end to the other, from Bengal to Gujarat, from the Himalayas to Rameswaran, in search of materials, ideas and inspiration. To my great joy I found many things to paint, I saw a new world opened before my eyes when we went to Benares (Varanasi) and saw Brahmin ladies bathing in the sacred Ganges. A different series of paintings was born from our trips to Behar (Bihar), to colourful Rajputana (Rajasthan), Punjab, Kashmir, Hyderabad, Madras (Chennai) and other places.

I can never forget the rhythmic tinkling of the bells on the heels of Hindu ladies as they walked back from the well, nor those millions of black diamond-like eyes that stared at me in India.

One of my special studies was made of the Santali people, the Todas and other tribals of India with their primitive ways of living, interesting quiet and rustic faces which are full of expression. The Todas of the Nilgiris recalled the people of the Bible, and many of them looked like the wise men.

We also visited sacred places, old temples and caves, and felt ourselves back two thousand years as we mingled among religious Indian saints - Gurus, Sadhus, Yogis and Sanyasis - the same now as they were in the beginning.

I was in India a considerable time, but not until that memorable day, 8th January 1934, after long years of impatient waiting, was my great desire to paint Mahatma Gandhi fulfilled. An eventful day in my life in Bangalore, when Gandhiji had just made a Round Tour of India. My heart, pent up with three years of expectation, cried with joy when I was permitted to paint his portrait. Gandhiji gave me only thirty minutes, all that he was able to afford out of this day of silence. But they were thirty inspiring minutes.

It was a cold afternoon, for it was January and winter. But despite it Gandhiji was sitting on an open veranda, seriously writing with only a thin Kashmiri shawl around him. He graciously smiled when he noticed my arrival and then glanced at his watch. Then he wrote on a piece of paper, 'why do you want to paint me? What is the use?' And continued writing and sorting papers on his knees, not noticing, all the while, that I was waiting, burning with the desire to paint him. His clear, brown sparkling eyes were for a moment hidden behind his shining spectacles.

What was I to paint? What was going to happen to my dreams? Where is Gandhiji? I nearly burst into tears. Perhaps Gandhiji felt what I was feeling so tensely. He glanced at me over his glasses and showed those unforgettable eyes of his. He was telling me to go ahead with my work.



### Toda Woman

All of a sudden I gained a clear perspective and lost myself in work. I quickly took my brush and endeavoured to transfer Gandhiji's forceful personality, his soft warm mouth onto my canvas. For thirty fleeting minutes all the strength I had in my body, and all the spirit I had in my heart were concentrated on him. They were thirty hard minutes, which gave me one of the greatest thrills of my life. My ambition was fulfilled.

After I had completed the portrait and showed it to Gandhiji, he looked it over with an expression so profound that I can recall his face as vividly today as I saw it then. There was such depth of meaning and spirit in it. After he had finished looking the portrait over, he took my brush and wrote his signature on it.

Thanks to him - to all - my life has been so rich and so wonderful."

## Epilogue

*Elizabeth Brunner is eighty-seven this year (1997). Unfortunately, since a few years she is bound to wheel-chair and bed by extreme arthritis. This sickness crept on her over the years.*



*I have been thinking about the strange ways she often found herself in during her life. Thinking of the situations to catch the right spirit of people and surroundings for her paintings (sitting crossed legs any length of time, disregarding the weather); but mainly of her inner feelings and respect for the subject she painted and which she wanted to transmit to the beholder of her creations (painting with her fingers and kneeling for long hours). It has also to be mentioned that Elizabeth and her mother travelled, as a matter of principle, third class on the Indian railways. And they walked with bare feet as usual on the hot and stony grounds. Although they often stayed and moved in exalted places, Elizabeth imbibed her mother's ways of a strict discipline, a vegetarian diet, and an almost meagre general way of life.*



*Considering all this, fifty-five odd years long, I am not surprised about her physical condition today. Elizabeth is always warning me to take good care of my body and not neglect it as she has done. By about the end of the nineteen-seventies, Elizabeth did not paint any more.*

*I might not see certain things in and around her properly, pin-point characteristics because she is, after all, a Hungarian lady by birth, and I do not understand her mother tongue. But I trusted my intuition and followed the vibes I felt when in her presence. Besides we speak one mutual language, English.*