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Fake Tagore paintings: Art school professor faces police probe

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KOLKATA: The higher education department on Thursday initiated disciplinary proceedings against Dipali Bhattacharyya, associate professor of painting, Government College of Art and Craft, for her alleged role in the fake Tagore paintings fiasco.

On February 27, 2011, when Bhattacharyya was the principal, the college had organised an exhibition of 23 'Tagore paintings' to mark his 150th birth anniversary. Later 20 of these were found to be fake. The case is now in court.

Two days ago, art college students Saptarshi Ghosh and Tamal Krishna Gowsami and painters Prithish Daw and Prabal Sengupta wrote to New Market police station seeking action against those who had "counterfeited the Tagore paintings".

Nineteen of the alleged fake paintings were supplied by Bhattacharyya and one by renowned painter Jogen Chowdhury, says the complaint. It also names Dhanbad-based art collector Jayanta Banerjee.

On Thursday, police took this complaint as an FIR under Sections 420, 463, 465, 471, 511 IPC (cheating and forgery) along with 120B (criminal conspiracy). The complaint had sought the immediate arrest of the accused.

The police took a couple of days to study the complaint because the case is in Calcutta high court. Second, the complaint doesn't clearly accuse Bhattacharyya, Chowdhury and Banerjee of making illegal gains from the alleged fake art.

The complaint mentions that the exhibition was organised under the ministry of culture.

A departmental charge sheet, along with the list of charges and documents, has been forwarded to Bhattacharyya, said an officer. "An inquiry officer and a presenting officer have been appointed for the probe. She will be asked to face the committee and if found guilty, she may be suspended. The officers will have to submit a report within the end of the month," the officer added.

The inquiry committee's tenure coincides with the date when Bhattacharyya is set to retire — October 31.

In March, 2011, Tapas Sarkar, another artist had moved a PIL in high court seeking action against those behind the alleged fake paintings.

The court appointed a special officer, Amit Roy, and asked him to seize the disputed paintings. ASI deputy director Gautam Sengupta was ordered to investigate the authenticity of the paintings. On November 23 last year, the ASI submitted its report, which said that 20 of the 23 paintings were fake.

Nearly 11 months later, in September 2012, a bench comprising then high court Chief Justice Jaynarayan Patel and Justice Joymalya Bagchi expressed surprise that the state government had not yet taken any measures. The government was asked to inform the court after the Pujas on what it planned to do in the case. The departmental inquiry and FIR are a direct fallout of the court order, say sources.