

Available online @ www.iaraindia.com
 SELP Journal of Social Science - A Blind Review & Refereed Quarterly Journal
 ISSN: 0975-9999 (P) 2349-1655 (O)
 Impact Factor: 3.655(CIF), 2.78(IRJIF), 2.77(NAAS)
 Volume. X, Issue 41
 April - June 2019
 Formally UGC Approved Journal (46622), © Author

REFIGURING SANTHAL LIFE IN ART: RAMKINKAR BAIJ'S ENGAGEMENT WITH MODERNITY

ARNAB DUTTA

School of International Studies
 Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Abstract

Ramkinkar Baij, the prodigy was born in Bankura in West Bengal in 1910. He went on to study at the Kala Bhavan, Vishwa Bharati University, Santiniketan in 1925. A brief introduction to clay modeling by a visiting French sculptor was enough to capture Baij's creativity. Groomed by his mentors, Nandalal Bose and Tagore, the clay modeler turned artist. The lack of academic training resulted in unique, individualistic works and an innovative way of engaging with the medium. He was the earliest artist in Santiniketan to experiment with abstract, modern sculptural forms. His innovativeness is reflected in the way he used Santhal wraps with packet colours thinned with linseed oil to create his oil paintings and drew his figures on silk with a shoe brush. Working at a time when traditional art was transitioning to modern art, Baij's work proved to be crucial to Indian art history. Baij was inspired by real life figures which gave his verbose works an inner suavity. He integrated elements of Santhal tribal art and life into his own work and enhanced them by an understanding of Western expressionism. He could be said to be the first truly 'modern' Indian sculptor experimenting with surrealism and impressionism where only momentum rules.

Key Words: *Ramkinkar Baij, Santiniketan, Expressionism, Santhal, Realism, Surreal.*

Introduction

In the history of art, the name of Ramkinkar Baij has become synonymous with ambiguity and abstruseness. In life as well as in death he remained an inexplicable personality, who through his paintings and sculptures gave birth to some bizarre and unbelievably outrageous products. Yet, he was respected as one of the foremost front ranked artist whose works stands apart in its purity of form, dexterity of texture and simplicity of subject.

Naturally, he was considered to be a living phenomenon to have graced this earth in

a poverty-stricken family at Yogipara on 25 May 1906 in Birbhum. Having an innate disposition towards art, he used to be automatically attracted by the natural objects around him. For ages, many an artist all over the world has tried to give an academically correct definition of art, but have failed. Perhaps, the cause behind this is that every as well as any kind of art is born out of a creative impulse and in those single or voluble bouts of intense feeling they imprint the supreme consciousness. Hence, even if we restrict the arts to their natural province like: music,

literature, drama, painting, sculpture, art and the handicrafts, we are not much better off. So the excitement of making something new, the thrill of reflecting the inner most thoughts through elemental modes is the primary driving force which imbues the subconscious of every genuine artist.

From his very childhood days, he showed no interest in academics and spent his time going around his village observing almost anything that met his eyes. From his autobiography, we come to know that how he liked the paintings of various gods and goddesses on the walls of his house and copied them. So, in one way visual art became the first step towards painting. His first work of culture too was an exhibition of seasonal revelation. On a certain rain-washed day, suddenly he saw that the red mud was totally washed off the road exposing the original blue soil. Immediately, he took a handful of that mud and begun to make a whole lot of dolls. This is how young Baij was initiated into sculpture.

However, his parents still thought formal education will help their child to make a better living in future. So, despite having financial constraints they insisted that he carries on with his studies seldom realizing that destiny has already paved the way for their child through the colourful alleys of images into the hall of everlasting fame. By dint of his painting he received free studentship and managed to complete his matriculation. The qualities of improvisation and innovation was so very inherent in him that leaf extracts, turmeric pastes, charcoal etc. easily became young Baij's much used ingredients.

Inspiration on Art

Ramkinkar Baij was perhaps an artist who understood 'modernity' and its connections to art practice, undoubtedly more intuitively than in an informed or acquired manner, at least in his initial years, as a young artist in Santiniketan, Bengal. In actuality, contrary to more what is popularly understood, he was not a tribal. However, he had a natural flair to connect easily with the tribal lifestyle. He had a spontaneous empathy with all that was tribal, born as a result of close and constant association with the Santhal community living near Santiniketan. A bond was established, sans any affectation or pretensions between the artist and his tribal subjects, visible to all giving rise to a much celebrated myth that Ramkinkar Baij

was himself a tribal. A fable that was able to justify and explain his temperament and natural artistic disposition. Ramkinkar had an intellect; perhaps, much like what Gauguin went in search for in Tahiti, what he did not find while in France and he felt compelled to abandon the entire civilization of Europe for moments of naïve intelligence and beauty. He celebrated life itself in all his individualistic enterprises. He learnt with passion from all elements of life and existence that stirred him. He received an informed education that helped him to continue working on an eclectic approach to art, innate to his character. This was despite the fact that he had teachers who had clear views in regard to artistic practice as it was essential to develop in India of the 1930s. However, he was fortunate to have in them also mentors who realized his potential and his need to nurture individualistic artistic expression. He grew under the benign supervision of Rabindranath Tagore and Nandlal Bose, who were also grooming simultaneously, some of the most enterprising young talents in Santiniketan Kala Bhavan, including Binode Bihari Mukherjee. The progressive milieu of Santiniketan encouraged Ramkinkar to develop as an artist who was not only a sculptor but was a painter, printer, a theatre person and a singer as well. No boundary existed for him between any of these passions. He was able draw on these pursuits with creative force and strengthened his own individual artistic performance. He had a natural, holistic view of art and its practice. He remained committed to this view till the end of his life. His genius was uncluttered and unflustered. In Rabindranath Tagore's *abode of peace* Ramkinkar sustained his abilities to uphold a vision, a sense of discovery, and create an idiom that would express his natural impulses and transform an ordinary reality, person, object into a theme of celebration and thereby transforming it into an extraordinary and unique experience.

Perhaps one man who could inspire him and add wings to his liberated artistic ambitions was Gurudev himself. Rabindranath Tagore took upon himself to see that his young boy from a modest family background found his creative realization to the full capacity. He would converse with him, leave him with words of encouragement and ideas on which he would think and would internalize much what was suggested to him by the poet. He was once

advised by Rabindranath to work and fill Santiniketan with his art so as not to leave a single space untouched by his vision. *Bharido* was the vision he received and he strived to live up to it all his life. Ramkinkar, through his voice, his *baulgaan* (songs of roaming faqirs), a tribal vision of a world of love and equality, as also his theatre, he indeed wrote his own plays and he extended his world view into his visual art. He explored all surfaces and techniques. His lifestyle rarely aligned with the 'bhadrakalok' sensibility, which it would not be incorrect to say, was then the ruling ethos at Santiniketan, as perhaps it still is. The art produced there was, in some ways, an expressed idiom through which this middle class awareness articulated itself most profoundly. It need to be observed here that he was constructing his artistic affinities with clear political overtones when he made portraiture painting of freedom fighters, the themes of Non-Cooperation Movement against the British Rule in India. This was before he joined Santiniketan in mid 1920s, as a student of art.

These overtly nationalist themes apparently were soon overtaken by a more idealistic and yet real humanity that he found in the world of the Santhal community. Undoubtedly Rabindranath's own world view helped the young artist to forsake early in his life a high pitched nationalistic overtones for a more real, as he envisioned, the future India and capture more exuberantly how India as a free nation could reinvent itself as a dynamic world culture.

At another time Ramkinkar was suggested by Rabindranath Tagore, while he was working on a bust study of the poet, to enter the subject of his study as a tiger and with astute observation, as the tiger would suck his object's blood, to achieve what he wanted. And he is recorded to have said that after this episode he had never looked back. And indeed, when one looks at his body of work from small but intense works in etchings, to relatively large oils and watercolours of the artist we are compelled to notice their ferocious self-absorption and utter intensity combined with an informed spontaneity. He made some brilliant studies of people all close to him in some context. A standing sculpture stands outside the *Amar Kutir* near Santiniketan, of Rabindranath by Ramkinkar. Another remarkable bust is in Budapest, Hungry, near Balaton lake, which

captures the likeness of the poet, made just before he died in 1941. Another rare bust study is of Ustad Alauddin Khan who was in Santiniketan, and sat for his portrait by Ramkinkar. The latter being an admirer of the Ustad for his music and his genius, had great love and understanding for music, music of all kind. He heard western music, introduced to it by his friends who included Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak. He, of course was heard singing himself *Lalangeeti* (the songs of Lallan Faqir), in deep open voice as he also did render songs based on *Rabindrasangeet*.

Reframing Modernity

To some, modern is synonymous with the machinations and therefore something decadent and indecently artificial. To yet others, modern stand for the material civilization of the west and is therefore to be looked down upon vis-a-vis the spiritual heights of India. To the young, the radical theory of social organization is what is modern, which advocates with impunity, the existing and the traditional in their own society and these are just a few points of view.

The element of modern may also be considered as a character of consciousness. It is a particular state of tension or concentration which accompanies human will and effort when it grapples with the changed aspect of form, when it battles and strains to grasp the new. It is that which gives a passionate and vigorous direction to the human activity of a period. The operation of this character of consciousness is like the undying force of the universe itself which urges forth at every fresh creation of civilization. The course of its working has been envisaged by the conception of 'Lila'-- the form that is eternally integrating and disintegrating. *Tadve Buh Bhavan Pranojane Nadhyap Nibrattam* (Its shape and character are determined by time and place).

Some works that have come to be known more than others are his large monumental sculpture the *Santhal family* which can still be found installed in the campus of Santiniketan. His life studies and portraits of *Binodini* worked in all mediums of oil, watercolour, and bronze. However, there a numerous sculptures that can be a surprise delight all over the campus. One is the charming elephant playing with a young one sculpted in concrete. Another Santhal family group called *Mill Call*, now installed under a

fiberglass canopy for protection from the elements of climate rain, hail and storm. Perhaps this is an attempt for preservation but definitely inadequate. It certainly needs more expert conservation here. The unfortunate fact is that Ramkinkar used material most easily available.

Sometimes he could afford more but perhaps more because of an attitude that actually can be discerned. Therefore you are faced with the problem of preserving sculpture done in mud and clay, pebbles and cement contrite where material is bound to disintegrate in an open atmosphere. There is an interesting episode, which I think speaks for what the artist Ramkinkar, on occasion, thought of his own works and their future.

In 1975, that is well fifty years of Ramkinkar's professional art practice Ghatak commenced shooting on him in Santiniketan. The filmmaker sees him as a political icon too. Ramkinkar was an artist with leftist linings and aspirations. He is seen articulating the problems that he faces as an artist. He is filmed drawing with graphic details as to how he has saved himself from dripping roof by covering the holes in the roof with his oil paintings. When asked by Ghatak what he is going to do for the art exhibition that is coming soon. Ramkinkar has this answer, *"As the paintings are made by oil on canvas water will not do any damage to them. I can pull them out for the show. But my worry is what I will replace them with to stop the rainwater. It costs hundred rupees to buy grass for thatching. It is very expensive!"* And thus he laughs off a serious situation of both art and living.

That is also the Baij we are introduced to in Ritwik Ghatak's incomplete 1975 documentary on the master. On being asked by the filmmaker to explain his Buffalo and Fish, a statue of two buffaloes in a pond, Baij said that he had imagined the tail of a buffalo enlarged several times over to capture the movement of a fish in water. At that point, Ghatak commented, "You are a crazy person, there's no doubt about that." To which, Baij simply smiled. *Ramkinkar Baij: A Personality Study*, by Ritwik Ghatak—one of India's foremost film directors – is the centre-piece of the exhibition and certainly does much heavy work in establishing an intellectual muse en scène for Baij's output.

Simplifying the Modern

Modern art not only reflects the obvious qualities about it but draws from more profound sources the inherently humanistic attributes of mankind. The modern artist has rediscovered the sources of intuition. The very junk and discarded bits of contemporary living that many contemporary artists have been motivated to employ, affirm the limitless reservoirs of spirits, paradoxically creating beauty from ugliness, stressing contemporary meaning rather than senseless routine. 'Happenings' attempt to capture the direct qualities that are a part of everyday living. The subjectivity that currently prompts researches, centred on the man, is already a highly developed avenue in art. The art of today is primarily an interior art and is subjectively oriented. Though it is mainly experienced through its visual elements, it also communicates on a philosophical and psychological level. Modern artists seem to see the reality of life only in parts. Most of them were searching to realize sensations and not to paint visions.

General Trends in Sculpture

Ramkinkar Baij, who spent practically all his life at Shantiniketan, gained a reputation as a modern sculptor and had a pioneering influence on the younger generation. Initially trained in the western academic style, he created entirely by his own genius. Basing his subjects on the common people, he worked mostly in a form that was a peculiar synthesis of the native folk and cubist elements, possessing a social significance and symbolic depth. His works reveals an organic integrity and exuberant energy. Among his illustrious disciples are Prabas Sen and Shankho Chowdhury.

While Indian art in the first half of 20th century reflected the dominance of colonial idioms and a pre occupation with monumental sculpture, the post-independence period is characterized by a freedom of expression, diversity of aims and deviation to formalistic principles embodying contemporary aesthetic values. Sculpture basically involves creating a volume. While one can study sculpture from varied points of view, such as tool, material, form, size, proportion, positive negative setting and expressing the most natural appreciation of a sculpture comes from the way it is made.

Modern Art in his sculpture

The sculpted *Yaksha* and *Yakshini* at the Revenue Bank of India's entrance in New Delhi, mark not only a free India's commissioned art projects but also the peculiar situation that underlined the questions of 'modernity' and of Governmental patronage. These sculpture were ideas that grew from the need felt by Jawaharlal Nehru to embellish State building spaces with visual icons that lent themselves to Modern Indian ethos. Out of the nine artists invited to submit their proposals, only one submitted models and sketches. The proposal of Ramkinkar was accepted. The art form of the male *Yaksha* was drawn from the *Parkham Yaksha* in the Mathura Museum. The art form of the female *Yakshini* was inspired by the *Bisnagar Yakshini*, Calcutta Museum. Karl Khandalavala, art historian and lawyer, felt that these massive figures would go well with the architectural features. The themes of peasant-worker prosperity inspired by Nehru's scientific temper, was thus found. Its manifestation in the form of the *Yaksha* and *Yakshini*, at the same time, appealed to the sensibilities of those who valued tradition, which of course is different to different people. *Yakshas* belongs to a class of demi-gods and they are represented as in service of *Kubera* the *God of Wealth*. The duty of *Yakshas* is to guard over Kuber's gardens and treasures. The *Yakshini* is a female counterpart of *Yaksha*. The Revenue Bank has the sole right to note issue and as a banker to the Central and State Government could, therefore, be compared with *Kubera* - the lord of wealth and thus the *Yaksha* and *Yakshini* could assume the duty of guarding the Bank's treasure. In the modern context, the figures could assume allegorical interpretations. They become here symbols of industry and agriculture, vital matter of concern to Revenue Bank of India. Ironically, the commission caused him a great distress. Unfamiliar with the ways of government assignments, Bajj was unable to adhere to the deadline. He made a series of studies for the two figures, travelling from Kangra to Baijnath for material, and spent almost a decade completing it. When it was finished in 1966, the sculptures had exceeded the original cost estimate and deadline.

Ramkinkar, took his own time in selecting the exact quality of stone that was needed. Exploration of sites, stone quality,

problems in its quarrying and transportation to New Delhi, delayed the actual commencement of the project. While everyone had no doubt of his artistic commitment they did have concerns over his managerial skills to undertake the enterprise. However, in January 1967 the sculptures finished and installed the original expense estimates had to be considerably revised. Finally installed, it was over ten years since they had been commissioned. The general political the outlook of the country as indeed of its leaders had changed considerably. The sculptures at the Reserve Bank's New Delhi Office at Parliament Street scandalised prudish sensibilities of the Delhi gentry who found it difficult to justify *Yakshini* nude presence in public domain. And the matter did not rest till it was raised in the Rajya Sabha. Blitz gave an interesting twist to the symbolism contained in the Sculptures. This time the highlight was on *Yaksha* when it carried the title *Yaksha Patil*, a photograph of the sculpture was carried along with a comment, "*But artist Ramkinkar's conception of a modern Yaksha, which now guards the Reserve Bank, has, coincidentally enough, taken an amazing likeness to Sadoba Patil, one of the most zealous 'guardians' of wealth and big business in the country*". He responded to the natural zest for life, and took a great interest in human figures, body language, and in the general human drama. Modern Western art and pre and post-classical Indian art were his main point of reference. He used local material advantageously, and worked combining the skills of a modeller and a carver. His paintings too take on expressionist dimensions like his sculptures, which are filled with force and vitality.

Reconstituting Santhal Art

The work of Ramkinkar Bajj can be taken as a turning point in the history of contemporary Indian sculpture-a significant departure from the neoclassicism of Europe and the academic styles taught at the government schools of art. His early work, spanning the 1930s and the 1940s was like a breath of fresh air- original and innovative without any obsession with the past or the decadent present. This trend of individual improvisation was also seen in his 'open air' technique.

Ramkinkar belonged to the period of transition from traditional to modern art, creating a style of his own, rooted in his personality and environment. As an exceptional

individual, he was saturated with intense love for life and an insatiable passion for work. By 1935, his works already showed interest in structural quality, something that is characteristics of his more mature works in the 40s and the 50s, which are marked by abstract as well as surrealistic features. It was obviously at Shantiniketan that he imbibed Rabindranath Tagore's view that tradition, though very important, should not act as a barrier between artist and his artistic growth. His art is characterized by tremendous energy, exuberance and vitality. His figures and forms, whether in sculpture or in painting, are dynamic and earthy, possessing a surging movement of growth. His sculptures have a typical 'put of door' quality for they were created on location and seem to grow out of the environmental context. Whether in cement, plaster or stone, their forms as it were, arise and are proliferated by their own laws, such as in his *Santhal Family*. They are infused with a certain joyous and vital feeling. Regardless of their style, whether abstract, representational or conventional, they are alive with their slow massive rhythms that respond to changing light and shadow and the forms of nature around.

His monumental oils are unconventional and highly individualistic. Ramkinkar did not imitate, forging his own path towards a desired mode of expression- abstract, cubistic, expressionistic or surrealistic. Hence, there is no stylistic affectation in his work, be it sculpture or printing. His feeling was his law. For him, art was a necessity for filling up a creative barrenness and poverty of imagination that surrounds over lives. He served an inner demand that arose within him waiting for the creative act for its fulfillers. And he fulfilled this demand with immense creative ability till his death. He remained consistently a humanist, both in attitude and subject matter. *Santhal Family*, widely considered to be the first public Modernist sculpture in India, was made by Ramkinkar Baij in 1938. It's a peculiarly familiar work, depicting a mother, father, child and dog from the Santhal tribe, carrying their few possessions with them to a new life. For the exhibition *Santhal Family: Positions around an Indian Sculpture* the curator Grant Watson in collaboration with Suman Gopinath and Anshuman Dasgupta invited a broad range of international artists to respond to the sculpture, embodying and also reflecting on contemporary

discussions about ideas of social mobility and artistic practice. As a concept Baij's *Santhal Family* sits firmly at the centre of this exhibition, with concentric circles of interest overlapping and connecting across different cultures and generations.

This is also true of the exhibition as a whole. The works that succeed best at plotting themselves in some way against (or maybe alongside) *Santhal Family* are those that slip outside a direct dialogical relationship with the sculpture, instead floating near it with an attitude of concentration or obtusely enacting it. Deceptively witty and easy to miss, Ashim Purkayastha's *Found Object/Objects 2003-7* is one such work, in which the artist has defaced, reclaimed and transformed a collection of 100, 500 and 1,000 rupee notes, all of which feature the face of Mohandas Gandhi. On each, the Mahatma has been altered in some way by hand (appearing, among other things, as Adolf Hitler, as Salvador Dalí, as a cowboy, as a Rastafarian, playing a flute, picking his nose and taking a drag on a cigarette), with the effect of destabilizing the iconography of recognition by creating a subtle shift in the use-value not only of the currency itself but also of Gandhi's image. In this way Purkayastha manipulates subject and object, expressing an essential dislocation in his act of making.

Cum Grano Salis

His meditative intensity enabled him to cultivate the field of feeling in such a manner that it became a receptor of the immanent sensations. The entire strength of his creations intact rested wholly upon this unique ability to reflect the infinite form within the finite objects of the surroundings. The *Santhal Family* widely considered to be the first public modernist sculpture in India depicting a mother, father, child and a dog from the santhal tribe at once lifted them out of dismal darkness to the limelight of universal appreciation and acceptance of their existence in the social fabric of not only Bengal but of India as a whole. Baij was trying to tell us that an apparent vision about these people will not help in unravelling the stupendous variegations inherent among them. They were nature's own people and demanded a more proximate viewing. The daily activities of the village people attained supreme artistry at his hands. This became an eternal celebration of life through the toils and tensions transformed into a livid struggle of survival.

The Call of the Mill, running to reach the rice mill on time in hearing the whistle, captures the hectic schedule imposed on the rustic simpletons by the industrial society. This mundane theme is made a marvel by Baij in sculpting a piece of wet cloth held by one of the santhal females overhead so as to dry it while on their way to the mill creates the inherent dynamicity and the grace involved in the process of labour. If stone spoke for Michaelangelo so did the mud of Bengal for Baij. The latter's dexterity was unearthly as was once told by Nandalal Bose to Benod Behari. Just by observing Baij at work one could see the initiation of the 'life' bestowed upon him by earthly elements.

He stuck to the structural quality of the human body, not the anatomy as we know it. This was about knowing and defining the body through the skeleton. You analyse the body and sculpt it as armature. Distortions, if any, are only meant to create certain vitality, as this work does. Look at his wonderful work on Tagore. In Santiniketan, he was the first to bring in the concept of outdoor sculpture, using the play of light and darkness to highlight its subtleties. He was capable of both, realism as you can see in *Mill Call* and *Santhal Family*, but he could also make an absolutely abstract lampstand.

Ideological Ramkinkar

Ramkinkar taught for many years and gave the Sculpture Department in Kala Bhavan a unique working temper. He came to know two sculptors Lisa Vonpott and Margaret Milward, artists of European origin. His fascination for human form widened into rethinking form itself and Western traditions were also accommodated by him with an empathy and interest in modernist exploration for new idiom and visual vocabulary. However, expressionism apparently was the idiom that articulated much of his mature artistic work. His sensitivity to the life of the dispossessed and the disadvantaged section of society was made more sharp and deep with his inclination towards socialist political thinking and his close association with intellectuals of the Left thinking. He succeeded in translating it with intensity in his art. In a way, Ramkinkar's works reflect the ideological Left and his attempt to bring contemporary art and culture into active people's politics. An ideological energy was increasingly becoming visible in all

spheres of national life, in the growing middle class and its vision of the political future. Perhaps one more extension of his artistic beliefs was that he did not make art with the intention to preserve them or commercially gain from his works. He created for expression and articulation of an idea. He used clay, cement or what he could afford. It was never easy to generate expensive material like metal and marble stone. What indeed was more important was for him was to work and create and work as an artist for the society.

A visit to the ongoing retrospective exhibition at NGMA (National Gallery of Modern Art) of his, offers some brilliant insights to his creative virtuosity and intellectual commitments. There are works, and more especially some smaller ones like *The Colt*, etching, now in private collection. To say that he was the pioneer of modernist art in India will not be complete truth. For the modernity is discernible in India in artists like Rabindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore and Jamini Roy and more can be added here. However, it would certainly be truthful to say that he was indeed a modernist, one of the few who make the earliest phase in India, who celebrated it with utmost abandonment and zeal. He has left behind him a great body of work that the Modern state of India has yet to learn how to conserve and preserve. Not wanting to end on a resigned note I would like to make an appeal to all concerned bodies, of government or non-government, to act fast, coordinate systematically and bring Ramkinkar Baij's contemporary modern legacy into a definite state of permanent existence accessible to all for all time. May his art remain a defining icon of Indian stepping into the phase defined as Modern'.

Artist A. Ramachandran vividly recalls his first meeting with Ramkinkar Baij in 1957. A photograph of Baij's monumental work, *Santhal Family*-a mother, father, child and dog with their few possessions had drawn him to Santiniketan. The now Delhi-based artist went on to work closely with Baij for eight years in Santiniketan. "Kinkarda was always exploring new ideas. He did not use still models but gave shape to sculptures by observing the inherent movement of people," he says. Baij was an unconventional teacher singing Rabindrasangeet and Bhatiali folk songs with his students, and taking them for long walks to

sketch the Santhals near Santiniketan. Mostly seen in cotton shirts and sporting a Chinese straw hat, Baij was far from a member of the cultural elite. He was known to be indifferent to fame or money. In a 2009 interview, quoted on Shodhganga, an online library of Indian dissertations, artist and teacher Dinkar Kaushik quoted Baij as saying: "I feel an inevitable impulse and it forces me to create. Does it matter whether the rich and elite class demands my art or not?"

While his initial lessons came from observing local idol-makers, he was also inspired by the terracotta sculptures of the Bishnupur temples. His political posters painted during the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920 caught the attention of the editor of the Kolkata-based magazine, *Modern Review*, Ramananda Chattopadhyay. Baij would go on to bring a sense of social commitment to the romanticism of Bengal art. An artist of the masses, he began as a traditionalist, but soon started experimenting with more Western approaches, including Cubism and abstraction. His protagonists, though, were rooted in India, in Santiniketan's khoai, and drawn from the Santhals, the original inhabitants of the land.

Baij had struggled with his identity during the initial years of his art practice. He used several names—some of his earliest works, reproduced in the journal *Prabasi*, carry the name Ramkinkar Pramanik. A work in the 1920s is undersigned Ramprasad Das. Not everyone appreciated his art even in Santiniketan and it was Tagore, who, after seeing his first free-standing outdoor sculpture in concrete, *Sujata* (1935), said that he will be allowed to sculpt as he wanted across the campus. His student KG Subramanyan once compared him to the *khepa Bauls* or the mad mystics; "an artist crazy with his art, lost so much in his search as to forget both his person and his product."

Baij was notoriously unconcerned about fame and posterity. For the father of modern sculpture in India the joy of art lay in creation. He was not beyond using it to plug a leak in a roof, as Ritwick Ghatak documented in his yet to finish movie on Baij, or giving it away on a whim. His students KG Subramanyam and KS Radhakrishnan have spoken about the horrors of curating his works for retrospectives. His bas relief sculpture *Dandi March* too faced scorn when it was to be

installed at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in Delhi to commemorate the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's trek from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi. "What is there in it?" a panel member had scoffed. "Just a man with a stick in his hand."

Legacy of Ramkinkar

Ramkinkar was singularly reticent and otherworldly as he was single-minded in his commitment to art and humanity. But this did not stop his work from being noticed and appreciated by sensitive artists and connoisseurs. He was invited to participate in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in 1950 and in the Salon de Mai 1951. And in the seventies national honours began to come his way one after the other. In 1970 the Government of India honoured him with the Padma Bhushan in 1976 he was made a fellow of the Lalit Kala Akademi, in 1976 he was conferred the Desikottama by Visva Bharati, and in 1979 an honorary D.Litt. by the Rabindra Bharati University. Some of his sculptures are preserved and displayed at locations including Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan, Late Rani Chanda Collection & Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, H.K. Kejriwal Collection & Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat, Bangalore, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Reserve Bank of India, New Delhi, Jane and Kito de Boer, Dubai, and the Delhi Art Gallery in New Delhi.

Conclusion

The coming of Baij from his village to Shantiniketan, immortalizing the place and thereafter departing is all expressed in the various objects he made. In his autobiography, one comes across the kind of definition he tried to provide behind the various themes on which he worked. It was in one sense or the other, his own story of life garbed into the sculpted objects through various materials. In light of post-modernity, one could reinterpret them as portraits of unconscious domain expressed through objects of vision. These, in the making became definitive indicators of his inner-self fused into the rhythm of man and nature. All his paintings and sculptures tried to canvas the various moods of interaction between humans and his surroundings. He was a connoisseur of the school of re-expressionism which delved into the normal activities of the living creatures to bring forth beauty and challenges of them in the nature.

This feeling of embedded lustre, the keen observatory quality scooped out the inner trajectories of the man-nature-being triangular to express anything in a vibrant manner. He was instrumental in introducing modernity in Indian art and to go beyond in making a bond with the surreal. The mixture of cubism, pointillism led to the Bajism. *Sujata, harvester* and *lamp stand* fused impressionistic elements with that of cubic nuances. The interaction of length and width with spatiality made a timeless appeal in his works. They transcended the boundaries of present to speak for the rustic life at all times. None other than another doyen of a sculptor, Chintamani Kar said that Baj is a *Dionysian*, in the sense being iconoclastic. The ecological aspect of Baj's work can be seen in the *Fountain* where a hybrid of buffalo with fish was made. The extremities of the climate of that particular region make the buffalo to quench its thirst while simultaneously pointing to the necessity of water conservation in keeping the aquatic life intact. He himself said that everything in art is making and breaking. In the process, emerge a new dimension, meaning and appeal. His innovativeness was well reflected in the *Birth of Krishna* and *Kongsha*, having definitive aspects of cubic touch of Europe synchronised by Baj with nativity. He was a product of the sub-continent to whom the *Shivalinga* and the *Nataraj* was high examples of modernity. While working on various themes, he created his own avant-garde genre of force and vitality. His works became synonymous with the motion of the universe, making him an eternal crusader of life-force.

References

1. Amit, M. and P. Das. (ed). (1991). *Shilpo, Shilpi, Samaj o Ramkinkar*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co. Private Limited.
2. Apasamy, J. and Kowshik, D. (1982). Ramkinkar and Santiniketan. *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Vol. 46.
3. Apasamy, J. (1983). *Ramkinkar as a Pathfinder*. Special Issue on Indian Sculpture.
4. Apasamy, J. (1970). Trends in Recent Sculpture. *Lalit Kala Contemporary*. Vol. 16. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi .
5. Apasamy, J. (1976). *The Art of Ramkinkar*. Hindusthan Times.
6. Bagal, R and P. Das. (ed). (1991). *Chokhe Dekhte Pachhi Kinkarbabu Ekhono Achen*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co. Private Limited.
7. Bajj, R. (1980). *Atmakatha*. Visva-Bharati News.
8. Bajj, D. and P. Das. (ed). (1991). *Amar Kaka Ramkinkar (My Uncle Ramkinkar)*. Calcutta: A. Mukharjee and Co. Private Limited.
9. Bajj, R. and Chakraborty, S (td). (2005). *Self-Portrait*. Calcutta: Monchasa Publishing Project.
10. Bandopadhyay, P, M. and P. Das (ed). (1991). *Amar Sahapathi Ramkinkar*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co. Private Limited.
11. Bandopadhyay, P, M. (1980). *Ramkinkar*. Visva-Bharati News.
12. Bandopadhyay, R. and P. Das. (ed). (1991). *Ramkinkar: A Rekha*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co. Private Limited.
13. Benodbehari, M. and K. Chakraborty. (ed). (1983). *Chitrarekha*. Calcutta: Aruna Prakashani.
14. Benodbehari, M. and P. Das. (ed). (1991). *Ramkinkarbabur Katha*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co. Private Limited.
15. Chaitanya, K. (1980). *Ramkinkar-Impact Monumental*. Hindusthan Times.
16. Chanda, H. (1980). *Amar Pratibeshi Ramkinkar*. Visva-Bharati News.
17. Choudhury, S. (2006). Kinkar-da's Firm Brush, Some Colours, Some Lines and Some Recollections. *Ramkinkar Bajj Centenary Exhibition Catalogue*.
18. Choudhury, S. (1980). *Kinkardake Jemon Dekhechi*. Visva-Bharati News.
19. Das Gupta, A. (2006). Visual Metaphors for the Modernist Moments. *Ramkinkar Bajj Centenary Exhibition Catalogue*. Nandan. Kala Bhavan.
20. Dinkar, K. (1963). Ramkinkar. *Lalit Kala Contemporary*. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi.
21. Dinkar, K. (1967). Contemporary Indian Sculpture. *Lalit Kala Contemporary*. Vol. 6. New Delhi. Lalit Kala Akademi .
22. Dinkar, K. (1976). Ramkinkar: His Contribution to Contemporary Art. *Lalit Kala Contemporary*. Vol. 22. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi.
23. Emanul, H. (1992). *Bengal Sculptures: Hindu Iconography up to c. 1250 A.D.* Bangladesh: Bangladesh National Museum.

24. Jaya, A. and P. Das. (ed). (1991). *Shilpi-Manush Ramkinkar*. Calcutta: A. Mukharjee and Co. Private Limited.
25. Edith, B. (2008). *Brancusi and his World*. Carnegie Mellon University Press.
26. Geeta, K. (2000). *When was Modernism? Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*. New Delhi: Tulika Publication.
27. Ghosh, Dr. S. (1980). Tradition and Modernity: A Note. *An Annual Art and Aesthetics*, Kala Bhavan, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan.
28. Ghosh, S. (1980). Notes on the Plastic Formals. *An Annual Art and Aesthetics*, Kala Bhavan, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan.
29. Hore, S. (2006). *Ramkinkar's Drawing. Ramkinkar Baij Centenary Exhibition Catalogue*, Nandan, Kala Bhavan.
30. JanakJhankar, N. (1978). *Some New Trends in Modern Indian Sculpture*. Bombay: Marg Publication.
31. JanakJhankar, N. (1995). *Modern Indian Sculpture: A Brief History*. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Academy.
32. Kamal, S. (1984). *Bharater Bhaskar o Chitrashilpi*. Calcutta: Yogamaya Prakashani.
33. Kar, C. (2002). *Ramkinkar*. Sukhi Grihakone, (March).
34. Koushik, D. (1980). *Blossom of Light*. Visva-Bharati News.
35. Koushik, D. (1974). Introduction in *Ramkinkar. Exhibition Catalogue*, Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan.
36. Koushik, D. (2006). *Ramkinkar. Ramkinkar Baij Centenary Exhibition Catalogue*, Nandan, Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan.
37. Kumar, S. (1980). A Room between Two Rooms. *An Annual Art and Aesthetics*, Kala Bhavan, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan.
38. Kunalkanti, S. and P. Das. (ed). (1991). *Chokhe Dekhte Pachhi Kinkarbabu Ekhono Achen*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co. Private Limited.
39. Mrinal, G. (2008). *Ramkinkar-Challisher Adhunikata*. Kolkata: Pratikkhan.
40. Mukherjee, B. (1980). *Ramkinkar. Exhibition Catalogue*, Visva-Bharati, Chaitra Sammilani.
41. Mukherjee, B. (1980). *Sadhak Shilpi Ramkinkar*. Visva-Bharati News.
42. Mukherjee, B. (2007). *Bandhaphather Baire*. Samhad Pratidin.
43. Mulkraj, A. (1985). *Contemporary Indian Sculpture*. Bombay: Marg Publication.
44. Narzary, J. J. (1980). *A History of Environmental Sculpture and Ramkinkar Baij. An Annual Art and Aesthetics*, Kala Bhavan, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan.
45. Narzary, J. J. (1980). *Ramkinkar Smaran*. Visva-Bharati News.
46. Pal, A. (1980). *The Man and the Artist. An Annual Art and Aesthetics*, Kala Bhavan, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan.
47. Pal, R. (1985). A Few Paintings of Ramkinkar's Last Phase. *Pratikhan*, 4 (5).
48. Paritos, S. (2008). *Adhunik Bharatiya Bhaskaryer janak Ramkinkar*. Calcutta: Dosh.
49. Partha, M. (1994). *Art and Nationalism Colonial India 1850-1922*. Britain: Cambridge University Press.
50. Prabhas, S. and P. Das. (ed). (1991). *Chokhe Dekhte Pachhi Kinkarbabu Ekhono Achen*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co. Private Limited.
51. Pradosh, D. (1988). *The Art of D. P. Roychowdhury*. Calcutta: Birla Academy of Art and Culture.
52. Pran Nath, M. (2001). *Contemporary Art in India- A Perspective*. New Delhi, India: National Book Trust.
53. Prasad, D. (2007). *Ramkinkar Baij's Sculptures*. New Delhi: Tulika Publication.
54. Prasanta, D. (2011). *Ramkinkar: Pioneer of Modern Sculpture*. Kolkata: M. C. Sarkar and Sons Pvt Ltd.
55. Pratima, S. (2006). *Dictionary of Indian Art and Artists*. India: Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd.
56. Radhakrishnan, K. (2012). A Retrospective Comprising 350 Works of Ramkinkar Baij. *Frontline*, 29 (5).
57. Radharani, D. and P. Das. (ed). (1991). *Ami Tomar PashePashe Achi*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co. Private Limited.
58. Sanda, M. (1995). *Constantin Brancusi: A Survey of his Work*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
59. Shiva, K. and P. Das. (ed). (1991). *Ramkinkarer Jalronger Chobi*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co. Private Limited.
60. Sivakumar, R. (1997). Santiniketan: The Making of a Contextual Modernism. *Exhibition Catalogue*, National Gallery of Modern Art.