

GOKURA

India - Japan Confluence



Mumbiram & Party

DISTANT DRUMMER

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SAMPLE PAGES 1-19, 60-69



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Distant Drummer, 2019

www.distantdrummer.de

First published 2006: Gokula Auction - New Era of Japan-India Relations

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ISBN: 978-3-943040-12-8

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About Artist Mumbiram

Foreword

The 'Gokura' catalogue is about the story of an Indian artist, who followed his muse to Japan.

The five oil paintings artist Mumbiram created in Japan are astonishing in their innocence, romance, simplicity and boldness.

They are wonderful examples of art produced from the confluence of Indian and Japanese cultures. They are also wonderful symbols of friendship between India and Japan in our times. They tell the story of a young Japanese woman who travelled to India attracted by its spiritual treasures and artistic excellence. There she resided in holy places and lived a life inundated by love, devotion and creativity.

The paintings have a story-like quality found in Indian as well as Japanese miniatures. Every detail is full of meaning. Indeed to discover these details is the joy of these paintings. They invoke images of a spiritual India in the most happy and optimistic light. They inspire hopes of a way of life that is peaceful yet full of adventure and mystery. The adventure is into the inner world of mysteries of existence. This is the heritage of India that we all would like to see preserved.

This Gokura ensemble is a tribute to love between people that goes beyond cultural differences and causes a renaissance through the coming together of great ideals.

“Love in the Time of War”



“Love in the Time of War”

Watercolour, S.H. Godbole, 1940s

Mumbiram’s maternal grandfather Mr. Shankar Hari Godbole was one of the finest watercolor painters of his time.

Of the sixteen grandchildren of Artist S.H. Godbole

Mumbiram was the only one to take to art.

The Japanese clay vase that appears in this water-color still-life painting occupied a place of pride in the Godbole household. Kimono clad figures of men and women in a ponderous garden setting were painted on the clay vase in subtle muted shades. The realism and details of the half-peeled tangerines in the foreground prepare the eye to imagine the details on the vase that are rendered with an impressionistic flair. The abundant variety of flowers that are stuffed in the vase are arranged and painted in an impromptu haze that embellishes the beauty of the vase without overwhelming it.

The painting is verily a fine instance of one great artist paying tribute to another from a far away fairy-like land. As a child Mumbiram loved spending time at his grandfather-artist’s place. Mumbiram had never been to any art-school but had earned painting from his grandfather.



“Philosophy in the Times of War”

Krishna as Arjuna’s Charioteer, Balinese print.

The best beloved spiritual text of India, the Bhagavad Gita is a dialog between Krishna and Arjuna. Young Sachiko’s first encounter with the spiritual splendor of classical India was through a Japanese translation of the Bhagavad Gita.

Young Sachiko’s Fascination with India

Young Sachiko from Chiba Prefecture in Japan was attending the Tokyo School of Design. How exactly she came under the magical spell of India we will never know. Among other things she read a Japanese translation of the Bhagavad Gita spoken by Krishna over 5000 years ago. One thing led to another. Not only was she fascinated by everything about Krishna, she was enchanted by everything she read about India. How she wished she could wear a saree! How she wished she could speak Hindi if not Sanskrit! How she wished to discover the soulful mysteries of classical Indian music! Doing a temporary job at an office Sachiko saved enough money to make a trip to Krishna’s Vrindavan near Delhi. Without informing her parents, without letting know her room-mates at her college dormitory, Sachiko boarded a flight to New Delhi. It had to be a very brief visit of only four days. She got a glimpse of the magical land of Vrindavan. The meandering Yamuna river. The forests. The peacocks. The cows. The temples. The devotees. The songs. The winding narrow lanes. The shops. The clothes. It was irresistible.



“Iconic Krishna“

Watercolour, 1980

She had to do it again. And once more again. She made three short visits within a year. On her fourth visit she was determined never to go back again.

In the Kaliya Daha area of Vrindavan stands a temple that is peculiarly conspicuous. Its red brick spire sports an unfinished look. It is not plastered and decorated like other temples. This is where Kishori Baba the oldest holy man of Vrindavan resides.

Sachiko obtained spiritual initiation from Kishori Baba. From now on she will be called 'Gokula'. Gokul is the tiny hamlet across the Yamuna river where baby Krishna was taken to soon after his birth, in the middle of the night, to escape the wrath of the tyrannical King Kamsa. In the Japanese language 'Gokura' means paradise. What a wonderful congruence! Gokula will not wear any other attire than a saree, the beautiful six meter long colourful cloth that Indian women wrap around themselves in exquisite individual ways. On her forehead she wears a vertical sandalwood tilak decoration that vaishnava Krishna-lovers wear. Her head is always covered with one end of her saree when she steps out of her residence.



The Madan Mohan Mandir was built on the sublime inspiration of Sanatana Gosvami nearly 500 years ago. This was where Krishna's beloved Radha came every day for Sun worship. The ascetic brothers Rupa and Sanatana were always merged in meditation upon loving affairs of Krishna and his beloved Radha. They composed treatises in Sanskrit that are the foundations of the Rasa Theory of Love and Devotion.

Mumbiram's Personalist Painting carries on the same Rasa tradition in an exquisite avant garde avatar.

Mumbiram in Vrindavan

Artist Mumbiram arrived in Vrindavan at high noon on a late May day in 1987. Although he has been a Krishna-lover all his life, this was his first ever visit to the blessed land of Vrindavan where Krishna grew up as an adorable cowherd boy.

The ancient Madan Mohan Temple built by Sanatan Gosvami was where he had wanted to reside. He was turned away. Then he tried several dharmashalas, community residences for travellers, supported by charitable organizations. There also he was not welcome. Finally he entered a hut of low-caste 'ahir' residents of Vrindavan and begged for shelter. The elder woman of the household led him to the Ramanand Ashram in the 'dwadas aditya' area. This was where Krishna's beloved Radha used to go for her daily sunworship. On the insistence of the old woman the bachelor residents of the ashram let Mumbiram stay in a spare room below ground level that had no windows. In the courtyard there was a Kadamba tree. Soon Mumbiram evolved a daily routine for himself. In the mornings he would go to Mother Yamuna for a swim in the cool waters.



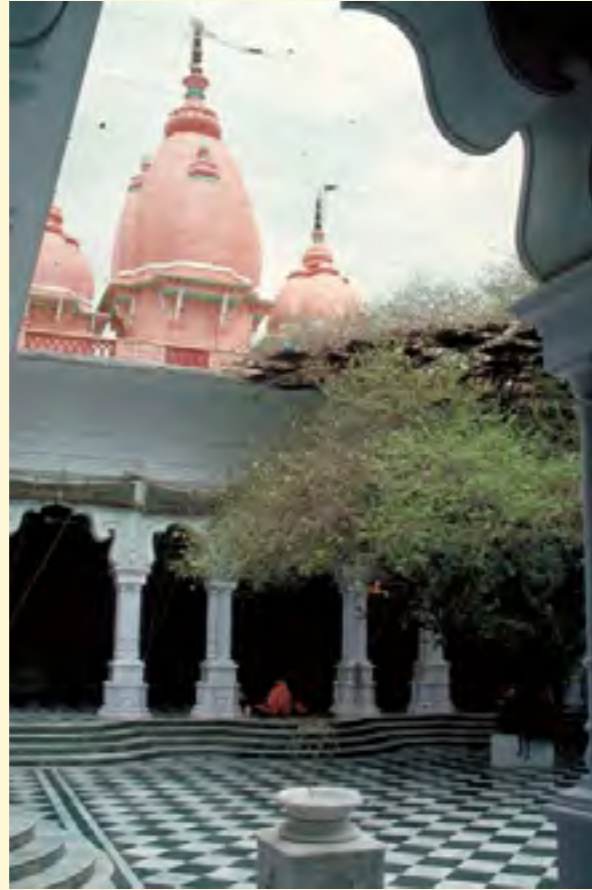
The supremely attractive adolescent Krishna sported amorously in Vrindavan on the banks of the meandering Yamuna river. A life lived meditating on those guileless passions of simple cowherd boys and girls is considered to be the ultimate in love and liberation.



Then Mumbiram would go to a certain dharmashala that served rice and moong-beans khichadi for breakfast. Then he would walk all morning visiting different temples along the banks of the river. Ruins of abandoned havelis at picturesque Keshi Ghat conjure visions of romantic rendezvous. He would happily appreciate different architectural styles of different temples and meditate upon the different episodes in the life of Krishna and his associates that these different temples commemorate.

At noon time he would visit a Punjabi dharmashala that served bhakri bread and lentil dahl. There he would have his noon-time meal along with many gentle old women from Bengal and Assam who were clad in white sarees. The sun was so hot that most everybody stayed indoors for the next three hours. The afternoons were spent visiting the holy men of Vrindavan, learned scholars of the science and art of Love of God.

Ruins of abandoned havelis at picturesque Keshi Ghat conjure visions of romantic rendezvous.



First encounter at Krishna-Balaram Mandir

The Krishna-Balaram Mandir stands in the Ramana-reti area of Vrindavan. It is near the forests on the outskirts of Vrindavan where Krishna and his elder brother Balaram loved to sport with their friends while tending the calves in the forest. This newest addition to the hundreds of Krishna temples of Vrindavan was built in white marble through the untiring efforts of young devotees from all over the world. Every Sunday afternoon the devotees of this temple hold an open house feast for all. It is a joyous congregation of Krishna admirers from far corners of the world. Both Gokula and Mumbiram came to the Krishna-Balaram Mandir for Sunday feast on a hot June noon. Both had noticed each other and would have liked to meet and get acquainted. But it was not to be quite yet.

The Krishna Balaram Mandir in Ramana Reti is a modern day classic built through international effort.

A pilgrimage place of East-West confluence.

Krishna's elder brother Balaram loved to play in the forests on the sandy banks of the river.



“Dreaming of India”
(Oil on Canvas, Japan, 1988)

The very first oil painting Mumbiram created in Japan had a reclining Gokula “Dreaming of India”. Gokula has fallen asleep while reading a book about India. Jagannath has appeared in her dream. Gokula likes Jagannath idols. Mumbiram has chosen Jagannath idol as representing Krishna. That is significant because it has an equivalent of sorts in the Daruma idol of Japan.

The patterns on Gokula’s saree and on the Indian printed handloom sheet are created with carved potatoes as printing blocks.

Mumbiram has included the blue porcelain bird of fantasy from Gokula’s home that had fascinated him. It is the equivalent of the peacock that is so prominent in Krishna’s retinue.

Notice the very pleasing combination of the neatness of the Japanese interior and the curvilinear Indian mood.

The intimate intertwining of the artist’s life and his art is the vital ingredient that goes in making of such a natural Rasa Classic.



Detail of “Meditation in India”

Mumbiram treats every single painting as a unique creation. He does not let his art get into a stereotyped style.

Making paintings in Japan was a great challenge. The rendering has to be true to several distinct realities. He is the artist who made mural masterpieces such as the “*Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis*” and exquisite charcoal portraits of dark beautiful rag-pickers of India. Now he was in Japan which has its own tradition of paintings that have the tidiness and grace of ink-and-brush calligraphy.

The other small vertical canvas he was working on shows Gokula sitting in a *vajraasana* yogik posture that is practiced during prayer in India as well as in Japan. Gokula was Sachko’s new name in meditation. Gokul is the holy land on the bank of the Yamuna river where the mythical blue boy Krishna lived as a baby. In Japanese Gokura means paradise.

Gokula’s search for a devotional consciousness brought her new ideas about man’s search for beauty. She saw art and spirituality as two sides of the same coin. She enjoyed making garlands, lighting oil lamps, arranging flowers.



“Meditation in India”
(Oil on Canvas, Japan, 1988)

Gokula is sitting in *vajraasana* yogik posture that is practiced during prayer in India as well as in Japan. Gokula thoroughly enjoys posing for the artist because he sees painting as an enlightening experience for the artist and also his model.

A little altar in front of her has Jagannath bedecked in a deep purple turban matching Gokula’s saree and wearing orange flower garlands. The deliberate juxtaposition of ochres and purples on a background of greys and whites just about brings out the essence of the mood of spiritual India. The artist treats his brushes like flowers and his canvases like altars. For him the essence of art is to sublimate passion and make renunciation creative. Hence the combination of ochres and purples, the coming together of art and spirituality, to show Gokula’s meditation. Making garlands, lighting oil lamps, arranging flowers. The spirit of offering back some of creation’s bounty in a mood of supplication, gratitude and celebration is the key to a happy and prosperous world civilization.



Anyone who has visited Mumbiram's Pune studio would recognize that this is a scene at his Pune studio.



There is a portrait of "*The Constructionwali in the Afternoon*" that Mumbiram made some years before. She is sitting at the same spot where Gokula is sitting. Even the blue crystal ball in the window appears in both these paintings. How wonderful that Mumbiram made this live portrait of Gokula in Japan but she is seen sitting in Mumbiram's studio in Pune in India.



Mumbiram treats his brushes like flowers and his canvases like altars. For him the essence of art is to sublimate passion and make renunciation creative.



Gokula and Mumbiram both had come to the realization that art and spirituality can be two sides of the same coin. Art at its best can be an enlightening experience to the artist as well as his muse. Art gives wings to man.



You are welcome to find out more about the romantic world of
Rasa Renaissance, that bring us good-tidings that the barren
void in Art and Spirituality will once again resound
with the passionate calls of cuckoos maddened by mango
blossoms and hordes of bumblebees lusting after honey.

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