

# Introduction

## Part A

“Art speaks its own language: It does not consist of words and its contents are not ideas, but forms and colours which assume the shape of an inner experience. The language of art is international.”—Stella Kramrisch. (Lectured on Art during 1920's and published in the Visva Bharati quarterly on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1924)

Love of nature and man's intimate communion with the beauties of natural forms, are <sup>as</sup> old as the history of human culture. Landscape paintings help us, while seated indoors, to have a peep into the outdoor life, to plumb the secrets of distant views, to soar into limitless extension of space before our gaze, to view the panorama of the Earth and of the heavens which opens before the eyes of man as he gazes before him in search of the secrets of nature. A landscape painting therefore, is a substitute for out-door- life without stirring out of the four corners of our indoor shelters. Yet, the study and enjoyment of landscape art sometimes persuades us to leave the comforts <sup>of</sup> our shelter in order to go out and directly taste the treasures and happiness of out-door life by a direct communion with nature. Skilful landscape painting beacons to us to undertake the adventure of a long journey, far away from our homes and to travel over hills and dales or to penetrate into impenetrable forests in order to taste the beauties of nature by a direct contact.

The scenic representations can be divided into different categories. One can be the presentation of a place where we build our homesteads and live our

daily life, another scene may present the place where we can indulge in our outdoor games and athletic sports, yet another, which gives us an extensive area suitable for our enjoyable walks and excursions, beneficial for our physical health and bodily enjoyment. Yet there is another category of scenes on which we can open our eyes and to which we can open our hearts for disinterested contemplation and mediation. Thus, images of nature can be used and have been frequently used as a subordinate background or foil to minister to the selfish needs of our daily life. Yet, in spite of the fact that our good earth and its scenic representations may illustrate the uses and applications of our selfish ends, in pictorial art only that category of landscape is prized and valued for their higher significance and uses, which help us to think and to indulge in disinterested reveries which help us to build our subjective life of contemplation, our spiritual life of meditation and introspection. Thus, landscape painting in particular is very rich in this respect as it usually embodies, consciously or unconsciously, not merely valuable visual information about the land that is seen, comprehended and felt, but reflection of attitudes about how men at a particular time see themselves in relation to the land and nature, and some inkling of their hierarchy of values.

To express in a painting the direct experience of a landscape is not an easy task. The real landscape is all around us; not confined within a frame. It is never completely still. As we move through its innumerable details compel our attention, some near, some far away. And the light continually changes whereas selection and arrangement are essential. The difficulties are reduced, but not

eliminated, if we move to the man-made surroundings of the town or street, or move indoors. But the challenge was one that appealed to seventeenth century artists who, more than their predecessors, sought breadth and unity and even the infinity of the heavens. Patrons remained chiefly interested in the kinds of subject that we have already considered, but there was a market for biblical and religious scenes in which the landscape setting that caught the mood of the story became, really, the main subject. In Holland the changed condition created an entirely new market for straight factual records of life indoors. There were also artists, notably Rubens and Rembrandt, who turned to the landscape more as a personal choice and source of spiritual refreshment in later life or in times of stress. Different artists transmuted the direct experience, or the memory of it, in different ways.

Art practice in Bengal has been prominently central in the rich scholarship on the trends in early twentieth century art of modern India. From the urban-folk imagery of the Kalighat paintings and contemporary prints in wood-block and lithographs to the emergence of the three Tagore's (Abanindranath, Gaganendranath, and Rabindranath), and then go on to the legacy of the 'Bengal School' with Nandalal Bose and his students, mainly Ramkinkar Baij, Benode Behari Mukherjee and many more creating a distinctive movement from Rabindranath Tagore's educational institution at Santiniketan as well as the role of Jamini Roy in introducing a folk-inspired alternative, significant transformations in the art of Bengal have an acknowledged eminence in the historiography of the early 'modern' in art of India.

This research project, as the title “Ramkinkar’s Landscape Painting in water colour: In the perspective of Indian Landscape Painting” suggests, began with the following decade of the nineteen twenties and continued till the artists last breath was to be investigated. Initially, the project originated from the personal quest of Ramkinkar Baij and art practices in the period under consideration had remained marginalised in the domain of Indian art and to realise if the reason for this lay somewhere in ideological preferences regarding the choice of pictorial language, the aims, objectives and ideals of this artist. In the course of investigation, increasingly at least four decades of the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s appeared to be sufficiently and logically coherent as a case study and hence determined the point of termination for this thesis to place Ramkinkar Baij as one of the leading pioneering landscape artists in the Indian art scenario.

In Part B of introduction, we discussed the context of the research/investigation, an overall picture of the period has been attempted with a brief but relevant recapitulation of the historical background in terms of the political scenario. The chapter also discusses briefly some of the relevant debates of the four decades (mainly started from early nineteen thirties) prior to the scope of the present study. The present project, therefore, revolves primarily around Ramkinkar Baij and his unique practice of watercolour landscape paintings. The *First chapter* deals with mainly the Biographical sketches of artist covered under the title ‘Landscape: a story of evolution in the Eastern, Western and Indian contexts’. In the *Second Chapter* “Landscape: A Story of Evolution in Western, Eastern

and Indian Context”, has been discussed. This chapter very briefly discusses on Taoism in Chinese landscape painting and also how the Cha'n philosophy inspired landscape painting in China. The Second part of this chapter broadly discusses landscape in the Indian traditional context. The *Third chapter* entitled 'Legacy of Bengal School landscape painting' which covers the three painter genius Tagore's, Abanindranath, Gaganendranath, and Rabindranath. This chapter covers Nandalal Bose, BenodeBehari Mukherjee and other artists like Ranen Ayan Dutta, Ganesh Haloi and many more who belonged to the early 1970's and 1980's. This chapter also includes "Why Ramkinkar's landscape?" along with a discussion on "An Explorative Discourse of Ramkinkar's few landscape paintings". This chapter also covers Prof. Sankho Chowdhury's elaborative discussion on Ramkinkar using firm line work, brush strokes and handling of colours. In The *Fourth chapter* 'Beyond the outside Bengal School landscape artists were beginning with John Deschampa, William Parker, Olinto Ghilardi and a few British painters who came to India and practiced landscapes with a propensity for creating a pictorial language have also been discussed.

The *Fifth chapter* entitled '*Specific features of Ramkinkar Baij's painting style*', deals with some exceptional features of Ramkinkar's watercolour landscapes. The multiplicity of voices regarding Ramkinkar's work comes to reveal the complexity of a situation at the given time and location because he was primarily a sculptor and at that time when most of the artists (mainly sculptors) were engaged in commissioned work, he was involved in search of his own. The Second part of this chapter entitled 'A Critique on Ramkinkar's

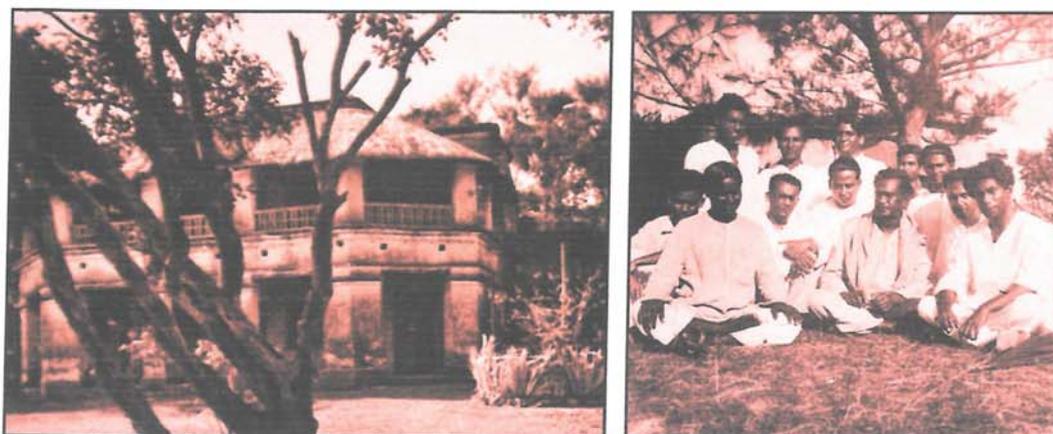
Work,' where various comments are cited by some great art critics such as Benode Bihari Mukherjee, Prof. Kanchan Chakrabarty, Prof. Nikhil Ranjan Pal, Prof. Ratan Parimoo and others.

The *Sixth chapter* which is categorized into four parts and in support of those three paintings of Ramkinkar has been reproduced.

The *Seventh chapter* is related to comparative study of the three major landscape painters in the contemporary Indian art scenario very much socially responsive; define a standpoint distanced from the limiting confines of the so-called Bengal School. The same chapter then deals with the European influence on Ramkinkar's work. The debate of a post-Tagorian contemporaneity and defining the "modern" in Bengali literature also played a role in Ramkinkar's work. Simultaneously the play has been situated in the context of comparison with the post-impressionist painter Paul Cezanne. This chapter also addresses the Chiaroscuro of nature in Ramkinkar's work.

The brief concluding chapter sums up the earlier discussion and concludes on a note of the possibility of a simultaneous existence of diverse pictorial languages in a given time and place. Ramkinkar's quest for a modern language in the pictorial surfaces both in paintings and sculptures necessarily involves the integrity of the derivation-assimilation-expression equation, variously approached. Within these different approaches and the logical consistency of the versatile genius artist Ramkinkar Baij's watercolour landscapes will not only open a new window, but also the various types of water pigeon-hole like compartment for the upcoming generation artists.

He came to Santiniketan in 1925 and joined Kala Bhavana as a student at the age of nineteen. It was the posters and the portraits of nationalist leaders he made during the non-cooperative movement that led to his talent being noticed by the local nationalists, including Ramananda Chatterjee who brought him to Santiniketan. In his involvement with nationalism he was closer to Nandalal than BenodeBehari Mukherjee. Again, unlike BenodeBehari, he was more open to the influences of Abanindranath and Nandalal in his early years. During his pre-Santiniketan years-besides what he did for the Congress-he also did drop curtains for the local theater, portraits of family and friends, and a few paintings influenced by popular taste. These were mostly in oils, but after coming to Santiniketan he began to do highly finished wash paintings depicting both romantic and mythological themes, and some of the latter were influenced by the work Nandalal did soon after his visit to Ajanta. Thus he was talented, but highly impressionable. As BenodeBehari has observed, when he came to Santiniketan Ramkinkar already had all the skill an artist needs, the only thing he was left to acquire was discrimination and direction.



**Dwarik, the first building where Kala Bhavan started. Students of Kala Bhavan with the only teacher Nandalal Bose popularly known as 'Mastermoshoy'.**

Ramkinkar is often described as the first artist in Santiniketan to use oil paint and do distinctly modern abstract work. However, it would be more accurate to say that though in the early twenties many in Santiniketan learned the technique of oil painting from Andre Karpeles, it took roots in Kala Bhavana only after Ramkinkar and some of his contemporaries began to use it in the thirties. Similarly before Ramkinkar came Stella Kramrisch had lectured on modern art at length, Rabindranath had started painting, and there were already books and reproductions of modern art in the library. So the ground was prepared and the climate was congenial for the kind of work Ramkinkar began to do in the mid- thirties.

He completed his education in the year nineteen thirty and joined Kala Bhavana as a guest lecturer in the same year. In the year nineteen thirty -four he became a full time lecturer. His interaction with Nandalal and Benode Behari helped Ramkinkar to find his direction. During the early years the three met daily at a wayside tea shop and discussed art over cups of tea. Both Benode Behari and Ramkinkar have described these discussions as seminal. A theater enthusiast from his pre-Santiniketan days, Ramkinkar also found Nandalal's costume and stage designs remarkable, and it inspired him to experiment with the stage, costume and direction. He was also infected by Benode Behari's interest in literature and the two often got together with a few students for joint readings that included recent Indian and Western literature. K.G.Subramanyan remembers reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* to him on one such occasion. Russian realists and Bernard Shaw were his particular

favourites. And these, it can be seen, helped him to develop his own responses to the modern movements.

Until the early thirties he worked more or less in tandem with BenodeBehari, often painting the same motifs and sharing the same concerns. A work like *Kali* (the figure of Santhal woman draped in yellow) marks the beginning of a more personal vision. It still carries the romantic resonance of the Bengal School; it even looks a little like a blown up wash painting, but its size and its realism strikes a new note. This becomes clearer in paintings like *Golden Crop* and *Santhal Family*. These images being more rooted in reality, their romanticism is more nuanced and subsumed to the representation of life's vitality and its small pleasures. Santhal life as a subject matter had antecedents in the work of both Nandalal and Benode Behari. However there was a marked difference in Ramkinkar's approach.

In Nandalal not only the Santhal's but human subject matter in general was seen as a part of the larger reality of nature, and the human figure was shown in close-up or represented monumentally only when man assumed a larger than life role as in myths or history. A striking example of this is his 1930 fresco titled *Halakarshan*, where Tagore as a ploughman appears surrounded by villagers, including Santhal's. The earliest representations of the figure in BenodeBehari are the sixteen panels he painted in the niches of the Santoshalaya in nineteen twenty -five depicting scenes from Santhal life. What distinguishes Ramkinkar is not chronological precedence, but that for

him the Santhal's represent the archetypal man, and that man stands in the foreground of his vision of life. Being no introvert or recluse, unlike Nandalal and BenodeBehari, we find him responding to the Santhal's natural zest for life, and take a greater interest in the human figure, its body language, and in the human drama in general.

Ramkinkar did not share Nandalal's and Benode Behari's enthusiasm for Far Eastern art perhaps because it was essentially a painterly tradition. Modern Western art and pre -and -post-classical Indian art were his main points of reference. Knowledge of traditional Indian sculpture and contact with visiting Western sculptors were decisive in his development as a sculptor. Then to come was Liza Von Pot, an Austrian sculptor. She was followed by Marguerite Milward and a British sculptor called Bateman. Milward who was a student of Bourdelle and the most important, incidentally she was also an early admirer of Rabindranath's paintings and suggested that he exhibit them in Paris. Ramkinkar's assimilation of the Rodinesque tradition is best seen in one of his early *Mithuna* images and in *Hunter*, one of the large reliefs he did on the mud buildings at Santiniketan called Shyamali. Whenever there has been a period of transitions, a certain kind of reinnovation always takes place. History can tell us that a single period can never be termed as "Renaissance". Certain kind of mindset in a certain period can look at a particular phenomenon of Revivalism as Renaissance. Logical reasoning and scientific explanations were brought to this part of the world in a large way by the British occupations. The thought process in this part of the world was getting layered upon by inconsistent

thinking, bias and the critical reticence to enlighten and explorative thinking. Thinkers like Raja Rammohan Roy and his contemporaries brought about a huge amount of change which resulted in some radical<sup>i</sup> thinking amongst the intellectuals. This perhaps can really be termed as the inception of Renaissance in Bengal and its adjoining areas. However, in the last three or four decades of the twentieth century Ramkinkar's revolutionary compositions have been continuously tried to be pushed into oblivion.

An attempt has been made here to

- a) Re- discovering of Indian techniques and methods as practiced by the ancient Indian Masters.
- b) To try and understand the older works from a newer perspective and understanding.
- c) To try for a healthy fusion<sup>ii</sup> or chemical synthesis of the old oriental techniques with modern methods.
- d) To search out newer idioms and semiotics in the contemporary art practices. From the nineteen thirties onwards we see several avenues picking up pace and several artists in different fields finding out their own methods and modes of expression.

Before concluding I would say that this thesis is an honest attempt to study such an eminent personality - Ramkinkar Baij who seems to be an

---

i Here the term '**radical**' should not be interpreted as a point of Leftist thought process, but rather should be adduced as a factor where newer and hitherto unseen perspective were brought forth.

ii **Healthy Fusion:** Healthy Fusion of styles which leads to creation of an entirely new genre without sacrificing the originalities.

unfathomable depth in the field of Visual Art and also Performing Art. Here I have put my maximum efforts to take a measure of his vast and limitless creations and presented some rare collections of information, paintings and their photographs which were yet to be seen in this field. Hence, it can be said that to study Ramkinkar Baij and confine his artwork and contributions in a limited matrix is not possible. However, the scope for further studies on this aspect is still open.

## **Part B**

Ramkinkar Baij is well known in the history of Indian art. Though more acclaimed as a sculptor, Ramkinkar has to his credit a wide range of paintings. People in general have little knowledge of Ramkinkar as a painter. And in this 21<sup>st</sup> century though his reputation as an Indian landscape painter has gone up considerably, Ramkinkar has not achieved the honour that he deserves as a landscape painter. He carried on with painting water colours alongside his oil paintings and in this sphere he showed equal expertise and natural proficiency as he had shown in his sculptures.

Prof. K.G.Subramanyan had mentioned in the early 80's in his 'Water colour landscape' that came under the title 'The man and his work'. And besides this in 1962 Jaya Appasamy in Lalit Kala Contemporary Journal (vol.no.30) had mentioned his water colour paintings in her article, 'A painter and sculptor'. But, unfortunately, there was no idea among the writers and art- historians that any research could be done in this sphere. However, in the early part of the 1990's there was a spurt of research and original interpretation over

this issue and at last after a productive interaction with Prof. Sovon Som I could get an idea of the possibility of a serious research on this subject and consequently on 21<sup>st</sup> Sept., 2007 the proposed research was registered under the title – “*Ramkinkar’s landscape in water colour in the perspective of Indian landscape painting.*”

It is very much known to us that at Santiniketan visual art training usually started with painting pictures. However, without considering the range of knowledge or how much it still remained to be learned, our art education started in full steam throughout painting pictures, and Ramkinkar Baij all through his life carried on this tradition of painting full pictures with bold originality, be it sculpture or a painting. As we have seen this enigmatic artist present in his works in varied styles and formats.

In Santiniketan art education would start right with a full fledged practice in painting pictures, and not through clarifying the areas of knowledge and ignorance. (We can very easily say the name of this method was ‘direct method’ and this method got its enlivened version in Ramkinkar’s artistic life). Ramkinkar thrived under this system straight away displaying a strength of painting pictures, be it in the field of sculpture, or in painting; and we get the full view of this powerful artist advancing in his vastly nuanced career of versatile practices in the field of art. In Santiniketan, the first step of art education was what is known today as ‘direct method’ and this method was the main stay in Ramkinkar’s career as an artist. During his first phase as a learner

Ramkinkar chiefly drew Realistic or Naturalistic paintings and those were mostly done in wash technique. Ramkinkar carried on this technique painting pictures putting on the medium layers after layers of colour and throughout his career as a painter till he breath his last. However, Ramkinkar maintained a happy balance between his landscape painting and his sculptures. The idealism manifested in his landscape paintings in water colour and in oil paintings; Ramkinkar found his themes in his persistent observation of the variety of natural objects and scenes. His landscape paintings have presented the living activities, the sundry rituals, social activities and festivals of the Santhal's, the original residents in the arid terrain of Bankura and Birbhum districts.

There had been efforts in showing up the differences in Tagore's Santiniketan and Ramkinkar's pristine rural culture. But such treatments have not been accepted. Artist Sheikh Sahabuddin of Bangladesh spent his early childhood in a village in Bangladesh and for that he is not branded as rustic, and this could be said about innumerable artists. But for Ramkinkar this epithet has come as an underlined expression. Here we refer to an excerpt from an article by Geeta Kapur wherein such thought is perceivable.

“Modernist vocabulary, properly speaking (as against initiatives, laying down for a half century before, proportions ground for modernisation as such), was introduced in a brave gesture in the 1930's when a rural boy (Ramkinkar Baij) decided in Tagore's Santiniketan (an orientalising institution) to bring to bear in a somewhat hazardous manner a post-cubist expressionism to openly

volarize primitive/peasant proletarian bodies; to give them an axial dynamic, so to speak. And to thereby bring through the ruse and reason of indigenous subject matter a methodical shift in constructing the image. This somewhat reckless manner of cultural symbiosis was re-enacted by two Bombay artists (Francis Newton Souza and Maqbool Fida Husain) in the late 1940's. (Geeta Kapur, When was Modernism in Indian Art, Journal of Arts and Ideas, Numbers-27-28, March, 1995, pp.110-111).”

Though Geeta Kapur offered Ramkinkar a niche in the domain of modernism in Indian Art, but her remark that she found in Ramkinkar in fused so much of the element of spontaneity and verbe all through his creations that hallmark his unique excellence. There is no doubt about it. The ‘primitive element’ that Geeta Kapur found in Ramkinkar’s work is also not at all clear. There is nothing ‘naive’ in Ramkinkar’s work. He did neither share any Henry Rousseau nor any Bhupen Kakkar in his early phase and Ramkinkar possesses redoubtable ‘skill’ in his field of work. The characteristic of ‘the reckless manner’ of ‘cultural symbiosis’ in the works of Ramkinkar, Husain, Souza and a number of other Indian Artist, that Geeta Kapur could detect, is not also acceptable. Looking at the thing from this stand point, we would perceive how Paul Klee, Picasso went the way of cultural symbiosis with African Art, as did Henry Matisse with Islamic Art. Rather it would not be wrong to say that artists of China, Japan & Australia and many other countries including Arabian countries, have started naturalizing the features of Western Modernism. It should be remembered that Ramkinkar’s works since the 1930’s of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century have been acclaimed as epoch making one and the completeness of the achievement could be notched up through intellectual excellence only.

In the history of art it is seen that the advent of great artists has always been marked with a certain element of the unprecedented or unconventional, and this does not follow any rational order. The experiments that Ramkinkar did in his work is not anything predisposed or pre-imposed, rather it ensued from his spontaneous realization of life.

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 philosophies of the existing traditions.

**Background of the Study:** Ramkinkar Baij has always attracted a lot of attention as an artist. The presentations of his works are unique in their own way. Viewers find that the personal perspective and the context of his own inner feelings are brought forth in such a way that they seem to carry a dimension of their own. He is usually known more for his sculptures. That he was a prolific painter was known to only a few; particularly the enthusiasts and the individuals who were quite close to him. Today, in the twenty first century,

a few more have come to know about this particular feature. However, an acknowledgement and a thorough analysis of his works are yet to be done. Sri K G Subramanian in the eighties of the previous century made a pioneering effort by presenting *The Man and his Works* where he introduced us to his water-colours, his oil-paintings and the beauty of his numerous sketches and doodles. He particularly took care to mention about the prolific and wonderful quality of his *water-colours*. His close associates had always admired his prolific capacity as a painter, however, they were known only to a few.

In the previous century, during the thirties and the forties, when Santiniketan had still been in its nascent stage, emphasis had always been on learning the basics through direct method. It hardly mattered whether any body was formally trained or not. Here, individuals were taught to go through the methodology of visual arts in a wholesome and holistic manner. There was a serious effort with regards to the necessity of studying about aspects of Bengali culture here and thus it became a pioneering hub of deliberate revivalism. Rabindranath Tagore himself had taken the initiative to facilitate and enhance the platform by looking into the traditional roots. He also tried to bring in the other parallel and allied elements as well. For example, he had made deliberate attempts to try and imbibe elements from not only cultures of other Indian communities but from the Far-East as well. The foundation of this aspect, however, was not based on the element of deconstructing other platforms. It was more about development and amplification of the indigenous platform by assimilation and amalgamation where the characteristic originalities as well as the aspects of synthesis were

laid out in perfect harmony. This blending had given Santiniketan, its unique specification which had continued to enthrall the intellectuals as well as the general mass alike through much of the second half of the twentieth century. The members of the Āśram community held on to this aspect which had given them a feeling of solidarity and have always successfully retained it for the purpose of holding on to this unique specificity that identified the tutelage and the upbringing of Santiniketan that is so typically of its own (courtesy Sri Rabindranath Tagore and the others who understood, believed and were convinced by his revolutionary endeavours). Ramkinkar Baij had taken full advantage of this aspect and had gone on to produce numerous works of art, be it sculptures, paintings, sketches, graphics, stage-designs and so on. Even the conflict within the community, his own conflict with the other members of the community and his passive resistance regarding the interference of the authority has been much deliberated upon. Many lament the fact that in their obvious penchant for overzealousness the bureaucracy had created many difficulties for him. However, his strong mind and his zeal for work had made him oblivious to all of this. He had even considered them to be trivial since he believed that his creations will speak for themselves.

Discussions with the eminent art critic and art historian, Dr Sovon Som, during the nineties of the previous century had brought forth the idea of doing a full-fledged research on Ramkinkar Baij's works. However, it was still undecided as to how it should be done and what would be the major areas of its focus. Finally, a decision was taken to keep the focus on Ramkinkar Baij's

*water-colour landscapes* because that would focus attention to almost all the parameters that are considered to be unique in his work.

**The Topic: Its Relevance; and Emergence of the problem:**

When we assess the work of an artist purely from the perspective of objectivity alone, it becomes quite imperative that the points of emphasis remain impartial and impersonal as far as possible. However, in order to do so, several factors are to be taken into account.

Some of the basic queries are:

A.  
What was the situation like during the initial/formative years of the artist's career trajectory?

B.  
Was there any kind of artistic background in the family?

C.  
If yes, then was the background an affluent or a financially challenged one?

And, when that artist does indeed come from a financially challenged background, other queries regarding the period of training and the methodology invariably arise:

- I. What were the primary implements with which he used to practise?
- II. Were they extremely rudimentary? Were even the basic simple things like a 'pencil', 'eraser', 'paper' etc. unavailable to him?
- III. If yes, then what did he practice with?

While discussing the sociological factors these queries may become important points of deliberation. On the other hand, we must remember that this is not an endeavour where factors of sociology take a major place in the issue. The serious intent is that of analysing the factors (objective as well as subjective) that underline the unique specificities of the water-colours that has been done by the artist. Other factors i.e. his sculptures, the designs that he used

to produce for the drama-productions at Santiniketan, his love for music, his affinity for the various knowledge platforms and so on will definitely come in for deliberations, but only as per their necessity and relevance to the central idea and focus of this research topic.

In his own words, “A neighbour, senior to me and a college student, once brought me a copy of *Madonna* by Raphael from his collection and advised, ‘Copy this, and you will learn something.’ I accepted it..... ‘At that time I had the task of reading the *Rāmāyaṇa* to my father. The sorrow of *Sītā* at the forest exile chapter had struck me with deep impact. So I painted *Sītā* with *Luv* and *Kuś* on her lap. I painted her in saffron clothing. The gentleman asked to have a look at my painting. I said, ‘For the time being I have painted *Sītā* in place of *Madonna*; here it is.’ He could not appreciate it. Quite peeved, he exclaimed, ‘I asked you to paint *Madonna*, what you have done instead! Just return my painting!’ A friend arranged to publish the *Sītā* painting in the literary journal called *Bhāratvarṣa*. I got some money too. The original painting remained with the friend.’.....” From this short piece we can definitely conclude that in this case – ‘morning had (indeed) show-s/ed the day’. Even during the formative years of his artistic trajectory, as we have come to understand in the course of our research, he was never interested in compromising the essential factors of his life and his art.<sup>iii</sup> He was never interested too much in the luxurious amenities of life. Reluctant about acquirement of wealth and

---

iii *Ramkinkar Baij – Self Portrait*; Collected Writings and Interviews – 1962-1979; Translated by Sudipto Chakraborty from the Original Bengali Book *Mahasay, Ami Chakkkhik Rupokar Matro*; Compiled and Edited by Sandipan Bhattacharya; Monfakira – 2006 – pg-27.

retiring to a fault he was, however, neither a recluse, nor a quasi-ascetic – he had a tremendous zest for life. As a practitioner in the field of applied mode of aesthetics (Skt. *prāyogikinandana kalā-vidyā*), he understood that there are certain sacrifices which had to be made if (as it has been mentioned in the *BhagavadGītā*) one pursues to stay in this particular arena. He says, “Artists are naturally poor because their urge for unwarranted work keeps them poor. So they have to depend upon the compassion of learned connoisseurs. Even then it gets managed between them through their mutual understanding. It has always been like that. .... I consider myself fortunate to have met a great devotee of the purposeless on Santiniketan here. .... He infused life into my speechless, motionless scriptures through the elixir of his music; and himself became engrossed with his silent worship.”<sup>iv</sup> The natural query in the mind of the reader and the admirer would be, “Who is he talking about? Has Tagore and the Almighty become the one and the same for him that he himself doesn’t even understand where he is talking about the former and where he is talking about the latter” Though, it may be pointed out that, he himself had considered Tagore to be a representative symbol of the latter and he had reiterated this fact several times at the nether end of his life.<sup>v</sup> He had adored and idolised Tagore like many of his seniors, peers and contemporaries. But there seemed to have existed a different kind of bond of kinship between the two. In a way,

---

iv *ibid...* pg – 26

v 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 Baij’s teaching life at Santiniketan and is currently a practitioner and exponent of renown) and Mr. Salam Anil Kumar Singh, who used to be a student in the department of History of Art in Santiniketan during the same period had said as such during personal interviews taken in the years 2010 and 2013.

a certain mode of similarity does come to the mind when we try to understand both in the light of each other. Tagore was essentially a *littérateur* with a great deal of interest regarding the applied mode of performing arts and their various research oriented aspects. However, in the last decade of his life, he had suddenly become deeply interested in visual arts (particularly painting). The rest, as they say, is history – today he is perhaps one of the most well known and most debated upon artists of the yesteryears. Ramkinkar Baij, on the other hand was chiefly a practitioner in the field of visual arts. During his stay in Santiniketan for the rest of his life, he became deeply interested in the various aspects of performing arts. His associates, juniors and his peers reiterate the fact he had a deep baritone voice which was wonderful to behold. His interest in dance was so deep that he used to observe the practices at Sangeet Bhavan (the building which house the various faculties of performing arts) on a regular basis. Unlike western artists, he never believed in the academic methodology of detailed study, hence, he refrained from sketching right on the spot. He had always preferred to move away and create in his own given time and space (i.e. his own workplace). In fact, several of his works radiated an aura of ethereality which, experts deem, are never achievable through realistic study. This was much similar to the fact that the Chinese masters too did the same. They would go and take a look at a particular piece of landscape and ponder deeply on all that was there to see. Then they would come and go into a deep meditative silence. Later on they would produce a work whose primary aim was to express the essence of nature and not only

just a photographic representation. Given all that, it is understood as such that music and drama held equal importance for him. People, who have had a chance to observe him deeply, say that his prolific capacities regarding vocal music, his understanding of any musical genre, his ability to create magic regarding stagecraft and stage-design in dance and drama, his erudite capacity as a drama performer etc. were unparalleled. He himself had confessed to his peers, juniors and other contemporaries that the interdisciplinary nature of Santiniketan's curricula and the atmosphere which got created as a result had made a deep impact on his creativity. This then is a true reiteration of the comment cited here in the earlier paragraph in the thesis.

Regarding marriage and family life too, he had a great deal of apathy. He was however, never disinterested in actual conjugality. As it has been pointed out, he was neither an ascetic/celibate, nor did he have any inclination as such. Yet, he has always asserted that commitment to family life was not for him; he was there to serve the bigger cause of art and culture.<sup>vi</sup> Similarly, regarding all the issues, Santiniketan – it seemed – had become the touchstone of his life. He was never happy when he had to leave for an extended period. He asserted that his creativity got hampered when he had to be away for a long time. Thus, here is an example of the socio-psychological factor which had become a situational denominator for his creativity which needs to be looked into in detail. He did get into relationships with quite a few individuals as he had reiterated in his autobiography. Some, according to him were purely

---

vi *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 – pg-40&41.

platonian while other was purely on a level of mundane physicality. Yet all of them had proved to be fruitful because works had been created based on these experiences.

---

**Objectives of the Study:**

The area of research in the field of Visual Arts (particularly the field of art-criticism and art-history) and Studies in Visual Arts can be varied because by nature it is multi-dimensional. Then again the perspectives of these different dimensions connect and inter-connect at many different levels. Hence, to understand this particular arena, one has to sift through data of different kind, e.g. primary, secondary and others. To classify them to be as such is again a separate academic issue altogether. Whereas, certain kinds of data, necessary for formulation of minute details, is essential as a preliminary factor, other kinds of data may help in understanding the general overview in a proper way which one may tend to overlook – or it is unnecessary in that particular context in relation to which the interpretation is being made.

As mentioned earlier, this work is regarding analysis and understanding of the ‘Water-colour Landscapes of Sri Ramkinkar Baij’, the primary focus of this dissertation will be based on that only. However, the other areas will definitely come under the purview.