



K. VENKATAPPA

The Man and his Art

Prof: S. K. Ramachandra Rao

Directorate of Kannada and Culture
Government of Karnataka

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1886-1965

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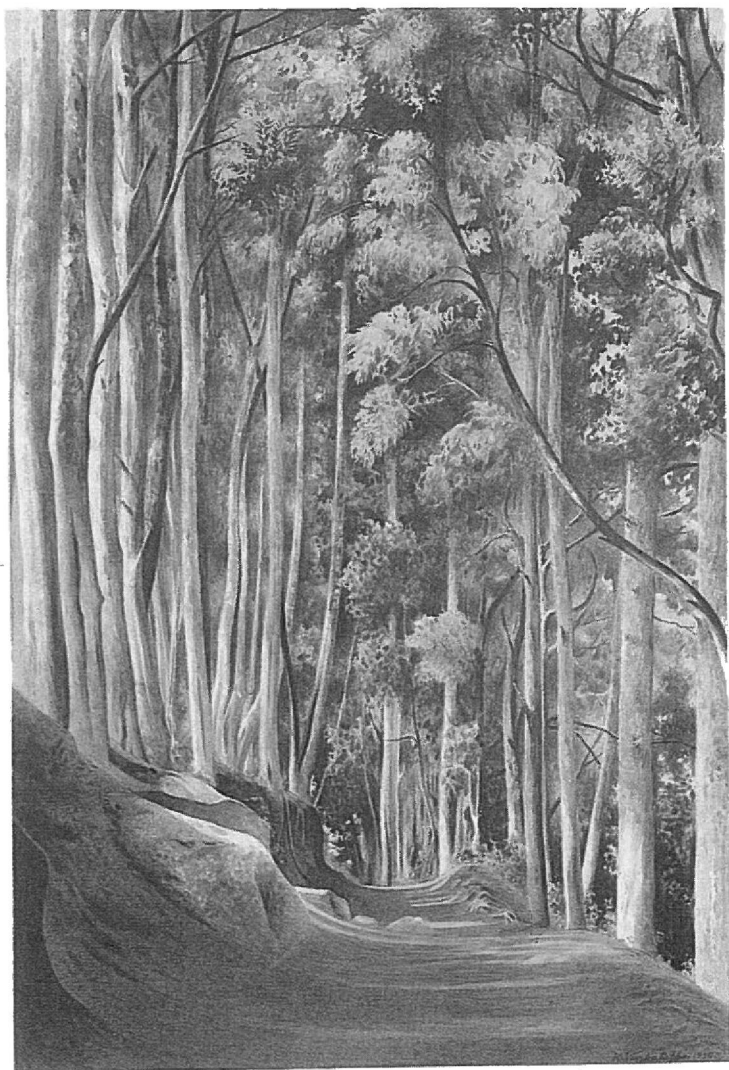
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H.H. Krishnaraja Wodeyar



Path to Elk Hill, Ooty

Foreword

The Government of Karnataka have decided to hold the Centenary Celebrations of K. Venkatappa, renowned artist of Karnataka, in a befitting manner by bringing out some publications including a biography, a pictorial volume and a portfolio, both in Kannada and English. Prof. S.K. Ramachandra Rao has written the biographies and edited the pictorial volume and portfolio. National Institute for Designs have contributed the designs for the publications. Every endeavour has been made to achieve standard and excellence as to the production of the volumes.

These books are made available to the public at subsidised rates.

The Government of Karnataka will feel a sense of fulfilment, if these volumes published to commemorate the centenary of artist K. Venkatappa, project the personality and eminence of the artist to the general public and provide inspiration and guidance to the artists.

The Directorate conveys its grateful thanks to Prof. S.K. Ramachandra Rao, author and editor of these volumes, Sri Prabhajit Singh, Sri Dheeraj Chawda, Sri Ajay Gehlot and Sri Eswara Raju for the photographs and transparencies of Venkatappa's paintings, the Curator, Jaganmohana Palace and the Curator, Venkatappa Art Gallery for permission to take photographs of artworks, Sri Ashok Panikker of National Institute of Design for the designs, Prof. Sankho Chowdhuri, Chairman, Central Lalithkala Academy and Sri. M.S. Nanjunda Rao, Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat for their cooperation in this publication, and Sri M.S. Chintamani of The Eastern Press for neat printing of the biographies.

21 May 1988
Bangalore

I. M. Vittal Murthy

Artworks in this Book

Frontispieces

H.H. Krishnaraja Wodeyar

Path to Elk Hill, Ooty

Between Page 128 and 129

Rabindranath Tagore

Veena Sheshanna

The Great Renunciation

Shiva Thandava

Rama giving signet-ring to Hanuman

Ekalavya practising archery

Departure of Shakuntala

Famine Relief

Municipal High School and Old Agrahara, Mysore

A panoramic view of Blue Mountain range and Ooty Downs from
the top of Church Hill

Reflection, Ooty Lake

Bright aspect after Monsoon, Ooty

Physical Development

Botanical study

A sketch

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APOLOGIA

1

It was towards the end of 1948 that I first saw him. I did not then know who he was. But I had never set my eyes on a more majestic figure. Although of medium height and medium build with a slight stoop, he appeared tall and statuesque. For all his years, the face with well-chiselled features, was undoubtedly handsome and intensely expressive: broad forehead, well-set and lustrous eyes, prominent and patrician nose, white walrus moustache, delicate but well-formed lips, and rounded chin. He was picturesque with a snow-white turban, close-collared and black coat of the old cut, muslin dhoti and rubber shoes. An umbrella in hand completed the picture of one who seemed to have just emerged from the royal court of Mysore in a bygone age. His looks, manners and movement exuded supreme self-confidence, not without a trace of haughtiness. Everything about him warned you that you may not take him lightly, that you may not take liberties with him, that you must step aside and make way for him.

It was later that I learnt who he was, and much later that I made bold to beard the formidable lion in its den. He lived (in his Studio) in the 18th cross of the Malleswaram extension, not far from the Indian Institute of Science where I was working. I did not know that he would record my meeting with him in his diary for 1954, until two months ago when I had to go through all the forty odd diaries that he

had written and that are now preserved in the Karnataka State Archives. The entry for March 28, 1954 reads:

At about 3.45 p.m. Sri. S. K. Ramachandra Rao, Lecturer, Social Science, I. I. of Science, came and showed me all his drawings, paintings and crayon work. I advised him to undergo systematic training under a good teacher. I showed him four panels. It was 5.50 p.m. when he left the Studio. He left a June 1953 issue of *ASIA* which contained an article by him on the 'Dance of Siva'

I now realized that I had unwittingly committed two improprieties. One was to have walked into his studio not so much to see his works as to show him my works! But he did not seem to mind at all. When I told him that I hesitated to knock at his door and was scared to meet him, he laughed and said: "Am I a tiger or a lion? I am a student of art, and you too are a student of art. I am an older student and I know a few more tricks of the trade than you do. Why should you be afraid to meet me? I have dedicated my entire life to art, and as you are interested in art, meet me as frequently as you can". He carefully examined my works – of which I am ashamed now – and pointed out patiently many a defect. He explained the value of sketching, and showed me how to make key-sketches. He took me to the main Studio where the panels were kept, and asked me to see them from different angles. He closed and opened the windows to admit suitable light. He explained the nature of imaginative work in panels of plaster of paris, and the difficulties involved in it.

I was truly amazed at the patience, consideration and even affection that I received from him, for I had heard stories of his formidable frankness, fiery temper and sharp tongue. I was in fact drawn to him, and began visiting him frequently. Probably much of the fabled fierceness of his soul had by then mellowed. He was 67 years old when I met him, and physical infirmity and ailments were already assailing him. Probably also, my interest in painting,

sculpture and music made me rather acceptable to him, for he himself was devoted equally to the three muses. The active creative phase of his life had by then ended, and he was now free to spend hours talking about the arts in general as well as about himself. He found in me a good listener, to my good fortune. He seemed to open himself out, and spoke of his achievements and frustrations, plans and failures, principles and practices. More often, however, the talk centred round art, the principles and techniques. I distinctly remember the evening when he talked for two hours on different techniques in painting, sculpture and music and on the common aspects thereof. It was an inspired talk, and he spoke like one possessed. The entry in his diary dated Dec. 2, 1954 records this circumstance:

At 3.45 p.m. Sri. S. K. Ramachandra Rao came and showed me the bust he had made of H. H. late Sringeri Swami and some portraits of different persons painted by him mostly from memory. I explained to him the importance of complete mastery over technique. It was 5.50 p.m. when he left the Studio

The previous evening, he had taken me to show his landscape paintings in the Art Exhibition in South Parade (November 30 to December 10) arranged by his friend, the art-critic G. Venkatachalam. There had been very few visitors that day, and he patiently explained to me the occasion, the mood, and the highlight of each of those paintings. In the light of this, the talk that he gave me the next day made an indelible impression on me.

2

When I left the Indian Institute of Science to join the staff of the All-India Institute of Mental Health (now National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences), which

was then housed in the Government Mental Hospital, at the other end of the city, my visits to him became less frequent. But whenever I went, he was interested to see my art-works. An entry for August 22, 1956, reads:

At 3-15 p.m. Sri. S. K. Ramachandra Rao, working in the Mental Hospital, came and showed me a number of pen and ink sketches done by him. I showed him a number of free-hand drawings (pencil) done by my student late Anand Mohan Sastry of Musulipatam and brush-works (tempera). I advised him to take up free-hand outline drawing in pencil first and then colouring. It was 6.45 when he left the Studio

Two days later I visited him again when he showed me the panel of Prince Siddhartha (which was an experience by itself) and the two busts (of Rabindranath Tagore and of the hotel-server, Mani) and explained in detail the difference between the techniques employed in the imaginative panels and those in the realistic busts. The two hours that I spent that evening was great education for me.

The editor of Prajavani (Deccan Herald group) requested me to write an article on Venkatappa, and the article written by me was published in the 9-12-1956 issue of that Kannada daily. This was brought to the notice of Venkatappa by a common acquaintance, H. V. Venkatarama Iyengar, whereupon Venkatappa bought a copy of the daily and showed it to several people. There is a detailed mention of this in his diary. It was my good fortune that he liked the article, and he thanked me for it when he met me on January 14, 1957, at the Indian Institute of World Culture after a lecture by Prof. Arnold J. Toynbee. It was a cause for embarrassment for me, because with me were Prof. V. Sitaramiah and G. Venkatachalam who knew him much longer and more intimately than I did, and were writers in their own right besides being my seniors. Later Prof. V. Sitaramaiah told me that it was quite unlike of Venkatappa to have

appreciated a write-up on himself, and that I should plan a book on him.

On January 18, 1957 when I visited Venkatappa, I mentioned to him what Prof. Sitaramaiah had told me. He said: "Not while I am alive! You may do what you like after I am dead. But it is more important for you to understand the techniques and appreciate the effects in my paintings, because you are interested in art". And he asked me that evening "to see the landscapes liesurely". (I may mention in passing that I have not kept a diary myself and these dates and events are extracted from Venkatappa's own diaries). He explained to me that evening in great detail every one of the Ooty and Kodaikanal paintings.

Thus, the idea of writing a book on him originated as early as 1957 but had to be deferred indefinitely. It was only ten years after he died that the India Book House got me write a small book on his life for school-children, in Kannada. My plans of writing a book on his art remained unfulfilled until this year, his Birth Centenary Year. I should be grateful to the Govt. of Karnataka (Dept. of Kannada and Culture) for asking me to prepare this volume, comprehending his career and art-creation. In particular, three of my friends merit my gratitude, for they prevailed upon me to accept this assignment: Sri. Chiranjeev Singh, who was then the Secretary to the Government of Karnataka, Sri. Chandrasaha Gupta, the then Director, Kannada and Culture and Sri. K. C. Shivappa, the then Joint Director. I am also grateful to Sri. M. S. Nanjunda Rao, Secretary of Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat, who provided all help to me to accomplish this work.

3

Besides my own notes which I used to make soon after my

meetings with Venkatappa, the major source of my information concerning him and his art has been the Venkatappa Collection of correspondance, documents and diaries preserved in the State Archives, Vidhana Saudha, Bangalore. Venkatappa was meticulous in his correspondance; and he has left behind, carefully collated, not only the letters that he received but also true copies of the replies that he sent. It is unfortunate that the entirety of his correspondance has not reached the Archives. More important and celebrated of his letters (such as his early correspondance with the Mysore Palace, legal documents, papers relating to the Udbodhan Case, Rangabhumi Case, the Palace Appeal Case, letters to his guru Abanindranath Tagore) are not to be found in this collection. I have heard him talk about these matters. It was with deep disappointment that I found papers relating to them missing from the collection. I attempted, without success, to get details of these papers from other sources. I have had, therefore, to rely almost entirely on my memory of what he had told me. However, I have been careful to utilize here such details as I could ascertain and verify.

Valuable are the diaries that he had kept. They cover the period beginning from 4th March, 1913 when he left Calcutta on his Himalayan pilgrimage and ending with 4th April 1958, when his health completely broke down. There are, however, some gaps in the series. But the diaries that are there have entries carefully written in neat flowing hand, giving details about the persons who visited him, the places he visited, what he talked about and what he did during the day, the food that he ate, the state of his health, how he slept and what rest he took and so on. Owing to the courtesy of the Director of the State Archives, Sri. Muniswami, I was able to spend days in the Archives gleaning through the diaries and making my notes. I have

organized my material for the first part of this book, mainly relying on the sequence of events recorded in the diaries.

4

I have also been benefitted by what I learnt about Venkatappa from persons who knew him rather intimately: Dr. Rallapalli Ananta-Krishna Sharma, who knew him in Mysore while studying veena under the great Sheshanna, Sri Venkataramiah who was an Officer in the Mysore Palace when Venkatappa was working there, Prof. V. Sitaramaiah who knew him both in Mysore and in Bangalore, Sri. Devulakunda Vadiraj and Sri. H. S. Inamati, the artists, who met him frequently in Bangalore, the late Sri. S. B. Shankar of the Arts Design Centre who attended to his needs during the last decade of his life, and Dr. R. Rangachar, who was his physician towards the end of his life, I am grateful to all of them for enabling me to make this volume as comprehensive as it could be. Sri. Isvara Raju, the grand-nephew of Venkatappa, has also been helpful in providing me with some details concerning Venkatappa's life, and I am thankful to him.

I acknowledge with gratitude the help rendered by Dr. A. Sundara, the Director of Archaeology in Mysore, who enabled me to study Venkatappa's panels in the Amba-Vilas Hall of the Mysore Palace, Sri Lakshminarayana, curator of the Jaganmohan Palace Art Gallery, Mysore, who enabled me to study Venkatappa's paintings there, Sri Chikkamare Gowda, Curator of the Venkatappa Art Gallery in Bangalore, who provided me the opportunity to make repeated studies of the works of art preserved in the Gallery, and to Prof. (Smt) C. N. Mangala, Principal of the NMKRV College for Women, Bangalore, who allowed me to get an oil-painting done by Venkatappa which has been

acquired by the Shashwati Museum, photographed. I acknowledge the kind courtesy shown by Sri Prabhajit Singh of New Delhi, who has photographed most of the works of art reproduced in this Volume, in sending me the prints earlier, thus facilitating the preparation of my text. I am also indebted to Sri Dhiraj Chawda, the photographer, for some colour transparencies and to Sri. M. S. Chintamani of the Eastern Press for the excellent manner in which the book has been printed.

More than a year elapsed before the printed book could be released to the public. I am grateful to the present Director of Kannada and Culture, Sri. I. M. Vittala Murthy, K.A.S. and the present Secretary Sri. S. R. Vijay, I.A.S. for having taken an interest in this publication, and for having brought it out of the press.

I am grateful to my friend and student, Sri. M. Sridhara Murthy, Lecturer in Psychology, NMKRV College, for help in preparing the press-copy of this volume.

S. K. Ramachandra Rao



K. VENKATAPPA ...

EARLY MYSORE YEARS (1886-1908)

Venkatappa had so completely identified himself with his art and was so averse to regarding the details of his life as of any interest to others that we know very little about his early life or ancestry. It is said that his forebears were painters (*chitragaras*) attached to the Mysore palace, and that they came to Mysore from Chitradurga during the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (died 1868). They belonged to the Haritasa gotra of the Soma-Vamsi Arya-Kshattriya clan. Venkatappa used in later life to visit the shrine of Nimishamba, the tutelary deity of this clan and a form of the mother-goddess, in the Arya-kshattriya-Seva-Sangha once every year, "with cocoanuts, plantains and other things for the worship" (diary, 23rd 1953). It appears that this clan originally settled in Sriřangapatna, near Mysore, and built a temple to Nimishamba there, but moved to Mysore when the capital was shifted.

The name of Venkatappa's father was Krishnappa of Durga (short for Chitradurga). He was an employee at the palace in Mysore, and his job was to decorate the interior of the palace with wall-paintings (*chitra*). The mother's name was Rangamma, and Venkatappa was the second son. Venkatappa was born on the second day of the bright half of the Indian month of Ashadha, corresponding to 23rd June, 1886. Even as a small boy, he accompanied his father frequently to the palace, and by his bright looks and eagerness to help his father at work attracted the

attention of the ruler of the State, Chamaraja Wodeyar (1881-1894).

When the boy was eleven years of age, there was a devastating fire in the palace, and a large portion of the building was destroyed. Chamaraja Wodeyar had been dead, and his son Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV was still a minor. The queen of the dead Maharaja, Kempananjammani, was the Regent. The eldest princess Jayalakshammanni had been married, and after a few days a maid-servant had accidentally set fire to the marriage pandal erected in the quadrangle of the palace. About one-fifth of the old palace including the audience-hall (*sejje*), the three storeys rising above it, the library of old manuscripts, armoury and the music room, was burnt down. This disaster took place in 1897, and immediately plans for the reconstruction of the palace started. After the death of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, the British Government had firm grip over the administration of the State, and had their say in all matters. The design of the new building was entrusted to the English architect Henry Irwin, who had designed the Viceregal Lodge in Simla. This architect, however, had the sense to adopt the general outline that was prepared by Indian architects and approved by Purnayya when he was the Dewan.

The reconstruction of the palace, which was completed only in 1912 involved a large number of masons (drawn from Tiruchchi, Madras, Kolhapur, Jaipur and other places) carvers in wood and stone, workers adept in marble inlay from Agra and Jaipur. The job of decorating the Durbar Hall was entrusted to the famous artist from Travancore, Raja Ravi-Varma (1848-1906) and his brother Raja-Varma. The local artists and craftsmen had an opportunity of studying the methods and skill of workers from outside the state. Venkatappa's father who was a

professional painter attached to the palace was probably engaged in decorating the Durbar Hall, under the guidance of Ravi-Varma and his brother Raja-Varma.

Venkatappa was sixteen (in 1902) when he joined the Industrial School which was located in the Nazarbad area of Mysore. This school had been started as early as 1892 principally to train carpenters and rattan-workers, but the curriculum included subjects like drawing, sandal-wood carving, book-binding and weaving. This school was later amalgamated with the Chamarajendra Technical Institute, the foundation stone for which was laid by the Prince of Wales (later King George V) in 1906, in which was incorporated the Engineering School which was till then located in the Ittige-gudu area of Mysore. The Institute was well organized in 1910 by a committee headed by the famous M. Visvesvaraya.

It cannot be ascertained how long Venkatappa studied in the Industrial School; but we learn that he returned from Madras in 1906 after completing the three courses in drawing, painting and sculpture in the Arts School there, about which there is some uncertainty. The School in Madras had been started by the government of the Presidency, and Ernest Binfield Havell (1861- 1915) had been brought from England to organize it in 1884. Havell had left Madras in 1896 and had gone to Calcutta as the Principal of the Government School of Arts there. But the celebrity of this man, keenly interested in Indian art had lingered on in Madras; and if Venkatappa joined it, his resolve to study art in Calcutta must have been prompted by his desire to study under Havell. But the year Venkatappa seems to have returned to Mysore (1906) was also the year Havell left India, on grounds of ill-health. He was, however expected to return when his health recouped. It was not until 1909, when Venkatappa arrived

in Calcutta, that it was known that Havell would not return.

But we are anticipating the course of events. The year that Venkatappa probably left Mysore to join the Madras School (1902) was memorable to the people of Mysore, for Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV assumed the reins of administration from his mother who had been Regent till then. He had already been formally installed on the throne after his father died, in 1895, but he was only ten years old then, and therefore his mother was nominated as Regent. He was now eighteen when he became the Maharaja (two years older to Venkatappa), and P. N. Krishnamurti, the scion of the family of the illustrious dewan Purnayya, who was his Dewan (1901-1906), looked after the details of administration. It was he who took an interest in Venkatappa and arranged for his training in fine arts in Madras. By the time Venkatappa returned from Madras (in 1906), Krishnamurti had retired and V. P. Madhava Rao was dewan (1906-1909).

Venkatappa was 20 at that time, and the reconstruction of the palace had not as yet been completed. During the two or three years that Venkatappa spent in Mysore (after he returned from Madras and before he went to Calcutta), he must have frequently visited the palace and helped his father in the decoration of the Durbar Hall. He must have then seen the famous Ravi-Varma and his brother Raja-Varma, who were guiding the decoration work. There is nothing, however, to suggest that Venkatappa's genius was recognized by the eminent artist brothers; but the palace administration did notice that the young artist had a big future. It is probable that those who were immediately in charge of the decoration work made a favourable report to the Maharaja about the earnestness, diligence and intelligence of the young man who had returned from

Madras. For we learn that the Maharaja made inquiries of Venkatappa about his plans, and that Venkatappa expressed his desire to get trained under Havell in Calcutta. R. H. Campbell who was the Private Secretary to the Maharaja was a lover of art, and he admired Venkatappa's early works which showed great promise. He recommended the young man's deputation to Calcutta.

Lord Curzon, who was the Viceroy and who had visited Mysore twice, had taken a keen interest in the Calcutta School of Arts, and it was thus a prestigious institution. Venkatappa's plans had therefore no difficulty in getting approved.

The reorganization of the administrative aspects of the Mysore Palace in 1868 effected by Major Elliot and C. V. Rangacharlu had brought into being three major departments (called *Katcheris*) and eight sections (called *Ilakhas*). The three major departments were the general office of records and documentation (called *Aramane-daphtar*), the office of guards, soldiers, watch and ward and escorts (*Kille-daphtar*), and the office in charge of periodical public ceremonies and processions (*Zillo-daphtar*). The sections included administration of religious institutions, outdoor and indoor servants, stables for elephants and horses, cow-pen, gardens and so on. The three major departments were presided over by the senior relatives of the Maharaja, and these officers were called Bhakshis. The Bhakshi in charge of the Kille-daphtar department was also supervising the reconstruction of the palace that was going on since 1897, and he had taken a kindly interest in the young Venkatappa who was engaged in the decoration of the Durbar Hall. And it so happened that he was asked to suggest the names of some young men from Mysore for scholarships. He at once thought of Venkatappa, and his name was approved by the palace authorities.

There was a provision even during the Regency years for technical scholarships (of value ranging from Rs. 15 to Rs. 20) being awarded to deserving students to go to Bombay, Madras or other places in the then British India, or even abroad, and study industrial or commercial subjects for which facility did not exist in the State. Although this scheme became well-organized only by 1916-1917, there were students who had been sent earlier to Victoria Technical Institute, Sydenham College of Commerce and J. J. School of Arts, all in Bombay and to the School of Arts in Madras. Venkatappa himself had been sent to the Madras School of Arts under this very scheme in 1902. These scholarships were instituted to facilitate industrial and commercial development of the State and also to provide trained personnel in various departments. When the young Maharaja who assumed the reins of administration in 1902 (the year Venkatappa went to Madras), was asked to open the Industrial and Arts Exhibition in Madras on 26th December 1903, he said during the course of his inaugural address: "It seems to me that what we want is more outside light and assistance from those interested in industries". This was obviously not the considered opinion of the young prince but the policy of the British overlords who presided over the destiny of the State and who spelt out their decisions through the royal mouth. The Government scholarships were termed 'technical', and the stress was unmistakably on industry and commerce. The scholars deputed by the government were to bring into the State "outside light".

But Venkatappa's interests were neither industrial or commercial. His interest was exclusively in fine arts even from those days. Nevertheless the 'technical scholarship' was awarded to him because the Kille-dephtar Bhakshi was interested in him, and the Maharaja was interested in fine arts. This was also the reason how the scholarship was

awarded to Venkatappa twice, first to go to Madras and now to go to Calcutta. This was rather unusual, for the government did not encourage repeated benefits to the same individual. The scholarships, although meant for industry and commerce, were within the jurisdiction of the Inspector-General of Education in Mysore. And the incumbent of this office during those days was Hormasji Jehangir Bhabha, the father of the eminent scientist (J. H. Bhabha, F.R.S) who became in later years a friend of Venkatappa. Venkatappa did not know him, nor had he seen him, for the office of the Inspector-General of Education was in Bangalore, the administrative capital of the State. But the Kille- daphtar-Bhakshi had spoken to Bhabha about Venkatappa, and the latter's deputation to Calcutta on scholarship was approved.

THE BENGAL SCHOOL (1909-1916)

Venkatappa arrived in Calcutta in the year 1909 and joined the Government School of Art "for special study of advanced painting and sculpture". Calcutta was then the place in India where the impact of Western culture was the greatest. The School of Art, which was started in Calcutta in 1854, was the private enterprise of the Industrial Art Society, and the School in its early stages was little more than 'industrial'. Among the subjects that were principally taught here were useful arts such as wood-carving and lithography, with ornamental design thrown in. It was Lord Curzon's idea that crafts had to be emphasized in such schools, for economic reasons. Arts, according to him, was a handmaid to the crafts. This was the general orientation of the Calcutta School of Art until Havell arrived on the scene in 1896 as Principal. He believed in the independent value of art; and painting became a major subject taught there. When Venkatappa joined the School this change had already taken place.

E. B. Havell, born in 1861, came to India as a young man of 23, and his assignment was to teach Western art to Indian students in Madras (1884). During the decade that he spent in Madras, he kept his eyes open and perceived the anomaly of teaching western art to Indian students. At that time, the heritage of the art-student in the Schools such as those in Madras or in Calcutta was an undercurrent of indigenous art traditions, superimposed by the Persian and Mughal styles, which in turn were

overladen with European influences. The Indian artist was being taught to adopt Western motifs, methods and manners. The outstanding example of a successful artist of this hybrid strain was Raja Ravi-Varma, who was influenced by the English portrait-painter Theodore Jenson. Havell, with his unblurred vision and unerring mind, saw the stupidity of the whole enterprise. He pointed out that it would spell ruin to art in India if the rich and precious indigenous heritage is forgotten by the people and ignored by the administrators. And he boldly set himself against the Europeanized Indian artists like Raja Ravi-Varma and the products of the J. J. School of Arts in Bombay, and proclaimed that it was absurd to graft European art-traditions into art-education here.

One of the first things that he did after assuming charge of the Calcutta school was to banish most the copies of the European masters from the gallery attached to the School (save the really great ones), and to display fine reproductions of Rajasthani and Mughal miniature paintings. And then, he took on the staff a descendent of the hereditary artists of Patna, Lala Isvari-prasad, and another artist who had no contact with Western art, Hari-narayan, to teach the students the art of painting. He took upon himself, with missionary zeal, the work of revitalizing traditional and indigenous painting. His goal was to make an art-student in India get intimately acquainted with the country's own rich art heritage, especially of the recent past, viz. the seventeenth century, before the country came under the spell of Westernization.

He was fortunate in securing the cooperation of several eminent persons, like Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, Sir John Woodroffe (judge of the Calcutta High Court and authority on Tantra), Sister Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Abanindranath Tagore (whom Stella

Kramrisch described as “the first Indian painter to paint Indian pictures”). Ananda K. Coomaraswamy who was the main spokesman of this movement to resuscitate Indian art values wrote

I have twice visited the Bombay School of Art, and on each occasion was impressed with the entire lack of inspiration, the dreary futility of nearly all that was going on. The whole regimen, from ideals to methods, like the education provided in Missionary schools and contemplated in official universities, was so entirely unIndian as to explain at once the dullness of the results. It is the irony of the fate that the one School of Art built and endowed by an Indian should be the least Indian in aims and methods

(*Art and Swadeshi*, pp. 44-45)

and further

The true function of the schools of art in India is not to introduce European methods and ideals but to *gather up and revitalize* the broken threads of Indian tradition, to build up the idea of Indian art as an integral part of the national culture

(*ibid.*, pp. 53-54)

This renaissance and revitalization were accomplished largely by Abanindranath Tagore (1861-1951) and his disciples who came to be recognized as the Bengal School. Abanindranath was a nephew of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore and was trained in painting by two English teachers Palmer and Gillardi. He joined the Calcutta School of Art as a teacher and his early works were all in the western style, themes as well as method, spirit as well as appearance. He continued this until Havell arrived at the School. Here is what Rabindranath himself wrote:

When Abanindranath first took up painting, he was nothing but a disciple trying to imitate the style of his foreign masters. It makes one smile to think of the cultivation of art in those days which consisted simply in the copying of foreign models; but at the time it was taken very seriously. That discipleship might

have continued to this day if Havell had not come and changed our outlook. He turned our gaze to that realm of our art which preserves the living genius of India"

("Havell and Abanindranath"

Golden Jubilee Number of the Indian Society of Oriental Art
Calcutta, 1961, p. 92)

Havell met Abanindranath in 1897, and he was pleasantly surprised to see his 'Radha-Krishna' series of paintings, done about two years earlier in the Japanese scroll-style (*Kakemono*). Here was an artist, trained in European ideals and methods of art but had his preference for oriental technique and spirit of Indianness intact. Abanindranath and Havell were kindred spirits, and the two of them made the new movement possible in the field of Indian art. Havell persuaded Abanindranath to take up the post of Vice-Principal of the Calcutta School of Art; and the cooperation of these two great men continued till 1906, when Havell had to return to England on leave to recover his health which had suffered a set-back.

Abanindranath regarded Havell as his "guru whose unworthy *chela* I am" (in a letter to Havell, dated 2nd March 1911, *Visvabharati*, 1981, 46, 1-4, p. 217), and it was only because Havell insisted that he had taken up the administrative post of Vice-Principal. Now that Havell had gone away, he had to officiate as Principal of the School. When Venkatappa arrived in Calcutta and joined the School, Abanindranath was the Principal. But soon Percy Brown joined the School as the regular Principal (in 1909), and Abanindranath continued as a teacher in the School. Shortly before Venkatappa left the School, Abanindranath resigned from his job at the School (in 1915), and set up a Studio of his own at his ancestral home Jorasanko. He had started the Studio in a small way even in 1911, when differences between him and Percy Brown began to surface; but when differences mounted, Abanindranath left.

Abanindranath had a poor opinion of Percy Brown, who was raising a small band of supporters to contain the growing influence of Abanindranath and his disciples. He referred to this group derisively as "PB & Co". Brown did not share Havell's enthusiasm for indigenous art traditions, and prompted the Indian art-students belonging to his camp to seek inspiration from the West.

Venkatappa had to continue in the School of Arts for some months after Abanindranath left, in order to complete the course and obtain the diploma, unlike Nandalal Bose who left the School, without taking his diploma or completing the course as soon as his master Abanindranath left. Percy Brown gave Venkatappa a nice testimonial and warmly commended him to the attention of the Maharaja: he pleaded that Venkatappa be sent to England for higher training. Venkatappa naturally was grateful to Brown. It may be that there was a suspicion in the mind of Abanindranath and his followers that he belonged to 'PB & Co'. Even if this were a fact, it was a short-lived affair. Percy Brown continued as Principal of the School till 1917, and there was no correspondence between him and Venkatappa. And, when the Mysore Government wanted Venkatappa to go back to Calcutta for further training under Brown, Venkatappa flatly refused.

Venkatappa was probably influenced by Percy Brown to some extent, but he could never regard Brown as his *guru*. His chosen *guru* was of course Abanindranath, from whom he learnt not only art but lessons for life. Abanindranath was not in reality a mere art-teacher but a sage, a visionary. As his close associate, Pandit Kshitimohan Sen, said in an address delivered in Santiniketan on 5th December 1951 (the day of Abanindranath's death):

His literary and artistic talents were undoubtedly great; he was indeed one of the progenitors of the cultural renaissance of

India. But the trait of his character which has the deepest appeal for us on this solemn occasion is not this or that fragment of his being, but the *sadhana* or the inner spirit which actuated the various manifestations of that being and integrated them into one indivisible personality. This quality of the spirit, in the case of Abanindranath was his worshipful devotion to Visva- karma (God the All-worker). All his activities at creative self-expression were but a part of this worship.

(*Visvabharati News*, for December 1951, XX, 6)

Venkatappa records in his diary for 6th December 1951 that he "was shocked to read in the Hindu that my Guruji Dr. Abanindranath Tagore died at 10.30 p.m. yesterday at his residence in Barrackpur Trunk Road, near Calcutta. May his soul rest in peace"; he then notes that he had his customary bath of purification (as one has when a near relative had died and has been cremated). Venkatappa's art-style had greatly been influenced by this *guru*, and this will be dealt with at length later. He was on closest of terms not only with Abanindranath but with all his followers like Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar and others.

Abanindranath's method of teaching was informal and direct. He did not believe in communicating the appreciation of art within the confines of a drab room. Like a sage, he would teach not only the techniques and the principles underlying them but the spirit of art-creation, under a tree or on a rock. He taught his students several styles of painting. He was undoubtedly the major attraction of the Calcutta School. Before Venkatappa joined the School, Nandalal Bose (who became the foremost disciple of Abanindranath and organized the Kala-bhavan at Santiniketan) was already there as a student. Other students of Abanindranath who were contemporaries of Venkatappa include the eminent masters, Asit Kumar Haldar (who later became the Principal of the Lucknow School of Art, and Director of the Art Design Center in Bangalore), Sailendranath

De (who later became the Principal of the Jaipur School of Art), Kshitindra Mujumdar, Samarendranath Gupta (who later headed the Lahore School of Art), Pramode Kumar Chatterjee (who later taught at the Andhra-jatiya Kala-sala, Musulipatnam), Mukul De (who later became the Principal of the Calcutta School of Art), Surendranath Kar and Sarada Ukil (who founded the Delhi School of Art).

Lady Harringham of the India Society, London was fascinated by the Ajanta frescoes, and wanted to get them copied by accredited Indian artists. She came in 1909 to India for this purpose, and mentioned her desire to her friend Sister Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Sister Nivedita in turn approached Abanindranath, whom she knew very well. Abanindranath sent his favourite and foremost student Nandalal Bose to the Ajanta Caves for the first time to copy some paintings (1909). When Lady Harringham came to India again in 1911 for the same purpose, Abanindranath sent Venkatappa, Asit Kumar Haldar and Samarendranath Gupta along with Nandalal to make copies. Unfortunately all these reproductions were destroyed in an accidental fire that broke out in London.

During his student days in Calcutta, Venkatappa became acquainted with Sir John Woodroffe, who was an art-enthusiast and well-versed in the Tantrik literature (and who left India in 1919 after retirement as the Judge of the Calcutta High Court), Sister Nivedita who was the well-known disciple of Swami Vivekananda (she died in 1911), and Gaganendranath Tagore, the elder brother of Abanindranath and a celebrated painter in his own right. Woodroffe and Nivedita were great friends of Abanindranath as also of his *guru* Havell. Nivedita in fact was the person who inspired Abanindranath to recapture the truly Indian ideals of beauty. Venkatappa too was similarly inspired. Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938)

was a great experimentalist and individualist. He preferred the Western mode and introduced into his works the chiaroscuro effect. He experimented with the differential play of light and shade, and the pictorial possibilities of light, especially in interior scenes. He was also a cartoonist and satirist. He was fond of symbolism, and had a mastery over technical aspects of painting.

The relation between Gaganendranath and Venkatappa, who was seventeen years younger, was cordial and even affectionate. Gaganendranath was frequently visiting Puri and often took Venkatappa with him. But in the first week of May 1914, he decided to go to Darjeeling and asked Venkatappa to accompany him. Venkatappa was provided with a separate room in the house ('Hollywood Villa' in Auckland Road) that Gaganendranath had taken for rent in the hill-station. They stayed in Darjeeling from 8th May till 14th June, and Venkatappa enjoyed the stay thoroughly. Venkatappa had love for the hills, and in later years he frequently visited Ootacamund and Kodaikanal. This love was derived from this visit to Darjeeling. And while in Darjeeling he made a number of sketches, but the sketches unfortunately have not survived. Years later, in 1954 (18th August), Venkatappa went to see a documentary film in technicolour on Darjeeling before the screening of the Hindi movie *Chor Bazar* in Sagar Talkies, Bangalore. He notes in his diary –

This was simply excellent. It reminded me of my ever memorable and enjoyable stay in Darjeeling for two months 40 years ago – in the summer of 1914 with late Babu Gaganendranath Tagore, eldest brother of my Guruji, Dr. Abanindranath Tagore.

It may also be mentioned that Gaganendranath and Percy Brown were great friends, and they often travelled together to the hill-stations. As mentioned earlier, Gaganendranath, unlike his brother Abanindranath, had a

great predilection for the Western approach to art, especially English, and this drew him close to Percy Brown. There were occasions when Venkatappa also joined Gaganendranath and Percy Brown during their holidays on hills.

Even before Venkatappa came to Calcutta, Gaganendranath, Abanindranath, Sir John Woodroffe, and others had founded the 'Indian Society of Oriental Art' in Calcutta (1907), "to study art in all its branches and to provide better teaching in art and crafts". This was started under Government patronage, with Lord Ronaldshay, the Governor of Bengal, as patron. The first secretaries of the Society were Abanindranath and Norman Blunt; later Gaganendranath took over as Secretary. They periodically arranged exhibition of paintings done by the artists of the new movement. Venkatappa's works were also shown in these annual exhibitions after 1910-11. The Society also published an art journal, called *Rupam*; Ordhendu Coomara Ganguli, the well-known art-critic, solicitor by profession and artist by temperament, was its editor. Ganguli became a close friend of Venkatappa. Venkatappa's two other friends, Nandalal Bose and Asit Kumar Haldar, were also associated with the activities of this Society. But Venkatappa did not participate actively in any such programmes.

In 1911, King George V, the King of England who was then the Emperor of India, visited Calcutta; and the job of decorating the shamiana where he was to be received was entrusted to the Calcutta School of Art. Abanindranath, who was at that time still with the College, assigned this work to three of his students, Nandalal Bose, Venkatappa and Asit Kumar Haldar. The excellence of their work was admired by the administrators as well as by the press.

Venkatappa came to Calcutta to study only for two years.

But he was so fascinated by his studies and so convinced about the vastness of the subject-matter that he continued for a total period of seven years and a half. The Government of the Maharaja of Mysore readily extended the period of technical scholarship to him, although this procedure was unusual.

THE HIMALAYAN INTERLUDE

Venkatappa began keeping his diary when he set out on his pilgrimage to Kedaranath in the Himalayas during early April 1913. The School of Art closed for summer vacation on the 14th of April, to reopen on the 16th of June 1913. It is not known what prompted him to undertake this journey. His *guru*, Abanindranath was in the habit of retiring to the hills during holidays, and it is probable that this was his suggestion. Venkatappa left Calcutta on the 12th April for Banaras. Before he left, he visited his *guru*, Abanindranath, to take his blessing. Abanindranath called all those who were in the house and invited them to have a last look at Venkatappa: "Look, Appa is going to the Himalayas! Have a look at him! No one knows when he will return, or whether he will return at all! Perhaps this will be your last sight of him!" Abanindranath was no doubt joking, but he had great affection for Venkatappa and knew that Venkatappa was planning to retire from the world.

Earlier that year, on the 21st January, he gave the last three pictures of the Ramayana series to his *guru*, and thus completed the work-assignment for the year. We do not know how many pictures he was asked to do in this series, but what remain are but a few: monkeys building the bridge across the sea (reproduced in *Indian Art Through the Ages*, Government of India Publications Division, plate 60), the delivery of the signet ring by Hanuman to Sita (reproduced in *Udbodhan* of the Ramakrishna Mission),

the Mother Earth bestowing sandals on Rama (reproduced in Ananda K. Coomarswamy's *Art and Swadeshi*, plate XVIII), and Rama pursuing the golden deer (collection of the National art Gallery). We are told that the Ramayana pictures were acquired by the palace of Digapathia of Bengal.

He arrived in Banaras on the 13th April and visited Ayodhya on the 15th. Returning to Banaras the next day, he proceeded to Haridwara on the 18th. Reaching Dehra Dun on the 22nd, he walked six miles to arrive at Rajpur above Dehra Dun. Passing through Landour (Mussoori), Uttar-kasi and Maneri-chetty he reached Gangotri on the 1st of May. He had walked the entire distance of hundred and odd miles from Dehra Dun, and had survived on very frugal diet (milk and bread), often fasting during nights. He was excited when he reached Gangotri. Even his diary records –

Jai Ganga Mai ki Jai

Jai Bhagirath ki Jai

He resided in Gangotri for two days and proceeded towards Kedaranath, passing through Trijugi-Narayan and Harasilla.

It was in the first week of May (on the 6th to be precise) that Venkatappa resolved to adopt the principle "Self-help is the best help" wholly and meticulously in his life. There is an entry of this principle of his diary for that date. Probably this was the beginning of his life-long vow of 'aparigraha' (non-acceptance of gifts or service of any kind from any one). It is a time-honoured custom among pilgrims to holy places to give up for the rest of their lives the use of a convenience they are used to, or an article of good life they are fond of. This is meant not only to celebrate their presence in a holy spot, but to mark their adoption of the spirit of renunciation, which is

meritorious. Venkatappa resolved to give up his dependence on others, an exceedingly difficult thing to give up. He took care for the rest of his life to be indebted to no one on any account.

There are many interesting stories told about his refusal throughout his life to be under the obligation, great or small, of any one, friend or relative. Living in Mysore, he used to come occasionally to Bangalore where his only sister lived. But he preferred to stay in a hotel (usually in Modern Indian Lodge), and only briefly visit his sister. He would not accept anything to eat or drink even from her without some payment in return. He kept up this principle very meticulously and methodically, down to the minutest detail. Once Mrs. M. E. Cousins (wife of his friend James H. Cousins) sent him a book which she thought Venkatappa would be interested in: *Music, A Science and an Art* by John Redfield. After reading the book Venkatappa sent the book back to her "enclosing eight one-anna stamps to cover the postage she had incurred in sending it to me" (10th December 1938)! This became a guiding principle in his life, and often made him open to sneer and sarcasm.

He had left Harasilla (where he had prepared his own food), fourteen miles from Gangotri, on the 3rd of May, and had walked for two days (surviving only on bread and milk) in the direction of Kedaranath, which he reached on the 12th. It was half-way between Gangotri and Kedaranath when this resolve appears to have been taken. He had a bath in the river Mandakini as soon as he reached Kedaranath, and after a stay there for a day and after walking for about hundred miles reached Badarinath on the 19th. He performed the customary rite known as 'Vasudeva-pinda-sraddha' at a place called Brahmakapala in Badarinath, visited the principal shrine and received the 'prasadam' (food-offerings from the temple). He sent a

telegraphic communication to his *guru*, Abanindranath, about his safe arrival at the holiest of the holy places in India, to visit which is the fondest dream of every pious Hindu.

Leaving Badarinath two days later, he passed through Buldora, Vishnu-Prayag, Garuda-Ganga, Karma-Prayag, Rudra-Prayag, Bilva-Kedar and returned to Haridwar. He left Haridwar on the 4th of June and arrived in Kurukshetra the next day. The day after that, he was in Delhi. He spent two days in Delhi visiting the Kutb-minar, the Red Fort, Diwan-i-khas, the tomb of Humayan, Jantar-mantar, the tombs of Nizam-ud-din and Safdar-jang.

He proceeded from Delhi to Banaras, which he reached on the 9th and where he stayed on till the 14th. He arrived in Calcutta on the 15th of June at 6.15 a.m. a day prior to the reopening of the School. He attended the School on the 16th, in time to participate in the function arranged to congratulate his *guru*, Abanindranath, on his being honoured by the British Government with CIE.

The Himalayan interlude had an interesting sequel. During August of the same year, a month and a half after his return from the pilgrimage, his involvement with music began. On 7th August, S. M. Ramaswami Iyengar of Srirangam, a Veena-player and disciple of the celebrated Sheshanna of Mysore, arrived in Calcutta and called on Venkatappa. As coincidence would have it, a European friend of Abanindranath who was interested in Indian musical instruments had asked Venkatappa to get him a veena from Mysore, but by the time Venkatappa procured it, the person had left Calcutta. The veena was thus lying idle in Venkatappa's house (No. 17, Shobharam Basack's Lane, Bow Bazar). Ramaswami Iyengar was surprised to see the instrument with Venkatappa, and offered to teach him if he cared to learn. Venkatappa expressed his

willingness and thus began his commitment to veena, which continued all his life vying with his commitment to painting and sculpture!

Ramaswami Iyengar had come to Calcutta from Srirangam with the hope that he could be a music-teacher to a large number of South Indian families and thus make his living. But he was disappointed that Venkatappa was about the only student in music that he could get in that extensive and expensive city. He continued in Calcutta for about three months, and early in November he decided to leave Calcutta for good and return to Srirangam. Venkatappa records in his diary for 5th November

Mr. Veena Ramaswami Iyengar said to me as follows while talking was going on this morning: 'Na inge vandattile ungalukku matram anukulamachi'. He plainly expressed that by his coming here it was *only myself* who was benefitted and not he

Venkatappa's interest in music not only survived the departure of his disappointed music-teacher, but grew. He became so deeply engrossed in the subtleties and technical aspects of classical South Indian music that by early next year he had fabricated (according to his own statement "invented") a new instrument for demonstrating the organization of the traditional scalar values in music known as 'Sruti'. He called it 'Sruti- Veena'. He wrote in a letter: "I have invented a Sruti-veena which is a practical demonstration of the very ancient Hindu musical scale". This instrument was ready by the end of January 1914; and Venkatappa sent it on 2nd February to H. P. Krishna Rao in Mysore, who was an authority in theoretical as well as practical aspects of music. This gentleman, who was himself a veena player, had authored a remarkable book in English entitled *The Psychology of Music*, which sought to establish correspondances between the art of painting and the art of music.

It may be mentioned in passing that this 'Sruti-Veena' was regarded by Venkatappa as his greatest, and justifiably proud, achievement in life. And he continued modifying it and perfecting it all through his life. He was at it even in his old age. It had become a passion with him to talk about this instrument with all the musically-inclined acquaintances of his. He demonstrated it before experts in music conferences, he sent it to the palace in Mysore for the Maharaja, his patron, to have a look at; and he discussed about its merits and problems with knowledgeable musicians like 'Tiger' Varadachari, K. Vasudevachar, Bidaram Krishnappa, Veena Venkatagiriappa and others. It was shown in the Dasara Exhibition in 1916, the year he returned to Mysore. It is, however, unfortunate that the instrument failed to evoke the interest and secure the attention it merited.

To return to the sequence of events, soon after he fabricated the 'Sruti-veena', he fell ill in the month of March. He notes in his diary that he resorted with success to "self-treatment". It was in May of the same year that he went to Darjeeling along with Gaganendranath Tagore, an account of which visit has already been given. While he was in Darjeeling, an interesting event occurred, which reveals the stuff of which the young artist was made.

On 20th May, Percy Brown (the Principal of the School where Venkatappa was studying) sent words to Venkatappa to meet him without fail the next day at the 'Retreat', between Ghoom and Darjeeling. When Venkatappa met him, Brown apprised him about a Government appointment as an art-adviser, for which he had Venkatappa in mind.

He told me several times that it was a very good Government post and advised me to consider about it well before I refuse the same

But Venkatappa rejected the offer forthwith and firmly -

Before taking up an appointment in any Government other than Mysore, my gratitude to H. H. the Maharaja of Mysore and his Government was a great matter of fact to consider first

It is true that the Mysore Government had deputed him to study in Calcutta with scholarship. It is also true that they had sent him only for two years, but had agreed to support him another five years. But the scheme of technical scholarships was as yet unorganized and nebulous; and there was nothing in the nature of a written contract between the Government and Venkatappa. Therefore, Venkatappa was strictly under no obligation to serve only the Mysore State. And the Mysore Government would not have objected to Venkatappa serving elsewhere, if the proposal came from an eminent Englishman like Percy Brown, who represented the British Crown. Venkatappa's approach to the problem was, however, entirely ethical. He felt indebted to the Maharaja who had sent him here for advanced training in art and so it was but natural that he should go back to the Maharaja after the training was over. He refused to regard the Maharaja (Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV) merely as a personification of the Government; the Maharaja was a patron, a beloved ruler of the loving and loyal subjects among whom Venkatappa counted himself. There was, therefore, no question of his going anywhere other than Mysore.

Among Abanindranath's famous students, only two stuck to their own homes. Nandalal Bose settled down in Santiniketan and did not move out till he died. Venkatappa returned to Mysore and lived there until the Maharaja who was his patron, died, and then moved only to Bangalore to have his own Studio. He did not stir out of Bangalore for the rest of his long life. But others went wherever opportunities were available: Asit Kumar Haldar first to Lucknow and later to Bangalore, Samarendranath Gupta to Lahore, Sailen De to Jaipur,

Promode Kumar Chatterjee to Musulipatam, Surendranath Kar to Punjab, Sarada Ukil to Delhi, and Debi Prasad Raychowdhuri to Madras. Venkatappa's outlook on life and art is sometimes regarded as thoroughly unpractical and needlessly puritanical. This also came in the way of his genius being widely appreciated, besides depriving him of the benefit of rich and variegated experience of art-styles.

In the month of April in 1915 he made a visit to South India. He went to Srirangam (Tiruchchirapally in Tamil Nadu) to look up his music teacher, Ramaswami Iyengar. He acquainted himself with several musicians on this occasion. It was during this visit that he cultivated the friendship of the renowned violinist Marungapuri Gopalakrishna Iyer, who was also residing in Srirangam during those days. Gopalakrishna Iyer was a musician for musicians, a scholar among musicians, and a musician with unmatched technical skill and unrivalled aesthetic appeal. Venkatappa now developed some insight into the principles of instrumentation, which helped him in refining his 'Sruti-Veena', and also prepared him for his later tutelage under Veena Seshanna.

LATER MYSORE YEARS

(1916-1940)

Venkatappa left Calcutta on the 15th of May, 1916, and arrived in Mysore on the first day of June. In the meantime he had visited Ootacamund, Coonoor, Fernhill, Coimbatore (where in a choultry he met his music teacher Veena Ramaswami Iyengar of Srirangam), Tiruppur (where he obtained a set of Veena strings), and Mettupalyam. On the 4th of June, he reported himself at the office of the Private Secretary to the Maharaja, Mr. (later Sir) Mirza M. Ismail.

Mirza Ismail (1883 born), who played a significant role in Venkatappa's career at Mysore, was a descendent of Ali Akbar (who helped the Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III to regain control over the State administration) and a school-mate of the Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (the patron of Venkatappa). He joined Mysore service as Assistant Superintendent of Police in 1905, became Assistant Secretary to the Maharaja in 1910, later Huzur Secretary, and then Private Secretary to the Maharaja, in which capacity Venkatappa met him in 1916. He later became the Dewan of the State in 1926 and his services to the State were manifold and magnificent. He was, after Purnayya and M. Visvesvaraya, the most illustrious of the dewans of the state. He took a liking for Venkatappa at the very first sight, and the two were loyal to each other till their last days.

Before Venkatappa left Calcutta, the Principal of the

School where he studied, Percy Brown, had written a letter (dated 17th February 1916) to the Maharaja's Government, addressed to the Private Secretary to the Maharaja (viz. Mirza Ismail) :

In view of the fact that K. Venkatappa's scholarship so kindly maintained by the Government of Mysore expired I have the honour to submit that K. Venkatappa has studied in the Govt. School of Art, Calcutta for seven years and applied himself earnestly to his work. The result is that he has now completed his course as a painter and a modeller and is competent to undertake work in either of these branches of art. Apart from this, however, he is a diligent student of his subject, interested in his work and, most important of all, has a keen artistic temperament...

His desire is to go to England in order to perfect himself in the higher aspects of art, especially the technical aspects of marble carving and bronze casting...

Personally, I may add that I have always found Venkatappa an ideal student, quiet and gentlemanly and credit to the State which he represents

Mirza Ismail had sent the letter to the Dewan (who at that time was M. Visvesvaraya). He promised Venkatappa when the latter met him on the 4th of June that he would send a reminder. Mirza, however, suggested that in the meantime Venkatappa should do some landscapes for the Palace. About a month later, Venkatappa finished three landscapes ("three views") and took them to Mirza, who liked them and promised to show them to the Maharaja. He had already spoken to the Maharaja about Venkatappa, and the Maharaja had desired that Venkatappa should do "the pencil sketch of the birds' eye-view of the City". Venkatappa did this and took the painting to Mirza on the 1st of August. Mirza liked it very much, and showed it to the Maharaja the next day, and the Maharaja "expressed much satisfaction" and also made a present of fifty rupees as a token of his appreciation.

Mirza had also spoken to the Dewan about Venkatappa.

The Dewan, however, thought it better to retain Venkatappa in Mysore till the war was over, and after sometime to send him to Europe. This was a matter of some disappointment to Venkatappa, but the terrible and devastating world war (1914-1918) had rendered Europe especially unstable, and the atmosphere was most unfavourable for Indians to go abroad. As an alternative, Venkatappa wanted at least his scholarship of forty rupees a month to continue until the war was over and he could be sent to Europe. He met the Private Secretary to the Dewan in this regard, but the officer suggested that Venkatappa should take up some job until conditions were favourable for going abroad. Venkatappa, however, "didn't wish to do so until my education is quite complete".

There was a deadlock on this issue for several months and Venkatappa's future remained uncertain. During March of 1917, the Inspector-General of Education in Mysore inquired if Venkatappa was willing to prosecute his studies in the Government School of Art for a further period. Venkatappa replied (31st March 1917) that he was not willing to do so, for he had already spent more than seven years in that institution and had learnt all that could be learnt there; further scholarship to go there would be a waste of his time and waste of Government's money. His desire to go to England was in order that he may "study the higher aspects of art, especially technical aspects of bronze-casting which can't be learnt in any part of India".

On the other hand, he suggested that his "humble desire is to cultivate my natural instinct in classical Music through a regular course of training under eminent Veena-players of the Mysore Durbar till I am sent to Europe". He requested that his technical scholarship be "transferred to enable him to study advanced music in Mysore". Again there was a delay of several months before the

Government took a decision. In the meantime, Venkatappa had made an application to the Maharaja himself praying that "His Highness should be good enough to order either Mr. Sheshanna or Mr. Subbanna to train me up in Veena-play" (27-8-1917). Venkatappa was asked in January 1918 if he would be willing to join the Palace Music School that had just then been started. He replied that he "would be quite willing". Thus began his serious involvement with music.

It may be recalled that he was initiated into music even while he was in Calcutta by Veena Ramaswami Iyengar of Srirangam. But he could not make much progress owing to other preoccupations. His interest had however been aroused, and he had decided even while he was in Calcutta to continue learning Veena after he returned to Mysore and if he was not sent to England for higher training in sculpture. Now that his deputation abroad was indefinitely delayed, he resolved to apply his energies to learning Veena. And it is natural that he set his eyes on the best of Veena-players, Seshanna, to learn from, for his own music-teacher in Calcutta, Ramaswami Iyengar, was one of Seshanna's students and he had heard from him glorious accounts of Seshanna's music. Having learnt painting from a master like Abanindranath Tagore, he did not like learning music from a less eminent master. But Venkatappa could not be certain that he should be lucky enough, for Seshanna was too big a maestro for teaching almost a beginner like himself. Seshanna was teaching Veena to the Maharaja himself!

The Durbar Bhakshi of the Maharaja, Lingaraja Arasu by name, who was in charge of the Palace Music School was instructed by the Maharaja (in response to Venkatappa's petition) to get Venkatappa examined by Subbanna, another eminent Veena-player of the royal court and cousin-brother to Seshanna, and Bidaram Krishnappa, a

vocalist of great renown attached to the royal court and a student of Seshanna. Venkatappa was examined on 30th January 1918, and was admitted to the Palace Music School.

In the meantime, Venkatappa had been painting, and towards the end of January 1918, he had sent six paintings to be exhibited at the Madras Fine Arts Society. But now he decided to devote himself exclusively to music. Mirza Ismail, still the Private Secretary to the Maharaja, did not like this idea, for "he feared that I may loose touch of the Fine Arts which I specialized at Calcutta at an enormous expense and trouble". He sent for Venkatappa and advised him against straying from his field of specialisation :

He asked me to paint some portraits of His Highness whether in oils or water colour. After I suggested that ivory miniature would be better than these two, he said he would get some ivory plates cut for me and send them to me along with some photos of His Highness

(10th February 1918)

Venkatappa had already made up his mind, and he would not give up music at any cost. He regularly attended the Palace Music School, although he was assigned to Subbanna, who was both irregular and indifferent. He records in his diary that the 7th of March, 1918, "is a memorable day", because it was on that day the great wizard Seshanna agreed to teach him. The lessons began on the 14th of that month and continued till a few weeks before Seshanna died (25th July, 1926). Venkatappa was so inspired by Seshanna's music, personality and character that he set about doing a bust of the great maestro in plaster of paris. The work began about July-August in 1918. Seshanna went to the Studio for several days, between 10th July and 6th August and gave sittings (an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening). The bust was completed a few days later, and

when it was ready it created a sensation in Mysore. There was for several months a stream of visitors to the Studio of Venkatappa to have a look at the bust of the maestro who was legendary in his own life-time. This was Venkatappa's first great work, and it was duly acclaimed by all the art-lovers in the city. Venkatappa's talent, sensitivity and regard for the man have found their fullest expression here.

Venkatappa adored Seshanna as an angel in human form. When Seshanna died in Mysore, Venkatappa was in Ootacamund, and when he learnt that his master was dead, he wrote in his diary on 28th July 1926

Received a card from C. Ananda Rao at 12 noon to say that my Guru died on 25th inst. My sorrow was overwhelming. I came to the hotel and bathed the second time on account of the news of my music teacher's death. I could take neither food nor tiffin nor anything, but shedding tears the whole evening for the loss of my great Guru, the greatest Veena-player of India. At 5-15 p.m. Mr. Nanjappa Chettiar came and though he was trying to divert my mind from this sorrowful mood, it was impossible to suppress shedding tears. I couldn't get inclination to think of food or tiffin or sleep for the whole day and night

and on the next day:

I couldn't get inclination to do anything the whole day. Every now and then the idea of impermanence of the world was coming to my mind. I was sleeping till 4 p.m. and then went out on a long walk aimlessly through the Coonoor Road upto the 29th mile-stone and back and was sitting in Botanical Gardens for a few minutes and returned home at about 8.30 p.m.

During this period of his residence in Mysore Venkatappa used to get up at 5.30 in the morning and practice Veena till 7.30. He would be in the Studio from 8.30 till 12.30 or 1.00 p.m. After food and rest, he would again be in the Studio till about 5.30 p.m. Then he would go to his music lessons. He discontinued going to the Palace Music School from the middle of March 1920, and started having his

lessons in Seshanna's house, usually from 6 p.m. till about 8.30. Quite frequently, there would be programmes by eminent musicians (both Mysoreans and outsiders) in Seshanna's house during nights. Venkatappa would attend them and return home late in the evening. Sometimes these concerts would go on past midnight, as recorded in the entries in his diary for this period, like :

(6th April 1920) Had been to Seshanna's in the night to attend Mr. Bidaram Krishnappa's performance, who sang wonderfully till 1.15 A.M. The rush was very very great and sometimes was so great that I feared some may die of suffocation

He also started learning Sanskrit with his friend Krishna Sarma, who was also learning music in the Palace Music School.

He developed during this time some enduring friendship with like-minded connoisseurs and artists. Among his intimate friends were the renowned musicians Bidaram Krishnappa, Chikkarama Rao, K. Vasudevachar, Lakshminarayanappa, Muttaya Bhagavatar, and 'Tiger' Varadachari, eminent men in public life like Sirdar K. Gopalaraja Arasu, Lt. Col. A. V. Subramanya-raja Arasu, (the Hon. A.D.C. to the Maharaja), D. Srinivasa Iyengar (advocate), B. Lingappayya and C. Ananda Rao (who after retirement started a theatrical company called Mysore Nataka Sangha). He was residing at that time in Prince Gopalaraja Arasu Choultry in Old Agrahar and later in the Udupi Hotel in Santhepet.

It was while he was in the latter place, owned by Udupi Visvesvaraya, towards the end of 1918 that he made the bust of a boy who supplied food (*mani* in Kannada and Tulu). Thirty years later, when the bust was accidentally broken, Venkatappa notes in his diary (5th September 1959)

It may be recalled that when I was studying advanced Veena-

play in Mysore, I was put up in a hotel where Sri Narasimha alias Choonda or Mani was supplier; and to be in touch with the art of sculpture also along with my advanced veena-study, I tried his bust from life in 1918. It is this bust that was broken last year which was repaired with greatest difficulties

During this time he had started his work in the Palace (6th February 1920). He had also made some paintings, which he sent to the Indian Society of Oriental Art (which was started in Calcutta in 1907, and with which his Guru Abanindranath and friend Gaganendranath, and class-mate Nandalal Bose were associated) for sale. He had designed a hill-model, with which Mirza and the Maharaja were "pleased" (as Seshanna told him on 5th August 1920). Unfortunately nothing more about this hill-model is known. He undertook occasionally some routine jobs like enlargement from photographs, but only when pressed hard to do so:

This morning Kitta came to my Studio with the photo of an old rich merchant of Closepet for enlargement, which I couldn't but promise him to do as he said he could get much help from the party who had ordered him to do it. I was anxious to see that he is helped somehow and so I had to undertake to do it

(11th June 1920)

His financial situation may not have been very sound, as the Indian Society of Oriental Art had not sold any of his paintings, and he continued to get only Rs. 40/- by way of scholarship from the Palace. He had done ivory miniature paintings of the Maharaja, as Mirza had suggested, but he refused to sell them or part with them. There was an offer of a lucrative employment from the Andhra-jatiya Kalashala of Musulipatam (Andhra Pradesh), but Venkatappa declined it (17th April 1920). It was in the beginning of 1922 that the well-known art-collector B. N. Treasurywalla of Bombay wanted to buy some paintings of Venkatappa. His eyes were set on a painting entitled 'Mad after Veena' which Venkatappa had done in answer to a criticism that he had neglected painting.

There were many well-wishers of Venkatappa (including Mirza Ismail himself and Sirdar Gopalaraja Arasu, (a close relative of the Maharaja and an officer in the Palace) who disliked Venkatappa's total involvement with music ; they felt that this would be detrimental to his proper vocation, which was painting and sculpture. And art-collectors, who were busy acquiring masterpieces of the Bengal School, were disappointed that nothing was forthcoming from Venkatappa, a leading student of this school. They complained to Abanindranath that Venkatappa had abandoned painting altogether, which however was not a fact. And Abanindranath sent words to Venkatappa that he should not forsake painting. This was the provocation for Venkatappa to do this painting, which is now preserved in the Jaganmohan Palace Art Gallery in Mysore. He sent it to his *guru*, Abanindranath, sometime in 1921; and Treasurywallah had seen it with Abanindranath. He liked it so much that he wanted to buy it. But Abanindranath said that he would have to return it to Venkatappa with his comments. Treasurywallah met Venkatappa in Mysore and expressed his eagerness to acquire the painting for his collection. Thereupon, Venkatappa wrote on 16th March 1922 to Abanindranath to send the picture "along with his criticisms and corrections". Abanindranath replied on 24th March 1922:

...I think that the technique of the picture was very good but somehow the subject-matter did not appeal to us.

You may be mad after Vina or Painting, but that is not sufficient to put it into a picture; in the same way one may be fond of drinking wine but that does not interest all. Your picture must contain something which is of permanent interest for only then it can appeal to many.

I send you my blessings

Soon after this event, the poet Rabindranath Tagore (the

uncle of Venkatappa's *guru*), whom he knew very well in his Calcutta days, visited Mysore in the last week of September 1922. Venkatappa met him in the Summer Palace where he was staying. The poet's friend C. F. Andrews (whom also Venkatappa knew well) was also there.

The first word he (Rabindranath) said after we saw each other was "You have not yet become a sannyasi, Venkatappa?" and then we were talking of various things for about 45 minutes. All the while he was giving sitting for the photographer. He said he heard Mr. Seshanna's Veena last night till midnight, and he expressed that though Seshanna is a master he liked Sangameswara Sastri's Veena (of Pithapuram) better and he asked me whether I had heard him.

Venkatappa began making the clay bust of Rabindranath Tagore on the morning of 30th June 1923, and worked continually at it till he finished it on the 22nd August the same year, when he invited his friend Sirdar Gopalaraja Arasu to have a look at it and suggest improvements. On the 28th of the same month, the clay model was cast –

with devices I had thought over and with the various kinds of materials I had kept ready for the purpose I was able by the Grace of God to cast the mould so very successfully that there was no trace of the hopeless breakage of the back piece. It was 2.15 p.m. when the cast was placed on the modelling throne. My heartfelt thanks are due not only to the Great God who gave me such an ability but also to the friends who assisted me as I directed, and without whose help I wouldn't have been able to do this alone. I cannot express how much I was tired and how much the joints of my body were paining

Then about a month later he began working at the cast, and finishing it on the 14th of December, spraying the fixture on the plaster bust. In the meantime he had taken up a miniature painting of Chand-bibi, which his friend Dr. James H. Cousins wanted. Cousins was known to him from his Calcutta days, for Cousins was an enthusiast of the Bengal School of Painting. Both he and his wife were also

lovers of Indian classical music. He kept contact with Venkatappa in Mysore as well as in Bangalore. The painting which was $13\frac{1}{4} \times 10$ " was sent to Cousins on 18th January 1924. I have not been able to ascertain where this piece now is.

From 1920, Venkatappa had trouble with his eyes, and by the time he began work on Tagore's bust (1923), it had grown worse. The treatment in the Palace Dispensary did not help him. He was so desperate that he consulted his teacher, Veena Seshanna, who was also knowledgeable in astrology. Seshanna put it down to 'Angaraka-dosha'; the details of Seshanna's reading are given in his diary for 19th October 1923:

The Guru will be favourable from Asvija- 7 saptami (1st Nov. 1923) and Angaraka would remain in the same place (till 24th November). But his place is not so bad as he was till 15th. I will not have any kind of trouble hereafter. I would get good remuneration for the works I did

It was during this period that he painted a scene from Ramayana, which is now preserved in the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. The title that Venkatappa gave to this painting was: "Mareecha as Golden Stag tempting Sita". He undertook in the beginning of 1924 a rather unusual work: a realistic portrait representing his friend and a well-wisher Prince Gopalaraja Arasu (a close relative of Maharaja and a Palace officer) at physical culture. Entitled 'Physical Development' (entry in diary for 28th September 1924), he studied the photographs of Arasu closely for a week, and then started this work, which he completed on the 10th May. Arasu, who was asked to see the work in the first week of June "was very pleased with the work". He was a devotee of physical culture, and he advocated it to all whom he met; this was his life's passion. He was also a lover of Venkatappa's art, and a sincere friend of his. Venkatappa presented this picture to him on

3rd June along with an Ooty landscape. He also went to the Arasu's bungalow the next day and selected the right place for the picture. It is now in the collection of the Venkatappa Art Gallery in Bangalore. Arasu commissioned Venkatappa to do for him a portrait of the Maharaja. This portrait, which is a water-colour ivory miniature, too is in the Venkatappa Art Gallery now.

It was at the suggestion of Arasu that Venkatappa was invited "do something for the circular frames" in the Drawing Room of His Highness the Maharaja, on 8th September 1924. T. R. A. Thamboo Chetty, who was then the Huzur Secretary to the Maharaja (and who later officiated for the Dewan) was instructed to bring Venkatappa to the Palace and let him examine the Drawing Room and make his suggestions. Venkatappa suggested bas-reliefs in plaster of paris for the circular frames (size $1 \times 9\frac{3}{4}$). Venkatappa also told the Huzur Secretary that "it will not be possible to say what the cost would be now, and that I would be glad to accept whatever His Highness kindly offers, and that I can undertake the work only after the work of H. H. The Maharaja of Cooch Behar is over". The Huzur Secretary was bewildered at the strange and arrogant aspect of this artist, but the Maharaja "sent words that I may do whatever I like for those circles and whenever it will be convenient for me" (12th September).

When Sir Albion R. Banerji was the Dewan of the State (1920-1926), the Maharani-Regent of Cooch Behar visited Mysore in the early part of 1924 and had an opportunity of seeing the ivory miniature portrait of the Maharaja of Mysore, done by Venkatappa for Mirza Ismail. The Maharani was so fascinated by the portrait that she wanted Venkatappa to do a similar portrait of her late husband. The Yuvaraja (Narasimharaja Wodeyar, younger brother of the Maharaja of Mysore) persuaded

Venkatappa to accept the assignment. Venkatappa was busy with this work, when he was asked to "do something for the circular frames" in the Drawing Room of the Palace.

It may be mentioned here in passing that Venkatappa made two miniature ivory portraits of this late Maharaja of Cooch Behar from the photographs provided by the Maharani: one of the portraits was in the native regalia and the other in Western dress. The portraits were actually begun on 6th January 1926 and finished on the 1st day of April of the same year. The Maharani was happy with the former portrait, but wanted the artist to make a few changes in the latter. Venkatappa obliged, but refused when the Maharani wanted him to make another change, which was untrue to the original photograph. Further, the Maharani went back on her side of the contract and wanted Venkatappa to reduce the price of the portrait, whereupon the angry Venkatappa firmly declined to part with the portrait. All the pleadings and expression of regrets on the part of the Maharani of Cooch-Bihar, and all the attempts to pressurize and coerce him on the part of the Yuvaraja of Mysore failed to mollify the adamant artist. He presented the portrait years later to the National Art Gallery, Madras, at the request of the then Governor of Madras, the Maharaja of Bhavanagar.

Sirdar Gopalaraja Arasu, who saw the ivory miniature portrait of the Maharaja of Cooch-Bihar on the 9th of April 1926, wanted Venkatappa to make a portrait of the Maharaja of Mysore in the same manner for purpose of presentation to the Maharaja on the latter's birthday. Venkatappa did this portrait, and it is now in the collection of the Venkatappa Art Gallery at Bangalore, along with another portrait of the same subject done earlier at the instance of Mirza Ismail.

When the Indian National Congress had its session in

Belgaum (Karnataka) in 1924 under the presidentship of Mahatma Gandhi, Krishna Rao Muduvédkar (1874-1947), who took the leading role in organizing it, met Venkatappa in his Studio in Mysore on 11th December 1924 and asked if Venkatappa could attend the Congress session and take his art-work with him. A swadeshi exhibition had been planned as also a music conference to coincide with the sessions. The Veena mastro of Mysore, Seshanna was expected to attend the sessions and play before the Mahatma. The students and friends of Seshanna who were also going to Belgaum prevailed upon Venkatappa to join them. Venkatappa was not very enthusiastic. When C. Narasimhayya (who was a friend of Seshanna and also of Venkatappa, and who was making all arrangements on behalf of Reception Committee in Mysore) assured Venkatappa that he would arrange everything for him,

I told him that my nature is not to depend upon any person and that I would try to go there if the work is finished and if I get sufficient funds

(16th December 1924)

Venkatappa sent his art-works for the exhibition through railway parcel on the 17th December, and joined the party of musicians headed by Seshanna and others who left Mysore to Belgaum by train on the 24th. Venkatappa found that the "arrangements were unimaginably splendid" in Belgaum. He "had the good fortune to see Mahatma Gandhi with bare body who came to the pandal with other leaders" on the 26th. But his paintings had not arrived at all, and this gave him an anxious time: "As I felt quite uneasy I could get no inclination to attend the Congress session or any other function".

On 28th, the musicians from Mysore entertained the Mahatma and other leaders, and Seshanna's concert was fixed for the next day, as it was the Mahatma's 'silence day'.

Seshanna played for an hour; the national leaders like Muhammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai were also present. Venkatappa met on the occasion H. P. Krishna Rao, the Veena-player and author of *The Psychology of Music*, with whom Venkatappa was in correspondence since 1914 concerning the Sruti-Veena. On 29th Venkatappa went with the musicians to the Mahatma's *ashram* at 3 p.m.; the musicians from Mysore sang or played an instrument before the Mahatma one after another. Finally Seshanna played on the Veena. But he takes care to note in his diary :

While returning from there I found that my umbrella was missing. I couldn't understand who walked away with it in the ashram

Venkatappa left for Mysore by Mail on the 31st with the musician-friends Belakavadi Srinivasa Iyengar and B. Devendrappa and with D. V. Rangaswami Iyengar, while the other musicians proceeded to Dharwar.

The first (and the last) students to learn painting from Venkatappa arrived at his Studio on 26th March 1926. They were brothers from Andhra Pradesh. K. Ramamohan Sastri and K. Anandamohan Sastri. They had studied painting in the Andhra-jatiya Kala-shala in Masulipatnam, under Pramode Kumar Chatterjee, who was a student of Abanindranath Tagore in Calcutta. Pramode Kumar was a junior to Venkatappa by a few years in the Calcutta School, and had gone over to Masulipatnam to teach art in the new institution started by Andhra-jatiya Vidya Parishad, around 1920. Venkatappa had been invited to take up service in this institution on the 16th of April 1920, but had declined. Then Pramode Kumar was sent there by Abanindranath. But late in 1925, Pramode Kumar had left Masulipatnam to head the Art Section of the Government Technical School in Baroda. Among his promising students in Masulipatnam were the Sastri brothers. Before

he left, Pramode Kumar had suggested that they should continue their studies under Venkatappa of Mysore, as he belonged to the same School of painting. Venkatappa agreed to teach them "provided they worked diligently and studied for several years". They were diligent, gentle and well-behaved, and Venkatappa liked them. However, one of the brothers Ramamohan went back to Masulipatam after a few months to teach in the institution. Anandmohan, who was the more promising of the two, was sickly. He continued a couple of years, and when he fell seriously ill went to Adayar, Madras, for treatment late in 1928. He passed away soon after.

During the first week of May 1926, Venkatappa went to Ootacamund (shortened as Ooty, the well-known hill-station in the then Madras Presidency, sixty miles remote from Mysore) and stayed there till the last week of October. During this period he prepared and finalized his famous landscapes, which are now preserved in the Venkatappa Art Gallery in Bangalore. He began by sketching the Elk-Hill Road on 27th May and coloured it on the 29th. 'Sun-rise' was completed on 30th June; 'Dawn' was retouched on 21st July; 'Elk-Hill under Rain' on 3rd August, and 'Lake-view' on 4th September. His plan was to paint different moods of the hill from dawn to midnight. He was very happy with these paintings and he refused to sell them or part with them. To one who offered to publish them, he wrote (on 30th August 1926):

I regret to inform you that the Elk-Hill Path and other pictures are intended not for cheap publication in newspapers, but to form a standard gallery in a free School of Fine Art to be started by me for the good students and art-lovers.

He visited Ootacamund again during March-September, 1929, and painted several views of the Blue mountain range. The landscape studies of Ootacamund were all ready with frames in the month of October 1929. He even

toyed with the idea of settling down in Ootacamund in due course. He notes in his diary (16th September 1929) that he "sent Rs. 1000/- to Rev. W. M. Theobald, Principal of Brecks Memorial School in that place towards the value of 34 cmls of land in Welbrick at Rs. 3,500/- an acre". It is a fact that he liked the hill-station very much, and visited it frequently while he was in Mysore. It was his plan to start a free School to teach fine arts that came in the way of his settling down in Ootacamund.

The idea of starting a School of fine art in Bangalore which was the administrative capital of the State had taken shape during the early part of 1926. He came to Bangalore on 22nd February and saw two sites in the Malleswaram area, belonging to one Y. V. Krishnamurti, and agreed to purchase them for Rs. 800/-. The deed was executed in his name on 15th April. He discussed the School idea with his friends D. V. Gundappa (the celebrated leader of Karnataka in the fields of literature, journalism and public affairs), S. G. Sastri (the well-known industrialist, art-lover and public figure), Dr. B. K. Narayana Rao (the famous eye- specialist and surgeon in Bangalore who was also a patron of art), Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar (the industrialist, philanthropist and educationist of Madras Presidency) and others:

They all appreciated my idea of starting a School in Bangalore, and much more with my determination to do it quite independently from my hard-earned money

(11th April, 1926)

But the School idea was not pursued until 1940, when he left Mysore and came to Bangalore for good. His life in Mysore was comfortable and it was the most creative period of his career. Besides, he had a commitment to the Maharaja of Mysore and had begun the work of decorating the Amba-Vilas Hall in the Palace, with bas-reliefs in plaster of paris. When in the month of August 1928, the

famous educationist Dr. C. R. Reddy urged him to join the Faculty of Arts that was about to be started at his instance in the Andhra University and promised that "he would see that I enjoy quite an independent life etc. etc.", Venkatappa refused without a second thought.

The year 1930 was for him memorable, for during January of that year his patron the Maharaja visited his Studio. At that time Venkatappa was living in a hotel called Modern Lodge, and had his Studio in the upstairs of the Palace Dispensary in the Motikhana buildings. The Maharaja had come to the Palace Dispensary on 27th January to look up his old teacher Bhima Rao who was a patient there. He also visited on this occasion Venkatappa in his Studio at 7.40 p.m., and saw the bas-relief panels in plaster of paris and the landscapes painted in Ootacamund:

I showed them to His Highness in different lights and he expressed himself several times that the reliefs are splendid etc. He was immensely pleased with the expressions of animals and with the delicate details. Lt. Col. A. V. Subramanyaraj Urs said, after a while that His Highness is never seen to have expressed his satisfaction about anything so openly as he did today several times

The next two years witnessed Venkatappa's unremitting work on the panels to be kept in the Amba-Vilas Hall in the Maharaja's palace. He had studied the layout of the Hall carefully as early as 1916 and had suggested that he would do the following paintings on the walls (in a note sent to the Huzur Secretary to the Maharaja on 10th November 1961):

1. Chamundesvari, A religious subject. The Hall takes its name from this Deity.
2. A Darbar of H. H. Late Krishnaraj Wodier III (Historical).
3. Indra Sabha. The figures to be drawn from the artist's

imagination. The details are described in our Classical Works.

4. The Scene in "Shakuntala", prior to her departure.
5. An Episode from the Puranic History of Yadava from which the Mysore Royal Family descends. For this subject I would suggest the scene of Sri Krishna's "Upadesha" of Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna.
6. Droupadi Svayamvara.
7. Thandava Natana. After the model of the brass figure in the Madras Museum.
8. Rama Pattabhisheka.
9. Krishna playing flute in the midst of cow-herd women (A Pastoral Scene) in moon-light. I saw a beautiful representation of this in Abanindranath Tagore's Studio at Calcutta.
10. Bali-chakravarthi and Vamana (a scene from "Dashavathar").
11. A love Scene.
12. The Mysore Coat of Arms.

The pictures of "Chamundesvari" and the Coat of Arms with a border of all the Royal Insignia may be put on directly opposite walls.

It is not known if the note was brought to the attention of the Maharaja at all, for nothing was subsequently heard from the palace authorities. When the Maharaja visited the Studio of Venkatappa, he was more impressed with the bas-relief panels than with the paintings. He had seen the bas-relief that Venkatappa had done in 1924 to fill the circular frames in the Drawing Room, and had asked him to do the royal coat of arms in the same manner. But he

had no idea of the nature of the imaginative panels until he visited Venkatappa's studio. He commissioned Venkatappa to do panels for the Amba-Vilas Hall. Venkatappa went, examined the Hall again, and suggested that he would do five panels. The Maharaja gave him full freedom in the choice of subjects and the treatment, and also allowed him to do the work at his own convenience and pleasure. No time was stipulated; and the artist was free to enter and leave the Palace premises whenever he wanted. He was also exempted from the dress regulations which normally visitors to the interior chambers of the Palace were required to observe. The artist was allowed to enter the Palace and work in his usual dress (coat, dhoty and turban). The Maharaja would give the artist Rs. 40,000-00 for the panels (whatever the number).

Venkatappa completed two panels and the royal coat of arms in relief by April 1931. Venkatappa's friend and the Hon. A.D.C. to the Maharaja, Lt. Col. A. V. Subramanyaraja Arasu brought on July 6, 1932 a message from the Maharaja. In Venkatappa's words:

His Highness was gracious enough to leave everything to the best of my discretion with regard to the omission of gold leaf to the animal 'sarabha' in the coat of arms

The matter of placement of that piece was also left to Venkatappa's choice. When Venkatappa visited Amba-Vilas Hall (21st August), he

studied the panels with the environment in the Amba-Vilas and thought fit to keep 'sarabha' in the coat of arms without gold. It was very heart-rending to see the cruelty done to the small panel (base) which is below the big panel 'Sakuntala' (which he had done in 1928) by the crudest possible way of Golding and colouring it! I pointed out that the frames fixed to the coat of arm and the Bird's panel were not correct to the plan

The Palace Overseer, B. V. Narayana Rao, who was there promised to send the panels for correction the next

morning; and the Bird' Panel was removed to the Drawing Room, on the advice of the artist.

During 1933, Venkatappa was busy with the panel of the Buddha as a mendicant. Early in 1934, the mould was taken and the cast was got ready. Venkatappa invited the Maharaja to come and have a look at the panel in the lamp-light. The month of March he spent on the Nandi Hills near Bangalore. He notes in his diary for 20th March that "the sea of clouds and the effect of sky before Sun-rise were simply marvellous. It is only in Darjeeling that I could see such effects". In the middle of April (12th) the panel was removed from the Studio to the Palace. There was a shower of rain as the panel reached the Palace. "His Highness was kind enough to see the panel of Lord Buddha at about 7.30 p.m. on Sunday (15th) and ... he was immensely pleased with it", and regretted " he couldn't come to the Studio to see the panel in lamp-light as promised" (19th April).

After the panel of 'Buddha as Mendicant' was fixed in the Amba-Vilas Hall, Venkatappa left for Kodaikanal for a long holiday (21st April to the 11th July). He spent the time painting landscapes. He visited Ootacamund quite frequently during this year as well as the next three years; he worked on his old paintings, trying to improve the effect by bringing about greater correspondance with nature. He spent several days observing the changing moods of nature in the hill-station. During these visits Venkatappa stayed either in the YMCA or in a hotel called Ramachandra-Vilas.

As he was working on his Ooty landscapes, the desire to build his own Studio in Bangalore, with a free school attached to it, grew stronger in him. Somehow he always associated the landscapes of Ootacamund and Kodaikanal with a studio and a school of fine art. It may be recalled

that he had refused as early as 1926 to part with the Ooty landscapes for he had "preserved them to form a standard gallery in a free school of Fine Art to be started by me" (entry in diary for 30th August 1926). He was worried that things had not moved at all in this direction. He also consulted his astrologer-friends, Gopalakrishna Rao and Paramesvara Madhyastha, and he was told that "it is only in Budha-bhukti that my studio is to be built and that too in the 4th part of Budha-bhukti and that it was, at present, the fag-end of the third part of the Budha-bhukti" (entry for 6th July 1937).

There was a panel that he had done for the Amba-Vilas Hall, depicting Rama delivering the signet-ring to Hanuman. Photograph of this panel was given by him to a swami of the Ramakrishna order with whom Venkatappa was acquainted in Calcutta. This Swami got the photograph published in the Bengali Journal of the Ramakrishna Mission, *Udbodhan*; but the block in print had unwittingly reversed. Venkatappa was aghast with indignation, and brought this carelessness to the notice of the publishers of the periodical. The publishers, however, chose to ignore the artist's protest. Venkatappa engaged a solicitor in Calcutta, Robson, and filed a case against the publishers for damages in the Calcutta High Court. His plea was that by the carelessness of the publishers, the artist had been exposed to the false impression that he had no understanding of Indian customs and conventions. Considering that the publishers belonged to a monastic order, Venkatappa claimed not more than a rupee as damages. He would not have dragged them to the court, had they apologized for the mistake they had committed.

The case came up for hearing towards the end of March 1938, and Venkatappa was summoned to Calcutta for

examination. On 7th April, judgement was pronounced "awarding damage of Rs. 1.00 (one Rupee only) with half-cost". One of his legal friends in Calcutta, Barwell, advised Venkatappa to appeal for full costs, but Venkatappa "decided to stop where I am". While he was in Calcutta, he called on his *guru* Abanindranath Tagore who "was glad that I got damage of one rupee from Udbodhan as Wheeler got one shilling from Ruskin". He also met Percy Brown during this visit.

Later in the same year, he camped in Bangalore from November 2nd to 12th staying in Modern Indian Lodge (although his sister was then living in the city) and fixed up a contractor K. Siddappa, to build his Studio, and also performed the ceremony of digging the land with a pick-axe for the first time, after propitiating the earth ritually (known in Kannada as 'guddali- puje') on 10th November 1938. The function commenced at 6.45 a.m.:

Then I began to dig the land with my own hands for sometime and then the mason removed the earth ... From the beginning to the end, the function was a very pleasant one, with good omens

He got more intimately acquainted on this occasion with the astrologer Gopalakrishna Rao, who became his friend and influenced his actions considerably for many years.

He returned to Mysore after this function. But within a short time an event happened that cut short his association with Mysore and forced him out of the City. He notes in his diary (3rd August 1940):

At about 9.30 p.m. I was shocked to hear of the sad demise of His Highness the Maharaja at Bangalore and till 11 p.m. we were talking about the greatness of the revered past. An irreparable loss to the country

It was a blow that fell on him, a lightning that struck him.

The dead Maharaja's body was brought to Mysore and Venkatappa was among those who attended the funeral. "It was nearly 1 p.m. when I left the crematorium" (4th August). Things moved fast in the Palace, and one of the developments was the withdrawal of favour and patronage to Venkatappa. Here are Venkatappa's own words that narrate this story (23rd September 1940):

At about 1 p.m. I got the information that Mr. M. Rama Rao, Asst. Secretary to His Highness wanted to see me. I went to him at about 2 p.m. and he said that the present Maharaja does not want any more panels to be done and that I may see Mr. Thamboo Chetty. Saw Mr. Thamboo Chetty who informed me the same thing and asked me if I could not vacate the building after Dasara, when I told him that I had to do some more panels to complete the work entrusted to me by His late Highness. He promised to submit it to the present Maharaja.

At 6.50 p.m. received a letter from Mr. Rama Rao stating that the panel of "Dancing Siva" (which I had just completed) may be placed in the Amba-Vilas, for inspection and the other panels are not wanted and no further work need be done, and that he had asked the Palace Engineer to help in taking the panel to the Palace (24th September)

Next day, not only the said panel but also the big easel on which it stood was taken away from Venkatappa's Studio to the Palace. The subsequent pages in his diary are intriguingly blank. Probably he was overwhelmed with agony and anger at the shabby way he had been treated by the new set-up in the Palace, and he found no words to record his feelings.

On 5th October, he "handed over the key of the suite of rooms he occupied in the upstairs of the Palace Dispensary, Mysore, where I was doing the Palace work upto 24th of last month, and also the furniture to the Munsiff of Palace Motikhana, Mysore". The very next day, he left Mysore by train at 7.15 a.m. and arrived in Bangalore at 11.45 a.m. He took up his lodging at the Highland Hotel, near his site in Malleswaram.

IN BANGALORE

(1940-1965)

The day after he arrived in Bangalore (7th October, 1940) he went to the Municipal Commissioner and obtained permission to start the construction work on his site on the basis of the 'old license' (which he had obtained a couple of months earlier) and to submit soon the revised plan. The blue-prints of the new plan (Studio, School and his residence) were submitted ten days later, and the very next day he was in Mysore in the morning to consult his lawyer M. A. Doreswami Iyengar about what he may do about the injustice that was meted out to him by the Palace authorities. He was so disgusted with the people in power there that he disliked the idea of staying in Mysore even for a night; he left Mysore by train at 10 p.m. and arrived in Bangalore the next morning. Three days later he again went to Mysore for a day, and arranged with his friend Kumbiah (carpenter and cabinet-maker) to have his things brought to Bangalore in a lorry. Returning to Bangalore he occupied the house no. 276 in the 7th Cross Road of Malleswaram, not far from his site, and all his belongings from Mysore were received on 24th October.

Work on the building began on 4th December 1940 and the door-frames were fixed on 16th February, 1941. The building was practically completed by 4th June, when the ritual of *grha- pravesha* (formal first entry into the newly built house, 'house- warming') was conducted. On 12th September 1942, there appeared much to his

consternation “a big crack in the main Studio, from one end of the flooring to the other, extending to the southern and northern walls and also to the basement and plinth slabs both north and south”, with the result that the building began sinking on one side. The engineer who examined it ascribed the sinking to “insufficient and imperfect foundation”.

This was a constant source of annoyance and irritation for him, although he did not do anything about it. After some years (in 1944) cracks developed in the centre of the terrace also, and during the rainy season it leaked heavily. Several repairs were carried out to correct the condition by engineers and contractors, but without success. At last he undertook to carry out the repairs himself, and he succeeded, for despite heavy rainfall soon after the repairs were completed, “not a drop leaked”. He writes in his diary for 5th July 1951 :

Thank God. Self-help is the best help. What a great mental relief that I was able to successfully repair the cracks which leaked heavily for years

The building shows careful planning not only with regard to the apartments but as regards ventilation also. There was provision too for the first floor, and he had got blue-prints ready for this portion of the house, which however was never built. Besides living quarters for the artist, there was the main Studio, small Studio, an ante-chamber, a spacious quadrangle and a receiving room. His plan included a music-chamber, an art-gallery and class-rooms. He wrote on the 4th June 1955 to his friend and well-wisher, Lt. Col. A. V. Subramanyaraja Arasu (formerly the Hon. ADC to, and also a close relative of, the late Maharaja) :

From 04.06.41 I am by the grace of God, living happily in my *own Studio*, which was my life's Dream and which is built

according to my taste and purpose from my honest hard-earned money, almost in the middle of a big plot measuring 227 ft. by 431 ft. surrounded by numerous Hongay trees, and I am going on with my studies as a life-long student of my favourite subjects, Painting, Sculpture and Music-Veena with their different branches both day and night in pin-drop silence; and so I am forced to stick up to my Studio, living a secluded life, cooking my food and doing all other domestic works myself, besides imparting gratuitous instruction to worthy students that go to my Studio.

That is the reason why I was not able to go to Mysore, in fact to any other place beyond Bangalore all these years. Another reason is that I have no business of any kind or attraction in Mysore, which has lost its charm or the real soul after the death of our revered beloved late Highness”

However, it was not given to him to “live happily” in his new home in Bangalore. Soon after he began residing there, he had serious misgivings about his health, and had to get ‘pacificatory rites’ conducted on his behalf by a tantrik, Budhanadi Srinivasachari of Basavanagudi, at the instance of his astrologer- friend Gopalakrishna Rao (11th September to 12th November 1941). Next year, a worker dwelling in the neighbourhood who had trespassed into his land abused him and threatened to kill him. Venkatappa had to seek police protection (13th August 1942). This kind of irritation from his neighbours continued almost till his last days. Encroachment upon his property, cutting down of the trees in his plot at night, damage to the building by wanton stone-throwing, abuses and quarrels disturbed him almost continually.

Read for instance this account in his diary for 6th July 1946. He saw a boy who was removing grass from his plot, and tried to snatch the instrument he was using to cut the grass. The boy ran away, but

an hour later 50 or 60 Kunigal labourers, (living in huts in the 15th cross) came to me in a body when I was very near my site in the 17th cross with sticks and weapons and threatened to chop

off my head because I beat the boy who was removing the grass; one and all of the gang of 60 using all sorts of obscene language towards me. They formed a ring round me and continued threatening and abusing me. And I must say with gratitude to God that it was simply a Divine miracle that saved my life this evening... When I was proceeding towards my house they all followed me abusing me throughout. I instead of entering my house went to Malleswaram Police Station and reported the incident to the Sub-Inspector...

or another account (3rd April, 1950):

It was 8.30 p.m. when I came home. To my great astonishment I found that some faecal matter had been thrown into the small Studio hall through the window that is always kept open! I didn't get inclination to prepare my food in the night. This seems to be the mischief of Mari and his people

He then went to the Police Station, gave a written complaint, and brought a police constable to see the faecal matter thrown into the Small Studio; and then got the rooms swept and washed thoroughly. Mari that is referred to here was a labourer residing in a hut in the adjoining plot, who developed an ill-will for the artist ever since he built his Studio, and frequently caused him great concern and annoyance.

Or still another account (17th October 1950):

At about 10 a.m. I was able to catch hold of a buffalo belonging to Thimmaiah alias Neela (who is employed in the Lamp-Works); his mother and wife both used filthiest language, threatening to get my house demolished, window panes broken and even to send me to Police Station if I did not let their animal go without impounding it ... I decided to teach them a pucca lesson in the police station

Added to all this was his pre-occupation for years with "the unpleasant and unprofitable litigation due to the mischief of the then Huzur Secretary to His Highness". It may be recalled that "by the compulsion of the late Maharaja", he had given "a scheme for decoration of the

Southern wall of Amba-Vilas Hall of the Palace, after studying the environment for several months in 1927". "This commission dramatically ended only a few weeks after the sudden demise of His Highness in 1940, when the decoration work was at the fag-end". The new potentates in the Palace refused to honour the promise that had been made by the late Maharaja to pay the artist Rs. 40,000 for the panels. What was worse, they rejected in effect the panels made by the artist and summarily dismissed his services in the Palace. Venkatappa was promptly infuriated at this affront, and decided to teach them a lesson.

For the first time in the history of the royal dynasty in Mysore, a case was filed in the law-courts against the Maharaja. When Venkatappa consulted his lawyer-friend in Mysore M. A. Doreswamy Iyengar, the latter referred him to his brother M. A. Gopalaswami Iyengar, who was a leading advocate in Bangalore. Venkatappa got a notice issued to the Huzur Secretary to the then Maharaja through his lawyer in Mysore on 5th September 1943, and because the reply to the notice was unsatisfactory he instructed the advocate on 30th September to file a suit against the Palace for damages of Rs. 40,000-00. His plaint was rejected with costs in Mysore District Court on the 6th of January 1944. Then the advocate-brothers consulted the celebrated legal luminary in Madras, V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar, who examined the case and suggested that it was a fit case for appeal in the High Court (25th May 1944), also offering to conduct the case himself without expecting monetary benefits, for he had great regard for the artist.

The appeal was filed in the High Court of Mysore on 5th June, 1944, with V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar as the Vakil. This became a sensational case in the annals of legal

proceedings in the native State that Mysore still was, and became known as the 'Palace Appeal' (R. A. 126 of 1943-44). There was an attempt initiated by the Huzur Secretary to arrive at a compromise and settle the case 'out of Court' (21st June, 1946); but it satisfied neither the advocate (V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar), to whom Venkatappa left entirely the decision "to do as God dictates him" (4th July) nor Venkatappa. The case went on, eagerly followed by laymen as well as legal specialists, and the High Court held that the Palace was not a legal entity and dismissed the case with costs on 27th October 1946. The 'Hindu', the leading daily of South India, wrote an editorial on the judgement (31st October).

Although Venkatappa's appeal against the Palace was dismissed, the Maharaja was "pleased to offer a sum of Rs. 5000-00 to me and that I may make use of the (panels) pictures as I like and the payment would be made at once, if I showed my willingness to accept it" (cf. entry in his diary for 14th November, letter from the advocate Mirle Lakshminarayanappa on behalf of the Palace to Venkatappa's advocate M. A. Gopalaswami Iyengar). When his advocate consulted Venkatappa about it, Venkatappa "flatly declined the offer". Later the matter was reported to V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar, who counselled that Venkatappa should accept the offer of the Palace. But Venkatappa had already made up his mind. When Gopalaswami Iyengar drafted a diplomatic letter in reply to the offer of the Huzur Secretary, Venkatappa "told him plainly that the tone of his reply was not at all to my taste and that it was dead against my principle". The Huzur Secretary got a firm and unequivocal rejection of the offer. Thus ended a litigation that had aroused wide-spread popular interest that revealed to the world the artist's independence of spirit and high sense of integrity.

After settling down in Bangalore, Venkatappa did not attempt any new works of art. He was harassed by numerous cares, and troubled by visitors; and his health also suffered. Numbness of fingers first appeared in the month of March 1943, and he was advised infra-red ray treatment. He had to visit frequently the Radiology Institute of the Victoria Hospital, where his ailment was diagnosed as 'arthritis due to old age' (he was 58 years old then). Then his right ankle started giving him trouble in the month of May 1948, and he took treatment in the Malleswaram hospital. Pain in the left knee, which began around the same period became "unbearable" in 1952, and the infra-red ray treatment at the Victoria Hospital proving ineffectual he tried Ayurvedic treatment (*pinda-taila*) and got his knee massaged by two professional persons (Venkatappa and Venkatesappa). His ailment now being diagnosed as rheumatism, he consulted Dr. Parthanarayana Pandit of the Ayurvedic College and applied *kanaka-lepa*, *guru-taila* and *kanaka-raksha-vati*, and used medicinal green leaves, *Vata-narayana-soppu* with dhal at lunch. His teeth and gums began giving him trouble around 1953, and Dr. J. M. Fernandez became his dentist-friend. He developed a great attachment for this doctor. In August 1954, he suffered from excruciating pain in the ring finger of the right hand, for which he was treated in the Bowring Hospital (diathermic treatment). It was then that he got his urine examined, and was known to be a diabetic. He was advised to take wheat preparations.

Living all alone, he was cooking his own food. Now he had to prepare the food for a diabetic. He discovered that preparations from powdered fried husk agreed with him, and he used it regularly. He also used to prepare saltish *laddoos* and *pongal*. He invented a special kind of *laddoos* which were appetising, nourishing, as well as suitable to his health conditions. He called them "Health laddoos".

By November 1954, he was so disgusted with the medicines that he was taking almost continuously for years for one ailment or the other, that when one of the doctors (Dr. Parthanarayana Pandit) asked him to come for examination, Venkatappa "told him that I have stopped drugging my system" (10th November). When his sister was ill and bed-ridden, he visited her and "advised her to take sufficient nourishing diet more than the medicine".

Despite the dogging ailments, he kept himself active. He went out regularly for walks, prepared his food twice a day, washed his clothes, received the visitors, taught some students of music, attended to the correspondence, went to hear lectures and music recitals at the Indian Institute of World Culture, and also visited films frequently. Among his new friends in Bangalore were the famous scientist H. J. Bhabha, F. R. S., the well-known industrialist Vikram Sarabhai and his dancer-wife Mrinalini, the great promotor of Indian crafts Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, (wife of the poet Harindranath who was also his friend) and the art-critic and author G. Venkatachalam. He also threw year after year his birthday parties, for a select group of 20 or 30 friends and acquaintances (his physicians, lawyers, near relatives and tailor), in Sri Chamundeswari Bhavan, the proprietor of which, Shamlal, was a trusted friend of his. It is because of the unfailing courtesy and sincere regard shown to him by this gentleman, Venkatappa visited this hotel everyday for coffee and tiffin, and for lunch whenever he could not prepare his own food at home. He was fond of the 'pulkas' and 'vetta-kolambu' that were prepared in this hotel. They used to prepare for him specially salt-free 'pulkas' after 1956. And when Venkatappa prepared some delicacies (like sweet and salt *laddoos*) at home, he would take them to this owner of the hotel.

An example of the enthusiasm with which he gave his birthday parties may be furnished from an entry in his diary for 21st June 1955, which was his 69th birthday:

All the invitees came and the dinner party began at 12.15 p.m. All were immensely pleased with the preparations which were excellent. Sri. S. Narayanappa was kind enough to offer garlands and fruits to me with his greetings but I had to decline them with thanks for the sake of my principle

The dinner that he gave on his 70th birthday the following year (7th July 1956), he described as "a grand dinner" for 22 guests. And, the year after that, he had special preparation of *laddoos* (by an expert cook Nagappayya Hande of the Planters Coffee Home in Malleswaram) served to the guests. On such occasions he would not sit and eat with the guests, but have his lunch after all the guests departed.

He had not given up the idea of having a Studio with a gallery and school of fine art attached to it even as late as 1952. For on 3rd October that year, Dr. Alexander Markay, the film-maker came and saw his paintings:

He wanted to buy at least one of my pictures, particularly the twilight pictures of Ooty with which he wanted to live. I told him that they were painted specially for a gallery in my Studio and that I have preserved them all these years in spite of tempting offers

He wrote to the then Governor of Madras (Krishnakumar Sinhji, the former ruler of Bhavnagar) on 21st August 1951:

... I only mention that my idea of forming an Art Gallery of my studies in my Art School had the blessings of the Father of our Nation in August 1927, when he was in Mysore City, of which I am a native, and when I had the good fortune of showing ten of my humble studies of different moods of Nature from Dawn to Midnight done in 1926 at Ootacamund, and to keep up my ideal and my promise to Mahatma Gandhi, I am jealously

preserving them and other studies, in spite of tempting offers by art- knowing millioners of Ahmedabad and Bombay

He refused even to allow them to be exhibited outside his Studio. When the Dasara Exhibition Committee wanted these paintings of his for their art section in 1950, he declined, saying that "they were specially created and are jealously preserved for the sole purpose of a gallery in my School for the benefit of art-students and the Nation, and so they cannot be allowed to be exhibited elsewhere" (21st September). But he was not doing anything to materialise this dream of his. He did not even make it widely known; nor was he the type to approach the Government or influential people to help him in this project. It was becoming increasingly clear to himself and to all those who knew him that he was a lone wolf, and that no one could really get along with him. He was too full of ideals and principles and too proud of them to compromise with people or situations.

He discussed with some of his astrologer-friends (like Rangaswami Iyengar) to make sure if his Studio would at all materialise, and if it did, would prosper (15th June, 1948):

He said that it (vrschika lagna of the studio) was a very very auspicious time. After glancing through my horoscope he said that chandra-dasa and kuja-dasa are the best periods of my life to be enjoyed

While it was certainly not the best period of his life, considering the events as they actually occurred, the prediction provided fresh enthusiasm for him to work towards the actualization of his dream. He reconciled himself to the reverses that he had experienced in his life till then, and hoped that things would change for the better. He was sure in his mind that his Studio would come into being, and that his art would be preserved and

communicated to posterity. He unpacked all his paintings, and arranged all the panels that he had done in Mysore and spent months looking at them and thinking of possible improvements.

It was for the sake of the gallery that he planned in his Studio that he began collecting his old works and kept himself engaged in improving his panels, and in 'adding beauty' to his paintings, while he did nothing new after 1940. He had painted for his friend and patron in Mysore, P. Raghavendra Rao (a senior officer in the then Maharaja's government), two landscapes from the top of the Chamundi Hills in 1919. "They were presented to him by me in 1919 and of course he had not given me even a single pice in return". Dr. M. Shivaram, (the leading physician of Bangalore and popular writer in Kannada), who treated P. Raghavendra Rao in Bangalore, had got them as a present. Venkatappa who became acquainted with Shivaram in Bangalore requested the latter to return the paintings to the gallery which he was planning to start (21st August 1945). Shivaram returned them to Venkatappa a few days later, but the artist was pained to see "the miserable condition of the landscapes". When he removed the paintings from the frames (which were in poor shape), he found a large number of silver- fish inside, and both the pictures had been eaten away all round and in the centre. Venkatappa spent three days repairing these paintings, and then Shivaram took these paintings to his house promising to return them within a few days (3rd September 1945).

He began "the reorientation", as he called it, in the closing months of 1948, of the panels in plaster of paris that he had done in Mysore. The panel depicting the departure of Sakuntala was "created in Mysore in 1928" for Amba-Vilas Hall of the Palace. The original is still there. But a

copy taken from the broken mould of the original was with the artist, and he had brought it to Bangalore. "After 20 years of continued study, the panel appeared to be too crude and wanting in many respects to my mind and so the decision to reorientate" (entry on 7th February 1949 after the reorientation was complete). The reorientation began on 18th November 1948 and went on day and night till 29th December of that year. He also began on 3rd April 1949 the reorientation of the bust of Rabindranath Tagore, which he had done in 1923. He began "reorientating" the circular panel of Prince Siddhartha in lamp-light on 30th November 1951, and completed it on 21st March 1952. He worked on the Ekalavya panel for several days during October 1954, and made several changes in it. He worked on the panel "Dance of Siva" during September 1956. He also took up his miniature landscapes done in Ooty and Kodaikanal for retouching and improvement, especially the study of 'Sun-set' (which he completed in October 1957). He even set out to do fresh art-works in 1951 (11th May), although the attempt was still-born :

At about 10 a.m. I began the studies of drawing and painting which were neglected for the last several years for various reasons

During the month of May in 1949, the bust of the supplier ('Mani') in the Udipi Hotel in Mysore, which he had done from life in 1918, accidentally fell down in his Studio and was broken to pieces :

... after 31 years' association with it, it was destroyed at 5.15 p.m. (3rd May)! God alone knows the destiny or end of everything on earth!

This was a matter of great depression for him and robbed him of enthusiasm for any art-work for several months. It is only on the first of January 1950 that he decided to take up the Mani's bust for repair. "All the broken pieces were

arranged on the table, to be fixed with glue or gold-size tomorrow afternoon". He got busy and spent several days trying to reconstruct the broken bust, by assembling and fixing the pieces. He finished retouching the reconstructed bust on the 14th, with black Japan here and there. On the 3rd of the following month he attempted to remove the black Japan from the bust with turpentine but could not remove "even a trace of it", even using force several times. "Black Japan seems to have become part and parcel of plaster". He tried painting the bust with white oil-colour, but was not happy and so removed the paint with turpentine. He tried again on the 28th of February, and this time he was successful. He gave three coatings of the paint, and softened the paint by tin-piece. The finished bust was placed in the Main Studio at 5 p.m. on 8th March. Later in the year (in September), the subject of this bust Narasimha chanced to pay a visit to his studio with his wife and children, and had the pleasant surprise of seeing his own bust as he looked thirty-two years ago!

The Studio had been open to the public ('art-lovers') from 1943, with a permanent arrangement of panels in plaster of Paris and busts in the 'Main Studio'. The paintings (landscapes of Ootacamund and Kodaikanal, and ivory miniatures) were normally packed and kept in the 'Small Studio'. They were unpacked, and exhibited for a few days every year. He would then inform his friends and acquaintances that the paintings would be on show, and receive the visitors when they arrived. When art-lovers wanted to see these paintings at times other than these annual shows, they were expected to write to him and fix up the date and time mutually convenient. He did not care whether the art-lover was a dignitary or a labourer; at the appointed time, all the paintings would be neatly and chronologically arranged in the Small Studio, and the artist would be there ready to receive the visitor and

explain to him the details of the paintings, the panels and the busts.

Dr. Bhabha F.R.S. and his mother were admirers of his art. In the month of February 1943 Bhabha wanted a portrait of his father (Hormasji Bhabha who was the Inspector-General of Education in Mysore) done, and requested Venkatappa to accept the commission. But Venkatappa "gave a negative reply since I had not seen his father". Three years later, Bhabha's mother renewed the request when she visited Venkatappa along with her scientist-son and with photographs of her late husband,

I however promised that I would sincerely meditate over the portraits of her husband for several weeks and that I would certainly undertake to do it if I get a clear impression of her husband in my mind after deep meditation.

She asked me what I would charge for that portrait on ivory as big as the portrait of His late Highness the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, I said that the minimum would be Rs. 3,500-00 and that it would be finished only by the end of the year if I decide to undertake to do it in the end of March next"

But when Bhabha reminded him about his father's portrait, Venkatappa returned the photos with the explanation that "I couldn't undertake to do for reasons mentioned in my letter to him a year ago"; the reason was that he had not seen the person whose portrait he was asked to make.

He had taken the idea of his Studio seriously for he at last condescended to show the visitors not only his art-works but certificates he had received as well. He notes in his diary for 20th November 1946:

I was busy in mounting all the certificates of merit awarded to me along with medals by different Fine Art Exhibition Committees in different parts of India from 1910. Though framing them and showing them to visitors was against my will and taste all these thirty-six years, yet the inner urge to bring

them out to light now was great and so took them out of the trunk in which they were locked ever since they were received. I was surprised to see that they were not at all damaged by worms all these 36 years!

This was preliminary to an exhibition of all his works in his Studio for two days on 23rd and 24th November, for two hours each day (between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m). A large number of people visited this show. The exhibition of his art-works once a year invariably drew large crowds. And it was not seldom that he was greatly inconvenienced by people in his Studio. During a show in 1948 (28th January) a bas-relief of Bodhisattva by electro-copper deposit method that was placed on the ground in the Main Studio was trampled upon by a careless visitor, a double-graduate and a teacher who was living close by. It was broken, and it was partially set right on 26th May by the artist's carpenter-friend N. Kumbiah and his nephew Krishna-raju.

Venkatappa never allowed his art-works to be taken out of his Studio for being shown anywhere else. The two exceptions were in 1950, when his friends Fred Harvey and G. Venkatachalam had organised an exhibition of paintings in the Theosophical Society in the Cantonment area of Bangalore; and in 1954, when G. Venkatachalam organised an art exhibition in South Parade (the present Mahatma Gandhi Road) from 30th November till 10th December. He had an especial regard for the simplicity, sincerity and art-sense of Fred Harvey who was connected with the Theosophical Society. He notes in his diary for 2nd December 1953 that he "was shocked to learn from the Manager of the firm (Bombay Tailoring House) that my good old friend Mr. Fred Harvey died on Tuesday 15th inst. by heart-failure".

He was, however, gradually getting disillusioned about his free School and art Gallery project. His health was causing

him considerable concern. No worthy student had turned up to learn painting from him. He had trouble from his neighbours ever since 1940. It was ten years since he arrived in Bangalore, and his dream of a free school of fine art remained unfulfilled. He ascribed this initially to astrological reasons. He was, however, still hopeful that things might improve:

From 5.30 a.m. today I had some mental relief that the evil period of (Seven and half) years of Saturn which is otherwise known as *ela-rata-Sani-kata* was over by 5.30 a.m. today by the grace of God

(20th September 1950)

But things did not really improve, for soon after obtaining this "mental relief", he put up a notice outside the entrance of his home that the Studio was closed until further notice and that the artist should not be disturbed. But there was an occasion to lift somewhat his depressed spirit. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India visited Bangalore in the month of July 1951, and among the places which he was to visit was Venkatappa's Studio. He was scheduled to call on the artist and go round the Studio at 5.30 p.m. on the 15th. But this was made known to the artist only in the forenoon of that day! "So I restlessly unpacked all the pictures and arranged them within 4 p.m". Venkatappa waited till 7.30 p.m. "Thousands of people who were waiting from 4.30 p.m. to have his darshan were disappointed. "At 8 p.m. I went out for a short walk". He was informed the next day that the Prime Minister would "surely" visit the Studio that day, only to be told at 6.30 p.m. that the visit was cancelled "owing to other engagements"!

By 1954, he realised that his dream of a Studio and School was not destined to materialise. He reconciled himself to selling his art-works which he had preserved all these

years “zealously” for the planned gallery of his Studio. There was an offer to buy some of them by the All-India Handicrafts Board through its Chairperson, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, who was a friend of Venkatappa and an admirer of his art:

(She) pressed me more than once to mention my price for all the five panels and one ivory miniature of His Highness the late Maharaja of Mysore, but I declined to give out my price to any of them. I left the question entirely to her discretion

He was also made to believe that the State Government was interested in acquiring all of his art-works to be kept in an art-gallery the Government proposed to start. The then Chief Minister of the State K. Hanumanthayya visited his Studio on 25th September 1954, and mentioned about this proposed art-gallery in Bangalore. He also promised to invite suggestions with regard to the decorations in the ‘Vidhana Soudha’ that was being built to house the Government secretariat. Then there was a move to start a College of Fine Arts by the Mysore University, and Venkatappa was invited to attend a meeting on 31st August 1956, which he did. As early as 1949, there had been a proposal to start a College of Fine Arts in Mysore in memory of the late Yuvaraja, and J. B. Mallaradhya, the then Commissioner of Economic Development and Planning to the Government of Mysore, was the Chairman of a committee that had been formed for this purpose; and Venkatappa had been consulted then too.

But nothing encouraging for Venkatappa came out of these moves. And this was partly at least due to the honesty, integrity and independent spirit of the artist which made him averse to flatter the politicians and seek their favour. He was constitutionally incapable of bowing before people in power, and in fact he treated them with disdain. On the 18th July, 1957, he notes in his diary that

G. Venkatachalam suggested (thoughtlessly and with no regard to the artist's personality) that he should apply for the post of Director of the Art Design Centre (Government of India) in Bangalore, which had recently been vacated by the artist's class-mate Asit Kumar Haldar :

I told him frankly that I would be the last man to stretch my hands for a Government job in my 71st year, having lived an independent life all these 70 years honourably and that I would be glad to think of it if it is a request to me from the Central Government

He knew of course that the Government was as unlikely to request him as he himself was unlikely to request the Government! But his health was fast failing. To the well-meaning and friendly J. B. Mallaradhya, who tried to pressurise him to attend a meeting, he wrote (on 7th September 1958) :

It is simply unkind on your part to expect me to agree to be a member of the Mysore Dasara Exhibition Committee though I have already informed the Secretary that I am quite unwell from 1st week of March last. I am suffering from giddiness, insomnia, diabetes, severe type of neurites and extreme weakness. It is with very great difficulty that I walk a few yards from my sick-bed to the latrine with a bamboo stick

Early that year (on 19th February), a short talk by him on his *guru* Seshanna in Kannada was recorded by the All India Radio in his own Studio for broadcast on the occasion of the Veena maestro's birth anniversary. Later the same month, the Veena- player Doreswami Iyengar copied from Venkatappa's music note-books a rare *tillana* (a musical composition) in the *raga* Darbari-Kanada composed by Seshanna ; this piece was hitherto unknown. Next month, he did not feel well, felt dull and had spells of giddiness due to extreme weakness.

On the 13th of March, he was compelled to do something he had never done all his life – to seek for help. He walked

up in the morning with difficulty to the Super-Photo-Studio of his nephew (his sister's son), K. Ramaraju in Malleswaram, and "explained to him the condition of my ill-health and asked him whether he can come and sleep in my studio until I recover. He said he would gladly do it from tonight...Took my lunch at Sri Chamundeswari Bhavan. Sri Ramaraju's severant followed me upto my house".

This was a turning point in his life: he was really seriously ill and for the first time in his life his spirit of independence and self-reliance suffered a blow. It must have made him feel miserable. And also for the first time, there was a kindly touch in his approach to any relative of his. His diary for 23rd March:

At about 4.20 p.m. my sister Srimathi Yellamma and her eldest son came and made enquiries about my health. It was too kind of her to have taken the trouble to come from her sick-bed. They came in an auto-rickshaw and remained for a few minutes

Medication did not improve his condition, and he became increasingly weak. Even small movements tired him; he was progressively disinterested in the world around him.

But he was his usual self when he notes in his diary (18th March):

S. B. Shankar came at 5 p.m. and was talking about various things till 6.30 p.m. Felt tired of this long talk with him. I asked him not to come, in the interest of the patient

He was not in a condition to leave his bed. On 20th March, Dr. R. Rangachar of Malleswaram began treating him. His heart was found to be in fairly good condition, but he had urinary problems, swelling of legs, stiffness of joints and extreme weakness. The physician advised him to go to the Nandi Hills (near Bangalore) for a change, and the patient appeared to agree to go. And a car was also engaged to

take him along with his nephew to the hill-station on 4th April. But that morning:

I told him (Shankar who had come with the car) that I am not in a position to travel as I am feeling feverish and severe giddiness, from last afternoon

The doctor who was summoned suggested that he be admitted as inpatient in the Bowring hospital for a week, "not because the case had become worse but for change of atmosphere". Venkatappa was not enthusiastic about the suggestion. He preferred to spend his last days in his own Studio.

The next three years he was practically confined to his bed. His nephew looked after him with the help of a servant. The patient was disinclined to meet anybody, and was mostly wrapped up with himself. The proud lion had been stricken down by old age, infirmity and ailments. It was a pathetic sight for those who had seen Venkatappa in his earlier years.

On 17th June 1961, the Central Lalit Kala Academy elected him a Fellow and the following year it wanted to honour him with the presentation of *tamrapatra* (highest honour for an artist) and *anga-vastra* (customary insignia of high status) at a special function in Delhi (29th March 1962). As he was unable to travel, the function was arranged to be held in Bangalore. Venkatappa declined, saying that he "was so weak in body and so feeble in mind that he cannot even sit for minutes and accept the honour to be awarded", and requested the arrangement to be cancelled.

However, the authorities of the Lalit Kala Academy came down from Delhi and presented the honours to him at his own Studio in Bangalore in a brief function. He appeared happy to see in the small crowd that had gathered on the

occasion his old friends and acquaintances many of whom were artists. But this was his last contact with the outside world, and his mind had already been considerably enfeebled. It was obvious that he was at death's door.

He lingered for another two years, prostrate on bed and utterly helpless. He passed away at 1 p.m. on Tuesday the 25th of May 1965. His body was cremated the next day at 11.45 a.m. at Harischandra-ghat crematorium.



... THE MAN ...

ECCENTRICITIES

He corrected those who called him an artist; he pleaded that he was only a 'student of Art'. He wrote in reply to a letter from the Director of Public Instruction, Bangalore, on August 18, 1958 when he was already a renowned artist: "I am a life-long student of (a) painting, (b) sculpture, and (c) music – veena. I have had fourteen years of academic training in painting and sculpture, and ten years training in veena". He frequently said that the field of art was immense like an ocean, and that his own achievements were a mere drop in that ocean. It was not modesty, for of it he had but little! He sincerely believed in what he said, and therefore disbelieved any one who claimed to be an artist. Hence his almost continuous fight against the pretensions of vainglorious artists, professional art-critics and self-styled art-lovers. He was firmly convinced that a life-time is not enough to attain mastery over any branch of art, and that one who was devoted to art can only be a student. It was sacrilegious, according to him, for anyone to call himself an artist.

K. Venkatappa was a strange amalgum of an extraordinarily integrated soul and an exceedingly contentious spirit. He was at once sensitive and severe, simple and strict, austere and uncompromising. He created works of art and adversaries with equal ease and ardour. He had a forbidding exterior, a very severe appearance, unsmiling, grim-visaged, reserved in manner,

fixed in convictions and hard in prejudices. When he looked at you, he intently peered ; when he talked he only laid down edicts and pronounced his judgements with an air of finality. But when he laughed, which was rare, his face opened up with abandon, and you could perceive the child in him. His ferocity was probably a facade. If one could break through this hard shell, he would discover his simplicity, frankness, honesty, warmth, purposefulness in life and love of delicacy. Closer acquaintance would show him tender, affectionate, helpful and intensely human, both in strength and in weaknesses.

Having spent his impressionable years in the elite atmosphere of the Mysore Palace, he had become thoroughly meticulous, punctilious, correct and formal in all his dealings. He was courteous and restrained in his talk, prompt in keeping his word, and intolerant of those who lacked courtesy, restraint and promptness. Order and punctuality were his passions. His works, his utensils and instruments, his residence and Studio, his habits and manners, his correspondances and transactions were all specimens of orderliness and punctuality. If you took liberties with his time, or with his works of art, even inadvertently, you could be sure that he would pounce upon you and tick you off, not however unceremoniously ! If he found that you took him lightly or treated him slightly, he would not hesitate to teach you lessons, not seldom in courts of law.

Love of litigation was an outstanding trait in his personality. He spent almost equal time in his Studio and in the chambers of solicitors and court-rooms. He did not spare even the erstwhile Maharaja of Mysore from a legal notice. He almost regularly visited the Malleswaram Police Station to file complaints against his offensive and encroaching neighbours and irreverent mischief-makers ;

and he spent considerable time and energy in consulting his lawyers (of whom he had a large number) about the law-suits he kept on preferring in courts of law. It no doubt cost him not only hard-earned money but also peace of mind.

Not that he was by nature cantankerous. Indeed he was not. He scrupulously avoided taking interest in the affairs of others. He encouraged no one to indulge in gossip in his Studio. He never interfered with what others thought or did. Nor did he ever consider it his duty to correct the defectives and reform the deviants, to fight against injustice and work for a cause. But he violently resisted any attempt to slight him, or to misrepresent him or his works of art. Much of his litigation emerged from this sense of injustice done to himself or to his works of art. The truth was that although he moved and had his being in this world of men and matters, he lived in a world of his own, which he zealously guarded from others. He tolerated a few friends, suffered some acquaintances, but shunned all others. He lived all alone in his Studio which was also his home, never having married and never allowing his relatives or friends to be anything other than casual visitors, and even that not without prior notice. There was a cousin-brother of his (D. Kasipathi by name) who was the only relative to be allowed to visit him frequently. Towards the end of his life, when he was bed-ridden, physically weak and mentally feeble, he allowed his sister's son, K. Rama Raju, to take care of him, his Studio and his works of art.

It was a matter of principle with him, a vow known as 'aparigraha', not to be under any sort of obligation to others. Even when his own sister Yellamma (Lakshmiddevamma) offered him some pickles or fruits he would accept them only after making cash payment for

them or giving some other articles in exchange. When his nephew, Rama Raju, who owned a photographic studio, took photographs of the uncle's works of art, the uncle would accept the prints only after making payment. This fear of being obliged to others was almost morbid with him. There is no doubt that he carried this principle, in itself a good one, to an extreme degree, much to the embarrassment of his admirers, relatives and friends. But there it was, an irrational principle, altogether self-imposed and unflinchingly followed. Well or ill, he refused to be under the obligation of anyone, friend or relative.

His inordinate love of solitude and uncompromising passion for personal independence were distinguishing and almost morbid, traits in him. It is not without a pathological streak that he occasionally imagined intrusion into his private world, and somewhat like Don Quixote he fought imaginary adversaries. It is a fact that the victims of his wrath were mostly innocent parties, and that their offences were unwitting and slight. He was quick to take offence even when it was not intended, and not seldom did he merely imagine the offences. He frowned upon publishers and authors who used the blocks of his works of art without his permission or knowledge, or printed them carelessly. He promptly set out to teach them lessons. Even the literary giants like A. R. Krishna Sastri, V. Sitaramaiah, A. N. Krishna Rao and Shivaram Karanth, who were actually among his admirers, were not spared from his righteous anger. The revered monk of the Ramakrishna order who was responsible for incorrectly printing the block of one of Venkatappa's painting in *Udbodhan* was hauled up before the court; Venkatappa made him part with not more than a rupee by way of damages!

WEDDED TO ART ALONE

Art was undoubtedly his sole mission in life, his passion, and even his obsession. He pursued it all alone, and against heavy odds. His was a fighting spirit, and he violently resisted even the semblance of offence or injustice done to his art. He did not encourage people without artistic inclinations to go anywhere near him or have anything to do with him. Even his lawyers and physicians had to be lovers of art. He did not tolerate critics who were themselves not artists in some measure. And he did not care even for appreciation from people outside a small group of friends and acquaintances for whom he had some appreciation. He disliked most thoroughly the charlatans with pretensions to art-appreciation. He had unconcealed contempt for them.

This single-minded devotion to art, which was the outstanding quality of his life, was truly remarkable and rather unusual among the artists. He held before him the goal of perfection, and moved steadfastly in that direction. He declined many lucrative and administrative assignments and attractive and prestigious commissions in his pursuit of art for its own sake. He refused to be sidetracked by worldly or spiritual gains, to both of which he was singularly adverse. He had a hearty disdain for publicity and advertisement either for himself or for his art. He wrote to the journalist V. R. Ruthnam on November 28, 1951, who offered to write a feature-article on him in a leading daily.

Regarding your desire to write for the Press a sketch about me, let me tell you frankly that I am not for such things, self-advertisement, and that I have on previous occasions flatly refused to give my consent ... I consider such things as sheer vanity, which I hate

Much earlier, an artist from Bangalore, Rumale Chennabasavaiah who visited him frequently, met him on 20th October 1946 and:

He requested me to give a brief sketch of my life, which I declined to do

But he did not mind recounting during conversation his past, his experiences with people, his impressions thereof, his successes and failures, techniques that he tried and perfected, and the occasions which prompted his artworks. His talk would invariably turn to the qualities of art. He made passing references to people, to his own development and training, to his earlier life; but would never linger on such details. Any one talking with him for ten minutes would realise that here was one who had identified himself with art, and had no interests in life that rivalled art. When people objected to it and regarded him as more important than his art, he rebelled and that is what he called advertisement. D. K. Sengupta, who was the Station Director of All India Radio, visited his Studio on 10th December, 1956; he appreciated his works and wanted a photograph of the artist:

He asked me whether I had a photo of myself. I said No, and that I am not for advertisement

This was because he honestly believed that personal details were of no public value or interest. There is an entry for 1st September 1954:

Chokkalingam, law student of Ramnad district, said he is anxious to write an article about me in some of the Tamil papers of his native place for the information of his countrymen. I said it is of no use to anybody.

It is for the sake of art that he took the two vows: the vow of life-long celibacy (*brahmacharya*), and the vow of non-acceptance of gifts either in cash or in kind (*aparigraha*). These vows were meant to facilitate his total dedication to the muse of art, undistracted by normal cares, worries and interests. I have heard him tell that the latter vow was taken during his Himalayan pilgrimage of 1913. And all those who knew him knew very well that he held fast to this vow, all through his life. He was so particular about this vow that he did not accept any kind of service or even a garland, a coconut, a few betel-leaves or a cup of coffee from any one, unless he was allowed to offer something in return.

The vow of non-acceptance of gifts was probably due to his deep-rooted conviction that "self-help is the best help", which advice he recommends to himself as early as 1913 (entry in his diary for 6th May). When he was in Calcutta next year, he had severe headache, fever and cough on 5th and 6th March, and he notes in his diary that he administered to himself with success "self-treatment". When he was hesitating to go to Belgaum in 1924, along with his guru Veena Sheshanna and other musicians, a friend C. Narasimhaiah who insisted on his going, offered to make all arrangements for him. But –

I told him that my nature is not to depend upon any person, and that I would try go there if the work is finished and if I get sufficient funds

(16th December 1924)

Since then the conviction had grown on him, and assumed sometimes awkward and ridiculous forms. In 1942 (17th September), he went to the house of a much-respected and friendly State Officer, Dewan Bahadur P. Raghavendra Rao for some consultation –

He offered cocoanut and pan-supari and pressed me to accept the same, which I could not easily do because of my principle. Finally I accepted it as he gave the permission to present the same to any other person I like!

There are frequent references in his diary to this curious habit of his. To take but a random note (for 16th September, 1950):

It was about 2 p.m. when I finished my lunch. At about 3.30 p.m. my sister came and offered puddings of different kinds specially prepared for Sri Vinayaka Chaturthi festival, but to maintain my principle I had to pay a rupee before accepting the puddings!

Or another (for 23rd October 1950)

My sister came with her grand-daughter and gave a jar full of pickles (herale). In exchange I gave her (three fourth) seer of wheat.

We cannot, however, ascertain when the vow of celibacy was taken, or what the provocation or stimulation was. He seems to have had no aversion to marriage in his earlier years. We read in his diary for 11th March 1938 –

At about 4 p.m. Venkatapathi came and informed me that a rich man of our community who has a jewellery shop at Bangalore is anxious to give me his daughter in marriage

There is, however, no indication of what his own reaction to the proposal was. The person who brought him the message was his cousin-brother, who was in close touch with him. And there is an earlier entry in the diary (6th July, 1937) which suggests that he was discussing with his astrologer-acquaintances the prospects of his marriage –

... As regards the question of marriage, he did not agree with the other astrologer Mr. Madhyastha

The astrologer who is mentioned earlier in this entry was one, R. Gopalakrishna Rao, a Railway signaller who was

also an astrologer, residing in Bangalore. He was introduced to Venkatappa in the first week of July 1937, when Venkatappa (still in Mysore) visited Bangalore. He had met the other astrologer, Parameshvara Madhyastha also in Bangalore. It would appear that Venkatappa had kept the question of his marriage open till about 1937, when he was fifty years of age! But we do not know what the two astrologers told him, or how they influenced his decision not to marry.

The desire to remain a life-long bachelor was probably formed while he was still a student in the Calcutta School of Art, studying under Abanindranath Tagore (1908-1915). For the poet Rabindranath Tagore who knew Venkatappa only during these years knew that Venkatappa had plans of renouncing normal life. When the poet visited Mysore on the 28th September 1922, Venkatappa met him, and "the first word that he said after we saw each other was 'You have not yet become a sannyasi, Venkatappa!'" (entry in Venkatappa's diary for that date). There is, however, no indication that Venkatappa had at any time of his life wanted to become a sannyasin, although he lived all his life as a celibate recluse. He was no doubt deeply religious, but he was not enamoured of swamis or gurus or of their ideals or life. In any case, he was too independent-spirited to take to the life of a sannyasin, which he knew was a life completely dependent upon others.

It may also be mentioned in this context that his religious outlook was limited to a firm belief in God, in the value of His grace, and in the need for prayer. Although he went on a Himalayan pilgrimage and conducted himself throughout as a pious pilgrim, he was not given to visiting temples or places of religious interest after he returned to Mysore, or when he settled down in Bangalore. It was a

daily routine on his part to "say prayers", although what these prayers were is not known. Beyond that, he did not engage himself in any formal ritual, daily or occasionally. He wore his sacred-thread, and sometimes a thin red *namam* on his forehead. But he was by no means orthodox in the conventional sense. He ate in hotels, met freely Europeans, and went to picture-houses often. He visited his dentist J. M. Fernandes on the first day of January each year and wished him and family a happy new year; and he prepared the customary rice-pudding (*payasam*) and *pongal* on the Chandramana Yugadi day. He was by no means a conservative, although he led a strict, disciplined and austere life.

And he had no interest in spiritual matters. He saw his God only in his art-works. An entry in his diary for 30th August 1957 refers to the advice he gave to a student (A. R. Srinivasan) who was learning Veena from him:

...came at 8.50 p.m. though I had asked him to come at 8.30 p.m. The student said that I had asked him to come at 8.45 p.m.!! He seems to be a deliberate liar. I advised him not to utter falsehood, to be honest and sincere, not to be deceitful, but to have real devotion towards Art, in other words towards God – Fine Arts being Divine

His total and exclusive devotion to art did not allow him to waste his time in reading scriptural texts or philosophical or religious works. His reading was confined to books relating to art; and his transactions were only with art-lovers and art-students. His spiritual inclinations, if there were any, were not evident. It is hard, therefore, to imagine that his decision to remain a life-long celibate had anything to do with spiritual aspirations.

Nor was he by any means a life-denying ascetic. He liked good food, like *laddoos* and 'Mysore pak' (which he prepared even during his Himalayan pilgrimage, as for

instance on 2nd December 1914); on his birthdays and festival days he prepared *payasam*, *pongal* and other delicacies. He was very fond of pickles, which he prepared frequently and distributed to friends and acquaintances. He changed hotels often in search of good and clean food. He finally settled down to Sri Chamundeshwari Bhavan in Bangalore as the place which gave him food suited very well to his taste, so well in fact that he used to present the proprietor of this hotel, Shamlal, with the pickles that he himself had prepared at home. The 'pulkas' prepared in this hotel were most enjoyed by him, as also 'vetta-kolambu'. He visited cinema-houses regularly. And when the picture was good, he saw it several times. He saw Walt Disney's *Story of Robin Hood* three times within a week (November 1952); he saw *Fantasia* (again Walt Disney's) four times on four successive days in March 1945, and another four times in March, April and September, 1947. The movies that he enjoyed were in English, Telugu, Tamil and Hindi. He liked watching tennis matches. He even went to Srirangapatna from Mysore in 1918 (January) to watch a tennis match (final) in Daria Daulat. He was particular about his dress, although it was simple, especially the cut and quality of his coat. He had a tailor, Munnoo Rao, who gave him satisfaction, to whom he stuck and who was an honoured invitee at the Studio whenever a show of Venkatappa's art-works was on. Venkatappa also regularly celebrated his birthday year after year by giving a party to about twenty friends, relatives and acquaintances of his, in Sri Chamundeshwari Bhavan. He attended lectures at the Indian Institute of World Culture, and good music concerts without fail. When a press correspondant who saw Venkatappa at the Art Exhibition arranged by G. Venkatachalam reported that Venkatappa had come out of his 20 years' hiding, Venkatappa promptly walked upto the office of Deccan Herald and "pointed out

the blunder that had been committed in publishing" this news, and asked them "to rectify the mistake" (30th November 1954). He was by no means and never in hiding. He was not a recluse in that sense of the term.

Painting, sculpture and music were the three muses which possessed him completely, to the exclusion of all other normal interests. He devoted all his energy, attention and time during his long life to the pursuit of the three branches of art. He was so exceedingly earnest about this pursuit that he often disregarded elementary courtesies and ordinary human considerations. For the major part of his life, he seemed incapable of human love and indifferent to sympathy and understanding by his fellow-beings, although there were occasions, especially in his old age, which were in the nature of exceptions. This again was probably the reason why he relied frequently on legal protections and provisions. However, even when he lodged complaints in police-stations and filed cases in law-courts (as he quite often did), the vindication of his devotion to art was uppermost in his mind. It is in the cause of Fine Arts, with which his life was wedded, that he fought his legal battles and lived his lonely and austere life.

An insight into the robustness of his spirit can be had when we consider his disposition to astrology. While not being given to religious involvements of any sort, despite his austere mode of life, he was a serious student of astrology for the greater part of his life. It cannot be ascertained when or how this interest arose in him. It is probable that he caught it from his Veena master, the great Seshanna, who was not only a great believer in astrology but was well-versed in the subject. During the month of October in 1923, when Venkatappa was learning Veena, he developed eye-trouble of a serious type. Seshanna, who examined his horoscope, put it down to 'angaraka dosha'

and predicted that the eye-trouble would disappear from the first of November, as Guru would be favourable despite Angaraka's continued presence in the same place. It turned out to be so, and perhaps Venkatappa's faith in astrology then took root.

Venkatappa cultivated close friendship with R. Gopalakrishna Rao, whose name has already been mentioned. This gentleman, who was a Signaller in the MSM Railway, stationed in Bangalore was also an astrologer. He was introduced to Venkatappa sometime in 1937, when Venkatappa had come to Bangalore with the idea of building the Studio on his site in Bangalore. After Venkatappa came to Bangalore for good, his association with this gentleman was almost continuous till late forties. It is likely that even before he met this astrologer Venkatappa had acquainted himself with some details of the subject, for we find an entry in his diary for 6th July 1940:

Mr. Gopalakrishna Rao, the astrologer, told that I was wrong in saying that Budha-bhukti would be over today. He was of opinion that it is only in Budha-bhukti that my Studio is to be built, and that too in the fourth part of Budha-bhukti, and that it was at present the fag-end of the third part of Budha-bhukti

Venkatappa had in his personal collection some books on predictive astrology in Sanskrit (like *Pratyaksha-Phala-Jyotisha*, *Uttara-kalamrta* and *Nadi-jyotisha*) which he had studied and he was recommending and lending to others. The entries in the diary during this period repeatedly refer to his discussions with knowledgeable people (besides the two professional astrologers mentioned above, Rangaswami Iyengar, Raghunath Rao-Sahib and Venkataramiah) on astrological subjects, particularly his own horoscope. While he was in Mysore, he had started learning Sanskrit from one Krishna Sarma (who was also studying Veena under Seshanna); the date

when the instruction began was 18th March 1918. And he must have subsequently acquired sufficient proficiency in the language to read astrological books in the original. Probably his knowledge of Sanskrit was intended only for this purpose, for the rest of the Sanskrit literature appears to have had no appeal for him.

But Venkatappa was not the type to continue hugging a thing after he was disillusioned about it. His dabbling with astrology was never a strong urge in his life; nor was he preoccupied with predictions to the detriment of his normal interests. His continued interest in his astrologer-friend had also been partly due to the love of art that the latter evinced. In any case, his interest in astrology faded as years passed by, and his faith in it was shattered. Deokar an artist from Bombay visited him on 16th November 1956, and the talk turned to astrology. Venkatappa records in his diary:

He asked me whether I knew astrology. I said No and that I had No confidence in that subject since very eminent astrologers had failed to predict two most important events in my life

In the above entry, there is an unmistakable stress on 'No Confidence'. It is interesting that he also disclaims any knowledge of astrology. And we can only guess what the 'two most important events' in his life were. Probably marriage was one, and the Studio was another. And neither of them materialised. It is also probable that he was as keen on marriage as he was on the Studio. While the details of the former are uncertain, the circumstances of his failure and frustration with regard to the Studio and the free school attached to it are well-known.

FIERY TEMPERAMENT

Despite his total devotion to the muses of art, and despite being a loner all his life, his was a stormy life by all standards. As a student in Calcutta, he was caught up in the renaissance movement in Indian art which Bengal spearheaded. And after his return to Mysore he was tossed about in the waves of palace politics. He, however, always kept aloof, and did not stoop to any meanness, dishonesty, foulplay or intrigue. He was much too highly principled to succeed in the power-games that were rampant alround. He was consistently indifferent to ill-gotten gains and favours. He found no reason to wink at the folly of the officials, or to feed the vanity of the courtiers, or to be frightened by the wrath and threats of the administrators. He displayed on all occasions a spirit of fiery independence and fought against all adversaries with equal ardour, whether it was an unmannerly neighbour or the Huzur Secretary to the Maharaja.

Once, while Venkatappa was still working on commission at the Mysore palace, the renowned master of South Indian music, 'Tiger' Varadachari (who was attached to the royal court at Mysore as 'asthana-vidvan', and who was a personal and esteemed friend of his) wrote to him and spelt out his designation as 'Palace Artist'. Venkatappa while replying to his letter took care to point out in the postscript: "I am not a palace artist, but an independent man" (letter of 5th November 1935). Even the Maharaja

who was his patron (Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV) understood his idiosyncracies and avoided causing any offence to him. Venkatappa was allowed to enter and leave the palace premises at will, work whenever he chose, wear his normal dress even when he visited the Maharaja (instead of the customary 'darbar-dress'), and choose the subjects of his work for the palace. There is an entry in his diary (dated 12th September 1924):

His Highness sent words (through T. Tamboo Chetty, Huzur Secretary) that I may do whatever I like for those circles (viz. circular frames for bas-relief in the Maharaja's Drawing Room), and whenever it will be convenient for me

He refused to be hurried and jostled along. He wrote to the Superintendent of the Madras Government Museum a spirited reply for the latter's reminder to execute a commissioned work early (letter dated 23rd July, 1952):

I am in receipt of your letter no. 3200/51 dated 7-7-'52, along with an extract of my letter dated 12th September 1951 to the Ex-Governor of Madras, but I wonder why you have omitted to include the last sentence in your extract – the last sentence being – “My only request is that I must have plenty of time, because of the fact that creation of a work of Art, as your Excellency knows, requires ‘mood’ and cannot be done in a hurry”.

In the dictionary of an art student or artist the meaning of the phrase “plenty of time” is years and years; whereas it is not even (ten and half) months since I promised the Ex-Governor! My promise is there, and it would be fulfilled in due course in the right royal way.

If you had seen the last sentence in my letter, I am sure you wouldn't have wasted your valuable time, energy and paper in writing to me reminders after reminders. I wonder who instructed you to do so.

I am very busy with a serious work of imagination in sculpture-bas-relief since some months both day and night, and sometimes without rest; and it is approaching completion. Then only my mind could be diverted towards other matters.

It is small wonder that he did not mind offending the palace officials and administrators while he worked in Mysore, and earning the displeasure of those who mattered in that set-up. When the Maharaja who was his patron (whom he admired and always referred to reverently as 'His Highness') died and was succeeded by another (whom Venkatappa cursorily referred to as 'the Maharaja'), Venkatappa's foes in the palace (who were naturally in large numbers) revelled in the opportunity they got to cut him to size. He was abruptly asked to stop his work at the palace and vacate the Studio within the palace premises. In a fit of rage, Venkatappa left not only the palace but even Mysore where the palace was situated, came away to Bangalore and began to wage a war against the Mysore palace in a court of law ! That was in 1940, and since then he refused to set his foot in Mysore, except for six visits during the rest of his long life, and each visit not longer than a few hours, spent only in his lawyer's chambers!

Undoubtedly his was a fiery temperament, and he managed to be in the midst of a storm most of his life. He was intolerant of deceit, dishonesty and devious ways. He was by nature forthright, courageous, uncompromising and belligerent. Added to this was the principle of 'aparigraha', which he observed strictly, much to the embarrassment and inconvenience of others. It is natural that he had few admirers and fewer friends. And he did not care for admiration either; nor did he hesitate to tick off his friends when they erred even inadvertently. One of his very close friends from his Mysore days was a gentleman, C. Ananda Rao by name, who was residing in Chamarajapuram, Mysore and who after retirement had set up a theatrical company called 'Mysore Nataka-Sangha'. He moved very intimately with Venkatappa, and had won his confidence. After Venkatappa came away to

Bangalore, they corresponded regularly. But when this friend died on 3rd April 1952, Venkatappa recorded in his diary (for 6th April) "C. Ananda Rao (one of my *mitra-drohis*) passed away on 3rd"! There is no reference to how or when he had proved treacherous to Venkatappa; but the reference suggests that he was not alone among Venkatappa's friends who proved false!

S. B. Shankar of the Arts Design Centre, Bangalore, who was also a sculptor, was a regular visitor to his Studio, especially in his old and infirm years. He was his constant companion for years when he went out, and was also helpful to him in odds and ends. When Venkatappa was seriously ill and bed-ridden, Shankar came on 18th March 1958 to enquire after his health. The old and ailing giant records:

S. B. Shankar came at 5 p.m. and was talking about various things till 6.30 p.m. Felt tired of this long talk with him. He said he would come and see me on Friday next. I asked him not to come, in the interest of the patient

Surely an extraordinary man! One for whom sympathy from fellow human beings, even when well-meant, did not mean anything. This spirit of independence did not flounder even when his health was shattered beyond repair. It must have been a moment of mortification for him to be forced, when he was very ill, to ask his nephew Rama Raju to come and sleep in the Studio during nights (13th March 1958); but he collected his flagging spirit when he added "until I recover". He was still hoping to recover and live all alone as he had all along done. Fate, however, willed it otherwise.

FRUSTRATIONS

Behind this facade of robust spirit of independence was an undoubted element of frustration. After he returned to Mysore, finishing his seven years of advanced training in Calcutta in 1916, he expected to be sent to England for further training in technical aspects (such as bronze casting). The Principal of the College of Arts from which he passed out with distinction and high commendation, Percy Brown (who was also an authority on Indian art) had recommended to the Maharaja of Mysore (who had sponsored his studentship in Calcutta) that Venkatappa be sent abroad. The delay caused by the indifference of the palace officials and also the unsettled conditions in Europe at that period on account of the World War (1914-1918) prevented Venkatappa's hope being realised. His restless activity during this period as well as the entries in his diary suggest that he was deeply disappointed. Being by nature unrealistic, he continued to expect to be sent to England not before long, and refused to take up any job in the meantime.

It is difficult to understand why he yearned so intensely to get trained abroad; especially at a time when the 'Svadeshi' movement had entered the field of art also and the renaissance of Indian art was already taking shape. And it was wrong of him to imagine that the kind of training that he wanted was not available in the country. But it is a fact that he was extremely unhappy that much-

coveted opportunity was denied him. He was so unhappy indeed that he seemed to abandon entirely painting and sculpture, and took feverishly to music. True, he had already been inducted into the charms of music even while he was in Calcutta as an art-student. But the urgency with which he took to music now was rather unusual and unwarranted. The painting "Mad after Veena", which he did apparently to answer his friends and teacher who found fault with him for neglecting painting, is an eloquent testimony of his anguish, uncertainty and indecision during that period.

It is interesting to note that another fellow-student and close friend of his in Calcutta also had this urge to get trained abroad. It was Asit Kumar Haldar. Their teacher Abanindranath Tagore wrote to E. B. Havell on 5th September 1925:

Asit Haldar returned from England the other day ... The young man was rather anxious to visit England, but he has come back perfectly cured of his 'foreign ideas' and says he will never cross the 'kalapani' again

Asit Kumar Haldar had joined the Kala-Bhavan when Rabindranath Tagore started it in Santiniketan in 1919. After his return from England he became Principal of the Lucknow School of Art.

There was yet another fellow-student of Venkatappa who was eager to get trained in England. He was Promode Kumar Chatterjee, whom Abanindranath Tagore in the same letter refers to as "England-returned poster painter, a former student of "PB & Co" (reference to Percy Brown). He later became head of the Andhra Jatiya Kalashala, Masulipatam (for the above letter, Cf. "Letters: Abanindranath to Havell", *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Santiniketan 1981, 1-4, published 1982, September, p. 226).

It is probable that Percy Brown, who was the Principal of the Government School of Art in Calcutta (1909-1927), where Venkatappa, Haldar and Chatterjee studied, put this idea into the head of his students. It may be recalled that it was he who wrote a letter to the then Government of Mysore strongly recommending that Venkatappa be sent to England for higher training. While Haldar and Chatterjee succeeded in their efforts to go to England (although much later), Venkatappa did not.

He recovered from this disappointment to an extent when the Maharaja commissioned him to decorate the Amba-Vilas Hall, and also allowed him free scope as regards the choice of imaginative subjects and the manner of handling them. He cultivated during this period friendship of a valued gentleman who was a lover of art in general and a sincere admirer of Venkatappa's art, Sirdar K. Gopalaraja Arasu of the Bettada-kote family. Arasu was a close relative of the Maharaja and as such wielded considerable power and influence at the royal court. He visited Venkatappa's Studio almost daily and spent some time with the artist. Another influential officer of the palace who admired Venkatappa's art was also a relation of the Maharaja, Lt. Col. A. V. Subramanyaraja Arasu, Honorary ADC to the Maharaja. Venkatappa's relation with them was cordial and even affectionate. The third gentlemen to support Venkatappa during his Mysore days was Mirza M. Ismail, who was at that time Personal Secretary to the Maharaja and who later became Huzur Secretary, and later still Dewan of the State.

It was mainly owing to the encouragement given by these three gentlemen that Venkatappa continued painting even while he was "mad after Veena". Despite an obvious element of frustration, this period was most creative for Venkatappa. His Ooty and Kodaikanal landscapes took

shape, most of the panels and busts also were originally executed during this period.

The second crisis in his life was experienced when the Maharaja who was his patron passed away on 3rd August 1940. Things moved fast to drive him out of royal favour and deprive him of the commissions already given ; and he left Mysore for good just two months later (6th October 1940). But he had already been thinking of starting his own Studio in Bangalore. He had purchased the plot for this purpose in Malleswaram as early as 15th April 1926. The construction work began on 4th December 1940 and he moved into the Studio which was also to be his home on 4th June 1941, although the work on the building was completed only towards the end of 1942. He was indeed happy that he built his own Studio and could plan to live truly as an independent man rather than as a 'palace artist'.

But the Studio idea never really materialised. He lived here, worked here, and periodically had public shows of his works of art. His dream of opening a free school here for teaching art and his hope that students of art would flock round him remained unfulfilled. In a sense, the intensely creative period of his life was over when he left Mysore.

His days in Bangalore were filled with annoyances of diverse kinds, and we find him constantly engaged in litigation against institutions and individuals, appeals and protests, complaints and corrections. His friends in Bangalore included mainly lawyers and police officers, whereas in his Mysore days his friends were exclusively art-lovers (like Gopalaraja Arasu, Subramanyaraja Arasu, Mirza M. Ismail, B. Lingappiah and D. Srinivasa Iyengar, all celebrities in the public life of Mysore) and musicians (like Bidaram Krishnappa, Chikka-rama Rao Venkatagiriappa, Muttaya Bhagavatar, 'Tiger' Varadachari,

Veena Lakshmi-narayanappa and Karigiri Rao, all eminent personages in the field of music). He missed in Bangalore the atmosphere suitable for the cultivation of arts; and none of his friends or acquaintances here were 'eminent'. The artists and musicians that visited his Studio in Bangalore were mediocre, and the art-lovers were little more than dilettantes.

Had he been less conscientious in his devotion to art, less exacting in his standards and less indifferent to the politically powerful, he would probably have made good. But he had sneering contempt for pretensions, compromising quality with quantity, clever maneuvers and political hobnobbing. He kept self-styled art-critics at a distance, and discouraged firmly those who wanted to exploit him for their own ends. He refused to sell his works of art to individuals or to institutions, for he had preserved them all for his own Studio.

The difficulty with him was that he lived in a world of his own, in Bangalore as in Mysore. And he had rubbed his shoulders with some of the giants of his age. And naturally the people among whom he was condemned to live in Bangalore were preposterous midgets. The Maharaja of Mysore who encouraged and supported Venkatappa in his formative years, Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, was celebrated as the enlightened, benevolent and cultured monarch, respected even by the leaders of the national movement and loved by his people. Mirza M. Ismail, who admired Venkatappa and his art, has rightly been hailed as the 'maker of modern Mysore'. Abanindranath Tagore, under whom Venkatappa studied, was the pioneer and leader of the renaissance movement in Indian art. Percy Brown, who was the principal of the Art College in which Venkatappa studied and who prophesied Venkatappa's great contribution to Indian art, was a celebrated art-

educator and leader of the art-movement. Veena Seshanna, who was Venkatappa's *guru* in music, was a legendary maestro renowned all over the country. The celebrated artists Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar, Sailendranath Dey and Barada Ukil were his fellow-students. He was an honoured friend of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore, his cousin Gaganendranath Tagore, the eminent author Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, the celebrated Sister Nivedita, the poet Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and his wife Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, the savant James H. Cousins, the renowned art-collectors B. N. Treasurywallah and Karl Khandalavala, the art-critics O. C. Ganguli and G. Venkatachalam, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, the educationist C. R. Reddy, the maestros like Bidaram Krishnappa, M. Vasudevachar, Muttaya Bhagavatar, Baraulla Khan, Chikkarama Rao, and eminent scientists and industrialists like Dr. H. J. Bhabha, F. R. S., Dr. Mahadi Hassan, Vikram Sarabhai and Raja Sri Annamalai Chettiar.

STUDIO AND SCHOOL

He was greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, whom he met for the first time in Belgaum on 29th December 1924 in the company of his guru Veena Seshanna. It was a meeting of kindred souls. They had much in common: simplicity, austerity, discipline, dedication to a cause, independence of spirit, honesty of purpose, commitment to the nobility of life, aversion to hypocrisy and intrigues. Venkatappa, who had till then been a votary of ideals only in the field of art, began now to think in terms of the good of the country. His nationalism, which he imbibed during his student days in Calcutta, had been confined to art. It now comprehended the country's life as a whole. He could, for instance, note in his diary on 2nd September 1946:

Jai Hind. This is golden letter day in the history of Modern India. It is from 11 a.m. today that the new Interim Government was established at New Delhi with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as President. This is certainly a day of rejoicing. May God give all the true Indian leaders long life and courage to serve the masses and to get complete independence for India

and on 26th January 1950, in bold letters:

Srih! Birth of Indian Republic. This is a Red-letter day in the history of India

However, his interest in politics was by no means active. He no doubt informed himself every morning through news-papers about what was happening in the world as

well as in the country. He felt fidgety if the arrival of his newspaper ('Hindu') was delayed. And although he spent his early years in the monarchical and feudal set-up, he had genuine appreciation of democratic values. He was happy that the 'native' states were freed from the clutches of the princes. He wrote in his diary on 2nd January 1952 :

Today is a red-letter day in the history of India and Mysore State. Election took place here (Bangalore City), and I exercised my franchise in the afternoon.

But beyond that, his interest in public life was little indeed. He was convinced that his service to the country could only be in the field of art, and that he would best serve the cause of public life by being an honest and law-abiding citizen. He concurred with the insistence of the Mahatma that the movement for independence must begin at the level of the individual and that purity in private life was the indispensable ingredient of collective welfare. He had resolved to infuse the ideals which the Mahatma upheld in public life into the world of art that had fallen to his lot. He understood fully the spirit of 'swadeshi' in art and attempted to realise it in his life.

He had resolved as early as 1926 to start a free school of fine arts in a Studio of his own at Bangalore. And this resolve may be traced to the impact of the Mahatma on him. He had seen even in his student-days in Calcutta that art was becoming increasingly commercialised, and that the influence of Western culture was gaining momentum in the field of indigenous arts and crafts. The 'Swadeshi' movement, spearheaded by the national leaders including the poet Rabindranath Tagore and the scholar Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, had sought to recapture the spirit of Indianness in arts as well as crafts. Venkatappa fully imbibed this spirit, for his own master Abanindranath Tagore was in the forefront of the movement. His visit to

the Ajanta caves to copy the paintings for Lady Harringham in 1911 along with Nandalal Bose was an opportunity for understanding and appreciating the nature and technique of Indian painting. This visit helped him not to fall completely in line with the Bengal school but develop an independent idiom in the context of indigenous art.

His ideal was to train artists in the truly Indian perspective and without commercial motives whatever. As has already been mentioned, his longing to go to England to specialise in the technical aspects of art *vis a vis* this commitment to 'swadeshi' is hard to understand. It must, however, be conceded that Venkatappa was not a fanatic in this regard. He had great admiration for European painters, especially of the Renaissance period, and had studied them assiduously. He never failed to visit any exhibition of the works of great masters from the West, whenever it was arranged in Bangalore, although he did not care for what went in the name of 'modern' art. It is possible that he had an admiration for the superior technical skill of European painters and sculptors, which he wanted to imbibe and perfect, and communicate to art-students here.

Had he been more sympathetic to the frailties of ordinary art-students, more understanding of the practical problems of professional artists, and indulgent enough, probably his Studio and Free School could have become realities. But he was too idealistic to compromise with what he thought were considerations extraneous to art. He records in his diary for 20th April 1950 that when the Superintendent of the Arts School in Madurai (S. Sundaram) visited him and wanted his suggestions for the improvement of his arts school and for the livelihood of his students, he told him:

that I didn't know what to suggest regarding their livelihood. I

told him that I am concerned with the subject of learning and teaching Fine Arts

This was evidently not a very helpful attitude in one who wanted to be an independent art-educator. And his refusal to accept assistance from the governmental agencies and involve other art-enthusiasts in the enterprise made it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for the Free School idea to materialise. And he was too idealistic to care. He never made serious attempts to start the school, although his Studio as the place where he worked and where his art works were preserved took shape soon after he arrived in Bangalore. He had also declined to sell his paintings and panels, although there were buyers for them, in the hope that the students of his planned Free School would need to study them.

In fact, he was too disillusioned with the few students that did come to learn painting and music from him, to persevere in his idea of the Free School. While his interest in astrology was still alive, he had discussion with an astrologer about the prognostic significance of 'vrschika-lagna' when his Studio was inaugurated. The indications were favourable to some extent. There were some students who did come to learn. Two brothers, Ramamohan Sastri and Anandamohan Sastri of Masulipatam were deputed by the Andhra-Jatiya Kala-shala (Krishna Dist. Board Office) to learn under Venkatappa during 1926-1928. One of them Anandamohan Sastri, continued for two years, and Venkatappa was satisfied with him. Unfortunately, however, this young man fell a victim to the then dreaded tuberculosis and died. The late Dr. B. G. L. Swami, son of the celebrated Dr. D. V. Gundappa and Principal of the Presidency College, Madras, who was a serious student of science and arts, met Venkatappa early in 1943 and offered to be a student in painting. Venkatappa asked him to consider the idea very carefully, and explained his

conditions to teach. He notes in his diary (7th January) :

... came and informed me that he finally decided to entirely give up the idea of learning painting, the vastness of which he was able to know only after studying Drawing under me for some time. He said it was impossible for him to master it

On 1st July, 1946, B. V. Narasimha Rao, an industrialist of Cocanada (Kakinada) approached him with a desire to learn painting, and Venkatappa notes :

I told him plainly that I have decided to take up only those students who would study art purely out of love of Art, irrespective of time, trouble and expense

In 1948, a group of students came to Venkatappa to learn painting, but were turned back. "I told them that I don't propose to take students older than 14 years of age" (6th July).

Thus, there is no one who succeeded in learning painting or sculpture under him, except the short-lived young man from Masulipatam. His principles were too rigid, his prescriptions for learning too exacting, and expectations from the student too stringent. He frightened away prospective students with lukewarm interest; and discouraged even the earnest ones. Nor did he care to associate himself with regular art-schools run by professional artists with commercial interests. In 1948, J.B. Mallaradhya, who was the Commissioner of Economic Development and Planning to the Government of Mysore was appointed Chairman of a committee to start a college of Fine Arts in memory of the late Yuvaraja Narasimharaja Wodeyar in Mysore. An admirer of Venkatappa and a close acquaintance of his, he sought without success Venkatappa's active co-operation to the project (April). In 1950, the renowned artist A. N. Subba Rao who had founded 'Kala-mandira' and was running it in Basavanagudi, Bangalore, wanted to know if

Venkatappa could go to his school once a week or once a fortnight to instruct the students:

to which I gave a negative reply on the ground that it would be impossible for anybody to learn any of the Fine arts receiving instruction once a fortnight, and that I would always be busy with my Studio

(19th February)

While it is true that he did not take regular students who were not disciplined and devoted enough, he did guide, without any remuneration, of course the artists who went to him. Whenever artists took their drawings and paintings to him for his suggestions, he carefully studied them and pointed out corrections, improvements and alterations. His explanations were always in great detail. There are numerous entries in his diary recording these occasions. Among the artists in Bangalore who profitted by his guidance were S.R. Swamy and S.S. Kukke. When they went to his Studio on 31st May, 1956 with their water-colour paintings:

I studied them carefully for more than an hour and offered them my sincere opinion about them

There is another entry for 8th April 1957:

At 3.30 p.m. S. R. Swamy, artist, Srirampuram came and showed me four paintings (water colours), done by him. Though I was not feeling quite well, on account of severe cold, I saw them leisurely and pointed out certain defects and suggested some improvements in light and shade and harmonious colouring. It was 6.20 p.m. when he left the Studio!!

It was his nature to be sincere and conscientious in whatever he did, and when his advice was sought, he examined the pieces exceedingly carefully before he tendered his suggestions. And he was quite frank and forthright in giving expression to his opinion. He did not care how they were received, nor did he care to follow up.

S.B. Shankar was an artist employed by the Art Design Centre (a government undertaking), and he moved closely with Venkatappa during his later days.

He showed me (on 17th September 1957) the fresh work that he had attempted in soapstone. I told him that his work had many defects, and (it was) impossible to rectify them since much of the stone had been removed. I advised him to make sketches of his subjects first and then try them in plasticine before carving in stone. I showed him a few very grave mistakes in his work

Naturally it was not often that artists liked his criticism. He inspired a sort of dread in them, and legends spread about his arrogance, intolerance, and lack of sympathy. The fact, however, is that he never volunteered any opinion on any one or on any subject; he offered his opinion only when it was solicited. And his attitude was always to help those who came to him. His belligerent nature has unwarrantedly been magnified. Of course, he was intolerant of hypocrisy and he shunned the indolent; he kept out the underserving, and he told off in no uncertain terms those who came to patronise him or to exploit him.

It is curious and an irony that whereas he had but one student in painting and none at all in sculpture, he had as many as five students in music, albeit he got rid of them sooner than later. Rudrappa, the professional maker of musical instruments, especially Veena, was inspired enough to begin learning Veena from Venkatappa in January 1926. But after a few lessons, the Veena-maker disappeared, without even completing and delivering the Veena that his teacher had ordered. Venkatappa promptly called him 'guru-drohi' ('one who had wronged his teacher'). Thus the very first student augered ill for Venkatappa's career as a teacher!

The second student was introduced to Venkatappa by his lawyer-friend M.A. Doreswami Iyengar of Mysore. This

student was the legal luminary's brother-in-law, Srinivasa Iyengar by name, and an engineering contractor by profession. The first teaching session was on 24th January 1943; and the student dropped off after a few months. The third student was a lady, Padmavathy by name, daughter of Srinivasacharlu, an acquaintance of his. Venkatappa, the sworn bachelor, had stipulated that the student came always with her father or brother and never alone. The teaching which began on 21st April 1943 came to a close on 2nd July 1943. We find Venkatappa resolving soon after that he would never teach ladies again! When on 1st November 1944 Visalakshi, a Veena-player from Madras, was impressed with Venkatappa's knowledge of music, and

wanted to learn about 22 srutis and other things from me, and requested me to take her as my student, when I told her plainly that I did not take female students

It was in February 1952 that he took his next student, this time a blind boy, son of an Assistant Superintendent of Police who was an acquaintance of Venkatappa. He had already learnt vocal music, and Venkatappa taught him Veena-playing. The lessons began on 27th February, and continued till April of the same year. Then the student made his appearance only on 20th October. But Venkatappa turned him out:

I asked him to inform Sivappa that I would never teach such students as Sivappa who absent themselves for more than six months continuously, and that I will have no enthusiasm to teach such absentee students who have no regard for discipline, and that he may learn from any other teacher

His final student was a laboratory assistant employed in the Indian Institute of Science. He began his study of Veena under Venkatappa towards the end of August 1957, and had to stop around the middle of September of the

same year, as Venkatappa :

advised him to unlearn his old lessons and to be practising only right hand fingering for some months and then come to me with a fresh hand when it would be easy for him to follow my instructions

The plain fact is that he had no interest whatever in students who were not as devoted to art as he himself was, and not as hard-working. He did not take any money from his students, nor did he accept any service from them. And when he taught, he was invariably earnest and painstaking. He never took either learning or teaching lightly. He saw, therefore, no reason why he should suffer indifferent students. He ticked them off curtly, but not before they deserved it.



... AND HIS ART

THE ART HERITAGE

When Venkatappa was born (in 1886), Raja Ravi-Varma was 38 years old and Abanindranath Tagore was only 15. The Raja had already established himself as a great painter, having exhibited his works in Madras in 1873; he was planning for an exhibition in Chicago (which actually took place in 1892). He was also popular as a painter of epic themes and mythological subjects. Abanindranath had still to flower out and make a mark as a painter. His early efforts revealed an influence of Ravi-Varma. The latter's popularity was partly due to the princely family he hailed from and to the European education that he had. He was no doubt a good portrait-painter, and had a fine sense of colour. But his gods and goddesses, heroes and giants were so obviously modelled after the human beings who sat for him (and who were by no means best specimens of humanity) and so anachronistically clothed in contemporary costumes that his paintings lacked the stylization characteristic of traditional Indian painting and sculpture. He had no real appreciation of the Indian idiom, and was heavily indebted to the European techniques and expressions. His works were products of Indian admiration of English culture.

Because Travancore was a neighbouring native state, Mysore had a greater sympathy for Ravi-Varma than the other states had. It was natural that the Maharani-Regent or her advisers thought of entrusting the decoration of the

Durbar Hall of the Mysore Palace that began to be reconstructed in 1897. The Mysore administration had increasingly exhibited not only loyalty to the British crown but admiration for the English culture since the closing years of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (death 1868). There was a growing impact of the British officers and teachers on the local administrators in Mysore as it was in Travancore. It is small wonder therefore that Ravi-Varma's imitations of European paintings (substituting Indian contexts) found favour with the Palace authorities in Mysore.

Venkatappa's father was a worker from the indigeneous school of painting that developed during the earlier days of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, and that bore the influence of Tanjore and Amaravati. He was a professional designer and painter (*chitragara*), who had a family background for generations in the art of drawing and painting. But he had now to work under the guidance of Ravi-Varma who was entirely ignorant of (or indifferent to) the indigenous style. We cannot identify the individual contributions of the artists who worked in the Palace at that time, but we may judge from the work of the Mysore artists of the next generation, that the influence of European techniques, style and outlook was marked; they were loyal to the Raja from Travancore. The indigenous '*chitragara*' tradition received a set-back, never to recover its relevance.

This also marked the alienation of the art-works as produced by these pseudo-Europeanized artists, encouraged by the Mysore Palace, by the administrators of the State and by the people at large. What Rabindranath Tagore wrote from Japan to his nephew Abanindranath in the Bengali year 1916 (8th Bhadra) describes actually the immediate benefits of the imported art ideals and methods:

The winds of art never blew in our country, there is no vital link between art and social life – it has ever been a thing of the surface, superfluous, it has never really mattered. That is why you will never be able to draw all the sustenance you need from that soil alone

Rabindranath was undoubtedly mistaken if he thought that indigenous Indian art had at no time any relevance for the people. He was wrong, again, if he imagined that borrowal of art forms and techniques from Japan would help the cause of Indian art in reaching the masses. However, he was right if he referred to the situation of Indian art that prevailed at that particular period. Indian art ideals that were manifested in the Ajanta cave-paintings, or in Bagh or in Sigiriya, were obviously things of the past, and had been forgotten. Traditional techniques and conventions given in books were likewise forgotten. Prominent local styles (like Rajasthani, Bundi, Kangra and Mughal qualams) were formed in the 17th century; and they flourished with the patronage of rulers and chieftains of states and principalities in the subsequent centuries. With the advent of the British and the spread of European culture, these styles too were pushed to the background. When the poet wrote the above letter to his artist-nephew, the two schools of art in the country, one in Bombay and the other in Calcutta, had masters from abroad to teach Indian students, and naturally what Indians learnt revealed “no vital link between art and social life”.

Both Ravi-Varma and Abanindranath were products of these attempts to create a pseudo-European art-style in India. And all those who participated in these attempts during those days were non-Indians: Sir John Woodroffe, Sister Nivedita, Lord Ronaldshay, C. W. E. Cotton, Annie Besant, Lord Northbrook, Justice Pratt, and James H. Cousins. With all their sympathies for India, they were incapable of appreciating the indigenous spirit of Indian

art. The reason was simple : they did not really belong here, and their interest in art was not as an inseparable part of Indian culture, not as a way of life, not as relevant to their inalienable aspirations. They attempted to introduce art for the casual enjoyment of the well-to-do, English-educated folk in the urban centres.

The first institution that took shape in India for the promotion of art in the country was the 'Industrial Art Society' of Calcutta (1854). The name itself is highly suggestive. And the persons who were actively involved in it were those who were highly Westernized in their outlook on life, despite their knowledge of, and interest in, India's past: Rajendralal Mitra, Jatindranath Tagore, the Maharaja of Burdwan, Justice Pratt and Lord Northbrook. When the School of Art was started in Calcutta, first as an organ of this Society and later as a Governmental enterprise (now it is the Government College of Arts and Crafts), the teachers were brought from England. Gunendranath Tagore (uncle of the poet Rabindranath) joined the Society in 1864, seven years before his son Abanindranath was born. Naturally, Abanindranath as a boy of eighteen was admitted to the Art School run by this School. He was taught by Signor Ghilardi, who was utterly ignorant of the existence of anything like Indian art. He was later (1893-95) taught by another English artist who served as Professor in the same School, Charles L. Palmer, equally ignorant of Indian art. Thus, Abanindranath's early training was in the European tradition of Pre-Raphaelite art (as crystallised in South Kensington), and his early art-works were in the same tradition.

It is only when he was a young man of 26, thanks to his association with Havell, that he became aware of the fact that India had her own artistic tradition. But this awareness was restricted to the Mughal and Rajput miniatures dating

back to the seventeenth century. Whether there was an artistic tradition that could be traced to earlier times, neither Havell nor Abanindranath at that time knew, although J. Griffith had published a volume on Ajanta in 1897. Being thus essentially ignorant of the true Indian idiom, Abanindranath, after he was appointed teacher in, and Vice-Principal of, the Calcutta Art School (in 1898), was exposed to Japanese influence through the art connoisseur and critic Okakura Kakuzo (who arrived in Calcutta 1902, at the instance of Sister Nivedita) and the artists Taikan and Hisida, the former of whom painted some Indian scenes in Japanese style. He learnt the wash technique that was characteristic of Japanese painting, and his subsequent art-works are indebted equally to the seventeenth century Indian *qualams* and Japanese influence. Although he appreciated the Ajanta murals, and recognised them as examples of the true Indian art-tradition, it was given only to his disciple Nandalal Bose to fully incorporate that tradition, and what is more important, prove true to it.

It is not until Nandalal Bose arrived on the scene that the Bengal School really marked the renaissance of true Indian art. Abanindranath's art was only a concoction (albeit delicate and effective) of Western, seventh century Mughal-Rajput, and Japanese art-trends. He was not successful in evolving a definitive style of his own which could reflect the genuine Indian techniques and expressions. He, therefore, wisely refrained from providing a rigid framework or model to his numerous students, and allowed each of them to develop his own style. The saying that "the *guru* does not create the artist, but the student becomes an artist" is ascribed to him. And none of this students, barring Nandalal, was inspired by the 'Svadeshi' spirit. The movement had already become a spent force in the art-circles. The gospel of 'oneness of the East',

enunciated by the Japanese mystic Okakura had become increasingly irrelevant. Many of the students of Abanindranath continued to seek light from European art as he himself had done. They were indifferent to the spirit of Indian art, rooted in mythology and metaphysics, and relevant to the eye and heart alike.

TWO BIRDS ON A TREE

Indeed it was Nandalal Bose (1882-1966), whose 'Sati' (painted before 1907) was rightly described by Ordhendu Coommar Ganguly as "the first manifestation of the new school of Indian Painting" – (*The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Nandalal Number, 1968-69, 34, 1-4, p 23). He got into the very spirit of the truly indigenous Indian painting. His exposure to the Ajanta frescoes when he was commissioned to prepare accurate facsimiles for Lady Harringham of the India Society, London, was his great good fortune. His *magnum opus* 'Partha-sarathi' is in the best Ajanta style; his series of 26 illustrations of *Ramayana* (1911) is also reminiscent of the style crystallised in Ajanta in the century before Christ, and followed in Bagh, Sittannavasal and Sigiriya. Although he was acquainted with European principles of art and the Japanese methods, he was loyal to the Ajanta model and never attempted a 'syncretic' approach. "Tradition in art", he said, "is like capital in business".

It was not an accident that Venkatappa was asked to accompany Nandalal to the Ajanta caves to prepare copies of the frescoes (for Lady Harringham) in 1911. They had been the earliest of students of Abanindranath, and had collaborated even as students in illustrating their master's introductory book on art, and in decorating the shamiana which was erected when the British King and then the Emperor of India, George V, visited Calcutta in 1911. They

were both asked by their master to prepare a series of paintings illustrating *Ramayana*; and these paintings were completed by them during 1911-1913.

They were in fact kindered spirits, who birds with golden plumage on the tree of Bengal School of art. Nandalal was four years senior to Venkatappa, but died a year later than Venkatappa did. They joined the Calcutta Art School almost together (1909), and their early tuition before Abanindranath took over, was under Harinarayan Babu and Lala Isvari-prasad, both hailing from families of artist-craftsmen specializing in Mughal-Rajput style of painting. Nandalal left the Art School without completing his course in 1915, but Venkatappa completed his course and left in 1916. The principal of the School, Percy Brown, had great regard to both of them. Indeed he offered Nandalal a job in the School, although Nandalal was known to be loyal to Abanindranath, who had left the School because of his differences with Brown. Venkatappa too remained loyal to Abanindranath, and spent all his spare time in Abanindranath's home with Nandalal.

Unlike the other students of the School, Nandalal stuck to Calcutta (1915-1919) and later to Santiniketan (from 1919 till his death in 1966), even as Venkatappa stuck to Mysore (1961- 1940) and later to Bangalore (from 1940 till his death in 1965). Both pursued their career as artists with total devotion to the cause of art. Both held that "training must be continuous, the experiments endless. Avoid fear and greed. The artist should only express the little that he has seen or experienced"(words of Nandalal). The two were by temperament austere, ascetic and lonely. Nandalal had married in 1903, and had a family, but he spent his days as 'an essentially lonely man' (G. Ramachandran's *Reminiscences* in the Nandalal Number of *The Visvabharati Quarterly* cited above, p 27), even as



Rabindranath Tagore



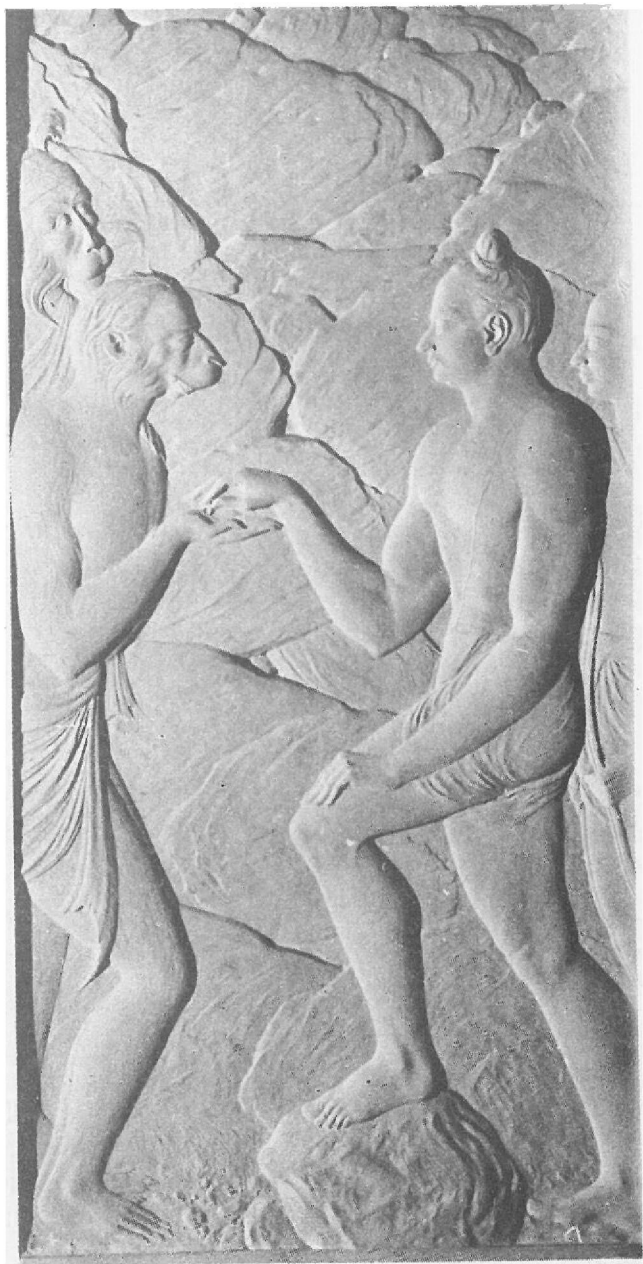
Veena Sheshanna



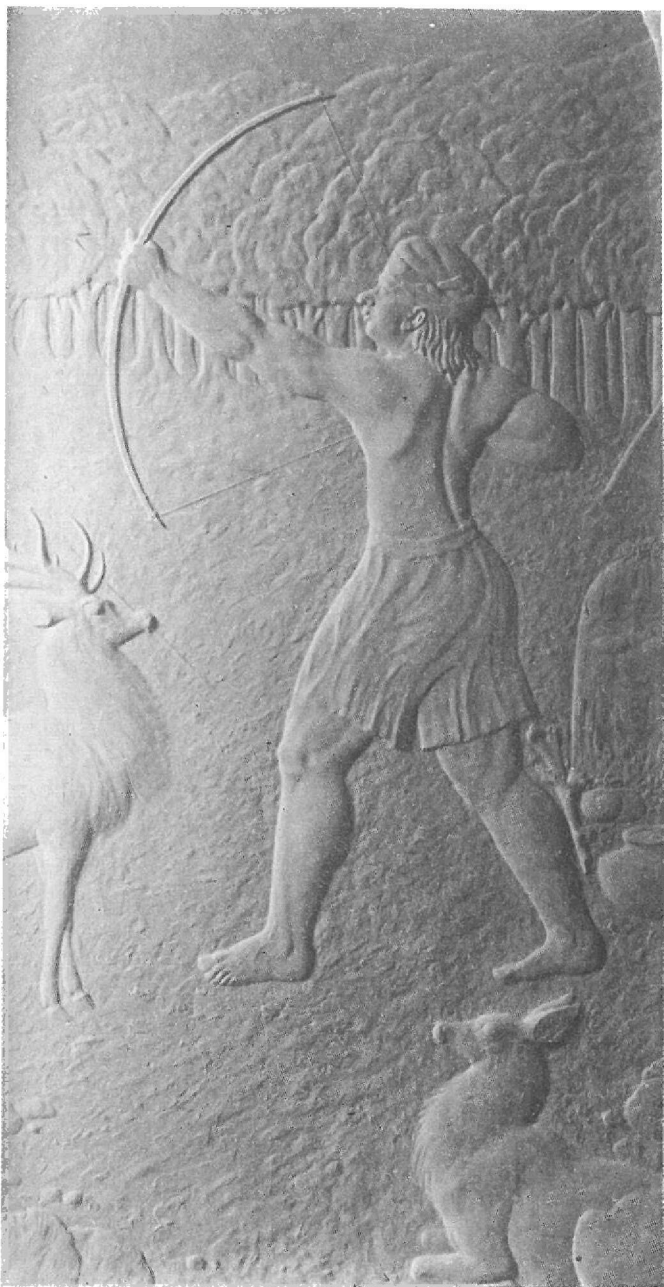
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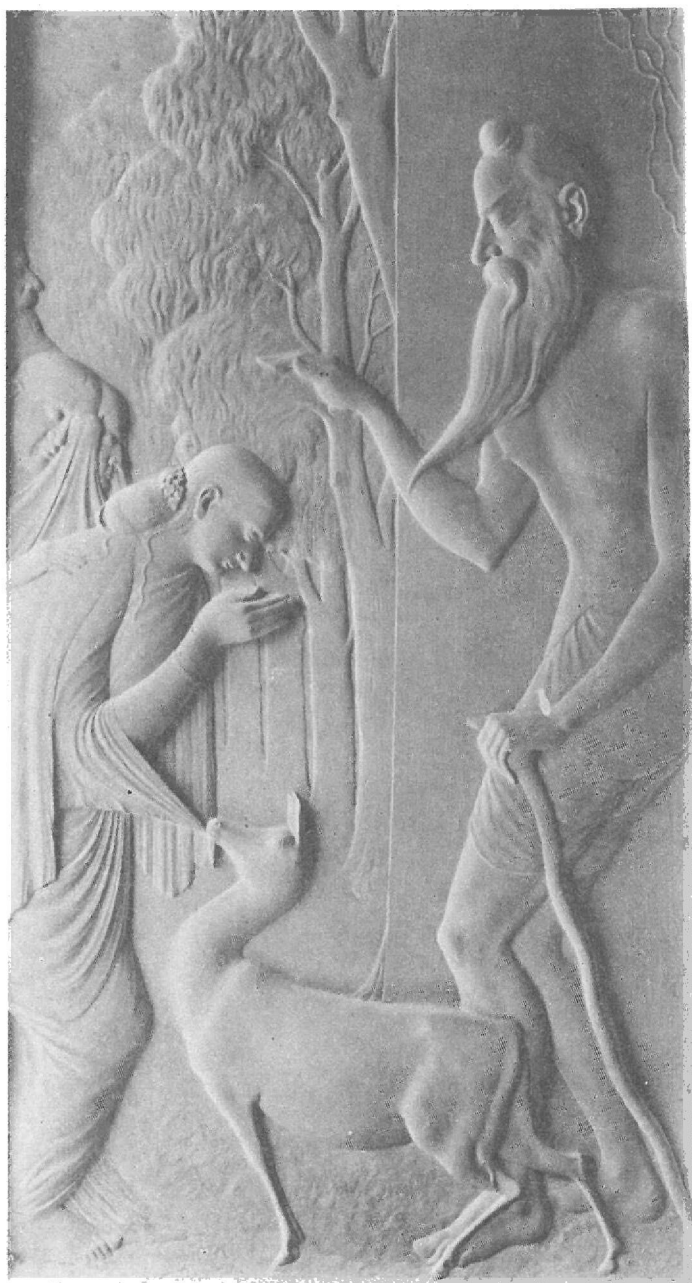
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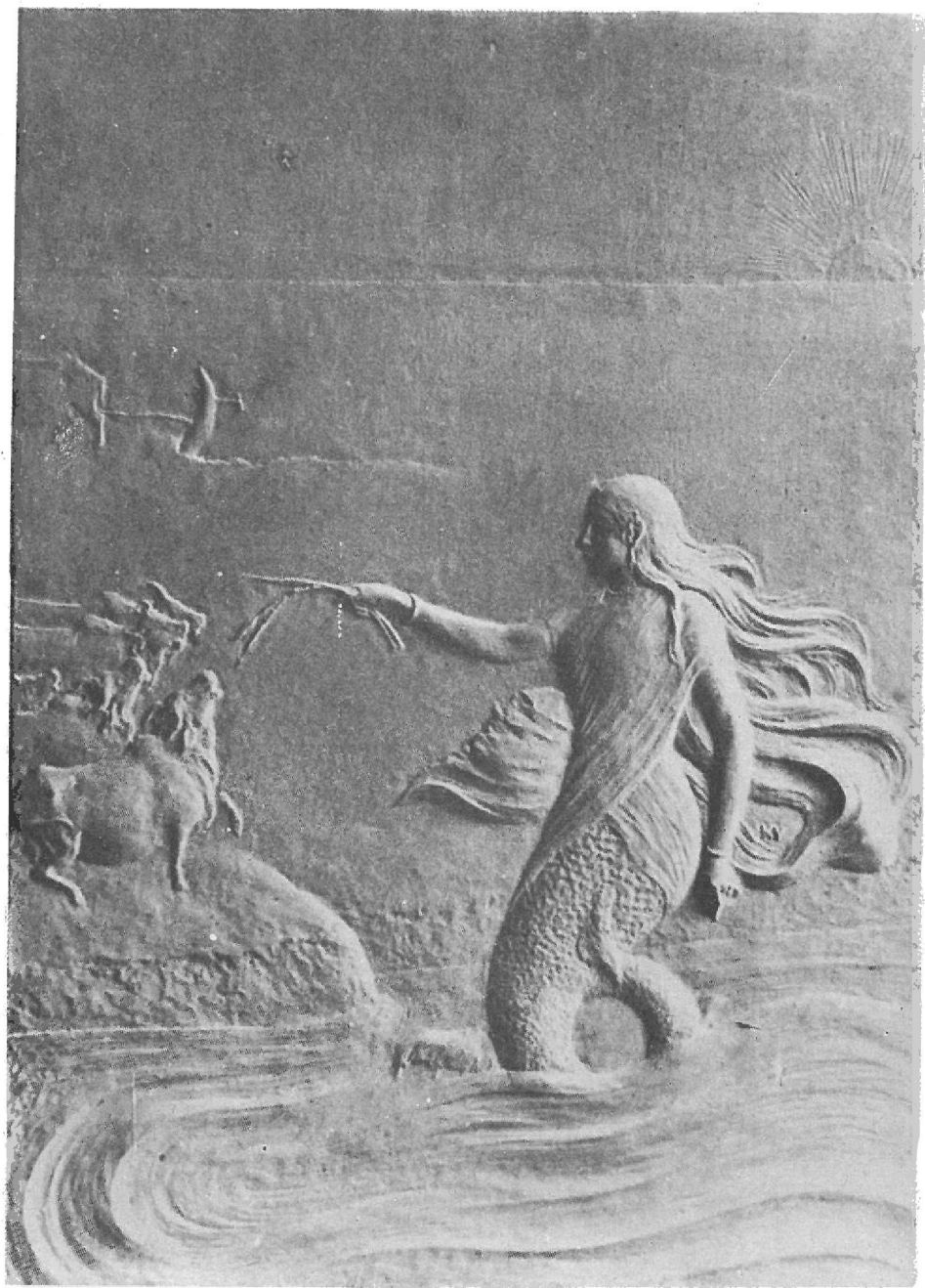
Rama giving signet-ring to Hanuman



Ekalavya practising archery



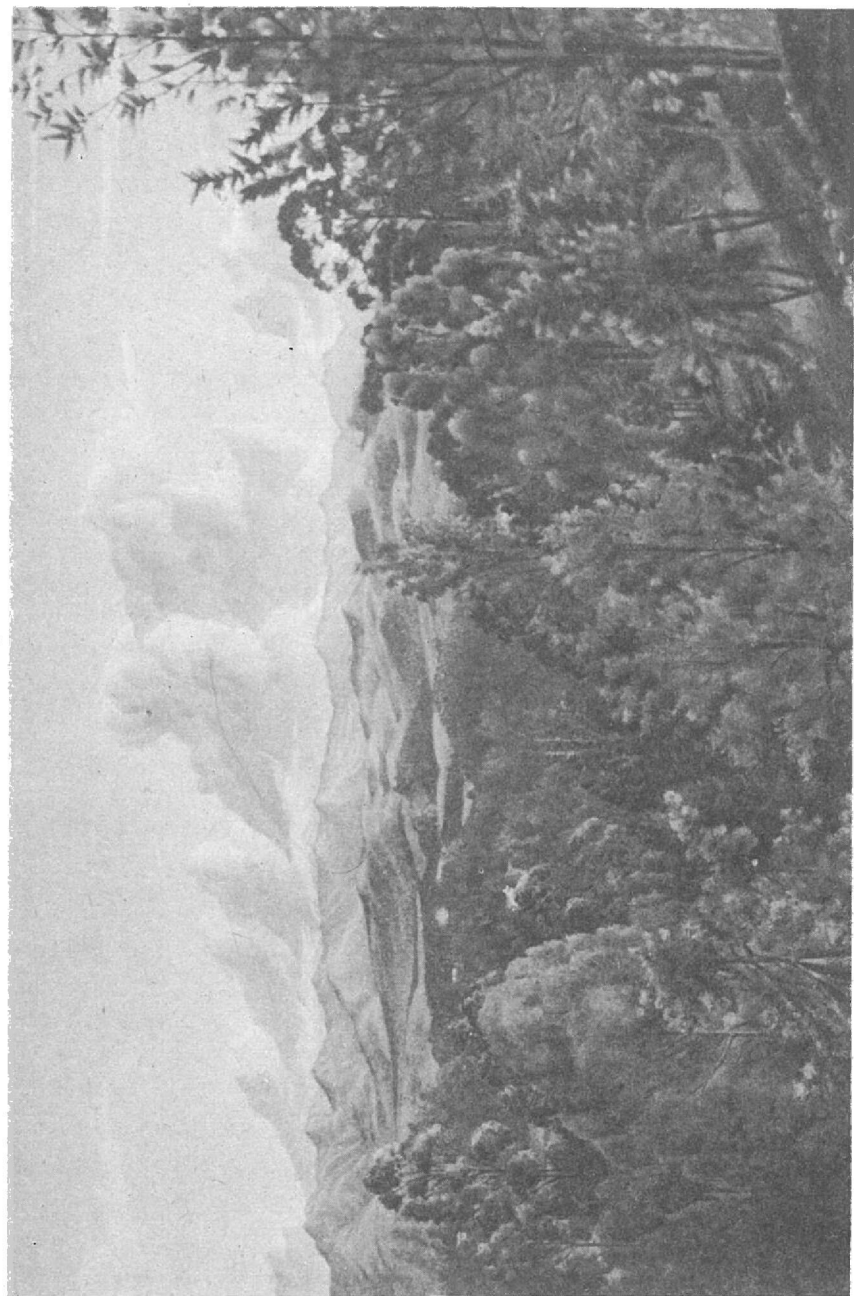
Departure of Shakuntala



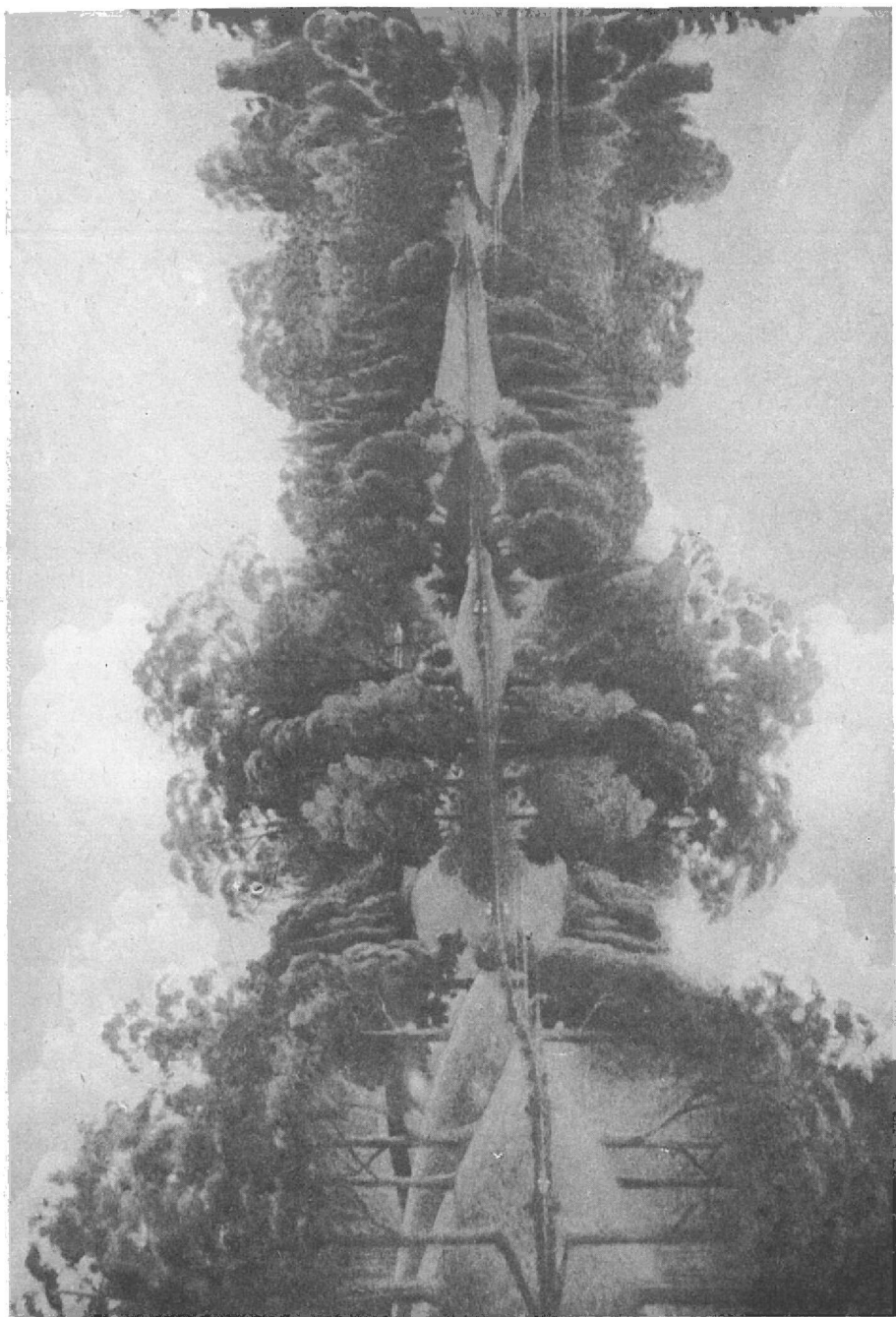
Famine Relief



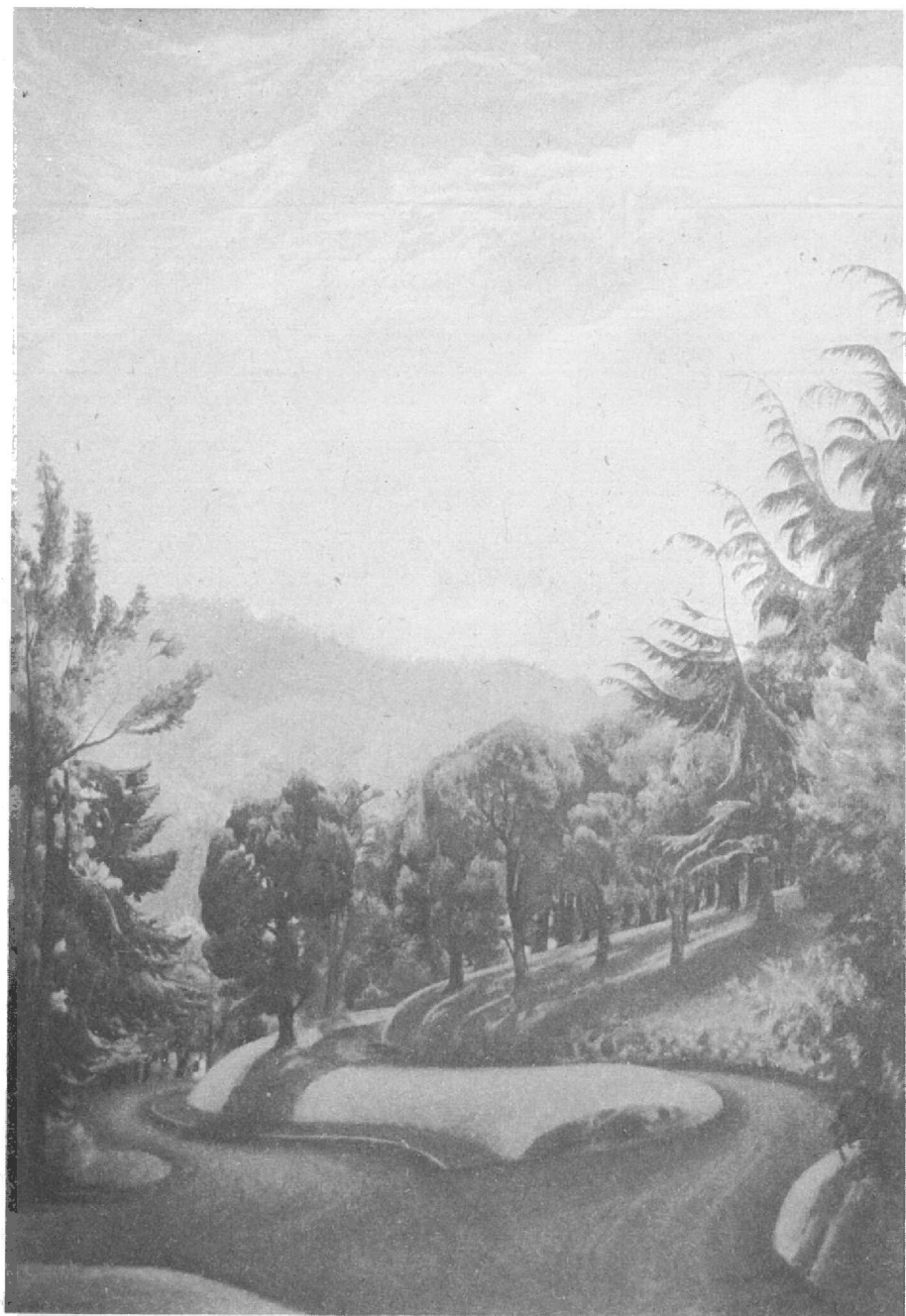
Municipal High School and Old Agrahara, Mysore



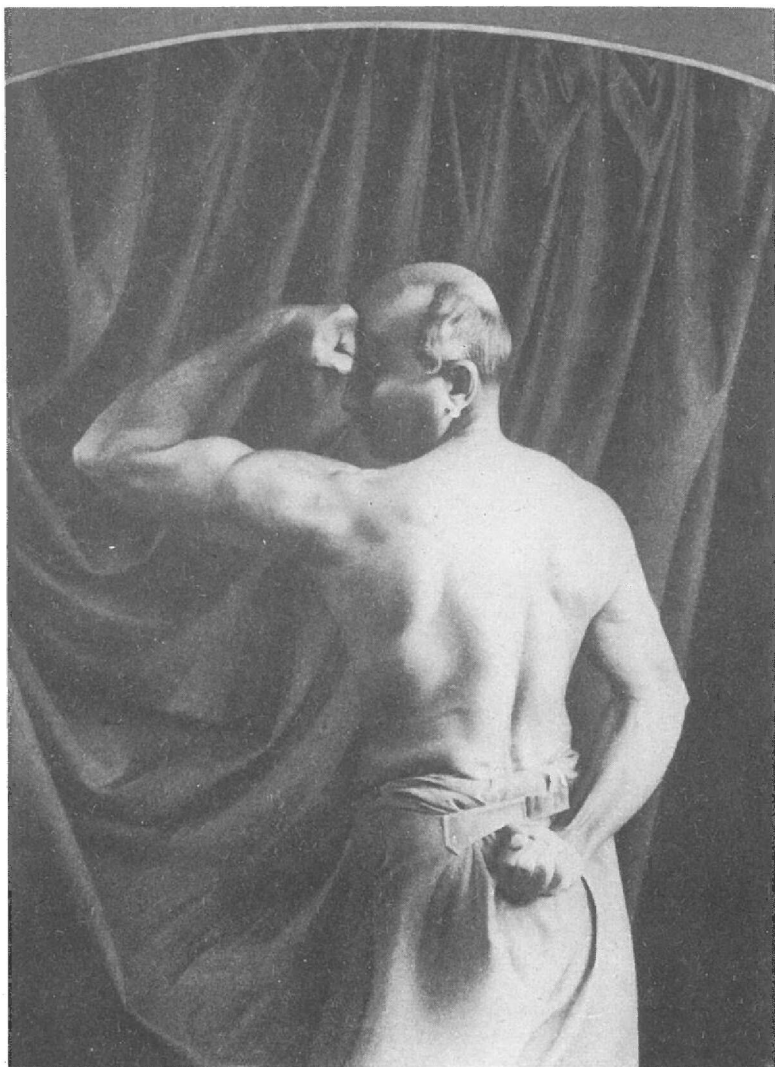
A panoramic view of Blue Mountain range and Ooty Downs from the top of Church Hill



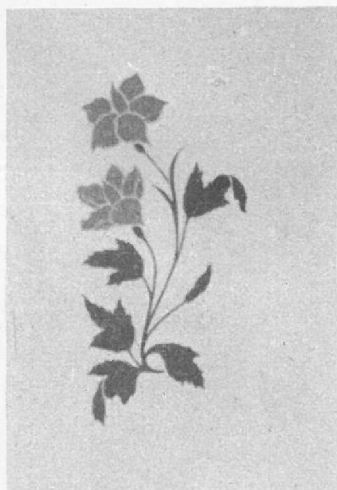
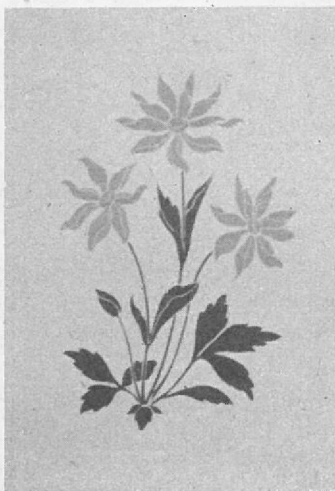
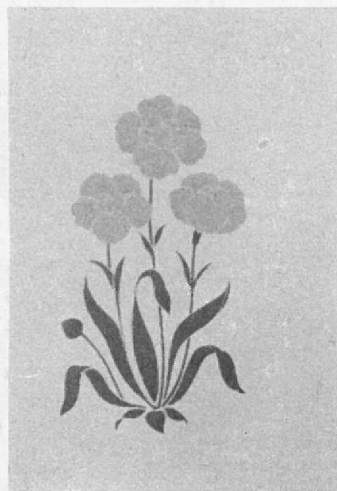
Reflection, Ooty Lake



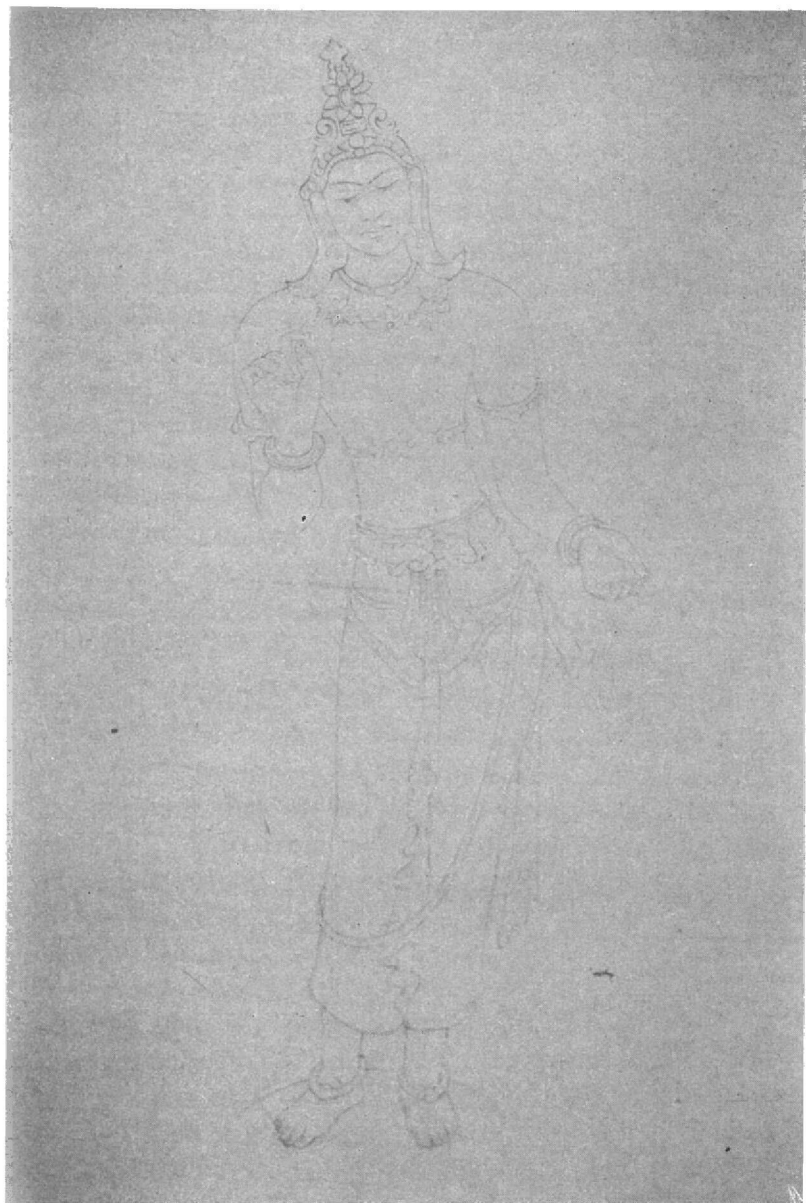
Bright aspect after Monsoon, Ooty



Physical Development



Botanical study



A sketch

Sir,
I am in due receipt of your letter ^{Nº 3200/51} dated 7-7-52, along with an extract of my letter dated 12th September 1951, to the Ex-Governor of Madras, but I wonder why you have omitted to include the last sentence in your extract - the last sentence being:-
"My only request is that I must have plenty of time, because of the fact that creation of a work of Art, as your Excellency knows, requires "mood", and cannot be done in a hurry."

In the dictionary of an art student or artist, the meaning of the phrase "plenty of time" is years and years, whereas it is not even 10½ months since I promised the Ex-Governor! My promise is there and it would be fulfilled in due course in the right royal way.

If you had seen the last sentence in my letter, I am sure you wouldn't have wasted your valuable time, energy and paper in writing to me reminders after reminders. I wonder who instructed you to do so.

I am very busy with a serious work of imagination in sculpture - bas-relief ^{since some months} both day & night, and sometimes without rest, and it is approaching completion. Then only my mind could be diverted towards other matters.

Yours Sincerely,
Renukappa.

Venkatappa who remained a celibate did. Both had strong convictions, but Nandalal was always gentle while Venkatappa could at times be fierce. Both had an abiding interest in sculpture, although Nandalal never ventured into this field as Venkatappa did. Neither Venkatappa nor Nandalal was interested in politics, although they both adored Mahatma Gandhi.

It is natural that both were inspired by the mountains, for their *guru* Abanindranath was himself drawn to the Himalayas. But it is a curious coincidence that while Venkatappa was painting landscapes of the Blue Mountain ranges in Ootacamund, Nandalal was painting landscapes in Karseong in the Himalayan ranges. Both did about twelve paintings each in the series. It is another strange coincidence that Nandalal learnt the North Indian musical instrument Esraj while Venkatappa learnt the South Indian musical instrument Veena, almost at the same time.*

Nandalal developed a great interest in etching and wood-cut techniques around 1920-1924. About the same time, Venkatappa was doing bas-relief panels in plaster of paris for the Mysore Palace. The only other artists of the Bengal school to depart from painting and try their hand at a graphic medium like etching and engraving were Ramendranath Chakravarty and Binode Bihari Mukhopadhyaya, but that was at a later period. Venkatappa experimented with etching and engraving on a metal plate by electro-copper deposit method. He completed the piece entitled 'Bodhisattva' (inspired by the Ajanta painting of Avalokitesvara), which was distinguished by clear, uniformly thick and sensitive lines, clarity and definition of forms, and beauty of composition. This piece was, however, destroyed by a visitor to his Studio stamping on it in 1948.

PANELS AND BUSTS

Venkatappa began as a painter as all students of Abanindranath did, but preferred at a later stage to create bas-reliefs in plaster of paris, which is rather an unusual medium for a conventional artist. Sculptors in India generally work in stone, wood, ivory, bronze or clay, and not in plaster of paris. The use of this material is limited to taking moulds before casting. Venkatappa, however, chose plaster of paris (as sculptors in South Kensington did) for the panels to be kept along the walls of the audience hall in the Palace in Mysore. Any other material would have been in the circumstances unsuitable. Besides, a professional painter would ruin the sensitiveness and delicacy of his fingers if he worked in stone or wood. A further reason was that as a painter he preferred, and was trained to do, miniatures, even as his *guru* Abanindranath did, and as the models provided by the Mughal and Rajput paintings were. And miniatures would be thoroughly inappropriate to the large dimensions of the Palace Hall. The panels in plaster of paris were designed as a definitive part of the setting of the Palace Hall. It is, however, a pity that except for three, the other panels did not find a place there.

The technique of bas-relief which dominates his panels was adapted by Venkatappa to provide magnificent chiaroscuro effect. He did each of his panels after careful study of the advantageous play of light and shade in order

to heighten the intended sentiment of the whole composition as well as the emotional expressions on the faces of the human and animal figures. He attended to the broad anatomy of men, women, and animals that were portrayed in the panels, and also to the muscular tensions in action and in repose. Classical themes from epics like *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* were sought by him to be imaginatively interpreted, without however allowing fantasy to ruin the effect. Although bas-reliefs, his panels sometimes give the impression of sculpture in the round and remind one of the Greek stele. With a wealth of details, they are not flamboyant; nor do they lack a governing unity in the composition.

A contemporary of his in the Calcutta Art School, and a celebrity of the renaissance movement in art, Asit Kumar Haldar, visited Venkatappa's studio on 13th September 1956, examined the plaster of paris panels and observed: "There is painting in your reliefs". Never was a truer comment made. Venkatappa's reliefs are in effect paintings in white. And by the clever play of light and shadows, soft and sensitive forms take shape even as figures in a painting do. The absence of colours is successfully made up with the modulations of the reliefs. The themes are epic and narrative, and the treatment is both realistic and sentimental. And there is a wealth of details, and each detail is not only treated delicately but marvellously subordinated to the sentiment of the whole panel. Each panel has an unmistakable quality of a miniature, only blown up to large proportions.

There is not only painting in his panels, but poetry also. Look at his panel depicting the departure of Shakuntala. The sage Kanva, expected to be calm and unagitated in all circumstances is shown here as moved to dejection as his foster-daughter Shakuntala is taking leave of him; the girl,

who must be happy for she is going to her loving husband's home, is obviously sorrowing that she is leaving her aged foster-father behind. Not only the human beings, even the deer (the pet of Shakuntala's) is aware that it is being forsaken, and tugs at the dear lady's garment. I remember Venkatappa, while showing this panel to me, drew my attention to the varying and intensified expressions on the faces of the old sage, the romantic daughter and the trusting deer by adjusting the lights of his Studio. The scene reminds one at once of the tender story of Shakuntala, forcefully told by Kalidasa in his celebrated play in Sanskrit, especially in the fourth canto which no one can read without shedding tears.

Or think of the other panel, circular in shape, illustrating the momentous episode in the life of the Buddha when he, as prince Siddhartha, steals out of his palace in the stillness and secrecy of midnight to the life of a forest-dwelling hermit. The well-known story has it that he rides on his favourite horse, Kanthaka, and goes out of the palace and to the outskirts of the capital, where he asks the horse to get back. Attached to the master as it was, and unable to bear separation, the poor horse silently sheds tears. This is a remarkable portrayal of a poignant situation. When Venkatappa first made this panel, he had bedecked the prince with various ornaments and costumes. But when he 'reoriented' this panel after years (during December 1951), he divested the prince who had set out renouncing the kingdom of all these ornaments and costumes which "are jarring to the situation" (as he explained to me); he made the prince as hermit-like as possible. He heightened, during this revision, the sorrow on the face of the horse; tears gleam and flow.

The treatment of these panels are undoubtedly poetic. His narrative skill is evident in the other panels also. There are

two panels illustrating episodes from *Mahabharata*. In one, Drona, the master of archery, is teaching the Pandava brothers Bhima and Arjuna and the Kauravas, and in the other Ekalavya is learning archery on his own, with the image of his chosen teacher, Drona, rudely but reverentially made by his own hand, in front of him. In the former panel, the artist has attempted to delineate the robust character of the old master, Arjuna's love of archery contrasted with Bhima's disdain for it (for he preferred club to bow and arrow), and the differing traits of the pious Pandavas and the wicked Kauravas. In the latter panel, the concentration and devotion of the tribal boy stand out in bold relief. The story is that although Drona refused to teach him, he was determined to have Drona as his *guru*, and so made an image of him (as his limited skill would permit) and practised archery in front of this image.

There is a panel illustrating a sequence in *Ramayana*. In this panel, Rama is presenting his signet-ring to Hanuman, who undertakes to take his message to Sita, who had been carried away by Ravana and held captive in Lanka. In another panel the Buddha is depicted as a mendicant on his begging round. This is, as mentioned earlier, modelled directly from a painting in Ajanta. The last panel that we have shows the dance of Siva. This shows an astonishing technical virtuosity, for the relief is nowhere more than one eighth of an inch deep and the modelling of the dancer's body is powerful, rhythmic and full of feeling. It combines realism, naturalism and spiritual significance. And evident here is the Florentine concern for the study of human form in action.

While making these panels, it was the artist's habit to make a perfect clay model, complete in all details, giving attention even to minute jewellery or subtle expression on the face. His work after the panel was cast in plaster of

paris was very little. Therefore, he would take extraordinary care to take accurate casts. Once the panels were ready, he would alter details only if he found the alteration justifiable from the point of view of beauty, realism and effect. He would, day after day, observe the panels, carefully and critically, especially the ones that were left in his Studio, and over years he found that they needed improvements here and there. He incorporated these improvements in a liesurely and meticulous manner.

His portrait-busts are also in plaster of paris. There are three of them, one of his Veena master Seshanna (1918), another of the poet Rabindranath Tagore (1923) and still another of a hotel server, Mani (Narasimhayya) (1918). They are realistic and in the best style of portrait-sculpture. But the artist has attempted to bring out the excellent character of an inspired musician in the first, the noble bearing of a great poet in the second, and the charming innocence of a poor lad in the third. All three were made from life, with feelings of admiration for the subjects. An entry in his diary for 24th December 1954 indicates that he had made a clay model of Percy Brown, the Principal of the Art School in Calcutta. It is not known where this model is now or what happened to it. However, there is a photograph of this model, which is reproduced in this book.

PAINTINGS AND PORTRAITS

His training was principally in the field of painting and his early influence was from the Mughal and Rajput miniatures. Havell had already acquired many splendid specimens of these for the Gallery attached to the Calcutta Art School, and the students were asked to imbibe not only the technique but the spirit of this style. Venkatappa had also the benefit of learning initially under Lala Isvari-Prasad, who belonged to the family of artists from Patna who had preserved this style. His tutelage under Abanindranath began only after this foundation had firmly been laid. It is therefore that we find that Venkatappa's paintings do not reveal much of Abanindranath's influence. Nor are his works ethereal and dreamy as the paintings of Abanindranath, and the earlier paintings of Nandalal are. Venkatappa obviously preferred firm lines, definite contour, clear figures, and rich colour that are characteristic of the seventeenth century miniatures. Although he experimented with the Japanese wash technique that was popularised by Abanindranath, it did not appeal to him. Nor was he influenced much by the techniques or expressions that one finds in the Ajanta paintings, as Nandalal was. Thus Venkatappa is not a typical product what is known as the Bengal school; he departed from its basic norms and methods.

He managed to develop an independent style that combined realism with lyrical beauty. His human beings,

birds and animals are anatomically accurate. He did not allow sentiment and symbolism to distort reality, as the artists of the Bengal School generally and rather deliberately did. It was not his purpose to produce a dreamy and vapoury effect in his paintings; nor was mystery his attraction. He emphasized that drawing was fundamental to painting; his outline drawings were bold, sharp and clear, and colours were equally well-defined. He did not violate the academic principles of perspective, geometry, and anatomy; and he made good use of the principle of broad forms and proper proportions producing a unitary vision, avoiding crowding of details in the composition. His human figures are invariably graceful, slender and contemplative, and the background landscape is always serene and exquisite.

His paintings, mostly in water colour and miniature, can be considered in three groups: imaginative compositions involving human figures, landscapes, and portraits. To the first group belongs the well-known painting entitled 'Mad after Veena' (1922). It is autobiographical in inspiration and narration. The artist has forsaken the muse of painting (which he had cultivated assiduously for years) and has been indifferent to sculpture symbolised by his *guru* Abanindranath. The muses are in fetters and the *guru* is veiled and dust-laden. The emaciated and forlorn artist turns away from both, and is seeking the grace of the muse of music, symbolised by the deity of Veena. This represents a period in the life of the artist when he turned his attention whole-heartedly to Veena and neglected painting (1918-1922). This was also the period when he came under the spell of the all-time great maestro Veena Seshanna, whose portrait bust in plaster of paris is dated 1918. Again, this was the period when he felt the pangs of frustration that he could not go to England for higher training in sculpture. The painting is thus a picture of

anguish, the symbol of the lure of music, the expression of a guilt-feeling that one has neglected his professional calling and has proved false to his masters in painting. It is noteworthy that he chose to paint his explanation as to why and how he neglected painting; and he describes it as 'madness', which is actually beyond explanation. The muses are damsels, right out of the seventeenth century miniatures; graceful, weak, subdued, formal, naive, stiff, and inexpressive. Even the man fades into insignificance beside the Veena which is in a bold relief in the composition, full of solidity revealing the charming form of this most ancient of musical instruments in India.

'Maha-Sivaratri' is another imaginative composition illustrating a couple's visit to the temple in the night. The artist describes the 'Nocturn effect' as the soul of the picture, and draws our attention to the "artistic beauty of the skyless interior". When this painting was reproduced in a periodical, *Rangabhumi*, and the reproduction was bad, he bewailed that it "was a gross and malicious misrepresentation of his great art" and charged that the publishers had "wantonly created in the minds of the readers of your journal a wrong impression of the artist". Indeed, the artist has marvellously introduced the light and shade to heighten the impression of the devotion of the pious couple and also the static solidity of the tree. The light comes out of the temple and illumines the approaching devotees; otherwise it is dark night. The tree outside the temple is illumined from the opposite side by the lamp-light placed on the platform. Venkatappa called this picture 'Night-worship' when he sent it to the Madras Fine Arts Exhibition in 1923.

The water-colour entitled 'Radha and the Deer' is a conventional treatment of the conventional theme from the Life of Krishna. It is a strange juxtaposition of realism

and sentimentalism. It must have been an early attempt, probably done while he was still in Calcutta. It may be recalled that his *guru* Abanindranath was fond of the Radha-Krishna theme, and had done a series of Krishna-lila miniatures as early as 1896. Probably this was an assignment given to Venkatappa as a student. The involvement of deer occurs prominently in the miniatures of the Basohli school, but while borrowing the detail Venkatappa has made the deer very realistic and alive. The whole painting breathes a lyrical beauty that can hardly be missed. Straight lines and flat surfaces are avoided, and easy curves have been skilfully introduced. The slender damsel in the company of an equally slender deer has a background that is tender and poetic. But the work lacks maturity on the whole.

There are two paintings from the *Ramayana* series that Venkatappa did earlier to 1913, which have been brought to public attention. One was reproduced in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's *Art and Swadeshi* (Madras, 1910, Plate 18); the other is in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The former illustrated a little known episode in *Ramayana*, Mother Earth presenting a pair of sandals to Rama while he was a forest-dweller. Rama is here asleep, and the presentation is being received by Sita on behalf of Rama. Ananda Coomaraswamy describes this painting as "really beautiful and naively expressive" (*ibid.* p 133). It is a fine illustration of the supposition that the medieval miniatures were large in design although small in size. The design is highly imaginative, and the composition is lyrical especially the sleeping Rama. What is outstanding in this picture, as in the other works of his, is the perfect precision of the outline of the figures, although the figures of the two women are highly conventional in treatment. The latter painting depicts the building of the bridge across the sea to Lanka by the Vanara chieftain. There is nothing in this

picture that is really attractive, apart from a sense of excitement that can be seen on the faces of the monkeys and the element of tension of composition. There is also a third painting of the *Ramayana* series, 'The wedding of Sita', which has been printed sometimes.

The 'Bird' painting is also a work of the early period. It was done in 1910, sometime after Venkatappa joined the Calcutta Art School, and has an obvious imprint of the Persian Art. Other paintings done during this period include the 'Bengal Fish Market' (1911 which, he records in his diary, was wanted by James H. Cousins), and 'Sankaracharya and the Toddy man' (which is praised by Ananda Coomaraswamy in the work mentioned above as 'beautiful and expressive'). I have not had an opportunity to see either of them. Still another painting, which is more in the nature of a drawing of the same period, is the beautiful, iconographic portrayal of '*Ardhanarisvara*' (1911). It is a composite image of the masculine Siva and the feminine Parvati, beautifully rendered by simple but bold, definite but flowing, lines. This picture was reproduced and published in the quarterly publication from Mysore, *Prabuddha Karnataka* (Mysore University) during 1930. But there is no knowing what happened to the picture after this year.

There is a water colour composition with a curious theme. A priest has offered sweet-cake (*modaka*) to the idol of Ganesa, and while doing so closes his eyes in deep contemplation. Pleased with his devotion, but unseen by him, Ganesa stretches out his hand and accepts one of cakes. The imaginative treatment is no doubt original, charming in its conception, not without a touch of humour, and delicate in delineation. The human figure contrasts well, and balances the iconographic figure of the elephant-headed and pot-bellied god of good fortune.

Details do not crowd the picture, and the background is as plain as the theme is simple. It cannot be ascertained when this unsigned painting was done. It is now in the collection of the Jaganmohan Palace Art Gallery in Mysore.

Venkatappa wrote in 1957 (10th September) to Barada Ukil, his friend who was at that time Secretary to the Lalita Kala Akademi, New Delhi in reply to a request by him to send some of paintings to Delhi: "One of the best paintings I have done is in the National Art Gallery, New Delhi ... suitable for reproduction in an Album or Portfolio proposed by the Government". This refers to the well-known composition 'The Buddha and His Disciples', done in 1921. Although the painting is in water-colour, the faces of the Buddha and some of his disciples have been done in tempera medium, thus "creating an unusually delicate yet rich effect". The painting was done when the Buddha theme had caught the fancy of the artists of the Bengal School; and every disciple of Abanindranath had done scenes from the life of the Buddha. Abanindranath himself had done some paintings to illustrate episodes from the Buddha's life. Venkatappa's panel in plaster of paris ('The Buddha as a mendicant') is heavily indebted to a painting in Ajanta as well as to a painting by Abanindranath based on the Ajanta painting. This painting, of which Venkatappa was justifiably proud, is among the most effective compositions attempted in the Bengal School. It has a lyrical quality about it, the quiet dignity of the teaching master harmoniously related to the eager absorption of the listening pupils. There is here a balance, both pictorial and spiritual. And the colours are at once soft and aglow.

There is an unsigned and undated oil-colour painting in Jaganmohan Palace Art Gallery, entitled 'Bull on the Chamundi Hill', and ascribed to Venkatappa in the

records of the Art Gallery. But the size of the picture and the treatment, apart from the medium, make one doubt if the ascription is correct. Even if it is a genuine Venkatappa piece, it is a mediocre work.

The most magnificent of Venkatappa's paintings, however, are his water-colour miniature landscapes done in the two hill-stations of South India, Ootacamund (done between May and October in 1926 and between March and September 1928) and Kodaikanal (between April and July 1934). The artist sets out to capture the different moods of nature during the course of the day and night and also in the several seasons. Outstanding features of these paintings are delicate draftsmanship, sensitive colours, unobtrusive play of light and shade, and immaculate realism. The landscapes are uniformly simple and natural in space-composition, and serene in effect. The hills and the valleys, the trees and the rocks, the sky and the land are harmoniously related, and there is a perfect and rhythmic unity. The tonal contrasts of the colours lend dignity to the pictures, and the fore-ground and background differentiation is dramatically treated.

Venkatappa studied the Elk-Hill avenue in Ootacamund for days before he sketched it from different angles. He repeatedly observed the low hills and the gentle valleys amidst the luxuriant vegetation, day after day and night after night, all alone and in a state of at-tension, before he locked himself up in his room to prepare the draft-paintings. When he recounted his experiences of those days to me thirty years later, the imagery of each detail of the landscapes was vivid in his mind. He had drunk nature deep and in leisurely measures. He had taken his Veena with him. During the day he ingested the ocularly evident moods of nature, and in the night he tried to relate them to the melody-moulds on his Veena. The softness and

warmth of the colours in the landscapes that he painted then were a reflection of the glow within which was made the mood melodious. He made only key sketches in the open; he always painted in his own room, closed to outsiders. What he painted was the mood of nature recollected in the tranquillity of his own being. His landscapes are thus imaginative interpretations of realistic themes. While there is a concern for accuracy, the composition does not suffer because of it.

This combination of imagination and realism is also to be seen in his portraits. There is a solitary oil-colour portrait that he did early in his career, of a lady, and probably this was a commissioned work. This is now preserved in the "Saswathi" museum of the N.M.K.R.V. College for Women, Bangalore. His other portraits are water-colour miniatures on ivory. The smooth surface of ivory is an excellent, but exceedingly difficult, medium for water-colours. This medium was exploited to best advantage by the Mughal painters, and we find that painting on ivory was popular in medieval Europe also. This was also seen in the Mysore royal collections during the days of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III and Chamaraja Wodeyar. Venkatappa tried his hand at it with great success. The first portrait that he did in this medium was that of his patron, the late Maharaja of Mysore, Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, who was celebrated as the "royal sage" (rajarshi). This was done in the month of February 1918. The second was that of his teacher Abanindranath Tagore, done probably during the same time. Both these are now in the Venkatappa Art Gallery at Bangalore. The third portrait is that of the late Maharaja of Cooch Behar, which he did in 1926, and presented to the National Art Gallery, Madras as a gift in 1954. He had made another portrait of the same person, commissioned by the Maharani of Cooch Behar. Venkatappa's friend Sirdar Gopalraja Arasu who saw this

portrait, got a portrait of the Maharaja of Mysore done for himself. This miniature on ivory, the second portrait of the Maharaja of Mysore, is also in the collection of Venkatappa Art Gallery at Bangalore.

His portraits on ivory breathe a concern for the accuracy of appearance. But the photographic appearance of the subject is transformed by the artist's brush into a portrait with expression, character and spirit, where every feature has an essential function. No detail, however small, escapes his attention and utmost care; and no detail, however significant, is allowed to disturb the balance of the whole composition. The artist studied the personality of the subject before he undertook to portray him; he never relied on photographs exclusively. The subjects of all the three portraits were known to him personally and two of them (the Maharaja of Mysore and Abanindranath) intimately; and he had great regard for both of them. And these portraits were labours of love for him. The portrait of the Maharaja of Cooch-Behar, however, was done mainly on the basis of photographs, although Venkatappa had seen him once or twice in the company of the Yuvaraja of Mysore; and this was a commissioned portrait.

Venkatappa's involvement with water-colour miniature portrait painting on ivory was rather unusual because it had gone out of vogue by about 1900. This genre was brought to India by the English artists during the days of the Mughal emperor, Jehangir (1569-1627). It was first adopted by the Indian artists at Patna and later at Delhi. They followed the British model in the style as well as method. The artists who set the standard for this were George Chinnery, Ozias Humphreys and John Smart. This was around 1780. By 1830 there were in Delhi a number of Indian artists who, painted on ivory. The art arrived with the 'Company Art' in Tanjore about the same time, and in

Mysore a little later. Venkatappa was probably acquainted with the art-style while he was in Calcutta. He found it a challenging task to paint in water colour on the smooth and polished surface of ivory; it had necessarily to be a miniature. But the Delhi artists had switched over to landscapes and decorative designs from portraiture. Venkatappa returned to portraiture, and in this he followed the Western idiom thoroughly; style, shading and draughtsmanship were all in the best European tradition. It is interesting that he did not try his hand at compositions on ivory.

Events

Born (Mysore)	June 23, 1886
Joined Industrial School (Mysore)	1902
Passed Art exams of Madras Government	1906
Joined Govt. School of Art, Calcutta	1909
<i>Portrait of a Lady</i> (oil painting)	1909
<i>Bengal Floriken</i> (Bird Study: water colour)	1910
<i>Deputed to copy Ajanta Frescoes</i> (for Lady Harringham)	1911
<i>Ardhanari and Bengali Fish Market</i>	1911
<i>Ramayana</i> pictures	1913
Himalayan Pilgrimage	April-June 1913
Vow of Aparigraha (non-acceptance of gifts)	May 6, 1913
Started learning music (Veena)	End of 1913
Fabricated <i>Sruti-Veena</i>	Jan. 1914
<i>Abanindranath Tagore</i> (Ivory miniature)	1914
Returned to Mysore	June 1, 1916
<i>Street of Old Agrahara, Mysore</i>	1917
Began work for the Mysore Palace	1918
<i>Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV</i> (for Mirza Ismail) (Ivory miniature)	1918 (Redone 1937-38)
Plaster of Paris Bust of <i>Mani</i>	1918 (Reconstructed 1950)
Began music studies under Veena Sheshanna	Mar. 7, 1918
Plaster of Paris Bust of <i>Veena Sheshanna</i> (finished)	Aug. 6, 1918
<i>Two Views from the Chamundi Hills</i>	1919
<i>Mad after Veena</i>	1921-22
<i>Mahasivaratri</i> (Night Worship)	1923
<i>Chand Bibi</i> for James H. Cousins	1923
<i>Physical Development</i> (Sirdar Gopalraj Urs)	May 10, 1923
Plaster of Paris Bust of <i>Rabindranath Tagore</i> (finished)	Dec. 27, 1923 (Reorientated 1956)
<i>Mareecha</i> as <i>Golden Stag</i> tempting <i>Sita</i>	1923
Met Mahatma Gandhi (Belgaum)	Dec. 28, 1924
Plaster Reliefs for <i>Amba-Vilas Hall</i> of the Palace (planned)	1924
Ivory miniature of <i>Cooch Behar Maharaja</i>	1924-26
<i>Siddhartha</i> (Plaster relief panel)	1924 (Reorientated 1951-52)
<i>Drona Teaching Archery</i> (Plaster Relief Panel)	1925

<i>Ekalavya learning Archery</i> (Plaster Relief Panel)	1925
Bought Plot of land in Bangalore for Studio	April 15, 1926
Landscapes from Ooty (water colours)	May 9, 1926-Oct 27, 1926 (and again March 29 - Sept. 27, 1928)
<i>Shakuntala's Departure</i> (Plaster Relief Panel)	1928 (Reorientated 1948)
Mysore Maharaja visited his Studio (in Mysore)	Jan. 27, 1930
<i>Rama presenting Signet-ring to Hanuman</i> (panel)	1932
<i>Buddha as Mendicant</i> (Plaster of Paris Relief panel)	1934
<i>Scenes from Kodaikanal</i>	April 21 - July 11, 1934
Visit to the Nandi Hills	March 7 - April 21, 1934
Udbodhan libel case (Calcutta) settled	April 16, 1938
Construction of Studio at Bangalore formally began	Nov. 10, 1938
<i>Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV</i> (Ivory miniature for Gopalaraaj Urs)	1939
<i>Dance of Shiva</i> (Plaster Relief Panel)	1940 (Reorientated 1956)
Left Mysore (due to differences with the Palace, after death of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV) for Bangalore	Oct. 23, 1940
Construction of Studio completed (grhipravesam)	June 4, 1941
Legal proceedings against the Mysore Palace began	Sept. 5, 1943
The 'Palace Appeal' dismissed in Court	Oct. 28, 1946
Fabricated the Standard Veena	Jan. 2, 1949
Trouble with the knees and eyes began	late 1952
Diabetes onset discovered	Aug. 28, 1954
<i>Golden Sun-set</i> study completed	Nov. 18, 1957
Illness takes serious turn	Mar. 1958
Elected Fellow of Lalit Kala Akademi, Delhi	June 17, 1961
Presentation of Award (tamrapatra and angavastra) at a special function at his residence from the Central Lalit Kala Akademi, Delhi	Aug. 7, 1962
Presentation of address by the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat	Dec 2, 1962
Died at his residence (1 p.m.)	May 25, 1965
Cremated at Harischandra-ghat (11.45 a.m.)	May 26, 1965
Formation of the Venkatappa Art Gallery (Bangalore)	1974