



The Pushkar Fair

INDIA AT ITS EXOTIC BEST

Text & Photographs:
NISHEETH M. KATARA

On the fringe of the desert in Rajasthan lies Pushkar, practically a stone's throw from Ajmer. Surrounded by hills on three sides, Pushkar – an important pilgrimage spot for the Hindus – is famous for its lake. According to mythology, Lord Brahma set out on a quest for a tranquil spot to perform a *yagna* when a lotus fell from his hand. A lake sprang forth from the ground at the spot where the lotus fell. Pushkar was born.

In the good olden days, Pushkar was an important pilgrimage for kings and emperors, and is believed to have had over 500 temples and more than 50 palaces. One of the most spectacular sights in Pushkar today is not during the day, but by night. Pushkar lake is the venue for *deepdan* (offering of lamps) to the lake which comes alive with hundreds and thousands of tiny earthen lamps floating out into the dark waters, creating a breathtaking view.

A massive cattle fair takes place during October and November around the lake which is also famous for its crocodiles – which,

The Pushkar Lake.





Different facets of the fair.

simply put, means that if you get in, you might not get out in one piece! The Pushkar Fair, as the cattle fair is commonly known, attracts thousands of people from all over the country who come to trade and watch the crocodiles and camel races. A full moon means its time to take a holy dip in the lake in places where the crocodiles aren't around. The 'loading of the camel' is a very popular event in which a camel is made to sit down while as many riders as is possible – plus a few more – happily clamber onto the poor animal and go for a ride. Camel polo is another hit with the people, although its technique and expertise would embarrass any horse polo buff.

Two lakh people flock to Pushkar for the camel fair, with 50,000 camels and cattle accompanying them. For livestock traders, this is a pretty serious affair, and many of them travel hundreds of kilometers with the sole intention of getting a good price for their cattle. While the fair is in progress, a mini tent city springs up near the lake, seemingly appearing out of nowhere and disappearing as soon as the festival ends, only to reappear once again next year.

Pushkar has 52 ghats and each one of them has a story to tell and often a special miraculous property too. The shortest and simplest tale is of the *Gau* (cow) Ghat: it was originally the 'Queen Mary ladies ghat', constructed for the wife of King George V, when she visited

Pushkar. Today it is one of the town's most important ghats alongside the pre-eminent and very ancient Brahma Ghat.

Every evening, women congregate at the ghats to offer prayers and set sail little leaf-boats carrying lit oil-lamps, flower petals and other poignantly symbolic offerings to Brahma (Lord of creation). They cast aside some of their modesty and boldly complete the ritual of a holy dip.

Internationally popular now, a bed in the tented colony that provides accommodation to thousands of tourists has to be booked six months in advance! It has religious, social and commercial significance for the rural dwellers who attend it. In the life of a village dweller who does not have much time for social visiting, Pushkar is a fine place to catch up on old acquaintances. For the camera wielding tourist, it is an unparalleled glimpse of India at its most exotic.

◆
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"Green is my valley..."

Araku Valley

HILL RESORT WITH A DIFFERENCE

Text & Photographs: RAMCHANDER PENTUKER

Nestled at about 4000 feet above sea level in the beautiful Eastern Ghats and about 120 kilometres from the coast of Visakhapatnam, Araku Valley is a hill station with a difference. For, there are not just the green of the hills and the dales to enchant you here but there is much more. Its crowing glory are the *Adivasis* (tribals) living a quiet life here in relative isolation for centuries. The sheer heights and the fathomless gorges provide a befitting backdrop for their small habitats and their colourful costumes and customs.



Araku valley is a haven for anthropologists and naturalists; for the tourists, it is a visual feast. You will pass by miles and miles of soft, soothing greenery as you drive through the winding Ghat sections. The best time to visit the valley is immediately after the monsoons when the valley offers you the most magnificent spectacle. It is at this time the nature is at its wild best with swollen brooks, rushing rapids and the falls that cascade down from dizzy heights

The highest point in Araku hills is also the highest broadgauge railway station in the country, where lying at your feet will be an entire valley. Click away with your camera, for sights like these come by but rarely.

While camping at Araku, one can venture out into its many scenic sites, not very far from the valley. About 40 kilometres from the valley is that geo-wonder called *Borra caves*. It is a chain of limestone caves full of excellent specimens of stalagmites and stalactites. This site is also famous for mica mines.

Araku Valley also has a history museum where one can have a glimpse into the life and history of the hill tribes living here. Each tribal hamlet has not more than two dozen one-roomed haystack houses lining the foothills.

Each major settlement in this region has a different market day, an important periodic event where tribals gather to sell what they have produced, or barter with what they require for their

Way to world famous Borra caves.



daily use. Rows of pack animals stream in bearing paddy, pulses, firewood, baskets, sheep, pottery et el. These markets also serve the purpose of bringing together the prospective brides and bridegrooms, as young tribal girls specially come in traditional finery and colourful costumes.

Life is a succession of fairs and festivals for Araku tribals. When there is no activity in their fields or after the harvest season, they indulge in revelry. They sing and dance, drink the home-made wine and puff away at rolled cigars.



However, change is on the way. Improvements in farming, primary education and awareness of outside world through electronic media have already begun.

◆ *The author is a noted photo-journalist based in Hyderabad.*



Tribals of Araku at their weekly bazaar (top & centre) and the country's highest broad-gauge railway station – Araku.

Patliputra

THE GLORY THAT WAS...

Text & Photographs: SHAHID AKHTER MAKHFI

The lofty, hypnotic lure of ancient India finds anchorage in the city of Patliputra. Buddha attested its birth while Hieun Tsang saw it abandoned. Sher Shah revived it and today, pulsating with life, Patna is more than what archaeologists are looking for.

Patna at its earliest was a small straggling village with the name of Patali or Pataligrama as mentioned in Buddhist texts. The origin, according to Jain and Puranic traditions, is ascribed to a

king who was overwhelmed with grief owing to his father's death. The council of ministers advised him to bypass the city of his father and build a new one. Experts were sent in different directions to locate

Kumrahar – the site where ancient palace of Patliputra stood.







a suitable place which was discovered on the banks of Ganga. What impressed them was a shining Patali tree burdened with flowers of thick foliage; hence the name Patali.

King Ajatshatru was interested in shifting his capital from the hilly Rajagriha to a more strategic Patali, on the confluence of the Ganga, to serve as a base for his operations against the Lichchhavis. This fact is further corroborated by Buddha who was impressed by the site when he saw the fort being erected here while he was passing by this village in the last year of his life. The enlightened one further prophesied a great future for the new found city but simultaneously predicted its ruin from flood, feud or fire.

Patali, under different names like Pataligrama, Kusumpura, Pushpapura, Kusum Dhvaja, Padmavati, Patliputra, Azimabad, and finally Patna served various dynasties. However, it witnessed its golden days under the Mauryas in the 4th century B.C. who brought about an all-India empire for the first time. The lofty buildings and parapets for which Patliputra was known impressed Patanjali to the extent that he referred to them in his grammatical examples. Patliputra's fame as a centre of learning outlived its political glory where scholars like Aryabhata, Ashvaghosha, Chanakya, Panini, Sthalabhadra, Vatsyayana (author of Kamasutra) penned their ideals. Greek ambassador Magasthense left behind a vivid account of Patliputra which is further supplemented by Kautilya's work and much later by the Chinese travellers.

A fertile imagination is required to recreate the Mauryan Patliputra

The Dargah of Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri.



Takht Harmandir Sahib (top) and the "Padri ki Haveli" (above).

replete with multistoreyed wooden buildings, palaces surrounded by parks and ponds. If we are to believe the Greek accounts of Selukos Niketor, the royal parks were lined with evergreen trees, which neither grew old nor shed their leaves. The capital city with more than 500 towers and 64 gates was surrounded by wooden palisade with loopholes for the arches. A moat around the city served the dual purpose of defence as well as sewage disposal. Every street had its water courses serving as house drains that finally emptied into the moat. Any deposit that obstructed the passage was punishable by law. House owners were also required to have fire prevention elements and the streets were provided with vessels of water and sand kept ready in thousands.

It was Ashoka who transformed the wooden capital into a stone construction around 273 B.C. This sudden change prompted Fa Hein, who visited India between 400-15 AD, believe that demons were commissioned to erect these massive stone structures.

Mauryan architecture is one of the least known subjects in Indian history, though literary references to palaces, forts, halls and stupas are aplenty but archaeological evidences are scarce. Kumarahar site at Patna is associated with the ancient Palace site of Patliputra. The excavations have brought to light the period from 600 B.C. to 600 A.D. Here one can admire the remains of the 80 pillared hall that impressed Magasthenese most. These pillars with the magic of



Saif Khan's mosque.

Mauryan polish continue to impress even the architects of today. Arranged in eight rows with ten pillars in each, the plan resembles the hall of hundred columns at Persepolis. Possibly, Kautilya urged the king to attend the public issues here for three hours each day.

Within the Kumarahar complex are the excavated remains of Ashoka's charitable hospital. A little distance away is another Ashokan remain, the *Agam Kuan* or the fathomless well which is believed to be a part of the legendary hell created by the emperor. Later he demolished the hell and embarked on better projects of compassion and piety. Besides the numerous rock edicts proclaiming his message of

universal peace, he is credited with the construction of 84,000 stupas throughout his mighty kingdom.

Since the imperial innings of the Mauryas and the Sungas, Patliputra lay, not in darkness but in perpetual twilight. Besides the loss of political patronage, Patliputra suffered the ravages of nature. At the close of the 6th century, continuous rain for 17 days devastated the city which had earlier been set aflame by the Greeks. Patliputra further witnessed violence and bloodshed at the hands of Kharavela, Shasank and Huns who were all set to destroy the vestiges of Buddhist establishment.

Patliputra was revived by Sher Shah Suri in the middle of the 16th century. On his return from one of

the expeditions, while standing by the Ganga, he said, "If a fort were to be built at this place, the waters of the Ganga could never flow far from it, and Patna would become one of the great towns of this country." Sher Shah's fort in Patna does not survive, except for some of the walls that have been incorporated within the complex of the Jalan House which was formerly the nawab's haveli but now a private residence that houses an interesting museum famous for its jade collection and Chinese porcelain.

A little away from this place is the historic mosque of Sher Shah where there are numerous tombs, including that of Mustafa Khan Rohilla. The earliest mosque in Patna is dated 1489 and erected by



The Patna Museum.

Alauddin Hussani Shah (one of the Bengal rulers). Locally it is called Begu Hajjam's mosque, simply because it was repaired in 1646 by a barber of this name.

It was in August 1574 when Akbar came to Patna to crush the Afghan Chief Daud Khan. His successful siege resulted in an enormous booty that included 265 elephants and much more to the rejoicing of common people who enjoyed picking up gold coins and other articles on the river bank through which Daud had fled to Orissa under the cover of darkness. Akbar's Secretary of State and author of *Ain-i-Akbari* refers to Patna as a flourishing centre for paper, stone and glass industries.

He also attests to the high quality and the numerous varieties of rice

grown in Patna that had gained popularity in Europe. Much later, the Venetian traveller Manucci was impressed by the fine earthen pottery and the cups of clay made in Patna that were finer than glass, lighter than paper and highly scented.

Shah Jahan as a rebel prince visited Patna together with Queen Mumtaz and their architectural pursuit finds reflection in the shape of a beautiful mosque cum madarsa by the side of the Ganga. It was built by Saif Khan, the Mughal governor married to Mumtaz's eldest sister, Malika Bano. Other Mughal constructions include the Idgah and a serai that was once rented for months to make it easier for foreign traders. Later in 1704, Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb acceded to the request of his favourite grandson,

Prince Muhamad Azim, to rename Patna as Azimabad after his own name. Prince Azim was a young prince who aspired to make Patna a second Delhi but his ambition was cut short by the fratricidal war. With the decline of Mughal power, Patna slipped into the hands of the Nawabs of Bengal, who maintained its commercial prosperity.

Patna during the 17th century was the centre of international trade. The Britishers started with a factory in Patna in 1620 for the purchase and storage of Ambati calico and silk. Soon it became a trading point for saltpeter, musk, rice and other commodities urging other European powers like the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese to compete in the lucrative business. Various European factories and godowns started mushrooming in Patna and it acquired a trading fame that attracted far off merchants.

Peter Mundy reached Patna in 1632 after his 25-day sojourn that covered 544 miles from Agra; 21.75 miles per day on a bullock cart speaks high of the medieval roadways! He describes Patna as the greatest mart of the eastern region. Another European, Manrique, talks of its population as 200,000.

Bankipore Club is precisely the place where the Dutch are believed to have anchored their boats and the dance hall of the club is one of the original Dutch buildings. Today's Patna College administrative block was said to be the Dutchman's residence. Other important European landmarks are the *Padri ki Haveli*, deemed to be the oldest church in Bihar dating back to 1772. Nearby is the Patna cemetery which was once the haveli of the Bengal nawabs. The cemetery is marked by an obelisk

that covers the remains of the 47 Englishmen done to death by Samru, a French freebooter in the army of Nawab Mir Qasim.

Takhat Harmandir Sahib here is one of the sacred Sikh shrines, marking the birthplace of the 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh. The present five-storeyed building was completed in 1957 though it was started by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. A little distance from the shrine is Mir Ashraf's mosque dating back to 1773 and admired for its beautiful tank just outside the mosque. A unique and Patna's only single domed mosque built during Shah Jehan's period can be seen around the Mangal Talao. Mirza Masoom's mosque, built in 1616, is appreciated for its beautiful black basalt door that possibly belonged to a Buddhist shrine as is evident from its rich carving.

Other places of interest in Patna include the Khuda Baksh Oriental Library, famous for its rare Arabic and Persian manuscripts, rich paintings and numerous volumes of rare books. Likewise the Patna Museum is a treasure house of stone sculptors dating back to the Mauryan period and other archaeological finds. Among the stone sculpture, special reference may be made of the famous Chouri bearer of the Mauryan period, popularly called *Didarganj Yakshi*. Another captivating image is that of *Shalabhanjika* (late Maurya Sunga period) in her full youthful posture, twisting the branches of the Sala tree. One of the museum's prized exhibits is the 16-metre long fossilized tree, and another priceless object that has just been included in the display section are the ashes of Lord Buddha.



The author is a noted travel writer.



Lala Lajpat Rai

EPITOME OF PATRIOTISM

K.K. KHULLAR

If the history of the freedom movement in India is conceived in terms of inspired patriotism, sacrifice, ethical values and service to the people, the name of Lala Lajpat Rai would shine like a polestar on the firmament of our liberation struggle. An embodiment of renunciation and all worldly ambitions, he fought like a wounded lion and secured for himself the crown of martyrdom he so coveted. He lived and died for the country.

“Every blow that they hurled at us drove one more nail in the coffin of the British Empire”, roared the lion of Punjab, an echo of which is heard till this day as a voice of prophesy amply fulfilled. The drama of well-rehearsed British brutality was enacted on 30th of October, 1928, outside the Lahore Railway station where Lalaji led a peaceful and disciplined protest rally against the visit of an All-White Simon Commission. It was a black-flag but most peaceful congregation

which Lahore had never seen before.

The British police for whom Lalaji was a scare, pounced upon the peaceful demonstrators without any provocation. Lalaji received the first lathi-blow from the Superintendent of Police, Mr. Scott, who personally conducted this brutal operation. Lalaji stood like a rock. Then came the second, the third, the fourth, fifth, the n'th blow. Then there was a massive lathi-charge on completely unarmed protestors. Lalaji kept the crowds restrained and peaceful even when the blows rained upon him hard and harder.

Feroze Chand, the illustrious biographer of "Lalaji's Life and Works" vividly describing the scene says though he looked rather frail, yet his spirit was dauntless. He could receive the blows like a man. He did not flee. He did not flinch. He did not budge. He did not permit his people to hit back. His followers tried to surround him. He still received the lion's share so that one of his doctors, Gopi Chand Bhargava, who gauged the force of the blows not as a mere eyewitness but more intimately and more exactly as one of those who took on themselves some of the blows meant for the chief, wondered how it was that he stood up to it at all without collapsing on the spot. When the assault had halted and the demonstration was over, a badly mauled and wounded leader again marched at the head of the procession on its way back. But the 63-year old Lalaji died in a Lahore hospital 18 days later on November 17, 1928. Bhagat Singh,

who was an eyewitness to the whole episode, called it a national humiliation.

Lajpat Rai was born on January 28, 1865, at village Dhudhuki in Moga Tehsil of Ferozepur district. He was schooled at Government Middle School Ropar in Ambala district where his father Munshi Radhakrishan, a scholar in Persian and Arabic, taught history. After his double Matriculation when he was only 15 (from the newly-started University of Punjab as well as from the Calcutta University) he joined the Government College, Lahore. In 1883 he passed his Intermediate examination and also acquired a Diploma in Law from the Law School. He practised in Haryana towns as a lawyer, particularly in Rohtak and Hissar. At College, his class-fellows, among others, were a galaxy of patriots such as Pandit Guru Dutt Vidyarathi, Hans Raj Wireless, Narendernath et al. Patriotism and puritanism was a common bond with them. He first joined Brahma Samaj but later under the influence of Lala Sain Das joined Arya Samaj. He came in contact with Lala Hardyal, the revolutionary who founded an organisation with Sardar Ajit Singh and Syed Hyder called "Indian Patriots Association". He made his first political speech at an AICC Session at Allahabad in 1888. His "Open Letter" to Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had already made him a hero. Tilak and Gokhale both held him in their highest esteem.

He came to the notice of British CID when his book in Urdu on the life of revolutionaries such as Mazzini and Gabriel appeared in 1896. The official machinery came into action and surveillance was

kept on him. The next book he wrote was on Shivaji, Swami Dayanand and Lord Krishna. His social work in the famines of 1897 and 1900 raised his status further. During this time his social work became his all-time passion and he abandoned his thriving practice. His agitations, although perfectly peaceful against the levying of taxes on farmers, made him a suspect in Government's eyes. The unrest in Punjab was ascribed to him and on the misleading report of the Punjab Governor, it was decided to deport him to Mandalay, Burma (now Myanmar).

In November 1905 when he returned from England where he had gone with Gokhale, he was a marked man. It must be mentioned here that since the 50th year of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was drawing near the British Government's fear of a revolt in Punjab increased. On May 9, on the eve of the Golden Jubilee of Indian War of Independence, he was almost kidnapped and captured and taken to an unknown destination in a sealed train, He was detained without any charges, without trial, with no defined destination. At Mandalay, he was kept in a sub-standard prison and was treated very shabbily. On November 11, 1907, he was set free. Madame Cama had strongly denounced his arrest and deportation. Later Lajpat Rai wrote an inspiring book called "Story of Deportation".

Back from exile, he went straight to Surat to attend the Congress session where he was offered its Presidentship which he graciously declined. Even before the session was over he left for

relief work when he came to know that there was a famine in the neighbourhood.

Politics for Lalaji meant nothing if it did not include service to the poor masses; it must address the poverty and ignorance of Indians, he said. He shunned meaningless political speeches although he himself was one of the greatest orators of his time. Indifferent to popularity, he led an austere life.

At the time of Jallianwalla massacre, Lalaji was in USA. Since all news about the massacre was blocked by the British, he came to know of it many months later. He rushed to India to be amongst his people. His life thus was a saga of patriotism and love for his countrymen. So when he breathed his last on November 17, 1928, more than a lakh of mourners stood silently on the banks of river Ravi when "man, nature and flames all bathed in one colour, the colour of the golden sunset," as his biographer put it.

◆
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Red Lotus

USHA JOHN

Shekhar read Chandra's letter again, but he still could not place her in his memory. Yet the tone of her letter was warm and presumed instant recognition.

As a film star he usually treated such letters with casual indifference. But this letter intrigued him because she chatted about their past. Did he remember the Red Lotus? He did not! She wrote about people whose names meant nothing to him.

It vexed Shekhar that those memories that Chandra had so clearly recalled had been

obliterated from his mind with the passage of time... He had got enmeshed in his work and in the pursuit of pleasures in which, till recently, he had indulged in without any consciousness of guilt. He tried to remember her personality. But with so many emotional entanglements with girls, he found it difficult to distinguish her from the rest.

The only dependable clue in the letter was Swami Muktananda – his guru. Chandra had frequently met the Swami and was delighted to know that he was, like her, an



ardent devotee. She was not surprised that he had sought Muktananda's guidance after his divorce. And she had remained unmarried...

Chandra expressed her joy at getting an opportunity to meet him in Delhi. She knew he was very busy, but she still could not stop hoping... A glance at the dates in his diary revealed a hectic schedule. The shooting of the film "Tughlak" at Tughlakabad... wedding receptions... parties... There was one evening he had reserved for relaxing at the hotel's health club. Perhaps he could cancel that appointment?

When Chandra heard Shekhar's voice on the telephone, she chirped, "Bless your soft heart!"

"I can be quite ruthless too."

"I know that only too well! In spite of that, I am eager to be your hostess for an evening. Does that sound brazen?"

He laughed softly. "No, it sounds charming!" Like one totally mesmerised by a magician he accepted her invitation.

"Dinner will be at eight," she decided. "But we could meet around seven if that suits you."

He readily approved of the time. He totally agreed with her that the Golden Dragon was a suitable place even though he had no idea where this restaurant was located! With a girlish giggle and a hearty laugh from him they decided to meet in the lobby of the hotel where she was staying. "You will not be mobbed by fans," she assured him. "This restaurant is different."

After their conversation ended and the magic of her dulcet tone wore off, Shekhar wondered, "Am I

being impulsive? – Rash? Her voice sounded girlish; it could be a prank played by a naughty siren... She claims she lives in Bombay... Why did she ignore me all these years? Why is she impatient to meet me now? Telephone calls from his film fraternity soon put an end to his dark suspicions. He was lost in a whirl of discussions...

That evening in the lobby Chandra gazed at Shekhar and exclaimed, "You are not exactly the Mr. Delhi from our past... The stresses and strains of working in films have left their traces on your face."

"Mr. Delhi?"

She was amused by his puzzled expression.

"I really wish I could remember," he said apologetically. "Why did you decide to meet me now?"

"Because human nature is unpredictable. Not even the best astrologer could have predicted that we would meet again in October 1976."

"We may have met when I was a student of the National School of Drama," he said vaguely groping for a clue.

"Yes, we did meet then," she agreed excitedly and then hastily narrated other details of her life, "We met in 1962... I was twenty... I nearly got married after I stopped moping about you... But I didn't have the courage to take the final step... Slowly all my dreams of married life faded... I took up designing garments and exporting them to foreign markets... My work took me to Tokyo, Paris, New York, Sydney, London... It was in the midst of the hustle-bustle of my business world that I met Swami Muktananda. Strangely, it was Joy Philippon, a British artist who



introduced me to him! It is not just our clothes, fabrics, gems and jewellery that are putting India on the world map in an impressive way. Hindu philosophy is being explored in all its seriousness. At the house in London where I heard Swami Muktananda speak on *Siddha* Yoga there were men and women from thirty-seven nations! Ever increasing numbers of disciples of all nations, races and creeds flock to the Gurudev Ashram in Ganeshpuri to get *Shaktipat* (spiritual awakening) from Swami Muktananda. Their faith in him is deep."

He gasped. "All this could not have happened to you! You are not thirty-four years old."

"Some people can retain their youthful looks – some cannot. I am thirty-four," she insisted.

In that tense moment of disbelief all that he was aware of was a girlish figure draped in a mauve

sari, the fragrance of the Indian perfume Heena... She is about twenty-five, and so her adventurous spirit knows no fear, he surmised.

Quite pleased with his impression of her, she laughed at his amazement.

He thought there was mockery in her laughter. "Chandra, I like people who say what they mean." His tone was stern.

"Then you must like me immensely because so far I've said exactly what I mean."

As they walked to the restaurant, Shekhar remarked probingly, "I find it strange that though you live in Bombay you decided to play this prank on me in Delhi."

"It is not a prank," Chandra vehemently protested. "I just couldn't foresee the possibility of this event because my bruised ego strongly opposed any thought of reconciliation. But many pleasant

and unexpected things have been happening to me since I met Swami Muktananda! The transformation of my nature after I received *Shaktipat* from him is amazing... This August when I met him in London he said, "Come to Delhi in October and attend the intensive Meditation Sessions... I'll be there." I thought a trip to Delhi would be impossible because I had a lot of work to do in London... I had planned to open my showroom in October... A few days later, to my great surprise, I was invited to exhibit and sell my popular Indian and western style dress creations at the current autumn *a la Mode* Fair. I accepted the invitation because it augured well for expansive business activities. But at that time I never expected there would be such a tremendous demand for my garments and accessories at the Fair!

The meditation sessions made me introspective... helped me to look at my past from a totally different

perspective... There was love in my heart for everyone... such was my transformation that I who hated you... was least interested in meeting you, was now concerned about your welfare... was anxiously looking forward to meeting you. I even went to Muktananda to enquire about you! His answer was a mysterious smile... I thought he approved of my meeting you because if he disapproved he would have reprimanded my... And so I wrote that letter. The fact that you too are a devotee of Muktananda gave me the impetus to write to you." They laughed together when he said, "And it was his name in your letter that convinced me you were worth meeting."

Dinner was a varied fare of vegetarian dishes with appetizing aromas. Chandra and Shekhar chatted amiably. She aroused in him a curiosity that expressed itself in probing questions. He observed,



“You are not glamorous but you are rich and enterprising... there must have been many admirers who wanted to marry you...”

“There were several insincere suitors. By dilly-dallying I exhausted their patience,” she laughed. “As I had expected, as soon as a richer or prettier girl came their way they turned their attention on her! My conservative parents and relatives believed that marriage is the most fortunate event in a girl’s life. Her social status, prestige and prosperity are all acquired with marriage... Her own aspirations and professional achievements are unimportant. For a girl to remain unmarried in a cruel world was unthinkable. However successful in her professional work she may be, an unmarried woman would always invite jeers and sneers and sly aspersions on her moral character. I discovered that I could enjoy a richer life without marriage... live my life in a style that suited me. Regardless of what yardsticks conservative people may use, I have lived a life that has brought me fulfilment.”

“There must have been times when you needed a friend – a lover?”

“I had serious relationships but they could never replace my love of freedom. Work provides me with a world of adventure... The thrilling adventure of the power to do exactly what I want to do, when I want to do it... The adventure of seeing your ideas take concrete shape in the form of well-designed garments...”

“You are a woman of rare courage!”

“Yes, because it hasn’t been smooth sailing... I have faced many ups and downs of life alone and have grown self-reliant. Married or

unmarried – no one is spared harsh experiences and disappointments...”

After dinner Chandra said, “You’ll have to come to my suite because I forgot to bring the photograph.”

“Photograph? – What an evening of surprises!”

“I am really surprised that you still haven’t recognized me!”

In the suite Chandra took a white envelope from the coffee table and gave it to Shekhar.

He eagerly opened the envelope. His eyes expressed astonishment as they peered at the picture of an attractive girl placing a diadem on his head. “Chandra, from where did you get that flashy crown?”

“It was mine – I just took it off and placed it on your head.”

“Was this a scene from a play?”

“No, it was not! – This picture was taken in 1962 – the night I was crowned Miss Delhi. It was clicked in the home of the sponsor of the Beauty Contest... We were all having a rollicking time when someone suggested that now it was my privilege to crown Mr. Delhi. It was all said and done in jest... there was nothing official about it. People were urging me to quickly select him... I hesitantly wandered around the vast drawing room looking for a handsome young man... someone I could sincerely regard as my dream boy... Boys were whistling and clapping and girls were giggling... Then I saw you – you were nonchalantly smoking a cigarette and viewing the whole scene with a smile, for me it was love at first sight! At that time I was a starry-eyed student of the Institute of Fashion Design... After that night we met many times...”

“Really?”

“Yes – I thought you loved me... Rumour said you were deeply in love with another girl. But I was so naïve... I believed all the compliments you showered on me... I believed you alone could make me happy. My love for you was a well-guarded secret... I intended to keep it that way till I received a hand-written proposal from you... I was dreaming of that day... ”

Shekhar was amazed that this affair had remained for so long in the dark recesses of his memory.

Chandra reminiscently continued, “I painted a red lotus and gifted it to you on your birthday and you promised to keep it with you always.”

“Why a red lotus??”

“Because it is the emblem of Muruga – the son of Lord Shiva. Muruga, as you know is the guardian deity of lovers. It was many months later that you coolly told me that you had given your heart to a young actress. With those treacherous words you ruthlessly smashed to smithereens all my dreams of our future life together. In the cold silence of my room I often wept inconsolably... I often wondered, if you really felt I was unworthy of your love, why did you prolong our intimate relationship... Then I realized it must have suited you to adopt a style of convincing duplicity as long as possible... ”

At last Shekhar saw Chandra’s personality emerge from a maze of sketchy memories. He remembered the brightness of her eyes... the lilting tone of her voice... But she was intolerably possessive... The other girl was a social butterfly with whom he could boisterously flirt and laugh away the hours. With

Chandra he had to play the role of a sedate and serious suitor because she constantly talked about marriage. But he was reluctant to abandon Chandra because it flattered his vanity to have an acclaimed beauty as his girlfriend. A collage of memories came alive. The heady excitement of being selected by Chandra... the crowd that cheered him and egged him to accept the crown... The ecstatic adventure of the early days of their romance... the nights of devouring passion... He had been the first man in her life...

Chandra’s voice gently pierced the mist of past memories that engulfed him. “Shekhar, I couldn’t forgive your treachery and I couldn’t forgive myself for loving you so deeply. Years later, I met Swami Muktananda who steadily destroyed all my negative thoughts. Slowly I realized that all along I had nurtured an illusion about you. The error was mine as much as it was yours. At the recent intensive session, I realized that my negative attitude towards you had completely changed!”

Shekhar confessed, “At the time I met you I had joined the National School of Drama. I was intensely devoted to achieving proficiency in the art of acting. Girls were an amusement! I played different roles to suit different girls. This role-playing continued throughout my married life and even after my divorce. I played this game, assuring girls of marriage, making wild promises which I heartlessly broke, till I met Swami Muktananda at a friend’s house. There – Meditation which was a strange thing to me, came automatically. As I meditated regularly, my craving for cigarettes and whisky declined. I have now completely given up

alcoholic drinks... Nowadays I no longer feel the urge to flirt with girls. The Swami advised me to be careful about the company I keep to maintain the purity of *sadbhava* (spiritual discipline).”

“Chandra, I believe our lives have taken a sharp turn for the better after we received *shaktipat* from our beloved guru. I am so glad to meet you again – it has given me a chance to open a fresh chapter in our lives... “Based on a kind of spiritual compatibility...?”

◆
The author is a noted freelance writer.



A make-shift learning session for the Van Gujjars.

Uttaranchal

ON WAY TO FULL LITERACY

RADHAKRISHNA RAO

The nascent Indian state of Uttaranchal has pulled off a sort of social revolution by achieving a literacy rate close to 75%. Till mid- 1990s, Uttaranchal was considered backward on the literacy front. Against such a backdrop, voluntary agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) active in the area of education took upon themselves the task of spreading the light of literacy in this hill state known for its tough topography but undimmed vigour. However, the ground for the literacy upsurge in the state was being quietly prepared by the Dehra Dun - based Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK) since the early 1990s. Significantly, the chairperson of RLEK had from the very outset envisioned that Uttaranchal had all the ingredients

needed to turn it into a fully literate state.

The innovative and pioneering adult literacy campaign spearheaded by RLEK in 1993 to free the nomadic forest dwelling community of Van Gujjars from the centuries-old curse of illiteracy did attract international acclaim. For the first time in the world, the literacy missionaries deployed by RLEK took the education campaign straight into the forest dwellings of the Van Gujjars who were reluctant to move out of the jungles. The most conspicuous feature of this campaign was that the volunteer teachers would accompany the community during its annual migration to the upper reaches of Himalayas so that the continuity of the learning process is sustained.



Thus fighting against heavy natural odds, RLEK succeeded in making 21,000 Van Gujjar adults literate in the real sense of the term between 1993 and 1995. For this commendable achievement, RLEK was honoured with UNESCO award for adult literacy for the year 1998.

Not surprisingly literacy opened up new horizons and fresh opportunities for the Van Gujjar community. Once shy of the outside world, they are today attending seminars on environmental conservation in as far away countries as Brazil, Denmark and Sweden. Literacy made Van Gujjars realise that educating their children could bring the community far reaching benefits.

The aspirations of this pastoral community led the RLEK to launch a formal education programme for the benefit of the children of the community. Two schools were set up for the purpose. At one school, an English teacher from Great Britain, Andrew Raw, taught Van Gujjar children how to read, write and speak English for about six months. He was deputed to the

“Literacy Fair” for the neo-literates.

school on a teaching assignment by a London-based voluntary agency.

For those children who because of their family circumstances have not been able to benefit from formal education, an informal literacy programme on the lines of adult literacy programme has been launched by RLEK. Here the teachers stay with the community to teach the children through 200-plus educational centres spread across the Garhwal region of Uttaranchal. About 3000 Van Gujjar children derive benefit from these educational centres.

Literacy fairs are regularly organized by RLEK where hundreds of Van Gujjar children exhibit their literacy skills before the assembled elite. RLEK is also now running Community Empowerment for sharpening the literacy skills of the Van Gujjars and helping them get insight into issues like health, natural resources and environmental conservation.

RLEK’s success in the area of literacy and education has also attracted international attention. As



Top: RLEK Chairman Avadesh Kaushal receiving the UNESCO award for adult literacy.

Above: Dr. Herman Laan, the ILO Director for South Asia, and his wife at a school in Gaichwan village.

part of the assistance provided by the Japanese government RLEK has set up a school in the remote Gaichwan village in the Uttar Kashi district of the state. This school mainly caters to the needs of the children from the marginalised communities. After visiting the school Dr. Herman Vander Laan, Director General of ILO (International Labour Organisation) for South Asia region stressed the need for running more such schools in the remote locations of Uttaranchal. Dr. Laan also

commended the efforts of RLEK in spreading literacy in the state. The Gaichwan school was part of the Japanese-funded project to build three schools and a girls' hostel in the state.

Interestingly, the womenfolk of Uttaranchal who not long ago were confined to the four walls of their homes are quite enthusiastic about their children getting educated. This sentiment was clearly reflected in the gesture of Mahaipa Devi, a poor woman from a disadvantaged community, in donating a piece of land for building the school in a village.



The author is a noted freelance writer.

Waris Shah

PUNJABI POET OF ROMANCE

B.M. MALHOTRA

Punjabi writing originated in the Persian script nearly nine centuries ago with the philosophic and devotional compositions of the twelfth-thirteenth century Sufi saint-poet, Sheikh Farid. The tradition was continued by another prominent Punjabi Sufi saint-poet- singer, Bulhe Shah in the eighteenth century. However, the first popular Punjabi author of the romantic genre was another God-inspired eighteenth-century poet, Sayyed Waris Shah, who composed the immortal love story, "*Quissa Heer Ranjha*" in verse. This work has been rated as an unsurpassed masterpiece of its kind.

Waris Shah crafted the characters and the contents of his marathon narrative on the basis of the actual lives of two lovers, who lived in the Punjab during the reign of Emperor Akbar in the sixteenth century. The story was first written in verse by Damodar Gulati, a resident of Jhang (now in Pakistan). He was an eyewitness to a girl's travails who happened to be the daughter of his boss under whom he was serving as an officer of land records.

Damodar's story synoptically is that handsome Dhido (Ranjha), a bachelor, is the youngest of seven brothers in a village. All his sisters-in-law are attracted to him.

Incensed, the six brothers hatch a plot to kill him. Sensing danger, he escapes to Jhang, where he falls in love with the beautiful Heer, daughter of Chuchak Sayal. Heer is, however, married off to Saida Kheda of village Rangpur against her wishes, but Heer and Ranjha manage to escape. Although they are at first overtaken by the Khedas, finally the lovers do succeed in dodging their pursuers and escaping to safety.

In the writing of this romance in Punjabi, Waris Shah was also preceded by a couple of decades by Shah Jehan Maqbul, a blind poet, who too like Damodar, concluded the story with a happy ending by dispatching the united lovers for Haj to Mecca. Waris completed his magnum opus in 1766 in a village mosque near Sahiwal (also a district town in Pakistan), where he had sought seclusion to sublimate his emotions after his own experience of unrequited love and to pour out his sensibilities, philosophy and wit through this romantic epic.

Born in 1722 at Jandiala, Waris was educated at Kasur. In his narrative of the famous romance Heer refuses to accept Saida as her husband. Subsequently, Ranjha, disguised as a yogi, follows her to her marital home.



Taking Heer's sympathetic sister-in-law, Sahti, into their confidence, the lovers elope, but are apprehended. They are produced before a Qazi who pronounces his verdict in their favour. Thereupon, idealist Heer returns to her parents and asks Ranjha to bring a regular marriage party for a proper, honourable wedding. He agrees. However, Heer's parents, who feel deeply humiliated and cut up, poison her. She dies immediately and when the news of her death reaches Ranjha, he too suddenly drops dead. Waris Shah's story thus ends in tragedy in the manner of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and several other oriental legendary romances.

Though versions of the story by different writers vary, but the true love remains the soul of this intense romance. The lovers' longing for each other stays undiminished throughout their lives despite the taboos and strictures imposed on them by the sadistic society. The concept of

love is presented as a mystical notion and a metaphor for spiritual and religious attainments.

Waris Shah's presentation of the story with his pithy comments on human nature and other insightful observations lends to his narrative the status of an immortal classic enjoying a universality of appeal. He regards love as a source of life and commences his book with an invocation to God, who Himself is recognised as the Supreme Lover. He describes love as a privilege of saints and sages and a harbinger of the liberation of hearts and souls. The epic also mirrors with graphic details the times which the story represents and incorporates the writer's own interpretation of them.

Selected portions of Waris Shah's 'Heer' such as those describing the bride Heer's departure from her parental home and appearance of Ranjha as a yogi at her in-laws' house have been sung in a special "Kafi" style by many folk-singers and other vocalists. A Hindi film titled, *Heer Ranjha* (1970) was also made by Chetan Anand with a particularly melodious music by Madan Mohan. Even in the singing of *Heer* in Hindi the same traditional Punjabi tune has been retained.

Waris wrote in the Punjabi language of his time, in the Persian script. Having deeply imbibed the Islamic learning and the Indian lore, he embellished his narration with a plethora of gems of Punjabi phrases and sayings, which exude the native wisdom of a keen observer of life in its various aspects. The

following are some of his axiomatic couplets, which he couched in the style of the renowned Persian poet, Sheikh Saadi:

*"Waris Shab! Na betiyan jinban
janian,
Qadran jaande nabin
jawaaiyaan diyan"*

(Waris Shah! Those who have begotten no daughters, Know not how to honour sons-in-law).

*"Jeha kare koi teha paanwada ee,
Sachche waade Parvurdigaar
de ni"*

(As you sow, so shall you reap, This is God's true promise).

*"Suleh keetiyan fateh je bath
aawe,
Kamar jang te mool na kasiye
nee"*

(If peace brings victory, Never resort to war).

Waris Shah passed away in 1790. Many persons, especially the lovers, visit his mausoleum as a pilgrim.

◆ *The author is a noted freelance writer.*

Indore Museum

TREASURE-TROVE OF NATIONAL HERITAGE

Text & Photographs: Col. K.J. CHUGH

One of the best-known museums of India, and nearly eight decades old, the Indore museum is a treasure-trove of the regional and national heritage. The collection here is wide and varied from some of the best in art, archaeology, history and culture of India from 600 century BC to date. The museum is spread over a large area with nearly 500 pieces of rare value displayed in aesthetically laid-out premises. The plaster cast replica of Raipur temple in Sirpur village (now in Chhattisgarh) stands in front of the main building. The lawns of the museum are creatively laid-out with sculptures at eye level. The museum has a unique collection of some of the finest works of art.

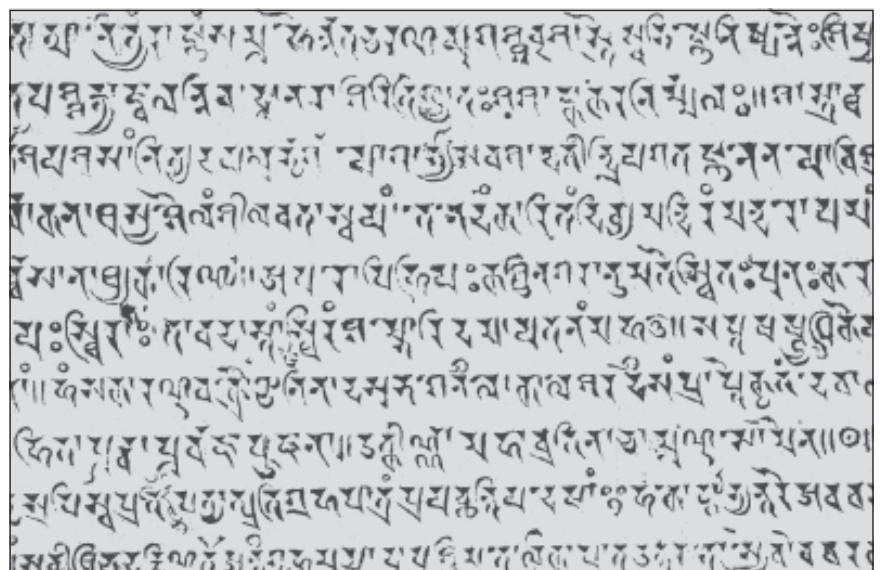
Established on November 23, 1923, Indore Museum had its beginning

as a temple which was set up on the instructions of the then ruler Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar, at a place called *Devealika Kala Vithika*, which is now quite famous as the only art gallery of Indore.

Though it started with sixty photographs and a hundred books, within two years the number of photographs had increased to 225 and the books to 130. Since the photographs and books mainly related to well-known personalities, it was therefore known as the "Home of Greatness" or the "House of Great Men."

In 1931 the temple was converted to a Museum and Mr. RC Ojha was appointed its first curator. With this began a quest for the collection of rare works of art and crafts, statues and sculptures, coins and

A stone inscription at the museum.





the guns and pistols. All this bears testimony to the dedication of curators posted here from time to time.

The museum has various sections. There is a separate art gallery dedicated to Hinglajgarh that displays sculptures from the western Malwa region. The collection relates to early Gupta period to Parmar rulers, and is quite voluminous from both Artist and iconographic point of view. It depicts a sense of refinement, vitality, suppleness, sensuousness. Sculptures of the Parmar period rank high as far as the human form and decorative patterns are concerned. They exude a pleasing sense of softness and finely chiseled, intricate work which is evident in the *Mithun* sculpture collected from Mandsaur.

“Malwa Gallery” is famous for its cultural wealth. One can find here several art styles from pre Mauryan to Maratha period. The collection here includes Sculpture, terracotta figurine and metal images. The gallery represents different sites from Malwa region from the 3rd to 12th century AD.

“Antiquity Gallery” displays excavations from Malwa and Mohenjodaro (of Indus Valley Civilization). These are rare and original. A locket is an outstanding work of art and adorns the Cover of the book “Masterpieces from Indian Terracotta.” The gallery also has a unique collection of Italian Art gifted to the rulers of Malwa. “Archaeology Gallery” tells the story of evolution of man and includes pieces from Indus Valley Civilization. In addition it has



The reclining Lord Vishnu (top) and the “Yagya Vraha” (above).



What serenity... in the heart of Bangalore!

The Grass is Greener in Bangalore...

RUSKIN BOND

Bangalore is a leafy, shady city, a welcome relief after the mid-monsoon heat and humidity of Delhi and the other towns of north India. Although the young Winston Churchill described Bangalore's climate as "torrid", I find I can walk the streets and parks without wilting under a fierce sun. And in the evening a cool breeze springs up, bringing with it the scent of flowering trees.

When I was last in Bangalore, forty years ago, it was a medium-sized town, an ideal place for those

wanting a quiet, retired life. Now it's a teeming city of more than eight million. One needs a magnifying glass to discover the old landmarks but some of them are still there, if you look hard enough. Except for the Sampangi tank, which has been filled in and turned into a sports stadium. A tiny pond is all that remains of the original lake, once an idyllic spot where boys brought their buffaloes to bathe, diving into the water off the backs of their docile beasts. There was even a form of bullfighting at the old tank; but the bulls, buffaloes and naked children



Bangalore still retains its unhurried pace.

appear to have retreated into the hinterland.

The only bull I saw was the massive rock-carved Nandi at the small temple on the Bull Temple Road in the old part of the city. I made it an offering of jasmine flowers, while the temple priest's enthusiastic assistant obligingly struck a large gong just behind me, causing me to leap about two feet into the air.

This 16th century temple, built by Kempe Gowda, the chieftain who founded Bangalore, is one of the city's oldest. The monolithic bull is

said to have grown in size over the years. It is carved from gray granite and is regularly polished with a mixture of groundnut oil and charcoal.

Not far away is the Cave Temple, also built by Kempe Gowda. It is supported by four massive pillars and has an unusual image of Agni, the god of Fire. On the 14th or 15th of January each year, the sun streams through a narrow opening and lights up the deity.

Many of Bangalore's old colonial residences and bungalows have disappeared, replaced by high-rise



The Nandi Temple.

office or apartment buildings. I suppose this was inevitable as the city grew and land prices shot up.

One of the survivors is the Bangalore Club, a spacious, airy colonial building, which is still the hub of the city's social activity. Its history is told by M. Bhaktavatsala in a most readable publication, *A Club's World*. It was from it that I learnt of young Lt. Churchill leaving behind a debt of rupees thirteen at the Club, written off by the Committee in 1899 as an "irrecoverable sum".

Another venerable institution is the Bangalore Golf Club, now celebrating 125 years of happy golfing. Very much at the heart of Bangalore, the Club's 'High Grounds' as they have always been known, provide a home to over 2,000 trees - among them many species of fig, cassia, poinciana, casuarina, tamarind and jacaranda, either lining the fairways or forming islands of "green-hatted men" as Stevenson once described the trees on his favourite Scottish golf course. These trees, in turn, provide shelter to a large number of birds

and small creatures who reside here in spite of the constant din of traffic along nearby Sankey Road.

The only bird that's unwelcome is the ubiquitous crow, for this enemy of the golfer is given to making off with the odd golf-ball, no doubt mistaking it for an egg. I don't suppose the crow knows the difference until he tries to hatch one or break it open. But some crows are collectors.

At breakfast time on the Club's veranda, one particular crow was eyeing my boiled egg with a certain amount of speculation. He sidled towards my table, awaiting his opportunity. I cracked my egg open, just to show that I had no intention of surrendering it. The crow flew off in disgust. Obviously he preferred golf-balls.

In the bar of the BGC there is a plaque with the inscription 1867, the year the Club was started. The emblem is a pair of golf clubs and a crow with a golf ball in its beak. Not all of the 1500 members play regularly. Some are more attracted to the 19th hole - golfer's jargon for the bar. And a very fine bar it is!

In a lane off Brigade Road there is a little bookshop called the "Select Bookshop". I discovered it back in 1960, when it was run by Mr. K.B.K. Rao, an antiquarian bookseller who also kept old photographs, postcards, film magazines and memorabilia of interest to a jackdaw such as this writer. I stayed in touch with him until he passed on; and now meet with his son, K.K.S. Murthy, who carries on the tradition of tracking down rare books for his customers.

It was good to visit Mr. Murthy and his bookshop again, and to find it full of customers. One even had a copy of an old book of mine which



I hadn't seen in thirty years and which I hoped had vanished for ever, its cover was so terrible! Over the years, Select has moved from Museum Road to M.G. Road to Brigade Road, growing as it goes along.

Another area little changed is the Russell Market, but I did not linger here too long. I love the smell of jasmine, with which beautiful ladies decorate their hair; and I have no objection to the smell of fish, fish'n'chips being my favourite dish. But when jasmine flowers and dead fish are sold side by side, or under the same roof, the smell can be a little overpowering. I recommend it to any boxer who has just been knocked down by Mike Tyson. A whiff of Russell Market, and you'll be up like a jack-in-the box, ready to take on Tyson or anyone else.

After this, I'm off to Lal Bagh for a breath of fresh air, and then to the Infosys campus outside town, where a number of bright young men and women have put India on the world map of information technology.

Yes, Bangalore is a happening place, and modern Bangalore has everything - pubs, clubs, theatres, cyber-cafes, splendid shops and restaurants, and the most fashion-conscious young people in the country.

And yet I can't help feeling that the ghost of Kempe Gowda is looking down on all of it with a certain amount of amusement.

◆

The author is an internationally-known writer.
Photographs: Ganesh Saili.

The Glass House – one of the finest in India.



The majestic Chaukhamba peak – mirrored in water too!

Madhya Maheshwar

A TREK TO DIVINITY

Text: Dr. ISHWAR DUTT VARMA
Photographs: Dr. NARESH KAPOOR

There was a time when pilgrimage was perceived to be a means to discover oneness with self, nature and God. It was considered to be more meaningful and fruitful if the journey was tedious, difficult and bereft of comforts and conveniences.

In modern times, however, we look for shortcuts. Construction of

smooth motorable roads in Himalayas has changed the scenario of pilgrimages altogether. Hundreds of kilometers of arduous hill journey can now be accomplished in few hours. It has become a rare sight to see trekking pilgrims on strenuous treks. Nor do we see those small resting places, traditionally known as *chattis*, which dotted the treks every five-ten kilometers.



“Vradh Maheshwar”.

Despite this so-called development, the five *Kedars* of Garhwal Hills have not yet been connected through motorable roads. They can only be accessed through treks. While visiting these *Kedars*, one has no option except staying in the *chatties* enroute. It is on these treks that one can relive the experience of the days gone by when pilgrimages used to be time-consuming and were associated with thrills, risk and excitement.

According to mythology, the *Pandvas* of *Mahabhart*a while playing their hide and seek with the *Kauravas* chanced to see the mid portion of Lord Shiva at Madhya Maheshwar, one of the five *Kedars*. Hence, this has become a famous pilgrimage destination for the devotees. The only way to reach Madhya Maheshwar is through a 30-km trek that begins at Kalimath. This is a small hamlet of some forty-fifty houses on the

banks of river Saraswati. This beautiful place is located at a height of 1463 meters above sea level. It is believed that Kalidas, the great Sanskrit poet, was born in a village Kavitha, located close to it.

During the trek, one comes across many *Chattis* and *bugyals* (meadows surrounded by high mountains). Nature is at its best all along the trek. The view of streams that overcome all obstructions of mountainous terrain to confluence with the river in spectacular surroundings is simply breathtaking.

Trekking through abundant beauty of nature, you reach Madhya Maheshwar (3200 meters) where the Shiva temple is located in the centre of a lush green *bugyal*. The serenity and ambience of this temple instantly fills the trekker’s heart with faith and reverence.

“Vradh Maheshwar”, which is believed to be the older temple of



The main "Madhya Maheshwar" temple (top) and the pilgrim-trekkers (above).

Madhya Maheshwar, is next on a trekker's itinerary. This is just two kilometers from Madhya Maheshwar and 200 meters higher than it. As you move ahead, the magnificent Chaukhamba Peak bejeweled with sparkling milky

snow starts coming in view. At every step forward on this trek, Chaukhamba unveils its magic and mystery. While at Madhya Maheshwar, you may think that you have seen the ultimate destination in search of natural beauty, but this

myth is soon belied as you reach *Vradh Maheshwar* temple located in a *bugyal* of similar dimensions. You feel as though you have ascended up to the second storey of the same temple. One wonders why this place came to be known as *Vradha* (old aged) Maheshwar, while it is only here that the nature reveals the prime of its youth.

Plan your trip at the time of full moon during winters as clear sky enables you to have an infinite view of the snow-capped peaks.

◆ *The author (late) was a poet and writer.*

President's Bodyguards

THAT GRAND SPECTACLE...

Text & Photographs: P.K. DE

At ceremonial functions, the President of India is escorted by a select group of elite troops – 145 bright and smart horseriding men – each of them handpicked and selected from families having long and glorious tradition of military service. Together they constitute the senior-most unit of the Indian Army, called the President's Bodyguard.

Raised almost 230 years ago in September, 1773, by the then British Governor-General Warren Hastings, The Bodyguard has, throughout its chequered history, maintained an enviable record of combat service both in India and abroad. It now bestows a grand spectacle, colour and pageantry on all State functions.

Through the passage of time the composition of the Bodyguard

President's Bodyguards – at the Republic Day parade.





On ceremonial occasions, the President's Bodyguard is distinguished by its scarlet and gold embroidered frock coats, ceremonial turbans, Napoleon jack boots and trappings. In summer, the scarlet-gold coat is replaced by white tunics. Each man proudly wears the gold embroidered wings of a trained Parachutist. When mounted on horseback, the Bodyguard carry the traditional bamboo lance of the cavalry, topped by a fluttering red and white pennant.

Since 1947, the major function of the Bodyguard has only been ceremonial – as the personal troops of the *Rashtrapati* (President of India). However, the officers and troopers are nevertheless all active combatants ready to proceed on active duty, anywhere – anytime.

◆
The author is a noted lensman/writer.



At the Rashtrapati Bhawan (top) and a mounted trooper's winter uniform – normal (left) and ceremonial (right).

has changed to meet different requirements. Today, service in Bodyguard is essentially hereditary and cannot be achieved by a soldier less than six feet in height. The President's Bodyguard is an elite unit as it is specially trained to serve both as armoured and mounted ceremonial troops. For

ceremonial occasions, its horses are all Indian bred and all chestnut brown in colour without white markings, averaging over fifteen hands in height. The President's Bodyguard enjoys two unique distinctions, namely its horses wear manes – a distinction held only by the Household Cavalry in the British Army – and it is the only unit in the Indian Army privileged to carry the Presidential Silver Trumpet.



The Stunning Handcrafted Pottery

SHALINI MITRA



Her fingers played with clay, her mind created the designs, her heart filled them with colours and lo, Anmol was born - the brainchild of artist Anju Kumar. She has revived the ancient art form of pottery with her exquisite handcrafted and handpainted creations.

She is no master in fine arts, nor has she studied pottery. A career in pottery was not in her mind either. A few paintings now and then were enough to keep the artistic bent of mind active till she touched clay. Earthen planters and urns designed and painted by her for her own house were appreciated and this changed the course of this once domesticated lady who has now become a pottery designer of repute.

Anju works under the brand name 'Anmol' meaning priceless. True to its name, Anmol Designer Pottery creates beautiful and treasured handcrafted pieces - each one unique and exquisite in shape, colour and form. With emphasis on a blend of beauty and utility, her creations range from *ganeshas*, urns, planters, sculptures, paintings to garden furniture, table lamps, pillar tables, *jharokhas* and stained glass panels and murals. Today



a whole gamut of innovations are packed in to embellish these exclusive pieces. The sizes range from cute six inches to mammoth six footers. She has also pioneered the concept of coloured pottery by using bright colours to accentuate her work.

Anju has learnt only with experience, as she pursues pottery as a full-time passion. She handcrafts each piece with dexterity and precision. For her it is the most challenging and flexible medium – ideal for self-expression. Although women of Rajasthan and its rural background fascinate Anju, tribal, Egyptian, abstract and geometrical designs are also her favourite. Sculpted women figurine in terracotta, tall floor lamps along with vases in gradation, oriental vases, geometric stenciling on pots etc. are some of her exclusive designs which are a total sellout in any exhibition she holds.

Working almost sixteen hours at a stretch Anju has now over 50 exhibitions to her name. She has prestigious contracts from 5-star hotels and has exported her products to countries like USA, Singapore and the Middle-East.

◆
The author is a noted freelance writer.

The photographs in the article display the exquisitely handcrafted pottery items.





JUNE 2003

India Perspectives



From the Editor...



The significance of literacy can hardly be overemphasized for a nation that is vigorously pursuing the road to progress and prosperity.

Although India is already a power to reckon with in the comity of nations – thanks to its giant strides made in the fields of science and technology, space, nuclear energy and industry, it is nevertheless steadfastly following a policy of education for all its citizens so that they can meaningfully contribute their mite in its all-round development. Towards this end, India has adopted a multi-pronged approach to make its population – both school-going children and the adults – fully literate.

In fact the campaign for literacy in India owes its origin to our Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi who had way back in 1922 spearheaded the education movement. He had called for the setting up of night schools for adults and conducting of literacy classes both in urban and rural areas for all children. This led to the establishment of mass literacy committees and village libraries. However, since India was reeling under a colonial power, this movement could not acquire the required momentum.

After independence, all the successive governments both at the centre and in the states have been implementing policies aimed at imparting education to all. While formal education held sway for a very long time, the need was also felt for a non-formal education programme that catered to the needs of all those who could not, due to various factors, attend the regular schools. The National Policy on Education of 1986 sought to link both the formal and the non-formal education systems. The National Literacy Mission launched in 1988 aimed at achieving “functional literacy” by a large number of people in the age group of 15-35 years.

The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have also been playing an extremely vital role in education-dissemination among people living in remote and inaccessible areas. The results have now started becoming visible – as state after state is becoming fully literate. The day is not very far when India will have a cent percent literacy rate!

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Back cover: Tipu Sultan's Summer Palace in Bangalore, a tribute to conservation. Transparency: Ganesh Saili.