

## Chapter 2

# Landscape: A story of evolution in the Eastern, Western and Indian contexts

### Eastern Landscape Paintings

The term 'landscape' is not of very remote origin and a painter's term of Dutch derivation 'landscape' was first used in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The term "landscape" refers to that type of pictorial representation in which natural scenery is the subject or at least prevails over the action of the figures. In other words we may say – landscape, meaning a sheaf, a patch of cultivated ground. The word entered the English vocabulary, of the connoisseur in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. As this fact suggests, the concepts of landscape i.e. the artistic representation of nature in terms of the physical "view", far from proving a universal of literature and pictorial art, constitutes only one comparatively as a recent, form of conceiving and representing the manifold reality of external nature.

In many civilizations landscape was a subordinate art form (i.e., in ancient Greek and during the medieval period), retaining this position even when great proficiency had been achieved in the depiction of nature (as in late Gothic and Renaissance). In western art from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on, landscape gained a place as an independent form of pictorial art, even though initially it was considered inferior to figure painting. Outside Europe on the other hand, especially in China, landscape art long flourished as a respected and autonomous form of artistic expression.

Chinese landscape are rendered with an intimate understanding of nature, such as comes only from observation as sharp – eyed as it loves. Artists roamed the country side; many of them are known to have sketched and what they saw, and their landscapes thus bear a strong likeness to the real scenery, though only a generic one, for they were painted indoors and were intended to represent the essence of nature and not simply views of natural beauty as in Western landscape. Here lies the difference between Chinese and European landscapes.

The painters of interiors have to arrange his subject matter as he pleases. The disposition of light and shadow or the figures or object can be observed at leisure. But the landscape painters have constantly to face the subject with detail due to changing conditions of light, colour and movement. It is obvious that in landscape paintings the skill and mastery in capturing the real spirit of nature are most desirable and without which painting would be dead. The Chinese painter almost played the role fully by using the techniques of brush and the use of wash method. They created such atmosphere that the observer also reacted with the same spirit. Thus they revealed something to us that is original- a unique and private vision of the world.

The five elements Chinese cosmology begins with water, followed by fire, metal, wood and earth; and water is also a symbol of femininity. Landscape had to be painted according to the six cannons and only he can initiate who initiate fully understand the six cannons or the qualifications of a good painting. The six

principles or cannons were (i) animation through spirit consonants (ii) Structural methods in the use of the brush (iii) Fidelity to the objects in portraying forms (iv) Conformity to kind in applying colours (v) Proper planning (vi) Transmission of the experience of the past in making copies.

In China, a landscape is called "Shan – Shui hua" means "the painting of mountains and water." This expression derived partly from the Fact that mountains and water appears so frequently in landscape painting. Landscape exploits the relationship between these two elements visually and spiritually. Confucius remarks that a Wiseman finds pleasures in the mountain. For the Taoist, water had a special significance in landscape, and they celebrated the place where streams from the mountain are gathered.

For this reason we can see water goes down from the upper level. Here hill is static and water is dynamic. The point where the waterfall and the ground merge in a white smoggy effect are produced a Equilibrium (meeting point of two). Moreover there is an abstraction of germination of a potent relationship of man and woman subordinates to the case mentioned, which is also the concept relates to the philosophy that Yang means male (positive, active, productive, and celestial principle of light, heat and life and also hard, unyielding yang elements is represented by mountains) while water provides the female Yin element (represented the negative, positive and earthly principle of darkness, cold, death), which is described in Lao-Tzu's Tao Te Ching, in J.J.L Duyvendak's translation, as follows:-

“The weakest thing in the whole world dashes against the hardest in the whole world. There is in the entire world nothing that is softer and weaker than water, but in attaching what is hard and strong, nothing surpasses it. Without substance it penetrates where there is no crevice; by what-is-not this becomes easy....The weak conquers the hard.”

In keeping with its female character, in Chinese landscape water is always less emphasized than rocks and mountains. It remains in the background, in the deepest or most remote places, moving frequently out of sight although it is clearly the moving and forming force, only the rarest cases does it hold the stage as a main actor in the picture. It is felt to be there, sometimes in the form of rain or snow or clouds, always counterbalancing the more rugged, obvious aggressive forces of rock and mountain. This retiring charactering character of water explains why, despite its great importance, we shall be able to treat it here within fewer pages than were necessary for the richer varieties of rock and mountain shapes. This is the basic philosophy of Chinese landscapes.

As we reach more to the top of the mountain the horizon opens, in its vitalities our spiritual out being also variates. The staggered communicates more than one horizon. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore –

*“Hriday Amar Prakash Holo Ananta Akashe.”*

Which means my heart finds expressions through infinite sky. The parts are always like pilgrimage for mind and the winding paths leads to the sacred temple – one has to reach there, visually, physically as well as spiritually.

The works of Sui and T'ang masters are all lost and copies are unreliable. But far more is known among the T'ang predecessors, While a substantial amount of landscape paintings has survived in the form of wall – painting in cave – shrines and tombs, and paintings on silk and other materials from Tung huang, the Shoso in Repository and elsewhere. These give a much clearer impression of what landscape painting was like, and made it possible to discuss the technique in a simple way, and even, from the eighth century onwards, to identify different styles.

### *Taoism in Chinese Landscape Painting*

The atmosphere of art has changed and the landscape painters in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries were steeped in Taoism. For them, fairies and immortals dwelt on every peak; and their styles were compounded of charm and artificiality, for imaginary things were “easier to draw”, as they said, than real things. In the Sui and T'ang landscape comes down to earth, or rather; landscape painter is now able to translate his knowledge of the real landscape into forms that match his experience. The age of innocence is left behind, and something of the wonder and magic is gone; but in the process landscape painting, by the end of the eighth century, it has found itself as an expressive art form. The T'ang was not, on the whole, a speculative age. Although Buddhism and Taoism both coloured the thinking of intellectuals and the T'ang philosophers.

Painting in China is never separated from the Tao or the way of living. It is related to the cosmic order and is aimed at creating a harmony between the

earth and the heaven, and of matter that which pertains to earth related both to the artists own development.

The first canon of Chinese painting are 'Chi' or the breadth of heaven, the essence of life itself. In a painting one must leave enough space for the proper movement of this "Chi." According to the Tao, the composition should always predominantly from nature.

The second canon states that the brush is the means of creating structure, establish the aim and the mean representing the ideal and its form, the spiritual aspect and its tangible expression. (Tangible means here that cannot be tough).

This two canons are most important of the six canons formulated about 500 A.D. by the portrait of painting Hsieh- Ho.

### *How has Cha'n philosophy inspired landscape painting in China?*

The landscape thus conceived reflected the influence of the mystical idealism that the Buddhist sect of the China propagated since the Tang. If we are searching for the origin of this sect the name of which is simple the Chinese transcription of Sanskrit 'Dhayana', 'meditation', 'contemplation' and whose doctrine was supposed to have first been preached after the first quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century by the Indian missionary Bodhidharma (in Chinese: Ta-mo).

### *Taoism – its relationship with the art of sung landscape painting*

The Tao has several meanings. There is no exact translation. Chuang – Tzu said 'Tao' can't be conveyed by either word or silence. In that state which is neither speech nor silence its transcendental may be may be apprehended'.

He also said, that painting might be described as a manifestation of that stage which is neither speech nor silence.

Tao is roughly translated 'a way or path'. To become worthy of *Tao* a way of training and discipline was established that make s specific demands of painter beside technical skill. Throughout a common purpose is being to reaffirm the traditional *Tao* and to transmit the ideas, principles and methods that have been tasted and developed by the masters of each period especially of the Sung pd. Landscape is a means that brings closer to nature. The Chinese saw the wood through the *Tao*. They considered Tao as external values and maxim of these values was the heaven.

The idea of Tao perpetual motion has been expressed in the diagram of Yin Yang. In Chinese a single character or combination of two or more character depicts an object or thought with vividness possible only in pictographic writing. Tao is made up of two pictographs. We don't know in what period the *Yin Yang* idea originated, but as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C. these are mentioned as two primal forces.

These are discussed in early Taoist text. The diagram depicts *Yin* as a dark are and *Yang* as a light area of a composite whole. Both sharing equal space and are divided by a 'S' like dimension. The basic structure denoted a circular figure being dissected in the manner of 'S'. One side being dark with a white dot. It is a symbol for completeness which suggests a perpetuality of union. It reflects positively and negatively of the same theme. The essence of heaven

*Yang* as the main principal and the *Yin* represent subordinate. They also indicate positive and negative. They activate each other. When two opposite forces are activated- a creation takes place. They are supplementary and as well as complementary to each other. According to Rabindranath Tagore – spotless white paper is ever silent. He said one of his famous poems –

*“Sada Kalor Dande Je*

*Ajj Chande Nanan Dheu Jage*

*Rupsagare Dheu Lage”*

The darkness which fades away becomes of light is actually the external conflict representing the continuous ongoing process of the universe. It is important for light to be prominent on its own; it's only in contrast to darkness to make it more understandable.



The Chinese applied the principles of yin and Yang to every activity being thought and especially in landscape painting. The Yin Yang was like warp and woof in the fabric of Chinese life. They are used in all Chinese rituals. They developed into main stands Chinese tradition the one - the Confucian standing for regulation. The reeling with initiate wisdom and in the magical forces of nature. Taoist influenced contributed to imagination, spontaneity and humour to Chinese life.

India did not have a tradition of landscape painting. In China, we can see pure landscapes from the very beginning as a part of their basic philosophy of life. The idea of landscape borne and developed in China with the help of Taoism. The Tao concept was not iconic, where as Hindi art, Greek art and Christian art was iconic as well as figurative before the arrival of the Dutch in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century there was no landscape painting. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the British took it from the Dutch landscape used to play a background role in their pictures never the main role. British draw landscapes to show the power of possession and dignity. They draw landscapes as a part of power.

In Europe, landscapes mainly serve as the background for human drama. The three dimensional perspective was given importance, i.e. capturing the vanishing point perspective was given importance. However the landscapes of Gaganendranath Tagore don't use the vanishing point perspective. He didn't follow the academic perspective rather; he followed the Chinese and Japanese perspectives where the aerial view perspective is main. Ramkinkar began withdrawing landscapes in a way similar to Nandalal. They did not capture objects using illusionistic flat surface. Ramkinkar, Nandalal or Benode Behari did not draw landscapes from the illusionistic perspective. Since they used to add or remove many elements or take elements from elsewhere. In Ramkinkar's work, we find a much larger presence depicted lines and gestures. His gestural line brings out a feel of motion. Through his gestural application of colour, he created linear masses or massive lines disregarding the separation between line and masses.

Ramkinkar shows an inner strength in his landscapes. He used to work with the structural movement of the visual view. He has tried to interpret the essence of nature in his own way. In Benode Behari's work especially in his landscapes painting we find a mathematical perception, but Ramkinkar's work show an attempt to capture movement. As an example, in case of study of flowers or trees we find Ramkinkar working with the movement of foliage. This works in the Ghats of Rajgir show that he worked on the structure of the Ghats using their essential quality. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century when painting started to become narrative in nature, landscapes could not have been a part of that. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the art of England, Landscapes used to function as a point of technical excellence. And to the contrary Ramkinkar used to draw landscapes just out of sheer joy, to translate the lines and colours of nature in his works.

Ku – Kai – Chi (344 – 406) is probably the best known of Chinese painter of antiquity. He was one of the most honoured masters and there are a number of anecdotes about his eccentricities. Come to the western perspective the continued lack of autonomy of landscape as an art form delayed the formulation of theoretical principles of landscape art. Moreover, when these finally did appear, they were formulated in terms of theories of nature or vision.

### **Western Landscape Paintings**

The awe and curiosity that nature has always aroused in us has led to landscape painting. The Hellenistic painters though they had a sharp eye for the visible world, evolved a school of landscape painting where the effects of light were recorded mainly for the sake of decoration. This style continued right up to the 15<sup>th</sup> c.

To some extent all art is symbolic, but the symbols used by medieval artist usually bear no relation to what they symbolize. This was to some extent the result of Christian philosophy which considered that to represent religious and God like subjects surrounded by nature as we see it would be positively sinful. It must be divine symbolization.

The art of symbols always evolves a language of decoration. Trees, flowers etc. were not only considered as objects of beauty, but prototypes of the divine (In the purely symbolic works of the mosaics in St.Marks new an element of design is added.)

The next step towards landscape painting was to see them natural objects forming some whole which would be within the compass of imagination, and itself a symbol of perfection.

Petrarch was the first man to express the emotion on which the existence of landscape painting so largely depends.

The frescos of Avignon are the first complete examples of the landscape as of symbols both in subject and style; and are an example of the mastery of decoration.

During the first decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> c., in the 'Tres Riches Heures' of the Limbourg brothers one notices an eye fact so keen that symbolism is practically non – existent.

Aristocratic landscape painting originated in the courts of France and Burgundy but soon spread to Italy. A curiosity about nature is noticeable in pisanello's

works. But the most elaborate landscape of symbols is in Benozzo Gozzoli's 'Journey of the Magi'. Here all the details of chaotic landscape – carpet of flowers, little woods, rocks etc. are combined to decorate and delight.

During the Renaissance, the new idea of space and new perception of light, however, led to the end of landscape of the painting of tapestry which was all important and the unifying factor in the picture.

In the landscape, light is the unifying factor, and the sense of saturating light grew out of the school of manuscript illumination and appeared in miniatures.

Hubert Van Eyck was however, the first artist to be so much in love with the effects of light, that the figures became entirely subordinated. We get the feeling that we are in the landscape.

The curiosity about the precise character of a particular spot--the general curiosity of the 15<sup>th</sup> c. Culminated in the water colours of Durer, which he has almost by accident produced the first sentimental landscapes of modern painting.

One of the conditions of landscape was a new sense of space which appeared simultaneously in both Flemish and Italian art. In Flemish painting it remained empirical but for the Florentines it becomes geometrical and scientific. Bellini, one of the greatest landscape painters, was born with an emotional response to light and he makes the effects of light the motive power of the pictures.

After about 1485 for Bruegel, landscapes of the fact disappeared completely from Italy to reappear only in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. In the landscape

background of Giorgione, Titian, Paul Veronese there are plenty of facts do enter, but they did not consider the recording of true visual impressions of nature as a sufficient and in itself.

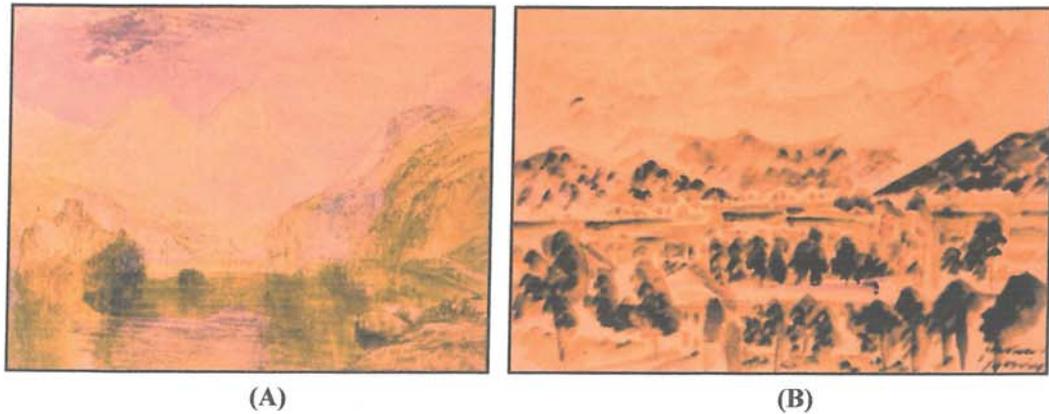
In the 17<sup>th</sup> c. Holland came up with some of the best landscapes without being influenced by the other landscape painters. Rembrandt and later Bosch, Jacob Van and Ruisdael are dramatic landscapes; on close observation one sees that they are full of observed facts.

Brunellesco's the Florentine painter had attempted to reduce nature to terms of measurements but had been defeated by the sky. It is this 'sky' that made the Dutch painters make the impression of the landscape their whole subjects. Light was no longer static and saturating but continual. The Dutch painters perfected paintings of towns and buildings, and Vermeer's 'View of Delft' a masterpiece work, closely resembles colour photography.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> C., painters, even if they did have an interest in 'nature' in their earlier years, soon began relying more on their imagination than the true representation, Thomas Gainsborough being a good example.

During the Renaissance the depictions of space was added not by sudden jumps from foreground to middle ground as the Flemish masters had, but by gradual recession, also natural objects leaves, stones etc., were rendered with extraordinary precision, and light from one source becomes a very important element in the landscape.

Giorgione did paintings where there were dark masses of trees and woods on either side with the action in the centre. This scheme was followed far over a century by great painters like Titian and Nicholas Poussin.



**FIGURE 20(A)** Turner's watercolour landscape. Source: taken from net.  
**(B)** Ramkinkar Baij's Nepal series watercolour landscape. Collection: N.G.M.A



**FIGURE 21** John Constable's Hey Wein landscape. Source: taken from the net

The nineteenth century shows the period of great landscape art. It began in England with John Constable and William Turner and in Germany with the romantic works of Caspar David Friedrich. According to Farington, who made contemporary notes in his diary, Girtin made copies of the outlines of Cozens' sketches, and these were then passed to Turner to wash in and thus finish. The resulting drawings were reinterpretations of Cozens, but in a less melancholy

key. They were bold, fresh, and decisive. Turner learned not only from them but from the stimulus of working in rivalry with his most gifted contemporary. Some accounts suggest that Turner was perhaps unworthily jealous of Girtin, who was his own age. In the last few years of his life Girtin's style in watercolour developed away from, and in advance of, Turner's use of that medium, in warmer harmonies of tone, a greater breadth of handling, and a choice of viewpoint which fully brought out the romantic feeling in his landscapes. With his startling early success Turner might well have been inclined to follow the natural pressures of patronage and be exclusively and artist in watercolour. If we see early life watercolour landscape of William Turner then we can find out a similarity between Ramkinkar and Turner. It followed in France with the Barbizon painters and in Holland with the School of Hauge. Van Gogh and Cezanne influenced the French Impressionist to further develop the landscapes. In the twentieth century some of the expressionist painters like Norwegian Munch and Kokoschka who painted successfully in this field.

The painters of inferiors have to arrange his subject matter as he pleases. The disposition of light and shadow or the figures or object can be observed at leisure. But the landscape painters have constantly to face the subject with detail due to changing conditions of light, colour and movement. It is obvious that in landscape paintings the skill and mastery in capturing the real spirit of nature are most desirable and without which painting would be dead. The Chinese painter almost played the role fully by using the techniques of brush and the use of wash method. They created such atmosphere that the observer also reacted with the same spirit.

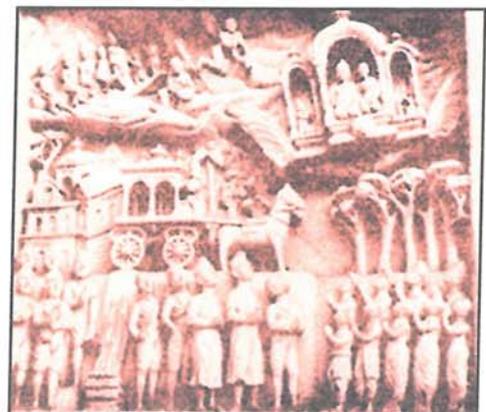
Thus they revealed something to us that is original- a unique and private vision of the world.

### **Landscape in Indian traditional context**

Indian landscape has its extensive history. Even in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata we find hints of landscape painting. Whenever Ram, Lakshman and Sita are sitting or going anywhere we find a landscapes background always accompanied them. Similarly in the Mahabharata landscape paintings hints have been revealed through several compositions. Standard information is available on this subject. It can safely be said that this culture of landscape in the era of Lord Buddha is evident not only on the cave wall sides of Ajanta & Ellora but also as relief in the gate way of Sanchi. We can have a proof of the culture of landscape even before that on the hill sides of Bhimbetka, though that was only linings. Therefore it is proved that the cultivation of landscapes runs on here from the pre-historic period, though not continually so we must not have to judge our landscape culture in respect of history of western civilization.



(A)



(B)

**FIGURE 22(A) Ajanta painting landscape. (B) Ellora sculpture landscape.**



**FIGURE 23 Harappan Seals relief landscape. Collection: National Museum**

The oldest fragments of crude paintings on the seals of the Indus, or Harappa, Civilization (3000 - 2000 B.C.) present just a few hints of Vegetation, along river banks with deer grazing. Early Buddhist art, on the other hand, aspired to a more comprehensive treatment of the natural environment. In the reliefs from Bharhut, scenery continues to be artificially disposed: the over - all ground plans is rendered from a bird's eye view, while the individual elements are viewed from the side. 1st Century B.C. Reliefs from the cave monasteries of Bhaja (near Bombay) and Udaygiri (Near Orissa) depict real landscapes based on empirical - though naive -observation. The components are many and diverse: Sacred trees protected by railings and hung with Votive gifts, lotus banked ponds and rivers with bathing elephants, Various tame animals, the rude huts of ascetics, men and women playing musical instruments, dancing or courting, the land appears to slope upward from foreground to background, perhaps a visual convention, since the setting is probably meant to be a plain. Where mountains appear, they are oddly stylized and resemble grotesque cliffs, a strange conformation actually found in many parts of India. The abundant caves of these mountains attracted both pious ascetic and amorous

couples during the torrid season. In the gate way reliefs of stupa at Sanchi (2nd - 1st Cent B.C.) the landscape, though it has become a more elaborate and balanced backdrop, has retained its naive charm and its detailed observation of nature. The stupa reliefs (2nd - early 3rd Cent.) of the Satavahana and Ikshvaku dynasties, from the Andhra littoral, reveal an almost illusionistic, Yet empirical perspective. In these, because the culture had become predominantly an urban one, the subjects in turn become episodes in the life of cities and sizable villages, as well as at pilgrimage sports, and the open country side is but rarely depicted.

In the provincial Hellenistic art at Gandhara (1st -5th Cen.), along the Indo - Afghan frontier, landscape is rarely depicted, being confined largely to representations of the Buddha sitting in a mountain cave; over head are grouped bodhisattvas, monks, lay flowers, and various animals. Unlike earlier art of the Country, this recurrent compositional scheme has almost no peculiarly Indian features; rather it belongs to the Alexandrian tradition.

In the decoration of the Hindu temple, from the Gupta period (4th cen.) through medieval times landscape backgrounds or motifs are virtually nonexistent. Figures of gods, heavenly nymphs, men, and animals are ranged in essentially flat friezes about the walls of both free standing and cave temples. Individual figures may have pronounced depth, or the conventional over lapping of groups of figures may create a suggestion of depth; but there is no systematic attempt to achieve the effect of a trolley spatial setting. Even where some indication of setting is indispensable to the purpose, such elements are reduced to a

minimum: a bed, a portal, a diminutive palace, a tree, or some rocks. During this era it is only in the cave temples of Ellora and, to some degree, in those of Elephanta (6th - 8th Cent.) that a little more in the way of setting is presented: a mountain scene, with Siva and Parvati surrounded by Gods and demons; a lotus pond spreading at the feet of Lakshmi; a lake from which rises the steam of a huge lotus held by Nagarajas (snake kings) where on the Buddha or Siva as Lakulisa is seated in the Yoga posture. The most ambitious landscape, the representation of Mount Kailasa, occurs in the episodes when Siva, merely by pressing down with his toe, subdues the rebellious the demon king Ravana, imprisoned and quaking within the mountain throne of the Gods. This scene, well known from the large group in the Kailasnath at Ellora, recurs as the sole landscape motif in the walls of many freestanding temples, especially in southern India. This mountain, essential to the narrative but stylized almost to a throne like conformation, is after represented in various tiers filled with animals, gods, and god lings.

The murals at Bagh, Ajanta, and similar sites prove that such restrictive use of landscape can be attributed to purely religious considerations implicit in the magic symbolism of the Hindu temple. In these frescoes -which reflect the character of the lost secular paintings of the time, the landscape of earlier Buddhist art persists, though in a very refined guise. Scenes are minimal depth and include streets, views into houses, gardens, and Pavilions sometimes disposed over a slope with geometrically stylized cliffs but with admirably life like plants, animals, and richly dressed people as well.

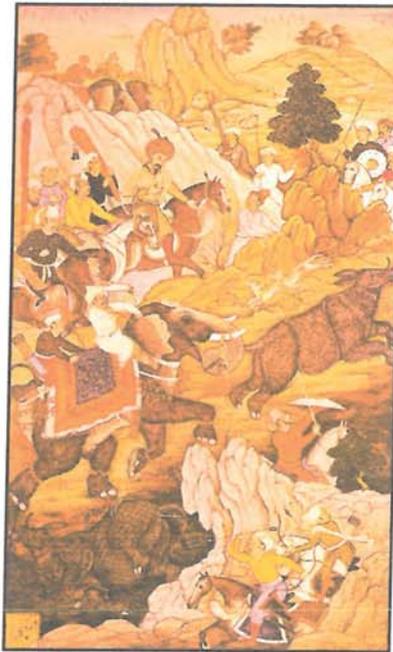
Evan going back to the Chinese landscape culture of Oriental tradition is simply not essential. It may be said that before the western invasion the landscape culture in India was not called landscape. This was called 'description of nature' or 'rivers cape' or 'mountains cape'. Therefore it is proper to call it picture of nature rather than landscape. The pictures of the then period reveal the characteristics of the presence of nature. In a word landscape can be hailed as the pictorial tradition of India.

Nature and individual got mingled in the background of nature, which is likened to *Yin* and *Yang* in the Chinese language. In the Indian background nature and iconographical feature have been juxtaposed.

Tying nature with landscape is branded as approach to nature. In later period one finds local artists in the Jain and Pala text pictures by the local artists which contain nature pictures. It is a matter of controversy how much touch of pure landscape is there! This picture may be branded as 'naturescape'. In the composition '*Gitagovinda*', a Jain text picture nature has been shown behind Krishna, the protagonist.

Nature has been shown in the composition '*Hamzanama*' by Akbar. Here nature has been fringed. The religious conception was not the theme. '*Babarnama*' shows flora and fauna which is a particular part of nature. In 1526, when Babar came to India, brought with him Persian art and artists. During his reign naturalistic study was one of the important subjects in the arts. The Persian miniature had decorative element because of their conception that

representation of God was forbidden by the religion. Here we find landscapes having trees, small plants which become more of a design than the realistic representation.



**FIGURE 24** Babarnama landscape painting. Collected from Net.

The character of landscape art in India has been determined by the topography of the country: on immense plain rising gradually from sea level to a high land, occasionally interrupted by low ranges of hills and broken with ravines near the large rivers. The most salient features are the innumerable shallow ponds and lakes; whether natural depressions dammed whatever possible - or manmade excavations, these are covered with water lilies and lotus and swarm with geese, ducks, herons, and other aquatic birds. The dams are surrounded with bathing Ghats, pavilions, temples country houses, and luxuriant gardens irrigated by channels from the lake. Beside mountains and primitive tribes the Hindu Pilgrims have contributed significantly to the inspiration of landscape

painting in India. Although their snow covered peaks occasionally figure in the Rajput miniatures of the Pahari School (18th - 19th Cen.) these paintings ordinarily depict their more accessible surroundings - the river valleys, lakes, and undulating hills of the outer Himalaya.



**FIGURE 25** Pahari School miniature landscape paintings. Collections from the net.

Thus it is typical of landscape in Indian art that it is for the most part without broad vistas; instead there are generally found painstaking reproductions of details of the immediate environment. Within this prevailing tendency, however, wide variations in approach are to be noted, for although scenery was in some periods reduced to summary indications of trees or houses, in others one may find attempts to encompass perhaps several miles of landscape.

Afterwards, Indian landscapes slowly started merging into the Persian miniature. Hunting scenes were common where foremost or the tree groves are shown. The distinct feature of each tree could be traced in their miniature paintings e.g. the mango grooves can be differentiated from the Sirish tree or the Shal tree. Thus Mughal miniatures assume a naturalistic outlook.

During the reign of Jahangir and Akbar some paintings were influenced by Renaissance prints. The atmosphere of the place with the distinct character of the total landscapes came in. The horizontal attitude, the treatment of subject in perspective and the treatment of the distant hills and hours in light diffused colours show definite effect of western influence on Indian miniature.

In the time of Aurangzeb the art was deteriorated as he believed that art was against Islamic religion. Therefore, many artists left capital and went to Rajasthan and hills of Punjab. They depicted their beauty of the hills and treated space in perspective.

By 1760 the Mughal dynasty came to an end and decay of Indian art was at hand. Artists were working in many parts of India but their work show a strange mixture of East and West.

In the later Mughal period miniature painting and description of nature are prominent in Rajasthani and (hilly) Pahari (text) paintings. Even in Rajasthan landscape paintings there are touches of metaphysics.

During the Islamic rule in India a new style of landscape art is introduced by the Muslim artists, early Indo-Muslim painting - only few fragments have confined itself to spare indication of background, just as is found in contemporaneous Jain miniatures. After wards, the introduction of Timurid painting in the late 10th century, especial through the work of the Mughals, brought with it the seem Chinese landscape and its combination of bizarre cliff formations and naturalistic trees, flowers, and animals. This style of landscape was again seen with bird's

eye perspective as a whole, but individual details were rendered as if viewed from ground level. Often the artists also tried to compress all the landscape details into several compact groups establishing the fore ground, middle ground and background of the picture. Houses and towns were treated much like stage wings, resembling card board panels rather than substantial structures. This tendency to organize a composition in depth like a sequence of scenery panels became more pronounced after Mughal painting became Indianized during the 17th century. The landscape was interpreted as if seen from a top a one -or two - storied house. The principal event - usually occurring on a terrace, meadow or court - was set between a fore ground consisting of flower Decks, a seashore, or other elements and a dual background comprising first a garden, lake pavilion, or gateway and then the outlines of tree and palaces, as well as a splendid post - monsoon sky of red and golden clouds. In the 18th century partly because of acquaintance with European painting there developed a convincing landscape setting. Especially in pictures of the school of Oudh (second half of the 18th Cen.) one finds broad vistas of enclosed gardens, towns, fields, lakes, rivers, and hills, frequently with caravans or armies moving across the scenes Erratic perspective is common in this late eclectic style, however, and is the result of combining several pictures into a single more comprehensive landscape, without properly adjusting the components to a consistent view point. Only toward the end of the 18th Century was uniform perspective achieved in such landscape.

The early painting of Rajput school does not evidence any spatially convincing landscape. The subjects were conceived quite two-

dimensionally, and the scenery constituted merely a sort of flat backdrop. When scenic elements were taken over from Mughal painting, the figures were often apparently suspended in mid-air, without, contact or relation with ether ground or background. After Mughal painters immigrated to the Rajput courts in the second and third quarters of the 18th century, true landscape art developed; but in the Rajasthani branch of the school, the art of the Plains, depictions of landscape remained rudimentary. In Pahari art, the Himalayan or hills branch of Rajput, however, especially in Kangra painting, scenery became a rather well-developed accessory. Here it was also quite carefully observed but tended toward an ornamental stylization.



**FIGURE 26** Rajasthani School miniature landscape paintings. Collection: National Museum

The only true art that survived in the 19th century was a continuation of the traditional schools in the Punjab Hill States and in isolated courts in Rajasthan. Afterwards the traditional arts had fallen into oblivion and the link with tradition had declined. With the loss of power of the Rajput courts royal patronage was no more enthusiastic with the tradition of their time. However, artistic activity had been continued at such centres as Delhi, Oudh, and Patna, and in the South in Hyderabad, Mysore and Tanjore. Due to the negligence of

royal support, artists were not so interested with their landscape art rather they executed their deeds with professional attitude but not entirely.

The presence of nature is fully felt in *Gitagovinda*, *Baramasya* etc. As for *Ragamala* painting natural beauty is expressed behind the emotion of the characters of 'Bhava' and 'Rasa'. The construction of nature is very much rich in hilly miniature painting, especially in colour applications. Even in 18<sup>th</sup> century the Pahari paintings show the purpose was textual and image and text gets mingled. The pains of writers or poets again and again reveal nature or image. The seed of this thought is very clear. The culture of nature painting is only a reference in literature. None can deny the presentation of literary characteristics in '*Ritusamhara*', '*Markandeya Purana*', '*Bhagbata Purana*', and '*Vishnu Dharmottara Purana*' (Chapter 8) etc. Mahamahopadhyay Haraprasad Shastri found in the Royal Library in Nepal a copy of the '*Sandhya Purana*' written in the later Gupta characters of the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. From that it is obvious that the composition of the '*Skanda Purana*' must have taken place four or five centuries earlier than Prof. Wilson's estimate. Hence it is possible that a corresponding modification of his estimate regarding the *Markandeya Purana* should be made, and that would place it about the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D where ideal landscape paintings have been vividly described.

From chapter no.51 to 57 in the '*Markandeya Purana*' described the earth and its continents, especially Jambu-dvipa; and also Mount Meru, first briefly, and then with full mention of neighboring forests, lakes and mountains; and the course of the Ganges in the sky and on the earth. He mentioned the nine

divisions of Bharata, and then dealt with India in detail; naming its seven mountain ranges and its scattered hills; and its rivers, distinguishing them according to their sources, in the Himalaya, the Paripatra, the Vindhya, the Rksa, the Sahya, the Malaya, the Mahendra, and the Suktim at ranges. He named the various peoples inhabiting India and its confines, according as they dwelt in the Middle Land (Madhya-desa), in the north-west, outside northwards, in the north, in the east, in the south, in the west, around the Vindhya Mountains and beneath the Himalayas.



FIGURE 27 Markandeya Purana landscape painting.

In 19<sup>th</sup> Century, with the arrival of Britishers the pattern of Indian art appeared to have lost its balance. In the case of painting the main cause for this upset was the medium itself. Oil as a medium was quite foreign to our country and did not offer any opportunity for the local artist to handle it for their expression. Owing to the loss of patrons kings and Maharajas the artists dispersed here and there and thus could not create any noteworthy piece. Artists were left at the mercy of English patronage. The British administrators were not interested in the art but for the sake of their souvenirs they patronized Indian artist. However, artistic activity can be divided into three broad categories.

Firstly, they encouraged the artist who had 'Picturesque' background and depicted Indian tropical birds in most typical Indian in character. Here the artist had the Mughal background and hence they could draw with careful details. They were encouraged by the Britishers.

Secondly, some artists were at pilgrimage centre's in Rajasthan and Orissa. They worked with large brush strokes of elementary colours using thick bold outline. In 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of our young artist influenced by this style.

Thirdly, the most favourite group of artist is patronized by Britishers and then by some Indian rulers. Many European artists were invited them. They were asked usually to make portraits of government designators and Indian Nawabs. Among them Daniels, Capt. R. Elliot and Col. Barton were landscape painters.

This kind of art was mainly for aristocratic class. Britishers created a class of persons who would be Indian in blood and colour but English in taste and

culture. Imported ideas became a new feature of the developing cities of India. Thus, a seed of new taste cultivated but the result was a most unfortunate that the sensibilities of our people blended to such an extent that it became difficult to reassure our people that all we possessed in our art was not so bad after all.

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century art schools at Madras, Calcutta and Bombay were started. They created a class of man called a designer who was non-existent previously and between the designer and craftsman stood a gulf. The designer remained a pathetic outsider.

In 1871, Lord Napier, recommended that the Indian artist could paint Indian mythology and life with the power of European art. This European academic style was then practiced by J.P.Ganguly, Atul Bose, Hemen Majumder in Calcutta and Haldankar and M.V.Dhrunder in Bombay.

We cannot find out the word landscape before feudalism entered India. As per India thought man can never be the owner or the predominant figure in nature. There was never a feudal sense of landscape in India. Even in the Vedic Age there was no concept that man can own a land. So landscape culture in India can be called Western hegimionious improvisation.

From the ancient times of India suffered many invasions of which historically the Aryan invasion was the first. Therefore the Greeks left traces of their culture with us which were finally absorbed into the main body of Indian culture. This mixed culture affected the artistic activity and thus artistic activity was weakened and led towards decadence. But with the Muslim invasion, a new

life force added to the strengthen of local tradition in the form of architecture and painting of our country. For about 400 years of Muslim rule Indian art rose to an excellence. Painting was nourished in the miniature form.

After 1900 there was a change in the outlook of Britain's attitude towards India. In India, the changing pattern in economic political and social structure resulted changes in the pattern of art. E.B.Havell who came as principal of Calcutta Govt. School of Art during this time, realized the importance of Indian philosophy and favoured its introduction in India. According to him painting in India must become Indian in attitude, execution and spirit. His first step, on joining the Calcutta Govt. School of Art, was to abolish the British system of teaching. He believed that Indian artist must return to the Indian tradition as it had existed before the British. Havell's influence was first felt strongly by Abanindranath Tagore, and then followed by the development of a Bengal School- between 1900 and 1925; Indian artists became aware also by modern movement. Interest in study of art began to be revived as a result of the efforts of Tagore family who started a movement in Indian art. They tried to bring together the best in the orient. They were mainly responsible for the art which is poetic in approach and literary in content.

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Abanindranath is rightly said to be the first modern Indian painter. He came in contact with water colour painting when he did landscape painting at Monghyr. He started painting landscapes by depicting historical subjects in a literary style derived from Mughal as well as Chinese water colour style.

In his landscape paintings he made use of orient influence like the Japanese, Chinese, and Ajanta and Persian to form a style where colour was subdued, applied in pale shades and cast shadows were absent. He had many pupils who spread all over India. They included Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Halder, Suren Ganguly, Samarendranath Gupta, K. Venkatappa, Kshitindranath Majumder, Abdurrahman Chagatai and others. Their pupils were responsible in spreading this style in all parts of India.

Though Abanindranath's elder brother Gaganendranath worked in Cubist manner but side by side he also worked with water colour landscape painting. He was inspired by the works of French Cubism. His paintings deal with suffused light in high contrast, mysterious quality of the colour and pattern. They look more occult mysterious than a search in volume and plane. One of his remarkable works entitled 'The Palace of Snow' he used black ink with different gradations of tone for producing an atmospheric effect. Here the structure is given much emphasis which contains dreamy and fantastic complexes. It is in his work for the first time we find that Indian painter preoccupied with problems of planes of light and shadow achieving a wonderful synthesis of form and content.

Rabindranath Tagore was a great lover of nature. His slogan, therefore, was 'back to nature'. He started doing his painting very late about seventies. He had received no technical training in painting. His art was quite personal like Gaganendranath. It has the spontaneous rhythm of children's imagination and

the primitive's expressiveness of the subconscious. In his landscape painting green trees have rich texture and are used unconventionally and expressively- 'Landscape with Yellow Sky'. Thus as Gaganendranath he added new elements in Indian paintings like space, light etc. We find abstraction and expressionism in the works of Gaganendranath and Rabindranath.

Benode Behari Mukherjee's work shows ripe understanding towards landscape painting. We find vibrant and ornate linear quality depicting generally the fold life of Bengal. It is in his earlier landscape namely 'Automan' which shows plasticity and organic coherence with his expressive bold reeve movement. We find formal simplification, refine drawing, compatible layout of colours in patches and calligraphic lines.

In the early fifties of 20<sup>th</sup> century we find the Sailoz Mookherjea who has continued painting landscape from Indian rural life in a style where bright, pure colours are applied in dashing brush strokes.

After 1930s, the artists were influenced by the currents of post-impressionism. During that period Professor W.G.Langhammer came to India and started working at different places with bright colour palette. He painted landscapes in a very powerful manner using bold patches of bright colours. This style affected many of our young artists. They started landscape painting on the spot – choosing the subjects like street scene, cityscape and seascape. They started using water colour under the guidance of foreign artists. The group of artist namely William Hodges, Thomas Daniell, William Carpenter, John Deschampa, Olinto Ghilardi,

L.N.Taskar, Nicholas Roerich M.K.Parandekar, N.R.Sardesai, D.C.Joglekar, A.H.Muller, S.L.Haldankar, G.S.Haldankar, K.Venkatappa, S.G.Thakur Singh, M.V.Dhurandhar, Ambika Dhurandhar, N.S.Bendre, S.H.Raza, H.A.Gade, A.H.Muller, A.M.Mali, G.S.Haldankar, Kanwal Krishna, Devyani Krishna and many others were working in this style. But after 1950 most of them realized the limitations of this kind of represented style and then they found a new way of modern style. Many of them visited France, Italy, Germany and came in contact with ideas and new ways of thinking. N.S.Bendre is considered to be a versatile colourist. He painted the subjects, mostly from Kashmir Valley and Kulu Valley. His early landscapes show the effects of Bombay School with its Rajput and Mughal tradition. In his later works we see the rhythmic fresh colour pattern with good sense of light. Every landscape of his shows the vividness of the subject, appropriate choice of colours, a careful study of the details and his unlimited aesthetic zeal.

S.H.Raza is internationally known for his landscapes in water colour. His landscapes capture the enjoyment of handling the brush and the colours. In his later work we find the landscapes have grown brighter and more daring, the brush has been replaced by the palette knife. He prefers river-sides, valley place and monsoon. He becomes successful by his bold carefree splashes on the paper in producing correct atmosphere. His works have a refreshing air above them with the forms created not by an outline but by a contrast and they abruptly catch observers attention. With his bold brush, he is predominantly an impressionist. He is considered to be colourist of the high merit.

The landscapes of Harkrishen Lal possess the character of pastoral existence. His tour to Europe has given him a wide outlook and the ability to grow and change. His recent paintings show development with a more modern feeling for colour. Kanwal Krishna is inspired by the glory and grandeur of mountains. As a water colour painter his on the spot paintings have remarkable freshness, solidity and style which make his work in this medium important. From his work we can say that he is quite successful in creating the effect of the mysterious silence of the snow-covered battlement of the Himalayas.

In the early 1960's artists namely come for landscapes are Ramkumar, Akbar Padamsee, Krishan Khanna etc. These people did many experiments and tried to make use of textures too. They give the importance to the surface and create the different textures too. They give the importance to the surface and create the different textures by introducing the material in painting like sticking wood, metal and pebbles etc. We find the landscape paintings of Akbar Padamsee in striking paints of grey and others. While Ramkumar, in his landscapes with his grey colour and other colours, creates a poetic world showing delicate and atmosphere. Ramkumar is probably the most successful exponent of the cityscape in painting. He used the character of the city as the device for creating construction. His colours are limited and thus by using minimum means he creates concentrated composition while seeing at his painting one kind of bodily movement. His most successful paintings are not abstract experience but abstract construction based on the city.

Thus we can say that the Indian contemporary artists in painting a landscape do not want to describe the visible appearance of the landscape, but to tell us something about it. That something may be observation or emotion which we share with the artist, but more often it is an original discovery of the artists which he wishes to communicate to us. The more original that discovery, the more credit we shall give to the artist.

### **Why Ramkinkars Landscape?**

In Indian landscape painting we never see any pure landscape. The British painters who came to India in search of picturesque. They started painting landscape in India from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Landscape in Indian painting such as Mughal, Rajput always existed as a location not as a theme, as a location - as a corollary (secondary to subject). Even landscape, we generally see in Ajanta, are not pure landscape.

In order to place the object in the location landscape started. Landscapes were not treated as a pure landscape. British painters who came from Europe started landscaping not with the painters eye but as a substitute for photography. They did that in order to satisfy the curiosity of the European people who had no other way of knowing how this new country looks.

When they introduced academic painting in art schools, they mostly stressed on figure painting. Landscape was used just as a supporting background of the main subject. Therefore landscape was never painted on its own ground which we can see in so many oriental paintings, especially in Indian art. What

they actually wanted to do through the study of water colour landscape was to know the characteristics of the transparent colour. This is why what they did was not landscapes but cityscapes. It was not Ravi Varma but Abanindranath Tagore who introduced pure landscape painting which was inspired by Chinese and Japanese painting. Both Abanindranath and Gaganendranath painted pure landscape. Nandalal also painted pure landscape but he painted mostly figurative paintings. Among his pupils who took up landscape were Ramkinkar and Benode Behari. Other painters who took up landscapes were Manindrabhushan Gupta, Ramendranath Chakrabarty and many others. All of them started landscape as we called the pure landscape in Indian art. Therefore Ramkinkar's important in the sense that he carried forth his newly established tradition as an expression of Bengal School. On the other hand other painters painted landscapes which had apparently no other theme than showing the landscape itself. They did not only do narrative painting i.e. storytelling, they also did landscape which is visual. It shows nothing but the visual. So Ramkinkar carried forth that tradition of totally purely visual painting. Today no one paints pure landscape. Nowadays, landscape painting has become a lost art because our artists are not concerned with social and other visuals. They mostly like to follow the ancient ideology of Indian art.

### *Exceptionalism in Ramkinkar's work*

The British landscapes were easily identifiable because of chiaroscuro, (the light and shade), technique used in each and every kind of colour combination and presentation. However in case of Ramkinkar, it is not important to capture

the transparency of the colour. And even the representation of reality was not that far big deal as was the internal expression. In the works of Ramkinkar it's the movement that mattered most and in which the use of diagonal move displace the sense of dynamism. Pompeii (Nagari or city) landscape was prepared with nature as its backdrop. They created this natural backdrop. They created this natural background for the garden they used to prepare. They used to do the landscapes mostly for luxury or entertainment.

The landscapes of impressionist period are actually immediacy. When Ramkinkar did his landscapes he used the patches of colour to capture the fleeting movement or immediacy. He matched his style with the painters of the impressionist period. His style of fast drawing instead of slow & careful, is mainly due to capture the feeling of immediacy. His similarity with impressionist artists lies in his effort to capture instant moment not with respect to style. In case of Gaganendranath Tagore, there are few landscapes based on the staggered horizon, however most are done from vanishing point perspective. He used Japanese brush and ink instead of using the Japanese perspective in his works. Mainly he stressed upon to capture the tone-say in case of Himalayan landscape. But he did not capture the Japanese language through his painting rather he assets the Japanese tone or style that's to say he only captured the variations involved in those painting. These characteristics are primarily reflected in his works of Himalayan landscape and the "Jivansmriti." "Jivansmriti" is replete with many landscapes. The tendency to do landscapes from the Japanese angle is quite clear in these pictures.

At the same period, Europeans are doing their works looking from the eye-level. However we find Degas captured his painting from top i.e. regarded as Japanese perspective. In case of impressionist pictures or paintings they followed the Japanese perspective but in their own way. While moving the vanishing point gets changed. The Japanese pictures show this in their pictures. At the same time Chinese also see from the top. The Japanese also show their landscape and composition from the top. Degas and Whistler made us look from the top. In a painting of Whistler we see a girl standing below. Our eyes looking at it automatically go down. It happens as his view point is not at the horizon. Once Mukul Dey also used to do landscapes. Specially most of his etchings are landscapes and the lines used in these etchings are very close. Bengal School revived the landscapes. Ramkinkar, Gopal Ghose, Sailoz Mookherjea started their Endeavour to do landscapes with a common motivation. Their works do certainly in tone and technique, canvas and perspective from the traditional British landscapes. In case of Sailoz Mookherjea, gloominess looms large throughout his paintings. A masterful uses of colours characterizes the landscapes of Gopal Ghose. The colours are not necessarily of some natural objects or the real objects.

The western artists especially belonging to the impressionist group as well as expressionist group in the later period were inspired by the Japanese landscape painting to a great extent. Even our Nandalal was inspired by the Japanese Landscape especially by the use of brush strokes and boldness which he discovered in Japanese landscape. He was not only astonished and impressed

to see the spontaneous stroke of the brush by expressionist artist but also in the core of his heart he cherished to make his expressions in his pictures. In the works of Nandalal during 1925 we see the influence of the Japanese and the expressionist artists. It is not difficult to discover many a similarity between what Nandalal did and the works of the expressionist and the Japanese artists. In some cases Nandalal used dry brush and thus he went on creating his own medium of expression through landscape.

In the hands of Ramkinkar and Benode Behari, landscape pictures grew from the images of the objective world and they became representation of reality. In their landscapes we discover the power of expression, the expression of self. Moreover both of them were influenced by Rabindranath's art in bridged the western and eastern moods. In the works of Sailoz Mookherjea and Gopal Ghose we find the gestural spontaneity which is the forte of Tagore. Rabindranath, Ramkinkar, Benode Behari, Gopal Ghose and Sailoz Mookherjea gave landscape of place in Indian art though each of them has his own distinctness. Ramkinkar was in a class by himself in water colour landscape while Nandalal in mastered tempera.

In the works of Gopal Ghose we see the play of colours which originate from neither flowers, nor soil nor sky but a colour of all colours. He uses the colour in such a manner which seems to spring forth from the depth of his feeling i.e. colour expression. But in the case of Ramkinkar, movement especially diagonal movement is all and with this singular point or quality.

When diagonal line is used on horizontal plain it certainly creates depth and movement. With this attribute of diagonality that Ramkinkar's works are to be established. Herein lies the similarity between Cezanne & Ramkinkar. In Cezanne, we see the stroke of patch in oil. Similarly we see that patch in the Nepal series works of Ramkinkar. At Santiniketan Rabindranath subscribed quite a few of the western magazines which greatly helped Ramkinkar and Benode Behari to comprehend what was going in the South East Asia and freed them from the obligation of the following conventions.

He painted with such bravura and charm as few could do in his times. But he repudiated the easily captured success of his early washes and temperas where he was as capable as anybody else, to embellish his work with high finish and exquisiteness of workmanship. He chose in elegant, prosaic forms from life and invested them with a personality and character. The frame of reference and theme to him was mainly the rectangular space. There he let played on his fine moods of line-calligraphy as a foil and counter-harmony to space calligraphy or to colour-calligraphy. It is all an artificially painted world on line, colour, volume and tension. In its intention, it is purely abstract: more abstract than the avowed schools of cubism, constructivists or mathematical schools of painting.

He chose in elegant, prosaic forms from life and invested them with a personality and character. His was a restless spirit. Like a seemingly dry branch of Palash, straining to throw its spring flowering. He abandoned his easy success to

court daring innovations. His exposure to 20<sup>th</sup> century Art movements, like cubism and expressionism moved him to his depths. And he launched a struggle for form in terms of sculpture and painting, which ran counter to the Bengal Movement of Art. This movement deeds its strength mainly from the classics like Ajanta, Rajput, and Mughal and also from Japanese wood block prints of Hiroshige and others. It was suffered with a sense of rhythm and melodic organization. But this art did not challenge his restless psyche which symbolizes the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ramkinkar had to accept the cubist and the post-impressionist as his starting point for a new departure. This he did long ago in 1036 when many of the painters were either he doing Gauguin from the Indian scene or where he-doing Kangra, Hiroshige or Ajanta with personal variations.

Ramkinkar has shown in his work a zest for life and love. The simple Santhal's of Birbhum have given him a source of infinite joy and also a source of wealth in form. The red earth, the flowering of Palash and Simul, the working farmer and the nursing mother, the threshing season and the Sirish tree occur in his work with recurrent rhythm. He was never tired of singing their glory, with a new melody. His portraits in sculpture, as also in painting bring to as his deep human understanding. He is able to hold the essence, by shearing off all the unnecessary frills of human character gathers in its prices of living. He goes to the core values of personality. (He never speaks all of life and despises art that standers or profanes the values of life.) He has shown in his work what an artist can be, with his faith in Mother Earth and her rich everyday bounty.

Ramkinkar's personality as an artist has to be viewed against the cultural background of his times. The major thought currents at the time were set by such individual geniuses as Rabindranath, Abanindranath and Nandalal. The recurring refrain in the ideas placed before the eyes of any young aspirant was that an artist had the whole wealth of the world at his disposal as his source material. The recanting rhythms of reasons and the perennial freshness of the human emotion of love, affection and wonder, were springs of aesthetic vision. The painters of the generation of Abanindranath came to formal problems of art by a thematic ladder. Evening glow from the river or lover's return were some of the most infrequent themes. These clearly reflect the socio - cultural situation of a middle class, which had problem of carrying on a minor struggle with the political masters. But these never crossed the placid calm of their sense of security under a strong administrative regime.

Observation from a fellow enthusiast Anjon<sup>18</sup> Bose who belong to performing art - we must remember that when Ramkinkar had ride in Santiniketan the two medium of visual arts & performing arts were getting a lot of impetus from each other. In fact Tagore himself had wanted it to be that way. That both the arenas were influencing each other abundantly, was absolutely clear from their manifestations in different perspectives, We have to remember that Ramkinkar himself was also dramatic artist. He had performed regularly and was through enthusiast. As said earlier, Tagore encouraged his students to dabble and indulge in most of the things despite having one particular field as a specialization. He must remember that the

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<sup>18</sup> Anjon Bose is a visual as well as performing artist who engaged in a famous theatre group 'Sansaptak' in Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi.

performing art production of Santiniketan reflected quite a lot of 'flavor' of the visual arts media. Likewise, the creations of the artists of the visual arts arena of Santiniketan showed the influences of being closely associated with the field of performing arts too. Looking at his creations one may feel that not only did he love to experiment with different kinds of colours, their tones, and their textures but it was as if he was trying to search out the very soul of each and every individual colour and its subsequent manifestations. Same can be said about his black and white creations and his sculptures too.

Space and light have been two of Ramkinkar's lifelong preoccupation. Ever since his childhood days when he escaped the street of Bankura and explored the surroundings on foot and he has been drawn to the landscape. After joining Santiniketan he found the open expanses and bright light he yearned for, and soon settled there. But he would make frequent expedition across the Bengal (especially Birbhum, Bankura, Bolpur etc.) in search of new ways of depicting space and capturing fleeting light and weather conditions.

The colour washes are repeatedly laid around sensitive out times, in a synthesis of the eastern and western water colour technique. (Mainly found in his early works of Santiniketan). The transparent pigment alternates with gouache to secure both luminosity and volume. Modeling and finish of figures is rendered in impeccable decorative lines and subtle highlights are added to the delicately contrasted colour.

As an innovative water colourist his works are the synthesizing of Chinese and British techniques, so that the system of stagger or multiple horizons and

a raised skyline are mingled with each other. His early works reveal a deep sensibility and a poetic imagination. Despite freely assimilating influences from many sources, he remained innovative and refreshingly original.

In the early works of 1930's Ramkinkar's experiments can be better described. He always remained a free painter, with no fetish of any kind, oriental or accidental. To understand his art one has to recognize the Uniqueness of his personality. For, his art was intensely subjective, guided by a deliberate intellection and surcharged with a strong emotional impulse. Moreover, there is a kind of spirituality in his forms. His colour schemes are bright and harmonize of hope with joy. His execution is independent and force, full of strength and vitality. His control of form and sense of balance between form, line and colour displays his inborn gift.

Ramkinkar's quest had taken him far and wide. In Rajgir, the history of the ancient city excited him to paint different landscapes around the city. On a trip to Nepal he was entranced by the magical spirit of the north and produced a evocative visual diary of the journey. The sun and warmth of the Nepal have long attracted him, the strong undiluted light being a constant inspiration. In the north, in Nepal, the muted and changing atmosphere presents different challenges and demand different techniques.

The first thing that attracts the eye when views this painting is dash of brilliant blue. Ramkinkar's handling has ranged from bold impasto not only in the sky but also on the mountains top to the thin striations on the water. Each form each

effect required something different. The structure of the undulating landscape suggests a lover rock-basalt type of geographical feature. The manifestation of the shadow invariably points out that the time is either sun rise or sunset. Yet there is a marked absence of slanting sunrays. A mixture of different kinds of brush strokes along with a constant and continuous use of black lines intrigues us. This particular style of Ramkinkar is common throughout that period. The viewer may ask himself or herself 'What is he trying to say? Let us remember that the dash of blue.... Is perhaps an expression of a deep inner 'want'. We have to remember that even though Bengal is basically a 'Non-Himalayan' geographical area; its northern region does create a thorough sense of monasticism inside us. This happens perhaps because of the close proximity that it enjoys with the eastern Himalayas. Himalayas represents a lot of things. Its presence assures us of many things that we have taken for granted; i) It is the mother of most of the glacial river, ii) The monsoons that are a blessing for this sub-continent, iii) The abundant forests and the life that it supports and so on.

One may ask oneself is the artist wishing for some kind of vibrancy from a particular rough non snow manifested landscape. Is he wishing for a balance between hot, humid tropically and the varied grandeur of the Himalayan multi dimensionality?

We may ask this question only to ourselves. To say in the words of Tagore – '*Nana Jane Naey Tar Nana Artha Tani*' which roughly translated would mean

that each viewer or enthusiast may infer the measuring according to his or her own taste or understanding. The artist creates a particular creation to either all of them or may be none at all. He creates a particular composition according to his own understanding and perspective. The viewer may choose to take it as he pleases.

Apart from Ramkinkar's monumental work in the sculptural arena we may set him as a landscape artist essentially and most of his best work done in either in water colour or oil. It was Nandalal Bose from whom he learnt pictorial construction, various types of techniques of painting, the basis of drawing and anatomy and ways of observing and recording visuals. On several sittings with Mastermohoy (Nandalal Bose) he had imbibed the fluidity of East Asiatic Cartographic lines. Most probably from Jamini Roy or the other establishing artists he learnt of the strength and purity of now primary and secondary use of colour while he points and counterpoints in a visual symphony.

### **An Explorative Discourse of Ramkinkar's Few Specific Work**

Ramkinkar's water colour landscapes do have a lot of importance, Matisse, Picasso didn't blindly follow by imitating the reality around them, they wanted to move another platform-it was as if they were looking for certain kind of a separate point of view, little be moved away from the reality, may be but never completely surrealistic. They also remembered that the people around them were not appreciators of too much distortion so they wanted to bring a balance.

Like Matisse and Picasso, Ramkinkar too was in search of a 'newer artistic idiom' which would not be totally unrelated with the depiction of physical reality but would have a very fine sensitive view whose roots would be in physical reality but which would reach to a different arena. They had actually found that balance between physical reality and extreme distortion. It was as if amplification was taking place from the artist view point. So they stayed in the path and perhaps that is the reason why they used to sign and put the dates of their creations. Probably that is the reason why their paintings are even much more acceptable to the so called critics. Because they have the point to discuss between the reality or nothing to discuss at all. So it is the question of a journey of an artist down the ages as he progresses through the annals of time. Perhaps that is the reason why we go back to those water colour paintings so much. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore

“Nana Jane Naey Tar Nana Artha Tani

Toma Pane Dhay Mor Sakal Artha Khani.....”

“Tomay Notun Kore Pabo Bole Harai Khane Khan

Omor Bhalobasar Dhan.....”

It means I am afraid of that I will lose you again and again and that is the reason why I always go back to you, to rediscover you again and again. Let me say this is a kind of a relationship which is like a never ending thing. You feel as if it has got no particular point to stop; if he is just like unfathomable

depth of a sea. The more you try to discover the depth of poets inner being the more attached you became with the poets secrecy. That is timelessness. That is the reason why we compare Ramkinkar's work with the western artist like Monet, Matisse, and Picasso.

Ramkinkar Baij's water colour reflected his romanticism with kinds of mediums. He was always looking out for ways of experimenting with techniques and materials. There was a time when oil painting was not considered to be the 'in-thing'. During the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>cent there were two distinctive groups in the Indian visual arts community. One group did not bother about the cost of the materials or the facts that the European influence was making its way either consciously, sub-consciously, or unconsciously to their work. For them presentations of artistic creations and their aestheticity was something which can be considered to be independent of the over manifestation of the psycho-sociological surroundings. The other group believed the practice of any form of art that was not independent at all the happenings in the contemporary society. This group quite consciously advocated the causes of social injustices and the nationalistic sentiments which abounded the surroundings. They were in a noticeable significant manner stayed area from most of the thing that were alien to the culture of this soil. Oil painting, because of its expenditure and the difficulty of its procurement soon received the 'dislike' of second group. That the reason why an alien phenomenon transferred to the society through the Europeans was another cause.

Ramkinkar was not at all and 'extreme- reactionary' regarding this particular cause, even though he understood the sentiment behind this mentality perfectly. He practiced with oil, but as time went on he did so sparing. On the other hand the non-oil mediums gradually made lengthy inroads in his psyche.

His water colours showed his sensitivity, dexterity and skill which still manages to create a sense of amazement within the minds of serious enthusiast and the non serious alike. He mixed colours and yet somehow managed to retain the individualistic illuminative capacity of each and every colour tone. It never seems that any particular colour was out of place in contrast to the other one. Therein lays his adroitness. The colour 'blue', perhaps appealed to his sense of 'liberal-ness' and the 'open - hearted acceptance 'of his character. The colour 'Red' was just the representative of beauty and 'cuteness'. In fact many a times he had expressed his feelings for the colour red as such in the company of his students who showed and shared his affinity for this particular colour. His other important specialty was to unbound the painting after finishing the colouration with black lines which he used to put on by dipping a twig in black ink. It was as if he was pin pointing and accentuating the structural periphery of the different objects depicted in his paintings. It is not as if he always employed this technique post colouration. The usual practice that most of the artist follows is to draw outline before and then put colours on it. Novice, painters are always taught in this way. One can obviously assume that this particular feature of his work is a manifestation of 'sculptors' inner being.'

Ramananda Bandopadhyay, the noted artist has given us a few very interesting information's. He tells us that there are instances where Ramkinkar has directly used the colour cakes on the canvas immersing them in water without bothering to use a brush. It is in his paintings that the usage of black ink lines after colouring the painting/picture is mostly seen. This colour cakes are usually rectangular in size. Therefore their direct usage on the canvas necessitated the need for geometric linearity along with a balancing effect of harsh bold strokes combined with the light elegant and grace. Everybody knew that his favourite season was summer. Perhaps that is the reason the Grey colours Chrome-Yellow, Prussian-blue, Indian red and so on were his favourite. The application of both the features gave him a unique style. Unfortunately nobody seems to be following this tradition.

R. Sivakumar is of the same opinion. He goes even further to say that Ramkinkar had created his own method of 'cubism'. OR rather futurism which seems to be a conglomeration of all the different styles seems to be apparent in his works.

Again if we take a look at his woks done in Nepal, there is hardly any touch reminiscent of any of this features as mentioned above. At first they may seem to be like Cezanne so that is why 'Cezanne - is tic'. However, one realizes that he is more interested in short quick strokes. In this particular category the creation depicts a kind of 'vitality' which capable of reaching out even the non serious viewer. The empty spaces seem to speak out in their own particular

language which seems to be sharp and extremely weighty. Or The depth the volume, the tension the lyricism etc all seem to be the result of the dexterous maintenance of the equilibrium of the two above mentioned factors.

When adjudged from the point of view of genesis and development of landscape, quite a few queries arrive on the forefront - i) what are the specific arenas to reach artist like Nandalal Bose, Benode Behari Mukherjee, and Sudhir Khastagir belonged to? ii) Can they be actually categorized under any genre at all; or should all of them be ascribed with individual platforms? iii) Surprisingly though, do all of them however, follow one basic pattern in a religious manner? For them depiction of a landscape means all the objects appearing as part of the background or in the background should completely blend in with the mood of the landscape. When we view the Nandalal Bose's landscapes we see this particular feature- one Nudia or the Santhal lady get blended in to the landscape, they became the part of the nature and so that they became the part of landscape.

In one of the Ramkinkar's particulars paintings we see a the herd of cows completely blending in with the background in such a way that even the periphery of their outlines has become completely indiscernible from the backdrop. Whether this has been done deliberately is something which can be answered only by his inner psyche. At the same time we may say that his style was so distinctive, his subject remain always so well known, his masterly execution so cherished and admired forever that none of his work looks unfamiliar.(here 07.09.15 folders last two paintings will come)



**FIGURE 28** Herd of cows, watercolour landscapes. Collection: N.G.M.A

Similarly in one of Benode Behari Mukherjee's paintings 'The Bridge' also depicts the same thing. Even the thematic priority is the landscape, the chief protagonist being the bridge, the whole focus gets concentrated on that particular object which is perfectly understandable. The Background and all its other factors become the supporting casts in the play whose central character is the bridge.



**FIGURE 29** Sunset by William Turner. Taken from Net.

If one wants a comparison one can take a look at Turner's 'The Sunset' where the sunset being the chief protagonist with the sea being its major structural background where the ship and the sea are in the supporting cast.

The die-hard enthusiasts in the world of visual arts are quite well aware of the fact that Ramkinkar Baij was equally inclined towards the mediums of both the painting and the sculpture. A wannabe visual artist usually gets initiated by learning how to draw. It is one of the most essential things that need to be done in order to get started. Once well done the road he/she starts to feel the special preferences and gets separated by the urge to specialize.

Ramkinkar was basically an experimentalist and that is the reason why he was interested in trying out almost everything that he could lay his hands upon.

During 1930 onwards Santiniketan countryside were more fresh and pristine, or when Santhal maidens would uninhibitedly offer cool drinking water from a village well to a thirsty traveler or if not for anything else those time artist's were engaged in meaning the serene landscape composition. But Ramkinkar's temperament and attitude was totally different from those artists. Ramkinkar was engaged in depicting the daily life activities of the surrounding people. Despite the human centric element of his work in the earlier modes the natural evolutionary progress regarding the inclusion of nature was rather intrinsically seamless. Infact it had been so spontaneous that the effortlessness is hardly noticeable unless and until one goes looking for it.

Santiniketan in the nether end of 30's became a witness to a unique happening. Robust rustic looking young sculptor, having little care about working in the strong simmering heat of sun with only a straw hat for protection was putting his hearts & soul into the perfection of the creation in front of him. All of a

sudden a tall white bearded long haired gentleman wearing look fitting long Persian cloths comes up behind a sculptor quietly. The latter observes the former keenly and then is an affectionate gesture (which had probably stemmed from an overwhelming sense gratitudinal appreciation) keeps the hand on the shoulder of the former. The young sculptor gets started and is immediately felled with trepidations and apprehensions. The chief characters of these scenes are—the former, young Ramkinkar Baij, the latter Rabindranath Tagore. After some pregnant moments Rabindranath asked young Ramkinkar –whether he would be able to saturate the whole of Santiniketan with sculptures just like the one which was creating at that moment. Ramkinkar had silently nodded in affirmative. He probably had never even thought that he would get such a license like this. He however took the works from such a great man –the founder –modulator – formulator of Santiniketan himself –quite seriously. This resulted in him being in a continuous effort of creation (even through financial constraint was his lifelong companion) as he went on creating work after work which defied any human comprehensibility. One is forced to ask “where from did he find at such a huge amount of spontaneous creative inspirations?” it is enough to dumbfound people of mundane intellectual like us.

The above story is quite well known, however myths (and these are several have branched art from some genuine stories like the above one and have worked as a fuel for the other imaginative tall-tales about Ramkinkar. Needless to say that his seminal identity as an artist and as a human being having super human capacity of aesthetic and intellectual senses lies in his works of creations. It's

a pity though his capacity of being a capable performing artist (we know from several accounts he was a prolific and a theatre worker) has evaded posterity. His works show a huge amount of physical effort behind these. In his own words-“when I was creating those sculptures I felt extremely tired, I usually had sleepless nights.” It was probably a result of continuous exposures to sun because I usually did most of my works in broad day light, hence very easily became physically spent.

These are landscapes of the imagination, painted in new colours and infused with tremendous vigour. They rank among the most significant works of this time since they suggest that the artist is continually exploring, inventing in a space that is highly intuitive.

Having been in close contact with nature since childhood, Ramkinkar Baij's love for things related to nature was a natural phenomenon. Hence, its study and experimental depiction had become a part and parcel of his regular activity. It had led to a state which included intensified self-indulgence with relation to nature as well as intellectual introspection. He used to roam around in order to absorb all the beauty that was abundant in those surroundings. The beauty of nature was expressed by him through lines on paper or sometimes even on soil. Not having adequate materials for practice & experimentation; he expressed himself regarding his creations on any medium he could lay his hands upon. For example we come to know that he even used to draw landscapes on the banks of Dwarkesar or on the dry bed of river Gandeswari.



(A)

(B)

**FIGURE 30(A) River Gandeswari, watercolour on paper, 1922 Collection: Visva Bharati.**  
**(B) Nepal Series watercolour landscape, 1930. Collection: Visva Bharati.**

His notebooks of those days and later years bear witness to his romanticism regarding the beauty of these two rivers, the tree lines of Sirish and Sisu or Coconut. Along with landscape in the background, various flowers and plants like Kurchi, Muchkund, Himjhuri and rarely Kesia or Bogonvelia have also been brilliantly depicted. The brick & laterite stone-chip laden village roads and their ambiance have also found a place in his creations. History attests that the river bed of Gandeswari has always been typically dry, with a vast expanse of sand and dry mud laden effervescence, barring thin flow of stream beside one of its banks.

His close associations with nature incited him to create myriad depictions. Subjects like scantily covered ladies having a bath (the scant covering is in no way suggestive of anything else other than the necessity of having minimum clothing during bath), flora and fauna in relation with nature, creations having a human hand with their homogenous as well as non-homogenous co-existence with nature etc all found their place in his works. These studies were mainly

in pencil line. The use of colour was very rare because Ramkinkar at that time could not dream of buying colours. Colours that we sometimes see were collected by him from nature only. Father Chandicharan Baij forced him to take up the family profession of a labour.

Ramkinkar's artistic itinerary, his trajectory and his relationship with his nature and his surroundings can perhaps be denoted in the following manner:-

- (i) He was born in Jugipara of Bankura District. This area, in those days belonged to the Bengal Presidency under the British rule and is currently under the state of West Bengal. Hence, a few things that he was closely associated to-are
  - (a) The scenic natural settings of his native village;
  - (b) The abundance of flora and fauna that existed there;
  - (c) The tall trees like Sal, Pial, Coconut, Sirish, Sisu etc;
  - (d) The rivers of Dwarkesar and Gandeswari;
  - (e) The red laterite laden soil and the typical mud –hut based agrarian country side;
  - (f) The vast expansive lap of nature – and so on;
- (ii) It is quite normal, therefore, that his early works were deeply influenced by these factors. We can perhaps, analysis it in this way:-

Nature has always found itself in his works,  
Because his early childhood and his younger days had been spent in scenic natural beauty (as mentioned above).

However, in his younger days, there was a dearth of proper materials for practice and experimentation because of the unavailability as well as family condition.

These hardly proved to be a daunting factor to an individual like him. Sometimes he even used the sand and clay of the river banks to practice his lines and other things too.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons, why he understood the dearth of availability of good materials.

Hence, tendency to experiment with various kinds of available materials and improvise with them during the creative process on spot.

In his work process-which is essential for other landscape artists too:-

(iii) Thus we can see several landmark aspects in his work process- which are indispensable for other landscape artists too:-

- a) An artist must always realize that there could always be a serious dearth of proper materials at any given moment during the creative period. It is compulsory for him/ her to be prepared to improvise with any available material.
- b) An artist must always realize that while studying the nature and its various components, one has to be quick (of course within a reasonable acceptability factor) as well as obsessive regarding the minute details. The details may/may not get featured with prominence, however their symbolic abstractional representation (whether in actuality or with passing reference) does play a role in the finished product.

Nature is ever changing, hence, the necessity of speed and obsession regarding the capturing of its momentary details.

- c) While working with nature, it is mandatory for the artist to\* be absolutely honest regarding the theme, the quality of material that he/she is using and the compatibility of the theme and the materials.

\*remembering 3 things:-

\*\*He/ She have to perfectly honest regarding the theme and its truthful depiction.

\*\*\* He/ She must understand the true nature of the materials i.e. the tools like paper, linear drawing materials (ink, pen and pencil) and the colours.

\*\*\*\* Various compatibility factors

The tools—i.e. compatibility of the papers, the drawing materials & the colours.

The compatibility between the theme/ subject and the tools that are being used to depict it.

The compatibility between the actual reality and the philosophy of the creative depiction.

- (iv) Thus we come to know that during his early formative years he is into several creative processes.

a) He used to observe the clay modellers and also used to dabble in clay modelling with them.

b) Copying the images of gods & goddess from the calendars at the behest of his elders was also a regular feature of his childhood creative trajectory.

c) During his school days he, quite consciously got involve into.

Observing and asserting the back drop painters of the local theatrical set designers on curtains made of jute and other course of materials.

Painting posters, drawing images of popular nationalist's leaders for the local anti-British movement.

Doing illustrations for the school books & magazines at the behest of his elders and teachers.

d) Along with these various experiences in the various branches of visual arts, his own experimentations continued at a full pace. This gave him ample opportunity to won his skills. By the time he reached Santiniketan, his creative itinerary had-

Bathing Santhal women who are minimally clad for the sake of their activity. Tall trees silhouetted against the dusky reddish of the dusk sky.

The vast fields in the soft golden colour of the dawn and so on.

e) Initially his works were mostly done in-

i) Sketching with pencil and pencil shades.

ii) Line drawing with ink on paper.

iii) Drawing with minimum usage of colour (unavailability was a major factor)

iv) Experimentation with various vegetable colours gave him enough experience regarding their utilization.

Yellow ochre from yellow lime soil, Chrome yellow from turmeric, Red from commercial vermilion used by the married Hindu women, Green from

vegetables, Violets from the seeds from a particular plant, Black from the cooking hearths and so on, Blue from the rain-washed mineral soil of Bankura.

f) He always looked for the freedom to create, in his words, -‘the vast expanse of this world needed by the individual for creative depiction,’ whatever he/ she might feel to do so. His father had pushed him towards the family profession of becoming a barber; he had taken the crude scalpels to create a landscape on the bark of a tree.

(i) Dearth of colours had taught him how to capture the moods and the emotions with only two or three colours in hand.

(ii) The tendency of minimalism regarding the usage of colours enabled him to look for an alternative plain of symbolic usage of colours.

(iii) Actual physical reality based depiction of the physical world keeping the usage of colours to the minimum incited the spectator to look for a philosophical insight which went beyond the boundaries of the objective.

In his water colour presentations of the 1950’s (and so on), he has done a wonderful job of putting forth the intricacies as well as simplicities of the Santhal life.

We can notice certain features in these:-

(i) One can definitely understand that the works have been done at an incredible speed and tempo.

(ii) The strokes and lines belie the fact-that the artist has not even bothered to ponder over their proper application-such was his confidence regarding his speed and capability.

- (iii) The typical vertical and horizontal lines have not bothered him at all- he has rather chosen the diagonal aspect over the other two.
- (iv) Speed can often be achieved if verticality and horizontality it is bypassed. Thus, Ramkinkar's dependency on diagonality can be easily understood.
- (v) Once, the event of capturing the moment is over, he moves on to the next. When one gets a chance to view these works as a series, one may feel that he/ she is seeing a row of photographic compositions which has been done on the same subject from different light and perspectives.
- (vi) His understanding of the Santhal life-style was quite extensive. Hence, he knew what to portray and where he should limit himself.
- (vii) The bold and brilliant usage of black ink lines gives the colour and the whole presentation three dimensional aspects. From the South-Asian point of view it can be said that Ramkinkar was a pioneer in this technique regarding water colour presentation.
- (viii) This feature can particularly be noticed regarding the usage of yellow ochre.
- (ix) The definitive separation of the human figures has been done with the help of different kinds of blue 'amongst which Prussian blue is main'.
- (x) With reference to point no (iii) & (iv) a particular comment can be passed here. Even though, it seems that the artist's main intention was to capture the momentary feature of a particular time; inadvertently he provides us with a theme or a plot of a short story.

He has created voluminous contour by dipping the brush into the colour and applying it an indirect wave over the paper and then with the back of his brush he has etched black outline. This has created a whole new structure resembling the multi-branched image.

The branching out of a tree from a main spine or similar kind of imagery where we get to see the same thing within the vein structure of a leaf seems to be portrayed here. The voluminous brushstrokes itself adds to the beautiful structural formation. The elementality of nature in all its symbolic primeval grandeur hits us. Shillong landscapes/mountainscapes seem to obtain a wonderful living quality instead of just being a static representation. The dynamicity seems to touch us through sheen of marvelous ethereality.

- a) The dynamicity of nature's activities like the falling down of the leaves,
- b) The changing colour of the sun as it journey through the sky,
- c) The gentle swaying of all the flora in the breeze and so on seems to be vibrantly present in his renderings.

Therefore we get to see some essential unique quality:-

- (i) Not an exact photographic representation of the British water colour landscape artists.
- (ii) The primiveality gets even more prominent when the Chinese ink is applied directly on raw wet water colours.
- (iii) When we use the rear end of a brush to etch black line within a painting, one may achieve the following results-

a) Swift, b) bold yet c) simple as well as eternally attractive like the lightning bolts across the sky.

The creation of water colour achieved a different kind of meaning in Ramkinkar's hands. He did not consider them to be limited versions of expressions only; this was the life embodiment of his emotional virtuosity.

Unlike Benode Behari whose expression showed foundational weakness in his middle life i.e. from the early fifties but Ramkinkar carried on the true nature of his structural solidity till his death.

### *Kinkar-da's Firm Brush, Some Colours, Lines, and Some Recollections*<sup>19</sup>

I had a small sketchbook of drawings by Kinkarda. I still have a couple of colour drawings; some I have given away to the National Gallery. But what I must mention here right at the outset is that I have never seen so many nude drawings of Kinkarda before. It amazes me — he had made so many studies-from-life and yet none of us were ever aware of it!

Specifically in the context of our country, what is of primary interest in Kinkarda's drawings is the use of hatching lines and the placement of a model in space employing a parallel range in treatment. At one point in time, Mastermoshoy held the opinion that drawing must be linear. But Kinkarda never practiced that. Binodeda practiced in a lot of ways and finally did drawings of every kind. But there was the minimum line with the brush; even after blindness, Binodeda continued to draw.

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<sup>19</sup> Source from "Ramkinkar Baij Centenary Exhibition 2006-07", written by Prof. Sankho Choudhury, pp. 19-21.

Each individual draws in one's own way. Our eyes roam about. They see various things. Amidst this some see colours, some see lines. All of these coexist. But the core decisive is, how would you react. To achieve this aim certain things need to be selected ... others rejected. That helps in retaining the basic significant. Everything cannot be achieved physically. That may be possible in a photographic studio. But that which we call photographic reality is not identical with the vision through the eyes. So one has to recognize what it is that primarily draws one's attention. From this, the aspect called focus is derived. Which is to say, where will you guide the eye to the proper location. Amidst so many things to see, so many elements strewn about, which is that central point that you want to see. Everything exists, but art is all about what doesn't. That is vitality. Now the thing is that everybody draws, but not all drawing is imbued with this touch of life. It does not appear alive. Many attempt to grasp the whole; they build up the picture into a coloured drawing. That has much to do with cleanliness. On the other hand are others who create as if in a spark of motivation. Kinkar-da's drawings have a marked difference from such attempts. In these, while on the one hand Kinkar-da's individual brush handling strikes us as unique, on the other hand, one can clearly observe that there is a simultaneous capacity on the part of the artist to control the brush through his will. One can sense the soul of a picture in these drawings.

When we were students in Santiniketan we often heard the dictum - "Observe; observe the phenomenon". Which implied, please observe and note down and study. Meaning to say, observe everything and make a drawing or a sketch.

What is the distinction between observing something and making a sketch of it? Making a sketch is something akin to taking down notes while reading a text. What I write down remains securely in memory. Similarly, one notes down the scene observed, the things perceived. When one returns to the drawing, it enhances the memory. Yes, I saw this face. I liked it. Then comes the question, but how much did you see? There was the face. You saw it. You remembered --- yes, the hair was in curls like this.

What else? Yes, it was like this. What more? Yes, it was this way... etc., etc. That is how one proceeds ahead. By asking questions. Again and again, by searching out the proper answers. With more and more answers gleaned this way it becomes more of his own realisation.

In our times, drawing was the main focus in Kala Bhavana. During the day we made plenty of these drawings. And during the night, when the actual objects *were* no longer in front of our eyes, we did drawings from memory. That is to say, making a drawing when the object exists in front of our eyes, is one thing; but what happens when it is not? How much of it did I retain in my recall? We saw Kinkarda practice drawing in this mode; he used to instruct us to do so too. This is one of the most significant aspects of his art. I do so too. I can work from memory for three months, after working from a model for three days. Kinkarda's work process had this characteristic about it. That was his magnitude. That is greatness. So, following this, it would be difficult to say for certain whether all the nude studies were done from immediate observation of a model, or from recall.

Drawings by Kinkarda's that laid primary stress on linear definition remind me of something that Mastermoshoy used to say. He used to say, 'Do you know the role assigned to the line? There are things strewn about, they have to be tied up with the line. Just as one binds with the rope.' In Kinkar-da's art too the role of the line was this. What can be called the ultimate grip? Final bindings, that which holds life together. It makes life more organically vibrant, alive and situates it right in front of our eyes. The greatness about Kinkar-da's art is this. Something that never clashes with life.

There are several pictures of birds and animals by Kinkarda. In the Santiniketan our times we drew three things, duck, hen and goat. Other than these we also painted a lot of lotuses. Speaking of lotuses reminds me an incident about Kinkarda. I used to work with a stress on the strokes at one point. One day Mastermoshoy told Binodeda, 'He's having a problem in this aspect; explain it to him'. Binodeda asked me to accompany him and began to point out that the stroke was not merely a matter of flourish; it was a process of memorizing, remembering. One can only do what one remembers. There was a pond with lotuses close to Kala Bhavana. We set to work from the bud itself. It bloomed day by day. Observing it mature gradually, a day would come when it would be in full bloom. Then it would be possible to study each individual petal, finishing each a day. One day, Binodeda said, 'Let me see what I can do'. All of a sudden Kinkarda arrived saying, 'Let me see what is going on' and did a drawing with ink in a swift moment. It was his habit to drop by like this. I still remember his drawing. The lotus is in bloom, there are water and the leaves.

The background is composed of twists and turns; and amidst these, with a few touches he had delineated the buds, while the leaves were brightly alive. What a work! As if, sheer magic!

I had observed that Kinkarda never allowed a model to pose silently during a portrait session. He used to trigger off a conversation while he kept working. He used to say, 'When a person becomes emotionally charged as one speaks, the muscles become heightened and enhance the face. That is what one has to render.' And he also used to mention a lot about the skin tint and quality. Even when he was drawing with the pencil, I used to find that he caught the likeness effortlessly. Then he used to become obsessed with dissecting the studied form. In Kinkar-da's works in clay, the most primary faculty happens to be the integrity of rhythmic structure, and a construction endowed with the power of rhythm. Most of this emerged from his work with portraits. The playful adjustments of proportion, the elements of impression and distortion — even these emerged from portrait exercises. Eventually one becomes silent after having seen the portraits in the present collection; there is no other option left but to stare in wonder. Take for example the portrait of the Chinese girl. Extraordinary. The lines have descended from every possible direction, but the central region does not have any lines. Empty, remarkable. Worth observing. There was a bold black and white face of a girl with me; probably I have given it away to the National gallery. Must search it out and keep it — it is one of his masterpieces and I have a feeling that he did several others works in a similar vein.

Amongst the Indian artists, many have effectively produced drawings. An example could be Jamini Roy. He used to repeat the motifs over and over again. It was something like an exercise in perfecting a skill. But Kinkar-da's drawings were not merely the grinding of manual skills alone. These were his source material for the paintings. It will suffice to say that his drawings were like lightning speed renderings of complex forms. For example, the drawing from the present collection showing a woman making puffed rice, is by all standards as complete picture. Even if it does not lead to a painting, nothing would be sacrificed. The drawing has all the characteristics of a dry point, an etching. I can very comfortably hazard the opinion that Kinkar-da's drawings would hold a prominent forward rank and position in all of eastern and western art taken together. Such drawing as this has not happened before him. If I were to choose an expression in Bengali, I would say, 'without precedence'.

That is the identity of Kinkar-da's broad independent mind. In Santiniketan, those days, no one could imagine of doing nude studies. It was beyond imagination. Much later in his mature age, Kinkar-da had revealed the details of his nude studies. But it must be remembered that one cannot extend this practice to the wider conclusion that in Santiniketan people were easily doing nude studies. It was a private exercise. I may be drinking at home, but liquor is abhorred in Santiniketan. So when I came to Bombay, my first engagement was to pay ten rupees daily to do nude studies in a place called Lakshmi studio (or something of that kind) near Dadar. When I told Kinkar-da about this, he replied, 'But do you know - that is what I too wanted to do. If you

wish to work in an abstract language you are free to do so, but if it loses contact with life then it becomes too “cad””. “Cad” was one of the terms in Kinkar-da’s personal vocabulary then. What I felt lacking in Santiniketan, I had compensated for when I reached Baroda. I had told them in Santiniketan, ‘Would you be able to keep nude study in the five-year course that you have framed?’ They have merely replied, ‘Oh yes, yes ... why not. Certainly, why not...’ etc. In fact in the other art-institutions in our country too there was no practice of nude studies then. Not even in Kolkata. Makhan Dutta-Gupta pioneered the practice when he joined. Rodin never had static models posing for him; he had a couple of selected female models, who used to move about nude in the studio, as Rodin watched and drew. In terms of their pictorial quality, Kinkar-da’s nude drawings come close to Rodin’s in spirit. They possess the same dynamism that is movement.

Kinkarda used to work a lot. The look in his eyes and the appearance of his face used to transform when he was working. One dared not go near him. He was a magnanimous personality and a wonderful artist. But there was something he did not possess. That which is called sophistication of class. He has had to suffer immense humiliation because of this. If anybody tells me that this suffering was necessary, that without it he wouldn’t be able to produce what he did, I wouldn’t agree with such an opinion. Must everyone suffer so? Is sadhana impossible without it?