

Chapter 1

Biographical Sketch of Ramkinkar Baij

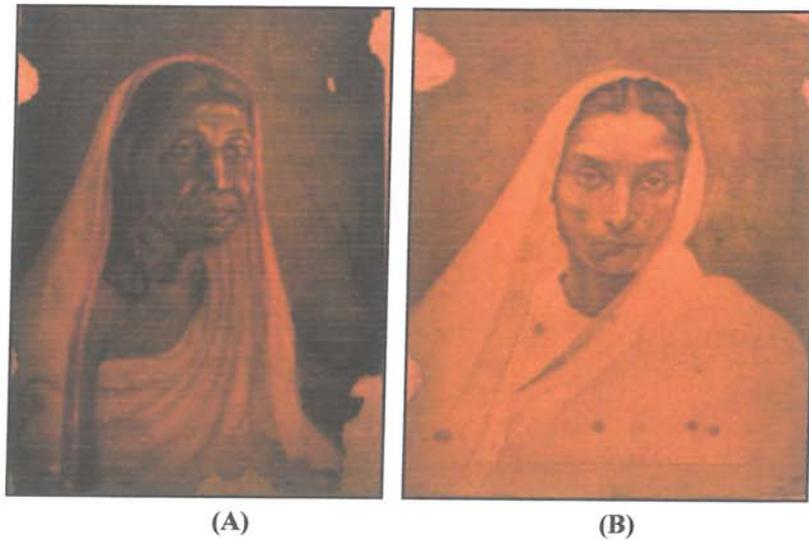
The appearance of Ramkinkar Baij on the Indian art scene took place when a particular category of revivalism was taking a definitive shape within which he appeared an enigma. For any contemporary artist he continues to be a factor for never ending speculation. However, his life and times have been touched nominally. His own ideas and explanations regarding his association with various people and acquaintances have been touched fleetingly. Ramkinkar continues to be an enigma till this day and shall continue to be so for eons to come.



FIGURE 1 What lay behind all the creations in this thesis. Collection: Private.

It is impossible to enclose all his work in one single work or effort. Born in a poor family of a barber he was the first person in his family to break away

from its social moorings and pursue his career outside its hereditary/family/ ancestral profession. Uncertainties begin with his year of birth. He was born on twenty fifth of May Nineteen hundred six in (Jugipara) in Bankura district of West Bengal and took his school education there (there is some controversy regarding his year of birth). It is now generally accepted but according to some sources he was born in Nineteen hundred four and according to others it is Nineteen hundred ten.



**FIGURE 2(A) Ramkinkar Baij's mother Sampurna Devi
(B) Sister-in-law Basantabala, Collection:Kala Bhavan.**

His father was Chandicharan Baij and mother Sampurna Devi. His father was happy that one of his children showed promise and encouraged him by showing his artistic efforts/ ability to those around him and trying to sell them at local markets. Ramkinkar was evidently quite attached to his mother who we know through an early portrait he painted. He painted his mother's portrait in gouache in his early life. From his account we come to know that he has remembered her that she often appeared to him in his dreams after her death. Some of his

later works revolve around this experience. In contrast to the emotional bonding between mother and son, we know little about his other family members and his ties with them. He had an elder brother Ramapada, and four sisters, Thakmani, Narayani, Kalidasi and Indumati. Besides their names we know hardly anything about them. All except Indumati (who died by drowning when he was young) were elder to Ramkinkar, and his brother who was the eldest was much older to him. We also have an early portrait of his sister-in-law who he seems to have been close to, and who, in his youth, played a role next only to his mother. Some artists are born to proclaim freedom, Ramkinkar was such a one. He cannot be classified and refuses to be labeled because of his many sided genius. Ramkinkar was born at a time when artists belonged to schools, but he being with a school and yet outside it can be called an individualist par excellence. Though he belongs to his time, his environment, his culture, he transcended it; indeed he made this culture wider than he found it, enriching it with his personal vision and style. In contemporary sculpture in particular he infused a new vitality turning away from the spiritless academism of his day.

Jaya Appasamy has written in her article entitled "RAMKINKAR- His Contribution to Contemporary Art"- 'Ramkinkar was born of humble parents in Bankura, Bengal in 1906. He was orphaned while yet a child and so had no option but to start working at an early age. He joined a folk theatre group (Jatra) for whom he painted their screens and stage props. Here perhaps Ramkinkar received his first experience in the practice of using paint. Perhaps also this type of work gave him the opportunity and space to paint boldly,

emotionally or even theatrically. Ramkinkar's talent and originality were noticed quite fortunately by Ramananda Chatterjee, a distinguished writer and Editor of 'Modern Review'. And on his recommendation the young boy was admitted to Santiniketan to study art.'¹



FIGURE 3 Ramkinkar Baij in different moods. Collection: Private

Ramkinkar's ties with his siblings were tenuous at best. His relations with his family, including his parents, almost snapped after he left home and went to Santiniketan.

Ramkinkar's family circumstances were not conducive to nurturing his artistic or intellectual ambitions, but he found stimulus in the folk and popular art scene of Bankura. Initially (as per his own accounts and descriptions) he was neither a very attentive student nor was he a very easy child to manage. Yet he had already developed a very keen sense of observation and had an artistic bent of mind. There was a colony of skilled carpenters near Jugipara where the artisans were good

¹ **Ramkinkar-His Contribution to Contemporary Art.** Jaya Appasamy, Lalit Kala Contemporary Vol. No.30 Page-38.

in pottery and wood carving as well. In fact, Ramkinkar took his first lessons in sculpture from artist Ananta Sutradhar, popularly known as Ananta Mistry.²

The stone carvings on the temples of Bishnupur fascinated him. He had making sculptures with burnt clay and stone from an early age. It is heard that he was adept in making images of Bhadu, a God worshiped in rural Bengal. The old craftsman was appreciative of the young artist's skill and left the important ritual of painting the eyes of the idol to Ramkinkar. This relationship continued even after he went to Santiniketan. Ramkinkar acknowledged that this was his first experience of sculpting while underscoring that he imbibed the lessons of the idol makers and folk painters by watching them at work rather than by training under anyone of them.



FIGURE 4 Untitled, watercolour on papers. Collection: Kala Bhavan Santiniketan.

The paintings based on mythology and religion which generally adorn the walls of most of the domestic households in Bengal have been an inspiration

² *Ramkinkar Baij Self Portrait*, pp. 38-39

for Ramkinkar. There was a particular painting which he had mentioned repetitively: couple figure of Radha and Krishna done in the calendar style. This one had remained etched in his memory for ever. He however liked to work with artistic materials even from his earliest days. According to his own account his brother Ramapada made him sit down to arithmetic but his mind wandered in the usual fashion to the scroll of Radha and Krishna. Unfortunately his brother's scolding forced him to return to his studies.³

Ramkinkar had become skilled in watercolours. He had come in touch with the great painter Jamini Roy in Beliatare. During his school days and when he was in search of jobs he used to paint scenes and stage props for folk theatre (Jatra) groups and also draw posters for the Congress, the then leading Indian political party. The well-known patriot Anil Baran Roy, with whom Ramkinkar had become acquainted during the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921, inspired him to make portraits in oil of freedom fighters like Chittaranjan Das, Arabindo Ghosh and Mahatma Gandhi. From early accounts, we get to know how his talent in drawing had been noticed even in his school days. He made a picture of Gour Netai (the typical picture and imagery of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and his consort) which his school mathematics teacher appreciated so much that he had it hung in school. And he didn't punish Ramkinkar for two whole months regardless of whether he had done his homework or not! The National School where he was enrolled became the centre of the nationalist movement in Bankura. Greatly drawn towards it, his artistic talent was noticed by Anilbaran Shah, the

³ *Ramkinkar Baij Self Portrait*, pp. 38-39 and 45

local leader of the Congress. Shah freed him from distributing *charkas* and doing other sundry works that the young activists were put to, and instead asked him to make posters and portraits of the leaders for meetings and processions. This brought his talent to the notice of various nationalist leaders including Ramananda Chatterjee, who played a pivotal role in encouraging and publishing the works of nationalist artists through his magazines *The Modern Review* and *Prabasi*, was also a friend of Rabindranath Tagore and at that moment the honorary Head of Santiniketan's undergraduate section. A classmate of mine one day suggested that we should call upon Ramananda Chatterjee—who had come to Bankura—to pay him our respects. Even at the first interview he saw some of my paintings. A greater surprise awaited me when the next day he appeared at my cottage door to have a look at the work I was doing. He proposed that I should see him again as soon as he wrote to me for the purpose. This was his way and he was constantly on the lookout to help people to give recognition due to due to them.

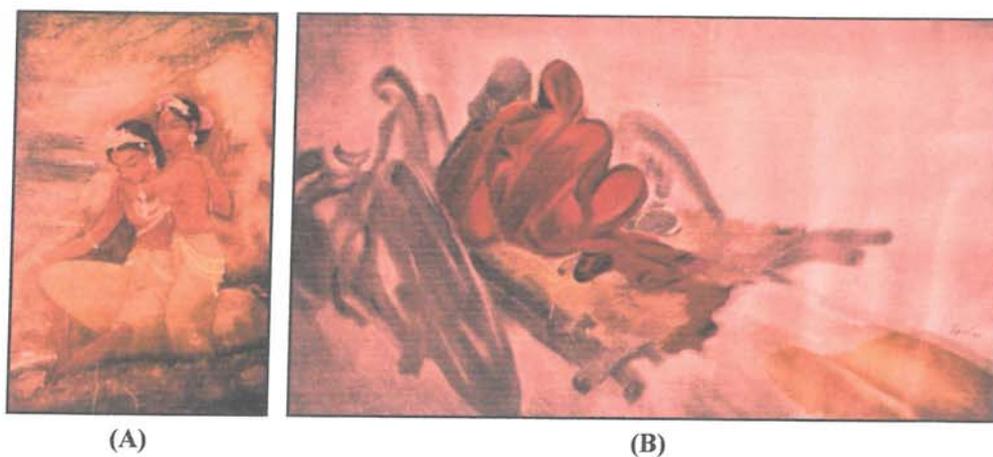


FIGURE 5(A) Untitled, 1922, watercolour on paper.
(B) On the way to Konarak, watercolour on paper. Collection: Kala Bhavan

The promised letter soon followed and it contained detailed instructions about the journey and the destination. Accordingly I undertook the trip to the

Brahmacharya Vidyalaya at Santiniketan. I had misgivings—what good would this Vidyalaya do me when my heart was set on the Art School in Calcutta? I thought I had already passed beyond the stage of probationary rigour and discipline. Anyway, the same morning he took me to the Kala-Bhavana, occupying in those days the upper storey of the general library building and there I was introduced to Nandalalbabu. Apart from some reproductions published in the Prabasi album, I knew little about Nandalalbabu's art. Moreover, I was then strongly attached to naturalistic art. While Indian painting did have its appeal for me, I happened to believe firmly that a realistic approach was the sole guarantee of success in the world of art. Naturalistic art in fact found favour in Santiniketan and the tradition has continued. Students receive lessons on anatomy and painting from life.'

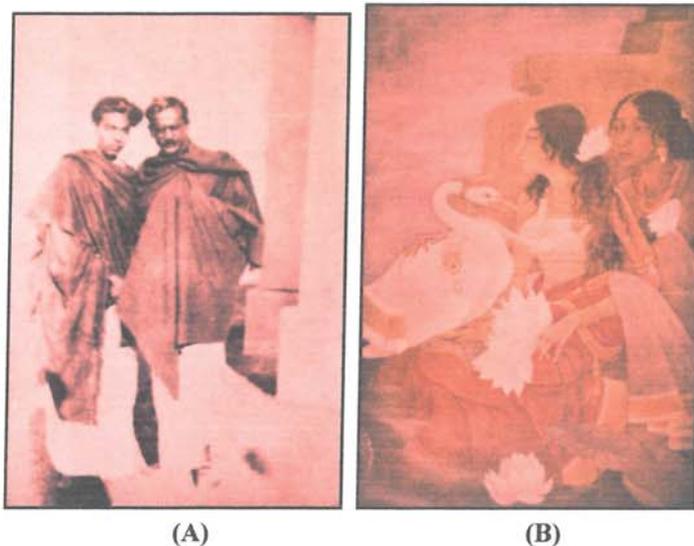


FIGURE 6(A) Ramkinkar with his teacher Nandalal Bose.
(B) Hamsadoot, watercolour on paper. Collection: Kala Bhavan

On seeing Ramkinkar's works Chatterjee decided that Santiniketan would be an ideal place for him and found him a seat in Kala Bhavan, its art school. Ramkinkar was

placed under Rabindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose. From the way Ramkinkar's genius evolved at Santiniketan, Ramananda could never regret this action of his. Later on, he came in contact with Anil Baran Roy and other important persons. He also participated in the non-cooperation movement and joined the National School.

Ramkinkar flourished under the influence of Rabindranath Tagore. He had the opportunity to join Santiniketan at a time when he was almost on the verge of getting lost in the vestiges of traditional Swadeshi political activism and other inconsequential things. Thanks to Ramananda Chatterjee, he reached the comforting arena of Santiniketan, where Rabindranath and Nandalal took him under their wings. At that time when the whole of India was trying to rebuild its tradition from the ruins and ravages of time, Ramkinkar was searching for a path of his own. While on the one hand he was continuously experimenting with the traditional water colour by doing landscape of various kinds which were available to him in and around Santiniketan, on the other he was also trying wash techniques on various kinds of mediums like silk, etc. However his legendary experimentation was of course doing paintings on a vast scale when miniature painting was in vogue. He did this by using cheap oil paints available in the market and traditional jute cloth used by the Santhal community. This was considered to be revolutionary in those days and thereby became legendary.

One of Ramkinkar's devoted friends requested him to copy Raphael's Madonna. In his own words, 'At that time I had to read out the Ramayana to my father every day. The sorrow of Sita in the chapter on Banabas touched me deeply. I had painted Laba and Kusa in the embrace of Sita instead of

Raphael's Madonna. Sita was in a pale yellow saree. The gentleman wanted to see the drawing. I told him that instead of painting Madonna. I have painted Sita living in the forest, and will do Madonna after this.' We can note here how strong the inner creative urge of the artist was, that he could not help painting what he felt within himself instead of what he was told to paint. A well wisher and admirer of Ramkinkar, Sajnikanta Das submitted the picture to Bharat Barsha, a Bengali magazine, without his consent, and it was published in the Boisakh 1332 (1925) issue. It was for this picture that Ramkinkar and his teacher Nandalal were awarded with a gold medal in a Lucknow fine arts exhibition. Gurusaday Datta was then the district magistrate of Bankura. He asked Ramkinkar to take the Silpa Patha of Santiniketan. Mastermohoy Nandalal Bose was the Director of Kala Bhavan. There is a common misconception amongst the art enthusiasts. Existing literature on this issue is misleading in their views that Nandalal Bose was a principal of Santiniketan. But such views need not be taken seriously at all because the post of 'Principal' did not exist in Santiniketan in those days. Actually Nandalal was 'Director' Ramkinkar joined Kala Bhavan in Santiniketan in 1925 as a student at the age of nineteen. According to Ramkinkar Baij – (published in The Visvabharati Quarterly Vol.34, Nos.1, 2, 3&4 and the Editor was Sisir Kumar Ghose.) "In 1925 I was a student of one of the National School which was run by eminent persons as teachers and was set up when government institutions had to close down following the non-cooperation movement. I was not asked to distribute *charkhas* to people in the locality but had, instead of lessons, to draw large portraits of national leaders taken out in processions. Sometimes, I

reproduced significant saying in bold characters and hung them in front of the Congress office. Contributing coloured paintings to the school magazine was also another task for me. Bankura had welcomed almost all the great leaders of the time including Bipinchandra Pal, Chittaranjan Das, Gandhi and others.

To return to my account of the first interview, the teacher – a strongly built man in *dhoti* and silken *panjabi* – desired to have a look at my works. The comment it drew was: Well, you seem to have learnt everything – how can you profit by being here? After a brief silence, however, he suggested that I could never the – less stay for a couple of years or so.

But the period has stretched to the present time far beyond the stipulated 2 or 3 years. He has since passed into the world of the invisible and my quest continues in the same direction – the quest of the Invisible through form and appearance.

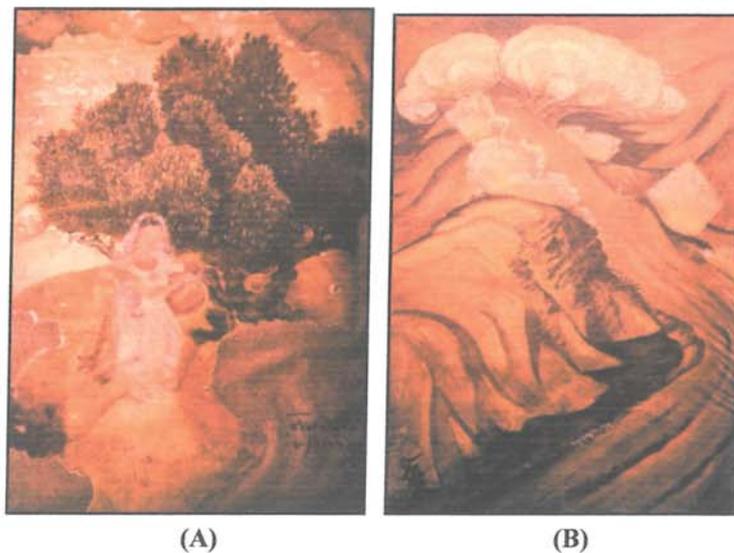


FIGURE 7(A) Lady with a Pitcher, watercolour on paper. Collection: Private
(B) Rocks Plants and Shrubs, Tempera on paper. Private

At the time I joined, there were just a few pupils. But we were all genuine and intense doubters. As we came into more intimate contact with him we realized what an amazing artist he was. The spell of reverent wonder took a firmer hold of us as days went by. In the process of our work we constantly made and unmade our drawings, etc., but we had all along respectfully borne him in mind. As the successive waves of his powerful artistic creations contributed an amazing variety of form and style we noticed that nothing he ever did lacked a certain depth of thought and emotion. He seemed to have a spontaneous affinity with traditions of eastern, especially, Indian art.

He was then occupied with sketches for a huge mural painting for the Kirti temple of Baroda. What continually haunted his imagination was the image of *Maharaj* of Konark, the form, attitude and the symbolical powers of that image had captivated him and he reproduced it in Toto without modification. He had confided to us that were he to be born again as an artist he would devote himself to sculpture. He deeply admired all aspects of eastern art and desired to perpetuate them in his work in as perfect a manner as possible. This attempt has all along provoked criticism; but living in the post – Cezanne days he never permitted modernism to blur his individual vision.

As a teacher, he did not interfere with the freedom of his students, and sought instead to foster their individual tastes. Inspiring one to cultivate his own technique he used to point out the specific defects in composition and impressed upon one the pitfalls in matters of taste. There had been differences

of opinion but they were always followed by the friendliest of treatments which often left us repenting our own folly.

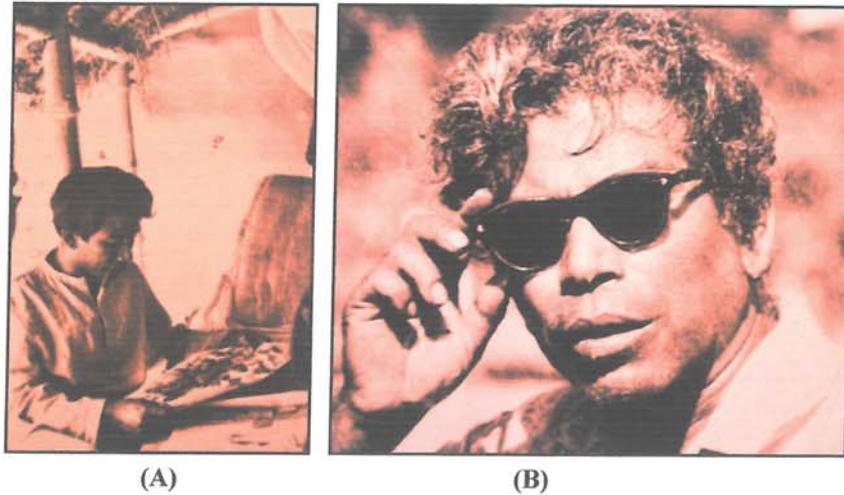


FIGURE 8(A) Ramkinkar Baij checking his own works.
(B) Ramkinkar Baij in different mood. Collection: N.G.M.A

Seeking professional training was on Ramkinkar's mind but Santiniketan was not quite the place he had thought of going to. Although he had seen some of the works of the nationalist artists reproduced in Chatterjee's magazines, he was more drawn towards realist painting. This was partly due to the compulsions he faced while undertaking various commercial works including the painting of signboards, portraits and drop curtains for theatre, all of which called for realist rendering. This in turn led him to admire the work of art school trained academic artists and to work with enamel and oil paint rather with water colour in the wash technique preferred by the Bengal School artists. The few works from this period that have survived include a landscape that shows the influence of popular art; a portrait of a young boy with the inscription 'Drawn from Life' written prominently across it; another of a friend's mother done

from a photograph; and three figurative paintings. All of these have been done between 1922 and 1924—the first showing two female figures ostensibly on the way to the temple seen from behind, and the third of Radha and Krishna. These are the most skillful of his early works and demonstrate his familiarity with similar paintings of academic realists.⁴

In each of these he shows a certain stylistic affinity to the source. Judging by these, it seems that left to himself at that time his choice would have been the Government Art College at Calcutta rather than Santiniketan.

In those days all our paintings were exhibited at Oriental Society, Calcutta, which was conducted by Abanindranath Tagore. On one such occasion I proposed to send two large paintings, one in oil and the other in water colour. For some time he was undecided whether they ought to be sent. But soon he gave a favourable decision and was subsequently spared worry as these paintings won Abanindranath's praise.

I came under the spell of Cubism which my teacher did not quite approve of. Initially he wanted to dissuade me from it but chose later to leave me along. As for abstract art I had by then inspired such a confidence in him that he defended my work in the teeth of hostile criticism. The sculpture in front of the *Mandir* at Santiniketan indicates his approval of my art.

The novelty of his stage décor came as a most agreeable surprise to me. We had the whole stage setting once made up only with wreaths of flowers.

⁴ The first two themes have been used by academic artists including Hemen Majumdar and these should have served Ramkinkar as his immediate model while exploring the sensuality of the female form.

Everything was visible through the setting. From his idea of the stage décor and make – up for all the plays of Rabindranath I had experienced a strange new feeling for beauty.

Mastermoshoy rejuvenated the Indian tradition of decoration and his students have following in his footsteps. He started a humble museum at Kala – Bhavana with the specimens of traditional art which had been neglected over the years. He had a special affection for folk art.

An artist by nature, he had dedicated himself to art and beauty and his personality found a fascinating expression in everything he did. He had won the complete trust of Rabindranath, Gandhiji and others who entrusted him with responsibilities of various kinds. Gandhiji, for instance, had left him the full charge of Congress exhibitions. The great teacher had chosen Santiniketan for his field of activity, accepting the charge of educating those who flocked here. With what distinction did he discharge his duties! His students all over India and even outside still respectfully adhere to ideals set forth by him. The great teacher who had combined in him the ideals of truth and beauty was the Creator's blessed child and we are ourselves blessed that we entered into an intimate association with such a person." (Translated by Shyamal Sarkar from the original Bengali article published in *Desh*, 14 May 1966.

It was the posters and the portraits of nationalist leaders he made during the non-co-operation 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 to Benode Behari Mukherjee. Again, unlike Benode Behari, 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 theatre, 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 and highly impressionable. As Benode Behari 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.



(A)

(B)

**FIGURE 9(A) Stella Kramrisch teaching the students.
(B) Ramkinkar Baij in different mood. Collection :Kala Bhavan**

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 1920's 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 wants to prepare. Although young Ramkinkar was more drawn to realist painting, he was also a *khaddar* wearing nationalist and Santiniketan in those days was a natural refuge for people like him, who came there either directly, or after being denied a place in government institutions. In addition, without the financial resources necessary for living and studying in a city, he had little choice in the matter. Although he was initially apprehensive, he found the place very conducive to his nature and it became his home for life. In 1925 when he first came to Santiniketan, Ramkinkar was nineteen; he had studied up to matric but had not completed the course. Despite being untrained he was clever with his hands and had acquired commendable representational skills, and after looking at his work Nandalal Bose is reported to have said that he had already learned what an institution could teach him, but could stay on for two or three years since he wanted to.⁵ Rabindranath and Nandalal had immediately recognized Ramkinkar's talent. They also felt that he needed to be allowed to blossom. However, he did not need to be instructed for that. He needed an atmosphere

⁵ *Ramkinkar Baij Self-Portrait*, p. 28.

where he could continue his work and experimentation thereby reaching a complete blossoming.

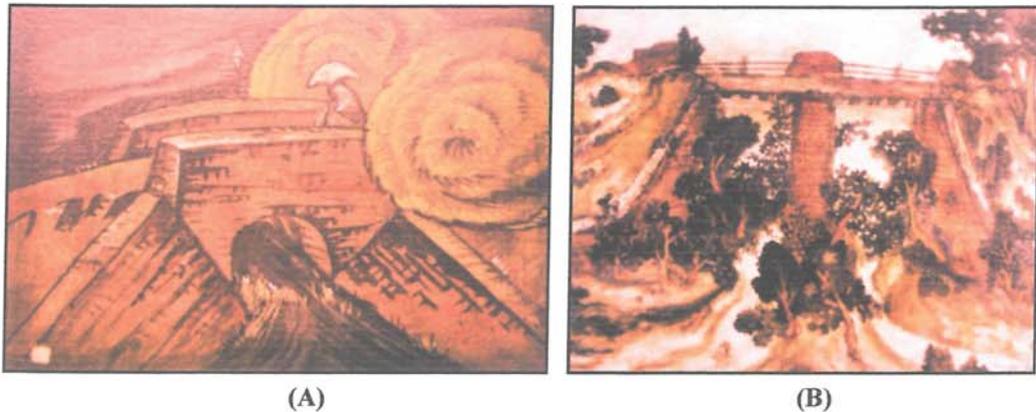


FIGURE 10(A) Bridge by Ramkinkar Baij Tempera on paper. Collection: N.G.M.A
(B) Bridge, Tempera on paper by Benode Behari Mukherjee. Collection: N.G.M.A

On the basis of what survives of his earlier work it would be a slight exaggeration to say that he was already a well-honed artist when he arrived at Santiniketan. The matter as Benode Behari Mukherjee observed, was what when he first arrived Ramkinkar had the basic skills, had already embarked on his career and had a professional approach; but he was yet to acquire a discerning taste and an individual artistic personality. A comparison of the early works and attitudes of these two artists would be useful in clarifying this. When Benode Behari came to Santiniketan (although he was deprived of formal school education due to his impaired vision), he was fairly well read and had a clear attitude towards art. He was only fifteen when he joined Kala Bhavan in 1919, but was clear that his way would not be that of the Bengal School to which his teachers, except Nandalal, still belonged. Nandalal was in the process of distancing himself and forging an independent trajectory.

Benode Behari joined forces with his own distinct thematic focus. From the outset he had decided that his inspiration would be nature and not mythology or history, which was the staple theme of nationalist painters. In contrast, Ramkinkar was skilled but very impressionable. While popular art including calendars and academic oil painting were his inspirations before he came to Santiniketan, after his enrollment in Kala Bhavan he returned to emulating the themes and techniques of Abanindranath and Nandalal, which in turn co-existed with realist portraiture.

Thus, in the work done during his student years at Kala Bhavan, we have wash paintings that exude a restrained romanticism with symbolist undertones like Abanindranath's, and paintings in which the figures and space are definitely structured and rendered with a plastic linearity as in Nandalal's works done after his visit to Ajanta, existing side by side with paintings that invoke the more linear and affected work of Abanindranath's followers, all very skillfully done. He was clearly trying to master the entire stylistic gamut of the nationalist painters; just he had tried to absorb the different skills employed by popular and academic artists earlier. This did not mean that he gave up the practice of realist representation during his student years. He still used it in the portraits and illustration work he undertook to partially support his stay and education at Santiniketan, with the rest of his finances coming from the occasional sale of paintings. But there was also another side to it. Of the three portraits from this period that have survived, only one seems to have been commissioned. The other two, of his mother and sister-in-law demonstrate an un-idealized intimacy, more forthcoming in his mother's, and

more decorously restrained using the framework of representational objectivity, in that of his sister-in-law.

Whatever their style, the works he did after arriving at Santiniketan demonstrate the strides in technical refinement he achieved over a short time. But Santiniketan's main contribution to Ramkinkar's growth lay elsewhere. Given his background, Santiniketan's rural setting and simple life should have appealed to him. Like the other Santiniketan masters-Tagore, Nandalal and Benode Behari- he too loved nature. Later in his life while talking about why, since he had initially come only for a few years, he had stayed on in Santiniketan forever, he said: 'The nature and climate of this place are to my liking. It was even more beautiful then, and less inhabited. The rugged Khoai was all around and the heat fierce, and in its middle like a lonely, cool, unknown valley covered with trees stood the Santiniketan Ashram. Nandalal Bose was the teacher, and we the students. No big buildings yet. Not many people, no such hustle. We painted, did sculptures, sometimes performed plays, and sang songs. We were like a large happy joint family. I knew nothing other than painting, sculpting and to live holding on to Santiniketan then. Also now.'⁶

Ramkinkar definitely benefited from having a versatile teacher like Nandalal, from the close proximity of an exemplar like Rabindranath, and from the company of informed and enquiring friends like Benode Behari. In Santiniketan he found an intellectual and creative community that was most cosmopolitan

⁶ See Ramkinkar Baij, 'Murti Tomar Jugal Sammilane', *Mahasay, Ami Chakkkhik, Rupokar Matro*, Ed. Sandipan Bhattacharya, Monchasa, Alipurduar 2002, p. p. 34-35.

and the best an artist could have found anywhere in India at that time. Although he showed little involvement in formal education, Ramkinkar's interests were wide. Even during his Bankura years he showed interest in theatre, literature and in learning English. It was clear that though he was a small town man by circumstance and earthy by temperament, he had an intellectual curiosity that was cosmopolitan and Santiniketan provided him with the perfect setting for gaining the kind of informal education he longed for.

Just as Rabindranath strove to bring art, music and dance into the lives of the middle-class, he and Nandalal also worked together to bring an intellectual quotient into the practice of art. As Ramkinkar remembered later, Nandalal besides giving him the freedom to explore his own possibilities as an artist,⁷ also advised him to go through the books in the Kala Bhavan library, take lessons in English⁸ and familiarize himself with the larger art scene. Rabindranath too reported to have once told him: 'It is not enough to paint and sculpt. Alongside you should also read a lot', and given him a book of Eliot's poems.⁹ As a result, besides Rabindranath he began to read Tolstoy, Turgenev and Dostoyevsky and fell in love with Bernard Shaw's plays and prefaces. In the company of Benode Behari the range of his literary interests expanded to include authors like James Joyce and modernist Indian writers. So did his interest in theatre. In Bankura his contacts were limited to popular Bengali theatre; in Santiniketan he became familiar with the new theatre of Rabindranath and Abanindranath

7 Ramkinkar has pointed out that Nandalal sometimes had initial reservations but never stopped him from experimenting and usually ended up supporting his efforts.

8 See Ramkinkar Baij, 'Jeebaner Ek Parva', *Mahasay, Ami Chakkhik, Rupokar Matro*, p. 22.

9 See Ramkinkar Baij, 'Murti Tomar Jugal Sammilane', *ibid*, p. 32.

and saw how Nandalal was helping to introduce a new aesthetics of the stage. Gradually through his readings he became familiar not only with Shakespeare and Shaw but also with Ernst Toller, Gorky and Pirandello, Rajshekar Basu and Sukumar Roy. He even tried to make original presentations of some of these. Santiniketan also influenced his taste in music; In addition to becoming an admirer of classical singers like Faiyyaz Khan, Amir Khan and Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, he grew to love Rabindrasangeet and Baul songs, which became his soul music and which he sang to himself with great passion.

While Nandalal as a nationalist showed a distinct preference for oriental traditions, Santiniketan was not closed to Western art, and more importantly to modernist ideas. Though Ramkinkar, in contrast to Nandalal, is often seen as the rebel who ushered in modern Western art into the Pan-Asian Santiniketan, this perhaps would not have happened without Nandalal paving the way for him. Among other things Rabindranath and Nandalal played a role in veering Indian art away from the historicist path of the Bengal School, towards an art more sensitive to local environmental experience, and based on a sense of place rather than history. This definitely shaped Ramkinkar's choice of subjects. Acknowledging as much he said: 'The subject matter of almost all his (Nandalal's) paintings was simple. Ordinary people, common landscapes, his paintings convey a complete picture of the village. This simple theme attracts me very much. Ordinary people are also the subject matter of my paintings and sculptures, and this is largely due to Nandalal's indirect influence.'¹⁰

10 Ramkinkar Baij, *ibid*, p. 34.

Nandalal's impact on Ramkinkar was not limited to the choice of subject matter. His engagement with oriental art, like Abanindranath's before him, had a modernist underpinning to it. What they picked on often revealed a modernist taste, and thus the issues of syntax and aesthetics they raised were more modernist than traditional, even when the themes were not visibly so. Further Rabindranath, in keeping with his belief that literature and art should be a people's vehicle to transcend the parochial and travel towards the universal, made several attempts to introduce Western modern art into Santiniketan. He invited Stella Kramrisch¹¹ to Santiniketan and in 1922 she gave a series of forty-eight lectures covering the progress of Western art from the Gothic to the Dadaist, which he ensured all art teachers and students attended. In the same year Kramrisch also played a role, probably encouraged by Rabindranath, in bringing an exhibition of Bauhaus artists to Calcutta. Andre Karpeles, a French artist who painted in a Post-Impressionist manner and was a close associate of the Tagore's, worked in Santiniketan for short periods during the early twenties and taught oil painting to a few students. And Rabindranath while returning from his travels in the West, periodically brought books and journals for the Kala Bhavan library.

Ramkinkar did not share Nandalal's and Benode Behari's avid interest in 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. In 1928

¹¹ See Somendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Silpi Ramkinkar Alapchhari*, Dey's Publication, Kolkata 1994, p. 17.

Liza Von Pott, a Viennese sculptor, came to Santiniketan and with her help sculpture classes were started at Kala Bhavan. She taught some of the interested students, including Ramkinkar and Sudhir Khastagir, the basic techniques of modeling, mould-making and plaster-casting. The following year another sculptor, Marguerite Milward, who was a student and later assistant of Antoine Bourdelle and the most important, incidentally she was also an early admirer of Rabindranath's paintings and suggested that he exhibit them in Paris. She visited Santiniketan for a few months chiefly to do a portrait of Rabindranath. She was much more accomplished sculptor and besides demonstrating her methods of modelling, also delivered illustrated lectures on modern European sculpture. This brought the students, including Ramkinkar, into contact with not only new skills but also different aspects of Western modernism, which as we shall presently see, greatly influenced Ramkinkar's development as a sculptor. 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. The latter was based on a small maquette by Bourdelle gifted by Mil-ward to the Kala Bhavan museum. This and the other reliefs on Shyamali depicting life-size Santhal figures that fill the entire panel represent not only a thematic preference but also a growing commitment to realism. They dramatize the shift from the Bengal school that Santiniketan began to represent in the 30s.

In 1930, Ramkinkar completed his course in Kala Bhavan. The beginning of sculpture as an academic discipline in Kala Bhavan coincided with the

end of his studentship. Prabhat Mohan Bandopadhyay, his contemporary at Kala Bhavan, points out that with the introduction of sculpture Ramkinkar out-stripped his classmates and became their natural leader. His familiarity with the modelling of traditional images and interest in realism now came in handy. After finishing his studies he stayed on and began to informally teach sculpture at Kala Bhavan. The relief of *Kach Devayani* which he did in collaboration with Sudhir Khastagir on the outer walls of Santoshalaya, the school children's hostel—based on Abanindranath's fresco tile—belongs to this period. But what characterized his work during this period were small sculptures based on the everyday world and portraits. As a sculptor he took to portraiture in a big way. The first was perhaps that of Benodebehari, which was followed by those of Sayed Mujtaba Ali, Krishna Kripalini, Vasudevan, Masoji, Ramananda Chatterjee, and culminated with that of Alauddin Khan.

Portraiture and sculpture in general led to the revival of his interest in realism. Grey's *Anatomy* and Edouard Lanteri's book on modelling and sculpting were source books for Ramkinkar and his friends, and gradually they began to employ models to draw from.¹² Even Nandalal—who believed that drawing from posed models was a Western practice and only drawing from living, moving figures allowed one to understand and internalize the life rhythm of living things—relented and brought them a skeleton, got revolving stands made and finally even invited a professor from the medical college to lecture on anatomy. It was as if two models of pedagogy existed, one for painting and one for sculpture.

¹² In the beginning this seems to have been done unofficially.

Incongruous as this now appears, the nationalist resurgence in Indian art was limited to painting. There was no parallel movement in sculpture. While the painters revolted against the Western realist manner of painting and moved away from the path of Ravi Verma, developing what was identified as a new 'Indian way' of painting, nothing similar happened in sculpture. The colonial academic tradition continued unbroken in sculpture from G.K. Mhatre (1876-1947) through Fanindranath Bose (1888-1926) and Hiranmoy Roychowdhury (1884-1962) to Deviprasad Roychowdhury (1899-1975). Portraiture and public monuments were considered legitimate goals of sculpture.

Although the nationalists extolled the virtues of Indian sculpture, for Abanindranath, Michelangelo and Rodin and Mughal miniatures remained the archetypes for sculpture and painting, respectively. Nandalal was more appreciative of Indian sculpture and even noticed that relief sculpture and mural paintings in ancient India were informed by the same visual sensibilities and that their visual languages overlapped. Yet he collaborated with Mhatre to transform his own drawings into relief sculptures and once invited Deviprasad Roychowdhury (who had learned painting from Abanindranath, the leader of the nationalist group, and sculpture from Hiranmoy Roychowdhury, a academician), to instruct Kala Bhavan students on sculpture while on a private visit to Santiniketan.¹³

Ramkinkar, who was so far given to absorbing the lessons of Abanindranath and Nandalal in painting, was now enabled to make his own intervention through

¹³ This was before 1928. See, Benodebehari Mukherjee, 'Adhunik Silpa Siksha', *Chittrakatha*, Aruna Prakashini, Kolkatal984, p. 165.

sculpture. This did not mean that he instantly set out to comprehensively negate their viewpoints-especially those of Nandalal-but that began to establish a framework for a dialectical engagement with it. The dialectics began by moving from one pole of contemporary practice to the other, from nationalist painting to realist portrait sculpture, and then affecting a kind of synthesis within his own sculptural practice. Portrait sculpture called for realism, an adherence to individual physiognomy. Though this was an accepted part of contemporary practice it stood at the opposite end from nationalist painting and called for a different set of skills and sensibility. But when it came to doing independent sculpture, the same adherence to muscular-skeletal physiology was not exercised. Take for instance a group of intertwining male and female or *Mithuna* figures that have survived from around 1929-30. In these sculptures, rather than focusing on the physiological integrity of the individual figures, he focuses on the movement and rhythm of the human bodies and their interrelation or 'rhyming'. Whether rhythmically intertwined or locked in tension, in them the human body lent itself to greater abstraction.

The dialectic is played out on a grander scale in two of his outdoor sculptures, the *Santhal Family* and the *Lamp Stand*. But before we turned to them we may take a quick look at some of the architectural reliefs and outdoor sculptures that led to them. His first piece of large work was, as we have noticed, a relief based on Abanindranath's *Kach Devayani*. With its theme and composition borrowed, it was an extension of his apprenticeship to the Bengal School, and thus, in line with his student work as a painter. The next large piece was

a relief sculpture representing *Saraswati*, which he did in 1931 at Modern School in Delhi where he was appointed as a drawing teacher for six months but unfortunately he left the school after finishing this work.¹⁴ Though the theme is still traditional, compared to *Kach Devayani* panel the figure of *Saraswati* is more animate and angular in rhythm and structure, and there is a definite personal touch to it. But for all its distinctive tenor, the fusion of the decorative and figurative reminds us of Nandalal, and of Ramkinkar having been one of his students.



FIGURE 11 *Saraswati*, 1931, Relief Sculpture, Modern School, New Delhi.
Collection: Modern School

While Ramkinkar was working in Delhi's Modern School for six months, he had created *Saraswati* entitled sculpture with the permission of the authorities. He used locally available materials for this wonderful creation. This particular work, like his other works did not adhere to the typical structure of heavy

¹⁴ He left Santiniketan for Delhi in December 1931 and returned by the middle of 1932.

lower portion of the Indian temple tradition. Like *Sujata*, this female form is also slimmish and tallish with long legs and hands (its structure in stone reminds you of the dancing girl from Mohenjodaro. Lithe and sinuous she has a wonderfully relaxed and sober pose. However there is one thing which might amaze the viewer. The goddess figurine has a bird on one of her left hands. The bird resembles most likely a parrot (which is a symbol of sexuality and fertility). However on the other hand, it could very much well be some other seed-eating bird (this is a symbol of bounty). One may get strongly reminded of the goddess Meenakshi who is the south Indian female counterpart of Lord Pashupati (Pashupati is the non-Aryan icon-the god who takes care of the plant and animal kingdom of the earth-who has been later on coincided with Lord Shiva). We must remember that his association with the south Indian students who were residing in Santiniketan in those days could have very well enriched his knowledge too.

The next set of relief sculptures he did were on the walls of Shyamali—Rabindranath's mud-house-which were completed in early 1935, and which represented a more radical break in theme, style and vision. They are the first life-size representations of Santhal figures. Compared to Bengal School and his own earlier representations of the Santhal and peasants, these figures exude a new spirit of realism.

There were probably two distinctive influences behind it, one not merely adding to the other but also transforming it. Firstly there was the example

of Nandalal, who was already drawing the people and the life around Santiniketan with a new insight and empathy, in marked contrast to the romanticized imaginings of the Bengal School to which he himself had earlier contributed. This, as Ramkinkar acknowledged, improves his own choice of subject matter. But the introduction of sculpture in Kala Bhavana also led to the employment of Santhal's as models,¹⁵ who possibly influenced by Milward. Although occasionally did portraits of eminent personalities like Rabindranath or Jagadish Chandra Bose,¹⁶ her travel and work in India was primarily under taken for the anthropological documentation of tribal men and women, including the Santhal's. Her own training under Bourdelle combined with the professional requirements of anthropology, merged to give her work a quality of engaged modelling and objectivity. In fact, in a strange way her interest in tribal people went beyond that of an anthropologist and touched on the personal. Though her brief in her professional work as an anthropological documenter was to make a collection of types while choosing her models, she did not look for stand and types but for distinct individuals within the tribe who appealed to her. Ramkinkar seems to have imbibed this convergence of anthropology and art,¹⁷ of type and individuality, noticeable in her portraits a long with her Bourdellesque work methods.

15 The Santhal models they employed were always clothed, life study came much later. For the use of Santhal models see, Prabhatmohan Bandopadhyay, Amar Sahapathi Ramkinkar', Prakash Das Ed. *Ramkinkar*, p. 97.

16 In Santiniketan besides a portrait of Tagore she also did also at least one other portrait, that of Krishna Bey a student from Madras.

17 She often recorded the names of the individuals who sac for her anthropological documentations and similarly she also sometimes exhibited her portraits of individuals from the social mainstream as examples of racial types. Thus a portrait of [Umrao Singh?] Sher Gil was show with the title 'Sher Gil: Punjab Type -India' and of Kedarnath Chatterjee's as 'Kedarnath Chatterjee: Bengali - reversion to Greek Type' when they were exhibited at the Platt Hall, Manchester in 1934.

Ramkinkar's reliefs on Shyamali demonstrate not only an intimate familiarity and objective knowledge of Santhal bodies but also his familiarity with the Post – Rodinesque figurative tradition in modern sculpture. Besides demonstrating her own techniques of modelling and lecturing on modern European sculpture, Milward also gifted a maquette of Bourdelle's *Force de la Volonte* in plaster to the Kala Bhavan museum. And Ramkinkar's *Hunter* on the left side of the main door of Shyamali, with its linear terseness and axial turn of the head that gives the figure a heroic and energetic posture, carries on echo of this and similar sculptures of Bourdelle. These reliefs were worked over at some later date, especially the torch bearing female on the right. By comparing old photographs with the present image, it can be noticed that she was originally a slender and slightly stiffer figure, resolutely striding forward. In the present state her posture is more relaxed, her proportions plump and with her head turned to look over her shoulder. She is sensuous like an ancient Yakshi. These changes suggest that the reworking was done sometime around 1950.

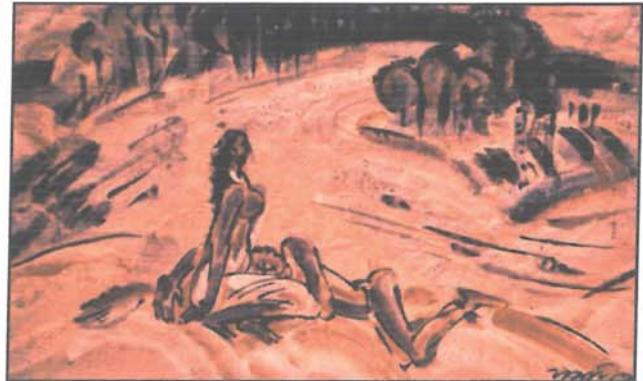
In the year nineteen thirty four he became a full time lecturer. His interaction with Nandalal and Benode Behari helped Ramkinkar to find his direction. During the early years the three met daily at a wayside tea shop and discussed art over cups of tea, both Benode Behari and Ramkinkar have described these discussions as seminal. A theater enthusiast from his pre-Santiniketan days, Ramkinkar also found Nandalal's costume and stage designs remarkable, and he inspired him to experiment with 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 Benode Behari, 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 strike a new note. This becomes clearer in paintings like *Golden Crop* and *Santhal Family*.



(A)



(B)

FIGURE 12(A) *The Golden Crop*, oil on canvas.
(B) *Santhal Couple taking rest*, Tempera on paper. Collection: N.G.M.A

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 named *Halakarshan*, where Tagore as ploughman appears surrounded by villagers, including Santhal's. The earliest representations of the figure in Benode Behari 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 Benode Behari, 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 avid interest in 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. 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. In 1935 Surendranath Kar and Nandalal Bose constructed a mud house named 'Shyamali' for Rabindranath. The outer walls were decorated by relief sculpture. At both sides of the gateway one male and one female Santhal relief sculpture were prepared with the help of mud mixed with tar. In these two statues, he interpreted the human anatomy using geometrical figures. Early traces of Ramkinkar's own style of sculpting female figures could be observed in this relief sculpture.

As Nandalal made the drawings, drawn in the foundation of the outer walls, open for the public, Ramkinkar also brought the natural sculpture to the public in Santiniketan with the help of his personal perseverance. At a time when sculptors were running after the commissioned work of the rich, aristocrat and royal society and used to decorate public ways with the help of statues, Ramkinkar devoted himself in creative sculpture. Although there was plenty of scope for other work, he paid no attention to that.

Ramkinkar's reliefs on the Shyamali were some of his first important environmental work. The tall and poised *Sujata* was also done about the same time. Its romanticism is comparable with that of *Kali*. He conceived it as a sculptural response to the tall, slim figure of Jaya Appasamy who was then a student at Santiniketan. Nandalal, Ramkinkar tells us, gave it a narrative twist by adding a small pot and transforming her into *Sujata* carrying 'payas' to the

nearby image of Buddha by Rudrappa Hanji — however, Ramkinkar accepted this literary conceit and when Rudrappa's clay image broke he remodelled it in cement. The students of Santiniketan had to work various disadvantages, the main issue being the acquisition of equipment/apparatus relating to the creative arts. In order to help Rudrappa Hanji, Ramkinkar introduced a new type of material mixing cement and sand with the locally available gravel. This material was used in construction of statues in open places as a substitute for stone. But the reliefs on the Shyamali and other contemporary paintings show that he was on the way to curing himself of such literary romanticism.

Ramkinkar was passionately attached to nature, as brought out in many of his works which depict, for example, the groves of *Palas* or *Simul* trees—with their red glow. As Arun Paul has pointed out natural scenery evoked a 'madden emotion' in Ramkinkar, which he expressed in his work to a high degree. His landscape studies in water colour capture his strong romanticism regarding nature, with improvisation of black lines, flow of colours, and strange forces symbolized through upright tree trunks, projectile branches, and the spray of foliage and spiral clouds. The other main subject of focus found in Ramkinkar's art was the human figure, which can be seen both his paintings and sculptures. A minute observation of the strength and vitality of the Santhal's is seen in his works. Ramkinkar brought out the emotion and animation of human beings, and never tried to convey social or political messages through his depictions of the common working men and women. His portrayal is of the evergreen human spirit,

busy in work, relaxed in festivity, tender in love and warm in sensuality—regardless of where he saw it.

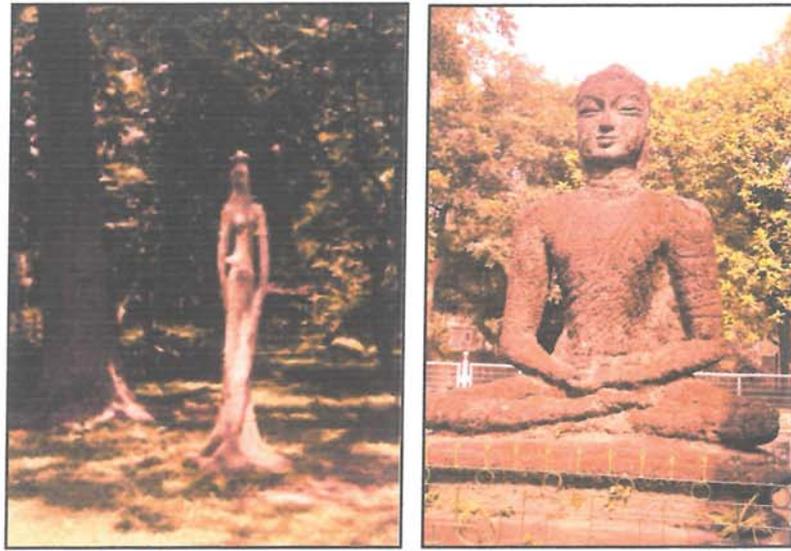
In those days life in Santiniketan was idealistic, simple and joyful. Poet Rabindranath lived among his students and was a liberal influence. Among the ashramites were many minds whose vision, catholicity of taste and deep humanity inspired the young people there. Ramkinkar earned while he learned and in an environment particularly suited to his own fulfillment in sculpture and painting. Music, drama and poetry as much as the natural beauty of the place had all contributed to his growth and were part of this ideal environment.

Ramkinkar must be considered to be the most important original sculptor working in India in the period of transition to modern art. His significance lies in the fact that he was not guided by the conventional format but built up a style and a body of work that is essentially individualistic, based and rooted in his own personality and environment. The sculptors and painters of his time are of two main kinds, firstly those of Bengal School who had evolved a nationalist and romantic art, and secondly those who adhered to the strict academism of the schools of art based on western models.

Ramkinkar's art in contrast is essentially pioneering and personal. It is characterized by tremendous energy, is exuberant, strongly vital, reaching for the light. It has a surging movement of growth and its figures and forms are dynamic and earthy. It is typical of Ramkinkar that most of his work is out of doors. His body of creations belongs to the wind and the soil and is part

of the bursting fruit and the blossoming flower. To some artists their work is informed with a sense of struggle. Even the finished work is not restful for, apart from its own dynamism, one feels the questioning and striving of the artist. Ramkinkar was such a personality and when through passion, purpose and effort the work of art at last comes into being, it is the birth not of a complacent ideal but of a volatile entity with the marks, accidents and vitality of life itself.

‘Sujata’ (1935), ‘Santhal Family’ (1938), ‘Dhan Jharai/ Paddy Threshing/ Reaping’ (1943), ‘Kaler Banshi/ Mill Call’ (1956), were done on concrete. From these four sculpture or statues ‘Sujata’ and ‘Santhal Family’ have no smooth base but the other two have little pedestals. Materials used here are also non-traditional. It was Nandalal’s idea that an artist would not seek help from others for art materials and would not seek help from others for art materials and would collect them as well as the subject of art from the nearby places where the work could be done. In this regard Ramkinkar’s sculptures/ statues are ideal. The material most used was the gravel of Birbhum mixed with cement and sand. The conscious attachment to the constructional format of painting that Nandalal and his followers showed was not seen in the paintings of society art schools. The Santiniketan School of painters enriched their paintings with the formal excellences of the successive schools of paintings.

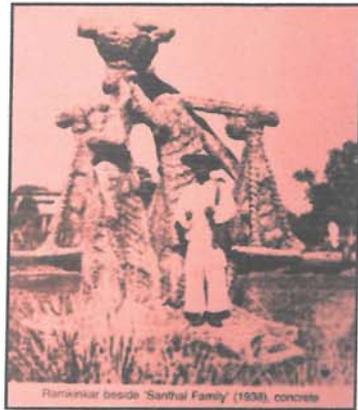


(A)

(B)

**FIGURE 13(A) Sujata, 1935, Concrete, First Environmental Sculpture in Indian art scenario.
(B) Buddha, 1931, Concrete. Collection: Visva Bharati.**

These were followed by his first monumental sculpture the Santhal Family (1938). It was based on a small clay piece he had done before he left for a short stint at the Modern School in Delhi at the end of 1931 and which was salvaged and repaired by Nandalal who found it in a broken state. Nandalal himself used the motif in his Way to Bolpur done in 1934. But in 1938 when Ramkinkar gave it a monumental scale it took on a new dimension that went beyond that of a genre. It was both a landmark in modern Indian sculpture and arguably one of his greatest achievements. He was merely thirty two and he was already a master, little wonder that Benode Behari considered him the genius among them.



(A)



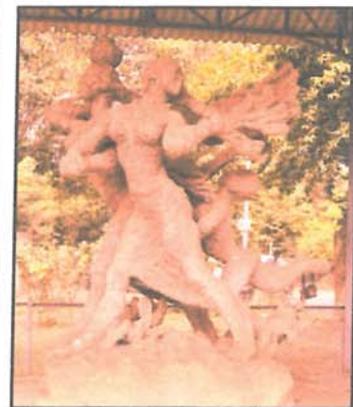
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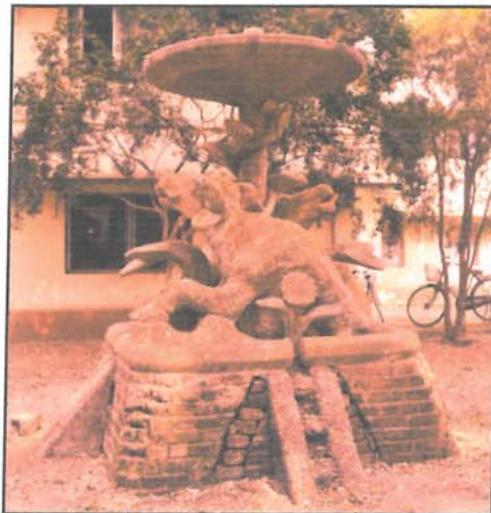
(C)



(D)



(E)



(F)



(G)

FIGURE 14(A) Santhal Family, 1938, Concrete.
(B) Ramkinkar Baij standing in front of his Santhal family.
(C) Lampstand, 1938, First Abstract Sculpture of India, Cement. (D) Paddy Threshing, 1943, Concrete.
(E) Mill Call, 1953-56, Concrete. (F) Fountain, 1963, Cement.
(G) Untitled, unfinished work. Above three Collections are from Visva Bharati.Santiniketan.



FIGURE 15 Yaksha & Yakshi, stone, 1962-66, in front of Reserve Bank of India

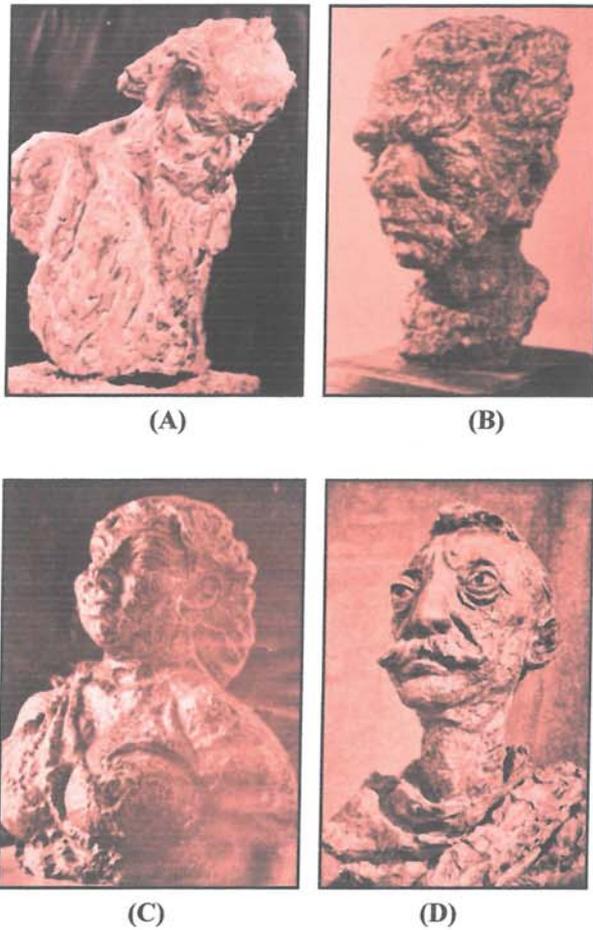


FIGURE 16(A) Portrait of Rabindranath Tagore, Plaster of Paris, 1941.
(B) Portrait of Abanindranath Tagore, Bronze, 1945.
(C) Portrait of Madhura Singh (a student of Ramkinkar), 1942.
(D) Portrait of Pramod Gangooly, Plaster of Paris.
 All four above portraits photographs are collected from N.G.M.A

Such an imposing presence of the figure conjoined with such restraint, such a combination of realism and emotional empathy was not achieved in any of his later monumental sculptures. The technique was innovative and in the Santiniketan tradition of employing local materials advantageously. He worked combining the skills of a modeler and a carver, and made the cement and lateritic-gravel mix suggests the sensuousness of flesh and the structural strength of stone. These massive and slow moving figures originally made by the side of a mud road with clusters of reeds around and seen against an uncluttered space had a solemn presence. He always considered the surroundings when he planned his outdoor sculptures and his work gained in nuances from it, but since the environment is no more the same these original effects can now be grasped only from old photographs.

The decade between 1935 and 1945 was one of the most fruitful periods in Ramkinkar's career. As already noticed during 1935 -38 his works veered around Santhal life and, in quite a few, around the family. In them man and women appear as equals — as they indeed are among the Santhal's — full of self-respect, and in close contact with nature. These are the most positive and peaceful images of 'life' Ramkinkar ever produced. On a more universal plane and in a more abstract idiom he explored similar ideas in a series of *Mithunas* begun in the 'early 30s. This brings to the fore the question of the relation between abstraction and realism in his work. That some of the *Mithunas* slightly preceded the more realistic reliefs on *Shyamali* and the *Santhal Family*; and that the *Santhal Family* was in turn succeeded by other

abstract sculptures suggest that he did not see realism and abstraction in a teleological or evolutionary relationship but as alternate modes; and this we see was also the way he looked at modern styles as a whole. While his works are realistic they are not realistic in the Western sense. The movements of his figures are imbued with a rhythmic quality alien to Western realistic sculpture but characteristic of Indian murals and sculptures. By overlaying Western representational values with Indian rhythmic animation he produces works that are realist in attitude but not quite so in style. This was the sculptural equivalent to the post-impressionist technique he used in his paintings from the mid-30s.

Both his sculptures and paintings during the mid-30s were rooted in factual reality and stamped by his subjective sensibility. In the late 30s they were followed by a series of post-Cubist, post-Futurist works showing birds in flight against a landscape, or trees and houses fused into a composite image focusing more on the structure and movement underlying the scene than on individual objects. These drawings were done in black and white and therefore have a pronounced structural quality. On the one hand they led him onto one of his first abstract environmental sculpture the *Lamp Stand* (1938) and a few smaller abstract sculptures, and on the other to a group of post-Cubist paintings. *The Pond*, *Mother* and *Mother and Child* belong to the latter group and remind us of Picasso's post-Cubist works from the mid-30s which he seems to have known through the issues of 'Cahiers d'art'.

The Pond is based on a drawing made during a Kala Bhavan excursion and shows a pond seen through a tent and a medley of elements, including figures and trees, combined into a complex and composite graphic configuration. While the objects lose in volume they become part of an intricate drawing in space achieved through dissolution of Cubist facets. *Mother* is a post-Cubist image with a metaphorical and Surrealist twist. The emotional overtones takes on a more Expressionist dimension and the surrealist insight becomes more unsettling in *Mother and Child* where an image of 'endearment and love', as Subramanian says is 'turned into one of undisguised violence; showing the new preying on the old'. In these paintings his natural optimism and *joie de vivre* for the first time yields to a murkier vision.

The source of this growing darkness was the Second World War and the Bengal Famine of 1943. Ramkinkar was deeply troubled by these developments and they once again awakened his social concerns and prompted him to express them through his works. This led him to transform facts into metaphors and individual events into general symbols. *Jogin's Death* and *After the Storm* (both not in the exhibition) are representative of his work at this point. Jogin was found dead in his tea-shop which was frequented by Ramkinkar, Benodebehari and Nandalal and Ramkinkar while mourning his death in a painting transformed the image of dead Jogin — his body dry and bony as the rickety structure of his shop, painted in tones of elegiac blue and tender pink — into an archetypal image of suffering and death. *After the storm* is also based on the metaphorical reading of a factual event. It was painted in

the wake of a storm that left behind a trail of destruction. Ramkinkar read into this experience of natural fury and destruction an analogous vision of destruction by man's inhumanity. In the painting on a grey ground that evokes soaked earth seen in the morning light he painted a human skeleton white and flattened like the petals of a flower pressed between the pages of a book. These images are poetic and moving, and suggest a reawakening of his romanticism along with his social concerns.

The figurative and the abstract were the two poles of his art. Though the two in many ways represent opposing tendencies in art Ramkinkar used both to express a common theme — the vigour and vitality of man. His sculptures relate to an Indian tradition that runs from Karle to Sanchi, and, after bypassing the classical, continues through Ellora to Konarak — a long tradition devoted to the celebration of the human body that moves from the contained vigour of the primitive to the exuberance of the baroque. His sculptures also relate in equal measure to the modern Western development running from Rodin through Epstein, to a post-Cubist like Duchamp Villon. While the Western sculptors connected the development of abstraction to progressive De -humanization Ramkinkar rejoined it with the organic and the human.

Reconciling the two was central to his vision and work process up to the late 40s after which their counter-pulls become somewhat disruptive. Among his sculptures one of the last works where the two are held in a fruitful tension is his small but powerful Gandhi done immediately after his assassination. It

shows Gandhi as a man striding triumphantly through a crumbling world. He saw Gandhi as a moving colossus, a whirl wind of action.

Human interest and post-Cubist abstraction are also held in a rewarding balance in *Shifting Generations* which can be read as an allegory on the existential predicament of man, especially of the toiling man. The uncared child in the foreground, the labour-couple in the middle and the suspended skeleton behind allegories the absurd progress of life. Though the painting is clearly allegorical it was occasioned by a skeleton dug up from a construction site in Santiniketan and thus born of an actual event. The allegorical co-implicitness of life and death finds a visual analogue in his post-Cubist interplay of definite lines and ambivalent planes which he develops into a visual hide and seek in the picture.

His themes became explicitly social after this and his images of the Santhal are more monumental. But popular as they are they do not have the same contact with life of his earlier works. They are charged more by ideology than by perception, and more by pre-disposition than experience. His *Thresher* (1950) for instance looks like a pneumatic figure, almost monstrous compared to his sculpture *Harvester* or the sensuously elegant figure in the even earlier *Golden Crop*. There is something unreal about its heroic monumentality; its exaggeration is comparable with that of socialist realism. This is also true of *Maternity* and his variations on *Mill Call* (1953-56). An ideological imprint is also visible in some of his overtly allegorical paintings like the *Birth of Krishna* and 'In the

Castle'. In his early work the primary value of the subject matter always came from experience and the symbolic was only an additional value. But in *Birth of Krishna* the subject matter is clearly symbolic and the sole reason for its choice. With the literary significance of the theme becoming more important than the visual experience of the image his Cubism became an academic device, a grid that pegs the figures in a space to which it has no organic relation. This is even truer of *In the Castle*, the superimposition of images used in it is a literary rather than a Cubist device, it is closer to post-Expressionist montage than to Cubist College.

What is problematic is not choosing to be literary but continuing to use Cubist devices that do not readily lend itself to involved narration. But this was not Ramkinkar's problem alone but of a generation of artists, who began as post-Cubists and then in the wake of the Second World War turned to Expressionist and more socially committed art. It is significant in this context that in 1950 he exhibited at the *Salon de Realities Nouvelle*. But the painter with whom he can be best compared is Renato Guttuso, the Italian artist who like Ramkinkar began as a post-Cubist but after World War-II turned to figurative and allegorical painting as an; artist strongly committed to social issues. For both of them this came with art ideological commitment to the left, though with differences of degree. And both oscillated between two stylistic ideals represented by Picasso — especially in *Guernica* — and socialist realism. Ramkinkar's *Birth of Krishna* compares with Guttuso's reworking of Gericault's *Raft of Medusa* or *Crucifixion*, Ramkinkar's *In the*

Castle and *Woman with Cup* can be compared with Guttuso's representation of Sicilian peasants occupying land and *Spaghetti Eater*. And both painted post-Cubist abstract work in tandem with these. The question of compatibility of Cubism and allegory has been through he continued to be engaged with a theme.

We also see the same spirit in his portraits. All his major portraits were done during the 30s and 40s when representation and personal vision were more focused than social concern. His first portraits were conventional but he soon began to take them beyond likeness by projecting a personal response into them and giving them an image presence. He was inspired by Rodin and Epstein but his own innovations are often comparable to those of Matisse and Picasso.

His portraits from the outset had an Expressionist underpinning and subsequent to his assimilation of Cubism he moved towards a post-Cubist and post-Surrealist Expressionism. Thus his development as a portraitist followed his general development as an artist and it can be exemplified with *Gangooly* (1936) *Preeti Pande* (1939) and *Abarani-ii* (1942). *Gangooly*'s head emerging out of an abstract vortex of forces formed by the folds of his shawl is modeled with an Expressionist urgency. In contrast to this gestural extravagance *Preeti Pande* has a clipped and compact body-line. The anatomical units are marked out without the excessive focus we find in *Gangooly* and resynthesised with a greater plastic articulation employing

Cubist principles, not allowing the exuding sensuality to burst into expressive violence or the formal structure to suppress it. The suffused sensuality we see in this portrait runs through many of his works including the almost contemporary painting *Picnic*, and the small sculpture *Perambulator*, and the mid-50s painting *Summer Afternoon*. It acquires more pronounced erotic and surrealist overtones in *Abarani-II* comparable to what we have already noticed *Mother and Child*. *Abarani* is more thoroughly dissected than *Preeti Pande*, the excesses are further lopped off and the parts — nose, forehead, eyes, jaws, arms, rib-cage and breasts — are given a near autonomous completeness and reassembled with a freedom that makes it something of a sculptural collage. As a portrait it conveys psychological penetration more than semblance. The Surrealist insight it brings to the perception of the human form considerably undermines the Cubist call to formal order and transforms the portrait into an icon of primeval eros. The post-Cubist, post-Surrealist dismantling of the head makes *Abarani* comparable to Matisse's *Jeannette* series and Picasso's *Bisgeloup* heads, but it represents an extreme point where portrait gains in expressive and revelatory power but almost destroys the objectivity of the model. Viewed from this point *Madhura Singh*, voluptuous as a *Yakshi*, is his counter-point to *Abarani*.

A similar comparison can be drawn between his two portraits of Rabindranath. The first which he called *The Poet* (1938) is actually a symbolic portrait where the features are subjected to analogical and metaphorical transformations which are more literary than visual and not always in harmony with the physiological

logic of the head. The second portrait done two years later began as a realist bust with hands done from life but was transformed radically and completed without the model. The final version with its broad taunt shoulders and thoughtfully bowed head rising from a ravaged bust (now without hands) is a virile monolith. It is not a representation of Rabindranath as he appeared in his last days or a smooth-faced idol of the famous man but the image of a remarkably creative man standing face to face, at the end of his life, with-what he reckoned to be a 'crisis in civilization'. This *Rabindranath* is a counterpoint to his Gandhi and he had once thought of doing a monumental double portrait of the duo.

It was usual for him to arrive at the final image after many cancellations and to finish the portrait without the model. For him it was a means of arriving at the appropriate equation between the objectivity of appearance and the subjectivity of experience. And each portrait was for him a different concretization of the artist-model interaction, and each encounter — regulated by admiration, intimacy, passion or awe — a particular gradient of inter subjectivity. It is difficult to view any of his portraits without becoming aware of this. In this respect his painted portraits *Soma Joshi* (Girl with Dog), *Swapnamoyi*, and *Binodini* deserves special mention (The first and the third are in this exhibition). *Soma Joshi* — rotund, beady-eyed and doll-faced, seated beneath a flowering bower, book in hand, pet dog by her side, the curves of her body echoing the surrounding plants and flowers — is a symbol of cultured bliss. In contrast to her *Binodini* (in Subramanyan's words) is 'an image of soft perplexity, a female Hamlet'.



FIGURE 17(A) Binodini, 1948, Oil on gunny cloth, Collection: N.G.M.A
 (B) Photograph of Binodini at the age of 16. Collection: Family of Binodini Devi.

Her ambivalence comes partly from the strange disjunction between her hands — suspended in mid-air like probing tentacles — and the reared head beaming passion. Though charged by the same emotion they seem to be acting in mutual oblivion. Similarly while she pins down the artist/ viewer with her pointed and aggressive glances her body is in turn compressed, flattened and unfolded side-ways like a fan. From a number of associated drawings and independent water colours of Binodini it is possible to see how her image turned from that of a passive and sensuous odalisque into an aggressive and tense *femme fatale*. This is one of his most personal portraits and it can be read as a condensed history of the artist-model encounter. And how it differs from fantasy can be seen by comparing it with a small etching which is now called the ‘*Artist with his Model*’ but he had titled ‘*Comrade*’. Titled ‘*Comrade*’, its true theme is that of the artist and the model as comrades-in-art. This is a

fleeting dream of a romantic artist, which as the oil portrait of Binodini shows, he ended up battling in life.



FIGURE 18(A) Artist with his model or Comrade etching. Collection: N.G.M.A
(B) Binodini, 1948, watercolour on paper. Collection: N.G.M.A

Ramkinkar could express himself from within the routine experiments that a burgeoning institution like Kala Bhavan would offer, is evident from what he did on the wall of Black House. This building made on mud, brick and tar, was used as a studio and the become a practical exercise for public sculptures. Many of the reliefs were copies from the past or modeled after them, some of the larger reliefs show an assortment of world culture; an Assyrian lion shared space with the Mohenjo-Daro seal with the bull, and a camel and palm tree. While Ramkinkar was working on the walls of this building, Nandalal, the mentor, is said to have expressed amazement at his dexterity.

His expressive mode changed from the decade of the forties. This later became a point of debate, as to his ideological belonging. But seen in perspective,

he did get interested in experimenting with the varieties of ways seeing/ translating his immediate world at large. Cubo-expressionism was one of the means; he also got interested in Surrealism and did undertake ventures around the same time.

Ramkinkar was extremely sensitive to the mediums of expression; hence his thematic horizon always awaited a befitting medium. His oil paintings which tend to perplex most viewers for their combination of form and content are an example. Here, social subjects take on a more than fleeting form; the dramatics of gesture and movement are often combined with a knack for realism. Next to his sculptural explorations, this was the most tactile medium at hand.

He reserved certain themes for special occasions. Those who knew him personally observed that he represented the birth of Krishna on every birthday of his own. *'Birth of Krishna* is a dramatic subject, accentuated by the violence done to the innocents at the behest of Kamsa, the cruel uncle of Krishna, after the prophesy of his death at the hands of the nephew. This legend compares very well with the Christian subject matter of the massacre of the innocents during the birth of Christ. Ramkinkar perhaps chose this as a ploy to experiment with his variety of Cubo-expressionism, where some very volumetric forms jostle for space with flat float-lets. But this thematic is important to show how, while impressionably capable of succumbing to the popular myth of Annapurna, he could also examine the mythic by what was understood to be a vehicle of analysis (notably Cubo-expressionism).



FIGURE 19 Birth of Krishna, Oil on canvas. Collection: N.G.M.A

By the end of the forties he had mastered many of those received European styles so as to act as their interpreter. Thereafter, he would use any or even more than one stylistic code in a single work in an unusual combination. For instance, while the prevalent Cubo-expressionism, often shunned referential excess, in Ramkinkar this restraint is often violated. This is seen in his 1931 *Mithuna* sculpture as well as in many of his paintings, including the 'Birth of Krishna' series.

There were works, which went with the flow of time, the daily, the recurrent; these are mostly in the form of sketches, drawings and watercolours.

But there were points of time when Ramkinkar undertook works on an epic scale. Now, perspective changed, dramatization contradicted the epic. He had been sketching horses since the 40's, but in a wake of a possible public commission of an equestrian statue of Subhas Chandra Bose, he made many maquettes, quite a few pen and ink sketches and then an oil painting in

1969. The commissioned failed, but the traces of preparation for the work remained. While, a few works which define the starting point of his career, like Ramakrishna on swan-back or, more aptly, Shivaji scaling the mountain, could pass off as signs of youthful idealization, this project could hardly be called historically timed; considering the ideological complexities involved in heroism Subhas Bose and its untimeliness.

If one were to reflect on the choice of theme of Subhas Chandra, one may consider the choice as strange after Ramkinkar's early attraction to Gandhi and Tagore. It seems that Subhas Chandra might have been issued in 1940's but not the late 60's.

Yet, if anyone go back to Ramkinkar's early life, his penchant for heroes and the heroic comes to mind. Perhaps every Utopian idea is followed by a sense of disillusionment, or apocalypse. In the wake of protest against war as well as response to other man made calamities, there might have been, initially, a keen historical consciousness, but at the end of the road after the 1940's, the optimism of a collective vision waned; there was widespread disillusionment even among the committed socialists, especially the cultural workers. In one of Ramkinkar's works we see a contradictory symbol appear- a fire dragon, first in a brush and ink drawing titled '*Celestial Venom*' and then in an oil painting (a rather confusing title to give to a work on aggression). The Dragon is a symbol of fertility in Far Eastern legends; it is also a symbol of destruction. In both the works we see a dragon advancing towards the

foreground in a display of fury, while in the background there is a suggestion of a skyscraper.

Ramkinkar was a classical modernist on the one hand and a person caught in the recurrent and the archetypal on the other. His is an example that attends to the difficult question of cohabitation of past present and the future times. What appears to us a history of linear progress would have had little resonance to his mentality. Time as in progress, demands embodiment; in Ramkinkar, the body it gets is a cross between the mythic and the real.

Rabindranath was taken to Kolkata in the middle of the year 1941 with serious health problems. Before Tagore left for Kolkata Ramkinkar made a portrait of him from life; Rabindranath expired in the same year; after him, Abanindranath joined Visva-Bharati as its Chancellor.

In the year 1942, Ramkinkar along with the Professors and students of Kala Bhavan, namely Sankho Choudhury and Prabhas Sen worked on the fresco and relief works in China-Bhavan; during this time, he made many anti war paintings; in response to the disastrous storm that affected the surroundings of Santiniketan, he painted 'After the Storm'. His first solo exhibition was held in Delhi.

1943: Responding to the famine in Bengal Ramkinkar did various works, out of which 'Harvester', done in direct cement concrete remains one of the most significant works. In 1944 between 18th and 21st October, Ramkinkar and Benode Behari's works were exhibited in Massey Hall of Delhi. After

returning to Santiniketan, the same exhibition was held in 'Havell Hall', Kala Bhavan.

Ramkinkar was invited by the Nepal Government to do a few sculptures for the 'Nepal War Memorial' project, the first ever commissioned work under external patronage; by that time he started working on Buddha, his significant sculptural work. The very next year i.e. on 21st September 1946, *Satranj Ke Khiladi* directed by eminent film director Balraj Sahani was staged at Sangeet Bhavan, Ramkinkar took charge of the set design; at *Natyaghar*, Rabindranath's *Banshori*, was performed, Ramkinkar was the director; on 18th November 1946, an exhibition was held in Modern Art Museum, President Wilson Avenue, Paris in which he too participated with the oil painting called '*Kopai*'. It was his first work to be exhibited outside India.

1947: Rajshekhar Basu's famous play, *Bhushundir Mathe*, was performed in Sangeet Bhavan, where Ramkinkar again worked as the art director and makeup artist. The very next year i.e. 1948, he took the charge of the stage and make up for the performance of Othello, held in '*Dwarik*' building, Santiniketan. Ramkinkar worked on his series of portraits in watercolour and oil of '*Binodini*', a Kala Bhavan student bearing the same name.

1949: On 2nd January, Ramkinkar participated in all India Exhibition in Kolkata. On 20th March, the students of Visva-Bharati performed Sukumar Ray's text and in 1950, he takes part in a student-teacher collaborative Art exhibition, in Santiniketan; in July of same year Ramkinkar's work was projected in Paris.

In *Salon des Realite Nouvelle*, the fifth international exposition of abstract art, three of his works were in view; he worked on his famous series, 'Birth of Krishna' in oil; Radharani, a deserted woman, gets appointed in place of his assistant Bagal Roy, to look after ailing Ramkinkar; at this time he does her portraiture. During the period of 1940-50, he involves himself in carving a niche, via his engagements with Surrealist forms, Problems of Abstraction, Cubism, and Realism.

1951: Ramkinkar sends two of his paintings to Paris International *Salon des Mere* as an Indian ambassador to the exhibition; under the aegis of Sahittika, a student's literary association, the play *Arup Ratan* is staged in Sangeet Bhavan, the design and costume part were looked after by him. 'Othello' was staged in *Dwarik*, the stage was done by Ramkinkar; personal relationship with Radharani intensifies; she becomes the part and parcel of his life, till the end of his life. In the year 1952, his sculpture, 'Harvester' gets rejected from the international sculptural competition.

1953: He gets invitation from Baroda, Faculty of Fine Arts in 28th of January, to deliver a demonstration lecture on sculpture. Apart from decoration the stage direction, in *Muktadhara* he participates as an actor in the role of *Dhananjoy*. He has traveled various places like Bombay, Dhar, Aurangabad, Ellora, Konarak and Gopalpur. In 1954, Ramkinkar become a Lalit Kala member; makes the famous sculpture 'Speed'. In the year 1955, he gets invited by Govt. of India, for *Yaksha-Yakshi*, to be installed in Reserve Bank,

New Delhi. This year he becomes the Vice President, of Shilpakatha, a study circle of Arts.

1956: The portrait of Rabindranath Tagore, is installed on 9th October, on the bank Balaton Lake of Hungary, the portrait of Rabindranath Tagore, is installed. His major environmental work 'Mill Call' is executed in direct concrete. A joint venture of Kala Bhavan students and teachers, takes place, just before the summer vacation in the year 1957, Ramkinkar performs as *Bishupagol*. An unpleasant event occurred during the rehearsal of the play '*Antigone*', the same year.

1958: As a custodian of students, he visits Ghusuri, a place near Illambazar for taking a look at the terracotta Shrine. Disturbances occur during the quarrying of stone for the *Yaksha-Yakshi* sculpture. Rajkumar Jetli, who was in charge, gets replaced by Pranabkrishna Debbarman. *Ha-Ja-Ba-Ra-La*, an absurd comedy, based on the text of Sukumar Ray is performed; at the end of the year, he joined Kolkata group. From 2nd to 7th October, he takes part in a group show on 'Gandhi' in 'Visva-Bharati'; Delivers a speech on 76th birth anniversary Nandalal Bose at Kala Bhavan; decorates the science pavilion, *Pragati Maidan*, New Delhi; at the time he designs the initial lay out of his incomplete work, '*Birth of Fire*'.

1959: Does the stage design for *Khudito Pasan*; by the end of this year the quarrying of stones for *Yaksha-Yakshi* sculpture comes to an end; 1954-59, the five long years have been a phase of incessant study and experimentation

with *Yaksha-Yakshi*; The following years i.e. at the end of November 1960 Ramkinkar's exhibition was hosted by the students Union, Visva Bharati, for a duration of six days. Sri Sudhiranjan Das and Benode Behari Mukherjee read critical papers on his works; 'Sculpture Council, Calcutta' rejects his sculptural lay out for Netaji statue. In the year 1961 from 26th January onward, his first solo, combined show on Painting and Sculpture is hosted by the Calcutta Artistry House'.

In the year 1962, the Railway authority increases the freight for transportation of the stones, meant for the sculpture '*Yaksha-Yakshi*'; in between 60-62, the Rail Board, after prolonged negotiation arrives at an agreement and 1962 dispatches the eight pieces of huge stone blocks from Baijnath to Delhi. Reserve Bank Authority offers an improvised commission price from that settled erstwhile. In these two years, Ramkinkar also had experiments on sketches and moulds of 'Netaji' (Subhas Chandra Bose). '*Fountain*' entitled composite grotesque sculpture made in front of Birla Ladies Hostel, Santiniketan. In 1964, the execution part of *Yaksha-Yakshi* comes to a conclusion.

1965: With the help of his one of the favourite student Sri Kunal Kanti Saha, Ramkinkar finishes the '*Whale*' sculpture for Pampa lake in *Uttarayan* complex; after that he started making the relief works on the wall *Natyaghar*, the '*Dancing Girl*' and '*Lalan Fakir*'; in the mean time he gets hospitalized due to a typhoid attack. In the year 1966 his sculptural relief 'The Birth of Fire' starts, it stopped in the middle due to adverse condition; installation process

of the sculptures '*Yaksha-Yakshi*' comes to an end, this is his last large scale environmental sculpture. From 24th to 30th July 1967, a solo show of his works takes place in Nandan, Kala Bhavan.

He gets promoted to the post of temporary professorship in the year 1968. He starts making the outdoor sculpture Mahatma Gandhi in direct concrete (in Kala Bhavan) for the Government of Assam ; he finally leaves the work to be finished by his assistants. On 3rd November he delivers a lecture on 'Santiniketan and Modern Art Movement' in the exhibition of European Art (1900-1925); which is organized by UNESCO and held at Nandan from 26th October to 3rd Nov.; designs the stage, make up and direction for the play 'Poetess of Ispahan', performed by the student of Kala Bhavan. The main actors and actress performed in this play were the two direct students of Ramkinkar Baij Sri Asit Das Gupta and Miss Kiran Dixit respectively. In 1969 the Government of Assam receives the bronze casting of the open air sculpture 'Mahatma Gandhi'. This year he is promoted to be permanent professor and from now until retirement he would be the head of the department of sculpture. The oil painting 'Netaji Subhas' [in the hills of Arakan] is also executed this year by the artist. The eminent filmmaker Harisadhan Das Gupta makes a documentary film on the artist's life.

In the year 1970 The Government of India awards him the 'Padma Bhushan'; the Visva Bharati Students Union took this opportunity to felicitate him; this session is chaired by Benode Behari Mukhopadhyay. A group exhibition with

Benode Behari is held from 19th Feb. to 12th March at Nandan; the seriously ill Ramkinkar was admitted to the Medical Research Institute Hospital in Kolkata; the then principal of Kala Bhavana Prof. Dinkar Koushik proposes to collect all the works of the artist for cataloging and the next year i.e. 1971 On 25th May Ramkinkar retires from Kala Bhavana.

1972: The Birla Academy of Art and Culture arranges for his second solo exhibition in Kolkata. On 25th March the organizers of 'Rabindra Mela' felicitate the artist in this session and Benode Bihari talks about Ramkinkar's contribution in the field of sculpture. A solo exhibition of Ramkinkar's paintings and sculptures is held at Nandan in the same year on 6th December on the occasion of Kala Bhavan's Silver jubilee he took part in a group exhibition at Nandan.

On the occasion of Ramkinkar Baij's 67th birthday in 1973 an exhibition of the artist's paintings, sculptures and etchings is held at Rabindra Bhavan, Visva-Bharati on 5th June. Kala Bhavan makes arrangements for a felicitation programme. This year Ramkinkar inaugurates the film exhibition held during the All Bengal Youth Festival held at Ranji Stadium in Kolkata; in July the film department of Indian Government produces a forty minutes documentary directed by Debabrata Roy.

In 1974 from 10-15 August on the Occasion of Rabindra Saptaha, Kala Bhavan, together with Visva-Bharati *Karmimandali*, makes arrangements for a solo exhibition of Ramkinkar paintings, sculptures and sketches. In 1975 on

3rd January in order to celebrate the anniversary of *Chalaman Shilpigosthi*, a solo painting exhibition of Ramkinkar is held in Kolkata; in the end of May Anandabazar Patrika [a Bengali Daily] invites him to give his opinion on the open air sculpture scattered all over Calcutta; in June, West Bengal Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts honors him with the 1974-75 annual award. On 17th August, he is promoted to be the professor Emeritus of Visva-Bharati.

1976: The artist receives a fellowship from Lalit Kala Akademi. On 6th August, Lalit Kala Akademi felicitates him at Santiniketan; Kala Bhavan makes arrangements for a solo exhibition of his paintings and sculptures; in May the artist makes the clay maquette of *Balidaan*; he wishes that the 14 feet sculpture (including the pedestal) to be placed to the north of Purvapalli ground and this is to be his last environmental sculpture. But the Visva-Bharati authority does not approve the maquette;

January, 1977 he is awarded the highest honour of Visva-Bharati 'Deshikottam'. He sends a sculpture – *Rajpath* to a group exhibition of 50 sculptors held at the Calcutta Assembly Gardens arranged by C.M.D.A. This exhibition continued for one month; he leaves the mud house at Ratanpalli given to him by his student Sankho Chowdhury and starts living in one of the Visva-Bharati quarters in Andrews Palli; by this time his health was deteriorating and the very next year i.e.1978 he falls seriously ill, suffers almost yearlong.

On 22nd September, 1979 Rabindra Bharati University awards him an honorary D. Lit; The Government of India makes arrangements to send one painting and

one sculpture by Ramkinkar to the "Asian Art Exhibition" held in Fukuoka, Japan; the Government sends another of his sculptures (The bust of Tagore, bronze replica) to the trade fair held in Moscow; this year the artist takes part in the Silver Jubilee Exhibition of Delhi's Lalit Kala Akademi. In November, there is a vehement protest from the intellectuals, artists and ordinary people of West Bengal when the P.W.D. Minister proposes to replace the artists bronze bust portrait of Rabindranath, placed on the banks of Balaton Lake in Hungary, with a 'more suitable' one; the minister withdraws his proposal; a group of painters apply to the then Minister of Information and Culture, to take necessary steps for the artist to receive proper medical care.

At last on 23rd March, two doctors and one of Ramkinkar's students Prabhas Sen take the neuropathic patient Ramkinkar to the Seth Sukhlal Karanani Hospital. Ramkinkar is admitted in the Woodburn ward; he creates his last work, a small clay idol of goddess Durga, on 25th July from this hospital bed. Surgery was carried out on 26th July. He showed signs of improvement for a while. And then disease took a turn for the worse. Rapid successive degeneration accompanied oozing of blood from the brain. Ramkinkar seems to recover; later however there is further haemorrhage in his brain. On 31st July, his condition stated to be critical; at midnight, Saturday, The heartbeat that started in 1906 in Bankura's Jugipara stopped at half-past midnight in the metropolis on 2nd August 1980. The body was brought back to Santiniketan on a rainy night. He is cremated in his beloved Santiniketan where he spent 55 years of his life. The last rites are performed by his nephew, Dibakar Baij.

On the day of his funeral, ashram dwellers gathered in the Kala Bhavana premises. Ramkinkar's favourite *Rabindrasangeet* was sung on the occasion.