



**Banishing tourist-type visions**

Mumbai: It is a good idea to banish the artist's traditional, tourist-type visions from the pages of the Press. The artist's role is to create a vision of the future, not to depict the past.



...the artist who...  
...the artist who...  
...the artist who...

# Newspaper Articles

...the artist who...  
...the artist who...

**व्यक्तिसापेक्ष कलेची साध**

...the artist who...  
...the artist who...



by and about

# Artist Mumbaram

**HERALD**

**AN ARTIST'S MANIFESTO**

1. The artist is a man who...  
2. The artist is a man who...  
3. The artist is a man who...



**'Who's Afraid of a Rich Nietzsche?'**

Lakshmi: Just an ordinary portrait, you'd say. If you didn't know him. And then, suddenly, Lakshmi was dead. Was it an accident, or was it a more violent death? In a sense it doesn't matter, anymore. What matters is that Lakshmi, that madman, that guru, is no longer around. This is the story of the friendship between a computer and a painter, and the latter's attempt at evoking a concept of enlightenment.

**T**he artist is a man who...  
The artist is a man who...  
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...the artist who...  
...the artist who...  
...the artist who...

# Newspaper Articles

by and about

## Artist Mumbiram

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## Foreword

This collection of six newspaper articles by and about Artist Mumbiram provides a close-up of the artist's work and life, his inspiration and ambitions as well as the circumstances and world around in his legendary studio in Pune in the 80s. These were the circumstances that were exactly necessary for creating a Renaissance of Rasa, the rebirth of an aesthetic that purely concentrates on Rasa, feelings and emotions as reflections of the spiritual.

The flag-ship painting of Rasa Renaissance: "Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis" appears in almost all of them along with other images of Mumbiram's vast repertoire of artwork that were printed in colour.

The articles reveal this Renaissance artist as a man whose consciousness is inundated by the Aesthetic Choice, who has walked the fire of self-exile before he 'became', who spared himself no material hardships in his search but accepted them as boons of 'tapasya', opportunities of viewing life in its essence, who thrives on man more than on matter, who did not depend on institutional grants for his search but depended for his next meal on the people he was associating with.

The first articles "*In Search of Art that transcends Culture*" and "*Practice of Personalist Art*" are first-person accounts in Marathi that appeared in two Sunday Supplements of the Pune Sakal in 1985. There Mumbiram describes his adventurous and romantic becoming an art-

ist in the 70s in the US after throwing away his Ph.D from the University of Berkeley. As a child he had dreamt of stepping into the footsteps of his grandfather, the artist and master of watercolour painting. Already as a child Mumbiram was very good at art, even won prizes, but as a teenager he was persuaded to go for something 'practical'. Being at the top of his class in telecommunication at the College of Engineering Pune he joined the University of Berkeley as a graduate student in Mathematical Economics. After a brilliant academic career he decided to devote himself completely to his 'first love', which was art, and spent another six years as an itinerant artist and philosopher in the US. Mumbiram's writing invokes beautiful images in quick succession; a scholar walking to the library, a prisoner in a cellular jail, a man dancing to the bongo drums under a statue of St. Joan, an economist on the steps of the US Treasury, a devotee in the temple, an artist in the barn. It created a new dimension in contemporary Art Journalism as Mumbiram's engaging personal accounts, written in Marathi, were a happy change from the adjective-ridden staid fare that art columns of dailies and weeklies offer, which may bring accolades to the reviewer but never discover an artist. Mumbiram lived among blacks, whites, elders, Inuit, politicians, stars, professors, with equal vision while in America. After 12 years he comes back to India and does the same things only now with tribals and rag-pickers and pundits and poets. Mumbiram is fascinated by the dark beauty of India.

With a lucidity in his writing he gives a commentary even about profound social issues. He finds it deplorable

that marriages in India are based on data-matching rather than on mind-meeting. Mumbiram sees Indians as obsessed with fair skin and plump faces. Mumbiram gives an analysis that shows implications of aesthetic preferences on cultures at large. He goes as far as suggesting that the unfair dollar-rupee exchange rate is ultimately a manifestation of India's unwholesome aesthetic preferences and an impersonal perception of the economic organization, which according to Mumbiram, has to be seen as a club of individuals rather than a mechanism.

Mumbiram never followed any school, style or art stream. He called his 'ism' Personalism and is one of the rare artist with a manifest. That "Manifesto of Personalism" appeared in journalist Ashok Gopal's long article about Mumbiram in Maharashtra Herald in 1988. In that carefully researched article, titled "*Waiting in the Wings*", Ashok Gopal had undertaken to describe the unique position and situation of the artist. It had been several times that he visited Mumbiram's studio at the busy vegetable market place directly in the heart of Pune. The article talks about Mumbiram becoming a Krishna devotee, his profound understanding of Bhagavad Gita and his friendships with the rag-pickers of Pune. That combination must have been so unusual that the journalist referred to it as a 'discordant note'.

Similarly journalist Sudhir Sonalkar expresses in the article "*Banishing Tourist-type Visions*", published in Sunday Observer in 1988, his view on the artist and his art which reads at some places in the article as if the journalist takes pity on him. Nevertheless the article had in-

cluded a brave choice of Mumbiram's charcoal works. It must have been a thrilling undertaking interviewing and writing about such an artist who had put himself in the most lofty position, independent of any art school or institution.

One of the most unique aspects of this artist has been his real-life muses. Those were people of all walks of life and backgrounds he really met and became friends with. In the article "*Who's afraid of Friedrich Nietzsche?*" published in Pune Digest in 1989 Mumbiram recounts his friendship with Lakhu, a refugee from Karachi, who had come to Pune as a young man to escape the Hindu-Muslim carnage that took place during the partition of India in 1947. Lakhu had been a cart-puller in the local hardware market area. His cart was the only thing that he had. He slept under it at night. With Lakhu Mumbiram could share rare moments of philosophical discussions. Ironically Lakhu, who left Karachi to escape from Hindu-Muslim riots, died in a minor Hindu-Muslim riot in the slums of Pune at the hands of youth who mistook him for a Muslim. Mumbiram was inspired to write this article to pay his tribute to this very precious friend that he had lost.

The last article here is titled "*Art amongst the People*". It is an interview with Mumbiram by an admirer from Germany who came to meet the artist in his studio in Pune, India. It has been published in 2003 as a private circulation. It was the beginning of an intense cooperation towards the publication of Rasa Art and Rasa Literature.

# Table of Contents

*In Search of Art that transcends Culture*

*Practice of Personalist Art*

*Waiting in the Wings*

*Banishing tourist-type Visions*

*“Who’s afraid of Friedrich Nietzsche ?”*

*Art amongst the People*

# In Search of Art that transcends Culture

Mumbiram (March 17, 1985), Raviwar Sakal.  
Sakal Papers Pvt.Ltd, Pune.

It is seen that in India musical tradition is passed on from generation to generation in a family. But rarely does that happen in the case of painters. But I must say it did happen in my case.

In 1910 my grandfather joined the J. J. School of Art in Bombay in the face of severe opposition from his family. It used to be that respectable parents would not allow their young daughters and sons to enter the theatre in those days. The same seems to have been society's attitude towards an artistic career. It was in J. J. School that my grandfather met Narayan Eranna Puram who was later to found the renowned Abhinav Kala Vidyalaya of Pune. Their life long friendship was the origin of my artistic heritage. Thereafter their paths would sometimes meet and sometimes part. My grandfather took up an art teacher's job at the St. Vincent's High School in Pune. He was at his best in Watercolour Landscapes and his work was always acclaimed at the annual exhibits of the Bombay Art Society. For many years he was a Secretary of the Society. On the other hand Puram received patronage from Indian Princes – Maharaja of Baroda and the Raja of Aundh to name a few. He illustrated the monumental edition of the Mahabharat published by the Bhandarkar Oriental Insti-

tute. Shankaracharya, the high priest of Hinduism honoured him with the title 'Chitrakalacharya'- "The Grand Preceptor of Art".

Even when I was a boy both these masters were well advanced in age. Puram had wholeheartedly dedicated himself to the art school he founded. My grandfather had retired from his art teacher's job after 30 years of teaching. He bought two acres of land on the Poona – Bombay road and built himself a little cottage with a garden around. He produced most of his masterpieces in this late period of his life and I was fortunate enough to be a witness to it all. 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 learnt art at ?

In this way I was initiated into art at a very early age. I made my first memorable picture when I was three. I learnt how to handle the brush, how to wet it,

how to drain it, how to mix colours, stretch the paper, use the sponge. Besides these technicalities I had also figured out why and where to keep the paper blank, how to distribute the detail, how to make the composition effective, how to show distance, how to use colour harmony and colour contrast among other things.

It was around this time that Lever Brothers Ltd. announced a painting competition for young artists. Nearly 5000 boys and girls of Pune took part in it. The first 200 were invited to make pictures in the presence of the jury. I won the coveted prize which was a beautiful blue bicycle. My school also won a silver trophy. The prizes were distributed with great pomp and ceremony at the hands of the Minister of Education. I very clearly remember my grandpa moving about very proudly amidst the guests in his white suit and black bowtie. The principle of my school was also there. The next day he hung the bicycle from a high place in the school building and wrote on the bulletin black board in large letters: 'This young artist of today is certain to become a great artist of tomorrow.' My bicycle and I became the subject of every young boy's admiration and envy.

I was 11 years old at that time. As much as my grandpa was simple and gentle, his friend Puram was impulsive and eccentric. At least a few times I got to watch Puram making portraits. Puram had God's gifts in his hand. Watercolour portraiture is perhaps the most difficult department of the painter's craft. Yet in Puram's hands it seemed like a cinch. I was very lucky to have seen the master at work.

In this way it was now almost certain that I was to be an artist. Just then providence struck some near fatal blows that threw the entire proposed plan of my life to the winds. There was a great great flood in the monsoon of 1961 that broke two dams above the city. In the deluge that took place grandfather's house went under



”Chitalyanchi Soon” (Daughter-in-law of the Chitale Family )  
Mumbiram, Watercolour, 1982

20 feet deep water. All his watercolour paintings were pretty much destroyed in the broad day light of July 12, 1961. His life’s work, through which he was painting the dreams of immortality was all devoured by the gooey mud of the flood. The dream was shattered. The treasure that he had amassed after great material hardships and with never a thought for money was all washed away. ‘No more watercolours. I will only do oil paintings from now on,’ the dauntless old man said and started work again. Yet it must be admitted that he could never again reach the great heights he had reached in his watercolours. Oil paintings was not his medium.

At around this time Puram’s ceaseless efforts for a premier art institute for Poona bore fruit. His school was prospering. Just then the executive committee - a group of non-artist city respectables that he had himself put together - sacked Puram into dishonorable retirement on the charges of mismanagement. After that he did not live very long. In this way two great artists to whom I looked up for inspiration disappeared into the great darkness of oblivion.

‘To want to be an artist in India is to ask for a life of poverty and misery’. This was the refrain of everybody’s advice to me thereafter. Fortunately, or unfortunately. I also liked mathematics very much and was also good at it. Therefore, everyone would urge me to be practical and take a degree in science or engineering. I could always pursue art as a ‘hobby’, they would add sympathetically. As a result of all this, I quit art at the age of 12. Goodbye emotions, hello intelligence. I could never have looked at art as a ‘hobby’. Will a man who truly loves a woman be able to visit her as a prostitute afterwards ?

My next ten years were outwardly very successful yet inwardly very difficult. It has been my nature that whatever I undertake I do it with full dedication. I had



a brilliant academic career in science and mathematics. I took a Bachelor's degree in Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering with a first place in the honour list. I joined the University of California at Berkeley and within a year obtained a Master's degree in System Analysis. I got a grant from NASA for research in communication and control. Thus at the age 22 everybody looked at me as a young space scientist about to get the Ph.D. I was exceptional in mathematics; hence I had the good esteem of my colleagues. I was quite a loner and a taciturn. I was a voracious reader. I felt that anything that would be achieved with the help of intelligence was on the palm of my hand. Yet deep inside somewhere I was being untrue to myself.

The years 1968, 69 were the years of turmoil and transformation, introspection and self-criticism to all of America. In 1969 America was successful in sending the first man to the moon. Mr. Nixon became the president of the United States. American youth openly rebelled against the war in Vietnam. The very foundation of the American value system was rocked by the tremors of ideological innovations. Berkeley attained prominence on the map of America as the epicentre of that 'shaker'. On the one hand was a powerful and plentiful nation like America that aspired to harness the very sky. On the other hand was a tiny country like Vietnam fighting for liberty and equality and its diminutive, sensitive and poetic leader Ho Chi Minh. On the one hand was the material might of science, on the other the spiritual strength of very human values. In those times Berkeley became the eye of the conceptual cyclone that swept America. The social, political and economic values that we take for granted on which human affairs are firmly established were being discussed and examined down to the very roots. New directions were being searched, new experiments were being made. The iron was red

hot and on the anvil again. The Central Plaza at the University of California at Berkeley used to be a very active busy place in the afternoon. It was an open forum for the exchange and expression of ideas.

It was on one such afternoon that some organization had put up a table with a sign 'Come and Paint a Picture'. There were plenty of paints, paper and brushes. I was drawn to that table like the proverbial deer that is attracted by the hunter's song. Before I knew it, I had dipped a brush in the paints and was moving it quite freely onto the paper. I splashed those paints on the paper like on the day of Holi in India. My hands and clothes were all full of paints. After much splurging and revelling in colours. I reached home in an ecstatic state. My mind was crowded by memories of childhood. More than that, I was experiencing that pristine feeling of having discovered colours for the first time. It was a strange blissful state of total weightlessness.

After that, everyday, like an addict, I would buy paints and papers and spend hours making combinations and compositions of colours and forms. I had experienced trans-like states when working on some mathematical ideas before. But the states I would reach playing with visual rhythm and harmony were so much more deep and fantastic. My friends must have noticed the change that was taking me over. A German girl that lived in the dormitory where I took my meals took pity on me. She used to come to where I lived and watch my play with colours. One day she said 'Will you paint me?'

My whole outlook on life and my lifestyle were changing. Renate used to like the ocean and I liked mountains and forests. Pretty soon we were living in my station wagon. Renate began painting also. I was making mostly landscapes and some abstracts. I did not worry much about money and I always would have a trickle of it coming. In this way we traveled through California,



“Marathi Poets 1982”, Mumbiram, Watercolor, 1982

Colorado, Montana, Oregon, painting along the way. In the passion of art and youth we did not know how time passed. She went back to the university, learned Arabic, got a degree in Political Science with Middle East as specialization and took up a job in Washington D.C.

It was about this time that I learnt about 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 to the wind and also left California in search of a new aesthetic ideal.

The first stop in my six-year sojourn that followed was the beautiful town of Seattle in North-western United States. I improvised a studio in the black neighbourhood. So far I had done only a few portraits. The unique physical and spiritual beauty of the Afro American men and women touched me very deeply. They gave me much love. The coming together of the African and European races has created some truly glorious facial types, which I used to paint with great relish. Seattle also has a large population of Eskimos and other native tribes. I moved amongst them and painted many pictures of their lives.

After that, for the first time, I moved over to Eastern United States. When I came into Washington D.C. I

didn't have a penny in my pocket. After much walking and wondering I came upon a farm in Potomac about 10 miles outside Washington. The owner, who was a recluse of an Irish woman, let me make my studio in an abandoned barn on her farm. She used to live alone in her farmhouse surrounded by her 65 Afghan hounds. She also had many goats that she would personally milk mornings and evenings. My barn was on the other end of her farm. Next to it was the farm of Iskcon. Living there I made many paintings on Lord Krishna's pastimes. I had met the great Krishna devotee Shri Bhaktivedanta Swami. I used to often visit Washington D.C. In Georgetown I got to make portraits of some well known personalities. I came to know a redheaded 18-year-old amateur actress. This was Madeleine Potter who was recently awarded the Golden Peacock Award at the New Delhi Film Festival for her role in the movie 'The Bostonians'.

It is New York that must be called the Mecca of American Artists. I spent the summer of 78 in New York. American Painting had become totally 'impersonalist'. The artists were into the heavy drug scene. Their painting was preoccupied with existential decay and degeneration. Punk rock was of this same genre. My stay in New York was quite a disappointment, the only highlight being a chance meeting with Andy Warhol accompanied by Jamie Wyeth Jr., at midnight, outside the Russian Tea Room. With great alacrity I had produced a picture of Andy Warhol and myself playing tic-tac-toe at a table shaped like the artist's palette. I presented it to Mr. Warhol, I am certain he will always remember.

I spent two years in the Boston-Cambridge area. I produced my best in America during this time. Six of these works are with the Indian Embassy in Washington D.C. Stuart Cary Welch, the now famous expert on Hindu and Islamic painting wrote a glowing critique of my

work calling me "one of the leading contemporary Indian Painters". He was one of the prime movers behind the 'Festival of India' celebrated in America. According to him Indian painters are usually seen following in the footsteps of the successful Western artists of the yesteryear and Western critics see no inspired, innovative or impactful statement in them. On this background he found my paintings true to my experience, full of deep psychological insights, biting with a lining of humour and profound at their best.

The art of a sovereign artist never becomes a slave of style. It is undergoing transformations, taking on new dimensions. My art had now become entirely 'personalist'. I could only see people. My art revolved around the drama of the human situation. I omitted all material details such as houses, buildings, vehicles, furniture etc. As if I was preparing to come back to India. I began painting group portraits with two or three people. The characters themselves provide the context for each other. The characters create the perspective as well as meaning. It became my ambition that Art should transcend culture.

In September 1979 I completed my 12 years of my stay in America. I had completed a 'tapa' or 12 years of penances and austerity. I decided to come back to India.

On my return to India what struck me the most was the inundating variety of human beauty one sees here. Very few Indians are aware of it. The ideas about human beauty are extremely stereotyped here. For example the exaggerated preference for lighter complexion. I say it is a malady to not to be aware of your own beauty. Some say it was because the English ruled India that we got this idea of superiority of the lighter skin colour. It must have been the other way around. A handful of Englishmen could rule India precisely because Indi-

ans were in awe of the lighter skin. The consequences of a perverted ideal of beauty are so pervasive and far reaching that we don't find an ideal of dark beauty after the example of Draupadi of the Mahabharata. We find this same neglect of human beauty in contemporary Indian painting. Even a leading painter like Hussain paints blank faces. The affected distortion one sees a lot today is the most offensive example of blind following of western streams. India will have nothing to do with the so called existential void and degeneration. India will give the world great 'personalist art'.

The winds of change are already in the air. One can see that in the movies chubby faces are giving way to chiselled and pointed faces. Contrast Mumtaz and the old Rekha with the new Rekha and Shabana Azmi and Sarika. We now seem to accept a new variety of faces in what we consider beautiful.

What we need is art that can provide new archetypes of the human ideal. What we need is a Personalist Art.

# Practice of Personalist Art

Mumbiram (June 16, 1985), Raviwar Sakal.  
Sakal Papers Pvt.Ltd, Pune.

After 12 years stay in America I came to India in 1979. I had considered my stay in America as a 'tapa' a period of penances and austerities. I had not come back with a bundle of money like everybody else. Yet I considered myself rich with the fruits of my 'tapa'. I had gone to America to become a captain of the 'Third Wave' of modern technology and I had come back as a lonely cavalier in the fields of beauty. My personal gain was even greater. It was in America that I found Krishna, his teachings in Bhagavad Gita. Compared to this treasure I considered any other gain of less value.

This in short is the story of how I left America. Even wise, reasonable and proud men and women struggle hard and would give anything to get the 'Green Card'. But I had totally disregarded it. I made the provocative request to the Immigration Department to send me back to my beloved India. The Immigration Department must have been caught off-guard. They thought I was making a stunt to get a 'Green Card'. Anyway they refused my request. The next morning Washingtonians got to read the most curious combination of front-page news in the Post. On the one hand the lead dancer Godunov of the Bolshoi Ballet was seeking politically asylum in America. The State Department claimed that Godnov's wife also wanted to defect but the Russians wouldn't let her.



“I comb my hair, while you clean your gun“, Mumiram, 1985

This was very flattering to America’s self image as the great sanctuary of art. Right next to this was the story of an Indian artist who wanted to leave America. The headline was ‘Cruel Penance for a Brahmin’.

This creature who insinuated that America was a jungle was discovered by Post’s Christopher Dickey on the great Mall of the Smithsonian Institute, within sight of the dome of the Capital, in the shadow of the snazzy modern building of the National Gallery of Art, surviving on the leftovers of the tourists – just like a bear.

It was like finding theorem and its converse side by side. This was a difficult riddle for America’s self image as the great haven for the creative arts.

Indeed Thoreau or Walt Whitman would have envied my daily routine in Washington. I would wake up early and get out of my basement hideaway in Georgetown and go to the stream in Rock Creek Park and refresh myself. Then I walked over to Wisconsin Avenue, had a coffee with croissant in a French Café and then proceeded along the Potomac up to Kennedy Centre. Then took left near the world bank. Kept to the right of the Whitehouse and came onto the Great Mall. Treading across the mall I would walk up to the steps of the Capitol and pass through the Central Corridor and come to the Library of Congress. I would be there by 8 o’clock and enter the library along with the staff and vanish into the Sanskrit section.

This is the biggest library of the world. It has a large central domed hall with the floors of stack surrounding it on all sides. The Sanskrit collection there is quite extra ordinary. This section is quite secluded and deserted. If you could imagine that the bookshelves were barred doors then you have had the fantastic vision of being the last prisoner in a great cellular jail. I would not know how time passed there. My favorite book there was the treatise on theistic aesthetics by

the great Krishna devotee Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati. I spent many snowy nights in the library even after it was closed.

About lunch time I would go towards Embassy Row. I had become friends with Nishaat Lewis the dark and beautiful receptionist at the Indian Embassy. A remarkable woman she was. It would not have been an exaggeration to say that it was Nishaat who really set the tone of all cultural aspects at the Embassy. She went to Columbia University in the early fifties. Bhutto was her classmate. She had a grace about her not unlike Vijayalaxmi Pandit. We would either eat her lunch box in the Embassy or go visit the Art Galleries around Dupont Circle. I would bring Nishaat back to the Embassy and then move towards the Afro and Latin Sections of Columbia Heights. Young bongo players would gather at the horseback statue of St. Joan in the Meridean Park. I would soon find myself stepping and turning. It used to be ecstatic. As the shadows would lengthen, I would sometimes be invited to stay over by the hospitable and loving men and women of Columbia Heights or else I would spend the night in a little hideaway I had improvised in a basement in Georgetown.

Sometimes after lunch I would go to Jefferson Memorial and think about the 'self evident truths' that 'all men are created equal' and that 'the creator has bestowed upon them certain inalienable right'. Sometimes I would sit on the steps of US Treasury and investigate why the dollar equals to 8,10 or 12 Rupees. Sometimes I would go to Smithsonian Institute and inquire whether really Einstein's postulate of constant velocity of light had anything to do with the explosion of bombs. Sometimes I would sit on cool marble passages around Lincoln Memorial and watch some Krishna devotee offering flowers and the Bhagvad Gita to the visitors.

As night approached I would go to Bobby Scott's

hut in the woods along the Potomac. He was a Negro Vietnam Veteran. Sometimes I would spend long hours in the barn on Angela's farm and paint and paint. I used to give my work to 'Felluss Gallery' on Colombia Heights and 'B. David Gallery' on Eye Street. It was also around this time that I printed three collections of poems: 'Deluges of Ecstasy', 'Iceberg in the Bayou' and 'Spirit Moves Matter' (1977,1978,1979). America's favorite son, Walt Whitman would have loved my daily routine. In Thoreau's words: 'I was very happy with my fortune'. American newspapers and Radio took note of the statement I was making about the equity and morality of immigration barriers.

*'Alien Alien  
Eternal Alien  
Illegal Free Bird Caught  
In the Nations-net.'*

The Times of India reported the story under Current Topics under the heading 'The law is an Ass they say-'

At last the Immigration Department relented and they had to fulfil my desire. I was offered the Green Card in the Court trial which I honourably refused. Instead I quoted Walt Whitman's poem 'Passage My Soul to India' and thanked everybody for all the love and hospitality that everyday America gave me for over 12 years.

Friends, if you want to visit a place where they love India the most you will have to go to America. Every knowledgeable American is convinced that there is something more to life than just materialistic pleasures and that only India can show the world the path to that state of blissful consciousness. Why, anywhere in the world when any soul floundering in the materialistic phi-

osophy lays down his or her tired head on the pillow and introspects he or she inevitably thinks of India. The whole world looks to India with hope. Anyway after 12 years in America I came back to India.

The experience of coming back to India after 12 years was truly fantastic. It was not 12 years, it was a millennium. The beautiful meditative Pune that I had left behind was inundated today in the birth pangs of industrialization. Just like Dickens's England. The kind of suffering that is perceived and acknowledged only in the times of post-industrial prosperity. I was often reminded of the story of Muchukunda (king in Shrimad Bhagavatam.) in the scriptures. After helping the demigods in their wars against the demons Muchukunda slept in a cave for a 'yuga' (millenium). When he was woken up with his first glance he burnt the Greek Invader Kalyawan to ashes. Then immediately he could see Lord Krishna in person. When Muchukunda came out of the cave he noticed that all the animals and plants had become retarded and morbid by the onset of Kali Yuga (the Iron Age). Just as Oliver Goldsmith shed a bitter tear over the sweet Auburn village of his childhood that had now been deserted, I was in great anguish. A voidist Buddhist sage and his thousands of disciples were camping in Pune. Fortunately they soon all left Pune – for America.

My grandfather the artist was dead. So was my father's mother to whom I was dear. There was an uncle of mine who was a literary critic and who was the first discoverer of my artistic talent when I was still a child. He had also passed away. I prayed for all these dear departed souls and went away to the hills of Dahanu, 100 miles north of Bombay and lived there with the tribal Warlis for a long time.

I enjoyed painting most in a place where there are no preconceived expectations out of an artist. My Warli

young friends – both men and women – tremendously enjoyed my pictures of the American Marriage System. Nowadays everybody raves about the stick stones style of Warli pictures. As for me, I would never expect my Warli friends to continue in that style. Just as an artist can become limited by its quirks. The pleasure of art is precisely in finding new paths when modes of expression become hackneyed. Art at its best is the motivation behind evolution. Living with the Warli tribals I could do ink-and-brush renderings in such a minimalist and ethereal style as I would never have been able to do anywhere else in whole world. With them I could paint the innocence of love that goes beyond the pail of morality. When I was in Cambridge, Massachusetts I used to run an art-class at the Cambridge Committee of Elders. There was an 86 year old woman from Barbados. The pictures I made for her must be the best I did in America.

Places where art movements meet each other are the very pilgrimage places of civilization. Think of the French Gauguin who was fascinated by the mysterious and exotic beauty of Tahiti. There is a case of Raja Ravi Varma who was so enamoured by the nine meter Marathi saree – that all his heavenly characters in his mythological paintings are clad in that most feminine and graceful way of wrapping around a cloth on the human body. Picasso turning the flat nosed African dolls into their weight's worth of gold in his painting and sculpture. Van Gogh using the Japanese composition in some of his landscape. There is any number of examples.

In art I do not acknowledge the abstract vs. realist duality. Omitting the detail that is redundant for expression is abstraction. This is natural abstraction. Knowingly or unknowingly every artist is doing it. On the other hand, creation of meaning from juxtaposition of symbols is synthetic abstraction. Our Warli art is of



this latter type. Both these modes are used in drama as a matter of course. I feel especially close to the dramatic art. Just as an actor enters under the skin of his character I experience a similar projection of personalities when I paint.

Anyway, Pune has sort of come into its own in the last six years or so. It is rediscovering its identity as the prime mover of the Marathi cultural scene. It has even greater potential. I will always be attracted to Pune. I have set up my painting studio and residence in the very heart of the city in the Mandai market in the same house that I was born and grew up in. I like this place with a round balcony almost as much as my hut in the Warli village. The architecture of the old Mandai is really quite noble. It was designed exactly 100 years ago by Colonel Ducat of the Royal Engineers. It is based on an eight petalled lotus motif – sort of an Indian edition of St. Mark's in Venice. The nearby Shiva temple of Rameshwara and the old Mandai market look really handsome together when viewed from the Rameshwara Square. I find them as breathtaking as Gauri-Shankar and Dhaulgiri peaks of the temple in general. The spire of the Vishnu temple on top of the Parvati Hill is far and above the best. The spire of the Mahadji Shinde Memorial is also very handsome. In the Mandai market you get a glimpse of rural Maharashtra. The building is however inappropriately utilized as a vegetable market. If an organization such as INTACH takes the interest, the building could be used very nicely as a performing centre and museum of the folk arts. It will be a fine stroke of urban renewal and downtown beautification. As for me I am pleased with the bamboo weaver's lane and the goats and the cows feeding one the vegetable trimmings and leaves. Altogether a rustic atmosphere.

An artist is usually a persona in exile. It must be inevitable and even necessary. It must be in such an

exile that you can get a detached vision of life. After I came back, at least for the first five years I had to experience this state of being an outcast. The only friends I had were some rag picker girls. We have developed quite a unique relationship in the course of the last five years. They are most oblivious to what is printed on paper. They only think of its weight at the recycling shop. They come in threes and fives. It is said that the Bhil tribal beauties on the mythical Malaya mountains use all the precious sandalwood there as fuel. I am reminded of that when they start rummaging through my studio. It is very hectic and the painters art is put to the most candid criticism.

There are very few people in Pune that I can really discuss art with. There is Taty Aitawadekar of Grafina Process Photographers. Now there is Warren Sanders, a Jazz-Indian theoretician from Boston. My good friend Stephen Curtis, surrealist painter of Boston sent him hither. He is quite a sensitive and intelligent artist. Warren is, as is Stephen Curtis. If it were not for these people, many were times when I wouldn't have been able to keep body and soul together. Then there is Drupada the dark beautiful woman of the Phasephardi tribe. Also Choklet Pawar of the same tribe and his daughters Shanipar and Sangita. It was because of these beautiful souls that I was always inspired to greater ambitions.

In general in India men and women live segregated existences. Sometimes the divide is seen to be so great that even life time partnerships are fixed by advertisements in the newspapers, from matchmaker's lists and now even from computers. Cast, economic status, education and other social and statistical details is what characterizes men and women. I find it very incongruous and unagreeable to my 'personalist aesthetic'. An open, honest and forthright friendship between men and women in India is a very rare thing. The hide and

seek that they have to play is such a waste. I find it very tyrannical.

I have always been attracted towards bold women. I prefer the crispness of a bold girl's refusal to the mushy dealings with over cautious women. (in rope Wallis)

I find it quite touching to see man and woman working shoulder to shoulder. There is a cart-puller couple that steps on the sidewalk across from my balcony. There is another very beautiful couple I meet every afternoon. They collect metal waste for a living. I envy these working men and woman. Lately, however, I am more impressed by the stable and soft nature of the Indian woman, which makes her the most powerful anywhere.

One usually sees in my paintings faces of people whom I know, or whom everybody knows. I find this merging of the artist's life and his art absolutely essential. It makes for the artist's integrity. For art, it means relevance and communication – a prime concern of 'Personalist Art'.

Every human relationship is as fascinating as the most elaborately cut diamond. The wonders that abound in human relationships is what I find most fascinating. The 'Sadhna' (collective description of the activities of practice, training and evolution of any discipline of art or other human endeavour) of art is like a sojourn in a desert. The artist runs after the mirage. But his artistic creations really quench the thirst and add a dimension of purpose to life.

My canvas is not a peek at life. It is a window on life. The persons you see on the other side of the windows are familiar and so near you could touch them.

India has an unending variety of clothing. A touch of imagination in a person's attire is a sign of a noble turn of mind. Unfortunately the Indian male has very



“Ropewallis“, 1984, mixed media watercolour and acrylic, Mumbiram

much ignored this area.

There was a petite dark girl named Suman with very beautiful cheek bones and the most soulful eyes. She was the first amongst my rag picking friends who posed for a portrait, on her own. This was a lucky portrait for me. A doctor, a reputed gynaecologist of Pune, purchased it for very handsome price. After that my paintings have been fetching an ever-increasing price. I may add that soon after that Suman died in mysterious circumstance. It's a haunting mystery. Her friends gave evasive answers. She was possessed they say. Beauty, the most glorious dark beauty, can be a curse in the dark recesses of India. Someday beauty will be respected.

Sometimes my associates observe critically that most of my paintings are purchased by the high brow and the wealthy. I find nothing improper in this. It is my ambition to take aesthetics beyond the rich-poor duality. Art should turn the West pink as it turns the East pink. Art should bridge the schism between men and women. Art should be a great detoxifier for the electronic buzz of the media. Art should render economic disparity toothless. Art should give wings to men.

In this age of rapid transportation and all pervasive electronic communication, we would expect the world to come together. Instead we find it becoming more and more provincial. Art is the only panacea for this xenophobia, because aesthetic attraction goes beyond cultural diversity. In the age of material advancement man become faceless. It must be the ambition of art in this age to make us more sensitive to the aesthetic of human affairs.

Psychologists say that human mind thinks in the context of archetypes. Great art provides such archetypes. Shakespeare's "Prospero", Michelangelo's "David", Satyajit Ray's "Apu". These are my favorite exam-

ples.

Pune stands on the labyrinth of an artistic outbreak. Pune has the best screen printers and now it has a host of German Heidelberg offset machines. More than hundred years ago it was German litho printers that accepted the challenge of reproducing the paintings of the great Ravi Varma. It was a laborious process of colour separation onto 13 different stones. Now electronic scanning does it effortlessly with just four colours. But where are the painters who can produce the great art, which can be a challenge even to the high-tech printing gadgets?

By and large Indian painters are preoccupied with 'catching up' with the western artistic movements. Many talented young people are wasting away their craft for the money and glamour in advertising. Bombay has hoards of them. Bombay is magnificent like Rome. But renaissance can flourish only in the agreeable climate of a Florence.

# Waiting in the Wings

Ashok Gopal, Sunday Maharashtra Herald, 24 July 1988, Pune

**MUMBIRAM, the name of one of Krishna's boyhood friends, is the nom de plume of one of Pune's most talented yet little known artist. In the last eight years of his residence in the city, after 12 crazy years in the U.S., he hasn't held a single exhibition and his work is known to very few outside the inner circles of Pune's art community. His unconventional style of living and his apparently complete acceptance of Krishna Consciousness add to his image of obscurity.**

**But his charcoal portraits and oil paintings have a direct and forceful visual appeal that even laymen would relate to.**

**ASHOK GOPAL meets this maverick artist who now seems to emerge from the shadows....**



*"My name is Mumbiram. I am an artist."*

FEW people in the world would expect just this identity to be sufficient. Even for the maverick Mumbiram it is not adequate. But the extent to which this largely-unknown artist has stretched that one-line declaration of himself and survived is both amazing and noteworthy.

For over nearly two decades of struggle as an artist in the U.S. and in India, Mumbiram hasn't had one steady source of income. For nearly seven years he lived in America without any official papers. In the last eight years that he has been based in Pune he hasn't held a single exhibition of his work. He has no brochures or publicity promotion material and until a few weeks back, he had no business agent. His media presence is limited to two longish articles that appeared in Sakal in 1985.

### **AN ARTIST'S MANIFESTO:**

**The distortion in modern Indian painter's work is all borrowed inspiration inasmuch as modern Indian elite exists on a used up Western aesthetic. This in spite of the fact that Western civilization has failed in a big way.**

**This donkey-chase-carrot game can end only with a sovereign indigenous aesthetic. Unless you are aware of your own beauty you cannot do justice to yourself or to others.**

**Personalism is a frontal attack on materialism on the aesthetic front. India is the last and now the first bastion of Personalism. This is a place where even clouds are addressed as persons. Personalism leaves no room for the 'existential void'.**

**Sarcasm and cynicism are spiritually decadent. Faith and devotion are innocent, beautiful, closer to God.**

**I am bringing into the purview of Art faces and situations heretofore neglected. I am evolving indigenous archetypes.**



“Forest Women visit Krishna and the Gopis”  
Oil on canvas, 1985, Mumbiram

**In esoteric Vaishnav philosophy, my mood is  
“Prem Vivarta’.**

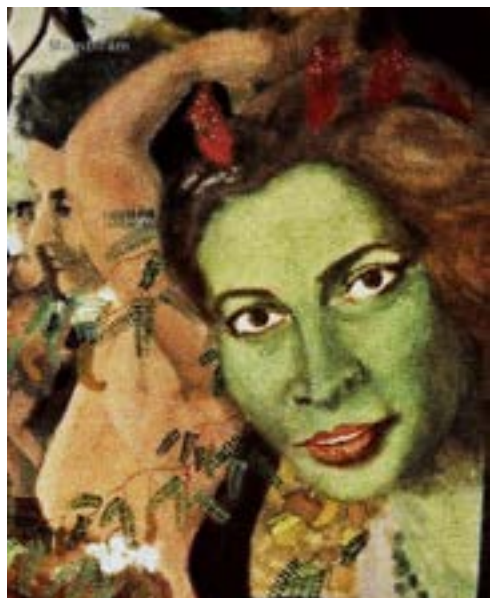
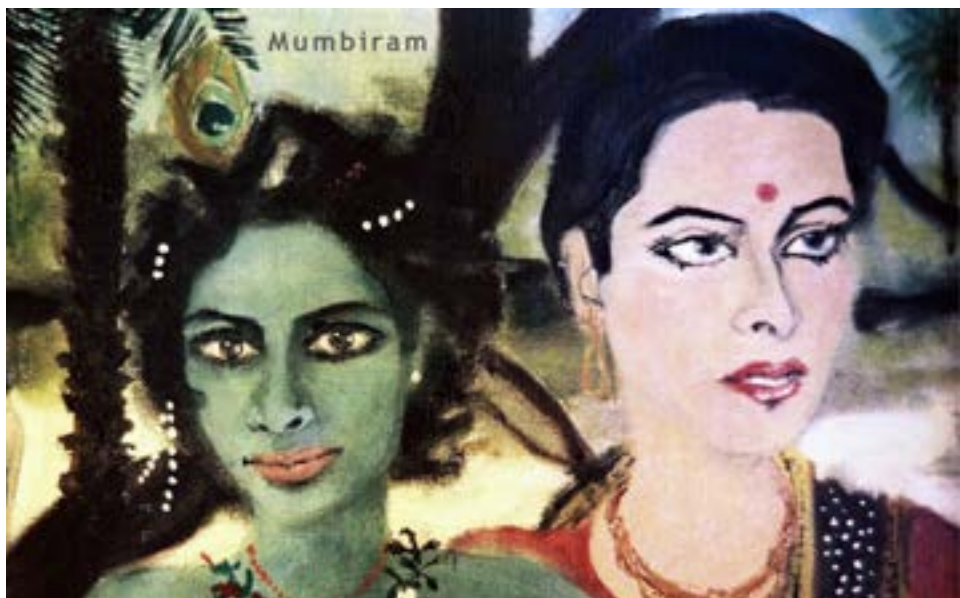
**My raven-dark rambunctious, roaming, rag-pick-  
ing girlfriends remind me of Krishna and his boys  
in the forests of Vrindavan.**

**I create best in the company of people who have  
no preconceived ideas about Art. I aspire to  
make paintings that have direct appeal and that  
need no academic intellectual props.**

**My canvas is a window on life. The persons on  
the other side are so close you could touch them.**

**As for myself, I am the painting. The pursuit  
of art is a strange penance. The artist works to  
quench the thirst of many, in his own life he is  
running after a mirage.**

**A sovereign artist bends style at will. But there is  
a method in the madness. That is style.**



Details of "Forest Women visit Krishna and the Gopis"  
Oil on canvas, 1985, Mumbiram

Only those in the inner circles of Pune's art community have heard of him and to the vast majority of art lovers his name means nothing against the reputations of scores of less thoughtful and less skilled contemporary artists.

This is not all. Mumbiram lives and works in an ethos where he is a complete misfit. His studio-cum-apartment is a two-room corner of a crumbling wada behind the Mandai market. Here, amidst the daily ruckus of the sale of vegetables, he is an alien with his straggly hair, his Yank accent, his outlandish dresses and his unusual coterie of women friends. When he steps out of his seclusion at odd hours, many around the market call him "Mambya" or "Paranjape" (his real surname) but there is little behind such friendliness that has anything to do with his artistic or intelligent mind; it is more in the nature of reactions you and I would have when we discover that a group of kindly and wise-sounding Amazonians have become our neighbors.

There are more discordant notes. Mumbiram's understanding of the Gita and other Hindu scriptures is profound and scholarly. Yet, his favourite models in Pune remain bhangarwallis, women whose profession can alternate from ragpicking to cheating, stealing and prostitution. Even the few in the city who know him well cannot quite fathom this relationship and with the red light area so close to his residence, it is an aspect of "personalism" (his "ism") that is fraught with danger, scandal and tension.

It is thus perhaps for the good that this enormously productive creator of over 4,000 small and large, original and powerful portraits should be an elusive public figure whose personal details are shrouded in suspect romance and mystery. But now there are signs that Mumbiram's days of hiding are over. With no systematic promotional effort, he has come to command a price of



“Lakhu”. Watercolour, 1988, Mumbiram

Rs. 2,000 for commissioned charcoal portraits that he does in about two hours. And his last oil painting that was sold fetched a price of Rs. 20,000.

Mumbiram himself talks of producing a book of his work and moving to a new residence, some-where else in Pune. One suspects that he knows, though he doesn't say it explicitly, that at the ripe age of 41 his extended period of waiting behind the curtains of self styled obscurity is not going to last long.

To use a cliché and risk an exaggeration-a major art figure promises to emerge from the shadows.

But who is he? And where does he come from?

MUMBIRAM'S REAL name is Dhananjay Paranjape and he comes from a respected Pune family that has a contradictory art tradition.

Mumbiram's mother's father, S.H.Godbole, was one of the first Pune Brahmins to choose art as a career. He taught the subject in St. Vincent's High School for 30 years and did many portraits for Englishmen living in the Camp. He was the secretary of the Bombay Art Society and hence, an influential figure.

Mumbiram's father was a successful lawyer and one-time Deputy Mayor of Pune. Due to this standing he was appointed president of the working committee of the body that runs the Abhinav Kala Vidyalaya, the city's only recognized art school. Among the first moves initiated by this committee was to throw out the founder of the school itself. This radical step was highly ironic because the eminent Advocate Paranjape did not want his own son to be an artist.

If only anxiety about the economic viability of art were behind such a stance, it was partly understandable: after the British left and he retired from Vincents' Mumbiram's grandfather faced great hardship. His later years were spent in waging a constant battle against debt and he was forced to sell a precious two-acre plot



on the Bombay-Pune road (now occupied by Rama Automobiles) for a song.

As a child, Mumbiram followed his grandfather's footsteps in art by drawing chalk portraits on the Shahabad tiles of the very room he now occupies. Among the people he now recognizes as those who greatly encouraged him was his aunt's uncle, K. Narayan Kale, a film director (Dharmatma) for the famous Prabhat Studio, art critic, and one of the pioneers of modern Marathi drama.

Mumbiram's parents had however had enough of art and so like scores of talented middle class children who are constrained by the complex psychological pressures of their parents' world-view, he chose one of the most predictable of academic avenues for forging a career: he joined the Pune Engineering College to do a B.E. in Telecommunications. But fortunately he was so good at his studies that it paradoxically gave him the very handle to the door that opened out to a world that strongly encouraged freedom, unconventionality and "doing your own thing."

THERE CAN possibly be no greater bum trip in the world than being a student in the U.S. at Uncle Sam's expense. Mumbiram went there in 1967 to do an M.S. in Mathematical Economics. Within a year, he was a Liberal Fellow at the University of California, a position that gave him lots of goodies and lots of freedom. "There's no other way I could have gotten out of my Pune upbringing," he now says firmly.

Ronald Reagan was then the Governor of California and with young Americans forced to drop bombs over Hanoi, the U.S. was a very turbulent place. Everyone who was intelligent and sensitive was trying to opt out and Mumbiram, who wanted to be an artist anyway, joined the fray.

His accounts of his experiences in the U.S. in those



Watercolour, Mumbiram



“Yamuna”, Charcoal, ca.1985, Mumbiram

days are full of inchoate expressions of youthful notions of ‘freedom’ and ‘self discovery’ and although they can make a hilariously entertaining book, only two of them are currently relevant to his work. The first is very personal and clouded by ambiguity; the second defines his self-proclaimed rationale for existence.

In the first instance he fell in love with a German girl for five years, much to his family’s disapproval. He says he told her often of his ambition of becoming an artist and she said, simply, “I like that!” It might have been only an Americanism but when they split up a year after a disastrous trip to visit his parents in India, Mumbiram’s resolve to be an artist seems to have become stronger.

In the second instance, Mumbiram discovered Krishna or specifically, the Krishna Consciousness movement in Seattle. Here, he says, he found a “faith portfolio” that is not only as good but better than any other because, according to him, it offers the richest meaning to human life yet is a contemporarily relevant body of “postulates”; a term, he points out, that scientists need to use but often don’t openly.

Love for Krishna swims in Mumbiram’s head and all that he sees, or so he would like us to believe, and virtually all of his work, except possibly the commissioned portraits, can be explained and understood within that framework. But fortunately it is not the only one available. Nor is it one that is necessary to succumb to the direct visual impact of his bold charcoal slashes, his carefully worked lines and his daringly simple colours.

It is equally less relevant to feel the reverberations; reverberations of haunting, soulful, proud, classically sculpted faces.

FACES DOMINATE Mumbiram’s work to the exclusion of almost everything else. He has no aesthetic interest in the environment in which his subjects live and

he has scant respect for the increasing number of contemporary Indian artists who grossly contort the human figure to make a cynical or sarcastic comment about the world around us.

Such contortion, he says, may have been justifiable in the West which faced the horror of Fascism, genocide and World Wars, but in India a similar expression of "anguish" is misplaced and mindlessly imitative. In any case, depiction of mental or physical torture "is of no use to either the artist or the viewer unless there is a hint of a way to transcend it"; and how many Indian artists have the intellectual and moral capacity to suggest such an alternative ?

Mumbiram's views on modern art are also interesting; those who think it's largely a load of rubbish but are afraid to say so would certainly find them reassuring.

Modern art, he says, is predominantly conceptual. This is its power as well as limitation. It's like a joke. The first time you say it, it can sound great but on repetition it progressively loses impact.

Likewise, the artist who first exhibited blank canvases in a gallery made a strong point and deserved credit; but anyone who tries to repeat the "trick" can only deceive his viewers through elaborately presented jargon.

These are not views the art establishment will welcome and they can possibly come only from an artist who would be happy to be considered a classicist in the tradition of Leonardo da Vinci, the Renaissance genius with whom he shares at least one quality: a striking recurrence of certain facial features over a large body of work.

Mumbiram loves the dark Indian male face (remember Krishna ?) and wonders why most of us, especially film stars, attempt to cover it up with thick layers

of talcum powder. His women have typically strong noses and like Radha vis-à-vis Krishna, they are invariably older to their male companions.

There is also a plentitude of joyous and candid eroticism in some of his discretely hidden drawings and paintings but these are not likely to see the light of day in the near future, because, the Krishna myth notwithstanding, we are now a society that seems mortally scared of self-confident, explorative and playful female sexuality.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Mumbiram has lived so far like a fugitive, protecting and maintaining his ego and his work through a strong veneer of deliberate poise and unconventionality. Long overdue fame might change that, but fortunately hundreds of proud Indian bodies, displaying a physicality that is so bold that it is uplifting, will overwhelm any sell-out that this "Mambya" can indulge in.



Ink&Brush, Mumbiram

# Banishing tourist-type Visions

The Sunday Observer, Mumbai ,11 December 1988, by Sudhir Sonalkar



Mumbiram in Mandai, Pune

**Mumbiram is a small town artist. Or rather, he is an US-educated, doctorate holder, who preferred to leave it all behind and paint in the heat of old Pune. SUDHIR SONALKAR describes the man, whose traditionalism is a form of a return to the roots.**

The word tradition resounds all round today, in the manner of the sound from a cement mixer operating next door, till one is inclined to try and chuck it all away. Since that is rather like throwing out the baby with the bathwater, it is certainly a pleasure to come across a painter whose traditionalism is a form of a return to the roots rather than a form of painful revivalism. It automatically implies a modernist perspective, if one does, not use the word to signify all that exists around us today.

Mumbiram lives in Mandai, the central vegetable market of Pune. His home-corner is on the first floor of an old, rather ram-shackled building, at the edge of the market, where the trucks load and unload potatoes, onions and other vegetables. It is also near the rubbish dump where the goats nibble and the rag-picker wo-



Charcoals, Mumbiram

men hustle, often shouting abuses at each other.

Born Dhanjay Paranjapye in Pune, Mumbiram went to the USA to study Mathematical Economics and after obtaining the PhD in the subject left dry academic ambitions behind to take up painting. The only painting he knew before this was what he had learnt from his grandfather.

When Mumbiram had lived some time in USA he, like many Indians living in the West, began to resent what seemed like the self-centeredness of the West, that just ignored other cultures. What is more important is that he went on to try and give this some actual formal expression in painting.

What first impressed me about Mumbiram's work was that it made me look at the very Mandai he painted, and which I had visited several times, in a totally new way. Tourists-type visions had mauled the living character of the colour of vegetables, colorfully clad women, goats and even the *gula* for me. Mumbiram's view, being people focused, brought a fresh, new living quality to the entire place.

Mumbiram calls his paintings personalist in style and calls for the development of a sovereign, indigenous aesthetic. He is a Krishna devotee, drawing his inspiration from a very close study of the Bhagvat Purana in Sanskrit. Lest this strike some, in this period of search for new aesthetic methods, as being too religious, it is important to stress that lack of prejudice and a presence of great tolerance are a completely integrated part of the painter's life.

Of course, his works are not repetitions of old devotional schools of painting, not even in terms of the colours scheme. And its sense is democratic.

In fact, in conservative Pune, particularly living in the middle of its old city heart, it is really quite an achievement the way Mumbiram has created a living,



Detail from "Sachiko Konno in Vrindavan"

working and creativity interacting space for himself. It should make things easier for those who come after him but even now there is some tension at times. His real companions are the rag-picker communities, the Mangs and Pharsepardhis (traditional bird catchers)--- lower casts that, nevertheless, are hostile to each other and who look down on each other but accept him. Then there are others like Muslim cart pullers, vegetable vendors, tea shop owners, and, of course, foreigners. It is sad, in fact, that he has yet to attract attention in India.

One of the reasons is that he rather abhors the wrong kind of publicity and attention.

In painting choices, he prefers the dark skin---like his favorite dark god---and finds it infinitely more beautiful and warm than the lighter skin. And, for him, this is not the typical reaction of some one returned from a sojourn in the predominantly white-skinned West.

"Before I went to the USA, I thought the sky was bluer in Hollywood," he says laughingly. It is a different matter now, of course, but his models include white-skinned women, too. The reverse prejudice has not set in. His is a search for a new form of expressing human truths through painting, or revitalizing the jaded eye and including it to probe again.

I disagree with most of the things that he says, but his painting certainly drew my eye and do so now. He is contemptuous of the existential void of western aesthetics but despite much that he says, I do not see the revivalist fanatic in him, but a rather eccentric naïveté in fact. With greater exposure and more interaction, I think a very important painter will emerge.

# “Who’s afraid of Friedrich Nietzsche ?”

Poona Digest, March 1989, by Mumbiram



**Lakhu. Just an ordinary cartpuller, you’d say. If you didn’t know him. And then, suddenly, Lakhu was dead. Was it an accident, or was it a more violent death? In a sense it doesn’t matter, anymore.**

**What matters is that Lakhu, that madman, that gem, is no longer around. This is the story of the friendship between a cartpuller and a painter, and the latter’s attempt at evolving a concept of enlightenment.**

To the casual eye, Lakhu was just another cart-puller in the market place. The cart was his companion, his house, his belonging. He slept beside it at night in the square. It was his conversation piece. It was his everything. And rented too. The rent was the price of a cup of ‘special’ tea, a tea, which he dutifully paid for every time. A rickety cart it was, with lots of colourful

ropes and rags wrapped around the planks. The man who pushed the cart was totally out of place in his situation. A handsome, intelligent and sensitive man.

Lakhu had nobody. No family, no relatives, nobody. A refugee with no trace of the past, but himself. Fate brought us together. Within a period of four years the friendship evolved to the point where I saw him as a close confidant on dark starry nights.

When I met Lakhu the very first time, I do not remember. But I do remember that Lakhu was 'exploding'. One doesn't remember all the details of an explosion, nor know them, for that matter. It must have been in the early hours of dawn in the downtown marketplace. A mad man. A spectacle. An old man. Hair disheveled. A beard that must have been a few months' growth but did not hide the handsome angular profile of the jaw.

There was nothing that was not handsome about this man. A handsome vision altogether. A coat with no



Lakhu outside Mumbiram's Mandai atelier

shirt inside bared a hairy chest. The hair was not all grey. Grey was not the colour to describe his hair. It was golden. His complexion was copper. His face was soiled in the most delicious masculine way. His feet were bare and soiled to an extent that raised alarm that turned into fear in the minds of the viewers. Along with a soiled lungi, he had several other colourful feathers hanging around the waist. A talisman, a key and some ridiculous plastic toy-like object, all threaded in colourful wool, hung around his neck. The powerful combination of the ridiculous and the handsome was truly moving to watch.

Lakhu when I first met him, was exploding. In his hand he held a zadu, a broom, which he held high every here-and-then when he made some solemn public proclamation. Now and again he also used it for its more legitimate purpose of sweeping the street. He had the most loving relationship with the road. I mean the pavement, the asphalt, the dirt. When he touched it, he nearly caressed it. All things on the road were like objects in his very living room. He was sweeping the road not so much to clean it as to turn over the objects, to rearrange them. He spoke chaste Hindi with Pharsee words and occasional Marathi ones, 'saavkaash' and 'gadbad', thrown in with easy populist grace. What he was saying I don't remember.

Eleven years ago I read Nietzsche in candlelight, huddled in a sleeping bag by the side of a basement boiler underneath a health-food shop in the old and swank Charles Street of Boston. No one knew I slept there. I would sneak in late at night and leave before daybreak. On those snowy nights I enjoyed Nietzsche's philosophical fiction and personalist philosophy like few other things I ever enjoyed. It was a discovery of style and methodology, rather than of content. What Zarathustra said, I don't remember.

While the whole world sleeps, there is, out there



in the dark, a world apart, which is a man's world. It has its own value system, its own very different conception of courage, camaraderie, conflict, morality, worth, creativity and beauty. It is not delicate but certainly not without love. It is sparsely populated but not without drama. It is lonely but not alone. It is the world of the thief and the murderer as also the drunkard and the fornicator. But it is also the world of the poet, the saint, the philosopher, the mathematician and the artist. I find men who cannot appreciate other men's beauty to be most vulgarly masculine and obscenely feminine in their spirit. They have no use for this men's world and this other world has no use for envy and jealousy.

Lakhuji was my discovery in this other world. The next several days we spent doing wonderful, meaningful nothings. Lakhu was in a euphoria and I was equally enamored. We walked the unknown by-lanes of Pune, the narrowest of them all, at odd hours. Lakhu would pick up what appeared to be 'anything' from the street and would offer it to me for my use. He would come with bulging pockets and laden sacks and empty t all on the floor of my atelier. I was amazed at the unending variety of things one could find lying by the wayside. The man who had nothing was laying the whole world on my floor. Lakhuji was fulfilling the admonishing query of the Shrimad Bhagavatam: "Are there no clothes lying on the common road ? Do the trees, which exist for maintaining others, no longer give alms in charity ? Do the rivers, being dried up, no longer give water to the thirsty ? Are the caves of the mountains now closed, or above all, does the almighty Lord not protect the fully surrendered souls ? Why then do the learned sages go to flatter those who are intoxicated by hard-earned wealth ?"

We didn't have to talk much to know that we had each run into a kindred spirit – someone who sees the meth-

od in the other's madness.

I found Lakhuji to be an expert on the Nagzari – that smelly, ancient, neglected guttery waterway with a patch of green on either side, that cuts across eastern Pune. Lakhuji brought me unusual stone lamps and stone utensils from its mud. He was totally at ease around the mysterious underworld atmosphere on its banks. I loved to walk around with him in that area. I remember distinctly the thrill of arriving, all of a sudden, in the backyard of an old stone house to find a Tibetan family nestled in its tiny yet cozy rooms with windows that overlooked a view of the Nagzari. Ordinary kids were scared of Lakhu. But these round-faced smiling kids were playfully friendly with him. This was one of the places where he would get food. Lakhu had the same idea of romance that the best French films have. There was a Jean Valjean charm about Lakhu, those who have read Victor Hugo would agree.

Now I was going into euphoria and Lakhu was getting enamored. Gokulashtami was approaching. Lakhu had enormous strengths in his aged body. He had spotted some giant earthen water pitchers that were abandoned at the end of the summer. I wanted to celebrate Krishna's birthday, so Lakhu hauled those three huge pitchers over his shoulders to my door. We planned everything secretly. On the eve of the Lord's birthday we carried those pitchers across the street and made a nativity scene on the sidewalk. That was Gokul, my house with its barred windows was Kamsa's prison, the road between was Jamunaji.

I began by sweeping and washing the sidewalk. Everybody jeered and sighed. The artist was going down the drain, Lakhu's way. I arranged the three pitchers around the beautiful boy Krishna kept in a basket. Then I lighted the stone lamps that Lakhu had brought and burned incense and offered flowers. Everybody wanted



“Lakhu”. Watercolour, 1985, Mumbiram

to help. We read the story of Krishna’s birth from the Bhagvata Purana. Then a brass band came and played all Krishna songs from the movies. I danced till after midnight. We enacted the drama of Yogamaya escaping from Kamsa’s hands by sending firework rockets into the sky. Then we distributed prasaada to the crowd. Lakhu was lying down on the floor upstairs in the balcony of my atelier listening to it all. The poet’s poet. The man behind the scene.

I had exhausted all my money and Lakhu all his madness! He had mellowed down and so had I.

Lakhu and I were spending so much time together that my babbling bumbling black beautiful rag-picking girlfriends became suspicious and curious. One morning two separate gangs stormed my studios. I was making a portrait of Lakhu. Lakhu was sitting with his back against the wall. For the sake of the artist he was sitting perfectly still and gazing into a tiny picture of Krishna on the opposite wall. The teen-aged girls were right comfortable with him and sat all around him shoulder to shoulder. Gentleman that he is, he slightly shrank his shoulders. You can see it in the portrait.

This was very early in our friendship and that would be one of the few portraits of Lakhu I would ever make. The teenaged rag pickers are street-wise and can judge men’s motives. For them to take to Lakhuji the very first time so completely speaks volumes about the innocence, forthrightness and empathy in Lakhuji’s charm. Lakhu was a gem.

It was about this time that I painted “Forest Maidens visit Krishna and the Gopis” which is based on a verse from the Bhagvata Purana. It shows the wild forest girls and the relatively civilized cowherd damsels vying for the attentions of Krishna. It is a recurring theme for me but that one rendering is easily one of the best

known of my paintings. The gopis are all Bombay's film actresses. They are guarding Krishna from the antics of the forest girls enacted by an international variety of beautiful women. The painting went on for several months.

Lakhu and I would have howlingly amusing times classifying into 'gopis' and 'junglis' all the familiar or famous ladies that we could lay our minds on. The lucky natural ones and the crazy beautiful outsiders, vis-à-vis God. We spared none. Rekha, P.T. Usha, Nalini Gera all were gingerly analyzed and appreciated. Then we did the same about men. Lakhuji had an enlightened attitude about men and women. It was without lust or envy. I could share with him the most erotic or intimate paintings that I ever made.

It was around this time too that my elusive friend of several years, Ramchandra Gandhi, gave two lectures in the philosophy department of Poona University. He had just put out a book on Ramana Maharshi, the gentle saint of Arunachalam. But surprisingly enough, for his talks he had chosen a reading from, of all the people, Nietzsche. It was the account of the mad man on the street who proclaimed, "God is dead". At the end of a very dramatic and impassionate presentation the audience was rather at a loss for a response. I felt I knew the mad man and suggested how I would be friends with him and what we could do together. Who is afraid of Friedrich Nietzsche?

The mellow Lakhu was the lovable boy you could take home to mother. He remained creative about his attire. He liked caps. Lately he had preferred only Gandhi caps. He went with his cart and delivered goods all day. One of the wheels of his cart would always be limping and hobbling. The cast-iron wheels would need replacement frequently. It used to look hilariously hopeless the way that cart would crouch. Perturbed by the inequities

of the human condition I used to visit Lakhu at 5 a.m. in his Lal Bahadur Shastri Chowk sleeping site. (That was a time you were sure to find him there) and the cart would already cheer me up.

Lakhu would acknowledge me with a faint smile, get up, put his sleeping covers on the cart, walk kitty-corner to the Subhansha Darga, offer obeisance and return to me. That was the routine. Then we would walk to a tea shop around Bohri Ali, have our morning tea and confide. I would promise to buy him a Victoria carriage that he could drive in his old age, instead of the cart. A disinterested Lakhu would keep harping on the deteriorating condition of the cart and that unless it was fixed some pedestrian might get hurt. It had become a ritual. The chakka of his cart would sometimes drive me up the wall. Once I suggested to him to put some shakkaa in his chakkaa then it would be shrikhand. I observed Lakhu's reaction. He was genuinely amused. The wheel was more or less a conversation piece, however dire. Lakhu was humble but never pitiful.

There were two stories Lakhu would often recount for my benefit. When he was an adolescent in Karachi he would go swimming and diving into the ocean. Once he dived deep down and touched a human body. He grabbed it and brought it out to the shore. It was a young woman fully laden with jewelry. He put her down, turned around and dived back into the ocean. He came out up the coast and walked home.

One very early morning he woke up to find a bundle of money spilled underneath his cart. Two street-sweeping women saw him with his hands full of bills. The older one says, "Did my friend here drop it?" The younger one says, "Give it back to my friend here. She dropped it." Lakhu handed it all to them. You see he had nearly hundred rupees of his own in the coat pocket. If anybody had searched him, they would have taken that

money also. What proof it was his?

Those early days sometimes we would go abegging. The shopkeepers, housewives, the hawkers, hotel boys, we didn't spare anybody. Not even the prostitutes. Lakhu would ask for 'Panch Paisa' (Five Pennies). Don't you think it's very little to ask? Was it worth the trouble? Lakhu would say, "The goldsmith rubs metal to test for gold. We rub people." The Bhagvata says a sannyasi goes to the door of the householder only for the spiritual benefit of the latter.

Lakhu had mysterious Sufi ways which gloriously agreed with my Bhagvata preferences. Lakhuji was humble, austere. Not destitute. To me he symbolized the dignity of human existence, in whatsoever condition.

Two months ago, Kushi, the most beautiful of my rag-picking friends from Yeravada had a tragic premature delivery. I was visiting and consoling her. She said she saw Lakhu with his cart the other day and felt great love and empathy for him. We recounted fondly how Lakhu would say, "Kisibhi baatki phikar nahi karnaa, Gangaa kabhibhi maili nahi ho sakti" (Don't you worry about a thing, Ganga can never become dirty.) and the girls would lustily respond in cheers, "Chalo chalo Lakhu!" Thinking of him enlivened us both.

People such as Ramchandraji and Lakhuji make me feel very humble. They have refined the art of humility to a magnificent hyperbole. Ramchandraji, the greatly charming, mad, intense and reclusive grandson of the Mahatma once asked me in earnest request if he could possibly find a room to live in this city for a moderate rent. These guys are so renounced they walk out on every advantage they have over their fellow man. It is impossible to know but I cannot help thinking that Lakhuji came from a greatly noble and cultured heritage.

And now he is gone. Wounded in Ganj Peth. Ganj peth boys used to think he was Muslim. The lungi, the beard, the cap. There was tension and disturbance that day. We will never know. "Drunk old man struck by a vehicle."

The rag-picking girls are sure he is not dead. "We will run into him one day with the cart in tow". The refugee from Karachi settled on the corner of Bohri Ali. Across Subhansha Darga. At the Hakim's door. Between Nehru Chowk and Mirza Ghalib Chowk. He is not there anymore. Nor the cart. The bandobast police have now put up a tent by the darga. A morcha to demand the removal of the Darga from the middle of the street is expected. Lakhuji, the man who offered obeisance to Mandir and Masjid with equal fervor, is not around.

Lakhuji Cartpuller. Adored by the rag pickers. Inspiration of the artist. Like a transparent rendering out of earthy gouache colours. He was handsomely unknown, all his days.

# Art amongst the People

Private Circulation, 2003

**One of the rare artists to combine the scholarly traditions of aesthetics and spirituality of Eternal India with the folk as well as contemporary populist realities of Modern India, Artist Mumbiram holds a very unique position in contemporary art world. His charcoal renderings of the dark beautiful people of India have caught the imagination of art lovers across the continents. In Germany alone there exist over a hundred such masterpieces. He has left behind over 200 early works mostly in private homes of friends and hosts during his romantic and eventful 12 year sojourn of the north American continent.**

**When not away with his Adivasi, Phasepardhi, Bugubugu people Mumbiram makes his home at a very unlikely address right in the middle of Pune's crowded vegetable Mandai market.**



Mumbiram's compact atelier in Pune (left) is full of paintings and rare Sanskrit books that Mumbiram is bringing into contemporary idiom in English and German. Mumbiram has a fascination for bamboo ladders and bamboo baskets. These are imaginatively used as furniture in his abode.

Away from medii and hype, Mumbiram is readily accessible to his friends. The gypsy in Mumbiram pulls him to the camps of Phasepardhis (right), Baluchis, Vaidus, Warlis, Thakurs and all others who are themselves very handsome yet have no affected preconceived ideas about art. Mumbiram cherishes their guileless opinions about his paintings.

**After a spate of thought-provoking articles giving rare insights into how an inspired artist's life and art evolve into a symbiotic whole, Artist Mumbiram has preferred to remain out of medii lime-light for the last thirteen odd years. In search of an Art that Transcends Culture, Practice of Personalist Art (1985), Waiting in the Wings (1987), Banishing Tourist Type Visions, Who is afraid of Friedrich Nietzsche (1988) were all enthusiastically received by the romantic and enlightened art-lovers. Here Mumbiram is interviewed by Vrinda Bhagavat where he fills us in about what he thinks about the art scene in India in general and his own life and art in particular.**

**Vrinda:** What are your expectations from your own art?

**Mumbiram:** I do not want to produce art that is created for and used as objects of interior decoration for the wealthy and affected. Art should inspire the human mind towards visions of an ideal world that is in the realm of possibilities for the human society.

Human society is divided by labels that get attached to every individual based on his/her birth. The labels may be based on religion, profession, geographical location or genetic bodily variety. All such labels are really as many castes. Any endogamous grouping is a caste.

We all experience that there exists a very natural and healthy mutual attraction between opposites. Cultural as well as bodily diversity can lead to most crea-



tive and fascinating unions of individuals. Unfortunately, economic or political vested interests, of the so-called leaders, frustrate this natural healthy life-force. Human society appears destined to unending conflicts between castes. Great art celebrates the material diversity yet brings out the transcending universality of human experience. It releases the suppressed forces of mutual attraction. Without such lofty art illuminating the social fabric there is no possibility of either peace or love.

Ideals of human beauty get caught in stereotypes. That is the most oppressive thing that there is. Much of my art is about bringing into the purview of art human types that have stayed outside of it. In India dark has been looked down upon even though the most glorious ancient ideals of humanity such as Krishna, Arjuna, Draupadi, Vyasa, all were dark. This very self-destructive trait of Indian aesthetic needs to be dealt without any delay. It has done great damage to the Indian self-esteem. If my own art contributes even an iota towards evolving a more healthy approach to human aesthetic I will feel greatly fulfilled.

We have all seen Krishna Leela depicted in Pahari or Mughal miniatures. It is all stylised. The Gopis all look alike. They all have the same fish eyes, the same straight noses that emanate from the same curved foreheads. We can only relate to them as distant mythological figures. Mumbiram's gopis are individuals. Women that could be the girl next door or movie actresses or rag-pickers or bird-catchers or whatever. The eternal causeless sporting of the divine with the living entities, leela, is brought to today's light. It breathes life-air into scriptural visions. Mumbiram's treatment is free from painterly affectations of brushstrokes and shadows. The lines are sweet and simple. Nearly minimal. One feels... .I could have done it ! The painting as well as the leela .....!

It is easy to forget that this sublime simplicity has been achieved only after a passionate study of the scriptures combined with a fine honing of aesthetic sensibilities. Dilettante imitations will be disastrous to the perpetrator as well as to the viewer.

***"We all experience that there exists a very natural and healthy mutual attraction between opposites. Cultural as well as bodily diversity can lead to most creative and fascinating unions of individuals... Great art celebrates the material diversity yet brings out the transcending universality of human experience ... Without such lofty art illuminating the social fabric there is no possibility of either peace or love."*** - Mumbiram

Mumbiram's large canvas "Forest Women visit Krishna and the Gopis" is based on an enchanting verse of the Shrimad Bhagavatam, tenth Canto, in Sanskrit. Mumbiram's interpretation is equally enchanting.

Mumbiram made his first rendering on this theme in 1975 in Seattle on the walls of an Indian Restaurant—Maharishi. The second was on a canvas that Mumbiram carried under his arm from Seattle to Denver in 1977. It should be with a Seventh Day Adventist Afro-American family of a retired air-force man. The one appearing here is the third one.

The adolescent Krishna is possessively surrounded by the Gopis who resemble well-known Mumbai actresses. The Forest Women are attracted to Krishna but cannot go near Him. In their



"Forest Women visit Krishna and the Gopis"  
Oil on canvas, 1985, Mumbiram





moods of ecstasy some are embracing each other, some are imitating Him just to attract His attention while some are steadfastly gazing at Him with offerings in hands. The Forest Women are seen to be all very unique beauties from Rest of the World. Some of these are indeed quite exotic – enough to make the home-town Gopis very agitated.

Mumbiram's art has this mood that transcends mere cultural variety and puts you on the sublime plane of a universal aesthetic. For this alone some art lovers rate this painting as one of the most significant paintings of the twentieth century.

The natural ease in rendering the great variety of ecstatic moods of the great variety of human types shows Mumbiram's acutely evolved sense of portraiture. The space is created solely through juxtaposition of faces and their gazes. This is Mumbiram's Personalism at its best. Only those critics who are well-versed with the Rasa-Siddhanta can do justice to this masterpiece.

It is ironical that this great work whose full purport comes out in the Indian context is now with a Mercedes-Benz high executive in Stuttgart. It augurs well that this treasure of universal brotherhood should travel every corner of the world and find a permanent home in the august premises of an international organization.



**One sees strong yet graceful, independent yet sensitive women in Mumbiram's charcoal pictures. When Mumbiram saw P.T. Usha's graceful strides in the 400 meters finals at the Los Angeles Olympics, the feelings of mere sympathy for the tribal girl from Kerala gave way to unmitigated unconditional admiration.**

**Here "*Payyoli Express*" takes off from the blocks in full concentration (left).**

**The authentic feeling has been achieved in this live portrait of *Sonabai Bugubuguwali* (right), because this artist involves himself wholeheartedly in the lives of the people that appear in his paintings. A series of Sonabai portraits will be the main attraction of Mumbiram's forthcoming exhibition of charcoal renderings.**

**V:** How about your own work ?

**M:** Most of my work has a context from Krishna Katha. Yet the solo portraits also stand very well on their own. It is simply exhilarating to make live portraits of some of the most amazing neglected beauties of folk India. It takes a lot of purity and integrity of the heart to be able to establish a rapport with them and inspire them to participate in this most ennobling endeavour. It is like discovering a star. Sometimes a whole constellation. It was all there all the time but was not noticed nor celebrated like the proverbial peacock dancing in the forest.

**V:** How is the response to your work ?

**M:** My charcoal portraits of strong yet graceful working class women are very much appreciated in Europe. Unenlightened upper class Indians will not choose these masterpieces for their homes. The persons depicted therein will resemble their maids. That will be an affront to the stereotyped ideals of human beauty. It is the rare enlightened Indian home that can proudly display such a portrait in their home. I cannot say such homes do not exist ! Mathematician Mangala and astrophysicist Jayant Narlikar are one such home. Much before them their friends avant garde Marathi writers Ashok and Ajita Kale bought a beautiful picture of a Vaidu woman sitting in front of Mandai. It is really one of my nicest early pictures. It has the romantically surrealistic chaos of India captured in beautiful faded exotic colours. A dog is curled up next to the woman and looks directly at the viewer in a protective way. A cow sticks her head in from one side, while a rickshaw is cruising along in the background.

Then there is Dr. Achyut Umranikar the renowned gynaecologist who bought the portrait "*Kali Suman*". She is very dark and beautiful. I was so touched by the doctor's choice that I gifted him the portrait of Suman's



“Mandai Madonna“ 1983, Mumbiram

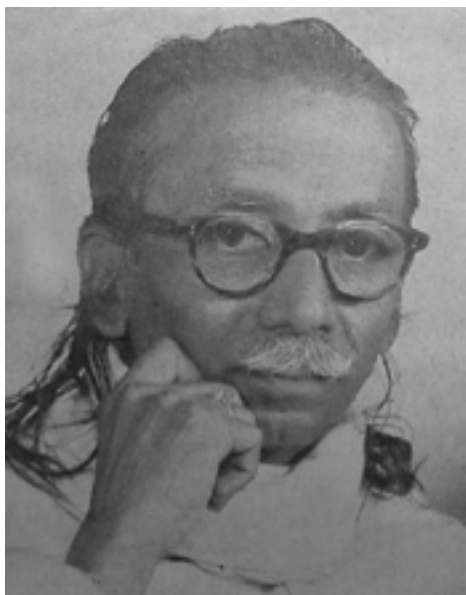
sister Dantali Kusum also. Kusum seems to have problem putting together the evening meal. She has only three eggplants in front of her. These girls were rag-pickers. The doctor's Gultekdi house was bought from the famous sociologist Dr. Iravati Karve. It is a great pleasure to see these pictures find wonderful homes. It is a great pleasure to meet enlightened people.

**V:** How is the economics of art in India ?

**M:** There are a lot of people who would like to take part in the wonderful world of Art today. In India there was no tradition of patronizing painters till recently. There always existed a tradition of hosting musicians. Mughals had court illustrators for court histories. Yet painting as a full-fledged art, standing alone as a medium of expressing the whole emotional spectrum of the human situation, was acknowledged, practised and found buyers only in the last 50 years of the British Raj.

My own maternal grandfather passed out of J.J. School of Art around 1910. Renowned artist N.E.Puram was his classmate and lifelong friend. In the 30's they had established a school called Institute of Modern Art. (Modern Art was to mean 'not traditional Indian' Art. Both of them could not stand so-called abstract art.) With no patronage from the government the Institute faltered. Puram sported long hair and was clearly the more dashing of the two. He was invited to be the art director of one of the annual conventions of the Indian National Congress. My grandfather became an art teacher in Pune's St.Vincent High School. This was pre-independence India. He was one of the finest watercolourists of his time.

His rural Indian landscapes found ready buyers in British civil and army officers. For many years he was a secretary of the prestigious Bombay Art Society and was entrusted with the organization of the annual monsoon exhibition of paintings in Pune. I have heard and read



Chitrakalacharya Narayana Eranna Puram (left) and Mubiram's grandfather Artist Shankar Hari Godbole (right) were major artistic influences on Mumbiram at an early age.



Artist Mumbiram

about the pomp and glory of the opening ceremonies of these exhibitions. The governor of the Bombay Province was the chief patron of the Society and chief guest of the opening ceremony. There were gold medals galore in every category and silver and bronze too.

When the British left it was all over for both these artists. Puram left for Africa to run a photography shop in Kenya. My grandfather had to sell his precious piece of land that he had bought in better days. It was only after the state of Maharashtra came into existence that Puram's dream of an art school materialized in the form of Pune's Abhinav Kala Vidyalaya.

**V:** Is the scene any different now ?

**M:** We have come a long way since then. Many people would like to participate in the culture painting. I empathize with all such magnanimous souls. Are there painters that live the lofty ideal of art and lead on the path of evolving aesthetic sensibilities ?

Much of the art from India seen in the last fifty years is really repetition of earlier European experiments. The so-called Progressive Artists of Bombay were doing what Matisse had done earlier. Our own Hussainji has clearly repeated Picasso's Guernica theme. These artists had remained far from anything that was truly indigenous in its inspiration. Hussainji has aligned himself with Mumbai's movie industry which in turn is not famous for indigenous inspiration. The warmth of the reflected glory is comforting to the artist but such art does precious little towards inspiring people towards an aesthetically sensitive society. It really has very little relevance. It is only fodder for the celebrity culture that rides piggyback on the restaurant-bar-promotion culture. Art itself takes the backstage.

**V:** What are your suggestions to the prospective art lover ?



The painting “Ravana luring Sita“ by S.H. Godbole presents a thought provoking interpretation of what really went on in Panchavati that fateful afternoon. Ravana is shown as a dandy mendicant who could have charmed a pious and generous young woman. Has Sita forgotten that she has just dispatched with harsh words her most upright brother-in-law to assist her husband who is in great danger ? Much of Godboleji’s work was submerged in the flood waters of the great Panshet deluge of 1961. This is one of the many watercolour masterpieces that were cleaned and conserved from the aftermath. Puram was a fabulous and inspired watercolour portraitist. After the death of his wife Vijayabai, Puram’s work has disappeared into oblivion.

**M:** It must be a very bewildering choice for a newcomer. Hardly any artist has a manifesto. As if it is not cool to have any sense of purpose or direction. Hype is all it takes ! So it must be very confusing to the new initiate to have any truly rewarding experience.

When you buy a painting from an artist you are doing much more than acquiring an art object for your private pleasure. You are joining an aesthetic movement. Further, you are undertaking the responsibility of taking care of a treasure that belongs to all art lovers of all times. Above all you are befriending a personality that obtains meaning and content to the otherwise absolutely chaotic ways of civilization. You are not doing a favour to the artist. You are doing your bit for civilization. As for the artist, he has dedicated his life to that goal. So look for art and artists that fulfil these expectations.

Sure, art is an investment. But not in the narrow sense of the stock market. It is an investment in a better life for yourself and society.

For the inspired artist art is not practised for any mundane material gain. It is a passion, a love affair, verily a devotional offering and a way of life. He will not seek you. Only a stroke of providential good luck will bring you face to face with him.

**V:** How do you see art from the perspective of a Krishna Lover ?

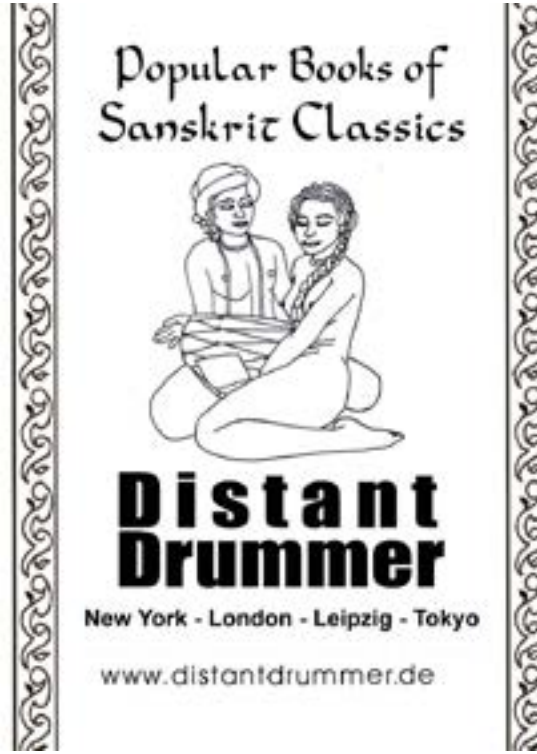
**M:** Bhagavad Gita says even a sannyasi who is in the renounced order should not give up yagya, daana and tapa. These purify even the liberated souls. Bhagavad Gita says communion with God is nothing but Art of all work. Art can be pursued as a self discipline, or as a munificent activity or as a loving offering celebrating life itself. It purifies all concerned.



“The Blue Crystal of Ranabai’s Mind” is a portrait of a construction worker also made on a hot summer afternoon in Pune.



“Jagannath appears in Sachiko Konno’s Dream“ was made by Mumbiram in Japan in 1988. This young Japanese woman read the Bhagavad Gita translated into Japanese and became a great India lover. As a lover of Krishna she was known by the spiritual name Gokula. A chance meeting on the deserted streets of Shri Vrindavan on an incredibly hot July afternoon led to a stormy affair which gave birth to six important oil-paintings, perhaps the only important works of Indo-Japanese confluence so far.



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