

Chapter 7

Watercolour Landscape: A Comparative study on the work of Ramkinkar Baij, Gopal Ghose and Sailoz Mookherjea

Ramkinkar's rebellion was against himself; he renewed himself constantly. His energy, perception, education and thinking thrived on questioning existing structures, both within himself and beyond. He was not unaware of the modernist experiments happening in Europe and elsewhere. He imbibed the spirit of all, neither discarding anything nor preaching to his students to reject the traditions of Santiniketan. On the contrary, he evolved as an artist, and created works that stylistically opposed the fundamental styles, rules and philosophy of expression of traditional work.

His construction of the painting started without any preliminary drawings, since the whole surface of the canvas/paper became a playground to realize his ideas.

The flow of Ramkinkar's work was so deeply rooted in his mind and nature that no duality was ever found in his works. He offered such simplicity to any composition that those expose transparency, one of the greatest characteristic features of rigid personality. In every landscape we would find side by side with calmness, a spontaneous feature of transgression in various surfaces. Ramkinkar never copied anybody. Though he followed someone

unconsciously it is never evident. He always kept himself aloof as a separate individual. Therefore, though his arts created in the forty's, fifties and sixties of the 20th century his art is ever adorable in ever the first half of 21st century. A closer scrutiny of the application of water colour sixty or seventy years ago would reveal that it is apparent for being created yesterday. Ramkinkar looks upon everything as a form—not in outline. Everything existing in this universe appears three dimensional to him. He would often say “there is no line in nature, everything is in form”. It is we who have drawn line and tried to capture everything in circles.

Ramkinkar simply tried to express the emotional response through his works of what he saw. Though his works always contain compactness and it was brought about consciously or unconsciously.

The patterns of living of Ramkinkar was different from the other artist those who belongs to his time/arena. Only one can find out a striking similarity with the other famous artist named Gopal Ghose. Ramkinkar had lived most of his life in the cloistered atmosphere of a monastic university in a natural setting in Santiniketan whereas Gopal Ghose had lived much of his adult life in a bustling metropolis. Their approach to art & life, however, had much is common. They were both eccentrics who did not conform to standard norms and could not careless of what others think of them. In their sober moments they took great interest in what went around on them.

They were personally very cordial and friendly to everyone. Their love for nature was pantheistic but they both understood the bond had broken and human beings had betrayed nature was bent on destroying it. Their works are infused with this discord and do not project a view of harmony. Their awareness of disharmony within and without marks them out as 20th century moderns. Their non-formal approach in search of meaningful form is also another indicator.

In 1930 onwards Ramkinkar along with his classmates visited Nepal, Rajgir, Baijnath and many places. The hilly landscape was a little bit lush and less stern. Suddenly in Rajgir his painterly inhabitation was swept away by a mighty onrush of wind, as it were. His landscapes were submerged in contrasting colours. Lines were just suggestions of shapes. Yet there is a remnant of essential resemblance. The landscapes that he subsequently did of Rajasthan, Baijnath and the Puri coast or the various states of India manifest a particular locality. Even the weather conditions, the warmth of the sun and variations of the pace of the wind can almost be felt. The treatment did not (remain /confined) two dimensional. It became three dimensional and general emphasis is on the expansiveness of space. Apart from the Birbhum, Bankura terrain landscape series we may notice bird series, horse series works. Many times people come into his paintings, but generally they are kept out of it. In oil, e uses locally available dust with the gum adhesive to create a variety of expressive textures while in water colours the intense luminosity of the contrasting hues create vision airy effects.

To gratify his unquenchable thirst for beauty, he turned to nature, which alone could often him infinite varieties of form and pattern. In fact, Ramkinkar Baij is the first successful painter of nature in modern India. When one compares Ramkinkar Baij to any landscape painter of the West one can easily discern a similarity in attitude towards nature. Landscape as a theme is surprisingly lacking in Indian art, both ancient and medieval. In modern times a few landscape paintings by Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagore are all we have. Ramkinkar was the first to give us an abundance of pictures exclusively devoted to nature. The new revaluation of nature that we find in his paintings has hardly any parallel in Western Art either. A parallel can however be found in recent Bengali literature. After Rabindranath Tagore there has been a new interpretation of nature in literature. For instance the novelist, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay (the author of Pather Panchali) and the poet Jibanananda Das in completely different ways interpreted nature in their own individual languages. It was a breath of fresh air blown into Bengali literature. Ramkinkar Baij is the first successful interpreter of nature in the field of visual art. Such an example of originality, free from any semblance of imitation, is really, rare in modern Indian Art. Yet his art has been enriched by the mainstreams of world art. While he has some admiration for Abanindranath's art, he has the same respect for the work of Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso and other Western artists. In his art we find a strange synthesis of all his impressions of their arts, and the result is something that is different and reaches beyond them. He never hesitates to acknowledge his indebtedness while pursuing a lonely and original course.

Gopal Ghose

Although Ramkinkar has in some of his landscapes grasped mood but what becomes conspicuous in his works was chiefly rhythm and consciousness. In Gopal Ghose's landscapes though mood is paramount he never clung to mood only for form. In his landscapes Ghose had a tendency to tell stories which Ramkinkar never indulged in. Ramkinkar used to classify his water colours in the category of forms and shapes.



FIGURE 140 Two landscapes by Gopal Ghose, mixed media on paper. Collections: Private

According to Jaya Appasamy- Ramkinkar received many honours in his last years and was in his lifetime something of a legend. But the praise of the world and the material benefits these brought hardly mattered to him. One remembers him as a lonely figure walking through the sunlit Santiniketan landscape with his sketching materials in a bag. The baked terrain and the lustrous *Shimool* flowers, the rustling palms and the lean village dog these were the sources of his form and colour. One remembers him perched high on a scaffold at work on a gigantic sculpture, scorched by the summer sun, singing aloud as he worked.

Probably no artist in India had loved landscapes and particularly Indian landscapes as he did in recent times. Only his huge works can be comparable with the works of the Gopal Ghose who is contemporary of his and a friend also. No one has been able to point out its majesty and grandeur as he has. The tradition of landscapes is rather new to Indian. Unlike East Asia and later the west, landscape was never painted separately. It was Abanindranath Tagore, through Okakura perhaps, who understood the value of landscape painting. Since his times Indian artists have woken up to the possibility and the significance of it. Ramkinkar Baij's paintings are loaded with emotion but although there are layers of sensitive feelings expressed they are rarely sentimental.

As like Ramkinkar Gopal Ghose was also a romantic visionary, both are pantheist of sorts and do not believe in mechanical determination. Trees, birds and mountains, the sea, valleys and clouds have entered their works and they have passionately tried to capture nature's various moods- the change of light that effect to the brightness of the hues. Even their lines seem to dance to the rhythm of their applied colours.

Gopal Ghose was an artist who had devoted to landscape painting. He was born in Calcutta on 5th December 1913. His childhood was spent in Simla where his father had a career in the military services with the rank of captain. He grew up amidst a great variety of silent forms, the forms of Nature. He then spent a part of his formative years at Allahabad from where he did his

matriculation in 1930. Later he went on to study at Maharaja School of Arts & Crafts, Jaipur under the tutelage of Sailendranath Dey, the disciple of Abanindranath Tagore from 1931-35. Despite standing first in the 4th year he didn't finish the course and went on to Madras School Art where he did not finish his course also. He has a restless spirit as evident from his student Shri Vishnu Das. Again and later, the first changing blues of Madras Sea added to this vast colourful treasury of formal experience. This mine of images is freely drawn upon, takes significant form in his art to produce a new world of vision and design. He used softly subtle and carefully controlled lines in all of his works. He learned about the delicacy from his teacher Sailendranath Dey and learnt three dimensional drawing from D.P.Roychowdhury. Unlike the Bengal School which followed wash painting he has painted in opaque areas colours. The colour patterns are subdued and have a lyrical dreamy atmosphere.



FIGURE 141 Landscape by Gopal Ghose, mixed media on paper. Collection: Private

He was among the significant painters whose work spans the period of transition. He has always been very prolific working in media which are

comparatively delicate -water colour, pastel, pen and ink and brush. In these media he evolved a highly personal language distinct from the schools and tendencies of his time mainly the Bengal School tradition. Gopal Ghose drew his strength from a direct observation of nature; he sketched from life and nature incessantly filling innumerable notebooks with his drawings. The two important aspects of his work are firstly his achievements as a draughtsman where he adopts a linear mode, and secondly his work as a colourist.

Gopal Ghose seems to have been influenced to some degree both by the Impressionists and the Expressionists and by artists like Turner and Degas. But it is important to notice that he took an independent course at a period when the Bengal School style was clearly dominant. He was not confounded by the call for "Indianness", rather he went direct to his source of inspiration which was nature, and developed an individual style. Gopal Ghose's subjects are characteristic; they are chosen vignettes from the landscape around us and include familiar birds and animals, trees and plants.

According to Jaya Appasamy ... "However Gopal Ghose's style is also noticeably lyrical, it has a certain poetry which he shared with the artistic output of the period. He is contemporary with artists like B.C.Sanyal, Sailoz Mookherjea, and K.K.Hebber - and he had in common with them an interest in drawing. But where as these artists generally chose figurative subjects and pastoral scenes. Gopal Ghose most often depicted landscapes and its essence. His drawing is not documentary or rhythmic; his long flowing lines-are more

delicate and wayward than theirs and may owe something to Far Eastern sources. His way of seeing could be considered oriental, especially his use of line which is sometimes spare or broken, at others attenuated. He shows an interest in textures to build up tonal areas. When we compare his work to some of his contemporaries in Bengal such as Nirode Majumder or Pradosh Das Gupta his work appears to be more spontaneous and less cerebral. It is first last only a visual statement and captures an ephemeral mood. Gopal Ghose traveled in India extensively, seeing a good deal of it on bicycle. He had lived at different periods of his life in Simla, Banaras and Madras, and was familiar with the Indian landscape. His pictures were generally small and low priced, but his output was enormous.”.....

We are very much accustomed with that Gopal Ghose was a master in drawing. His drawings include all aspects of nature, especially trees, flowers and the Indian terrain. Figures and portraiture were less usual, often the figures in his pictures are minute, they are seen as part of the landscape as in Chinese art. Gopal Ghose explored drawing and his drawings show great variety. Sometimes they are minimal and consist of a single enclosing line, very spare, terse and vibrant. In another style the lines are enjoyed for themselves. They are long and straggling of following. Often there is repetition and hatching, expressing certain restlessness. The lines may build up texture and convey a feeling for the surfaces of objects. Often his sketches are of brush lines supported with watercolour. The drawing in black tones is seen against the empty space of the page. The artist practiced drawing regularly very much as

a musician might practice music and this constant activity was no doubt the source of spontaneity and a memorizing of forms.

Gopal Ghose was also a great colourist. His paintings are in watercolour, tempera and in pastel. He had a special feeling for media which are comparatively slight. Sometimes he mixed two media such as watercolour and pastel. His paintings are generally small in size, so that one may say they have a miniature quality. But their aim is impressionistic, that is, to capture the fleeting mystery of colour that results from the incidence of light of nature. His attitude towards nature is that of a contemplative, nature is for him the beginning and the end of all forms. She is his subject matter par excellence; inexhaustible, sometimes tender and tantalizing, at others brooding, earthy and profound. Gopal Ghose's colour sense was unique. His palette especially favoured gentle misty shades broken by patches of sharp colour. The strokes of the brush or crayon had an expressionistic scribbling quality though the general effect of his landscapes is lyrical rather than distraught. His appeal is always to the senses rather than to the intellect and so this artist may also be considered romantic.

Again, in his art we find the granite quality of classic composition, an interest in the free textures of lines; and his treatment of colours the delicate control of orchestral music. Here a question arises from different points of view/perspectives – “Is it not surprising then that an artist who refuses to be carried away by fashion, and who has a superb craftsmanship and an almost ethereal

colour sense, should be one of the most problematic to writers on modern art?"

Because of his superior skill Gopal Ghose has always been able to explore new ground and move from one technique to another and from one medium to another with utmost facility. And in each we find a unique fusion of the artist's personality with his work and its conscious synthesis into new art forms. In fact, there is hardly any artist in modern India as prolific as Gopal Ghose. His genius is marked not only by the sublimity of his works but also by their apparently endless number. This profusion of creativity in different media has occurred periodically throughout the artist's life. Whenever he has chosen a medium and become proficient in it, there has been a tremendous release of his inner fire. Take his water colours, temperas, or pastels; we find him running riot in each; a sumptuous process of the liberation of the élan that constitutes the artist's personality. It is a great regret/pity that although Gopal Ghose's work deserves greater recognition than it has received, he is not very well known outside of Bengal.

Gopal Ghose's art unfolds a whole gamut of colours in all possible nuances and shades. Little wonder then that nature, that vast repository of all colours, should inevitably play a dominant part in his art. Again, he moves nature not for any superficial or 'easy beauty' that has been the undoing of many an artist and tied down their art to pedestrian levels but as the source of formal expression. His quest has been to capture the fleeting mystery of colour that

results from the incidence of light on nature. His landscapes are thus not the topographies of particular places, but contemplations of the varying moods of nature.

Every artist is a product of the social milieu of his time and this environment is thought to determine his basic awareness. According to some critics, the Calcutta School is the origin of Gopal Ghose's unique approach to art. But no school can claim to be the sole maker of a great artist. The truth lays rather the other way round. Often a school follows a great artist, as the Bengal School grew around Abanindranath Tagore. Many artists adopted the ideals of the 'Calcutta School' like people embracing a new branch of a religious faith. Judged from this angle, the Calcutta School instead of being called a school should be termed an association of rebel artists professing a new attitude to art. But each one's approach to art was so widely different that it is not possible to discover a common basis for their artistic aims. Like diverse people joining together for political convenience they came together with a common interest, and when that interest was served, or rather when their diversity began to make, itself felt, they had to break apart and go their individual ways. Gopal Ghose came under the banner of this group to escape the oppressive authority of the Bengal School. But rebellion for rebellion's sake has never been his credo; to a creative artist such an aim makes no sense. So, of his own accord, Gopal Ghose also broke away from this group and, like a river, has ever since cut his own path through unknown terrain.

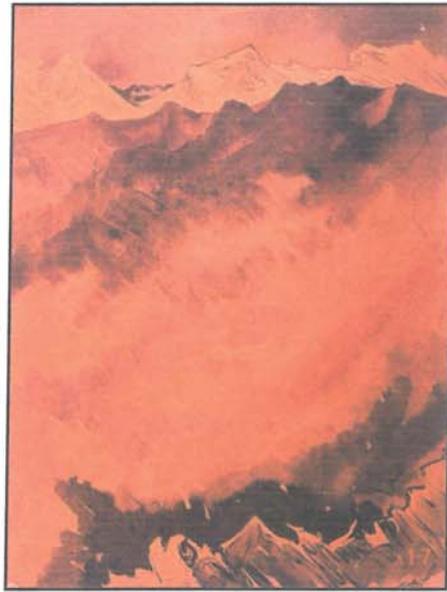


FIGURE 142 Himalayan landscape, watercolour on paper by Gopal Ghose. Collection: Ossian

Considering the distinctive features of his art, Gopal Ghose is undoubtedly a rebel artist. Though he was influenced at the beginning of his life by the techniques and art forms of the great masters of the Bengal School, he had, in the very qualities of his mental endowment the urge to build beyond these influences, and to create his own style. Once he was free of these influences, his style began to unfold; he shaped and developed his own art forms and technique. If we compare the contemporary art forms of the Calcutta Group with his recent works we would be amazed to find how far he has traveled and how he has developed a new language of art forms. The evolution of infinite varieties of landscape from created out of line and colour, which was his forte from the very start, constitutes the major output and the essence of his art. “He has an extraordinary gift of drawing” said Abanindranath Tagore. This superb skill was really a gift, for at the very beginning of his art life we find

him a master in drawing. During the first phases of his life, however, we find his lines very sensitive and the colours loud. In his later works these have been largely controlled, the lines and colours do not proclaim themselves, they fuse together to convey a deeper significance and like pure music strike deeper chords in the spectator's mind. These compositions, however, are not the results of recent or new realizations of his art experience. Rather they belong to the depths of the unconscious where numberless events and images from the past contribute to the very stuff of his unconscious. From this vast mine of rich experience and recollection fragments chosen unconsciously, which ultimately take the shape of his paintings. I quote below T.S Eliot's words about the mystery of imagery during a poetic creation.

“Only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood. Why, for all of us, out of all that we are, have heard, seen, felt in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others? The song of one bird, the leap of one fish, at a particular place and time, the scent of one flower, an old woman on a German mountain path. Six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at a small French railway junction where there was a water mill; such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they came to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer. We might just as well ask why when we try to recall visually some periods in the past, we find in our memory just the few meager arbitrarily chosen set of snapshots that we find there, the faded poor souvenirs of passionate moments.”

The mystery of Gopal Ghose's recent art lies in the interplay of images born from the artist's unconscious. In his boyhood spent in Simla, Gopal Ghose grew up amidst an uninhibited feast of silent forms of Nature. Later, in Banaras, the lanes by lanes, the inimitable and ancient river- front, and the temple bells cast indelible impressions on his memory. Still later, when he visited Jaipur, the granite beauty of colourful arid expanses left another set of impressions in striking contrast to the former ones. Again and later, the fast changing blues of the Madras Sea added to this vast colourful treasury of formal experience. This mine of images is freely drawn upon, and takes significant form in his art to produce a new world of vision and design. In his recent works he uses softer and carefully controlled lines. The colour patterns are subdued and have a lyrical dreamy atmosphere.

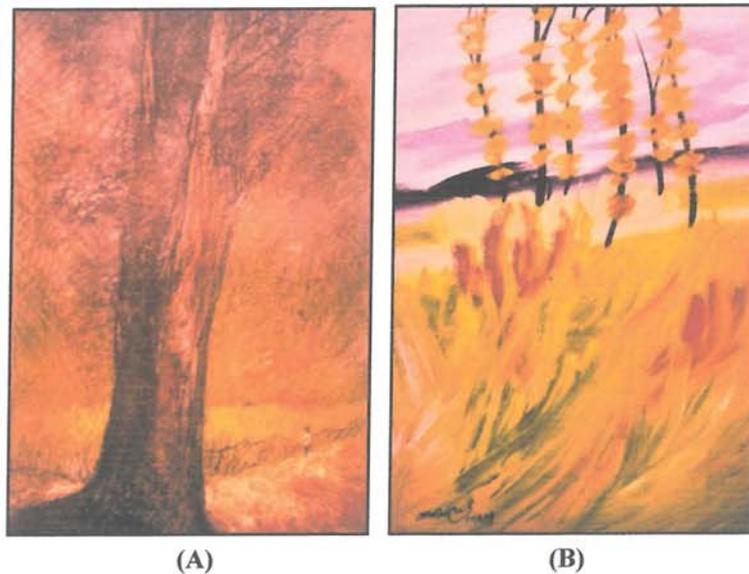


FIGURE 143(A) A pastel work landscape.
(B) Mixed media landscape. Collections: Akar Prakar Art Gallery.

As a young man Ghose once traveled all over India on a bicycle, drinking his fill of Nature's bounty. He was felicitated by that untiring champion of youth,

Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore blessed him with the words of a sage, “You have set out to see India through the eyes of an artist, I hope the world will someday see its grandeur through your works.” These were prophetic words. Through his innumerable paintings we today witness and enjoy the natural beauty of India’s abundant landscapes. As a painter he has co conserved his energies solely towards one end, the production of pictures. His works are entirely imaginary; visions recreated from a storehouse of forms that are part of experience and memory. Today when art is often referential and esoteric Gopal Ghose’s work is direct and straightforward. It is an art made casually from elements that all of us see and know, yet out of this everyday material is created something rare and special. Gopal Ghose’s life and work show a remarkable unity, he lives and paints according to his beliefs.

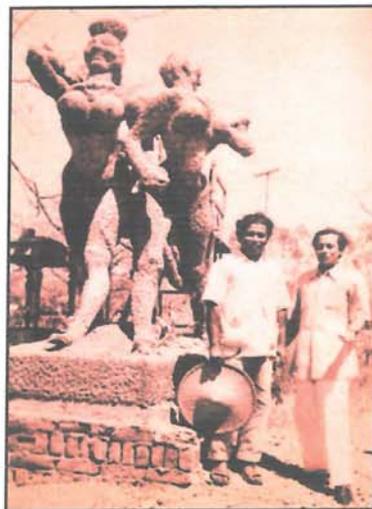
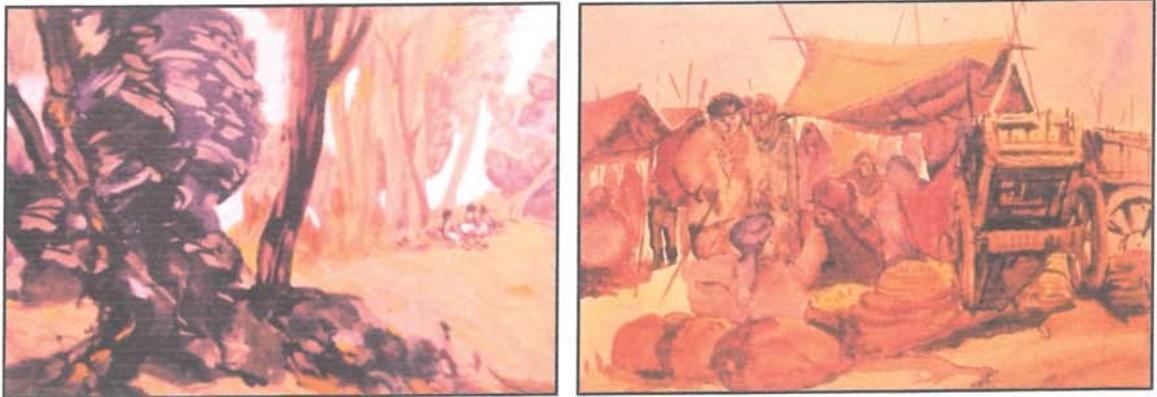


FIGURE 144 Ramkinkar Baij with Gopal Ghose in front of “Mill Call” sculpture.
Collection: Private.

Sailoz Mookherjea

Sailoz Mookherjea is a painter who spans the transition from the past to the present. His work seen against the art environment that dominated the Indian

scene before independence and the modern phases of art that arose after it, defines his role. He was a bridge, a connecting link and a mediator, his art partakes of and unites the old and the new.



(A)

(B)

**FIGURE 145(A) Picnic landscape, watercolour & mixed media on paper.
(B) A Village Bazar landscape, watercolour on paper. Collections: Private.**

Sailoz had many characteristics associated with Bengal School and nineteenth century romanticism. His paintings have firstly, a clear subject matter, generally the kind of subject which was considered “artistic”; women at leisure, pastoral idylls, landscapes with ruins and so on. But if he chose his scenes from reality there were imbued with a new poetry, though based on elements of the real world his pictures were in essence visionary. His women are all heroines of whose frail beauty we catch a fluting glimpse, his landscapes are suffused with the nostalgia of things remembered that are no more. Sailoz also evolved a form of expression suitable to these themes which emphasized the romantic view of life and the lyrical nature of his art.

A monograph was published on Sailoz Mookherjee from Lalit Kala Akademi in the year 1966 where the write (Jaya Appasamy) has written about the artist

- "His style is original and does not resemble that of earlier painters but is connected to theirs by his aim which was to create a poetic beauty. The same intention is seen for instance in the work of Abanindranath Tagore or so late a painting as Amrita Sher-Gil. On the other hand, Sailoz is very modern"

Sailoz's contemporaneity is seen especially in a free and spontaneous handling of his media. His questions older conventions and his painterly, pseudo – careless treatment is typical. Here figures are not figures but patches of pigment; garments, hair, trees, are liberated colour. His thin brush sweeps across spaces and whips up shapes with art nouveau exuberance. He prefers suggestion to statement and his details are only the right amount of decoration. This attitude towards paint and brush is very modern. It is uninhibited and enthusiastic, restless and momentary.

Again Jaya Appasamy has mentioned in this (monograph) write up – "the style of Sailoz Mookherjea is a natural reflection of the artist's personality. Sailoz was a small active man, full of curiosity and keen sense of observation. He went through life, with a slightly bohemian air enjoying it to the full – perhaps sensing too that life was too brief for perfection. (In the nineteenth century we see the artist's personality becoming a major importance. Not only was he not anonymous, he was a figure with a special aura. As a result of industrialization there was the tendency to isolate the fine arts from crafts as a superior function and for the artist to consider himself the spokesman of his age.) Sailoz had a large circle of friends was able to find delight in all of them.

He was an extremely well informed man, a remarkable conversationalist and a guest whom it was a delight to entertain. His courtesy and charm, curiosity and richly descriptive talk made him a delightful companion both at work and at home.

Sailoz studied art carefully and never lost the opportunity to learn from ancient works. His enquiry into folk art, his visit to Europe and the European galleries were experiences which were a strong inspiration. He did not work hard and long but rather intensely. His art took the form of small lyrical gems that had been created spontaneously rather than laboriously contrived. The result of impetuosity and improvisation was that his output was uneven.

Sailoz looked at life and commented on it with characteristic, favour and exaggeration. It was an inevitable necessity for him to garnish the truth and discover beauty; and this poetisation of the concrete is seen in his painting where 'everything was less present than represented, more; everything was less represented than recalled.' For while his art is evanescent and unreal it proclaims the transience and vanity of all things other than the observer's mind. From the stream of time the artist rescues these cameos, one cannot help sighing at their frailty, and they are tinged with vague melancholy and Urdu Gazal."

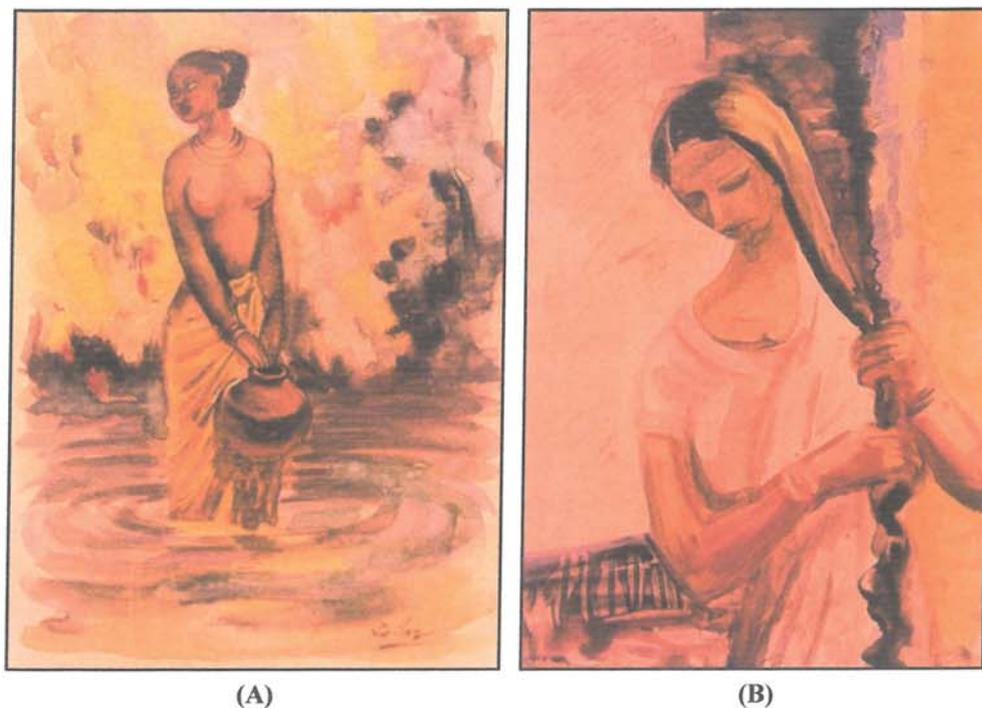


FIGURE 146(A) A village girl carrying water with a pitcher, watercolour on paper.
 (B) Toileting, watercolour on paper. Collections: Private

Though Sailoz's main medium was oil painting but simultaneously he had produced lot of water colour landscapes which was not so much transparent like Ramkinkar Baij – opaque quickly always remains. It is useful, however, to begin with a survey of his drawings. The drawings and sketches are of several kinds. Firstly there are the studies of folk art which he made for an album. These are in colour and finished with black lines. The motifs and his interpretation of them show that he was not so much interested in form as in flat coloured shapes. His brush lines do not repeat the originals but prefer to be vivacious and decorative.

Of another kind are the India ink sketches he made of local scenes for the Sunday papers in Delhi. The treatment here is very lively and calligraphic and

creates an all over pattern. He uses a medium brush which freely delineates figures and surroundings. He does not dwell on a motif; rather the environment itself is his subject. In these drawings the emphasis is on capturing the mood and atmosphere of a locality and this is achieved with the immediacy and freshness of on – the – spot observation.

Another kind of sketch Sailoz practiced is tonal. Here he uses even so sharp an instrument as a pencil to build up areas of varying dark and light tone in which further areas of blackness or whiteness appear. This is a very painterly optic type of drawing, here objects are indistinct and connected and interrelated by tone which functions almost like colour. In very late sketches Sailoz gets practically the same effect in reverse by painting on a board, then scoring and scribbling on its surface. In a different medium are those done in coloured inks with a blunt ‘pen’, resulting in drawings and doodles of a lively and variegated texture. All of these methods call attention to the surface of the drawing. The line work is distributed to form areas of varying density creating a colouristic all over tonal patterns.

Sailoz is one of the first Indian painters to use oil colour with understanding. Confidence is even virtuosity. His colour is generally very thin, lucid and luminous; his mastery of the medium is seen especially in his refined handling of transparent hues where the white of the canvas or of other colours shines through. His colour juxtapositions are adventurous and sophisticated, each bit always alive and resonant yet mingling with others in a new harmony. Sailoz’s

oil compositions are his main work. He painted landscapes, figure subjects and occasionally portraits and still lifes. In his treatment of landscape he creates spaces organically by the movement of colour rather than by any clearly indicated recession. The trees evoke a fairy – tale atmosphere and provide the setting for some poetic event. Often the whole composition surges with rhythm, now delicate and grave now tumultuous and free. His arrangements are usually asymmetric and daringly balanced. See for instance **Buffaloes** or **Bathing Day**.

Figures in his compositions are most often not large but participate in a ‘scene’ with architecture and landscape. In his treatment of figures he does not dwell on their corporeality. There is no modelling, the brush drawing is flowing and makes coloured silhouettes rather than builds form. This surface is finished with decoration or with sharp white and black lines. He is keep to establish his theme through mood and colour, through atmosphere and allusion and not through a mere enumeration of lifelike facts. For example in such a picture as *Windy Day*, the composition is a mere strip parallel to the picture’s edge. On a road proceeds a woman her veil blowing in the wind and a child, nude, almost like a hieroglyph. Beyond is a pale expanse of water in the sun, its irregular contours creates a splurge of movement, to the left is a water buffalo and further beyond the light green mustard fields lean to the horizon. A few wind tossed trees add to the feeling of a cool crisp morning when the whole earth is swept by a spring breeze. The painting is a fleeting momentary vision; it thrills us by its lack of calculation, by its colour which is clear and cool and by its lyricism and spontaneity. In such a work the artist refers not to what he

has seen but to the recesses of his intuitive being, the painting is born like an outburst of song, and has no **raison d'être** other than its own beauty.

Sailoz Mookherjea, one might say, has a certain art nouveau aim; his art is for art's sake. This attitude is seen both in his choice of subject, the subject matter here is an aspect of style, and in his presentation of it. Rajasthani women are here because they are exotic and picturesque so also saracenic architecture combines visual motifs with romantic historical associations. The trees of his paintings cannot be identified too closely, they are sheer decoration. While Sailoz's very strength lay in his lyricism, his lyricism itself leaned a little on associations and allusions. Only in a few of his last works does he give up the subject matter as a point of departure. In his best works however the artist goes beyond anything the theme alone could suggest. He reaches a purely abstract beauty where colour and movement, tension and texture, line and space exist by themselves. The fine qualities of his art seen in **Washing Day, Shahnai, Lonely Pines, Summer** and similar works.

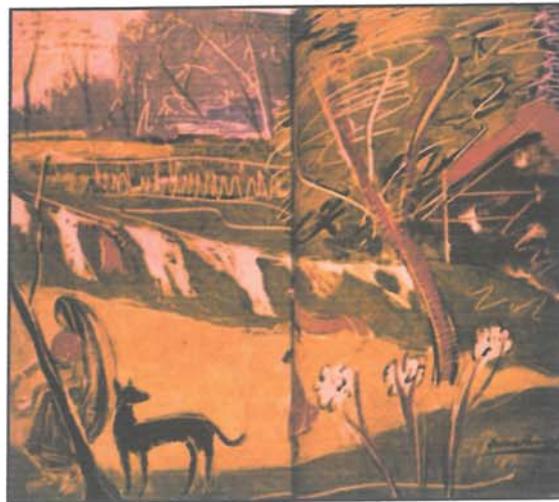


FIGURE 147 Washing day, watercolour and mixed media on paper.
Picture taken from *Lalit Kala Monologue*.

Sailoz Mookherjea's early works already show certain characteristic mannerisms though the style comes to fruition only in the late 1940s and 50s. His abandonment of descriptive drawing in favour of distortion, a rapid brush stroke and the dominance of colour is evident even in early works. Sailoz was an admirer of modern French art. Indeed a certain awareness of tradition and history is perhaps characteristic of the modern painter. He knows the past but is not confined by it; on the contrary, he is free to choose his own path. Sailoz examined the work of the great masters, whether Indian or foreign, with care and some paintings show traces of this admiration. A few writers have pointed out the influence of Matisse on his work; while no specific derivations come to mind one may agree that Matisse's style and colour confirmed those aspects of decorative treatment which Sailoz himself was interested in. Occasionally one also finds traces of a commercial practice in his use of white lines to separate or define form. Again some compositions and figures echo elements of Rajasthani art. Sailoz was the first to admit his respect of earlier art. He was able to use whatever he borrowed in a personal way and this is a capacity nature to a good painter. His style had a certain ease and casual grace, but this simplicity was the result of profound feeling and study.

Sailoz's oeuvre may be divided into three major periods. The earliest paintings are comparatively simple and open, clearly stated and have a plain motif. Among these should be mentioned a few works done in Europe such as the portrait of the **Dutch Girl and Lane in Italy** (not reproduced) both dated in 1937. The beginning of his Delhi period is also characterized by this austerity;

Last on the Field and Buffaloes are fairly typical. The composition is singularly uncomplex; the subject often a landscape with figures or animals; the point of interest is in the foreground and the landscape tilts sharply to the horizon. The figures are almost in silhouette and their dark shapes are clear cut compared to later more complex forms. The colours are restricted to only a few tones with sharp contrasts.



FIGURE 148(A) Last on the field and Buffaloes, watercolour on paper.
(B) A Sunlit Day, Gouache on paper. Collections: Private

The art nouveau qualities of Sailoz's drawing are seen very clearly here, for there is no elaboration or subsidiary rhythm. We notice his use of curving lines and forms and how they become part of expression and movement especially in such paintings as Buffaloes and Bathing Day.

Sailoz's second period (1949-59) includes the mature phase of his art and the paintings of this decade represent consolidation of the style. His work is much more confident and loose, spontaneous and lyrical. The paintings are full of light and air and movement. We see his full unrestricted palette and the freedom and zest with which the artist plays with his colours. Sailoz was a

great colourist. These qualities are more evident in the landscape compositions like **Washing Day** but are also seen in figure paintings with no background like **Village Family**. Though the paintings in general are small they are full of verve and energy.

In his last years Sailoz developed a more extreme style using and accentuating rapidity of manner, and uninhibited brush work. The subject matter is virtually abandoned and the colours intermingle without boundaries, there is extensive scribbling on the surface of the picture with the blunt end of the brush. These result in a kind of 'action painting' where the frenzy of the artist is recorded as surface texture; we see the increasing importance of the artistic process. His fine colour sense never deserted him and the pictures now assumed a new complexity. There was no theme or the theme is subordinate to a rich, variegated, lush, freely etched surface; good examples of this type are **Forest** and **Stupas on the Way to Tibet**. Sailoz's death was untimely, for he was only 53 and perhaps on the threshold of a new phase. His paintings though not many in number are important as harbingers of the new attitude towards painting and the 'art about art' of the mid-twentieth century.

Sailoz taught art for a number of years in Delhi. To aspiring young artists he was ever kind and regaled his classes with stories and anecdotes. His students loved him unreservedly for to them he was all an artist should be; perhaps he seemed closer to them because of his unconcealed weaknesses. His teaching was inspiring because of his enthusiasm for art, his rich personality and many sided experience.

Sailoz Mookherjea left an indelible image on the memory of all who met him. His life was lonely and haphazard (he never married) but he retained an immense optimism which perhaps was a kind of protection. As an artist his taste was eclectic, his judgment sure and his ideas extremely liberal. By his life he showed what the ideal artist's life should be, immersed in the world and yet a witness of it, concerned with life only as the source of art.

Sailoz has to be considered one of the major figures in modern Indian art. In the 1940's he did indeed enjoy a reputation and popularity few Indian artists have since been able to rival. Today his work may seem to belong more to the past but as we have seen he had the capacity for renewal and adventure and was a painter leading to the present. Sailoz was proud to be an artist. There is a cold impersonality and ambiguity in modern art from which his work was free. His painting was vibrant and positive, clearly a result of his convictions and temperament; he rejected disappointment and difficulties. He was a man with the soul of a pilgrim, the hand of the artist, the eye of a poet.

European influence on Ramkinkar's works⁵⁹

Comparison with Paul Cezanne

With special care, Ramkinkar explored the properties of line, plane and colour and their interrelationships. He studied the effect of every kind of linear direction, the capacity of planes to create the sensation of depth of lines and planes. To create the illusion of three-dimensional form and space, Ramkinkar

⁵⁹ Book name: ART THROUGH THE AGES-FRER S.KLEINER,CHRISTIN.J. MAMIYA Richard G. Tansy Harcourt Collage Publishers. Chap-29 Page-922-924

focused on carefully selecting colours. He understood the visual properties hue, saturation, and value of different colours vary.



FIGURE 149 Cezanne's watercolour landscape with a little bit similarity of Ramkinkar's.

Cool colours tend to recede, while warm ones advance. By applying to the canvas small patches of juxtaposed colours, some advancing and some receding, Cezanne created volume and spatial depth in his works. On occasion, the artist depicted objects chiefly in one hue achieved convincing solidity by modulating the intensity (saturation). At other times, he juxtaposed contrasting colours- for example, green, yellow and vermilion (red)- of like saturation (usually in the middle range, rather than the highest intensity) to compose specific objects.

Nepal landscape series are of many views Ramkinkar painted during early thirties. In this series of painting he replaced the transitory visual effects of changing atmospheric conditions, effects that occupied Ramkinkar, with a more concentrated, lengthier analysis of the colours in large lighted spaces. The main space stretches out behind and beyond the canvas plane and includes

numerous small elements, such as fields, houses, (and the viaduct at the far right), each seen from a slightly different view point. Above this shifting receding perspective rises the largest mass of all, the mountain, with effect achieved by equally stressing background and foreground contours-of being simultaneously near and far away. This portrayal approximates the actual experience a person observing such a view might have if apprehending the landscape forms piecemeal. The relative proportions of objects would vary, rather than being fixed by a strict one or two point perspective, such as that normally found in a photograph.

Cezanne immobilized the shifting colours of Impressionism into an array of clearly defined planes that compose the objects and spaces in his scene. Describing his method in a letter to a fellow painter, he wrote:

“Treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, everything in proper perspective so that each side of an object or plane is directed towards a central point. Lines parallel to the horizon give breadth that is a section of nature... Lines perpendicular to this horizon give depth. But nature for us men is more depth than surface, whence the need of introducing into our light vibrations, represented by reds and yellows, a sufficient amount of blue to give the impression of air.”



(A)

(B)

**FIGURE 150(A) Watercolour landscape by Cezanne. Collection: from the net.
(B) Watercolour landscape by Ramkinkar. Collection: N.G.M.A**

Almost same thing observed in the works of Ramkinkar too. Though little bit dissimilarities are there but the impression are like the same.

Ramkinkar's interest in the study of volume and solidity is evident from the disjunctures in the painting- the edges are continuous, and various objects seem to be depicted from different vantage points. In keeping with the modernist concern with the integrity of the painting surface, Ramkinkar's methods never allow viewers to disregard the actual two-dimensionality of the picture plane. In this manner, Ramkinkar achieved a remarkable feat- presenting viewers with two-dimensional images simultaneously.

Ramkinkar felt deeply the pain as well as the pleasure of human life. His belief that humans were powerless before the great natural forces of death and love and emotions associated with them- jealousy, loneliness, fear, love & affection, desire and despair- became the theme of most of his art. Because Ramkinkar's one of the goal was to describe the conditions of

“modern psychic life”, as he put it, Realist and Impressionist techniques were inappropriate, focusing as they did on the tangible world. In the spirit of Expressionism, Ramkinkar developed a style of putting colours, line and figural distortion to expressive ends.

The Chiaroscuro of Nature in Ramkinkar's Work

Ramkinkar found the link of association between natural landscapes. The artist's personal feelings and the work he created in what he call the 'Chiaroscuro of nature' a general term of those qualities of 'light bloom, freshness no one of which has yet been perfected on the paper of any painter in this world.' Chiaroscuro, thus understood, was also the chief source of the 'sentiment of nature', and his obsessive concern to embody it truthfully was the most important spiritual source of his pictorial originality. Chiaroscuro, as the vehicle of his feeling about landscape, could convert any place, however insignificant, from being a mere subject and perhaps a trivial one, into something deeper content and meaning, it could convert the modest scenery which he most enjoyed into a source of affecting images.



FIGURE 151 Two Kulu village watercolour landscapes where chiaroscuro of nature is clearly visible. Collections: N.G.M.A

In considering Ramkinkar's painting, it is therefore particularly important to recognize that natural landscape presents the artist particularly with two distinguishable, if indivisible, elements. There is the permanent or at least, stable material of which it is composed the earth and vegetation, the creature and objects which inhabit the scene, while affecting their appearance and behavior are these impalpable, volatile elements – light, an enveloping atmosphere, the moving air which modify the local colours and the tones, determine the level and character of the scene's illumination and direct the action and movement of everything able to move. If the stable elements in nature can be treated, metaphorically as being the landscape's body the Chiaroscuro and the moving air can be considered as the source of its changing mood or sentiment, as being the landscape's spirit. From that period in the history of European art when natural landscape become an independent and sufficient subject for painting, this quality and all its expensive implication has to be recognized. Whatever the philosophical and religious problems occasioned by the idea of a body mind / spirit duality in relation to man and his experience of the universe, an artistic dualism, if only for its practical consequences, has to be accepted as an unavoidable condition of the painters practice. Perception of the physical world depends upon light and in depicting nature light and form have to be differentiated. In the evolution of landscape painting a most significant stage was reached when the duality of form and light, from being an objective phenomenon and a matter of technique and style, become deeply involved in the painters sense of reality and in the current of his feelings. The subtle and

elusive union of light and form gradually gained control over Ramkinkar's work and his attempt to present landscape in terms of Chiaroscuro and the aerial movement which enhances its effects distinguishes him from the artists of the 20th Centuries, even those in whose pictures light had such an important function. They had exploited their interest in light through the established conventions of painting; Ramkinkar's obsession drove him to methods more unconventional than any art of landscape had yet known.



FIGURE 152 Flowering trees landscapes, during mid 1950's, watercolour on paper.
Collections: N.G.M.A

He may well have been the first painter, at any rate in India, to apply a word Chiaroscuro-hitherto to use in relation to art, to the appearance of nature. Moreover, although the Ramkinkar documents do not, I believe, contain any specific use of the word in relation to his or anyone else's emotional state- so connecting the range from light to darkness with the emotional gamut from joy to despair- there is at least the evidence provided not only by his pictures but in certain remarks such as his words to the journalist / art historian – “I draw in picture what I see in the labour of life, what I touch in murky darkness, I put that into sculpture.” So light, shadow and grades of tone were not merely

the means by which some object was pictorially modelled or given relief, not just an attribute if something seen, an element within the painter's control which could be a resource for dramatizing human behavior or enriching the sentiment of a subject as Caravaggio or Rembrandt has used it.



FIGURE 153(A) A village scene, watercolour on paper during 1950's.
(B) Seascape, watercolour on paper, 1951. Collections: N.G.M.A

The natural Chiaroscuro of landscape in its commonest aspects could transform the significance of a place. The three aspects of Chiaroscuro as natural phenomenon, as a pictorial device and as a metaphor for the range of human emotions- were at last, in such works as "Spring Greeting" to be so instinctively combined by Ramkinkar that for him landscape became, to an unprecedented degree an instrument of self confession.