

Chapter 5

Specific features of Ramkinkar Baij's painting style

K.G.Subramanyan mentioned in his article entitled “The Man and His Work” which was published in Lalit Kala Contemporary Vol. No.30. “...But when we came to Santiniketan we found three artists who did, of whom through and through without the least sense of affection. Everything he saw excited him and he was constantly giving chase to that excitement. It was a great education to watch him work or go sketching with him as some of us did, across the Khoai in the noon day sun. For a young initiate like me, who had spent his childhood days in Kerala, then landscape of Santiniketan seemed terribly bare. Where in such a landscape could one find anything to paint? I used to wonder. (Then I found one could.)”



(A)



(B)

**FIGURE 119(A) Flowering Trees, watercolour landscape, 1966.
(B) Waves, Konarak, 1951, watercolour on paper. Collections: N.G.M.A**

According to the different available sources it has proved that these outings of his resulted in stacks and stacks of drawings. And this was almost a daily

routine life of Ramkinkar Baij. (During the four years of time span courses of Kala Bhavana each and every student knew him closely he should have produced water-colour drawings or landscapes at the average of one a day. There were already heaps of drawings done in the earlier years like 1930's, 40's and 1950's. According to the different available sources (like the taken interview of 1947 batch Mr. Dinanath Bhargava of Indore and 1955 batches Mr. Shyamsundar Pattanayek of Orissa) that he (Ramkinkar) kept this rate of productivity till the mid sixties. Even when he went outside Santiniketan on short trips and holidays he brought back piles of drawings and water colour landscapes – from Nepal, from Kathmandu, from Shillong, from Cherrapunji, from Rajgir, from Bhimband, from Baijnath, from Kulu, Manali, from Bokaro, Gaya or Puri. These were like his everyday written pages diary; in them he recorded his impulses, adumbrated his future interests, analyzed and reconsidered a work in progress. Only a few of these can be seen together today. Most of them have got dispersed though the years, having been gifted or sold away. If they could all be brought together they will, by themselves, form an impressive corpus of work.

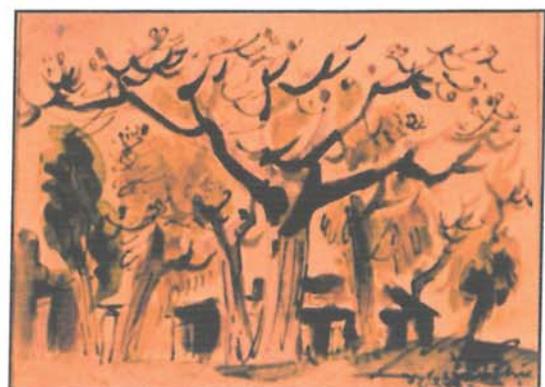
Ramkinkar's landscapes are generally water colour studies of the open and undulating Birbhum terrain. Here again his use of water colour is unconventional. When he sat down with his sketchpad before any of the landscape each common spot underwent a change. Each little detail came to throbbing life. The modest trees bristled up with a primitive vigour and the foliage took on a new sheen and vivacity. The sky played hide and seek with the barren earth, new zooming

forward with a patch of blue, now going into hiding under a veil of grey. The seasonal nuances came out with great authenticity. With his company the students saw nature in a new light. His conversation enriched the experience. His rather picturesque observations about art and life, about the creative process, its excitement and frustrations, came as eye-openers to us. Through them he outlined to us a philosophy of life that was as individual as it was elevating

It we have gone through the earliest drawings of his then it would be clearly visible that those were done in pencil and crayon, had a rhythmic vitality all their own. Being an intuitive kind of an artist his response to things was immediate; he fell upon them like a beast on its prey. This figure of speech is his own or, as he used to say, Rabindranath who had once impressed upon him the necessity of dealing with the work in hand with such single – minded aggression. The results were closely structured rhythmic images. It is known to most that Nandababu's drawings used the frame – work of a spinal rhythm and this gave a calligraphic terseness to a lot of his work.



(A)



(B)

**FIGURE 120(A) Shillong landscape, watercolour on paper, 1947.
(B) Study of Trees, watercolour on paper, 1953. Collections: N.G.M.A**

If we see very minutely every work of Ramkinkar then we find out that Ramkinkar's chase for the rhythmic structure took him further afield. It took him into a kind of cubist analysis of the pictorial field. The earliest examples of this kind (probably datable to mid – thirties) are some drawings in black and white with fluid ink. They showed birds in flight, laying more stress on the flight, than the birds themselves. Some showed bird's flight against house structures, playing the moving against the static. Others showed houses amongst trees. After these a cubist feature is discernible in all his subsequent work, whether they are drawings, paintings (both water colour & oil) or sculpture.

Ramkinkar's energy was one that ran in many channels. Firstly he loved nature deeply; the great outdoors was his real home. He spent many hours wandering in the rugged sunlit landscape dotted with Santhal villages. The scenes of his experience, the pastoral people, their dogs and animals, the dry rivers and scrub trees became the themes of his best works.

But this feature was of an individual kind. It steered clear of the central cubist ethic which, if one may say so, was concerned with stereo-visual relationships of objects and space, leading from there to an analysis of the image components into an object or space image, superseding its previous visual logic with a new one and giving it, in the process, a new expressive or dimensional reach. Although one can see that Ramkinkar was very much aware of the work of a core-cubist like Picasso and brought into a number of his works a kind of

plastic ambivalence or metamorphic distortion comparable to his, the major part of his work shows that he used the lessons of cubism and its antecedents in a rather personal way.

K.G.Subramanyan has mentioned other few things in this same article – “In case of Ramkinkar one cannot fail to notice that his responses to Modern European art forms were quite individual and that the sequence of these responses does not necessarily correspond to the sequence of the sources themselves, as you notice elsewhere. On the rhythmic drawings mentioned above with a cubistic space – grid Ramkinkar breaks in impressionistic, sometimes pointillistic, colour. A typical example is a large water colour (presumably in the collection of the Delhi college of Art) showing people taking tea under a fan-shaped trees. Following this in the next few years, he does a great number of landscapes with a rhythmic spatial structure enlivened by judiciously laid washes and hatching of brilliant colour in between; their varied densities and surface breaks accentuate the movement.

Thematically they veer round the Santiniketan landscape, the Nepal panorama, the Shillong lakes and hillsides; the rhythms vary with the location and the subject. The technique is, to an extent, modeled on Cezanne's; the overall spatial statement is made with neutral washes, the spaces between are manipulated with colour layers of various trees and intensity forward or backward. But this, despite the linear drama, is prominent.”



FIGURE 121(A) Watercolour landscape by Cezanne. Collection: NET
 (B) Landscape, Baghmata, Nepal early 1930's. Collection: N.G.M.A

From this point of view I have objects on to the comments of K.G.Subramanyan which is mentioned in the above paragraph. Few of Ramkinkar's water colour landscapes have the little bit similarity with Paul Cezanne but never claim like Subramanyan's comments. In my support I have to conclude Jaya Appasamy's comments from her article 'Painter and Sculptor' where she opined – "In an early style the strokes of the brush are clearly visible and the colours are separate rather than merged. Some of these works have a slightly Cezanesque feel because of the treatment. The river bed of Kopai, the rugged red terrain dotted with stiff palms and the light and shadows of the Sal forests around Santiniketan are familiar and constant themes. Here the artist picks out details and forms it with calligraphic brush lines."



(A)

(B)

FIGURE 122(A) Watercolour landscape by Cezanne. From net
(B) Nepal landscape, watercolour on paper, early 1930's. Collection: N.G.M.A

Through the years of practice Ramkinkar becomes more and more fluent in the water colour techniques of his own, he tackles any theme with ease, whether it is a bullock cart on a Birbhum road, or a train puffing through a row of Khejur palms, or a horse and carriage in the Rajgir Bazar or a group of Simul trees on the steep banks of Kopai. The ease with which he does this is remarkable; it is the ease of a practiced juggler or balancer or rope-walker, highly tensing and diverting to watch; but his keen emotional response to each stimulus takes them beyond being exercises in virtuosity. In his finest work, whether water colour or painting or sculpture, a dynamic balance between emotional ebullience and structured order is an invariable trait. But now and again, his work gets over powered by impulse. His colours become turbulent, his lines lash around, and his gestures become over – theatrical. But this despite they rarely oversteps the limits of structural propriety.

The paintings of Ramkinkar are no better preserved than his drawings. The fault was largely his; after he did a work, he hardly ever looked after

them, or stored them well. Nor did he have anyone close of kin who did this for him. A complete catalogue of these has not been made and the way the works have got dispersed a comprehensive catalogue may not be easy to compile. His early paintings in Santiniketan used wash and tempera techniques with great individuality; they are invariably well – constructed and have noticeable graphic finesse. Although he did a few paintings in the beginning on mythological themes his eyes were on the visual Facts around, the landscape, the men and women of the villages, working in fields, tending cattle, riding on bullock carts. The sensuous elegance of the Santhal tribal's and their infective gaiety and good nature impressed him greatly, as also the people and things in the ashram environment. But wherever lay the visual stimulus his intentions in painting went beyond making an aesthetic or emotional document. Thus they were different from his water – colour. In each painting he certainly started with a personal experience, often emotionally loaded, but he fed and nurtured it, day after day, with other experiences to build it into an independent entity. This took him time. And the object source underwent change furlough many metamorphic states. He wants to trap the intractable, to catch the proverbial golden deer. He made no compromises on this account. Each day he completed a painting, but each day he rubbed it down. The reasons he gave for this were typical, the work – lively as it seemed to us – was 'too sentimental' or 'too pretty' or 'too factual'. One feels sorry that the intermediate stages could not be preserved or recorded (as in the case of Matisse or Picasso), for each one seemed

unique in itself. But he was too strict with himself; he wanted to compile his intuitive effusions into an ordered statement and invest it with a kind of hieratic mystery. For a man whose emotional impulses were as strong as his, this was a struggle between the demon and the angle.

The landscape or space is filled with diagonal strokes which help to repeat the movement. In another kind of composition Ramkinkar is more formal. A good example is "Toilet" where he paints an older woman assisting a younger one to arrange her hair. The theme is one common enough in the period, yet Ramkinkar treats it in a new way, avoiding sentiment and emphasizing shapes and volumes and the movement of lines. The painting is very stable and has restrained colours some dark and others light.



FIGURE 123(A) Kulu, watercolour landscape, 1956.
(B) Village Path, 1955, watercolour on paper. Collections: N.G.M.A

It is rather characteristic that Ramkinkar became a sculptor. Sculpture as an art was more difficult than painting in a period which indulged in romantic and delicate styles. It would seem that Ramkinkar's rather exuberant spirit settled for a medium that was more solid and difficult to grapple with. The fact that

there was hardly anybody to learn from did not deter him from adventuring on a lonely path. Painting with its illusions, its imagery was comparatively easy; its lyricism was a continuation of the poetic and literary feeling of the period. Sculpture was far less seductive; one may say it was a lyrical. In it the artist has to come to terms with such qualities as weight and measure, dimension and strength. Its search is for permanence, a physical permanence that can only be achieved by a mastery of means and materials. Much more clearly than painting it is not an imitation of life but the creation of a new order. It is characteristic of Ramkinkar that he laboured for years to handle the crude and simple materials he could command. It is only after two decades that he was able to build up a body of work that possessed vitality and style, individuality and permanence.

Ramkinkar had the opportunity to study with some progressive European Sculptors who visited Santiniketan and taught there briefly in the 1920's. The first instructor in sculpture was an Austrian, Liza Von Pott. Later another lady, Madame Milward, who had been a student of the great Bourdelle, also took sculpture classes and later stills an Englishman called Bateman. Though these teachers introduced some modern techniques they did not impose the burden of Neo-Classic conventions and academism. Also their activity was necessarily limited by lack of funds and facilities. In Kala Bhavan there were no hard and fast rules about the nature and aims of art, thus his sculpture could be experimental and he ventured to do what others did not dare, indeed his art was created simply to satisfy his own intuitions. Over the years he worked at portraits, monumental

reliefs for architecture, small abstract works and large open air figurative monuments. Ramkinkar's works have a dual nature, firstly a structural core which is interior and organic and shows in itself in the organization of forms. And secondly an expressionistic quality which is baroque, buoyant and flowering. There is certain joyousness in his work which one becomes aware of, if one compares his pieces to the solemn or even sad studies of his contemporaries. There is a great affirmation of life, of youth, of nature. For him art was not merely work but play. One feels this delight in the running movement of his contours; through all his figures and groups one feels the breath of open spaces, of sap, of blossoming. His surfaces with their multitudinous thrusts, rugged texture and crevices are not related to the slick products of the art schools but to the elemental surfaces of nature. The light falls on them not to be reflected but to be absorbed as it would be on a thick jungle of leaves or on rocks of red laterites.

Ramkinkar's abstract sculpture broke new ground. For the first time in modern Indian art were created works that were not indebted to their subject matter. They did not illustrate anything nor have sentimental titles like many of the academic products of their day. Secondly, these powerful images have a marked three – dimensional quality, they invite one to walk around them and enjoy them in the round. And thirdly, many of his sculptures have an open structure so that one can see through its spaces; the sculpture interweaves mass and space, form and texture. Among important examples of his abstract work should be mentioned the “Deep Stambha” outside the Guest House at Santiniketan finished in the late 1930's.



(A)



(B)

FIGURE 124(A) Seascape, watercolour on paper, 1951.
(B) Fishing Boat, 1955, watercolour on paper. Collections: N.G.M.A

Ramkinkar's portraits were also new and freely conceived. Here too he was not overwhelmed by the subject, rather his studies simply take off from his subject. In his attempt to be representational he never forgot that his first commitment was to sculptural values. His portraits of Mr. Ganguly and Miss Madhura Singh are tours de force; there is a complete absence of dull imitation or slick surfaces. The surfaces are vibrant, the head itself a form of contained power.

Ramkinkar's monumental sculptures made out of doors are examples of his abundant vitality. These works were built and fashioned on the site, growing amidst the environment and inevitably part of it. His "To the Mill" is a joyous buoyant group of women, the wind blowing their sarees and a little boy gamboling along. In "Santhal family" we see a man and his wife going to market, the man shoulders a bamboo pole with two suspended baskets, the woman carries a bundle on her head, accompanying them is their dog. The whole group is earthy and informed by movement. Ramkinkar's sculptures

though drawn from life are not life-like, they recreate life in terms of art, and they are a new reality.

In Ramkinkar's work kinesis and rhythm are get mingled. The sole aim of his works is the expression of kinesis and rhythm through his paintings and sculptures.

A line has always spontaneity. Here no line can be looked upon as a confirmed line. A line cannot ensure some subjective sketch of concept directly rather it is an objective focus of something. This line clarifies the attitude of the producer. He appears to express everything through mere lines with colour and brush.

Every line has a tendency of showing a formation. When a form grows some confirmed grows. Closely observed his lines provide a certain shape to the works obviously. In brush and colour works one finds a shape but Ramkinkar's work proved that viewed from the angle of colours sans lines the works gain a definite shape. But that shape avoids some particularization of shapes. But the shape itself is an impression through which one can penetrate deeper. Simply through that are formed the depth and surface of the paintings. The interplay of colours in the entire work is visible in Ramkinkar as we see in Cezanne's work. Side by side with the formation of surface the Marshalling is also cleared. It is not that the characteristics are beyond our reach; rather the ins and outs come to us with notable clarity. Herein lays Ramkinkar's success. He has used colours even in the line-less landscape in such a way that those automatically established the

finer characteristics of every object in particular. This make Ramkinkar find a great identity entitling himself.

When an artist reaches the pinnacle of maturity he automatically gains the ability to give birth to nature, i.e. he can afford to create nature, after the formation of an association with nature. If he wracks with brush he can sufficiently express his object through that and if he draws upon a line the lines would speak of itself and its inner significance.

Comparison may be taken here of Abanindranath Tagore whose initial works like *Krishnamangal* and *Krishnalila* so his works with realistic details while his later works correspond to liming up programmers. A picture does not call for photographic details, it always a medium of Experian of style and the man in the artist. An artist must give vent to his formation, style etc through art, and be it consciously or unconsciously. A picture can be looked upon as an evolutionary expression of one's self, thought and consciousness. The atmosphere from which Ramkinkar has come up asserts the fact that the consciousness and thought purely belong him.

The legend says that when a bird flies away from a branch, it does not decide any destination beforehand. There may be many similarities in the arts in batmen Ramkinkar and Nandalal but it is certain that in no way Ramkinkar was influenced by Nandalal thoroughly. And all his works have their fountainheads in his own brain and heart. Like a line colours is also spontaneous.

Colour has often done the work of line as in brush vice-a-versa. Every work of his water colour landscape displays the colour of nature at its best.

The thoughts, Rabindranath had in mind was unparalleled in the then India and there thong to inspire both Nandalal and Ramkinkar to instill in their works.

Though the works of Ramkinkar differ from Cezanne in both formation and style there are certain cases in which both are identical in the conformity of colour.

Every work of Ramkinkar boasts of rustic nature which prevents us from thinking that anything of that belongs to any locale outside India. His landscapes are chiefly based on the place where he was born and brought up not and no imaginary environment comes into his works ever.

The landscape named 'Kulu' signed by Ramkinkar shows a flow of water from different angles. The Marshalling of water flow sheen there varies from that of Nandalal which shows same decorative counterpart.



FIGURE 125(A) Snow capped mountain, Baijnath, watercolour on paper, 1956.
(B) Kulu landscape, watercolour on paper, 1956. Collections: N.G.M.A

In all the landscapes work by Ramkinkar we see the lines in a run-on mind. Any formation including their homes etc reflect same natural movement. It should be said that his works prove to be a background of the eternal truth that kinesis is life, stasis is death. Ramkinkar's realization was Himalayan. An inspired realization is always at work behind each and every of his landscape painting. He never did his works to please the customers and therefore those shunned the way of following photographic details.

Ramkinkar landscapes were not only formed through the manner of space, it was rather a mixed product of his intelligence, perseverance, realization, sensuousness and some absolute concept.

Ramkinkar was a unique technician. The aim of this thesis is to highlight the finer points and the technical aspects of this legendary artist and to try and analyze them. In him, we find that the subjective and the objective intertwine and interconnect at many different levels. It can be a rather daunting task since; we have to dissociate the two. Whereas, the analytical would take us down the path of detailed understanding of his style, the holistic would help us in observing the organization of his compositions with regards to his creativity. While discussing about the watercolour landscapes of Ramkinkar Bajaj the two associated points which would invariably come up for discussion are the genre of *watercolour* and the concept of *landscape* as is relevant to this context. Queries like "what are the characteristics which define the genre of water colour?" or, "how does one define the genre of landscapes?" will definitely

be touched upon. However, it should be remembered that elsewhere in this thesis this has been discussed. The central topic here will be the *watercolour landscapes of Sri Ramkinkar Baij*. Thus, the subject of discussion here will be limited to that purview only.

The evolution of Ramkinkar Baij's works has been through several stages. Essentially his keen interest in the world of visual arts was a gradual evolution. Several times, he had reiterated that his interest in visual arts had started by observing the local folk artists and commercial craftsmen.⁴⁸ We have to point out here that the world of artistic creations in this subcontinent had always been the area of activity for the so-called class who did not belong to the upper echelons of the society. Before the advent of the European colonization, the feudal and medieval mentality was very much prevalent in this sub-continent. Artists rarely came from the sophisticated and well tutored background. Gradually though, the scenario changed and the mode of revivalism became a major feature in the field of arts and culture. This however, did not mean that the social scenario changed overnight. It was revolutionaries like Rabindranath Tagore, who steadily put the wheels into motion. Thus, individuals like Nandalal Bose, Benode Behari and so on, found a new calling. The advent of new found nationalism brought to them a breath of fresh air. They moved out of the so-called *European Academic Training* and its influences and went on to build up on the foundations that were already there. These specifically included,

48 Inferences regarding this particular aspect may be found in *Ramkinkar Baij – Self Portrait*; Collected Writings and Interviews – 1962-1979; Translated by Sudipto Chakraborty from the Original Bengali Book *Mahasay, Ami Chakkhik Rupokar Matro*; Compiled and Edited by Sandipan Bhattacharya; Monfakira – 2006.

- (a) The already existing rich lineage and heritage of miniature paintings prevalent in the Islamic and pre-Islamic period (right up to the early stages of colonial period when the amalgamation of the *European* and the *Oriental* techniques were yet to happen),
- (b) The motifs available amongst the folk and tribal communities of this sub-continent, and
- (c) The styles and modes that were practiced in the Far-East – there were (and still are) a substantial aspect of commonality between them and the indigenous styles of this subcontinent.⁴⁹

Ramkinkar too, was not far from this influence. As stated earlier, watching local artisans and craftsmen was a key feature during his formative years. Later on, he was sometimes allowed to experiment with their materials and he utilized that to the fullest extent. Several individuals who had known him personally do attest to this fact that he himself had said so. Sri Dinanath Bhargav⁵⁰ (eminent artist, cover page designer of the Indian Constitution and student and former alumni of Santiniketan) and Sri Salam Anil Kumar Singh (eminent art historian, critic, teacher of history of art and also a former alumnus of Santiniketan) both reiterate that Ramkinkar Baij had conveyed as such during their personal interaction

49 References about this particular factor may be found in several well known and erudite volumes. Eminent art critic and essayist of social issues Sri Suneet Chopra had pointed out to this particular feature during a personal interaction with him on 07/01/2014.

50 Prominent amongst these are Sri Dinanath Bhargava – student and associate of Santiniketan during the period of thirties and forties of the previous century who, under the tutelage and supervision of Sri Nandalal Bose, later on became the designer of the front page of the Indian Constitution (during personal interactions with him in the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014) and Sri Salam Anil Kumar Singh – also a student of Santiniketan in the department of History of Art during the period of 1974-79 (currently a teacher in the Central Government School system and also the author of a handbook on History of Art) – both were closely associated with Ramkinkar Baij at different periods of his life.

with them. On another occasion he had told to Sri Salam Anil Kumar Singh and one of his close disciples and associates Mrs. Kiran Thapper Dixit that he used to pick up a stick and draw on the dried clay of the river banks. They have said that they also remember his saying that in his early youth, he was involved in painting of the backdrops of local traveling theatre companies. He had also supervised the set designing and its various other aspects.⁵¹ All these activities had probably tutored him thoroughly in the various different styles and arenas in the field of visual arts. He thus, became an informally self tutored artist who had achieved certain skills that were quite remarkable in themselves. He shares a wonderful anecdote in this regard. He says, that when he had arrived in Santiniketan with the assistance of Sri Ramananda Chattopadhyay, Acharya Sri Nandalal Bose had commented that there was nothing new for him to learn. He must have felt that Ramkinkar's technical superiority was quite apparent and therefore, there was no need for him to go through any kind of any technical training at all. But later on he had given his consent and had allowed Ramkinkar to stay in Santiniketan to go through the training methodology as well as work and create on his own.⁵² In his first series of landscapes in black ink, working with simple medium of monochrome, the training regarding firm lines and a

51 This particular information has been corroborated by several individual who have had the honour of having been associated with him. Mrs. Kiran Dixit, (who had been a student of sculpture during the penultimate days of Ramkinkar's Baji's teaching life at Santiniketan and is currently a practitioner and exponent of renown) and Sri Salam Anil Kumar Singh – also a student of Santiniketan in the department of History of Art during the period of 1974-79 (currently a teacher in the Central Government School system and also the author of a handbook on History of Art) – both were closely associated with Ramkinkar Baji at different periods of his life. Also in *Ramkinkar Baji – Self Portrait; Collected Writings and Interviews – 1962-1979*; Translated by Sudipto Chakraborty from the Original Bengali Book *Mahasay, Ami Chakkhik Rupokar Matro*; Compiled and Edited by Sandipan Bhattacharya; Monfakira – 2006.

52 *Ramkinkar Baji – Self Portrait; Collected Writings and Interviews – 1962-1979*; Translated by Sudipto Chakraborty from the Original Bengali Book *Mahasay, Ami Chakkhik Rupokar Matro*; Compiled and Edited by Sandipan Bhattacharya; Monfakira – 2006.

solid linearity is much apparent. It seems as if he is deliberately experimenting in these early works. The dual efforts, achieving control on black and white and understanding atmosphere and ideational unity of nature is very much apparent. In these works light enters his landscapes from different angles.

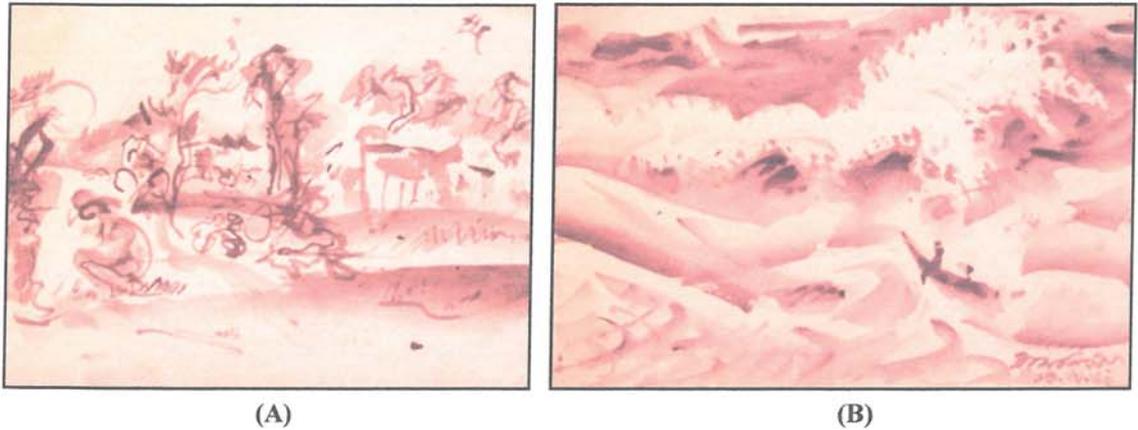


FIGURE 126(A) Study for Kankalital, brush and ink on paper, 1960.
(B) Waves, brush and ink on paper, 1960. Collections: A.Ramchandrans.

Therefore, to understand all of that we will have to discuss the following,

- (a) The styles that he was exposed to during his childhood and his pre-Santiniketan days,
- (b) The systematic training during his days in Santiniketan,
- (c) His exposure to the various western styles that he had got to view and understand through the various albums that were there in the libraries of Visva-Bharati,
- (d) The unique qualities of his drawing and the brush strokes which have wonderful proportionate usage of volume and broad and thin lines
- (e) The attractive and superior linear quality that was the very essence of his creations,

- (f) The effective usage of volume in the presentations.

The above mentioned points would, to a certain extent help us in analyzing his work from the qualitative point of view. However, there are other factors which also need to be discussed. Eminent art critic, art historian and teacher, Dr Sanjay Kumar Mallik opines, “Quite often, we tend to suffer from an inescapable propensity to typify an artist in terms of his or her stylistic preference, linguistic characteristics, thematic choice and mode of expression. Such an act inclines towards classifying iconic images as the sole identifying characteristic, thereby limiting an artist within the confined perimeter of signature styles, and dismissing all differences as aberrations beyond the normative.”⁵³ Thus, for analysis, we need to go beyond the technical parameters and look into sociological aspects as well. This can be put forth in the following manner:

- (a) The conditions which became instrumental in him taking up visual arts,
- (b) The conditions that were prevalent in Santiniketan during initial period of his stay and the kind of training that he was able to acquire along with the influences that came with it,
- (c) The various individuals (Indian, Western as well as Far-Eastern) who had come to Santiniketan and had stayed as guests; the kind of exchanges and interactions that he had been able to have with them and the subsequent influences that there had been,

53 *Gopal Ghose – a jubilant quest for the chromatic* – Sanjoy Kumar Mallik; Ākār Prakār-Kolkata, National Gallery of Modern Art-New Delhi, Mapin Publishing-Ahmedabad – 2013

- (d) His interactions with the indigenous tribal (particularly the *Santhal's*) and non-tribal communities that were there in and around Santiniketan who had been a major inspiration for the themes of his creations,
- (e) The social conditions of Santiniketan (positive as well as negative which somehow or other had become subjects for the themes of the presentations),
- (f) The various individuals with whom he had interacted (particularly the ones with whom he had formed a deep personal bond),
- (g) The various experiences he had gathered while traveling to different places; either on personal journeys or on tours with the students of Santiniketan,
- (h) He being always drawn towards the so-called non-elite members of the society since he himself had come from such a background.

While analysing Ramkinkar Baij's water-colours, all these factors needs to be taken into account and to do so in a lucid and easy manner so that even a layperson can understand its nuances is no easy task.

However, let us, for a moment, keep these queries on hold and take a look at another side of the whole scenario. What is there inside "art" that makes us feel positive (or may be negative)? Life is reflected through art. Sometimes, art is created for pure beauty and sometimes we convey feelings and narratives through it. But if we are to ask ourselves, - what is there in it which gives us understanding and appreciation of life in its multiple levels? Then again, why should such a query be relevant at all with regards to the topic of this discourse? Any discourse of aesthetics has to defend itself when it is being based on the analysis of a particular topic and not any generalized aspect.

Western classicists like Aristotle, Pliny, Plato and others like them can always be referred to for their viewpoints. Arguably, one of the best examples of the Indian perspective (and we are not referring to the classical texts like *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *Dhanvālokaḥ*, or other ancient texts; they can be referred to for this aspect irrespective of the period that is being talked about) of the post-“medieval”, “modern”⁵⁴ era can be Abanindranath Tagore’s lectures delivered during centenary celebrations of University of Calcutta when he had graced the chair of “Bāgīśvarī Professor” in the Faculty of Indian Fine Arts.⁵⁵ These were later on published by the university itself in the same year. Finally they were translated into Bengali sometime later. All of that can be delved into for an extensive expose if necessary however, we would like to quote something much simpler but less known. Eminent scholar of the Soviet era, Pavel Gurevich, in the introduction of his small but erudite volume *Man and Culture* – says, “....., it is not only because ancient edifices we spared by chance misfortunes that they have continued to exist from century to century, connecting one epoch to another. It is not only stone, but also an architect’s conception embodied in design and construction that supports the vaulting ceilings of churches and castles. At dawn, when the hills are shrouded in a slowly lifting fine morning dust, one may see a truly wonderful sight: a

54 The lexicon “modern” here has been taken as it has been understood from the “The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary – Third Edition – 1977 – Clarendon Press, London (UK). Since, here in this context we will be referring to a particular time period, hence taking the measuring methodology of the Geological, Biological and Historical sciences will be in the best interests of the article. According to that quotient, the word “modern” essentially refers to the period that comes after the 18th century even though the aspects of “modernity” had already started its process quite a few decades earlier.

55 Currently, for this paper, we have taken the Bengali publication titled *Bāgīśvarī Śīlpa Prabandhāvalī* (published by Ānanda Publishers’, Kolkata – 2010) for reference.

cathedral, flaming on the crimson light of the rising sun, seems to be floating on unsteady swaying clouds. Beauty created by architects and blended into one with nature is a miracle Blended into one with nature...”⁵⁶ Similarly, quite a few examples can perhaps be taken from the writings of several litterateurs and others. Therefore, it is quite needless to say that the process of artistic activity is intrinsic to our natural existence. It has to be there irrespective of any obstacle that we might be faced with. Further quotations can be taken from the various treatises of the Indian and western traditions to elucidate the fact. This particular point is being brought into countenance only because we would like to understand the reason behind Ramkinkar’s prolific creativity.

It is quite apparent that Ramkinkar Baij was a creative artist for whom artistic satisfaction was a chief reason for any kind of any creative work. He had chosen several mediums for his artistic expression i.e. oil, watercolour, sculpture (be it clay, concrete or any other), sketches (pencil, charcoal or ink including doodles) and so on. However, it is with watercolour and sketches and doodles that we find that he has been the most prolific of all. There is a surprising element of *speed* and *accelerative power* in these works which many find as exotic. Sri Dinanath Bhargava has given a most interesting opinion.⁵⁷ He says that Ramkinkar Baij had an almost ascetic or monastic dedication regarding his work. He had the habit of deep contemplation and he saw more than what was right there in front of the eye. In this regard he was almost like the saints of ancient India. Hence,

56 *Man and Culture* – Pavel Gurevich – Translated into English by Mikhail Nikolsky – Novosti Press Agency Publishing House – 1989.

57 As mentioned by Sri Dinanath Bhargava during a personal interaction with him in his residence at Indore on 09/01/2014 and 10/01/2014.

when he wanted to put down something through the medium of drawing and painting, he preferred to have materials which would help him create things quickly without wasting much time. In those days, the synthetic medium of acrylic was not available. Looking at the mode and character of Ramkinkar Baij's creations, it is highly doubtful if he would have preferred it. *Watercolour* as a medium demands meticulous patience but unlike the medium of oil, which requires the same kind of meticulousness (if not more) it requires a dynamic vitality for its proper utilisation. If an artist has skill and speed regarding utilisation of the momentary qualities of the medium, then watercolour is ideal for him or her. It dries up fast. The base being water, during its application the correlative thickness can be easily managed. Thus,

- (a) It can be applied in a thinly veiled layer which is usually termed as *transparent watercolour* technique,
- (b) It can be applied either (i) thickly in a single layer or, (ii) with the same kind of thickness but with many layers; this is usually termed as an *opaque* technique,
- (c) It can be tempered by adding layers mixed with white on it which is usually known as *gouache*.

When the far eastern masters had visited Santiniketan they have left an indelible imprint in the minds of the practitioner who resided there. They had two particular features which were highly interesting-

1. They believed in limited usages of colours.

2. Symbolic and inferential usage of space, lines and shapes had become an epitome of sophistication in their hands.
3. The economic usage of various shapes and forms had reached a kind of meditative peak for them.

Ramkinkar Baij was influenced by the western systems of colour application. It is quite apparent in his angular and non-angular strokes of brush which may be flat or otherwise.

To us, his admirers- it seems that he imbibed the best of the far-eastern and the western and made a seamless amalgamation of the two.

The synthesis of the local folk techniques and various other Indian techniques gave rise to the Bengal School. The heritage of miniature paintings relied mainly upon artisanship and craftsmanship. Their stylization and mode of application had attracted me. However their structural boundaries were very strict. The post renaissance scenario of the world demanded an approach which went beyond the boundaries and yet had its roots very firmly within the tradition. Eminent art critic and art historian Suneet Chopra is of the opinion the western landscapes were markedly different from the depictions/works found in this subcontinent.

Paintings in this part of the world were usually multi-centric. This means that there were multiple centres in these depictions. An article by B.N.Goswami published in The Sunday Tribune dated August 12, 2012 can be referred to in this regard. Titled "MATTERS OF DETAIL", it talks about one particular

painting which showcases a Mughal Princes engaged in the activity of game fowl hunting. There are multiple centre's of activities which may draw one's attention only if one goes looking for it. B.N.Goswami argues that this multi-centric feature emphasises the fact that tradition of painting in this subcontinent has always been holistic just like everything else which we have now come to understand as a chief characteristic of the art and culture that is practiced in this part of the world. This of course does not mean that there is no meditative or contemplative quality in the works of the western world. The fourth dimension of time and space is and has always been a major feature of the western works. However in their landscapes, human beings are present in a minimal manner.

In the works of this subcontinent human beings are the part of landscape depictions. It can be in three ways-

- a) Where human beings are depicted in a prominent manner but that does not mean there would be no other smaller details involved.
- b) Where the human beings as well as other non-human factors share an equal space on an equal footing.
- c) Where the human presence is almost minimal.
- d) Where there is no human presence at all.

In the western format the viewer may feel the human presence. A sensitive admirer and interpreter can feel it. It is as if the artists tell the viewer "there indeed is a human presence; you are there; you are on the other side of the portrayal, hence I haven't been able to depict you.

Making the viewer feel something virtually is a quality of any creative artist. Ramkinkar too had this quality in a big way (whether his creations had human figures or not is immaterial). If we keep aside the fact that human figures may or may not be there in his depictions, it is not difficult to see that the features, about which we have discussed here, may be seen in varying degrees in his works.

The Far Eastern techniques' regarding the flow of the brush is delicate and has a sophisticated softness in its linear character. In contrast, the western technique shows

- a) The thick heaviness of the colour being applied or it not being as such is totally dependent upon the wrist control of the artist.
- b) Whereas the eastern masters (far eastern and otherwise) had a preference for brushes which tapered at the end (whether the brushes tended to be thick or not), the western masters, in case of using thicker or wider brushes had a preference for flat non tapering ends.

This is the reason why Indian miniatures we find that the application of colours within the black boundary being so perfectly inclusive. Even today, in the works of the traditional miniature painting practitioner and the *Patuas* of Bengal we find the same feature.

The western masters typically avoided working within black boundaries. For them the free flowing brush technique was more important rather than the control inclusiveness.

In Ramkinkar Baij we find that he is utilising the both in a dynamically experimental manner.

1. He applies the brush of colours in a free method. (It is like view seeing through the moving train window).

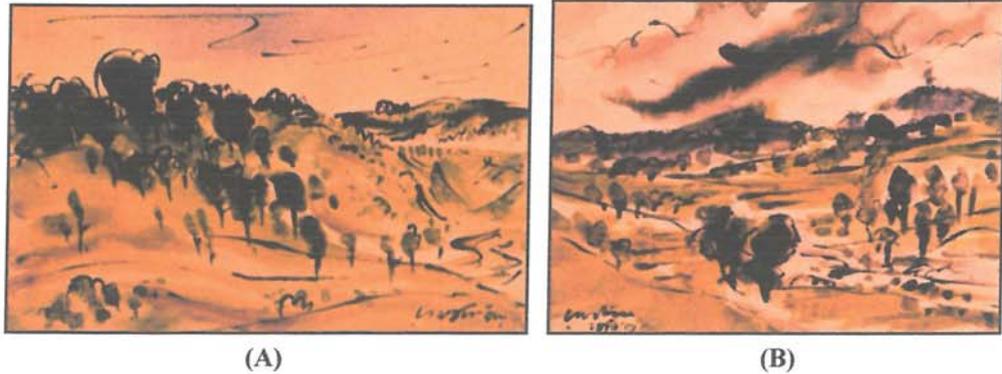


FIGURE 127(A) Landscape, watercolour on paper, 1952.
(B) Rajgir, watercolour on paper, 1949. Collections: N.G.M.A

2. Sometimes he controls the final termination point by masterful restraint.
3. Sometimes he allows the flow to go on and then tries to define the end or the boundary of the object he is intending to show by dipping either a quill or the back side of a brush or a small twig and putting black lines over those flows.

A critique on Ramkinkar's work

During 1930's

During 1930 onwards time Santiniketan countryside were more fresh and pristine, or when Santhal maidens would uninhibitedly offer cool drinking water from a village well to a thirsty traveler or if not for anything else those time artists were engaged in making the serene landscape composition. But Ramkinkar's temperament and attitude was totally different from those artists. Ramkinkar was engaged in depicting the daily life activities of the surrounding people. The aspect of depicting nature along with the human elements came naturally. It seemed that this addition in the evolutionary process was seamless and effortless.

Despite the humane-centric element of his work in the earlier modes the natural evolutionary progress regarding the inclusion of nature was rather intrinsically seamless. In fact it had been so spontaneous that the effortlessness is hardly noticeable unless and until one goes looking for it.

In the mid 1930's and 1940's Ramkinkar Baij brought in elements of brushstrokes that he had learnt from Chinese and Japanese watercolour landscapes and enriched Indian landscape paintings. His landscapes of Nepal, Rajgir, Shillong, and Birbhum and study of lotus ponds are creative experiments in calligraphy from Nandalal Bose. He felt strongly attracted to Cubist landscapes. In his oil and watercolour landscapes he mixed these various characteristics and added to the scope of his style. After the formation

of Calcutta Group in 1943, Ramkinkar Baij, Gopal Ghose dominated landscape painting. His use of very few watercolours in an almost visionary and impressionistic and expressionistic frenzy gave it a new direction. He also showed his mastery in oil which he mixed with the great skill. Similarly in watercolours, Ramkinkar used a technique which adequately provided for transparency, little bit delicate wash and sometimes emotional brushwork.

Santiniketan in the nether end of 30's became a witness to a unique happening. Robust artistic looking young sculptor, having little care about working in the strong simmering heat of sun with only a straw hat for protection was putting his head & soul into the perfection of the creation in front of him. All of a sudden a tall white bearded long hair gentleman wearing loose fitting long Persian cloths comes up behind a sculptor quietly. The latter observes the former keenly and then in an affectionate gesture (which had probably stemmed from an overwhelming sense gratitudinal appreciation) keeps the hand on the shoulder of the former. The young sculptor gets startled and is immediately filled with trepidations and apprehensions. The chief characters of these scenes are—the former, young Ramkinkar Baij, the latter Rabindranath Tagore. After some pregnant moments Rabindranath asked young Ramkinkar—whether he would be able to saturate the whole of Santiniketan with sculptures just like the one which was creating at that moment. Ramkinkar had silently nodded in affirmative. He probably had never even thought that he would get such license like this. He however took the words from such a great man—the founder-modulator-formulator of Santiniketan himself- quite seriously. This

resulted in his being in a continuous effort of creations (even though financial constraint was his lifelong companion) as he went on creating work after work which defied any human comprehensibility. One is forced to ask 'where from did he find out such a huge amount of spontaneous creative inspirations? It is enough to dumbfound people of mundane intellect like us.

The above story is quite well known, however myths and there are several have branched out from some genuine stories like the above one and have worked as a fuel for the other imaginative tall-tales about Ramkinkar. Needless to say that his seminal identity as an artist and as a human being having super human capacity of aesthetic and intellectual senses lies in his works of creations. It's a pity though his capacity of being a capable performing artist (we know from several accounts that he was a prolific singer and a theatre worker) has evaded posterity. His works show a huge amount of physical effort behind them. In his own words—"when I was creating those sculptures I felt extremely tired, I usually had sleepless nights." It was probably a result of continuous exposure to sun because I usually did most of my works in broad day light; hence very easily I became physically spent.

During 1940's

By 1940 onwards Ramkinkar is exploring new dimensions in depicting the landscape or capturing the landscape in his own way/individualistic way, those which internalise the subject. Even his brushstrokes have changed from the light, deft and fluid water colours of the earliest landscapes. These are deliberate experiments where he turning from the outward 'spectacle of

nature' to its inner rhythms and moods. Traditionally, painting in India was grounded in the medium of tempera and the gouache technique. Ramkinkar now turns to explore the medium of pure water colour.

In some unusual paintings of this time he explores the textures of water crashing against dark rocks, their movement creating iridescent daubs of green, blues and yellows almost as if the sole purpose here was to create the sound of waves.

During 1950's

In the work of Ramkinkar of the 1950s we find farmers mowing paddy fields and some where winnowing. An endeavour to make such an inspirations through two or three colour is seldom found in any Indian artists. Instead of using vertical or horizontal lines he used diagonal lines to express their body languages and show his skill in the expression of beauty and splendiddness in their love for work. He appears to have caught those moments through camera clicks again and again. Though he has caught those in rushing moments no tenacity for work is hampered there. Every line explains in their own language. The yellow colour may have been used as a base colour flatly but no flat impression has come out to be the final result. Again the use of blue colour in order to clarify and separate the bodies creates a dynamic atmosphere in every step. Ramkinkar never made an endeavour to tell stories consciously or unconsciously yet every painting has a plot of its own. The lines have their own body languages. Though sweeping lines have been used, nowhere is the pace or rhythm hampered. It may be mentioned here that while using

characters other artists inevitably upheaval the shadow but Ramkinkar never did such a thing.



FIGURE 128(A) Landscape, Kulu, watercolour on paper, 1956.
(B) Landscape, Kulu, watercolour on paper, 1956 Collections: N.G.M.A

In some painting the black smith are found to be busy working in their smith in the hut. The delicate lines reveal their movement and moment of work. Even here we see the use of various colours. He has used the vermilion colour using the brush he showed the scene of bathing by fat, middle aged women. The obese bodies have been expressed through the movement of brush including various movements of every figure. The artist, in a painting shows the working of labour in a quarry through cylindrical features. Every figure has turned cylindrical. Side by side with the use of front side figures the textuality of the back side is also revealed. Though the face is not clear their body movement suggests everything of their character. The lines are not always natural rather those described the feature of some person or place. He found the source of his works in the place where he lived and where he gets sustenance from. In both Bankura and Santiniketan the windows of his houses showed various

peoples and their activities and he copied those regularly on pages or parts of art papers. In addition to human forms and landscapes he expressed realization of life. From the works of Ramkinkar's student life it was clear that his lines are hesitating and smooth. Perhaps his latent desire was like the steps of a soldier clear and deft. We find with the passage of time his lines have become better and indomitable. Throughout his life he changes himself but did not copy anybody.

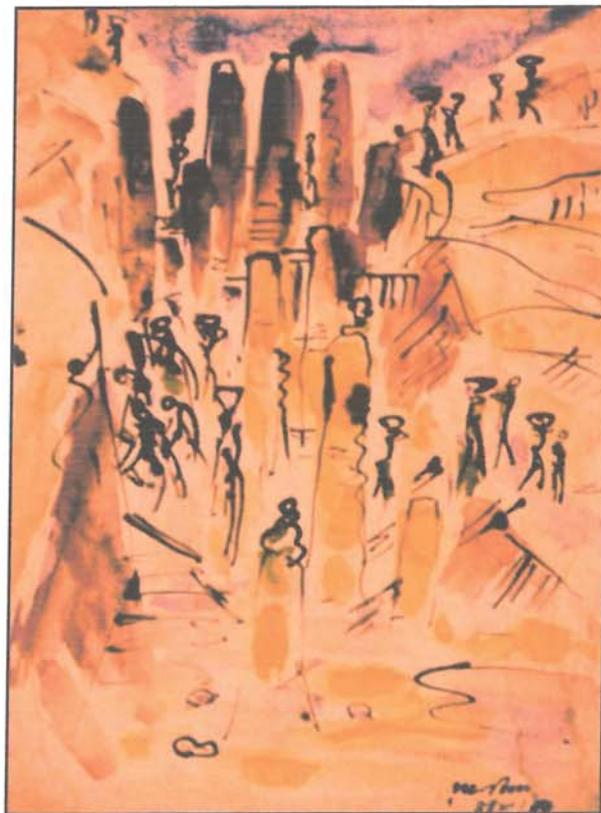


FIGURE 129 Canal Diggers, watercolour on paper, 1951. Collection: N.G.M.A

Civilization has given us many things; yet there was much of a great substance less shape in order to protect and preserved itself. Man continuously labours under the dark choking mine in some mechanical atmosphere. The poetic

emotion very beautifully presents that apparent contrast. If we take as the representative of civilization the line- "The hard iron was unconscious in hard sleep and the labour awake. Tagore's plays '*Achalayatana*' and '*Raktakarabi*' are sure to represent the negativity of this. Everyman connected with mine technology is well aware that some part should be left to work as a pillar. Similarly Ramkinkar sought to uphold both the negative and positive aspect of his work.

During 1960's

The common labouring class people are focused in Ramkinkar's watercolour landscape paintings done in the 1960s. The fact is that Ramkinkar Baij never came out of his own life style. He put into sketch whatever he saw in real life. He never fell a prey to hyperbole. To speak the truth directly or indirectly the poetical theme of Sukanta Bhattacharya gets prominence in his paintings. Tagore writes- "*She Kabir Bani Lagi Kann Pete Aachi Je Aache Matir Kacha Kachi.*" (For the saying of the poet my ears closer to the earth). Really Ramkinkar's watercolour landscapes are reflected as compensatory to the above line. In 1960s Ramkinkar lessened his works on watercolour landscapes. Now he formed a tendency for big oil colour compositions and sculptures. Another cause that comes into surface mainly is that Ramkinkar's excursion or educational trip gets lessened. Consequently there was ebb in his landscape cultivation. Now let us go to his application device where we find the excess use of colour gets lessened. Even the number of lines gets lessened. In addition the strength in the lines used in the paintings finds witness. The changes in volume in the rise of

fall of lines found in the paintings of the former decades are almost completely absent here. Instead we find flat thick lines. The touch of greenery found in the 1940s or the 1950s are completely absent in those of the 1960s or the 1970s. Another characteristic of the painting of the period is the thickness of colouring, though it should be mentioned that Ramkinkar's work were never as transparent as those of the British watercolour landscapes or not even opaque. The works of this period find excessive use of grey colour. In fact it may be looked upon as the dusk period of life.

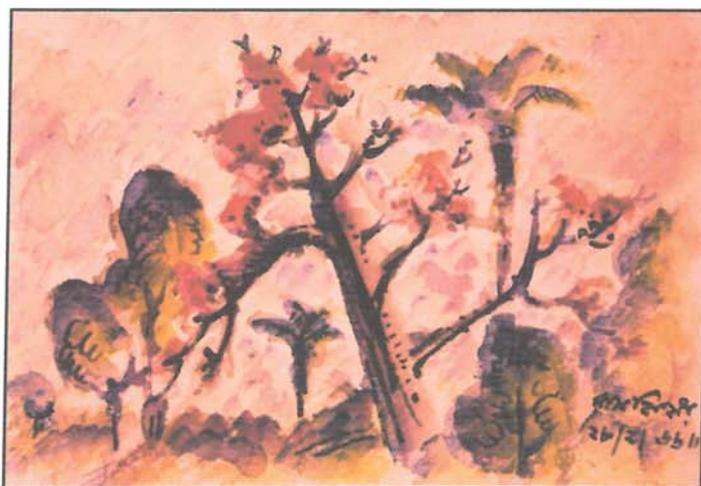


FIGURE 130 Watercolour landscape, 28.02.66. Collection:N.G.M.A

In later period i.e. in the 1970s Ramkinkar is hardly found to indulge in watercolour landscapes. Both his body and mind were in broken states. He did sometimes on requests but no evidence of that is found yet. He did drawings sometimes according to his will. Though he retired in 1971 from Kala Bhavan, Visva Bharati he would come on rickshaw to his own studio led by his heart-felt desire to teach students. Most of the students fled from him in fear. But those who could stay with him with boldness got much, many unknown

information, process, what not. In the 1970s Ramkinkar Baij's cultivation of art did not have a smooth flow. Rather it ran to a disconnected way. The small thoughts that played in his brain found expression sometimes through pen and paper, sometimes on canvas. It is not that he never did some watercolour landscapes from memory this time but those were either given as gift or taken by students.

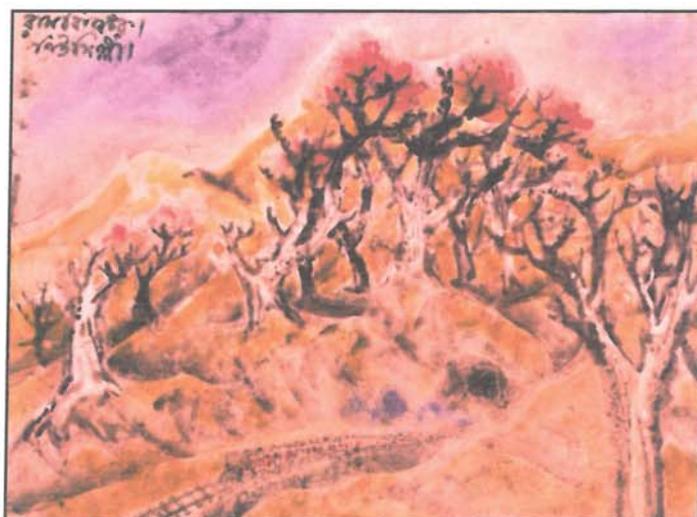


FIGURE 131 Santiniketan landscape from memory during 1960's.
Collection: Goutam Krishna Debbarman.

Though Visva Bharati gave Emeritus professorship in 1975 he could not attend Kala Bhavan regularly due to illness as waned his works. Yet, he continued enlistment on the pages of diary of his drawings- which was a part of his daily work. Actually he had the taste of the nectar of art. The last part of the 1970s continued or ended thus. From the beginning of the 1980's Ramkinkar felt ill highly. He was first admitted to the hospital in Santiniketan and then was transferred to P.G where was discovered the lifelessness of his lower part. Even at this time, though not daily he fulfilled the requests of students for

drawing on paper. Later on his hands shivered and his lines were hampered. Anybody who saw his lines could easily recognise the lines as Ramkinkar's.

SOME EXCEPTIONAL FEATURES OF RAMKINKAR'S

WATERCOLOUR LANDSCAPES:-

1. There are several common elements in his paintings and sculptures but when he paints it is through the vision of a painter aware of the nature of the pictorial medium and likewise the potential of the sculptural medium is not lost sight of while creating his sculptures.
2. In this he is unique among Indian artists. In both cases, he has worked in relationship to nature. He painted his immediate environment, the people and the landscape around him—the Santhal's at work and the Birbhum countryside.
3. His vision is direct with no psychological overtones or hints of pessimism. If it is a human figure, then it is the movement, the action, be it sculpture or painting. It is the gesture and postures which offer the units of compositional structure or they assume the role of rhythmic beats through which he catches the pulsating life, the surging body or the thrusting limbs when it concerns sculpture or a quick brush stroke here and a delicate linear curl there to enliven a gesture or to animate an otherwise stiff-looking stance in the case of paintings.
4. If he paints a buffalo, it is not to dissect it like the artists but made to emerge as a moving mass consisting of appropriate brush work and deliberately

care free calligraphic lines together suggesting mass and movement. (For the painting of **Buffalo**)



FIGURE 132 Buffalo studies in watercolour during 1950's. Collections: N.G.M.A

5. If he is painting mountains what he brings about is their firm staticity, massively occupying the space, which is again not etherealised like the cubists, but retains much of atmospheric light and air. Such preoccupations also determine his choice of palette which are always colours of nature—blues, greens, ochre's etc, and very rarely bright hues. (For the reference of mountains)
6. In most of his paintings there is a happy and self-conscious coming ling of impressionist light, Cezannian space, cubist planes and transparency and the verve of oriental calligraphy.
7. Due to the nature of medium itself his watercolours are much more spontaneous by comparison with his oils.
8. In the latter, cubistic elements dominate, in which medium also exist many of his abstractions.

9. In them line, low-keyed colour and plane are contrived to define and construct space and volume which make him one of the first Indian painters to turn to 'formal pictorial' problems.
10. Extended volumes become space and transparent planes replace volumes. In this he has a predecessor in Gaganendranath Tagore, while his preoccupations with resolving the spatial tension between line and colour link him with and look forward to certain types of works of M.F.Husain. According to Prof. Ratan Parimoo –“It has been suggested that Ramkinkar is not a purist. He is a purist in the sense that he uses paint, colour, brushwork to do what they can do—to depict nature, atmosphere and build up the pictorial structure. But he never gets entangled into mannerisms and clichés. He is not a search for style, nor is it intellectualisation, but spontaneous reaction to what is visually present to remember. The pictorial style comes as spontaneously as are handled colour and line. While assimilating the 'sophisticated' modern sources he has also been able to retain his emotive-intuitive innocence”
11. We can able to see through his watercolour landscapes the idyllic setting has been beautifully used by him to establish a harmony between them and nature.
12. The natural movements of the human body, stressed legs, gesticulating arms and thrusting heaving torsos are integrated to give an inner vitality and pulsating life to the sculptural mass.
13. Prof. Kanchan Chakrabarty feels that Ramkinkar had studied dynamic movement of different objects (human as well as non human) deeply.

Hence depiction of movement and especially speed naturally came to him. It is a great reflection on the nature of this wonderful creator. It seemed that he was in constant awe of everything that was structurally attractive to him; this intern probably forced him to have a detailed knowledge of different kinds of structuralities. So much so that structural variations and their peculiar properties had probably become intrinsic to him.

14. A certain degree of monumentality was always there in his works however much big or small the work might have been. This is a rare quality amongst the artists in general.
15. There was no self-conscious arrogance in his work (This can probably be said about Nikhil Biswas too). No amount of textual tutelage can produce such voracious voracity. Intellectual pedagogy or any kind of pedantic training would absolutely fail to produce such copious amounts of aesthetically daring attitude.
16. Ramkinkar always believed, it seemed, in going deeper beneath the outer surface, even beneath the subservient level. Correction (which can probably be also understood as improvement through constant rectification) was his forte. Looking back was never there in his ideological and behavioural vocabulary.
17. All these three artists understood the importance of allowing the images of the moment to be imprinted in the mind so that later on they could be brought forth with either actual representation or a representation moved away from reality.

Benode Behari's creations are quite unique when it comes to the question of form and technique. The contradictory presence of the unflinching hardness of rock and stone along with the super smooth flexibility of water is perhaps the wonderfully attractive factor of his creations. Many of his works contain such amazing visuality.

To make a separate category and put these three stalwarts into that would be highly unfair according to one perspective because they each possessed a separate and unique identity. Yet from another perspective it might not be unfair since they all belonged to the same period and they did indeed possess certain similarities.

In comparison to his contemporaries (and others also) Ramkinkar's brushstrokes had their own unique condensed characteristics (Reader, please note, we are not discussing about the colour's density here).

According to the artist (Prof.) Nikhil Ranjan Pal of Rabindra Bharati University the technique of putting paint in a layer after layer bases by Ramkinkar can perhaps be seen as a very conscious effort to seek the reality beyond reality. In his case the presentation of point to point structure seems to be an unhindered truthful revelation.

Unavailability of good quality paper, brushes not enough available colours, these could all be seen as a hindrance to creativity where as in case of those three stalwarts, their limitations opened newer avenues for unexperimental exploration both in cases form as well as technique.

Their approach to the thematic concepts of the subjects of a painting is more or less of the same nature. The rough quality of nature, its supernatural unapparent apperency direct form and exclusive study of living forms and the flowing lines of every subjects from a structural point of view.

From experience we know that Ramkinkar's can be contemporaries usually looked at watercolour landscape as a particular category of expressions. Ramkinkar on the other hand search for a different mind of semiotics in his work which characterized his uniqueness.

The period of mid (1945-48) a structured quality in this works usages of lines were in the least while brush strokes were allowed to do most of the work. The highly individualistic brush strokes brought on a prolific creativity which went till the late 50's and early 60's

It seems that Nandalal Bose had influenced in Benode Behari and Ramkinkar. This evident from many similarities in their works, A very good example which would be 'Thrashing Corn' by Ramkinkar.

An enthusiast with some serious interest in Ramkinkar's work would notice several prints. - i). A rather uncompromising feature of using minimum tools and resources while trying to portray the speed as well as the soft ethereality of nature juxtaposed against me another in as stark contrast. ii). He went for depiction of defiled features, yet he hardly cared at all for meticulous details which he felt over not necessary at that time. iii). There is a noticeable yet subtle and gradual transformation in his form and techniques. Whether or not it could be considered as 'amplification'

best left to the serious enthusiast. But it is there; serious enthusiast can always find it if he or she looks for it.

He used to create a certain kind of structurality based on the natural tint of colours like lemon yellow & Prussian blue (all the other combination which came to his mind also). His creation of oil lacked the variety which was evident in his watercolours.

According to the contemporary artist Arjun Bhattacharya⁵⁸, shunning the beaten tracks of Bengal School and also western academic technique Ramkinkar Baij devoted himself to watercolour landscape study for ever that is solely dependent in reality on the mind and the mental. He had an innate belief that the level of watercolour would be somewhat different. He not only eyed the soil reality but also had a tendency to go out and see the outside world. He never had the tendency to copy from top to bottom and this is a proven truth. The whole of his work style give a different dimension as also a new philosophy. He viewed everything in a different perspective and could create simultaneously a force in his works. Really a rhythm is observable in the force of the lines used by Ramkinkar. His water colour landscapes are at the same time sensitive, connected with earth colour and inspired by Indian touch. His chief objective was taken the tradition out and form a new flow. Consequently a deformative language has automatically been created in his water colour landscapes. In Ramkinkar's painting colour has been reduced to the minimum. In some cases the sceneries are based

58 Arjun Bhattacharya is a versatile genius contemporary free-lance artist who lives and works in Kolkota.

on lines only. Sometimes he made this colourful world colourful through two tones or colours. It would seem that colour is unnecessary. His work is estimated sans any foreign influence. The watercolour landscapes done by him does not only belong to the world of watercolour landscapes; it rather spread to the horizon the languages of colour. The spontaneity of brush use created tonal variation. The quality of indigenous soil and soil texture are prominent in his paintings. The lines work as if the life of paintings. His monochrome works proved that Ramkinkar's vision was colourful. In a word his works started a modern chapter. Certainly through his watercolour landscape study Ramkinkar Baij offered us a new language that was created through seeing and realizing. Though the seeing were very simple, a every moment those became more healthy through realization. Some of his works which do not have tonal variations but those have variations in line. A bit of explanation will clarify the matter. Ramkinkar Baij plan fully did not create layer or tone. Rather he clarified the difference through the creations of depth and volume while drawing lines. Certainly a motion was observable in his lines and thence was created the emotion. On one hand it may be said in his paintings Ramkinkar Baij incorporated the indigenous qualities and avoided western culture as far as practicable. The occidental touch in his paintings was actually the reflection of his subconscious or unconscious mind.

Visual arts are actually a sub-family in the field of *Liberal Arts and Cognitive Sciences*. If one has the opportunity to do a simultaneous-study of its practical and theoretical nuances in detail then one would realize how interdependent

and relative each of these different branches are. However, each of these branches themselves are highly-specialized in their own accord.

For instance let us take our chief point of discussion as an example. The platform of Visual-Arts can further be subdivided into several areas. Painting the first sub-division of this field can also be subdivided into further subcategories.

The observations & comments Shri S.Anil.Kr.Singh (Manipur) 'Alumni-History of Art-Visva Bharati-Santiniketan'

Depictions of landscapes have always been there in the Indian context. For instance, if one observes the baas-relief sculptures etched on the temples and other structures in the different parts of South & South-East Asia, one will always find some features of this kind. Even though (mostly) the chief focus of these works has been on the characters or subjects of religious-mythological background, the landscape have always been there as an item of back drop.

Finally when we arrive at a time when we actually get to see the actual paintings in particular (and there are several styles). They each had different points of origination and evolution.

Whereas the schools of *Rajput*, *Pahari*, *Kangra*, and *Mughal* and so on had all developed from approximately 16th century onwards, the *Deccan* school had originated a bit earlier. This is the point from where onwards we get to see actual paintings on various subjects. As mentioned before, the landscape in these works has been as backgrounds to the actual subjects their portrayal can

certainly be a point of mention. The works of Mughal school are particularly rather vivid and detailed in their depictions of plain lands, mountains, rivers and other forms of flora and fauna.

Prior to these styles we can also mention the cave paintings and murals which were found in various places of this subcontinent. For example, the works at Ajanta and Ellora too belie these features. Here too the portrayal of nature and the land & river scapes (albeit as a backdrop no doubt) has been very powerful.

However, in all these genres, we find the portrayals to be rather three-tier or two-tier in nature. There is no conscious effort to present them in the three dimensional illusion. To be precise, there is no point where we can find a gradual receding visionary optical illusion which would make it seem that the horizon is fading into the background.

The advent of European invasion brought with it the concept of landscape as an individual item for the first time. Even though the Europeans had arrived here chiefly with the purpose of trading and commerce, their natural sense of exploration and query had taken them up to many an unexplored avenue (It should be remembered here that the early explorers and inquisitive travelers usually accompanied traders and conquerors — very few of them arrived individually). For the sake of keeping records these officials had brought along with them quite a few skillful painters for the sake of keeping records and so on (in those days there were no other methods available for the purpose of

keeping visual records). However, they also trained some local artists for the same purpose. These 'company painters' of the colonial period were revered by not only the Europeans but by the local rulers too for their clarity and near realistic skillful depictions. Gradually the local artists also started getting influenced by these styles.

Comments by Lokendra Arambham

The three prominent artists *Debi Prasad Roychowdhury*, *Gopal Ghose* & *Chintamani Kar* initially had started from the platform of painting. Later on they had gradually shifted to the field of sculpture. The artists who are coming into this deliberation regarding the comparison with *Ramkinkar Baij* are all members of the same epoch. Therefore, their influences and traditions will naturally have the same kind of inclinations. It has got to be remembered that they all had absorbed similar kind of experiences and traditions of the past. At the same time they are aware of the new things that are happening around them. They have acquired a new kind of sensitivity which is very modern or so to say contemporary to their times.

Did any of them do any work which was typically traditionalist so as to say?

When do they paint?

They paint when they have a fundamental interplay of passion and imagination inside them. Only when their souls are turned on they get engaged in this kind of activity. So the essential question is what are their motivating factors? Do they do it do it consciously or is there a subconscious flow which gets generated

inside them of which they become aware only when they completely into the process or is almost on the brink of finishing it?

The artists other than *Ramkinkar* were all basically steeped in urbanity whereas he was much more connected to the soil. (This fact is corroborated by several articles and writings by several eminent stalwarts of this field). In his younger days *Ramkinkar* used to imitate calendar-art which in those days used to depend a lot upon the typical traditional painting styles of the region or the locality from where they used to originate. Having voluminous and capacious amounts of colour to make them more gaudy and attractive from the layman's point of view was an inclination these used to have. Regarding *Ramkinkar* this might have been the case since he used to imitate them. Finally when he got to the stage where he started do posters and background paintings, this inclination of his continued, because these modes did demand that style. The others had grounding in the middle class based education which in those days was pretty typecast. The folk arts of Bankura had definitely inspired him a lot. Along with those traditional styles there was something else too which had made him move along the creative lines the way he had done. His tragic encounter with his self and his other experiences of his life had also done their fare share. He never belonged to the approved discourses of the society. He was a rebel. Society is never much tolerant of the rebels. Perhaps from the contemporary viewpoint of twenty-first century it's rather hard to believe, but times in those days were even much more unforgiving. His experiences in his life and his rather unconventional life style (some might term it as revolutionary) had

raised many an eyebrow and generated many a protest to which he didn't pay any heed at all. He went along on his own which was belied in the styles of his painting too. The radicalism seen in his work may have come from the fact that in return he too disapproved the naturally followed styles of his society. He, it seemed, refused to follow the footsteps of his predecessors and be a member in the pack to which his peers belonged negating the actual principals and methods which they adhered to. Your intense physiological activity can generate a lot of energy in you which must be harnessed, resulting in a didacticism of positivity. He finished his works with a speed and energy which is very much apparent in his style. He never looked back. His contemporaries do corroborate this fact. Once a particular work of his was done, he moved forward and went ahead with the next one never wondering about their effect or whether there could be any necessity for any rectification, any remedial effort at all. His dynamism had a lot of similarities with the creations of **Rabindranath Tagore**. Not at all tepid and very much refreshing, they would incite you to come back again and again to his works for rejuvenation of the self. He was a minimalist by nature. Minimum colours, minimum amount of complexities; he kept everything to a minimum. It is very much apparent from his work that he put the colours with his brush first and then later on he gave them a periphery by outlining them with the back of his brush by dipping into black ink. It is as if his inner sculptor self was very much conscious about the fact that a periphery is always easy to the viewer's eyes.