

S.H. Godbole

Master of Watercolour



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Mumbiram & Party

Distant Drummer
www.distantdrummer.de

First published 2019

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Book Cover: Detail of “Midday Feast for the Village Deity in the Forest”,
S.H.Godbole, circa 1950, Watercolour

ISBN: 978-3-943040-15-9

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Artist S.H. Godbole

Master of watercolour

Secretary of Bombay Art Society, Pune

Grandfather of Artist Mumbiram,

**who considers Godbole his greatest inspiration to become
an artist and feels eternally grateful to him.**

Foreword

Historians, anthropologists and philosophers may wonder about the reasons why the art of drawing and painting did not evolve in India the way it evolved in Renaissance Italy even when other art forms such as literature, dance or drama achieved great heights of aesthetic excellence in India well since antiquity.

Indian visual art thrived in elaborate sculptures carved in stone in temples and in caves. The temple sculptures of Ajantha, Ellora in Maharashtra, Khajuraho in central India, Halebid in Karnatak and Mahabalipuram in Tamilnadu show that there existed a very highly evolved sense of human beauty expressed in the three dimensions. These manifestations in stone had a long lasting quality in the protected environment they were ensconced in. Paper for writings or pictures was not so commonly used. Miniatures that were commissioned by the Delhi Emperors were the earliest artistic illustrations that we encounter in abundance. It is obvious that the art of painting two-dimensional pictures was not extensively practised in ancient or even medieval India. The murals in Ajantha are perhaps the only place where we see Indian paintings in two dimensional representation that have equivalent maturity

The English arrived in India initially with ambitions in trade alone. Yet remarkably very rapidly they developed territorial ambitions as well. Eventually their endeavour proliferated into an amazing encounter of east and west

in every field of human endeavour that would transform both beyond imagination. First Calcutta and then Mumbai became the two great centres of this fusion of cultures. Leaving aside a few exceptions, Indians took to the art of painting only since the beginning of the 20th century. In Bombay the establishment of the J.J. School of Art was the most important event in this matter. Many important and interesting Indian painters emerged around this institute. The creation of the Bombay Art Society under the patronship of the mighty Governor of the Bombay Presidency was the other most important event that shaped the evolution of this nascent world of Indian Painting and Painters.

We will never know what attracted young Shankar Hari Godbole of Pune to the world of Western Art. It must have been something of a leap into the unknown when he ran away from home to join the J.J.School in Bombay. Two years later he had enough of Art School and he returned to Pune. Pune had evolved into a garrison town of the English Army as well as the Monsoon Seat of the Governor of the Bombay Presidency.

Young S.H.Godbole obtained the position of the art teacher in the St.Vincent High School in Pune Cantonment. Before long, Godbole and his Art were objects of admiration amongst first the English and later the Parsee society of Pune. As the Secretary of the Pune branch of the Bombay Art Society, Godbole enjoyed proximity to the Governor and wielded considerable influence as the convener of the Society's Annual Art Exhibition in Pune.

Godbole and his close friend Artist Puram tried to evolve a fusion of styles that would do justice to classical Indian themes. In Bengal we see Tagore and Kshitindra Majumdar trying the same. Around the beginning of WW2 Godbole retired from his teacher's job, acquired a piece of farmhouse-land on 99-year lease from a Parsee acquaintance who had settled in England. There Godbole made a new beginning on a journey of rediscovering himself as an artist.

Godbole produced some of the finest watercolour paintings in this late mature stage of his life. The world around him was changing. The English left India in 1947. There were no buyers for contemporary Indian Art for a long time thereafter. It hardly mattered to the inspired artist. He was now a sovereign artist. He was not painting to placate the buyer. He chose his subjects, his styles, the genre, all to exactly suit his fancy. He would adopt an entirely hands-on approach. His brushwork used to be mind-blowing to watch. The micro-treatment was mighty abstract. It could be a portrait of George Bernard Shaw. It could be 'Flooded Godavari in Nashik'. It could be a caravan of bullock carts. It could be a tribal beauty or it could be a still-life with a Japanese vase. The total effect was about bringing divine visions into today's daylight. This very quality is inherited and brought to great heights of excellence by Artist Mumbiram himself in his own sovereign Rasa Art. Materially, Godbole was sinking into debt. Devastating floods following dam-brakes inundated his atelier in 1961.

The only one of his dozen grandchildren who had connected with him as an artist had left for America.

Meanwhile back in Bombay, the Bombay Art Society was reduced to a position of impotence. A group of upstarts calling themselves the 'Progressive Group' had undertaken the task of following the directions that various European and American artists had set out on, half a century before. Thus Souza and Hussain more or less took to Picasso in his various avatars. Husain's later iconic style clearly originated from Picasso's famous mural 'Guernica'. Ara took to a fuzzy edition of Matisse. Gade took to being 'the first Indian abstract expressionist'. Raza stayed very close to Frank Stella without giving him credit. This group of 'second hand' artists would take the credit for 'bringing out Indian Painting into the era of Modern Art'. They had nothing original of their own to show.

Godbole died in oblivion and penury in 1972. But it was not to be the end of his story. His one grandson that was inspired by his life, that was entirely dedicated to the aesthetic ideal, would take to the world of art and spirituality even after attaining the heights of academic excellence in America. He would point out that western art, in the name of abstraction, was floundering without any philosophy of aesthetic criticism whatsoever. Artist Mumbiram would introduce the classical Rasa Theory of aesthetic appreciation to the universe of Contemporary Art. He would proclaim the arrival of Rasa Renaissance in our times. Not only would he produce great Rasa art, but he would steer around myriad

challenges that he brought on himself and show us how he successfully lived the life of a classical painter. He would not hesitate to express his eternal gratitude to Godbole for being a living example of a life dedicated to the aesthetic ideal. According to Rasa Theory, destinies of individuals and societies are guided by the aesthetic choices that they make rather than political, economic or even technological paths that they embrace.

Here we find the story of this important artist of colonial India who successfully rediscovered himself in nascent independent India. Seen through the perspective of his loving grandson, we see him living the life of an inspired classical painter even in the face of the onslaught of mindless abstraction and distortion in the field of contemporary art of the second half of the 20th century.



“Atmavidya” by Hari Ganesh Godbole
(Keshav Bhikaji Dhavle, Mumbai, 1911)

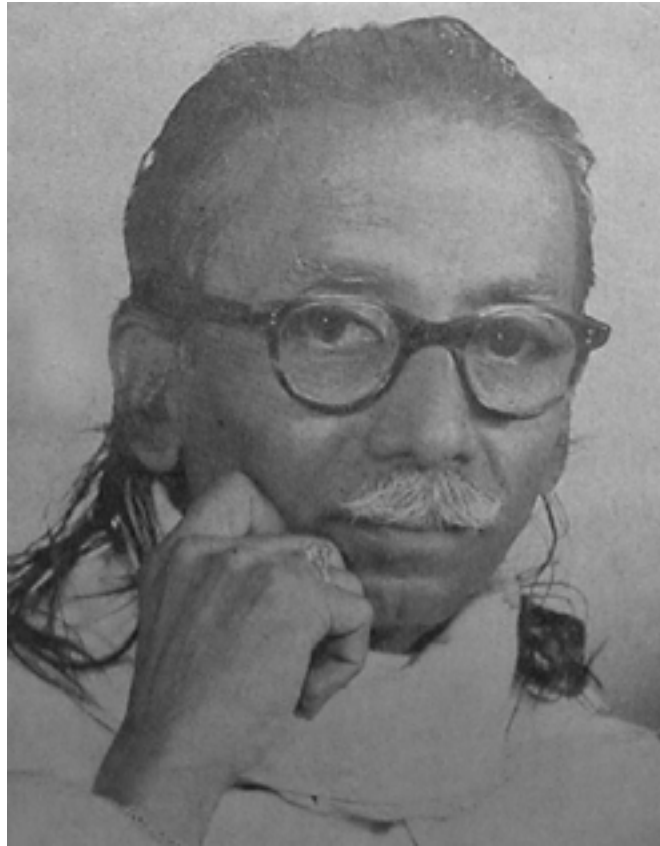


Hari Ganesh Godbole's Residence in Narayan Peth, Pune
S.H.Godbole had his earlier studio here.

British influence in Pune - Chitapawan Brahmins

The Godboles' roots were in Wai, south of Pune. Wai was an important religious center on the bank of the Krishna river. Godbole's ancestors were in traditional priestly occupations, well-versed in the Vedas. Godbole's father Hari Ganesh Godbole educated himself in the British colonial education system and became the headmaster of government high schools that the English had established in Pune, Satara, Nasik, etc. He had a house in Narayan Peth, Pune. He wrote “*Atmavidya*” and was also close to Lokmanya Tilak. Indeed the rear walls of their residences in Pune nearly touched each other.

S.H.Godbole was born around 1885 at the height of the British Empire. The brahmins of Pune were divided into two categories in terms of attitudes towards the English rule. Mr Godbole's father belonged to the group of brahmins to whom it was immaterial who rules, as brahmins are supposed to be devoted to the cult of knowledge whereas kings and rulers come and go. This group joined the English institutions. The other group was passionately and actively planning for the day when the English rule would be overthrown. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the 'Father of Indian Unrest', who was spreading disaffection towards the English, was the leader of this second group. Tilak belonged to the Chitapawan caste as did the Godboles.



Artist Puram, important watercolour artist and life-long friend of Artist S.H.Godbole.

Artist Puram was invited to illustrate a translation of the epic Mahabharata from Sanskrit into English. It was a monumental project undertaken by Bandharkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune. The 18 volume work contains many illustrations executed by Mr.Puram.

Leaving home to follow art - Meeting Puram

Around 1911 Mr. Godbole left home against the wishes of his father and family. He went to Mumbai and joined the famous J.J. School of Art for a couple of years. There he met the best friend of his life, Artist Puram. A couple of years later both of them dropped out and came to Pune. Mr. Puram was from a Telgu family, originally from the east coast of India. Both of them had kindred understanding and remained lifelong friends. Mr. Godbole considered Puram to be more gifted and more inspired an artist than himself. As a child, Artist Mumbiram had seen Artist Puram make watercolour portraits, something Artist Mumbiram will never forget. At that time both Godbole and Puram were in their 70s.

Art Teacher at St. Vincent High School

Back in Pune Godbole's mother was accusing him of not supporting the family. Therefore he decided to take a teacher's job at St. Vincent High School and became an art teacher for the next 30 years. That's how he came to know the English establishment in Pune. His watercolour paintings found many admirers amongst the English and Parsee communities of Pune.

Secretary of the Bombay Art Society

In the 1930s Godbole became the secretary of the Pune branch of the Bombay Art Society. In that capacity he organized the Annual Monsoon Exhibitions of the Bombay Art Society under the patronage of the governor of the Bombay Presidency. It was the most important event for artists and artlovers of



Gold Medal of the Annual Monsoon Exhibition of the Bombay Art Society. Artist Godbole's daughter Anjani had won one such gold medal for her excellence in Stitchwork Art.



Faizpur Session of Indian National Congress in 1936. Here we see Jawaharlal Nehru addressing the gathering.

Pune. Contemporaries have reminisced about the pomp and circumstances of the grand opening ceremony of the exhibition in which the governor was the chief guest. The military band would start playing when the governor arrived and Mr. Godbole dressed in a white suite with a black bow-tie would receive the governor and lead him into the exhibition. S.H. Godbole would never enter any of his own works in these exhibitions. But he chose the winners of Gold, Silver and Bronze medals in various categories of art at the exhibition. It was a very covetable position indeed. One reads about it in the autobiographical book *"Raapaan"* written by Artist Prahlad Anant Dhond who had known Godbole and who was many years later the director of the J.J. School of Art.

Founding of "Institute of Modern Art"

Puram and Godbole founded the "Institute of Modern Art" in Pune in the 1930s. After Indian Independence Puram went to Kenya and made a photographic studio in Nairobi for a few years. After he came back he started the *"Bharatiya Kala Pras- arini Sabha"*, the parent body of Pune's first art and architecture college: *"Abhinav Kala Vidyalaya"*. Puram had a rebellious attitude in him. He had joined the Gandhian movement as a young man. He was also the art director of one of the Annual Sessions of the Indian National Congress (The Faizpur Session). It was the first time that the Annual Session was held in rural India. Jawaharlal Nehru was the president of the session.



Themes of Indian Mythology

In the 1930s Artist Godbole was experimenting with a fusion of Indian mythological themes and western classical painting. It was also the period when his friend Puram was creating illustrations for the monumental Mahabharata edition.

A rare surviving masterpiece made by Godbole in that period is '*Ravana's encounter with Sita in Panchavati*'. This is a painting based on the defining moment of the epic Ramayana when the innocent Sita was kidnapped by the villain Ravana who appeared in a disguise. Godbole's depiction of Ravana's encounter with Sita is entirely different from traditional understanding of that meeting.

“Gopis pleading with Krishna to give back their clothes“

S.H.Godbole, Watercolour, (late 1920s/early 1930s)



S.H.Godbole

“Ravana’s encounter with Sita in Panchavati”

S.H.Godbole, Watercolour



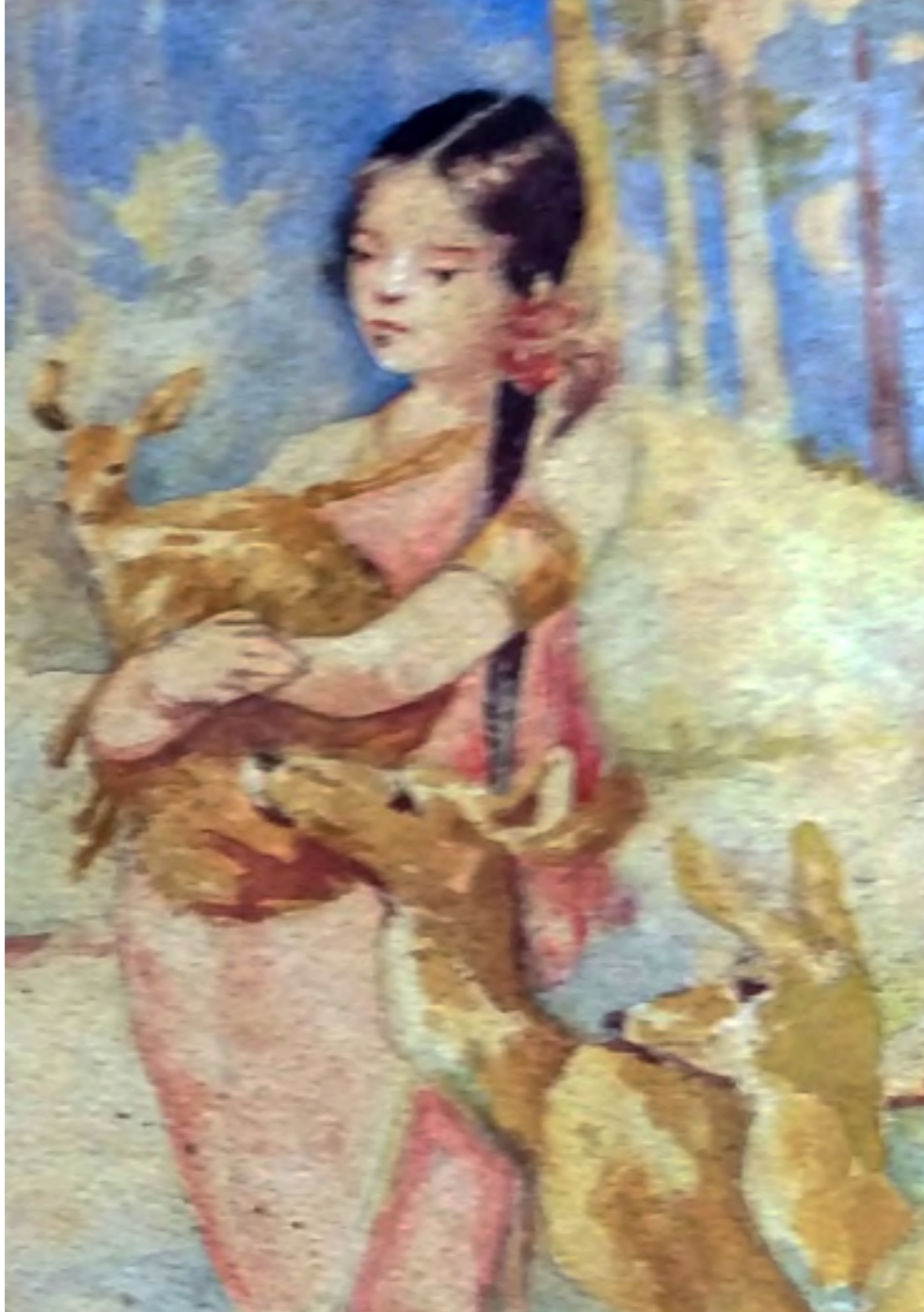
This is a painting based on the defining moment of the epic Ramayana. Godbole’s depiction of Ravana’s encounter with Sita is entirely different from traditional understanding of that meeting and offers a different explanation. The clever Ravana is seen approaching Sita neither as a sanyasi to be respected nor as a fearful demon who can scarcely disguise his real self. Ravana is seen here as a youthful, courteous, even likable, wanderer of the forest. Sita is shown as an innocent beautiful girl, who seems more like a typical college sophomore.



Ravana had kidnapped Sita during this first encounter in Panchavati. Rama and Sita had spent the happiest years of their life in exile in the idyllic forests in Panchavati. In Ravana's estimate the beautiful and devoted Sita who had followed her exiled husband into the forest embodied the highest ideals of womanhood. Ravana considered Sita to be more precious than the hordes of beautiful women that had flocked to the glamour and opulence of Lanka. He considered her to be more precious even than his chief queen, the devoted Mandodari. In short Ravana was determined to possess Sita at any cost. He also had heard from his sister Shoorpanakha how attached Rama was to Sita. He was aware that taking Sita away from Rama would drive Rama to insurmountable grief and make him vulnerable to defeat in combat. However, Sita was protected by Rama, who was invincible with his Kodanda bow and the numerous Astra weapons he had acquired from the sages of Dandakaranya. There was also Rama's brother Laxmana to assist him. Therefore Sita could be abducted only when Rama and Laxmana were removed from the scene, even briefly. Therefore Ravana hatched a plan with the help of his ally Maricha to achieve these goals. Ravana was a learned as well as clever man. He understood the vulnerabilities of a woman in Sita's situation. On Ravana's instructions Maricha appeared in Panchavati in the guise of a dazzling, golden deer. Sita was tempted by the thought of acquiring the beautiful skin of that deer, so she could make a blouse of



that skin. She persuaded Rama to go after that golden deer to hunt and fetch his skin. Sita and Laxman were left behind in the ashram. Just then they heard Rama calling out Laxmana for help. In truth it was the deceitful Maricha calling out in Rama's voice. Laxmana would not believe that Rama would need help going after a mere deer. Laxmana refused to budge. Thereupon Sita accused Laxmana that he did not want to rush to where Rama was shouting for help only because he secretly wished Rama to perish, so he, Laxmana, could have her alone in that wilderness. This was too much for Laxmana to take. Laxmana was devoted to both Rama and Sita more than to his own life. Laxmana created a protective ring around the ashram, the 'Laxmana Rekha' (line), by the dint of his devotion and rushed to where Rama would be. With both Rama and Laxmana away Ravana approached Sita in the disguise of a hermit. What transpired between Sita and Ravana is nearly inconceivable. Sita had just spoken the harshest words imaginable to Laxmana to make him rush to Rama's help. Sita did not shout out to the approaching hermit about the grave danger in which her beloved Rama was. She did not implore the mendicant hermit to rush to where Rama was. She forgot about Laxmana's sincere request and warning to stay inside the Laxmana Rekha. Different versions of the Ramayana seem to give different accounts of how Sita left the safety of the ashram and was lured to cross the Laxmana Rekha. Certainly all the events of that fateful afternoon indicate that Sita was acting unlike her usual character.



She had prevailed upon Rama to go after the elusive deer against his intuition that the deer was an elusive creation. She had grievously hurt Rama's devoted brother by accusing him of having devious motivations upon her.

According to traditional accounts Sita felt obliged to treat the unknown, strange mendicant at the gate of the ashram (in whose disguise demon Ravana had appeared) with utmost respect and hospitality. Traditional visual depictions considerably vary in their treatment of this scene. Some show Ravana as a furious sanyasi that is demanding respect from the householder Sita. In other depictions Ravana is scarcely able to hide his real demonic self. Neither of these two extreme depictions explain what spell Ravana cast on Sita that she was "lured" to approach Ravana, totally forgetting the grave danger Rama was in.

Artist Godbole's interpretation appears to offer a different explanation. It appears to point out that the clever Ravana had great understanding of a woman in Sita's situation. Sita had spent 13 years of the exile in the total protection of Rama and Laxmana. Here was the rare occasion when Sita was on her own without Rama or Laxmana around. The clever Ravana is seen approaching Sita neither as a sanyasi to be respected nor as a fearful demon who can scarcely disguise his real self. Ravana is seen here as a youthful, courteous, even likeable, wanderer of the forest. Sita is surrounded by deer. She is carrying a fawn in her arm. Sita



appears to be pondering upon this cavalier creature in curious attire. Here Ravana seems to be in acute understanding of the mental state of an overprotected young woman approached by an exotic stranger with unfamiliar intentions. This depiction seems to suggest that Ravana “lured” Sita to cross the Laxmana Rekha rather than “blackmail” her to cross it. Clearly this interpretation comes out of a deep understanding of the cleverness of Ravana as well as the out-of-character all-too-human sentiments exhibited by Sita on that fateful afternoon that disrupted the idyllic life that Rama and Sita were living in Panchavati and set the stage for the ultimate confrontation of all-out war between Rama and Ravana that led to the annihilation of Ravana along with his invincible Lanka. Godbole’s depiction of Ravana’s encounter with Sita is entirely different than traditional understanding of that meeting. It appeared to be plausible and convincing only to the rare individuals who had meditated upon those events in intimate detail.

Artist Godbole had profound and unorthodox ambitions about the prowess of an inspired artist in bringing out profound nuances in our understanding of seminal episodes in our collective culture consciousness.

With the emergence of Rasa Renaissance we now realize that Artist Godbole was far ahead of his time.



GODBOLE

S.H. Godbole

“Young Men with Ganesha on Ocean Beach”

S.H.Godbole, Watercolour, 1930



This is an idealised version of a Ganapati Visarjan procession. This is one of several renditions on this theme Godbole made in the 1930s. It is unlike any such procession that has taken place in Pune or Mumbai at any time in the last 100 years. This is Godbole's own vision that he obviously cherished very much. It shows no crowds hovering around. It shows only a small group of youth playing on musical instruments and dancing ecstatically. The line is very simple, spontaneous, almost like a caricature. But the mood is one of total involvement. All you see is bare bodies and flying dhoties. There is no pretence at showing anatomical accuracy or virtuosity of technique. Yet the artist is successful in communicating his vision of an intimate emotional experience. It is reminiscent of early Bengal School of Art such as seen in Kshitindranath Majumdar, Jamini Roy and even some early Rabindranath Tagore paintings.



What is noteworthy is that this artist sees that the artist's contribution is in presenting his aesthetic visions rather than only depicting realities we see around us. It takes certain courage of conviction to harbour such an ambition which is seen in Godbole's art in plenty. Another unorthodox feature about this painting that is noticed is the obviously androgynous quality that the bodies and souls of these Ganesha devotees exude. Godbole's grandson Artist Mumbiram has mentioned that the image of Ganapati that the men are taking to the sea is a remarkably accurate rendering of a wood carved idol that Godbole had in his collection.



Daughter Anjani with Mumbiram.

Ajani was the only one of Godbole's four daughters to excel in art. She was a master of portraits made in stitch-work. She had won a gold medal for her art at the annual exhibition of the Bombay Art Society. It seemed everything was favorable for Mumbiram to be considering a career in art. Photo made in the studio of celebrated photographer W.N.Bhat who was a family friend.

Four Daughters of S.H. Godbole

Mr. Godbole was married to Varanasi Vartak, the eldest daughter of Vishnu Vartak, chief engineer of the Bombay Presidency. Vishnu Vartak had graduated at the top of the first batch of graduates from the celebrated College of Engineering, Pune. Sir Mokshagundam Vishveshvaraiya was his classmate. Vartak was one of the most famous engineers of his time and a wealthy man. Godbole had four daughters from his wife Varanasi, spaced about five years from each other, the eldest named Shanta, then Anjani (Mumbiram's mother), the third was Lalita and fourth was Hema.

Varanasi Vartak was suffering from Tuberculosis. Mr. Vartak was very conservative by religious and social standards. The women of the Vartak household spent much time in dark smoke filled kitchens which was not good for their health. Mr. Godbole had to devote much of his time to take care for his wife. She died early, around 1935, when her eldest daughter was about 18 years old and Anjani was not yet married. Anjani was about 14, the younger one was ten and the youngest was five. Finding husbands for daughters used to be a big responsibility, especially in the brahmin caste. One had to make oneself humble and climb the steps of homes that had prospective grooms to be married. The prospective bride's father had to be ready to take humiliation and abuse during the negotiations and the bargains. Mr. Godbole had to go through all that. Without losing much of his honour he got them married. Anjani had obtained a teacher's diploma besides having shown artistic talent at this point.

Wonderful relationship with Ramdas Paranjpe



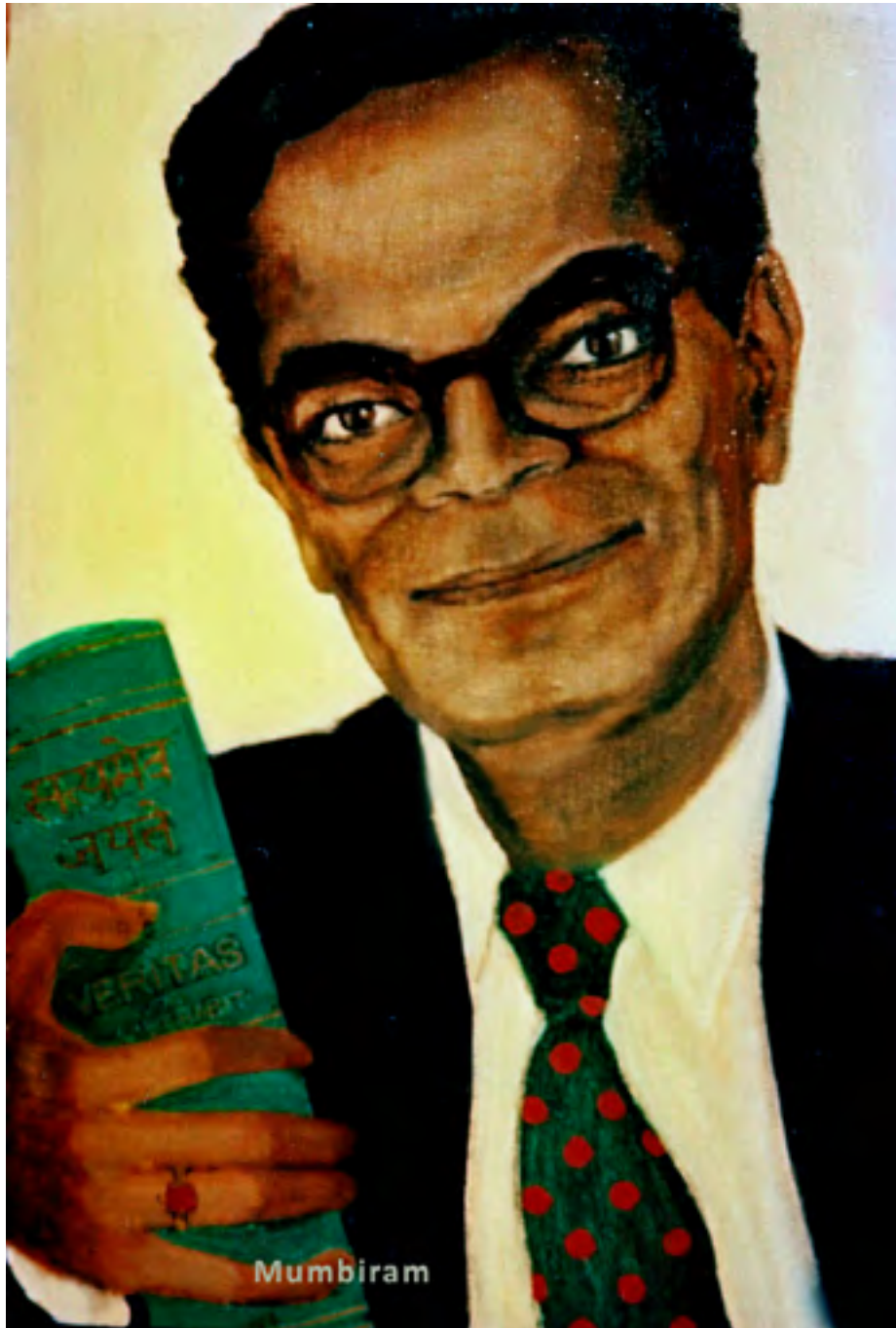
Anjani and Ramdas in 1973 in their later home in the upscale Prabhat Road residence in Pune. Anjani's husband Ramdas Paranjpe had a relationship of mutual respect and admiration with artist Godbole. Ramdas Paranjpe was actively involved in Puram's art institute, the 'Bharatiya Kala Prasarini Sabha'. Artist Mumbiram is continuing the legacy of both S.H.Godbole and Advocate Ramdas Paranjpe. Ramdas Paranjpe was the first lawyer to represent and defend the Pharsepardhi tribal people of Maharashtra. Mumbiram has delved deeply in the lives and loves of these proud nomadic people. These forest people have been the muses in Mumbiram's important paintings that are about the Pulindya forest women that were attracted to the adolescent Krishna in his sweet Vrindavan Leelas. This photo was made by Mumbiram during his three week visit from the USA in 1973.

Mumbiram's father, Ramdas Paranjpe, was Mr.Godbole's favourite son-in-law. Ramdas had something very noble about him, which Mr.Godbole sincerely liked. Ramdas also was a great admirer of Godbole as an artist and as a man. They were very good friends. Godboleji used to ride his bicycle nearly four kilometres daily from his farm house on Bombay Road to where his daughter Anjani and Ramdas resided near downtown Mandai Vegetable Market in Pune.

For many years Advocate Ramdas Paranjpe was a member of the executive committee of the 'Bharatiya Kala Prasarini Sabha' founded by Puram. Puram had roped in Sayajirao Silam, the speaker of the legislative assembly of the state as the president of the Sabha. Along with Sayajirao Silam Ramdas contributed to the fund-raising activities of the institute. Later in the 1960s Ramdas himself became the president of the Bharatiya Kala Prasarini Sabha.

Second marriage

Mr. Godbole was about 42 years of age when his wife died. Some years later he decided to get married again. His daughters did not like that at all. Nevertheless Godbole contacted the Karve Institute that was encouraging and facilitating marriage of widows. In those days the priestly class frowned upon widows of upper caste society marrying again. Mr. Godbole married a widow who had a daughter from her first marriage. Godbole and his second wife had a son.



“Advocate Ramdas Paranjpe“

Oil, 1989, Mumbiram

Advocate Ramdas Paranjpe was the president of the Pune Bar Association in 1963. After he passed away in 1989 it was proposed that a portrait of Ramdas Paranjpe should be hung on the premises of the District Court of Pune.

Artist Mumbiram happily accepted the challenge of making this portrait of his father. Mumbiram wanted to show his father as he remembered him. In this portrait we see Paranjpe holding a volume of law book that has two inscriptions across its ribs: “Satyameva Jayate” (truth always triumphs) in Devanagari script and “Veritas Vos Liberabit” (truth will set you free) in Latin. In Mumbiram’s estimate his father was a handsome dark man. He had kind eyes and a winning smile. He was well liked by his friends. He had delicate hands as you see here holding the book. The ring finger is adorned with a purple ruby ring, which was the only ornament he ever wore. Mumbiram has lovingly captured all these details and left the background entirely empty. The composition is interesting, the head is tilted and the top of the head appears cropped. The painting was installed in the District Court Library at the hands of the retired chief justice of India, Shri Y. V. Chandrachud, in a special ceremony.

Master of Watercolour

Godbole was famous for painting Indian rural scenes and was a master of the watercolour medium. He had perfected the transparent treatment of the watercolour medium. This technique involves letting the paper shine through by keeping it just blank. This is how the highlights in the watercolour painting are created. That was in fact Godbole's special and unique technique which his grandson artist Mumbiram happily picked up from him. It gives the picture a transparent feeling which oil paintings rarely achieve.



“Fishermen at a Konkan Beach”

S.H. Godbole, Watercolour

Favourite with English Art Lovers

While being an art teacher at the local high school in the Garrison Camp Area of the English army in Pune Godbole gained much popularity with the English inhabitants of Pune. They loved his watercolour paintings depicting village life of India. As the secretary of the Bombay Art Society he had considerable influence amongst the art-circle of Pune. English men were happily buying his paintings and taking them back to England. This went on till the dawn of Indian Independence in 1947. After the English left India indigenous Indian art was without any significant patronage for some time to come.



“Proud Owner of a Fighter Rooster”

S.H. Godbole, Watercolour

Remarkable Rediscovery and New Direction

Godbole had retired from St. Vincent's High School in 1942 and created an idyllic farmhouse outside the city. Political realities around him were changing fast. The War and the Quit India Movement dominated the social and cultural scene. The English would soon leave India. We see Godbole making a remarkable adjustment, a rediscovery that harmonised with the emergence of a new independent India. Godbole's attention was drawn to the nomadic tribal people of India. The watercolour works that he made depicting the lives and circumstances of these people are of a genre that is entirely different from the type of neoclassical depictions of Indian mythological themes that he was attempting in the 1920s and 30s.

This was a new direction that manifested in new techniques and styles that were never attempted before. The spirit and ethos of this new dawn would find its highnoon in the art of Rasa Renaissance that would emerge many years later.

**Two Examples of Godbole's
earlier Neoclassical Period**





“Man from Kashmir”
S.H.Godbole, Watercolour

“Hooka Smoker”
S.H.Godbole, Watercolour





“Bullock Cart Caravan returning home at Sundown”

S.H.Godbole, Watercolour



Godbole made this painting when he was residing at his idyllic farm house on Bombay Road outside Pune. Bullock carts was a favorite theme in many of his paintings in the 1940s. Even though this painting may be seen as one of his many bullock cart renderings, it was a favorite with rasiks, because of its sentimental depiction of the lengthening shadows heralding the end of the day.



Godbole had developed a hands-on approach that was suitable for each individual painting. The treatment here is impressionistic. Through blobs of the brush an impression is created of many bullock carts and many people traveling. The shadows are depicted with minimal effort but maximum impact. The dark clouds forming in the midst of a sky that is getting pink and purple must be creating a memorable déjà-vu experience for the villagers returning home. The artist has succeeded in capturing that very feeling, which would be hard to describe even in thousands of words.

The maverick Indian movie maker K.Narayan Kale had hung this painting on top of his bed in his house in Pune for many years in the 50s and 60s.

Godbole's grandson, Artist Mumbiram, wrote about his grandfather artist in the article: "In Search of Art that transcends Culture". Raviwar Sakal. Sakal Papers Pvt.Ltd, Pune.

(March 17, 1985):

"All my sweet memories of childhood revolved around my grandfather's house. He was a very gentle man and never lost his childlike innocence. He was fond of collecting birds and animals. He surrounded himself with a large family that included peacocks, doves, ducks, chicken, turtles, rabbits, guinea pigs, dogs, cats, etc. Every room of his house was full of paintings. He also had a very large collection of prints and cuttings out of magazines of the works of great masters of the past. All these he had meticulously pasted into oversized albums. Finding treasures in the junk market was another of his passions. For my child's mind his house was indeed a living fantasy."

"Inside the house he had rare china porcelain statues, brass cannons and trinkets. Outside the house he had a variety of trees - jamool, tamarind, sandalwood, mango, guava. There were birds in the trees and fish in the streams. The sun would rise, the clouds would gather, the grass would grow, the cattle would rest under trees. I watched my grandfather depicting all this in his paintings. Could there have been a better institute that I could have learned art at ?"

Unique Atmosphere at Godbole's Studio

After retirement from his art teacher's job, around 1942, Artist Godbole bought a piece of land of two acres on the road towards Mumbai. It was between the road and the railway line. It was outside the limits of the town. At night it would be very dark and one would hear jackals calling out. It was a wild area. He had built a little house and was living the idealistic life that he had always wanted to practise and which he could only do after he had retired from his teacher job. It was then that he was inspired to create some of his best watercolour paintings. Meanwhile his grandson, Artist Mumbiram, was growing up and was able to watch his artist grandfather working in his best favourable environment. Young Mumbiram's favourite thing to do at the weekend was to take a bus-ride and visit him. It was not very far, maybe five kilometres from the city centre. Mr. Godbole had kept all kinds of animals and birds around his house. He didn't eat them, but he liked the atmosphere. There were many nice trees and a stream was passing on one edge of the property. It was a place that had no comparison in the whole of Pune. He was living and creating very peacefully and quietly there. For Mumbiram it was a place of pilgrimage. Godbole had studiously made big albums that had the photos of all the classic paintings through the centuries beginning from the renaissance artists. Mumbiram's desire to become an artist was obviously inspired by his grandfather.



“Japanese Vase“

**S.H.Godbole, 1950s,
Watercolour**



This very vibrant “still life” was produced by Godbole around 1950 which was the peak of his creative genius. He was well settled in his farm house. He had no connection with the Bombay Art Society which he once steered under the close patronage of the governor of Bombay Presidency. In the name of modernity Indian artists were coming under increasing influence of “western” art movements of the first half of 20th century. Godbole was now a free man with no pressing need to align with any movement or any society. He was 65 and had the experience of a life time with his favourite medium: water colour.



Godbole was passionate about collecting art objects wherever he found them. The Japanese Vase seen in this painting was one of these. Artist Mumbiram has described what a magical experience it was to visit Godbole Park. It had exotic trees, birds and animals. But the house itself was studded with Godbole's own art. This painting used to hang above the dining table in Godbole's kitchen.

The painting is a unique masterpiece of a still life in impressionistic style. The vase itself is superbly rendered. The assorted fruit in the foreground are rendered in delightfully imaginative brush work. The flowers in the vase are deliberately ambiguous and effortlessly merged into the dream-like background which looks like a Japanese fan on the left and a silk cloth on the right. Altogether it shows an entirely sovereign state of the mind of an inspired artist, who has honed his technique through his own experience alone.

During the deluge of dam breaks that inundated much of Pune city, this masterpiece along with all others of Godbole's works lay under thick layers of mud. Mumbiram, then a young teenager, along with his mother Anjani worked tirelessly to salvage most of them.



Later on when Mumbiram created his own legendary atelier near Pune's Mandai vegetable market this painting adorned a place of pride in the midst of Mumbiram's own art.

This still life is an example of the versatility of the themes that Godbole handled. One cannot help but notice that even this still life has become uniquely interesting because of the figures of two Japanese women engaged in a mystical discourse.

That makes Godbole's art quintessentially Personalist Rasa Art.

Other Artists around Godbole



This extraordinary likeness of Anjani Godbole exists in sculptor Karmarkar's studio museum near Alibaug. Mumbiram has no idea when the sculptor had the opportunity to have artist Godbole's daughter Anjani to pose for him for this spontaneous inspired portrait bust. In another instance artist Dhurandhar had made a watercolour portrait of Godbole's eldest daughter Shanta. This work exists at the Prabhat Road residence of Shanta Abhyankar in Pune.

Godboleji shared mutual admiration with a number of artists who were his contemporaries. Artist M.V. Dhurandhar who made many depictions of the folk people of Maharashtra was a personal friend of Godboleji. He was also the first Indian principle of J.J. School of Art in Mumbai. He once made a watercolour portrait of Mumbiram's aunt, Shanta (a sister of Anjani). When he was once visiting Artist Godbole, Godbole said to Dhurandhar 'Make a portrait of my daughter.' Dhurandhar readily complied. This watercolour portrait of Mumbiram's aunt Shanta is a classic example of Dhurandhar's delicate and accurate style of watercolour portraiture. Presently it hangs in the residence of Shanta's grandson in Pune.

Sculptor Karmarkar of Sasavne, near Alibaug, was a friend of Godbole's. Once Karmarkar made a bust of Godbole's daughter Anjani, Artist Mumbiram's mother. It is seen at Karmarkar Museum at Sasavne.

There was a group of artists that had gathered around the Christ Prema Seva Ashram near Wakdewadi at Shivajinagar. The Goan artist, Angelo de Fonseca, was the most prominent amongst them. Artist Tribhuvan and Artist Malelu were some other names Mumbiram had heard from his grandfather.

Admirers in the Parsi Community



Photographer Vinod was over 90 years of age when he met Mumbiram accidentally at Taty Aitvadekar's Process Studio. Vinod was thrilled to meet artist Godbole's grandson who was also an artist. Vinod took instant liking to Mumbiram and visited him in Mumbiram's Mandai studio many times. Vinod made this photo during one such visit to Mumbiram. Mumbiram had also visited Vinod at his residence in Jogeshwari Lane near Laxmi Road. Vinod was very organized. He dug out from his collection the photos of Godbole he had made nearly 60 years before and gladly offered them to Mumbiram without any strings. Unfortunately those photographs have been misplaced and cannot be traced.

Godbole had many good friends and admirers in the Parsi community of Pune. Around 2001 Mumbiram met a Mr. Vinod at Taty Aitvadekar's Process Studio. Vinod had been an army photographer in the 1930s and 40s. He remembered Artist Godbole very well after all those years. He offered Mumbiram some photos of Mr. Godbole he had made when Godbole was the secretary of the Bombay Art Society. One such photo that Vinod gave Mumbiram showed a young Godbole being honoured by the daughter of the governor of Bombay with a bouquet of flowers. They are surrounded by some Parsi celebrities. Photographer Rustomji was a close friend of Godbole. He had his photostudio across from the WestEnd Cinema in Pune Cantonment. Rustomji met his end in a tragic accident when the car he was driving was washed away in a flash flood while crossing a small nullah (stream) in the countryside. Godbole would often mention a Parsi admirer in Pune named Dady who was a frequent buyer of Godbole's art. Interestingly the piece of land where Godbole made his idyllic farmhouse studio outside Pune was leased on a 99 year contract from a Parsi gentleman who had settled in England after the British left India. Godbole had obviously created a vast repertoire of artwork much of which remains in unknown collections in India and England. Thanks to Artist Mumbiram's diligent efforts this important Indian artist of the 20th century will not be forgotten outside the pages of history.



S.H. Godbole

**“Midday Feast for the Village Deity in the Forest”,
S.H.Godbole, circa 1950, Watercolour**



Most of Godbole’s landscapes are contexted by people who populate them. Through a minimalist treatment the artist has depicted the happy drama of cooking a meal in the woods in large copper pots, offering it to the deity, and partaking of the prasadam.



With equally consummate flair the artist has created the atmosphere of friendly Indian woods under the hot midday sun. The ease of the brushwork lifts the spirits of the viewer. There is nothing laborious in this painting. The happy mood of enjoyment is clearly shared in the happy effortless treatment by the artist. The same feeling is experienced by those viewing this painting. That is what makes this a great Rasa Masterpiece.



S.H.Godbole's grandson Mumbiram with mother Anjani, ca.1950
This photo as well as the photo of Anjani with S.H.Godbole was made
in the photostudio of Rustomji, a Parsi photographer friend of S.H.
Godbole.

Grandson winning Art Competition

When Godbole's grandson, Mumbiram, was 11 years old there was an art competition for children up to age 15 arranged by Artist Puram who had gotten the Hindustan Lever Brothers to be a sponsor. The first prize was a big radio, the second was an English made sports bicycle and the third was a camera. More than 5000 children took part in the competition of colouring a picture. It was a picture of a mother coming home with grocery shopping and bags full of vegetables. The cabbages and cauliflower were almost popping out of the bag. She is walking in through the door and her son of eight or ten is showing her the picture he had made while she was gone. There was a picture in a picture. Out of the 5000 entries they chose 200 and asked the participants to come in person to colour this picture again this time in front of the judges. The committee of judges had three members. Puram himself was one of them, then there was Mrs. Yamutai Kiloskar, the wife of the famous industrialist of Maharashtra S.L.Kiloskar and the third was the movie director K.Narayan Kale. Mumbiram was one of the 200 invited. Out of these the best three were chosen. Mumbiram got the second prize, the blue bicycle, the only blue bicycle in Pune at that time. The education minister was invited to give away the prizes at a very elaborate ceremony arranged by the sponsor and Mr. Puram.

Mr. Godbole was very happy because it was the same hall, where 30 years ago the fancy Bombay Art Society exhibition used to be held and which he was in charge of. Artist Godbole was excited like a little child, when he was excited. He



S.H. Godbole with daughter Anjani, ca. 1950

Photo made in the studio of Godbole's friend, photographer Rustomji in Pune.

was dressed in his best white satin suit with a bow-tie. He was not going to sit in the audience nor was he going to sit on the stage with the celebrities. He was standing in the wings from where he could see everybody. Mumbiram could see him from the front seat where the big winners were sitting. One by one their names were called and Mumbiram got this bicycle. All the other 200 were given consolation prizes of nice art sets. Mr. Godbole was very overwhelmed and in his enthusiasm and euphoria he made Mumbiram's three year old younger brother, who had not taken part in the competition, go and receive a prize. It was sort of a prank that Godbole was playing in good humour. Alas Mumbiram's mother did not like it at all and she chastised her father and next day made him go back to the sponsor's shop to give back this little box of crayons. Mumbiram felt very bad. It was an anti-climax to the enthusiasm of Mumbiram's grandfather.

The next day the blue bicycle was hung from a high place in the school building along with a bulletin on the black board in large letters: 'This young artist of today is certain to become a great artist of tomorrow.' The bicycle and Mumbiram became the subject of admiration and envy of every young boy of Pune.



**“The Noble Sinhadgad Presides
over the Flooded Mutha”**

Mumbiram, 1990, Watercolour

Standing halfway along the Lakdi Pool bridge on the Mutha river when the river is in flood is an awe-inspiring experience. One feels the mighty force moving right under you. Far in the distance the noble silhouette of the Sinhadgad presides over the landscape. The smoke rising from the Vaikuntha crematorium provides the counterpoint to the otherwise very wet feeling in the end-to-end flooded river below.

Deluge - Flood of 1961

In 1961 the monsoon was very strong. A new dam was being built, up the Mutha river at Panshet, in a hurry. A new technology was being tried out. Instead of a barrier wall made of cement concrete and stones, an embankment of an artificial ‘hill’ made of just loose earth was being tried out. If the mound of loose dirt was allowed to settle under its own weight it was expected to be strong enough to withstand the pressure of a reservoir full of water. Experts had recommended two years of settling time for the embankment. The ruling party wanted to fill the dam in a hurry before the upcoming elections to impress the electorate with the new abundance of water. It was part of a political campaign promise. Not heeding expert advice the dam was filled prematurely. There was strong rain in the first week of July. It had rained for five days non-stop and all the dams were full. The new dam broke and sent a big wall of water down the river into the second dam at Khadakwasla (which was built by Mumbiram’s mother’s grandfather, Mr. Vartak). The Khadakwasla dam also broke and the whole deluge of a 20 or 30 feet wall of water flooded Pune.

Artist Godbole’s property was not far from the river and the water kept rising until it had covered his whole house and was ten feet above the roof. He could escape to the roof of the three-story building next doors. But all his paintings, all his life’s work, was under 20 feet of muddy debris of the deluge. Everything was under water for more than 24 hours. When the water subsided it left behind two to three feet of mud covering everything inside the house. It was a devastating scene for



“The Day the Dams Broke”

Mumbiram, 1982, Watercolour

This painting shows a scared child being comforted by a goddess like figure. The orange waters in the distance show a flooded river. The clear sunny skies above are deceptive. The river is bringing a deluge of a flood with it. This painting is about the awesome vision of a deluge that he had experienced as an adolescent in 1961.

Mr. Godbole. Nearly 400 people were washed away and lost their lives. Pune was an old town built along the river. Many old homes just collapsed like houses made of playing cards. It was a big calamity that changed the whole town forever and ever. The reconstruction work went on for months.

Mumbiram and his mother took the lead in salvaging as many of Godbole’s artworks in watercolour as they could. They worked non-stop for two months. At that time Mumbiram was in the eleventh grade at school. The schools were closed anyway. First they washed each of the paintings in water as tenderly as they could without washing away the paint and the colour. Some of the paper was already rotten or gotten mouldy. They made a fire under an Indian-style bed, burned loban and dried the paintings on that smoke. Each piece would take 10 to 15 minutes to process. While doing all that clean up Mumbiram got to see every single of Godboleji’s work very closely. There were also albumfuls of specimens of world art history that Godboleji had meticulously put together. It was like a huge data bank of valuable art history put at Mumbiram’s disposal. Godboleji’s hard work was finding the right person to appreciate it. Somewhere inside was an uncanny feeling that Mumbiram was going to take ‘revenge’. But that would be much later.

Persuasion not to follow an artistic career

Mumbiram had spent the happiest days of his childhood watching his grandfather's enchanted life devoted to the aesthetic ideal. He had shown himself to be a prodigious child-artist. It appeared natural that Mumbiram would become an artist himself. But ever since the English had left India, days of economic difficulty had descended on his artist grandfather. Mumbiram was persuaded by his family not to follow an artistic career but to do something more practical. Mumbiram never believed that art could be taught beyond some techniques. Since he was good at mathematics, he joined the Engineering College even though he did not want to become an engineer at all.

The College of Engineering was on the bank of the same Mula/Mutha river, that had swallowed his artist grandfather's atelier. Mumbiram used to spend much of his time in college sitting at the bank of that river. It was not far from Artist Godbole's farmhouse atelier. One could walk along the river from the boat club all the way to his grandfather's place. Six years after the big flood, Mumbiram had completed his college, was first and was offered a scholarship at the University of California in Berkeley as a graduate student. Artist Godbole had given Mumbiram some of his art to take to America to show work done by his grandfather.



“Culture conceived at the River Ghat”

1990. Watercolour, Mumbiram

“*Culture conceived at the River Ghat*” shows Artist Mumbiram sitting at the boat club of the College of Engineering Pune.



This is perhaps one of the very few surviving photos of Artist S.H. Godbole. It was made by his grandson Artist Mumbiram in 1967 when Godbole was nearly 82 years of age. He is sitting in Ramdas Paranjpe's office, his trademark solar hat on his knees. It was just a few months before Mumbiram went to Berkeley for his graduate studies. The artist and his grandson would never meet again thereafter.

Godbole's life in poverty

The flood and deluge of 1961 was a big shock for Mr. Godbole. He decided never to create paintings in watercolours again. He made several oil paintings after that. He changed to this very different medium at age 75. Some of these oil paintings indeed turned out quite good. But alas he was making them on sheets of plywood because he had so little money and could not afford canvases. These cheap plywood boards would eventually warp and the painting would be ruined. It was sad to see. The last six, seven years of his life Mumbiram was gone to the US. Godbole's second wife had died just a few months before Mumbiram left for Berkeley. Their son, Shrikant, was about four or five years older than Mumbiram. Godbole was in terrible poverty the last years of his life.

Last Years of Mr. Godbole

Mr. Godbole died in 1972, one year before Mumbiram came back to Pune for a visit. It was quite a sad end. Mumbiram could only imagine. He was not there to see it all.

Godbole's son from his second marriage was not taking pride in his father being an artist. Mr. Godbole had been very permissive towards his son and had let him do anything because he was the apple of his eye. The son sold Godbole's romantic piece of land, bought a little piece in the heart of the city and built a very small house. That is where Artist Godbole lived his last two or three years of his life and died. He went silent for these last years. He was very unhappy but did not want to say anything bad about his dear son. He had a good equation with Mumbiram's father, but Mumbiram's mother did not like

“..... my grandfather’s sad demise. He had waited eagerly for my return. He had hoped that I would carry on his artistic ambition. His last years must have been full of despair. Whatever few paintings he now had with him he used to throw away, anywhere, by the riverside, under the bridge, in the market place, anywhere. The last year of his life he went silent. I cried a bitter tear. Now there was no going back from art. On the contrary, I decided to channel my energy into art in a more planned and concerted manner. Before that, I decided to complete my Ph.D. I wrote a very concise thesis in Mathematical Economics. It was about ‘Competitive Growth Models’. I completed it within a year. My Ph.D. certificate bore the signature of the then Governor of California, Ronald Regan. I threw it in the wind and also left California in search of a new aesthetic ideal.”

(Mumbiram, “In Search of Art that transcends Culture”)

this stepbrother of hers at all. Ramdas was a lawyer with a son desiring to be an artist and Artist Godbole’s son wanted to be a lawyer. He asked Mumbiram’s father if he could be his apprentice. Mumbiram’s mother didn’t agree. She was very antagonistic to her stepbrother. Therefore Mr. Godbole and Ramdas Paranjpe, who were very good friends, could not do anything for each other. Mumbiram’s mother and her three sisters never forgave their father for having married a second time.

Mr. Godbole had been admitted to an expensive hospital by his son. They wanted to examine his head to find out why he did not talk. Once Mumbiram’s father was visiting and Godbole spoke and said, “Ramdas take me out of here. Right now.” Ramdas did just that on his own responsibility. At Godbole’s home there was also his daughter-in-law, Shrikant’s wife, who was a kind woman. Later on she told Mumbiram how Mr. Godbole had died. Every morning at five o’clock she would get up and make tea for him. That day he sat up against the wall when she brought him the tea. Five, ten minutes later she came to take the cup away and said “Ah you didn’t take your tea...”. He did not answer which was no surprise because he did not talk. Another five minutes later she came back again and he did not move. He was dead. He died sitting up as in the yoga practice which his father had introduced in his family. Later on one of Godbole’s nephews that Mumbiram became friends with, showed Mumbiram old photos of Mr. Godbole as a young man with his brother and with his father with shaved head and rudraksha mallas sitting as yogis. A yogi ideally leaves his body through the top of his head while sitting up.



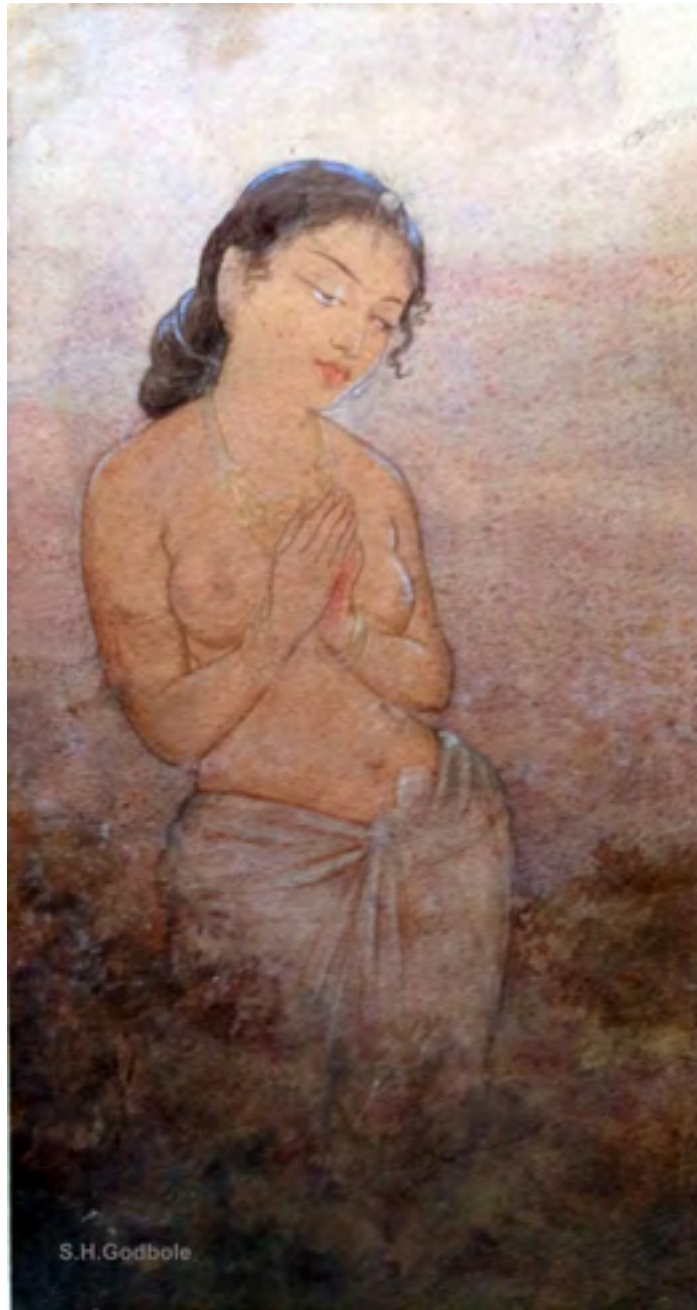
Bharatiya Kala Prasarini Sabha without Puram

From left: Mr. Naik, who owned an island in the Mula-Mutha river; Prof. Mangrulkar, scholar of Marathi and Sanskrit literature; Shri B.N. Kulkarni, principal of Bharat High School; Hon. Sayajirao Silam, speaker of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly; D.B. (Dayaram) Agarwal, chairman of cantonment board and childhood friend of Ramdas; Advocate Ramdas Paranjpe; Advocate Nargolkar, friend of Ramdas; Principal Divakar Dengale of Abhinav Kala Vidyalaya

This photo was made when the Sabha was located on the upper stories of a building next to Gokhle Hall on Laxmi Road. Ramdas Paranjpe had involved himself and his friends in the affairs of the Sabha mainly because he held artist Godbole in high regard. It appears Puram's artistic temperament found the official workings of the institution incompatible and therefore the executive committee seen here had to relieve Puram from any official position in the Sabha.

Mumbiram honouring Puram's wife

When Mumbiram came back to India after 12 years in America his grandfather artist was dead and so was Puram. Puram was married to Vijayabai Puram, who was always very active in supporting all of her husband's artistic endeavours. She survived Puram by nearly twenty years and dearly held on to Puram's surviving paintings and memories. Puram had made the institute Bharatiya Kala Prasarini Sabha. Ramdas Paranjpe was on its executive body. A young upstart that Mr. Puram had hired, Mr. Dengale, had ambitions to be the head of this institute and wanted to make Puram retire. Puram did not want to because the institute was his baby. Mr. Dengale conspired against Puram and somehow made Mumbiram's father agree to his plan. They passed a resolution in the executive committee and Puram was made to retire against his wishes. Mumbiram came to know these things from Vijayabai, who had always liked Mumbiram's parents and was shocked that Anjani's husband made Puram retire. Mumbiram invited Puram's wife to his Mandai studio. He made his rag-picking friends, who he was able to win as his muses in a gentlemanly way, touch Vijayabai's feet saying "This lady is my guru's wife. Girls." It hurt Mumbiram that his father was responsible for something he thought was unjust. He did not know how to make up for it. The rag-picking girls were very happy to touch the feet of this woman in white. She bestowed her loving blessings upon the young artist.



Watercolour by S.H. Godbole



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