

**“FOREST WOMEN  
visiting  
Krishna and the Gopis”**

**Mumbiram's  
Flagship of  
RASA RENAISSANCE**

**DISTANT DRUMMER**

\*\*\*\*\*

This has been only an attempt  
at putting this multidimensional  
narrative about an important  
masterpiece of our times  
and its three fold impact  
into words.

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**All artworks and photos by Artist Mumbiram.**

# Foreword



The “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” painting is rightfully considered the flagship painting of Rasa Renaissance, Mumbiram’s epochal contribution to the world of 21st century Art.

Yet so far there existed no writing that can claim to be a comprehensive statement about how it came to be conceived, what birthing pangs it underwent, what circumstances it encountered, how it was ‘adopted’ by different enthusiasts and yet kept coming back to Mumbiram’s legendary atelier at the Mandai marketplace in the heart of the historic city Pune etc. etc.

Nor does there exist any single treatise about its ‘never before’ features in Art, Society and Spirituality, that make it the iconic painting of Rasa Renaissance.

This here is a diligently researched presentation that aims to fulfill both these needs to reveal the Forest Women painting as the flagship of the nascent Rasa Renaissance movement that Mumbiram has conceived and ushered.



According to Mumbiram, Rasa Art does not exist only in the painting on the canvas. Rasa Art consists of the Rasa interactions between the Artist and the Muses, the Artist and the Admirers and also the Muses and the Admirer.

This document here does a very precious job of narrating the circumstances beginning from the US of 1967 when Mumbiram arrived at Berkeley California and continuing with his moves to Seattle Washington, Potomac Maryland and Cambridge Massachusetts, among other places. Then it briefly describes Mumbiram's dramatic return to India in 1979.

Back in India Mumbiram's tryst with rag-pickers, tribals, holy men, visiting westerners, art-lovers, poets, beggars, all of that is described with sensitive Rasik appreciation.

Through these narratives we get glimpses of Mumbiram's soulful interactions with his Muses and his Admirers. It also shines upon the happy chance encounters between the exotic Muses of the indigenous ethnic variety and passionate India Lovers from far corners of the world.

A historical treatise called Agni Puraan (history revealed through the medium of the fire deity), that claims its origin to Infallible Divine Revelations, introduces an entity called Rasa that rules all human emotions and activities. It declares that the Supreme Being is all Rasa.

रसो वै सः ॥

Raso vai Sah



The living entity may approach the Supreme through Rasa. The relation between the Living entity and the Supreme is ruled by the emotional quality or the Rasa of that interaction.

From one specific verse of the Rasa Panchadhyayi (Five Songs of Rasa), from the Tenth Canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam, Mumbiram deftly perceived that even the Pulindis, ‘uncivilized’ forest-dwellers, were dear to Krishna as the Rasa of their innate intuitive attraction was guileless and sublime.

पूर्णाः पुलिन्द्य उरुगायपदाब्जराग-  
श्रीकुङ्कुमेन दयितास्तनमण्डितेन।  
तद्दर्शनस्मररुजस्तृणरूपितेन  
लिम्पन्त्य आननकुचेषु जहुस्तदाधिम् ॥१०-२१-१७॥

Some may find delight in the egalitarian message of that episode. We are impressed by the revelation that sensitivity to the forces of aesthetic attraction makes any Rasa interaction sublime.



Rasa Renaissance as conceived by Mumbiram anticipates the rapid changes in, and also entirely new circumstances of, Advanced Technologies of capturing, processing, storing, implanting as well as reproducing visual images.

Judging by the prevalent static concepts about art, advances in technology would nearly make the position of the artist himself redundant. In the ambiance of Rasa Renaissance the canvas itself is no more than a symbol of all the emotional interactions that take place in the creation and appreciation of art. The Rasa excellence of those interactions is the goal of any Rasa Art endeavor.

By giving the emotional interactions the place of Prime importance in Art, Rasa Renaissance is restoring the Mighty Force that art is capable of exerting for the foundation of a happy and healthy civilization.

Rasa Art is finding a rebirth in this Rasa Renaissance through the fascinating intertwining between the Rasa Artist's Life and his Art.

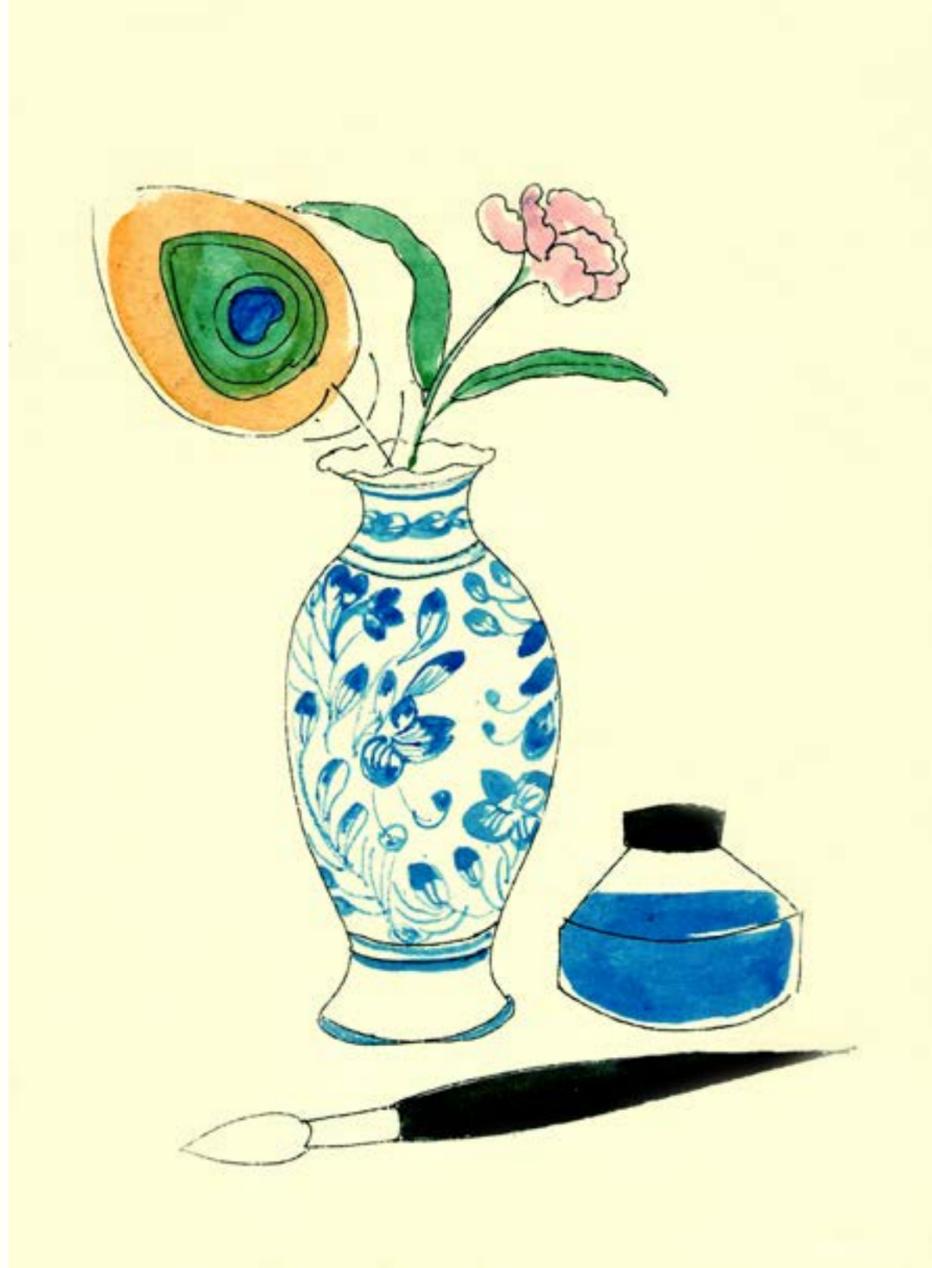
Mumbiram has found a universal meaning to the concept of Pulindas.

Mumbiram has brought out the esoteric Prema Vivarta principle of theophily for the easy joyful practice of all.

Mumbiram promises that Art, i.e. Rasa Art, is able to reconcile the Space Age with the Bow-and-Arrow Age and even 'make economic disparity toothless' !

The idea of Rasa Renaissance has arrived on the Feet of Doves !

**Viva Rasa Renaissance !!!**



**A Rasik Artist's fascination  
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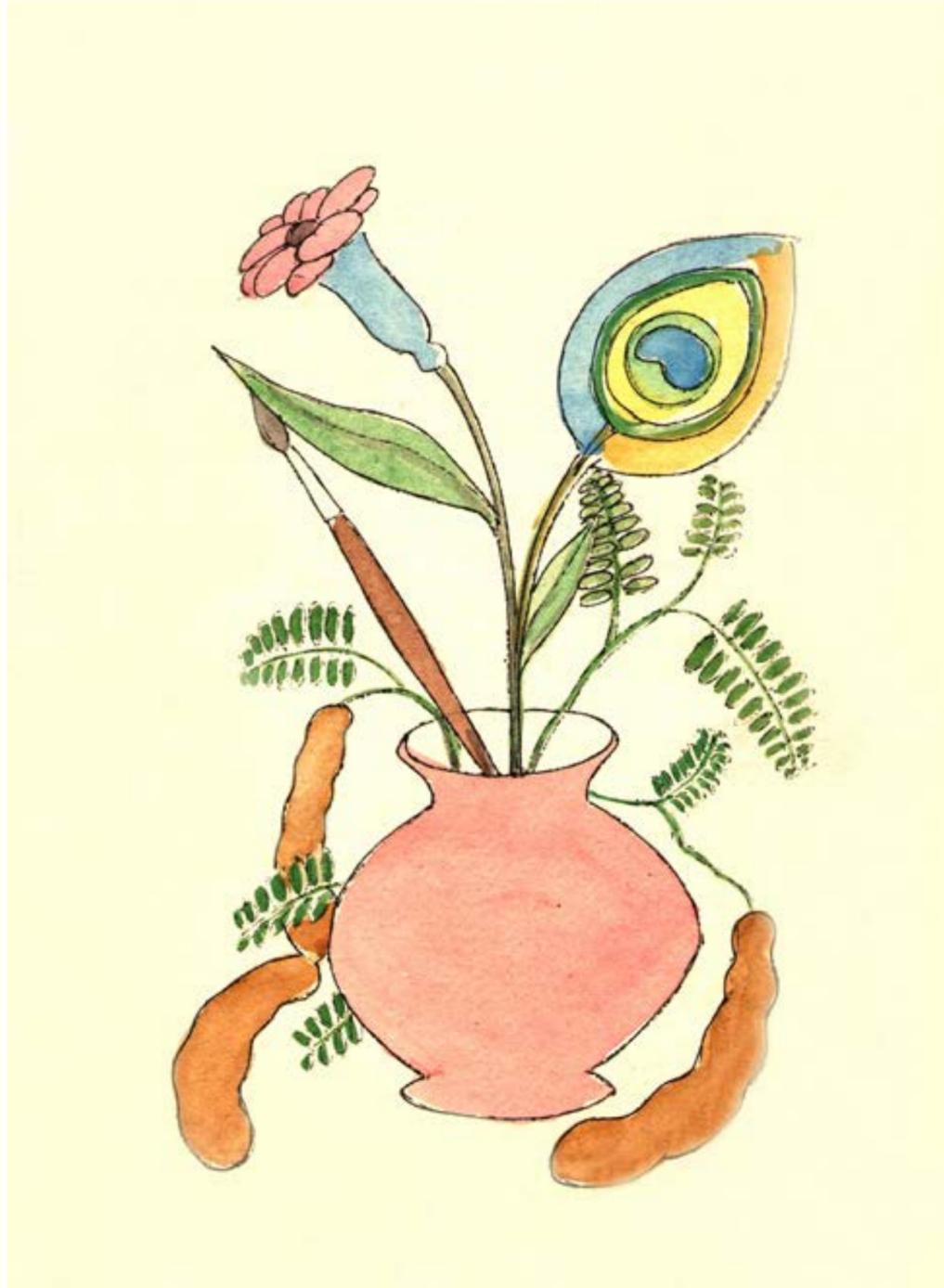
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“Laxmi’s Sakhi in Samaadhi”

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**An account of how the Pulinda  
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Govardhan Mountain mentioned  
in the Rasa Panchadhyayi  
of Shrimad Bhagavatam  
incited a Rasik artist's mind to visions  
that launched the epochal innovations of  
Personalism  
and  
Rasa Renaissance  
in Visual Arts**

# Preface:

## Flagship of Rasa Renaissance

The oil painting “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” is the flagship of Mumbiram’s Art of Rasa Renaissance which is Mumbiram’s most important contribution to the world of art.

Rasa Renaissance is what Mumbiram has been proclaiming in his artistic work.

The term ‘Rasa’ has now been adopted into the English language. It is a Sanskrit word that denotes the quality of emotional fulfilment that a work of art evokes.

Rasa Renaissance has evolved and come to exist naturally while Mumbiram has been following his aesthetic and spiritual preferences, mindless of career and fame but attracted to the beauty of life and people on the one hand and the esoteric scriptures of Vaishnava tradition, that have been topics of meditation of sages and poets, on the other hand.



Mumbiram (1992)

Besides its impact in the world of art the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” is loaded with spiritual and social nuances which are reflections of the artist’s bearing and as interesting as his life spent in search of beauty. Even connoisseurs of the Krishna paradigm will have some revelations from the “Forest Women” painting. Many of Mumbiram’s artworks are in the ‘Prema Vivarta’ mood and emphasize ‘Raganuga Bhakti’.

What was the inspiration behind this oil-painting and how did this final and third version manifest itself? What mystic message had captured Mumbiram’s attention? Who were the people who witnessed its creation and how did it become the centre of attraction in his studio at the busy downtown market place of Pune in the 80s and 90s? One also wonders how the artist dealt with the caste system of India which was on everybody’s mind all the time.

The inspiration and creation of the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” are also the story of the artist’s becoming, which goes back to the US of the 70s, and even more to the times when he was growing up and watching people of Phasepardhi tribes visiting his father’s law offices.

Yet its deepest meaning evolves from an esoteric Sanskrit verse of eternal relevance. Mumbiram’s enchanting interpretation of that verse is bringing the mysterious, forgotten Pulinda people into the limelight. It also is an innovative approach taking spirituality to a universal level.

The “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” was the centre of attraction in Mumbiram’s legendary studio in Pune, India, for over a decade and changed hands several times until it came to be in a private collection in Germany.

This flagship painting is a union of art and spirituality. It celebrates Rasa as a universal experience of divine love. Its time has come!



***“Forest Women  
visiting Krishna  
and the Gopis”***

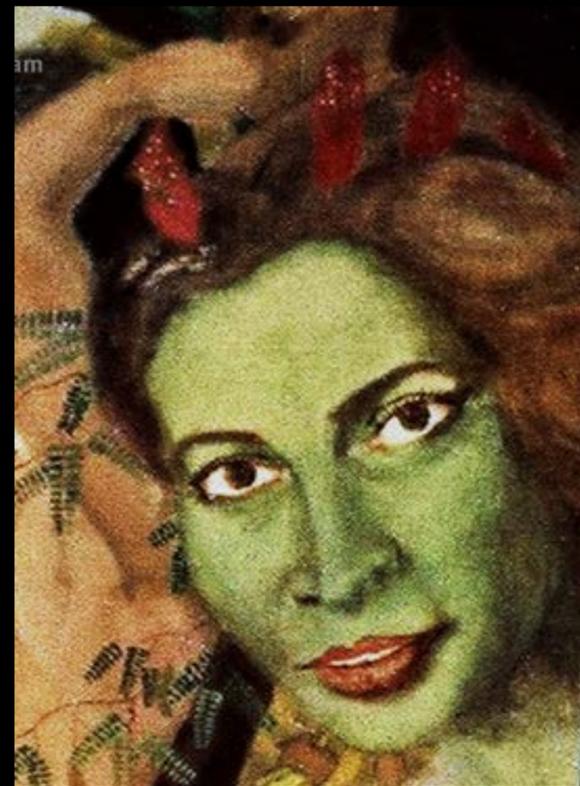
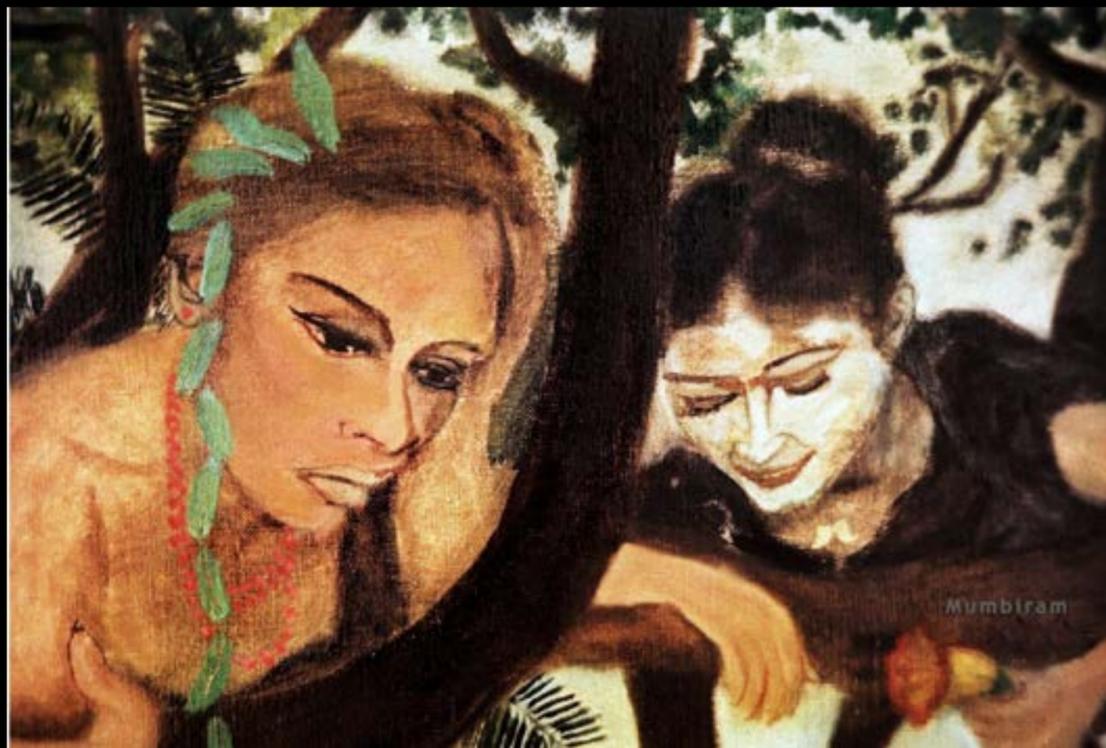
Oil on canvas, 1985



In this tumultuous vision of an afternoon gathering  
by the riverside every one is seen  
engaged in a very unique activity.  
Each one of them is in a different mood.  
It's ecstatic.

We seem to be sharing the very intimate and person-  
al emotional state of each one of them.  
There is not a trace of stylisation.  
They are all together but very uniquely.

Some have flowers in their hair. Some are wearing  
garlands of forest flowers around their neck.  
There are birds hiding in the confusion.  
The vision is compelling.



The composition is entirely made of faces.

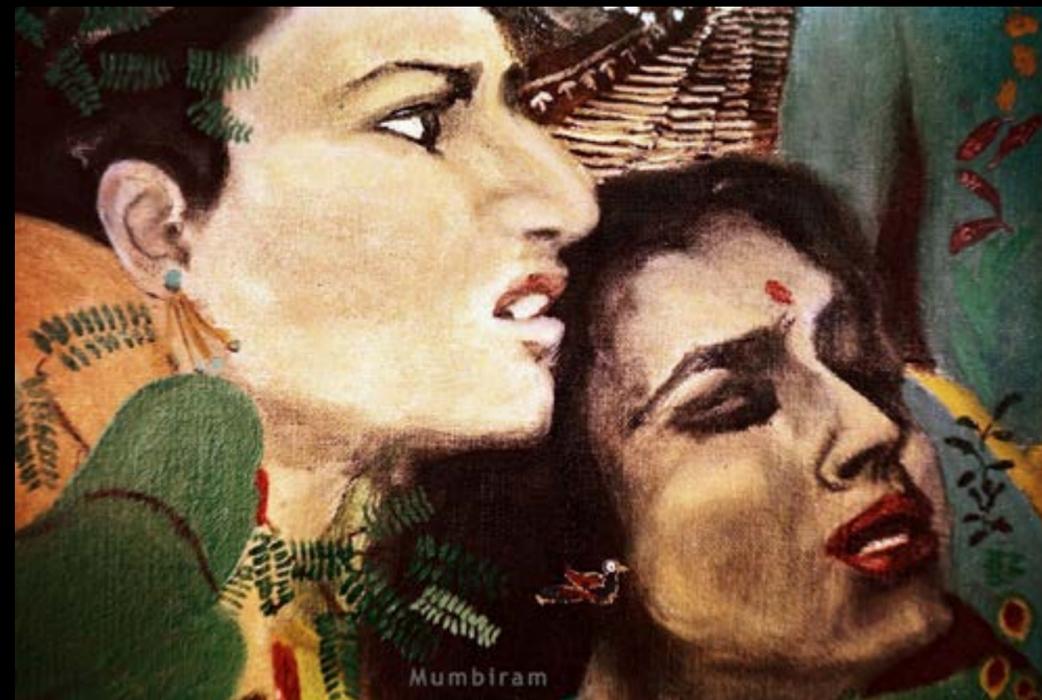
The natural ease in rendering, the great variety of ecstatic moods and variety of human types show Mumbiram's acutely evolved sense of portraiture.

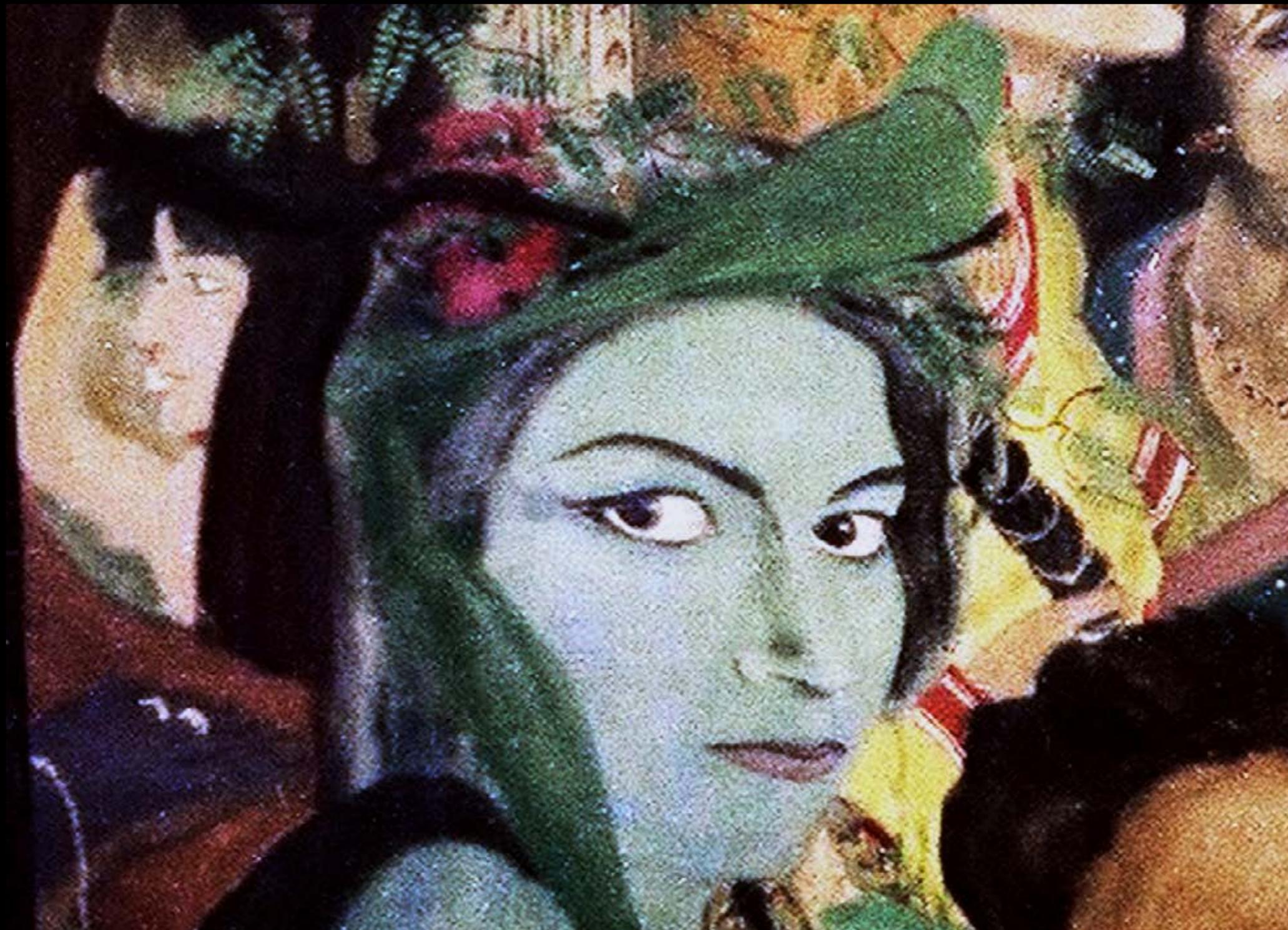
The space is created solely through juxtaposition of faces and their gazes.

Some are trying to attract each other's attention.  
Some are daydreaming.

Look carefully, each one is dressed very differently and very creatively.

Some are looking directly at us  
and some are totally unaware of the viewer.





You see the faces of people from all over the world.  
What is happening here?



Mumbiram in Berkeley, 1969

# **1. Inspiration far away from Home**

## **First Visions in Seattle**



**\*\*\*\*\***

**It was in the USA of the 70s that the journey of the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” masterpiece began.**

**Berkeley, Seattle, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Boston-Cambridge were some of the places where Mumbiram’s aesthetic search took wings.**

**It was during this time that his collection of cryptic poems, titled “Prema Vivarta - Delusions in Ecstasy”, was created.**

**It was also the time that the first version of the “Forest Women” appeared on the scene and made him make certain bold decisions.**

**Was it the “Forest Women” who inspired Mumbiram to take these bold decisions at this early stage in his life as an artist?**

**\*\*\*\*\***



**Berkeley Campus of the University of California  
overlooking the San Fransisco Bay**

## **Art and Academics**

The inspiration of the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” goes back to the US of the 60s and 70s where Mumbiram had gone to become an economist or mathematician. Yet art had been his first love. As a child in India he saw his grandfather artist, S.H.Godbole, at the top of his artistic life. He was a famous watercolour artist of his times and was admired by the British during colonial times. After India’s independence, Godbole’s fortune changed in a dramatic way. As a teenager, Mumbiram, then named Dhananjay by his parents, was persuaded to go for something more ‘substantial’. Being good at mathematics and at the top of his class at the College of Engineering Pune he was given a scholarship at the University of California in Berkeley as a graduate student in mathematical system theory in 1967 when he was 20 years old.

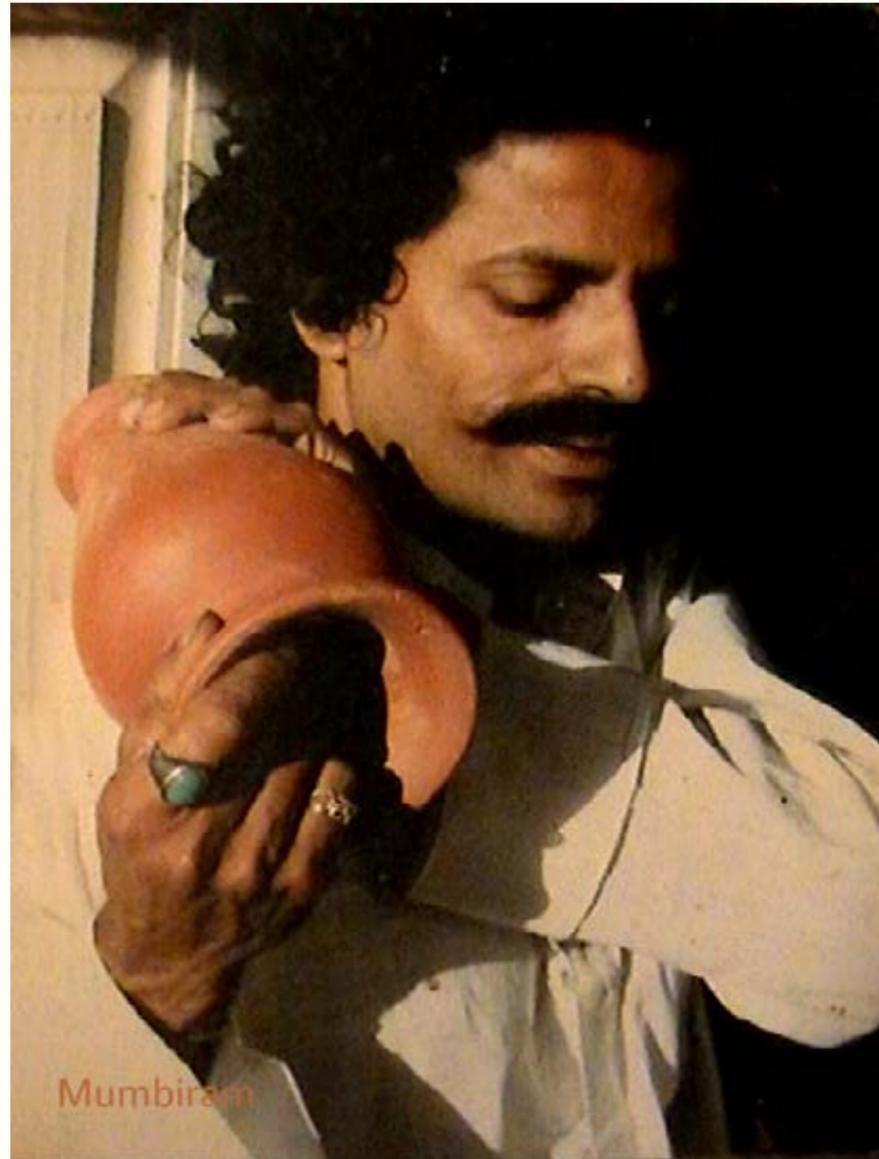


**Mumbiram as a brilliant graduate student  
in Berkeley in 1969**

Mumbiram was doing exceptionally well at academics. He felt right at ease, even ecstatic, to discover the world of axiomatic Mathematics at Berkeley. Differential Geometry and Differential Topology were his favorite as well as his forte. His doctoral dissertation was about a multisector economy that has money as a control parameter. With a mathematical model as a multidimensional surface he could compare performances of the economy under different regimes and economies. His evaluation committee had Stephen Smale the Fields Prize winner Mathematician and Gerard Debreu who would go on to get the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics as members. A post-doctoral assignment at Stanford University was in the offing.

How did he decide to abandon academic career at this height of success?

When Mumbiram arrived in Berkeley he had no idea that he had landed into the vortex of a 'cultural revolution'. All of America was experiencing what in hindsight



In the 'West' the Aquarius sign of Zodiac is represented as a water carrier emptying a pitcher of water from his/her shoulder. This photo was made by a reluctant American scholar from Iowa who was challenged to click this spontaneous avatar conjured by Mumbiram, around early 1980's in Pune.

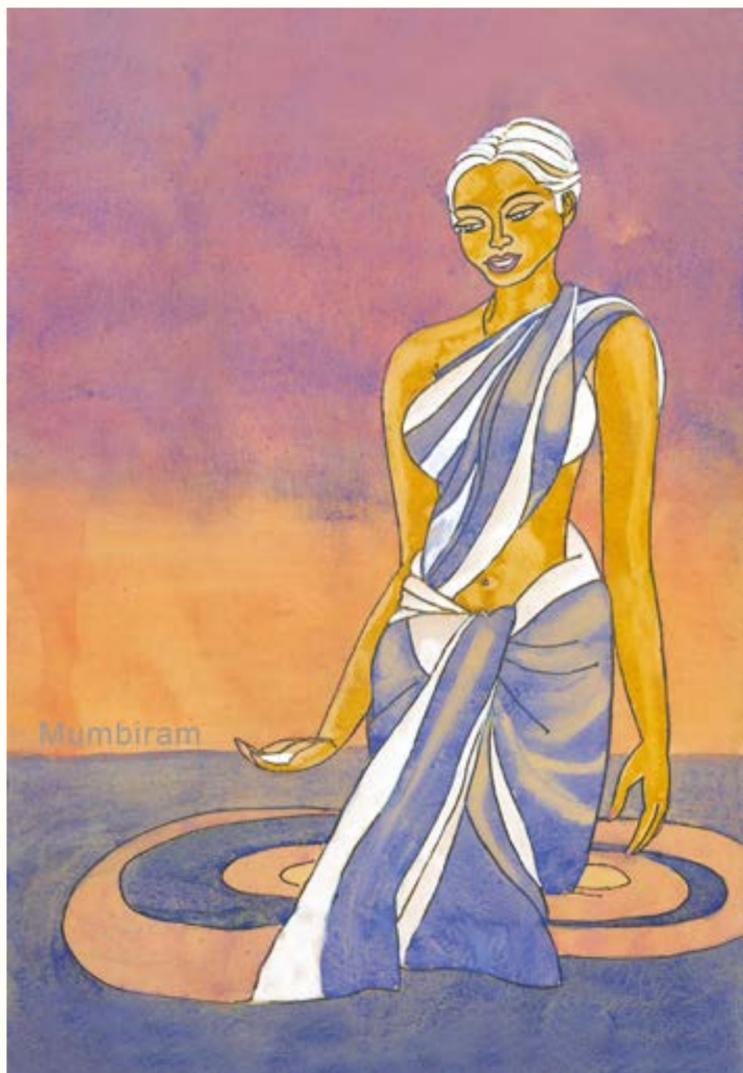
is called the "Counter Culture of the 60s". San Francisco and Berkeley across the Bay were leading the waves. The song "Age of Aquarius" had become the theme song of that super-charged atmosphere.

*This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius !  
When the moon is in the Seventh House  
And Jupiter aligns with Mars  
Then peace will guide the planets  
And love will steer the stars  
This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius !*

*Harmony and understanding  
Sympathy and trust abounding  
No more falsehoods or derisions  
Golden living dreams of visions  
Mystic crystal revelation  
And the mind's true liberation  
Aquarius! Aquarius!*

Astrologically, this Great Age is of harmony, egalitarianism, understanding, innovation and intellectual curiosity. It is culturally more intellectual, networked, and integrated around the globe. It is an age of love, light, humanity, new ideas and a broad perspective.

Mumbiram's arrival to America in September 1967 was nothing less than Providential ! It had happened at the right time without being planned so.

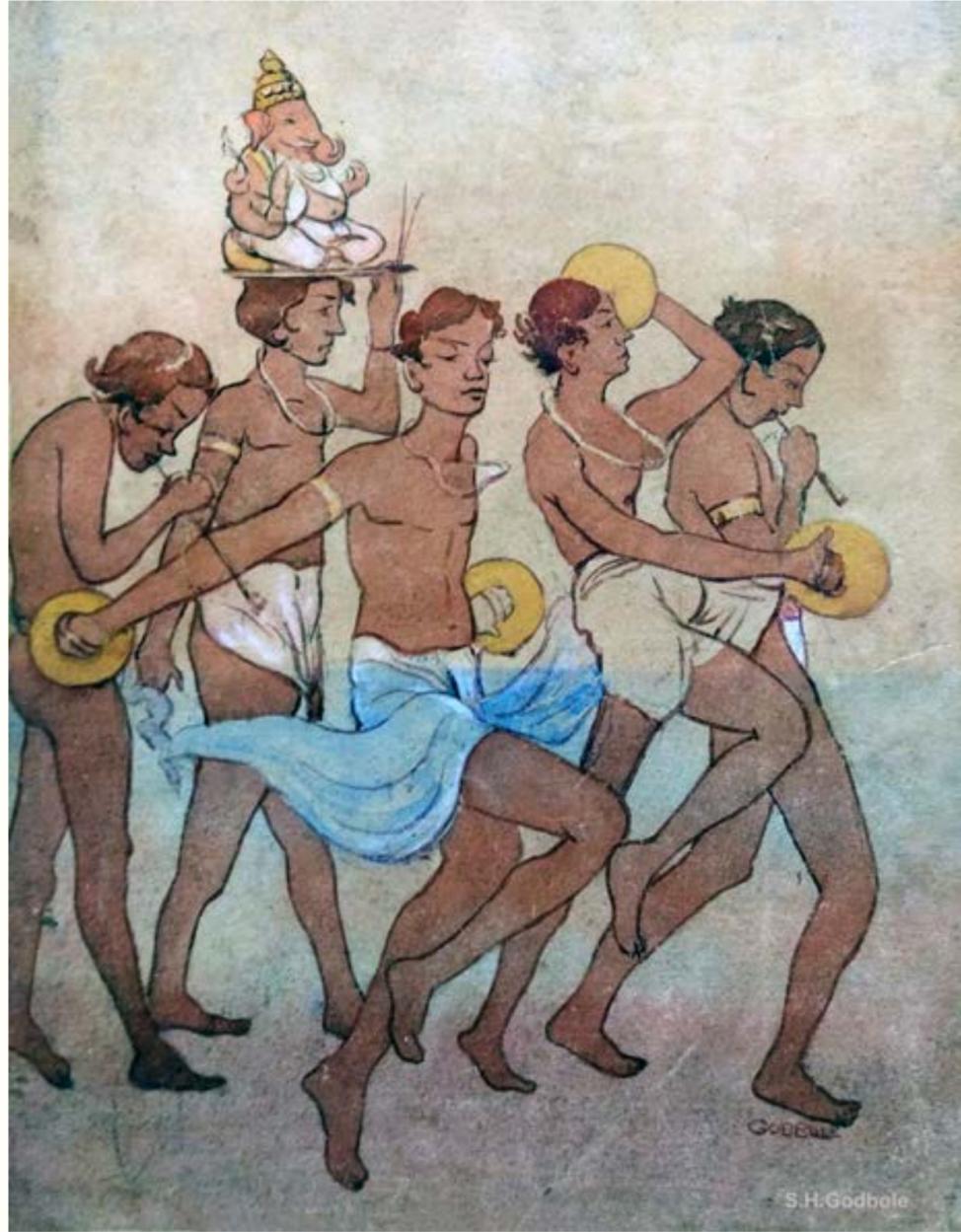


### “Age of Aquarius”

The lady with Buddha-like features is standing in water with a palmful of water in her right hand. This is how you made a solemn vow in the Vedic culture. This rendering is from 1980's in Pune. Westerners loved the spirit of gentle but firm resolve of the austere lady. Add to that Mumbiram's aesthetically delightful, spiritually potent, harmonious rendering. Everyone felt she was 'Age of Aquarius' incarnate.

During those tumultuous times of the 60s and 70s, two things were rekindled: his first love, that was art; and his love for Krishna. Mumbiram described that time in the article *“In Search of Art that transcends Culture”* (Ravivar Sakaal, Pune, 1985) some years later:

*“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*



**“Young Men with Ganesha on Ocean Beach”**

S.H. Godbole, Watercolour, 1930

*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.”*

Mumbiram always had a philosophical perspective about everything throughout his academic career. He had come to the conclusion that it is the aesthetic choice that rules the destinies of individuals and societies. He felt that aesthetics have a bigger impact on society than mathematics. He was convinced that the prosperity and freedom of a people entirely depend on a natural healthy aesthetic.

As a child he loved watching his grandfather artist paint in watercolour. His childhood memories were full of beautiful days spent at his grandfather’s house.



**“At the Foot of Mount Olympus”**

**Watercolour, 1971**

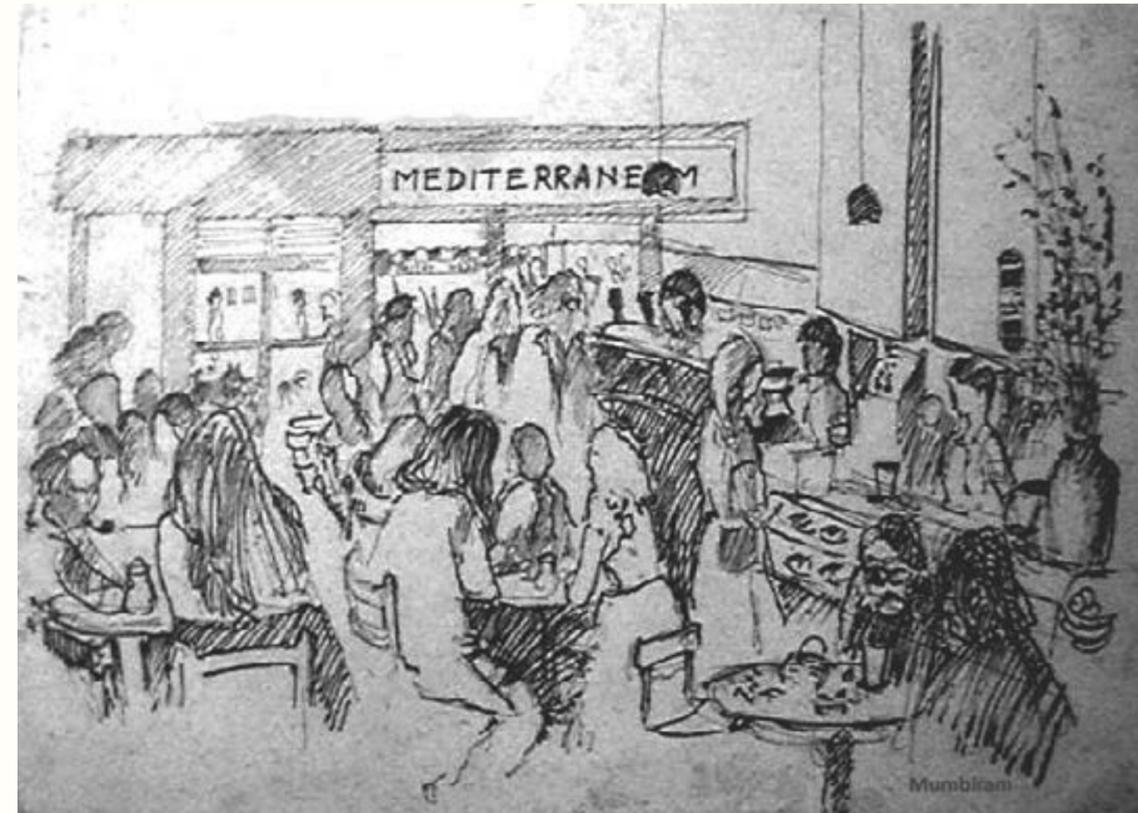
Even though geographically far away, while in the US, the connection to paints and brushes was always there.

One day at the Berkeley campus there was a stand where one could try out one’s creativity with colours. Mumbiram was drawn to it like a puppy and soon found himself immersed in that world of beautiful lines and colours. His grandfather had taught him how to use the brush and apply the colours when he was only few years old and he had won prizes at art-competitions for children. His grandfather had hoped his grandson would follow his love for art.

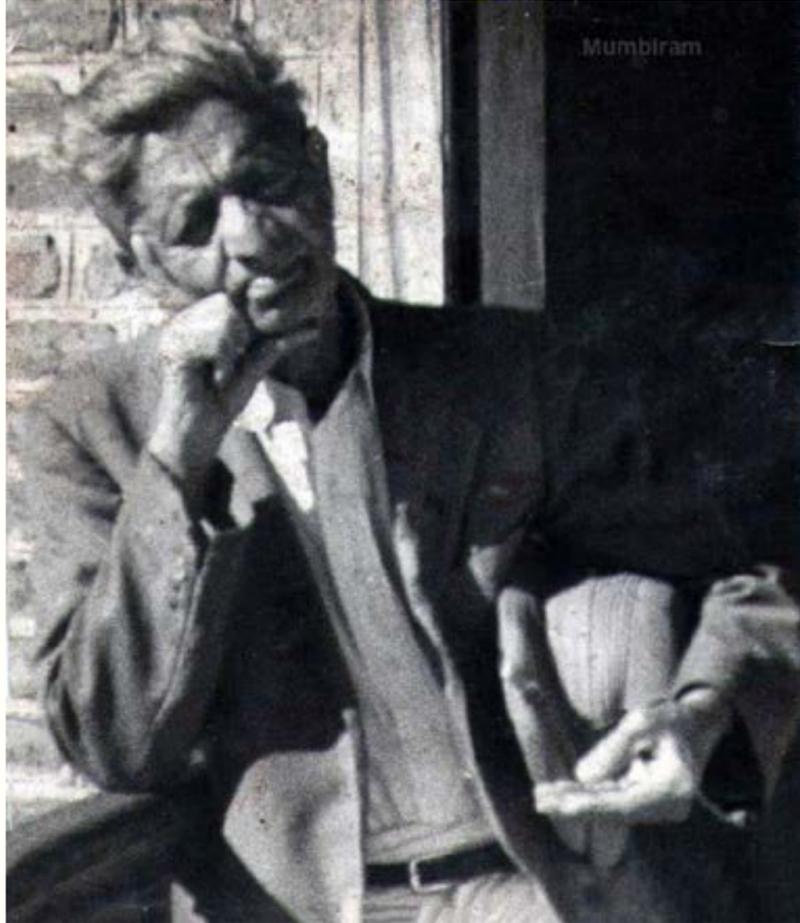
Mumbiram decided to buy paints and brushes and began to make sketches in his rented room in Berkeley. He had become friends with a girl who also liked art. Together they experienced the ecstatic moments of creativity. In his station-wagon they went around painting all along. *“At the Foot of Mount Olympus”* is one of his paintings made during that time.



**“Berkeley Cafes”**  
Ink & Brush, 1969, 1970



**Mumbiram was happily acclimatised and assimilated with the tumultuous atmosphere of the cultural revolution that Berkeley was leading in America of the 60s. These postcards made by Mumbiram in 1972 show the atmosphere in the iconic cafés on Euclid Avenue (left) and Telegraph Avenue (right).**



**S.H. Godbole, Pune, 1967**

**Mumbiram has always felt eternally grateful to his grandfather artist S.H. Godbole who was a living example and inspiration for Mumbiram at a very young age.**

**When he came to know that his grandfather had passed away, he decided to leave Berkeley behind and start a life as a full-fledged artist. He has expressed his sentiments at that time in the Marathi articles published many years later.**

*“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.”*

*(Mumbiram in “In Search of Art that transcends Culture”,  
Ravivar Sakal, Pune, 1985)*



**“Bullock Cart Caravan returning Home after Sunset”**

Watercolour, S.H. Godbole, 1940s

*“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 Reagan. I threw it in the wind and also left California in search of a new aesthetic ideal.”*

*(Mumbiram in “In Search of Art that transcends Culture”,  
Ravivar Sakal, Pune, 1985)*

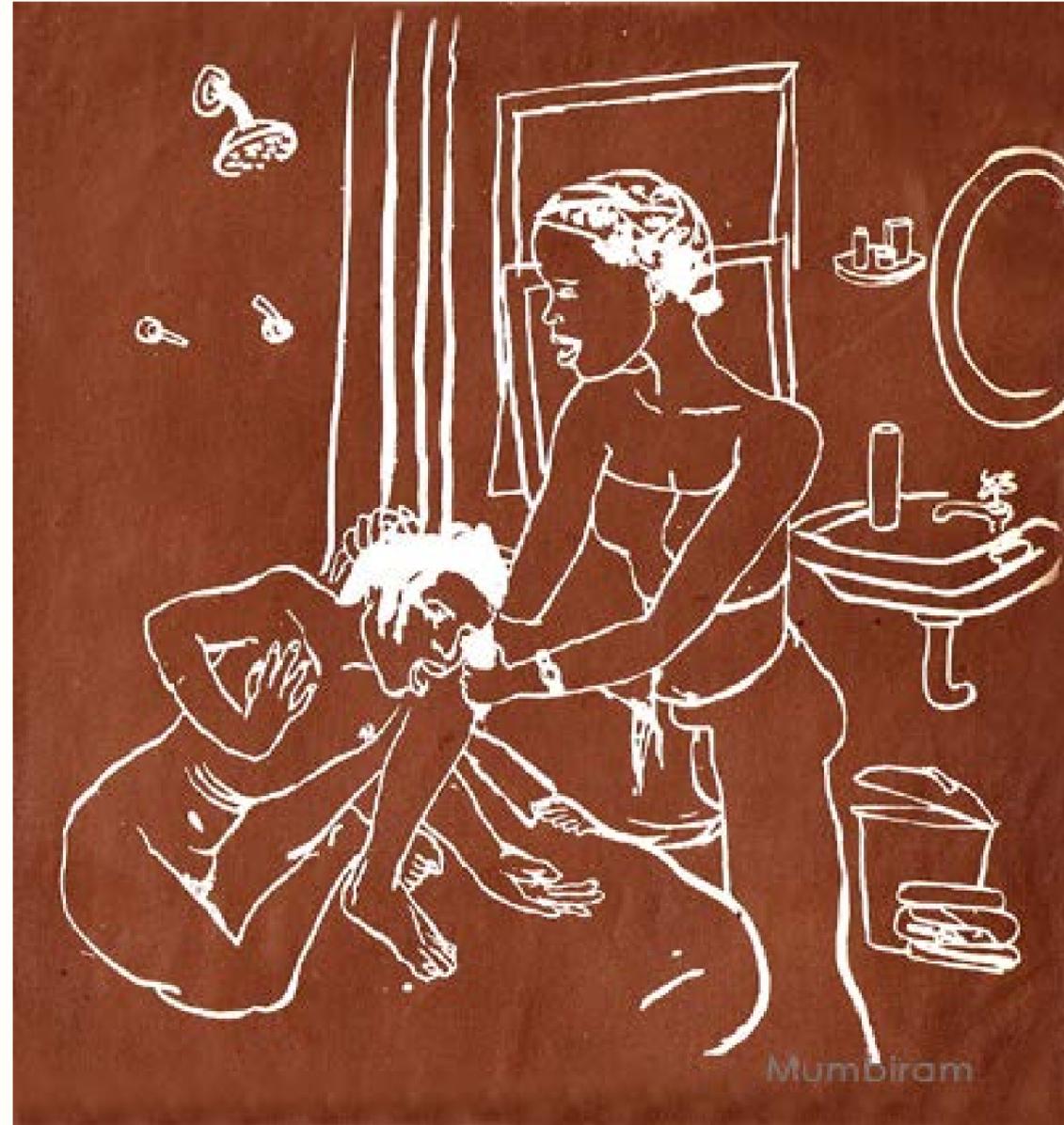


**Mumbiram in 1974**

## **Aesthetic Search begins in Seattle**

Having assumed the name Mumbiram he came to Seattle in the winter of 1974, a provincial town at that time. Living on Capitol Hill he enjoyed the mixed neighbourhood and was making friends among the great variety of people who welcomed him to stay at their homes. One of them was an Afro-American woman, who appeared in one of Mumbiram's early ink-and-brush works, where she is washing Mumbiram's hair. Alice Cooper was an Afro-American woman passionate about athletics. *"Alice Cooper washing Mumbiram's Hair"* is typical of Mumbiram's style in that period. Mumbiram was prolific in his creativity even when he had meagre resources for art materials. We have traced a mere handful of his works from that period.

Mumbiram has mentioned a portrait of his friend Candace who was going to play an important role in the creation of the "Forest Women". She was hosting him when he was painting the first version of the Forest Women painting at the Maharishi restaurant. Mumbiram had met Candace when she was visiting the Seattle Krishna Temple where Mumbiram was then staying.



## **“Alice Cooper washing Mumbiram’s Hair”** **Ink-and-brush, Seattle 1975**

**In 1975, Seattle’s Capitol Hill was a mixed neighbourhood of young and poor. Mumbiram was a welcome guest in many homes. Some of the fondest memories of America that Mumbiram cherishes are connected with people that had enjoyed simple loving friendship with him in Seattle. Aline Beck, Judith Lundberg, Gina Johnson, Alice Cooper, Vatsara Das, Candace Kleeb, Rikki Sara (Mukund) are some names that meant a lot to the young artist. They all came from different ethnic and social backgrounds. Alice Cooper was an Afro-American woman passionate about athletics. This ink-and-brush work is typical of Mumbiram’s style in that period.**

## Déjà-vue with Krishna in Seattle

It was about this time that Mumbiram became friends with devotees at the Krishna Temple of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) in Seattle. Its founder Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupad had arrived in America from India just two years before Mumbiram.

Krishna and his Bhagavad Gita were not anything new to Mumbiram. His parents had named him Dhananjay, a name of Arjuna, Krishna's close friend to whom Krishna had spoken the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita was something Mumbiram had grown up with. As a child he used to take part in evening recitals of verses of the Bhagavad Gita along with other children of the neighbourhood. Everybody in India knew Krishna. The songs on the radio and even the poems in schoolbooks were replete with references of Krishna. Mumbiram was impressed how seriously the devotees at the temple took the Bhagavad Gita and everything about Krishna.



**Krishna and Arjuna on the Battle Field of Mahabharata.  
(Image from an Indonesian print)**

In this far away place, India's ancient spirituality was gaining a completely new relevance and attraction. Mumbiram was full of admiration for the devotees wearing Indian *sarees* and *dhotis* and painting an ideal picture of an ideal civilization as was described in the Bhaagavat Puraana.

It was a very attractive proposition for Mumbiram to live around these devotees. A very enthusiastic young devotee, Vatsara Das, who had joined the movement during the legendary San Francisco Ratha Yatra of 1967 was now managing the Seattle temple. He was just the right person to take Mumbiram 'under his wings' and introduce this very special devotee to the visions of Krishna Consciousness. One of them, named Brihatsanu, who didn't live in the temple, but had hosted Prabhupad many times during Prabhupad's early years in America, became his close friend. Another one, named Jayanand, who as the builder of RathaYatra Chariots was dear to Prabhupad and to everyone, asked Mumbiram to join him in book distribution at shopping malls in Oregon.

## **Bhaktivedanta Swamiji's very unapologetic "Bhagavad Gita As It Is" Commentary**

Bhaktivedanta Swamiji's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita was certainly very different from anything that Mumbiram had seen till then. Swamiji had categorically refused to be apologetic about anything whatsoever about what Krishna has said in this his dialog with Arjuna in the middle of the two armies that were about to engage in combat.

Mumbiram was impressed how unequivocal Krishna is  
when he assures good friend Arjuna:

*“O Dhananjay, there is no Truth superior to Me.  
Everything rests upon Me, as pearls are strung on a thread”*

मत्तः परतरं नान्यत् किञ्चिदस्ति धनञ्जय ।  
मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव ॥ ७.७ ॥

He was impressed with how absolute Krishna is when he says:

*“Now I will tell you about Dnyana and Vidnyana, after knowing  
which there will remain no more to be known”.*

ज्ञानं तेऽहं सविज्ञानमिदं वक्ष्याम्यशेषतः ।  
यज्ज्ञात्वा नेह भूयोऽन्यज्ज्ञातव्यमवशिष्यते ॥ ७.२ ॥

Thus far Mumbiram had a somewhat superficial understanding of the Gita. Now as an alumnus of some great academic institutions Mumbiram was able to appreciate the profound assertions and fine nuances that the classic was studded with:

The Bhagavad Gita has an explicitly stated epistemology of its own. It makes a clear distinction between the spiritual realm and the material realm.

All living entities have an eternal identity as spirit soul. When they appear in the material world they take on material bodies of one of the 8.4 million species. But only temporarily.

To identify oneself with the attributes of the presently inhabited body is illusion, Maya. Then, as spirit souls we are all equal. We have all the same primal aspirations and are all subject to the same innate liberties and limitations. Regardless of our present bodily designations such as Age Gender, Nationality, Race, Religion, Caste, Creed etc. etc.

The *summum bonum* of our existence is to align our will with the will of the Creator. The Bhaagavat Puraana tells us how to go about achieving that blissful state. It has all the similarities with any emotional attachment in friendship or in love ! And vice versa.

Mumbiram felt greatly enlivened by all these primeval revelations from a source that was so familiar to him in all his experience.

After growing up in his native India ,Mumbiram had found himself in a new land, inhabited by people of different races, speaking different languages, practising different social customs and diverse religious practices.

Bhaktivedanta Swamiji's commentary of the Bhagavad Gita made it clear that it is illusion to consider oneself tied down to temporary designations such as Nationalities, Religions, Races, Ethnicities, Genders, Bodily Age, etc.etc.

Our eternal identity is that we all are children of God.  
We are all siblings.  
Our eternal domicile is Goloka Vrindavan, that blessed land without envy. We are all Aliens here.  
Art is to find our way back home !

## **Ending the Oppressive Caste System by Replacing it with the Original Varna System in its Pristine Status**

Mumbiram had always felt great inequity and injustice in the prevailing Caste System of India where one is destined to inherit the privileges and limitations of the occupational status of one's ancestors. It was a matter of the greatest relief for Mumbiram to read Swamiji's presentation of Krishna's original statements and even more importantly how his Society for Krishna Consciousness was putting it into practice.

In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna declares that He created the Varna Classification of Society so that the bodily material affairs of all members of society are taken care of without conflict or confusion. One is to belong to a Varna according to the personal qualities one is imbibed with and the nature of activities one is inclined to. Your Varna is recognized with the help of your Guru during your stay at his Ashram. Then you are initiated into that Varna and you are 'twice born'. Not that you 'inherit' the Varna of your ancestors. Then you may enjoy certain privileges of that Varna and you should abide by certain limitations ordained for that Varna.

In contemporary Indian society one inherits the Varna of one's ancestors. That is the Origin of the Caste System. It is an unfortunate perversion of an ideal social prescription. Bhaktivedanta Swami was unabashedly initiating into Brahmanhood anybody who was ready to abide by certain minimal moral and ethical norms of personal life.

Here was the only viable and eminently appealing way out for the hopelessly strapped Indian Society from the clutches of the Caste System. Far from being apologetic about, or far from rejecting Krishna's infallible prescriptions for a civilized society, here was a way of implementing the same in their pristine original intent.

Mumbiram felt that India had no other path to becoming a just society than getting rid of the wretched Caste System and waking up into a brilliant Varnashram society. In Vedic Times that would have been considered worthy of being called Arya Civilization.

It seemed Krishna's assertion that he was providing us through his Bhagavad Gita and his Shrimad Bhagavatam all that needs to be known, after knowing which will further remain no more to be known, was coming true for him.

## Encounter with the Rasa Panchadhyayi and the Pulindis

Mumbiram was glad to read the esoteric, as well as comprehensive, Shrimad Bhagavatam, in Sanskrit as well as in English, that Prabhupad had made freely available to anybody who so desired.

In those early days Iskcon temples were mostly rented houses that were imaginatively refurbished. The entire Shrimad Bhagavatam was elaborately translated by Prabhupad and enthusiastically distributed by his young disciples who were proud to be taking part in this idealistic endeavor. Swamiji had instructed the young inhabitants of these temples to be hospitable to all visitors and generous with delicious '*prasadam*' before discussing the books with them.

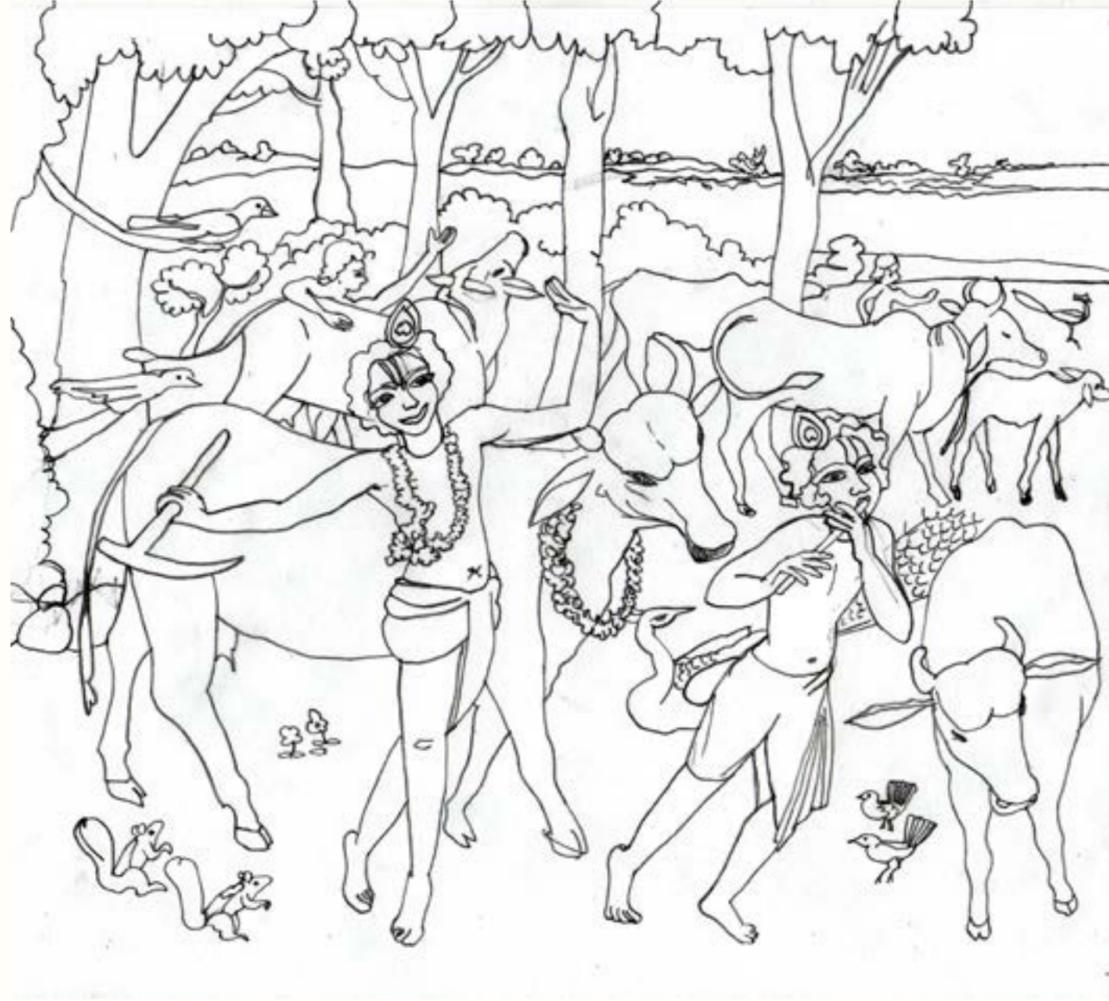
Mumbiram was ecstatically happy to read in this authentic authoritative expose that the activities of the adolescent Krishna in the pastoral setting of Vraja Vrinda-

van are the ultimate object of meditation for achieving the highest goal of self-realization.

In the very beginning of the Shrimad Bhagavatam it introduces itself as the fully ripened fruit dropping off the tree of Vedic Knowledge, verily a storehouse of *Rasa*. It invites all *Rasiks*, connoisseurs of *Rasa*, to relish it unabashedly.

Mumbiram was attracted to certain selections of the 10th Canto of the Bhagavatam that describe emotionally the most fulfilling descriptions of adolescent Krishna's activities in the blessed land of Vrindavan. These turned out to be the celebrated *Rasa Panchadhyayi* selections that *Rasiks* have acknowledged. (Distant Drummer has published Mumbiram's translations of these as Five Songs of *Rasa*.)

Mumbiram was happy to realize certain primal assertions of the Shrimad Bhagavatam which are also visible in some of his later line drawings:

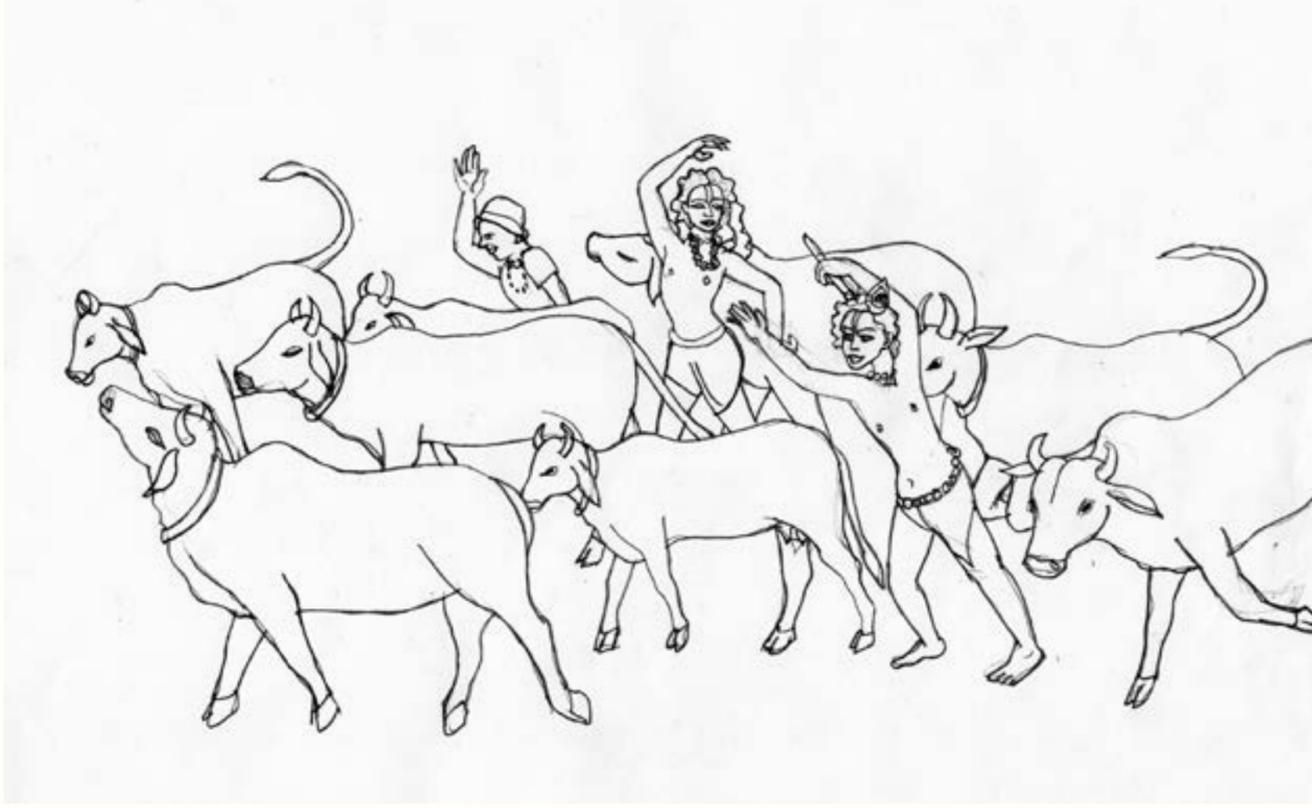


बर्हापीडं नटवरवपुः कर्णयोः कर्णिकारं ।  
बिभ्रद् वासः कनककपिशं वैजयन्तीं च मालाम् ॥  
रन्धान् वेणोरधरसुधया पूरयन् गोपवृन्दै ।  
वृन्दारण्यं स्वपदरमणं प्राविशद् गीतकीर्तिः ॥ २१.५ ॥

Krishna, the personification of Divinity is all attractive. He is beautifully adorned with the simplest natural objects that would be available to a young boy in even the remotest rural milieu - such as feathers, colourful beans such as red Gunjas, wild flowers, corals and colourful minerals that could be used to colour the faces and bodies.

There are many verses in the Rasa Panchadhayi that describe the irresistible beauty of Krishna's appearance and activities.

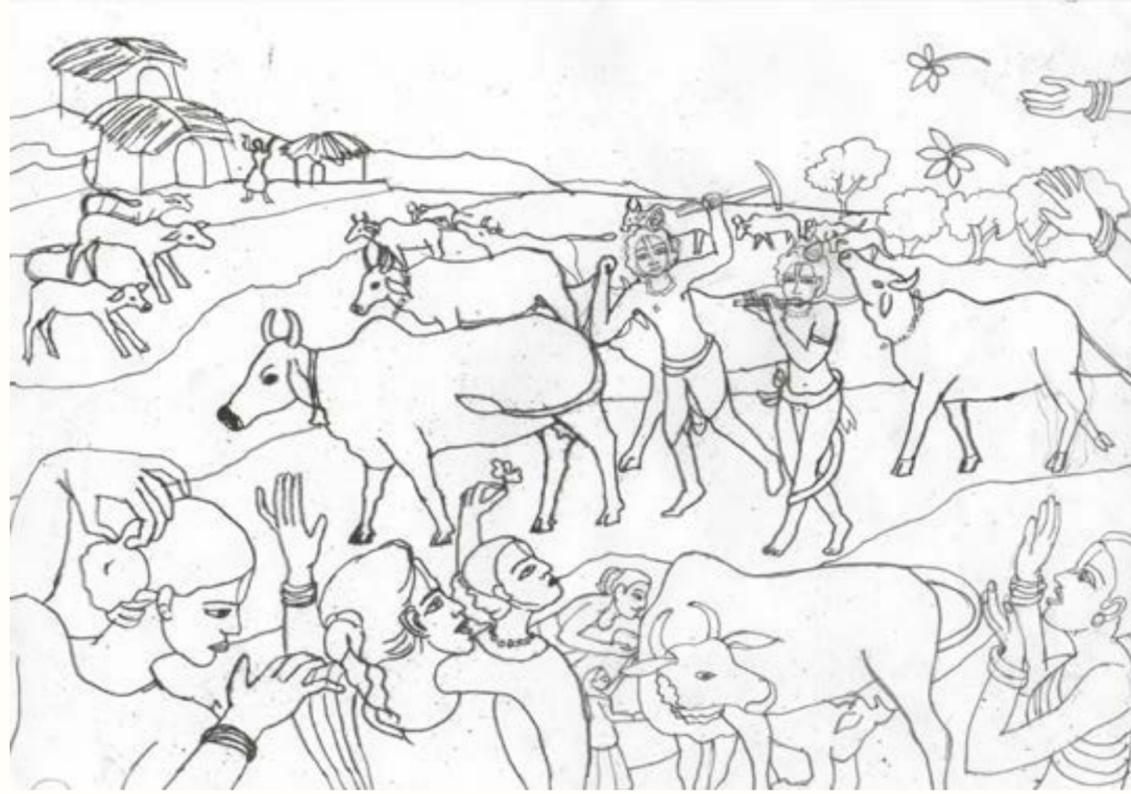
“Krishna entered the Vrindavana forest accompanied by His cowherd friends who were singing His glories as He was playing on his flute. Krishna was very happy to tread on the blessed ground of Vrindavana that in turn was greatly happy to be marked by Krishna's Lotus Feet. A peacock feather adorning His head, a Karnika Flower over His ear, a garland of forest flowers around His neck, dressed in a brilliant gold attire, he was the embodiment of a graceful dancer.” ॥ 10.21.5 ॥



विविधगोपचरणेषु विदग्धो वेणुवाद्य उरुधा निजशिक्षा ।  
तव सुतः सति यदाधरबिम्बे दत्तवेणुरनयत् स्वरजातीः ॥ ३५.१४ ॥

**Krishna was well versed with the activities that cowherd people have always done in their daily routine. That involved herding the cattle, and that involved playing the flute.**

**“O dear mother Yashoda, your son is quite an expert at all the tricks that the cowherd boys are adept at. He has also taught himself the art of playing the flute in different very original styles. Krishna’s lips are full and beautiful like the bimba fruit. But then he puts the flute to his lips and navigates the whole spectrum of musical notes in an ecstatic fanciful flight, at his own sweet will.” ॥ 10.35.14 ॥**



दिनपरिक्षये नीलकुन्तलैर्वनरुहाननं बिभ्रदावृतम् ॥  
घनरजस्वलं दर्शयन्मुहुर्मनसि नः स्मरं वीर यच्छसि ॥ ३१.१२ ॥

उत्सवं श्रमरुचापि दृशीनामुन्नयन् खुररजश्छुरितस्रक्  
दित्सयैति सुहिदाशिष एष देवकीजठरभूरुडुराजः ॥ ३५.२३ ॥

The cowherd women, who were missing Krishna and the boys all day, found their dust-covered exhausted faces, when they were coming home, passionately arousing.

“We remember you most fondly, when at the end of the day you return home with the cows and the boys. Your curly bluish black beautiful locks are bouncing around your dust-covered face. It reminds us of the pristine beauty of wild lotuses. Every time we see that dust-covered brave beautiful face or even remember it, our mind is filled with amorous passions.” ॥ 10.31.12 ॥

(Translation by Mumbiram, High Five of Love Vol.1, Five Songs of Rasa, Gopi Geetam, 12)

“When Krishna is returning home with the cows in the evening in this way, he looks exhausted and all the more beautiful for that. His body as well as the garlands that adorn his body are covered by dust raised by the hooves of the cattle. There! Everyone can see that Krishna who fulfils everyone’s desires is coming home. Doesn’t this son of Devaki appear just like the full moon surrounded by the stars and the constellations?” ॥ 10.35.23 ॥

(Translation by Mumbiram, High Five of Love Vol.1, Five Songs of Rasa, Yugal Geetam, 23)

Living entities can relate to Krishna as Lover, as Parent, as Friend, as Servant etc. Of these the amorous mood of the cowherd girls was the most intimate of all.

Besides the women of the cowherd families, there were also women of the forest-dwelling tribes, Pulindis, who had spontaneously developed amorous feelings towards Krishna mainly attracted to the beauty of Krishna's Persona.

Here is the verse about the Pulinda Forest Women from around the Govardhan Mountain mentioned in the Rasa Panchadhyayi:

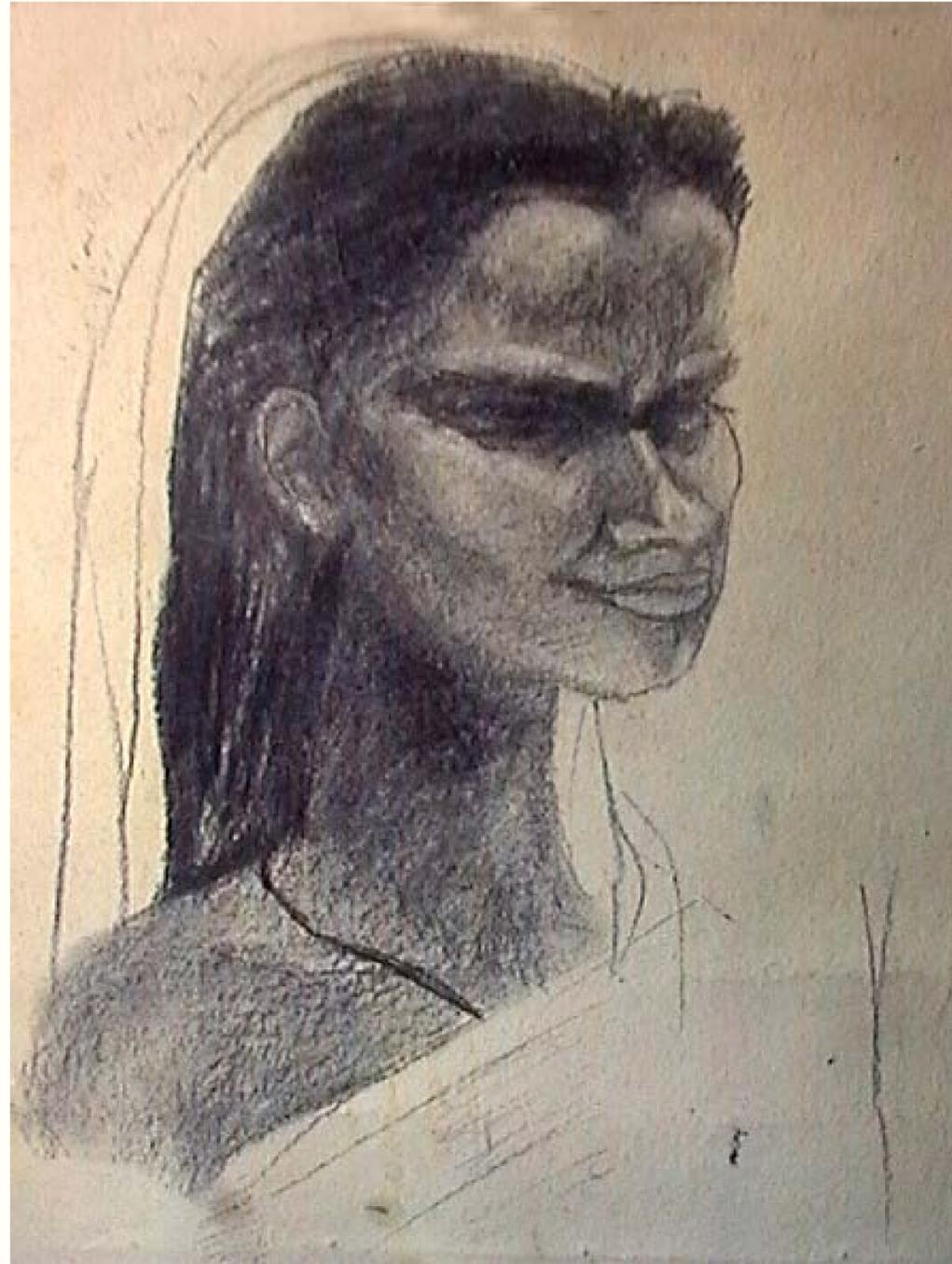
पूर्णाः पुलिन्द्य उरुगायपदाब्जराग-  
श्रीकुङ्कुमेन दयितास्तनमण्डितेन ।  
तद्दर्शनस्मररुजस्तृणरूपितेन  
लिम्पन्त्य आननकुचेषु जहुस्तदाधिम् ॥१०-२१-१७ ॥

“When Krishna sits with the Gopis on the bank of the Yamuna, the Pulindi, the forest-dwelling wild women, appear from the woods. They are also attracted by the beauty of Krishna.

They cannot go close to Krishna. He is surrounded by the Gopis. The forest women watch the Gopis placing Krishna's lovely feet on their bosoms. The red unguent of sandalwood and kumkum that is smeared on the breasts of the Gopis gets also smeared on the soles of Krishna's beautiful feet. The forest women become very agitated by this amorous vision of Krishna. When at last, Krishna and the Gopis walk away, treading on the luscious green grass on the ground, the red kumkum-powder from Krishna's feet makes the grass tinted red as well. The forest women now move ahead and hastily rip out that very red tinted grass and smear their faces and breasts with it. That is the closest they will ever get to Krishna! Yet even that far-fetched little association with Krishna completely satisfies their excruciating lusty desires that were aroused by watching Krishna in the first place.”

(Translation by Mumbiram, High Five of Love Vol.1, Five Songs of Rasa,

Venu Geetam, 11)



## **The Pulindi Verse incites the Rasik Artist's Mind**

Mumbiram had been familiar with many details of Krishna's Leelas but this one verse captured his attention when he was reading the 10th Canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam.

Here it mentions some forest women who could not go near Krishna, because He was protectively surrounded by the Gopis. It captured Mumbiram's fancy. The Gopis were popularly known as Krishna's close associates. What had struck Mumbiram was that there were not only the Gopis who were attracted to Krishna but also these others, the Forest Women, who were also attracted.

Mumbiram had a déjà-vue about something about the forest people. He was reminded of the Phasepardhi tribal people, who had come to his father's law offices at their home in Pune. His father was one of the first lawyers who defended Phasepardhis in court cases. Their tradi-



### “Tribal Scene”

Ink&Brush, Berkeley, 1970

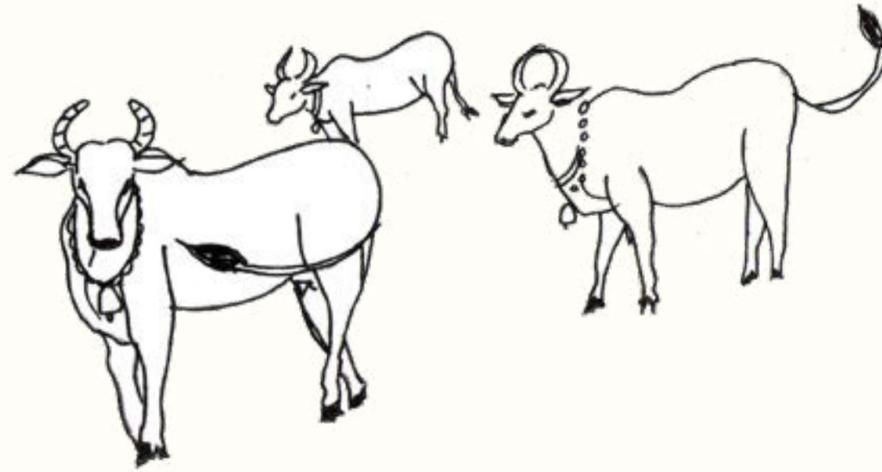
The “Tribal Scene” was one of the first Ink-and-Brush works he had made in Berkeley. He felt attracted to the Hopi Indians living in Southern California.

tional occupation used to be catching birds (phasepardhi means birdcatcher). During British colonial rule they had been categorized as ‘criminal tribes’. They could not read nor write and were often falsely accused in criminal court cases. Mumbiram’s father often helped them. They were fiercely freedom-loving. When they visited his father’s office the women would sit on the steps freely nursing their babies. Little Dhananjay was most fascinated by them. He loved the very freedom that they seemed to insist upon.

But that was deep down and far away too. The Forest Women and that verse stayed in Mumbiram’s mind for a long time to come.

**Verily they had incited the Rasik Artist’s mind to visions that would launch the flagship painting “Forest Women visit Krishna and the Gopis” of epochal innovations of Personalism and Rasa Renaissance in visual arts.**

## Leaving Temples behind



Mumbiram felt like visiting Berkeley and Los Angeles once again two years later, in 1976. He always liked the company of devotees but didn't like living in temples. Back in Berkeley he chose to live right next to the ISKCON 'New Jagannath Puri Temple' in the backyard of an abandoned home that shared its back wall with the temple.

There was a devotee named Brahmajyoti, which means 'the impersonal effulgence of the body of the Supreme Personality'. She was not living in the temple. She was a poet and was unconventional as a devotee. Temple devotees found her ways offensive. Not everyone saw the method in her madness. She had turned her backyard into a welcome space for creative Krishna-lovers.

That was where Mumbiram painted two flags. One showed Hanuman, the divine monkey who was a devotee of Lord Rama, floating in a gigantic leap over the ocean



**Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaj very kindly and graciously had Mumbiram's Hanuman banner prominently displayed in his private audiences in Los Angeles, 1976**

with the mountain in his hand to come to Rama's rescue. On the other flag he painted sage Narad Muni floating in space with his veena in the hand and his left foot barely touching the earth. Brahmajyoti enthusiastically sent these two flags to the Los Angeles ISKCON temple where Prabhupad was soon due to arrive. Mumbiram was not at all sure whether Prabhupad would ever get these flags nor how he would react to them.

A later-retraced photo of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupad sitting surrounded by devotees shows Mumbiram's Hanuman Banner prominently displayed in his private audience.

Mumbiram hitchhiked from Berkeley to Los Angeles to meet Prabhupad. Mumbiram's devotee friend Brihatsanu was accompanying him. Mumbiram only came to know later that Prabhupad knew Brihatsanu from the early days of ISKCON. Brihatsanu is a name of the mountain top in Barsana which is the native village of Krishna's Beloved Radharani in Vraja. Prabhupad had initiated this

devotee but he never lived in the ISKCON temples. On the other hand in the early days Prabhupad preferred to stay with Brihatsanu when he was on the west coast.

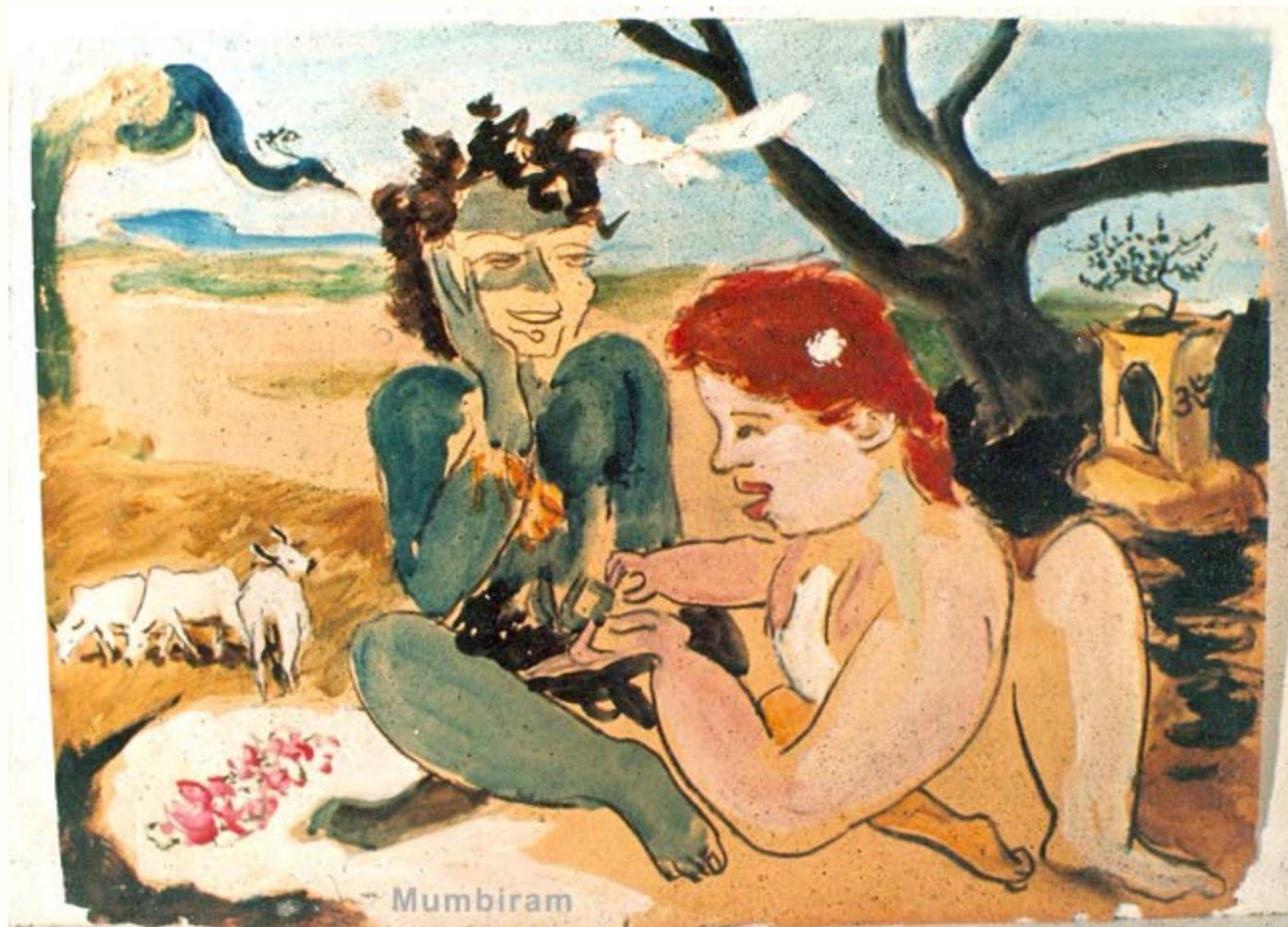
In Los Angeles Mumbiram was allowed to attend Prabhupad's evening *darshan* for a select audience in the back garden. During question time Mumbiram asked Prabhupad whether the Petroleum Demon digging holes in the earth was like the demon Hiranyaksha who had dug up earth for precious metals making earth lose balance. Prabhupad asked Mumbiram to see him in his quarters upstairs in the temple after the darshan. Mumbiram sat directly in front of Prabhupad across Prabhupad's low desk on the floor. Devotees sat and stood around in wrapped attention. Prabhupad asked Mumbiram about Pune, Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Bose. He also asked Mumbiram whether he wanted to be initiated. Prabhupad told Mumbiram to keep the name Dhananjay. Then he told the devotees to see that he was initiated. He instructed his secretary, Pushtakrishna Das,

and the chief of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Rameshwar Das, to see that Dhananjay went with him.

Mumbiram considered that to be Prabhupad's stamp of approval of his 'initiation' as well as his 'graduation', which is according to Mumbiram the spiritual 'ripeness' to be living outside a temple institution.

With all gratitude and love for his devotee friends Mumbiram decided to follow his Krishna consciousness independently, outside any institution. He was going to live as an artist. He knew that was his constitutional position.

By hitchhiking Mumbiram left Berkeley a second time and came back to Seattle. That was where his art and Krishna came together.



## **“Reading Krishna’s Fortune” Gouache Watercolor, Seattle 1976**

**The good-hearted girl wants to read Krishna’s fortune. It is clearly a ruse and an excuse to hold Beloved Krishna’s hand.  
Krishna is clearly amused.**

**In Mumbiram’s imagination Krishna devotees came from all colours and creeds. They did not have to be gopis (cowherd girls of Vrindavan) or even Indian village girls. Mumbiram has been most inspired by what is called *‘raganuga bhakti’* in esoteric Krishna theology. It translates to spontaneous loving devotional service.**

## **First Visions of “Forest Women” in Seattle**

In Seattle Mumbiram lived an intensely Krishna conscious life in the company of other *raganuga* souls who had developed spontaneous attachment to Krishna.

A young woman named Candace had given Mumbiram shelter in her basement apartment. He had met the owner of an Indian restaurant called “Maharishi Restaurant”. It was in the university district. The University of Washington has a sizable student population and a student culture and Indian restaurants used to do well in such a milieu. So Mumbiram talked to the owner, a Gujarati man named Mr. Patel, about making a painting. Mumbiram talked him into making a painting of Krishna on the large wall behind the reception desk and he agreed. For a fee of 125 dollars. Not a big sum but he would also pay for any materials and Mumbiram could also eat there when he was there and making the paint-

ing, which was okay. Mumbiram was not in it for any big money or nothing. He had the freedom to paint whatever he wanted to paint.

Mumbiram was having real wonderful visions of the ‘Pulindi verse’. Mumbiram did not want to be aware of anybody else there while he painted, so he used to put a cloth over his head so that he would be looking at the wall only, mainly. So, it went on for a month and a nice painting was materializing. Candace liked Mumbiram very much but she did not want to disturb him while he was painting. She would see him covering his head with a cloth. So she used to stand on the street to secretly watch him make the painting, through the glass window of the restaurant. He came to know this later on. Mumbiram was in good hands.

After a month, when the painting was done, Mumbiram thought he would now get the 125 dollars. However Mr. Patel said, “You have eaten so much during the last month and so you owe me 130 dollars. So, I owe

you 125, and you owe me 130 dollars". So Mumbiram ended up owing him five dollars after making a painting for him. Mumbiram was under the impression that the owner had invited him to eat there. Mumbiram did not know that meant he was supposed to be paying there as a customer to the restaurant. That was that. Mumbiram does not know what happened to the painting later on.

It must have been tragic for Mumbiram's friendship with Candace. Candace was an idealist and a romantic also. She was having a lot of problems with regular society. Those were times of turmoil when diverse social forces of upheaval were colliding as never before. The so-called counter-culture and the youth culture and the anti-Vietnam war protests and dropping out and all that. A whole youth revolution was going on. A lot of young people were having problems with their families as well. Living on their own was not always easy.

Mumbiram had hoped that the Mural assignment of the Pulindi Painting for even the modest 125 dollars re-

muneration would be a beginning of a sustainable life he could have shared with Candace. Candace had a twin sister who was more practical. She supposedly was looking after Candace. She thought Mumbiram with no income of his own was no good for her sister and he should leave.

The theme of this "Forest Women Painting" had caught Mumbiram's fancy. He said, "Well, I can make another one". So he got a medium-sized canvas and began to paint another version of it. Before it was even complete, he decided to travel to Washington, D.C.

So here is the account of how with this painting with him, he travelled to Washington D.C. with a stop-over in Denver, Colorado.

### **From Seattle to Washington D.C.**

President Jimmy Carter had got elected in the November election of 1976. They get inaugurated around 20th/21st January. It was tenth of January and the whole

East Coast was inundated by a snow storm. Americans always exaggerate a little in everything. 'The worst of the century'. 'Never has happened before'. etc. etc. The storm was predicted to get worse and even threatened Jimmy Carter's Inauguration. Whatever got into Mumbiram's head. He thought, "This is a good man. I must go there and do what I can". He had this outrageous premonition that his going there would pacify the storm. So he said that to his friends. They all said, "Are you out of your mind? You know there is a big snow storm, the worst ever, raging there and you want to walk into it?" Mumbiram said, "Ya and it is going to stop." They said, "Who do you think you are ? Moses ?" He said, "That is what I want to do." They said, "Alright then".

Candace and her friends stitched a long coat for him out of a blanket and gathered money for a plane ticket. What great friendships in this small town Seattle ! At that time it was a forgotten town in the north west corner of the United States. But it seemed like the greatest

of them all! These friends had collected 70 dollars for him. That would buy a plane ticket only up to Denver. Mumbiram said, "Ok, I will take it".

Candace and Mumbiram never said goodbye. They both had liked each other. Friends who had seen them together had felt they looked good together as well. Mumbiram was leaving Seattle a little over exactly two years after he had first arrived there Christmas Eve 1974.

## **Denver – Seventh-day Adventist Church - Second Version**

After arriving in Denver Mumbiram was spending days and nights at the airport in Denver. He did not know what to do next. It was a cold January 1977. He had decided to go to Washington, D.C. He did not know how. He had no money. He was sleeping at the airport at Denver. After a couple of days, the police noticed him and his big canvas. He obviously was not somebody who could be

hiding with it. So the police arrested him and took him to the police station, trying to see if he had any criminal record, if he was running away from anywhere. Nothing. They finger-printed him and checked their records, but nothing on him. So they said, "Alright, you can go. But don't go to the airport!"

So he came out and stood on the street and stuck out his thumb to hitchhike. An Afro-American woman picked him up and said, "What's up? Where do you want to go?" He said, "I don't know." She said, "Hey, I'm going to the church, it's Sunday morning. I belong to the Seventh-day Adventist church. Maybe you can be part of our choir. That's where I'm going right now. Maybe some of the brothers will give you shelter or something." So, she took him to the church and she introduced him to everybody and one of the members of the church choir said, "Okay, you're a painter, alright. I have a home and there is a basement which I have fixed rather comfortably. You can be there and paint whatever."

Mumbiram stayed there for a few days but he really wanted to go to Washington, D.C. Somehow that was what he had to do. He said to his host, "Hey, I really want to go to Washington, D.C." So the kind host who happened to be an Afro-American who worked for the U.S. Air Force said, "Alright, I will put you on the bus to Washington, D.C." Mumbiram said, "That would be great. This painting I have, I would like to give you in appreciation of what you are doing for me." So he left that second version of the 'Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis' with this man in Denver belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist group.

So, that was the second version of this painting.

## Itinerant Artist

In Washington D.C. he stayed in an abandoned barn on a farm next to the ISKCON Temple in a wealthy suburb called Potomac. Living in that barn he created some interesting artworks that have passed to unknown hands.

Mumbiram was always a welcome guest hosted by America's great variety of people. From Potomac he came to New York, to Princeton and then to Boston-Cambridge.

In Boston-Cambridge he became friends with one of the most unique personalities, an artist named Steven Curtis who called his own art 'Academic Surrealism'. Steven begged on the streets of Cambridge and Boston with the line 'Would you care to give a quarter to the greatest artist of America?'. When Steven approached Mumbiram for the first time on a sidewalk at Harvard Square, Mumbiram's reply was 'The greatest artist of India is pleased to meet the greatest artist of America'. That was how they became friends.



## “Free American Kunja”

Ink & Brush, Potomac

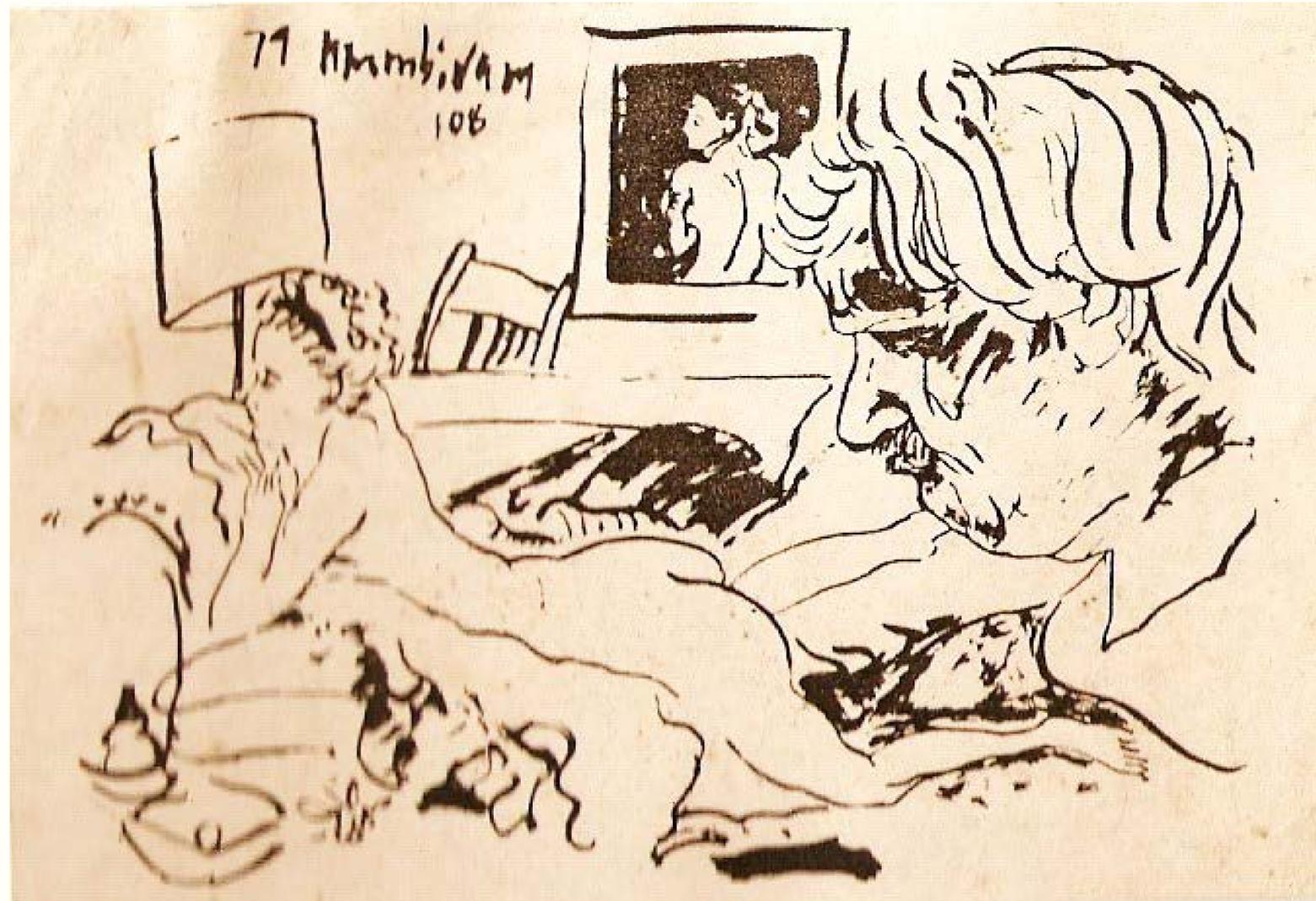
They have spent the night together under the tree. Now they are getting up. They are getting dressed. She has a bindi on her forehead. There are some hills in the background and some grasses. The birds are also up in the sky and her hair brush and maybe a purse she has kept under the tree. She is very happy to help him. Even in the simple Ink & Brush Mumbiram has shown accurate faces. They look like somebody specific. He has a nice jacket, like he is some artist on the stage, or a painter, or a matador. Maybe he will leave now and she is going to stay here. He is not so sure what is going to happen here under this tree. But she is very happy. She seems to say, ‘Go tiger, go!’ These simple lines express very clearly how nicely they have it together.

This rendering was done about the same time when Mumbiram was staying in the barn in Potomac.



## **“Steven Curtis”**

**Ink & Brush, Boston**



Steven Curtis used to ‘beg’ on the streets of Cambridge and Boston with the line “Would you care to give a quarter to the greatest artist of America?” When Steven approached Mumbiram for the first time on a sidewalk at Harvard Square in Cambridge, Mumbiram’s reply was “The greatest artist of India is pleased to meet the greatest artist of America“. They became friends. Steven called his own art ‘Academic Surrealism’. He made elaborate renderings to be printed as lithographs. Mumbiram could visit Steven’s one room residence in Boston in the middle of the night. He would enter by climbing a ladder to his back window. It was dramatic and exciting for both of them. Steven existed mainly on potatoes, coffee and cigarettes. Once they decided to make portraits of each other. It was Steven’s turn to make a painting of him first. After having spent more than two hours on making an accurate rendering of Mumbiram’s face, Steven didn’t want to pose for Mumbiram to make a portrait of him saying, “Oh, I am too tired“. Mumbiram insisted on making one anyway. Steven was making faces, so Mumbiram wouldn’t even try. Mumbiram still made it. In the rendering seen here, besides Steven there is Boucher’s famous reclining nude and Ingres’ classical painting showing the bare back of a fair lady. Steven had graciously acknowledged the alacrity and aplomb of this rapid rendering by his dear artist-friend Mumbiram.



**“Delusions in Ecstasy - Prema Vivarta”**

1978, Boston

*Cover of the original book of Mumbiram’s collection of poems*

Distant Drummer has published it with a revised title:

”Deluges of Ecstasy- Prema Vivarta”.

It is the fifth of the five-volume ensemble: “High Five of Love”

## **Perceptions of Spirituality and Aesthetics**

While staying at different places Mumbiram had composed a collection of poems which explain his *‘bhumika’* (Sanskrit word meaning ‘point of view’), from which he was approaching Krishna, art, and life at large. This collection of poems is titled: “Delusions in Ecstasy - Prema Vivarta”. It would have to wait for several decades to be ‘decoded’ and appreciated as advanced Krishna consciousness in the *‘Prema Vivarta’* mood that sees dim reflections of the spiritual world in mundane every day affairs. These delightful yet mysterious verses by Mumbiram addressed the ‘Supreme Mystic’ in a challenging and very intimate way that was truly innovative.

Mumbiram had visited museums and galleries of contemporary art only to find their obsession with matter pathetic. While in New York, he had even an encounter with Andy Warhol who was already a celebrity. Mumbiram had given him a picture he had made in Ink-and-Brush that

August 2, 1978

To Whom it May Concern

When Mumbiram asked for an appointment to show me his pictures, I was not optimistic. Over the years, almost all such appointments have led to disappointment. He came, smilingly and confidently, agreeable, and showed me his work - mostly large brush drawings, a few with color. I was impressed. Mumbiram handles the brush boldly and freely, combining humor with psychological insight. His pictures of Indian life recall the comical yet serious literary insights of Narayan. At once I wished that Mumbiram could illustrate the great Madras author. He also recalled other enthusiasms: Mughal and Rajput portraiture, at best so profound, insightful, and biting, and - best of all - many experiences of India. Rooted in Indian traditions, yet aware - without being overcome - of such Western artists as Matisse, Picasso and Steinberg, Mumbiram deserves a high position among contemporary Indian painters.



Stuart Cary Welch  
Curator of Hindu and Muslim Painting

Penelope Parker of Cambridge had liked Mumbiram ever since they first met. She knew Cary Welch quite well. She dragged Mumbiram to meet Welch with a few of his recent renderings. Welch was inspired to write this spontaneous impression that is surprisingly insightful and heartfelt.

showed Andy Warhol and himself sitting at a table in the shape of an artist's palette playing tic tac toe together.

Mumbiram was not impressed by "Western" art and its institutions. Yet while in Cambridge he came to visit Stuart Cary Welch's office at Harvard's Fogg Museum. Mumbiram was dragged there by Penelope, a very good friend, who liked Mumbiram very much. She was of an influential family background and thought it would help Mumbiram to meet Welch who was on his way to being recognised as the topmost authority about Indian Art. Mumbiram had nothing to show except himself and his art.

Welch was impressed by the literary and psychological insights in Mumbiram's paintings and considered him one of the important contemporary artists and spontaneously dictated to his secretary a recommendation:

*"Aware without being overwhelmed by such western  
greats as Matisse, Picasso and Steinberg, Mumbiram  
deserves a high position among contemporary Indian  
painters."* (Stuart Cary Welch, 1978)

## **Gaining inspiration from Vyasa's Despondency and Relief**

In Seattle Mumbiram read the 10th Canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam which describes the entire account of the appearance of Krishna on our planet. That inspired him to read the entire Bhagavatam. Right in the First Canto he came across the account of how Vyasa came to compose the Bhagavatam as the fulfilment of his entire literary composition. It was a great revelation for Mumbiram. It was all about the primacy of Rasa for all Life anywhere in the Creation.

Vyasa is popularly known all over India as the composer of the epic Mahabharata. The accounts of his own birth and how he is the biological forefather of both the Pandavas and the Kauravas have captured popular imagination through the millenniums. Vyasa is recognized as the literary incarnation of the Supreme, Shri Krishna. Among other achievements, he edited the divinely in-

spired Vedas into four divisions and for the upliftment of ordinary people composed the popular Mahabharata. In spite of such substantial array of literature related to spiritual enlightenment, Vyasa himself was not feeling any fulfilment.

Seating himself down on the bank of the sacred Sarasvati river Vyasa invoked his Guru – Narada Muni, the Sage revered even by all the demigods. The Guru appeared instantly for salvaging a disciple in distress.

Narada openly told Vyasa *“You have almost not described the glories of the Supreme Lord even after extensive literary compilation!”* (S.B. 1.5.8) Indeed all the Vedas could not decisively and unequivocally declare the primacy of the Personality of the Supreme. And even after faithful recitations of the Mahabharata it was debatable who the real Hero of the Mahabharata was.

Narada confided in Vyasa that any real fulfilment to the soul comes from topics related to the name, fame and super excellent activities of the Personality of the

Supreme. Narada advised Vyasa to compose an expose of prominently presented accounts of the wonderful activities of the Supreme and the lovers of the Supreme. That is where lies the *Rasa*, the entity that defies definition but we are all thirsting after. Thereafter Vyasa composed the Shrimad Bhagavatam, the “store-house of Rasa”

All this was a great revelation for Mumbiram. This primal entity called Rasa gets lost through the great influence of passage of time, as it seemed to be lost in our times, the so called 20th Century. In our times it is asserted that to assign any personal attributes to the Supreme is to limit our understanding of the Supreme. It had become common practice to lead disciples into ‘emptying the mind’ in meditation - a never-attainable task indeed! In the art of Painting and of Sculpture it had become ‘in vogue’ for a creation to be devoid of any decipherable form or meaning and not to have any aim whatsoever.

Art of painting had become a barren empty landscape. It had succumbed to impersonalism and voidism. There was nary a whiff of Rasa to be experienced in it. Art had lost all relevance to society. It was relevant only to academics, auction houses and Hedge-Fund type investors.

It was a challenge to restore our lost taste of Rasa in the visual Arts. Mumbiram was getting inspired to do just that.

Mumbiram has captured Vyasa’s mood by depicting Vyasa in his hut out in the wilderness in a quick informal rendering titled “Vyasa’s Despondency”.

During his days as an itinerant artist in America Mumbiram used the so-called ‘Manila Paper’. This wood and bamboo pulp paper was brittle and fragile yet very versatile. Mumbiram has used it with ink-and-brush as well as acrylics. For “Vyasa’s Despondency” he has used it with pen-and-ink and pastel crayons. The line is ir-reversably permanent. Mumbiram’s style is amazingly minimal and sure-footed.



## “Vyasa’s Despondency”

Boston, 1977

This is a brilliant example of scriptural themes of mystical ancestry seen in today’s daylight, making them eminently relevant. Vyasa is popularly known all over India as the composer of the epic Mahabharata. Vyasa is recognized as the literary incarnation of the Supreme, Shri Krishna. Among other achievements, he edited the divinely inspired Vedas into four divisions and for the upliftment of ordinary people composed the popular Mahabharata. In spite of such substantial array of literature related to spiritual enlightenment, Vyasa himself was not feeling any fulfillment. In this quick informal rendering Mumbiram has captured Vyasa’s mood by depicting Vyasa in his hut out in the wilderness. The interior of Vyasa’s little hut in the forest is seen to be much like the inside of a dormitory room in a private college.



**Vyasa in Despondency**

Behind Vyasa on the right there is a 'Painting of Ganesha'. Good friend Ganesha had been the writer of the whole Mahabharata when Vyasa dictated it to him. On the left upper corner there is a 'Poster of Krishna'. Krishna was always Vyasa's hero. It just happened that his Literary Compositions till this time had failed to bring that out unambiguously. The writing on the wall hanging says '*Om namo bhagavate ...*'. It continues with '*Vasudevay...*' but it is not yet focused in Vyasa's mind. There is a bow hanging on the door frame. There are all these books in his bookshelf. The books are held by an elephant. He is not interested in those. He has his hands on his cheek. His hand is pressing his cheek. He is in deep thought. There is a tiger skin. There is his open book with incense burning. There is a plant, maybe a tulasi. In the foreground there is this stick looking like a crutch. It is used by sages to rest their arm on while chanting on the japa mala.



**Vyasa's Krishna**

Krishna is in this wall poster. Here Vyasa is not at all unfamiliar with Krishna. Just that Krishna is not occupying center-stage in his universe and in his writings. The Shrimad Bhagavatam that he would compose is verily the treasure-trove of Rasa. The Rasa Panchadhyayi is the very cream of it. The Pulindi verse is part of it. Mumbiram would present an English rendering of the Rasa Panchadhyayi as Five Songs of Rasa.

It looks desolate thrown on the floor like that. Look carefully. On his writing desk there is a framed photo of Narada, Vyasa's guru. Bhagavat tells that in this moment of spiritual crisis Vyasa did the right thing- he invoked his Guru in his meditation. The Guru appeared instantly for salvaging a disciple in distress.

Narada immediately told Vyasa, "You have almost not described the glories of the Supreme Lord even after extensive literary compilation!" Indeed all the Vedas could not decisively and unequivocally declare the primacy of the Personality of the Supreme. And even after faithful recitations of the Mahabharata it was debatable who the real Hero of the Mahabharata was.

Narada advised Vyasa to compose an expose of prominently presented accounts of the wonderful activities of the Supreme and the lovers of the Supreme. That is where lies the *Rasa*, the entity that defies definition but we are all thirsting after. Thereafter Vyasa composed the Shrimad Bhagavatam, the "storehouse of Rasa". All this was a great revelation for Mumbiram.



**Vyasa's Ganesha**

Ganesha is sitting in a relaxed half-lotus Asana. His notepad is on his right thigh. He is writing with a feather pen. His left palm is asking Vyas to go slow, he must fully comprehend every line of the Mahabharat that Vyasa is dictating.



**Vyasa's Narada**

Narada is Vyasa's Guru. So like a modern day disciple, Vyasa is carrying a framed photo of Narada on his writing desk. Mumbiram had painted two banners while visiting the creativity backyard of Devotee Brahmajyoti of Berkeley. One was of Hanuman leaping over the ocean. The other was Celestial Sage Narada descending on the earth with his Veena string instrument. That is how Narada is seen in this depiction also.



### **“Meeting the Gypsies”**

**Ink & Brush, Boston Cambridge, 1977/78**

By now it had been six years that Mumbiram had spent as an itinerant philosopher and artist in the US. The paintings he created during that time have remained with individuals spread over far corners of the US to whom he has always felt grateful for their hospitality and who in turn thoroughly enjoyed this exotic artist from exotic India. His artworks of those days unmistakably show a deep connection to Indian themes and spirituality and that he was missing India.

These Ink-and-Brush renderings were made on Manila paper. It was an inexpensive paper made out of straw, roughly A2 size.

“Meeting the Gypsies” shows he has always been fascinated by the gypsies, their love for freedom and unconventional life. One can see there a wheel of a carriage and a horse of a pony. There is a hat. There is a bird cage, the parrot is outside. There is a little one with a guitar. Look at that shoe, he is dancing in a funny way.



## “Off and away in her Bullock Cart”

This village damsel has set out in a huff in the family bullock cart that has a hood made out of bamboo mat. It is decorated with auspicious swastika symbols. Her determined face and her rising posture loudly declare her fiercely independent spirit. She is well-versed in outdoor athletic adventures. This was something Mumbiram had admired in women that he would fancy.



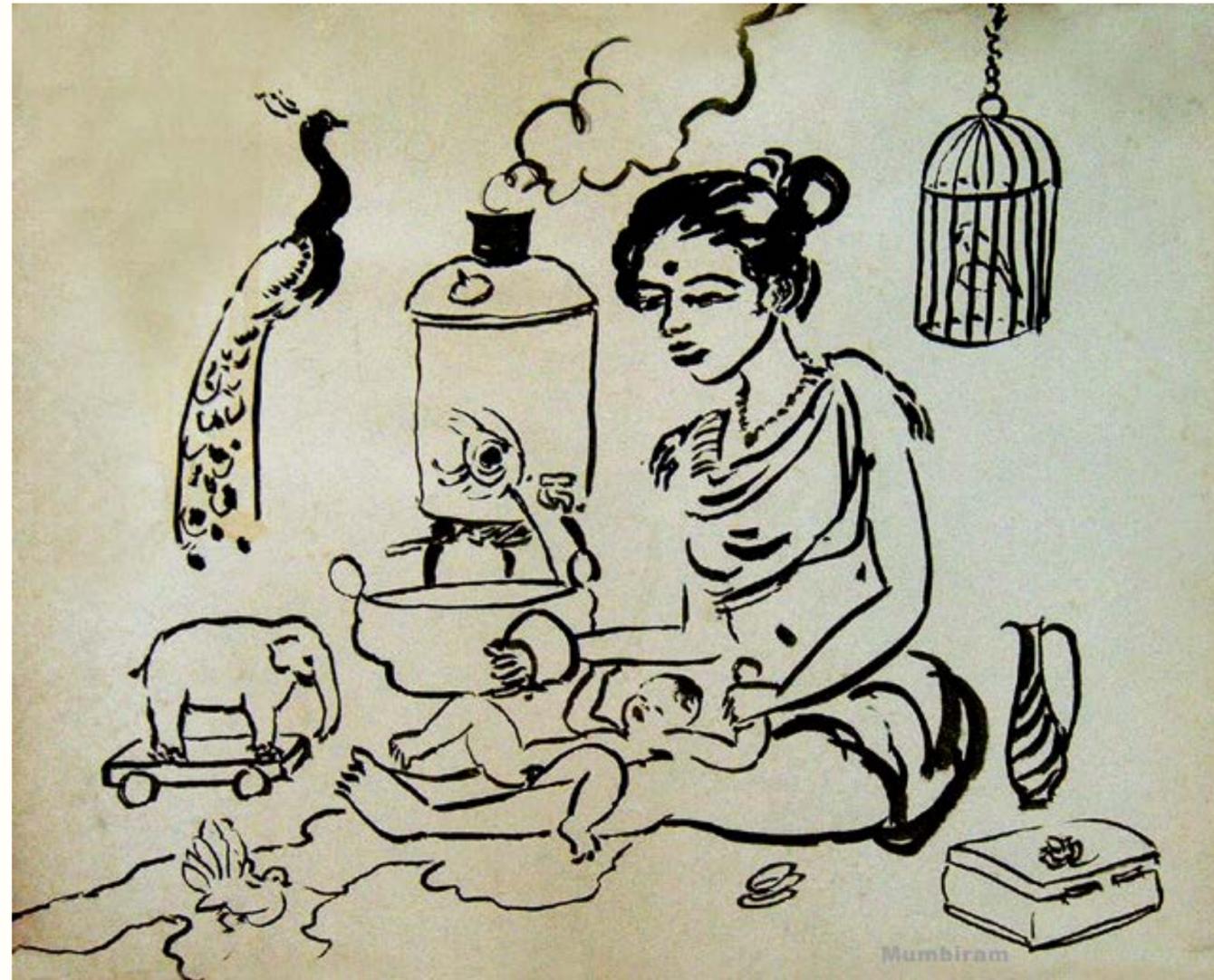
## “Busy Mother getting Daughter ready for School”

This is a very intimate glimpse that shows another facet of an Indian woman’s life that Mumbiram remembered from his life growing up in India. The mother is getting her daughter ready to go to school. The umbrella suggests monsoon season when school begins. Mama is combing and fixing the daughter’s hair. The girl has set aside her writing slate and is petting a cat. Mama is going to prepare an eggplant in an iron kadhai on the wood-burning fire. A whole coconut waits to be broken open. The pendulum clock is ticking away. The lunch must be ready on time.



## “Dreams do come True”

This is a rare personal moment for this independent woman. She is sitting on the bed and taking a look at herself in the mirror. The book lying next to the mirror is titled “Nairobi”. The lady is fascinated by Africa. The wall behind her has a framed image that is garlanded. A brass oil lamp sits next to a scriptural book resting on a wooden stand on the ground. An ink bottle has a writing feather dipped in it. Behind her two peacock feathers are bristling in the breeze. This is clearly an image of an independently intelligent and aesthetically sensitive woman.



## “The Baby Bath”

Mothers giving their babies a bath is a recurring theme for artist Mumbiram. Here this mother is bathing her baby who is just a few days old. A peacock, a caged parrot, a fan-tailed dove and a toy elephant are the only witnesses to this intimate, sensuous spectacle. Mama has taken off her bangles and rings as those would hurt the little baby. The fancy pot behind her carries some special oils for the baby's body. The wood-burning copper water boiler and the large brass water bowl are family heirlooms.



### **“Socialising in Boston”**

**Ink-Brush, Boston, 1978**

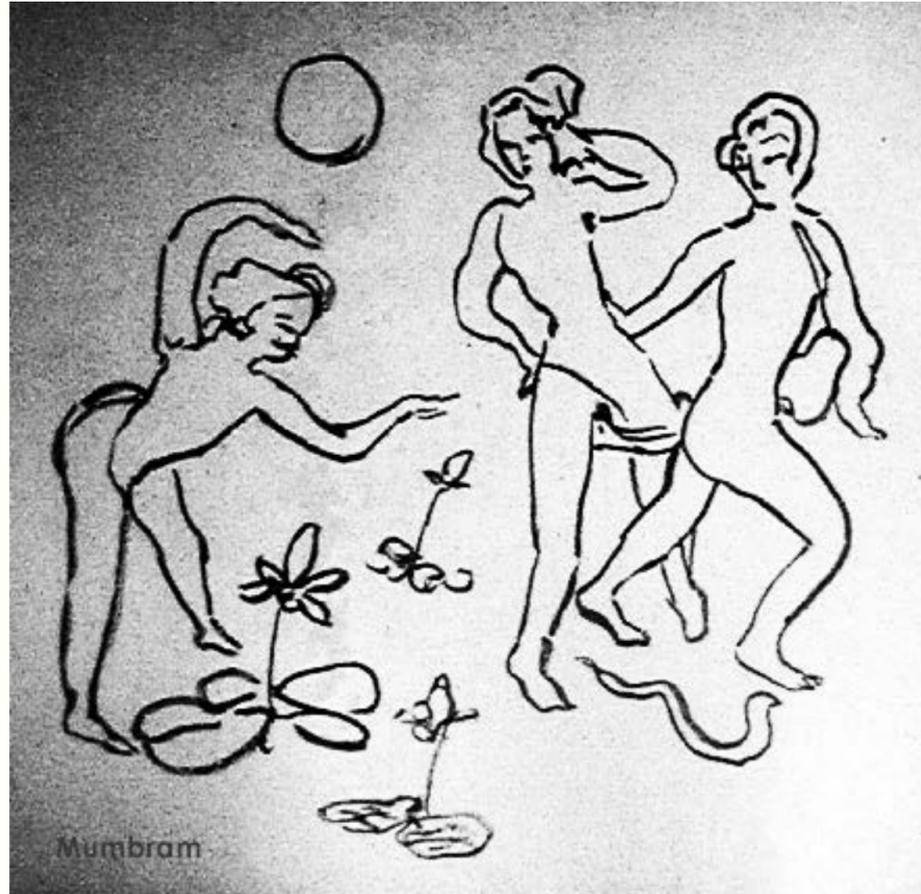
**James Stuckey of Cambridge Ma. (here with his back to us) had offered the upstairs of his house to Mumbiram for a while. The two of them did happy socializing in the Afro neighbourhoods of the Boston area.**

## **Passage my Soul to India**

**It was in the USA of the 70s that Mumbiram had all the freedom to follow his aesthetic antennas, yet something was missing. He had the intense feeling: ‘Wouldn’t an Indian artist look good in his indigenous habitat ? Why, even his universal appeal would be most standing out when he is exuding it from his natural, original *bhumika*.’**

**As a first step in his journey back to India he first obtained a new passport from the Indian Consulate in Boston. He had thrown away his earlier passport in Seattle as he wanted to rid himself of ‘all bodily designations’. With the new passport he went to the Immigration Department in Washington D.C. to ask for a visa to continue living in America as an artist. That way he could have returned to the US if he chose to.**

**During this time this is how Mumbiram spent his time in Washington. His days he spent in the Library of**



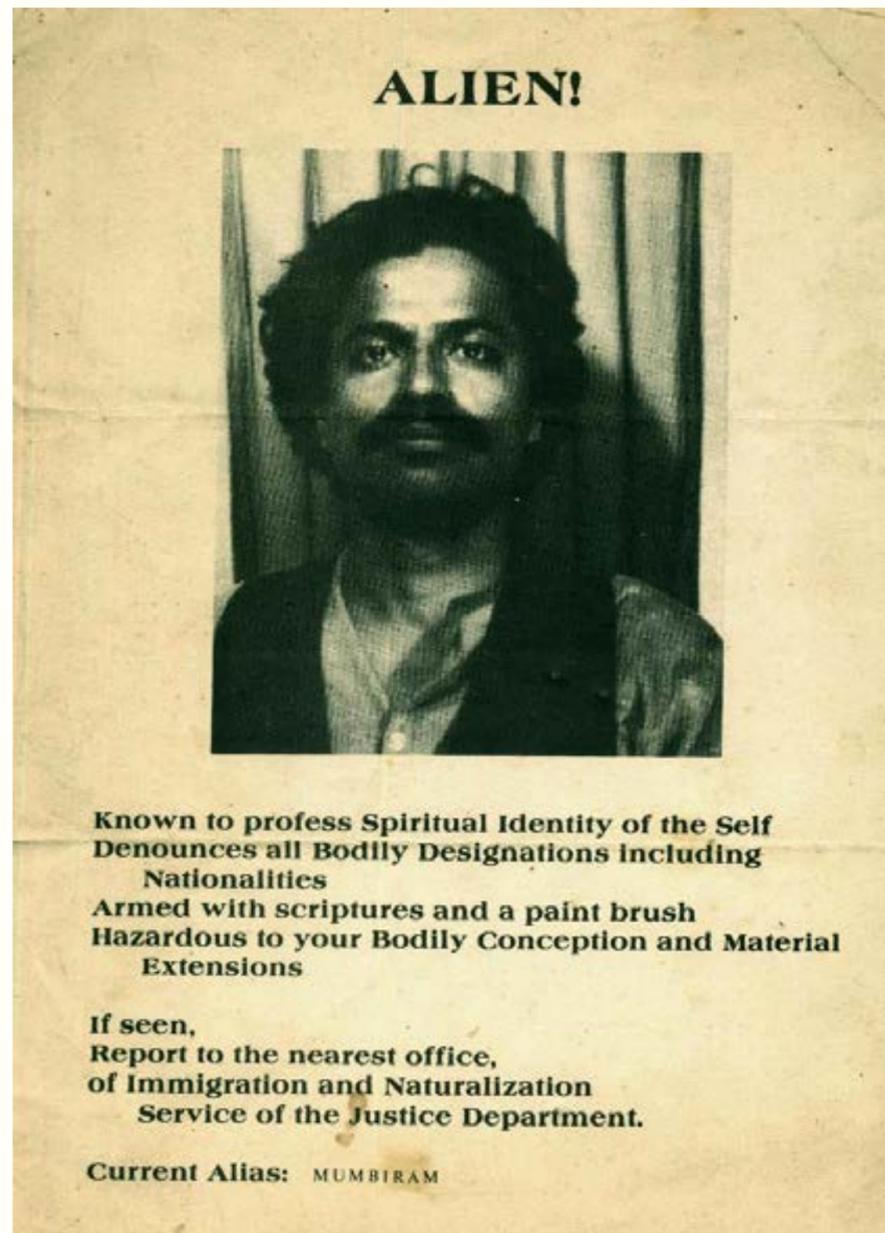
### **“Escape from Zarathustra Mountain”**

Ink-Brush, Boston - Charles Hill, 1978

Congress browsing through the vast, esoteric Sanskrit collection. Somewhere he knew there was more to find out about classical aesthetic criticism. And there was more to be found about Krishna, the Gopis and of course the Forest Women. He spent the nights in a basement in Georgetown reading Nietzsche’s “Zarathustra”. *“Escape from Zarathustra Mountain”* was created there.

Mumbiram was denied the visa he was asking for because an artist’s profession did not fit in the categories for which Labour Department would allow visas to Indian passport holders. Indians were allowed only in categories such as nurses and skilled or unskilled labour in type of work Americans were least eager to do. On the other hand, artists from Europe would qualify for such a visa. Mumbiram found this policy of the immigration department blatantly discriminatory. He decided to protest against this injustice. He would insist that the immigration department deports him to India.

Just then he came to know about the health condi-



**“Alien Poster” (Boston, 1979)**

Poster Mumbiram made when he was contemplating about getting himself deported back to India ‘in style’. He had pasted copies of it along Embassy Row in Washington D.C. before he turned himself in at the immigration department demanding to be sent to India.

tion of his father who was suffering from Parkinson Syndrome. Mumbiram felt now there was no time to lose and he decided to start a campaign to get himself deported to India. Part of this campaign was the ‘Alien Poster’ he had designed. It showed a photo of his face resembling a mug shot of a Mexican revolutionary under the title “Alien”. Under his photo it said: *“Known to profess Spiritual Identity of the Self. Denounces all Bodily Designations including Nationalities. Armed with scriptures and a paint brush. Hazardous to your Bodily Conception and Material Extensions. If seen, report to the nearest office of Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Justice Department. Current Alias: Mumbiram.”*

He pasted copies of this poster along Embassy Row before he turned himself in at the immigration department as an Indian citizen who is without a visa and needs to be deported to India. The immigration authorities did not take him seriously and felt this man was joking. They would deport ‘poor’ Mexicans and Venezuelans but refused this request of this artist.

Mumbiram decided to narrate this anomalous response to the Washington Post. A journalist named Christopher Dickey made an interview with Mumbiram and the very next day an article titled "*Cruel Penance for a Brahmin*" appeared on the front page of the Post. In the interview Mumbiram had said that in the Indian tradition the seekers of knowledge would go to the jungles for practising 'tapa' (austerities and penances) for a period of 12 years. So he also had spent 12 years of austerities and penances in the jungle that is America and now needs to go back to civilisation. The article had ridiculed immigration policies and made Mumbiram a hero overnight who was stopped and congratulated on the streets by people who had seen him in the newspaper.

When he went a second time to the immigration department some weeks later, they put him in jail for three days. The Washington Post article had embarrassed both, the Immigration Department and the Indian Embassy. The Embassy had Mumbiram brought from jail to the embas-

sy escorted by guards. The embassy staff was impressed by this artist's campaign, but the charge d'affaires decided to side with the Immigration Department and took away Mumbiram's passport. (Back in India when Indira Gandhi came back to power just a few days later, Mumbiram would honourably be given a new passport with his nom de plume "Mumbiram" included as a bonus.)

At the hearing at the Immigration Court Mumbiram was informed about an Executive Order from President Jimmy Carter that declared that anyone who was in the US for seven years or more was entitled to apply for and obtain a green card. Therefore, based on his stay in the US for 12 years he was entitled to obtain a green card. (Good old Jimmy Carter ! Was that why Mumbiram had felt the urge to travel from Seattle to Washington to quell the snowstorm that threatened Carter's Inauguration ?)

Mumbiram politely refused this offer and expressed his sincere love and gratitude to the American people for all the love he had received in the 12 years of his

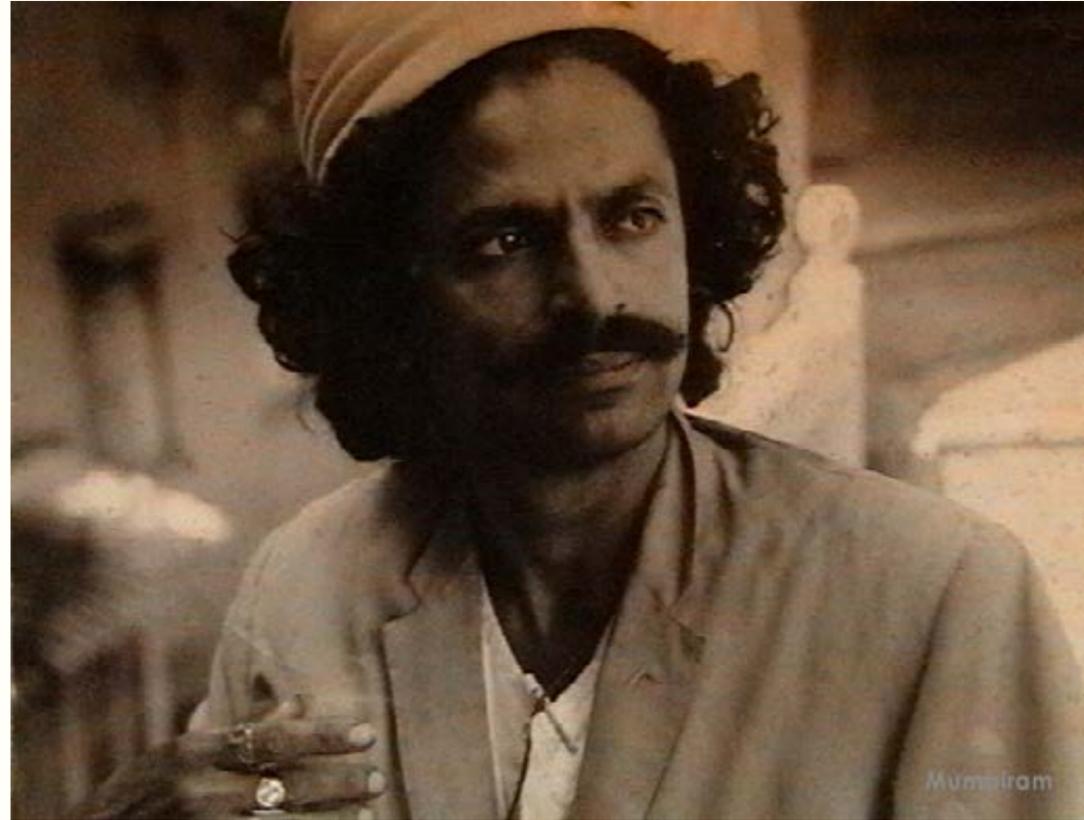


stay in America. Mumbiram's reaction left everyone astonished. He quoted loudly from Walt Whitman's iconic poem "Passage to India":

*"Passage my soul to India! Passage my soul to India!  
Passage my soul to India! And more."*

The next day Mumbiram was on a plane to India. Christopher Dickey who had visited him in jail published a second article that appeared on the same day. This time it read: *"Illegal Alien gets his wishes"*.

Back in India the Times of India had also reported about this strange incident under the headline: *"The Law is an Ass they say"*. That's how everybody in India knew Mumbiram was coming.



Mumbiram in Pune, 1982

## 2. Studio at the Mandai Market



**\*\*\*\*\***

Coming back from the USA after 12 years Mumbiram found that many things had changed in his hometown Pune.

He fell in love with the Mandai market place where he had grown up. He saw it now being flooded by interesting people of various ethnic backgrounds. It seemed, what used to be the Afro-Americans, Seventh-day-Adventists, Krishna devotees, Germans and Hispanics in the US were now the exotic people of India.

But in India, the most rigid barriers of castes had to be overcome. A challenge that verges on magic and could be easily mistaken as an onslaught of craziness.

In spite of obstacles that Mumbiram had to face there evolved some unique friendships that crossed all caste barriers. The rag-pickers as well as various tribal groups became his first friends and muses.

**\*\*\*\*\***



**Mandai studio from outside (top), 1980  
On the balcony of the studio at Mandai (bottom)**

## **Lonely Cavalier in the Fields of Beauty**

When Mumbiram came back to Pune in October 1979 he had been away from India for 12 years. Meanwhile Pune had grown and the place that used to be his home and his father's law offices had been empty and deserted for several years. His father, Ramdas Paranjpe, had been a famous lawyer of Pune. Now Mumbiram's parents had moved to a better-off area away from the huge vegetable market place, called Mandai.

Mandai was visited by farmers, villagers and tribals who sold their products in informal shops that they set up out in the open. Mumbiram enjoyed the rustic, romantic atmosphere and he liked the place about which he had wonderful memories. What appeared to most people like a deserted place, unfit for an artist's studio, was just right for him.

His family was by and large against his wishes of being an artist. They were disappointed because almost



**Mumbiram on the roof of his studio which used to be his home and his father's law offices, 1981  
That was the spot for which the first peacock feather flag was created.**

everybody who goes to the US would find a comfortable economic position and 'settle down'. His father was one exception. He had a broad, liberal outlook and also respected the artist's profession as a noble calling. But since he was suffering from Parkinson, he could not do anything for Mumbiram except letting him have the old rented place that used to be their residence as well as his law offices directly at Mandai.

### **Obtaining the Canvas**

Mumbiram did one thing to please his father. A colleague of his father from the Deccan College days, was now the Secretary of the Servants of India Society that was founded by the great patriot Gopal Krishna Gokhle himself. He was earnestly requesting Ramdasji to persuade Mumbiram to join the Gokhle Institute of Politics and Economics as a post-doctoral scholar. Mumbi-



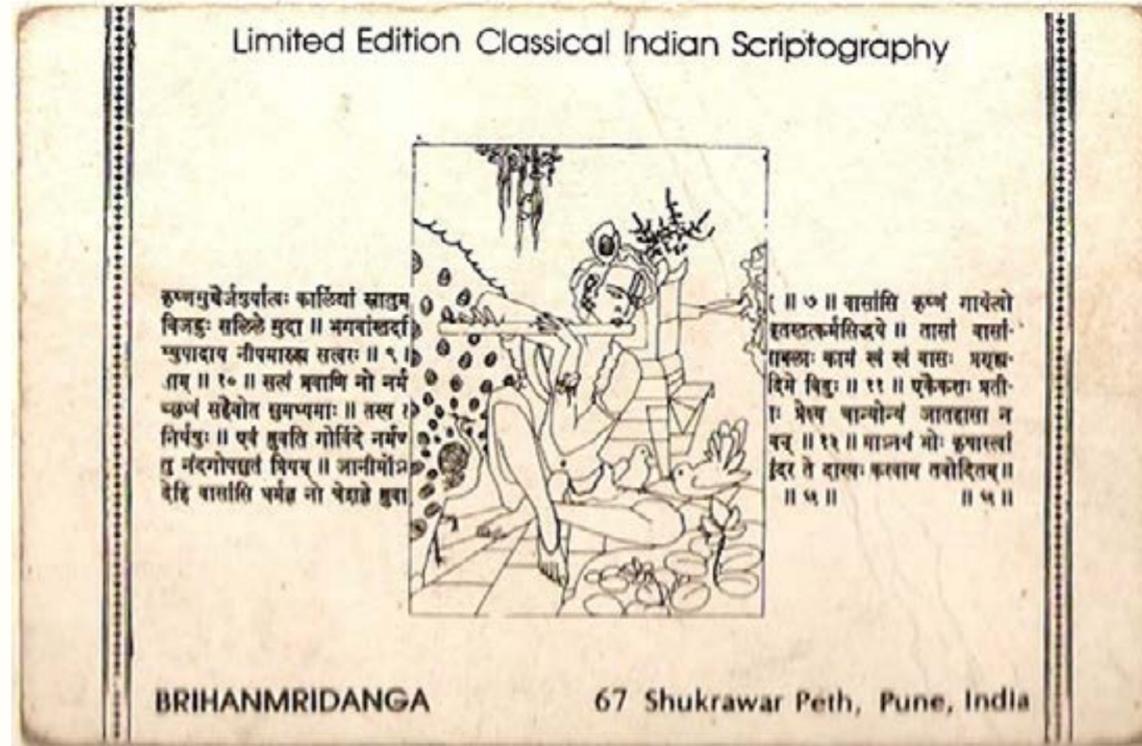
**Atmosphere outside Mumbiram's Studio at the Mandai Market**



ram saw this as an opportunity to raise amongst Indian economists the topic of the prevalent anomalous international exchange rates. So he accepted that offer for a year.

This could have been Mumbiram's entry into the world of Indian economics. The director of the Gokhle Institute even invited Mumbiram to stay in their own bungalow, but alas no one would take Mumbiram's passionate pleas about the exchange rate injustices seriously.

One day the wife of the director of the Gokhle Institute approached Mumbiram in confidence. She said she could see that he really wanted to be a painter and gave him the money for making a canvas. Overwhelmed by that gesture, he obtained the material and made a canvas of six feet by six feet. It was the canvas on which the "Forest Women" was going to be created. But its time had to come.



Mumbiram's visiting card from the 1980s. A leaf from the Rasa Panchdhyai of the Shrimad Bhagavat and a Line Drawing of his iconic Krishna painting. Mumbiram was excited about screen printing for limited edition reproductions of his ink-and-brush works. He saw advances in digital printing as a key ingredient in the Rasa Renaissance he was foreseeing. Brihanmridanga is the Big Drum. In the realm of Bhakti, it is the Printing Press.



This was Mumbiram's personal visiting card in the late 80s. Dancing under the Moon, at the River Front, by the Tulasi. That was Mumbiram's idea of a '*rasili*' ecstatic evening. It could start with just his Mridanga drummer friend and a shy drifter who also likes to dance. The monkey has spontaneously joined. Kamala Kunja was Mumbiram's residence in Vrindavan.

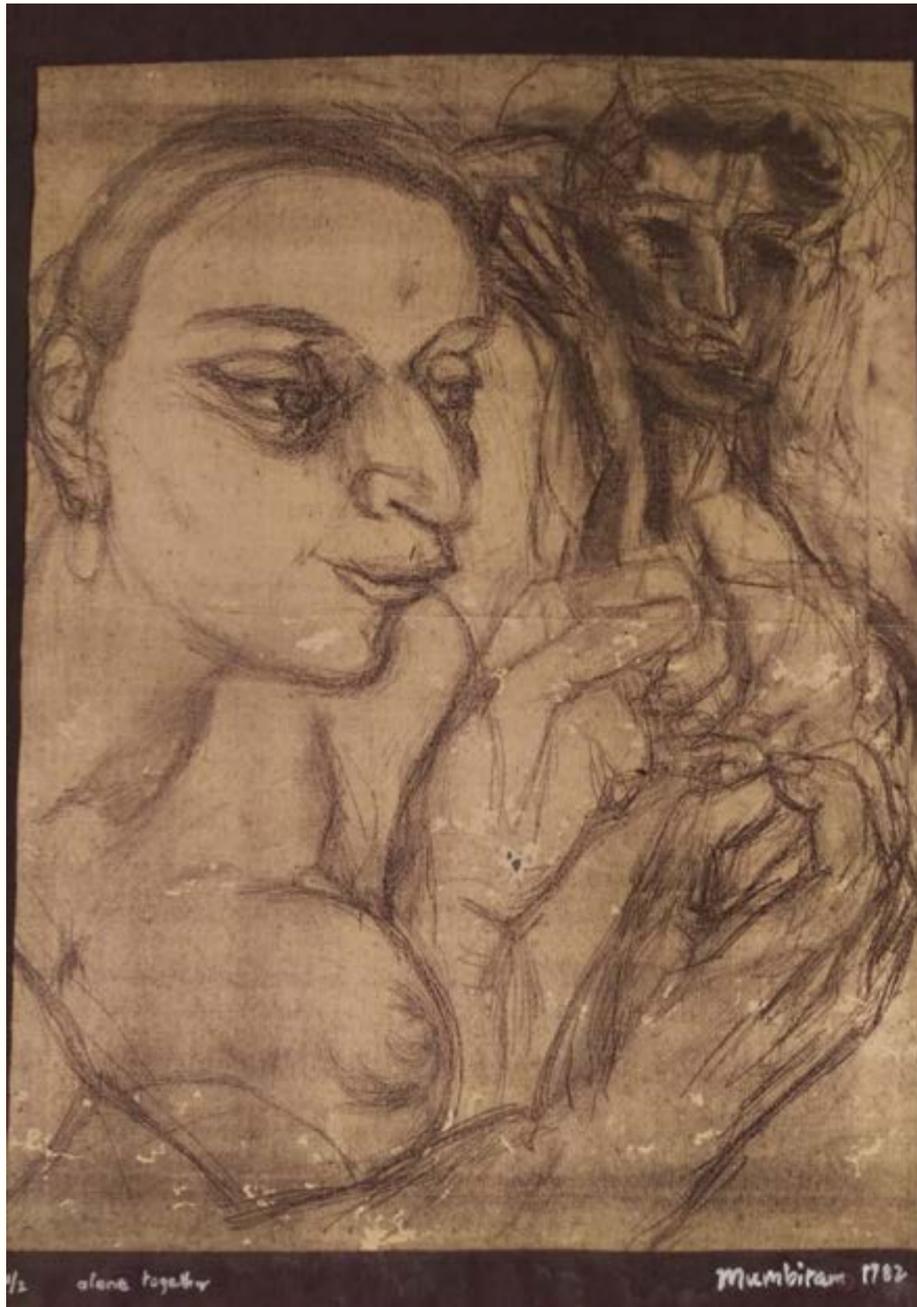
## Unique Vision of Krishna



The Mandai Market had a free passage for cows. Mumbiram has expressed how happy he was with the Bamboo Crafts folks on one side of his atelier and the cows at the Dump on the other.

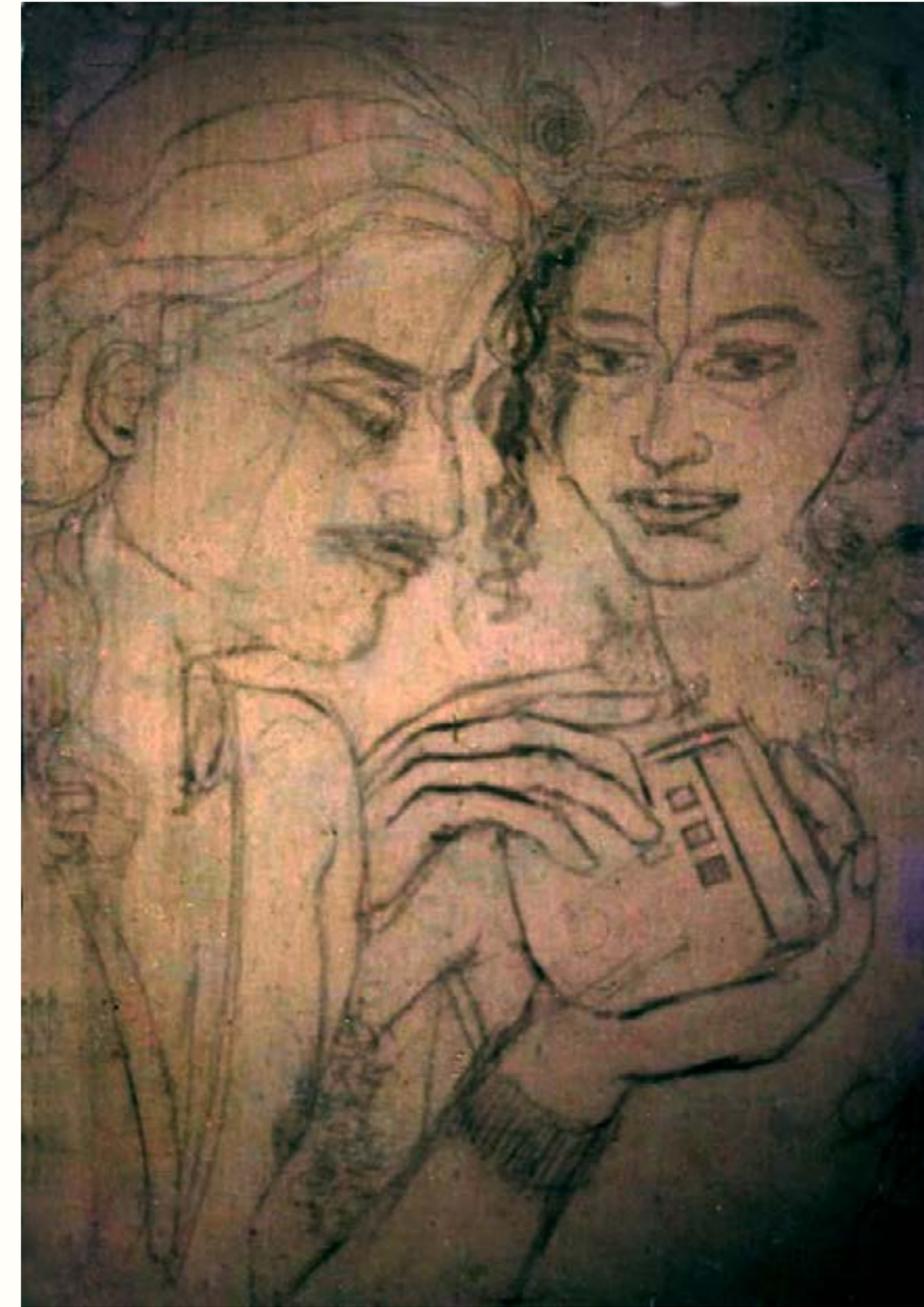
Mumbiram was happy to be at his new studio at the Mandai market which was surrounded by bamboo basket weavers on the one side and cows feeding on the big vegetable dump on the other side. There were several cows freely roaming around coming and going as it pleased them. He could not have imagined any better place. It reminded him of Krishna and the cows going to the forests every day. He loved using bamboo poles and bamboo baskets made by his neighbours as interior furniture and accessories in his studio. And wasn't Krishna's favourite flute made of bamboo? The newly made big canvas he kept in the studio for its right time to come.

The very first paintings he made in his newly created studio were paintings of Krishna. One of them was his "*Iconic Krishna*" which he would eventually keep with the Thakur tribals on top of the mountains near Pali, Sudhagad. The other two also showed Krishna. These were made on canvases that an old school buddy got for him.



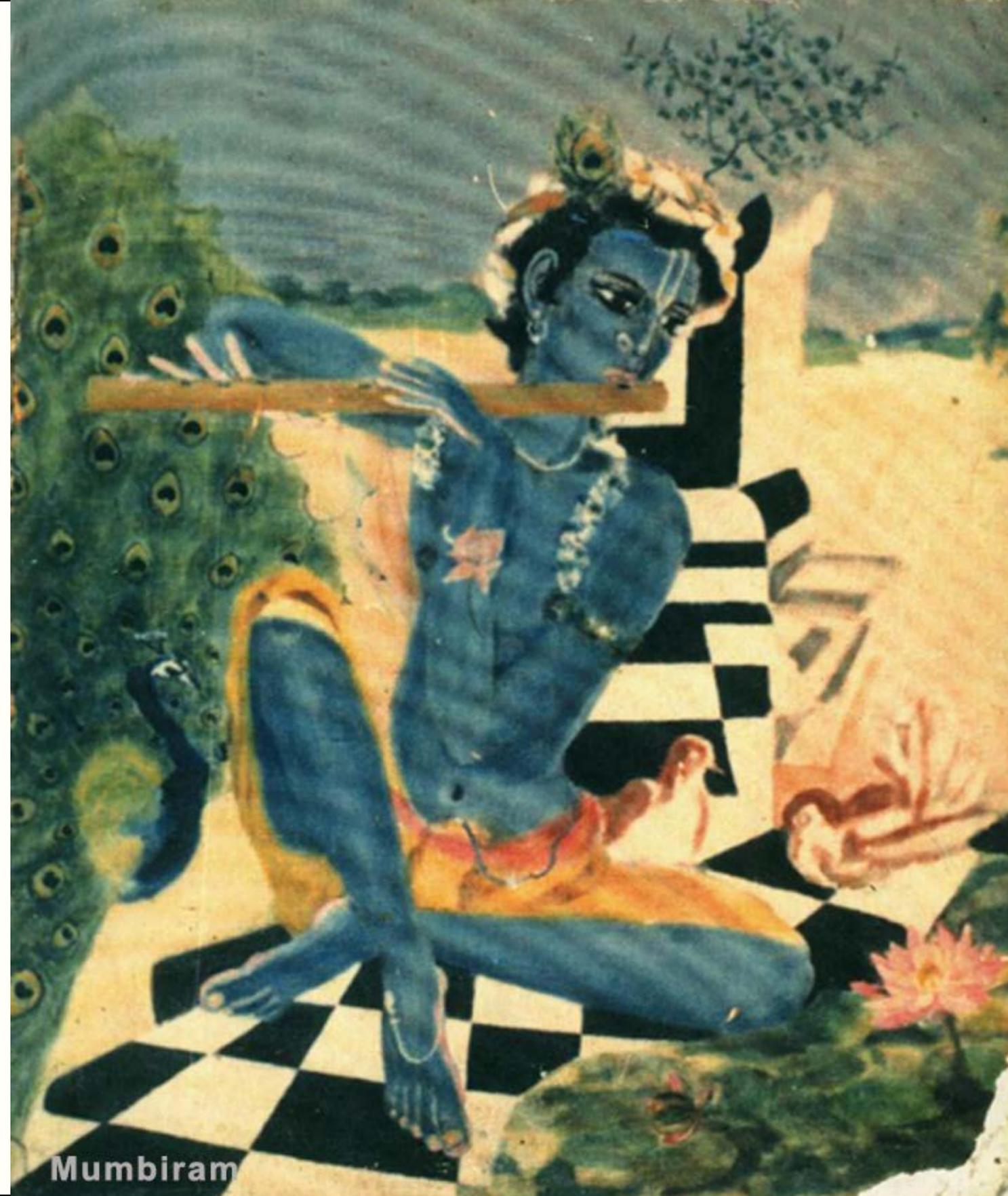
### **“Alone Together”**

**This pencil sketch titled “*Alone Together*”, 1982, is most likely inspired by a Phasepardhi youngster named Pepit who had befriended the artist in Pune. She appears to be threading a Mala.**



### **“Gita at their Fingertips”**

**This pencil sketch is a self-portrait titled “*Gita at their Fingertips*”, 1982. The hand-held device was an MD player. The idea was ahead of its time. The devotee is holding the device. Krishna is pressing the buttons.**



## “Iconic Krishna“

Watercolour, 1980

There are many visions and idols of Krishna. Most depictions of Krishna even in his adolescent leelaas in Vrindavan show him excessively laden with jewellery. Such '*vai-bhava-vilaasa*' belongs to Krishna's Dvaraka leelas. Those who are attached to the Vraja Leelas find such depictions incompatible with the nectarean visions of Krishna who went after the cows with the cowherd boys and came home in the evening with a dust-covered face that the Gopis found exquisitely beautiful. In Vrindavan Krishna cherished most the *Vanamala* (garland of forest flowers) that was put together by his loving friends.

Rupa Gosvami defines '*laavanya*' as the beauty of a person without any ornaments.

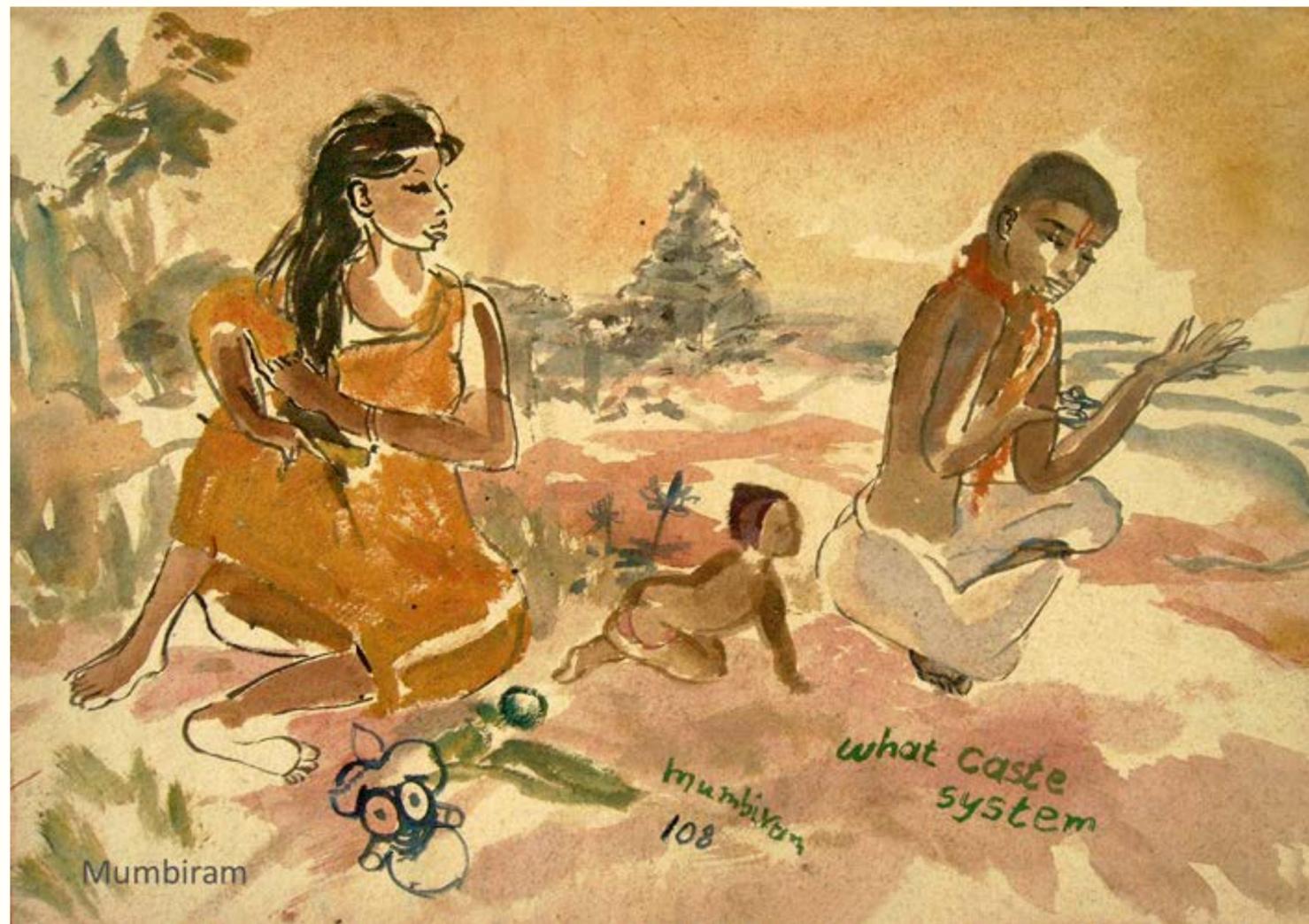
In Mumbiram's vision one sees Krishna's *laavanya* which was so very special to his dear associates in Vraja.



**One sees Krishna sitting and playing his flute in a meditative mood. You see a dancing peacock, lotuses bending towards Krishna's feet, a pair of amorous white doves near his lap and the Tulasi dancing in the wind. All these are enlivening the ambience.**

**This vision of Krishna seen in this painting of Mumbiram has been now recognised as Mumbiram's iconic vision of Krishna. Several similar versions exist. The very first of its kind was also one of the first paintings he created after his return to India.**

**Mumbiram had kept it with the Thakur tribals amongst whom he was living between 1980 and 1985.**



## "What caste system"

Watercolour 1982

Mumbiram's approach to the Krishna paradigm has been from the perspective of the artist. He has never been part of any spiritual organisation. He has always found the 'Divine Magic' among contemporary, 'ordinary' people, those he would meet on the street.

He had fallen in love with Krishna in Seattle, where he read the verse of the Forest Women for the first time. Now back in Pune he felt surrounded by the most interesting people he could have ever imagined to become friends with.

## Giving up Caste

Mumbiram was fascinated by India's variety of people. He has always found caste distinctions of India abhorrent. He would have liked to see all Indians drop their last names as these invariably announce caste identity. "*What caste system*" is a quick watercolour rendering.



**Mumbiram at the place of the Warli Tribals near Dahanu.**

He had assumed the nom de plume Mumbiram while in the USA and he continued with it while in India. In fact this his name had been included in his new passport given by an enthusiastic Indira Gandhi administration who had come back to power a few days after Mumbiram's return to India.

He insisted on being addressed only as Mumbiram which disconnected him from any caste identity. He saw it as an aesthetic choice.

### **Staying with the Tribals**

His 'personalist' way brought him in touch with different groups of tribals outside of Pune between 1980 and 1985.

One of them were the Warli north of Mumbai. Mumbiram was warmly received and invited to stay at their home in 1981. Fascinated by their life close to nature he lived with them. They were supporting themselves by working on a chikku tree plantation. He enjoyed living among people who had no preconceived expectations from an artist.



**The ladies at lunch break from the chikku plantation were happy to give Mumbiram this photo opportunity of their dance.**



**Parvat and Sakkhu are tickled to be photographed.**



**Mumbiram was in great awe of the beauty of the Warli's way of life.**



**This boy appeared somewhat shy and silent. But the boys and girls all agreed he was the best flute player amongst them all.**

**The festivities in the Warli village don't always coincide with the mainstream festivities. One full-moon day of the Falgun month, Mumbiram was confronted by the damsels with demands of "Fagwa". They were already drenching him with little fistfuls of dust.**

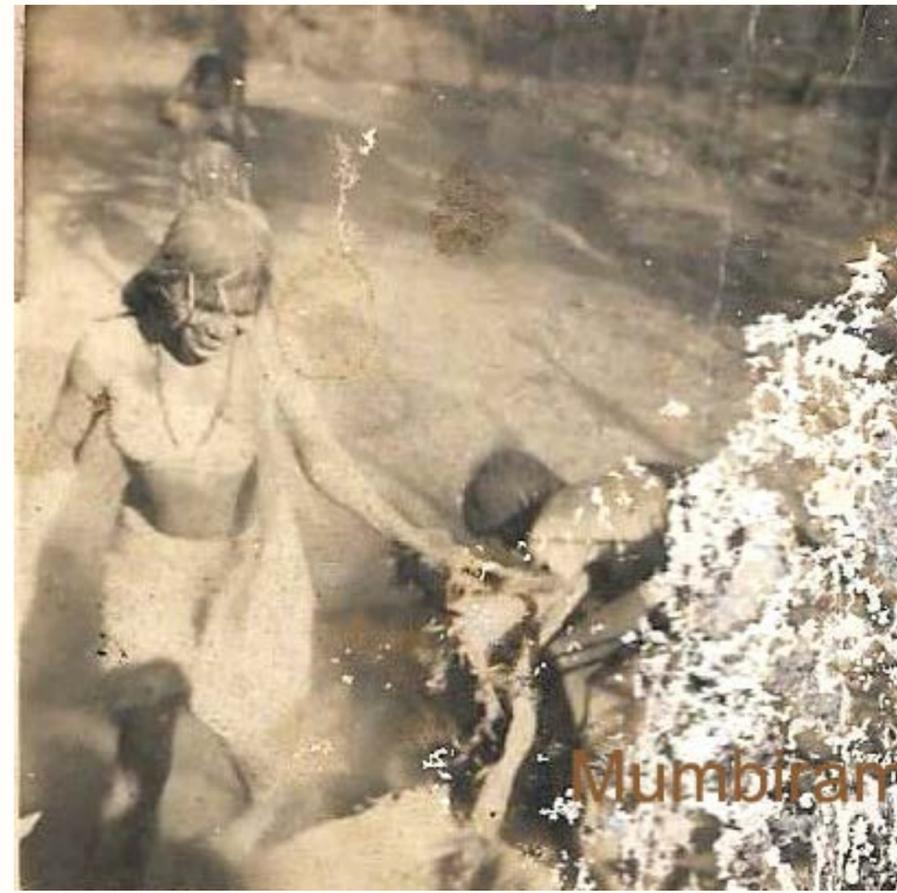
**Full-moon day of Falgun is celebrated as 'Holi' all over India ever since Krishna inaugurated the Colour Festival in Vrindavan. There the boys would assault the girls with colours. Here the Warli girls would extort 'donations' from the boys.**



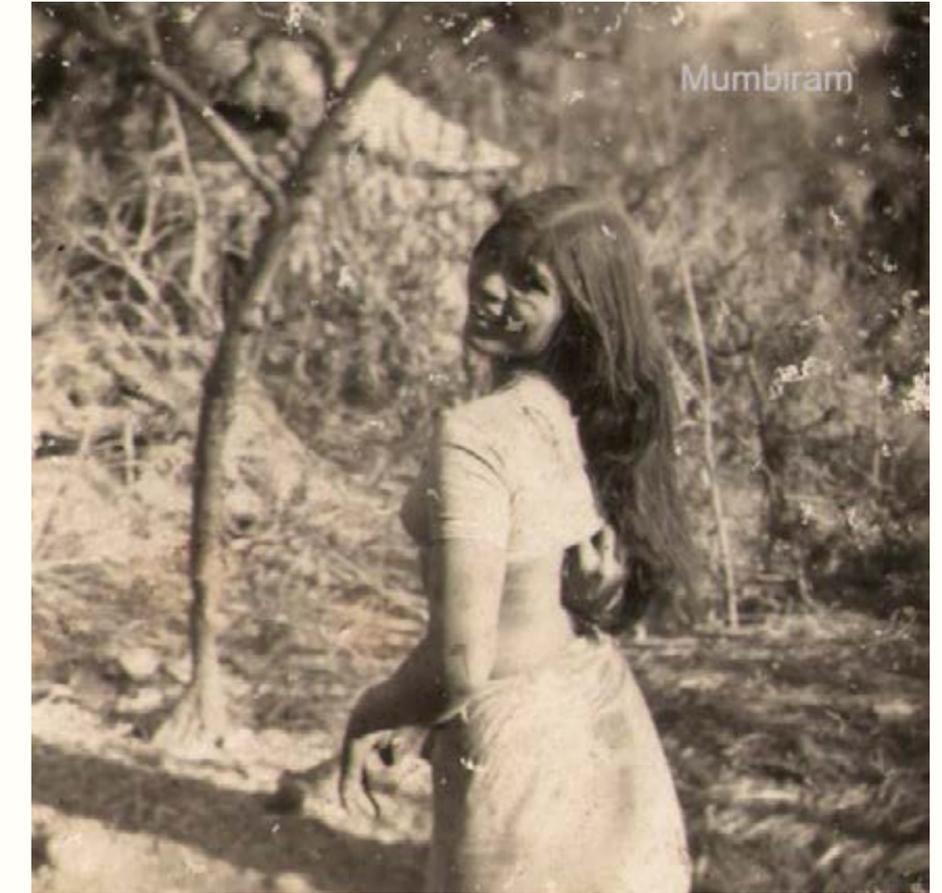
**Warli young men and women play Holi with just the dust (and mud!)**



**The littlest girls called Mumbiram 'phot-paadyaa'. They also nudged him to snap some photos of them. They had never seen themselves in a photograph.**



**The local boys would also retaliate. One boy picked some dust and shoved it down the blouse of this daughter of Mumbiram's host- Mangal Mangaat.**

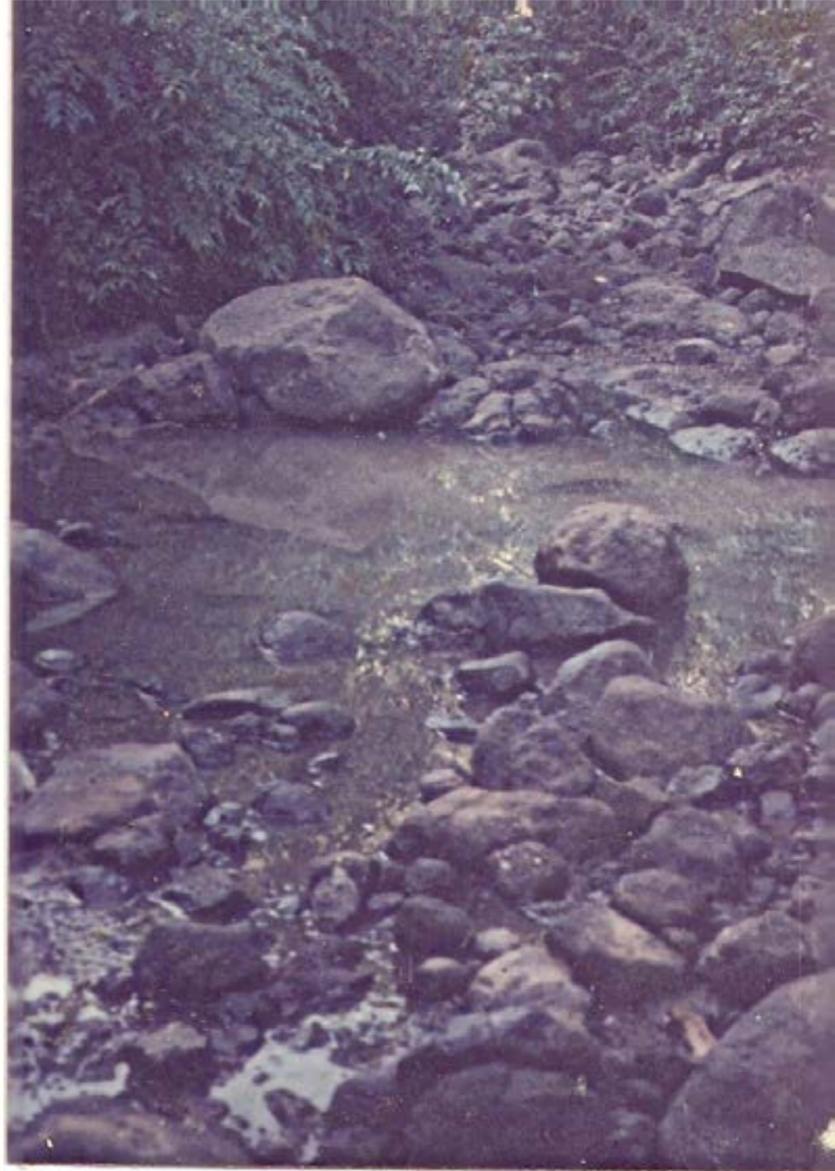




**An elevated shelter for the goats.  
It keeps them safe from wild cats.**

**Another group were the Thakurs who were living on the mountains near Pali, Sudhagad. They were living an isolated, independent life and liked to keep to themselves. They were almost self-sufficient and did a little trading of dried shredded mango and such products that they produced. Mumbiram was welcome to stay with them who considered him a sannyasi and lovingly showed him their hospitality.**

**He kept the very first of his *"Iconic Krishna"* paintings in their wooden house.**



The walk up the steep hills that led towards the '*Varadayini Temple*' were not without scenic spots that had streams of crystal clear water to refresh yourselves.



Mumbiram was reminded of the '*Venu Geetam*' of *Rasa Panchdhyayi* that describes how the Govardhan Mountain honors Krishna and Balaram along with the cows and the boys by providing them the fresh water, green grasses, roots and underground bulbs as also caves and valleys to sport and rest.

Other esoteric literature describes how the Pulindis hosted and entertained Krishna in the caves of the Govardhan Mountain for their noontime resting.

How fortunate the tribals living up those mountains were!



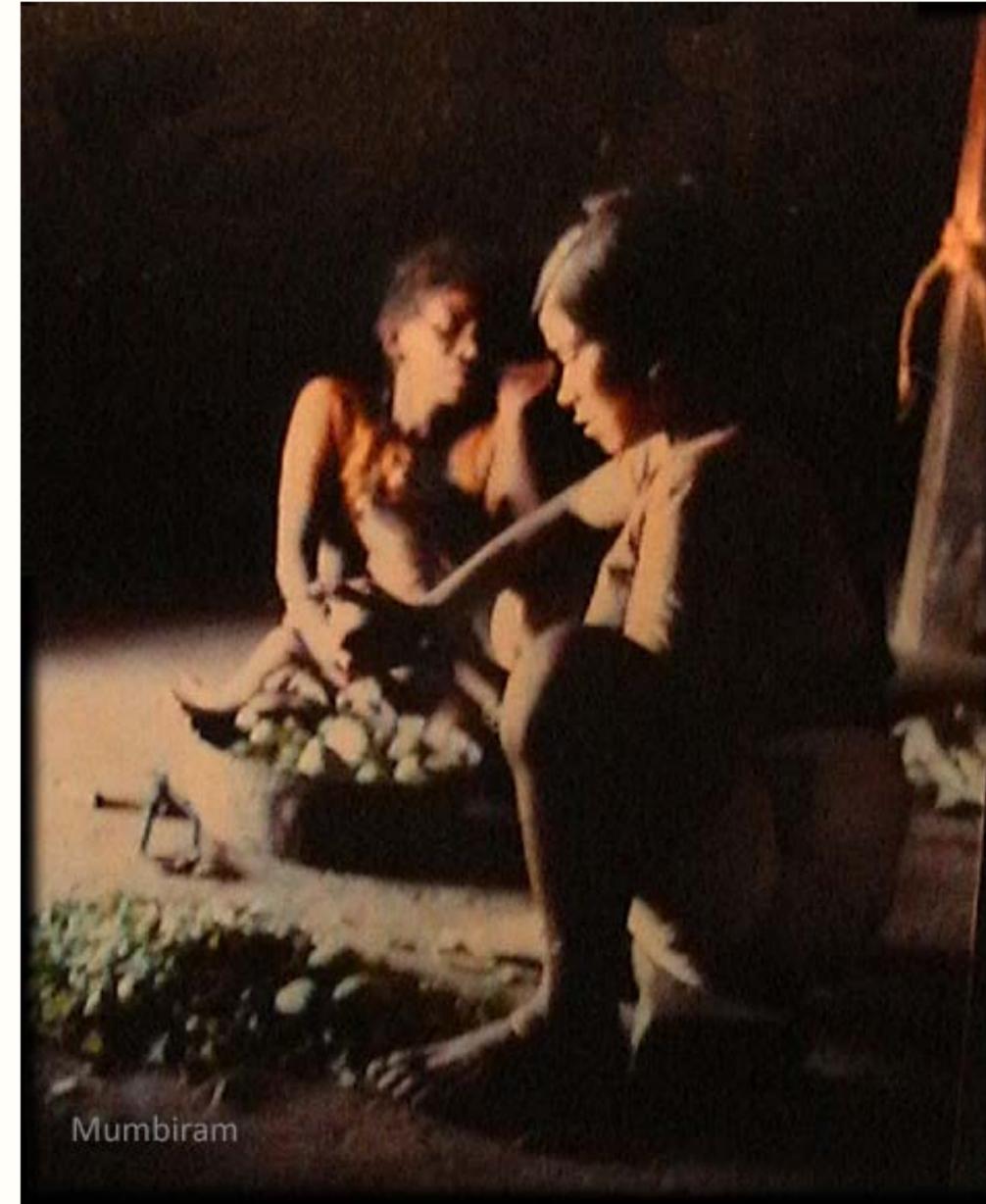
**Mumbiram in white cap joins Namdeo and his family at work on their rice fields. The picturesque Sarasgad Fort presides over the landscape.**



**Thakur tribals are gentle and loving with their cattle just as they are with their own children.**



**Mahada's pregnant wife personally and individually attends to the cows.**



**Younger members slice raw mangoes and dry them in the sun. They can sell the dry chips to the condiment vendors in the markets down in the flatlands.**



The older woman was not without happy surprises to give: One day all the able-bodied grown-ups went out to forage in the hills, leaving the elder lady and Mumbiram at the house. Soon Mumbiram realized that he had only rice left to cook. No dal or veggies. What will he eat his rice with? The lady told Mumbiram to wait outside a bit, she will see what she can conjure up. In half an hour she called out and presented Mumbiram a stew cooked made of native cashews that she had saved and stashed under the roof for a special occasion!



This happy photograph has men and women, boys and girls all sitting and standing in easy proximity. That is unlike mainstream Indian society. How did this happen? Mahada was a well-liked leader of that settlement and they all had an easy trusting rapport with Mumbiram. Mahada is sitting second from right. His son Hira is standing behind Mahada's elder brother.



**Mumbiram at Kusum's home in Yerawda.**

## **Exotic Muses**

**Five years before starting on his final version of the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis”, he has been fully following his fascination with people.**

**He became friends with people who were by and large considered ‘low caste’ and were avoided or exploited by the rest of society. Rag-pickers, Pharsepardhies and other tribal people became his muses and friends.**

**The rag-pickers, who were living in the slums in Yerawda at the outskirts of the city, were his first friends. An old woman drying old pieces of bhakri bread in the sun on the ground in Koregaon Park across the river from Yerawda was his first contact. He was reminded of devotees at the bank of Ganga, who beg for food and bury it in a piece of cloth in a hole in the sand to keep it away from dogs.**



**Kusum was attracted to the artist's abode but she was never alone.**

**Groups of rag-pickers were wandering around the city all day picking paper, plastic and metal scrap which they collected in big sacks on their shoulders to be sold to scrap dealers. Mumbiram was curious about them and he became friends with different groups. Some of them were teenagers and going out in groups was their protection. It was a vulnerable living. Their poverty, illiteracy, low-caste, wretched profession and above all their youth was all piled against them as they walked the streets. Many times they were caught or chased by guys for different reasons. At such times they often came running to Mumbiram's studio. They came running up the steps and knocked frantically on the door. There they were safe and welcome. They were wonderful company for him, who didn't care about what other people thought about his newly acquired friends who are picking scrap on the street. He saw it just as part of the drama when they took a volume of the precious 1911 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica from his father's times to be cashed at the recycle dump.**

They didn't know what it meant to be an artist and now they had become his muses. Especially one young woman he liked very much, Kusum.

When Kusum brought her mother along to the studio, the mother told him how they had come to Pune in the seventies escaping a big drought in their village Mungi Paithan. He would have liked to marry Kusum but it was not supposed to be. Belonging to the Matang (Mang) caste, who used to handle animal carcasses, bones and skins for a living; they were treated like 'untouchables'. They knew Mumbiram was of the brahmin caste. But caste was never any issue in this unusual friendship.

His rag-picker muses began visiting the studio almost every day. His friendship with them was going to stretch through several groups and generations. He was welcome at their homes as well.

Mumbiram felt blessed having such wonderful friends. He liked their ways, the way they walked the streets and the way they talked being very creative with words. It was a friendship crossing the rigid social barriers of caste. It was a friendship between an artist and his muses which was most essential for Mumbiram.

One of the first charcoals he made of them shows *"Kusum brings her Mother Sakhrabai to visit the Artist"*. It was later to be bought by an Australian couple and taken to Canberra.



Mumbiram

## **“Kusum brings her Mother Sakhrabai to visit the Artist”**

**Charcoal, 1984, Pune**

Sakhrabai had migrated from rural Mungi-Paithan to Pune as a teenager with her father and family and settled in what would become an urban slum. They were from the Matang (Mang) untouchable caste that salvaged bones and skins from animal carcasses. Kusum was her eldest daughter. Kusum went into the city with other girls in the neighbourhood to collect paper and plastic refuse as well as metal scrap from construction sites. It was an adventure fraught with danger for teenage girls. Kusum was the leader of her group.

She is a tall dark, strongly built, attractive teenager. She had a variety of suitors. That included a young Englishman that was once a disciple of Osho-Rajneesh, a Muslim boy from a neighbouring slum besides a fellow ragpicker who dressed as a girl. Kusum’s father had already got a boy from his relatives to marry her. Kusum had driven that boy away. Kusum had kept all this from

Mumbiram the artist who also liked her.

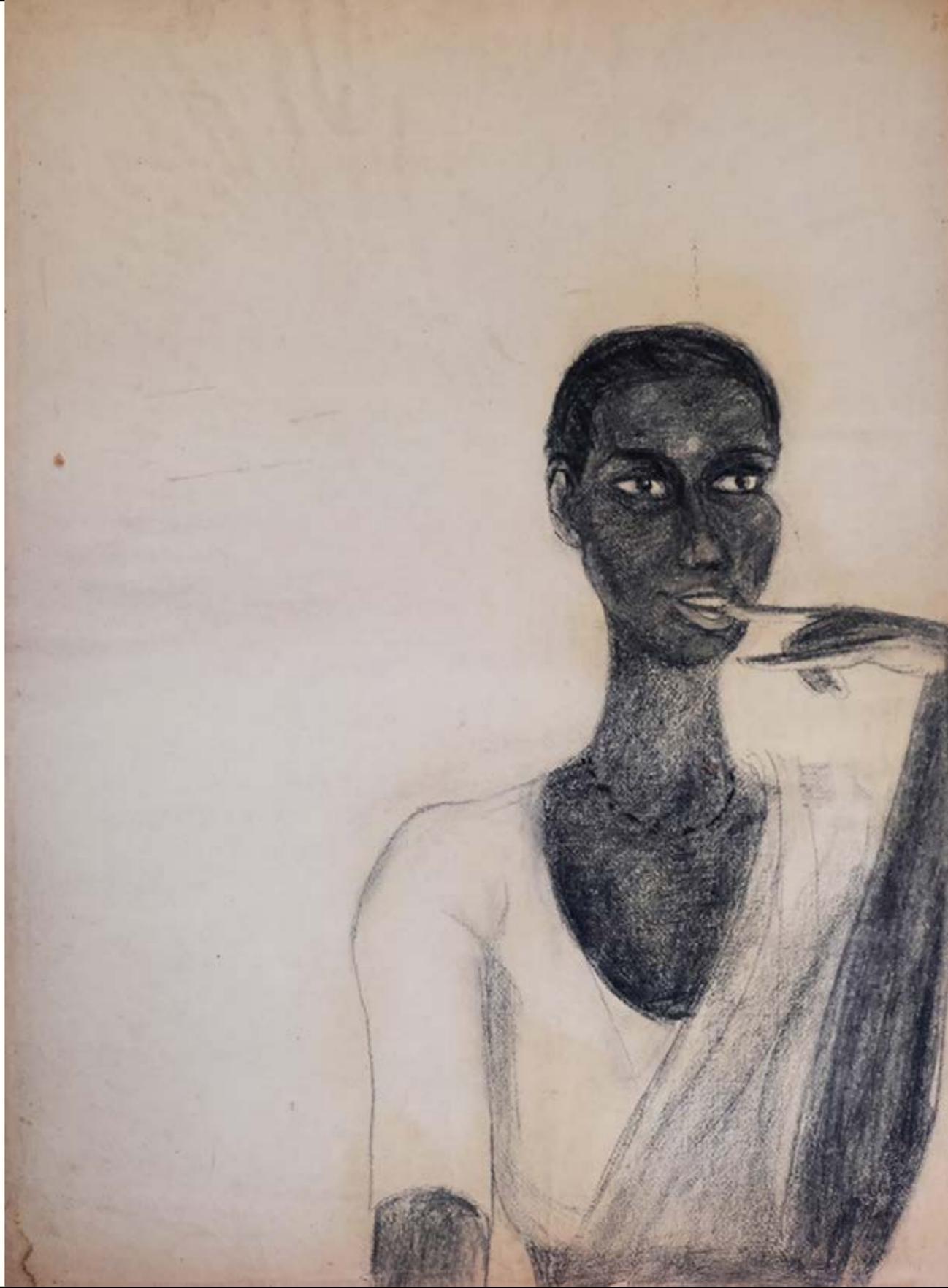


**Kusum and her gang became regular visitors to Mumbiram's atelier at the downtown vegetable market place. He was hospitable, gracious and generous.**

**Kusum kept it like that. He was the kind of man to take mama to meet. Nothing hanky panky. Here Kusum is seen sharing Mumbiram's art with her mother. Kusum has been Mumbiram's favourite muse and inspired many a classic of Rasa Renaissance Art.**

**This charcoal rendering has been included in an anthology of Mumbiram's other charcoal renderings depicting loving couples sharing their book reading experience. This anthology is titled 'Book Readers, Love on the Gutenberg Galaxy'.**

**This charcoal rendering is in private collection in Australia.**

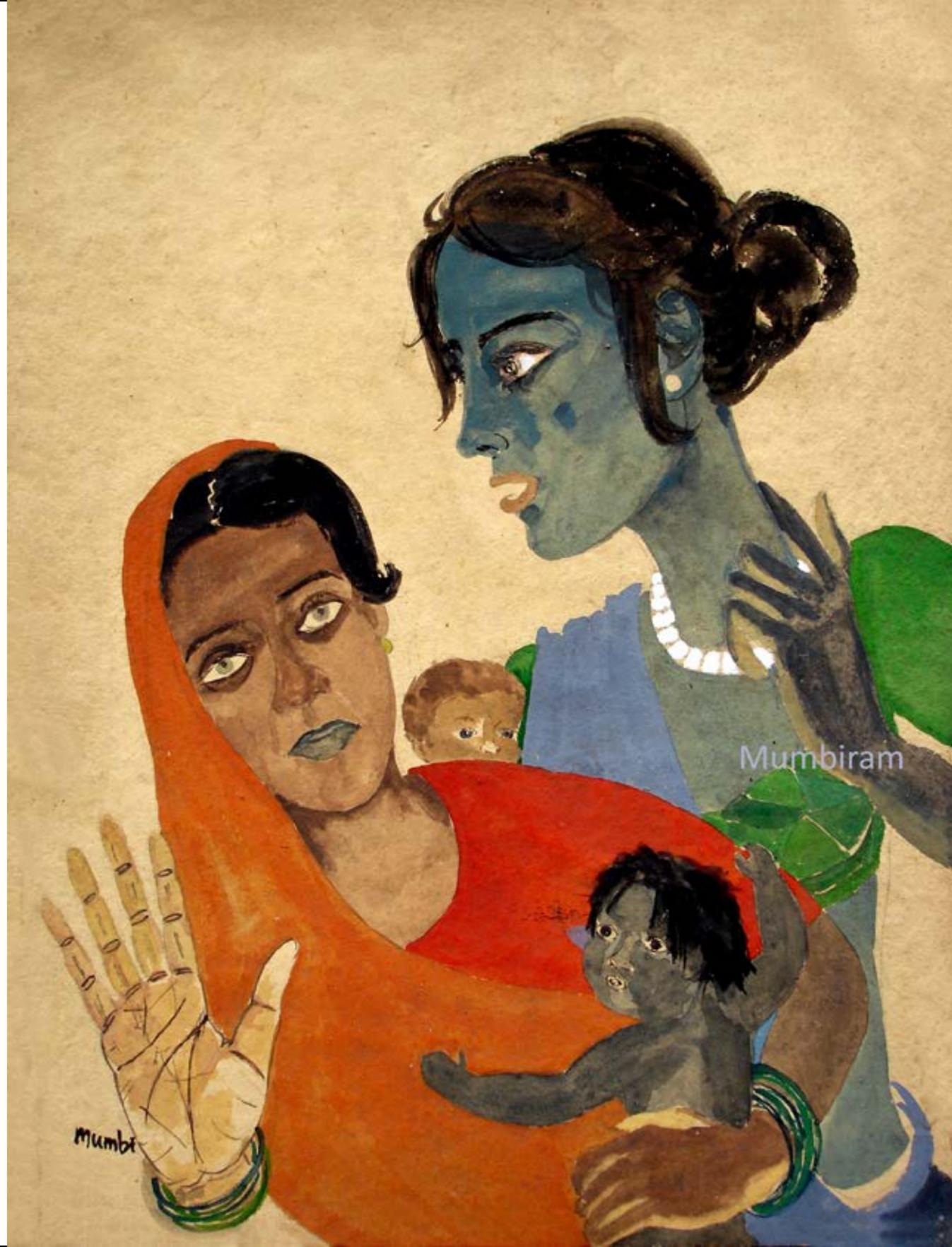


## Discovering Stars

Mumbiram did not go to the Adivasi tribals or the rag-pickers as a do-gooder. These friendships were part of his own aesthetic search. That was different to the attitude of the social worker who is insensitive to the grace and the ambiance of the natural people and who in the long run may only bring a cheerless ruin to their happy lives as a price of 'civilization'.

The 'poor' slum dwellers and tribes, the dark beauties of India, were not seen in the movies and magazines of India. They were not represented in the accepted art forms or were seen only in a stylized form. Mumbiram was determined to bring the beauty of these outsiders of society to the notice of the world.

The "*Ropewallis*" show the reaction of some tribal beauties who rejected his approach.



## “Ropewallis”

**Mixed media: Watercolour and Acrylic, 1984**

The rope-makers sell their ropes to the pan-wallas that one sees at every corner in India. The pan-wallas keep a piece of rope burning outside their shop for customers to light up their bidies or cigarette. Mumbiram found the rope makers fascinating. He always watched them, but never could connect with them. They were unapproachable.

In this picture you see what happened when Mumbiram once tried to approach them. While the beauty in the background is looking away, her older companion in the foreground is requesting the artist to stay away. Mumbiram has respectfully captured this refusal with great care and candour.

This painting appeared in the article “Practice of Personalist Art” in Ravivar Sakal in 1985. In the article Mumbiram says, “I used to be attracted to bold and fearless women. I found even a refusal by bold beautiful women very intriguing.”



Mumbiram in his studio in Pune, India, ca.1985

### **3. Creating the “Forest Women”**

**Scriptures  
brought to Life**



**\*\*\*\*\***

Throughout Mumbiram's creative journey it has always been people that were most important for Mumbiram. Every inspiration arose from a direct person to person affair. So was also the case with the third and final creation of the "Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis" in 1985.

Prior to that there had appeared two articles written by Mumbiram in the Marathi newspaper.

Those articles clearly reveal the influences that went into inspiring Mumbiram finally to put his brush to the canvas. And his friendship with the Phasepardhies was perhaps the most important of them.

There was only one person who was allowed to watch Mumbiram create the "Forest Women".

**\*\*\*\*\***



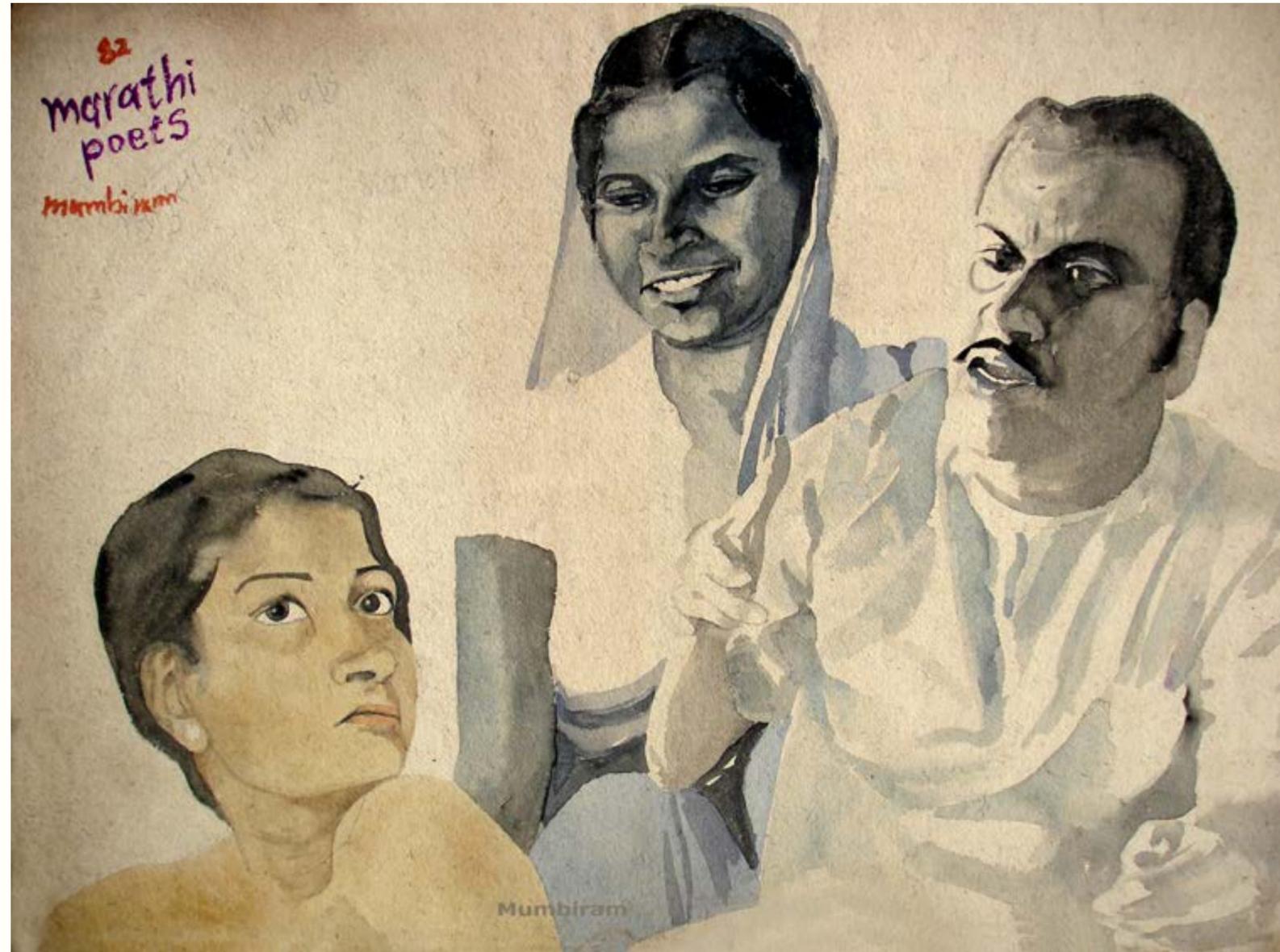
**“Daughter-in-law of the Chitale Family”**

Watercolour, 1982

## **Attraction of Personalism**

The two newspaper articles, written by Mumbiram in 1985, were titled: *“In Search of Art that transcends Culture”* and *“Practice of Personalist Art”*. They revealed his aesthetic choice of people over matter and gave insights into an artist who lives among scholars, beggars and tribals with equal vision. They appeared along with colour images of his art of ‘Personalism’.

*“Marathi Poets”* and *“Daughter-in-law of the Chitale Family”* are some of them and they deal with the Marathi culture.



## “Marathi Poets 1982”

Watercolour, 1982

“Marathi Poets 1982” deals with the rise of ‘Dalit’ Poets from the former untouchable class. This painting saw the light of the day in the article “In Search of Art that transcends Culture” in the Marathi Daily “Sakal” in 1985. This is from the “Personalist” period of Mumbiram’s art. Mumbiram was acutely aware of the emerging social movements in Maharashtra. Emergence of Dalit Literature was an exciting happening in the 1980s. Mumbiram’s muses were mostly from the Dalit communities. Through his art Mumbiram was making his muses aware of their own unique beauty. Two of the darker Marathi Poets shown by Mumbiram in this watercolour rendering appear to be from the Dalit community. They appear to exude great assurance and self-confidence. The third lighter poet perhaps represents traditional Marathi poetry. She appears to take thoughtful cognizance of her new colleagues. Appearing as early as 1985 in the local popular daily this watercolour rendering received an enthusiastic welcome. Notice Mumbiram has titled the painting “Marathi Poets 1982” without mentioning the possible Dalit background of the participants.

Mumbiram saw the most fundamental philosophical dichotomy in our age to be 'Personalism' versus 'Impersonalism.' With a lucidity in his writing he talked about 'Personalist Art', expressed aesthetic observations ahead of their time and shared sensitive comments on the socio-political milieu:

*"...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. ...*

*We find this same neglect of human beauty in contemporary Indian painting. Even a leading painter like Husain paints blank faces. The affected distortion one sees a lot today is the most offensive example of blind following of Western streams. ...*

*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. ... It became my ambition that Art should transcend culture."*

*"The personal realm is infinitely richer than the impersonal realm. Stripped of our ethnicities we are all beautiful belly-buttons."*

*(Mumbiram in "In Search of Art that transcends Culture", 1985, Ravivar Sakal, Pune)*

*“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.*

*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.”*

*(Mumbiram in “Practice of Personalist Art”,  
1985, Ravivar Sakal, Pune)*



## **“Mandai Madonna”**

**1983, mixed media watercolour and acrylic**

**This dark beauty with a baby has set up shop between heaps of watermelons, baskets of betel pans and a bed of bunches of marigold. A beautiful orange cow is meandering behind her looking for something to feed on. There are many other details that are intertwined in a complicated but peaceful way. One sees a hand with bracelets appearing from the right. The open palm is inquiring about the price of the wares on sale. In the foreground a mutt is keeping an eye at the viewer. The dog is protective towards the mother nursing her baby without any inhibitions. In the upper left corner the iconic spire of the Mandai market is depicted with great care. Yet the picture would have been incomplete without the rickshaw seen through the legs of another cow in the background. Those who have ever visited Pune’s Mandai Market are amazed to see the ingenuity of the composition that accommodates the ubiquitous symbols that together capture the unique atmosphere that prevails in that unique environment.**



**Mumbiram has made many portraits of the folk people of India. This one is different. It shows Mumbiram's muse in her natural surrounding. It is also the only painting where Mumbiram shows what and how he liked the immediate surroundings where he chose to make his atelier. Eventually Mumbiram came to know all the women in this group, becoming their frequent customer. They all hailed from a small village in Karnataka.**

**Mumbiram invariably found genuine friendship with the most unlikely and little known neglected members of Indian society. He made paintings only of people that he happened to be friends with.**



**A chance meeting on the street led to surprise recognition of bonds. Mumbiram's father had represented Choklet's father in Courts of Law. Here Choklet has taken Mumbiram in his Altar Room and shared the Deities and Weapons with him. Sometimes friends were amazed to see how the two had a lot in common in their Appearance and Aura.**

## **Personalism inspiring Rasiks**

**These engaging personal accounts were a happy change from the adjective-ridden staid fare that art columns in newspapers usually offered. It led to several wonderful reactions in various people, who liked Mumbiram's approach to art and his fresh modern look at older themes without falling for the abstract and the western influenced way of art. One of them led to a very spontaneous sale of the painting "*Mandai Madonna*" to a visiting Marathi scholar lady from America. It shows a dark beauty at the Mandai Market place.**

**Another one was meeting an architect, who introduced Mumbiram to the leading orthopaedic surgeon of Pune, who wanted to have a painting for the dining area of his new residence that this architect had designed. Dr.Sancheti offered Mumbiram 12,000 Rupees for making a painting on a canvas of six feet by six feet. Mumbiram agreed and was given total freedom about what he**



**Summer 1985. Mumbiram visiting Choklet, a Phasepardhi, living outside of Pune in the wilderness. Here Mumbiram is seen with a broken arm put in a plaster by Dr.Sancheti.**

would create. He was going to work on the canvas that had been sponsored by the wife of the director of the Gokhle Institute. Before that it is important to mention how his friendship with Choklet Phasepardhi, who was living outside of Pune in the wilderness, chanced to happen.

### **Phasepardhi Inspiration**

Mumbiram had met Choklet by chance on the street. Choklet was wearing turban and dhoti in a way that made Mumbiram curious. It turned out Choklet knew Mumbiram's father, the lawyer, who helped and defended Phasepardhis who were wrongly accused in court cases. In fact Mumbiram remembered Choklet's father Kanthia Pawar as one of the visitors to his father's law offices. Mumbiram and Choklet became friends and he often visited Choklet's camp in the wilderness outside Pune.



**Dhrupada of the Phasepardhi tribe had become very fond of Mumbiram ever since he saved her from a violent security guard near German Bakery. She had decided to call him by a new name: 'Parveen Shet'. Here she has found him near the upscale Mahatma Gandhi Road.**

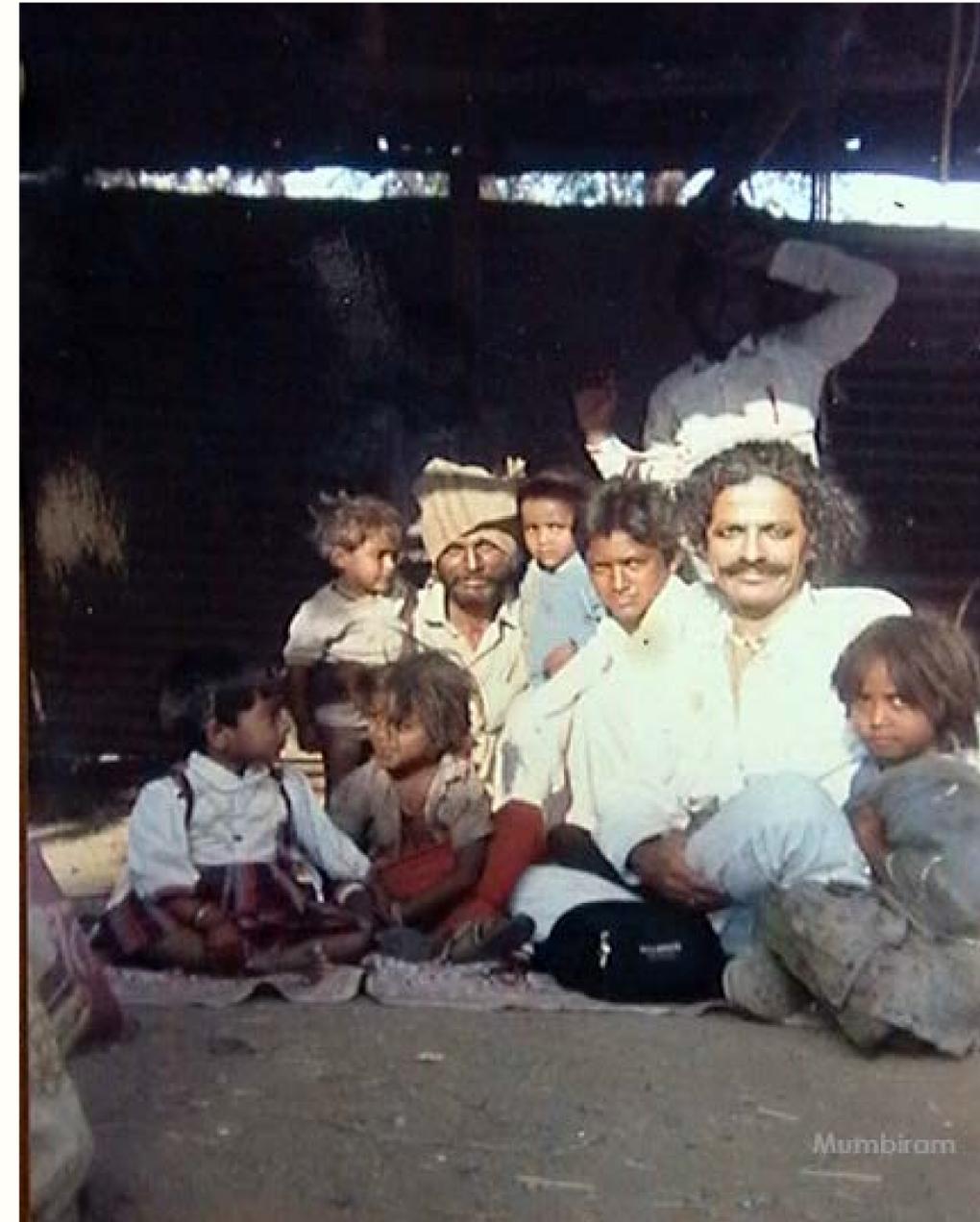
**Another group of Phasepardhis was Drupada and her troupe who begged around the affluent camp area. Mumbiram would certainly meet Drupada's troupe every time he visited this area. In the very Phasepardhi style Drupada had chosen their favourite nickname Parveen Shet for Mumbiram.**

**He was attracted to rag-pickers, tribals, broom-makers, rope-makers and mala-makers. The Forest Women are attracted to Krishna. The verse of the Forest Women has always stayed in his mind ever since he had read it in Seattle. What other theme would he be wanting to create on this canvas than this his dearest topic?**

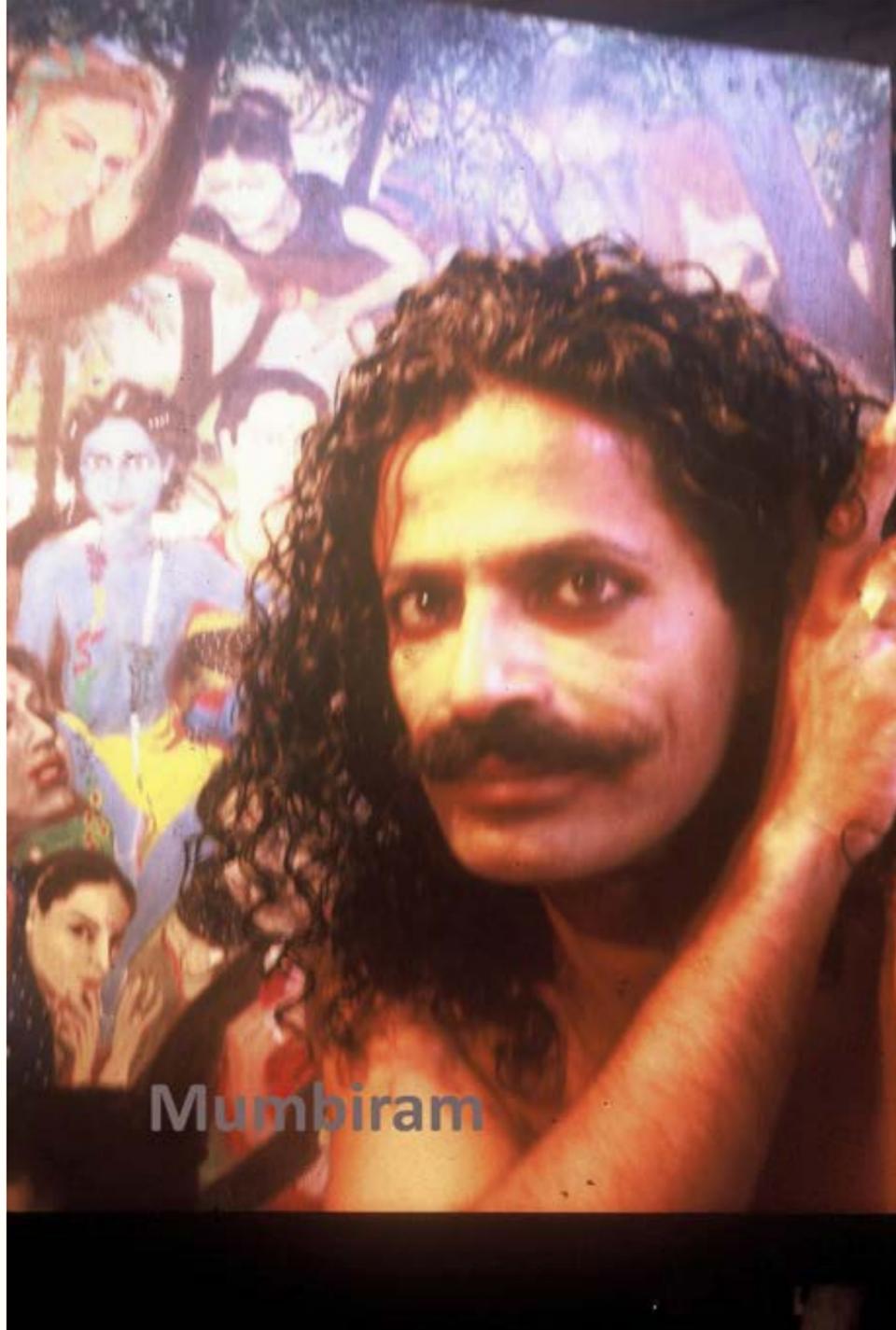
**Before he started, he had helped Choklet in selling his tree-cotton he was collecting for a living. Most Phasepardhis had to find alternate occupations after their traditional way of setting traps to capture small animals and birds had been made illegal. Mumbiram visiting Choklet, his wife Amrabai, daughters Shanipar and Sangeeta and three sons was always a happy occasion for all.**



**When Mumbiram was visiting Choklet's settlement at Padmavati, outside Pune, everyone was greatly enlivened. Here we see his sons, daughters and wife Amrabai.**



**At Choklet's settlement Amrisha insisted on clicking this informal group that she very lovingly assembled.**



## Creating the “Forest Women”

The “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” had been on his mind all this time. The verse where they appear is part of the much celebrated selection of the tenth canto of Shrimad Bhagavatam, called *Rasapan-chadhyayi*, which Mumbiram had himself translated from Sanskrit into English. It is about the unmitigated attachment of the Gopis for Krishna in the beautiful pastoral setting of Vrindavan, which is considered the epitome of selfless love and the ultimate object of meditation for sages and poets alike.

This is how Mumbiram had translated the verse:

*“When Krishna sits with the Gopis on the bank of the Yamuna, the Pulindi, the forest-dwelling wild women, appear from the woods. They are also attracted by the beauty of Krishna. They cannot go close to Krishna. He is surrounded by the Gopis.*”

पूर्णाः पुलिन्द्य उरुगायपदाब्जरागश्रीकुङ्कुमेन दयितास्तनमण्डितेन  
तद्दर्शनस्मररुजस्तृणरूपितेन लिम्पन्त्य आननकुचेषु जहुस्तदाधिम् ॥ ११ ॥

*The forest women watch the Gopis placing Krishna's lovely feet on their bosoms. The red unguent of sandalwood and kumkum that is smeared on the breasts of the Gopis gets also smeared on the soles of Krishna's beautiful feet. The forest women become very agitated by this amorous vision of Krishna. When at last, Krishna and the Gopis walk away, treading on the luscious green grass on the ground, the red kumkum-powder from Krishna's feet makes the grass tinted red as well. The forest women now move ahead and hastily rip out that very red tinted grass and smear their faces and breasts with it. That is the closest they will ever get to Krishna! Yet even that far-fetched little association with Krishna completely satisfies their excruciating lusty desires that were aroused by watching Krishna in the first place."*

*(Translation by Mumbiram, High Five of Love Vol.1, Five Songs of Rasa, Venu Geetam, 11)*



**In front of the masterpiece in progress, 1985**

**After the canvas had been waiting in the studio for five years its time had finally come and Mumbiram started working on a vision of the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” that was going to be a masterpiece.**

**For the next six months he was deeply absorbed in the happenings between Krishna, the Gopis and the forest women as described in that verse. He was so deeply involved that he felt he was right there.**

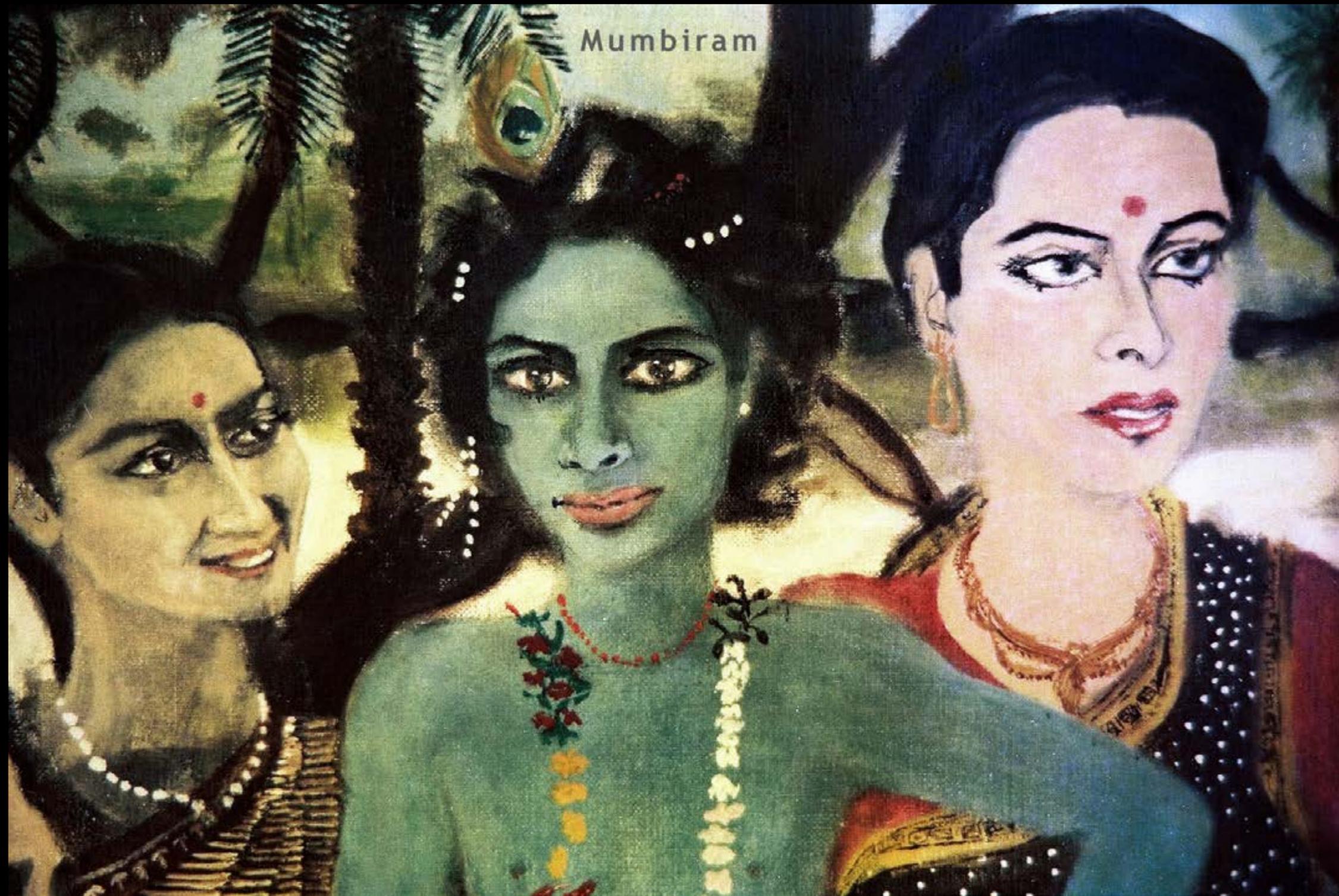
**The third and final version of the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” was manifesting on the canvas in the studio at the crowded vegetable market place in 1985.**



Mumbiram has not shown the obvious.  
He has not shown the Forest Women  
tearing off the grass and rubbing the  
kukum on their bodies as described in  
the verse in Shrimad Bhagavatam.

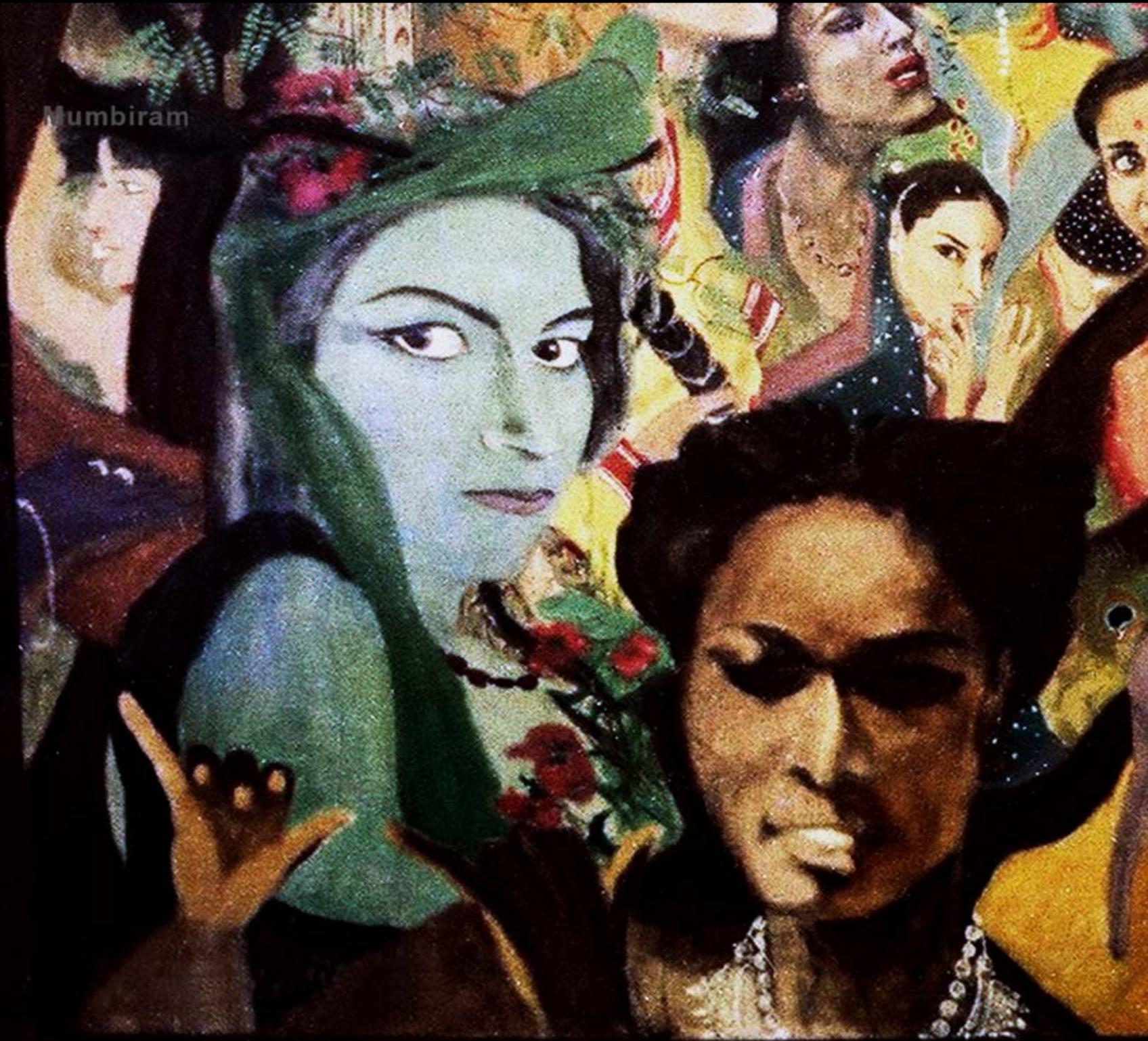
Mumbiram's enchanting interpretation of  
the verse shows real contemporary people  
who exhibit the mood and mode of the  
happenings described in the verse.

The Gopis resemble well-known  
Bollywood actors of the 80s.  
The Forest Women are the  
colourful people in the periphery.



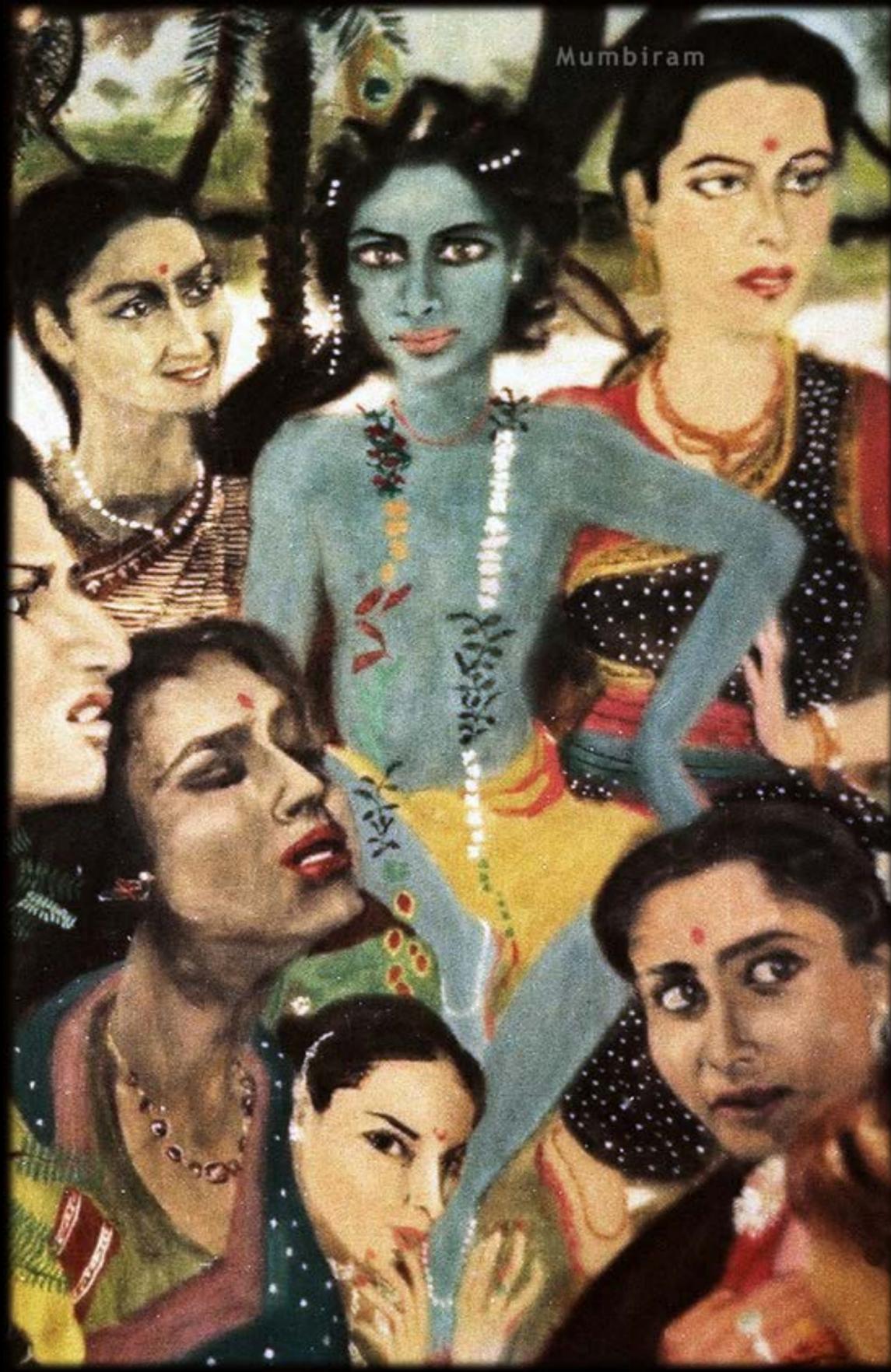
Krishna is seen as a young attractive boy, who is decorated with a simple garland of flowers.

Mumbiram



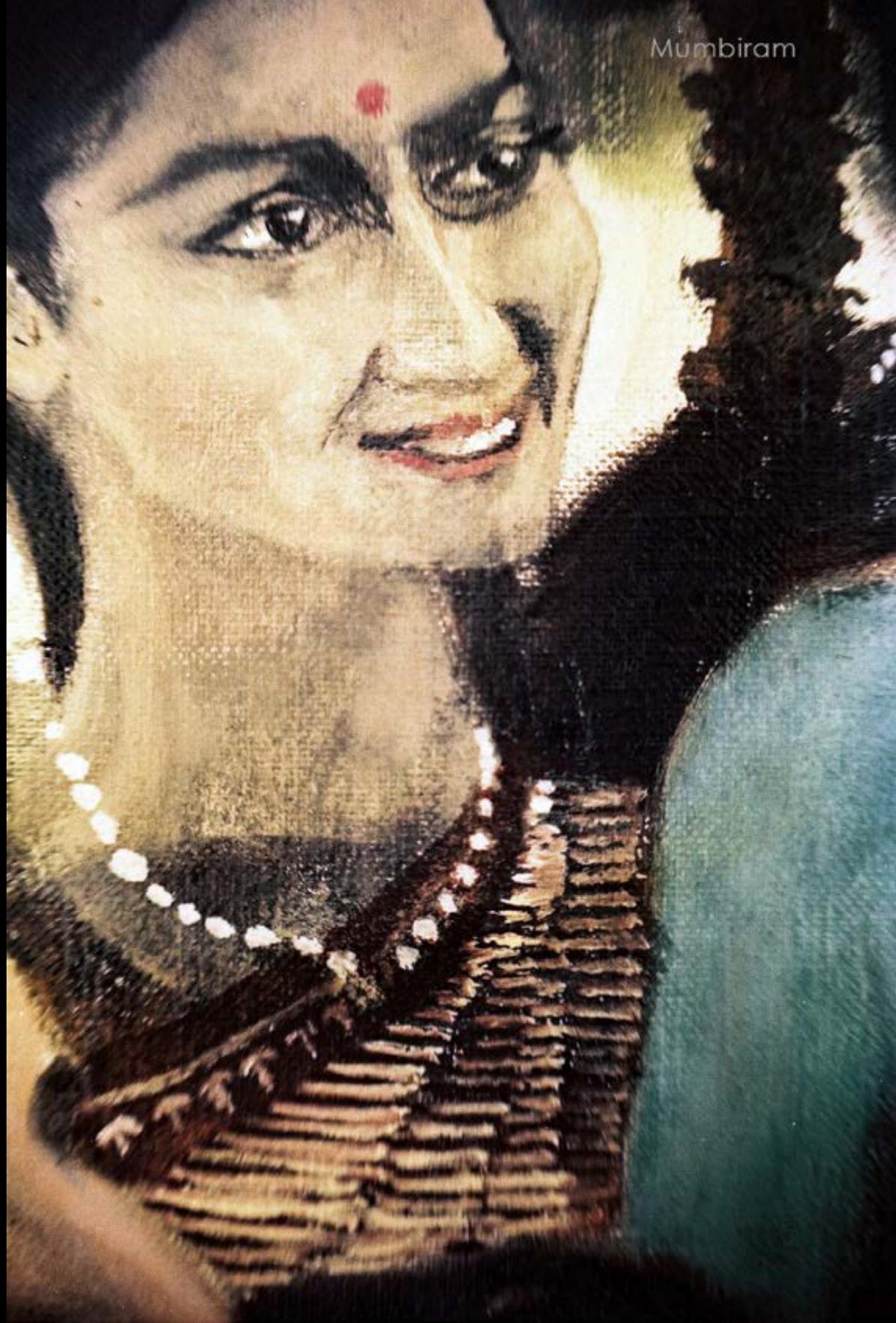
This one is imitating playing the flute  
to attract Krishna's attention.  
While the lady behind her has discovered  
that they are being watched.

Look closely !  
The parrot sitting on her head is watching  
the scene around Krishna.

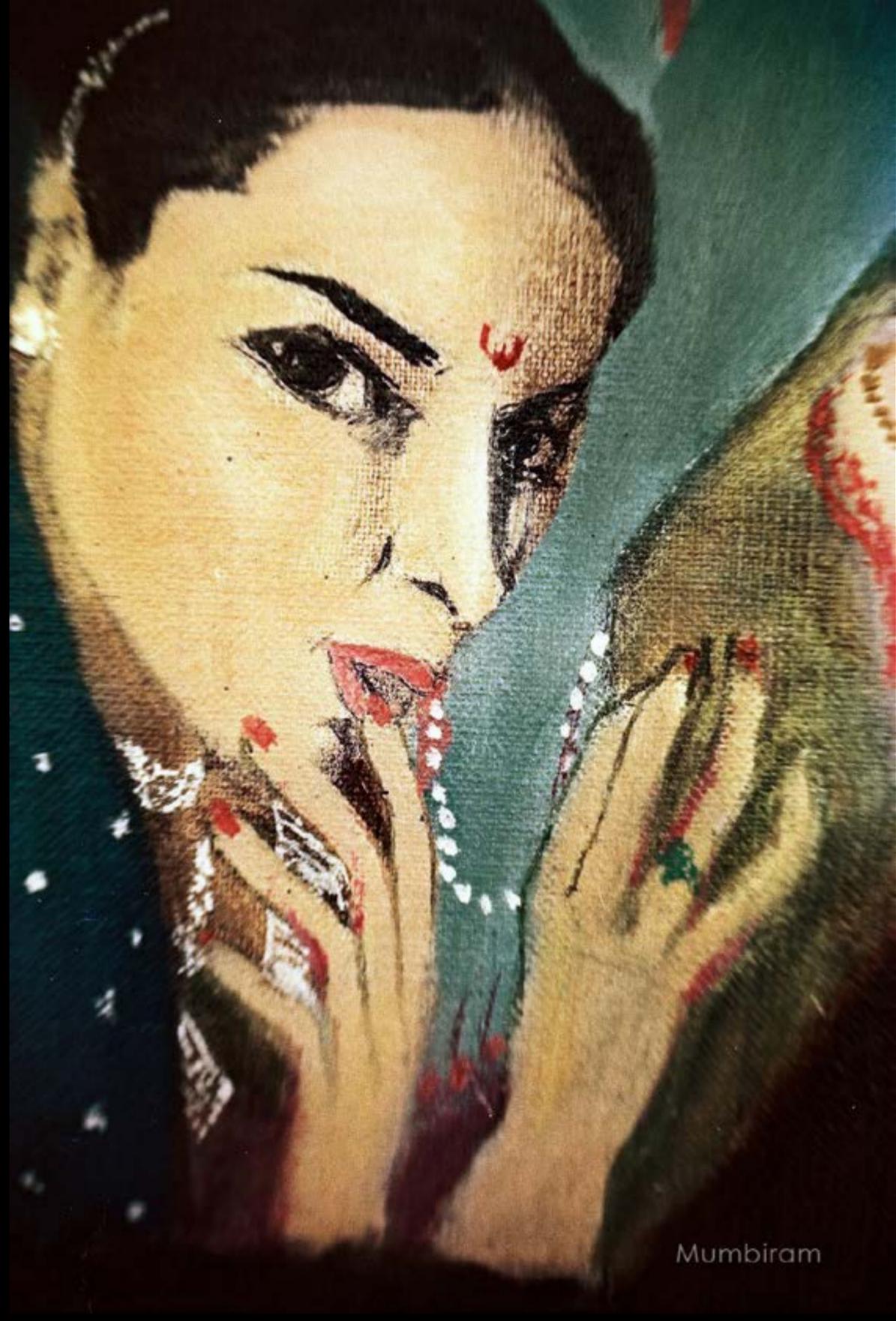


The Gopis, cowherd women, have surrounded Krishna.  
They are trying to sit as near to  
Krishna as possible.

Mumbiram



She just can't keep her eyes off Krishna.  
She is full of admiration.



Mumbiram

This Gopi is sitting at Krishna's feet.  
Not sure what is happening here  
she is looking directly at us.

It is as if the painter was there.  
He was amongst them.



This is close to how Lakhu was when Mumbi first met him. In the background you see Mumbiram's legendary atelier in early days. Lakhu is sitting on his limping cart. This was on the day the pilgrimage of Saint Tukaram stops by for halt and rest nearby. Those are pilgrims with saffron flags you see in the background.

## Gopi or Jungli ?

After the "Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis" had been complete, it was given to Dr. Sancheti.

The only person who was allowed to watch Mumbiram paint the "Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis" was Lakhu, a gentleman, who Mumbiram could share the creative world of an artist with.

Lakhu loved to classify Mumbiram's muses into Gopis and 'Junglis', as Lakhu would call the Forest Women. The Gopis resemble well-known Mumbai actresses of the 80s. One can see the likenesses of Rekha, Smita Patil, Anuradha Patel and Sarika and others.

Mumbiram and Lakhu often went to Mumbiram's favourite spot at the river where he imagined the scene of the Forest Women to happen. "*Magical Place at the River*" shows that place at the bank of the Mula river.



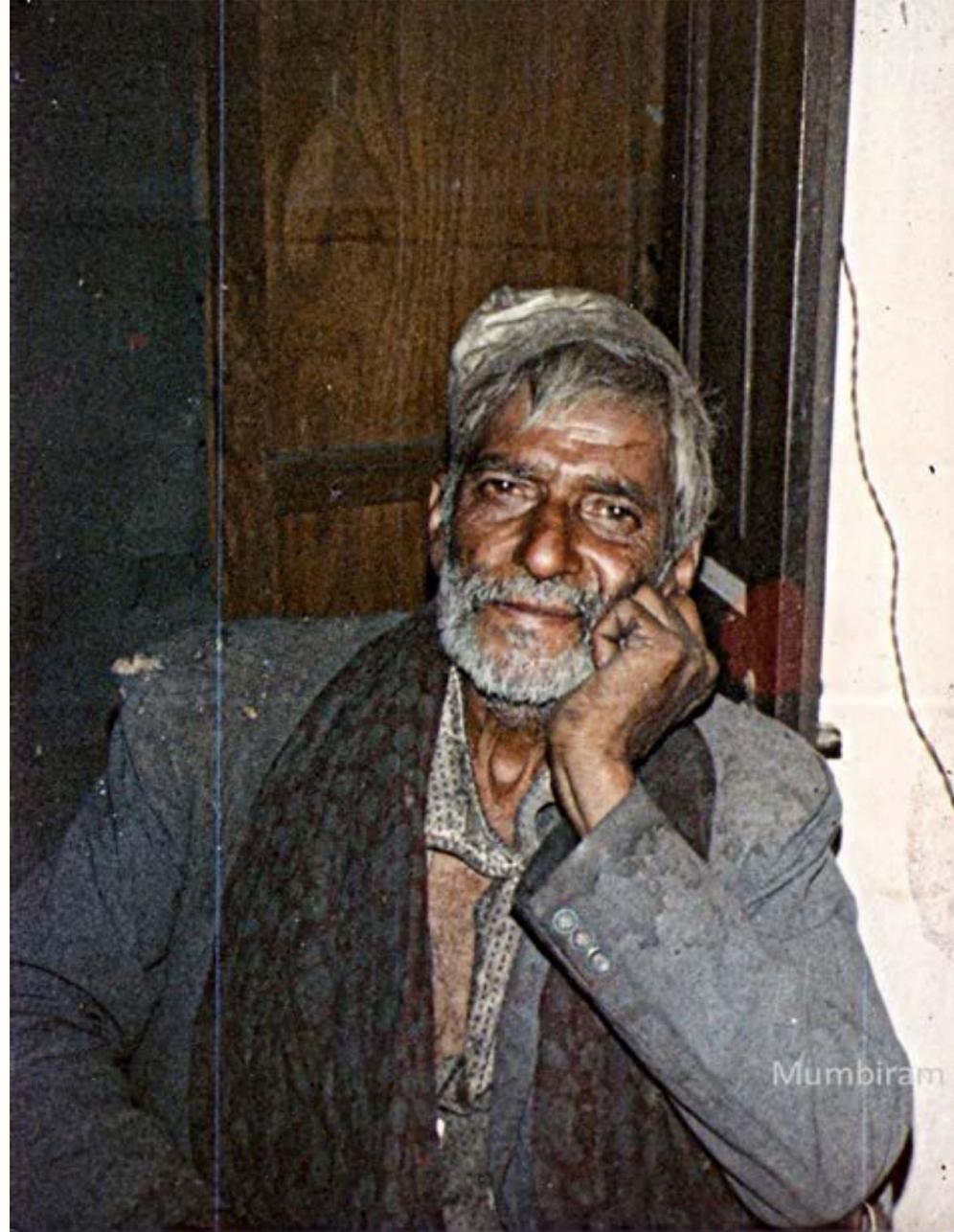
## **“Magical Place at the River”**

**Watercolour, Pune, 1985**

**This was the place on the bank of the Mula river in Pune, where Mumbiram imagined this incident of the Pulindi forest women coming across Krishna surrounded by the Gopis. In the “Forest Women” painting everything is covered by people.**

**It was Mumbiram’s favourite spot at the river. He always felt very close to the rivers Mula-Mutha of Pune. The series of watercolour riverscapes of the Mula-Mutha, which Mumbiram created later, shows Pune’s best places along the river.**

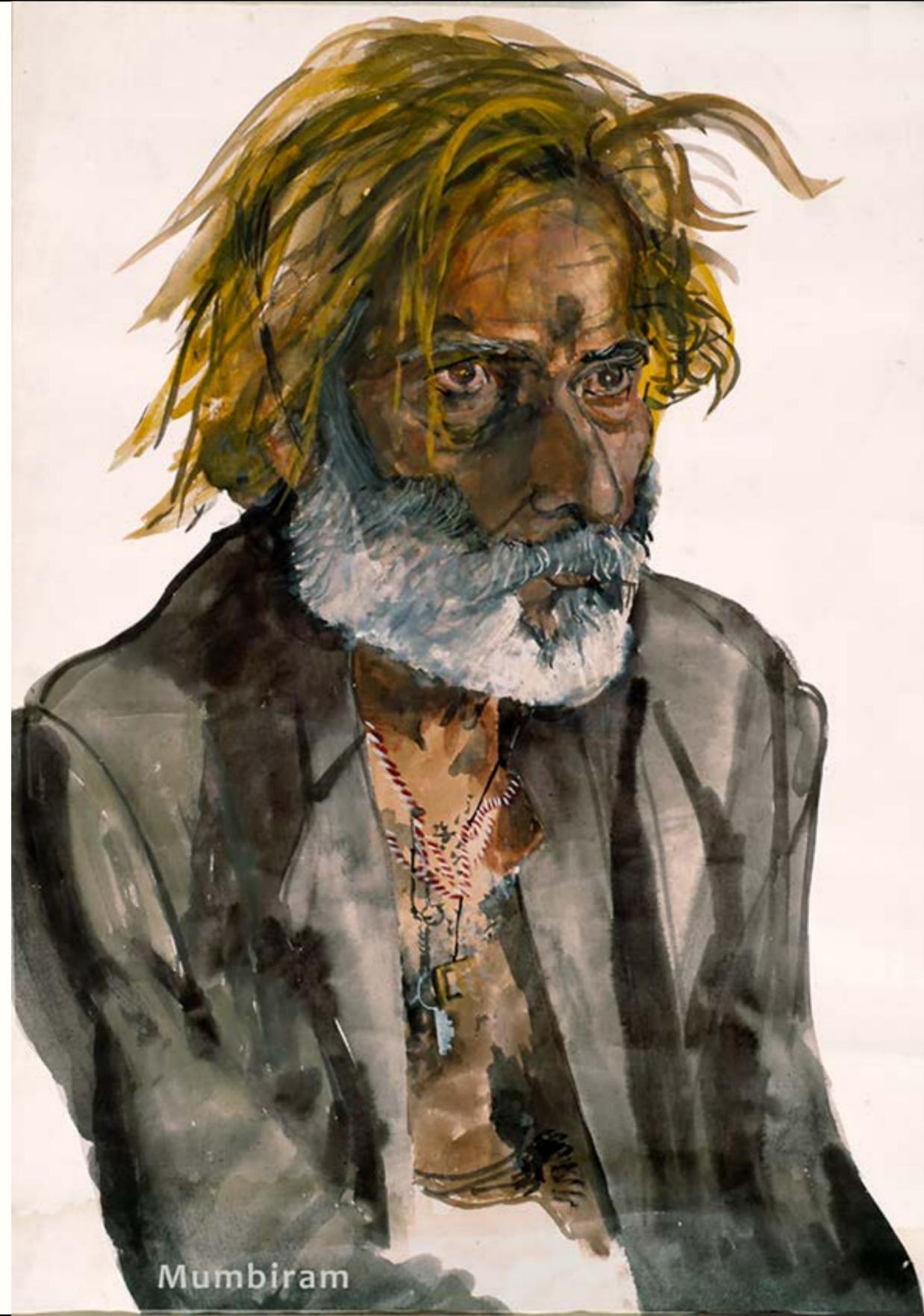
**This painting was made on the spot. It was acquired by Mumbiram’s aunt Daya. Mumbiram had become very dear to Dr. Daya Patwardhan. She was one of the few who was truly proud of Mumbiram who was doing both, continuing the tradition of scholarship in Sanskrit and Mathematics as well as being an artist. She could see that there was something truly wonderful about his work as an artist and she wanted to show her respect to that. In 1990 she decided to obtain from Mumbiram the painting “Magical Place at the River”.**



How Mumbiram and Lakhu had met in the first place is interesting. He had met Lakhu after midnight in the Mandai marketplace when Lakhu was in a state of wild excitement, carrying a broom in his hand which he held high as he made wild and loud pronouncements that were nearly incomprehensible. Mumbiram was reminded of Nietzsche's 'Mad Man in the Marketplace', who pronounced that God was dead. Beginning that first meeting Mumbiram and Lakhu developed a very close friendship.

Lakhu was a refugee from Karachi who had escaped the Hindu-Muslim carnage that took place during the partition of India in 1947. In Pune he survived as a cart puller in the local hardware market area. His rented cart was the only thing that he had. He slept under it at night.

Lakhu was a gentleman. Mumbiram was inspired to make a quick watercolour portrait of him, titled: "Lakhu - Who is afraid of Friedrich Nietzsche ?".



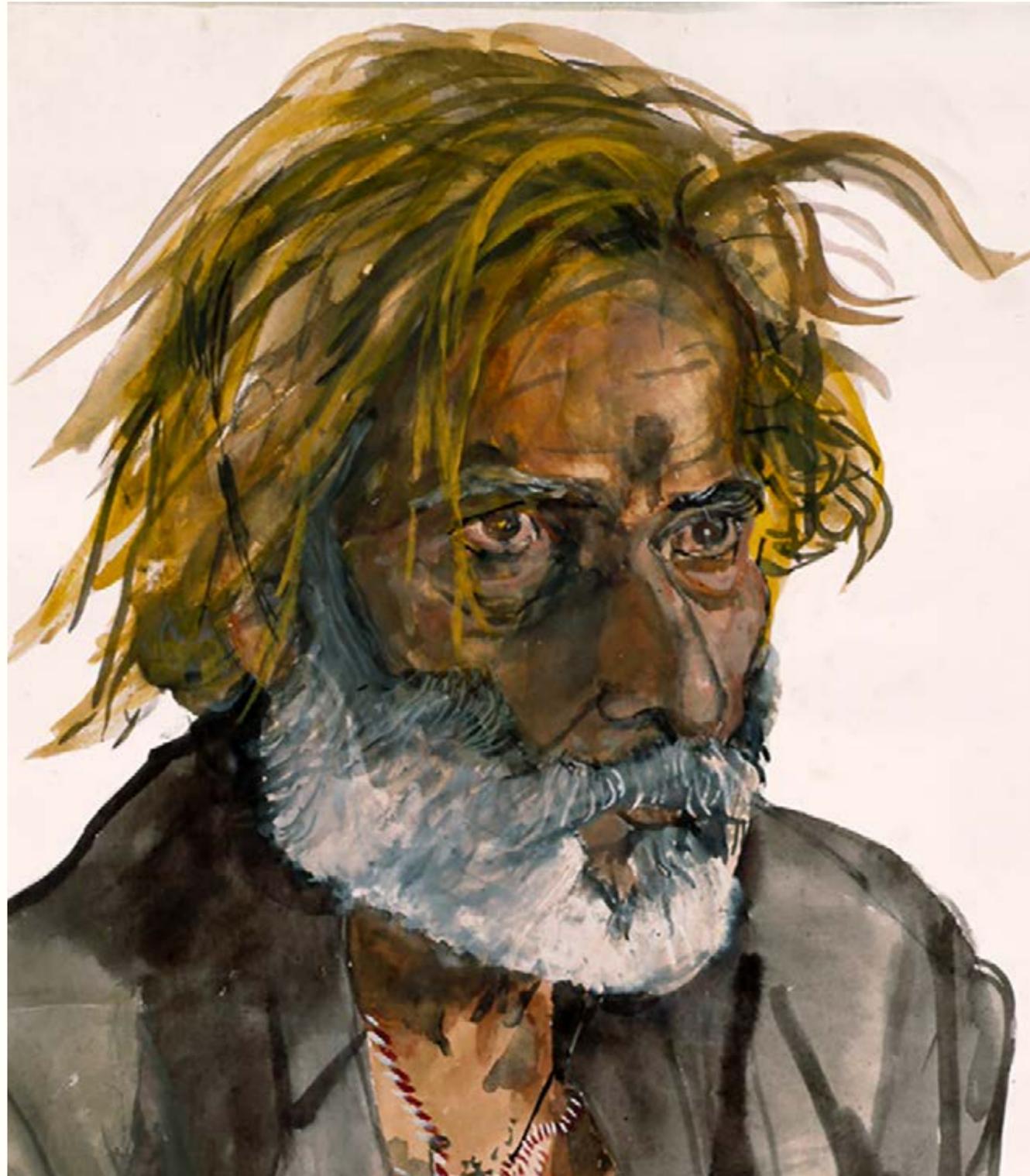
## **“Lakhu - Who is afraid of Friedrich Nietzsche?”**

**Watercolour, 1988**

Lakhu was born in Karachi. As a young man Lakhu left Karachi to escape the Hindu-Muslim carnage that took place during the partition of India in 1947. Mumbiram met Lakhu for the first time in 1985 one day in the early morning hours in the Mandai marketplace near his atelier. Lakhu was in a state of wild excitement. He was carrying a broom in his hand which he held high as he made wild and loud pronouncements that were nearly incomprehensible. Mumbiram was reminded of Nietzsche's 'Mad Man in the Marketplace', who pronounced that God is dead. Beginning that first meeting Mumbiram and Lakhu developed a very close friendship. Ironically Lakhu died in a minor Hindu-Muslim riot in the slums of Pune four years later. Mumbiram wrote the article 'Who's afraid of Friedrich Nietzsche?' (Pune Digest, 1989) to pay his tribute to this very precious friend that he had lost.

Lakhu had been a cart puller in the local hardware market area. His rented cart was the only thing that he had. He slept under it at night.

Mumbiram could share rare moments of philosophical discussions with Lakhu. For him Lakhu was a gentleman and a friend with whom he could share the creative world of an artist.



The article read, “There was nothing that was not handsome about this man. A handsome vision altogether. A coat with no 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. ... The powerful combination of the ridiculous and the handsome was truly moving to watch....”

Lakhu was one of the few people Mumbiram would allow to watch him painting. The legendary work “Forest Women” was one of the paintings Lakhu witnessed in its creation. Mumbiram will always remember the great talks with Lakhu about who is a Gopi and who is a forest woman.

This is how Mumbiram has summarized his account of Lakhu: “Lakhuji cart puller, 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.”



**Lakhu was a gentleman who was allowed to see the creative activities in Mumbiram's cave. Kusum and her companion were regular visitors, 1984.**

## **“Forest Women” coming back to Mumbiram**

**That was not the end of the “Forest Women” mystery. After the painting had been away from the studio for a month hanging in the dining hall of the orthopaedic surgeon's new home, it came back to Mumbiram's studio.**

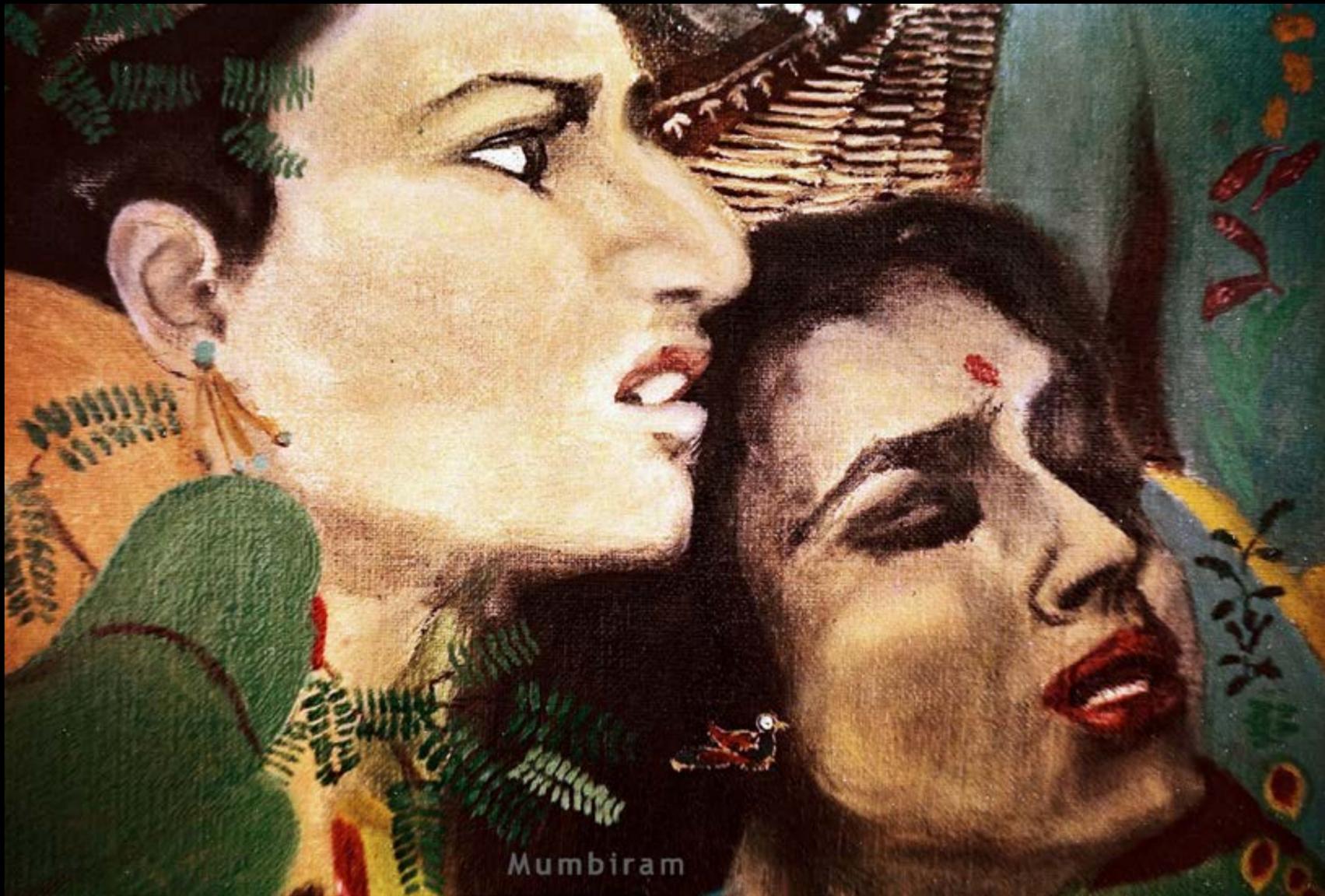
**This is how it happened: One day he got a call from Dr.Sancheti who explained that his mother, who was of a conservative Jain upbringing, found the painting conflicting with her religious sentiments. Therefore he requested Mumbiram to create another painting. A surprised Mumbiram readily agreed. Since they had not made any deal about what the painting should be about, Mumbiram chose a canvas of the same size and made the only abstract painting that he ever made. He made a diagonal in the middle, painted one side pink, the other green and signed it. The doctor was gracious enough to accept it without any complaint.**

**That was how the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” came back to Mumbiram by some stroke of providence.**



**This Gopi is looking at one of the Forest Women.  
She seems worried about what they are  
going to do next.**

**Her facial expression cannot hide her surprise  
about the ecstatic feelings the Forest Women  
experience when they see Krishna.**



This Gopi also seems quite bothered about the arrival of the Forest Women.

The other one has her eyes half-closed. She is deeply engrossed in her uniquely passionate emotional state. She is wearing an interesting earring in the shape of a bird.



This photograph from the mid 80's has the aura of an iconic classic. Those familiar with early history of colonial India saw glimpses of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in this standing portrait of Mumbiram on the terrace of his atelier at the Mandai vegetable market place in the heart of Pune. It exudes the mood, ethos and the spirit of a Renaissance.

## 4. “Forest Women” in the Legendary Studio



**\*\*\*\*\***

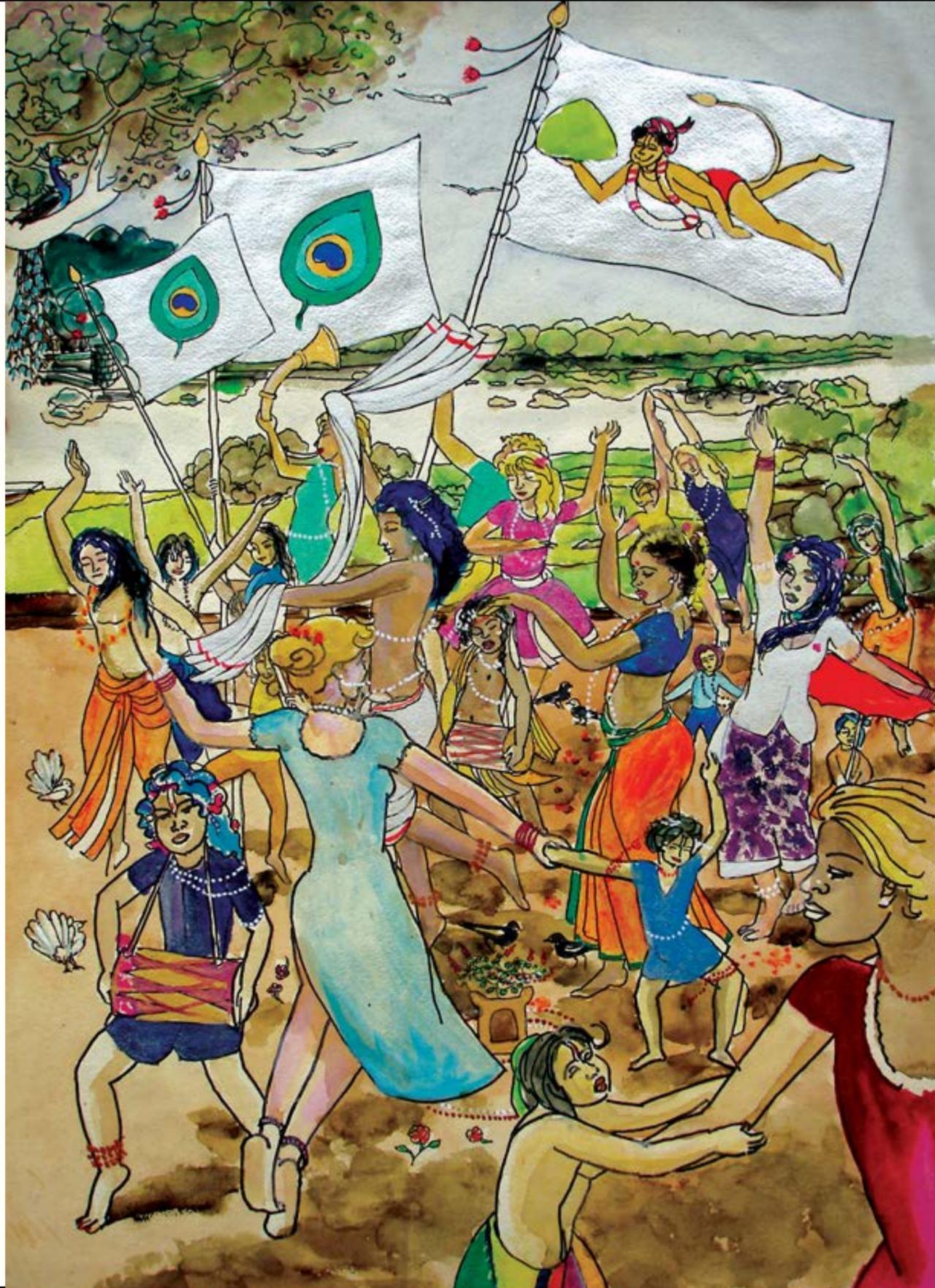
Being back in the studio the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” witnessed the studio becoming a meeting place for different ethnic groups and the creation of a beautiful array of works in charcoal and colour media. The “Forest Women” appeared in newspaper articles and next to his “Manifesto of Personalism”. This manifesto made his unique perspective on aesthetics as well as on the Krishna theme clear. Both together were creating an innovation, that was closely related to his unique mood, called ‘Prema Vivarta’.

His innovative way, that overcame existing stereotypes in art and in conventions of human beauty, not only put him in an exceptional position as an artist but could have created a controversy in India.

In comparison to “Indian” art, which was swayed by ‘Western’ ideals, his art was indigenous. Ironically it could not be shared freely in India. It needed to be shared with people from outside of India and also it required that the artist was ‘living from his palette’. It made his studio even more the legendary studio.

**\*\*\*\*\***





## **“River Dance Festival”**

**Watercolour, Pearlcolour, 2003**

Mumbiram had a heart-warming rapport with the Mula and Mutha rivers of his native Pune. He had many favorite spots along their banks. After his return from America he had become attached to a certain spot on the riverbank in Koregaon Park. During Mumbiram’s Legendary Studio Days it became a habit for him to spend long mid-day afternoons under the vast expanse of the sky that canopied over a pristine riverbed that was tree-lined to distances as far as eye could see.

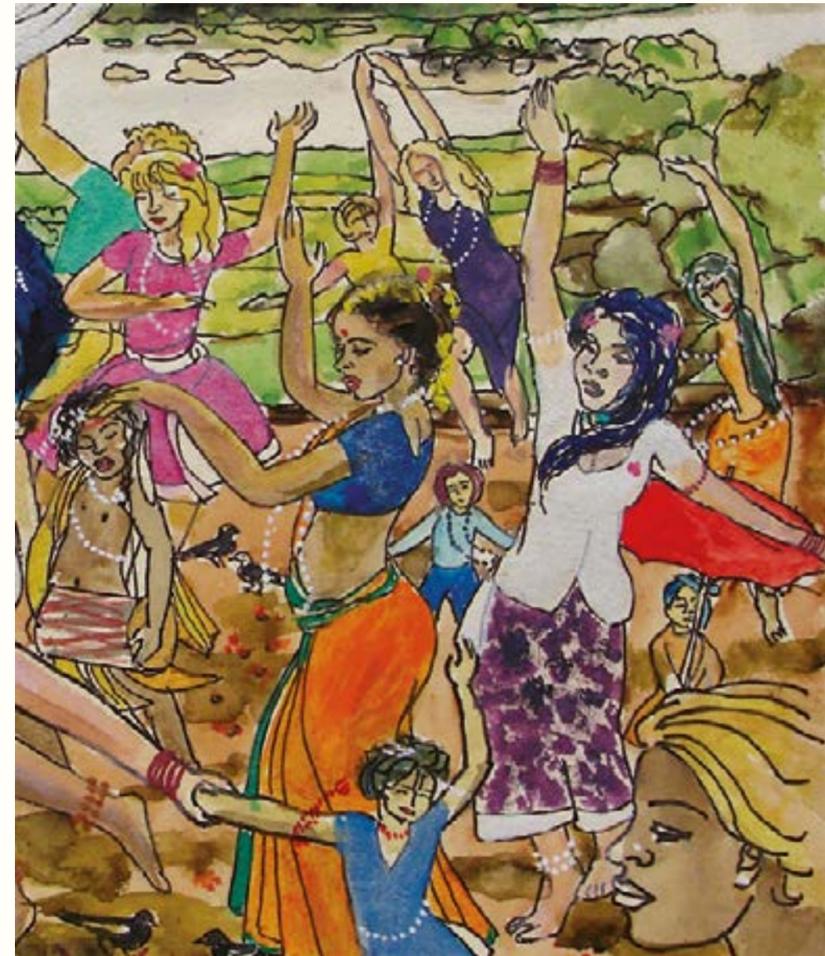
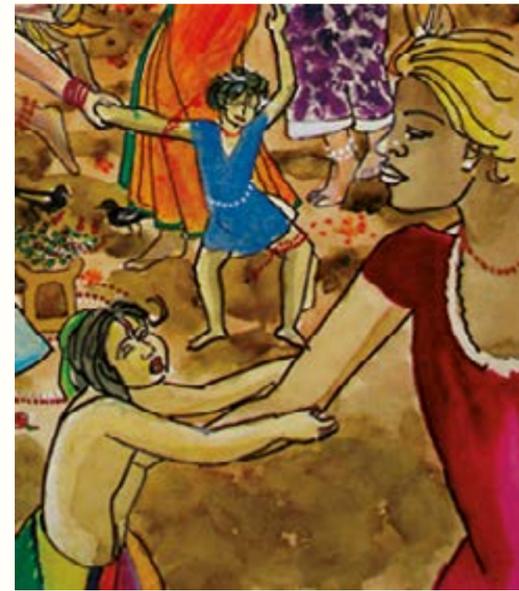
Across the river was Yeravda where inhabited his rag-picking cohorts with their families. Koregaon Park was the area preferred for residence by young international visitors to India with romantic ideas about an exotic India. Mumbiram had bosom-buddies in both these groups with whom he shared mutual attraction based on nothing except forces of aesthetic gravitation.



**They would frequently meet there in joyous rendezvous to share music and dance and drama and stories and company and victuals and banners and flags and surprises.**







This rendering wonderfully recreates the Rasa that they shared at that blessed place.

Mumbiram has said elsewhere:

*“Rasa Art is not just the painting. The Rasa interactions between the Muses, the Artist and the Admirers are equally important. Those may be captured by camera and sound and words. The painting is verily the ‘punchline’ to that medley.”*

This is a joyous expression of Rasa Art. It has been appreciated as the very emblem of Rasa Renaissance.



## **“The Blue Crystal of Ranabai’s Mind”**

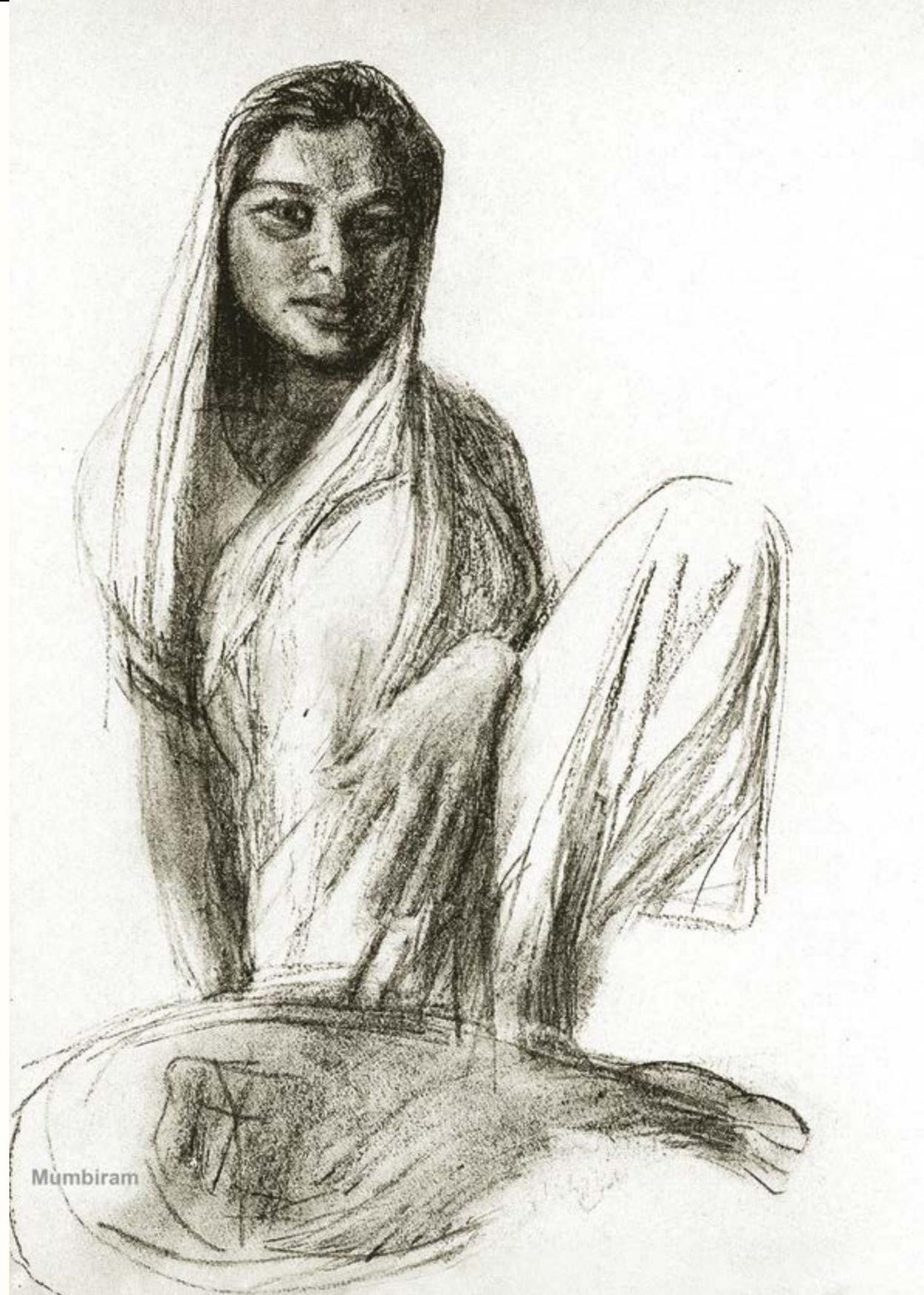
**Gouache watercolour, 1985**

**“The Blue Crystal of Ranabai’s Mind” is one of the fastest live portraits Mumbiram made. The secret of the mysterious charm of this beauty is in the spontaneity of her meeting with the artist. He met this construction worker with seductively engaging eyes only once. Where he met her and how he persuaded her to come to his Mandai studio may always remain a mystery.**

**It was one of the rare moments when the human spirit breaks itself free of all fetters and responds to sublime forces of aesthetic attraction.**

**She is sitting face-on looking straight into the eyes of the artist. He chose opaque earthy gouache colours for this delightfully transparent rendering. There are no redundant details in the arrangement. The brush work is austere, restrained and unaffected.**

**It shows Mumbiram’s studio. Behind her there is his easel and one of the wooden windows with a curious crystal ball on the sill.**



## **“Yamuna”**

**Charcoal, ca.1985, Pune**

**When Mumbiram was visiting Kusum and her mother Sakhrabai the beauty of this lady flashed on Mumbiram. Most houses in Kusum’s neighbourhood were tin shacks that had only one door and no windows. Yamuna is sitting about five feet inside such a door. Mumbiram had come to know all the neighbours of Kusum and Sakhrabai. One of them was Gunabai. One of her daughters, named Mathura, was going out ragpicking with Kusum. Mathura had two younger brothers. This charcoal portrait is inspired by the wife of the elder brother. Mumbiram had only seen her while visiting Gunabai’s home.**

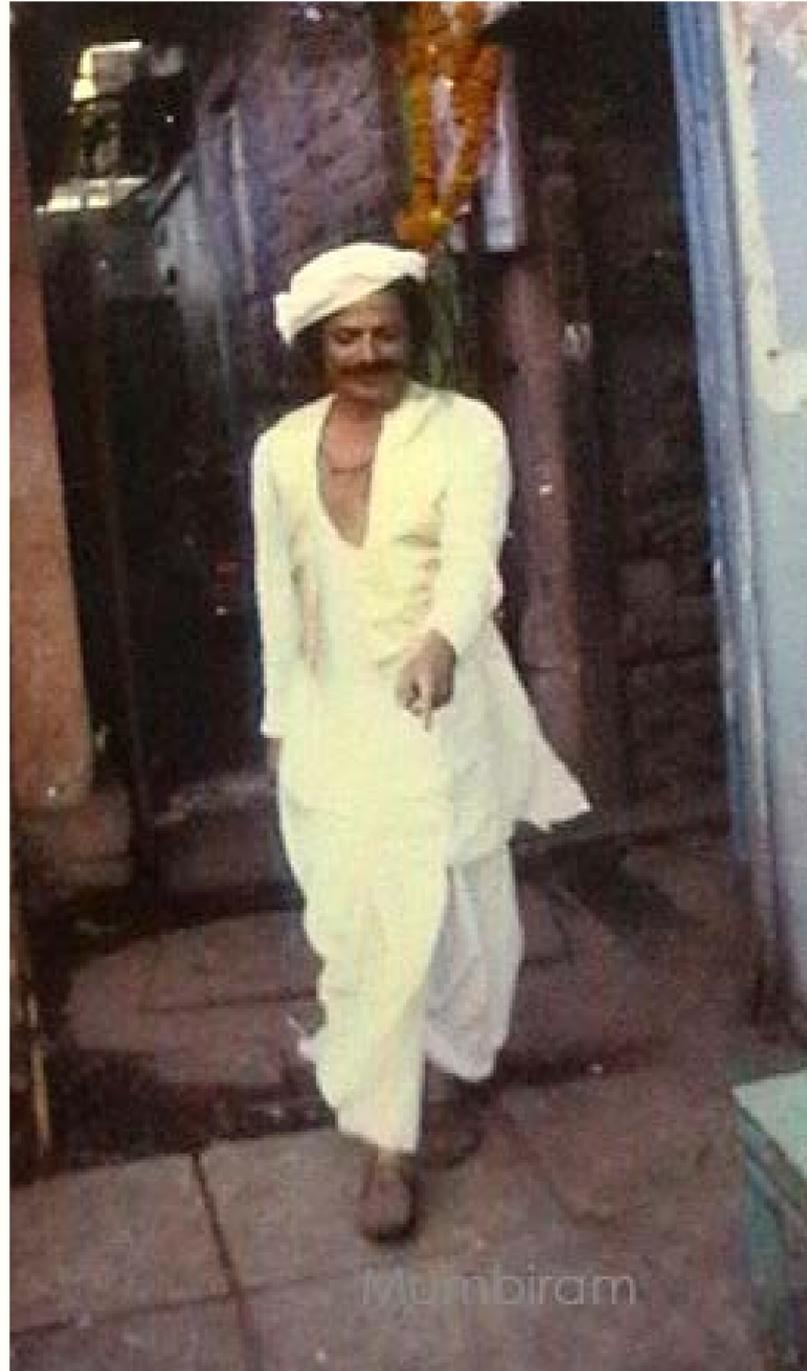
**Mumbiram was attracted to the very serene beauty that her face exuded. It lingered in his mind. Mumbiram made this charcoal rendering sitting in his Mandai atelier. Kusum and all her friends have seen it and liked it. Yet nobody has identified her as Mathura’s sister-in-law.**

**That suited Mumbiram quite well.**



**Mumbiram has wonderfully captured the amazing light and shade play on Yamuna's body. He was proud of this creation. The treatment of the face is gentle and masterly. The use of the charcoal medium in such a transparent way is extraordinary. Notice the extra large Kumkum decoration on Yamuna's forehead. Notice how gracefully Yamuna's sari wraps around her head, torso and legs. Notice the different textures of the hair, the face, the hand and the feet.**

**It is evident that this artist considers the human body and the human face as the most beautiful of God's creation. Much could be written about the expression on this beautiful face and yet much more will remain to be said. This masterpiece appeared in the 'Waiting in the Wings' article in 1987. It was spontaneously acquired by a young computer professional from Berlin visiting Pune in 1988. It was the first of the many charcoals that Mumbiram would eventually sell.**



Stepping out of the studio

## Frontal Attack on Materialism - Manifesto of Personalism

In 1988 a Pune journalist, named Ashok Gopal, wrote an article about Mumbiram for the *Sunday Maharashtra Herald*. He visited Mumbiram several times in his studio. It turned out a carefully researched article that carried colour images of the “*Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis*” as well as other paintings and charcoals. “Yamuna” was one of them.

It was in the same article where Mumbiram’s manifesto was printed for the first time. Mumbiram had titled it: “*Manifesto of Personalism*”. He wanted to make his perspective on art clear. The “*Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis*” appeared right next to it. Indeed this delightful interpretation of an important esoteric verse is the flagship of Personalism.

## **MANIFESTO OF PERSONALISM:**

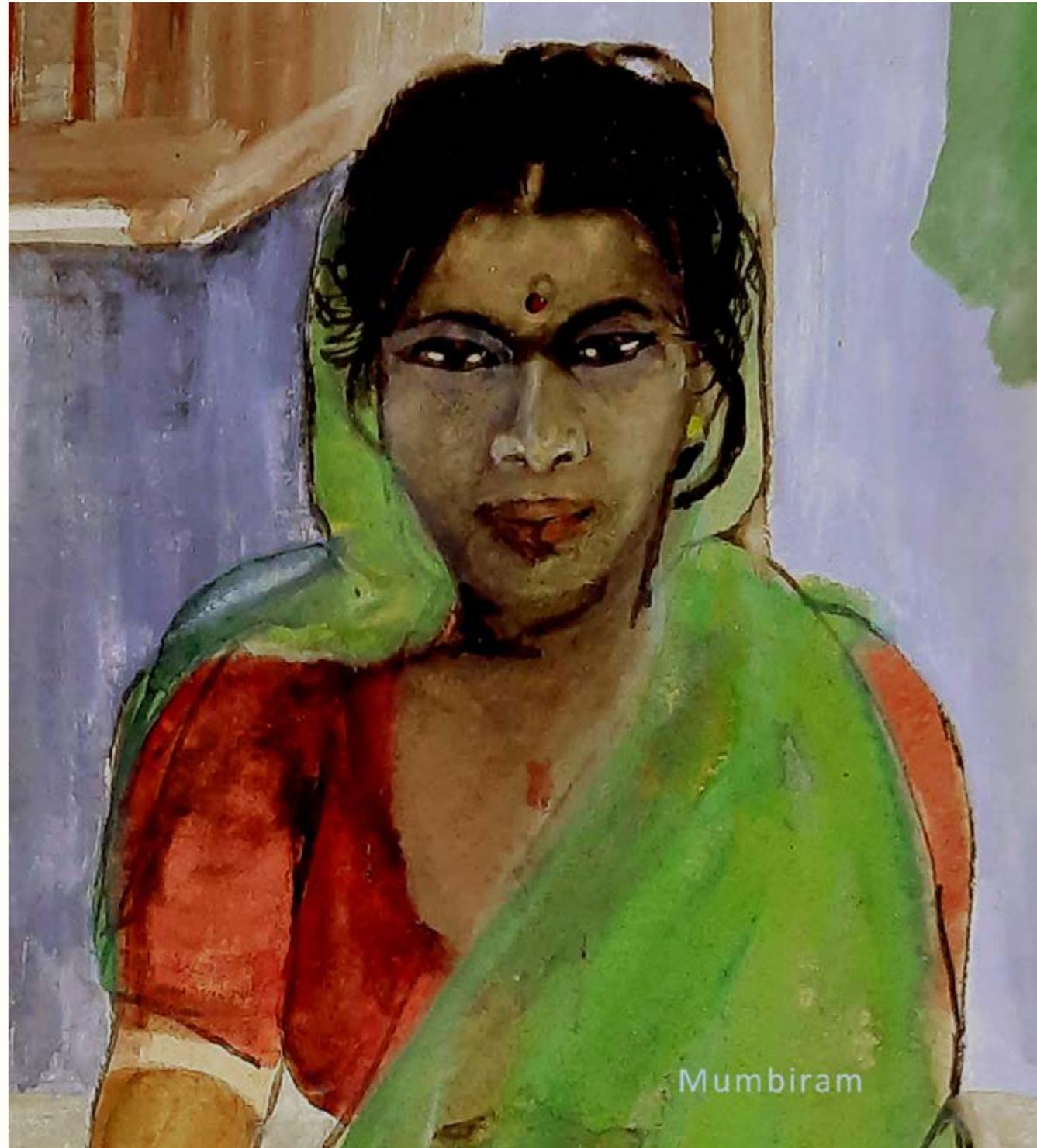


*The distortion in modern Indian painter's work is all borrowed inspiration inasmuch as modern Indian elite exists on a used up Western aesthetic. This in spite of the fact that Western civilization has failed in a big way.*

*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.*



***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.***

***In esoteric Vaishnav philosophy, my mood is 'Prema  
Vivarta'. My raven-dark rambunctious, roaming,  
rag-picking girlfriends remind me of Krishna  
and his boys in the forests of Vrindavan.***

***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."***



**Dalgi finds Mumbiram lying by the Roadside**

## **“Dalgi Leela” - Mumbiram’s Personalism in the Prema Vivarta Mood**

This “Dalgi Leela” is a vivid and wonderful example that illustrates Mumbiram’s assertion in the “Manifesto of Personalism”: *“My raven-dark, rambunctious, roaming, rag-picking girlfriends remind me of Krishna and his boys in the forests of Vrindavan”*.

Living right in the middle of the marketplace, Mumbiram enjoyed stepping out in the quiet, early morning hours. He had figured out which way his friends and favorite muses would be walking at that time of the day. Usually, in the early morning hours, they would run into each other on the empty Laxmi Road, the main shopping area of the city. On this day, Mumbiram had come out really early, determined to surprise them on the outskirts of the city. And, sure enough, he saw them walking on Bundgarden Road near Wadia college. He could recognise Kusum from blocks away, even in the early morning



**Dalgi, the teenage ragpicker on the prowl**



**Dalgi is transformed in Mumbiram's Atelier**

darkness, just from her proud, erect walk that fascinated him. Mumbiram knew her ways.

The girls had their eyes on the roadside, looking for metal scraps, planks of wood, plastic ropes, bottles and anything that can be salvaged. Mumbiram decided to surprise them in the darkness along the shoulder of the bridge over the railway line. Mumbiram was wearing his favorite gray one-piece airforce surplus attire as he lay in the shadows under the trees on the side of the road.

Kusum was with another younger girl named Dalgi who was so named because of her unique fluffed up hair-style that looked like a basket, or "Dalge" over her head. When they approached, Dalgi saw this man lying on the side of the road pretending to be trash to be picked up by the rag-pickers. When they found that it was Mumbiram, their joy knew no limits. Dalgi played along and 'revived' Mumbiram back to life. Now he was their property!

After this drama on the sidewalk, Mumbiram invited Kusum and Dalgi to his studio.



**Transformed Dalgi decorates Kusum**

**Mumbiram was fond of collecting unique items of attire and dresses, saris and accessories, which he got from the old-market, his favourite special shops and his tailors. He was known for happily sharing his collection with his friends. The girls felt very free in the studio. They could sleep, sing, dance, eat or try on themselves Mumbiram's collection of dresses and accessories.**

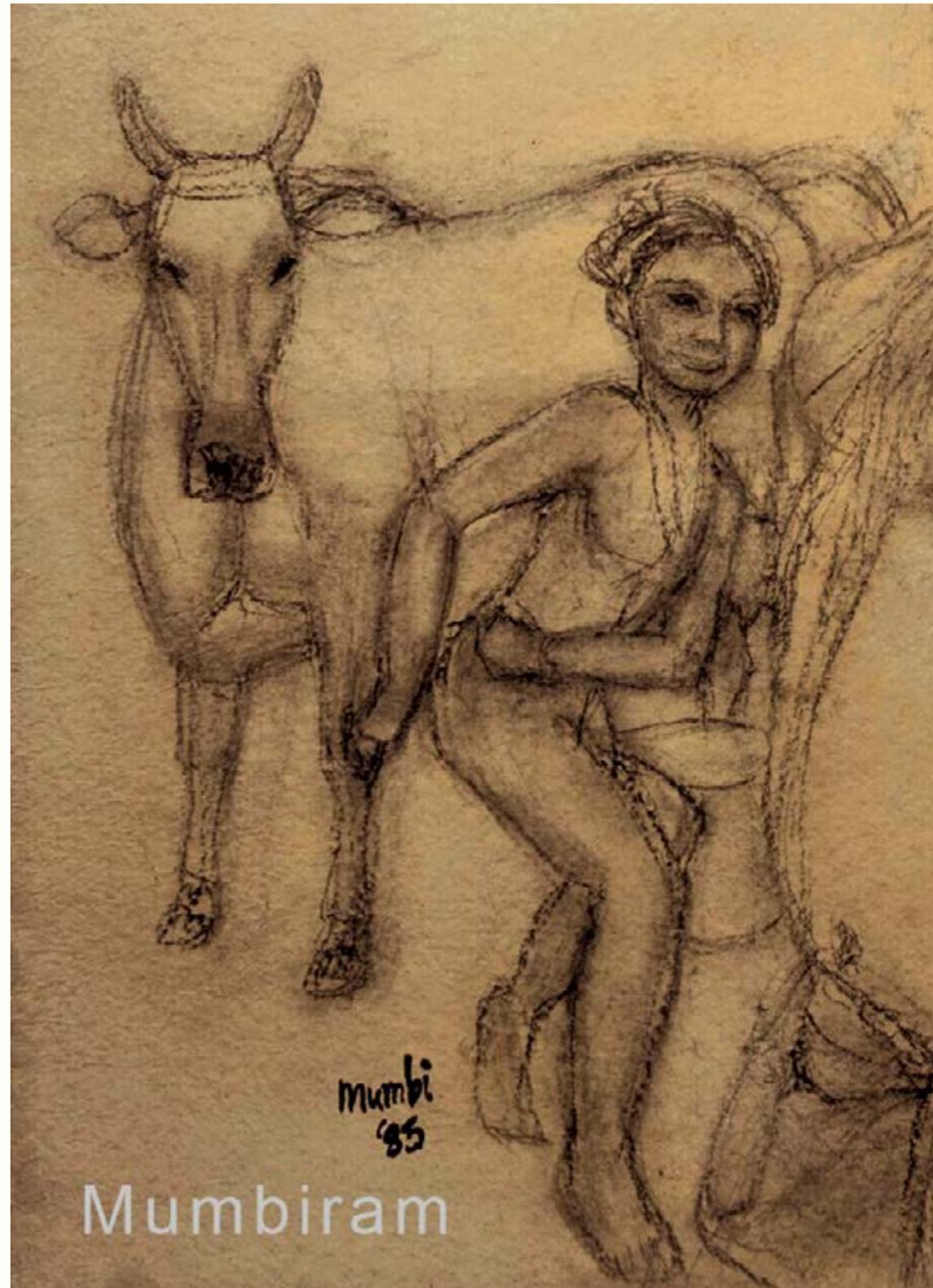
**That day Kusum decided to dress up Dalgi as Krishna. Dalgi has boyish looks. She became Girl Krishna with a peacock feather in her hair. Kusum was never jealous of her friends looking too attractive. In fact she dressed up Dalgi that way because she knew Mumbiram would like it.**



**Magic of Rasa Renaissance**



**Prema Vivarta**

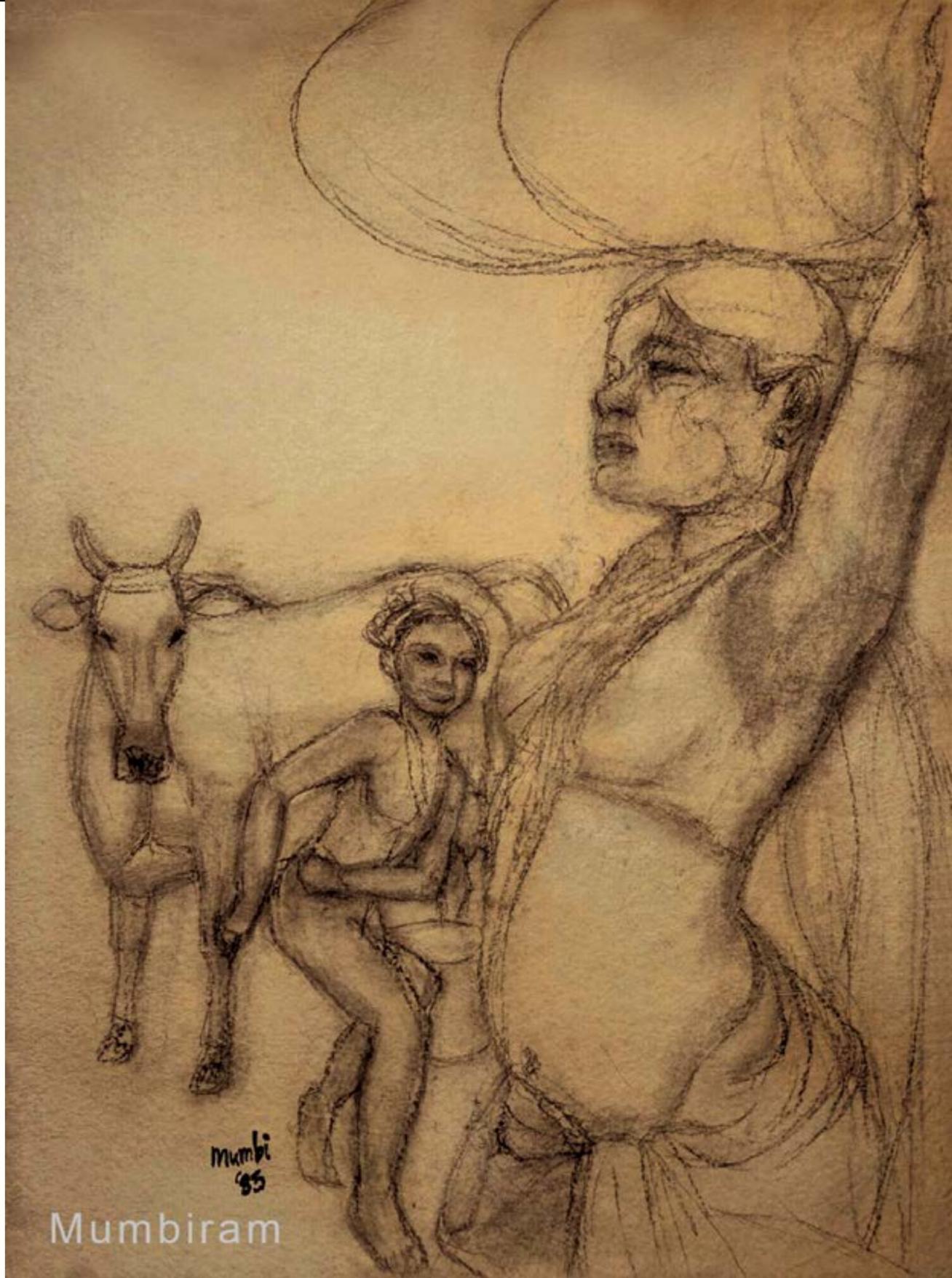


## Prema Vivarta

Mumbiram felt free to show in his art, the people and topics that he felt the closest to. He was immensely attracted to the beautiful natural people he was associating with and he was immensely fascinated by Krishna and his Leelas with his friends in Vrindavan.

Many of his works were inspired by Krishna's Leelas and remind one of situations and episodes from the classics. The "Forest Women" masterpiece was not the only one.

The scriptures describe how eagerly the Gopis, the cowherd damsels, used to wait for the adolescent Krishna and his friends to return from the forest with the cows.



## **“Encounter on the way back from the Forest”**

**Charcoal on paper, 1987, Pune**

In “Encounter on the way back from the Forest” one sees a village damsel returning from the forest with a heavy bundle of forage overhead. The remote hills of India are inhabited by tribes that subsist on fruit, berries, herbs, honey as well as fodder and firewood that is gathered from the forest. At the end of the day men and women come home with heavy loads much to the happiness of those waiting for them all day. Mumbiram was immensely attracted to that life close to nature. He experienced echoes of the pastoral scenes of Krishna’s boyhood Leelas in the forests of Vrindavan. The beauty of the damsel carrying the heavy load is captured with great élan. The young boy is about to rush to his beloved. His cow is the only witness to what follows. The damsel is pretending to ignore the advancing youngster but the expression on her face leaves much to the imagination of the viewer.



Mumbiram

## “I let him persuade me”

Charcoal on paper, 1985, Pune, Mumbiram

Also in “I let him persuade me” one can hear reverberations of nectarean melodies of the ancient scriptures of India. Mumbiram found that the ‘poorest’ people of India were living the kind of idealized life Krishna lived 5000 years ago. He thought it was unfortunate that the civilized world of city people missed out on the beautiful and touching human side of the tribes living a life that is closer to the life of adolescent Krishna. That life is considered to be the ultimate object of meditation by the revered scriptures of India.

व्रजति तेन वयं सविलासवीक्षणार्पितमनोभववेगाः  
कुजगतिं गमिता न विदामः कश्मलेन कबरं वसनं वा

*“We are enamoured with Krishna’s walk. But when he bestows a sporting glance upon us we are totally bowled over. We are transfixed to the ground like trees. We perforce yield to the urges of amour. We are unable to mind our clothes or hair.”*

(II 17 II Yugala Geetam, Five Songs of Rasa, translated by Mumbiram)



**One sees the eternal causeless sporting of the divine with the living entities, Leela, brought to today's light. The treatment is free from painterly affectations. The lines are sweet and simple, nearly minimal. Such leela. The title suggests the young lady's inclinations towards the young boy's light-hearted liberties.**

**Mumbiram has shown Krishna's Leelas in a way that had never been done before. It shows individuals. Women that could be the girl next door or movie actresses or rag-pickers or bird-catchers or whatever.**

**That innovative approach of the Krishna theme and his sweet and simple, nearly minimal, treatment and easy, confident lines have brought the eternal causeless sporting of the divine with the living entities, Leela, to today's light. It breathes life-air into scriptural visions. These two charcoals, "I let him persuade me" and "Encounter on the way back from the Forest", are today in a private collection in Lübeck, Germany.**



Mumbiram

## **“Coming back from the River”**

**Charcoal, 1987**

**Here we see one of the sweetest episodes in the life of adolescent Krishna. It is about Krishna accosting the Gopis on their way back from the river carrying pitchers of water or on their way to Mathura with pitchers of milk or yogurt overhead. Even though the Gopis dreaded such encounters they also secretly wished Krishna would honour them with such an ‘accident’. Many of Mumbiram’s muses regularly carried heavy weights overhead. He admired their great erect postures when they walked.**

**Certainly these visions are more than just illustrations of existing texts. They are based on Mumbiram’s own life experiences. At the same time they evoke the ideal and paradigm that is expressed in classical devotional literature.**



**Mumbiram on his daily routine at Mandai**

Mumbiram was attracted to whatever reminded him of the cowherd boys and girls of Vrindavan. That state of consciousness is mentioned as *'Prema Vivarta'* in accounts of advanced sages and spiritual personalities in the Vaishnava and Bhakti tradition. *Prema* means 'Love' and *Vivarta* means 'Whirling' in Sanskrit.

According to Mumbiram the mood of Prema Vivarta means seeing 'divine love' in daily and mundane affairs.

*"Prema Vivarta is the mood when one has deja-vue like experiences in daily life with ordinary people that remind one of similar experience with the Supreme Blue Cowherd Boy."*

Mumbiram's poetic work, *"Deluges of Ecstasy-Prema Vivarta"*, originally composed in Cambridge-Boston in 1978-79, revealed the Prema Vivarta mood as the art of reconciling the mundane and the transcendental on the path of self-realization. In that mood of Prema Vivarta the simple every day life and the eternal loving affairs find their divine connection.



**“Untitled”**  
Charcoals, 1988

Many of Mumbiram’s works are in the Prema Vivarta mood. They exude the same unabashed innocent passion that the classical Sanskrit literature about Krishna arouses. They make the confidential topics of divine meditation come alive.

### **On the Pedestal of Divine Love and Beauty - Inviting a Controversy**

Living in his studio in downtown Pune or cohabiting with people of tribes on the hills and in the coastal wilderness, he was making pictures that show the folk-people of India for the first time in the sublime context of high-spirituality and neo-modern aphrodisia.

Mumbiram was aware of the fact that this could have created a controversy. There was only one more time that he shared his works publicly. Two *“Untitled”* charcoals appeared in 1988 in a newspaper article in ‘Sunday Observer’ along with the *“Forest Women”* and other



works. These two charcoals show dark beauties in amorous meetings with the Supreme.

Mumbiram's muses were people who were not represented in any form of art. Here he showed them even as Krishna's beloved doe-eyed girlfriends in Vrindavan. Mumbiram was fully aware that showing 'ordinary' people, even 'uncivilized' forest-inhabitants and urban slum-dwellers on the pedestal of divine love and beauty would have been offensive for some people in India.

Mumbiram's approach to devotional topics has been innovative and indigenous. It overcame existing stereotypes in art and in conventions of human beauty.

It was so very different from what one sees in most visual art of the divine topics. There one sees a stylised Krishna and Gopis who remain distant mythological figures. Krishna is often replete with much gold and jewellery. The Gopis are light-skinned, have fish eyes and straight noses and all look alike.

## Living from the Palette

Mumbiram's exceptional position in the world of art didn't mean comfort but a life where he needed to depend directly on people. On the one hand there were his muses, who readily shared with him whatever little they had. Then there were his admirers and well-wishers who happened to be mostly from abroad. With some exceptions, sharing his work was only possible with people from outside of India, who would not be offended by his innovative approach to sensitive topics. Mumbiram managed that 'living from the palette' in wonderful creative ways.

The last thing he was going to do was changing his topics or muses. He has always been following his own inner aesthetic sense even though it meant hardships. That inner trust on the other hand has always brought him together with the 'right' people who could appreciate what he was doing. They were very dear to him.



**Mumbiram is served lunch at Kusum's place while Kusum's brother keeps company.**



They, on the other hand, were lucky to have the chance to acquire his works which could not be seen in public spaces or exhibitions but only at his studio at the crowded vegetable market place.

One of his first charcoals sold in Pune was titled "*Cologne Pulindi*", because it was bought by a German woman from Cologne. She had a chance meeting with him on the street and came to the studio where she spontaneously decided to buy this charcoal.

The title "*Cologne Pulindi*" goes along well with Mumtaz Ali Mumbairam's universal approach to 'Indian' spirituality.



## “Cologne Pulindi”

Charcoal, Pune, 1989

Here a dark beautiful woman has her Beloved all to herself. This is the *svadheenbhartrika* mood of the eight different moods of the heroine according to Rasa Theory.

The artist shows Krishna in a moon-like light complexion and his Beloved to be dark, which defies all stereotypes once again.

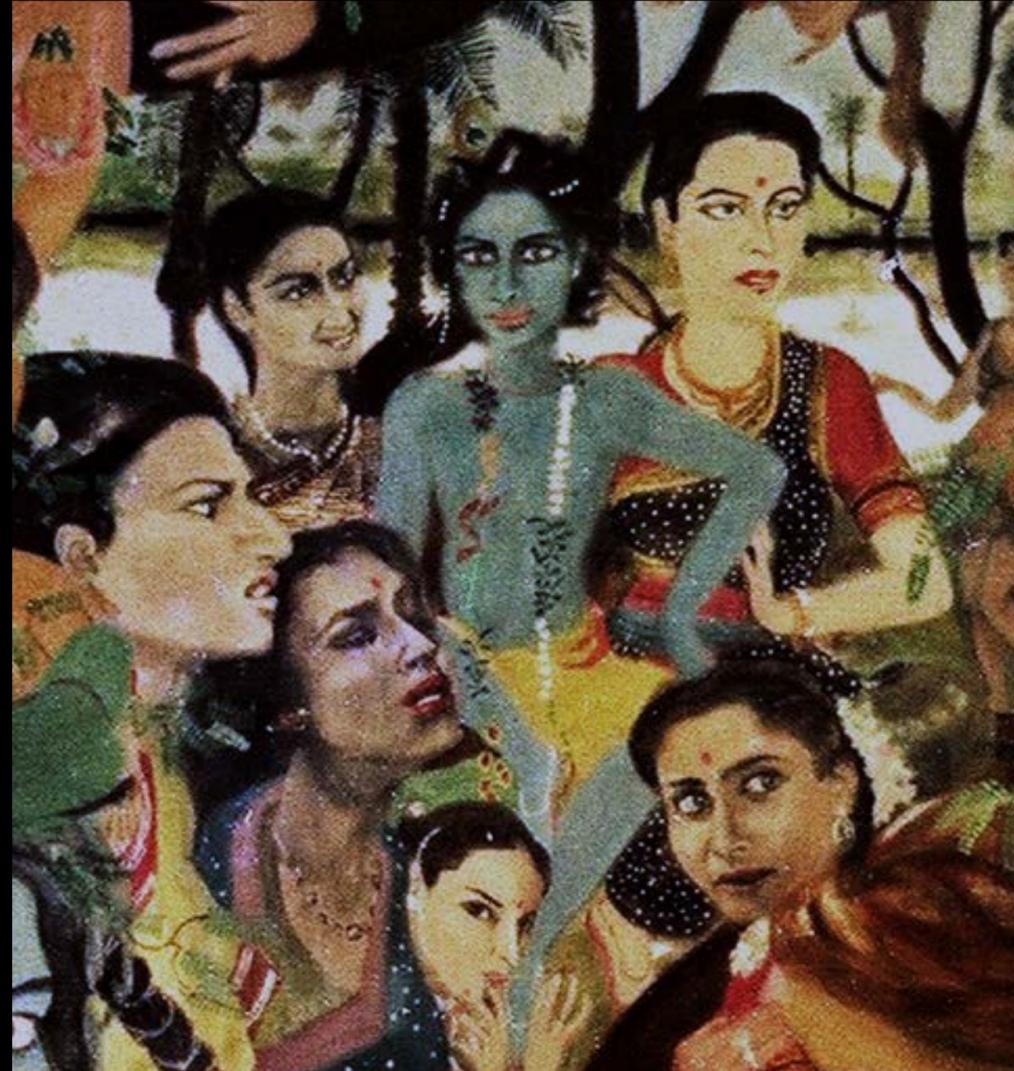
A parrot perched on a pitcher is the only witness to their intimacy. Meanwhile the full moon is rising. The two peacock feathers are only enhancing the mood.

The lines are beautiful and simple. It's a paradise-like place somewhere far away, yet it looks so very real.

Who are the *Pulindi* Forest Women people? Mumbiram was eager to find out.

In their ecstasy these two Forest Women are embracing each other. They would like to embrace Krishna, but that is not possible because the Gopis wouldn't let them come close to Krishna.

She is wearing a typical Warli design on her blouse.



The Gopis are protectively surrounding Krishna because the Forest Women beauties are arriving on the scene and they might attract Krishna's attention and lure him away from them.

The Gopis would like to have Krishna to themselves.



Mumbiram

She is not so worried. She is curious about who these people are who are also attracted to Krishna as they are.



## **5. Who are the “Forest Women”, the Mysterious Pulindi Women?**



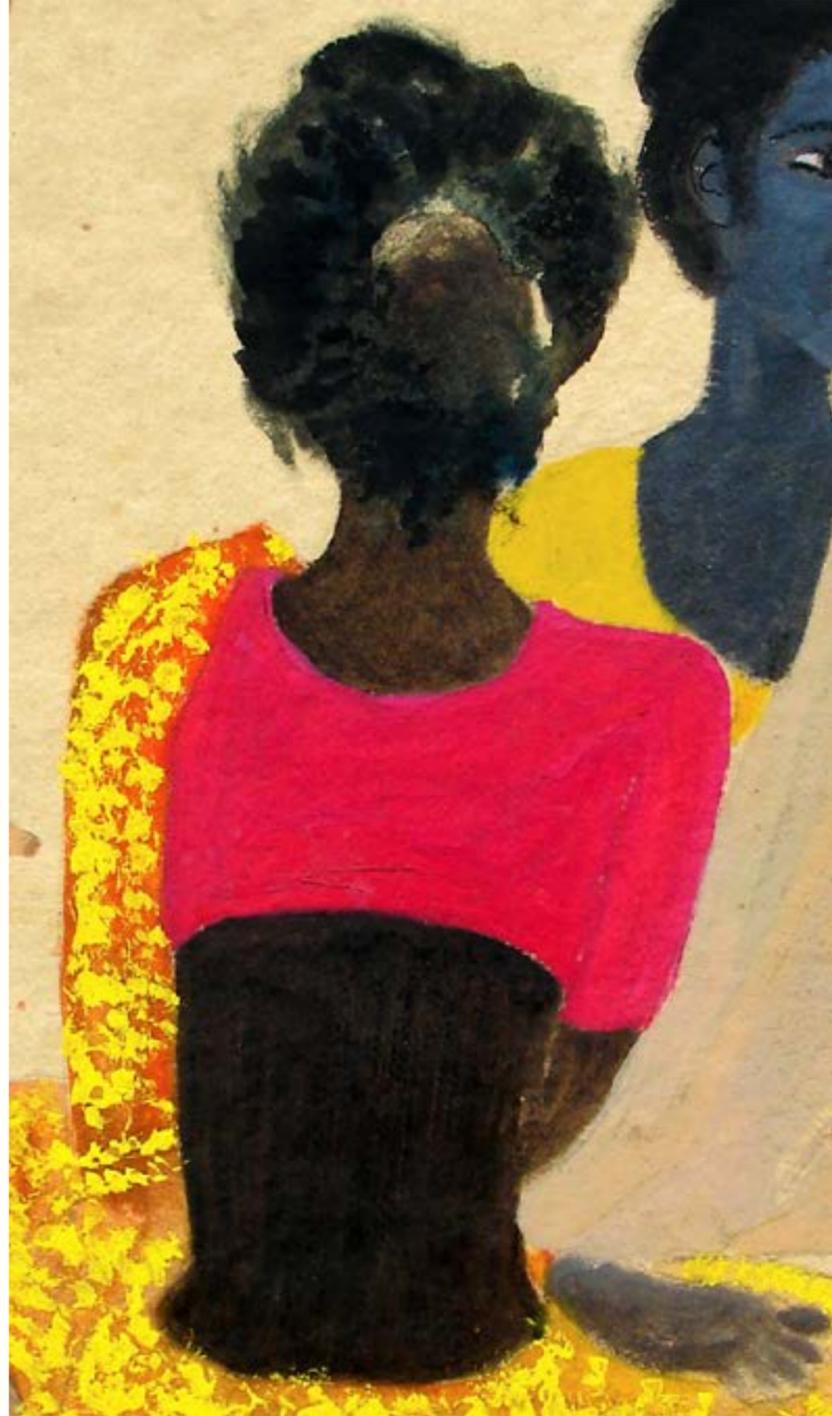
**\*\*\*\*\***

It is famously known how Krishna feels towards the Gopis who are cowherd people like Krishna. But who are the Forest Women who are only left tearing off the grass from the ground that Krishna had stepped on? They are rarely mentioned anywhere.

Mumbiram was eager to find out more in the scriptures. He left Pune, his studio and his “Forest Women” to go to Vrindavan, the land of Krishna. By some stroke of providence it brought him to Japan where he painted the beauty and magic of cultural confluence.

Nevertheless his muses back in Pune were waiting for him, so he returned. Back in Pune he was going to discover a whole constellation of new muses - especially the Pharsepardhis who were freedom-loving just like him.

**\*\*\*\*\***

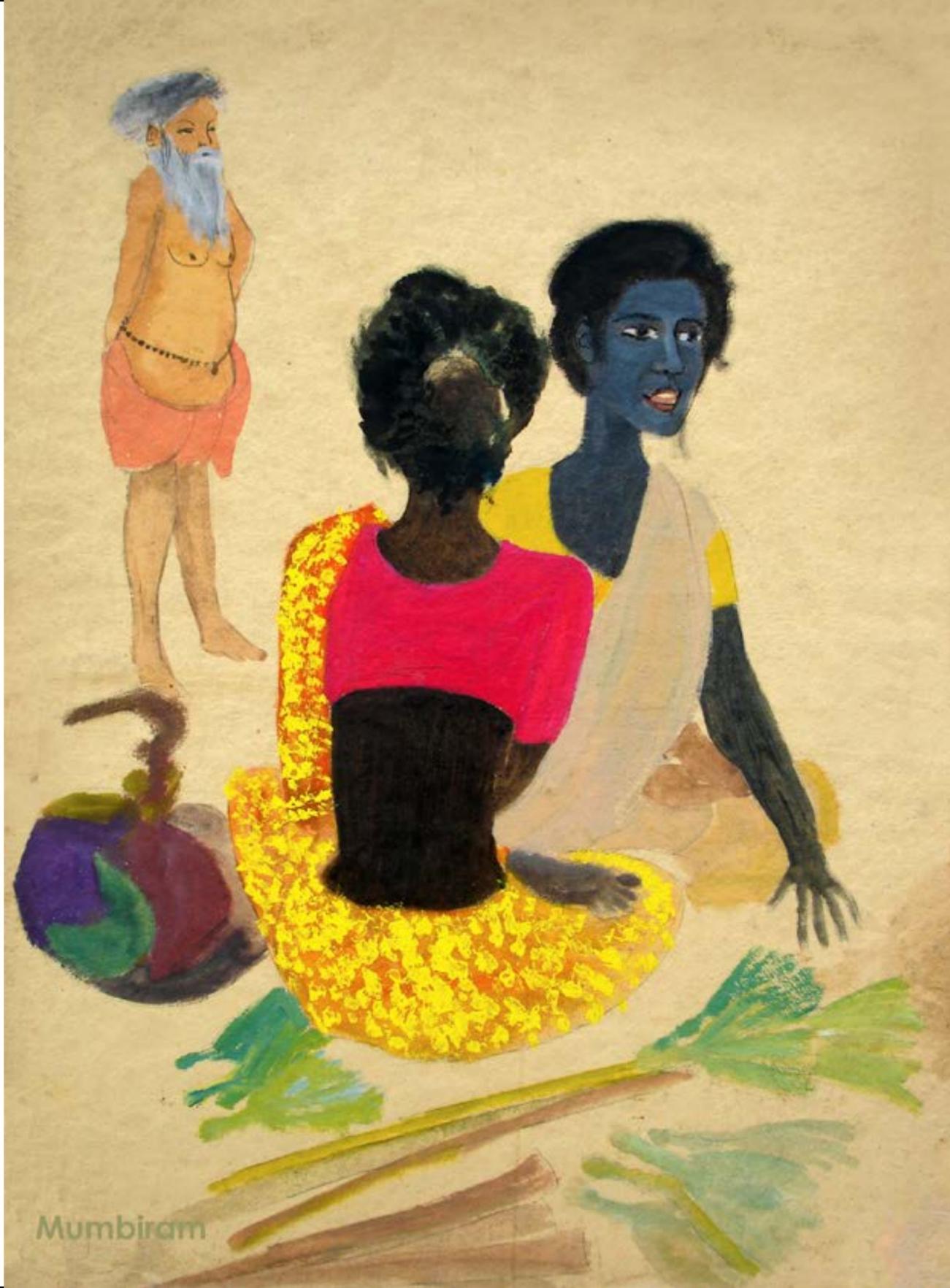


## Mysterious Pulindis

Mumbiram had not heard or read about the Forest Women in any other place than in that one spectacular verse that inspired the “Forest Women” masterpiece. He knew, in the original Sanskrit verse they are called Pulindis which could also mean ‘outsiders’ or the ‘others’.

He always felt that Krishna also liked the Forest Women, the Pulindis, and not only the Gopis and that the Gopis knew that, too. That was in fact the reason why they would not let the Pulindis come close to Krishna. They could have invited them and introduced Krishna to them. But their transcendental jealousy kept them from doing just that.

Mumbiram has always been deeply touched by the extraordinary spontaneous attachment of the Pulindis towards Krishna. In esoteric Vaishnavism that purely spontaneous aesthetic attraction is called pure *Raganuga Bhakti*.

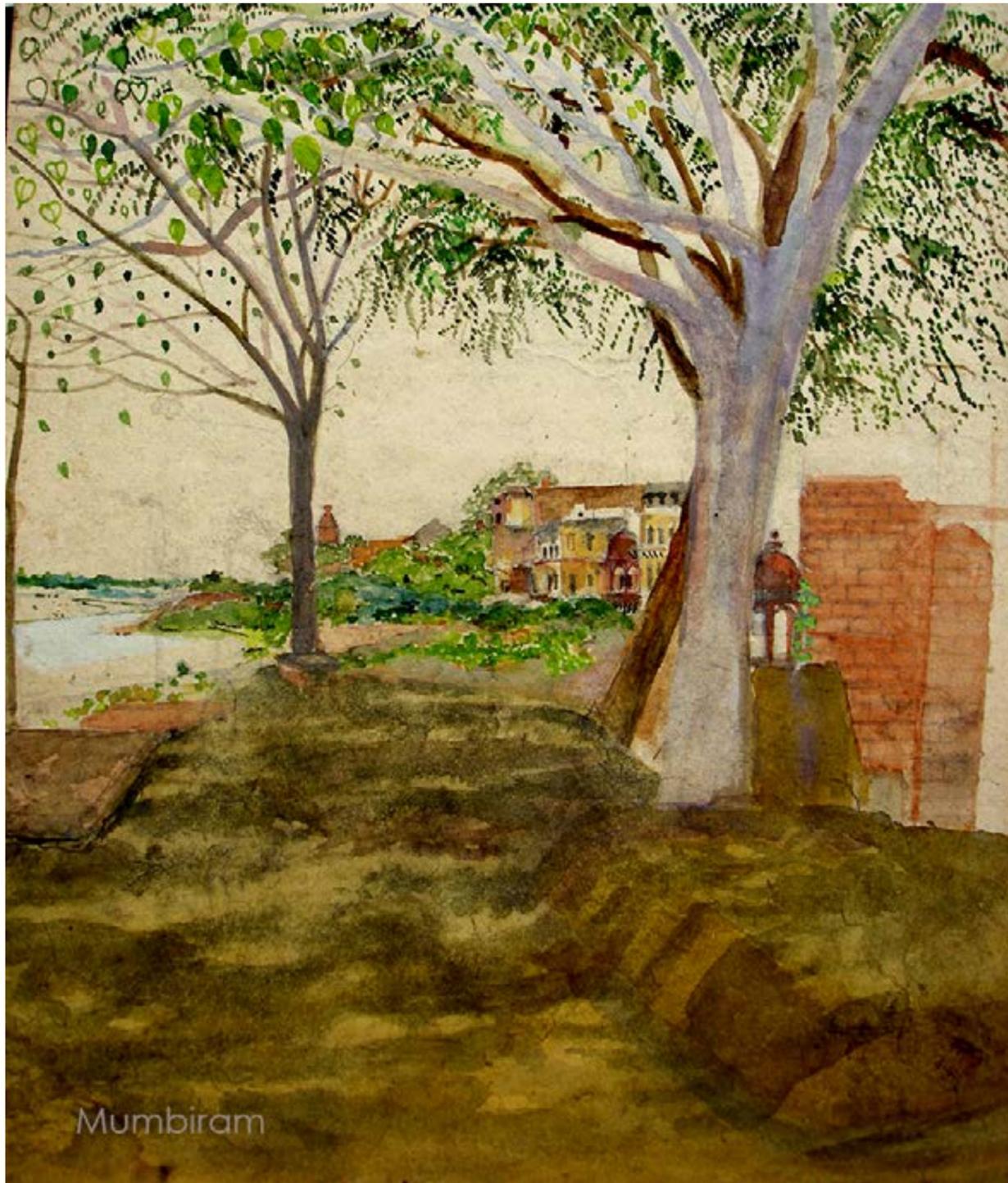


## **“Sadhu encounters Pulindis”**

**Watercolour and Acrylic, 1984**

**“Sadhu encounters Pulindis” was made even before the “Forest Women” was created. It shows two broom-makers sitting somewhere in the arid wilderness. Who else would you expect to run into in such wilderness? A bearded sadhu with matted hair and a saffron loin cloth has appeared on the scene. Sanyasis such as Rupa Gosvami and Sanatana Gosvami wandered around Krishna’s Vraja Bhoomi. Did they also encounter the Pulindi Forest Women ?**

**Mumbiram wanted to find out more about the mysterious Pulindis who find such rare mention but were full of passion for Krishna. And he had been wanting to go to Vrindavan, Vraja Bhoomi, for quite some time.**



**“At the Bank of the Yamuna”**

Watercolour, 1987, Vrindavan

## Vrindavan and Japan

Vrindavan is the land of Krishna. Krishna’s time in Vrindavan with his friends, the cowherd boys and girls, has provided topics worthy of meditation for sages and poets. Krishna and his friends spent all day together wandering through the Kunjas and along the Yamuna river, enacting Leelas.

On a hot summer day in 1987 Mumbiram arrived in Vrindavan. He left behind his studio and the “Forest Women” with the intention of finding rare books of Krishna Leelas and he had packed with him baskets of art materials. At that time Vrindavan was a pastoral scene with temples along the Yamuna.

Mumbiram used to make small landscapes as well as portraits through the idyllic afternoons of spontaneous communion. *“At the bank of the Yamuna”* shows his favourite spot at the Yamuna. During his walks through the winding by-lanes of Vrindavan he became friends with different people.



**“Meeting at the Bank of Yamuna”  
Watercolour, 1987, Vrindavan**

Mumbiram has met this Maharashtra devotee named Gaikwad in a hut on the sandy banks of the Yamuna. Gaikwad was singing devotional songs while playing tabla rhythms on the floor.

Mumbiram used a single sharp brush to make this remarkable portrait. The details of his face have been captured with the great ease on that long hot afternoon.

The expression in his eyes is captivating. His slightly open mouth and stubbly beard complete the magic that turns single moments into eternal unforgettable memories. The attention given to the face and the warm dark appearance of the man is touching.

Everything else could be left almost blank. Only a near invisible line is used for his simple attire.

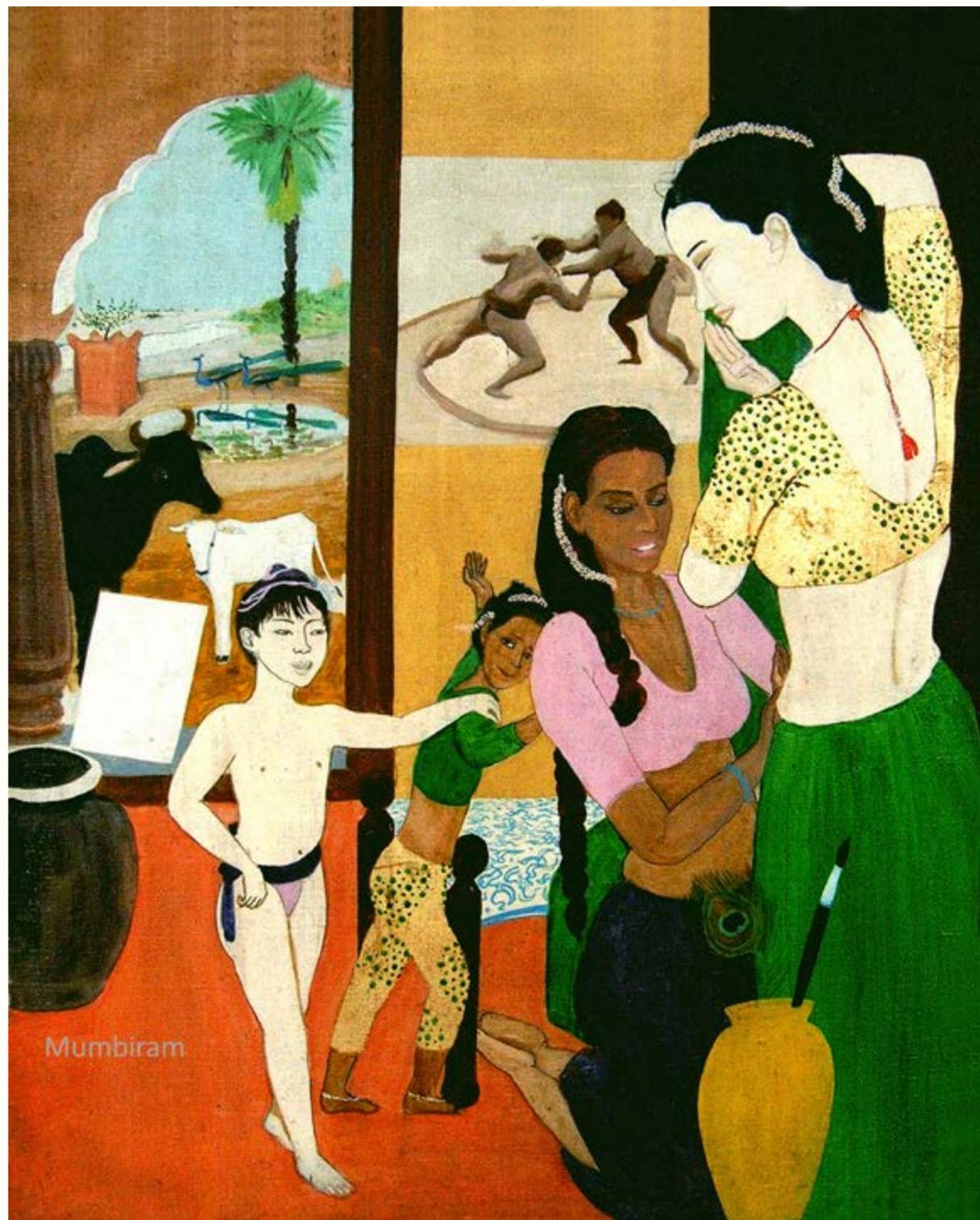
Mumbiram adopts a very unique style for every unique situation. It becomes once again obvious that this artist is totally dedicated to the Rasa of the situation and the personality.



While staying in Kamal Kunja with the Raasleela Mandali of Swami Hargovindji in Vrindavan in 1987 Mumbiram made this portrait: "Shri Hari Baba". Here he is seen with some of the young actors of the drama company.

While staying at a famous *Raasleela Mandali*, a drama company for Krishna Leelas, Mumbiram was asked to make a painting of the famous activist saint: "*Shri Hari Baba*". Hari Baba had manifested a legendary miracle way back in 1922. He inspired villagers along a stretch of the mighty Ganga to build a 30 miles long embankment along the Ganga within a few months. It was all achieved through volunteer Labour of Love, chanting the names of Krishna. That embankment forever stopped hundreds of villages from getting flooded and devastated every monsoon. It turned out that Hari Baba had been to the ashram of Mumbiram's granduncle, Ramadasanudas, in Wardha where Shri Hari Baba was inspired to abandon the impersonal path and to follow the devotional path of a Krishna devotee.

Mumbiram visited the many little book publishers and acquired rare Sanskrit books about Krishna's Leelas, esoteric works of the venerable Rupa and Sanatana Goswami and inimitable Vishvanath Chakravartji as also the "*Krishna Karnamrita*" by Bilvamangal Goswami and "*Anandavrindavana Champu*" by Kavi Karnapur.



**“Gokula’s World”**  
Oil on Canvas, Japan, 1988

One day at hot noontime he met Gokula, a Japanese young woman, who had come to India for living as a devotee in Vrindavan. She loved everything about India, always wore a sarie and a sandalwood tilak on her forehead. Mumbiram and Gokula spontaneously became great friends in a very short time. Unfortunately Gokula had to cut short her stay in India on account of severe unknown allergies. When she was back in Japan Gokula’s parents invited Mumbiram to come to Japan.

While in Japan for some months, Mumbiram was inspired to create five oil paintings based on the unique friendship with Gokula. These are examples of how cultural confluence can reveal surprising realisations about art and spirituality.

*“Gokula’s World”* shows love in simple sharing ways. The warm feeling of sharing and rapport is most wonderfully depicted in this vision. It is an idealized world no doubt.



**Village chief Ajmedar  
and his strong-willed daughter Khutke**

## **Mumbiram's Pulindi Muses**

**Mumbiram could not stay away from his dear muses in Pune for too long. He had a very personal relationship with every one of them.**

**There was a new group of exotic people that were setting shop not far from his studio near Datta Mandir. Ever since they appeared there in the morning scene, Mumbiram's mind was hovering around these interesting new-comers. They spread out their wares on sheets of cloth and sat next to them most comfortably under umbrellas protecting them from the hot midday sun. They were selling tulasi malas, rudraksha malas, crystal malas and also other decorative neck beads. There were other paraphernalia such as are found on altars in people's homes. They carried conch shells of assorted sizes, Shaligram stones of smooth pitch-dark surfaces and Shi-va lingas carved out of black stones or clear crystals.**

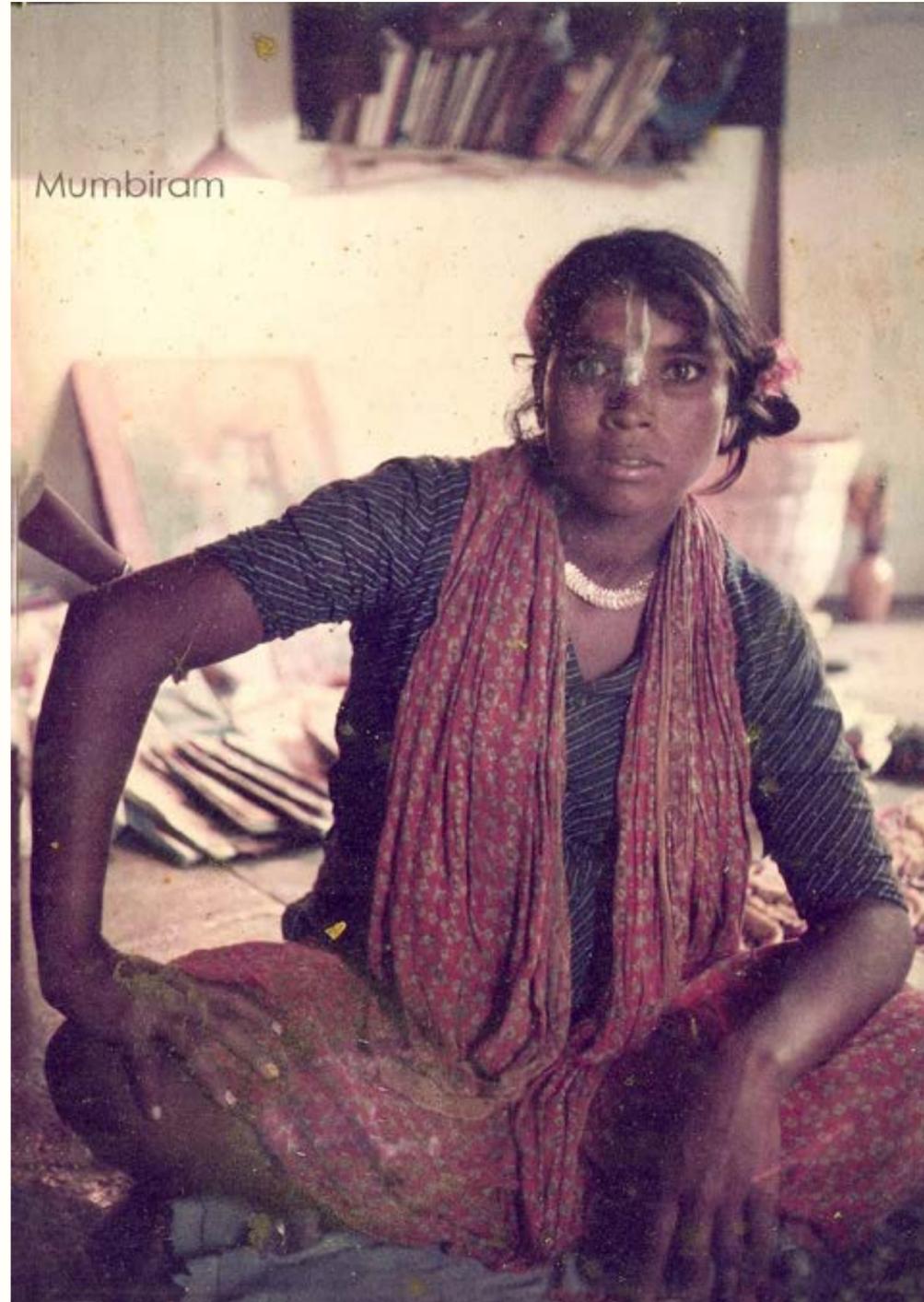
**For Mumbiram it was more interesting to get to know**



**Naurang and 'gang' camping out next to the railway tracks.**

the men and women proprietors that were running those shops. First Mumbiram got talking to the older man wearing a turban. He had the humble name Bandoo. But in his village, he was Ajmedar, the one time village chief. They were from a small village near Nandgaon in Nashik district. And they were Phasepardhis! Mumbiram had already known Choklet and his family as well as Drupada's gang begging on the streets of Koregaon Park. One could tell a Phasepardhi from his teeth blackened with Dantvan treatment. Now only the older generation of Phasepardhis stand out in a crowd from the way they wear their clothes.

Soon Mumbiram was getting to know each one of them and they in turn were fascinated to get to know, in this new city that they were entering, a 'Painter Babu' who was interested in them as his Muses, his models. There were Khutke, Surya, Ghuge, Shani, Labaad and her husband Gudchhap, with his sister Lyutyabai. Their names were exotic sounding. Some had a meaning and

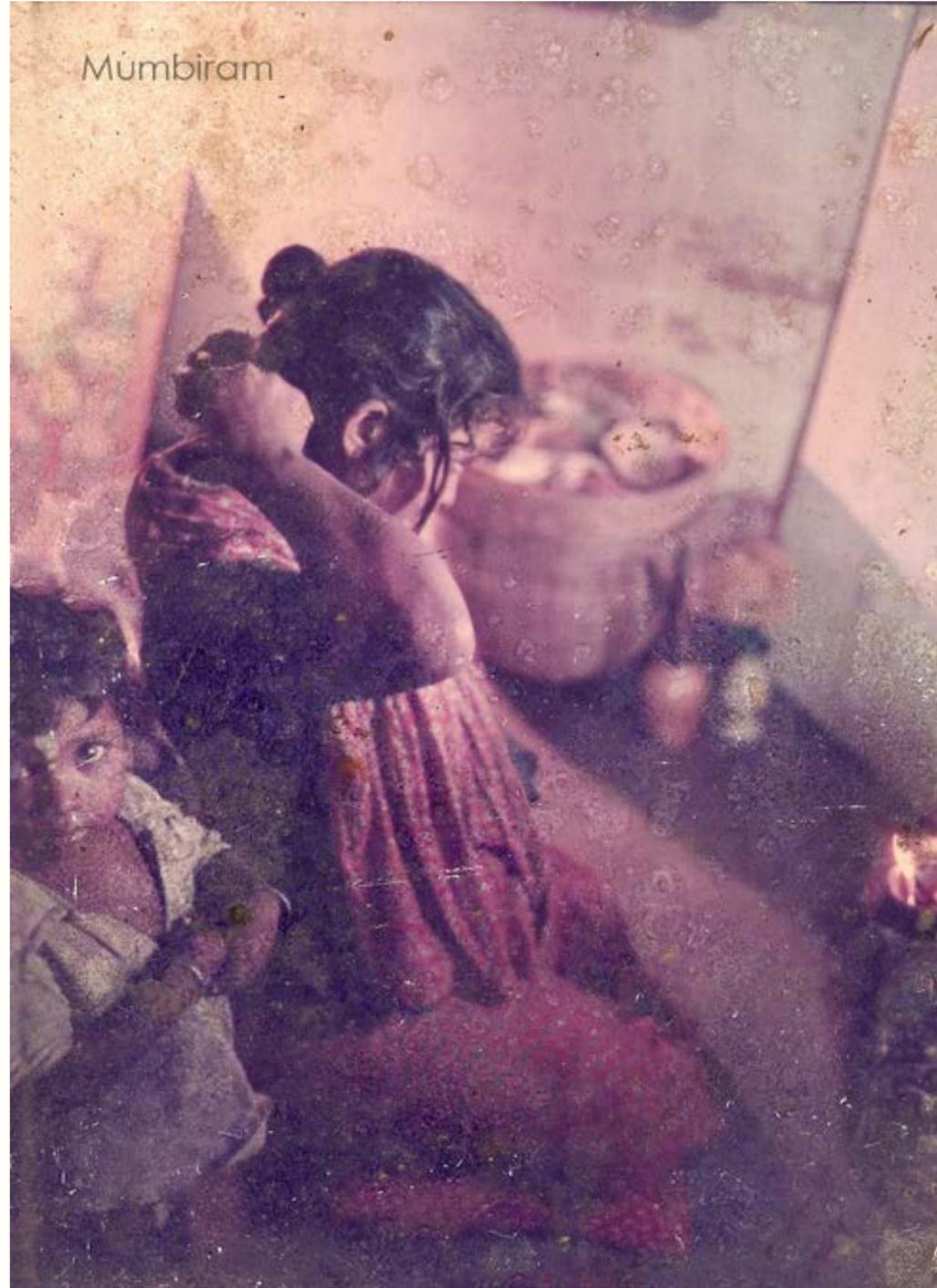


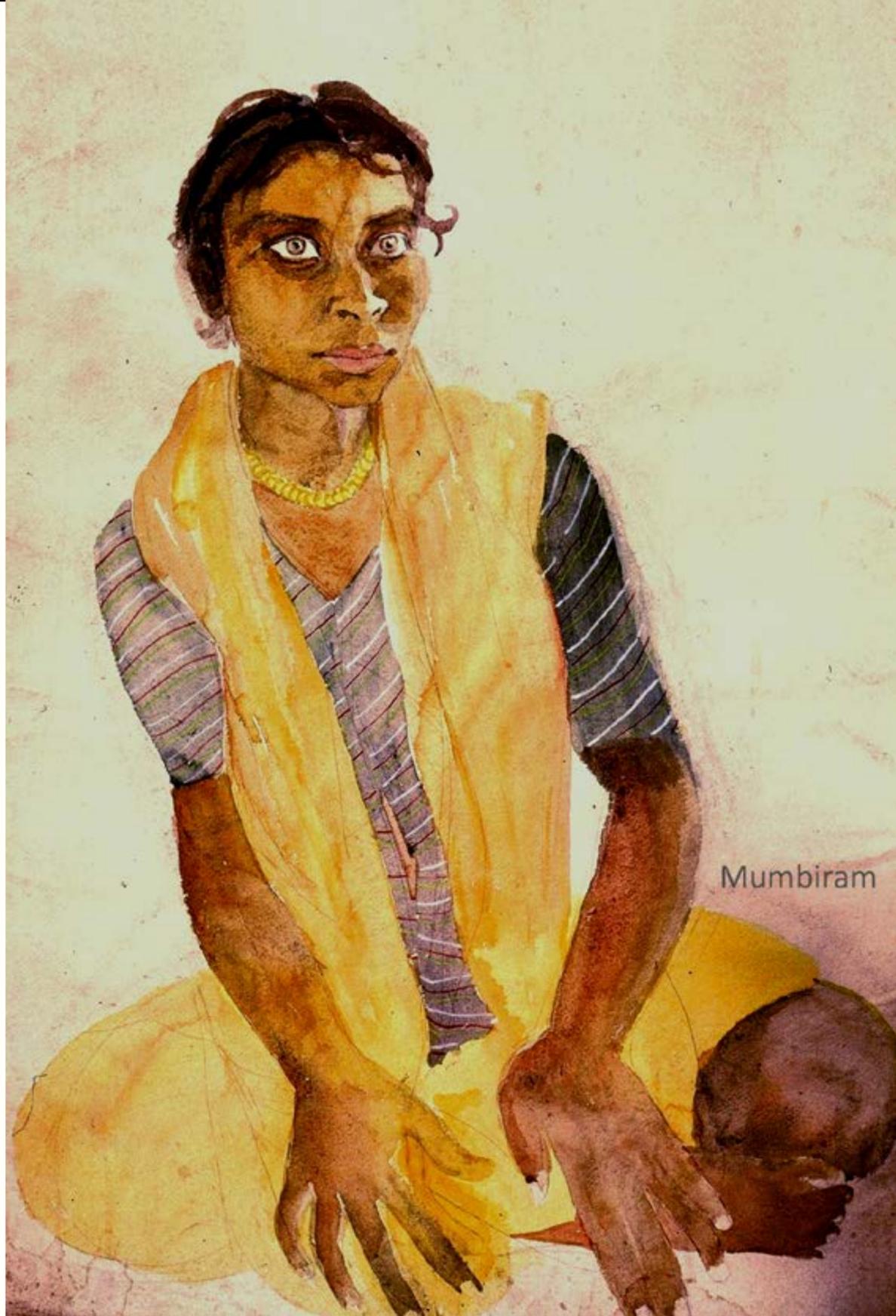
some were just sounding interesting to them. While in Pune they were camping out near the railway tracks.

Friendship between Mumbiram and the Nandgaon Phasepardhis grew like the moon in the light fortnight of the month.

It was not long before Ajmedar and Meera appeared in Mumbiram's Mandai atelier ready to have a portrait made! Such quick acceptance of an artist as a friend would be unheard-of from most other communities in India. Phasepardhis have a gypsy inside them. They have a surprisingly alive sensitivity to art, music and other romantic aspects of human life.

Meera herself was so inspired by the atmosphere in Mumbiram's studio, especially the Krishna paintings and the mirrors and the Tulasi malas and the paraphernalia of worship and the bamboo baskets and the bamboo ladders and the whole works. First of all, she put a big bright tilak on her own forehead. Then she lit an oil lamp in front of Mumbiram's iconic Krishna painting, offered haldi kumkum and folded her hands in a silent prayer.

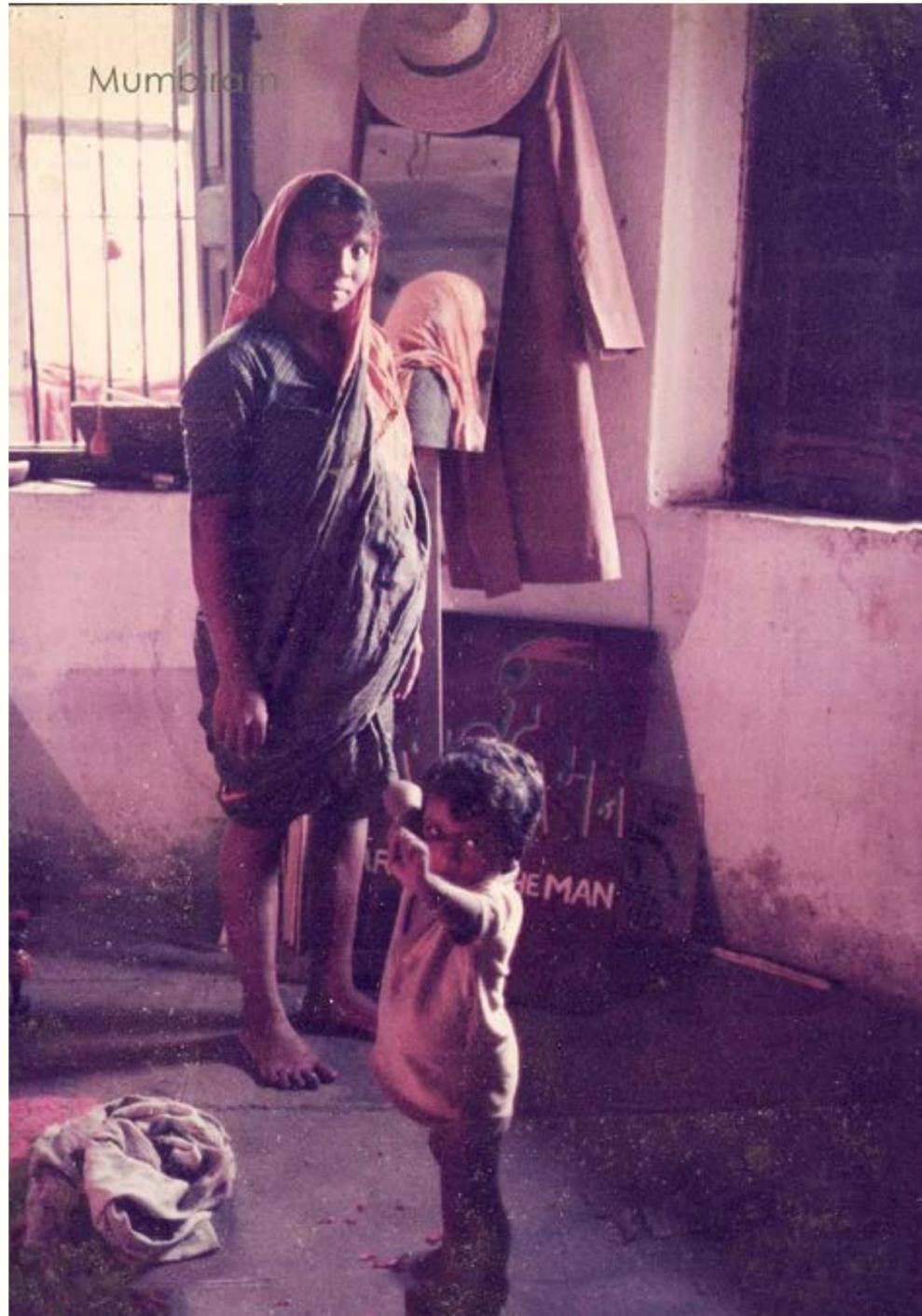




## “Naurang”

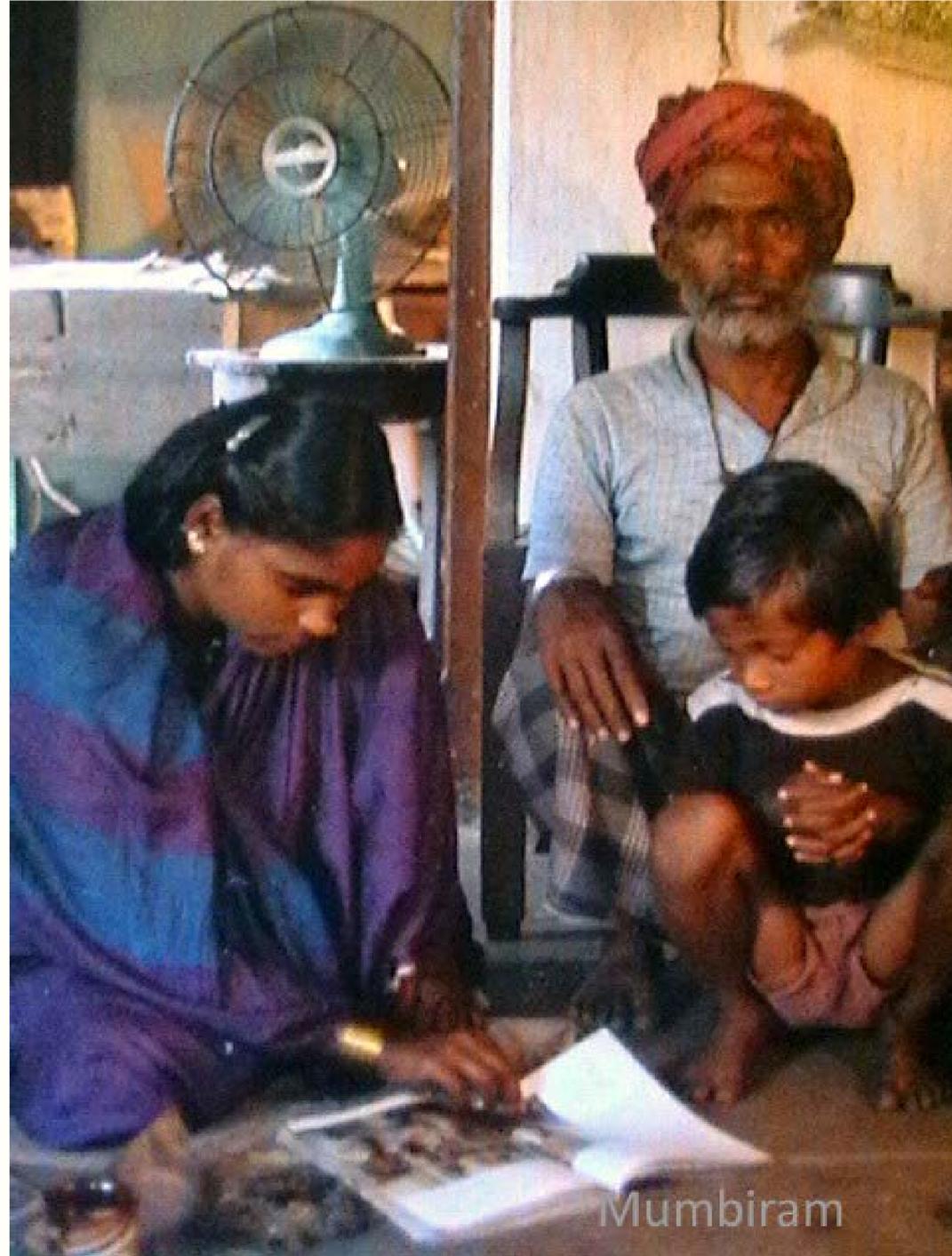
It was a surprise meeting. Mumbiram had to put paper on the board, find the right spot for Meera to sit and for himself to sit not far from her. Then he set out his watercolour paintbox, a pitcher of water and his brushes. When Mumbiram likes the subject of his portrait, it takes him no more than half an hour to materialize an inspired portrait. This portrait of Meera was one such inspired portrait.

This barefooted tribal woman setting shop on a sheet of cloth on the pavement had mighty good understanding of the artist’s craft and passion. The name Meera being the name of a celebrated sixteenth century princess devotee of Krishna fitted this Meera quite well. But it turned out it wasn’t her real name, after all. Her real name was “Navrang”, which means New Colours or Nine Colours. Navrang often travelled to Krishna’s Mathura to buy the Tulasi malas and Rudraksha malas and other worship paraphernalia. Navrang was pregnant at that time that Mumbiram made the portrait.



The whole group of Phasepardhis selling malas called Mumbiram “Painter Babu”, which was inspired by a Hindi movie of that name about the romantic episodes in the life of an idealist painter. It turns out that Navrang has named her little boy also Painter Babu.

Mumbiram gave Navrang a cotton handloom “Poona Sarie” that had a broad cadmium-yellow border and fine green and brown lines in the body. It was the kind of sarie that upper-class, educated women of good taste would choose for themselves. It was somewhat more expensive than the synthetic saries that are widely chosen for the cheap and easy maintenance they entail. Navrang really liked it. Next morning she wore it and came knocking on Mumbiram’s door with a little Painter Babu and her sakhi Kalpana. Mumbiram was very happy about that graceful second visit and captured it with his camera.



**Ajmedar, the ex-village chief who had accompanied Navrang the previous day, must have talked about the happenings at Painter Babu’s studio. Soon thereafter Ajmedar came with his own daughter, Khutke, and a little boy named Chidi, meaning “sparrow”.**



**Khutke had something proud about her that goes unnoticed on the street. She was aware of what Mumbiram was doing as an artist.**

**Mumbiram was fascinated the way Khutke showed amazing versatility in how she presented herself to the artist. All Phasepardhi women are creative dressers. Khutke improvised a turban out of the pallu end of her sarie. Mumbiram felt that added an exotic, regal touch to her demeanour.**

**She also showed remarkable understanding of using her hands to create the right mood. That inspired Mumbiram to suggest her to sit on the floor, at the classical Indian writing desk that he himself liked to sit at. He was pleased to have given the right circumstance for the proud, determined, wise and even regal demeanour that Khutke was getting herself into.**



Having settled that important aspect of making a live portrait, Mumbiram stood up his ply-board sheet, pinned his handmade paper on it and made a very quick sketch with a pencil that had a medium-soft lead. Later he was going to make a watercolour masterpiece out of it.

### **“Khutke as the Warrior Queen”**

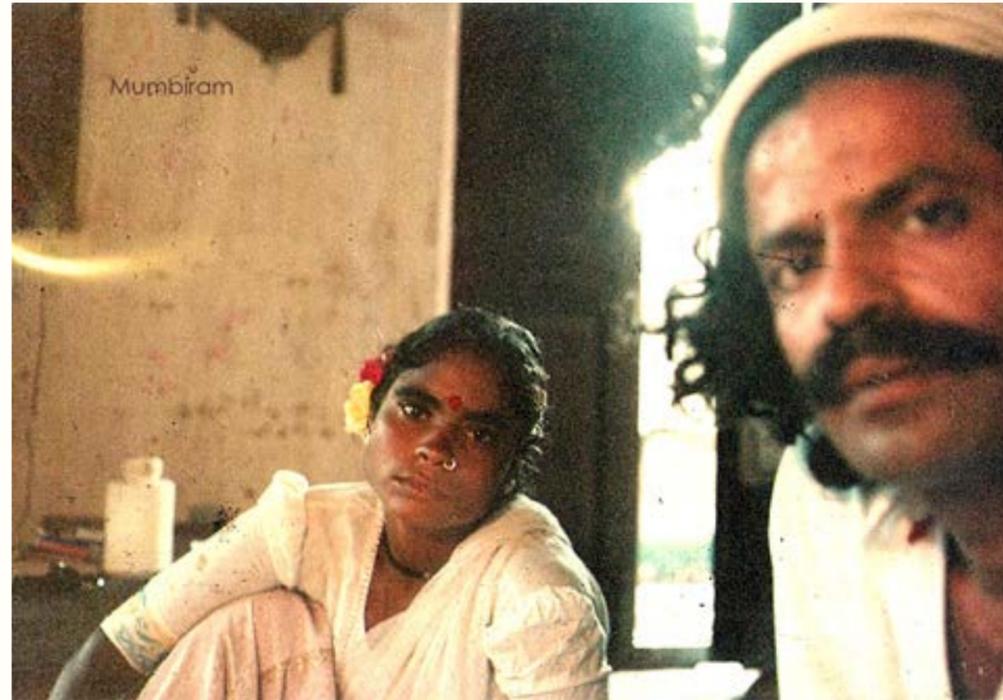
Mumbiram was pleasantly surprised at the way Khutke was positioning her strong big hands. You see an ink pot and a writing feather on top of the desk. But don't miss the handle of a sword showing in the space between the desk and Khutke. The piercing look in her eyes, the flaring, finely curved nostrils and the fine lips pressing against each other are wonderfully placed within the angular outline of her face. Her shoulders and her elbows silently articulate her bodily strength. Her feet crossing against each other are arranged in tidy determination.



Mumbiram let Khutke have a break while he got ready his watercolour paints, brushes and dishes. Barely had he begun to colour the pencil sketch, when a loud knock on the door made a rude interruption. A group of rag-picker girls from Yravda barged in when Mumbiram opened the door.

It would have been impossible to carry on with Khutke's portrait, as it became very quickly obvious that the rag-picker girls were too excited to see their friend Mumbiram making a portrait of some other woman from some other community and caste. So Mumbiram decided to do something else that they could all do together that would also be interesting. Mumbiram took out the fine quality music recording machine that Hans, a friend from Germany had left with him, along with his excellent SLR camera. They would all sing songs, he suggested.

Mumbiram had made it easy for Khutke to cope with that interruption of her portrait being made. The next day she came knocking at Mumbiram's atelier again. She



**Khutke came alone all dressed up in white.**

was resplendent in a white sari and a matching white blouse that had delicate embroidery on the sleeves. She had a red rose and a yellow rose sticking out of a neatly combed bunch of her curly dark hair.

Khutke sat again at 'her' writing desk like the day before and would have happily posed for more portraits. But Mumbiram was already pleased with the outcome of the previous day's rapid sketch that was still on the board. Besides Khutke herself was this day differently dressed and also differently poised. So Mumbiram invited her for a tea and to take a look at the portrait he had made the previous day.

She stayed and had a leisurely time till noontime. Then they decided to go out and celebrate over lunch along with one of her friends at a restaurant. They had a leisurely lunch in the back garden extension of that restaurant, and then said a gracious goodbye. Mumbiram hasn't seen Khutke after that.



**Naurang had two brothers and four younger sisters. Shani was the third of them and the pretty one. She was just coming of age when she first appeared in Pune. Shani had a turbulent friendship with Mumbiram to begin with but it matured into a very creative artist-and-his-muse relationship.**



**Now she was an adult. In her mature state of mind she could relate to the magical charm of Painter Babu's sublime passion. She would later confide that arrival of Tsambika on the scene was the game changer for her ! In the background, sitting under the umbrella is 'Diring', Shani's brother.**

**Shani had many suitors when she entered adolescence. She had spurned any advances from Mumbiram. Before long she settled for Sharad of Aswaldara. After a few babies with Sharad she had a Second Spring of sorts.**





Yes, Shani's blouse was nicely crafted. But it also had fine gold hollow circles shining mildly on dark background.



Shani was delighted to grab that sari from Painter Babu's bamboo ladder that had hollow gold spots on a black background in the body. It had broad red-and-gold border too. What a providential match that was.

Shani had not come alone. Her sister Lyutyabai had come with her, too. And Labaad's younger daughter Ghasaa was with her. They were all happy to celebrate their good fortune that afternoon.



We are reminded of how Navrang had greatly appreciated the Handloom Cotton Poona Sarie that Painter Babu had gifted her. It had a broad plain yellow border. The body had delicate diagonal gold lines that harmonized with the diagonal lines of Navrang's blouse.



**Shani came alone or with her baby ever since. Next time she grabbed a sarie that was of a mango yellow body and thin red-and-gold border. It very nicely matched the ‘accessories’ she was wearing and it matched her mood.**



**Next came Labaad’s Suryaa. Then it was Ballu’s Ghugay and Meenakshi. Then also Penchis. The list kept growing. They brought their friends, too.**

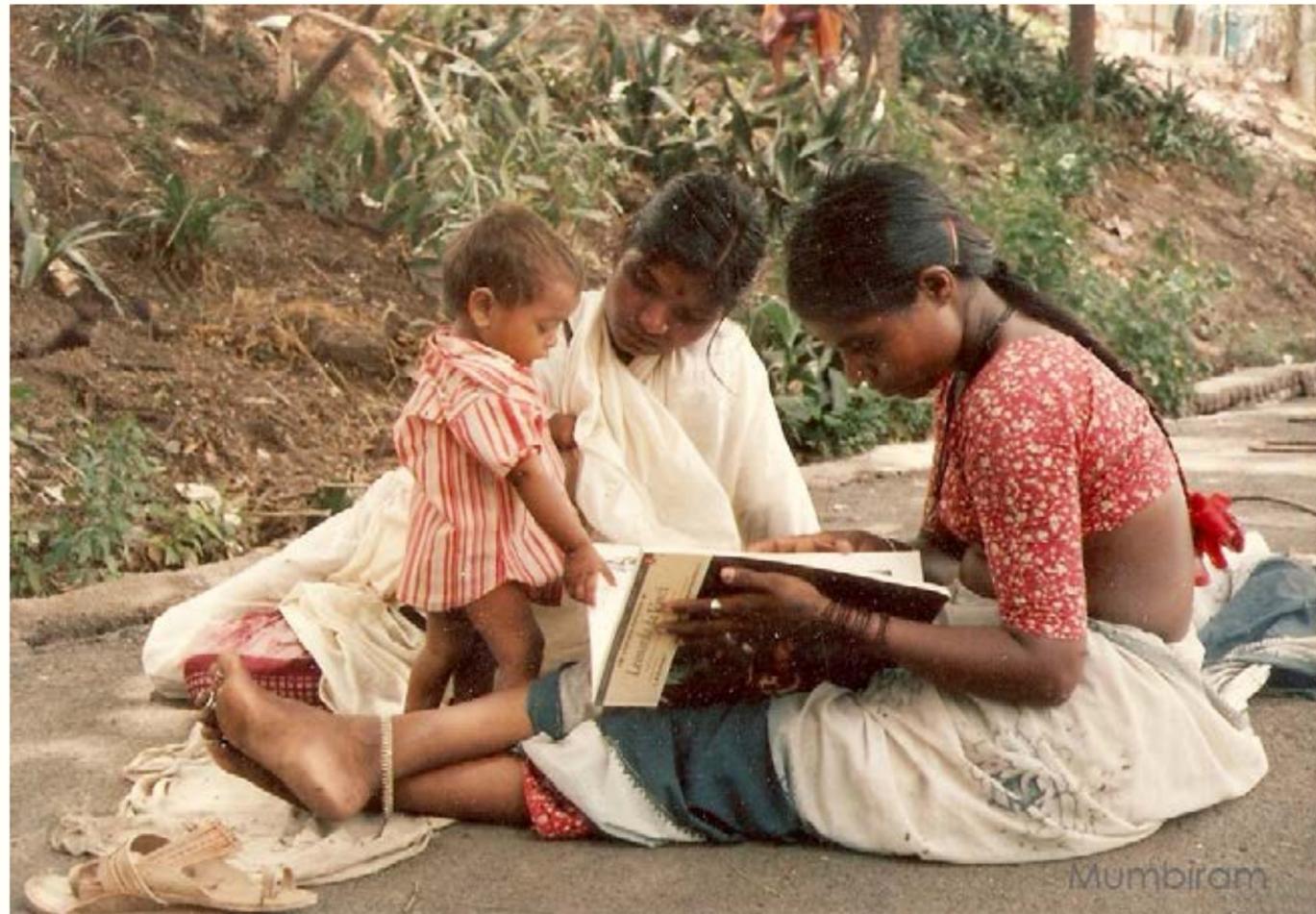
**What attracted Mumbiram to these outsiders who are avoided by the rest of society and also what attracted these outsiders to this Painter Babu who was unlike anybody they had met in their experience? We attempted to offer the answer that their aesthetic preferences were wonderfully in agreement. Their Rasas were compatible.**



**This celebrated charcoal work by Leonardo da Vinci shows Mother Mary, St. Ann, along with Baby Jesus and Boy St. John.**



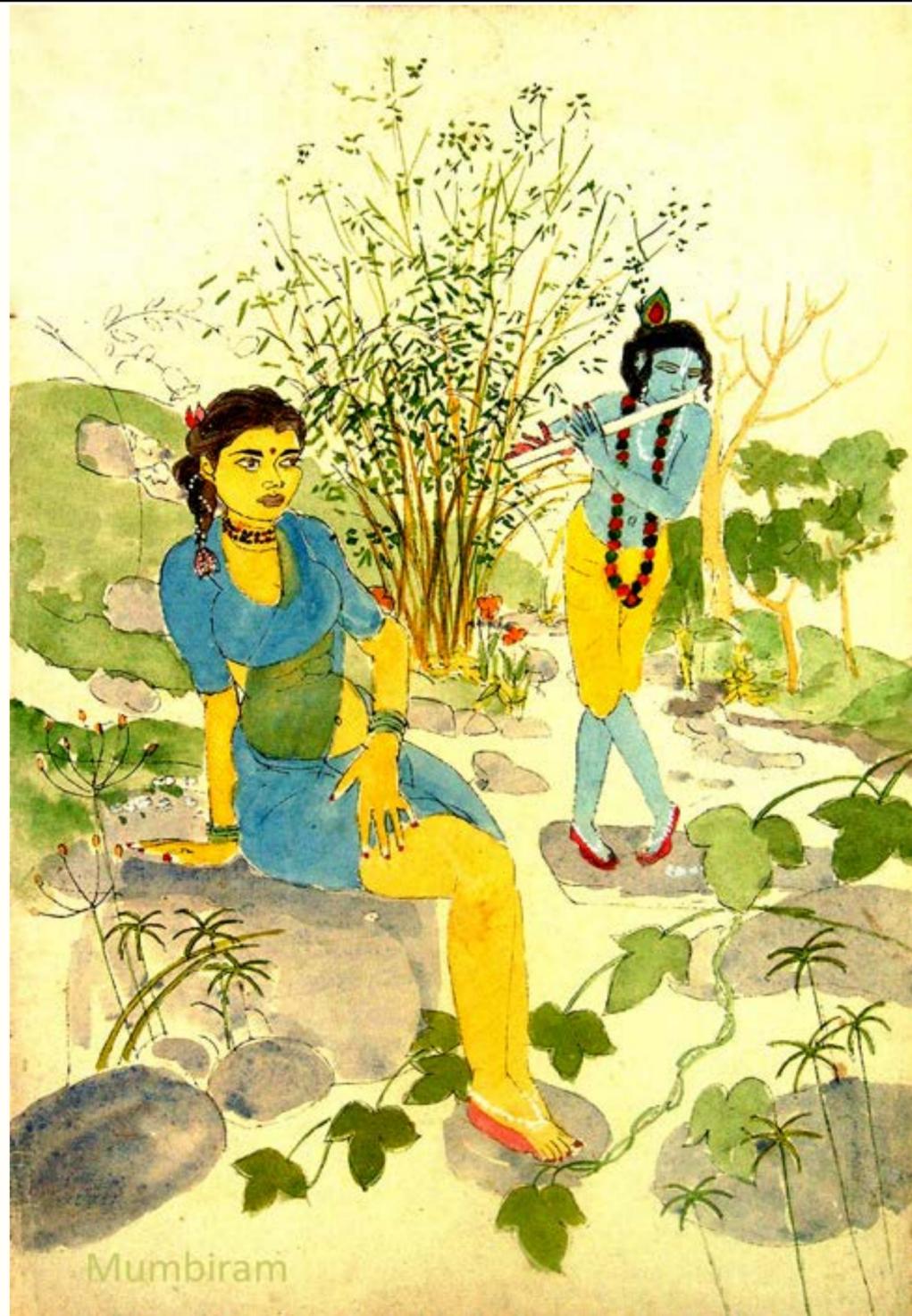
**Kusum had a favourite companion named Vimal. Both of them had little boys nearly of the exact same age. Mumbiram was reminded of many paintings of Leonardo da Vinci that showed Mother Mary and St. Ann with their babies together in a fascinating soulful demeanour. He often took them out at high noon time to visit some of the iconic temples of Pune.**



**The girls are looking through a book that shows such paintings in a book about Leonardo's paintings.**



**Mumbiram was immensely attracted to their casual ways. He didn't shy away from photographing them whenever he got hold of a camera. That was how some unique memories were captured while he took his muses to all kinds of places and enjoyed their company immensely.**



**“Meeting by the Stream  
- Leelas on Govardhan Mountain”**

Watercolour, Pune

## Rare References in the Scriptures

Mumbiram was looking up for any references to the Pulindi women in the scriptures. Rarely are they mentioned by saintly persons of the last many centuries. According to some, the Pulindis were the *Shiksha Gurus* of the *Brahmanis*, the wives of the learned *Yadnyik Brahmanas of Vraja* (not the caste). The *Brahmanis* of Vraja had met the Pulindis in the marketplace of Mathura. The Pulindis told them about the fascinating personality of the adolescent Krishna, with whom they were themselves enamoured.

At some other place it mentions the Pulindis hosting Krishna in the caves of Govardhan Mountain where Krishna spent much of his day along with his friends who were sent behind the cows and the calves. They were playing flutes and conch shells, dancing, devising games and thinking where the girls might be. One of Mumbiram’s watercolours titled “*Meeting by the Stream*” re-



**“Taking Krishna’s Flute”**

Charcoal

minds one of such memorable happenings on that blessed mountain.

It seems Mumbiram’s muses, the Phasepardhis, Warlis and Thakurs living in the hills and forests and the people living in the slums and on the streets of India were like the Pulindis, the ‘others’ and ‘outsiders’, who are spontaneously attracted to Krishna without having been to any guru’s place or without belonging to the same caste as Krishna.

### **Rasaraj and the Pulindis**

In Mumbiram’s charcoals and paintings the people who appear next to Krishna are from all kinds of backgrounds. He knew Krishna is Rasaraj, the king of Rasa, who enjoys the pure spontaneous attraction, *Raganuga Bhakti*, the most, such as the Forest Women exhibited towards Krishna. They didn’t have any guru but were attracted to Krishna because of their own sweet desire.

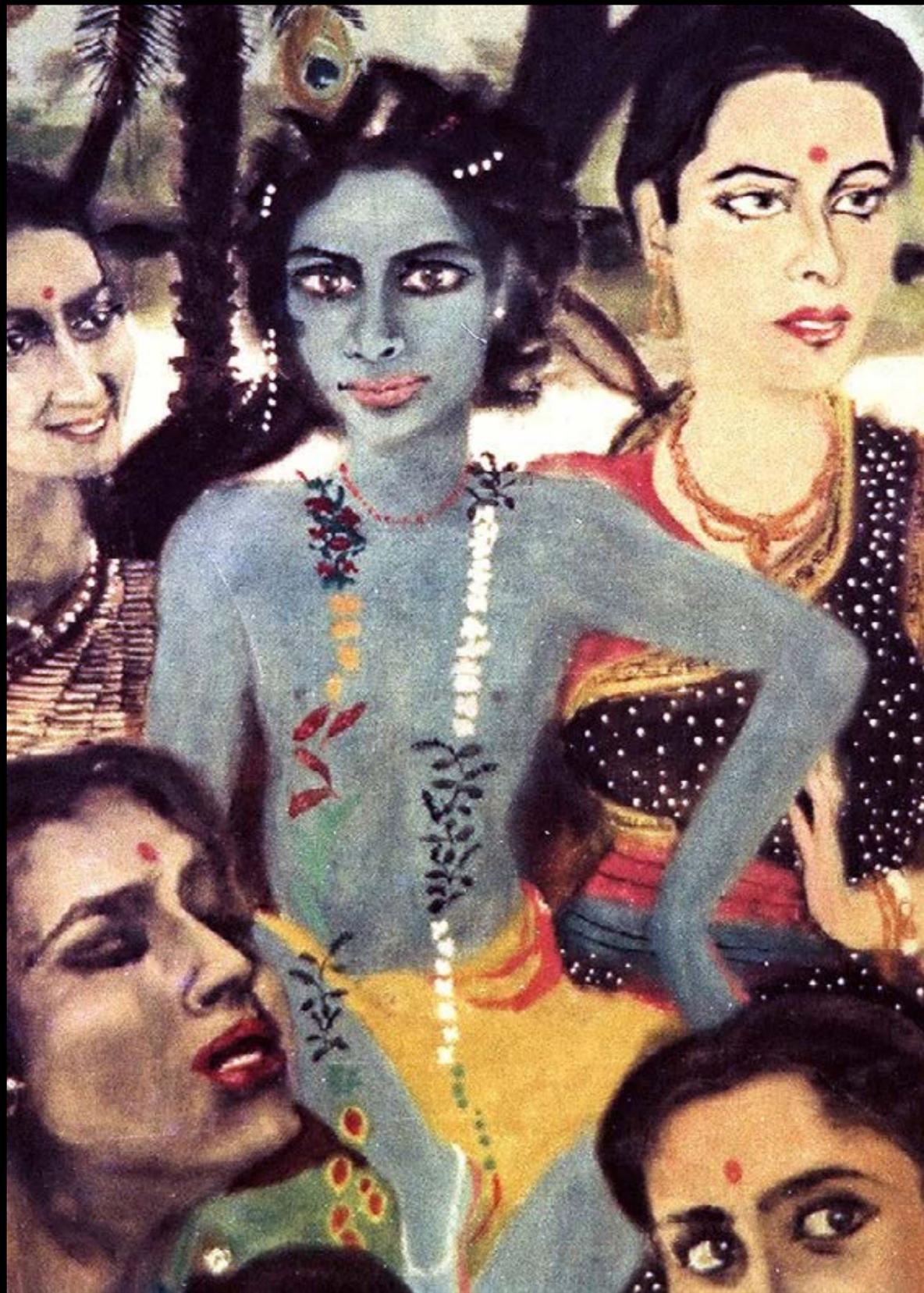


## **Krishna's Garland of Forest Flowers**

The punch line of the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” is closely connected to Mumbiram's favourite vision of Krishna in ‘*Lavanya*’, without gold and ornaments.

In the “Forest Women” masterpiece Mumbiram shows Krishna wearing a unique garland, which suggests that Krishna is not only attracted to the Gopis, who are of his ‘own caste’, but also to the others, the outsiders, those different ones, the Forest Women.

Krishna's garland is made of wild forest flowers such as only the Pulindis would pick. They are wearing the same forest flowers in their hair and decorations. Who made Krishna's garland?



## ***A Garland of Wild Forest Flowers***

Krishna is not adorned with gold-studded jewellery but by a garland strung with wild forest flowers.

It is popularly known that Krishna's favourite necklace is the Vanamala, a garland made of wild forest flowers.

Where would Krishna get these forest flowers from?



Mumbiram

On her blouse one can see typical patterns that the Warli people create.

Tribals have always existed in India and had already appeared thousands of years ago in India's great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Their situation today is very bitter. They are at the bottom of Indian society. Some of them are on the verge of extinction.



Mumbiram

Look closely !

The painting is full of amazing details  
for the discerning eye.

The Forest Women Pulindis are wearing  
exactly the same flowers, feathers and  
leaves that Krishna's garland is made of.

This one has climbed a tree and is hold-  
ing on to it to get a better view of her be-  
loved Krishna. She is wearing a garland  
of leaves around her neck that look like  
peacock feathers.



The Forest Women are shown as international crowd.

They are going into different ecstatic states because they would like to go near Krishna but are prevented by the Gopis.

# 6. International “Forest Women” attract International Crowd



Mumbiram, 1991



**\*\*\*\*\***

Mumbiram has taken it one step further, beyond the classification into Gopis and Forest Women. By showing Krishna's dear Forest Women as an international crowd, it becomes obvious that Krishna is attracted to the great variety of people. Love goes beyond race, nation, caste and culture. In the same way Mumbiram loved the variety of people. His muses have been Afro-American, Indian, Greek, Japanese, German and many more. It didn't matter. It was the person who mattered more.

Mumbiram's colourful "Forest Women" have attracted people from around the world who had a chance meeting with Mumbiram that lead them to his legendary studio that was also visited by India's exotic people who were his muses.

Hans from the Bavarian Alps would have been just one of many such admirers who were no doubt also exotic in their own way.

**But Mumbiram and Hans had an ideal artist-admirer relationship. Hans spontaneously acquired the “Forest Women” painting and then just as spontaneously decided to leave it in Mumbiram’s legendary studio.**

**In the rest of this section we get a brief introduction to some of Mumbiram’s exotic Muses and Admirers.**

**There is Shobha, the lively petit Phasepardhi teenager who defied the oppressive caste barriers in love for her amour. Then there is Ratnamala, the swarthy handsome and spirited teenager who was a daughter of a woman in an advanced state of leprosy.**

**Then there was tall, strong and spirited Kusum, and resourceful and mature Chanda and Surekha and Baby and Shani, the Phasepardhi teenager, and Phasepardhi Navrang and Khutke from Aswaldara and Sonabai the bugu-drum player. The list could have gone on.**

**On the side of admirers we are introduced to Dr.Hae Sung aka Amrisha from Korea, Lena from Netherlands, Kathryn Read from Australia, Tsambika from Greece, Hema from France, Prema Shunya from San Diego, Marion Blum from Switzerland and Margot from Perth, Australia and so on.**

The “Forest Women” were witness to all these happenings. These Muses as well as the Art Lovers from far corners of the world were both drawn to that Legendary Atelier as if by the Magic of Rasa. They were in turn Spectators to that masterpiece of Rasa Renaissance.

The intimate emotional encounters with people from far away places and cultures that they experienced at the Legendary Studio of this Cavalier Artist of Rasa Renaissance were thrilling and unforgettable to all these Rasa Sensitive Spirit Souls.

Then a High Profile Admirer from a High Profile German Auto Maker appeared on the Scene. It led to a bitter-sweet sequence of emotional and pecuniary exchanges that ended in the Legendary “Forest Women” painting leaving Mumbiram’s Legendary Studio.

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**Hans Sittenauer had travelled to India from a remote picturesque town from the Bavarian Alps to study Tabla Rhythms from great masters. But after he was introduced to Mumbiram he kept it all aside and just moved into Mumbiram's Mandai atelier. Soon he was borrowing clothes and accessories from Mumbiram's wardrobe and taking part in Mumbiram's various 'Rasa activities'. Here he has already borrowed his trademark hat.**

## **The "Forest Women" attract Hans from Bavaria**

**The "Forest Women" were attracting visitors from distant places to the studio. One day there was a knock on the door sounding different to the knocking of Mumbiram's friends and muses. It was Warren, a musician from the Boston. Warren had come to Pune to study classical north Indian vocal music. He was sent by Steven Curtis from Boston to meet Mumbiram and to deliver some of his early paintings made in the US. Mumbiram was delighted to hear from Steven.**

**Warren introduced Mumbiram to Hans from Germany. Hans was from a well known family from Bavaria in Germany. Hans was learning Tabla rhythms. He was being guided by the one-time great vocalist of Marathi musical theatre, Shri Suresh Haldankar. Warren had come to study classical north Indian vocal music with the legendary Bhimsen Joshi. Soon after meeting Mumbiram**



**Warren cherished the bond of friendship he shared with Mumbiram.**



**But Hans could share a friendship of total trust with Mumbiram.**

**both Warren and Hans weaned themselves off from their heavy-weight Gurus.**

**Hans was fascinated by the picturesque atmosphere outside and inside Mumbiram's atelier. Hans just moved in with Mumbiram. He spent a wonderful time for a few weeks living in the studio and came to have a glimpse of Mumbiram's Rasa way of living. He even got to know some of Mumbiram's muses as well as some of his admirers.**



**Phasepardhi Pepit was a confident model for the Princess' aura.**



**Sangita was eager to join the drama.**



**Tara's sister Mynah is tickled to see Hans in the exotic costume.**



**Pepit has garnished the looks with a pearl nasal ornament 'nathani' and matching pearl ear drops.**

## **Mumbiram and Hans team up as Costume Designer and Fashion Photographer**

**In those days Mumbiram was passionate about designing costumes that conjured certain classical dramatic themes that he fancied about. He had cultivated a few tailors around the fabric market of Pune around Laxmi Road in the city and along M.G.Road in the Cantonment Area. These tailors understood and could execute Mumbiram's designs using the special materials that Mumbi would procure.**

**Mumbiram had designed a three-piece ensemble drawing inspiration from the outfits that Kathak dancers would don on stage. Everyone called it the 'prince outfit'. Mumbiram modelled it himself. Once Mumbiram roped in Phasepardhi Pepit to visit the Mandai atelier and don this outfit for his camera. Then at one time he had Hans put it on when Tara and her sister Myna were visiting. Mumbiram's designs had an androgynous flair.**



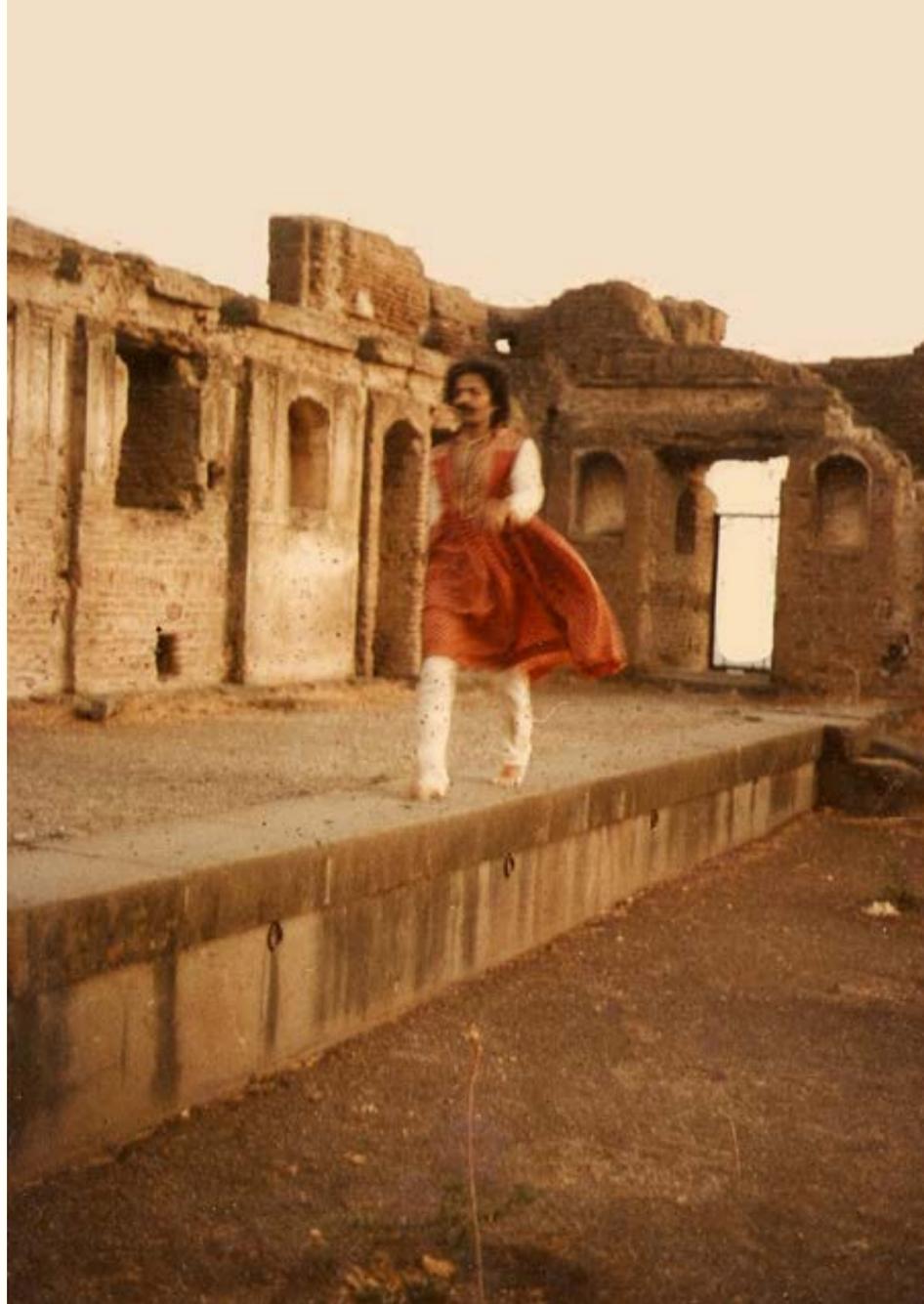
**Mumbiram and Hans climbed all the way to the back wall of the Vishnu temple at the back of the temple complex in the dark early-morning hour.**

**Mumbiram donned the Prince Outfit and Hans followed Mumbi close up. He seemed to know quite well when and what to shoot. They did not talk much.**



**Early one fine morning Mumbiram and Hans set out on way to Parvati Hill. Mumbiram had his “Kathak” outfit with him. Hans had his fine SLR camera which could choose aperture and/or exposure time to get perfect pictures. Hans himself had tunnel vision which meant he could only see what was in the centre of his field of vision. He had no peripheral vision. Hans had not told this to Mumbiram because he was sick-and-tired of being treated as an invalid. Mumbiram innocently took Hans with him on adventurous outings in the dark nights outside Pune. Hans always stayed close to Mumbiram and remained safe. They had developed a relation of total trust.**

**Mumbiram and Hans arrived at the foothills of Parvati and climbed all the way to the Vishnu temple at the back of the temple complex. It was a little after five o’clock. Mumbiram seemed to know exactly where he wanted to go. They arrived at the back wall of the Vishnu temple in the dark early-morning hour. A sliver of the moon**



**This energetic if restless princely figure conjures up the young prince Hamlet.**

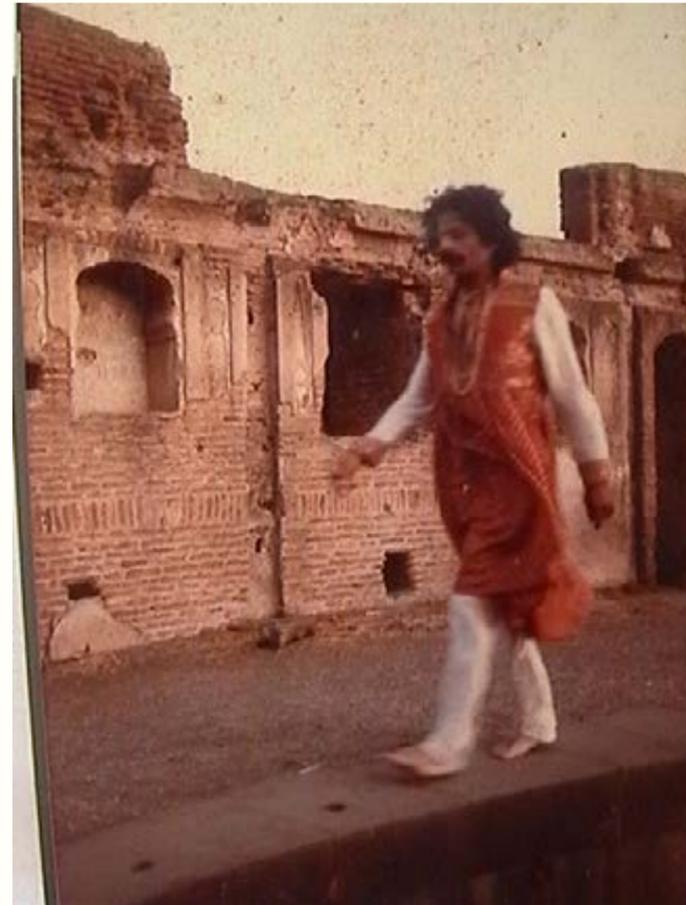
would soon adorn the purple eastern sky. It was a day or two before the no-moon night. Mumbiram donned the Prince Outfit and climbed the plinth between the temple and the massive fortified wall. They did not talk much. Hans followed Mumbi close up. He seemed to know quite well when and what to shoot.

What is most remarkable is that Hans had no idea of what character or what drama Mumbiram was inspired to. We cannot say with certainty whether Mumbiram himself had a clear-cut idea as to what role and rasa he was inspired to. Looking back we have a detached enough view to identify the resemblance with the scene where Hamlet meets the ghost of his father's spirit on the parapet of the castle.

Mumbiram undoubtedly had the episode of Hamlet meeting his dead father's ghost in mind when he took Hans along to photograph him with his Prince costume. In Shakespeare's Hamlet the father and the son interestingly both shared the same name Hamlet.



Here the walking figure likely was to invoke the restless ghost looking for the opportunity to incite his son to seek revenge from his murderous incestuous brother. The dazed figures on the floor are likely portraying the shocked and tormented Prince.



Hamlet's friend Horatio and also some guards had seen the Ghost of Hamlet's dead father appear at a parapet of the castle. They had invited Hamlet to come see himself. The ghost had then told Hamlet how he was murdered and who his murderer was. The ghost had asked Hamlet to take revenge against the dead King's brother. The brother had established an incestuous relation with the Queen and murdered the King. The whole incident had left Hamlet in a daze.

## Classical images invoked by Shakespeare's Hamlet



Hamlet, Horatio and the guards encounter the dead King's ghost at the parapet of the Castle



Hamlet kneeling in front of his father



Hamlet in distress acted by Sir Laurence Olivier.

Classical images invoked by Shakespeare's Hamlet show remarkable congruence with the images that Mumbiram and Hans have created that early morning on the Parvati Hill. But there is a more profound congruence that motivated Mumbiram to conjure this entire episode in the life of the Prince of Denmark.

Mumbiram's costume dramas apparently fulfilled a variety of emotional, artistic and creative urges. They were experiences, experiments, imaginations, imitations and above all they were about rasa and were full of rasa. They were self portraits projected onto celebrated iconic personalities.

Just after Mumbiram completed his doctoral dissertation he had travelled to India along with his sweetheart of five years, a German-American student at the university. To his utter surprise, Mumbiram's mother and brothers refused to accept that. This opposition was against the wishes of Mumbiram's father and grandmother. Mumbiram had always believed he belonged to one of the most

progressive Maharashtri families. He did not expect such blatantly bigoted behavior from them. Mumbiram had gone back to America a heart-broken man. He did not communicate with his family for the next five years.

Then he got a letter from his father's elder sister that his father had developed Parkinson's disease and had not long to live. Mumbiram had himself deported from America so he could be with his sick father.

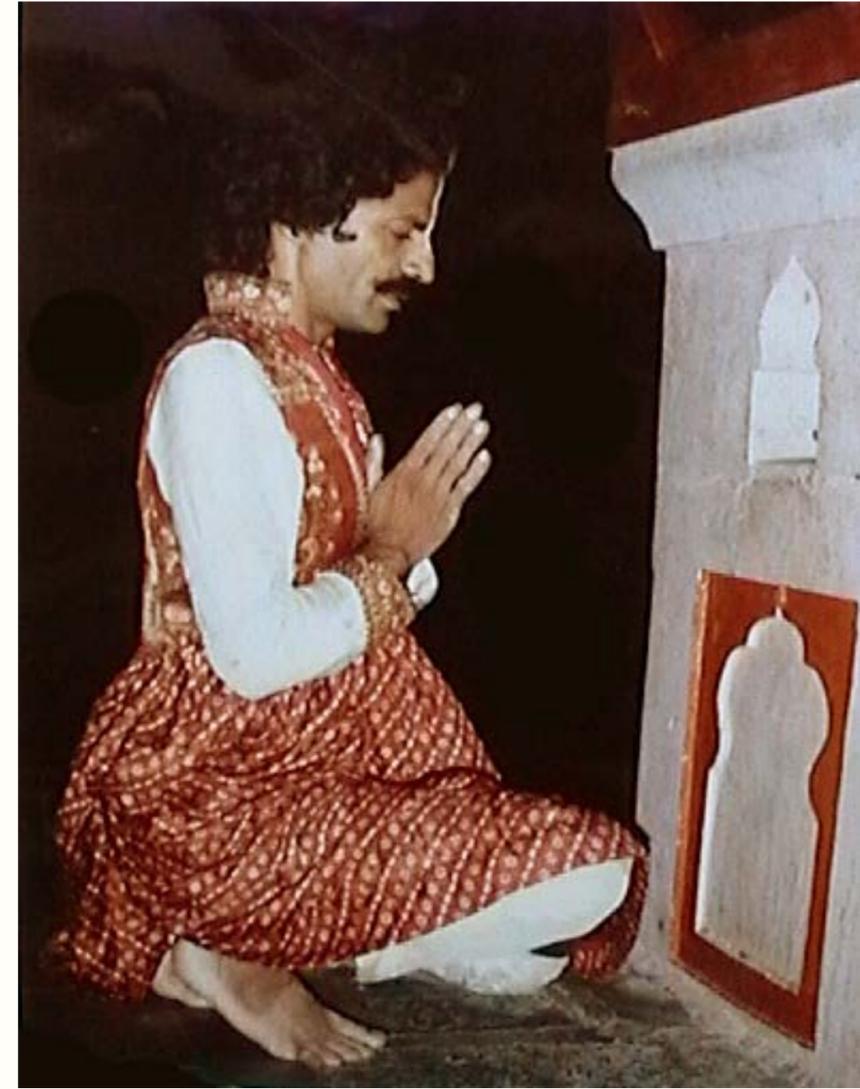
It was a great shock for Mumbiram to see his father, who was a hero-figure for Mumbiram, reduced to a near total invalid state and at the mercy of his wife and sons. Mumbiram was greatly sad but came out determined to find out what had happened to his father while he himself was away in America. This is where the congruence with the Hamlet story entered the 'picture'.

It took next several years before Mumbiram discovered the incestuous rot that had eaten up the very moral core of the once illustrious family, while he was away in America. Mumbiram was alone with the secrets he had

discovered. He did not lose his mind. He had only Krishna to thank that he had been safe from all the rot, away in America.

Mumbiram's father lived for another 10 years after Mumbiram was back in India.

Rasa Renaissance is a many splendored affair. It manifested in many different ways. Mumbiram was setting up entirely new rules and criteria for an entirely new game he had stumbled upon. It may have seemed entirely outrageous and even insane to those who had preconceived ideas about what art is supposed to be and what artists are supposed to do.



**Half way up the hill there is a spot where a beautiful Tulasi Vrindavan is built and a protective roof is also added. This has been Mumbiram's favorite spot of association. Hans made more photos as Mumbiram prayed at the Tulasi Vrindavan.**



**One hot afternoon Mumbiram came here with Kusum and Vimal and Shaki. Just as Mumbi shot a spontaneous photo a cow appeared from the side. It was cosmic, it was leela.**



**We also have a photo of Kusum walking towards the Vishnu temple several yards ahead of Mumbiram. From that we get a hint of what Mumbiram meant when he said somewhere else that he could recognize Kusum's walk from two blocks away in the pre-dawn hours when the girls were on the prowl on their rag-picking forays.**



Mumbiram would often visit that forest. Sometimes he would take Lakhu or Hans along. They would be mostly silent. There were many Tamarind trees and Shindi palms. But in their Prema Vivarta delusions they saw Kadamba and Tamal trees of Vraja.



Mumbiram would take his Yeravda friends on boat rides along that patch of forest.

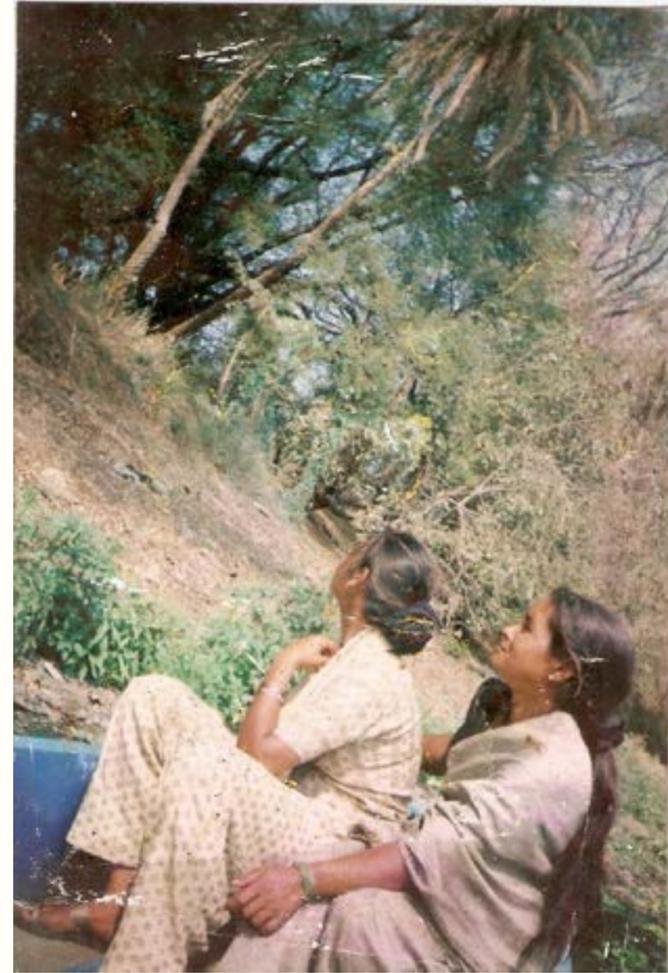


## Mumbiram and Hans at the Magical Place by the River where the Forestwomen would visit Krishna and the Gopis

Mumbiram was captivated by the aura of the forest by the riverside behind the Cowasji Jehangir Mansion even since his college days. He used to row little paddle boats up and down the Mula river which had mostly forests on either side. This patch of forest was especially isolated and hardly ever treaded upon by anybody. Mumbiram knew it as the forest where a rare species of Hornbill birds had their breeding nests. Twelve years later when he was back from America it was still much as it was before! And now it could be approached either through the river or over land. Mumbiram had found a way to do it. Now it gave him 'deja vu' like flashes of forests in Krishna's Vraja. This was the spot that inspired the artist to the vision of the Pulindya Forest Women. Mumbi had shared this bewitched forest only with very dear friends. Like Lakhu. Hans was another. Hans was also touched by the spirit of the Pulindis that Mumbiram was captivated by.



**In Mumbiram's company they would all experience a magical deja vu like feeling when they were visiting this spot.**



**On one such visit Mumbiram had made this soulful depiction of that forest. We can see a white peacock that has appeared at the edge of the water.**

## **When Hans and Mumbiram went looking for the Phasepardhi settlement in the No-Moon Night**

Mumbiram and Hans visited some of his Phasepardhi friends together. Meeting these 'real life' exotic people must have been a wonderful experience. But once they didn't meet the Phasepardhis they were looking for but had an adventurous all night of getting lost in the wilderness! It turned out memorable anyway:

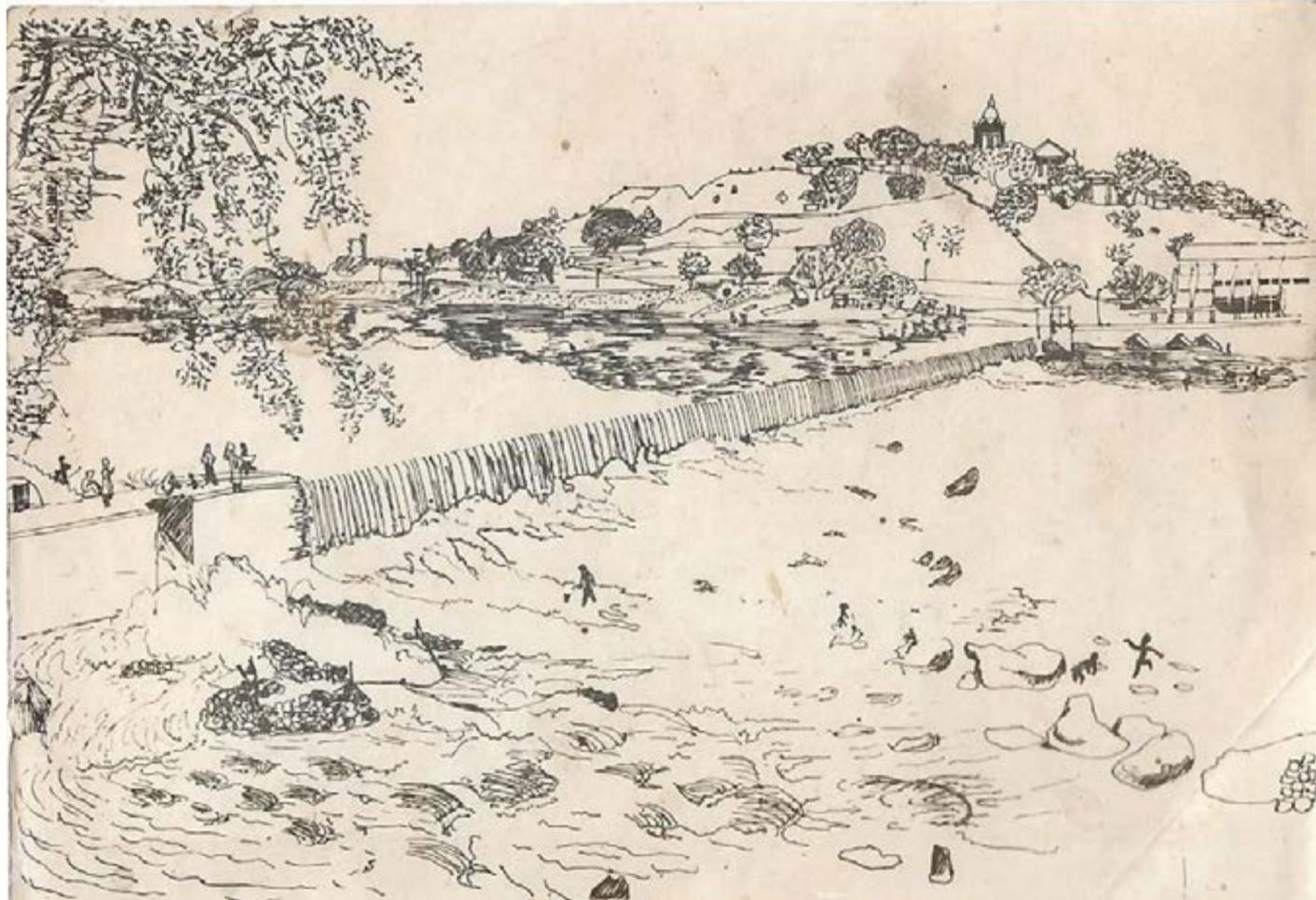
Mumbiram met by chance in the Mandai market place two elderly Phasepardhi brothers named Avchit and Kavchit. Their names translated to 'Suddenly' and 'Rarely'. They were happy to meet 'Parantya Vakil's son' (son of lawyer Paranjpe). Mumbiram's father Advocate Paranjpe used to be the only lawyer around Pune District who dared to represent Phasepardhi clients in the court of law. Avchit-Kavchit were touched to see that Mumbi even cared to meet them and talk with them. They invited

him to an all-night religious festival they had arranged in their outdoors settlement a little distance outside Pune.

When Mumbi told Hans about this invitation he immediately showed great eagerness to go. It was something of a shot in the dark. They went looking for this outdoors Phasepardhi settlement in the area the brothers had indicated. They didn't find it but instead ended up at a temple where a group of Sadhus was preparing their late night supper of boiled potatoes and buttermilk. After partaking in this surprise cordial hospitality Hans and Mumbi walked home in the early morning hours. They were laughing and talking all the way in the morning moonlight under a starry sky.

Mumbi had no idea that Hans could see very little in that light but he was staying close to Mumbi in full trust and was getting along just fine!

Hans and Mumbi had begun to enjoy the warm Indian nights either outdoors by the riverside or in Irani cafes that stayed open late.



**“Bundgarden Barrage”**  
Pen & Ink Drawing Postcard, 1984

## **When Hans ‘blooped’ in the River at Midnight at a Scenic Spot Mumbiram had al- ready Captured in a Sketch**

Mumbiram dearly loved many different spots along the Mula and Mutha rivers of his native town Pune. He especially had fond memories of the scenes along the river when the river looked spectacular during the monsoon floods.

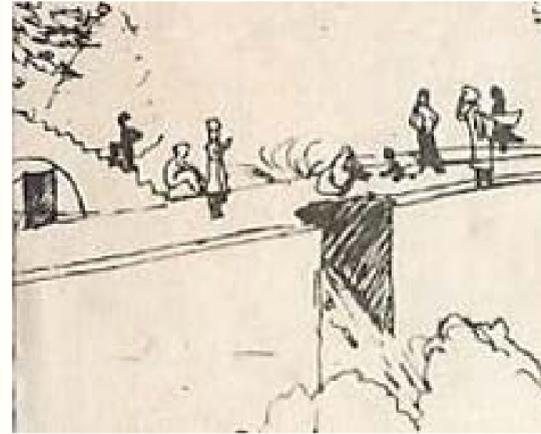
Around 1984, upon request from a printer-publisher friend, Mumbiram had made ten pen-an-ink sketches of interesting iconic spots of interest around Pune. These were printed as a set of 10 post-cards. These were greatly admired by international visitors to Pune. Two of them were of spots along the rivers. One of them was this serene panoramic view across the Bund Garden barrage.

In the distance you see the Parnakuti Mansion Hill of the Thackersey family where Mahatma Gandhi often stayed as a guest. Notice the minute depiction of the different activities of different folk that the artist has noticed. It clearly shows the steps on which Hans and Mumbiram would be sitting just before Hans would casually walk into the gaping inlet for the water to gush in to the other side.

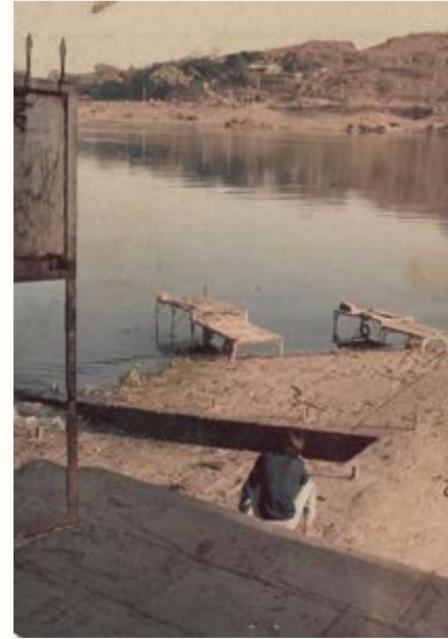


One early midnight they were sitting near the gate of the Bund Garden on the steps that lead down on the Bund itself. The discussion was getting quite fascinating such as to lose track of time. Suddenly they decided to make a pause and walk about a few steps to relax the legs. Mumbi walked down the steps on the right side so Hans walked down the steps on the left side. Hans did not expect an open gaping intake for the water from the entire dam just a few feet from the steps. He just walked into it and was gone. Mumbi turned around to see what the “buduk” sound was.

No one was there. Not even Hans. Mumbi shouted as loudly as he could but it was no match to the rushing roaring cascades of the dam’s outlet. What must have happened. What is to be done. What will be the outcome.



**In this serene and sunny photo in the early morning someone is sitting at the exact same spot on the steps where Hans and Mumbiram were sitting just before midnight. The water gushes into the gaping open inlet with great force.**



**Hans tumbled down over the rocks through the outlet and was carried some distance tumbling. Hans had practised oriental martial arts which teach you techniques of tumbling purposefully. Hans credited that and the little picture of Krishna he was fondly carrying in his shirt-pocket for the miraculous outcome of a potentially fatal mishap.**

**Mumbi went to the nearest Police Station on this side of the river and called the Fire Engine to come out and search. The police were interrogating Mumbi to probe if there was fowl play. It was a tense hour or two that was testing. Mumbi tried to get Tilman Waldraff, the Director of the Goethe Institute whose residence was in Koregaon Park nearby. Tilman knew both Hans and Mumbi. He could help. But alas he was not at home.**

**Two hours later back at the Police Station on this side they said the Fire Fighters found the body and took it to the Police Station on the other side. Mumbi rushed there to be told they sent it to the Sassoon Hospital. Mumbi rushed to the Hospital and was talking at the Front Desk when Hans could hear from inside. Hans shouted out in glee “Mumbiram! I am OK!” Mumbi rushed in to greet Hans who was in the greatest of spirits. “You know what really saved me?” He pulled out a small print of the iconic Krishna painting of Mumbiram from his shirt pocket! “This is what saved me!” Except for a jolted knee-joint Hans was OK.**



**Mumbiram made Hans feel like he was among friends by bringing friends to visit.**



**These are two daughters of Mrs. Kharat who Mumbiram knew. The elder had dowsed herself with Kerosene and set self afire at a desperately depressing turn of events in her marriage. She was admitted to Sassoon Hospital as was Hans. She was already there for three months and was in no hurry to get discharged. She was from the Mahar caste, as were many workers from the hospital.**

**Next morning Mumbi came with Lakhu to be with Hans. There was another girl that was in the Burns ward of the Hospital that Mumbi had been visiting. Her younger sister also came with Mumbiram to greet Hans. It was like a family gathering for Hans who was miles away from his native Bavarian Alps.**



**Hans was carrying a little print of this iconic painting by Mumbiram.**

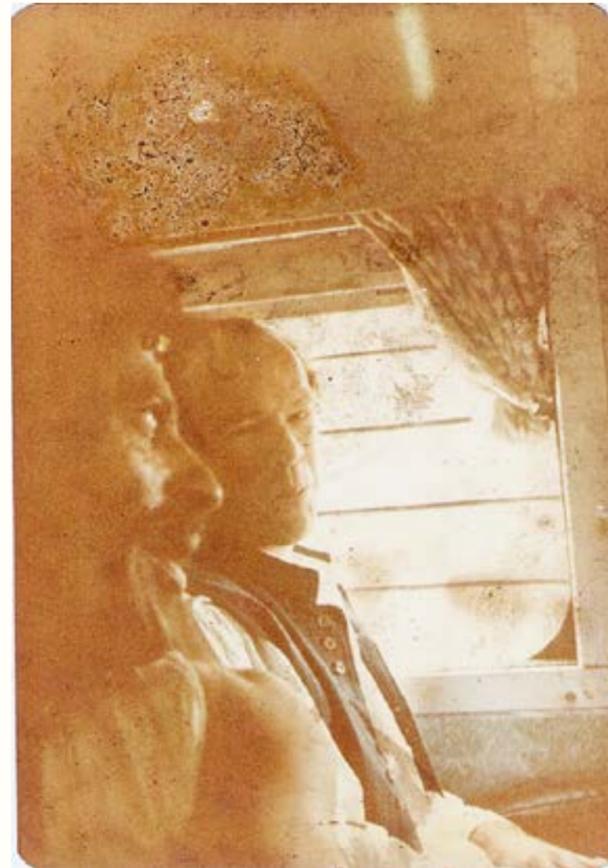


**Mumbiram met Tara when he was with the Gokhle Institute. Tara used to sweep the toilets there. Tara was residing in Ganj Peth right at the Lahuji Vastad Talim which was named after the legendary patriot from the Mang caste.**

**Mumbiram soon became a favorite friend of Tara's children, sisters, nieces, neighbors and all. The elder son Bharat would even join him on trips to the Thakur tribals up in the hills and then to the holy land of Vrindavan.**

**That was when Hans told Mumbiram about his Tunnel Vision problem. Now they really had no secrets from each other. Hans' glasses with the gold wire frame were swallowed by the river. Hans was the happier without them. Hans asked Mumbi to get him out of the hospital immediately. Mumbi did just that. Hans pulled out a bottle from his suitcase. It was the wonder herb Golden Seal his sister in Canada had sent him. Mumbi knew about it from California. It healed the 'wounded knee'! Hans threw away the crutches also in just couple of days.**

**Hans left with Mumbiram whatever was left over of the wonder herb "Golden Seal". It would soon after miraculously save the life of Mumbiram's dear Phasepardhi teenager friend Shobha, the rag-picker girl from Yeravda who would not go to the government hospital because she was afraid the so-called scheduled caste and backward caste workers at the hospital would kill her knowing she was a Phasepardhi girl and knowing why she was there.**

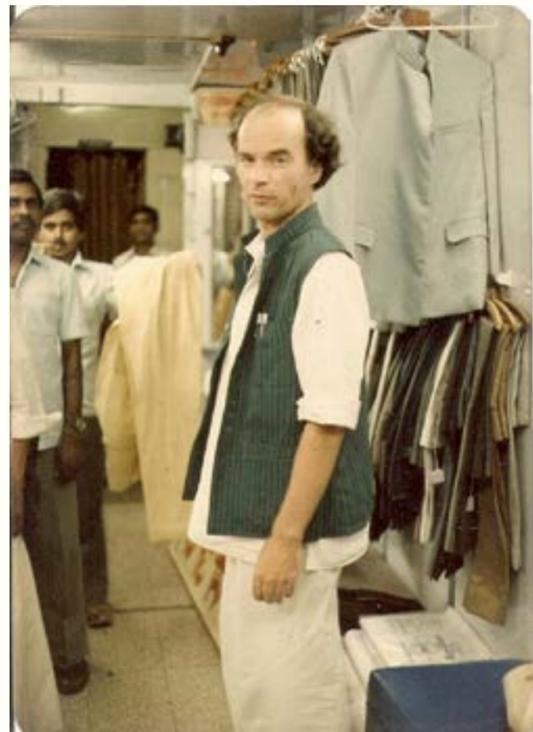


## **Hans acquires the “Forest Women” Near ideal Relation between a Rasa Artist and a Rasa Admirer**

Soon after this Hans decided to buy the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” for 3000 Dollars. When Hans had to go back to Germany he was hesitant about taking this masterpiece. He was feeling the “Forest Women” looked better in Mumbiram’s studio and he decided to keep it there. That was how the “Forest Women” came ‘back’ to Mumbiram a second time.

Hans could very well understand that Mumbiram’s paintings were really just the ‘punchlines’ to the fascinating episodes of a Rasik life.

Hans had thoroughly enjoyed the many splendoured personal friendships he was able to share with Mumbiram’s friends, each one appearing more exotic than the rest.



After Hans decided to leave the 'Forest Women' painting in that already legendary atelier, Mumbiram insisted that they create a tidy wardrobe of formal dress ensembles out of Khadi fabrics, out of cotton and silk that Hans could use back in Germany.

Patwardhan Tailors on Laxmi Road was one of the tailors Mumbiram had cultivated to execute his own designs. He liked to rise to the challenge that Mumbiram's designs would pose. He had done an excellent job of the Hamlet outfit. Mumbiram requested his staff to stitch the formal dress suits for Hans. They were glad to comply.

Mumbi took Hans around to Ravivar Peth area of manufacturers of musical instruments and drums. There they got Tabla and Mridangam drums for Hans. Mumbiram remembered Hans' lady friends in Germany who would like to have ankle bells that are tied by classical Indian dancers.

Hans as an admirer of a Rasa Artist and his Rasa Art indeed had many admirable qualities.

The Artist and this Admirer met when they were not even looking for each other. When they did meet, they were able to accept each other immediately, proactively and near completely.

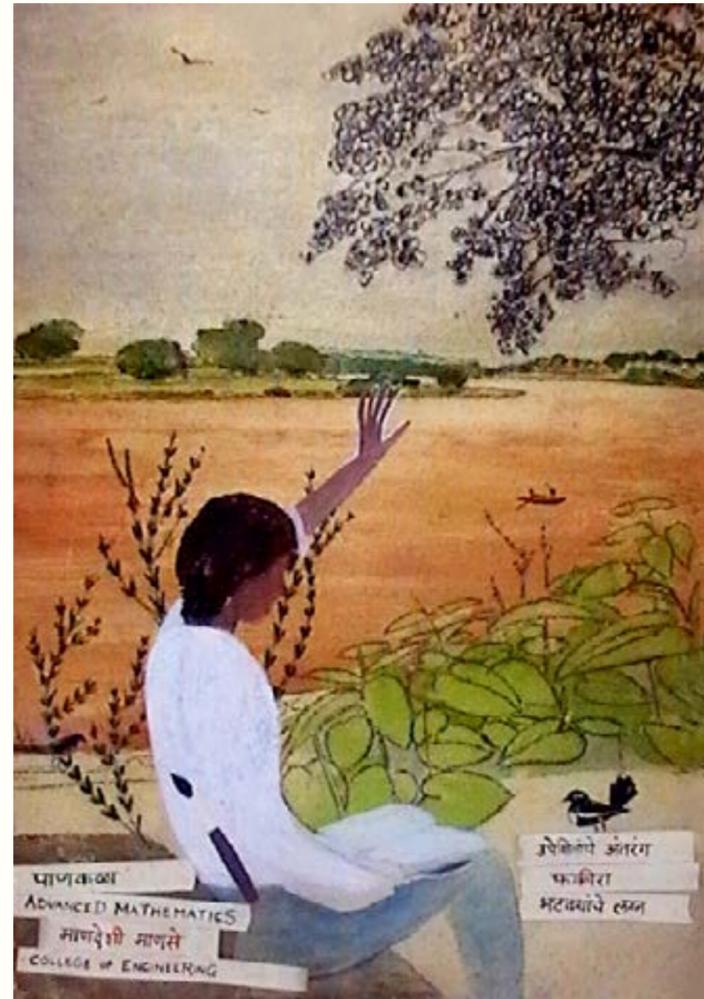
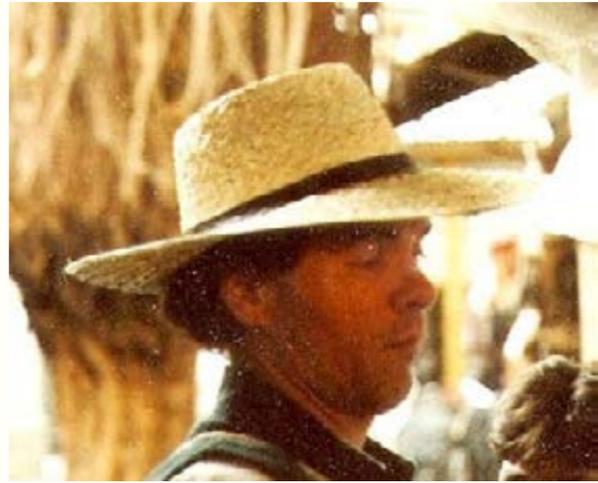
Hans could align his life style with Mumbiram's in an easy way. What is more, he could share with Mumbiram's Muses a rapport of quiet deference and inquisitiveness, overcoming differences of languages and cultures.



Hans appreciated that Mumbiram could easily make him part of his projects. Both found their collaborative efforts exhilarating. That must have been the secret why Hans could appreciate the drama that unfolded between Mumbiram, his Muses and his Admirers that would morph into the painting or the photo essay or the writing or whatever.

The novel idea of the Art of Rasa Renaissance was in its nascent thrilling stage. Mumbiram had connected with the right enthusiastic minds that were looking to art and spirituality for obtaining meaning and purpose to life's primordial seekings. They had become disillusioned with contemporary art of the 20th century. Encountering Mumbiram and his Art felt verily like a breath of fresh air.

Hans and Mumbiram had outdone each other in grace. They had showed a near ideal relation between a Rasa Artist and his Rasa Admirer.





## **Mumbiram's "Iconic Krishna" and Hans' Golden Seal rescue Shobha**

Shobha the petite doe-eyed Phasepardhi teenager girl fell in love with Yivrya the Mang teenager boy. These kids of the Yeravda slums grew up supporting themselves through rag-picking and scrap gathering. Their lives were constantly in peril, getting accused of theft. These two were further handicapped by their planned intercaste alliance. A police informer was blackmailing them and neither of their parents could help them, being poor themselves and embarrassed amongst peers, due to their children's transgression of castes. The pressure was too much and Shobha doused herself with kerosene and set herself on fire.

Shobha used to come to the Mandai atelier along with the other girls of Kusum's gang. Mumbi was always happy to hear Shobha's lighthearted sonorous banter. Therefore the shocking news was all the more painful.

Yivrya's young mother was traumatized. She had other children she had to mind. She was not panicking. She was greatly relieved to have somebody like Mumbiram to be on their side.



The little girl you see is her youngest daughter. The whole family became very attached to 'Mameerao'. They all remembered that visit for long time ever since.

Everybody felt great relief. Mumbiram was relieved that at least Yivrya's mother was not against the 'inter-caste' 'love-marriage'. Far from that. She was giving loving company to the brave young lover girl that felt trapped and helpless.



Mumbiram discovered that 'Yivrya' was a Phasepardhi-style diminutive version of 'Yuvraj' or 'Prince'!

Just that week Bhimsen Joshi's son Jayant had visited Mumbi in the middle of the night and expressed his high admiration for Mumbiram and his Art. So Mumbiram thought he would be a good person to take along to go see what they could do for Shobha. Alas when Mumbiram went to Jayant's home, Bhimsenji himself had come to the door and said Jayant could not come along because "Jayant cannot stand the sight of blood".

Mumbiram found Shobha in her "mother-in-law"'s hut. She lay there on the wet floor in the hut surrounded on all sides by red monsoon mud. Mumbiram offered to take her to the hospital. No, she wouldn't go there. The nurses from 'upper' castes would kill her. She also refused to go to a private hospital. 'Treat me with your own hands if you want', she said. Mumbiram was scared to do it himself. Her chest was full of blisters and pus. He gave her a stack of medical towels, some new towels and a new soft cotton sari, which was printed with little red, blue and yellow flowers.



**“Shobha”, Charcoal, 1985**

**A charcoal rendering that Mumbiram made when the gutsy young Shobha was well on her way of recovery. The original was later acquired by a family in Brandenburg Germany.**

**Then he sprinkled some “Golden Seal” on the wounds, a powder that Hans had used to treat his injured knee. Hans had taken it with him to India after his sister had sent it from Canada.**

**Mumbiram gave Shobha the same small print of his iconic Krishna picture that Hans had carried through his ordeal at Bund Garden and said to her, “Girl, I’m just a little creature. Only God can heal you now.”**

**A month later, Shobha walked all the way from Yeravda into Mumbiram’s studio atelier. ‘Here Mumbiram, I’m fine again!’ She never had washed the cotton sari that Mumbiram had given her. She was wearing it and it was covered with dried blood.**

**Mumbiram washed it in a bowl with plenty of soap. Both dried it together. She will never forget that. Some years later she had come strongly to the defense of Mumbiram when he got insulted by somebody on the street. She said to whoever did it, “If you say anything bad about this man, I will kill you!” You could tell that gutsy Phasepardhi youngster was serious about it!**



Some years later, Shobha had dragged Mumbiram to show him a little brick house she was building for her 'joint family'. First Shobha had a photo with 'Mameerao' all by herself.



Then everyone else wanted to be photographed with Mumbiram also.



Rasa Art and life of the Rasa Artist are intimately intertwined. This was the new game of Rasa Renaissance that was simultaneously getting revealed to Mumbiram's Muses and his Admirers.



This image of an adolescent Krishna is inspired by a verse from the "Venu Geet" (Song of the Flute) from the "Rasa Panchadhyayi". The rivers would be passionately aroused upon hearing Krishna's flute. With the waves as arms they would greet Krishna with lotuses and embrace Krishna's feet. This is one of many versions of Mumbiram's iconic vision of the adolescent Krishna.



These two Pulindis have also climbed the trees and are steadfastly gazing at Krishna with offerings in hands. One is wearing a garland of parrot feathers in her hair and a necklace of tiny red seeds around her neck. The dark haired Pulindi has a necklace of tiger claws around her neck.

## Iconic Figure at German Bakery



Mumbiram could not share most of his works with Indians, who could easily take offence at his innovative approach to spiritual and social life in India. It so happened that international travellers and spiritual seekers, who had come to Pune, were the people who admired Mumbiram's art the most. They had in their minds an image of an ideal India which was close to what they could see in Mumbiram's art and life.

Mumbiram had a unique appearance. He enjoyed dressing up in clothes of his own designs. A white shirt with a deep v-neck and a colourful vest on top. His self-made head gear was his most unique item and became his trademark. Nobody could have guessed that these caps in all kinds of colours and patterns were really re-fashioned pillow cases. Walking the streets people would always recognise him and turn their heads. Some people didn't know where to put him and it could happen that he was mistaken as a Pharsepardhi himself, because



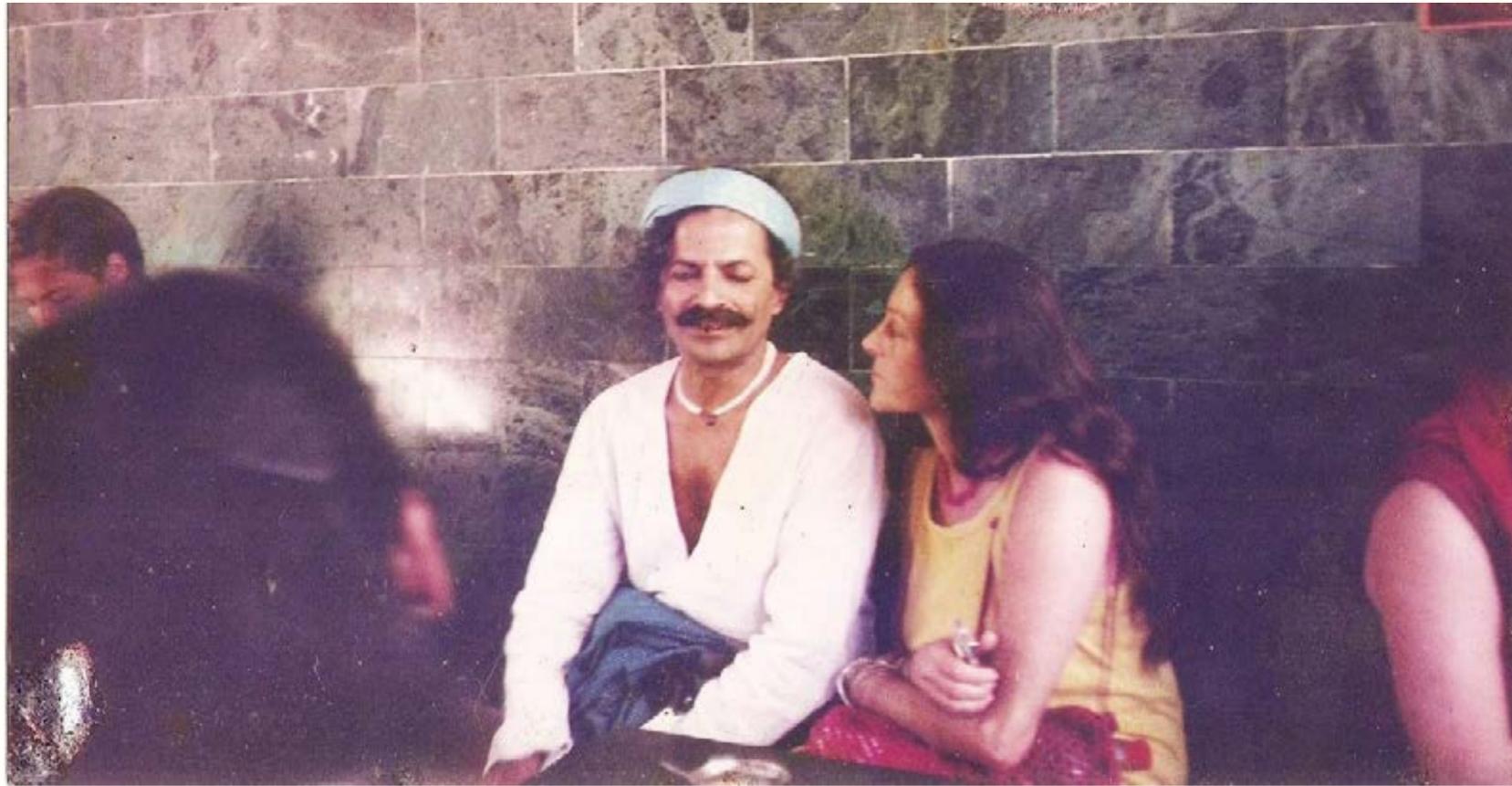
**Mumbiram's studio at Mandai Market in Pune, the meeting place of India's 'forgotten' people and art-lovers from distant places from all over the world, in a dilapidated house, but full of wisdom and surprise.**

**of his unusual look, his cap, necklaces and exotic pins of birds. One of these bird-pins even appears as earring of one of the ecstatic Gopis sitting near Krishna in the "Forest Women" painting. Who gave her that earring ?**

**In a part of Pune called Koregaon Park there was the German Bakery, a cafe near the Osho ashram. Both locations were mostly visited by travellers from abroad. Mumbiram enjoyed being there and meeting people from all over the world with whom he could share his life and art.**

**The German Bakery was also just across the river from the settlements of huts where his rag-picking muses and their families lived. Sometimes he even took them along to the German Bakery.**

**People from around the world, who Mumbiram met there, were happy to go with him in a rickshaw to his downtown studio. The crowd of 'Westerners' in Koregaon Park was not the exotic India these 'Westerners' were dreaming of. They were happy to get away from it.**



**The German Bakery had become a very well-liked place. The Osho Ashram, at one point, had their officials try to herd their disciples back to the Ashram!**



**Mumbiram enjoyed taking the children of his rag-picking muses from Yeravda, across the river, for a fun time and treats at the German Bakery. Here Arti, Pooja and Gauri are being treated.**



**Mumbiram stood out in his graceful attires that were of his own design. He shopped for the fabrics himself and had them stitched by tailors he had cultivated to understand his preferences.**



**The five-meter long dhoti with two knots at the two ends is swung over the shoulders. Mumbi uses it like a metronome. He uses it in amazing imaginative ways in his walk and in his dance improvisations**



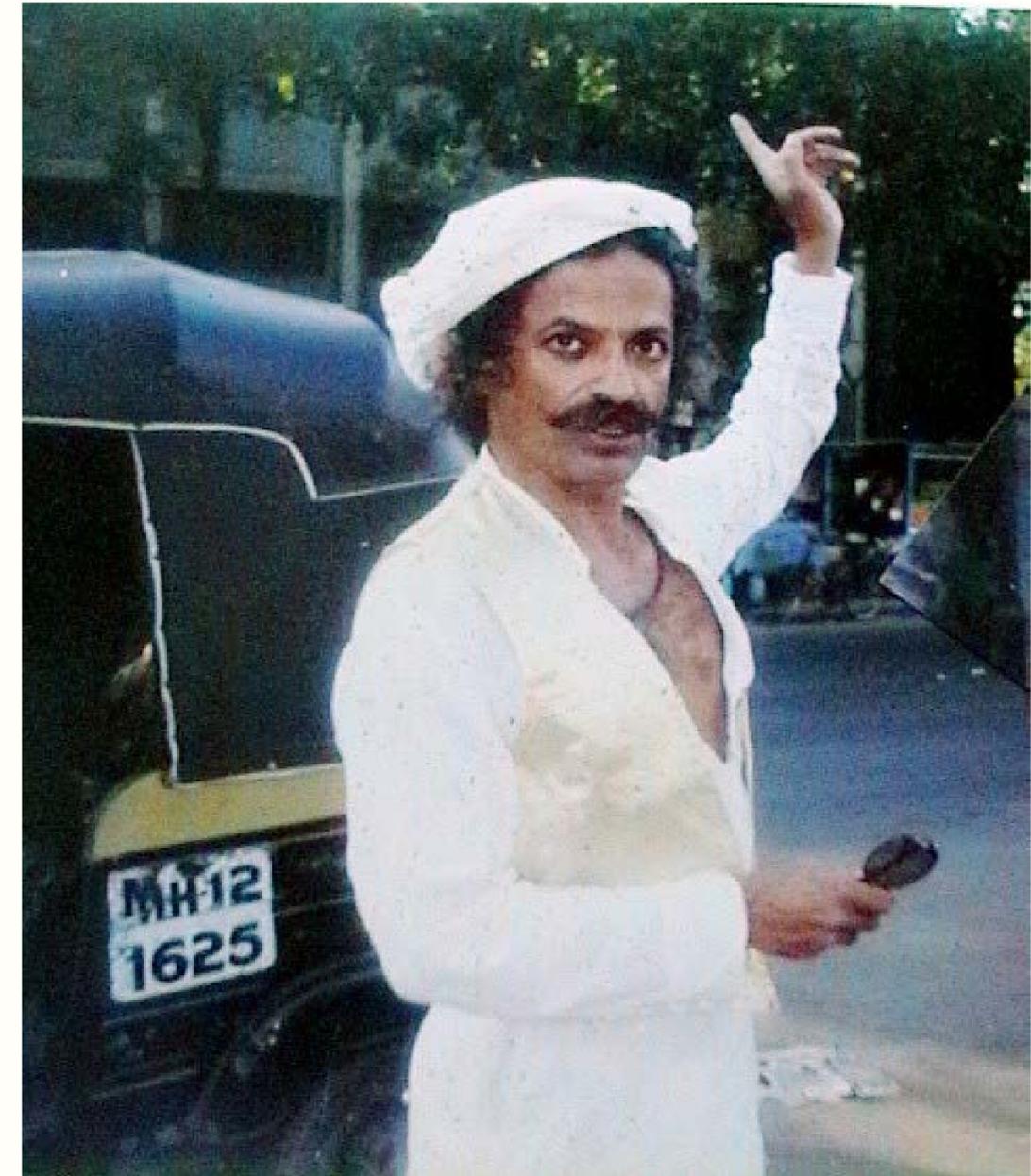
The sleeveless white vest is the classical 'Kopri' that is commonly used by men in rural Maharashtra. It has more than four built-in pockets, that make a shoulder bag or wallet redundant.



The one piece elegant attire is Mumbiram's adaption of an air-force uniform. The pure cotton material was created for bed-covers and curtains. The caps are cleverly folded pillowcases. The blue vest and the shoulder bag are from hand-printed fabrics that flaunt Sanskrit Vedic Mantras. Here Mumbi is meandering in the Bazaar at the annual Shiva Festival. The iconic necklace is custom-made for him by his dark beautiful muses that set up shop by the roadside. The 'Mandai Madonna' was one of them.



**With his verbal eloquence and dancelike movements Mumbiram would very quickly gather a crowd, much to the joy of his Mandai buddies.**



**Rikshawallas vied with each other to get him to ride with them.**



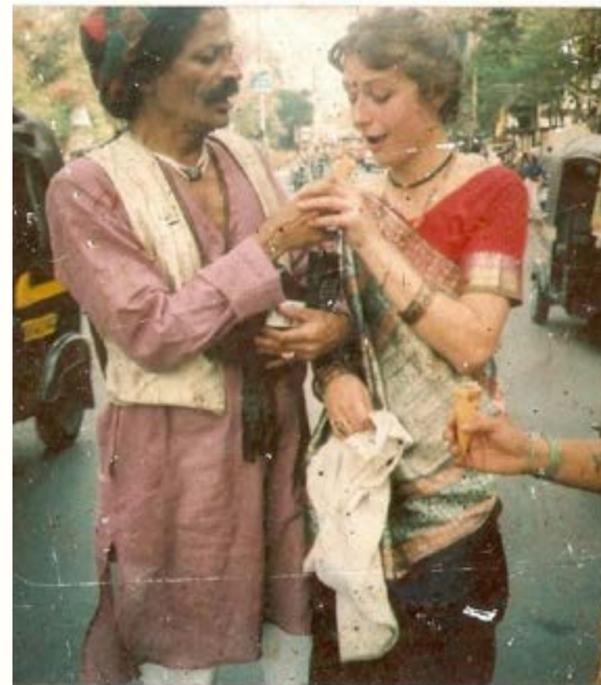
**Lena was originally from Russia and now had settled in Netherlands. She spent more time in Pune than in Netherlands. She would be at the Bakery every day. She was also fond of putting together exotic ensembles of clothings that she picked from the best shops of Pune. Lena loved to hang around with Mumbiram. German Bakery was started and run by a German India-lover. It maintained high hygienic standards. Westerners could eat there without getting sick.**



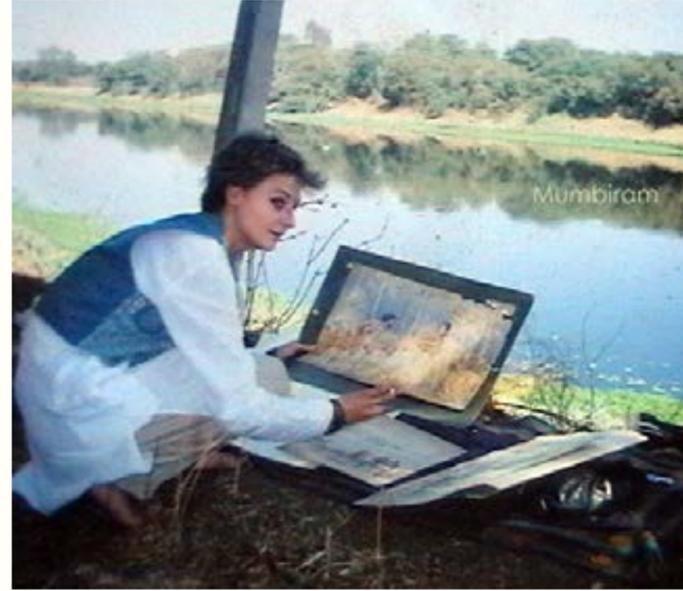
**Kusum's nephews and nieces and their neighbors from the slum dwellings are enjoying the atmosphere of relaxed communion that was transcending castes and creeds. The kids had become very fond of Vrinda who also enjoyed their company.**



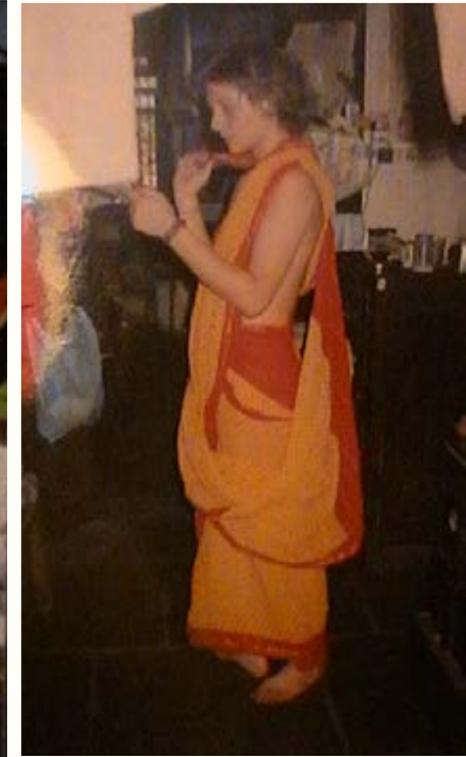
**Vrinda had taken to the sarie almost immediately after she arrived from Germany.**



**But she was even more greedy about Mumbiram's unique caps that were really ready-made pillowcases imaginatively folded into elegant head gear. It went well with his v-neck shirts and short vests.**



**Vrinda has been a real multi tasker. She has been the major force in the ambitious task of archiving Mumbiram's Art. She was playing the game of Rasa Art to the brim.**



**She models Mumbiram's designs passionately and with audacity and aplomb.**

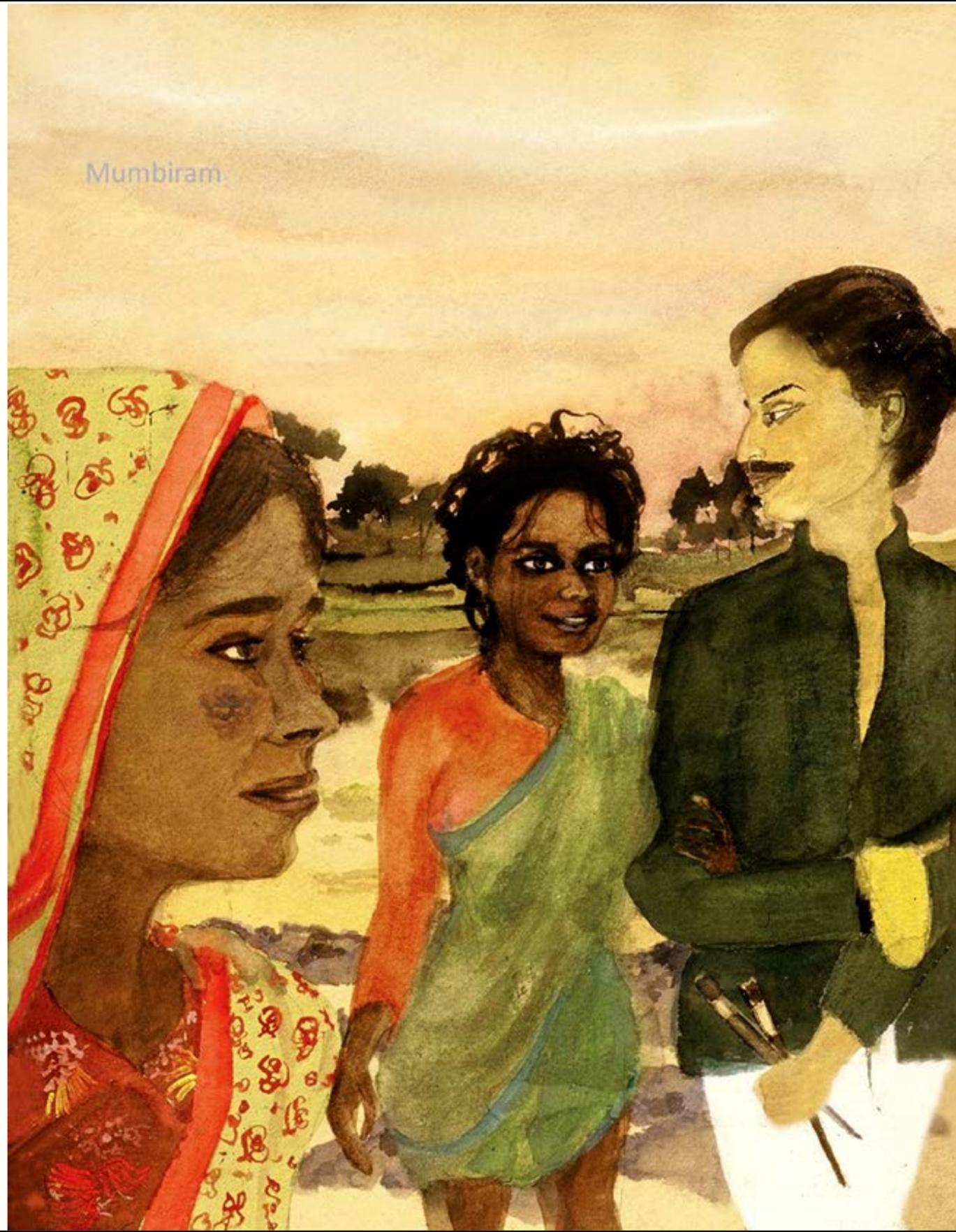


**Mangal, Kusum's daughter, in the studio**

**'Westerners' going to India are really struck by the beauty of the 'poorest' people of India living in the most humble circumstances. Despite what would seem like impoverished states of their homes, their clothes, their roads, the ditches and the mud, their beauty, their cheerful attitude towards life, their big smiles and friendly attitudes towards outsiders does not escape attention of visitors to India.**

**The studio was in a dilapidated house, but full of wisdom, surprise and romance. It became a meeting place for the 'forgotten' beauties of India on the one hand and lovers of art and India from far corners of the world on the other hand.**

**When these visitors came to Mumbiram's studio, they were overwhelmed to discover these wonderful people in his art and even meet some of them personally in the studio where they dropped in at any time. People, who they had so far seen as beggars and in other pitiable circumstances, appeared in graceful masterpieces showing proud beautiful people in familiar, universal situations.**

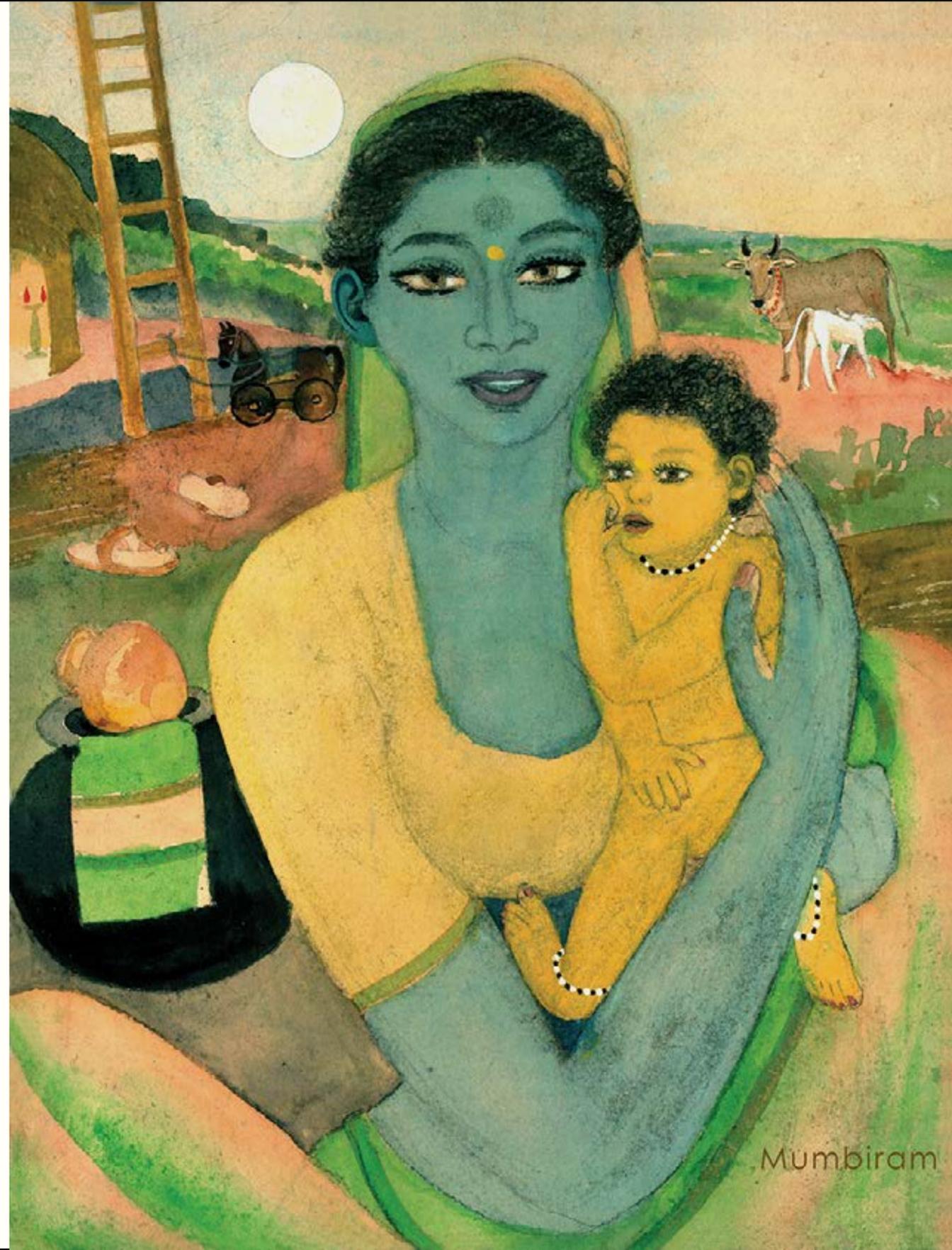


These travellers and seekers, who were visiting the studio, witnessed the deep symbiosis between the artist's life and his art. Some saw it as the Pygmalion story where forgotten people appeared as proud elegant muses. Some saw it as the Robin Hood story where the artist took from the 'haves' and gave it to the 'have-nots'.

### **“Drupada coming out of the River with Mumbiram”**

**Watercolour, Pune 1990**

This watercolour painting shows an episode in the friendship between Mumbiram and the Phasepardhi woman Drupada. They are taking a walk on the bank of the Mula river near Pune. Mumbiram had met her some years ago outside the German Bakery where she was begging and a watchman wanted to throw a rock at her. Mumbiram had come to her rescue and she would never forget it.



## **“Hirkani reunited with her Baby”**

**Watercolours and gold leaf, 1985**

This is a delightful interpretation of the popular story of a gutsy dweller of the hills, Hirkani (literally: diamond shredding). Leaving her infant child alone at her hut Hirkani had walked up the steep slopes of the fortified fort Raigad atop the mountain to deliver pitcherfuls of milk. At sundown the gates of the fort were all closed. Hirkani was stranded inside. Hirkani jumped down a little-used awesome parapet of the fort and found her way down the impossibly steep slopes of the mountain. She negotiated through impenetrably dense jungles to finally reach her hut halfway down the mountain below on the slopes. The intense force of a mother’s love for her baby had induced Hirkani to act courageously against all odds. Hirkani’s feat has become a legend all over Maharashtra. The parapet from which Hirkani jumped is known as Hirkani Buruz even after 300 years today.

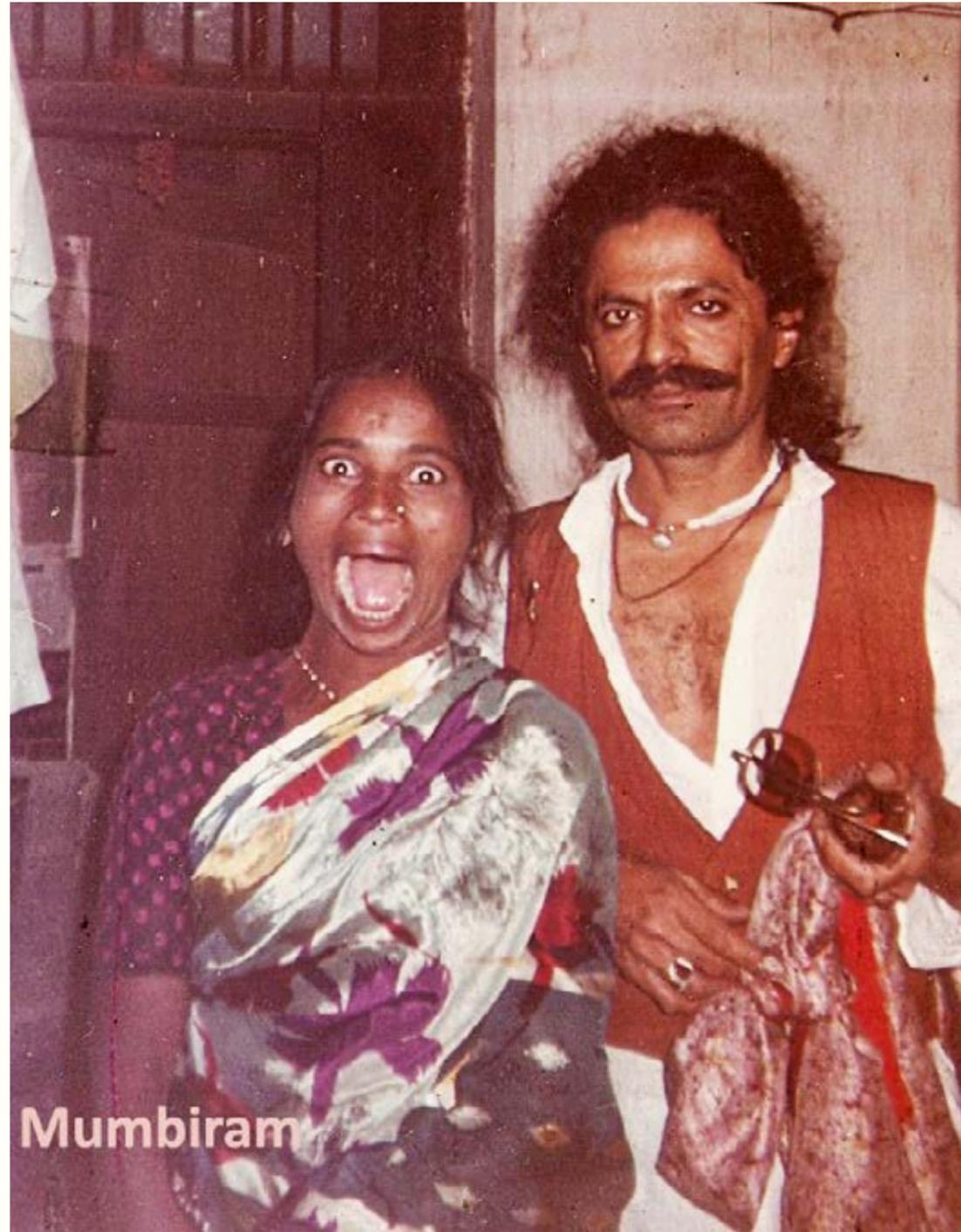
This rendering is a masterpiece of emotions and atmosphere. Mumhiram’s art is about situations, personalities and emotions. It is Rasa Art. This masterpiece in muted faded colours shows great aesthetic virtuosity combined with serene simplicity of faith.



**Amrisha was the leader of the very first group of Korean visitors to Osho Ashram. She shared the real life story of the Princess Suriratna of Ayodhya who travelled to Korea and married the King there to become Queen Heo of that Kingdom in the 1st century AD.**



**Sangita and Ratnamala were leaders of a group of rag-pickers that were 'rival' to Kusum's group. Here Sangita is doing a dance routine opposite Mumbiram while Ratnamala is handling the camera. Then they switched the roles.**



**Here Ratnamala has surprised us by breaking into the fierce Mother Kaali avataar at lightening speed.**

**Ratnamala was the first rag-picker girl Mumbiram had 'discovered' near Bund Garden when she was masquerading as a petite dark young teenager with her long dark hair let down defiantly. Mumbiram had found her a challenge to decipher. He could trace her to a neighborhood in the winding gullies of Yeravda across the river. She was the daughter of a woman in an advanced state of Leprosy.**



**Ratnamala and Mumbiram ever since shared a bond of utmost deference and understanding.**



Mumbiram would proudly share this quick rendering of *“Mumbiram giving shelter to fugitive Phoolan”* to his visiting admirers. Nobody knew it was spunky rag-picker Ratnamala who was the muse who inspired this intimate vision of a feared Bandit Queen whom Mumbiram admired.

Mumbiram vividly remembers meeting Ratnamala’s mother in the hutments of Yeravda. It put his understanding of this teenage charmer’s personality in an entirely different perspective.

Mainstream Indian society harbors a fearful stigma around anybody afflicted by leprosy. None of that in Yeravda! Bravo !

Mumbiram was immensely impressed with the spirit of confidence, to the point of defiance, that Ratnamala exuded. Those were early 80ies. It was a time when the down-trodden castes were discovering their own identity like never before.

In Uttar Pradesh the Thakur Kshatriya Upper Castes were shaken to the roots when Phoolan Devi the female gang leader from the ‘lowly’ Mallah caste had massacred 20 men of the Thakur upper caste, in revenge of a public humiliation she had suffered in their village earlier.



**Mumbiram is showing himself without his moustache. His hair is all silver. He is facing away from Ratnamala, eyes cast down. Phoolan is just reclining on a pillow propped up against the wall.**

## **“Mumbiram giving shelter to fugitive Phoolan“ Watercolour and Ink, 1981**

**When Mumbiram made this quick rendering “Mumbiram giving shelter to fugitive Phoolan“ the real Phoolan was heroically escaping capture by Uttar Pradesh police. Nobody had any real image of the real Phoolan available to them.**

**Mumbiram had the gangs of rag-picking girls coming frantically knocking on his door when they were being chased by upper-caste men who suspected them of theft. Mumbiram imagined Ratnamala as Phoolan Devi, the Bandit Queen, seen here catching a nap and her buddy Sangita, seen here as her lieutenant standing guard.**

**In the new game of Rasa Renaissance that Mumbiram had stumbled upon, the interaction between the Artist and his Muses could itself be so very exciting. The Rasa masterpiece is necessarily a product of that Rasa Cocktail.**



**Rebellious Ratnamala rendered by Mumbiram from memory**



**The real Phoolan as the daring dacoit**



**Ratnamala in happier days**



**The real Phoolan as member of parliament many years later**

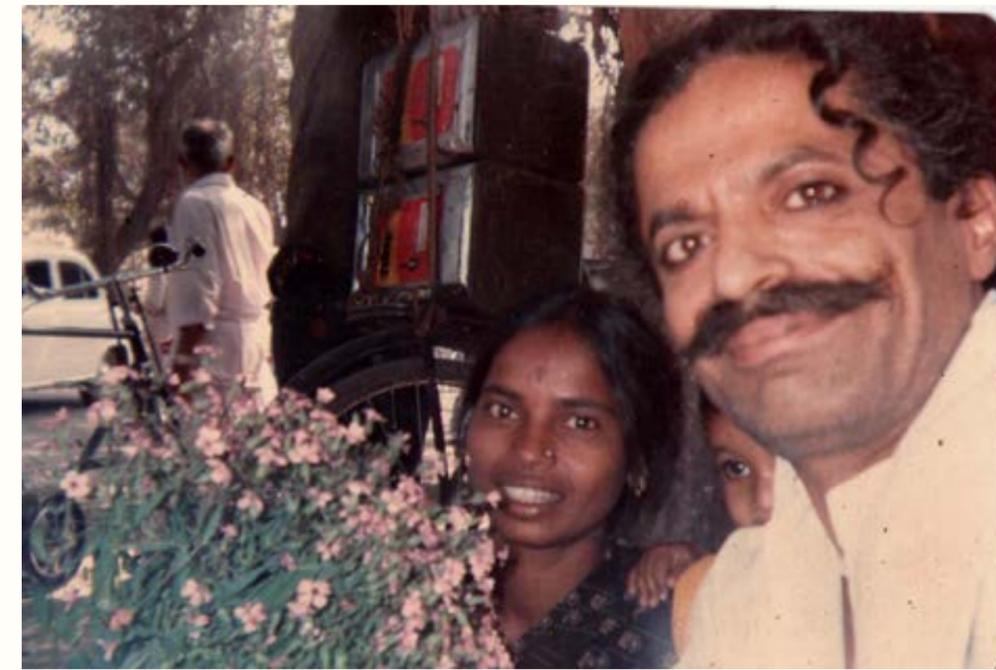
Soon after Mumbiram had ‘discovered’ Ratnamala as a budding teenager at Bund Garden a group of Yeravda girls arrived at the Mandai atelier along with a new girl who had covered her hair with a piece of cloth. The girls called her ‘Bhundi’ which meant ‘one with shaven head’. The girls said her brother has chopped off her hair because she was going around town outrageously immodest. The girl was silent all along but Mumbiram had found her eyes captivating and unforgettable. Only afterwards could he confirm that it was indeed Ratnamala who had fascinated him at Bund Garden.

Mumbiram could never figure out why he imagined Ratnamala in place of the fugitive, absconding Phoolan whom he had never seen in real or in picture. But when you compare the looks of the real Phoolan Devi with Ratnamala, real and in Mumbiram’s images, the resemblance is uncanny.

*“I just wanted to prove that we all have our honour, whatever our origins, our caste, the colour of our skin, or our sex.” Phoolan*



**Ratnamala never visited Mumbiram's atelier, except if she was with Sangita, her bosom buddy. And of course they were happy to run into each other on the road unexpectedly. In these photos you see one sudden meeting that Mumbiram had with Ratnamala and her gang under a giant Banyan tree on the roadside near Koregaon Park. From there one road went into Koregaon Park, German Bakery, Osho Ashram etc etc. The other went to the Bridge to Yeravda and the homeland of our rag-picker friends.**



**A flower vendor was preparing bouquets to be sold to the international crowd that would spill in and out of Koregaon Park. Mumbiram quickly bought the biggest bouquet that was being put together and presented it to Ratnamala.**





### **“Waiting for the Beloved”**

**This charcoal masterpiece has entered the Hall of Fame of All-time Greats in the History of Rasa Renaissance.**

People from around the world visiting the legendary studio at the busy Mandai vegetable market place acquired Mumbiram’s work. For most of them it was the first time that they bought art. It was attraction at first sight. They relished what they saw in Mumbiram’s artistic world as well as his real life. Some of these visitors also became his muses and appeared in his art.

Mumbiram’s artworks were bought and taken to distant places outside of India and came to Australia, France and many of them to Germany.

His charcoals in their classical aura on handmade paper were the overwhelming favourites of the lot. It was indeed a wonder that a simple stick of charcoal, which is just a stick of half-burnt wood, in the hands of an artist could capture the very essence of a person in such simple and disarming way.



**Tsambika, an art-lover from Greece, and Kusum meeting in the studio. The atmosphere in the studio was uniquely conducive for overcoming all possible differences such as language and culture. The studio had become a meeting place for art- and India-lovers from far corners of the world and these exotic beauties of the 'downtrodden' India.**



**Mumbiram met Amrisha and her Korean group at Prem's Restaurant down the main street of Koregaon Park. This spacious place was started by an Indian family that had settled in England. Here Amrisha is making friends with little niece of Choklet Phasepardhi.**



**Little Rekha has struck a chord of friendship with Mumbiram's admirer from France. The kids had given her a new name - Hema! Hema liked to 'model' ensembles that Mumbiram had created.**



**Here Mumbiram is on the roof of his Mandai atelier working with his hands on a claymodel of his iconic Krishna. In the background one sees two iconic architectural landmarks. The Mandai spire was built during the ascendancy of the British rule. The Shiva temple was built 100 years before that, during early Peshwa rule. The artist's lady friends are resting. One is swarthy, the other is fair. Mumbiram's Rasa Art is replete with loaded nuances. The painting itself is a symbol of the cocktail of Rasa exchanges between the artist, his muses and his admirers.**



**Prema Shoonya was a fashion model from Mumbai settled in US. Her visit to Pune from San Diego was uneventful till she met Mumbiram at the Burning Ghat on the riverfront in Koregaon Park. The magical atmosphere in Mumbiram's atelier inspired her to get up and dance.**

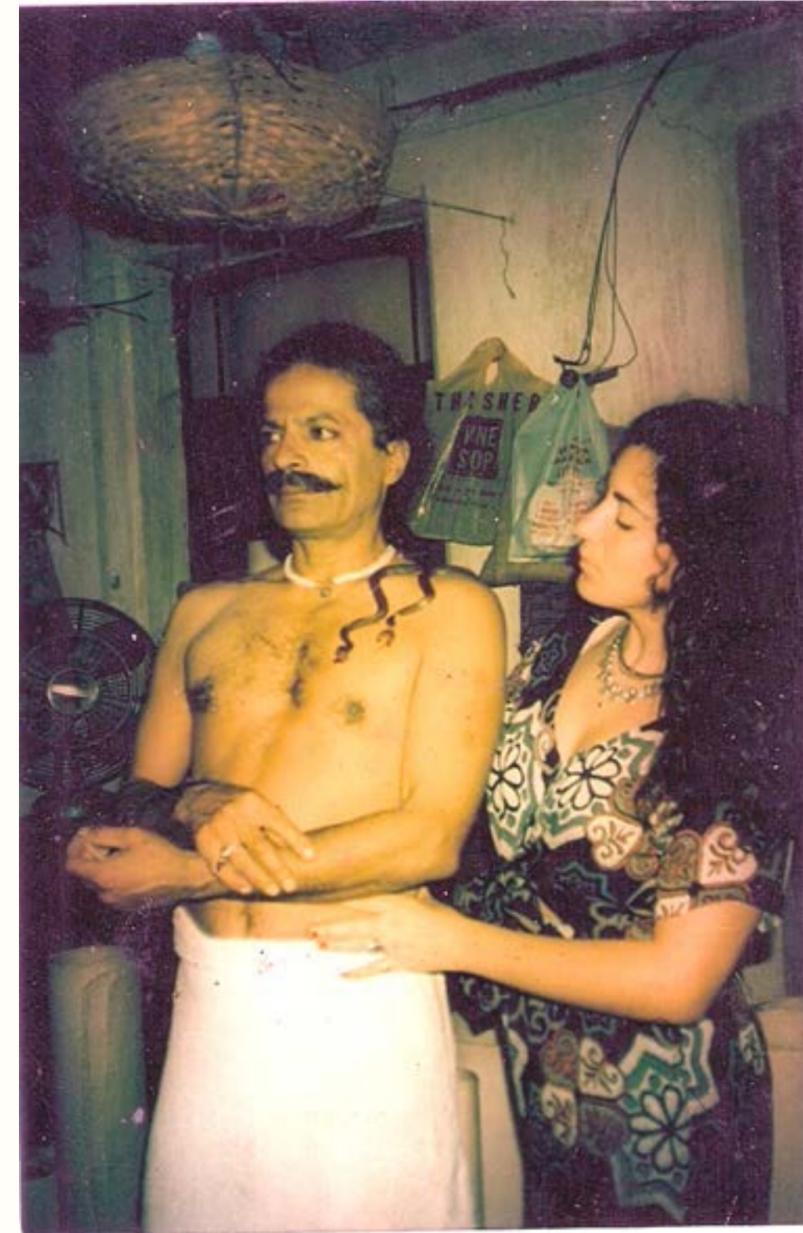


**“Salma will gladly wait”**

**This tall and graceful rag-picker was an inhabitant of the Patil Estate slums near the Railway Station. She was one of many who discovered their innate beauty at this artist's atelier near the downtown vegetable market.**



**Yerawda kids had shared a friendship of trust, equality and fun with Mumbiram**



**Tsambika from Greece and Hema from France came as admirers of the Artist but also became his Muses.**



Mr.Vinod was over 80 years old when he met Mumbiram at mutual friend Taty Aitawdwar's Graphina Process Studio near Peru Gate. Taty introduced Mumbiram to Shri. Vinod as grandson of Artist S.H.Godbole, the well-known artist of colonial times. Mr.Vinod came instantly alive and told Mumbiram he, as army photographer, had photographed the Governor's wife and daughter that figured Godbole as Secretary of Bombay Art Society. He was glad and kind to bring those photos over to Mumbiram in his Mandai Studio. He asked if he could click a few photos of Mumbiram. This is one of those. This was Mumbiram's own favorite design - an 'overcoat' with many zippered pockets.



**“Sparrows visiting the Baby Bath”**  
Charcoal, 1988

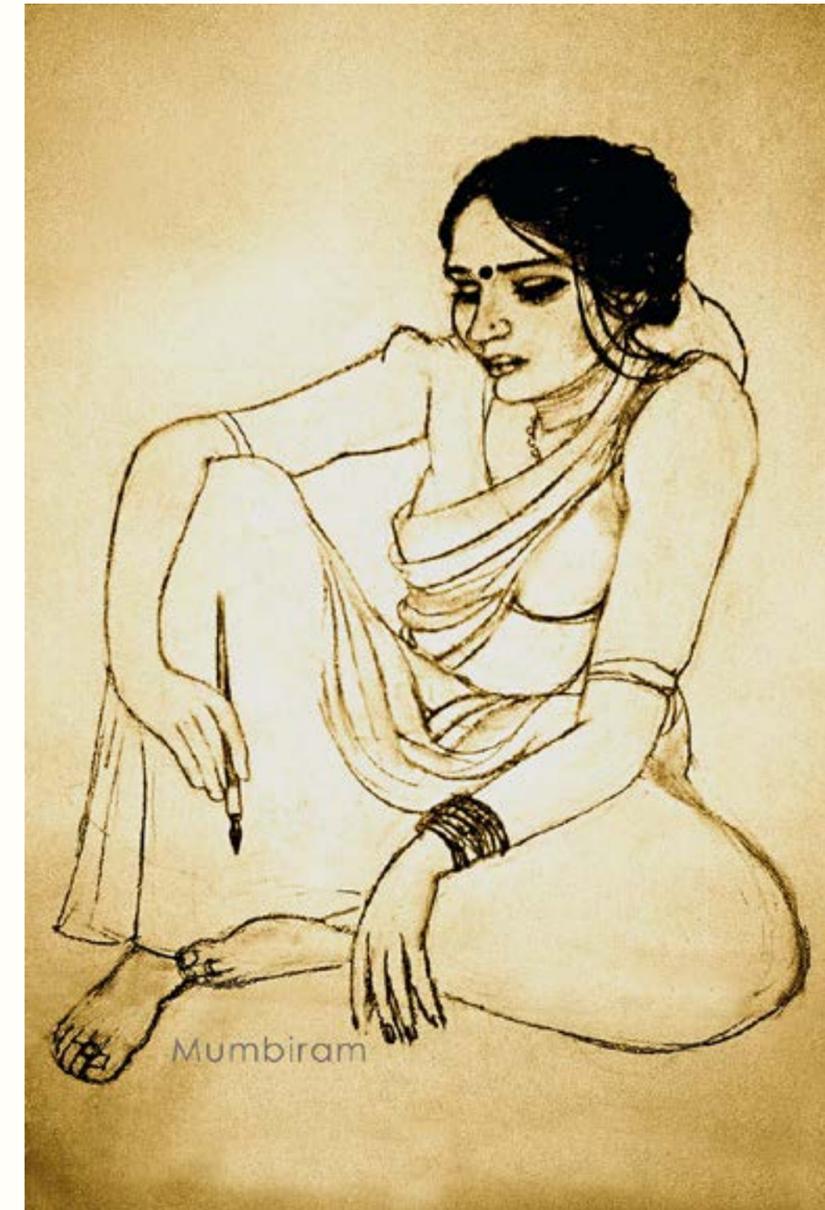


**Kusum's daughter, Mangal, and niece, Akki, had become bosom buddies with Tsambika and shared their personal beauty secrets.**





**Phasepardhis from Nandagao enjoyed visiting Cafes with Tsambika from Greece**



### **“Muse as the Artist”**

**‘Baby’ was an independently minded colleague of the Yeravda girls. She almost always came alone. She showed wonderfully mature understanding of what Mumbiram was up to as an artist. She made it easier for herself and Mumbiram by asking for paper and brush for her to try her hand in the noble endeavor that she saw Mumbi engaged in.**



**“Surekha as Philosopher”**

**Mumbiram almost never made his muses ‘pose’ for portraits. They would sit how they liked. Here Surekha is looking far away lost in far away thoughts.**



**‘Hema’ said she was a professional model back in Europe. In the Mandai atelier she certainly was very versatile in the moods she cojured up in vastly different ensembles.**



**“Perspective from a Vantage point”**

**This young couple have struck the chord in the hearts of many a visitor from far corners of the world.**



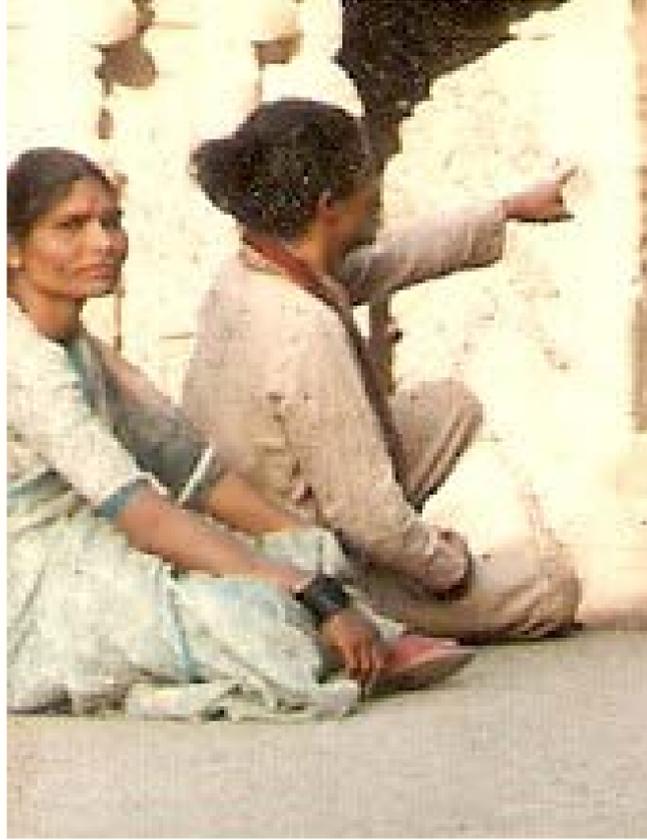
**Rasa Art of Rasa Renaissance as introduced by Mumbiram arises out of intimately intertwined Life and Art of the Rasa Artist. Mumbiram’s rag-picking Muses loved to wrap the sarie around Tsambika.**



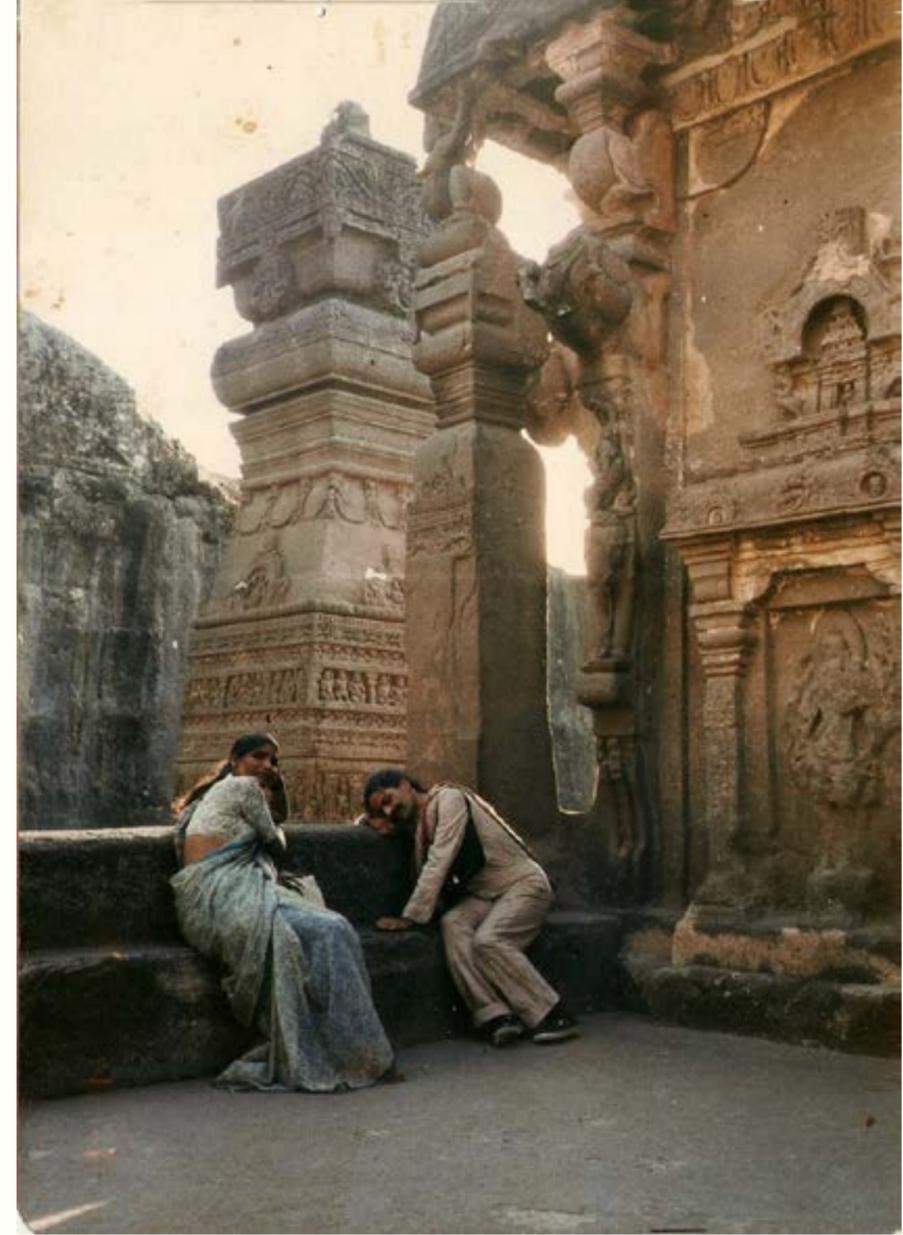
**Faces in Choklet Phaspardi's settlement lighted up when Amrisha was visiting.**



**Mumbiram's 'Secretary' Chanda was born in the Mahar caste of former untouchables. She was a confident host to Amrisha's party of visitors from Korea.**



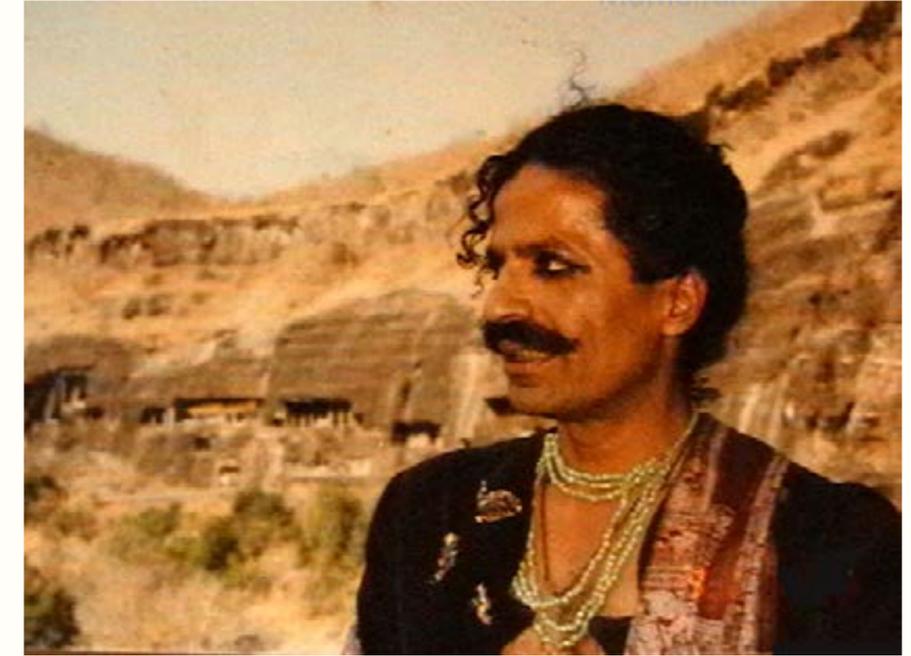
**Chanda was always eager to join when Mumbiram would arrange a trip to Ellora and Ajantha to view the artistic achievements of our ancestors in sculpture and paintings.**



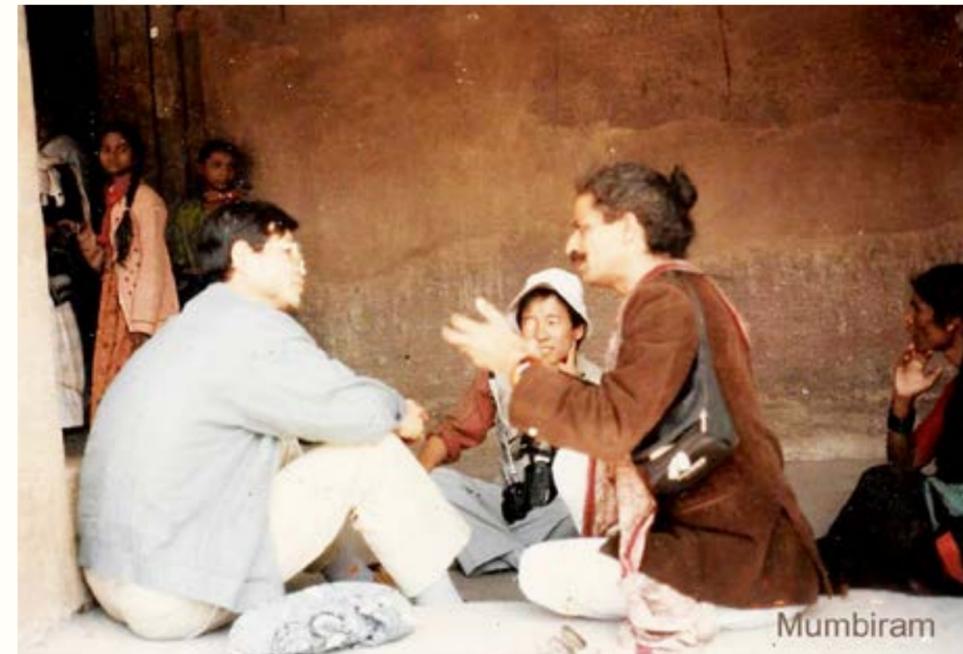
**Mumbiram's admirers from far corners of our planet would admire the enviable teamwork of this unlikely twosome.**



**Amrisha organized this wonderful interaction with a lively group of teenage schoolgirls from Karnataka. Chanda was ecstatically capturing the excitement with the camera.**



**Mumbiram enjoyed visiting Ajantha with the Phasepardhis of Nandgaon who lived in the wilderness not very far from Ajantha.**



**This professor from Seoul's National University was eager to hear Mumbiram's thoughts about Art as the impetus of evolution.**



**Sonabai and Vrinda had struck from day-one in their mutual bond of attraction and respect. That fascinated our Rasa Artist to no end. It has resulted in many a charcoal masterpiece.**



**“Sonabai - the Harbinger with a Drum”**



**Sonabai was proud and happy to share with her son Ithal and daughter Rajabai the portraits that were created that autumn of 2003. Sonabai always took her dear children when she went on her bugu-playing walks around the city.**



**Sonabai was a tall woman by Indian standards but she was the same height as Vrinda and she shared an amazing bond of understanding on an equal level.**



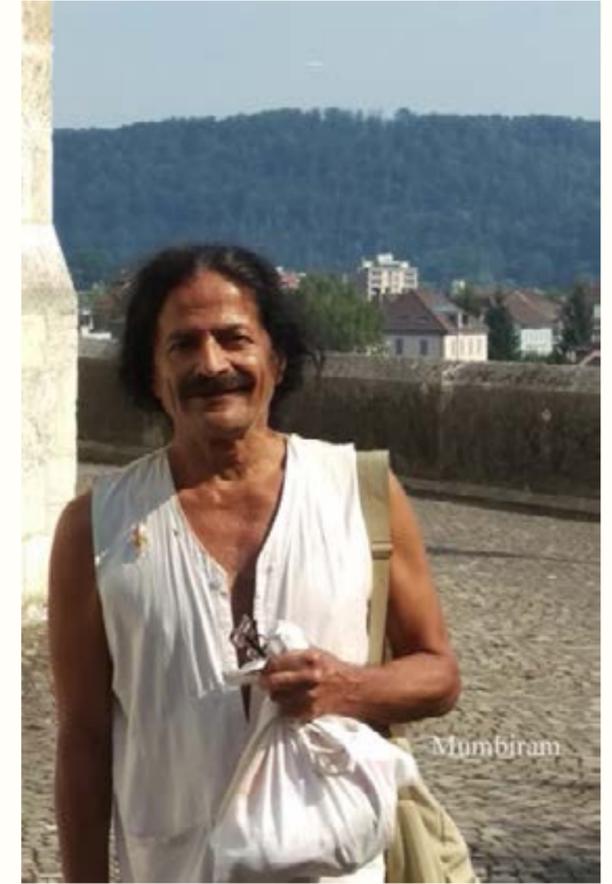
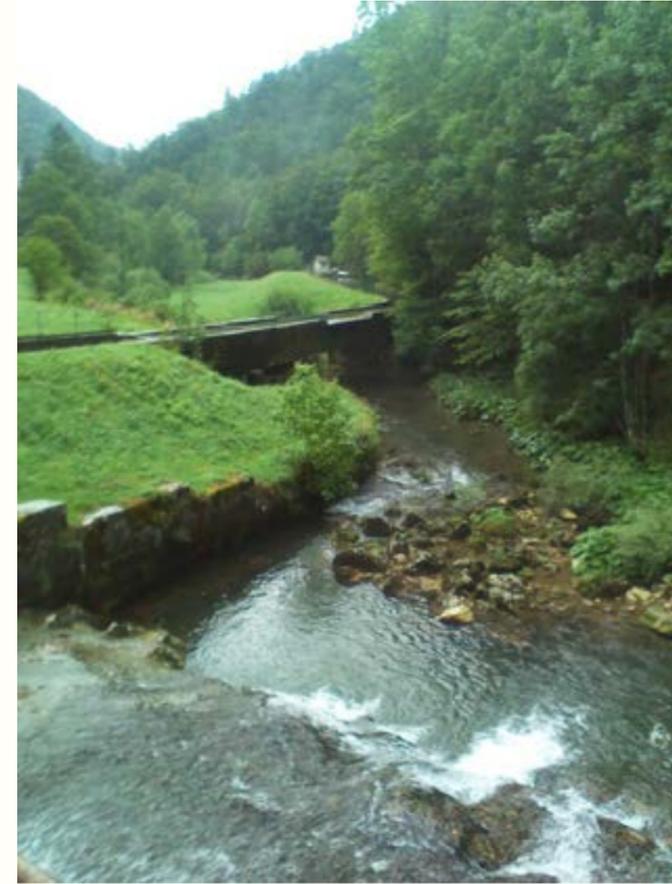
**Marion from Switzerland and her friend from Australia were early admirers of Mumbiram's art that gave amazing contemporary 'spin' to classical tales.**



**Marion's grandfather had owned Rubber Plantations in South Asia. So her family had a history of living in or visiting India. She had rented on long lease an apartment near Koregaon Park in the Pune Mansion of the Princely State of Bhor. She used to have her breakfast at the German Bakery. If she met Mumbiram there she would invite him to join her for lunch at the Gourmet Restaurant next doors. Marion was a kind and generous admirer of Mumbiram's art. Especially his charcoal renderings inspired by his bumbling Muses from just across the river.**



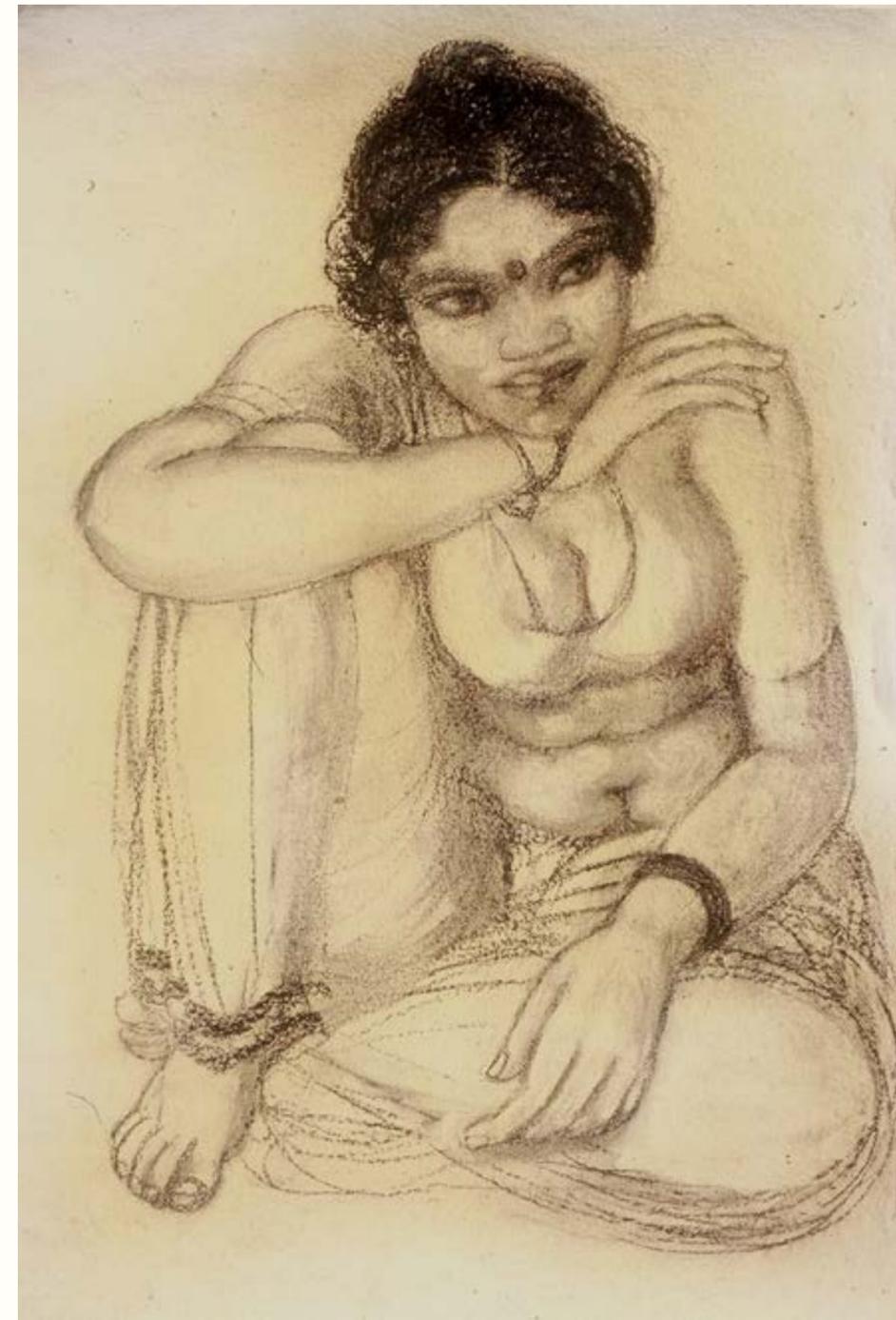
**Marion stopped coming to India when she was over 80 years of age. When Mumbiram was living in Germany Marion invited him with his wife and sons to her home in western Switzerland.**



**They spent a memorable week staying at her home while she was recuperating from an illness in a resort in the hills. Marion was happy to have them drive up to be with her every day of that week.**



**Margot was visiting from Australia. Her husband used to be the Mayor of Perth. Now she was with young Tony who belonged to the Bonham family that ran the Bonham's Auction House in England. Margot acquired spontaneously this charcoal portrait that was also spontaneously created one hot afternoon.**



**“This hot summer afternoon”**

**Charcoal, 2002**



## **Discovering the Magic of Rasa Interactions between the Muses, the Artist and the Admirers**

**Mumbiram has a profound passion for people, all sorts of people. It was this passion that was destined to manifest and bloom into the Personalist Art Movement and Art of Rasa Renaissance.**

**All his dealings with people were replete with Rasa, that precious entity that we all may experience and thirst for, yet we will never be able either to define it or even describe it. That was the secret behind his ability to attract a wide variety of Muses and inspire a confidence in them going beyond caste, creed, culture and gender. That was also the secret behind the delicate affinity that he inspired in the art lovers who spontaneously became his admirers.**

The sequence of these Rasa interactions was truly reaching an extraordinary height when his Admirers would also meet some of his Muses. This is going to be a unique facet of the Art of Rasa Renaissance that will enable Contemporary Art to establish its relevance and also stimulate attraction.

Mumbiram's friendship with every one of his muses as also with every one of his admirers was unique and lasting and flourishing.

It had become a habit for Mumbiram to visit the Phasepardhi Vasti (settlement) at Aswoldara and the classical caves of Ajantha and Ellora nearby in one excursion. When some lovely admirers from abroad would acquire an original Charcoal Masterpiece in Pune, he would invite them to that same excursion as his guest. It always was an occasion for great Rasik interaction and discovery and enlightenment as well as merriment and mirth.

Phasepardhis of Nandagaon had their Vasti (settlement) at Asoldara (Aswoldara) and they sold Rudrakshamalas and Tulsimalas. So they were identified by any of these attributes. They in turn called Mumbiram "Painter Babu". There was an off-beat but popular Hindi movie "Painter Babu" about the life and loves of a mythical painter.

We can recount Mumbiram's visits with Peter from Germany and Catherine Read from Australia as the earliest ones that were sweeter than the others. But there were many many other such visits.

Mumbiram once took Peter, a German youngster, along with him to Aswaldara the settlement of the Nandgaon Phasepardhis. They arrived in the middle of the night in a beige Ambassador taxi such as used by Ministers and high government officials in those times. They were greeted by a grand ruckus of dogs barking. The happy surprise was long remembered.

Mumbiram was happy that Naurang was there. But she said her husband at Ellora would not like it if she were to go with them. It was decided that her parents Zirmalya Chabukdar and Vachchhabai along with Shaani would go to Ellora and Ajantha with Mumbiram and Peter.

Zirmalya and Vachchhabai were not at all new to Ellora i.e. 'Verul'. They were married in Verul!

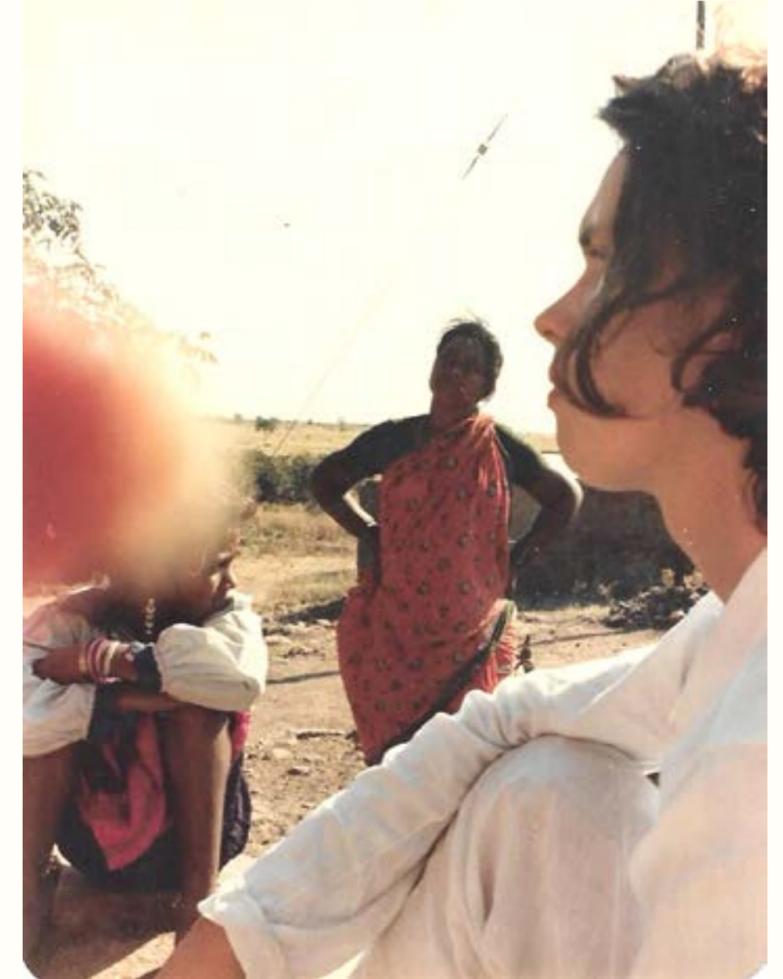


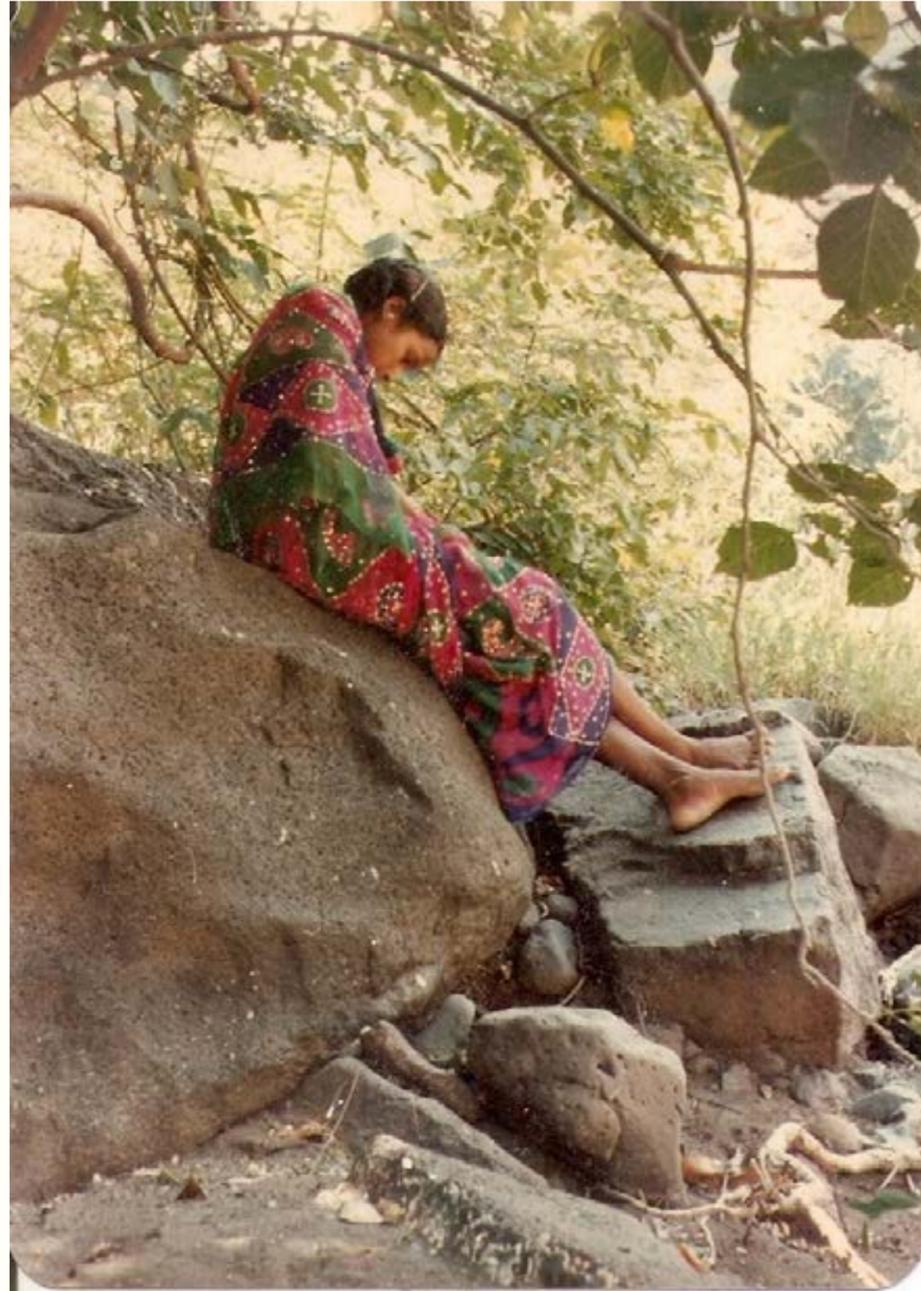


**Then Mumbiram mooted a bath at the open well next to the cactuses.**



**Peter and Mumbi had some lovingly curious spectators for an audience. That was a nice way to welcome and get to know your guests !**

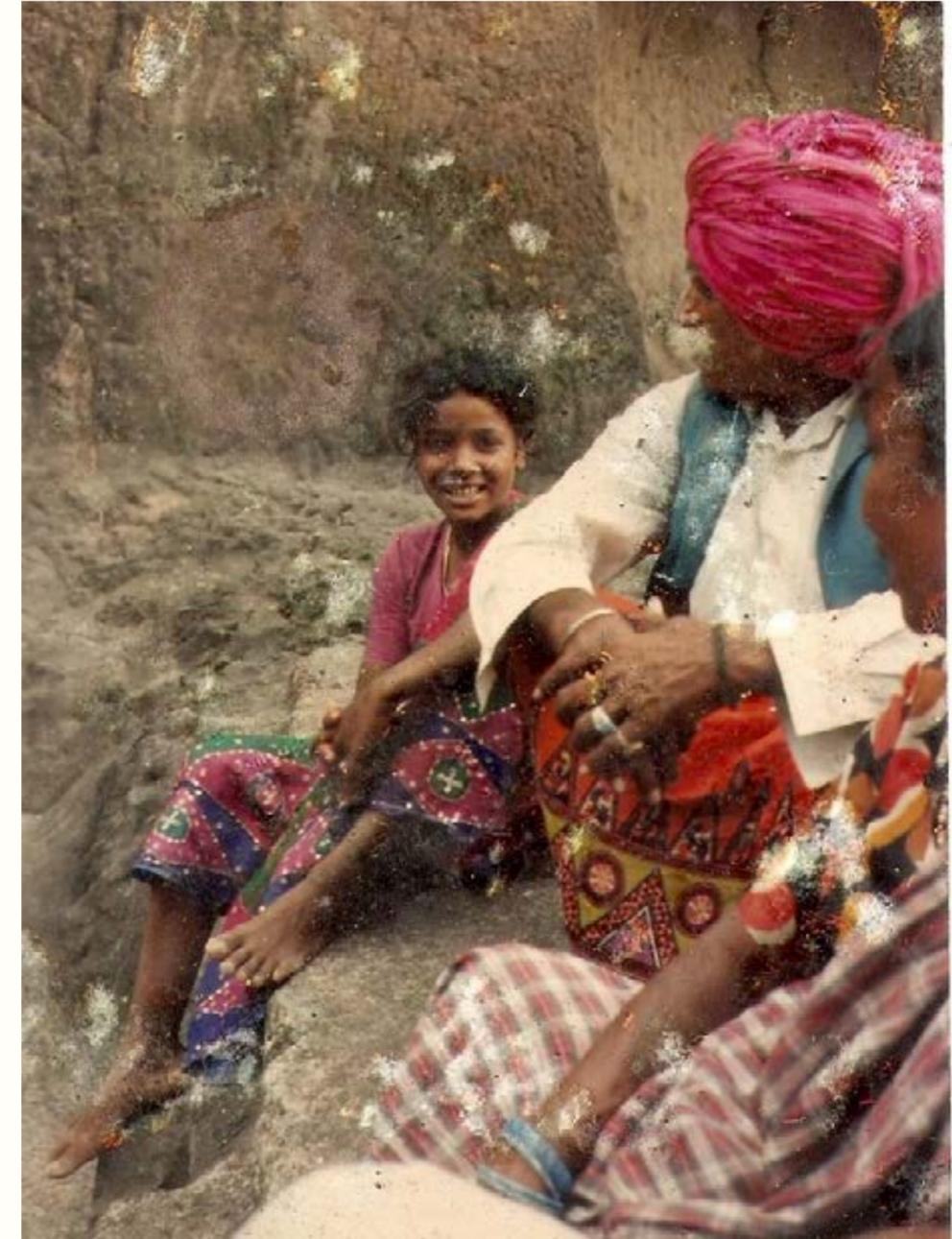




**Shaani was a wilful charming adolescent. Mumbiram had brought with him a fine Rajasthani sarie with glittering little crystals all over its body. Shaani was ecstatically happy to wear it.**



**Vachchhabai was from the Bhosle clan of Verul. These had originally hailed from the Sisodiya Dynasty of Maharajas who ruled from Udaipur. She thought Peter and 'Painter' made a wonderful team.**





**Peter was lost in his own thoughts. How Shani would have liked if he had paid her more attention.**



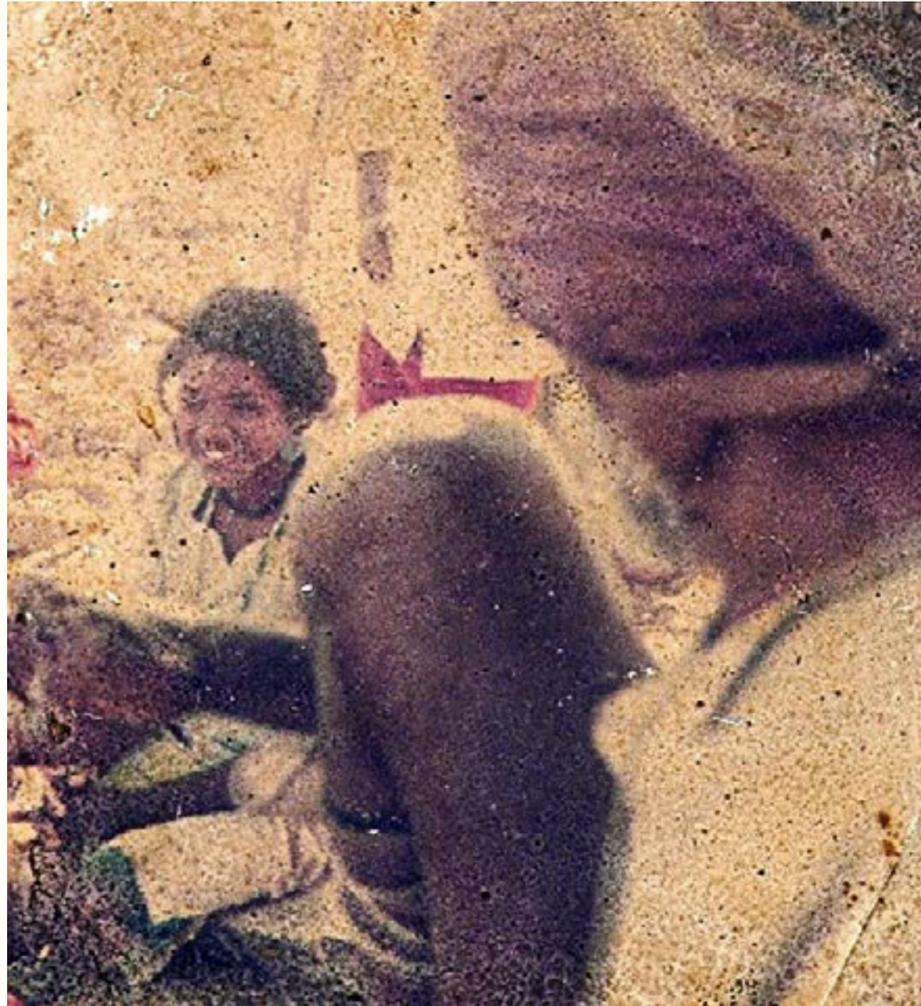
**The imposing aristocratic aura of Zirmalya, aka Chief Chabukdar, the dark exotic looks of Vachchhabai, the long dark curly crown of Mumbiram's hair, the tall fair figure of German Peter and the very Pulinda Shaani in an esoteric shining attire were the cynosure of all eyes.**

**At Ellora the visitors from far corners of the world were as interested in this our indigenous contemporary manifestation of art as in the art of our ancestors of 2000 years ago frozen in rock.**

Catherine Read from Canberra was visiting India with her son. Her neighbour back home was also travelling with her. They had such a joyful experience here that they tied the knot soon after they were back.

Mumbiram met these art-lovers at the Raja Kelkar Museum. Then they all walked to Mumbiram's atelier not too far away. They were genuinely thrilled at the surprise that awaited them there. Catherine liked everything about the artist but especially the charcoal masterpieces of the real beautiful people of India that one never sees in galleries and museums. On the spur of the moment she acquired "*Kusum brings mother Sakhrabai to the Artist's Studio*". Mumbiram also thought these three of them were near ideal admirers. He invited them to a trip to Ajantha-Ellora as his personal guests, an offer they could not refuse.





**Shani was now a demure damsel keeping her distance and her reserve.**



**Catherine enjoyed the visit to the Phasepardhi settlement of Aswoldara as much as Ajantha and Ellora. She could appreciate every one of the fiercely independent souls she could associate there. Mumbiram was happy to introduce Catherine to his Phasepardhi friends.**



**These ladies from Germany were greedy about Mumbiram's hospitality. They went to Ajantha-Ellora with him but missed out on 'Asoldara', the village of Mumbiram's wild birdcatchers, his favorite Pulindis.**



**In Pune, Aswaldara Pardhis were now regularly setting shop near Datta Mandir. When 'Painter Babu' was visiting them there, they could easily persuade him to take them out to an eatery off Lakshmi Road. Mumbiram's admirers from abroad would enjoy joining that experience as well. If he was in a hurry, they would settle for a Sweet Lassi at the Lassi Shop across the street.**





**Here we see La-baad's daughter Mangal and Shaani some years later.**

**Tsambika from Rhodos Greece shares with Mumbiram a genial bond of attraction and appreciation.**



**Here they are all together at a small family restaurant in a side lane just off the busy Laxmi Road shopping street of Pune.**

**The idea of Mumbiram's Rasa Renaissance evolved from this classical artist's practice of his passion in the face of the oncoming onslaught of Impersonalism and Voidism.**





Mumbiram

## **“Helping beautiful Kusum making Chapaties”**

**Charcoal, Pune, 1987**

**Mumbiram had abiding fascination for Indian women making chapaties for their families. Every woman has her very own method and style. Mumbiram loved to watch it and observe it. He saw the whole act as nothing less than sacred. It has the very essence of the love that a woman puts in her family.**

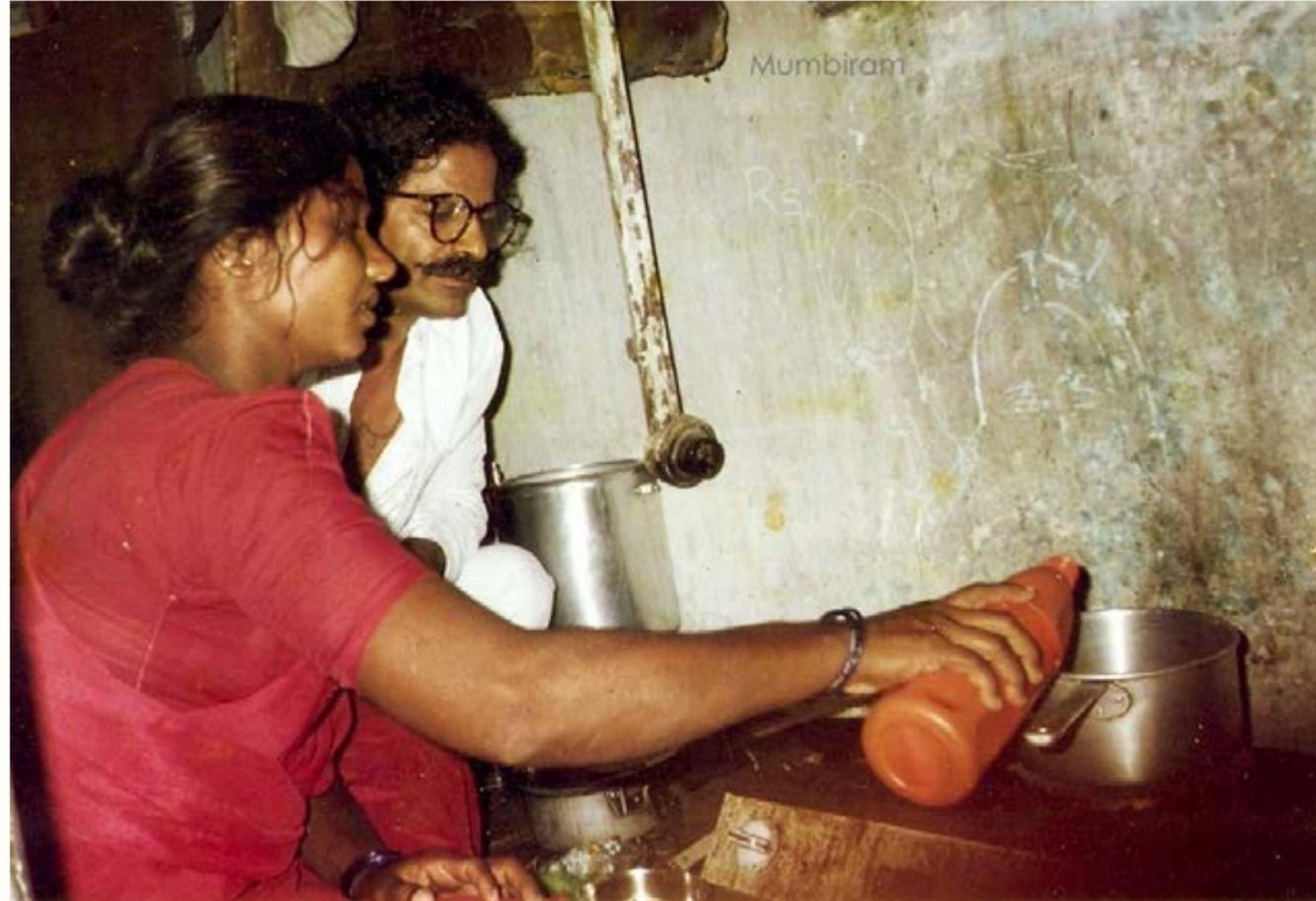
**When Krishna’s best friend Uddhava was visiting Vrindavan he observed minute details in the daily routine of the Gopis. He observed how they lighted the lamps, how they sprinkled water in the court yard, how they ground the grains for the chapaties, how they churned the butter, etc. etc.**



**Any woman who has ever made chapaties will testify that Mumbiram is very accurate in this depiction seen here. That includes the paraphernalia of the chapatie making, the sitting posture of the woman as well as the movements of the chapatie making hands.**

**As in many other of Mumbiram's charcoal masterpieces we see the noble simplicity of Mumbiram's lines. We see no other detail extraneous to the young couple's act of making the chapaties together. Obviously Mumbiram himself had first hand experience of such moments.**

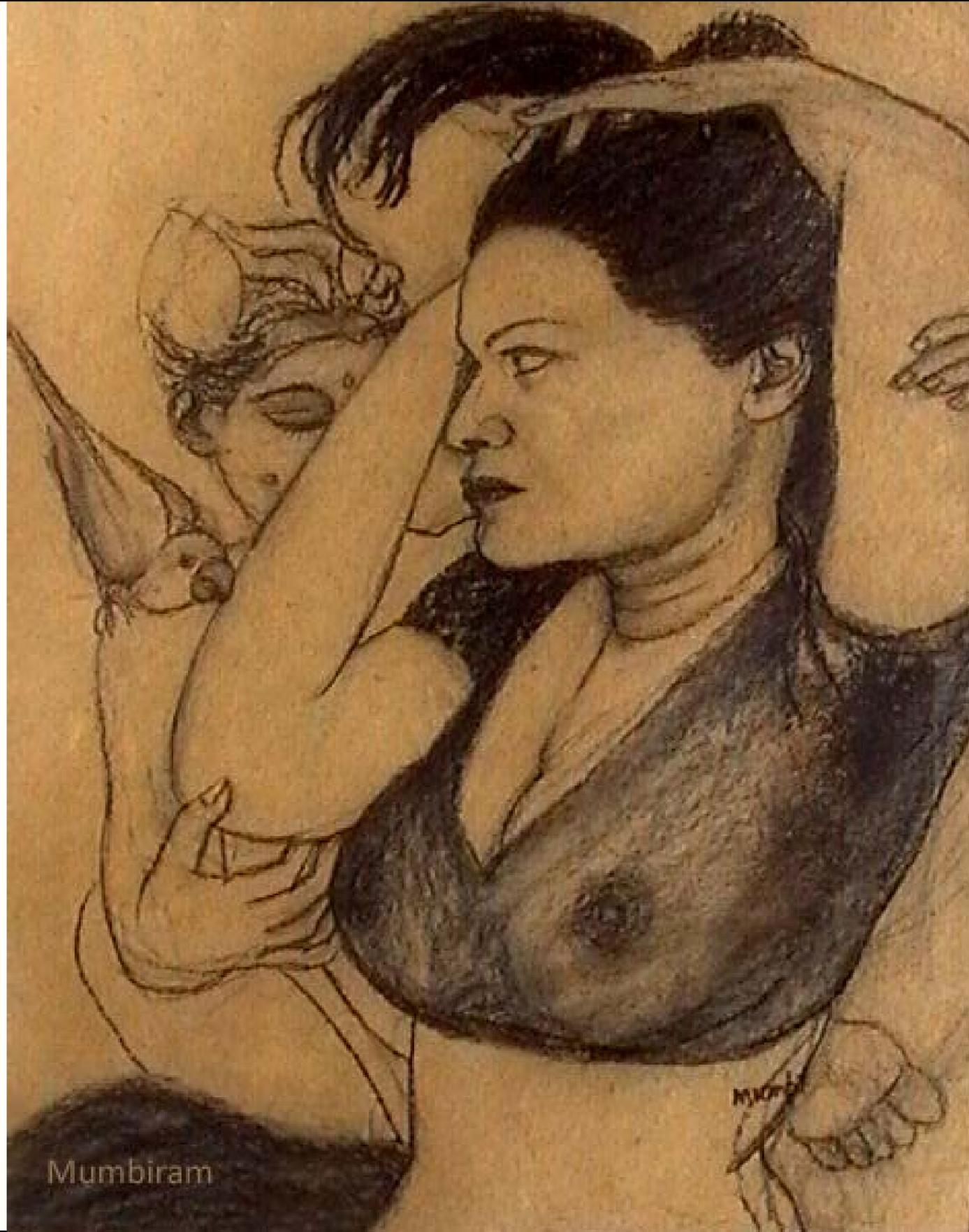
**This masterpiece brings out in wonderful ways the very essence of the love that a woman puts in her family and the beauty and magic of the togetherness of a couple.**



**Kusum and Mumbiram had shared a real-life symbiotic bond.**

**It was indeed a wonder that a simple stick of charcoal, which is just a stick of half-burnt wood, in the hands of an artist could capture the very essence of a person in such simple and disarming way.**

**Some saw it as the Pygmalion story where forgotten people appeared as proud elegant muses. Some saw it as the Robin Hood story where the artist took from the `haves´ and gave it to the `have-nots´.**



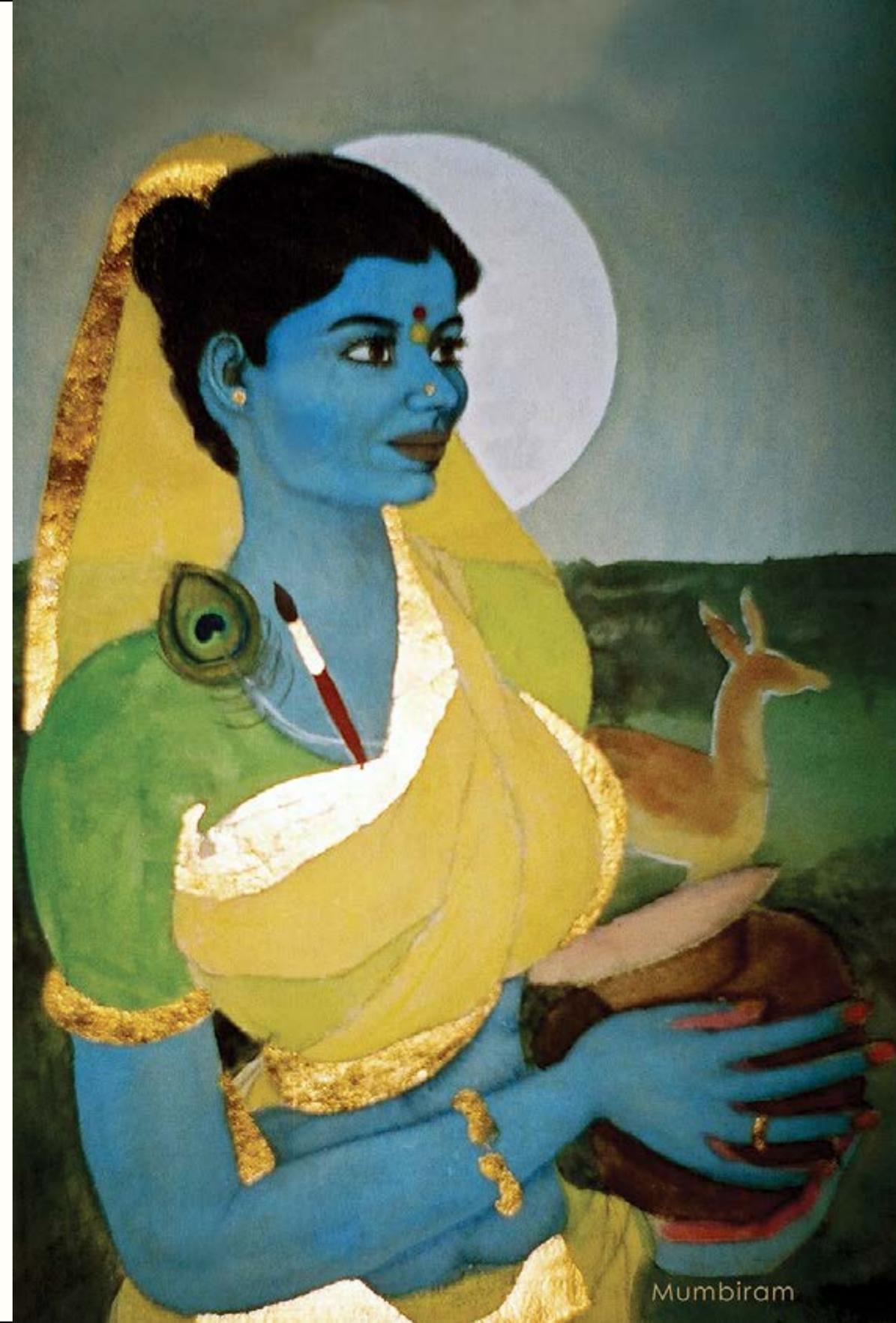
Mumbiram

## Visual Manifestations of Rasa

Mumbiram's art has brought the term 'Rasa' into the picture in a new way. The term Rasa, that has now been adopted into the English language, is a Sanskrit word that denotes the quality of emotional fulfilment that a work of art evokes.

### **"Dialogue with Krishna"** Charcoal

Some of Mumbiram's charcoals such as "Dialogue with Krishna" have the magic to share with the viewer the perspective of Krishna as also the perspective of his Beloved. One can take both perspectives and just let the inner dialogue prosper. There is no desire to show perfection or artificial adoration in any way. All that matters is the intimate relationship between Krishna and his beloved friends, may they be Gopis or Pulindis.

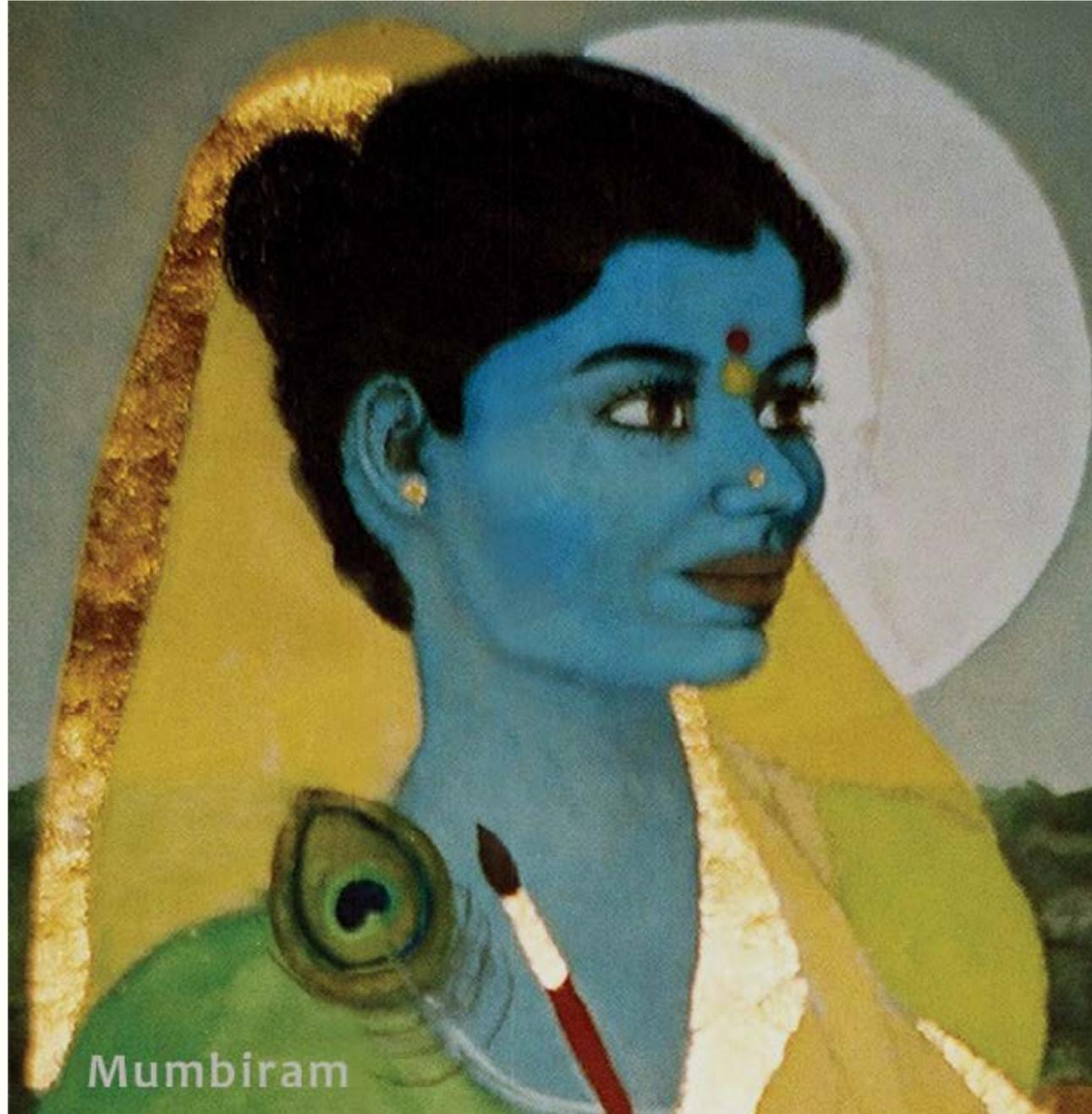


## **“Abhisarika Kusum with a Paint Brush”**

**Opaque watercolour and gold leaf, 1990**

**“Abhisarika Kusum with a Paint Brush” goes to meet her lover secretly at night. She wears only jewellery that makes no sound. She dares all dangers that might be lurking in the darkness. The hardships and obstacles she overcomes on the way only prove the purity of her love.**

**Such intimate states of mind and emotions have been the topic of the classical ‘Rasa Theory of Aesthetic Appreciation’ that has existed in India since ancient times and has been applied to classical Indian drama, dance and music. They have been described in devotional literature dedicated to Love and Rasa. Mumbiram’s art is the visual manifestation of these intimate states of mind and emotions.**

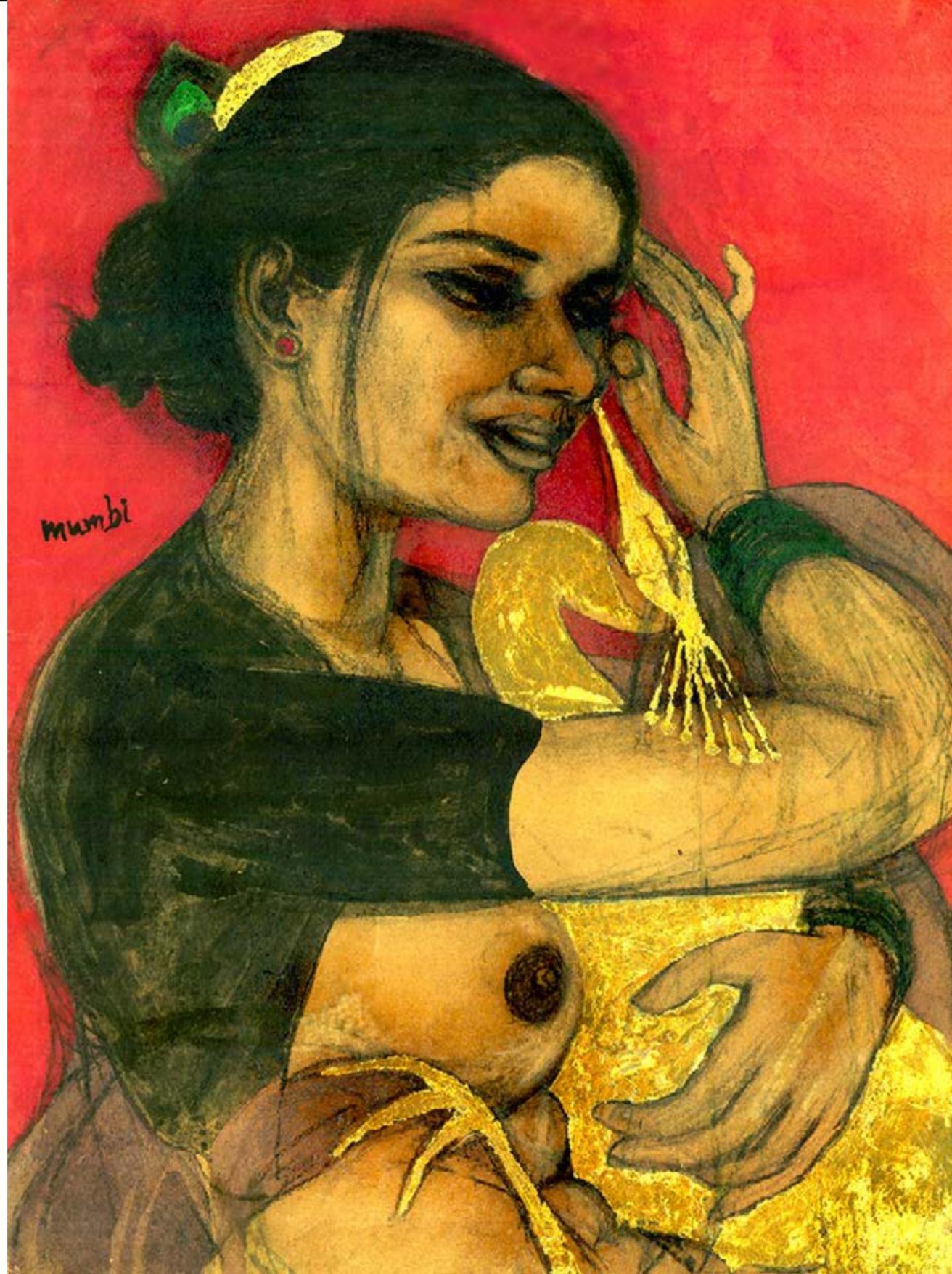


Abhisarika Kusum reminds us of a verse of the celebrated *"Gita Govinda"*, originally in Sanskrit:

*"Meanwhile the full moon rises over the horizon of Vrindavan illuminating every corner with its cool rays. But look closely, the moon is covered with unseemly spots. When lovers are going to meet their Beloved, the moon betrays their journey to the secret meeting place. It must be for this misdemeanour that the moon's face is covered with spots."*

(Gita Govinda, translated by Mumbiram)

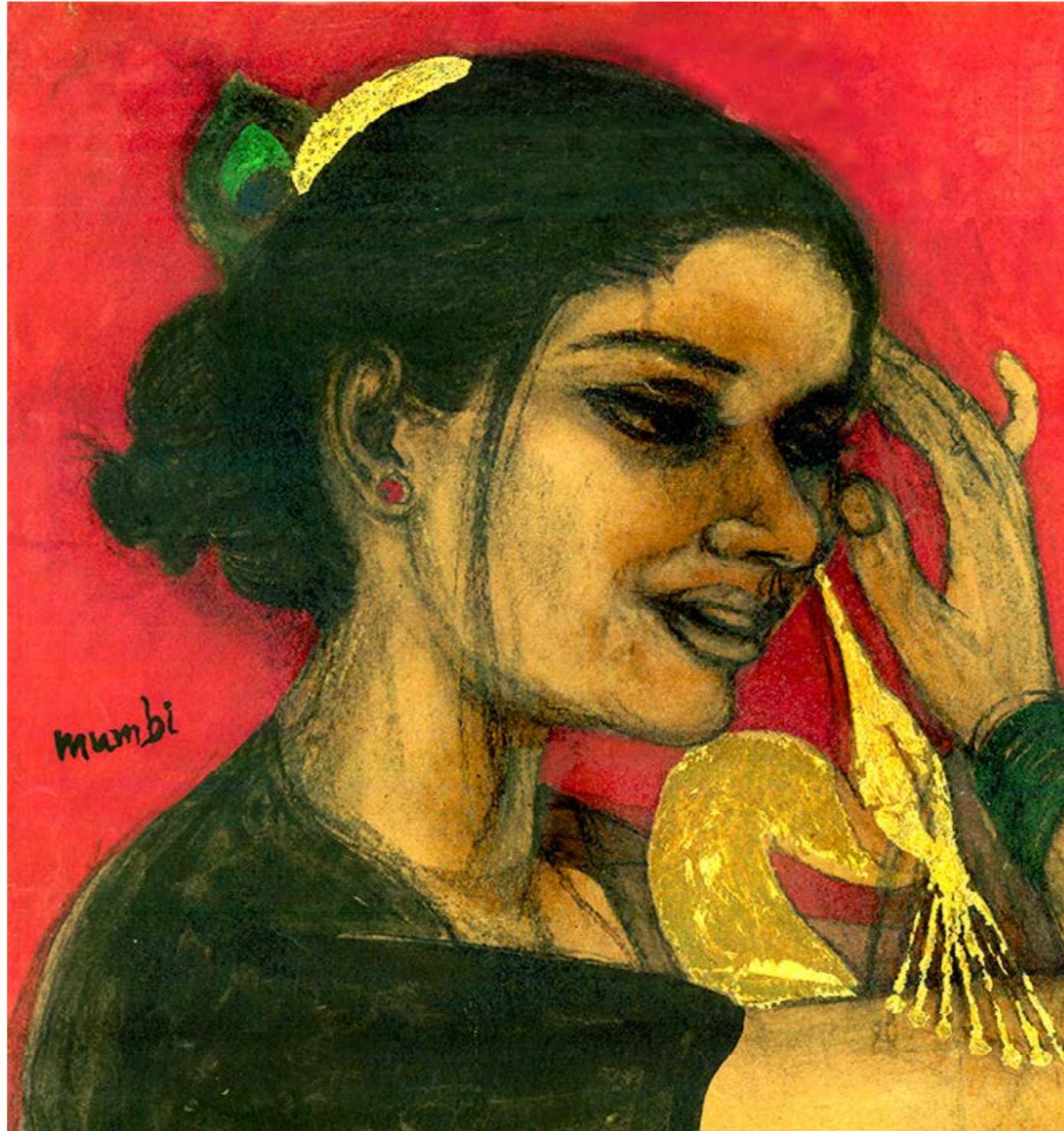
Mumbiram's artworks are full of details and insights. Yet, anybody can relate to them without being aware of deeper insights.



## “Manjishtha’s Ecstasy”

Charcoal, watercolour and gold leaf, 1990

“Manjishtha’s Ecstasy” is a timeless Rasa Icon. Raaga or attachment between lovers is quite a contradiction. Even a thorny rocky wilderness in blazing sun can appear like a bed of cool lotuses. Scandalous false rumours linking one with Beloved appear like hymns of some esoteric ancient sacred texts. When attachment is unconditional and secretive it appears blue like a clear crystal sapphire. When attachment makes one drop one’s worst inhibitions and fills one with heroic courage it appears deep blue. When one has fallen in love at very first sight, become obsessed, even hearing Beloved’s name gives one the goose-bumps, yet when one comes face to face one is stunned like a statue. One appears indifferent! Such attachment appears in the colour safflower red. When love appears self-sustaining, self-effulgent, everlasting, ever new, soaring to ever-new heights, it appears bright red like the flower of the Bengal Madder, Manjishtha.



The misty eyed day-dreaming Manjishtha Gopi here appears to be hugging a golden peacock. Radha sometimes embraced a dark Tamaal tree mistaking it for the dark beautiful Krishna in the heights of her excruciating ecstasies of separation from Beloved.

Great sages consider such ecstatic delusions to be the most relishable state of affairs between Love and Beloved (*Prema Vivarta*).

She appears nearly oblivious of the peacock she is hugging. The peacock in turn is drinking her tears rolling down from her eyes. This is a rare Rasa Masterpiece, a timeless icon. It makes one forget all about Mumbiram and everybody else.



Mumbiram neither depended on the camera nor turned his back upon the camera. In his own words: *'My Art has evolved as a Medley of paintings and photographs. Interactions between the Muses, the Artist and the Admirers are the main constituents of Rasa Art. The painting is a consummate symbol of those interactions.'*

## **The need for "Living from the Palette" in a Creative Way**

There was another reason why Mumbiram had to live from his palette. The avantgarde of Indian art centred around alumni of the JJ School of Art. They had proclaimed themselves as the Bombay Progressive Art Group. In fact they were only following the latest trends in 'Western' art.

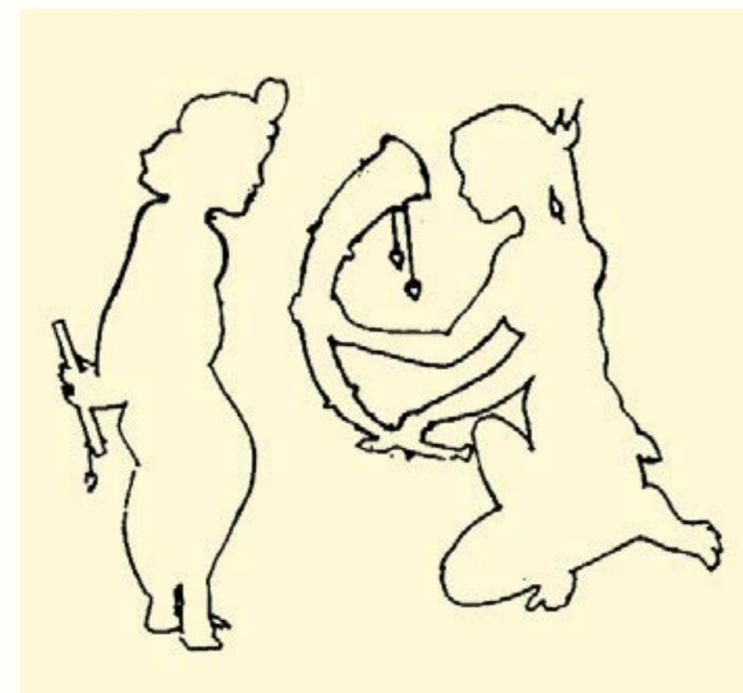
'Western' art of the 20th century had increasingly come under sway of impersonalism and voidism that manifested itself as meaningless abstraction and self-inflicted distortion.

All sincere art lovers in the west had already seen the cheerless irrelevance of that entire endeavour. Mumbiram was not going to compromise on his art that was standing tall on the classical Rasa Aesthetics. He couldn't have cared less if Indian art critics were to dismiss his art as 'merely representational' or 'merely figurative'.



**If Mumbiram was going to avoid joining the voidist impersonalist path of meaningless abstraction and self-inflicted distortion, then he would have to stay away from galleries, museums and academia. He would have to depend on the Rasa in his Rasa Art to attract and inspire admirers. He would be eating from his palette. Indeed that would make his interactions with his muses and his admirers more intense and authentic. That would give his Art the precious candor that makes great paintings.**

**But that meant Mumbiram couldn't share his art through Indian museums and galleries. He had to depend on chance meetings with 'outsiders' visiting India who had an open mind about India and Indian art. That meant he had to depend on Rasa Art attracting those who were sensitive to Rasa. That also meant he had to 'live from his palette'.**





## **Drama of the Ring "Forest Women" leaving India**

Mumbiram had become an iconic figure at the German Bakery. Now he was also accompanied by the sprightly Chanda who was genuinely excited about joining Mumbiram's dream-like art-endeavour.

Chanda worked in the vegetable market place carrying big loads of fruit in a basket overhead. She was a curious and intelligent woman, very expressive and emphatic. Her husband was a musician in a brass band that played in street processions.

Mumbiram would introduce Chanda as his secretary. Everybody could appreciate that. (Didn't Osho always have a secretary?) She could not speak a word of English, but it didn't matter.



**Indian society with its caste system and arranged marriages and rigid rules for married women to follow left no room for friendships in artistic creativity. When Chanda was introduced to Mumbiram she was ecstatic. Here she could find for herself a space of personal freedom and pursuit of emotional fulfilment that she would only see in movies and songs.**

**Chanda was remarkable in adapting herself to the role of an all-rounder as an artist's secretary. Chanda gave the best of herself in making every undertaking of her artist hero a success. It is possible to narrate how street-smart and resourceful and ready-witted she was in dealing with people, only if a biopic is ever made of Mumbiram's extraordinary life-story. Only then will we know how smartly she could penetrate the retinue of upper class academic women to reach and befriend Dr. Eleanor Zelliot the boss at the American Institute of Indian Studies. Or how she outwitted a corrupt police officer to rescue Nobukazu Shimoguchi, Mumbiram's Japanese admirer, from trouble with The Law. She understood the profound existential importance of Personalism!**

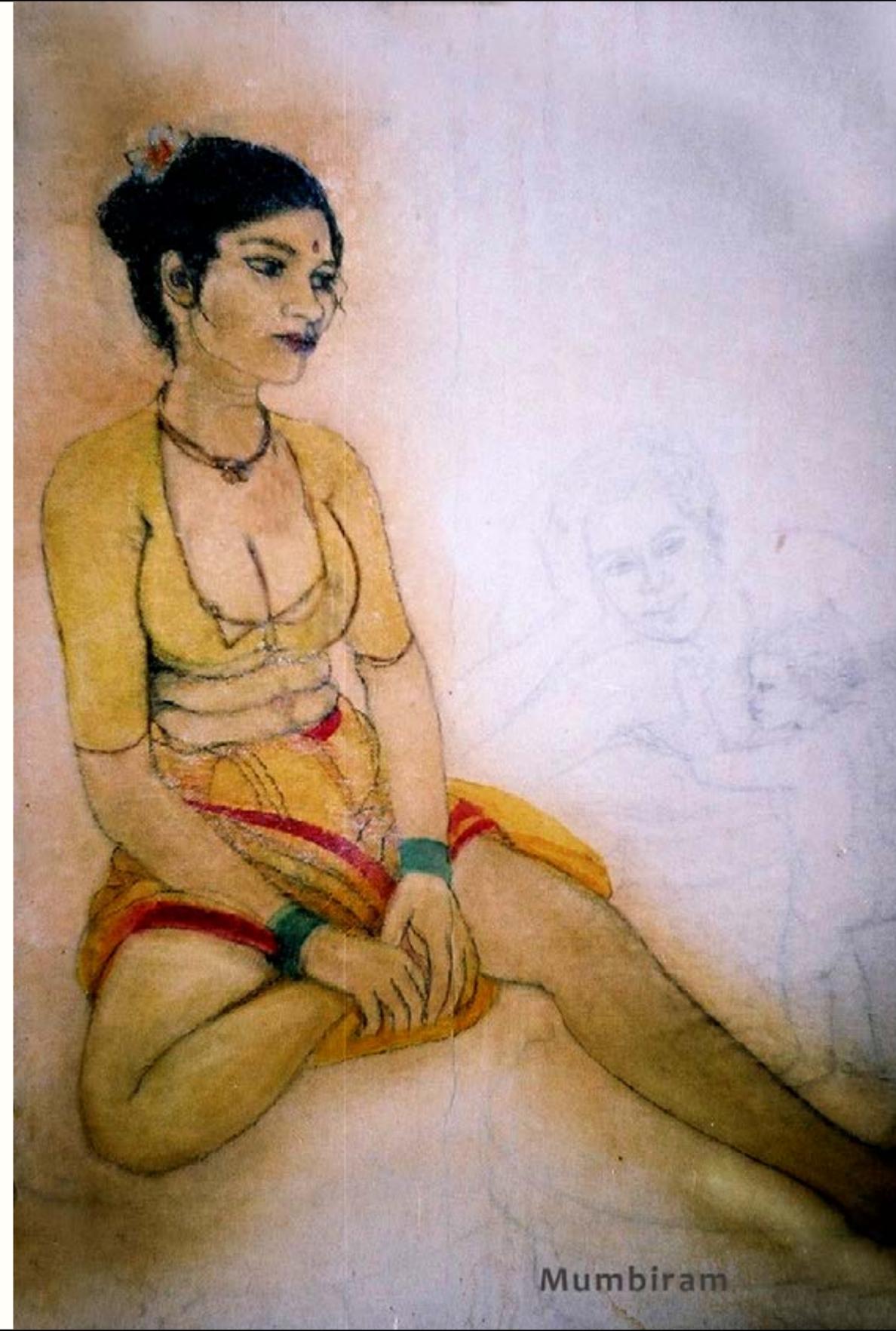
**Mumbiram appreciated the rich emotional universe of this sensitive yet tough girl that grew up in challenging rural society but adapted to the challenges of the city with great elan. Many amazing masterpieces that Mumbiram made in that period have unmistakable lovely likenesses of this precious activist of Rasa Renaissance.**



**“Gopi with Letter”**  
(1992)



**“Moonlight in the Afternoon”**  
(1993)



Mumbiram and Chanda were a wonderful team. That teamwork is reflected in some of the paintings as well. In “After the Dance” we see this intense emotional interaction between the artist and the muse that is so important in Mumbiram’s art of Rasa Renaissance.

### **“After the Dance” Watercolour, 1993**

Here Mumbiram is imagining himself to be the man in the life of a tamasha danseuse. She has come home after an exhausting on-stage performance. Now she is with her baby and her man. He has been with their baby while she was away. She has taken off the heavy ankle-bells and she is resting her legs. She has unbuttoned her close-fitting yellow blouse and she has pulled up her yellow saree above the knee. The portrait of the danseuse is executed with consummate skill. What appears in the background as soft pencil work is what creates the story.



**Mumbiram in front of the masterpiece before it left his studio in Pune, India, to travel to Stuttgart, Germany.**

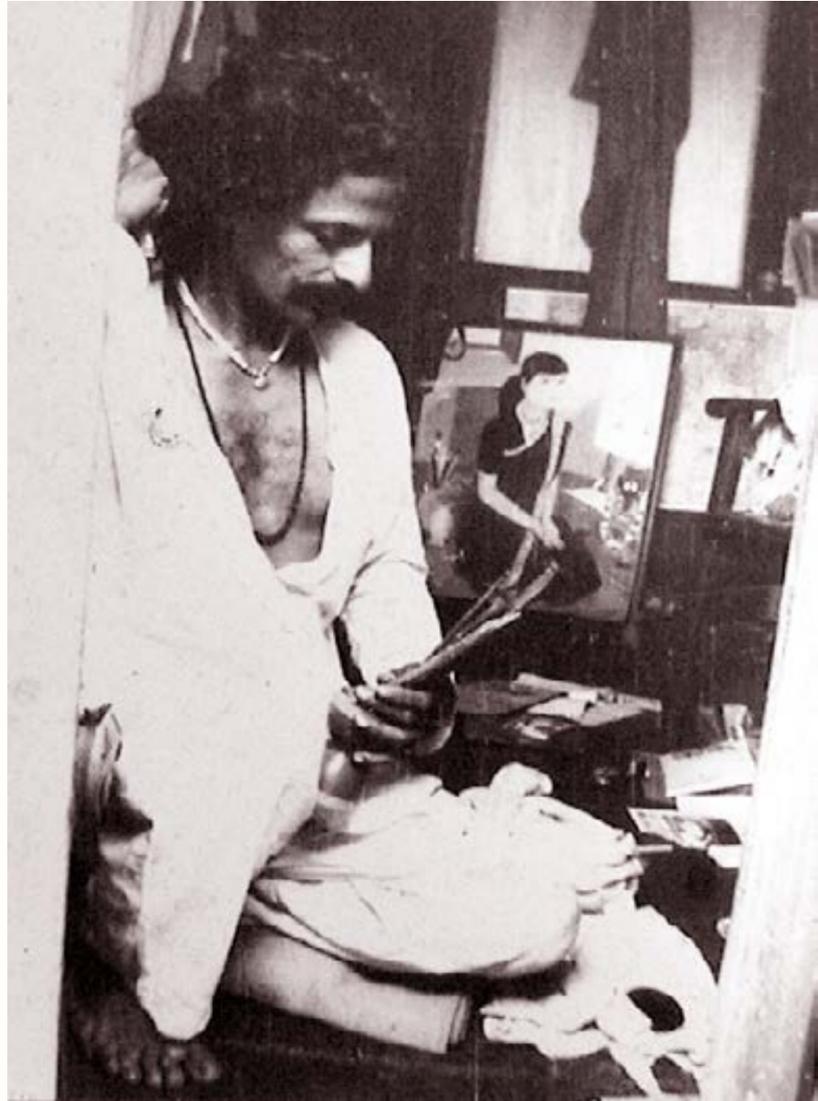
Many of Mumbiram's buyers happened to be from Germany. So also Manfred who had come to Pune to start a Mercedes Benz manufacturing unit and came to know Mumbiram in the German Bakery. Manfred had become a regular visitor to Mumbiram's studio on his weekly free days on Thursdays. One day Manfred wanted to buy 'the largest painting' for his wife's birthday. He had already bought a charcoal before.

The "Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis" happened to be the biggest painting. Manfred asked how much Mumbiram wanted for it. Mumbiram told him it was sold for 3000 Dollars last time. Manfred offered to purchase the painting for the same price. Chanda wanted to know what was going on and when she heard the sum in Rupees, she quickly suggested that Mumbiram sells it for that price. Since the roof of the studio had started leaking during monsoons and there was the danger of that masterpiece getting damaged, Mumbiram accepted the offer. Mumbiram told Manfred about the Forest Women and the verse in Shrimad Bhagavatam.

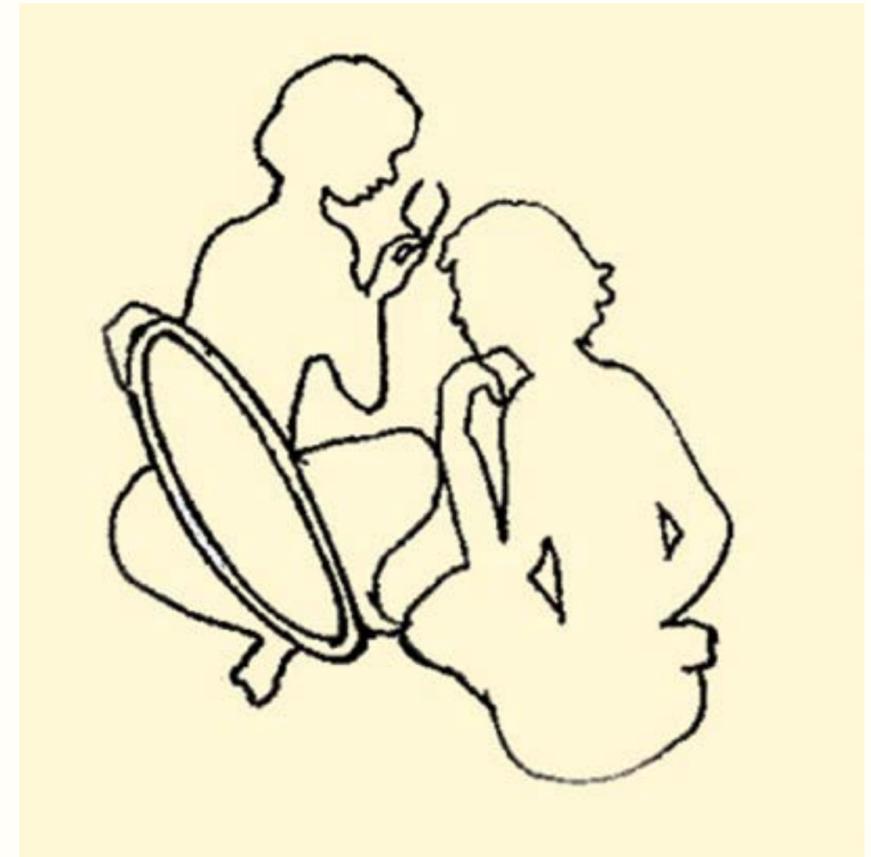
The transaction was quite dramatic. The evening that Manfred was to carry away the masterpiece, to be taken to Germany the next day, the lights in the whole district had crashed. So Mumbiram and Chanda had lit lamps on every step of the stairs up to the door. The neighbours were curious as to what was happening. Then Manfred came with his driver in his station wagon. After they did the transaction they carried the painting carefully down the steps. In the dark they loaded the painting through the back hatch of the station wagon. Mumbiram's hand was on the back hatch and before he could take it away the driver banged the hatch closed with Mumbiram's fingers caught in there. Mumbiram shouted. He thought his fingers were gone and maybe God did not want him to sell this painting. It took the driver a few seconds to realize what had happened before he came back to open the back door. Mumbiram's hand felt numb and he could not feel his fingers at all. Selling the "Forest Women visiting Krishna" was a trauma. Mumbiram requested

Manfred to take him to the orthopaedic surgeon. What a coincidence it was the same celebrity doctor for whom the painting had been initially made. First Manfred said he did not have time but finally agreed to drop Mumbiram there on his way back. Luckily his fingers were not as badly hurt.

It seemed the gold ring Mumbiram was wearing had protected his fingers. This gold wrapper had been given to him by his mother just before she died. Ironically Mumbiram's mother had strongly opposed his ambition of being an artist and his choices of friendly associations, even though her own father was a great watercolour artist. Anyway the gold wrapper itself had protected Mumbiram's fingers and had disappeared in the commotion and confusion in the darkness. That was how the "Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis" left Mumbiram in 1995 after being the magnum opus in his studio for ten years.



The dramatic exchange of the “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” one evening when the lights were gone was quite a momentous event.



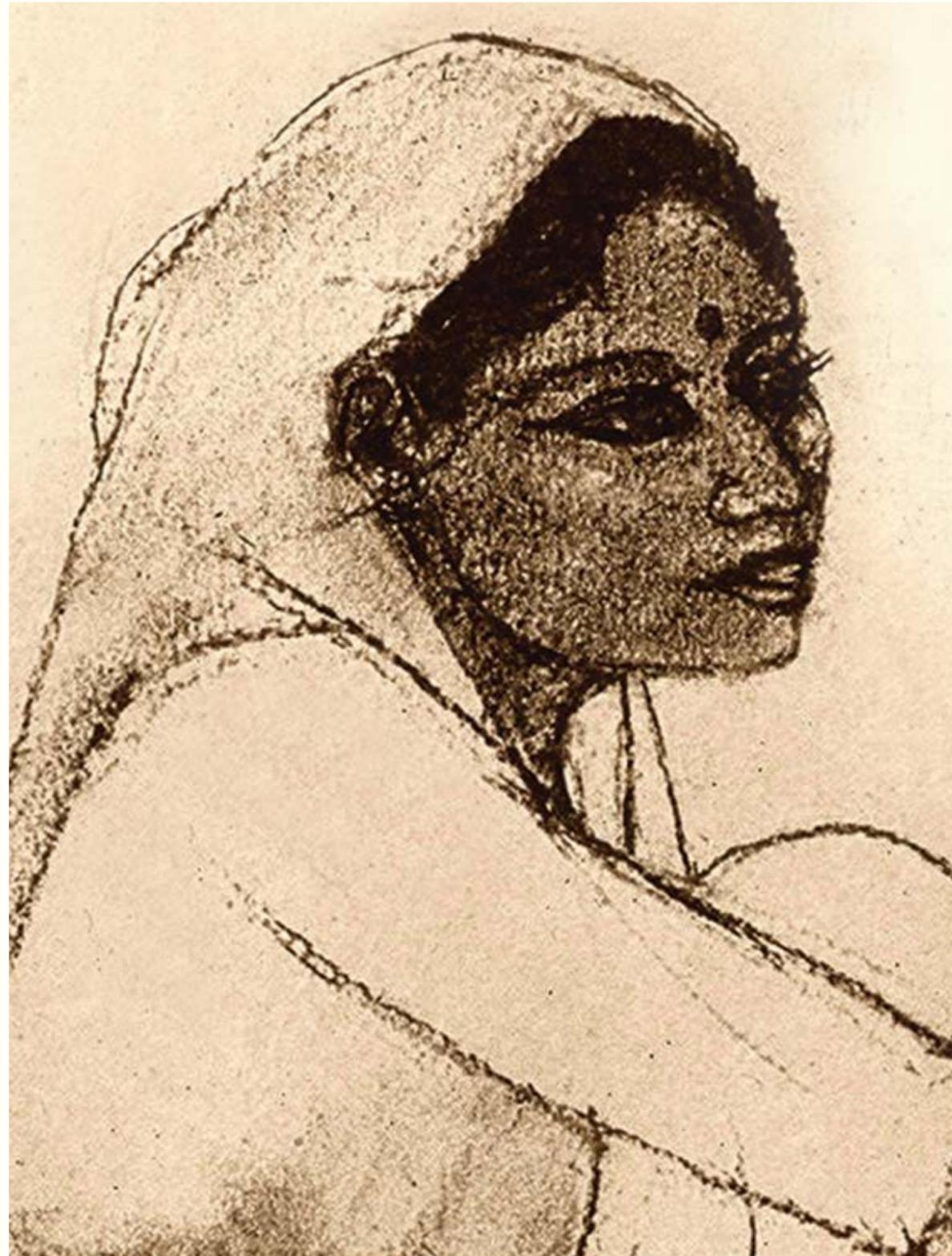


## **Dutenhofer's Wife gets "Laxmi's Sakhi in Samaadhi"**

Later Manfred's wife was visiting Pune and wanted to meet the artist who had made the "Forest Women". Together they visited the studio. She appreciated everything about Mumbiram. She said, they were going to make Mumbiram famous. Mumbiram gave her one of his charcoals as a gift. It is called "*Laxmi's Sakhi in Samaadhi*" which he had made from memory.

### **"Laxmi's Sakhi in Samaadhi" Charcoal, ca.1987**

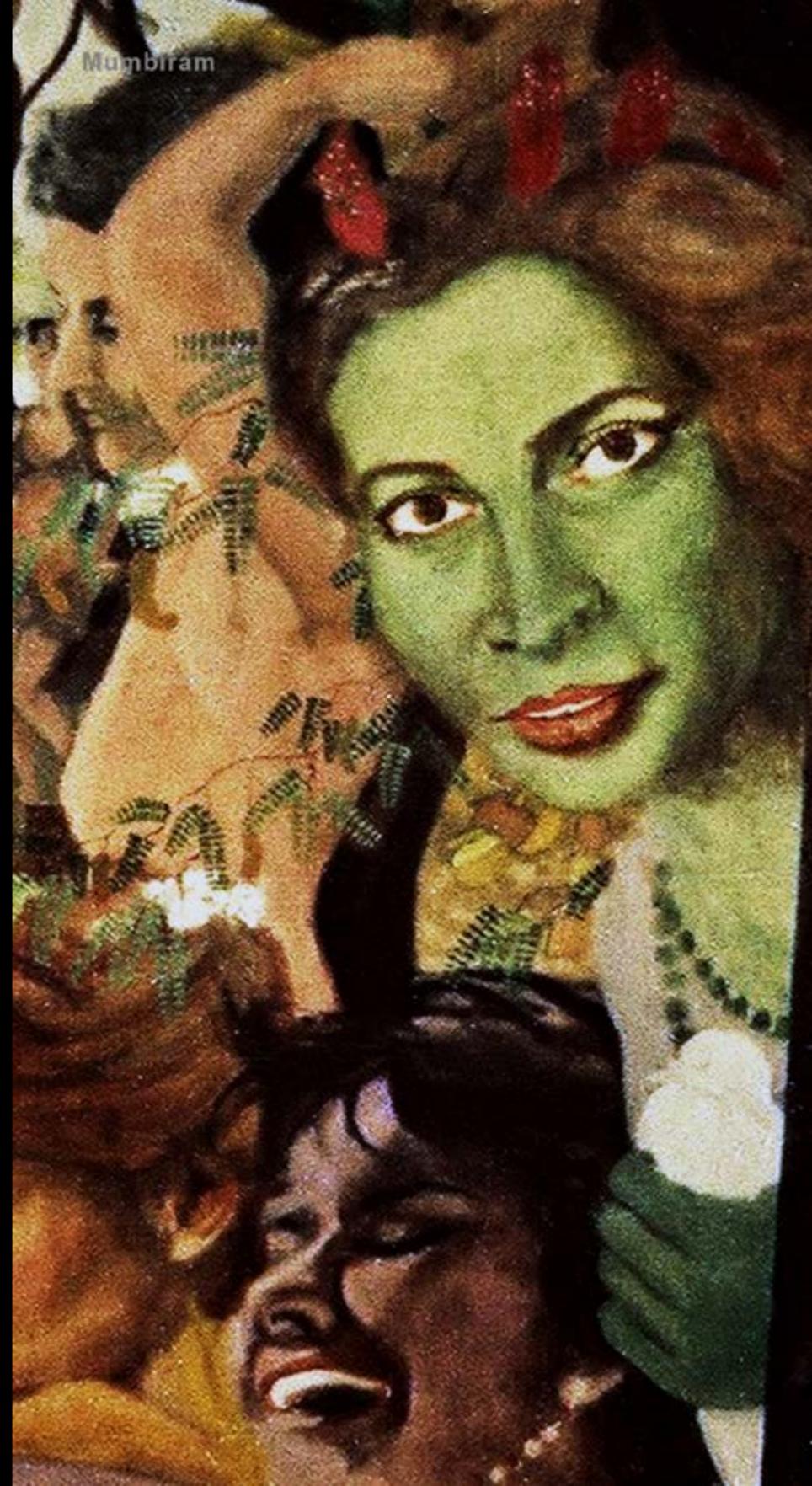
Laxmi is one of the women from Karnataka, who arrive in the morning with a small metal trunk they carry overhead. They lay out a fold of cloth on an empty space on the roadside and spread out from the trunks the wares they would sell all day long in the hot sun.



Mumbiram's early iconic "*Mandai Madonna*" painting shows one of these women with her little shop.

Mumbiram's daily routine of paying a visit to all of them would not be complete without dropping by at Laxmi's shop. Laxmi was always ready for a cheerful conversation.

Here Mumbiram has shown one of Laxmi's sakhis (friends). In many cases he was so fascinated by a personality that he would go home and render an impression out of memory. This charcoal rendering here is one such amazing work executed out of memory. She appears perfectly relaxed and at peace with herself. Mumbiram has captured all that so effortlessly that the viewer himself or herself shares the peace and grace that the artist perceived in his muse. Mumbiram found her lost in a 'meditative trance'. So he called this rendering *Sa-maadhi*.



Her hair is decorated with the same red feathers  
that are in Krishna's mala.  
She is looking directly at us.

Have you seen that she is holding a dove in her hand?

The woman behind her has closed her eyes.  
She is in a daze.



Mumbiram

### ***International Pulindis***

The verse of the Pulindi Forest Women who cannot go near Krishna has been given an enchanting spin.

The Pulindis are wearing the same flowers and leaves that Krishna's garland is made of.

The Gopis must have known that Krishna gets his favourite Vanamala from the Pulindis.

Here in Mumbiram's masterpiece Krishna's flower garland is made by the Pulindis from all over the world.

Krishna is attracted to the great variety of people.

Mumbiram has successfully shown what is most dear to Krishna but is not obvious on the first view.

This Rasa Artist has emphasized that it is the pure, unconditional attraction that is most dear to Krishna, Rasaraj.

# Epilogue:

## Flagship of Rasa Renaissance Universal Paradigm



For different reasons Mumbiram's masterpiece "Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis" is considered to be his magnum opus as well as the flagship of "Rasa Renaissance", the term that describes Mumbiram's epochal contribution to the world of art.

Three aspects of this masterpiece in oil are enhancing each other. It has a powerful impact in the world of art and it is loaded with spiritual and social nuances.

Its impact in the world of art is obvious. The composition is entirely made of faces. The natural ease in rendering the great variety of ecstatic moods and variety of human types shows Mumbiram's acutely evolved sense of portraiture. The space is created solely through juxtaposition of faces and their gazes.

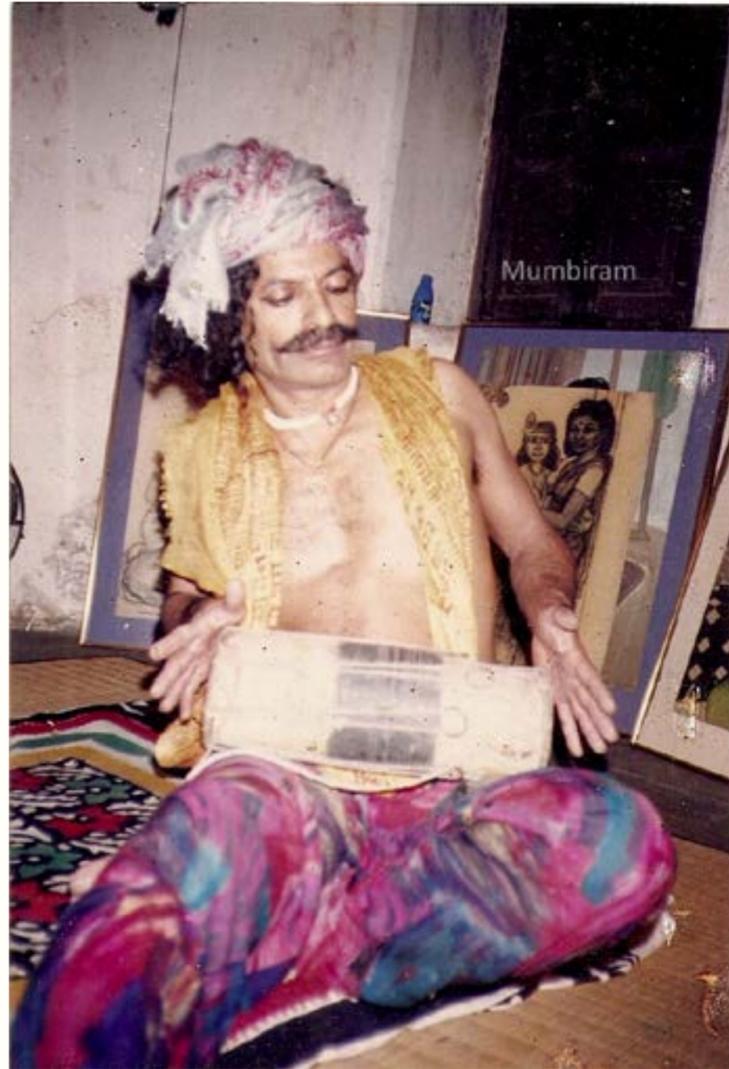


**Chanda in the studio.  
Taking part in Mumbiram's art and life became  
her daily creative and devotional engagement.**

Throughout his artistic career Mumbiram has been inspired by people. It is real people, especially those he became friends with, who can be seen in his works. The “Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis” is no exception. It is therefore also the flagship of ‘Personalism in Art’, which he had proclaimed as his domain from early on.

The impact of this masterpiece in terms of spirituality and society are closely related. First of all, it elevates the Krishna paradigm to an international and transcultural level. Its deeper relevance and its innovation are about esoteric insights which have been approached only rarely by scholars in their works but never ever by an artist, so far.

The phenomenon of the Pulindis is one of these esoteric aspects. This masterpiece is focussed almost entirely on the colourful forest women, the mysterious Pulindis, who ‘normally’ and ‘officially’ don’t appear in the literature and lore of the Krishna theme. Mumbiram has



*“Rasa Art focuses on love and grace amongst individuals in preference to fascination with matter.*

*Rasa Art strives for simplicity, innocence, faith and devotion. Rasa Art strives for honesty to an indigenous aesthetic and an awareness of one’s own beauty.” (Mumbiram)*

revealed the Pulindis to be Krishna’s secret paramours. He has done this skillfully - ‘between the lines’ - in a garland of forest flowers.

According to Mumbiram it was the Pulindis’ *Raganuga Bhakti* (purely spontaneous attraction) that fascinated not only Krishna, but also the Gopis. One can be sure it was the artist’s deepest inspiration as well. In his entire life Mumbiram has been inspired by tribals, beggars, gypsies, outlaws, unfits, no matter where from. It was their innate beauty that he was focused on. Their unconventional ways of life as well as their status of being excluded from the rest of society seem to resemble the phenomenon of the mysterious Pulindis, who are hardly mentioned even in the rarest of esoteric scriptures.

The Pulindis’ purity in expression of love and attraction in the sense of Raganuga Bhakti has been essential in achieving the radiance and deep meaning of this masterpiece. Mumbiram’s unshaken determination to follow his inner aesthetic attraction has been of no less rel-



evance. It has brought him close to the great variety of people who happened to be independent and freedom loving just like him.

According to Mumbiram these friendships and meetings across cultures and castes had a higher purpose where divine forces manifested in mundane affairs. That most esoteric aspect of Mumbiram's art is the mood of *Prema Vivarta*. For Mumbiram it means the mood of seeing 'divine love' in daily and mundane affairs. Prema Vivarta connects this world and the other. It reconciles the mundane and the transcendental. That is how we are able to see for the first time, through Mumbiram's art, people who are otherwise not seen in the Krishna theme in the world of art.

This powerful coming together of these esoteric nuances of consciousness, viz. Raganuga Bhakti and Prema Vivarta, has created a new paradigm and opened up ways for a Renaissance of Rasa.

In this vision the Pulindis' pure spontaneous expres-

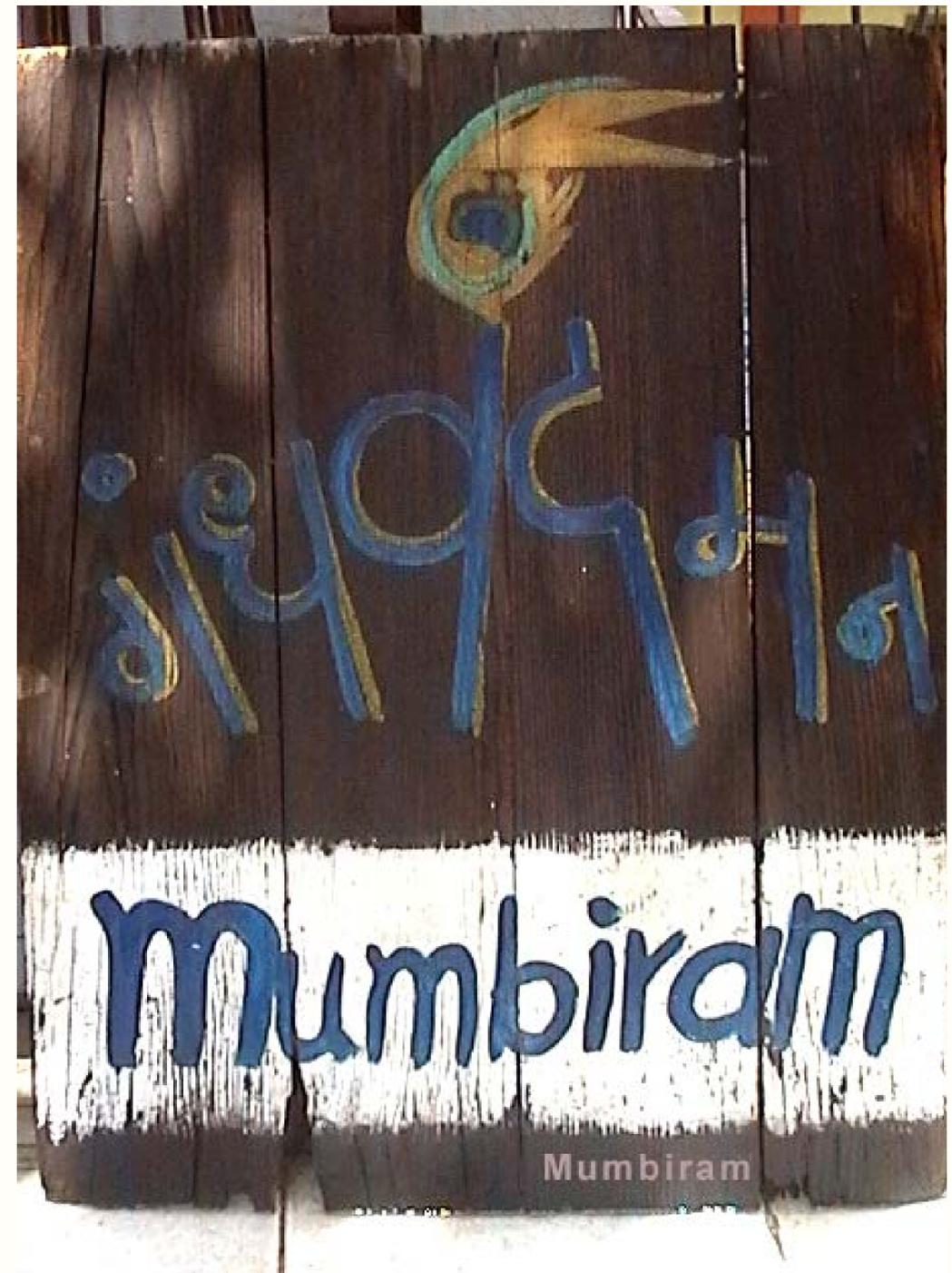


**The many exotic visitors to Mumbiram's studio made it the legendary place and the cradle of Rasa Renaissance.**

sion of attachment has made the great variety of people of God's creation appear all together and united. Their ecstasies shine gloriously through the confusion of the material world. The "Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis" shows the eternal causeless sporting of the divine with the living entities, Leela, as a universal paradigm of divine love that includes everybody.

Just as Prema Vivarta reconciles the mundane and the transcendental, Rasa Renaissance reconciles art and spirituality. Rasa Renaissance is Mumbiram's vital contribution to the world of art. It is where Rasa, emotional fulfillment, is the main concern of art; in its inspiration, creation as well as appreciation.

Rasa Renaissance as well as "Forest Women visiting Krishna and the Gopis" have come to exist on the feet of doves in the artist's studio at the busy Mandai vegetable marketplace visited by art lovers and muses who were attracted to the artist and became involved in the artist's life for their own sweet reasons.



## **Vital contributions to our understanding and enjoyment of Art and Life itself**

**W**hat began as an effort to save the Art of Painting from the dead-end of Impersonalism and Voidism has evolved into discovering the entirely unforeseen new perspectives on the role of the visual artist in the on-coming age of AI.

**C**hronicling the stages of discovery of the newly perceived role of the artist in the age of Rasa Renaissance in the face of the tech revolution of AI has lead us to the understanding that rather than the technical virtuosity of the Painter's Craft it is the Rasa Interactions between the Muses, the Artist and the Admirers that are the important inputs in the inspiration, creation and appreciation of Art of Rasa Renaissance.

**T**hese indeed are vital contributions to our understanding and enjoyment of Art and Life itself.

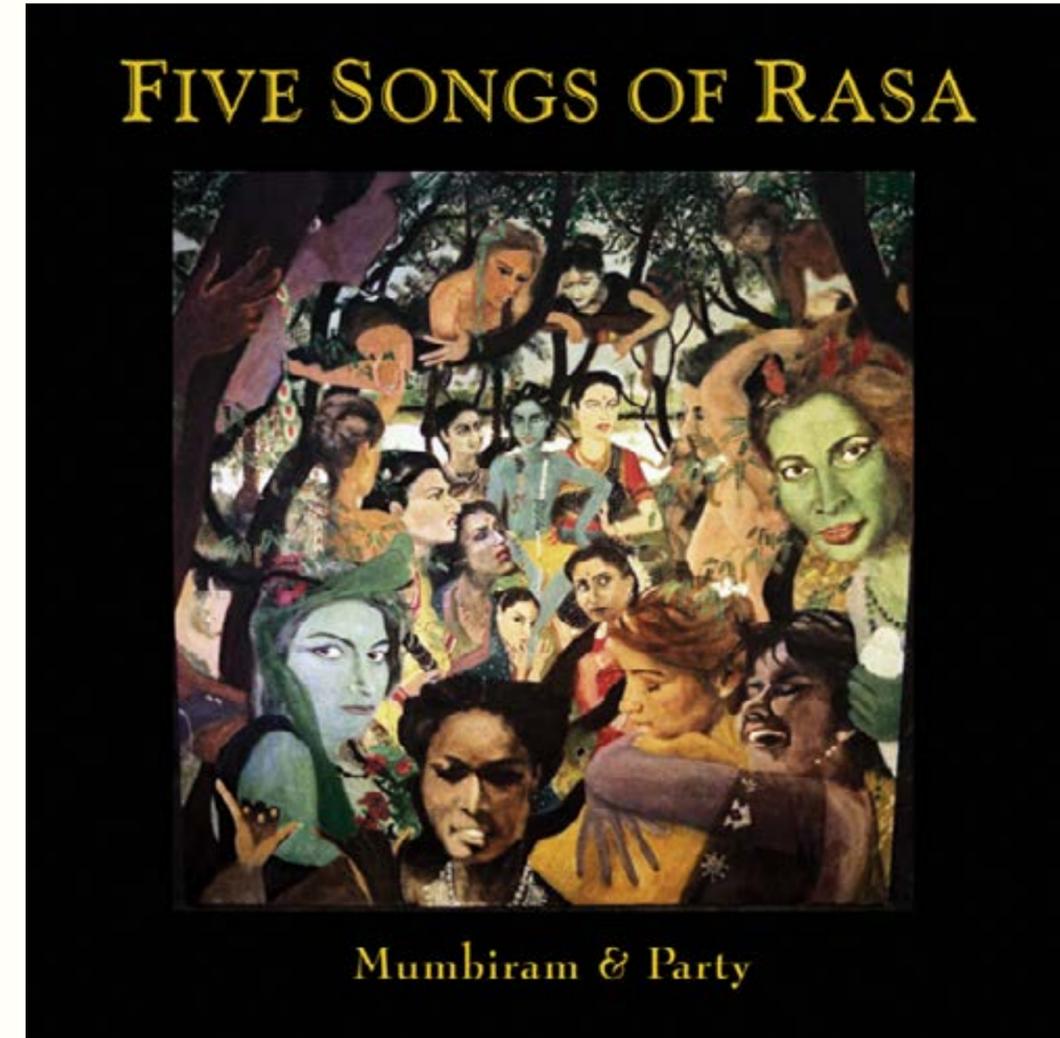


**Viva Rasa Renaissance !!!**

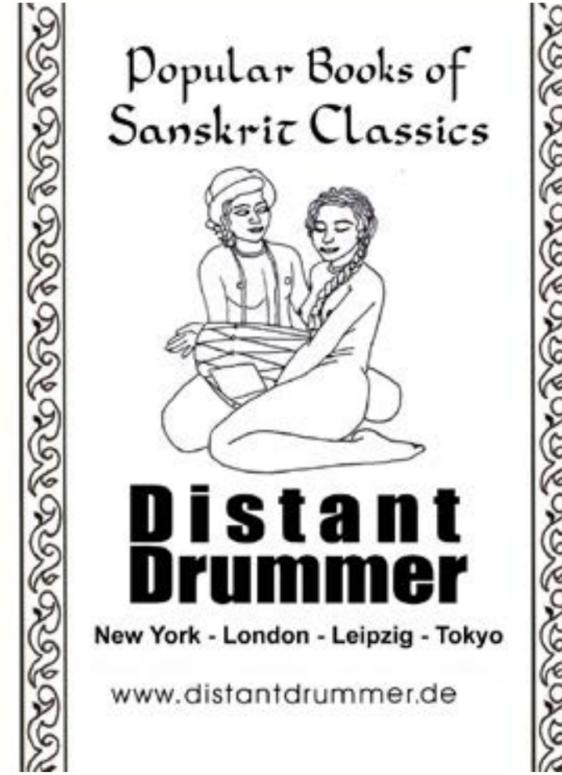




**As the flagship of Rasa Renaissance, Mumbiram's "Forest Women visiting Krishna" painting is going to be one of the important paintings of our times.**



**The "Forest Women" prominently appear in "Five Songs of Rasa", the first volume of Mumbiram's five volume ensemble "High Five of Love". "Five Songs of Rasa" is Mumbiram's contemporary English translation of the original *Rasa Panchadhyayi* in Sanskrit embellished with details of the "Forest Women" flagship masterpiece.**



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.

[www.mumbiram.com](http://www.mumbiram.com)

Artist Mumbiram

[www.distantdrummer.de](http://www.distantdrummer.de)

Rasa Art and Rasa Literature Publications