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Inside front cover: Terracotta model of a "Baul" singer, West Bengal.

Back cover: Paymaster Park at Matheran.
Transparency: Prakash Israni.



RAJGIR

CONFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM & JAINISM

Text & Photographs:
SHAHID AKHTER MAKHFI

*One of those dexterous superlatives
that light up a whole spectrum of
ancient history and stimulates the
imagination...*

It is exciting and thrilling to stand at a place where thousands of years ago other people lived and whose spiritual insights informed the tradition of which we are now a part. One such spot is Rajagriha or modern day Rajgir. Imagine Lord Buddha on his first alms begging mission while staying in a cave on the Rajagriha hills. Bypass your imagination to the hill of vultures - *Gridhrakuta*, the site where Lord Buddha returned after his enlightenment to deliver his sermons and converted the powerful Magadhan King, Bimbisara, into the Buddhist order.

Empathize with Fahein, the Chinese scholar who ventured to this site 900 years later and wept bitterly that he had not been fortunate enough to listen to the sermons of Lord Buddha delivered here. Conjure an intoxicated elephant let loose by Devadutta to kill Lord Buddha, the next sequence on these hills of Rajgir may be the big boulder rolled down from the cliff to crush him. The elephant, no doubt, was subdued and the boulder broke into splinters. And finally it was from Rajgir that Lord Buddha set out on his last journey. Let your imagination attend the first Buddhist Council held in the *Saptaparni* cave, the oldest in Rajgir, wherein the teachings of Buddha hitherto unwritten were penned down after his death.

Ruins of Jivaka's mango grove.



Above: Ajatsatru Stupa.
Facing page: Maniyar Math.

The story of Rajgir is not just Buddha's love for Rajgir and the events of his life that took place here; the place is equally revered by the Jains. Out of the 32 years of his missionary life, Mahavira spent 14 rain retreats in these surroundings. It was here on the Vipulachala hill that Mahavira delivered his first sermon. The 72-foot high Samvasran temple commemorates this sacred event. Of the eleven *ganadharas* or chief disciples of Mahavira, everyone is said to have died on the top of one or the other of the Rajagriha hills. Asoka (474-37 B.C.) too is believed to have died on one of these hills and his stupa can be seen here. A still earlier stupa has been identified as that of Ajatasatru (497-459 B.C.)

A good deal of history finds shelter in the lush green forests and hills of Rajagriha - the capital of the mighty

Magadhan empire in the fourth century B.C. (also construed as the first recorded capital in Indian history). Prior to the advent of Buddhism, Rajagriha was known as Girivaraja and *Kusagarapura* which implies an abundance of tall scented grass. *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* frequently refer to this place and depict it as full of wealth and water. It has been depicted as a beautiful capital with trees standing everywhere on the hill and peaks which make it impregnable. The cheerful inhabitants are given to perennial festivities.

The pride, power and prowess of pre-historic kings of Magadha like Brahadratha, Dirga, Jarasandha, Meghasandhi, etc was an established fact. In those days issues were settled by the wrestling duels between kings and warriors. Meghasandhi is believed to have attacked Arjuna while a duel on the



advice of Krishna was fought between Bhim and Jarasandha. Krishna is believed to have left for Dwarka when Mathura was repeatedly raided by Jarasandha.

In the words of Harivamsa, "The highly powerful, effulgent and persevering Lord Paramount Jarasandha came to Mathura encircled by four-fold ocean like forces, consisting of war chariots, containing beautiful seats and drawn by powerful steeds, whose course is never obstructed anywhere, cloud like elephants embellished with bells and golden seats, ridden by car warriors well read in the science of war and driven by clever charioteers, horses going by leaps and bounds, driven by horsemen and resembling clouds and numberless foot soldiers armed with swords and coats of mail, who could bound up in the sky like serpents."

The reigns of Bimbisara and his son Ajatsatru saw Rajagriha attain the zenith of its prosperity. The main interest of this period lies in the close association of both kings with the lives of Gautam Buddha and Vardhamana Mahavira. Within the ruins of the cyclopean walls of Rajagriha there are visible landmarks of tumultuous times, when empires flourished and disappeared. Until the discovery of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, this wall was deemed to be the oldest architectural remains of India. The 12 feet high and 18 feet thick wall consists of undressed stones that are so well piled up that they still hold together at various places.

The name Rajagriha (royal city) stems from the town where king Bimbisara banished himself as punishment for the outbreak of fire in the palace. In order to prevent the occurrences of fire in the city

the king had passed a law to punish the guilty person. Unfortunately the king himself was the first victim, so he left the kingdom under the care of his son. Finding the king alone, the neighbouring enemies thought of vanquishing him. However, people surrounded the king and gradually the city of Rajagriha sprang up which was possibly a burial ground earlier for the people of the old town. The new city sprang up with all houses resembling the royal palace and it prospered until the last days of Buddha when the capital was shifted to Patliputra.

A visitor to Rajgir first encounters the long stretch of dry *stone wall* that criss-crosses the road at various points. Originally the 40 km stretch of the cyclopean wall encircling Rajgir had 32 large gates and 64 posterns. However,



Walls that protected the Rajgir city.

only one such gateway in the North has survived the ravages of time. At regular intervals, the defensive wall was strengthened with bastions and watch towers while rivers and canals took care of the entire surroundings. Once the city gates were closed in the evening, no one, not even the king could gain entry into the city. High stone walled area in the

west was possibly the king's palace while the dwelling of common people centered in the eastern fringe, as is evident from the mud walls.

The Jain and Buddhist literature describe Rajgir as a populous and prosperous city which was abundantly beautiful. Ananda, a disciple of Buddha, considers

this place good enough for his master to attain *mahaparinirvana* here. These literatures are replete with references to numerous sites associated with the lives of these two great men. The concept of monastic institutions was laid at Rajgir which later developed into magnificent academic and religious centres, producing learned and well disciplined monks.

Amongst the various spots around Rajagriha, the most sacred are the *Venuvana* and the *Gridhrakuta* as devout Buddhists can be seen prostrating at these places in particular. *Venuvana* or the forest of bamboos was the royal park gifted to Buddha in order to make it easier for his devotees to visit him. It started with king Bimbisara, who was first attracted by the dignified and high born demeanor of Buddha, much before his enlightenment when he was wandering through Rajgir in search of an ideal teacher. The king lured the wandering prince with wealth and territory but when the future Buddha refused, he was requested to visit the king after his enlightenment. Bimbisara was impressed by the Buddhist doctrine and accepted the Buddhist faith. He was equally enlightened by the Jain school and it is not surprising to hear about Mahavira's claim about the conversion of Bimbisara to Jainism. Mahavira is further believed to have brought 23 sons and 13 queens of Bimbisara into the Jaina fold. Today the new *Venuvana Vihar* is identified by the site of a stupa built by Ajatsatru to enshrine the relics of Buddha.

A little further up the Vaibhara hill is the *Pipali cave*, well known in the Pali literature. It is named because of the sacred pipal tree at the entrance of the cave that was occasionally used by Buddha for meditation after his midday meal. If one manages to climb the hill, one is rewarded with a view of multicolour crops and variegated patches of cornfield. Buddha never missed passing through such scenic beauties without comments, and is believed to have called his companion Ananda to enjoy this particular panorama from the Vaibhara hill top, an area now crowded with Jain temples.

Following the foot track on this hill one reaches the *Jarasandha ki Baithak*. Historians consider it to be a military outpost with cells that served as living

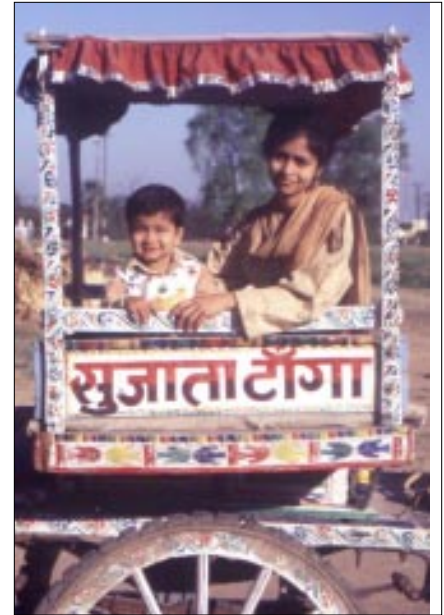
quarters for the picket. Another interesting spot associated with Jarasandha is the *Ranbhum* or *Jarasandha ka Akhada*. It marks the legendary wrestling arena that witnessed the month-long duel between Jarasandha and Bhima, who had entered Rajgir along with Lord Krishna and Arjun in disguise. The soil of the Ranbhum was once soft and white. It has now exhausted as wrestling enthusiasts carry away a good quantity of it. Two parallel cuts on the rock stretching for about 30 feet are believed to be the prints left behind by the chariot of Krishna.

Other points of interest include the *Maniyar Math*, a cylindrical brick shrine dedicated to the worship of the presiding deity of Rajagriha - *Mani Naga*. *Naga* (snake) worship was a distinctive feature of non-Vedic religion and Rajgir was a great centre of pilgrimage. People of Magadha regarded *Nagas* as generous deities who, they believed, could bring rains if properly appeased by worship. Excavations have brought to light large groups of multi spouted jars, the spouts of which having the form of serpent hood. Possibly these were used for offering milk to the snakes.

Amravana or Jivaka's mango garden marks the site of the dispensary of the royal physician, Jivaka, who happened to dress the wounds of Buddha here when he was injured by his unfriendly cousin, Devdutta. Jivaka converted this site into a Vihara and gifted it to the Buddhist order. It was amidst this thicket of Amravana that Buddha dwelt for some time and King Ajatsatru came to him seeking spiritual guidance. *Swarna Bhandar* is an interesting cave where the guide will convince you that it still contains the wealth hidden by Bimbisara. He points to the marks left behind by the British canons when they tried to explode the cave to retrieve the gold. The surrounding shell script can't be deciphered and hence the treasure remains inside. Only the recitation of the



Above: Swetambra Jain Temple at Rajgir.
Right: Tonga – the popular local transport.



mantra can open the cave leading to the fabulous Magadhan treasury!

Topada in the epic *Mahabharata* refers to the hot water springs of Rajagriha. Legend ascribes it to the *tapab* (austerities) of Brahma.

In Buddhist literature the main river of Rajagriha is called Tapoda, the waters of which were diverted to form a lake for the king. Today Rajgir is noted for its numerous hot water springs at the base of Vibhara Hill, attracting not only the pilgrims and tourists but the sick and the infirm as well. There are separate bathing cells for men and women. The hottest of the springs is the Brahmakundi where the water gushes at 45 degrees centigrade. Guru Nanak is believed to have bathed in one of these springs during his sojourn at this place.

Buddha spent much of his life in the caves of his favourite *Gridhrakuta hill*. Here he gave audience to one and all. It was from this site that he delivered his message of peace to the world and expounded the famous *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra*, which refers to the ever presence of Buddha on the hills of Gridhrakuta. Buddhist pilgrims spend

their days and nights in religious vigils burning lamps in these caves. The original road leading to the cave was built by King Bimbisara to facilitate the pilgrims' visit. Two small stupas once stood on the roadside which marked the spots wherefrom the king began to walk on foot and the other stupa demarcates the point where the king dismissed his retinue in order to be alone with the Lord. King Bimbisara was unfortunate to be imprisoned by his impatient son Ajatsatru but his request for a cell offering a view of Buddha on the Gridhrakuta hill was granted. Much later Mahendra (Asoka's brother) built his hermitage on this hill. The remnants of this prison can be identified by the iron rings on the floor that were discovered during the initial excavation.

Adjacent to Gridhrakuta hill is the *Ratnagiri hill* humming with tourists plying on the aerial ropeway leading to the 160 feet high *Vishva Shanti Stupa* built by the Buddha Sangha of Japan. A 2200 feet aerial ropeway carries the tourists to the hill top where the stupa is all alive with the chantings of *na-mu-myō-h-nga-kyō* amidst the beating of big drums.

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The Shanti Stupa (above) and the image of Lord Buddha on its outer wall (right).

The author is a noted travel writer.



Around Rajgir

Nalanda, 15 kms, should be the first choice for the visitor to see the ancient monastery.

Gaya, 68 kms, is the famous pilgrim centre for the Hindus where they offer oblations for the salvation of their dead ancestors. Twelve kms further south is Bodh Gaya, the rallying point for the Buddhists from all over the world.

Pawapuri, 38 kms is a sinless town, sacred to the Jains. Lord Mahavira attained nirvana here. The site is commemorated with a beautiful marble temple, Jalmandir, set amidst a lotus pond which was the outcome of the sacred ash and later the mud being carried away in great quantity by the pilgrims.

Bihar Sherif, 25 kms is venerated by the Muslims on account of the tombs of sufi saints. Prominent among them is Makhdum Shah Sharfuddin dating back to the 14th century. It was once the capital of the Muslim governors of Bihar between 13 -16 centuries when the city was an active cultural centre and seat of Muslim thought and learning. The earliest among the graves is that of Malik Ibrahim Bayu perched on the hill-top of Pir Pahar. He was the first local governor of the Delhi sultanate who died in 1353. The dome is curiously elongated and stands as one of the earliest examples of Muslim domes in this part of the country.



Timeless Ganga

IN THE EYES OF FOREIGN TRAVELLERS

Text: K.K. KHULLAR
Photographs: JITENDRA SINGH

The oldest river in the world, Ganga, says Mark Twain, is timeless; its spectacle has kept every one spell-bound over the centuries. Legend has it that when Aryans saw the river for the first time, they decided to settle on its banks. In the words of Dr. Mohammad Iqbal :

*'Ay Aab-raud-e-Ganga vo din hai yaad
tujh ko
Utra tere kinare jab karvan hamara'*

(O Ganga, the majestic stream of water, do you remember the day, When our caravan anchored on your banks)

According to the Hindus, Ganga is not merely the river of India; it is India's soul. It hides in its bosom not only India's historical past but also the pulsations of its present. Symbolising the onward march of India's civilisation it also flows into its future. Traveller after traveller has testified to the beauty and the



majesty of this magnificent river, the most venerated.

The foreign travellers who wrote on Ganga include those who came from Greece such as Megasthenes; those who came as pilgrims from China namely Fahien, Hsien Tsang, I-tsing and Ou-king; the Arab travellers of whom the most important was Alberuni; the European travellers like Bernier, Tavernier, Peter Mundy, Rudyard Kipling, Edwin Arnold and finally the Americans such as Mark Twain. All of them gave their impressions of this divine river, some even delved deep into the philosophical and the religious impact of the river like Alberuni and Twain did. The writings of these travellers are an important source of information on the history of India.

Before Megasthenes, who was the Greek Ambassador in the court of Chandergupta Maurya, Greek historians such as Herodotus, Arrain and Skylax thought India to be the last country in the East and Ganga as a big sea. That is why perhaps Alexander did not go beyond Beas river. Megasthenes corrected this wrong impression. "At night the Ganga in Patliputra looks like a bride", says the Greek Ambassador who stayed in the Mauryan capital for several years. "In Patliputra people do not lock their houses and there is no slavery here". He also refers to the Royal Road connecting the Ganga with the river Sind.

After the Greeks came the Chinese. The first to come and see Ganga was Fahien who came in the 5th century AD during the reign of the Guptas.

The revered Ganga at Haridwar (facing page) and at Rishikesh, just above Haridwar (above).





Above: "Gaumukh" – the source of Ganga.
Facing page: Ghats on the banks of Ganga at Varanasi.

Fahien says "there is no capital punishment in the Gangadesh. People are upright and honourable. Patliputra, which is situated on the banks of Ganges is not made with human hands, the city is so beautiful." Hieun Tsang who came in the days of the "Good King" Harsha in the 7th century left an everlasting impression in the form of a book called "SI YU KI". An eye-witness to the Kumbha Mela on the banks of Ganga, he stayed in India for 18 years, first as a student in Nalanda University, then as a teacher and finally as its Vice Chancellor. He says Ganga was sacred not only to the Hindus but to the Buddhists and the Jains as well. Of Gangadwar i.e. Haridwar, he gives a detailed account.

Abu Rihan Alberuni, who came in the early 11th century with the forces of Mahmud of Ghazni, has mentioned about all the rivers of India in his book 'Kitab-ul-Hind'. Alberuni says the people of India consider their rivers, their mountains, their flowers, their women as the most beautiful in the world. He states that India was a big sea once upon a time. He refers to the Sind and the Gangetic plains as Agradational plains made out of the deposits of several rivers of the Northern Himalayas, the source of Ganga. He says the Gangetic plain is made of alluvial dust or deposits. He also writes about the deltas and the island of India. Pilgrimages in India, he says, are not obligatory but facultative and meritorious. A pilgrimage to a place where Ganga flows gets one straight to heavens.



He says any temple on the banks of life-giving Ganga in its 2500-mile long journey is sacred. Ganga has 108 appellations and its water, Gangajal, removes all diseases. It is on the banks of Ganga that the Hindu philosophy and its classical music developed. Alberuni visited India several times.

During the 15th century, Nicoli Conte came from Rome and Nikitan from Russia. During the 18th century John Holwell wrote about Ganga during his stay in Calcutta. Tom Coyrot who came during Jehangir's time describes the night scene of "Har-Ki Pauri" at Haridwar. The French travellers such as Bernier, Tavernier, and Jaan Jaquemont have mentioned the serene beauty of the river. The description about the

'Aarti' is unforgettable. Rudyard Kipling too was fascinated. Arnold in his long poem "Light of Asia" says that Benares occupies the same place among the Hindus as Jerusalem among the Jews and Mecca and Madina among the Muslims. Some painters like James Princep also left behind marvellous paintings of the Ganga Ghats.

Last, but not the least, we come to Mark Twain who saw Ganga in 1897 and left behind his impressions in his book "Following the Equator." Twain saw Ganga from close quarters and delved deep into its soul. He also saw the fairs and festivals on its banks, the wrestling matches, the music gatherings, women worshipping the sun on its banks, old men coming from far off cities to die there as death on the banks of Ganga is the

most meritorious ambition of all Hindus. Mark Twain tried to squeeze Ganga into a pot but he himself said it was timeless, immortal. There are hundreds of rivers in India but Ganga is unique...

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The author is a noted historian



Stunning Textiles of Central India

Text: DINKER SHUKLA
Photographs: Dr. BIMLA VERMA

Extolled by poets and philosophers and vividly described in ancient texts, the unsurpassable beauty of Indian fabrics has been known since time immemorial. The madder-dyed textile pieces found at Mohenjodaro establish the antiquity of the craft. Recorded history reveals how the Indian textiles have been in demand throughout the world for centuries past. Gossamer fine muslins, rich gold thread brocades, printed and painted chintzes (cloth printed with coloured patterns) and finely woven jamawars were greatly prized and handed down as heirlooms from generation to generation.

The textiles of central India comprising the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh are part of this rich heritage. The weaving, printing and colouring of textiles in this region is, of course, influenced by the bordering states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. At the same time, however, it has developed its own distinctive style and individuality. This is seen in the highly developed craft of hand block-printing, tying and dyeing, Batik prints and delicate weaving patterns. The popular colours used in this process are vegetable and natural dyes like indigo, turmeric roots, pomegranate skin, lac, iron and other substances. They create an effect which is rich, yet subtle. These natural colours do not fade easily, permeate the fabric and lend it an attractive look.

Malwa and Nimar regions of Madhya

Pradesh are renowned for their hand block-printed cotton textiles. Bherongarh near Ujjain is famous for a range of hand-block printed products, such as sarees, dupattas, dress material, bed sheets, pillow covers, table cloths, lugdas (kind of saree), jajam (colour-printed glazed durries), quilts and cotton printed floor spreads. Jajams, oudhnis and quilts were a hot favourite overseas in the pre-independence days and were exported by the East India company. Printed quilts were also known to have been presented to the court of Emperor Akbar.

Bagh in Dhar district of MP is as famous for its printed textiles as its ancient cave paintings. The blocks used for printing fabrics are made of intricately stylized motifs which have evolved over hundreds of years. These prints have a tonal and three-dimensional effect, which is impossible to replicate in screen printing of machine printing processes. Thus, the printed fabric of Bagh and nearby Kushi and Manawar have become a national and international favourite.

The other important printing centres in the state are Ujjain, Indore and Mandsaur where craftpersons produce exquisite samples of tie and dye fabric known as 'bandhini' or 'bandhej', besides Batik prints and hand block-printed material.

Madhya Pradesh is also famous for its delicate weaves in its Maheshwari and Chanderi sarees. Maheshwar, that is ancient town Mahishmati situated on the banks of the Narmada, has given its name to the popular 'Maheshwari' sarees which are made of cotton, silk and artificial silk. Chanderi cotton sarees are

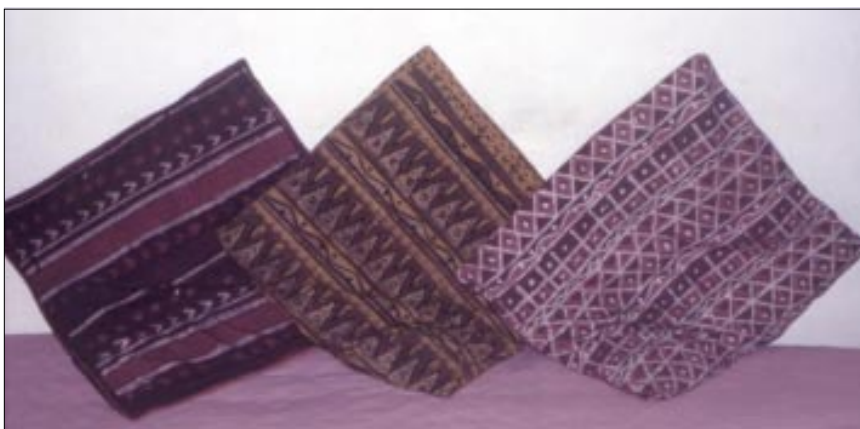
Facing page: Tusser silk printed sarees (top left); Chanderi saree (top right) and Bagh print (below.)



an ideal summer wear. Usually in subtle hues they have a sophistication which is hard to match. In fact, Chanderi has been very famous for its exquisite and delicate muslin industry. The weaving industry gained a world-wide importance in the days gone by. Muslin produced here used to find way to different parts of the world. Work on gold and silver embroidery on Chanderi sarees has been known for its great beauty and art. Even today it is living upto its old reputation.

The MP Handicrafts Development Corporation is promoting the traditional activities at all these important centres so as to preserve the rich heritage of crafts and bring them back into limelight. Tens of thousands of carftpersons have been reinstated in their traditional occupations connected with textiles. Training is also arranged by the Corporation for skill upgradation, design development and product diversification. It is also lending marketing support through its emporia known by the name of “Mrignayanee” and through organising exhibitions at home and abroad.

The author, a senior journalist, is a freelance writer.



Batik floral design (top); another specimen of Bagh print (middle) and vegetable-dyed cushion covers (bottom).

LIJJAT PAPAD

A SUCCESS STORY

Text & Photographs: NISHEETH M. KATARA



It all began on the 15th of March, 1959, when most of the women inhabitants of an old residential building in Girgaum, a thickly populated area of South Bombay (now Mumbai), were busy attending to their usual domestic chores. A few of them, seven to be exact, gathered on the terrace of the building and started making “Papads” (a salty snack). They finished by producing four packets of Papads with a firm resolve to continue production. This pioneering batch of seven ladies had set the ball rolling for the production of “Lijjat Papad”, the brand name given to their produce.

As the days went by, this group of seven began swelling. Despite their initial struggle, their faith and patience paid off. Strictly adhering to the policy of self-reliance, they started commercial production of the papads. With quality consciousness guiding its production, Lijjat grew to be a flourishing and successful organisation that it is today.

Shri Mahila Griha Udyog, makers of the now famous Lijjat Papad, is an organisation that symbolises the strength of the women of India. Because only women can become members of this organisation.

All members are also the owners of the organization and are fondly referred to as “sisters”. Their strength has now gone upto 40,000 throughout India. The organisation has diversified its activities and now produces many more kitchen items.

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The author is a senior Civil Servant.



Bhagwan Dada

END OF AN ERA

B.M. MALHOTRA

The passing away on February 4, 2002, of octogenarian veteran character actor, Bhagwan Abhaji Palav or Bhagwan Dada, as he was popularly called, signifies the end of an era of vintage entertainment, which generated joviality and liveliness among audiences and evoked their instant applause. Unlike a host of actors, who vanish after twinkling for only a short while, Bhagwan shone on the Hindi screen for well over six decades since his debut as a stunt actor in the silent movie, *Bewafa Aashiq* in 1931. During his long career he mesmerised generations of filmgoers with his unique style of comedy and dancing and a vast variety of light and interesting roles in over 400 films.

Born in Konkan on August 1, 1913, he shifted along with his parents to Mumbai, where his father was employed as a textile mill worker. Enamoured of cinema even as a child, Bhagwan gave up school after the fourth standard. When he grew up, he also became a mill worker like his father, but continued keenly to watch Hindi, Marathi and English films, especially those featuring action and comic heroes. He also aspired to become a successful film actor like Master Vithal, the best known Marathi and Hindi stunt star of that time. He also became friendly with Charlie, the then reigning comedian of the Hindi screen. In those early years of Indian cinema, male protagonists were supposed to be well-built and strong. So Bhagwan along with his

neighbour and friend, Baburao Pehlwani (wrestler), his future costar in numerous films, followed a strict regimen of strenuous exercises for body building and wrestling and emerged as a handsome, thickset and sinewy youth. Like others of his ilk, Bhagwan too for his physical prowess was introduced in films as “Master Bhagwan”.

After a few silent movies like *Pyari Katar* and *Jalta Jigar*, he was featured in a large number of talkies involving action and adventure, laced with his special brand of comedy and dancing. He also acted in a couple of Tamil films. With increased experience and popularity he graduated as a director and first wielded the megaphone for *Bahadur Kisan* (1938). In 1942 he turned a producer and five years later a studio owner. Over the years, he produced and directed 27 films, including *Naghma-e-Sabha* (1945), in which he was paired with Khurshid Junior, elder sister of Meena Kumari. He also teamed with Agha and Kishore Kumar in his self-produced and directed *Shake Hands* (1947) and *Bhagam Bhag* (1956), respectively.

On Raj Kapoor’s advice Bhagwan switched over from adventure to social themes and made the hugely successful golden jubilee hit, *Albela* (1951). In this movie he acted opposite the talented Geeta Bali with the particularly popular music scored by C. Ramchandra, who also rendered some romantic solos and duets in tandem with Lata Mangeshkar. The semi-bhangra type of dances performed by our roly-poly hero matching Geeta Bali’s equally well-devised rhythmic steps and body movements are said to have inspired many other top actors like Amitabh Bachchan and Govinda. Bhagwan’s dancing style was also adopted by common people moving in religious and marriage processions.

Albela turned out to be a big bonanza for Bhagwan bringing him enormous

profits with which he bought a bungalow and a fleet of seven cars. As years passed, he made many more films, including *Jhamela* (1953) and *Labela* (1966) with titles sounding like *Albela*, but the magic of *Albela* could not be recreated and dame fortune never smiled at Bhagwan again. Eventually, he had to sell his studio, bungalow and cars and moved to a typical lower middle class dwelling. His earning from hundreds of films in which he acted under other directors could not sustain his former high standard of living.

To compound his misfortune a fire broke out in the Bombay Labs in 1958 and destroyed all his films except *Albela* and *Bhagam Bhag*, which had been stored elsewhere. *Albela* was re-released in 1990s, but it did not fetch him much gain. However, when shown by a TV channel, it was appreciated even by the present generation.

During his hey day Bhagwan had squandered away his riches and even advanced money to some friends who never returned it. Now fallen on evil days and moneyless, he played only some cameo and bit roles, for which he was paid just a measly remuneration. Afflicted with asthma and various health complications of old age, he ultimately retired to a reclusive home-confined life. In his indigence he was, however, helped financially by the Cine Artistes’ Association and the Indian Motion Pictures Producers’ Association. He was also looked after by his daughter and his son, Sachin, an assistant cameraman.

The poignant story of the twilight years of Bhagwan’s vicissitudinous life is reminiscent of the hard fate of the director in Guru Dutt’s autobiographical classic, *Kaaghaaz Ke Phool* (1959). In that movie also, a once successful filmmaker was discarded by the selfish society. His anguish was articulated and interpreted in the song,

“*Dekhi zamaane ki yaari,*



A scene from “Albela” shows Bhagwan with Geeta Bali.

Bichhde sabhi baari baari”

(I’ve seen this world’s friendships,
All have left me one by one).

Despite awesome odds Bhagwan Dada’s spirit remained unfazed. He put up a brave face, though having resigned himself to his fate, saying that “Comedians have to struggle and yet wear that smiling mask to hide the pain behind”. He even benevolently forgave those who had deserted him or had exploited his goodness. He was indeed a *Bhala Aadmi* (good man or a good Samaritan), which, incidentally, was the title of his 1958 film, in which he gave a break to the noted lyricist, Anand Bakshi, who also passed away recently. Bhagwan reflected his own nature when for his trademark comedy, he acted as a naive simpleton reacting late to words and blows directed at him. He had, in particular, endeared himself to the working classes who, as Balraj Sahni had commented, “saw in him their own image as a fellow member of the proletariat”. This made him a favourite of the masses.

Bhagwan was honoured with the V. Shantaram Lifetime Achievement

Award in 1998.

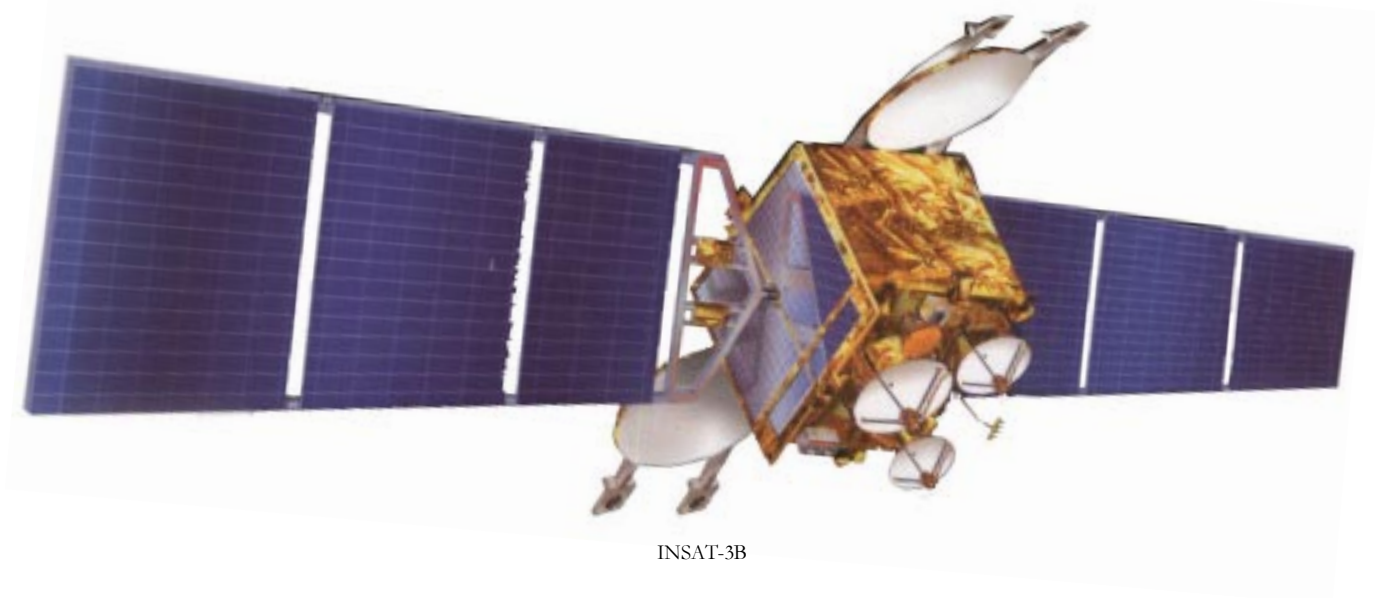
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The author is a noted writer on films.

SATELLITE TV

CATALYST FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

RADHAKRISHNA RAO



INSAT-3B

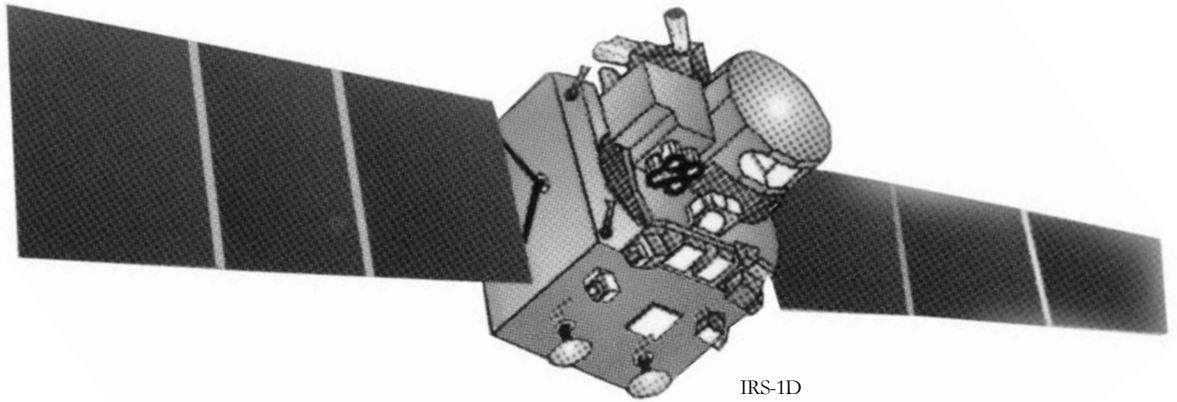
Satellite television is not a novelty in the rural, pastoral India. For way back in 1975, using the ATS-6 satellite, India launched an year-long innovative project called Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE). This project, involving the direct relay of instructional programmes to the augmented TV sets in 2,400 villages spread over six Indian states, has been hailed as the most ambitious mass communication experiment undertaken anywhere in the world.

The ATS-6 satellite, considered as a “teacher in the sky”, was powerful enough to beam programmes directly to TV receivers augmented with a 10 ft antenna and a front-end converter. SITE helped demonstrate the potential of satellite TV broadcasting in imparting practical instructions to the rural population in the country. The programmes telecast under SITE covered areas such as agriculture, animal

husbandry, dairy, poultry, health and hygiene, family planning, education, national integration as well as developmental issues and entertainment. A study of the impact of SITE carried out by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) which conceived and implemented the project revealed that instructional programming blended with entertainment could make a significant impact on the society.

In fact, one of the major objectives of the Indian space programme right since its inception has been to exploit the potentials of satellite technology to speed up the pace of socio-economic development in the country.

SITE was clearly a direct broadcasting system involving a “centralised” technology. While looking for technological options that would complement this system, the idea of “limited rebroadcast” was perceived. Out of this concept emerged the Kheda



IRS-1D

Communications Project (KCP). Under KCP launched in 1975, a low power transmitter was set up at the Pij village in the state of Gujarat. This transmitter was linked to a studio and an earth station complex on the campus of the Ahmedabad-based Space Applications Centre (SAC), a unit of ISRO. This was meant to broadcast both the local programmes originating from the studio and the central satellite programmes received at the earth station. No wonder, the project was described as a field laboratory in the development of system for educational and instructional communications. The KCP project was managed by Development and Educational Communications Unit (DECU) of ISRO. The mandate of DECU is to exploit the potentials of space technology to augment educational and developmental efforts in the country.

KCP had the specific objective of promoting rural development and bringing about social change, the job it has accomplished creditably. Appropriately enough, KCP bagged the UNESCO award for rural communications in 1985.

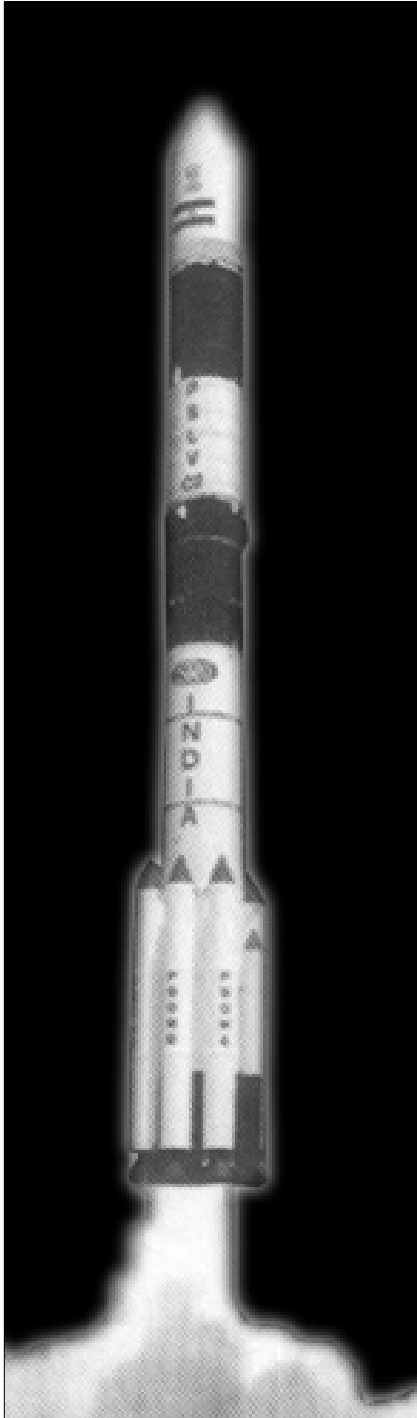
The expertise and experience gained in the course of implementing SITE and KCP have provided valuable inputs for developing India's domestic satellite system INSAT. The INSAT system capability which supports 22 TV channels of the state-owned TV network

Doordarshan has been harnessed to operate socially relevant direct broadcasting projects.

In pursuance of its social objectives ISRO also launched in 1996 the Jhabua Development Communications Project (JDCP) in the predominantly tribal dominated Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh. The objective of the ongoing JDCP is to gain experience in the use of interactive satellite based network for rural development in a "real life" situation. As part of the project, 150 direct reception television sets have been installed in as many villages and 12 talkback terminals have been set up at block headquarters. The project which has as its space segment INSAT-3B domestic satellite of India launched in March 2000 acts on two fronts. For the audience, it broadcasts development oriented programmes every evening. Simultaneously, it conducts training programmes in the afternoon for village level functionaries.

Encouraged by the successful run of JDCP and its positive impact on the grassroot level development, the project has recently been expanded to include 250 villages in Dhar and Badwan districts of Madhya Pradesh.

The success of JDCP led to the evolution of innovative Gramsat pilot project - a multi service programme involving broadcasting of programmes, computer inter-connectivity and a data exchange



PSLV-C2

system to spur the development of rural areas. Essentially Gramsat project aims at strengthening the communications and social services network in rural India. As it is, the Gramsat received a shot in the

arm from the Vidya Vahini educational channel launched by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Using INSAT-3B system capability, the eastern Indian state of Orissa is now making use of Vidya Vahini network for providing education, information and training to rural areas in the three districts of the state. The network will soon be extended in a phased manner to cover the entire state of Orissa. Its Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has driven home the point that his state will strive to make the best use of networks and computer connectivity to bring about revolutionary changes through e-governance.

On another front, the South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh will make use of the Ku-band transponders onboard the INSAT system for promoting distance education, telemedicine, agricultural extension and internet connectivity in the rural areas.

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The author is a freelance writer.



Punjab's Engineering Institute

EXPLORING RURAL AMBIENCE

K.L. NOATAY

Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering and Technology, or SLIET in short, is a new institution set up to promote technical education and scientific temper among the youths of Punjab in particular and other Indian States in general. The institute has been named after Sant Longowal of Punjab, who was a visionary beyond comparison.

Located in the Sangrur district of Punjab, SLIET was launched at village Longowal in 1989 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India. It aims at achieving technological excellence through dedication, innovation and self-study. However the institute conforms to all aspects of the country's education policy framed and revised from time to time. It is running 12 certificate courses, ten diploma courses and eight degree

programmes, the first two courses are modular and terminal in nature. The composite concept provides a unique scope for vertical mobility and lateral entry at each stage. The education programmes are non-conventional, cost effective, flexible and credit based, with emphasis on self-employment. First two courses are of two year duration while the degree study entails six semesters covered in three academic years. The institute also believes in equality of sexes; it admits girls on the basis of individual merit and without any bias as to their gender.

The institute is empowered to award its own certificates and diplomas as per the norms of All-India Council of Technical Education.

SLIET imparts training in semi-technical



SLIET complex (left) and its
Lecture Halls (above)

departments like food technology, chemical technology, computer science and engineering, instrumentation and electrical engineering, electronics and communication engineering and welding and manufacturing engineering. It has separate departments for basic sciences like Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Entrepreneurial Development, etc. Research, consultancy and vocational and technical education are the prime objectives here.

The infrastructure of the institute consists of a well-stocked library, well equipped workshops and matching laboratories. The teaching faculties believe in giving full freedom to students to develop their intellect and expertise.

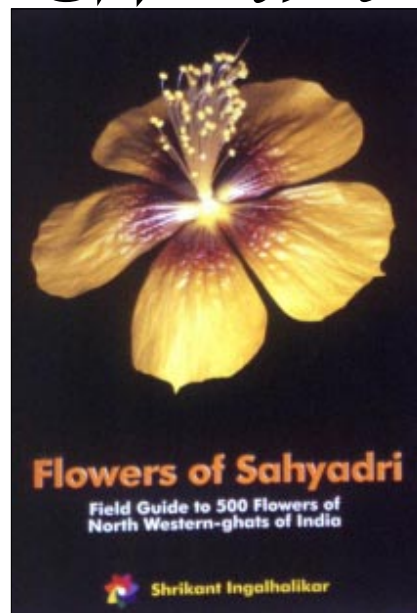
The Institute campus, spread over 450 acres of land, also provides hostel facility to nearly 2500 students. It has separate hostels for boys and girls. There is good accommodation available for faculty staff too. With a strength of 5000 students, the campus also boasts of a health centre, swimming pool, restaurant, post office, bank and a small shopping complex.

This institute has been specially set up in a rural area so as to inculcate love for

nature and rural life amongst the students. The trainees are groomed in such a way that they are able to help the people and the industry in the countryside. The institute keeps in touch with the industrial houses of Punjab and other states to provide them their future employees. Many of its graduates have been absorbed by foreign clients too sheerly on the strength of their merit.

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The author is a freelance writer.

Flower - IN THE SAHYADRIS Watching

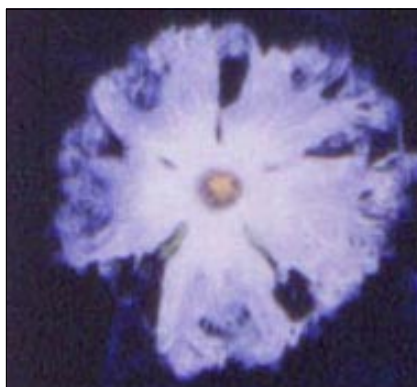


Scientists have identified the western Ghats, a mountain range running north-south along the west coast of India, as one of the prime bio-diversity hot spots in the world. The criterion for identifying a region as a hot spot is the presence of a rich endemic natural life and a thriving ecosystem. Thus the identification of a bio-diversity hot spot indicates the presence of rich natural vegetation that harbours and nurtures a variety of wildlife.

The Western Ghats stretch across the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The section of the Ghats that run through Maharashtra has traditionally been referred to as the Sahyadris. The maximum elevation these mountains touch is 1650 metres above sea level. The altitude keeps the

maximum temperature range between 21 and 27 degrees celsius, and the minimum between 10 and 20 degrees. The Sahyadris separate the golden band of the Konkan coast on the west from the sloping terraced plateau or Desh that stretches to the east. Tropical evergreen, semi-evergreen and deciduous forests cover the slopes, that on the steeper western side are copiously nourished by the moisture-laden monsoon winds that blow from the Arabian Sea in close proximity. Blocked by the mountains, rainfall is heavy-ranging between 2000 and 7000 mm for four months, before a long dry season sets in. Falling in the tropical belt, without a severe winter, the forested slopes of the Sahyadri harbour a treasure of India's wildlife.

It is in this context that the book under review is a valuable guide in savouring the joys of flower-watching in the scenic Sahyadris. The region covered by the field guide extends from Mumbai to Panaji (Goa), and adjoining areas, that is about 50,000 sq. kms. Written, photographed, designed and published by Shrikant Ingalthalikar - a formidable task in itself - the book guides the reader in identifying 500 plant species as seen in the region. A mechanical engineer by profession, Ingalthalikar is passionate about flowering plants and photography, and his love for the two has culminated, much to the benefit of readers, in this helpful publication. He worked for several years on the project, travelling and trekking through the Sahyadris to observe and photograph flowering plants. To capture them in bloom has often meant several trips to a particular



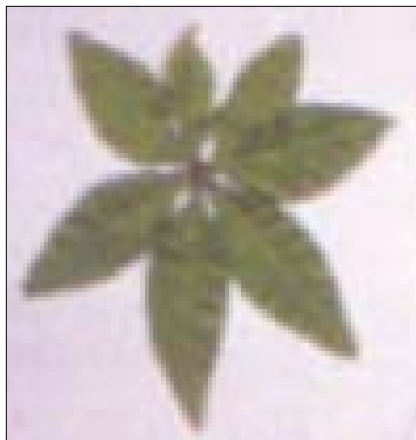
Exotic varieties of flowers (above) and plants (next page) of Sahyadri displayed in the book.

area as different species flower in different months. Further, as all species do not flower each year-the *Carvia callosa* flowers only once in seven years - it has sometimes meant a continuous and patient wait for the plant to yield blooms!

The format of the 210-page guide and the approach to the subject convey Ingallhalikar's scientific mind and organized thought process. The initial section is devoted to an introduction to the subject, which includes information on flower-watching, the Sahyadris, different habitats in the region covered, the different seasons, and some of the recommended locations for flower-watching. This is followed by hints to identify flowers by observing their growth habitat, season the flower has been observed in, colour, size, range

(location) and abundance. Along with the book is a small pocket index, that offers a quick and concise reference for recording or confirming field observations.

The significant portion of the book is the illustrated text that describes 500 flowers with accompanying photographs. This part of the book has been divided into four sections, namely, trees, shrubs, climbers and herbs. In each of these sections the matter has been treated month by month, and within each month the flowers have been listed in colour gradation. Thus, if the reader chanced upon a pink flower on a climber in the month of September, he can quickly identify it by first turning to the section on climbers, then to the particular month, and then identifying it both by its photograph and details! These details include the scientific name of the plant, its family, local name, as well as its month of



flowering and vegetative growth. Thus the book has a thorough and meticulous presentation, which encourages the reader to step out, observe and identify flowers. With excellent photographs and informative text, the book makes flower-watching an interesting and rewarding experience for amateurs too.

Ingalthalikar feels that flower watching is a welcome introduction to the treasure of nature. For he says, "Appreciation leads to knowledge and knowledge leads to conservation. Flower watching can be the most effective way to be aware of the importance of conserving our biodiversity and natural wealth. Flowering plants are the very foundation of the pyramid of life". And extending his views, his field-guide is indispensable for any enthusiast wishing to embark on the fascinating world of flower-watching in

the Sahyadris.

"FLOWERS OF SAHYADRI - Field Guide to 500 Flowers of North Western Ghats of India", by Shrikant Ingalthalikar;
e-mail: lexon@pn2.vsnl.net.in.

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The reviewer is a noted writer.



Wind instrument – a Bhimbetka painting from Madhya Pradesh.

India

ART IN EVERYDAY LIFE

UTPAL K. BANERJEE

According to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, ancient Indians were attracted to beauty as an attribute of godhead. The land has been a cradle of an infinite variety of visual arts, performing arts and handicrafts, where beauty has been endowed with divinity. There have been rich incantations and devotional lyrics addressed to beauty as the very source of life. It is natural, therefore, that this reaching out to beauty and its manifold manifestations should be made a constant factor in the daily life of people.

Art thus becomes an integral part of one's life and personality: to be enjoyed in everything one does. The measuring sticks like harmony, proportion, balance, rhythm and prominence blend seamlessly with rituals and votive offerings. In India, handicraft has always

been a basic human activity in society. Craft is recognised here as much an expression of the human spirit in material form – which gives delight to us – as the fine arts.

Since the earliest times, people first decorated their person, then articles of everyday use, later their weapons, and finally their surroundings. In an unbroken continuity, rough walls of the countryside huts and *havelis* and the mundane floors blossomed into alluring pictures. A death-dealing item like the bow and arrow became embellished with decorations; *Kumbhs* (water pots) took on pleasing shapes and fascinating designs came to cover the kitchen pans. Here one notices the transformation of the mere functional into works of visual art, - the common becoming the cherished! No aspect of everyday life in

India is too insignificant or humble to lay claim to beauty, or, acquire sanctity as symbol of good omen.

By way of illustrations, pottery has been called the lyric of handicrafts. *Kumbhis* made by the potter who starts work every morning by burning an oil-lamp as a mark of respect to his Creator. Even the most unlettered potter making earthenware displays an innate sense of aesthetic quality. Woodwork brings in another wonder world, stemming from man's kinship to nature, where every little thing has to be beautified by some carving. Thus, household articles like the pestle, the churner, the plough, even the lumbering cart, all become pieces of fine workmanship. The doors at home as well as temples are decorated by carvings as a sign of good omen, so also the roof, pillars, pilaster, beams and brackets in the corner. Then comes sophistication: in chests, containers, boxes for jewellery and trinkets, nuts and spices, lamps and chess sets. Much before modern-day furniture, Vedic literature referred to a variety of sleeping couches. Kashmir, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have profusion of rich woodcarvings, - besides those for folk deities all over India. Decorated inlay, wood-paintings and laquerware are other varieties emanating from the same inspiration.

Stone comes next only to clay and wood. India is blest with a large variety of stones, and stone monuments all over the country often rise to sublime grandeur with perfect symphony between their architecture and sculpture. In Tamil Nadu, there is a great tradition in stone carving of icons, which are of classical excellence, and the stone workers, known as *sthapatis*, are usually adept in the related spheres of dance, music, mathematics and religion! In West Bengal and Rajasthan, the practising craftsmen make art pieces of stonework for daily domestic use like plates and bowls.

Worn fabrics are celebrated for ages by virtue of their handiwork, out of which cotton and silk fabrics are the pearls of Indian weaving. Sensitivity to colour is expressed in symbolism, associating colours with seasons and even months. Crimson is the colour of good omen worn by brides, ochre the sign of renunciation and white of purity. Even the gods have individual colours! Assam and Manipur have a daily vocation of women to weave beautiful fabrics. Silk not merely has an ancient tradition, but also enjoys a significant status for its regular use in rituals. In wool, shawl is a superb product of artistic tapestry for winter months especially from Kashmir. *Bandhani* (tie and dye), *Zardosi* (embroidered ornamentation) and *Applique* (patch work) are other related crafts of daily use, besides metal wire, embroidery, gorgeous carpets and floor coverings.

Art metal ware in India covers religious images, ritualistic items and objects of utility – with a profusion found in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Bidri of Andhra, a type of silver inlay, has wide variety and originality of design. Other decorative specimen are simple vessels used in rituals and temple adornments like *chauki* (platform for the icon) and *chatra* (the overhanging cover).

Jewellery in India has few parallels, with a special ornament meant for every part of the human body. It is an integral part of Indian social pattern with deep religious overtones. Special jewellery is connected with every *samskara* (landmark arrangements in an individual's life). In the west, while jewellery has a focus with accessories to match, jewellery in India is worn as an ensemble. Folk jewellery in India is the most distinctive with motifs drawn from the immediate environment and developed into stylised patterns. Engraving on precious stones; corals and conch-shells are a well-developed art since Moghul times, with figures and ritualistic



designs etched in great detail and worn by women.

Decorative basketry and mat weaving are rural crafts intimately connected with everyday life, devised to meet common needs. Conch shells have everywhere a religious and social significance on a daily basis.

In the world of Indian child, toys and dolls have a freshness of ageless quality. In a glorious tradition of toys since the Harappan civilisation, folk animals are truly fabulous in their diversity and sympathetic portraiture of animal characters. Leatherwork is as widespread since 3000 BC touching everyday life. Finally, glass articles – with the quality of opalescence and glitter of a myriad diamonds – have been found in old Buddhist stupas and continue to this day as utility articles like common bangles.

In visual arts, rock paintings in caves are the specimens dating back to some 10,000 years, often found in very large clusters, which testify them as a community expression. In later times, one finds a definitive tradition of painting on various objects, – particularly the floors, walls and intimate items of everyday use. In almost every instance, the painting is associated with some ritualistic origin being traced to *Chitrakalashana*, the earliest Indian treatise on painting, and even Vatsyayan in 650 BC going eloquent on the beauty of popular ornamentation.

Floor paintings, done exclusively by women, are among the most expressive of popular arts in all the states. Decorating the floor is a daily routine, where its observance is accepted as a good omen. The altar room (for daily worship), the dining place, the platform for the holy *tulsi* pot and the entrance to home are appropriately decorated, with patterns changing from day to day. The designs are symbolic and basically

A Kathak dancer striking a pose.



A Madhubani painting from Bihar (above) and a raging battle displayed on a work from Paithan, 19 c. (facing page).

common to the whole country, like geometric patterns, *swastic*, lotus, trident, fish, conch-shell, Goddess Lakshmi's footprints, creepers, flowers and human like figures.

Wall painting have extended themes, told often in a series of panels. Apart from decorative purposes, they also constitute a form of visual education. *Madhubani* paintings of Bihar have elaborate pictures of *Khobar ghar* (nuptial chamber), invoking the divinity to bless the newly weds. Wall painting is a community act, performed by all women of a family or group. All over north India, Devi figures are painted on wall and worshipped by married women. Wall and ceiling paintings in Rajasthan use epic themes and heroic Rajput tales. *Worli* wall paintings in Maharashtra depict everyday life. Other common wall

paintings are *bar-boond* (dash-and-dot) of Kumaon; mud-plaster and cow-dung relief of Himachal Pradesh; *Pathachitra* of Orissa; and the art of *Tughra* calligraphy (in Arabic) made by Muslim women. Painted and decorated pottery in Gujarat and Rajasthan; *ganjifa* (a pack of playing cards) in Orissa; painting on wood in Tamil Nadu; and *Sikri* grass containers of Bihar overflow into small utility items.

Performing arts in India have been part of everyday life, marking particularly the rituals of *samskaras*, which – by declaring an order in life – make sense out of the chaos from which life arises and to which it returns. These landmark arrangements imply consecration and purification, with the help of rituals, chants and songs, adulations and lamentations:



putting together every individual in a well-defined relationship with the community. Prevalent since the Vedic times, some *samskaras* are more prevalent than others, but all of them have chants, prayers and songs culled with loving allusion to the household and nature.

Each day in India is seen as a cycle of eight *praharas* (3-hour units), each having its own ragas in classical music. The morning has devotional songs for the pious mind alongside the yogic art of *Surya Namaskara* (salutation to the sun). The noon has many a majestic *bandish* (lyric) and the evening is greeted by romantic songs – proceeding to more somber ragas into the night. The popular culture is steeped in wonderful melodies and rhythms associated with

regular chores of life. In Assam, for instance, the people perform the charming dance of *Vaisakhi Bihu* for sowing, *Kartik Bihu* for transplantation and *Magh Bihu* for harvesting.

Each region is depicted in its own regional art. Thus, Kathak's use of veil in the north comes in many charming ways. Bharatanatyam, on the contrary, has no use of veil, as it is not prevalent in the south. Looking closely, flowers are not pierced by needle in the south but wrapped round, - as reflected in *Kataka Mukha* and *Kartri Mukha mudras* in Bharatanatyam. Kathak, however, has the needle-piercing *mudra* as is wont in the north. All *mudras*, in fact, emanate from nature and gestures from everyday life. Not all performing arts are stylised, but they invariably reflect people and their

environment.

Traditional arts, related to everyday life, have not yet disappeared due to their strong affinity to common man. Thus, the ritual *Kolam*, done with great reverence and creativity outside a door by the ordinary housewife, is still a work of beauty. Terracotta horses are still placed as votive offering in temples of Bengal. Traditional textiles and jewellery are still worn at every wedding and a bride's trousseau must still include her prayer items everywhere in the country. The strong role played by religious wellspring, with which most arts and crafts are closely linked, has ensured the preservation of tradition and beauty in most Indian homes. In fact, the intermingling of the arts and crafts in the domestic melting pot has brought about a cultural change and a new connectivity



of the entire India in a remarkably
harmonious way.

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The author is a noted art critic.

A Konark sculpture.



View from “ Echo Point”, Matheran.

Matheran

THE PERFECT GET-AWAY

Text: SAMIR TULI

Photographs: PRAKASH ISRANI

Matheran, only about 110 kms from Mumbai, is indeed the “real” escape from the madding crowds of Mumbai. The rail route option has Neral as the point from where a quaint toy train chugs up 21 kilometers to Matheran. The small blue and cream coaches offset the green cloaked hills. The track curves and loops, with people jumping on and off (including food and drink vendors and monkeys), enjoying the fresh cool breeze. There are three services from Neral to Matheran daily, going upto four in the high season and down to one or none during the monsoons.

Another option is the road route. But wait, this option comes with a rider (one that deserves a standing ovation). There are no motor vehicles allowed in Matheran, without exception. This is the magic mantra that keeps Matheran so beautiful, serene and unique. This also allows for shady tracks and leisurely walks all over and around Matheran - not to mention zero pollution and environmental conservation. All cars and buses stop at Dasturi, nerly 2.5 kilometers from town. Taxis ply regularly from Neral and the drive is less than half-an-hour. There is also the option of an 11-km trek through thick shady



forests, most rewarding on a moonlit night.

Matheran, literally meaning “jungle-topped hill”, was discovered by an Englishman Hugh Malet in 1850. An altitude of 800 meters with stunning steep drops to the plains below creates a number of incredible viewpoints and vistas. Hugh Malet was the Collector of Thane and the colonial influence is apparent in the names of places as well as the cottages and buildings. A sizeable Parsi community also lives here, running guest houses and hotels. Different sources say the best time to visit Neral is from October to May. The holiday season is the most crowded. The temperature varies from 16c in winters to 32c in summers and the annual rainfall is 524 cms. Travelling around in Matheran is by hand pulled rickshaw, pony or by foot on the red sandy roads. These paths turn into a muddy, slushy quagmire during the monsoons. The hand pulled rickshaws, coloured in bright red and yellow, add a splash of vibrancy to the greens and browns of nature. A number of hotels, guest houses and restaurants offer good boarding and lodging facilities to suit most budgets. The best way to enjoy Matheran is to walk around leisurely, enjoying the scenery and the bounty of nature’s largesse.

There are white washed cottages with sloping red roofs along the roads and from some points the hillsides look like a layered cake, cut and scooped, showing green and brown variations all the way down in an even pattern. The shopping area and bazaar is a fun place to buy a hat, cane and leather articles, sandals and ‘chikki’ - the famous sweet specialty made of jaggery and nuts. The Paymaster’s Park is the place for children of all ages with play areas and swings keeping them happy. A small lake called the Charlotte Lake is a quiet spot with the tree line coming right upto the clear

A breathtaking view from Charlotte Lake.





Different facets of enjoyment
at Matheran

blue water. A small dam here keeps the water in, as this lake is an important source of water for Matheran. Some places offer beautiful views of the sunset and are on every tourist's itinerary. The Echo Point is another unique place where your voice bounces off the hills that surround you on three sides. The grand view from Louisa point is awesome. Another delightful spot is the aptly named "One Tree Hill" where a solitary tree stands atop a rounded hill. So Matheran is bewitchingly beautiful, providing the perfect get-away to a tired

soul.
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The author is a freelance writer.



HOOPOE

THE LEGENDARY BIRD

Text & Photographs: BHAGAT SINGH

The Hoopoe, with its striking plumage and splendid crown, has figured in legends, myths and poetic literature since time immemorial. In *Ramayana*, poet Valmiki symbolises its call “poova-poova” as a parent’s lament for lost sons, “putra-putra”. According to Islamic belief, the mark on Hoopoe’s crest resembles the Arabic character “Bismillah”. Prophet Mohammed, therefore, forbade his people from killing the Hoopoe. Its moral behaviour is evidenced by the fact that when its mate dies, it does not take a new one, and unlike other birds, it provides care and shelter to its parents.

A Persian legend describes Hoopoe as a friend of King Solomon, who gave it a flamboyant crown of plumage. In the 12th century, the Sufi Master Farid-un-din Attar, composed a religious poem “The Conference of Birds,” in which the Hoopoe assumed the role of a spiritual leader of all the birds in their quest for the wisdom of life.

Hoopoe is of the size of a Myna. Its fawn-coloured plumage is marked by black and



white zebra stripes on the back, wings and tail. A conspicuous black-tipped, fan-shaped crest extends from its bill to the nape of the neck. Its bill is long, slender, gently curved and sharply pointed. The male and female look alike and are usually seen singly or in pairs.

Found practically throughout India,

Hoopoe is a resident as well as a locally migrant bird. It inhabits open country adjoining human habitations, lightly wooded forests, cultivated fields, gardens, lawns, scrub jungle and hills upto an altitude of about 2000m.

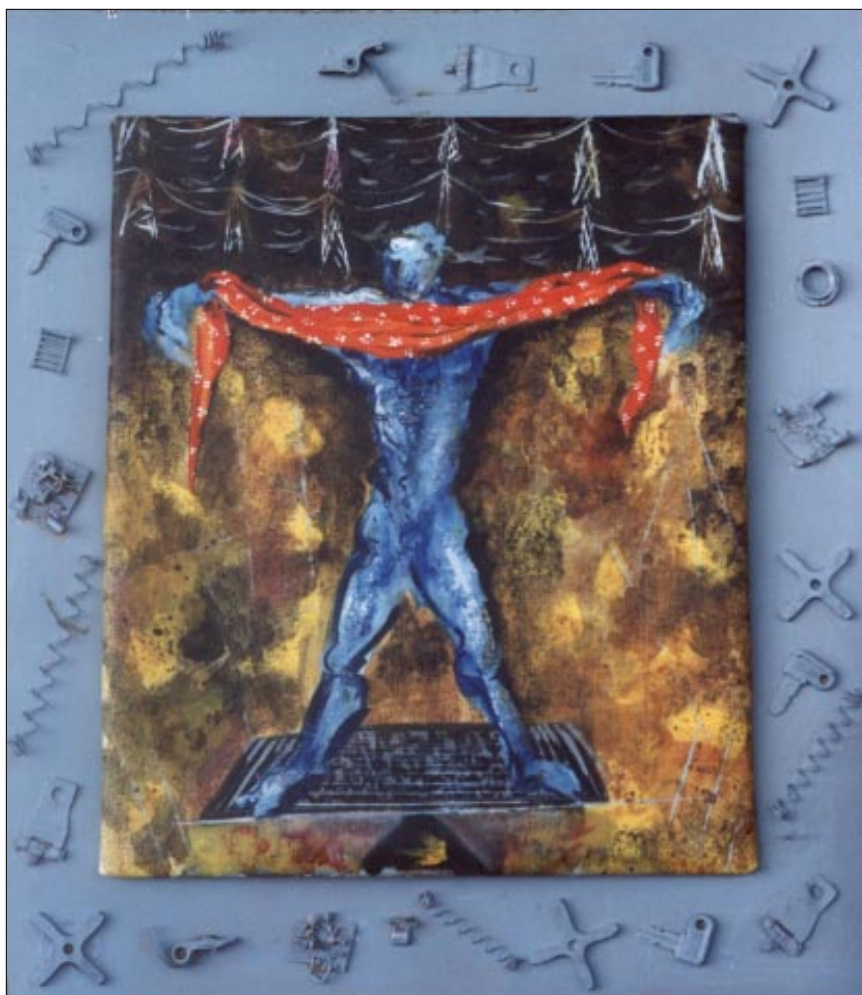
Hoopoe walks gently but also runs rapidly on the ground probing into the

soil for food (grubs, worms, pupae, insects and small organisms) with its long pointed bill. While digging, the crest is folded back into a point behind the neck. It is flickered open and erected fan-wise from time to time or when alarmed. It gives a soft but loud call "hoo-po" or hoo-po-po", that runs intermittently for about ten minutes and gives this bird its name "Hoopoe". Its flight is undulating, and though it normally flies short distances, it is capable of long migrations.

Its breeding and nesting generally takes place between February and May. It lays five to six eggs. The nest is built in a tree-hollow or in a hole in a wall, untidily lined with straw, rags and rubbish. The nest is known for its offensive odour and stench. Both parents perform their parental duties and share in feeding the young ones. It has been noticed that the female is generally reluctant to leave the nest, even when badly disturbed. When this author removed the front slab of the wall to lay open the nest to take pictures of the children, the brooding female pushed herself to the back wall as far as it could and squeezed her body with her face turned away from the author in utter disgust and fear. Even when fondled with the hands, it remained firmly squatted on the floor of the nest, and did not leave the place.

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The author is an eminent wildlife watcher, writer and lensman.



Beauty of the Male Body

ART OF NITASHA JAINEE

NIRUPAMA DUTT

India of the 1970s saw a tide of woman artists coming forward and claiming their place in the world of visual arts. These were women skilled and confident. Surely and steadily they made a place for themselves in the world of art which was as male-dominated as in the rest of the world. These younger sisters of Amrita Shergil, the lone woman artist in the subcontinent who achieved fame in pre-Independence India, worked hard to carve a niche for themselves in the plastic arts. The major thematic thrust of their paintings was the portrayal of woman, very often encompassing the self of the artist. In a way they upheld the Shergil tradition while exploiting their individualistic styles.

However, the 90s brought forth the second generation of women artists who



Two faces of "Blue Mountain" (above and facing page); acrylic on canvas.

represented the post-modern era which was witnessing rapid social, political and technological changes. The woman artist's way of viewing the world too underwent a change. A fine example of this is the art of young and talented painter, Nitasha Jainee. Sanguine in her own self, she dared to paint the male form and give it a dimension that no artist of the other sex could have done.

Seeing her early works, noted art critic Keshav Malik remarked, "Thank god for a woman painter who is not banking on her own gender but on the so-called opposite sex." However, in doing so, Nitasha was not making a political

statement. She was just being herself. "I had always admired the male form and found it aesthetically satisfying," says she, thus emerging on the art scene with intensely sketched-out, bare-bodied male figures. Eyebrows were raised, some called it a retaliation against the male gaze and others nicknamed her "Peeping Jane." But in the midst of all this an artist was blossoming and the gaze soon moved from the outer world to the inner and she tried to strike a balance between the two. In the process her work began probing the male psyche, the stereotypes and the power game. "My work was taking a direction that was deeper than the mere physical, even though the beauty of the physical form was the overriding factor motivating me

to paint. But as I did this there was an effort to unfold and understand the 'enigma' that is man."

But could the man remain alone on the canvas? Not for long because the painter was growing and wished to tackle more complex issues. Along with the man came the urban scene, the automobiles and the buildings. And somewhere along the line the woman too slipped in and now the painter turned to the man-woman relationship.

Sometimes the woman is present there in the female form and at other times in symbols like fabric or an umbrella.

"While probing men and their worlds, it is not possible to ignore what becomes of women in their relationships with men. So my journey continues and I continue to explore man and the world around him so as to understand the joys and sorrows of this primary relationship from which all relationships flow."

The creative exploration of this new woman (the much-used phrase that sits best on Nitasha) has been noticed and applauded both at home and abroad.

No wonder she has been going places in the past couple of years with an exhibition in Berlin and an artist's workshop in Italy. "Showing abroad and interacting with artists from different countries has enriched me", says the artist.

A welcome addition to her works has been her installation art. It was the pristine male form in Germany juxtaposed against the symbols of power at his feet, the sorrowing woman form done with scarves taken from women artists and acquaintances in Italy and the inner-outer hexagonal installation of the male body and soul shown earlier in Delhi. And so the artist moves on from one phase to another with the promise that her best is yet to come...

The author is an art critic.



Above: "Black & White" Installation at "Project Giotto", Italy.
Facing page: "Inner-Outer" – Installation at Indian Cultural Centre, Berlin.



"WAKA" – joint installation by Indian and New Zealand artists.

"Cross Currents"

A DREAM REALISED

Some wait for things to happen. Others make them happen. And Nitasha certainly belongs to the second genera. Enchanted by a group show of four women artists from New Zealand, Nitasha invited the visiting artists to her studio and an idea was born of a cross cultural exchange of women artists of the two countries. So Helen Kedgly, Diane Prince, Suzy Pennington and Kura Te Waru Rewiri from New Zealand and Usha Biswas, Meena Baya, Jaya Vivek and Nitasha got together and realised the dream of sharing vision. A travelling show representing the works of eight women artists called "Cross Currents" was put up in New Delhi, Udaipur, Bhopal and Mumbai in 2001. The grand finale was organised in the Pataka Porua Museum of Arts and Cultures in New Zealand in December last.

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