5.1 INTRODUCTION

The print making scene in North East geared up quite late due to immense lack of infrastructural facility which is the basic requirement for the art of print making. It was only during the eighties when it started the momentum to bring forth a bunch of talented artists and later on the scene really became very vibrant and expansive. The two artists who have made contribution to the development of this art in Assam and North East are Ajit Seal and Dilip Tamuly. (Kandali: 2011) Ajit Seal, a multi-dimensional painter, printmaker is among pathfinders in terms generating new idea and technology of art discipline in entire North Eastern India particularly in Assam during last part of twentieth century. Born in Guwahati in the year 1956, he was founder Head of Graphics Department of Government College of Art & Crafts, Guwahati and presently pursuing as Associate Professor of Visva-Bharati University of Santiniketan in the department of Graphics.

The particular generation of students during 1980s onwards who settled in Guwahati grew with the art institute- their association with Guwahati is more serious and of course deepest. They gave the Government School of Art and Crafts, Guwahati its identity and took up teaching and nurtured many students along with their creative art practices. Ajit Seal is the integral part of
that generation, main path-finder, motivator, who went outside Assam from Gauhati Art College to pursue training in print making as Garhi Studio and Department of Graphics of Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan.

The Guwahati Art School was established in 1947 with the effort of Jibeswar Baruah with limited Government support, which may now have been taken over by the Government of Assam and is functioning as the single complete art institution under Gauhati University. Since the fifties several young boys and girls acquired academic training from Santiniketan, Government College of Art & Crafts of Calcutta, J. J. College of Art of Bombay, M.S. University of Baroda and Lucknow Art College. Till 1990s, well-known among them except Ajit Seal and Dilip Tamuly, are basically practicing painting. (Misra: 1997) Ajit Seal amongst them has been experimenting in various painting and print medium as taking inspiration from both traditional ideal and modernist ethos/thoughts. Since sixties of last century onwards artists of Assam has been engaged to show contemporary temperament through their works. The easy access they have to the mainstream of various art centers in the country today has accelerated the process. (Brahma: 1998)

In this juncture a group of young, contemporary artist with fresh and shimmering fertility including Ajit Seal, has moved outside his native state Assam for acquiring knowledge about modern methods and material as print making for the first time. Born in 1958, Ajit Seal studied his Diploma in painting from Government School of Art & Crafts, Guwahati in 1979. After that he joined the Garhi Studio in Delhi and worked there from 1979 to 1981. During this period he learnt the basics of lithography and intaglio techniques of print making from studio in charge of print making studio as Devraj Dakoji
and Jogelkar. Actually eminent artist stalwart as Prof. Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal has made permission regarding working in print making at Garhi Studio for Ajit Seal. Since that early period he concentrated on lithography and that became a lifelong fascination. Ajit Seal’s empathy with the pristine beauty of Assam’s landscapes echoes in his multivalent canvas and print image. But this particular beauty is transmuted by the artist into many forms, many colors. Predominantly, Seal probes beauty in a borderland between myths and human realities. (Deb: 2003) His lithograph print entitled *Deity and the pet* done in 1993 is such evidence in this regard (Plate 5.1).

After Garhi Studio, Seal completed his Post-Diploma from the department of graphics in Kala Bhavana in 1983 and joined the Government College of Art and Craft in Guwahati as a lecturer in the year 1986. At present he is teaching in the Department of Print making in Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan. In recent years he has introduced platography, a medium previously unexplored by the artists and students working at Santiniketan. In the platography process the lithographic stone is replaced by an aluminum plate which is generally used for offset printing. Such an example of print entitled *Deity* in platography done in 2009 is such an excellent piece as exploring the medium (Plate 5.19).

Ajit Seal has exhibited his works at different art galleries of India and abroad. He was invited to the International Mini Graphics Biennial at Fadrikatad, Norway and to the International Show of Com-Art, Korea. A recipient of several awards at national level and Senior fellowship of Human Resource Development, Government of India, Ajit seal’s persistent effort and dedication, his aesthetic sensibility and imaginative probing and at most of his
attempts to fuse the tradition and the modern have really been able to create a special niche for himself in the contemporary art scene, of the state and outside as well. It is for Ajit Seal’s relentless effort along with Dilip Tamuly’s enthusiasm and dedication that the Department of Graphics in Government College of Art and Crafts, Guwahati has slowly been able to secure a foremost position among few print making department of providing bachelor degree of art institutions of the country with a set of technically sound and artistically forthcoming artists. (Kandali; 2011) Such an evidence of lithograph entitled *Man and the bird* done in 1993 during his tenure as teacher of Government College of Art and Crafts, Guwahati can be mentioned in this regard. (Plate 5.2) In this print, he has taken multiple colour impressions using single stone block and reverse process. His lithograph print entitled *Future man I* done during 2007 is another print of achieving extra ordinary monochrome textures and tone (Plate 5.8).

In the contemporary art scenario of Assam, new experimentation of traditional folk ways were initiated by some renowned artists like Neelpawan Baruah, Sobha Brahma and Benu Misra who exploited the folk forms and contents in the changing perspectives of modern artistic vision. Art is perhaps like the flute virus, metamorphosing throughout the temporal discourse, it unfolds, evolves, assimilates and sustains. Tradition gives way to modernity. Art goes on imbibing new concepts, styles, form and techniques. But whatever are the thematic and structural changes, self-insatiability of traditional and folk art infinite. (Kandali: 1999) As explorations of folk and traditional ways are adhere to immense possibility of the new artistic realm which can be classical and modern, local yet universal. Ajit Seal persistently
involved on fusing segmented experiences of two different worlds- an ancient and contemporary. On his part he has tried to renew formal novelty base on experimentation of the formal style and rigor of traditions with new color principles and imaginative probing. Kurone is such a lithograph, as fine blend of traditional form with modernist gesture/philosophy (Plate 5.6).

Ajit Seal, a dedicated artist and served as lecturer in graphics at the Govt. College of Art and crafts, Assam in Guwahati till 2007, presently Associate Professor at Department of Graphics, Visva Bharati University of Santiniketan with his utmost zeal, credentials for learning, teaching, creativity and innovation. Significantly Ajit Seal’s works has been included and discuss in two recently published books on print making in India recently as Printed Picture Four Centuries of Indian Print making (Volume one & two) by Dr. Paula Sengupta and another book entitled Between the Lines: Identity, Place and Power selections from the Waswo X Waswo Collection of Indian Print making, edited by Lina Vincent Sunish. While Baroda, Santiniketan, Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad emerged as prime centre of print making through the modernist era, isolated patchy efforts are visible elsewhere. Chandigarh, Jaipur, Lucknow, Varanashi, Goa, Khairagarh, and Bangalore have had active printmakers over the years. Worth mentioning among those practicing in the modernist era are Ajit Dubey in Bangalore, Ajit Seal in Guwahati are amongst the other. (Sengupta: 2012)

5.2 JOURNEY AS A PRINT MAKER

Just during the commencement of Independence India, renowned artist Jibeswar Baruah started Gauhati Art School in the year 1947 (today’s
reputed Govt. College of Art & Crafts), at Panbazar (near Regel Hotel presently), Guwahati, where print making as a medium of creative expression was popular among the teacher fraternity of that time. Esteemed painter like Sobha Brahma, Neelpawan Baruah and Benu Misra equally showed considerable interest in the medium and occasionally tried their hand/ experimented with wood-cut and lino-cut (Relief Print Making). (Rehman Ghose Dastidar: 2003) Ajit Seal being an alumnus of renowned Department of Graphics of Santiniketan has built-up confidence as creative artist printmaker. Santiniketan has been remained prime inspiration of his entire life and also the foundation Ait Seal’s method of constructing compositions are fundamentally Eastern in which its rhythm and character/ iconography is emphasized as the starting point. As he is creating strange interface of man and nature predominantly with human figures, his figures are largely created from memory, nostalgia and his awareness of a particular tradition/heritage. *Untitled, 2010* is such a platograph print in this regard (Plate 5.5).

Nandalal Bose first mentor of Kala Bhavan elaborates, *Santiniketan strikes a chord as, European Art moves from the part to the whole, and Oriental Art, starting with the whole, comes to analyze the parts.* (1999) So too as an alumni of art institution of Santiniketan, Ajit Seal’s method of creating the body has got inspiration from indigenous ideal; its rhythm and character are the starting point- a movement from totality to detail, tradition converging into modernist thought. As experimenting predominantly with human figures, Seal’s figures are largely created from memory as his *Untitled* platography print, 2010 (Plate 5.17). And the memory holds the idea of the object or the ‘life movement’ as much it does the detail of a situation- a
practice directly connecting to the art making tradition of Santiniketan. A process that starts with the idea or 'life movements' is so rich with endless possibilities and dimensions that the process of image making would be remained perpetually joyful and fresh. (Dutta: 2008) unquestionably works of Ajit Seal makes us mesmerized with its joyful and fresh pictorial depiction of his process of image making. As instance his *Untitled* platograph print done in 2010 can be mentioned in this regard (Plate 5.16).

As a printmaker Ajit Seal loved to work in stone lithography or platography on aluminum plate more recently, as according to him, with exploring reducing method, rather drawing with litho crayon or touché ink on the matrix. For him best process would be reducing method, rolling black on the stone or plate, and then taking different color gradually from that one stone rather working with multiple stone. So taking impression with one single matrix can be also economized the assets also. As instance his *Untitled* lithograph done in 2009 shows multiple layering of color impressions as using reverse and reducing method on particular stone surface (Plate 5.22).

During his tenure in Government College of Art and Crfts, Guwahati, Ajit Seal similarity worked with the tradition *Xatriya* or *Vaisnavite* monastery culture, after returning back to Guwahati from Santiniketan during 1986s. Basically, beginning to work with deities and later perhaps visit to Majuli and being touch with colleague friend Dilip Tamuly who has past resident of that island, he got to be gradually aware of *Vaisnavite* culture, exposed to Manuscript Painting Tradition; that’s how perhaps amalgamated to his work. We can see *Vaisnavite* head dress which is often reflection in his deities as accordingly earlier concept of deities of that is slowly conglomerated with
those Vaishnavite element. As instance, the print entitled *Untitled* platograph done in 2013 shows the inspiration from *Bhaona* or Vaishnavite drama tradition of Assam as figural arrangement and attire (Plate 5.48).

After successfully completing his studies from this department, he went back to Guwahati in 1986 and join as lecturer at Department of Graphics Government School of Art and Crafts, Guwahati. There he thought of establishing an active graphics department cum studio. As equally enthusiasm from Principal Sobha Brahma of that time, he procures a lithography and intaglio machine and necessary establishment along with woodcut and silk screen facilities within 1991. In our country no one had such courage to start or even to think of such activities at a remote place as Guwahati that time. With utmost sincerity and dedication, he not only did his own prints but also provides best print making education at Government College of art and crafts, Guwahati to students from all over eastern part of India. With several trials & errors he re-innovates/ develops the planographic technique on offset plate or platography as according to him and popularize among the students in making experimentation with it. In this medium he took the initiative of organizing of various print making workshops in the department of Guwahati among eminent artists, teacher and also student. Such examples of two platograph prints entitled *Untitled* prove his endeavor of making particular medium towards more perfection and creative exploration (Plate 5.19) and (Plate 5.20).

Thereafter, Ajit Seal moved to Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan in 2007, presently he lives & works in Santiniketan. That is more important as significantly he has gradually established himself as one of the serious and
most technically efficient print maker of our country. The wishful thinking of Ajit Seal in transforming all the lithography machines as running with electric motor which is less manual labor and also time saving during his tenure as head of the Department of Graphics, Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan and also his effort making platography in the course curriculum of graphic department of Kala Bhavana, print making studio of Santiniketan is now known as the best centre of print making activity and a name of quality editions. The wise thinking of Graphics Department of Santiniketan to start a residency cum studio providing print making facilities at the house of Shomnath Hore and along with Ajit Seal’s tireless role of its complete set up which made it possible at the rural village set up in Santiniketan. In viewing Ajit Seal solo exhibition at state art gallery, Guwahati, one of his mentor Prof. Kanchan Chakraborty wrote as,

"Modernism is no escape route: it is not even a pollutant. It is essentially indeed an attitude per se. It is a struggle extraordinaire for a creative soul. The stimuli- response paradigm of an individual mirrors the evolution of that struggle.

A visit to an exhibition is willy-nilly an invitation to the viewer to discover that individual identify. Under the surface of form- content equation- the style-treatment palette- reverberations are located the painter’s world of stimulation-motivation. A visitor to the recent canvases of Ajit Seal should equally feel the challenge to rediscover him under the surface. He hails from a North-Eastern periphery with still alive myths- temples mythologies in urban rural form symbols and beliefs. This is an invitation identify their correlation
Seal’s initial training as a painter has always played a great role in asserting his role as a printmaker. His concept first comes as a painted vision which he later converts into a print. Lithography demands a rigorous physical involvement from the artist and it compels the artist to revisit his conception in a different medium and space. Seal’s works combine these two different worlds of painting and print making to create a new vision. Animal and human forms are recurring motifs in the artist’s works. Painting and print making offer alternative means of acquainting himself with a subject. One gestural and colorful as etching print Vision, 2011 (Plate 5.34), the other linear and less color as Untitled, platograph print, 2011 (Plate 5.35). Pared down to essential and depicting figures closely drawn or isolated against silhouette backgrounds, Ajit Seal’s prints achieve a startling degree of psychological tension and formal abstraction as his precedent mentor Somnath Hore and Sanat Kar. Print making has opened itself out to experimentation in course of time, which has involved changes in the formal as well as the metaphorical aesthetic vocabularies of print makers. Somnath Hore’s works, especially those made in the ’60s and ’70s dealt explicitly with the translation of cultural memories. When Hore scooped out the soft surface of a zinc plate, or scratched lines into the soft ground of a metal plate, leaving it to erode in an acid bath, these acts translated the trauma of the Tebhaga rebellion in Bengal in material terms. The installation of the metaphor as central to the aesthetic experience can be seen as an important modernist maneuver. (Dasgupta: 2006)
He began exploring the possibilities of these forms while his stay in the Garhi Studio but their fullest potential was realized when he started taking interest in Assamese mythology when he was teaching in the Government College of Art and Craft in Assam. Beasts and humans started populating his works. Their worlds merge and often their space is further shared by gods or god-like mythical creatures with wings, multiple heads and arms. The tortoise is another motif that repeatedly appears in his works. To the artist this motif bridges disparate world as it represents longevity in the transient world of humans and it also represents the god Vishnu. Myths, the unreal and the real, simultaneously exist on his pictorial space to create another existence beyond the everyday reality.

Ajit Seal's early lithograph figures the *Deity and the pet* of 1993 (Plate 5.1). Buffalo in his lithograph, despite the dark overtones and the fierce posture of the figures still retain a sense of oneness between the animal and the figure. Ajit Seal's *Deity and the pet* (Plate 5.3) is one that reflected apparent story-telling as well. (Bawa; 1994) In another review of that work, has been written as Sidhu says, *October 9- November 12, 1994 an exhibition of graphic prints at Hussain Ki Sarai in New Delhi and managed by Vadhera Art Gallery, the venue presented artists from India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Korea with finesse of conceptualization as well as rendition of print making. In the exhibition Ajit Seal's Deity and his pet, lithograph on paper interplayed images they created in the mind of a viewer. But it was not only this theatrical, sequential pageantry of visual and psychic image frames that built up a cinematic effect, often there was obvious story-telling. In a dominant earth brown the animal form was powerfully juxtaposed with its human counterpart*
in a rhythmic rendition (1994). While his recent prints are more free and spontaneous in terms of dealing of figural compositions as Untitled platograph 2010 (Plate 5.24) and another Untitled lithograph 2010 (Plate 5.25), in comparing to previous planographic print as Solitude, lithograph 2010 (Plate 5.23).

This vision is created not only because of the coexistence of different worlds in the same time and space but also the way the artist treats his forms. The human and animal figures are flattened, distorted and twisted. The background is often an explosion of bright colors against which vividly colored forms walk, fly, sleep or dance. The forever exploding and distorting colors and forms lend the works a sense of chaos and madness. Untitled, 2009 (Plate 5.9) lithograph succeeds to create such an allegoric environment in the pictorial space as a whole. The need to use material to 'enact' a metaphor has been particularly significant to those interested in bringing a specific ideological slant to specific artistic practices. If print making were to be looked at only as a graphic medium with no consideration given to metaphoric acts, or to the process of constructing a humanist narrative, the surface of the plate can well be viewed as the artist's own tabula rasa. (Das Gupta: 2006) His Untitled in platograph done in 2012 (Plate 5.27) reflects his inner psyche of creating allegoric narratives. Another Untitled platograph print 2010 (Plate 5.29) can be mentioned in this regard.

Ajit Seal himself was a student of Graphics Department at Santiniketan, mainly under the revered printmaker Somnath Hore during eighties of last century. Mention ably, Graphics department at Santiniketan has been famous for teaching of lithographic processes, which is presently
headed by Ajit Seal. It is obvious to see fine instance of particular approach to print making in Ajit Seal’s image like his other mentors at Santiniketan as Sanat Kar, Lalu Prasad Shaw; for example, has developed the narrative mode to create a well-observed local universe. Ajit Seal has been developed individual signature style over the years, has bearing mindscapes, perhaps as inspiration of Rabindranath Tagore’s poetic image of grotesque man and beast. Untitled, 2009 in platograph is perhaps finest example among present series of prints. (Plate 5.11)

Female figures, frail birds, and shy curious tortoises are recurring motifs in the works of Ajit Seal. Known for the velvety softness of the lithographic prints, the respected Santiniketan educator keeps a low profile in India’s more academically and also commercially oriented art environments, though his works are quietly handled by a number of galleries in India and abroad. Ajit Seal’s lithograph has achieved silky and soft, with unique quality as inviting warmth, in opposite to conventional lithograph’s lack of texture and dull ‘flatness’ or lack of texture that seems to accompany the process. (Waswo: 2010) Ajit Seal’s three prints as Deity III in platograph done in 2012, Untitled lithograph done in 2012 and Untitled etching done in 2012 are significant works in this regard (Plate 5.37), (Plate 5.43) and (Plate 5.44).

In his lithograph (Plate 5.7) Untitled, 50 x39 cm, 2009, the bare hint of interior architecture is enough to suggest that young woman has emerged from a childhood tale of castles and sorcery. The confusion of wings just behind the body allows the viewer to speculate that she herself is a kind of allegory of bird woman, a fusion of the human and the magical as if her rescuing the multiple birds she reaches out too or binding in them kindred
spirits. Light and shade is used as allegorical in the lithograph. The artist offers us a scene from a fairy tale, and allows us to construct the narrative. Here the artist explores the complex relationships between animal and human forms through his mythical spaces and alien-like representations he transports the viewer to another world, one in which physical possibilities are expanded and time seems inconsequent. (Sunish: 2012)

The works done in Assam are sometimes ambiguous in terms of their subject matters. Ajit Seal’s interest in mythology compels the viewer to read these works as mythological stories. Forms serve as iconographic symbols to decipher and thus a man with a cow might be seen as representing Krishna or a man with a tortoise as representing Vishnu as Bond, 2010, an etching print (Plate 5.32). But the sense of doubt begins when the figure of the man is replaced by a female figure as Untitled, 2010 lithograph (Plate 5.16). In one of his work the grotesqueness of the dancing male figure and the cow (Plate 5.3), the feeling of tension and disquiet sensed in these works denies the hopefulness and the sense of order that the mythological stories of a divine avatar or incarnation which tends to generate. This is probably why most of his works are without titles. The viewer is expected to react to these works instinctively rather than being dictated by the artist.

In some of Seal’s works the body is treated as an important motif. The face of the white, twisted female figure with her arms folded under her head is left incomplete and there is just a hint of her left eye and lips. It floats down to the bottom of the composition through a landscape along with some abstract forms in a misty space while a tortoise floats down to her. In this dreamscape where the known becomes unknown, the slumbering figure floats helplessly
without any active agency. With the distortions and the passivity of the subject the sanctity and power of a human body is denied. By underplaying the erotic in these works the body plays a vital part in bringing out the potential of sensuality of a composition. Traditional form of vaishnavite Xatral monastery paintings of Assam has echoes in other traditional styles emerging in the wake of Srimanta Sankardeva’s propulsive influence that predominantly flourished in the 15th century. Ajit Seal’s artistic ochre has thrived on the Xatra drawings, wood carvings of the Namghars worshiping place and his creative search has been to establish a common bond between styles and the modernist ethos. He has imbibed the contours and style of the Vaisnavite drawings and integrated them with his vision and modernist contexts of contemporary art. (Kandali: 1999) As instance, Untitled, 2012 in platography can be mentioned in this regard (Plate 5.38).

The Deity series as Passion (Plate 5.30), pink desire (Plate 5.31) and Flight (Plate 5.36), most of his works have centered on this artistic exploration. Reincarnation visually depicts lord Vishnu slowly embodying the form of a tortoise. Lord Vishnu pictorially represents the mythical love with his form hands holding a couch – shell, chakral wheel weapon, a club and a lotus. The bulging bust of the tortoise delineates the image of the water animal as if rendered pregnant with lord Vishnu’s cosmic wisdom. The tortoise and Vishnu are harmoniously imaged to get her. The conspicuous forces of the work are voted in the radiant face of Vishnu at the very through of preaching wisdom.

In another lithograph Kurma done in 2000 explores the mythical splendor of tortoise as associating Hindu Supreme God Lord Vishnu and the
Kurma becomes the symbol of endurance and life (Plate 5.4). The artist has added an extra dimension as he recreates the mythical parable to serve his anesthetic end. Cosmic voyage has the visual vibration of its own. This again recreates the mythical tale of, Lord Vishnu riding the Shesha during the temporary annihilation of the universe. The face of Vishnu has been rendered gleam and joyless in keeping with his love for the universe. In the backdrop the dying species affirm the consequences of universal catastrophe. Since its beginning, the art of print making has created its own distinct space in the arena of fine works of prominent printmaker generation in India during nineties including Ajit Seal revealed that the ever growing ingenuity of the world of print making.

Ritual equates the compelling human association with the divine principles. The work evinces a non-descript figure with both human and celestial trait shows an uncanny joy on his quest for a possible commotion with the cosmic principle. This joy transcends human mood and the figure is captured at the very moment of its dancing celebration. The palanquin accompanying the figure emblematizes the ritual removed from ordinary human experience. The artist himself writes that over the years, through his art, he has been engaged to construct an alternative world. That world is orderly to a point that often the bestial, the human and the mythical co-exist, a world devoid of human dominance. As his opinion, humanness or human intelligence has heralded a reductive view of animals and, perhaps mythical denizens as well. The segmented world of humans is only a segmented cosmic reality. When animals or mythical Gods are humanized, then they may be created a new order- an order which may sublimate man into creature
searching for truths more sublime than any earthly mortal’s idea of sublimity. (Seal: 2003) *Untitled* platograph, 2010 (Plate 5.15) has been expressed that particular tenacity and morality in arranging man, woman and also beast.

The realm, the artist explores is that of the existential and mythical. The formal setting creates to depict the human situations is also that of our mythical pantheon. Most of his motifs are drawn from the animal world. The bizarre figures seem to assimilate the sublime concepts that are human-animal and mythical. The operating principle behind is that of the vision of a cosmic unity, the units of Man-Animal- God- the essential togetherness of humanity nature and the cosmos as *Untitled*, 2009 lithograph (Plate 5.26). On this very notional constructivism, the ‘kinship’ series evolve to some superb renderings. In these rendering God is humanized. Human beings are beastly at times. White animals and man are given a mythical aura. The whole space becomes the metaphoric expression of creational paradoxes. The artist himself calls it the mythical realism of his art where he lends to dissolve a mythical memory into the echoes of the present as Untitled, 2009, photo etching (Plate 5.33). The predominant use of soft colors, which another striking features of his artistic treatment, emits calm, soothing visual effect. A pictorial environment is carefully built to serve the thematic explanation.

In 2009 Ajit Seal executed a series on a trapeze artist and this series, as instance *Trapeze* (Plate 5.10) in platography is entirely opposite of what he has done in his previous works in terms of more spontaneous approach and language. In this he has used a photograph of a ballet dancer published in a newspaper which he has transferred on an aluminum plate with benzene. As against the manually drawn and painted imaginary human figures, the man in
the photograph belongs to a real world with an identity. He is not a passive motif that can be distorted and denied. His body functions as his personal language, a medium of expressing oneself and whatever distortion happens to it is a conscious distortion from the part of the owner, the dancer himself.

The three works of this series (Plate 5.12), (Plate 5.13) and (Plate 5.14) in platography consist of different moments of a continuous performance. By placing these figures against black and grayish backgrounds different from each other Seal has broken the apparent continuity of the movements. The abstract background is either coming down on the trapeze artist or enveloping him - as disturbing as looking at a human body twisted and frozen for eternity.

In this series Seal brings out the inherent anxiety of real people in the real world.

His latest works seem to extend horizon of his sensibility with a stress on the experiences of immediate time and history. Violence and blood may define this personage to be haunted by signs of weird expressions such as somnambulism, death wish and eerie wait as *Untitled* in platography (Plate 5.51) and also *Untitled* in lithography (Plate 5.52), both done in 2013. The artist responds to events creating ‘memories’ of spaces where temporal and the eternal are locked in an artistic communication. Ajit Seal, in other words, dynamically tailors his art as flow of his sensibility touches both the historical and imagined spaces which urge the artist to redefine both history and his art.(Deb: 2013)
5.3 AJIT SEAL'S URGE FOR A NEW VISIONARY: THE DISSOLUTION OF MYTH AND REALITY

Ajit Seal, like most of the contemporary Indian artists offers a robust impression of figurative tendency in his work. With a repertory of graphics, along with other painting medium, in a way he characteristically and continually searches for imaginative possibilities of the figurative with each of the figures he creates standing for the ever-shifting dynamics of inscription and articulation. (Deb: 2011) Most works in Seal’s oeuvre are informed by a consciousness of the subliminal in the seemingly mundane. An undercurrent of the sensual often animates the landscape. His figures move back and forth in time and space as symbolized in his deft of colors and boldly forms. His platography print *Window* done in 2012, reflects that known and unknown world as reflecting his inner psyche (Plate 5.28).

It would be misleading to look at printmakers in Bengal as well as Assam, like a homogenous collective of artists who work with the same aesthetic tools. When Santiniketan had just been founded and India was still under colonial rule, a shift of locale probably implied an ideological stance. Since the '70s and '80s of last Century, however, print making in Bengal, thematically speaking, has been progressively dissociating itself from older sensibilities, which, it would appear, have fallen out of pace with contemporary values. The extent of individual painstaking engagement with print making, and through print making with different aspects of modernism cannot be exaggerated though. Ajit Seal, such a genre of quiet worker, have achieved rare acclaim and distinguished among the elite group of contemporary Indian print makers.
Print making has often been looked upon as a medium that is heavily 'technique-dependent', especially when it comes to it being taught in institutions. Not only has print making laid itself open to be employed in counter-cultural art initiatives, but it has also served as an inspiration to artists to deviate from regular modernist protocols. Interestingly enough, as a medium, print making has involved materials and techniques which approximate industrial processes at a smaller, more personal scale. A printmaker's contemplation with work begins with the medium and the process of print making. Often they define the message that the final print is going to impart. Print making requires the artist to be rigorously involved, deciding on the role of the plate, tools, acid, ink and their relationships long before the actual art is produced. (Halder: 2011) Ajit Seal, mostly work with lithography, his long engagement with his mediums has taught him that articulating a composition can never be independent of the medium's possibilities, unique and particular, which heavily influence the final outcome. Ajit Seal, working within the tradition of fusing segmented elements of folk and traditional idioms with changing perspectives of modern artistic vision had experimented much in this medium. Collecting inspiration from wood-carvings of Namghars or place for worship and other 'Xatra'; the religious institution in Assam, he established a bond between traditional style and modernist ethos by imbibing the stylizations of Vaishnavite genre painting into modernist contents and visions. (Kandali; 2010)

Ajit Seal's empathy with the pristine beauty of landscapes in Assam echoes in the multivalent canvas in various painting and print making medium. But this beauty is transmuted by the artist into many forms, many colors.
Predominantly, Seal probes beauty in a borderland between myth and human realities. "His imbues his real-life image with a 'Mystical memory'. The whole space of his art often becomes a living symbol of trans-historical and meta-physical color-play as if he seeks to construct a Rilkean world where figures of myths and living human world appropriate each other. And to add more life to his spaces he draws in animals which are innocent, meek and at times, other worldly. (Deb: 2003)

The chief motif of Seal's work thus results from a visionary power of cosmic unity. Figures of the pantheon are humanized while animals and humans are given a mythical aura. A leading art critic has said that color is a clock. The predominant use of soft colors is Seal's oeuvre may be attributed to an aesthetic intuition that any juxtaposition of what we know as mutually in compatible universes is bound to take an art lover towards the borderline where imagination stops and where the viewer begins slowly to visualize the shadows of the artists vision and imagination. Thus visualization can only be matched by a color principle which suggests remoteness, both emotional and visionary.

In Ajit Seal's repertoire, dissolution of a mythical memory into echoes of the present is to felt over and over again, so the whole space becomes a probing symbol of trans-historical and meta-mythical color-play which the artist calls 'mythical realism'. Ajit Seal is such a genre of artists whose works consistently carry elements of folk life and culture of the state they are associated with, and it becomes an integral part of their artistic identity. (Bezbaruah: 2012) points out the works of Ajit Seal as come across hints of Vaishnavite art forms/ a cult of meditation of one God in Hinduism of medieval
India. Formally, Ajit Seal is drawn to animal world and to our mythical pantheon. What about the bizarre figures which seem alien to both the colourful animal world as well as to our mystical vision? Ajit Seal tends to explore and imaginative remoteness which transcends both our existential and mystical experiences. His lithograph print entitled *Image*, 2013 (Plate 5.39) presents such a vigor and spontaneity of living world. Long ago, Baudlaire exalted a painter's savagery in the most lyrical terms. For Seal, however, savagery remains a key-point only in a segmented world of animals where the struggle for existence is limited to physical prowess. Even in the esoteric universe of the mythical pantheon, the setting is as human as we can possibly imagine it to be there are struggles, wars and confrontations redolent of the human situation in the terrestrial world which conjures up similar images as his *Untitled* platography print, 2012 (Plate 5.40).

Ajit Seal's human mystical animal equation is based on an unusual brotherhood of man, animal and god. When it is realized in pictorial terms, we get an incredible visual vibration - the whole space becomes metaphoric meeting ground of polarized moods, creational paradoxes and sublime concepts which knows no bestial feelings, godly superiority or human limitations. As instance *Untitled* lithograph, 2013 (Plate 5.47) can be cited in this regard. Another two *Untitled* prints as platograph, 2012 (Plate 5.45) and lithograph, 2012 (Plate 5.46) of Ajit Seal explores metaphoric content within the composition.

His latest works seem to extend horizon of his sensibility with a stress on the experiences of immediate time and history as his *Untitled* etching print, 2013 (Plate 5.50), dealing with monotone sinuous linearity, spontaneous
brush work and soft tonal modulation contrary to previous multiple layers of color as seen in his *Untitled* platograph print (Plate 5.42). Violence and blood may define his personages to be haunted by signs of weird expressions such as somnambulism, death wish and eerie wait. The artist responds to events creating ‘memories’ of spaces where the temporal and the eternal are locked in an artistic communion as *Untitled* platograph print, 2012 (Plate 5.41).

5.4 INDIVIDUAL DEEP ZEAL, DOWN TO EARTH PERSONALITY AND ENTHUSIASM: AN INSPIRATION FOR THE YOUNGER GENERATION OF CONTEMPORARY PRINT MAKERS

Ajit Seal, starting his initial carrier in such a periphery region like Guwahati, that is not insular, he was get well-connected to larger metros and other art institute with his own serious concern and sincere efforts as mutual exchange of views and holding solo and group shows outside Assam. In this juncture, as instance, during 1994 Ajit Seal had organised a lithography workshop with offset plate as demonstration by one of his most brilliant pupil Debajit Sarmah in the Department of Graphics, Government College of Art and Crafts, Guwahati for the first time. After that plate-lithography was introduced in the curriculum of print making classes in Guwahati Art College and since onwards Ajit Seal’s plate lithograph print has been received rare acclaim and honour in all over the country.

Ajit Seal’s work, as an idea, has been legitimately combining notion of a universal time, concrete universalizable space and the artistic truth as the principle of his sense of modernity transcending the dichotomy formation of western modernity. This artistic formation also subverts dichotomous thought
patterns, such as thematic connotation versus object and time versus space, emphasizing instead a network of forever-changing relations between human subjectivity, living space and experience. Furthermore, this trinity principle is to be embodied in the daily experience. That is to say, considered within the perspective of daily environment and a person’s choice of truth and value, time is always a particular moment (not a linear, historical construct). In Ajit Seal’s repertoire, dissolution of a mythical memory into echoes of the present is to felt over and over again, so the whole space becomes a probing symbol of trans-historical and meta-mythical color-play which the artist calls ‘mythical realism’. Ajit Seal is such a genre of artists whose works consistently carry elements of folk life and culture of the state they are associated with, and it becomes an integral part of their artistic identity Human-mythical animal equation in Seal’s oeuvre is based on an uncanny brotherhood of man, animal and Gods. And, this motif results from a visionary power of cosmic unity. The world which emerges out of an uncanny painterly vision has serenity about itself; a utopian order man subconsciously yearns for, an order which is but a metaphor for a cosmic life, not a segmented universe. Be it his style recreating the miniature tradition, thematic representation of human mythical bond, Seal’s warmth of colors blurs the cold mental distance humans feel about themselves and figures of myths. Mixed and constructed colors impart eeriness in his figures, a novelty unknown to the ordinary consciousness. Yet Seal’s realism rests on his power to capture the reality of an alternative world devoid of the proverbial master-slave dialectics. A world whose hope Seal captures in his art. (Deb: 2003)
Since Ajit Seal, joining in Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan as faculty in 2007 and in the year 2010 onwards he has contributed as modernizing existing Lithography presses with new technology as fitting motors to make it more efficient and easy to handle especially for female students. Platography section along with Aluminum plate grinding machine was started during his tenure as Head of respective department has continuously boosted up. The Graphic Department of Kala Bhavana not only becomes a prime active centre for creative prints in our country, gradually enhancing new methods and materials of print making and introduced those into the curriculum in present time. (Das: 2011)

5.5 CONCLUSION

During this period he learnt the minute nuances of exploring techniques of print making. From that early period he has been innovating with confidence on specifically in lithography for new possibilities and creative expression and which become a lifelong fascination for him. Ajit Seal’s empathy with the pristine beauty of Assam’s landscapes echoes in his multivalent canvas and print image. But this particular beauty is transmuted by the artist into many forms, many colors. Predominantly, Seal probes beauty in a borderland between myths and human realities.

Ajit Seal being an alumnus of renowned department of graphics of Santiniketan during 1981-83 has built-up confidence as creative artist printmaker. Santiniketan has been remained prime inspiration of his entire life and also the foundation Ait Seal’s method of constructing composition was fundamentally Eastern; its rhythm and character/iconography are the starting
point-a movement directly from totality to detail. As he is creating strange interface of man and nature predominantly with human figures, his figures are largely created from memory, nostalgia and his awareness of a particular tradition/heritage. Unquestionably works of Ajit Seal makes us mesmerized with its joyful and fresh pictorial depiction of his process of image making. With an exceptional repertory of various print making medium, acrylic and water color, Ajit Seal works may legitimately interpreted as an idea combing notions of a universal time, concrete pictorial space and the artistic truth as the principle of his sense of modernity transcending the dichotomy formation of western modernity. This artistic formation also undermines dichotomous thoughts patterns, such as subject in opposition to object and time versus space. It emphasizes instead a network of forever-changing relations between human subjectivity, living space and experience which become a philosophical framework on a metaphysical level.

Worked as a printmaker Ajit Seal loved to work in stone lithography or platography more as according to him, with reducing method, instead of making drawing with litho crayon or touché ink on the matrix. For him best process would be reducing method, rolling black on the stone or plate, and then taking different color gradually from that one stone without working with multiple stone. So taking with one single matrix can be also economized the assets also.

Ajit Seal of similarity tried to take up or working with the tradition Xatriya or Vaisnavite monastery culture, after retuning back to Guwahati from Santiniketan during 1990s. Basically beginning to work with deities and later perhaps visit to Majuli and being touch with colleague friend Dilip Tamuly who
has past resident of that island, he got to be gradually aware of *Vaisnavite* culture, exposed to Manuscript Painting Tradition that’s how perhaps amalgamated to his work. We can see *Vaisnavite* head dress which is often reflection in his deities as accordingly earlier concept of deities of that is slowly conglomerated with those *Vaishnavite* element. In terms of the works of Ajit Seal, he depicts thematic images from myth of early *Vaishnavite* tradition of Assam. Modern Indian art had always tried to negotiate with tradition of some way or other. That means whatever elements which could be preserved and carried forward to many modern Indian artists do that. Tradition of art in Assam is rich tradition of *Xatriya* folk relief work especially, and also manuscript painting. Ajit Seal also has that kind of tendency to appropriate some elements especially some formal elements, some compositional elements, some image formation element from the tradition.

Ajit Seal, in other words, dynamically tailors his art as flow of sensibility touches both the historical and the imagined spaces which urge the artist to redefine both history and his art. That is to say, time is always a particular moment (not a linear, historical), as considering within the perspectives of daily environment and a person’s choice of truth and value. So in his repertoire, it becomes always a feeling of dissolution of a mythical memory into echoes of the present. So the whole space becomes a probing metaphor and text of trans-historical and meta-mythical color-play while the artist refers ‘mythical realism’. Ajit Seal is perhaps the most technological efficient print maker among present generation of printmakers in our country, and he has command over a wide range of print making medium, he knows intaglio print making, stone/ plate lithography, serigraph and relief print making. However
sometime his technological interest has overshadowed thematic, subject wise and aesthetic attention occasionally overshadowed those areas. His works has been critically examined by some art historian as overtly allegorical and narrative in temperament of mythical world, away from day to day harsh reality.

Ajit Seal with his innovation with their students of two major art institutions of our country as initially Graphics Department of Govt. college of art & crafts, Guwahati and at present graphics Department of Kala Bhavana, Visva Bharati. He has been persistent not only encouraging his student to work with various print medium but through his initiative “society of contemporary printmakers” also encourage to them to have their shows outside state New Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay since 1991.
Plate 5.1: Ajit Seal, *Deity and the pet*, 1993, lithograph, 40x50 cm

Plate 5.2: Ajit Seal, *Man and the bird*, 1993, lithograph, 40x50 cm

Plate 5.3: Ajit Seal, *Deity and the pet*, 1993, lithograph, 40x50 cm
Plate 5.4: Ajit Seal, *Kurma*, 2000, lithograph, 49.5x38.1 cm

Plate 5.5: Ajit Seal, *Laviathan*, 2007, lithograph, 40x50 cm

Plate 5.6: Ajit Seal, *Kurone*, 2007, lithograph, 24x19 cm
Plate 5.7: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2009, lithograph, 50 x39 cm

Plate 5.8: Ajit Seal, *Future man I*, 2010, platography, 56.5x46.5 cm

Plate 5.9: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2009, lithograph, 52.5x40 cm

Plate 5.10: Ajit Seal, *Trapeze*, 2010, platograph, 55x40 cm
Plate 5.11: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2010, platograph, 56.5x46.5 cm

Plate 5.12: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2010, platograph, 56.5x46.5 cm

Plate 5.13: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2010, platograph, 56.5x46.5 cm
Plate 5.14: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2010, plakograph, 56.5x46.5 cm

Plate 5.15: *Untitled*, 2010, plakograph, 56.5x46.5 cm

Plate 5.16: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2010, lithograph, 50x40 cm
Plate 5.17: Ajit Seal, Untitled, 2010, platograph, 56.5x46.5 cm

Plate 5.18: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2010, platograph, 56.5x46.5 cm

Plate 5.19: *Deity*, 2009, platograph, 32.5x25 cm
Plate 5.20: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2010, platograph, 56.5x46.5 cm

Plate 5.21: Ajit Seal, *Horror*, 2009, platograph, 40X55 cm

Plate 5.22: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2009, lithography, 52.5x40 cm
Plate 5.23: Ajit Seal, *Solitude*, 2010, lithography, 50x40 cm

Plate 5.24: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2010, platograph, 56.5x46.5 cm

Plate 5.25: *Untitled*, 2010, platograph, 56.5x46.5 cm
Plate 5.26: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2012, Lithograph, 52.5X37.5 cm

Plate 5.27: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2012, Platograph, 90x60 cm

Plate 5.28: Window, 2012, Platograph, 90x60 cm
Plate 5.29: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2010, planography, 50X40 cm

Plate 5.30: Ajit Seal, *Passion*, 2012, platograph, 32.5X25 cm

Plate 5.31: Ajit Seal, *Pink desire*, 2012, platograph, 46.5x56 cm
Plate 5.32: Ajit Seal, *Bond*, 2010, etching, 32.5X40 cm

Plate 5.33: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2011, Photo-etching, 56X41 cm
Plate 5.34: Ajit Seal, *Vision*, 2011, etching, 41.5×56.5 cm

Plate 5.35: Ajit Seal, *Voyage*, 2011, lithograph, 47.5×40 cm

Plate 5.36: *Flight*, 2012, Platinumograph, 56×46.5 cm
Plate 5.37: Ajit Seal, *Deity III*, 2012, platograph, 56X46.5 cm

Plate 5.38: *Untitled*, 2012, Platograph, 37.5X52.5 cm

Plate 5.39: Ajit Seal, *Image*, 2013, Lithography, 61x50 cm
Plate 5.40: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2012, platograph, 47.5x37.5 cm

Plate 5.41: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2012, platograph, 32.5X42.5 cm
Plate 5.42: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2012, Platograph, 61x51 cm

Plate 5.43: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, lithograph, 2012, 52.5x41 cm

Plate 5.44: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2012, etching, 32.5x25 cm
Plate 5.45: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2012, platograph, 42.5x32.5 cm

Plate 5.46: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2012, lithograph, 52.5x35 cm

Plate 5.47: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2012, Lithograph, 52.5x35 cm
5.48: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2013, platograph, 50x61 cm

Plate 5.49: Ajit Seal, *Deity II*, 2013, platograph, 52.5X36 cm
Plate 5.50: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2013, etching, 48.5x36 cm

Plate 5.51: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2013, platograph, 52.5x36 cm

Plate 5.52: Ajit Seal, *Untitled*, 2013, lithograph, 61x50 cm
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