

## Chapter 3

### Legacy of Bengal School landscape painting

All this was the personal triumph of Abanindranath. Evolving of a personal style as the aim of a painter was also shown by Abanindranath through his personal example, the clue to which was free adoption and mastering of various techniques. He also revived many indigenous techniques and processes. Since then working in terms of achieving mastery in different techniques has become a new phenomenon in India. In all these respects Abanindranath paved the way for both Gaganendranath and Rabindranath.

The changes in Indian painting largely in the context of grasping the tradition was a dramatically new phenomenon. In literature the continuity of writing traditional poetry on themes such as *bhakti* and *vairagya* remained unbroken.

The distinguished linguistic scholar Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has made a comparison between such early literary works of Rabindranath written before 1900 (i.e. 1880s and 1890s) and the revivalist paintings of Abanindranath through the next two decades (1900-1920), as a parallel phenomenon

In other regional literatures the Bengali influence together with the initiative of leading literary geniuses of respective regional languages brought about changes and new developments. Such is the commonly observed phenomenon. However, while grasping of traditional elements in the art of painting was by

itself a late phenomenon in Bengal, similar developments in other regions of India took place only subsequently, mostly through the agency of the presence of Bengali revivalist painters. Thus it is similar to the mela-phane situation as characterized in regional literatures. However, it is observed that the extent of the influence of the presence of the Bengali revivalist painter on another regional scene remains rather restricted unless the local response happens to be substantial. In Western India which was leading in naturalistic art, the 'revivalist' phase began by local initiative that was spear-headed by Gladstone Solomon as Principal of Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay from 1919. At the same time the J.J. School trained painter from Gujarat, Ravishankar Raval, set up his small teaching academy at Ahmedabad with direct inspiration from Indian styles of traditional painting.

By comparison naturalism, (i.e. influence of European style oil painting) in Indian pictorial arts is yet again a delayed development. The emerging phase of naturalism in India's painting during the late nineteenth century was not revolutionary in comparison to what that phase signified in the context of literary developments. Rather the painters of naturalistic style were trained in handling the pictorial elements brought and taught by the colonial masters, that is why it has been called 'art-school' naturalism. Moreover, it is quite clear that the Indian naturalistic artists were alienated from tradition. But Indian naturalistic artists were not 'raimeticists' (using the term Patrick Hogen coined for colonial literary productions) because they were not imitating any particular well-known European painter. It was a case of sheer ignorance and

level of education on the part of these Indian painters in comparison with Indian poets and novelists. Therefore, the influence of European naturalism in Indian painting is hardly comparable with the highly epoch-making role that 'critical traditionalist' as well as 'critical modernist' intellectuals played in the spheres of cultural resurgence, national spirit, social and educational spheres.

He is the first Indian to exploit light in its relation to space, so extensively, so masterly and so expressively never possible before. His proneness to influences shows an openness of mind and extreme sensitivity, instead of being a sign of weakness it shows his tremendous capacity for absorption. Certainly it is a quality worthy of a master. Surprisingly, only a few of his contemporaries could recognize his genius, the radicalism of his experiments and their success, fully aware of their western origin. Unfortunately recent critics<sup>14</sup> have utterly failed to assess his significance for his time (even though armed with the advantage of a perspective of almost half a century), his profundity and the self-evident links binding together his various preoccupations which all came to a final fruition in his late works. He was a lone rebel in a sea of conservatism. He met the challenge of modernity on its own around.

Interactions between Rabindranath on one hand with Gaganendranath and Abanindranath on the other have significance for the growth of personalities of the two young nephews of Rabindranath as creative artists. The affectionate association and opportunity helped them realise their own creative potential, however, mainly through the pictorial medium. *Gaudiya Vaishnavism* and

its influence on Rabindranath had also influenced both Abanindranath and Gaganendranath. Rabindranath's involvement with *Vaishnava* poetry has moreover implications in the context of Abanindranath's early Krishna Lila paintings. Although these paintings have been termed as "revivalist" because of the "style" which was based on Indian traditional pictorial elements, yet we have to note the fact that Rabindranath's interest in *Gaudiya Vaishnava* poetry itself, represents a kind of 'rediscovery' of a type of traditional regional or local poetic genre, an intrinsic phenomenon of growing modernism in Indian literature. Symbolism and symbolic implications in Rabindranath's poetry and plays should be generally considered as the source, and the inspiration for the intuitions in the minds of Abanindranath and Gaganendranath concretized through the pictorial imagery in which such aspects are implied. Here I have to quote Ratan Parimoo. I see in Gaganendranath's later work more and more influence of Rabindranath. The kind of creative force Rabindranath refers to and the kind of ambiance some of his poems evoke, the same effect is seen in Gaganendranath's paintings. The closeness of shared spirit between several paintings of Gaganendranath and Rabindranath's theatre and poetry analyzed by me leaves no doubt that Gaganendranath's creative work should in many respects be understood as equivalent of Rabindranath's alternative pictorial persona.<sup>20</sup>

In European terms in Abanindranath we find Naturalism, Impressionism and post-Impressionism (art nouveau) at the same time. Both he and Gaganendranath

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<sup>20</sup> Three Tagore's - Ratan Parimoo, pp. 548.

absorbed much from Japanese art something that happened in Europe also during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Gaganendranath further represents in his work Cubism, Abstraction (based on structure and colour orchestration) and the romantic fantasy of Surrealism. Rabindranath echoes the Expressionist acceptance of the naive and the instinctive, unpremeditated approach practised by the Surrealists.

In terms of Bhikhu Parekh's categories it has already been suggested that Abanindranath's work fits in the ideological matrix of "critical traditionalist". Along with other critical traditionalists from the field of arts, and parallel with socio-political critical traditionalists, they were confident that Indian art can regenerate only by mobilizing its own resources. As in socio-political field, they also criticized Western art for its 'materialistic' aspects. Apropos the categories propounded by Patrick Hogen, Abanindranath conforms to the classification of 'open-minded orthodoxy'. Modernization was intrinsic to this aspect of orthodoxy and to that extent a gradual modernizing process is distinct in successive stages of Abanindranath's oeuvre. Hogen's required conditions are also observable in Abanindranath's personality, that is, minimum severance from tradition and maximized internalization of tradition. However, it is amazing that the followers of Abanindranath became 'unreflective traditionalists'.

Gaganendranath's understanding and internalization of elements as well as system of Cubism in his colouristic as well as black and white paintings is

very amazing. He was able to contextualize Cubistic elements both through his personal experiences (such as chiaroscuro effects on architectural structures) and also through his cultural upbringing collective unconscious (grasp of the import of episodes from epics).

Benode Behari Mukherjee's (1904-1980) and Ramkinkar Baij's (1910-1980) mature works began at Santiniketan by the end of the 1940s." Their paintings are in the direction of continuous exploration of further possibilities of synthesis and individual expressions in the handling of line, colour planes and structure. Ramkinkar reveals an acquaintance with the essential elements of Paul Cezanne's works (French post-impressionist painter). In comparison. B. B. Mukherjee aims at spontaneity and intuitive simplicity of the folk artist's approach to line. However closer observations of his parallel linear contours in colouristic variations reveal that it is an attempt of recycling of the potential of traditional figurative modelling as in Ajanta murals. But Ramkinkar in his sculptures since around 1950 and subsequent to those of Fanindranath Bose and D. P. Roy Choudhury displays characteristic sensibility for three-dimensionality inherent in Indian tradition, in the manner he conceived open air monuments based on Indian rural life.

While closing this chapter we may once again refer to the pro-phane and meta-phane concepts as well as the comparison with the early and late (delayed) appearance of developments in Modern Indian literatures and modern Indian visual arts. From 1920s began the era of Gandhian influence of Indian literary developments such as Gandhian social philosophy and ideals. Gandhian

approach to freedom movement against colonial rule (i.e. the *satyagrahi* hero) and so forth Gujarati literary critics identify it as *Gandhiyug*, however the immense impact is seen on the novels of the great Hindi novelist Premchand. I quote an erudite literary critic: “*Premashram* (1921) and *Karmabhumi* (1932) reflect and typify the compromise affected by Premchand between the demands of literary sensibility on the one hand and the compulsions of adherence to a Gandhian outlook on the other. In his fully mature novel. (*Godan* published in the year of his death. 1936) Premchand’s heightened literary sensibility is able to shake off the constraints of the Gandhian social outlook and captures all the major contradictions of the village life”.<sup>21</sup> Gandhian influence on visual arts is restricted to interactions of Gandhiji with Tagore family in Calcutta and in Santiniketan during the 1920s. This has resulted in some portraits and caricatures. Besides, there is also the event of some artists led by Nandalal Bose (Santiniketan) and Ravishankar Raval (Ahmedabad) being engaged with the decoration of the Congress session *pandal* at Haripura (near Surat) in 1937.’ Interest in folk art and themes from rural life by Indian artists can be enumerated as a Gandhian impact at only an elementary level.

Rabindranath’s has been directly involved in discussions with die rebels in 1936 was held the significant event of the formation of All India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA) under the chairmanship of Premchand at Lucknow with the initiative of the Urdu author Sajjad Zaheer with whom was also associated the English language novelist Mulk Raj Anand.

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21 Three Tagore’s by Ratan Parimoo, pp. 552

The new awareness in the visual arts is very dramatically declared by Binoy Kumar Sarkar through his deliberately polemical articles during the late 1920s, based on his experience of European modern art in France and Germany. However, after a critical silence of nearly two decades a fresh stirring began to ferment in painting and sculpture, comparable to literary developments of the 1920s and 1930s during the transitional decade towards Independence of India (1947). This is another moment of pro-phane and meta-phane occurrences between literature on one hand and visual arts on the other hand. With the formation of rebellious groups and articulation of bold manifestos welcoming new influences from modern European art. (the Calcutta Group. Bombay's Progressive Artists' Group. Delhi's Shilpi Chakra. late 1940s) begins a new era of modern Indian art. its praxis and theories, a subject for another book.

### **Abanindranath Tagore's Landscape**

Abanindranath's individual style and sensibility were manifest by 1912. We have the first flowering of his personal style in the Omar Khayyam paintings and the first assertion of his unique sensibility in the Bengal Actors series. As we have noticed, with these he placed himself within the broad framework of Symbolism and modernist irreverence. The inward gaze and self-empowerment this entailed released him from nationalist bindings and set him free to chart an independent course through the world, with his own negative capability<sup>22</sup> rather than the

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22 In a letter he wrote to his brothers in 1817 John Keats described negative capability as 'what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—3 mean Negative Capability; that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' Such an anti-positivist position also appealed to the later Abanindranath.

certainties of tradition to guide him through. Given the relative freedom from the external world such an experience postulates, his inner world more than the world he lived in became the main burden of his work from now on. This means that we have to look for the inner patterns of his thematic engagements and not for any obvious correlations between his paintings and the social realities of the time he lived in.

This would involve considering the three major interests or focuses in Abanindranath's work — narration, portraiture and landscape — and their internal evolutions. We can trace each of them to the early years of his career. As his conception of art and interests took different turns, one of these would move forward and take centre stage; while what receded, remained in the wings ready to reassert itself at a later stage. Of these, we shall begin by considering his landscapes because the first references we have of his artistic inclination, are related to the painting of landscape. The earliest of these is contained in the reminiscences of his nephew, Jaminiprakash Gangooly. He gives us a picture of Abanindranath, aged about nine, sitting on the verandah of the garden house his father had recently built and painting the cut glass fountain on the terrace outside, complete with its spray turned into a rainbow by the rays of the morning sun.<sup>23</sup> Abanindranath, too, remembered drawing the scenes around this house and noticing how the huts looked different from those he had learned to draw from English drawing books.<sup>24</sup>

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23 Cf. Jaminiprakash Gangooly, 'Early Reminiscences', *The Visva Bharati Quarterly*, Abanindra Number, pp. 16-17.

24 Cf. *Jorasankor Dhare, Abanindra Rachanabali*, vol. 1, p. 200'.

They are followed by other images of him painting riverside views from a boat during a river trip the family took upcountry two years later. According to J P Gangooly, from painting landscapes he graduated to illustrating poems and painting people. But his interest in landscape continued undiminished even during his period of training in figure painting and portraiture under European teachers. First, after leaving Ghilardi, and later, after completing his training under Palmer, he went on sketching tours to Monghyr. Some of his earliest surviving landscapes, showing the ghats and the mountainous terrain of the region, were done during these trips. The interest he showed in landscape painting during these years was also a sign of his growing disinterest in academic figure painting, and was in direct proportion to it.<sup>25</sup> And when he returned to Palmer for a second period of training, it was with the specific intention of learning to paint landscapes in watercolours.<sup>26</sup>

Obviously, his first attempts at landscape seem to have been documentary in character. Some of the surviving ones show the countryside with flat green fields punctuated by a few trees or a mountain at the distant end of the vista; others show a small shed or hut tucked away under trees, or a solitary house at the end of a short slope seen against the sky. It is difficult to posit a definite attitude in such early exercises of any artist; however, from the few surviving examples of the work he did at Monghyr we might suggest in retrospect that what landscape offered to him primarily was an experience of space. The

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25 He found landscape painting relatively more interesting than figure painting in oils. Cf. *ibid.* p. 301.

26 Although no landscapes from this period are presently known, Abanindranath speaks of this attempt to become a landscape painter, and of his moving around with easel and colour for a while. Cf. *ibid.*

Ghats he painted at Monghyr stood aloof in the middle distance like some lost monument and showed little activity, and whatever there was, came to be miniature used and rendered insignificant by distance. The image of the *Pir Pahar* reproduced here is a narrow horizontal painting, like a hand scroll proportion, tracing a group of hillocks spread across the painting in the middle distance with a short stretch of flat green fields in front, giving the effect of telescoping into the mid-distance after abruptly cutting off the foreground. Devoid of human figures and coloured Corot-like in light and pleasant tints, the only animation and noise in it are those of the slightly patchy and unblended brush marks of the young painter. The quietude is also visible in another early watercolour showing the river Padma.<sup>27</sup> Like the *Pir Pahar*, it is descriptive and the vast space, more evident here, is reduced to the basics — the sky the horizon, the distant and near shores, and the river between them. The clouds, the sand banks, the huts, the moored boats, and their shadows rendered sketchily, produce a kind of painterly noise which, however, was not loud enough to break the overbearing sense of silent desolateness.

The discovery of Indian miniatures changed this: landscapes now receded, literally, into the background. Before we consider the use of landscape elements in his early narrative paintings, we may briefly consider the place of landscape in the art practice that he could have access to and thus formed the background to his own work. Although nature was keenly observed by Indian painters and a large repertoire of motifs reaped from nature's visual bounty

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<sup>27</sup> Although it is sometimes classified with later landscapes, on the basis of style and on the basis of the signature, it may be attributed to a period before 1897.

formed part of their to poi, there was no tradition of pure landscape painting in India. Even in miniatures where nature filled most of the painted field, landscape functioned as an ideal setting for the human drama that unfolded either within or in front of it. In the West there were two contemporaneous traditions he could have accessed. One was the nineteenth century French tradition of Landscape painting inspired by the British Romantic painters. This was antithetical to the Western classical tradition and therefore kept out of academic training, and thus relatively inaccessible to the native artists in the colonies who approached Western art through institutional venues of academic training.<sup>28</sup> The other was the landscapes of the Pre-Raphaelites in whom Asian cultural-nationalists and Pan-Asianists often discovered oriental affinities and was therefore more acceptable to artists like Abanindranath.<sup>29</sup>

We may now turn to his work between 1897 and 1903 — that is, between the *Krishna Lila* series and his encounter with Japanese art. The main burden of the *Krishna Lila* series was narration and the expression of human sentiments. In them landscape is used as a backdrop, and in some instances merely as filler. Even where they add to the setting, they are kept simple and not allowed to become involved or grow rich in details as they often do in traditional miniatures. They are usually kept quasi-impressionistic and atmospheric as in certain Western watercolour sketches. In some of the paintings that followed, we can

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28 However, as the landscapes of Havell and Raja Raja Varma demonstrate, a more constricted version of this sometimes percolated into the work of artists trained in the British academic system.

29 Okakura was the first to suggest this affinity in *The Ideals of the East*, but it was also later invoked profusely by critics like O C Gangooly. Journals like *Modern Review* devoted to the promotion of nationalist art also carried illustrations of the Pre-Raphaelite artists.

occasionally notice snatches of Pre-Raphaelite influence in the treatment of landscape elements, such as the rendering of the tree behind *Buddha and Sujata*. But they tend to move towards Art Nouveau-like expressive convolution rather than towards intricate detail and this is not difficult to understand. While Ruskin who laid the foundation for Pre-Raphaelite painters, in spite of championing Turner, wanted artists to study nature in her most minute detail, few followed it assiduously. Even among the Pre-Raphaelites only Holman Hunt found this advice worth pursuing. Abanindranath was more interested in the narrative and linear quality of Pre-Raphaelite painting, and should have found Burne-Jones more interesting than Hunt. Since he found academic realism tortuous, Hunt's unmitigated naturalism should have appeared to him as more insufferable. In his paintings inspired by Mughal history — both in *The Building of the Taj* painted in a sketchy atmospheric manner and in *the Passing of Shahjahan* which was more carefully finished — we find him continuing to use landscape as the mood-invoking backdrop.<sup>30</sup>

It was his encounter with the Japanese artists Taikan and Hishida that first led Abanindranath to reconsider the treatment of the landscape in his paintings. Nature played a big role in their work, and sometimes edged out everything else from their paintings. A few elements picked up from nature, and wrapped in an atmospheric veil and selectively focused, were the source of all the drama and emotion in their paintings.

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<sup>30</sup> The impact of Mughal painting on Abanindranath's work was confined to the treatment: of the figures and did not extend to the background. The spatial discontinuities that we notice in his later paintings, though comparable to that found in Mughal and Persian painting, came later.

For the landscape to re-emerge as an independent genre in his oeuvre it was necessary for Abanindranath to achieve a new equation between representation and feeling, and to return to images that were not overtly symbolic or suffused with feeling but drawn with representational restraint and yet open to allusive readings. He discovered it soon enough by combining Symbolist aesthetics with the Far Eastern approach to representation. The result was a series of small ink works recording his journey from Puri to Konarak and from Konarak to Swargadwar. This journey had made a deep impression on him and inspired him to write *Bhootpatrir Deshe*, a fantasy invoking among other things the experience of traveling across the desolate expanses along the sea.

The landscapes of Taikan and Hishida were based on impressions but were not impressionistic, and invoked moods without ceasing to be observant or burdening their images with self-conscious subjectivity. While Abanindranath confessedly gained from his contacts with Taikan and Hishida, and their work had, as we have already seen, influenced the development of his style, it should be said that the rhino style to which his approach to landscape is associated is not always considered native in Japan.<sup>31</sup> The *moro* style — hazy, colouristic and devoid of linear delineation — was specially associated with their landscapes in which often a single motif was placed against an indistinct background defined solely by amorphous tonalities. On the one hand the eschewal of linear rendering was considered a sign of Westernization and on the other it was associated by Taikan and Hishida with the aesthetic of anti-realism and defended by arguing that the

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<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of this style and the aesthetics of affectivity associated with it cf. Miriam Wattles, 'The 1909 Ryuto and the Aesthetics of Affectivity', *Art Journal*, vol.

pronounced use of line was a Chinese influence and ancient Japanese colourists could be compared with Delacroix and Whistler.<sup>32</sup> The *moro* style was not only non-traditional but was partly developed by Taikan and Hishida during their stay in India. And more interestingly, the underlying aesthetic ideal of *kokoromochi*, with the twin associations of feeling and suggestion, comes close to the ideal of *bhava* and *dhvani* associated with painting by Abanindranath.

The first examples of such an approach to landscape can be noticed in paintings such as *The Misty Morning* and *The Little Bird of the Call*, painted after a visit to Mussorie.<sup>33</sup>

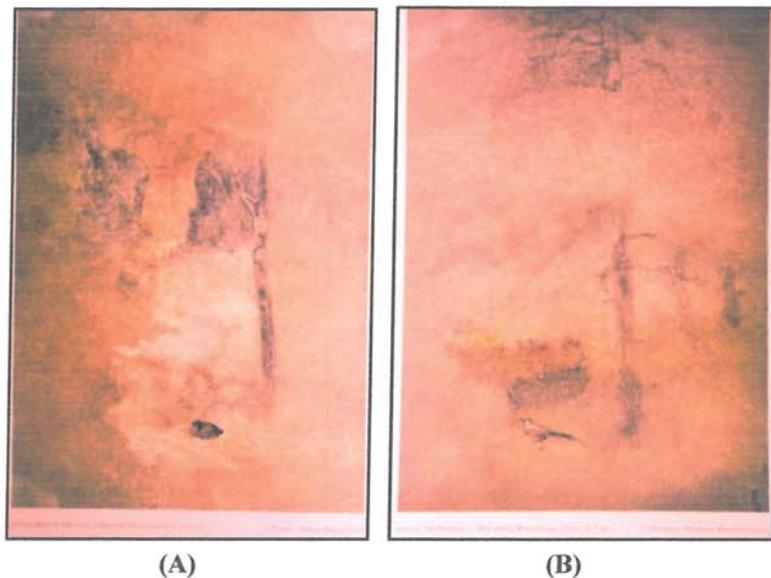


FIGURE 31(A) *The Little Bird of the call*, Mid 1920's, watercolour  
 (B) *The Misty Morning*, c. Mid 1920's, watercolour. Collection: Rabindra Bharati Society

Both show a clearly depicted bird against an amorphous background of luminous haze. Reminiscent of his descriptions of mist on the *Ganges in Pathe*

32 Ibid. On the one hand the Nihonga artists of the Okakura circle were actively involved in the Pan-Asian project and on the other they were ambivalently disposed towards China. Taikan of course would become a nationalist later.

33 Cf. *Jorasankor Dhare, Abanindra Rachanabali*, vol.1, p.326.

*Bipathe*<sup>34</sup> — the mist that hangs around the steamers on winter mornings; that stirs the water, the land and the sky into a milky haze; the mist through which the steamers push ahead slowly and cautiously; the mist, parting which the morning light falls over the body of the river like white jasmine flowers — these paintings capture the remembrance of similar experiences. Such experiences are recollected even more directly in some of the later paintings from the twenties in which water, land and sky are merged into one vast vista of luminance, mist and space.

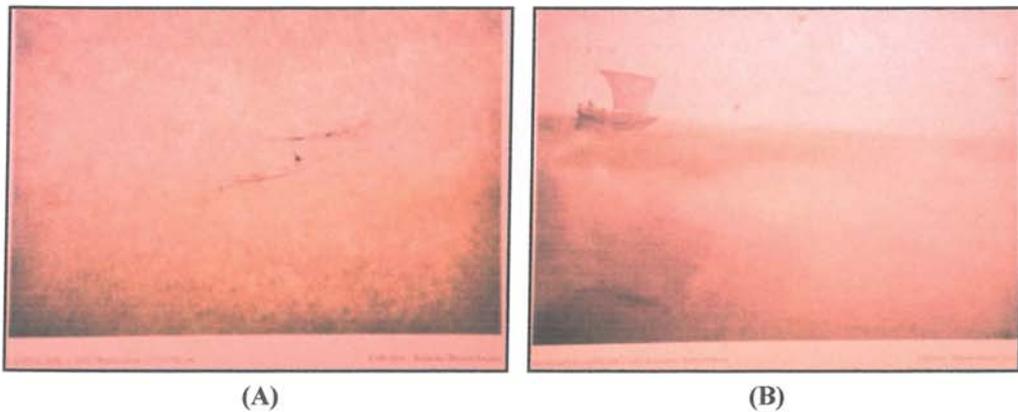


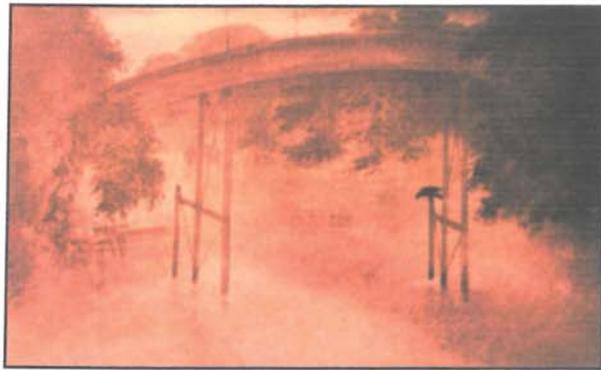
FIGURE 32(A) Ganges in Pathe Bipathe, c. 1927, watercolour.  
 (B) Shahjadpur landscape, c. 1927, watercolour. Collection: Rabindra Bharati Society

Probably painted between 1925 and 1927 they have been seen as collectively representing Shahjadpur.<sup>35</sup> Not many of the landscapes discussed so far offer us glimpses into a place as these do. These are landscapes with more human presence, and though it is not obvious at the outset they also contain more descriptive details that root them to a place and give them a local flavour. These last major landscapes of Abanindranath are strewn with signs of the local. There are local landmarks like

<sup>34</sup> A brilliant piece of writing that may be described as a blend of *The Arabian Nights* and Oscar Wilde.

<sup>35</sup> They are dated 1925-27 by Benodebehari, and in the absence of other external evidence to either corroborate or dispute it we shall stick to it.

the *Shahjadpur Bridge* and the *Ullapara Railway Station*, the *Talgachi Market* and the *Zamindar's office*, *The Milkman's Village* and the *Grave of Mokhdum Saheb* the *Sufi saint*.

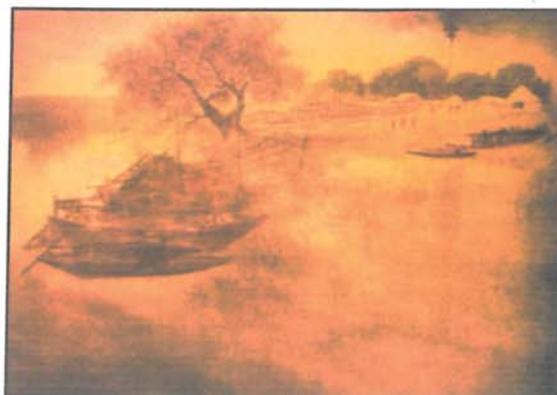


(A)



(B)

**FIGURE 33(A) Shahjadpur Bridge, c. 1927, watercolour.  
(B) Ullapara Railway Station Collection: Rabindra Bharati Society.**



(A)



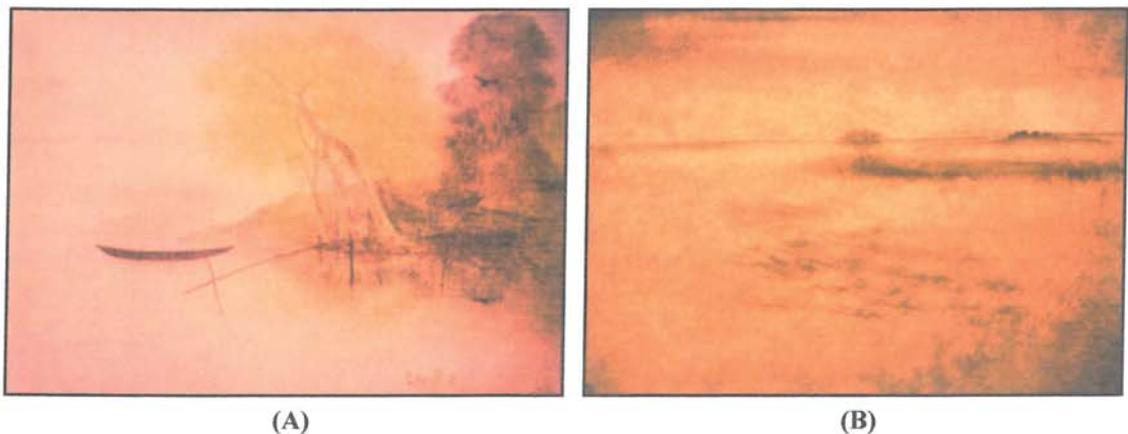
(B)

**FIGURE 34(A) Talgachi Market Place, c. 1927, watercolour.  
(B) The Zamindar's Office, c. 1927, watercolour. Collection: Rabindra Bharati Society**

We only have to telescope into the middle distance and peer a little harder to meet some of its inhabitants. Look carefully at *The Talgachi Market* and we can see a small crowd of people in the distant market, including a zamindar who has come to market in his houseboat; telescope on to *The Milkman's Village* and we can see the milkman himself, pail in hand, moving onwards the

pen filled chock a block with cows, and in the middle stands a woman wrapped in a shawl or quilt in a gesture that suggests that she has spotted us spying on her world; or zoom into the shadows at the centre of *The Zamindar's Office* and we can discover that the minuscule figure awaiting us on the landing is Rabindranath. Abanindranath himself is represented seated inside a houseboat moored by an island in one of the pictures, and in another he is seen seated listening to a village singer as he is being punted across the river that is wrapped in morning mist.

But in the *Shahjadpur* series Abanindranath combines wash and watercolour very deftly.



**FIGURE 35(A)** Shahjadpur landscape, c. 1927, watercolour.  
**(B)** Shahjadpur landscape, c. 1927, watercolour. Collection: Rabindra Bharati Society

Each painting was first worked in wash and once the right atmosphere was established the details were carefully worked-in in watercolour, moving from transparent strokes to translucent touches to achieve a fine blend of mood and detail.

By 'modernity', wrote Baudelaire, 'I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and immutable... This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. By neglecting it, you cannot fail to tumble into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty'.<sup>36</sup> Abanindranath's ephemeral did not belong to the urban social but to the world of rural nature, but like Baudelaire he clearly understood the function of the ephemeral in art and its role in giving a sense of palpability to one's visions. And it is the grafting of the ephemeral with the timeless, so intricately inscribed into the *Shahzadpur* series that sets it apart from all his other landscapes, and makes it one of his finest achievements.<sup>37</sup>

The marriage of the ephemeral and the timeless also leads us from Abanindranath to Andrei Tarkovsky. This should not be surprising considering that allows the modern artist to look keenly at physical reality is also the best tool he has to transform the mundane into the magical. Abanindranath's *Shahzadpur* motifs of the flooded grove with its shadowy depths and intense luminosity, and the horse wading through the flooded and desolate landscape are uncanny anticipations of pure Tarkovsky. His contemplative, imagistic style and slow camera work allows Tarkovsky to blend incisive observation with the intimacy of memory and give us glimpses of infinity through lyrical and haunting images of nature, especially through the explorations of earth, water and light. His extensions of Abanindranath's sensibilities into our times

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<sup>36</sup> Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> He never returned to landscapes with such rigour or seriousness of purpose later.

allow us to experience the older master outside the historical framework and notice how the beautiful and the vulnerable are coalesced in his landscapes.

Our analysis leads to the conclusion that Abanindranath “effected a fusion of western and oriental techniques and evolved a new style.” Benode Behari Mukherjee called this technique as that of the ‘realistic type’ “a realism absolutely his own”. Even after recognizing the sources from which Abanindranath derived the ingredients of his style, Mukherjee hastens to add that “it did not belong to any specific tradition.” Stella Kramrisch conceded Abanindranath’s technique as a ‘combination’ which was personal and Indian at the same time. But Prof. Ratan Parimoo opined -“I think cousins was much nearer the truth, who saw in Abanindranath ‘a fusion of the detailed observation of realism with the suggestiveness of impressionism’. That is why I have chosen to term it as ‘Indian realism.’”

Towards the end of the second decade he did a large number of landscapes which are probably his best. A great many of them are from Shahzadpur in Bihar, where they had family states. There is an earlier undated landscape in which water colour is handled in an impressionist manner, rather like Boudin (the 19<sup>th</sup> century French painter) and again like the latter it is of a seascape. But the moonlit landscape from the impressionist series is, in its use of water colour and nocturnal effect, close to the earlier Phalguni Paintings. The contrasting reflections of moonlight on water vary dramatically, adding to the frightening quality of the panoramic expanse. The effect is akin to the one mentioned by

Mukul Dey *Moonrise at Mussorie Hills* (1916) (of another landscape from Darjeeling). Abanindranath also painted neighbourhood house under the effects of night and the moon. Shahzadpur landscape. On the other hand, are inevitably rain-drenched river views, bathed in mist and haze, always evoking the effect of winter or autumn. Several of them show boats tied to trees along a river bank. In one of them the motif of a bridge and the silhouetted form of a bird perched on a pillar under it, is very Japanese in nature. Although these paintings can be classed as Impressionist yet they contain visible objects with distinct contours. It is only the individual details which are blotted out. In spite of several discernible colours the overall effect is monochromatic.

B.B. Mukherjee has listed groups of Abanindranath's landscape painted around 1915, and the early as well as late 1920, mentioning sites in Bengal and Bihar. But it is difficult to bring together all these landscape and to be able to distinguish them in terms of sites and stylistic qualities. Between the two brothers, it must be observed that factually Gaganendranath was the first to achieve mastery over the use of watercolour to depict landscape as an independent genre. He had already executed many landscape echoing Rabindranath's descriptions of nature and the Bengal countryside by 1911 and continued to do so for the next two decades. Abanindranath already was well-trained in transparent water colour as early as 1895 and at least one watercolour survives of Kashtaharini Ghat at Monghyr. He switched to opaque water colour subsequently till he devised the 'wash technique' around 1905. It is likely that only after he employed transparent water colour layers and brushstrokes in his

Phalguni paintings such as Rabindranath as Baul, that Abanindranath indulged in painting landscape, in what I like to characterize as the English watercolour technique. But in fairness to Gaganendranath, although often considered to be only a dilettante, he must be given credit for being a pioneer of landscape painting in India handling transparent watercolour.



FIGURE 36 *Village Music*, c. 1927, watercolour .Collection: Rabindra Bharati Society

A landscape titled *Village Music* and painted in the combination of opaque and transparent effects can be pinpointed to be a pre-Phalguni work, i.e. before 1915. A ferry boat is being plied through a river, the whole space; water, river banks as well as the sky are enveloped in a haze. Whereas silhouetted in opaque colour stands out a boat with a seated passenger, while a standing boatman is plying and significantly a seated *Baul* singer holding an *Ektara* is seated at the opposite end. It is the *Baul* who is associated with music and thereby the symbolism of Rabindranath's poetry is implied, but the *Baul* could also be the *Bhatiali* singer whose singing in the boats reverberates through the riverine panoramas. Landscape with impressionist technique and effects was indeed the

appropriate genre, for an artist handling the wash technique and effects which require appearing cloudy and rain-drenched, as in the case of Abanindranath. Looking at the diffused quality of Gaganendranath's landscape, Abanindranath realized the possibility of adjusting his own style of wash technique to 'landscape' subjects. Their landscape in the 1920s reveal similar techniques but eventually the temperament of each came to the fore; Abanindranath preferred the riverine environment, whereas Gaganendranath's predilection was for the urban, nocturnal and distant mountainous vistas.

In the case of Gaganendranath's landscape, the influence of Rabindranath's writings describing rural Bengal and especially riverine Bengal should be considered as a source of inspiration. I quote here from Rabindranath watching from a boat in Shahzadpur in June 1891, which also has the symbolism of the boat. We may bear in mind the landscape of the island with boats moored nearby.

"I sat wondering, why is there always this deep shade of melancholy over the fields and river banks, the sky and the sunshine of our country? And I came to the conclusion that it is because with us nature is obviously the more important things. The sky is free, the fields limitless; and the sun merges them into one blazing whole. In the midst of this, man seems so trivial. He comes and goes, like the ferry-boat, from this shore to the other; the babbling hum of his talk, the fitful echo of his song, is heard; the slight movement of his pursuit of his own petty desires is seen in the world's market place; but how

feeble. How temporary, how tragically meaningless it all seems amidst the immense aloofness of the universe! The contrast between the beautiful broad, unalloyed peace of nature—calm, passive, silent, unfathomable—and our own everyday worries—paltry, sorrow-laden, strife-tormented, put me beside myself and I keep staring at the hazy, distant, blue line of trees which fringe the fields across the river.”<sup>38</sup>

With reference to Abanindranath’s *Landscape with Moonlight* one feel following letter of Rabindranath seems very appropriate which he wrote from Shelidah in October 1891; “It was the Kajagar full moon, and I was slowly facing the riverside conversing with myself—But what a night it was.....here was not a line of ripple on the river, and far away over here where the farthest shore of the distant main stream is seen beyond the other edge of the midway belt of sand, right up to this shore glimmers a broad, band of moonlight. Not a human being, a boat in sight; not a tree, nor blade of grass on the freshly formed island sand-bank. It seemed as though a desolate moon was rising upon a devastated earth; a random river wandering through a lifeless solitude; a long drawn fairy-tale coming to close over a decorated world...”<sup>39</sup>

Shri Chaitanya’s *Ecstasy*, also called *Dance at Puri Beach*, and is one of Abanindranath’s few paintings on the theme of Shri Chaitanya. It can be considered one of the ‘post-Konarak’ paintings (a term used by B.B. Mukherjee) because the theme relates to Puri beach, the setting for Shri Chaitanya’s

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38 *Three Tagore’s* by Ratan Parimoo, p. 114.

39 *Three Tagore’s* by Ratan Parimoo - *Jivansmriti*, p. 116.

ecstasy, and is dated between 1951 and 1920. As around 1914 Gaganendranath Tagore completed a whole series of paintings based on the life of Shri Chaitanya, it is likely that, Abanindranath felt like joining his brother. (See the chapter on Gaganendranath Tagore for more details). The misty landscape atmosphere of the sea beach, relates this also with the 'impressionistic' group of Abanindranath's landscape. Granting a dominant place to the lean figure of Chaitanya, who is accompanied by six other companions singing and playing musical instruments, prominence is given to the long *mridanga* of the eastern Indian variety. Each figure is in a different posture of dance and their movements relate to each other in a carefully choreographed arrangement. This misty environment is appropriate for expression of such mystic ecstasy of devotional music in which Chaitanya often remained engrossed.

### **Gaganendranath Tagore- Jivansmriti Paintings and Grappling with Japanese techniques**

Another documented group of his works, the illustrations for Rabindranath's autobiography in Bengali, *Jivansmriti*, published in 1912. This confirms a firm date upon them. Again here, some bear the date 1911. Here for the first time we come across some paintings which definitely derive from the Japanese brush technique. Mention may be made here of the well-known and recorded incident of Okakura's visit and his sending of two Japanese artists. Okakura's visit to Calcutta 1902, when Sister Nivedita wrote the introduction to his forthcoming book *Ideals of the East*, published the following year.

Subsequently Gaganendranath and Okakura formed a special relationship, one of the few of the kind which are recorded. The few letters that are preserved reveal that Okakura was seeking Gaganendranath's help in forming a collection of Indian Miniature Paintings in Boston, just when the Tagore family art collection was being set up, as well as when the Indian Museum in Calcutta began to acquire Indian art objects. The guest artists had given several demonstrations of Japanese brush technique so excitedly narrated by Abanindranath, in which, Gaganbabu was to be passionately interested. But from the evidence of Gaganendranath's paintings his actual preoccupation with Japanese type brushwork does not date before 1910.



(A)

(B)

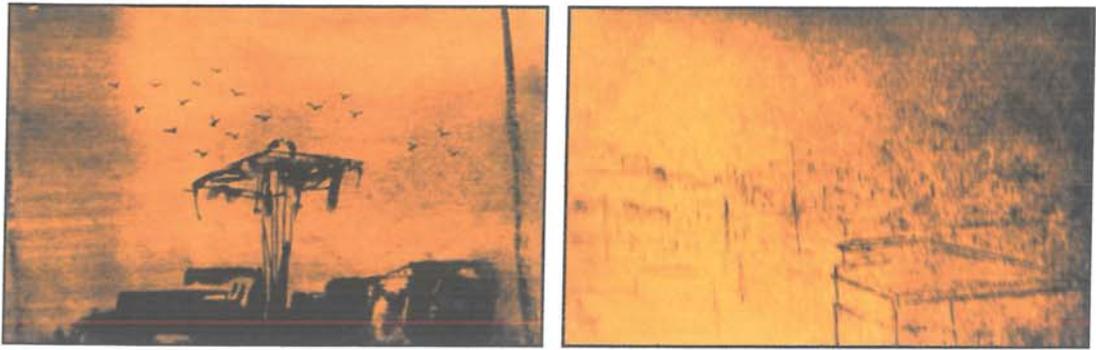
**FIGURE 37(A) Darjeeling watercolour landscape painting by Gaganendranath Tagore.  
(B) Calcutta Roof tops, painting by Gaganendranath Tagore. Collection: Rabindra Bharati University.**

Gaganbabu had further acquaintance with Japanese painting through the exhibition of Japanese art organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art and also through the reproductions in the then famous albums of *Kokka*.

The Jivansmriti ink paintings have several types of brushwork. Also here are discussed *aquarelles* not published in this book but either contemporary to them or done subsequently till about 1951. The fact that several types of techniques are used in them suggests that he worked in various styles all at the same time. Differentiating them from one another will enable one not only to pinpoint them, but also to observe how simultaneously he attempted to synthesize them, till around 1951 evolving his own approach to the use of *Sumi-e*.

First we may discuss those which could be called Naturalistic (or Impressionist) akin to Puri landscapes with hardly anything Japanese in them. (This will help in distinguishing those in the latter technique). An example of this is the street scene (one version of which is in Jivansmititi) depicting impressions of environs as received through eyes, for that is how this group of painting could be characterized. Here quick patches of black ink silhouette figure against the light tone of the street and atmosphere using a *trompe l'oeil* viewpoint. There are larger figures of beggars in the foreground partially cut by the frame, and then bare bodied fisherman in the middle and a diminutive buggy receding in the distance, Very similar is the watercolour (A Street Scene near the temple) with a slightly different kind of street scene with perspective in two directions, one as the street recedes from the foreground on the right hand side, and the other on the left as the devotees ascend or descend from the temple entrance, diminishing in size as they move away from the front plane, thus giving the entire compositing a spatial complexity. This is a prototype street scene for

those depicting night effects, often of the *Durga Immersion* developed a few years later. Much more impressionist is one of the versions of *Calcutta Roof Tops*, in which ink is spread like watercolour, graded from dark tones in the foreground, becoming lighter and hazier towards the distance.



**FIGURE 38** *Calcutta Roof Tops*, entitled paintings by Gaganendranath Tagore.  
Collection: Rabindra Bharati Society.

Here black ink rather than colour is used to give an impressionist effect of light and atmosphere. A superb pencil drawing exists delineating the roof tops by the Linear perspective system revealing his mastery and understanding of it

Certain *Jivansmriti* illustrations look forward to his later interest in the mystery of light and shadow. Their theme was taken from a narration by Rabindranath: “After nine in the evening, my lessons with Aghore Babu were over; I am retiring within for the night. A murky flickering lantern is hanging in the long venetian-screened corridor leading from the outer to the inner apartments. At its end this passage turns into a flight of four or five steps, to which the light does not reach, and down which I pass into the galleries running round and the first inner quadrangle. A shaft of moonlight stands from the eastern sky into

the western angle of these verandahs, leaving the rest in darkness. In this patch of light the maids have gathered and are sitting on the floor close together, with legs outstretched, rolling cotton waste into lamp wicks, and chatting in undertones of their village homes. Many such pictures are indelibly printed on my memory”<sup>40</sup>

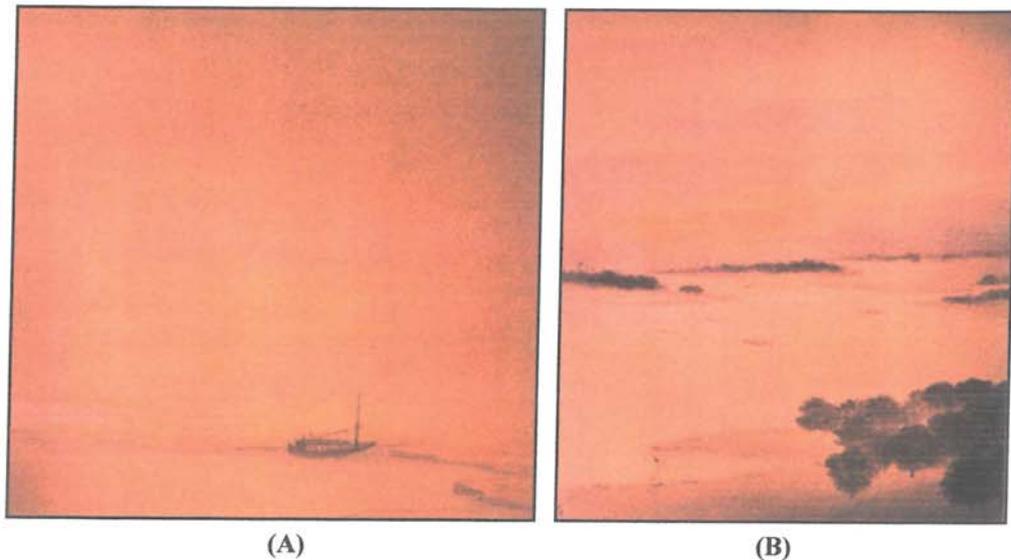


FIGURE 39(A) River view, wash & tempera on paper.  
(B) Bengal landscape, wash & tempera on paper. Collections: N.G.M.A

Oriental ink work is definitely used in where the rich, dark tones of fluid ink are juxtaposed to bring out the effect of the density and largeness of the gigantic banyan tree, (Compare in with the work of Japanese painter, Hasequwa Tohaku (1539-1610). This is one of Gaganendranath’s finest and powerful works of the period. Another exercise reveals brushwork which is undoubtedly Japanese, where leafy branches and foliage are depicted with characteristic oriental brush strokes called in Japanese *Bokushoku* or *Tsuketate*. Although the brushwork of leaves and foliage is easily recognizable to be Oriental, even in certain

<sup>40</sup> *Jivansmriti* - text by Rabindranath Tagore, p. 120.

depictions of human figures and birds, it is possible to distinguish between the various Oriental brush treatments, the 'rice dot' (*Bei Ten*), the 'nailhead', and the 'rattail line' (*Tei Tou Sobi Byou*) Gaganbabu's interest was not limited to only the brush techniques of Japanese art, but also the whole conceptual range of this art. This is particularly found in certain very 'Orientalised landscapes' where it is not impressionistic but an Oriental vastness and infiniteness of space that is evokes. This can be observed by analyzing examples of each of the two types; *Calcutta Roof Tops* and *Women at the Banks of Ganges* are impressionist, whereas *The Ganges Again* (from *Jivansmriti*) has an oriental quality.

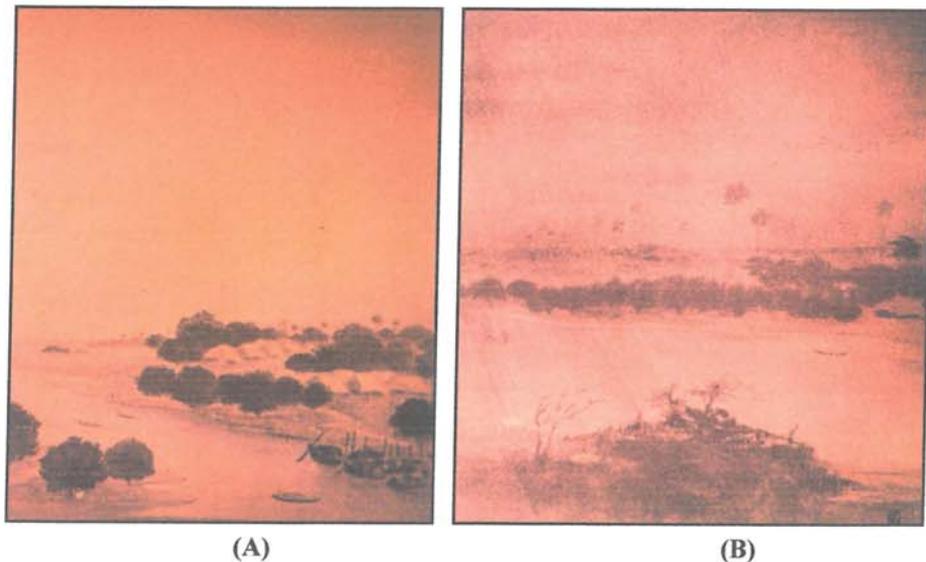


FIGURE 40(A) River view, wash & tempera on paper.  
 (B) Raining Season, wash & tempera on paper..Collections: N.G.M.A

How deeply a Japanese spirit is ingrained in his work can be gauged by nothing the fact that Japanese painters always showed water in landscape, either water itself, sea, river, mountain stream, or water in the form of *rains*. Gaganendranath also based his landscape on the same scheme of heaven-

man-earth (*Ten Chi Jin*) as did the Japanese. (See *Calcutta during the Rains* from *Jivansmriti*). Also the characteristic of simplicity and understatement, suggested more than represented, “leaving to the imagination to suggest itself the completion of an idea”. For further parallels with Japanese landscape, compare *The Waterfall of Nachi*, with that of Gaganendranath’s Himalayas from Darjeeling, which also contains a similar motif of a stream falling over a precipice. In addition juxtapose his *Mountain Road with Rain* by the artist Sansetsu (1589-1615).

I quote here two verses from Rabindranath, which can be linked with Gaganendranath’s landscapes with waterfall. “The waterfall sings, ‘I find my song, when I find my freedom’”, *Stray Birds*. “I give my whole water in joy; sings the waterfall though little of it is enough for the thirsty”, *Stray Birds*. The significance of Gaganendranath’s painting, *The Boat*. Of course, a difference in format exists. The latter is a horizontal *The Boat Padma*, with a long row of birds flying in the sky, gets enhanced, when the following verse of Rabindranath is read along with it. “Thoughts pass in my mind like flock of ducks in the sky. I hear the voice of their wings” with birds and without birds). The landscapes which come nearer to their Japanese prototypes in the use of characteristic brushwork for the depiction of trees are shown, which are comparable again with Sesshu’s work. Of course, a difference in format exists. The latter is a horizontal scroll portraying an entire countryside along a swollen river, while Gaganendranath only depicts a portion of a similar scene. The National Gallery (New Delhi) has at least four such landscape. All of them

appear to have been drawn somewhere around the same river bend. Apart from the brushwork for the foliage of trees placed in rows at different spatial points, with diminishing size, and tonal change from dark to grey as these formations spread across the horizon, this scheme of a gradually rising horizon from the foreground plane into the middle ground with a vast sky above is equally a Japanese triple part spatial panorama. In this idyllic Bengal environ, boats are moored at the river bank while some ply across. In the foggy effect shows the approaching evening over a low horizon and in rains slash diagonally across the entire space. An occasional coconut tree vertically cuts the horizon while a barely visible swarm of bird's traverses the sky is a variation with typical Bengal huts clustered from the foreground to middle ground. In this painting the locale shifts to Puri with a temple *shikhara* conspicuously emerging on the horizon, while in the foreground plane for a change there are groves of vertically shaped rather than round foliated trees.

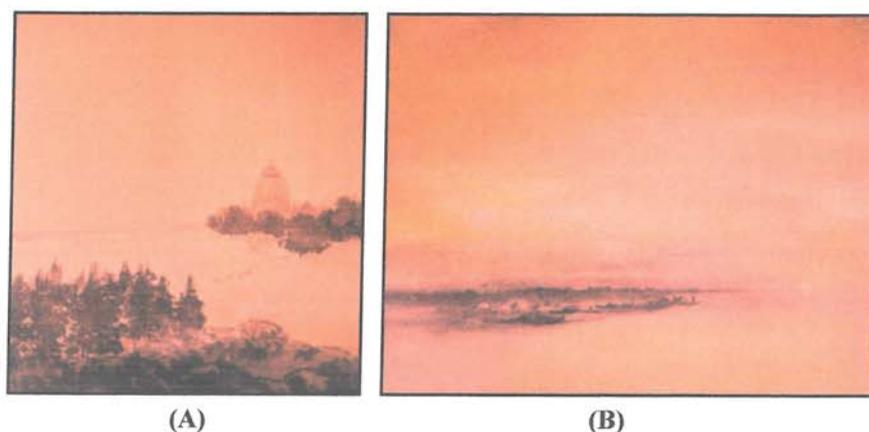
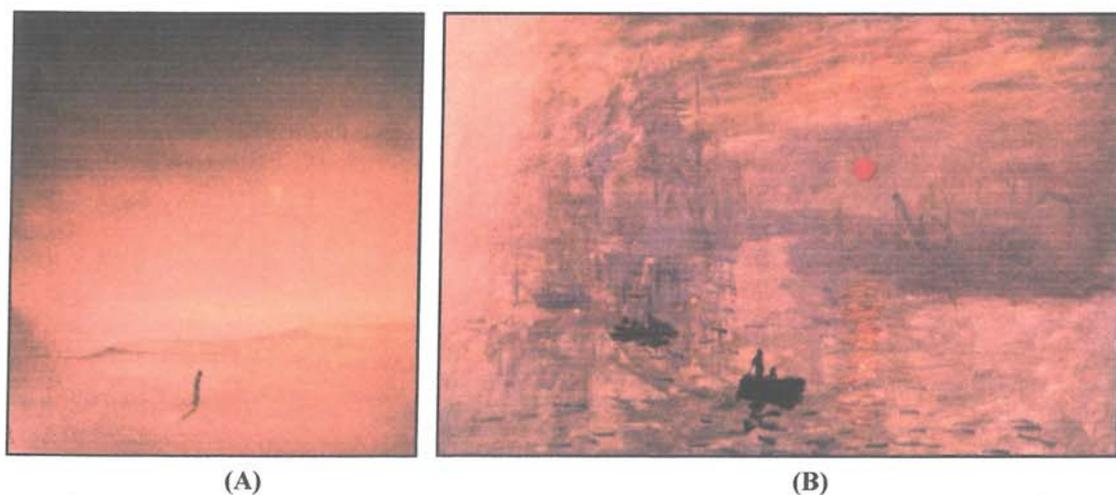


FIGURE 41(A) Puri Temple.  
 (B) Storm Ahead in Padma, watercolour & wash on paper. Collection:N.G.M.A

Another type of landscape found in *Jivansmriti* is that done with thin washes of colour with a minimum of tone and hue contrast, the entire picture looking

almost pale grey as in *The Boat Padma*. It represents a sheer limitless expanse. Such landscapes might have been inspired by similar ones of Whistler, who also derived such effects from a synthesis of Impressionist and Japanese techniques. Resembling this well known painting in which the long row of flying birds far away in the sky is absent. But *Early Morning over River Padma* is more Whistlerian, and still more so, *Storm Ahead in Padma*. What is titled as '*Moon above the Sea*' might actually be a river-scape in which a silhouetted solitary man stands on the shore as the lovely moon hovers in the sky.



**FIGURE 42(A)** Moon above the sea, watercolour by Gaganendranath Tagore. Collection: N.G.M.A  
**(B)** Sunrise by Claude Monet, 1872, oil on canvas. Collection: from the net.

This reminds us of the famous Impressionist painting *Sunrise* by Claude Monet (1872) and Gaganendranath's awareness of Whistlerian adaptations of Impressionism to night effects, that is where sunshine is absent, as Impressionism largely explored the effects of sunshine. Gaganbabu's definite interest in Whistler is however more positively established in the slightly later landscape of night subjects, significantly titled *Nocturnes*, a favourite theme of

Whistler as well. Other adaptations by Gaganbabu of Japanese methods are (i) the sprinkling of mica dust on the painting surface and (ii) painting with black ink on gold paper, which particularly fascinated him. One of the interesting examples of the latter is a very simplified seascape in horizontal format which has a composition similar to those seen in the Japanese folded painted screens. Gaganendranath continued to paint on gold paper with black ink later on even when his style changed. Here mention may be made of on his early caricatures (c.1917) entitled hair dressing in Bengal which uses the men's coiffure to make a comment on personality types of the Indian middle class of that time. It is based on a japans drawing in similar layout illustrating the varieties of male hairdo of that country which appeared in *The modern review* (December 1916). However, the central emphasis with this skull inserted in the middle as the dominant context of contrast is his own.

It is difficult to separate Shahzadpur (Bihar) landscapes and those at Shelidah (Bangladesh) where Rabindranath had family estates, from locations near Howrah and Konnagar. The Ganga is locally known as Padma (in Bangladesh), which was also the name of the boat owned by Rabindranath and moored near Howrah. Gaganendranath's family also owned a boat moored at Konnagar (in Hoogly district). He too was a familiar with the Bengal riverscapes as expressed by Rabindranath in his writings. The perception of Gaganendranath's painted versions is thus as much as his own. To recapitulate this early and formative period of Gaganbabu's art activity his attitude can be noted as naturalistic. He aimed at representing direct visual experience in his painting, either straight

from nature or unfiltered even if transcribed from memory. He began with a broadly Impressionist technique, but depended heavily on Japanese technique and its variations. Japanese art exercised a great deal of influence on his formative period, during the course of which he achieved a considerable mastery over the technique. In his handling of *Sumi-e*, Gaganendranath displayed all the skill, all the subtleties that the Japanese expect from a master which is especially conspicuous in his two studies of crows (also comparable to Pa-ta Shan-Jen, Chinese, and 17th century)

Rabindranath described the broad expanse of the Ganga stretching from one horizon to another, from green earth beneath to the blue sky full of light above. He mused on cloudy days, and golden effects of the evening sky so ably captured by Gaganendranath in these early landscapes. Yet, apart from the inspiration from Rabindranath's poetic descriptions, Gaganendranath's own sensibility and familiarity with the Bengal riverside is central to these works. Gaganendranath's night effects and the use of black for darkness appears as if they were based on Rabindranath's poems on *Darkness*. Gaganendranath created compositional structures deriving from the symbolism and thematic intentions of Rabindranath's plays and writings for the theatre. Several of Gaganendranath's Cubist paintings reflect the vastness and stormy aspects of nature, as if an explosive suddenly broke asunder and out of this formless chaos a new order is in the process of formation. One is not only reminded of Rabindranath's poems, but those of Wordsworth, as well as the paintings of Turner. Several feminine images of Gaganendranath can be correlated with Rabindranath's imageries of the universal mother. Ultimately

it is possible to say that Gaganendranath gave pictorial form to Rabindranath's concept of *Jibandebata*.

Gaganendranath's extensive use of transparent water colour medium for landscape subjects at this juncture and continuing preoccupation with landscape, enable him to be recognized as the major watercolourist of his time. This is so in European as well as Far Eastern techniques, even if his teacher Harinarayan Bandopadhyay is said to have been a foremost watercolourist. More than Abanindranath, Gaganendranath is a pioneer of India landscape as part of a personal and collective racial experience. Significantly, his landscape are characteristic depictions of the feel of the rain-drenched Bengal countryside and wide sandy river banks by a 'son of the same soil', quite unlike foreign artists like Daniells' topographical documentation of Indian locations delineated with clinical detachment.

### **Landscape Paintings by Rabindranath Tagore**

Landscape constitutes a major and constant theme in Rabindranath's oeuvre. And some of the most interesting, refined, expressive and mature paintings were done in this genre. They occur right from about 1929 spreading through all his phases till 1939, but the bulk of them are done in second half of 1930s. In building them up he tried varied techniques and nearly his entire technical repertoire is found in them. In his landscapes there is a constant and steady growth toward maturity and enriched vision. Not only do we observe in them the ripening and culmination of his style but also they indicate his growing sensibility and feeling for the pictorial medium—his understanding of

tone, of colour, of texture, of the beauty and rhythm of lines, and how their potentialities could be exploited to express the atmosphere, mood and the mystery of nature.

Rabindranath's landscapes are not studies of nature in the attitude of an observer but they are more as personal reflections. He was never interested in individual elements of nature; there are seldom single trees, for instance. One also looks in vain for nature studies. The many Rower pieces that he did are far from being records of botanical special men. When he painted a landscape it is always total atmosphere that he is seeking for. Even in the earlier cruder and rudimentary landscapes one can see such-a striving. Probably he never sat in front of a 'motif. They are not based on a particular spot. However, a number of them are certainly inspired by the lush forest-like surroundings of Santiniketan.

The earlier ones are of the type that has emerged out of spontaneous uncoordinated patches and scribbling of ink. Like the other kinds of early paintings he naturally painted his first landscapes in black ink, working with simple medium of monochrome so that he could concentrate on the main idea. In these early landscapes one sees then dual efforts, achieving control on black and white and understanding atmosphere and ideational unity, of nature. Light enters in his landscapes only later after specially concentrating his efforts toward it .



**FIGURE 43** Tagore's, untitled watercolour landscape paintings. Collections: N.G.M.A

First attempts at landscape comprise of patches of black crudely applied with no tone variations. The black patches indicating floating clouds, mountain as well as water. But the effect is more like a flat pattern of black ink and white areas of paper. They relate as pattern but do not have spatial unity. The spatial unity is achieved in a landscape again with black ink but with pen scribbles which shows excellent understanding of tonal variations and density. The white patches of uncovered paper give the feeling of light and merge with black forming part of the total atmosphere. This may be ascribed to early thirties. In its treatment of 'light' it has a plein-air quality like the Impressionists.

In an example "of, what perhaps belongs to middle thirties, (was published in 1936) it is not the impression of sun-shine in outdoors but a total mood with many dark shadows akin to the Romantic landscapes.



**FIGURE 44** Tagore's, untitled watercolour landscape painting. Collection: N.G.M.A

The silhouetted forms of column-like trees stand solemnly against a softly glowing sky which is reflected in water. The colour scheme comprises of warm variations of brown. The whole effect may have been inspired by evening but there is a stillness and melancholy about it so that one can see from now on-words that it was a quality of mood that he was seeking, a personal reflection in contact with nature—the mood it evoked in heart ( feeling), not meteorological truth through eyes. Thus these late landscapes are akin to Expressionist landscapes in particular to those of Emile Nolde.



**FIGURE 45** Rabindranath Tagore's, untitled watercolour landscape painting. Collections; N.G.M.A

The common features of the late landscapes are: silhouetted trees against glowing” sky arranged on either side of the painting surface, the middle opened up through which the glow of the sky is seen. This serves as compositional focal point and also as means of leading the eye into the pictorial space.

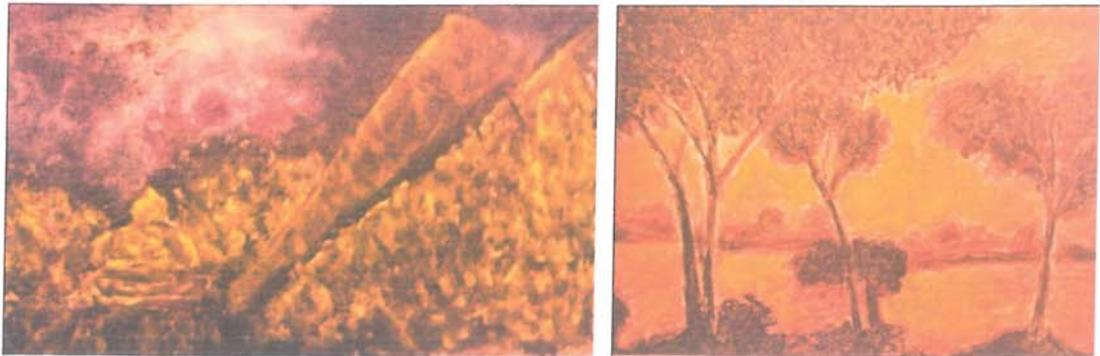


FIGURE 46 Rabindranath Tagore's, untitled landscape painting. Collections: N.G.M.A

Within such self-imposed limitations there are many variations in the placing and the grouping of trees and the shapes of the glowing sky visible through them. There are no local colours and no realistic details but spontaneous brush work of restricted palette. The fact that they are rarely peopled with human figures gives them an added air of peculiarity.

Tagore's landscapes will be found sufficiently clear and well defined to be intelligible to an average observer. Landscape symbols (tree, pond, and road) can easily be recognised and the character of the landscapes examined. We remark for instance that all seems near to the viewer while wide open spaces hardly occur. Deep distance is rarely found. Tagore's landscapes do generally not exceed an average middle distance. Reinforced by the light diffusion, this nearness acquires intimate character. Intimacy and proximity arise as the mark

of Tagore's space. Garden – like, neglected nooks of inhabited regions make their appearance. Ponds, shaded lanes, an occasional hut or a small temple indicate man's presence though his image is seldom seen. In the total output of Tagore's landscapes which amounts to nearly two hundred, hardly any figure makes its appearance.

Another obvious characteristic of the paintings is their apparent simplicity from several points of view. A pond, a road, a grassy hillock and a few trees, presented in innumerable variations constitute Tagore's ever returning subject matter. Neither does he go in for details. The symbol 'tree' for instance implies the idea of a trunk and foliage while the particular species remain generally beyond recognition. The exotic beauty of palms and ferns, the majestic proportions of the banyan tree etc. Do not really come into focus. It soon becomes clear that, rather than the description of the outer world, inwardly directed feelings and intentions are at stake.

The fact that we can infer all this directly from the pictorial signs demonstrates the clarity of Tagore's art language in terms of a relative realism. Indeed stylistically the landscapes may be classified within the realistic variety. Viewed within the total of Tagore's output, this naturalness and relative realism is found in contradiction with his figure and animal paintings which distortions and fantastic shapes are common features. This chasm may puzzle quite a few scholars who found interpretations of Tagore's paintings in terms of primitivism, tribal art, so called child art and the like. These explanations do not suit the landscapes which are of a lyrical mainstream but not anti or non classical. Moreover we remark

that whenever an animal is introduced in the landscapes, Tagore also tries its portrayal in natural proportions.

The realistic note in Tagore's landscapes is important from several points of view. It would be hard to deny that the experimental nature and often excessive freedom on the modern art platform renders interpretation more conjectural. In the case of realism nature and artistic symbol remain connected creating a reference point relatively free from traditions and fashions. Regarded as such, Tagore's landscapes may prove to be a safe key for the detection of his real pictorial intentions.

Examining Tagore's pictorial procedure, we note that most of the time the landscape symbols make their appearance through bold divisions of the picture space. The delineations often coincide with contrasts of light and dark. Large shapes, viewed in relation to the picture space are cut out. Close views result, often lending a theatrical appearance to the phenomena. Rabindranath's approach is direct and bold.

In a large majority of the paintings the picture space is well filled with nature elements. Large blank spaces are rarely found. Nature makes its appearance as rich and abundant. Not of emptiness or alienation, Tagore's landscapes accentuate the presence of things. Indirectly, this pictorial aspect reveals a sense for company and confidential interaction. Though a contemplative, Tagore is not the lonely ascetic delighting in the void but purposes interaction and the emotional charges of a well furnished life.

The feelings of nearness and participation are endorsed by other pictorial traces as well. Such is for instance the 'texture animation'. Working intensely with the brush, he superimposed layers of colour, scratches with pens, even dips with cloth. Tagore seems to suggest the vibrational qualities of organic life. Foliage, rendered in opaque or transparent media is rarely flat but recedes here, projects there, creating a mosaic of tones. The pictorial signs indicate Tagore's intuitive awareness of the intimate thrill of life. Thus while the landscapes are generalised, simplified in their formal and descriptive aspects, they nevertheless tend to delve deep into the essence of things. The essentialism does however not concern each landscape element in particular; but rather an all pervading rhythm and thrill.

The observations on the strongly centrifugal character of the landscapes are fortified by a large number of pictorial characteristics. Painting ponds over and over again, especially in Tagore's close up portrayals, a water bird, a water lily or the elaboration of reflections in the water surface would normally come in. Hardly anything of the sort makes its appearance. We cannot but conclude that the subject matter of the landscapes, far more than on the outer world concerns a projection of inner content into a simplified landscape vocabulary.

Certain recurrent configurations confirm the proposition. While huts, bridges or other favourite accessories of both the Oriental and Occidental landscape vocabulary are hardly seen, a temple or a temple fragment is the only recurrent architectural device in the paintings. It seems quite reasonable to accept that this pictorial sign confirms the contemplative character of the landscapes.

When in the seclusion of the natural environment the evening light disperses a reddish glow on a temple fragment, the contemplative mood acquires descriptive suggestivity.

As connected with the temple motif, another recurrent configuration needs mentioning here. Going through a number of landscapes, a step like design may be discerned. The edges of the landscape elements are often seen to connect stepwise i.e. alterations of short verticals and horizontals. Once identified and familiarized with, the design can be traced in various modifications in many of the landscapes. Sometimes we recognise the motif in the foreground while, in most of the overt cases, a real staircase makes its appearance, often leading to a temple structure.

Let us reflect for a while on this design. The geometrical nature of the step design conforms to the regular formats of the paper, increasing the stability of the composition. Gaps and irregularities disappear and the removal of uneasy feelings, associated with the inhabitable aspects of nature results. The step motif reduces things to the human scale. The impression that, in Tagore's landscape, man rather than nature, sets the standard becomes fortified. Whereas earlier we noted emphasis on sensuousness in tendencies such as texture animation, the step design introduces a geometrical element, disclosing the intellectual attitude.

### **Jamini Roy (1887- 1972)**

Having acquired sufficient skills in the European academic-realist mode at the Government College of Art & Craft, Calcutta, Jamini Roy began his artistic

career painting landscapes and portraits in the post-impressionistic style. Roy Later moved away from these and began to experiment with a more indigenous visual vocabulary. His early experiments were paintings on woven mats to achieve a mosaic-like effect. Level surfaces, flattening out of design in depth, the use of dissonant primary colours, and the equalisation of planes were other aspects of Bengal folk painting that Roy appropriated into his work. Also, he took up the volumetric forms of the Kalighat *pata chitras*. However, unlike the quick spontaneous brushwork of the traditional *patuas*, Roy's lines are more restrained and delineate a precise form.



**FIGURE 47** Jamini Roy's landscape painting. Collections:Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

For Roy, interest in folk art carried deeper implications than merely formal or stylistic possibilities. He would take up a subject and paint version after version, breaking and reforming the theme, as it went, over a few months — a long process. Turning his family into a production unit, Roy tried to actualise the link by emulating a craft-guild mode of artistic production. His interests were wide, ranging from the visual characteristics of home-

sewn Bengal quilts to the Byzantine icon, from mythic tales closer home to Christian themes.

Jamini Roy was awarded the Viceroy's Gold Medal in 1933, the Padma Bhushan in 1935, and elected a fellow of the Lalit Kala Akademi the following year.

### **Nandalal Bose's Landscape Paintings**

Nandalal Bose was a compulsive; he could never sit back without doing anything; he had a kind of artisan's itch to keep his fingers busy. So his work output was large, though, barring the murals, most of his paintings were of modest size and format. He traveled around often various centres in Bihar, Orissa and the hills and each trip brought forth a spate of fresh work. When he was in Santiniketan he was always seen in the studio or around the campus.

He has done a lot of water colour landscapes whenever he visited any place. It was like an everyday diary mentioning of his. If we see very minutely then it can be revealed out that most of the time he did those landscape paintings in tempera medium. Some of his landscapes were done in pure water colour technique.

Nandalal Bose in his own words describe (written in the article entitled 'The Discipline of Art') "A real work of art knows no death. If all the frescoes and sculptures of Ajanta and Ellora were to disappear, they would yet not die. In the mind of the art lover they would live for all times. If a single artist has looked at them, their truth influence and live through his work. It comes to this

that insofar as art is creation; it follows the law of all living things. It continues down the generations.



FIGURE 48 Two Tempera landscapes by Nandalal Bose. Collection: Kala Bhavan, Visva Bharati

The aim and endeavour of all the arts are the same. Poetry, sculpture, painting, dance, music, each of these, through a rhythm of joy which is the essence of all manifestation. Here there is a parallel between the pursuits of art and yoga. In spiritual *sadhana* or discipline the search is for the Unity of creation at the heart of diversity, it is to find the One by knowing which you know the all. In a similar manner art too moves towards its own vision of unity. Born in a Hindu family I have been brought up according to Hindu ideals and traditions. At one time I used to paint exclusively the figures of Indian gods and goddess. Now I want to draw events of daily life as well as the divine figures. I try to take the same delight in both. Formerly I used to think that the conception of divine forms was higher than that of everyday human life and of sensible things. With mental maturity I do not now emphasis the importance of forms of things as much; I see or try to see in each form the divergent rhythm an image of the same Being. The great globe, the forms in and outside the mind,

the *Prana*, Life in which all this universe of motion moves and from which also proceeds I try to see the Rhythm of Life in every form common and uncommon. In other words, previously I sought for divinity only in the image of the gods and goddesses, now I try to find it in 'sky, water and mountains'."

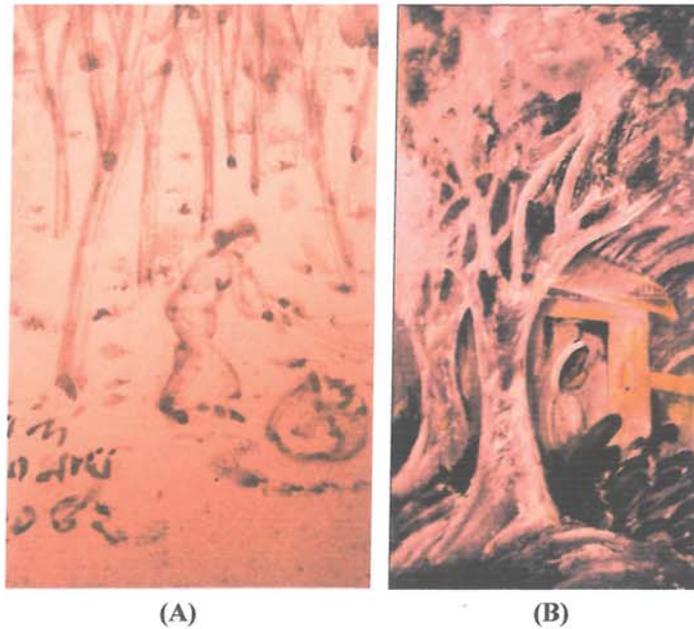
In all ages and countries great ideals have been the motive spring of art. Mediaeval Europe had the ideal of Christianity, India of Krishna and the Buddha, the Chinese of Tao. But when a personality comes to be worshiped as the symbol of an Idea, she suffers: in long run people either forget or misunderstand the root idea; the light of conscious joy is not reflected on the environment, it is ignored. That has been the case in India. In all ages the *sadhakas* have seen the image Kali or Siva in Nature; now screened by the images, we have forgotten to see the boundless Nature herself. 'All this is for the habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is, individual universe of movement in the universal motion'—initiated in this *mantra* of the Upanishad, the future art of India will look at the world with the vision of Truth and create anew.

Santiniketan transformed Nandalal conclusively. It weaned him off from Abanindranath in more than one senses; his work became more individual in content and technique. Though it drew impetus from various cultural antecedents, its main support was, now, his intimate and empathic response to environmental facts. He cultivated and refined this response by constant observation and study. A compulsive sketcher, nothing escaped his interest from the tiniest insect to panoramic landscapes and he reduced all these into

a handy mnemonic code, like pulling a camel through the needle's eye. The fractiousness of an artist's creativity lay, he came to realise, in how fully it embodied nature's life-rhythms, so he had to be alert, adept, and constantly vigilant like a religious seeker (or a robber, as he once told a student), and his work squared up the cultural and natural inputs, validating one with the other. No wonder that his best works hold a strange balance between tradition and innovation, naturalism and abstraction, and combine great simplicity and directness with playful virtuosity.

The Santiniketan experience broadened Nandalal's art perspectives. From his sketch book of 1917 one can notice that he took pointed interest in all categories of art and craft practice but Santiniketan gave him a *raison d'être* for such an interest. For here his responsibility did not stop with running an Art School on modern lines, he had also to rally the whole community in an aesthetic quest. Rabindranath had stated in no uncertain terms that man's sensory encounter with the environment was as important as his mind's enquiry into its inner mystery, and any worthwhile society should provide for both. Nandalal took it up as a challenge. Nandalal was a compulsive worker; he could never sit back without doing anything; he had a kind of artisan's itch to keep his fingers busy. So his work output was large, though, barring the murals, most of his paintings were of modest size and format. He traveled around often to various centres in Bihar, Orissa, and the hills and each trip brought forth a spate of fresh work. When he was in Santiniketan he was always seen in the studio or around the campus. He has done lot of landscapes like his disciple Ramkinkar

Baij whenever he visited any place. But if we see very minutely then it can be revealed out that most of the time he did those landscapes in tempera medium. Some of his landscapes were obviously done in pure water colour technique/process.



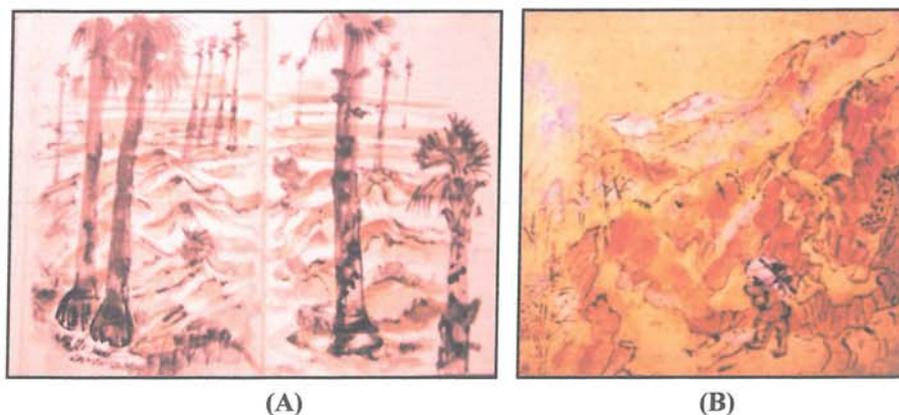
**FIGURE 49(A)** Leaf Collection, watercolour landscape by Nandalal Bose.  
Collection: Anindya Kanti Biswas  
**(B)** Village Scene, watercolour by Nandalal Bose. Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan,  
Collection: Visva Bharati.

Obsessive nature study, the art of the brisk and spontaneous sketch, the play on the stored and remembered image, the mastery of the '*morotai*' technique of fluid brush and ink, and the new intimate imagining of the Santiniketan landscape—these became the new, lasting notions of Japanese influence in the art of Nandalal Bose and the entire Santiniketan school that grew around him. What we saw flagged off as the common cause of 'Nihonga' and 'Indian-style' painting at the turn of the century would take on a whole new life as a dialogue of non-Western modernisms in the art of Santiniketan during 1920s and 30s.

The longer history- of an on-running dialogue with Chinese and Japanese art within the art of Santiniketan-is not a part of thesis. Today, both the earlier as well as the later history of this long-drawn artistic engagement with Japan in the modern art of Bengal are in special need of recovery.

### **Benode Behari Mukherjee**

In the books entitled 'Chitrakar' Benode Behari Mukherjee (1904-1980) written about himself- *My objectives have always been around an artist's ultimate's-have sought to know myself, and in the process unfold it to others, never forgetting that I am just one amongst the many.* A person with an unflinching individuality, Benode Behari, in the Words of Prithwish Neogy (an art-historian and a former student of Kala Bhavan of Santiniketan), *was independent almost to the point of being lonely.* A self reliant artist, he generally kept to himself staying away from limelight, and quietly committed himself to the multiple roles of an uncompromising artist, a resourceful and dedicated teacher and a discerning writer on art.



**FIGURE 50(A)** Birbhum landscape, watercolour on paper. **(B)** Mussorie watercolour landscape.  
Collections: N.G.M.A

While Benode Behari's significance needs to be reappraised in the larger context of modern Indian art, Santiniketan as a specific context, as his alma mater played an undeniable role in shaping his artistic aim and ideas. In Santiniketan he came in touch with great personalities like Rabindranath Tagore and found a remarkable teacher in Nandalal Bose. Moreover, the educational environment of Santiniketan and Kala Bhavan in particular was conducive to his eclectic bent of mind, providing with a wide range of inter-disciplinary experiences and cross cultural exposures. All these factors in combination contributed to the development of his sharp and insightful perception. But what perhaps influenced him most was the rustic, irresistible nature around. Reminiscing later in his widely acclaimed literary masterpiece, '*Chitrakar*' (1979), Benode Behari wondered who his real teacher was. Giving due respect to Nandalal Bose, and the library, he finally admitted that the stark and arid image of the local environment and its simple, sturdy people greatly inspired him to paint as he did. He did remain very close to nature, in more than one way, throughout his life.

When most Indian landscape painters painted the Indian scene in the broad generalities of European academic and neo-impressionist modes he painted it in an intimate calligraphic idiom reminiscent of the Far East but modified to suit its textural luxuriance and variety. When most Indian artists were involved exclusively with easel or miniature painting he explored the dimensions of screen, scroll and mural; when they tended to be professional purists out of contact with their environment he emphasised the continuities of Indian art through

its various hierarchies. So, he does not fall easily into the visual classifications Indian art critics are fond of.

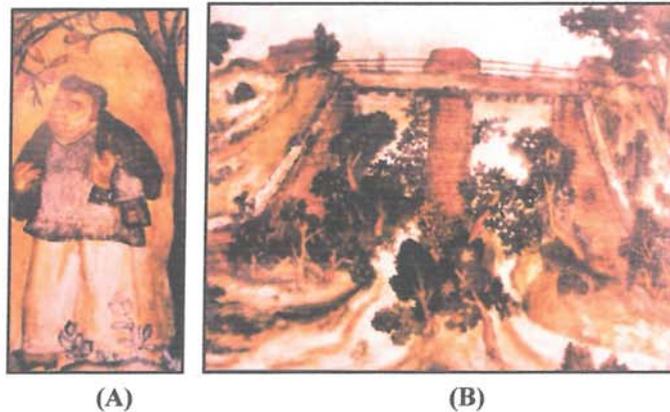


FIGURE 51(A) Tree Lover, Tempera on paper. (B) The Bridge. Collections: N.G.M.A

What makes him an artist without a dilemma is probably the fact that instead of depending entirely on the conventional vocabularies of the East and West, he started his work with a terminological search. Strangely enough, this can perhaps be attributed to his early interest in Far Eastern calligraphic painting. Although linear calligraphy was not unusual in various forms of Indian art, from the hieratic to the folk, calligraphic painting of the Far Eastern type which involved a terminological equivalence of the tool-mark and the visual image was something new altogether. The basic ingredients of such work, if it had to be authentic and original, had to be evolved afresh in each new situation; which is another way of saying—to the gaudy ‘palas’ and ‘Simul’ and the delicate ‘land-lotus’<sup>41</sup> [in Bengali term it is called ‘Sthala-Padma’, a bush carrying large flowers, (and so associated with the lotus), that change in hue through the day, from white in the morning to magenta at sunset], in the sun-drenched landscape

<sup>41</sup> Sthala-Padma, a bush carrying large flowers, (and so associated with the lotus), that change in hue through the day, from white in the morning to magenta at sunset.

of the Bengal countryside, the conventions used to paint the pine, the bamboo and the peony against the misty mountain landscapes of China and Japan are hardly adequate—their terms have to be sought anew.

So Benode Behari, popularly known as Benodebabu embarked on such a search, beginning at the beginning. At the start he sought image equivalents to local flora and fauna—flower and leaf, bush and tree, man and animal, the basic alphabets of the organic scene. Then he sought the means of unfold with these the Bengal landscape, the flat and austere landscape of Birbhum in particular. He sought to play the bareness of its field against the richness of its copes; he put character into its turf and its trees and made them individual. The lush ‘jamun’ tree stood demure in its cloak of leaf beside shapely leaf; the bare ‘siris’ listlessly shook its seedpods against a tattered summer sky;<sup>42</sup> the scraggy date- palm gesticulated in its loneliness<sup>43</sup> – all like characters in a mime, quiet but unforgettable, caught together in a very specific emotional web. His landscapes are for this reasons some of the most original in modern India and some of the most moving; they are sad, lyrical, and poignant by turns, without any attempt at violent drama. On the other hand, they have very little colour, work within a closed range of tonalities and are sometimes diaphanously non-material.

From single landscapes bristling with calligraphic niceties Benodebabu went into screen and scroll painting. These had new dimensions to them—they

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42 Painting in the collection of Mrs. Sheela Bharatram.

43 Painting in the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art.

unfolded slowly from area to area of interest in a time space relationship, affording to the onlooker great possibilities of visual perambulation. In these the descriptive vocabulary of Benodebabu's calligraphic style increased in range of acuity; he had appropriate visual devices answering to every kind of formal and spatial nuance. How could now lead one's eye with unerring ease from detail to detail, now to linger on a bush, now to scamper on a grass bank, now to belly crawl on uneven ground, surprising it, regaling it, drawing it into near-physical participation.<sup>44</sup>

So, when Benodebabu started painting his murals he had already with him a very sophisticated arsenal of visual devices. The mural usher the artist into a new stage of work. Adept at dramatic assemblages of water colour landscape and figure subjects, he shows even a greater sense of drama in his subsequent painting, done in Nepal, Mussorie and Patna; interpenetrate trees and architecture, in groups, in processions, in work and play; the calligraphic elements get welded together in tight but ambivalent images; the linear structure is summary, and the colour washes are used with great economy and precision.

There is great variety of range in Benodebabu's calligraphic work. His early work has the crispness, economy and inevitability for Far Eastern calligraphy, redesigned to tackle Indian subject matter—to elaborate the meticulous foliage of an '*amloki*'<sup>45</sup> tree, to indicate the elastic strength and spikiness of the Indian date

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44 Landscape scroll in the artist's collection.

45 The mural is unfortunately in a sorry state of preservation.

palm, or to show the lean pig and the midget goat against the dry ridgy Bengal countryside.<sup>46</sup> Slowly his landscapes gain in colour and textural variation; he brings a calligraphic precision to the laying of colour as to the statement of form, building with these a compact tapestry as in the backgrounds of certain medieval Indian painting. After 1950 his calligraphic work becomes broader and more adventurous, permeated by a realistic structural audacity almost like some kinds of folk painting.

Taken together, Benodebabu's work has great unity and variety. It is highly original but carries within it various historical undertones not surprising in an artist of his erudition<sup>47</sup> and experience. If one looks for parallels one can see a calligraphic quality in his early landscapes close in freshness and precision to the best in China and Japan, while in the same landscapes one can also see a tonal iridescence vaguely reminiscent of impressionist watercolours.

Turning away from the prevalent trends of painting romantic landscapes, mythological illustrations or nationalist subjects, Benode Behari was finding his themes in everyday scenes and the pastoral life around. For this he was largely depending on the observed visual facts and searched for a corresponding pictorial idiom. He took lessons from the indigenous traditions but was never in favour of a stylistic or manneristic revival. Neither he followed the lyrical style of Bengal School nor did he prefer the illusionistic

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46 This remarkable piece is located in a very narrow space, affording neither the viewer nor the photographer enough viewing distance.

47 This is on the south, west and north walls of Hindi Bhavan's entrance hall, now used as a reading room.

mode of Western realism. But he certainly realized the importance of a thorough knowledge of the formal aspects and skill inputs of visual language and meticulously learned and practiced various kinds of mediums like pen and ink, brush and ink, water colour, tempera, gouache, oil colour, fresco painting, wood cut, lino cut, dry point, lithography, modelling in clay and wax, and collages. Instead of imposing a uniform style on all these mediums, he responded eagerly to the curious demands of each medium, exploring his principal preoccupation with image and its articulations.

Until 40's Benode Behari was primarily a painter of nature. He was not painting landscapes in the typical Western definition of the term, in the sense that he was never interested in the 'picturesque' or 'scenic beauty'. In all his landscapes and paintings of trees and flowers, there is evidently a concern with the structural organisation of a pictorial space in terms of a tangible visual experience coded in elemental terms like lines, shapes, forms, textures, tones, colours, space and their mutual relationship as the case may be. This concern takes into account the characteristic features of the different perceived objects and their immanent identities which visually become the main visual components of the visual vocabulary in his works. Still he does not go for a mimetic representational style, but builds up a parallel structural autonomy which oscillates between the observed fact and itself. This led him to rely upon a schematic structure with which, as Arun Pal puts it; *he aptly transmuted the harsh reality, local significance magically into a pure pictorial sensation*. As a result, the thickly painted tree-trunk and its robust shape is

actually a pictorial response to the real, natural form and the sturdy bundles of grass are obvious visual equivalences of their strong presence, shooting up in an otherwise barren earth.

He occasionally punctuated this barrenness with spaced out vegetations, lonely palm trees, all culled from the local surrounding. But rugged vastness of local countryside apart, *it was also the sensuous comprehension of nature in its physical form*, as Gulam Mohammed Sheikh explains *which changed the tenor and mood of the experience of nature in the scrolls of Benode Babu*. This scroll format, by virtue of defying any fixed sense of time and space, is potentially ready to take you on to a journey, almost kinetically, involving a spatio-temporal movement. Benode Behari made a memorable trip to Banaras in 1942. In 1948 Benode Behari left Santiniketan and went to Nepal to take over as the curator of the Nepal Govt. Museum, Kathmandu. During this time and later from memory, Benode Behari did drawings and water colours depicting the landscape, people, society and customs of Nepal. In these works, it is clearly evident that the facial types and their characteristic features, the real-life details of costumes and objects, the architectural and the cultural environment—everything has been depicted in an idiom remodelled in accordance with what he observed. He uses the same calligraphic devices and broad, suggestive colour patches already employed elsewhere but the general pictorial experiences have been reinvented mainly in terms of a new topographical and socio-cultural atmosphere. He was also excited and moved to witness the living art and craft panorama of Nepal.

From 1952 to 1954, Benode Behari was in Mussoorie where he started summer school chiefly meant to teach art and crafts to both artists and art teachers. Mussoorie, a distinctive environment with its hills and valleys, mist and clouds left a long lasting impression on Benode Behari. In the Mussoorie landscapes he painted, he worked out a new kind of spatial construct in which one feels enveloped by it. Soft, spongy treatment of the mountains, discontinuous contour lines, and moist colour patches are the basic visual components gradually and coherently merging into an ambiguous fluid space informed by a sense of journey physical as well as non-corporeal. The monumentality of these mountains is certainly formidable, but the spatial tangibility counteracts that and makes the space humane yet distant.

He lets play on his fine moods of line calligraphy as a foil and counter-harmony to space calligraphy or to colour- calligraphy. It is all an artificially painted world of line, colour, volume and tension. In its intention it is purely abstract: more abstract than avowed schools of cubism, constructivists or mathematical schools of painting. He chose in elegant, prosaic forms from life and invested them with a personality and character.

Landscape is the chief in the first stage painting of Benode Behari. He drew the sceneries of the surrounding areas of Santiniketan. He did not make endeavour to be romantic in this. He sought to the structure, rhythm and colour of every shape of nature. Like Cezanne he did not bring into accord the nature in the general geometrical shapes like cone, cylinder and sphere. He tried to catch up

the unification which is formed of shape and rhythm by the interaction of every shape, apart from the individual forms and rhythms. Therefore all the painting form a dense design created out of doing and undoings. The culmination of this period of his work is seen in the landscape paintings like '*The Tree Lover*' or '*Sar Grass*'. Here the composition is concentrated, compact, dense, and terse and there is hardly anything which can survive elimination. In these, one tree symbolises a forest, the overall earthy red of the painting creates a mood of loneliness in which one can almost hear crickets, depending the torrid silence.



FIGURE 52 Sar Grass, Tempera on paper. Collection: N.G.M.A

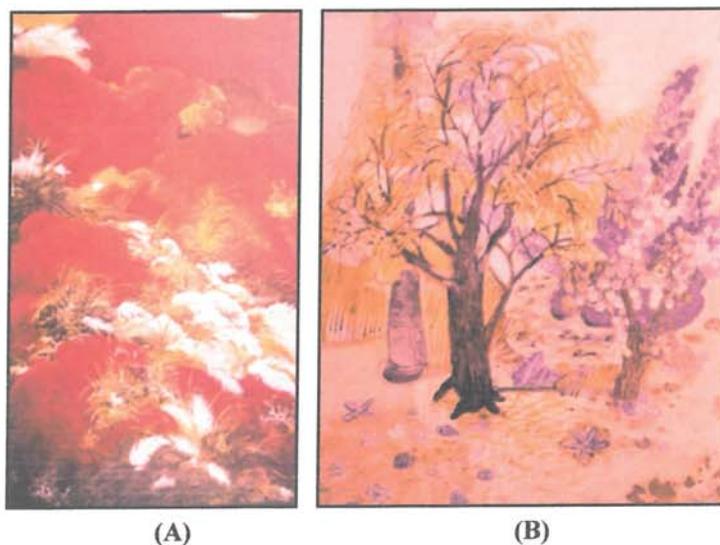
Line gets prominence in the later landscapes and this design gets highlighted in the 'Kashirghat' painting. In 'Kashirghat' painting the horizontal movement of the stairs, the vertical movement of the buildings, the diagonal movement of water and boat from such dense condition that no single line can be taken away. In some paintings of 'Kashirghat' a spiral motion of the umbrellas of the ghats has been added. In the physical shape there are four movements as elements—horizontal, vertical, diagonal and spiral. The shape can be

analysed by these four movements. No other movement can be thought apart from these. Therefore these four movements are hailed as four fundamental movements. But horizontal, vertical and diagonal – these showing the diverse characteristics of the same linear motion have the same goal. A spiral line changes movement every moment by forming a tangent; this line is moving in every respect and part. On the other hand there is a stasis in the straight lines finds movement due to association. Benode Behari showed these fundamental movements in the shape and rhythm of nature and made clear the internal and inter-relational status of size. Due to his short-sightedness he took up the elements of drawing like line and shape rather than optical sensation in his paintings, as he himself said. Though he had much eagerness for optical sensation his eyesight debarred from turning to that. For the same cause he wanted to catch the universal rather than light-shadow in colour. His colour is local. His first phase landscape the soil originated colours like yellow ochre, red, blue etc offer the local colour a grave weight.



**FIGURE 53** Two Banaras watercolour landscape on papers. Collections: Private

His landscapes got shelter in the open field, Khoai horizon, palm tree, short plants, Sar Grass and hamlets of Birbhum. The summer and colour of the Rarh have got a feeling in his paintings. According to the standard of quality of the colour wheel soil originated colour belongs to the third grade. Red, blue, yellow, absolutely pure form the first grade which has not formed by any mixture. Violet, green and orange from the middle grade- these are the amalgamation of two elemental colours. The colours of the third grade are formed out of two middle or one first and two middle grade colours. The colour of this grade is paler. Colour becomes paler the more it tends to mixture. In the nature of Birbhum we find this third grade colour profusely.

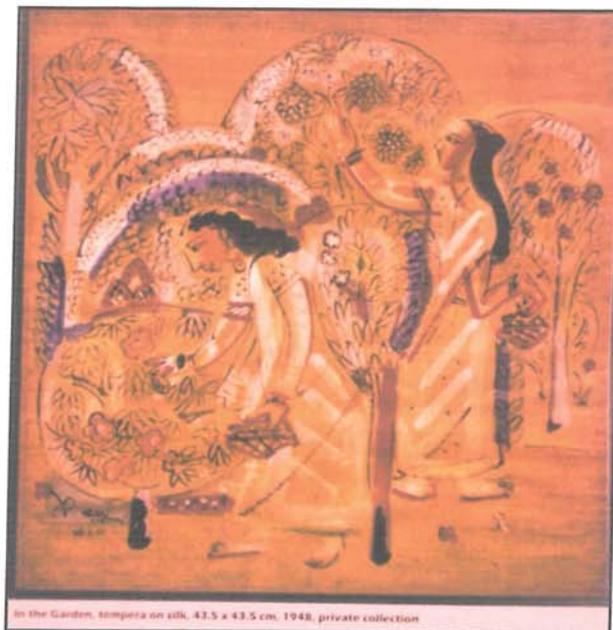


**FIGURE 54(A) Laughter, Tempera on paper. (B) In the Garden, Tempera on paper.**  
Collections: N.G.M.A

This environment of Birbhum found expression in his landscapes. Thus directness got a place in his paintings. This graveness colour is found in the fresco painting in the Hindi Bhavana of Santiniketan that he did on the lives of the saints of Northern India. In his hands the scenes of

Northern India have been transmuted into local personalities. For example from Gandhara to Japan the figure of Buddha has been built in keeping with the shape and size of the local inhabitants and the Radha Krishna in Kangra paintings have been shaped after the contemporary geographical background of Kangra in local attires and style. Such qualities offer a painting the reliability in the contemporary scenario.

In course of time line started getting prominence in his paintings and colour appeared to be splendour of materials. 'In the Garden' entitled painting one could see after space arrangement with bold lines of brush, the shapes has been made prominent with lines of black colour.



**FIGURE 55** In the Garden, Tempera on silk, 43.5 x 43.5 cm, 1948, Private collection.

Here colour does not cover the whole shape. Moreover, these bold lines only help in space arrangement but also in vivifying the shapes.

## **Bireswar Sen**

Anyone who has not heard the name of Bireswar Sen in the field of Indian Landscape Painting is rarely visible. Most probably he is the first person in the world who not only projected landscape painting in 'miniature style' but also set up a significant milestone in the history of landscape painting. India has produced many brightest luminaries (like) landscape artists in Indian art scenario/in the perspective of Indian art scenario. Among them there was only one miniature landscape painter whose paintings not only popularized in India but also abroad. The miniature landscapes of Bireswar Sen are little gems. He was cut out to be different. He proved himself so in many ways. In a small space so much is compressed without creating an impression of crowding. He has depicted various themes in little space with so much ease and clarity. In these miniatures, he has successfully caught the evanescent moods of nature- passing showers, sunset gleams which appear for a moment to vanish forever, shimmering sunlight on rusting foliage, clouds that form and reform in all sorts of fantastic shapes and the approach of heavy rain clouds of the Indian monsoon.

If we have gone through the past phases of Indian landscape painting then it would be clearly revealed out that- if the nineteenth century marked the heyday of the landscape genre in India, the twentieth century had already began to sing its dirge. Even as artists continued to be taught landscape (and still life, as well as portraiture) as part of the Eurocentric curriculum of art colleges across the country, they began to move into

their own evolved styles of which landscapes formed only a small oeuvre. Taught in the western academic style, the Indian artist responded to it in varying degrees- following it strictly, as J.P.Gangooly, or M.V.Dhurandhar might have done, or as an evolving vernacular in Bengal, where its gamut ranged from the realistic to the expressionistic and the abstract. Jamini Roy experimented with it, as did Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Baij and Benode Behari Mukherjee, paving the way for Gopal Ghose as one of few artists dedicated completely to landscape format. Bengal artists, who were influenced by their western academic training as well as growing proximity to Japan and China, wore both badges on their sleeve.

We are very much accustomed with that the landscape as a genre has greater antiquity in the Far Eastern Art than in the West and India. The spirit of man in the Far East looked for in nature a mother, a teacher and a companion. Such relationship with nature gave rise to ideals of humility, self-effacement, compassion and calm. This exactly happens with the true landscape artist Bireswar Sen. If we observe very minutely each and every of his work then it can be revealed out that his emotions were restrained to allow the “mood of nature” to grow. His landscapes are rendered with an intimate understanding of nature, such as comes only from observation as sharp-eyed as it loves. Sen roamed around the country side on a regular basis and see the landscape in very minute details.

Most of the time Mr. Sen depicted a very tiny figure pilgrim in his landscape not only to balance the composition of the painting but also to show that how (much) helpless the (man) people is in front of the vast nature! Himalayan pictures of Bireswar Sen make a new era in Indian painting. His images or paintings accomplished two goals simultaneously. They offered a panoramic view of a mountain range, employing the interpretive strategy of European topographical landscape painting.

The artist Bireswar Sen uninterruptedly run his small landscape culture till his demise with incessant flow. Here we can find out a likening with the lino cut pictures done for the “Sahajpath” text by the great artist Nandalal Bose. Nandalal’s measurement knowledge was so accurate and delicate that if we take his linocut graphic works as standard and see those enlarged we find that the picture is not getting broken or distorted. On the other hand we may observe this same matter in the miniature landscapes of the artist Bireswar Sen. If use lens for viewing the landscapes of microscopic vision we realize what monumentality is implicit in those. Originality in art is the outcome of the development of personal ideas conceived in an individual way and executed with a personal technique which is moulded by the creative ideation.

If we go through the early life of artist Bireswar Sen then we can find out that he was born in the year 1897 in North Kolkata and grew up in stirring times. His grandfather, Jogeswar Sen, a solicitor at the Kolkata High Court, took great delight when young Bireswar began to dabble in watercolours,

as his father, Rai Bahadur Saileswar Sen, Professor of Literature at Kolkata University. We know the English proverb "Man is born free, but every where he is in chains....." Bireswar Sen was not the exceptional one, his childhood intention was to become an artist but due to family pressure and other reasons he was forced to choose English literature as his subject. Matured Bireswar Sen joined Govt. school of Arts & crafts, Lucknow under the guidance of the great disciple of Abanindranath Tagore Asit Kumar Halder in 1926. Later Sen became the direct disciple of Dr. Abanindranath Tagore and learnt the wash technique properly and continued this process till his death. Among the more gifted of artist Abanindranath Tagore's students, Bireswar Sen started painting in the tradition and style of his teacher and drew his inspiration from the Japanese master Taikan and Kampo Arai. His fascination for painting did not compete with his deep interest in English literature, to which he dedicated equal attention and energy. He has written lot of books related to art & literature. For example I must mentioned "Fohs et Urigo", "Craft Design", "A.B.C. of Pattern Design" (published by the Department of Industries), "Abanindranath Tagore", "Main current of modern Indian Painting", "Art and Nature", "Tradition and Mannerism", "Art of Portrait Painting" (Radio lecture), "Art without Representation", "New Art", "Bases of village Ritual Decoration" & Author of all the articles in the Hindi Visva Bharati (Encyclopedia). In his early life he has participated various exhibitions which were held in Europe, Tokyo, Java & U.S.A, all over India and also in Lahore and won prizes and medals repeatedly for paintings in Indian style, portraits, landscape, pastels

etc. Later he was only concentrated on landscape paintings and became the expert.

In the year 1932 Bireswar Sen meets Nicholas Roerich, a momentous event in his personal life. It leads to him painting Himalayan landscape, and the innovation of rendering majestic Himalayan landscapes in miniature size 2.5 X 3.5 inches. It is a subject and style he will maintain through the rest of his career. When he began to paint Himalayan landscapes in the miniature format, marking a new era in Indian painting though compressed in a small space only slightly larger than a matchbox, the landscapes do not create an impression of crowding. He worked with infinite patience to secure microscopic tone values.

While Roerich had signalized their majesty in blazing colour harmonizes, Bireswar Sen functioned in terrible restraint (See Figure 56A & B), sometimes in very diminutive pictures, hardly larger than match-box, at which he worked with infinite patience to secure microscopic tone values. He prefers to do his larger pieces in pastels, for their speedier chromatic effects, captured in lighting impulses. Such are his "Mountain of Gold" (See Figure 56C), golden peaks amidst azure hills, with dark pines fringing a meandering rivulet, and the companion pieces, "Tattered Mantle", dissolving snow slipping down a mountain-side, and the "Sleeping Lion", an arrangement in grey, pink and blue. At his inspired best accomplishes, as in the watercolour of "Pilgrims" mounting the treacherous path to the summit of Badrinath and in his serene "Blue Hills" (Figure 56D) gentle colour harmonies in translucent tints of gold, grayish green and turquoise blue.



(A)

(B)



(C)

(D)

**FIGURE 56(A) Untitled, Private Collection.**

**(B) Untitled, Private Collection.**

**(C) Mountain Gold, watercolour on paper.**

**(D) Blue Hills, watercolour on paper. Collections: Private**

Bireswar Sen was a miniature landscapist par excellence and his works are exhibited and included in various museums and private collections. It was only when he started the innovation of miniature landscapes which have become so popular that he really came to his own. A large collection of these mountains are in the Mysore State Collection, Travancore Sri Chitralayam and with scores of private collectors. He was the only Indian Artist whose work was sold at the British Empire Exhibition, Wembley. He has made the huge mural decorations for the visits of H.E. Lord Irwin and Lord Willingdon at Banaras. He has designed the silver lock and key and Kalbhanion trowel for Lord and Lady Irwin. (Figure 57)



**FIGURE 57** Mountain, watercolour on paper. Private collection.

Artist Bireswar Sen was an artist with proper education & he has held many important positions such as Officiated Vice – Principal, Govt. School of Arts & Crafts, Lucknow in the year 1929, President, Fine Art Section, Bengali Literary Conference, New Delhi 1935, President of Drawing Section of the Uttar Pradesh Educational Conference 1938, Members of the Faculty of Arts and Board of Studies and Board of Examiners in Painting (I.A and B.A) at the Banaras Hindu University. Examiner and paper setter in H.S.Board and B.H.U and Allahabad University, Member, Drawing Committee, Board of High School and Intermediate Education, U.P member and Secretary and the Poster Design Committee, Rural Development, Govt. of the U.P was invited by the Alwar Darbar to catalogue all the State Art Library and Gallery 1939.

As one of the gifted pupils of legendary artist Abanindranath Tagore, his remarkable paintings of fine conception and refined technique placed him in the front rank of the group of artists not only in Bengal but also India, so far, who have brought about a renaissance in Indian Painting. He is the only artist in India, so far, who has combined University qualification with an aesthetic

training. He actually gave up a professorship in order to devote himself to the practice of Fine Arts and to elevate the teaching of art and craftsmanship.

Nicholas Roerich took some canvases as the surface in order to give vent to the colossusness of nature, especially the Himalayas. He took up oil technique as his medium. We know that there is much more acuteness and dexterity in representing the big through an iota. The first Indian to portray the big through the small was Bireswar Sen. These two landscapes by Sen reflect his unique place in the annals of landscape art in India. (Figure 58)



**FIGURE 58** Two Himalayan Range, watercolor landscapes on paper.  
Collection: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

Inspired by the Himalayan scapes of his predecessor (teacher like) Nicholas Roerich, Sen painted serene mountain scenes that depicted the Himalayas as reserves of great spiritual power, with humans shown tiny and insignificant in comparison. Sen evolved a unique style of painting his vistas of gigantic mountains and deep valleys on a minuscule scale. Despite their size, Sen's mountainscapes exquisitely evoke the grandeur of his subjects and reveal a nuanced mastery of light and colour. In general his light casts no shadows and his space is organized without any conventional perspective.

Bireswar Sen's background of English literature enabled him to enjoy macroscopic vision through the microscopic. It may also be mentioned that there may exist other reasons. Want of collecting so many canvases indispensable for painting stood in his way. This may be looked upon after Ramkinkar "Necessity is the mother of invention". It is quite obvious that within the domain of aestheticised representation, landscape painting becomes an ideal vehicle for the artist Bireswar Sen through which personal desires are often expressed. Sen is an artist in life, both by temperament and due to active interest in things. Even on crossing seventy five he not only worked actively but also interacted with the people too.

A dynamic personality, he invests his work with his own tremendous vitality; his paintings are charged with a quivering emotion under an intolerable urge to express it. He communicates to his work the immediacy of his own perceptions in equivalents of physical realism or romantic stylization. This individual style has become his standard, with slight perfections, for the conveyance of his aesthetic experiences; he prefers water colours, to which he imparts the depth and solidity of oils, without their heaviness through his miniature landscape paintings. Yet, he excels in the art of romantic visualization which is, however, purely sensory.

The persons with creative urge remains alive through their creations. Bireswar Sen is not only a mere individual but also an artist. It is true he has passed away but still he remains in the niche of our mind. His works always

remind us of not only his art but also his life style. It appears to us that the man whose art works was so excellent must have a life of the first order or the reverse.

### **KISORY ROY (1911-65)**

Kisory Roy's initial inspiration was his father Nandalal, a railway servant and occasional painter. Winning a school competition led him to the Government School of Art, Calcutta. He took a diploma in painting from 1931-37 under Mukul Dey, working in several mediums like water colour, oil, charcoal and crayon. In 1939, he learnt landscape painting under J. P. Gangooly and was considered one of his last great students. Teaching first at the Uttarpara Government High School, Roy joined the Government Art School, Calcutta, in 1950 and taught there for fifteen years.



**FIGURE 59** Night landscape, watercolour and Tempera on paper by Kisory Roy.  
Collection: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

Roy exhibited widely in Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay. He was famous for his landscape paintings, with the treatment of light and a great balance of Bengal mannerism and academic overtone apparent in his works. Roy is also known for the murals in the Ramgarh Palace, now in Jharkhand.

## Hirachand Dugar (1898-1951)

The Dugar's had migrated from Rajasthan to Bengal and set up their residence and business in Jiaganj, in the district of Murshidabad. During the Mughal period and the days of the British East India Company, the capital of the Nawabs or the Governor's of Subey Bangla or Bengal province, included undivided Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The province had its capital in the city of Murshidabad, a name by which the district came to be known also. Jiaganj in those days was a thriving business centre. The Dugars were Jains and in one sense their immigration was a pilgrimage, for Jainism like Buddhism had originated in Eastern India. The business involvement and the religious commitment merged in this move and helped them to adjust to the new environment. After a period, the Dugars were able to make a genuine and lasting settlement without compromising their religious faith in any way. Slowly, unmistakably by inclination and education they became Bengal is by culture like some other Rajasthani immigrants to the area in that period.

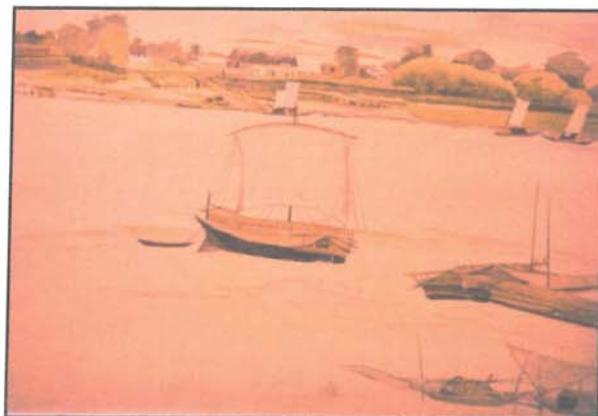


FIGURE 60 Untitled ,(Jiaganj, Murshidabad) Watercolour on Paper, c.1920,  
Size 15.0 x 22.2 inch. Collection: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

After Hirachand finished school his father Surajmal got him admitted to the Government Art School, Calcutta in 1916. As a child Hirachand had shown keen interest in art and would draw whenever he got a chance. In Art School the teachers were quick to spot that he was different from the rest of the students. His artistic sense and sensibility attracted attention of Iswariprasad, a remnant and an exponent of the traditional Patna style of medieval miniature art. Iswariprasad kept certain techniques of the Patnai Kowalam a closely guarded secret and would never impart them to his students. The deep reverence that Hirachand showed to Iswariprasad compelled the teacher to grudgingly give way. Hirachand learnt the trade secrets of minuscule ivory and mica painting from Iswariprasad.

In 1919 Rabindranath Tagore wanted to open an art department in Santiniketan and asked Asit Haider to join as the Head. Tagore told Halder to pick a handful of students from the Government school and enlist them in the new department. Accordingly Halder brought back Hirachand, Ardhendu Banerjee and Krishna Kinkar Ghosh. Dhiren Krishna Debbarman was the lone entrant from Santiniketan School. Hirachand was one among the first batch of students who had graduated from Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan. Two years later Nandalal Bose joined the Bhavan as Principal. By then Bose had infused various elements from ancient and medieval schools of Indian art and synthesised them with ingredients from East Asian calligraphic brushwork to form his personal style.

The strange and beautiful landscape, the villagers and tribal people who lived around Santiniketan changed his outlook and style and added liveliness to his work. This transformation affected his students. He moved away from the tradition of medieval miniature schools to the heritage of mural art, from the peculiar wash technique of Abanindranath to that of tempera and added various forms of mural paintings including fresco to his repertoire. Hirachand was inspired by Nandalal but not influenced by him. Like his younger contemporaries in the Bhavan, Benode Behari Mukherjee and Ramkinkar, Hirachand had quietly worked out a style of his own that was distinctly different from Nandalal. After a few years stay in Santiniketan Hirachand went on a tour to Kashmir. His wife died all too suddenly after his return. His father now wanted Hirachand to assist him and take over the family business. Hirachand began to run the flour mill that belonged to the Dugars. For almost twenty years he withdrew from the world of art that was so close to his heart. Later events proved that the artist in him was not extinct but lay dormant.

Hirachand took a holiday in Rajgir with his artist son Indra and his family. It was through the loving pressure of Indra and his wife, and surrounded by his grandchildren, he began to paint once again. Gradually he retired from business and became a full-time painter. People had forgotten him but he not forgotten himself.

He had unassumingly staged a comeback. A shy and modest man with a deeply religious bent of mind he shrank away from applause that experts and

laypersons showered upon him. Ramkinkar, Hirachand had quietly worked out a style of his own that was distinctly different from Nandalal. After a few years stay in Santiniketan Hirachand went on a tour to Kashmir. His wife died all too suddenly after his return. His father now wanted Hirachand to assist him and take over the family business. Hirachand began to run the flour mill that belonged to the Dugars. For almost twenty years he withdrew from the world of art that was so close to his heart. Later events proved that the artist in him was not extinct but lay dormant.

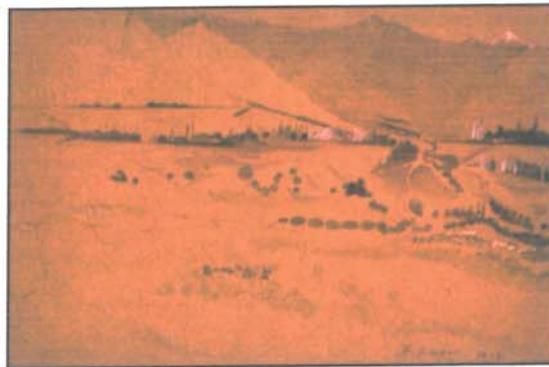
Hirachand took a holiday in Rajgir with his artist son Indra and his family. It was through the loving pressure of Indra and his wife, and surrounded by his grandchildren, he began to paint once again. Gradually he retired from business and became a full-time painter. People had forgotten him but he not forgotten himself.

He had only one lifetime in 1950 that he painted in Kumar Singh unassumingly Comeback. A shy with a deeply mind he shrank applause that laypersons exhibition his showed the works between 1945-50 Hall. He had staged a and modest man religious bent of away from experts and showered upon him. There was no dichotomy between religion and art in Hirachand mind. He went on a pilgrimage to paint the Jain temples of Palitana at Saurashtra. On 3rd May 1951 he died of Cardiac arrest.

Hirachand Dugar's works belong to the Neo-Bengal school and in a strange way he does not really belong to it. Many of his works are in pure transparent

watercolour of the British variety and some are opaque aqua colours of the European continental type. Sometimes he tempered them with emulsions. His mentor Nandalal had left behind the heavy and hazy wash of Abanindranath and Hirachand had understood the implications.

There are two distinct stages in his work or maybe three. Firstly there are the works that he did when he was at art school. Among them, there are a number that indicate his search for a style and drawing and painting exercises of different types. The mica and ivory minuscule painting are not dated but are probably from that period.



**FIGURE 61** Unfinished watercolour landscape by Hirachand Dugar.  
Collection: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

Similarly in Santiniketan he began his second phase. He started to depict the visual poetry of life, nature and seasons. His studies of plants and flowers are done in transparent watercolours with feeling for form and a deep pantheism.

In the third phase fall those transparent and opaque watercolours that he did during 1945-50. The Rajgirh and Palitana landscapes are from the period.

Then there is a large watercolour depiction of a marriage scene that Hirachand had cut into three and kept rolled in a big round tinned container.



**FIGURE 62** Untitled, (Palitana, Gujrat), Watercolour on Paper, c.1951, Size 7.0x14.7 inch.  
Collection: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

Hirachand's drawing is stylised but never weak unlike many of his contemporaries of the Neo-Bengal school. He was a transparent watercolourist landscape painter mainly used Windsor Newton watercolour for its bright hues against areas of paper white left to be integrated within the composition at a later stage. To this he added sometimes a slight light wash. The subtlety of treatment makes him out as different from other artists of the school he belonged to.

His lines are strong and rhythmic and encase forms and shapes unambiguously while the hues are bright, vibrant and juxtaposed as points and counterpoints. He can go in for meticulous details but they never become cumbersome, illustrative or ornamental. In spite of vague miniature overtures, his best paintings have monumental quality that reminds one of murals. They are not meant to be taken on the lap and viewed slightly tilted. They have to be seen

on the eye level. The larger ones should be put slightly above the eye level. His works are story less, non-illustrative and essentially two-dimensional. They do not only create expanding and vast airy space but also suggest weight, mass and volume that he elaborates on formal tensions and their variation.

Hirachand is a nature mystic like the English Lake poets. His lyrical and intense visuals move us because they appeal to the pantheism that is within us.

### **Indra Dugar (1918-89)**

Indra Dugar, unlike his illustrious father Hirachand Dugar, did not have any formal education in art. Born in Jiaganj in West Bengal, he did his schooling in Santiniketan where he unconsciously absorbed the artistic ambiance of Kala Bhavan and the neo-Bengal School. The technique and art practices he acquired from his father without going through any academic routine. Indra Dugar considered Santiniketan his alma-mater, and drew his inspiration from the art of Nandalal Bose.

Pursuing the art of painting as a serious hobby under the guidance of Acharya Nandalal Bose of Santiniketan he has taken as his models the techniques of old Indian masters, Rajput and Mughal of rendering minute details with infinite patience and careful accuracy, yet there is no trace of any imitation of the manners or mannerism of the old masters. He soon outgrew the Bengal School mannerisms; invariably visiting places to paint 'on the spot' observed views of nature and life. While progressively reducing the naturalistic details in his paintings, Indra Dugar instinctively retained

colour harmony for expressing serenity in nature. Dugar's artistic scale went beyond landscape imagery while executing decorative motifs for several Congress annual sessions in Ramgarh, Jaipur and Amritsar. His idiom of painting essentially Indian was his very own and was not derived directly from any school of Indian painting. Though his watercolour landscape, his pictorial diction was a continuation of the traditions of old Indian pictorial dialect, he was essentially modern and realistic in his outlook.

Indra Dugar started as a painter of figures. Until 1945 he painted Indian figures in the conventional style. At this point he turned to nature as if to discover himself. He has ever since been predominantly a painter of Nature. The first lap of his career up to 1945 was a period of grouping of ceaseless search for his own genius. Then came the sudden discovery and break with the past.

Dugar's landscapes show how far he has advanced since then. His work has the charm and freshness of a direct perception. He is ever observant of the changing face of landscape. He views nature against standards of beauty inherent in nature. That is why he never distorts her. He makes minor alterations here and there, only to enhance the beauty that is already there. He depicted Indian landscapes with topographical accuracy, sublimating well known scenes to the planes of earthly forms and imaginative idealism through the transfiguring technique. His famous painting '*This and Beyond*' is a lyric in lines and colours. We cannot almost hear the music

of water that slowly flows down its sandy bed into the distant horizon and gets lost where the blue sky descends on the earth.

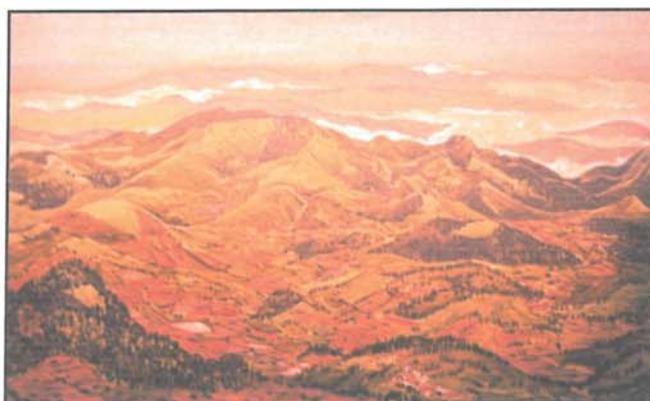


(A)

(B)

**FIGURE 63(A) Kanchenjunga. (B) View of Nilgiri Hills. Collections: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)**

Indra Babu has traveled Jodhpur or Varanasi and many parts of the Bengal villages. He observed these as a source of formal expression and painted elegant landscape with romantic mood. His landscapes are thus contemplations of the varying moods of nature. His great sense of realism (without which there can be no successful landscape painting), has, however, been a controlling factor. This has saved him from indulging in want on play of imagination. This realistic sense has brought him back to earth and made him concentrate on the infinite variety of nature. His brilliant study of 'Palas' in the Japanese manner is remarkable. He painted 'Kanchenjunga', 'View of Nilgiri Hills' and a seascape all are the realistic nature of his presentations of bits of memories of the dreamy beauties.



**FIGURE 64** Indra Dugar's tempera landscape painting. Collection: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

He however breaks new grounds in his lyrical study a girl standing against a lotus pool a great charm and dignity, where colour and rhythms play dominant role. He has the genius of synthesising trends and techniques, while keeping to his own. His genius is not given away entirely to imagination which seeks to find unearthly forms in all earthy things. On the other hand despite his realism in the art of Dugar we find a happy synthesis is discernible in his technique as well. If linearism be the basic quality of oriental art and plasticity that of western art then the art of Dugar we find a very happy combination of these contemporary qualities.

To his oil painting, where we will find bold application of colours and exquisitely balanced by lines. This combination of opposites may not be viewed kindly by many, but they should bear clearly in mind that the artist's vision of the subject is the thing that count and the technique must remain subservient to this vision. His technical adeptness and love for the elegant make him a very attractive painter. The artist also tried his skills as a children's book illustrator. As an art critic, Dugar wrote for Bengali journal's *Desh* and *Ananda Bazar Patrika*.

A member of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kolkata and of the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society in New Delhi, Dugar was awarded by various Indian institutions and organisations in his lifetime. To conclude this little essay with what Nandalal has said about Indra Dugar- "I have seen most of Indra Dugar's paintings and have really liked them. His paintings are not just copies of nature, nor are they wholly imagined. They convey the facility of the artist's soul, his idea and his innate sense of harmony and rhythm which are the essence of art. His originality of vision, sincerity and devotion will, I am sure, delight lovers of paintings."

### **Ramendranath Chakrabarty**

Born in Agartala, Tripura on October 25, 1902, Ramendranath Chakrabarty studied at the Government School of Art, and also worked at the time under Abanindranath Tagore at his residence at Jorasanko, Calcutta. He belonged to the earliest batch of Kala Bhavan students, who under the dynamic leadership of Nandalal Bose gave substance and meaning to the experimental atmosphere in the field of Indian art.

The natural sights and scenes of Santiniketan lined with trees; panoramic views of the vast landscape of wilderness around Birbhum countryside attacked him. He has done various types of landscapes not occasionally dealt with the life of the people in the countryside. He took assiduously to study village scenes and incidentally landscape subjects. But his great success in figure subjects differed the hopes for the immediate birth of an Indian Barbizon; for Chakrabarty, happily for himself and unhappily for Indian Landscape painting, strayed to

figure painting through he had frequently come back to nature, scenes, as in his delightful sketches of Europe. He was absorbed in sketching in blacks and whites. His pencil attains a remarkable virtuosity. His textures are rich and intricate his lines care form with intimacy. His whites and darks interchange with utmost playfulness and abandon.



**FIGURE 65** Ramendranath Chakrabarty's watercolour landscape painting.  
Collection: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

Chakrabarty was also the first and one of the few Indian artists who swung to graphic art with devotion. He was able to bring to his work in the graphic arts out only strength and vividness, but also a sense of the dramatic. Among these etchings the outstanding works are 'Hampstead Heath', 'The Padma' the artist has conveyed the typical outlines of this particular river scene with a few deft strokes. A fine sense of composition and delicacy of execution are the characteristic features of these etchings. The one called 'Santhal Dance' is a wonderful example of the blending of harmony and rhythm that can be achieved with simple materials on primitive subjects, when handle in the proper manner. Simpler still is 'A Well in the Hermitage', the subject is charming in its idyllic outlook; a hermit under a tree, two or three cottages,

and a well. There are few details but what little there is, is satisfying; which is really ample praise. The best example is 'Shyamali', the mud house of Tagore; other good examples are 'Boats' and 'On the Way to Badrinath' which show his easy handling of divergent mediums.



**FIGURE 66** Kopai River landscape, watercolour on paper Collection. Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

Ramendranath painted many oil paintings. Work in oils has often been unequal and falls far short of his heights in the field of graphic. One of the reasons for this may be that the oil as a medium being heavy he could not adjust it to the swift changing moods of his observant eye. Even then we see some very happy results where he reveals in the freshness of colour values. In this connection one remembers his landscape of East Bengal as also his oil of the Kanchenjunga. There is in them a quality of dynamism which is durable and fluid at the same time. His undoubted mastery over the brush and colour application with blues, greens, yellow and reds are really exceptional.

Ramendranath's lithographs and aquatints, mainly landscapes are in the western academic idiom. He provides an excellent example of resolution of tension between the Indian revivalism and European academism. Mr. Chakrabarty, who was undoubtedly one of the most promising in the field, came in contact with the European art forms and technique, during his stay in Europe.

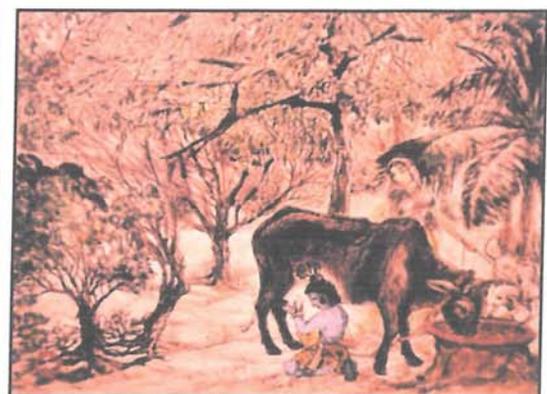
Ramendranath Chakrabarty will remain a source of admiration to the generations of artists to come, because his art was committed to life that enjoyed and revered the passing visual drama of human existence.

### **Mukul Chandra Dey (1895-1989)**

Mukul Chandra Dey was one of the brilliant exponents to explore the possibilities of printmaking (especially in etching) beyond its life as a tool of the colonial enterprise. He was born in 1895 at Sridhar Khola Village in the District of Dacca. In 1900 he had his first schooling at Hamilton High School at Tamluk in Midnapur district. His father Kula Chandra Dey had a nationalist leaning and he thought of bringing up his eldest child in an institution like Santiniketan Brahmacharya Ashram. He came from Ghatal to Calcutta towards the end of 1906 when his father took him to Rabindranath at Jorasanko. Mukul Babu got admitted to Santiniketan School early in 1907. Young Mukul Chandra came to Santiniketan and received non-formal education there till the end of 1911. He was greatly by his teacher particularly Bidhusekhar Shastri and Onkarananda Swami.



(A)



(B)

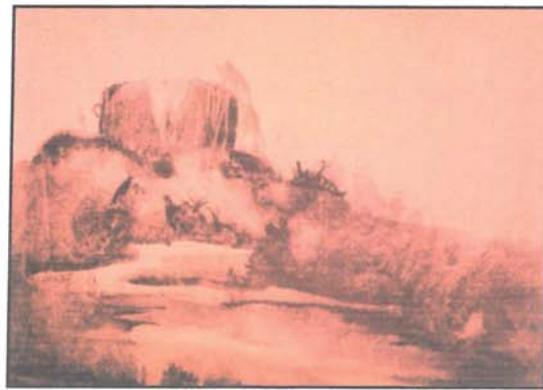
**FIGURE 67(A) Threshing Floor Hazaribagh, Hand Coloured Etching, 8.0x12.0 inch.  
(B) Gopala Milking the Cow Hand Coloured Etching, 9.0x11.5 inch Collections: Ossian's.**

Around Santiniketan Ashram stretch undulating fields unobstructed to the horizon-fields which have been known the stretch of a ploughshare. Here and there are to be found bushes formed by shrubs of wild date palms dwarf Jambolans and other stunted trees, growing through anti-hills. Here and there are to be seen the courses cut by the rainwater through the red gravel and in the deep ravine like furrows, differed with pebbles, are to be found many miniature caves and grottos. Over this lonely moorland, a red path stretches towards the villages beyond the horizon, along which the villagers go marketing to the Bolpur hut. The Santhal woman carry bundles of the straw of their fields on their heads, and bullock-carts under the weight of their loads grow slowly through silence of the noontide raising clouds of dust. These natural sights and scenes of Santiniketan show the breadth of the content of Mukul Chandra Dey's paintings.

Mukul Chandra Dey's academic progress was far from being satisfactory. Most of his time was spent in drawing Santhal huts and their life, the vast landscape of wilderness. His stay at Santiniketan was particularly fruitful because his naturally imaginative mind found a free play in the unspoilt environment of the place. He was so long confined to the natural setting in Santiniketan drawing sketches of natural scenes. In 1912 he left Santiniketan and went to Calcutta to study art under Abanindranath Tagore.

Mukul Babu has taken up drypoint etching to convey his message. The influence that his travel in Japan, America and England produced on him

can still be seen in his works. They are not divorced from life, yet they are idealistic and very close to the nature which came to his mind through the deep observation of the natural sight and scenes of Bengal village, river, sky, atmospheric mood of nature. One of his painting '*Midnight Cry*' indicates the atmospheric attitude of nature which perhaps he observed and successfully depicted.



**FIGURE 68** Watercolour landscape by Mukul Chandra Dey. Collection: Private

In the treatment of landscape in this painting where the sky and earth is depicted is of special importance. He delineated the village scene with light effect on uneven ground, luminosity of light in the middle portion or middle ground where form is visible, serenity of space like Japanese and Chinese. We can see his quality of line as flowing line of Ajanta. He had spent sometime at Ajanta and copied the painting, its calligraphic line. In '*Paddy Boat on the Ganga*' artist created focal point on human figure on the boat. There is one male figure on the other side of the boat which is very indistinct or hazy. We also can visualize some suggestion of wave of the river are very rhythmic flowing, soft but communicative. He was also influenced by western technique. His motto

has been to blend the best European craft with Indian idealism. His drawings are perfect, expressions imitable blending of realism superb. Those who gaze at Indian art will find something interesting in his work because it is so much near to life and yet so remote. Mukukul Chandra learnt Japanese technique of economy of lines as well as of colour and got the inspiration to idealise realistic subjects. Japan was then passing through a phase of art revival and breathing in that atmosphere he enriched his art conscious mind. His training in America had given him a sense of exactitude and his education at Jorasanko in Indian art had contributed the knowledge of Indian spiritualism.

Very much like his etchings Mukul Chandra Dey's watercolour and oil landscape paintings have delighted the hearts of many people in the East and the West. He is an artist of acute vision, shrewd and beautiful imagination who believes in doing his work thoroughly. He has a command on lines and colour and can produce a beautiful piece in a few touches. He does not live in dreamland but goes to nature for his inspiration. Actual Nature supplies him with subjects even when they are so near to life became idealistic in his hands. Mukul Chandra's paintings are never louder sensational. A man with dependent spirit and an aptitude for taking up the challenge of life was really unparalleled. He strongly advocates a synthesis of the best traditions of Oriental and Occidental art. He has a great admiration for Japan and China for their art achievements. Mukul Chandra Dey is, in fact, a living monument of the type of synthesis in the realm of art which he himself dreams of.

### Prosanto Roy (1908-1973)

Prosanto Roy took to art at a young age, copying the paintings of the great masters. After initial training in art under a European teacher, Roy joined the Tagore residence at Jorasanko in the Twenties. Groomed by Gaganendranath and Abanindranath Tagore, he worked on stage design and illustrated student magazines. Roy's initial inspiration was the Bengal School style, of which he went on to become an exponent, known for his layers of delicate washes which he merged with a later, cubist language. Working with the wash technique, Roy brought architectural details into his painting in the manner of Indian miniature paintings. Using Chinese ink he could create intense proliferations of tonal degrees and gradations. He applied warm pigments and expanded them with cool tonalities, thus creating a vibrant pictorial space. Also interested in carpentry and photography, Prosanto Roy became the curator of the Kala Bhavana Museum, Santiniketan, in 1952.

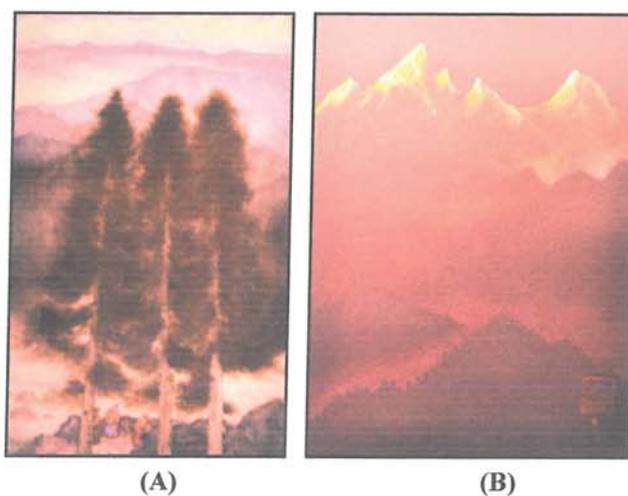


FIGURE 69(A) Through the Pine Trees, watercolour on paper.  
(B) Himalayan Mountainscapes, watercolour on paper .Collections: . Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

a compassionate humanism and his images were essentially an appeal on behalf of the labouring poor and the marginalized.

Apart from his body of works representing human suffering, the proletariat and the marginalised classes, Chittaprosad did several landscapes and cityscapes, portraits, female figures, nudes and illustrations for books. A defining moment in Chittaprosad's life was his meeting with Frantisek Ing Salaba, a Czech puppeteer, who lived briefly in Bombay, and because of whose association a film on his life, *Confession*, was made in 1972 by Pavel Hobbler, which went on to win a special prize from the World Peace Council.

### **Haren Das (1921-1993)**

A master printmaker, Haren Das specialized in graphic arts from the Government College of Art & Craft, Calcutta. At a time when oil painting ruled consciousness and prints were considered inferior, Das chose to work solely with printmaking. Taken from densely engraved or sparsely cut wood blocks, Das's prints are both technically and artistically superior. A dexterously crafted equilibrium of black and white, at times washed with thin layers of colour, detailed renditions of objects and elements, simplicity of composition and a petite format are all characteristic features of his prints, whether in wood-engraving, etching, dry point or linocut. No viable art market existed in India till the Sixties, with few taker's for prints in its narrow horizon. Das, however, continued with his passion, exhibiting extensively in India and abroad in the Fifties and Sixties.



FIGURE 71 Linocut landscape by Haren Das. Collection: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

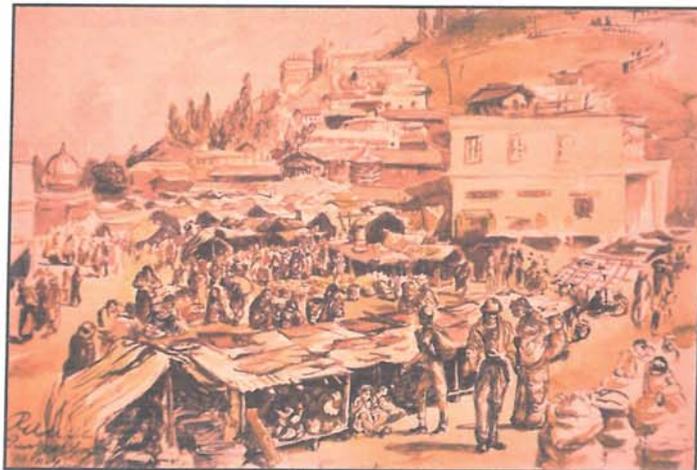
His prolific wood engravings and woodcuts capture detailed vignettes from rural Bengal life, portraying people's everyday life and labour. His deep identification with the hardworking rural folk and the urban poor stem from a natural empathy as well as a nostalgia for his lost, idyllic home of pre-partition Bengal.

### **Ranen Ayan Dutta (1925)**

A well-known painter applied artist, sculptor, mural artist and architect, Ranen Ayan Dutta was born in Sylhet, then in East Bengal, and moved to Calcutta in 1928. Best remembered as a watercolourist and commercial artist, Dutta joined the Government College of Art & Craft, Calcutta, in 1943. He exhibited his works at London the same year, winning a gold medal for the best exhibit.

Starting a career early in advertising, Dutta worked as art director at Stronach advertising agency in 1948 and was the chief art director at Thompson advertising agency from 1950-69. Honoured with a D.Litt by Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, Dutta received a gold medal from the West Bengal

government for his watercolour paintings. As a mural artist he represented India at Tokyo in 1970. His drawings for the advertisements for the hair oil brand Jabakusum won him renowned for his sketches of a typical 'modern' Bengali girl of the Sixties and Seventies, and he won the national award for his advertising campaign for Tata.



**FIGURE 72** Watercolour landscape by Ranen Ayan Dutta. Collection: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

Lauded for his watercolours, one of his early works, *Waterfall*, painted in 1943, received acclaim. Besides his work in advertising and individual art practice, Dutta has been an active member of the Kolkata art scene. He has headed the Academy of Fine Arts and been the vice-president of the Academy of Creative Art. Ranen Ayan Dutta is also known for designing the archives of the State Bank of India building in 1991.

### **Sunil Das (1939-2015)**

A student of the Government College of Art & Craft in Calcutta, Sunil Das would later also study at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and with William Hayter and Krishna Reddy at Atelier-17, also in Paris.

Known for his iconic drawings of bulls and horses, Sunil Das has painted across several oeuvres, each one distinctive and to which he brought his singular vision. F. N. Souza once said about Sunil Das: 'His paintings are often about death and horror... [He is] a master of the horrific in art.' Sunil Das's images of the bulls were inspired by his observations during a trip to Spain. And the horses were from, if not at Calcutta's racecourse, then at the stable of Calcutta's Mounted Police, where the artist spent his time observing and sketching them. His flawless drawings capture the speed, power and energy of the animals. They became symbolic of the energy, aggression and power of modern times and of his own untamed youthful spirit and a sense of liberation.



**FIGURE 73** Two Kashmir watercolour landscapes by Sunil Das .  
Collections: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

Sunil Das emerged on the Indian art scene as a painter with an astonishing repertoire of technical and formal capabilities. In his subsequent works, whatever the subject, Das has poured himself out on canvas in an obsessed mode of working. He has

unhesitatingly experimented with techniques, mediums and styles, charging his images with new ideas. Das has won medals and awards, including from the state government and the Lalit Kala Akademi, and has been part of juries and art bodies in India, France and Brazil. He lives and works in Kolkata.

### **Nikhil Biswas (1930-1966)**

Born in Calcutta, Nikhil Biswas was an indefatigable art activist and a firm believer in collective action. A founder member of the Calcutta Painters Group, Chitrangshu Group and The Society of Contemporary Artists, Calcutta, Biswas was committed to bringing about technical innovations as well as transformations in contemporary artistic thought. After receiving his training in art from the Government College of Art & Craft, Calcutta, in the midst of the abstract wave that influenced India in the Sixties, Biswas initiated a transformation in contemporary artistic thought. Working as an illustrator for Bengali news weeklies *Darpan* and *Janasebak Saptahik*, and in search of significant images to express the political and social turmoil of his time, Biswas proclaimed humanist preoccupations.



**FIGURE 74** Two watercolour landscapes by Nikhil Biswas. Collections: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

The bulk of Biswas's drawings emerged from his diaries which he used to maintain in order to keep up with his wide range of activities. Together with his core passion - art - the struggling artist worked as an art teacher in Mitra Institute, a government school, for a living. Biswas's dark and mysterious figures embrace his iconic clown, a combating soldier, horses and women, and are done in thick black ink or fine lines. His human figures are expressed at the moment of mortal combat through which Biswas consistently tried to provide an outward dimension to the inner manifestation of pain. An evocative, almost breathless energy defines his landscapes. Biswas's works traveled abroad and were exhibited in Europe. Some of his drawings are in the permanent collection of the Halle Museum in Dresden, Germany. Despite a very short life span the artist produced around ten thousand works, mostly black and white drawings on paper.

### **Ganesh Haloi**

(Born in Jamalpur in what is now Bangladesh, Ganesh Haloi was forced to migrate to West Bengal during the tumult of Partition. In Calcutta, where Haloi had settled along with his family, he joined the Government College of Art & Craft after being admitted to the commercial art section, where he acquired his personal style of sophisticated elegance and finish. Upon completion of his graduation, he joined the Archaeological Survey of India as a resident artist and was assigned the documentation of the cave paintings of Ajanta from 1957-63.



**FIGURE 75** Watercolour landscape by Ganesh Haloi. Collection: Delhi Art Gallery (DAG)

At around the same time, in the Sixties, he began his artistic career primarily as a painter of landscapes. Perhaps the picturesque landscapes of his lost homeland, imprinted as childhood memories, inspired in him the imagery of tender, verdant, moisture-laden lands in his paintings. Human presence was erased from his visual panorama, giving way to a sublime conversation between land and sky, air and water. By the mid-Seventies, Haloi was acknowledged as an accomplished landscape painter who could evoke metaphysical essences within an ordinary landscape. The transformation that began in the Seventies consolidated in the *Metascape* series of 1978, which demarcated a gradual transition from realism to abstraction. Since then, Haloi has made a significant contribution in building up an abstract trend in contemporary painting by creating a kind of abstract way of depicting nature that goes beyond visual documentation, but conveys the poetry of nature.