

Indian
Horizons

Volume 61 No. 2 April - June 2014

Indian Council for Cultural Relations

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The objectives of the Council are to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India's external cultural relations; to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries; to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people; to establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture; and to take such measures as may be required to further these objectives.

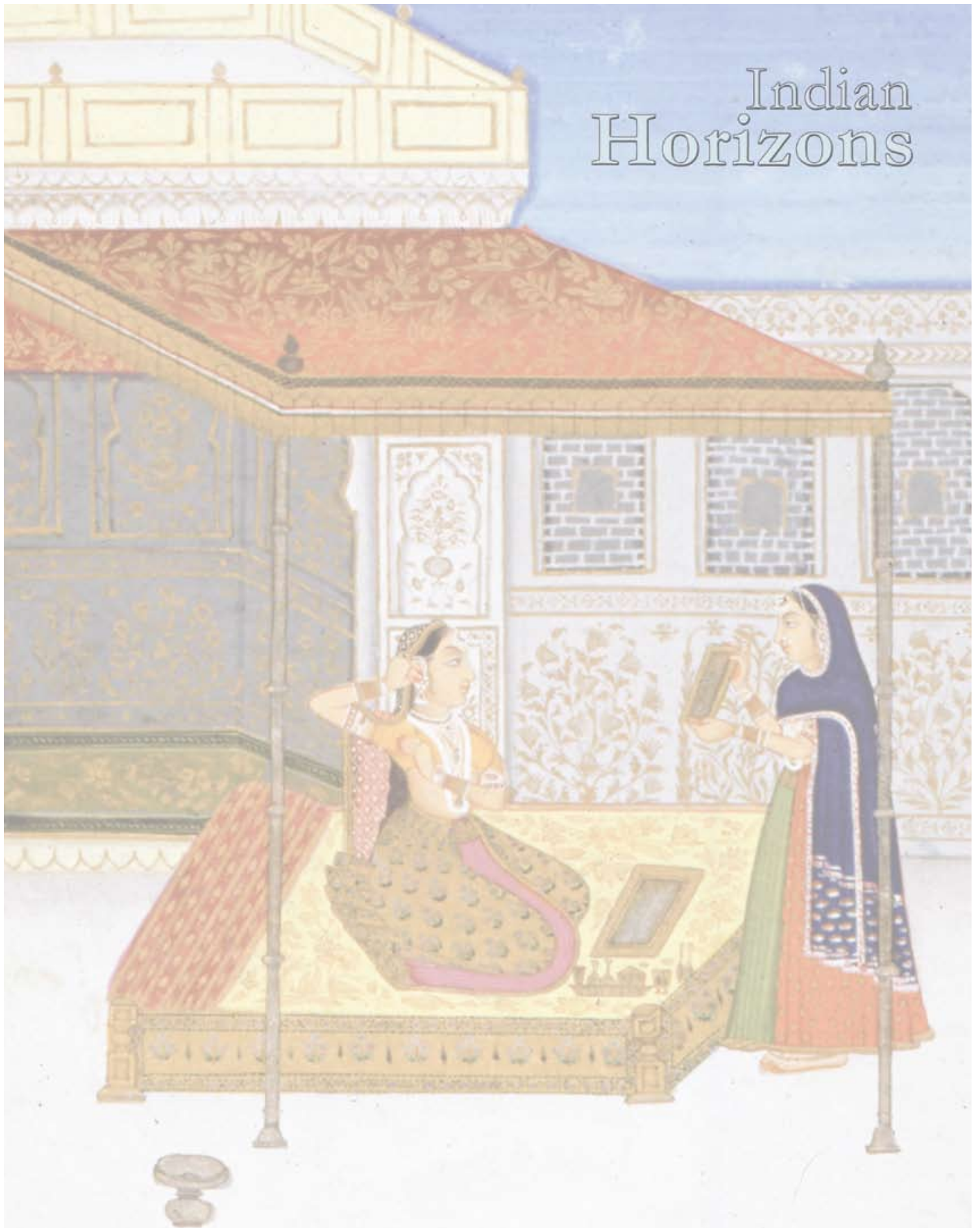
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Foreword

Satish C. Mehta
Director General, Indian Council for Cultural Relations

The dimensions of time conventionally are demarcated along the dates of the calendar. But in terms of human life, it is not the mechanical timepiece or the almanac but the cycle of seasons that becomes the perfect chronometer. Our current issue of *Indian Horizons* is an attempt to look at this cycle of six Indian seasons, each of a two-month duration. As artists and creators have been inspired in their own ways by seasonal changes, their experiences have become a rich granary of aesthetic resource for depicting seasons as an outlet to describe human emotions. The volume is an attempt to bring to the fore how this iconic association has impregnated the various performing arts, ranging from music and dance to painting and theatre, and on to literature.

The festival of Dussehra, which marks the arrival of autumn, finds a 'common theme' in the nationwide celebration of Ramleela. Of the plethora of places and fashions in which the legend of Rama has been portrayed, the most revered in our times is the one that the poet Tulsidas had initiated in his home city of Varanasi. Varsha Rani makes a special journey to Ramnagar, Varanasi, to pen her impression of the preparations for the event with her writing and her camera becoming worthy extensions of an Indian festival that has roots in every homestead.

Singing paeans to the rains is not unique to birds and flowers only. It has gripped the sensibility of music composers and led them to create ragas and compositions exclusive to the season. The article by Prof. Uma Garg, details this tracery, starting with the

Vedas, gathering in its fold the entire classical music tradition, highlighting the contributions of great composers like Tansen who has bequeathed the Raga Mian-ki-Malhar as a signature tune of the season.

A counterpart aspect to the music is the seasonal offering of classical dance, which Guru Shovana Narayan has woven together into a holistic look of the seasons through the dimensions of classical Kathak dancing. Her picture portrayals of each movement using supportive pictorial elements of the rich countryside, builds up a comprehensive seasonal collective evoked through the feet and hand movements of the dancer.

Not to be dismissed lightly, the 'Baramaha' or complete rotation of the seasons has been embodied into a novel assimilative stance. Artist Ram Chandra Pokale was motivated to use the forms of contemporary Indian art to express the poetry of our tribal folk from various regions. These imbue a visual sense of delight and give import to the forthright emotion that the seasons stir in our souls.

The painters of royal courts were also in the forefront of seasonal representation and they created several Ragamala paintings in the style of their individual art schools. Prof. Pushpa Dullar and Gayatri Tandon have examined the techniques, the elements of form, the brush applications of each artist, to uncover the emotions that each seasonal offering contained. The Ragas here are depicted as ascetics, or as Krishna among the gopis, seated in palaces and gardens, in groves and deserts, creating an aura of completeness against

the backdrop of the seasons. Their methodology of uncovering the intrinsic characteristic of each raga is thus identifiable through a study of the school of the painter, his choice of natural elements, like rain clouds and peacocks, and his ability to infuse these different forms into a comprehensive description of a season.

Imagining the present day world with such referencing to the seasons is proved plausible through literature. Today, readers' imaginations still throb to the heartbeat of the seasons. Prof. Shormishtha Panja focuses on a chronological study of three Bengali poets, starting with Tagore and moving on to Jivananada Das and the modern poet Joy Goswami. Each of their works is a mirror held up to the age in which they lived and worked, but instead of confining their output to just society in their times, they have wafted the scent of the seasons in the power of their pens. Only, the

language that was used to illustrate this seasonal pen picture has differed, being rooted to the literary style of their age and time.

In the book review section, Dr Rita Swami Choudhury has introduced a rare gem of writing analysing the music of the Karnatik region. With limited reading matter available on this vast and rich aspect of our music, this book is a timely intervention welcomed by scholars and interested listeners alike.

The Azad Bhavan Gallery saw a lively array of works across interesting subject choices. The walk down memory lane naturally focuses on international art and music exhibitions that have become etched in archival memory on account of their significance and their evergreen appeal. Altogether we have attempted to bring to you a bouquet of the seasons in the many colours of nature and the changing seasons.



Satish C. Mehta

Editorial

The actual rainy season this time across the country was a dampener as had been predicted by the weather pundits, but there is no letting up in the charming hold that the Indian seasonal calendar has, on the Indian psyche. That is why, our current issue is on the effect of the seasons on our cultural makeover. Journeying across this path of seasonal changes one has tried to halt at important landmarks in the spheres of the classical, the contemporary, and even the tribal, making for a compendium on the seasons spiced with the flavour of a variety of expressive forms.

As the next big seasonal outburst is linked with Dussehra, it was won't to take a journey with the many devotees of the delights of the season in Varanasi, where across the river in Ramnagar, the month long Dassehra festival has already begun. Preparations are afoot for the carnival like literary bonanza based on the Ramayana, as written by Tulsidas.

The dance theme narrates the Kathak dancer's rich posse of literature with which to improvise, ranging from simple descriptive passages to intriguing puzzles and short quizzes about various seasons. These are then danced and sung in the classical oeuvre, making the taste of the seasons turn classic and memorable.

The painterly scene of the seasons has delved into the subject of the Ragamala paintings, where the six main ragas, their accompanying raginis and the raga putras

are offset with examples from the major painting schools of the last three centuries. When tackling a seasonal coverage in literature, one had to narrow down one's sights to just one regional language and just over a century of writing. Nevertheless we have come away acquainted with the poetry of Tagore, Jivanananda Das and Joy Goswami of recent times, to fathom out for ourselves that the language of the seasons has been finding a differing mouthpiece in each passing age.

Realising that even the contemporary artist is as much moved by the Krishna lore in his choice of forms and expressions, we settled our sights on Ram Chandra Pokale who has used his 'Bansidhar' format to illustrate the folk numbers of our tribal offerings. His art work is the backdrop to express their poetic outpourings on the seasons. While it is Krishna in all his demonstrative best, the moods evoked by the forms and the folk earthiness of the literary content, give each frame a character of its own.

The regular features of Azad Bhavan Gallery and our freshly introduced segment of archival memories is part of our well loved dependables. The book review provides a scholarly look at Carnatic music this time, written with precision, clipped choice of words and delightful editing.

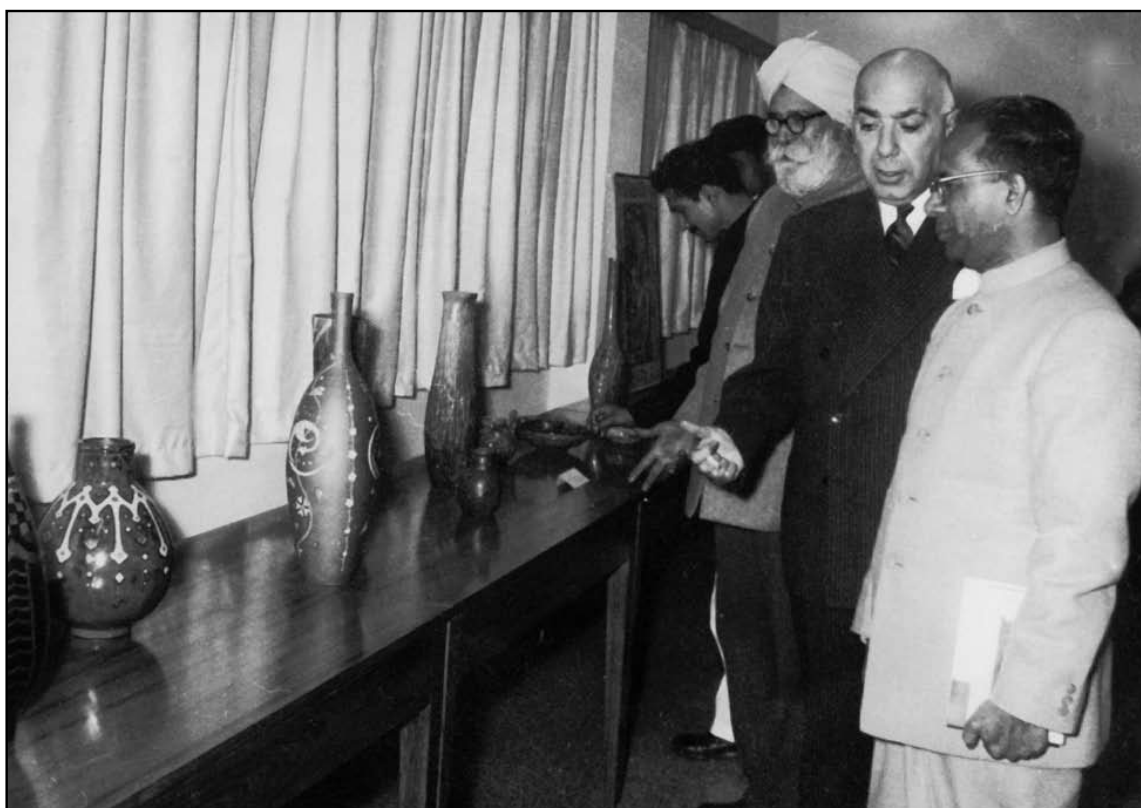
All of these subjects have been penned and designed for your exclusive reading pleasure. Happy reading.

Editor



Subhra Mazumdar

From our Archives



Exhibition of contemporary Iranian Paintings, Sculptures and Ceramics. (January, 1961)



Exhibition of Dutch Landscapes and Rembrandt drawn portraits, November 20-26, 1961



Exhibition of Dutch Landscapes and Rembrandt drawn portraits, November 20-26, 1961



Exhibition of contemporary Iranian Paintings, Sculptures and Ceramics. (January, 1961)



Performance during dinner in honour of Earl and Lady Harewood of U.K., April 12, 1961



Performance during dinner in honour of Earl and Lady Harewood of U.K., April 12, 1961



Exhibition of Art in Modern Japan December – January, 1961



Scene from Ramlila, Bharatiya Kala Kendra Troupe visiting Hong Kong, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, in October 1979



Scene from Ramlila, Bharatiya Kala Kendra Troupe visiting Hong Kong, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, in October 1979

The Unforgettable Magic of Ramnagar Ramlila

Varsha Rani

In India the advent of Sharad Ritu or autumn spells the end of Varsha Ritu or the monsoons. The cool breezy rainy season is replaced by the nip of the autumn air. This change of season is marked with great festivities throughout the various cities and villages, where the month of Ashvin on the Hindu calendar ushers in the Sharadiya Navratras or the worship of Goddess Durga, the primordial energy whom Lord Rama had invoked

to gain Shakti or strength before slaying the demon king Ravana of Lanka marking the victory of good over evil. The entire country, especially North India, celebrates this victory of the Maryada Puroshottama or the Ideal Man of the Hindu cultural tradition. Considered the seventh incarnation of Vishnu - the Preserver of the Universe, Rama's divine exploits are celebrated by reading the Ramcharitamanas or



The Initiation ceremony - The Pakki Puja in July



Demon effigies in the making

by staging it as Ramlila – Rama’s play for ten days. The Epic poem Ramayana which explicates his life in great detail was originally written in Sanskrit by Sage Valmiki over 2,000 years ago. Tulsidas believed to be his reincarnation rendered it as Ramcharitamanas — one of the greatest works of Hindi literature in popular dialect Avadhi in the 16th century. Finishing the composition of the Manas at Varanasi, Tulsidas created a religious fervour by beginning the tradition of staging it as Ramlila in the locality of Assi. The Ramlila gradually evolved assuming different forms and proportions in different parts and communities of the country. Listening and reading the holy verses with reverence or watching their enactment both accrue equal piety, erasing negative Karmas or action and resolving human miseries, believe the devotees.

Ramnagar situated across the river Ganga north of the holy city of Varanasi at a distance of about 14 kms, the capital of the former princely state of

Banaras hosts the most unique and spectacular show. This nondescript little Indian town acquires great significance once a year as it converts itself entirely into a vast open stage bringing to life the mythical story of Lord Rama. Enacted for a full month in its conventional form, for lakhs of Hindu devotees it is not merely observing a drama but an insight into the life of one of their most revered gods. A reminder of his righteousness, the true universal values which he embodied in his human form and the sacrifices he made for the welfare of his people. Rama is an ideal to be emulated forever. Several stories account for the origins of the Ramnagar Ramlila which is obscure. It is said to have been started by Maharaja Udit Narain Singh (1795-1835) who was an ardent devotee of Rama and ventured to neighbouring Chhota Mirzapur annually to watch the simple Lila held by the traders there. Legends have it that having once missed the performance a dejected Maharaja started the



The boys playing Svarups this year

Lila in Ramnagar on his wife's advice. She not only met the expenses of the performance but started the current practice of worshipping the actors or Svarups with Arati or the fire offering on the last day of the Lila. Thus the scale, significance and grandeur of the Lila gradually increased manifold and this is evident from its detailed depiction by British scholar James Prinsep in his *Banaras Illustrated* in a series of drawings. Published in 1833, his description bears many similarities with the performance held today. According to another legend the Maharaja a regular visitor to Assi Ramlila having missed the performance due to heavy floods in the river Ganga, patronised the Chhota Mirzapur performance, eventually transferring it to Ramnagar and styling it according to the Assi Ramlila. Another story tells us that the Lila was begun in Ramnagar when the Maharaja's ailing son was cured after wearing the garland given by the Svarup or actor enacting Rama at the Assi Ramlila. And yet another tale narrates how the Maharaja who had no children, while visiting the famous Sankatmochan temple of the monkey God Hanuman in Varanasi, once met a great Ramayani or the traditional singers of Ramayana called Ramprasad, who asked him to

attain the blessings of saints by serving them. He advised him to hold the Ramlila in his capital where they would automatically congregate. An elated Maharaja started the tradition of holding the month-long show following which Maharaja Ishvari Prasad Narayan Singh (1835-1889) was born.

Whatever be the antecedents the Ramnagar Ramlila gradually attained impressive proportions as it was spread over natural locations dotting the Ramnagar landscape, covering the entire town and its outskirts — an area of approximately five square kilometres. Legends again tell us that the reason for doing this was that Rama's life against the backdrop of Ramnagar was revealed to the Maharaja's Guru Saint Devtirtha Kasthajivhaswami in a dream. He later went around Ramnagar identifying the sites which coincidentally matched Tulsidas's description and were found appropriate for staging the Lila. Existing temples, gardens, fields, lakes and tanks were all used as Lila locations and some more permanent pavilions and platforms were constructed at important places. These were all given names mentioned in the Epic to make the event as realistic and authentic as possible.

Thus Ayodhya Rama's capital is located near the main entrance of the fort. Two kilometres away is Janakpur Sita's royal home where Rama wins the Bow sacrifice and Sita's hand in marriage. Across the road is Girija temple amidst a small garden where Rama and Sita fall in love at first sight. Small lakes and ponds in the vicinity form the river Ganga and Jamuna which Rama, Sita and Lakshmana cross over in a boat to reach Rambagh – two and a half kilometres from Ayodhya representing Chitrakuta — Rama's first sylvan dwelling. In exile for the next twenty days he moves to the wilderness on the outskirts of Ramnagar symbolising the Dandaka forest. He finally settles down in Panchavati two kilometres from Ayodhya — a large grassy tree lined field from where Sita is abducted. A kilometre away by the side of a large water reservoir stands the Rameshvara Shiva temple forming the boundary of India. Beyond this the large field is Ravana's domain Lanka. Situated three kilometres from Ayodhya, the final battle scenes between Ram

and Ravana are enacted here. Rama positioned on the Suvela mountain on the north faces Ravana's empire on the South. On a small hill is located Lanka marked by four gates and on a mound further on, is his palace. Ashokvatika or the grove of Ashoka trees where Sita is imprisoned is on the West of the field flanking Ravana's court. All locations are only suggestive of realism, for whatever the eye does not see the minds of the devotees conjure metaphorically. For them their journey is not a simple sojourn but a pilgrim's participation in the sacred life of their God. Ecstatic at Rama's coronation or distressed to follow him into his exile – the Lila ensures their spiritual progress in the saviour's footsteps.

The Ramayana Paricharya Parishist Prakash or the Kashiraj Sanskaran (Edition) of the Ramcharitamanas compiled during the reign of Maharaja Ishvari Prasad Narayan Singh with elaborate explanations from Saint Kasthajibhaswami, commentary by Pandit



Burning demons on Dasshera day

Hariharprasad and the Epilogue written by the Maharaja himself is the fundamental text on which the Ramnagar Ramlila is based. During a performance the Maharaja has a copy of this text before him which he carefully follows so that no episodes or dialogues are omitted. A brief daily schedule of the Ramlila was also written by Kanhaiya as Ramnagar Kashi ke Shriramlila ki Pratidin ki Pustika. The sequence of events mainly unfolds with the birth of Ravana the demon king of Lanka and his brothers followed by the birth of Rama and his brothers the princes of Ayodhya, Rama's wedding with King Janak's daughter Sita, their exile by stepmother Kaikeyi, Sita's abduction by Ravana, Rama's battle and victory over Ravana, rescue of Sita, reunion with brother Bharata and Rama's coronation at Ayodhya. The Lila ends with Rama preaching universal human values to people.

The Lila in its present organised and aesthetic form was restructured by the Maharaja with help from saint Kasthajibhaswami, and many poets, scholars and friends' viz. the noted Hindi litterateur Bharatendu Harishchandra and the prince of Rewa Raghuraj Singh. In the earlier performances the actors did not deliver any dialogues, only the Manas was recited between the scenes. Bharatendu especially worked on its dramatisation recasting the holy verses of the Manas into extensive dialogues or Samavadas in Khari Boli or Hindi prose lacing it with bits of Avadhi, Brajbhasha, Maithili and Bhojpuri. He expanded the brief expressions of the Manas to elaborate scenes besides improvising a number of set designs like gardens and forest groves etc. The document Ram Lilapatrak published by Bharatendu probably in 1935, housed in the Kashiraj Library bears testimony to Bharatendu's intense involvement with the Lila. Relevant references from other literary works on Rama were also incorporated to accentuate the effect of the dialogues and the scenes consequently. The impact of Keshavdas's Ramchandrika is clearly seen on the dialogues of the Dhanush Yajna or Bow Sacrifice. The songs sung from Siyampachisi elaborates the episode of Sita going to the Pushpvatika or flower garden for worshipping Goddess Girija, whereas

Tulsidas merely says that melodious songs were being sung on this occasion. The composition of Anirudhha Vyasa beautifully elaborates the pleasures that Rama will bring to his wife Sita after marriage. Folksongs like Banra and Sehra and even Ghazals were sung on the occasion of Rama's marriage. Yet the constant effort throughout the performance is to follow the Manas and so the Ramayanis continue to sing its verses between the scenes. However the main episodes e.g. Lakshman Parshuram Samvad, Angad Ravan Samvad, Sitaharan, Ashokavatika, Lakshmanshakti and Kumbhakaran Vadh were left untouched. The dialogues thus derived were written down meticulously in Pothis or Books so that nothing was lost. This extended narration facilitated the natural growth of the characters imparting great clarity to the sequence of events. Great emphasis was therefore laid on the proper delivery of the dialogues and realistic acting so that they accurately convey the emotions and moods of the characters- Ravana's vanity, Rama's modesty, Sita's helplessness, Laksman's dedication, Hanuman's devotion and thus the spirit of the Lila. The desired effect becomes visible when spectators empathising with the actors break down and weep profusely at Sita's lament of not being rescued and Rama's wailing at Lakshman's death. The solemn mood, changes suddenly when wiping away their tears people cheer joyously as Lakshman revives sniffing the life giving herb Sanjivani brought by Hanumana. Ram embraces him amidst thunderous applause and great rejoicing and revelry. The actors even enter the huge effigies of demons Meghnad and Kumbhakaran and after delivering their dialogues enact the battle scenes. Thus the Ramlila of Ramnagar gained its present magnificent form – a tradition which was carried forward by the successive Maharajas- Prabhu Narayan Singh, Aditya Narayan Singh, Vibhuti Prasad Narayan Singh and now Anant Narayan Singh.

The important rituals commence with the auspicious worship of Lord Ganesha on Shravan Shukla Chaturthi 4th day of the waxing moon in the month of July at Pakki a brick and mortar structure located near the

town square or Ramnagar Chowk. An administrative official of the Maharaja resolves or takes the Sankalp to hold the Ramlila as a mark of devotion to Rama and for the welfare of the royalty and the commoners alike. The main characters selected as Svarups or divine embodiments i.e Ram, Lakshman, Sita, Bharat and Shatrughan, their crowns, the great sages Vashistha and Vishvamitra, sacred masks, the Manas, the Book of Dialogues and the implements of the tailor, carpenter, and the painter etc are all worshipped . The Manas is first read on this day following which the Svarups and all other actors also begin to memorize their dialogues under the guidance of the Vyasas-directors cum stage managers. From early August the workmen begin making elaborate sets, costumes, chariots, effigies and weapons etc.

The same ritual is repeated on Bhadrapad Shukla Chaturthi, the 4th day of the waxing moon in the month of September and till Trayodashi or the thirteenth day

the Manas is recited by the Ramayanis every day. The Lila following the lunar calendar commences on the next day or Bhadrapada Shukla Chaturdashi the 14th day of the waxing moon. It ends on Ashvin Shukla Chaturdashi or 14th day of the waxing moon in the month of October. For 31 days the gods reside in Ramnagar and shower their choicest blessings believe the devotees, whose numbers approximately range between twenty thousand to over a lakh on special occasions.

The most outstanding feature of the Ramnagar Ramlila is its astounding scale. Basic preparations begin practically from February each year because its management is an arduous and complex task. It includes co-ordination of manpower, special effects, effigies and props and their movement to far-flung locations etc. The experienced stage managers, mostly the Maharaja's employees, function very efficiently remembering and executing even the minute details



The sacred masks of Ganesha and Hanumana



The Janakpur Temple where Rama and Sita get married

with great precision. In a show of religious camaraderie Muslim families for generations have been engaged in the craft of making, flares, firecrackers, gunpowder for canons and enormous effigies. The frame of these giant structures are made from bamboo and covered with cloth when divine mounts like rat, swan, and bull etc are made because the gods like, Ganesh, Saraswati and Shiva actually sit on them. The giant demon effigies of Meghnada, Surasa, Tadaka and Ravana are very striking. But Kumbhakaran, over fifty feet high, is the most spectacular of them all. Dressed in a colourful and shiny paper skirt, huge ear hoops and crowns he is installed with the help of ropes. People sitting inside it and over it dismember its limbs as he is killed by Rama in battle. This effigy is later converted into Ravana which is stuffed with crackers and set ablaze. Muslim boys are involved in the swordfight and fire-eating gimmick symbolising Ravana's Maya or magical illusions on the battlefield



The ancient Pothi- Book of Dialogues

of Lanka and Muslim craftsmen ignite the flares over deities for the fire-offering or Arati every night.

The Ramnagar Ramlila is not merely holy theatre with inanimate ritualistic presentations. Great efforts are therefore made to combine tableaux, processions and live performances with immense emphasis on dramatic excellence, realistic acting and originality of form. Illuminated sparsely with gaslights, flaming torches and flares, accompanied by only traditional musical instruments, the use of simple props like a few thrones, some chairs and chariots, and the absence of microphones and loudspeakers lend an otherworldly charm to the Lila. In its unique settings, the actors enacting this pristine play, like divine apparitions mesmerize the viewers.

The Lila begins with the homage to the gods and Milky Ocean or Kshirsagar Jhanki installed in the Pokhra tank near Rambagh where Vishnu implored by the gods agrees to reincarnate himself as Rama to destroy Ravana the tormentor of the Universe and restore peace. Some other striking tableaux and processions include Rama, Sita and Lakshmana crossing the river Ganga in a flower bedecked boat,

Rama's, birth, marriage and coronation and the splendid Dasshera procession displaying beautiful decorations, fireworks and musical extravaganza. Every evening at 5.00 p.m. as the bugle blows and the lilting music of the shehnai wafts in the air, the Maharaja appears majestically on his richly caparisoned elephant along with the Ramayanis for the performance. Since the Lila starts when he arrives and stops when he leaves, the Maharaja assumes the most important role of a lead actor without whom the show cannot go on. Regarded as a descendent of Lord Shiva the patron deity of Kashi, the Maharaja becomes a divine representative and is greeted by the milling crowds with the chant of "Har Har Mahadev." His presence adds immense religious and spiritual aura to the Lila. His dignified persona ensures great discipline among the audience. In his absence a member of the royal family needs to be present at the performances. Only the Maharaja and his family members, their special guests and some officials can watch the Lila from elephant backs. Patrons for over 200 hundred years the royal family of Banaras has generously contributed towards the expenses of the Lila, which is also funded by grants received from the Government of India.



The Inner Courtyard of Ramanagar Fort where the Maharaja performs the Aarti of the Svarups on the last day of the Lila

As a King the Maharaja is equivalent to Rama, so when he traverses his kingdom lakhs of people follow him in a procession to wherever the divine Lila unfolds. As soon as one episode ends, the crowds move towards another location, be it the town square or the dust and mud of the uninhabited distant suburbs. Every day before the Lila begins many sages and saints worship and pray to the Svarups making different offerings. The performance begins amidst the music of drums and cymbals, when twelve Ramayanis sitting next to the Maharaja's elephant begin to sing verses from the Manas. The head Ramayani's position is hereditary passed from father to son or from an older to a younger brother. The singers, mostly educated and respectable Brahmins, following different professions, range from newcomers to those with an experience of over thirty years. The vibrant and powerful style of only singing the original version of Tulsidas's Manas unique to Ramnagar is called Narada Vani as the sage

apparently first sang the poem to Lord Rama himself. The Saints, Maharaja and many common folk hear the singing but read the Manas themselves as both hearing and reading are considered as acts of real devotion.

The Vyasas are in — charge of the entire Lila — which practically includes everything - props, sceneries, the performance of actors, dialogue books, costumes, make-up etc. The Avadhi verses sung by the Ramayanis modified as Hindi dialogues in prose are delivered by the actors enacting relevant scenes. During the performance the Vyasas occupy the stage carrying the dialogue books and prompting the actors. He regulates all their actions with great precision telling them what to do and how to do it. Even though he asks Rama to lament and Sita to weep in front of the audience, the crowds ignoring his mundane act grasp the pathos and thereby the spirit of the event.



Icons inside the Janakpur Temple

Some actors who do not remember their lines mouth their dialogues along with the Vyasas. When one verse is enacted they lift the heavy dialogue books over their heads and give the Sanket or signal to the Ramayanis sitting far away to sing the next verse. As actors the omissions of the little Svarups are ignored and as divinity the common belief is that they can do no wrong and are perfectly capable of carrying forward the spiritual tradition of performing the Lila.

Playing multiple roles himself the Vyasa firstly is an extremely competent director who trains and prompts his actors and can stop or start the Lila anytime. As traditional priests, a keeper and worshipper of icons himself, he acts as a conduit between the devotees and their gods. As a stage manager when he points his staff and admonishes the crowds in his sombre voice — Chup Raho ! Savdhan, the multitudes of viewers fall completely silent to hear the dialogues, because the Ramayanis and the actors sit far apart and people have to choose between hearing and seeing the Lila.

The Vyasa faces an immense task of training the actors. The Lila is directed by two Vyasas; the Pratham or the first Vyasa is in charge of the Svarups. The Dwitiya or second Vyasa looks after the general characters like Shiva, Dashratha, Jambavan etc. played mostly by adult Brahmin males for over five generations. Besides the boatman who is real, the young boys playing the queens' roles and the children playing monkeys and demons belonging to different castes are chosen every year. Ravana is played by the same family since the time of Maharaja Ishvari Prasad Narayan Singh. Serving as priests in some temple in Ramnagar the Vyasas themselves hail from Brahmin families and as boys have normally played different Svarups and as adults enacted the roles of Janak, Jatayu, Hanuman, Vishvamitra and Vashistha etc. for several generations. Raghunath Dutta Vyasa currently training the Svarups is a priest at the Prabhunaryaneshvara temple at Balua Ghat Dharmashala and Lakshminarayan Vyasa tutoring the other characters is a priest at the Janakpur Temple. He is the son of the renowned Anirudha Vyasa whose career as a Vyasa lasted till about 74

years of age and who was gifted a silver staff for his exemplary services by the Maharaja. His ancestors were involved in the Lila from the time of Maharaja Ishvari Prasad Narayan Singh and his old and young successors today; pursuing different professions still carry that tradition further.

Short listed by a committee the Svarups are chosen finally by the Maharaja on the basis of their appearance especially height, beauty, voice quality and their ability to recite the Manas well. These are young boys all below the age of fourteen belonging to Brahmin families, who alternately play different Svarups for years. Only the lucky and the most deserving receive Rama's role. At puberty the career of the Svarup ends.

After the initiation ceremony away from regular life, their families and schools, the Svarups live with the Vyasa in the Balua Ghat Dharmashala till the end of the Lila at the Maharaja's expense. The Vyasas and some other actors also get provisions for a certain period during the Lila. The Vyasa tutors the Svarups to become sombre and graceful since they have become divine embodiments. Henceforth they are only addressed as Ramji, Lakshmanji, Sitaji etc even by their mothers who visit them regularly and sometimes stay and cook for them.

Rama is respected the most and he sits and eats before others. Woken up before daybreak and following a bath the Svarups begin reading the Manas while relaxing and cooking their meals intermittently. They go to bed at nine at night. For two months they learn and memorise their lines and speeches and are also taught the singsong style of dialogue delivery, graceful hand gestures and only some important body movements, which are largely improvised on the spot. A more rigorous schedule follows during the Lila with dialogue revisions, movement instructions and some advance rehearsals for important episodes in the morning. From ten to twelve is the siesta followed by elaborate dressing up for the performance which normally takes between two to four hours and by



Rambagh - Rama's first forest dwelling of Chitrakuta

four thirty the Svarups arrive at the designated site. They look resplendent in their marvellous costumes and ornate makeup stunning the audience. The make-up of the Svarups considered to be a holy act is what transform them into deities. Their bodies smeared with sandalwood paste yield to the touch of the make-up artists called Singaria like a canvas on which he deftly draws intricate geometric and floral patterns. Rama's sandalwood paste tinged with saffron gives him a golden sheen. The actor's foreheads are marked with bold tilaks and their faces are richly adorned with gold, silver and colourful sequins and stones in half moon designs probably believed to be beads of sweat resulting from a difficult life in the forest. They don long hair which is let loose, wearing exquisitely embroidered golden crowns fringed with pearls, gold and multicoloured bead jewellery like earrings, necklaces, waistbands, bracelets, armbands, nose rings, bangles, and fresh floral garlands and ear dangles. They wield traditional religious symbols like the lotus, bows and arrows specific to the icons.

The gods and the male Svarups depicting royalty normally wear flowing yellow, gold or orange silk

dhotis and long golden gowns, but in exile they look like recluses in their short jackets and tight dhotis. The war costumes which are knee length shorts devoid of all frills and fancies depict their battle readiness. Sita is clad in a beautiful red and gold Banarasi silk sari throughout with feet painted red. The other male characters like Ravana, Hanumana and the monkeys mostly sport jackets and pyjamas. Ravana's outfit is silver and red and he dons a shiny embroidered black cloth mask with his nine heads topped by a donkey head. Hanuman also wears a red costume and a brightly painted metal mask. The animal characters wear masks of wood or bronze and while acting mount it on their heads or let it hang loose on their backs to convey their identity. The monkey army displays colourful attire and antique metal masks wielding maces in their hands. The demons appear mostly in black or blue jackets and skirts wearing ferocious cloth and tinsel masks or faces simply painted black. Only Ravana's wife Mandodari appears as a human being. Ravana's sister Shurpanakha whose nose is chopped off every year has the privilege of wearing new papier mache masks every year. The other actors like, queens, courtiers, sages, and commoners wear simple clothes

befitting their characters. Wigs and beards which aid the actors transformation into specific characters are made of hemp and only the female characters apart from the Svarups use some make- up. The Ramayanis and the Vyasas are dressed in white dhotis, kurtas and turbans whereas the Vyasas additionally wear a white jacket.

The Lila is staged for 45 minutes and stopped at sunset for an hour when the Maharaja departs to perform his Sandhya Puja or evening worship. It is time for the audience to relax and feast on the famous spicy Banarasi Chaat, creamy Lassi and crunchy Paan. Fun, revelry and business entice them to the Mela or fair being held all around. Devouts throng for the Darshan of the Svarupas or join the Kirtan Mandalis singing devotional songs. The congregation of countless mendicants or Sadhus in Ramnagar enhances the religious fervour of the Lila. Singing and chanting the name of the Gods they rent the air with "Jai Jai Siyaram", "Sita Ram Sita Ram" and "Ramchandra ki Jai." Food and shelter throughout the Lila is provided to all such holy men who ask for it. The Lila commences again around 7 p.m. when the

Maharaja returns and continues till 10 p.m. The end of each episode is marked by an Arati of the Svarups and other important characters of the day. Not allowed to walk after wearing the sacred crowns the Svarups are carried on the devotees' shoulders to an extremely high platform. Calm and composed they resemble beautiful temple icons and their divine appeal charms the audience. Amidst the loud music of conch shells, drums, bells, cymbals and singing of the Ramayanis and the devotees they are also worshipped like icons with floral, incense, sweet and fire offerings. Brilliant flares light up the dais enabling even the far off cheering devotees to have their cherished Sakshat Darshan or direct glimpse of the divinities — a fitting climax to a grand day's powerful performance. Rushing fervently to touch their feet, chancing upon a flower or a garland or some sequins, or bowing before the Arati, they depart as the Maharaja leaves the venue. The Svarups return after an arduous day, for once dressed they are not even allowed to relieve themselves till the Lila is over at midnight. Changing their outfits and washing away their make up they have dinner and following a relaxing oil massage by some ardent devotee they retire for the night.

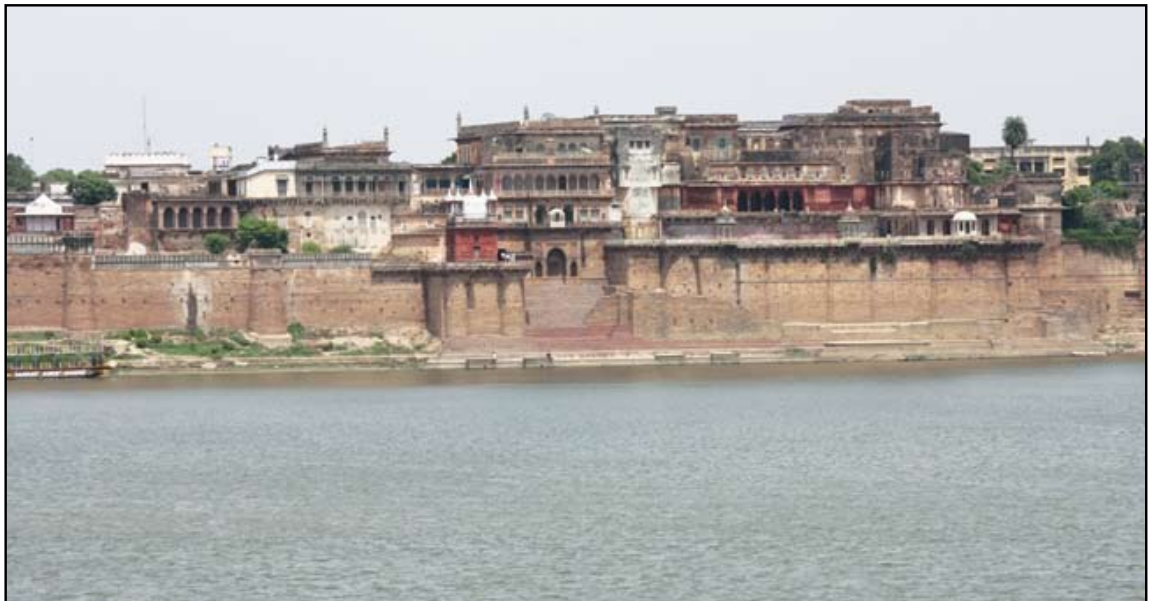


The main street of Ramnagar leading from the fort to the town square

Inclement weather sometimes leads to rescheduling of time and episodes on the next day. The most popular episodes include the birth of Rama and his brothers, Rama and Sita's wedding, Sita's lament in Ashokvatika, Lakshman's revival, Rama's victory procession on Dasshera, reunion with brother Bharata, and Rama's coronation. A few humorous scenes like cutting of Shurpnakha's nose, shaking Angad's foot etc also appear in an otherwise dignified and sombre show. The Ram Ravana battle on Vijayadashmi day is watched with great enthusiasm. In an atmosphere charged with great valour and amidst powerful battle cries, thunderous music, magical illusions and acrobatics, masked demons exhibiting their prowess and powers combat monkey forces, but Ram eventually breaks their valiant spell with his arrows. Amidst great fireworks Ram and Ravana seated on chariots confront each other. The gods watch this debacle from a high stage mounted on bamboo poles fixed in the middle of the battleground. The Maharaja having performed the traditional Shastra Puja of worshipping weapons which are the symbols of his power and position arrives with the Svarups seated atop elephants. He adheres to the Vaishnava belief that the King should

journey towards the south believing that he is Lord Rama's supporter and is proceeding to Lanka to help him. Ravana is defeated after a pitched battle and Rama slays Ravana by shooting several reed arrows symbolically after which the actor playing Ravana prostrates himself before Rama surrendering his ten headed mask and twenty arms which symbolise his subjugation and death. Later the gaily attired and decorated mammoth effigy stuffed with crackers explodes as it is set ablaze amidst great revelry and cheering by the onlookers rejoicing Rama's victory that has ultimately decimated his evil opponent. This burning symbolises Ravana's cremation and balloons bearing flames are released into the dark sky which indicate that Ravana's soul is rising above to meet the divine. The Maharaja does not witness this scenario for a King seeing the death of another king is not considered auspicious.

At the town square more than a lakh of people jostle with each other to see Rama's homecoming after fourteen years. The entire town with its illumined houses and pathways wears a festive look, becoming a big bright stage on which the divine and emotional union of Dashratha's sons takes place amidst loud



The Imposing fort of Ramnagar across the river Ganga'



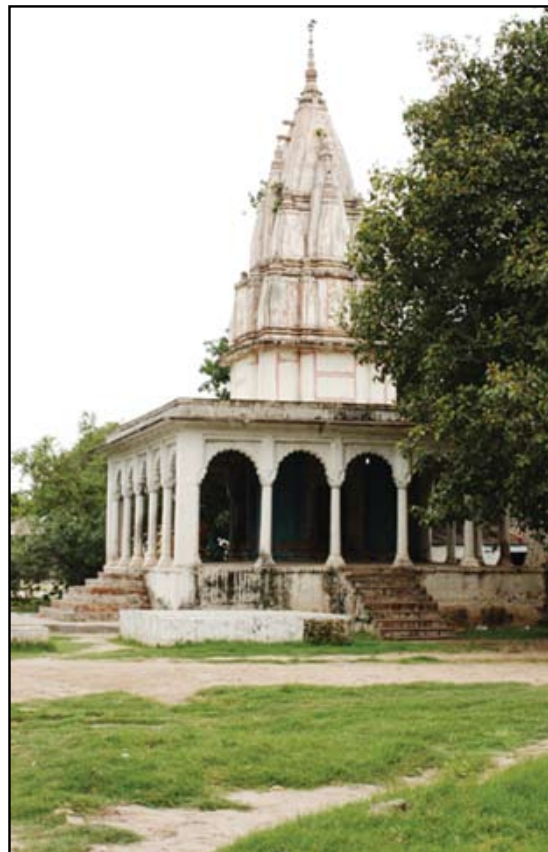
Preparing for Arati

cheers of "Ramchandra ki Jai". This Bharat Milap procession with its splendid gods seated in decorated chariots ushered in at midnight lit by brilliant flares; religious singing and devotional offerings present a magnificent spectacle.

Only on this day the Maharaja missing a part of his own Lila visits Varanasi to view the Bharat Milap at Nati Imli. It was started by Tulsidas's ardent disciple Megha Bhagat who dreamt of the Lord Rama asking him to stage this event. Renowned for the divine presence of Rama and Bharat themselves Megha Bhagat having seen this vision collapsed and died.

After Bharat Milap the four brothers along with Sita and Hanumana proceed towards Ayodhya where Rama is welcomed heartily by the queen mothers with an Arati. Rama's coronation follows with the

Svarups in fine attire seated on thrones placed on a special coronation stage made in the courtyard of Ayodhya. Hanuman stands devotedly behind his Lord fanning him with a whisk. Rama bids an emotional farewell to all his associates giving them suitable gifts. The Arati performed at dawn attended by lakhs of devotees amidst great fanfare and rejoicing is a spectacular event. The Lila ends at Rambagh with Rama explaining the purpose and goals of human life — good deeds, faith, compassion, detachment and devotion to the Supreme. Narada and other sages arrive singing his praises seeking refuge in Rama themselves. They also eulogize his power to salvage his devotees from the trials of human existence. The scene shifts to Ayodhya and finally to the Fort where one King receives another King. Followed by countless spectators the Svarups journey on elephant backs



Girija Temple where Rama and Sita see each other for the first time



Pokhra Tank where the first tableau of Milky Ocean is installed

to the inner courtyard, where like a true devotee the barefoot Maharaja displaying a simple outfit is waiting with his family to receive them. After seating them on a wooden platform he washes their feet in reverence, worships them, and performing Arati organises a sumptuous feast for them. The Ramayanis continue to read the Manas for without finishing it the Lila cannot end. The Maharaja and the royal family garland the Svarups and following another Arati receive the garlands back as blessings. Since the performance is considered a holy act and is voluntary no wages are paid. The Maharaja assuming the role of a royal patron only distributes prizes or Puraskar — a token of his appreciation to all the participants. The other actors and Ramayanis receive it in public the same day, while the Svarups receive it the next day in private and the amount is more than the others.

Thus sanctifying the royal space the Svarups leave for Ayodhya for the grand closing Arati of the Lila which

is performed past midnight since the reading of the Manas has to be completed. Meanwhile amidst great festivities and celebration the Svarups are seated on the golden Lotus throne. A Ramayani flanking them continues his chant as crowds pour in with varied offerings of flowers, incense and sweets and clamour to steal a final glimpse of their fascinating God who has heralded the Ramrajya or ideal reign of Rama ensuring the well-being of all mankind. The divine Darshan continues for hours as the Ramayani concludes his reading. Amidst the sound of music, the perfume of heady incense, shower of fresh flowers and the crowds happily cheering "Raja Ramchandra Ki Jai" the sacred flame is waved before the scintillating deities. Certain sadness engulfs the devotees who know that this enthralling vision will soon disappear. The waiting period of twelve months when they will reappear once again is rather long and excruciating. Receiving Prasada they retrace their steps with a heavy heart, weary yet content for the time being for

having witnessed the most sublime and spectacular show on earth. The Svarups are carried back to their dwelling, where the Vyasa and other Svarups pay obeisance to Rama following which the make-up and costumes are taken off finally.

One by one the little gods convert into human beings once again. The Ramlila rituals however conclude ten days after the performance with a fire sacrifice or Havan in Ayodhya. With Rama's departure the Maharaja regains his status and kingdom. With the end of the Lila the holy spaces once again gain normalcy. So do the actors. Those who have watched it merely as a drama are overwhelmed by the style, scale, presentation, ambience and impact of this conventional theatrical form and the synthesis of traditional and popular cultures. The unique distinction of the Ramnagar Ramlila of combining the live dramatic performing style and diverse literary forms leaves them spellbound.

The countless spectators who have viewed the performance as divine play or Lila having revived their faith in the triumph of good over evil are infused with a religious fervour par excellence. They had flocked to Ramnagar from far and near, believing like Bharatendu that hearing and viewing the Lila is a meritorious act, a sacred duty — a rare chance to connect with a personal God. Like Tulsidas they were convinced that Rama's name is the boat which will ferry them across the sea of mortal existence into salvation. For a full month they have therefore loved and lived with their hero, wept at his travails and celebrated his successes, fostering a bond so strong that as Nemis they vow to return every year to watch the divine spectacle till they die. They remember all the scenes and dialogues



Shiva and Durga idols in the Ramnagar Durga temple - deities worshipped by Rama before slaying Ravana

by heart and staunchly believe that those who have seen the Ramnagar Ramlila would never be impressed by any other Lila ever. Thus actors and devotees, gods and demons, king and commoners all come together to create the unforgettable magic of the Ramnagar Ramlila which is both a unique theatrical feat and an intense spiritual experience, a rare combination of the mundane and sublime.

according to eight time periods (called *prahar*) of three hours each.

The origin of the seasonal ragas can be traced back to the Khandas of the Panchavidh Sam in Chhandogya Upanishad, viz. Hinkar, Prastav, Udgeeth, Pratihar and Nidhan, which were said to have had a relationship with the five seasons, espoused thus –

*ritushu panchavidhan samopaseet vasanto hinkaro greeshmaha prastavo varsha udgeethaha sharatpratiharo hemanto nidhanam*¹

Translation: During seasons, five types of Sam must be rendered for worship. Vasant (spring) is Hinkar, Grishma (summer) is Prastav, Varsha (rains) is Udgeeth, Sharad (autumn) is Pratihar and Hemant (winter) is Nidhan.

This apart, we find the prevalence during the Vedic period, of the singing of specific Samas during morning, noon and evening times. The five types of Samopasana have been compared to five different stages of rain, from the sight of clouds to the termination of the rain, thus –

हिंदोल-त्रिताल (मध्य लय)			
स्थायी			
सा	सां ध म	ग सा सा	सा ध - साम ध सा सा सा -
च न क ब्रू	३ ३ ३ ३	द प रि	लो ३ रे ३ ३ व ल मा ३
सा	ध		३
मा सा ग ग	म ध सां सां	सां - (सां) -	सां सां ध
च लो ह म	तु म मि ल	खे ३ ले ३	ब ३ ३ ३ त।
	३	३	३
अन्तरा			
म म ग म	ध सां - सां	सां - - सां	सां (सां) - सां
ग व न क	रि बे ३ कि	ये ३ ३ रु	त ना ३ हि
सां		३	३
मं गं - मं	गं सां सां सां	सां - सां (सां) -	सां ध
न द ३ रं	ग कि ग ल	सां ३ चि मा	३ न ३ ले ३ ३।
	३	३	३

*vrishtau panchavidhan samopaseet puravato hinkaro meghe jayate sa prastavo varshati sa udgeetho vidyotate stanayati sa pratihar*²

Translation: During the rainy season, worshipping through five types of Saam has been prescribed. The easterly wind is Hinkar, the cloud that is created, that is Prastav. That which rains is Udgeeth, and that which blasts and rumbles is Pratihar.

In addition, in the *Yajuh Samhita*, specific Samas have been ordained to be related to specific seasons.³ The *Rathantar Sam* is to be sung in Vasant ritu, Brihatsam in Grishma ritu, Vairup in Varsha ritu while Shakvar and Raivat are to be performed in Hemant ritu. However, it has not been possible to ascertain on what principle the above classification has been made.

As Sama chanting has blurred into distant memory, in the current context a more relevant comparison of seasonal and time-based renderings can be derived from the Ramayana, in particular the version of the Ramayana penned by Valmiki. He describes the rainy season through a nature-centric depiction sung as *visarga sangeet* in the forest.

"The buzz of the bees is accentuating the sound of the *gunjan tantri* (stringed). The monkeys are using their vocal chords to pronounce the *taal matras* (rhythmic beats). The clouds are playing the *mridang*, while the singing is being done on the branches of the trees by peacocks, which are adept at both singing as well as dancing."⁴

Even Kalidas gave a lot of importance to the concept of singing according to the seasons. In his famous play – *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*, the *sutradhar* (male lead) asks the *natti* (female lead) to entertain the audience by singing a song for the just-commenced *Upbhog* according to the summer season.⁵

Thus even in the pre-raga era of Indian music, the concept of singing according to the seasons (and times of the day) was widely followed by the great bards and even non musical texts of that time.

further on, their offspring. An interesting syllogism derived by the 17th century author Faquirullah about the Raga-ragini system vis-à-vis their performance times intertwines the enactment of music and the seasons a step further. He says that this system has been created by the *devatas* and based the *shatt* (six) ragas on the *shatt* seasons.

In a particular season, one designated raga is sung along with its ragini and their offspring. This was the customary presentational format of the *nayak* predecessors Baiju *nayak* and Gopal *nayak*. Furthering this practice it was felt that when ragas are performed according to their designated time, it creates a full impact upon the audience. However, flouting this norm results in its impact being lost. The six ragas according to their six seasons are – Hindol in *vasant* (spring), Deepak in *greeshma* (summer), Megh in *pavas* (rain), Shri in *sharad* (autumn), Malkauns in *hemant* (sowing) and Bhairav in *shishir* (winter).

In the *Sangeet Darpan*, Pt. Damodar espouses the raga-season relationship thus –

*shri rago ragini yuktaha shishire giyate budhaiha
vasant sahayastu vasantatau pragiyate*⁶

Translation: Shri raga and its raginis are sung in *shishir ritu*, while vasant and its family is sung in *vasant ritu*. The author also goes on to add that Bhairav and its family are sung in the *grishma ritu* while Megh and its raginis are sung in the *varsha ritu*. An identical relationship between raga and season is established by Pt. Ahobal in his text *Sangeet Parijat*, used the prose of his lyric to elaborate on its contextual significance. Thus using the format OF Raga Megh Malhar for instance, he describes the essence of the season saying:

*yato varhasu geyoyan megh ityapi kititah
akalraga ganen jatdosh haratyayam*⁷

The 18th century A.D. author Shri Kanth also endorses the concept of performing certain ragas according to specific seasons. He directs Raga Bhupal to be sung in

shishir, Vasant to be sung in *vasant*, Bhairav in *grishma*, Megh in *varsha*, Pancham in *sharat* and Narayan in *hemant ritu*.

Though mention is made of ragas to enunciate all the six seasons, over the years it is no longer a forum of equalization as throughout the ages, there have been two seasons which have had an everlasting impact on the Indian psyche. They are – *varsha ritu* (rainy season) and *basant ritu* (spring season) and the bulk of compositional matter relates to these two seasonal stalwarts. The reasons for this are twofold. Both of them provide comfort from the extreme weather of the preceding season and there exist a strong relationship with the sowing and harvesting seasons of agriculture.

In the modern scenario of performance in Hindustani classical music too, these two seasons – rainy and spring seasons respectively – have dominated the artistic repertoire of musicians and the creative thought process of composers alike. The rainy season ragas, are called Malhar ragas (also called Mallar). These ragas primarily depict events associated with rain. The primary feeling in the rainy season is one of joy, which arises out of the knowledge that the hot, humid and sultry summer season is finally over, and has been replaced by the cool weather brought about by the seasonal rains. In his book – *Treatise on the Music of Hindusthan* – Captain Willard has published an extract from the book of Mr. H.H. Wilson which reads:

"The commencement of the rainy season being peculiarly delightful in Hindus than for the contrast it affords to the sultry weather immediately preceding... Hence, frequent allusions occur in the poets to the expected return of such persons as are at this time absent from their family and homes."

The creative soul of the Mallar ragas describe the clouds, the thunder, the rain and the winds, the birds of the rainy season like papiha, chatrak, and peacock in particular. Several songs describe the condition of the love-lorn nayika pining at home, separated from their lovers and husbands."⁸

The Malhar cosmology in vogue today has both *prachalit* (popular) and *aprachalit* (less popular) varieties. The *prachalit* varieties of Malhar wear the links with their originators in the course of their rendering as also in the naming of the raga form. Thus the Raga Miyan ki Malhar is a legacy bestowed by Miyan Tansen, as also other forms interrelating the composers with their creations. Most important categories of this genre include Megh, Gaud Malhar, Ramdasi Malhar, Soor Malhar and so on. The lesser known *aprachalit* varieties include Meerabai ki Malhar, Charju Malhar, Nat Malhar, Dhulia Malhar and so on.

But irrespective of whether they belong to the *prachalit* or *aprachalit* varieties the Malhar Ragas share a few commonalities. For the lay listener unaccustomed to deciphering the intricate differences they offer other compensations in that they waft the resonance of the rains through the subtle delineation of the scale,

where the third 'ga' note and the seventh 'ni' note of the scale are sung in the *komal* or alternate form. In the singing of all the varieties of malhars, these is a classic glide of notes from the second 're' to the fifth 'pancham' note. The use of the Sarang style of Malhar rendition, as in the Ragas Megh and Soor Malhar, the notes 'ni, pa, ma, re' are prevalent. In the Kanhada-based renditions, the scale is sung as 'pa, ni, pa, ga, ma re sa' and can be heard in the ragas Miyan ki Malhar, Ramdasi Malhar, Megh Malhar compositions. But whatever the form of the malhar being sung, they must bring forth the emotional moorings of the Veer Rasa or the emotive appeal of vibrancy. Needless to add that all the lyrics in these ragas sing paeans to the rains, with classic descriptive touches eulogizing rain filled clouds and flora and fauna therein. More importantly the Malhar format can be sung anytime of the day or night during the monsoon season.

By far, the favourite pick of Malhar performers of today is the Miyan ki Malhar. It is based on the Kaafi thaat, where the *gandhar* note is 'komal', both *nishad* notes are used, while the rest of the notes are sung in their *shudh* format. Pt. Bhatkhande says that *dha* is omitted in *avaroh*, hence its *jati* is considered to be *sampurna-shadav*. While many consider 'Sa-pa' notes to be its *vadi-samvadi*, others opine that 'ma' is *vadi* and 'sa' is *samvadi*. It is formed by the combination of the Malhar and Kanhada *angas*. It is a *Purvang pradhan* raga of a serious nature, with much movement in the lower notes. Its movement across the scale may be demonstrated thus –

Sa ^{ma}re ^{ma}re pa, ma pa ga ma re Sa. Sa ma re pa, ma pa ni dha ni dha ni dha ni ni Sa, Sa dha ni pa, Sa pa ni pa, ma pa ^{ma}ga ^{ma}ga ma re Sa.

The following is a *chhota khayal* in *Teental* –

Sthayi – Bijuri chamke barse meharva
Aai badariya
Garaj garaj mohe ati hi darave

Antara – Ghan garaje ghan bijuri chamke
Papiha piyu ki ter sunave

(५४५)

गौडमन्हार—त्रिताल (मध्य लय)
स्थायी

ग प र सा	सा रे सा -	रे ग म प	म - ग -
सा रे ग ब	द रि या ऽ	सा ऽ व न	की ऽ ऽ ऽ
ग रे म म	प - म प	धनि सां ध प	म ग म प
पा ऽ व न	की ऽ म न	भाऽ ऽ व न	की ऽ, कु क।

अन्तरा

ग प र सा	सां ध सां सां	सां - सां -	नि सां रे सां -
सा ऽ व न	मे ऽ उ म	गे ऽ जो ऽ	ब न बर ऽ
ग रे म म	प - म प	धनि सां ध प	म ग म प
पा ऽ व न	की ऽ म न	भाऽ ऽ व न	की ऽ, कु क।

Kaha karu kit jau mora
Jiyara tarse

Another much extolled form of Malhar is Gaud Malhar. This raga arises from the Khamaj thaat. It uses the both the nishads, while the rest of the svaras are shuddh. Its jati is sampurna-sampurna. Ma is vadi while Sa is samvadi. It is devoid of the serious nature that Miyan ki Malhar has. Its chalan or movement may be demonstrated thus –

Sa re ga ma ga ma, ma ^{ma}re ^{ma}re pa, ma pa dha ni pa,
ma pa dha ni Sa s s dha pa ma pa ma, Sa dha ni pa, pa
dha ga ma pa ma, ma ga ma re Sa.

The following is a chhota khyal in Teental –

Sthayi – Jhuk aai badariya sawan ki
Sawan ki mann bhawan ki

Antara – Sawan mein umge jobanva
Chhadi chale pardes piyarva
Sudhi na rahi ghar aavan ki

The Megh Malhar bears its seasonal imprint in a more congenial mileau. This raga arises from the Kafi thaat. It uses the komal variant of 'ni' while the rest of the notes are shuddh. 'Ga' and 'dha' are omitted in the aroha according to some, while others omit only 'dha', making a restricted use of 'ga' as part of the Kanhada anga. Even then, its jati is more or less unanimously considered as that to be audav-audav. Pt. Bhatkhande says that 'Sa' is vadi while 'pa' is samvadi, while some others consider ma to be the samvadi. It uses the Malhar and Sarang angas. It is a purvang pradhan raga of gambhir or deep seated nature. Its chalan may be demonstrated thus –

Sa ^{ma}re ^{ma}re pa, ma pa ni pa, ma pa ni ni Sa, Sa pa ni pa,
ma pa ma re, ma re re Sa

A medium-tempo lyric set to the ten-beat jhaptal cycle portrays the season in the words:

Sthayi - Garaje ghata ghan
Kaare ri kaare
Pawas rut aayi
Dulhan mann bhaye

Antara - Raen andheri
Bijari darave
Sadarangile manmad shah
Piya ghar nahi

As the music of Malhar marks a significant turning point in the cycle of Indian seasons, it is but obvious that the influence of this raga should be carried beyond the strict confines of the classical layout and find takers in the lighter singing forms associated with the rains, such as the Jhula, which is popular in the eastern U.P. regions. Even the Nobel Laureate poet-composer and legendary bard Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore immersed his love for nature, with a pick of songs for the rainy season. One of his popular melodies is composed in Ramdasi Malhar –

Mono moro meghero shongi
Ude chaule deeg deegontero prane
Nishshimo shunne
Shrabono bauroshono shongite
Rim jhim rim jhim rim jhim

The song paints the unfolding of the season through its impact on the visualiser, much like the way a painting impacts upon the senses.

In the 1971 Hindi film *Guddi*, Vani Jariam sang the following song composed by Vasant Desai in Raga Miyan ki Malhar –

Bole re papihara papihara
Ik ghan barse, ik mann pyasa
Ik mann pyasa, ik mann tarse

In the 1981 Hindi film *Chasm-e-Baddoor*, Yesudas and Haimanti Shukla have sung the following duet in Raga Megh –

Kahan se aaye badra
Ghulta jae kajra

In the 1993 classic Hindi film *Rudaali*, legendary music director Bhupen Hazarika, composed the following song in Raga Megh, sung by another legend – Lata Mangeshkar. It has an added shuddh Ni in aroha for a slightly different flavour, something like a Vrindavani Sarang sung in a Megh manner –

*Jhuti muti mitva aavan bole
Bhado bole kabhi sawan bole*

The immortal Ghazal singer Jagjit Singh too, composed one of his songs in Miyan ki Malhar

*Garaj baras pyasi dharti pe
Fir pani de maula*

If the importance of the varsha ritu lies in the relief from the hot and humid summer, the significance of the basant ritu lies in the relief from the harsh cold of the winter. If the sky of the summer is replaced by the dark clouds in the rainy season, the foggy atmosphere of the winter is replaced by the bright sunshine of the spring season. And if the dusty roads of the summer are washed away by the waters of the rainy season, the withering leaves of the plants in the winter are replaced by the blossoming flowers in the spring.

It is with this feeling and emotion, where one literally smells the fragrance of the flowers blooming all around, with bees buzzing around them and with the warm sunshine lifting up the spirits, that the ragas of the basant ritu are sung. With a time period spanning from mid-January to end of March (depending on the geographical location of a particular place in India), the life span of the Basant ritu ragas in a calendar year is very short, less than even the four-month window of the Malhar ragas.

The Basant ritu ragas are mainly three in number –

1. Basant - re-dha komal, both ma and rest shuddha
2. Bahar - ga-ni komal and rest shuddha
3. Hindol - teevra ma and rest shuddha, with omission of pa

The remaining ragas performed during this season, may be considered as *sankeerna* (hybrid) ragas, formed as a result of the admixture of the above ragas, such as Basant Bahar, Hindol Bahar, Shuddha Basant etc. or inspired by any one of these ragas, such as Shahana (from Bahar). In order to understand better, the scholar shall present the chalan and a bandish, each from Basant, Bahar and Hindol. It may be pointed beforehand that tivra ma is denoted by Ma.

‘मनहर’ प्रेमप्रकाश जौहरी की स्वरचित बंदिश

स्थाई

नि	नि	पम	रेसा	निप	वि	सा
मऽ	रऽ	जऽ	घऽ	नऽ	वं	र
		2				
रे	-	प	रे	नि	सा	सा
से	ऽ	झ	मा	ऽ	झ	म
		2				
नि	सा	रे	म	धिप	नि	सा
धि	जु	री	च	म	क	त
		2				
रं	सा	पप	रें	सांनि	पम	रेसा
नि	या	डऽ	रऽ	पाऽ	ऽऽ	वेऽ

अन्तरा

नि	म	प	सा	सां	सा	सां
मं	न	ह	र	पि	या	न
		2				
नि	प	नि	सां	रें	रें	-
आ	ऽ	वे	स	ज	नी	ऽ
		2				
मं	रें	सां	रें	नि	सां	सां
दी	न	न	मो	रें	झ	र
		2				
नि	पम	प	रें	सांनि	पम	रेसा
लाऽ	ऽऽ	मे	लाऽ	ऽऽ	मेऽ	ऽऽ
		2				

Basant:

This raga arises from the Poorvi thaat. It uses the komal variants of re and dha and both the madhyams, while the rest are shuddh. Re is omitted in the Madhya saptak aroha while being used in the aroha of the taar saptak while pa has a restricted use in the aroha, hence Pt. Bhatkhande considers its jati to be sampurna-sampurna. Sa is vadi while pa is samvadi. It is an uttarang pradhan raga. It is a raga of gambhir (serious) nature. Its chalan may be demonstrated thus –

Sa ga ma dha Sa, dha re s s Sa, Ma dha Sa s s dha s s pa, (pa) ma ga ma s ga, ma ga re Sa. Sa ma, ga ma ma ma ga, ga ni dha pa, ma dha ni Sa, re s Sa.

The following is a chhota khyal in Teental –

Sthayi - Phagva brij dekhan ko chalo ri
Phagve mein milenge kunvar kanha
Jahan baant chalat bole kagva

Antara - Aai bahar sakala ban phoole
Rasile lal ko le agva

An equally engrossing seasonal counterpart to the Malhar raga in the contemporary musician's repertoire are the ragas of spring or Basant ritu. This raga arises from the Kafi thaata. It uses komal 'ga' and both 'nishads', while the remaining notes are 'shuddh'. 'Re' is omitted in the aroha of the raga while 'dha' is omitted in the avaroh; hence its jati is shadav-shadav. 'Ma' is vadi while 'Sa' is samvadi. It is an uttarang pradhan raga. It is a raga of chanchal (non serious) nature. Its chalan may be shown thus -

Sa ma, ma (pa) ga ma ni dha, ma dha ni Sa, re ni Sa,
pa ni pa, ma pa ni pa, ma pa ma ga (ma) re Sa.

The following is a chhota khayal in Teental –

Sthayi - Kaliyan sang karat rangaraliya
Bhanvar gujaar phuli phulvari
Chahu mor bole
Koyal ki kook sun hoonk uthi

Antara - Lahar lahar laharaat
Sab birhan mori re
Naar gaduva bharan aai aaj
Baag mein pukare kiniva le
Ram bole har baar baar

The Raga Hindol according to Pt. Bhatkhande, arises from Kalyan thaata, though others opine its parent scale to be Marwa thaata. It uses 'tivra ma', while the rest are shuddh. 'Re' and 'pa' are omitted throughout the raga, hence its jati is audav-audav. 'Dha' is vadi while 'ga' is samvadi. It is an uttarang pradhan raga. A peculiar feature of this raga is that 'ni' has a

restricted use. Hence many a time, this raga is called chatuhsvara raga (four note raga). Also 'ni' is used in a vakra manner in the aroha, as shall be seen from the chalan thus -

Sa ma ga dha ma ni dha, ni dha Sa, dha Sa ga, ma ga Sa, Sa
ni dha ni ma dha ga, ma ga Sa.

A popular chhota khyal in Teental is

Sthayi - Chanak boond pari lo re balma
Chalo hum tum mil khele basant

Antara - Gavan karibe kiye rut nahi
Sadarang ki gal sanchi maan le

In the iconic Hindi feature film of 1956, titled *Basant Bahar*, the legendary Pt. Bhimsen Joshi sang a composition in Raga Basant –

Ketaki gulab juhi
Champak ban phule
Ritu basant apno kanth
Gori garva lagae
Jhulna mein baith aaj
Pi ke sang jhule

This was immediately followed by the versatile Manna Dey who joined in a duet, with a similar composition in Raga Basant Bahar.

These seasonal offerings capture the transcendence of the seasons and mould them into experiences of human creativity. In their reining in of our senses they give rise to visual drama culled the vital energy of music when it fuses into the life energy of the seasons.

References:

¹Hindustani Sangeet mein Raga ki Utpatti evam Vikas, Dr. Sunanda Pathak, Ch. 6, Pg. 286.

²Ibid.

³Bhartiya Sangeet ka Itihas, Thakur Jaidev Singh, Pg. 29

⁴Ramayan, Valmiki, Kishkindha Kand, 28, 36, 37

⁵Ibid (ref. pt. 1) Pg. 288.

⁶Sangeet Darpan, Pt. Damodar, Pg. 77, Shlo. 27

⁷Ibid (ref. pt. 1) Pg. 293

⁸Bhatkhande Sangeet Shastra, V.N. Bhatkhande, Part IV, Pg. 330

Seasons and Performing Arts

Guru Shovana Narayan

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is an infinite healing in the repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that dawn comes after night and spring after winter". These words of

Rachel Carson mirror the emotions of anticipation, hope, ecstasy, joy, pain, anguish et al that surge within man with every passing moment of time and seasons. Imageries of vegetation, birds and animals associated with varying seasons have been used in



Awaiting the arrival of Monsoon like Chatak bird



Batade Sakhi Kaun Gali Gaye Shyam

Sanskrit and vernacular poems to epitomise different human activities and associated pent-up emotions, chief of which is love. The darkening clouds followed by torrential rain bringing relief to the parched earth, the gradual stillness of autumn replacing the turbulence of the monsoon, the thawing of emotions, re-kindling of hopes, heralding the arrival of joy and fulfilment with the onset of spring, seasons have always provided fertile ground for poets and artistes.

Unlike the western tradition of four seasons (namely summer, autumn, winter and spring), India celebrates six seasons. These are 'greeshma' (summer), 'varsha' (monsoon), 'sharad' (autumn), 'hemant' (fall), 'shishir' (winter) and 'vasant' or 'basant' (spring). However, in rural India where life is intricately intertwined with agriculture, pent-up emotions of pain of separation ('viraha') of the lovelorn heart with each passing month mirroring the gradual changing of seasons is

the 'Barahmasa' ("songs of the twelve months"). The poetics of 'Barahmasa' with the intensity of feelings and of passionate yearning writ large on the changing face of nature, clocks the passage of time, best represented in the imageries of Krishna and Radha.

Starting with the Vedas, seasonal poetry has had a long tradition in Sanskrit literature. The harmonious relation between man and nature and the importance of each season has been beautifully described by the great poet Kalidasa in his monumental Sanskrit work, "Ritu Samhara" ("Garland of Seasons"). Divided into six main chapters, each of the six seasons is described as a pair of lovers who experience changes in their relation like the changing seasons. This tradition of Ritu-Varnan set by Bhasa and Kalidasa, was evident in the Bhana plays of the Gupta Era (4th-6th centuries) that included songs that sang the glory of one or the other season. Twelfth century poet, Jayadeva, has in



Writing a letter to the beloved

his Gita Govinda, described flowers, fruits, trees, with different seasons of nature while also composing the 'prabandhs' in appropriate 'ragas' and 'talas'. The initial cantos describe the rainy season with rolling thunder, silver lightning and downpour that makes Krishna frightened so much so that Radha is requested by Nanda to drop Krishna to his house. The evergreen 'lalita lavanga lata parisheelan' dwells on the description of spring and the pain inflicted on the young couple due to separation. The great poet Vidyapati of Mithila has allegorically described the beauty of a woman as follows:

*"How shall I her lovely body express?
Fair things how many Nature in her blended,
Mine own eyes saw ere my lips praise.
Her twin fair feet were lordly leaves of summer,
Her gait vied with the forest's best.*

*Upon two golden trees a lion slender,
There over the hills of heaven were placed....."*

In the Indus-Gangetic belt, it was a usual feature for the man to go away on work from his native place leaving behind his young wife in full bloom. Various poems, verses and sonnets in the context of the lover and the beloved symbolised mostly through Radha-Krishna, give an idea of various flora and fauna connected with seasons as well as the geography of the region. Any mention of spring is usually accompanied with the description of the yellow blooming mustard fields and the sweet song of the 'koyal' (cuckoo) bird while the monsoons refer to the fragrant smell of the damp earth and the dancing peacock, while approaching winter is signified by falling leaves and cold wind. The yearning of romance after long separations, memories of clandestine trysts and meeting of lovers – all these became themes of songs in classical as well as folk literature and were sung to specific melodies or Ragas woven with specific notes. The verses also indicate the festivals associated with different seasons such as 'hori' (festival of colours) with spring, 'jhoola' (festival of swings) with 'sawan-bhadon' (monsoons) and 'diwali' (festival of lights) with autumn to name



Virahini Nayika

a few. Virtually all months are associated with festivals. No celebration or festival is complete without associated rituals and performing arts.

The great Bhakti movement raging through various parts of India in the medieval period saw in the 14th century, the birth of Raas leela in Braj bhoomi situated on the banks of the river Yamuna. In the 'pushti marg' philosophy of Vallabhacharya, devotees were gopis or Radha, symbolic of souls ('atma') who were constantly seeking union with Krishna, the universal soul ('paramatma'). This philosophy found expression in 'leelas' (plays), 'keertanas' (community singing) and Raas-leelas (operatic plays). With Vaishnavism taking roots in Manipur, the Manipuri Raas Leela was initially visualised by Maharaja Bhagyachandra in the 17th century. Generally performed throughout the night in enclosures in front of the temples of Vrindaban and in the temple of Shree Shree Govindajee in Imphal on full moon nights of Basanta Purnima, Sarada Purnima and Kartik Purnima and at other local temples, Raas performances are seasonal and varied.

In the north Indian Hindustani style of classical music, each of the seasons has its own associated 'ragas' and 'raginis'. The scorching heat of summer is reflected through the Raga Deepak with its ability to kindle a fire. Raga Megh, Miyan ki Malhar, Malhar, Megh Malhar, Sur ki Malhar reproduce the humidity of the clouds and rain. Malkauns and Puriya Dhaneshree are



Yearning for the beloved

the ragas for autumn and fall producing sweetness and relaxation in the mind while winter carrying the freshness of dawn and the song of the early birds is best conveyed through Raga Bhairav. And the eternal spring (spring of hope, joy, love, passion et al) - the season of vitality and romance reflecting the freshness of nature after the cold winter is best expressed through Raga Basant, Raga Bahar, Hindol



Joyous reception of the beloved

producing the sweetness of spring and exuding the fragrance of flowers. On a micro-scale, Raga Bhairavi is sombre, serene and graceful in mood, evoking the devotion and calm of morning while Raga Pooriya, Sri Raga, Raga Darbari are evocative of twilight and late evening mood.

It is believed that Indian music possesses great psychological and elemental power and, therefore, the vibrations emanating by the execution of a raga can not only cure certain ailments but also cause events appropriate to its mood. It is popularly believed that Tansen (born as Tanna Misra, son of Makarand Pande, a Hindu priest of Gwalior), one of the greatest singers the country has ever known and who lived during the reign of Akbar the Great, kindled a fire by the sheer power of his rendering of Raga Deepak which could only be extinguished by the equally powerful singing of Raga Megh Malhar which effected a downpour.

Sharangadeva in his *Sangeet Ratnakar*, mentions the existence of over 664 ragas and raginis. Drawing inspiration from nature, Abul Fazl has recorded the

origin of each note of an octave in the following manner:

- Sa (shadaja)* - from the note of peacock
- Re (rishabha)* - from the note of a 'papiha' (species of cuckoo bird)
- Ga (gandhara)* - from the bleat of a buck (male goat)
- Ma (madhyama)* - from the cry of a crane
- Pa (panchama)* - from the note of 'koyal' i.e. a cuckoo bird
- Dha (dhaivata)* - from the croak of a frog
- Ni (nishada)* - from the sound of an elephant

Furthermore, the time of the day has also its own respective 'raga' and 'ragini' in Hindustani style of music. Bhairav, Bhairavi, Asavari are morning ragas while Malkauns, Darbari and such others are evening 'ragas'. The ten broad 'thaats' (families) of music each having a host of ragas and raginis under its umbrella are associated with a particular hour of the day. These rules and categorizations are evident when music

compositions such as 'phag', 'chaiti', 'thumri', 'hori', 'jhoola', 'sawan', 'baramasa' and 'kajri' are performed.

How many songs have been written about the onset of monsoon with its dark clouds, rolling thunder, flash of lightning, pitter-patter of rain drops, fresh smell of the damp earth, dance of the peacocks as they fan out their long incandescent tails, the Papiha bird singing its love songs, and the young beloved sending messages to her husband via the dark clouds to return home, with the whole atmosphere loaded with emotions of love and yearning! The classic work of Kalidasa in 'Meghdoota' has inspired artistes of all genres.

*"Oh, Megh, Listen to me for directions to my beloved:
Take what you need through every pore;
If your tired feet must rest, on mountain tops repose with
crystal waters to quench your thirst...." (Meghdoot)*

Come Monsoons, and strains of Raga Megh Malhar and Raga Des fill the air. Dancers and musicians sing and dance to:

*"Meha re ban ban daar daar murla bole meha
bauchhaaran barse...."*

(O Clouds, as rains pour down and drench the earth, the joyful cry of the happy peacocks can be heard through the branches). Who can ever forget the evergreen 'thumri' "*chha rahi kaali ghataa, jiya mora lehraye hai*" in the immortal voice of Begum Akhtar that has inspired generations of Kathak artistes!

In Kathak, the traditional repertoire includes the 'jhoola' with one of the popular pieces being: 'jhoolat Radhe Naval Kishore....".

The 'virahini nayika', pensive and sad, thinking of her beloved in faraway land, expresses her feeling as:



Nayikas dancing to Megh Malhar — catching the first drops of rain

*"gheri gheri aayee kari badara, barsela boondan
boondan phooharava
dekhata nachela ban ban morva, saumi sugandh chahun
or hariyali
aise mein hum baithee akeli, tarpat tarpat tarasat
jiyara
sajan mor kahan kit jayoon, lekar sandeswa ja re
badariya..."*

(i.e. The sky is overcast with dark clouds; In the falling rain, the peacocks dance; sweet smell of the earth fills the air; but I sit alone, anxious to be united with my beloved; O clouds, take my message to my loved one!)

But yet there is yet another 'nayika' who still awaits the arrival of her beloved. Rains have arrived, mating



Bird messenger

of the earth and the sky has occurred, yet he has not arrived! Neither the cool monsoon breeze nor the cool showers manage to put out the raging fire within her! The falling rains are the tears from her eyes. These feelings are evocatively portrayed in various songs of the 'Baramasa'. It is the eternal wait of the nayika "mai neer bhari dukh ki badli" (Mahadevi Verma). Bulle Shah writes:

*Ais Ishq Di Jhangi Wich Mor Bulenda
Sanu Qibla Ton Qaaba Sohna Yaar Disenda
Saanu Ghayal Karke Pher Khabar Na Laaiyaan
Tere Ishq nachaiyaan kar key thaiyaa thaiyaa*

(A peacock calls in the grove of passion
It's Qibla, It's Kaaba where lives my love
You asked not once after you stabbed
Your love has made me dance like mad)!



Jhoola



Perturbed nayika in the hot summer

Medieval period Hindi literature is replete with poems reflecting imageries of dark clouds synonymous with the dark skinned Lord Krishna. No wonder he is also known as 'Ghanshyam'!

The familiar pine of Radha (consort of Krishna) and the gopies (cow-maidens) for Lord Krishna and their emotion evoking love play and their cup of happiness and joy overflowing at his sight are expressed vividly through the medium of 'thumri' wherein emotions ('rasa') play a dominant role.

*"batade sakhi, kauna gali gaye Shyam, gokul dhundi,
Brindaban dhundi
dhunda phire chari dhama, raina divasa mohi tarapata
biti, bisara gaye saba kama"*

("O friend, show me the lane by which Shyam went; I have combed the whole of Gokul and Brindaban. I have sought him in all the four sacred places; I have been restless day and night, neglecting all the work").



HR Bacchan-(Chandni) Phaili Gagan mein



Krishna in Vrindaban

Sharad Ritu (autumn) named after Sharada the goddess of speech (vac), learning and fine arts is replete with festivals with display of learning, performance of arts and honouring the learned and the virtuous during Navaratri are all in humble submission to the mother. Kalidasa has compared Sharad Ritu to a bride, decked in white as the moon and the swan, adorned with jewels and flowers, moving with gentle grace like the rivers. The Dhurta-vita-samvada describes Sharad Ritu as follows: "The veil of clouds vanishes; moon shines in the blue night sky with gentle breeze blowing; there atmosphere is filled with intoxicating fragrance of flowers withering gently from the Aasan trees; In this conducive environment, the lover swims in the scented lotus pond with his beloved who as the Chakravaka bird is well versed in the secrets of love; the air around resounds with the music of Saras birds and the peels of girdle bells and anklets of cheerful beauties playing around the pool whose foreheads are adorned with Bindis as bright as the Bandhuka flower".

Harivanshrai Bachhan has written about the desire of union with the beloved under the moonlit sky of autumn which has been portrayed in paintings and performed in dance.

"chandni phaili gagan mein chaah man mein"

But Malik Mohammed Jayasi says that even the coolness of the sandalwood paste in the cool moonlit night of autumn cannot diminish the raging fire of yearning within the nayika: "*neend na parai raini jo awaa.... dahe chand aur chandan chiru, dagadh karain tan viraha gambhiru...."*

The moonlit nights of autumn are fertile grounds for performing arts. The Sharad Raas leela of Manipur and Vrindaban express various emotions experienced in the union of the gopis and Radha with Lord Krishna. The 29th chapter of the Dasam Skandha of the Bhagawadapurana refers to the performance of 'raas' as:



Radha adorning herself — arrival of spring

*'bhagawanapi ta ratrihi sharadotphullamallikaha
viksha rantum manschakre yogamayaupashritaha'*

('Yielding to the requests of the gopis, Krishna through his 'yoga maya', decided to perform the 'raas' amidst the fragrance of the night flowers of autumn').

Seeing the 'khanjan' (the wagtail bird) Sumitra counts the number of winters that had passed in separation from her husband Lakshman when he had accompanied his brother Rama during his exile: "Nirakh sakhi, ye khanjan phir aye"....

Summer with its blistering heat, with the sun emitting scorching fire, drying up of ponds and wells, dry earth, withering of trees and plants, hallucinations of

mirage and the chatak, the pied crested cuckoo bird, are familiar. The eyes of lovelorn 'nayikas' scan the sky for the arrival of monsoon (allegory for the arrival of the beloved) as does the 'chatak' with its beak on its head waiting for the rains to quench its thirst. For the 'nayika', in Vaishnavism, it is the eternal wait for union with the Almighty.

*'Chatak khada chonch khole hai, sampat khole seep
khadi hai,
liye ghat apna khada hai main, apni apni hame padi
hai'*

(ie all await for the arrival of the rains; the chatak with open beak, the pearl oyster opening its lips, and the poet with a pitcher).

As says another poet "Chatak's love if we for the Lord of the universe hold, like the bird we too settle for nothing less, Behold shall we Him who unseen still us bless!"

The Seasons also provides beautiful imagery for a riddle. An example is the evocative 17th century alliterative verse that has formed part of the traditional Kathak dancers' repertoire.

"Behold the canvas with gems bedecked, Luminescent brilliance splash the sky

On face beauteous doth shiny veil reflect, Warmly beckoning hearts, high and nigh!

Girdhar, ardorous heat of youth at its crest, Setting aflame all within its range

Stealer of life and energy in test, Yet none that will it ever exchange!"

("Jagaha jadaau jaame jade hain jawaahiraat, jag-mag jyoti jaake jag mein jamati hai, jaame jadujaani jaan pyari jaat roop aisi, jagamag jypti jeev mein jakati hai. Girdhardas jor jawan jawaani ko hai, johi johi jalaja hoon jeev mein jakati hai, jagat ke jeevan ke jiyee ko churaaye joye, joye jyoshitaa ko jeth jarani jarati hai")

(answer: Height of summer)

Dispelling the monotony of a low-spirited shivering winter, with internalisation and inward reflection, comes spring with its message of rejuvenation. Spring ('vasant') is deeply associated with Krishna and Radha as also with Kamadeva, the God of love, through the release of pent-up emotions and playful spirits. The colour festival of Holi brings with it chaiti, thumris, and horis revolving around the eternal spirit of eternal longing and romance symbolised by enchanting Krishna – our own Sanwale Salone Shyam! How many songs have been written about the onset of spring, with tender young buds, rows and rows of mustard in the fields, the fresh nip in the air awakening similar



Manipuri Raslila

languorous emotions within the young wife waiting for fulfilment with the return of her husband!

aaya basant chalat poorvayee
chhaye phoolanawa sarson leharaye
bole koyaliya kunjan kunjan
dole bhavara galiyan galiyan
nachat gawat khelat sung sub
rang rachawat dhoom machawat
kinh sung nachat ras machayai
aas lagayai chain churayai
katat nahi mohe sooni ratiyan
kabahun awahain meet piyarawa

(i.e. spring is here with its cool breeze and swaying mustard fields; cuckoos sing in every bough, bees buzz all around; dance, music and colour rent the air; but with whom should I dance for I desire the return of my beloved; he who has stolen sleep from my eyes and peace from my heart).

In the 'baithiki bhava batana' style of 'thumri' rendering in Kathak, the vignette of the farmer looking lovingly at his fields cloaked in a veil of yellow mustard after years of drought is a familiar imagery!



Vidyapati — description of the nayika

The influence of seasons especially with Lord Krishna or the Ashtanayikas (the eight states of a woman in love) as central motifs has been felt in the field of paintings and sculptures. Mughal miniatures influenced and spawned schools of art in the princely states of Kota, Bundi and Kishangarh in Rajasthan and in Kangra, Bhasoli, and Guler in Himachal Pradesh. The themes of these exquisite landscapes and portraits dealt with the love of Radha and Krishna, the changing cycle of seasons and the Ragas that are modes of Indian classical music. The Barahmasa and the Ragamalika series of paintings are evidence to the native genius in painting that survived the vicissitudes of political history since the days of Ajanta. So wide has been its appeal that it also inspired the costume of women Kathak dancers in the twentieth century.

The landscape of Indian arts, ranging from philosophy to painting, from literature to performing arts, owes its richness to the perennial cycle of seasons reflecting the Indian philosophy of the cycle of life and time cycle and the eternal cycle of pain and anguish caused by separation ('vivyog') and joy and ecstasy in union ('sambhog'). In each representation, the intimately and lyrically presented nature is linked with the singer's or the dancer's pain either through similitude or by painful contrasts enveloping mystic dimensions. The pirouettes ('cakra bhramari') in Kathak dance style are visual interpretations of the philosophy of 'jivan-chakra' and the 'kaal-chakra' namely the cycle of life and death and the cycle of nature as well as the revolving of the 'atma' (the soul) around the 'paramatma' (the universal soul) and the 'mandala' (circle) formed by Lord Krishna and the 'gopies' (cow-maidens) in the 'ras-leela' and the 'maharas'.

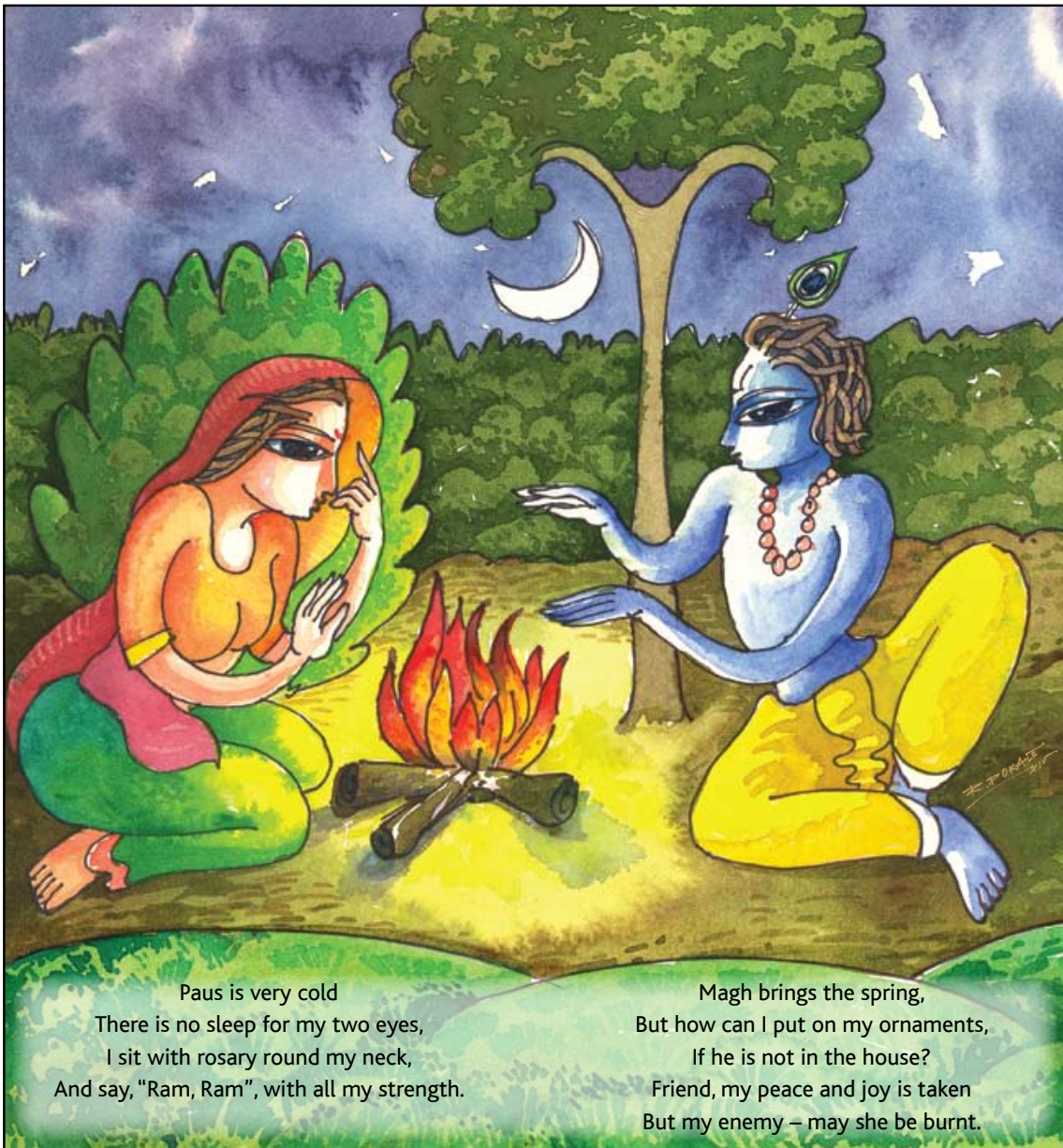
One of the most evocative allegorical poems referring to the eternal cycle of life in terms of seasons is "Mera Safar" of Ali Sardar Jafri.

The eternal cycle of nature leads to the act of becoming. In this act, the spiral representing growth symbolized by the creative coil of feminine energy or 'kundalini sakti' denoting the inward journey as a microscopic reflection of cosmic rhythms and the circle symbolizing 'wholeness' in 'yantra' and 'tantra' philosophies, has been succinctly summed up in the ancient text from the Isha Upanishad:

*"Om Purnamadah Purnamidam Purnat
Purnamudachyate,
Purnasya Purnamadaya Purnameva Vashishyate. Om
shanti, shanti, shanti!"*

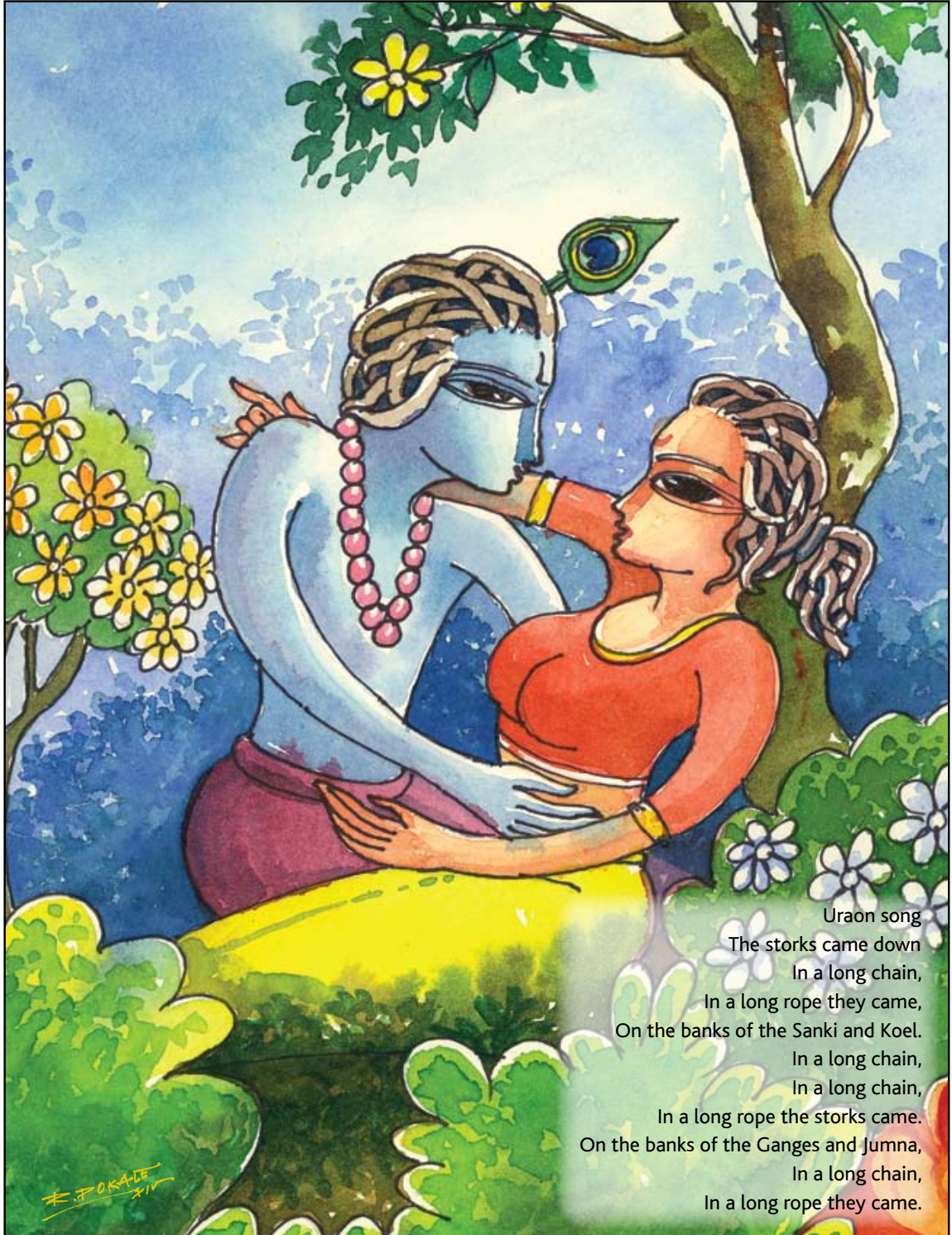
(Om! That is the whole (or reality/absolute), This is the whole (or reality/absolute) ;
From the whole (or reality/absolute), the whole (or reality/absolute) becomes manifest;
Taking away the whole (or reality/absolute) from the whole (or reality/absolute),
The whole (or reality/absolute) remains. Om! Peace!
Peace! Peace!)

Photo Essay

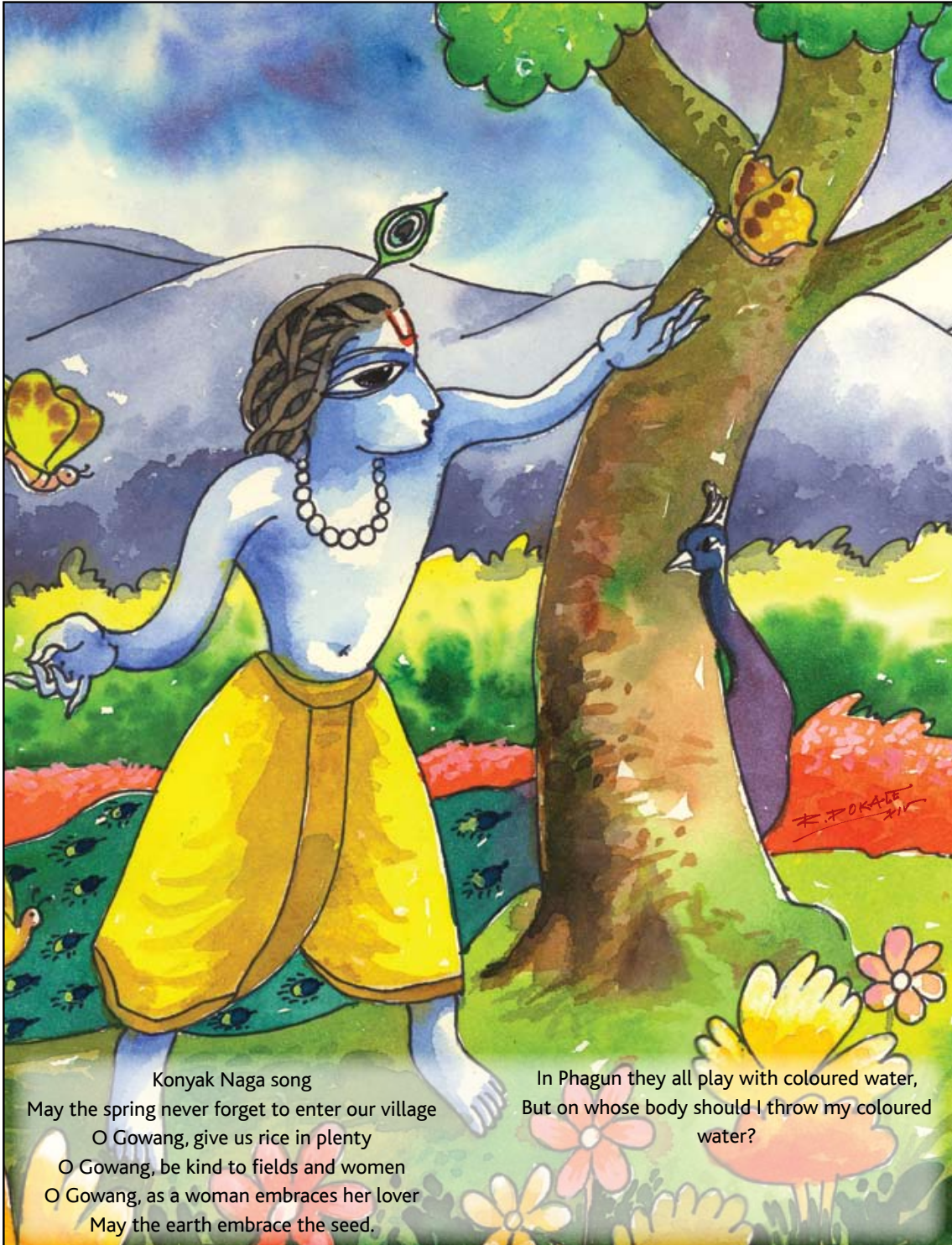


Paus is very cold
There is no sleep for my two eyes,
I sit with rosary round my neck,
And say, "Ram, Ram", with all my strength.

Magh brings the spring,
But how can I put on my ornaments,
If he is not in the house?
Friend, my peace and joy is taken
But my enemy – may she be burnt.

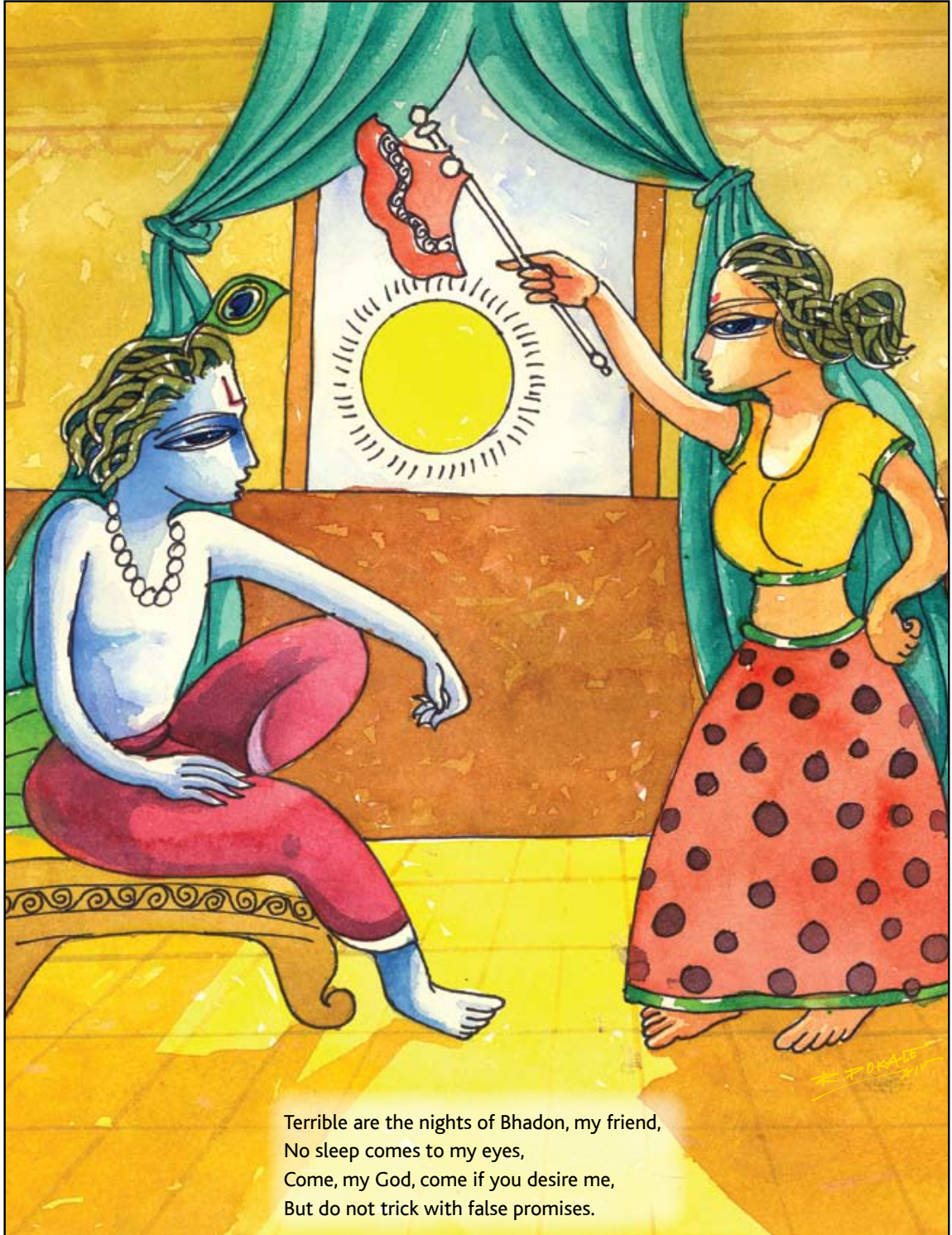


Uraon song
The storks came down
In a long chain,
In a long rope they came,
On the banks of the Sanki and Koel.
In a long chain,
In a long chain,
In a long rope the storks came.
On the banks of the Ganges and Jumna,
In a long chain,
In a long rope they came.

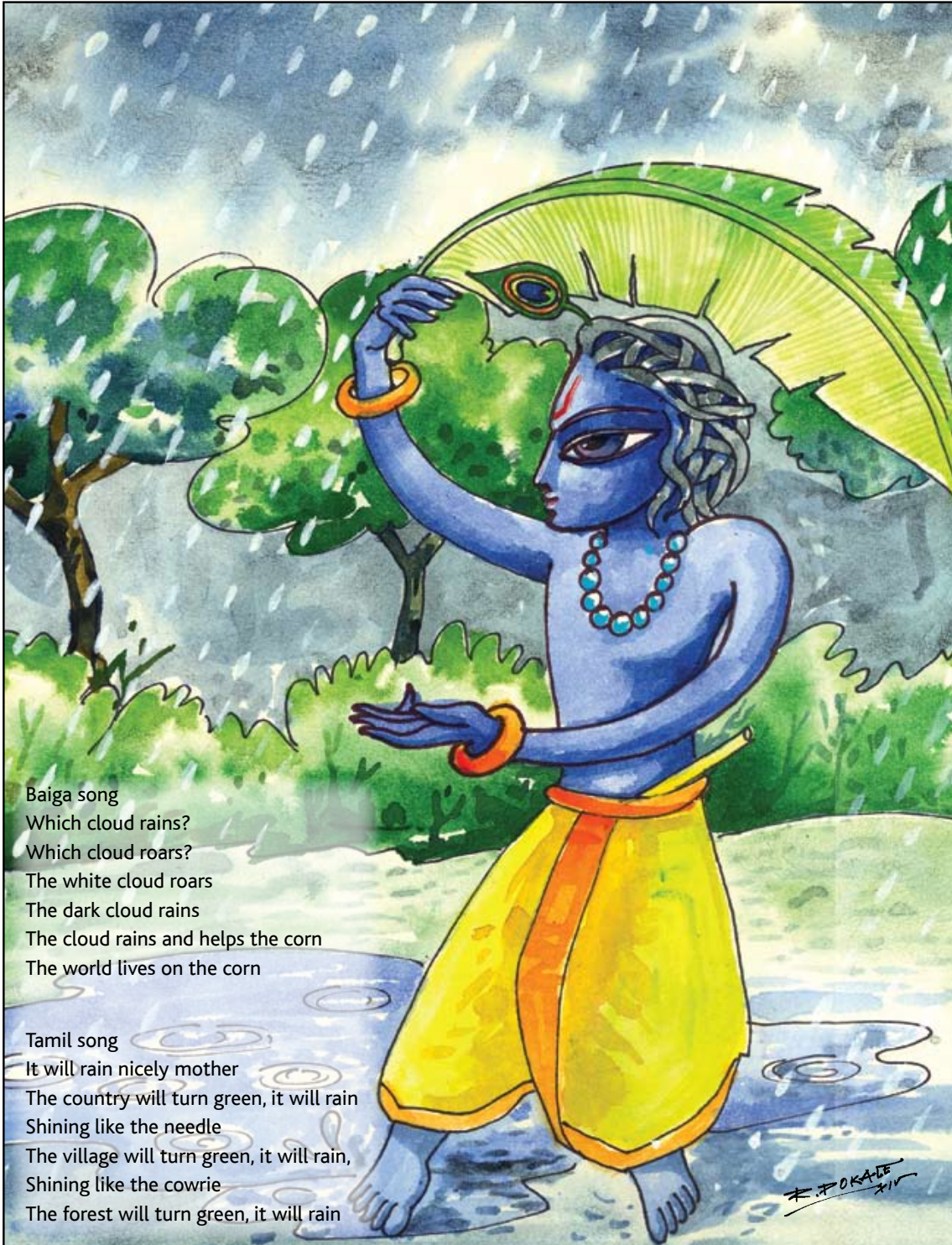


Konyak Naga song
May the spring never forget to enter our village
O Gowang, give us rice in plenty
O Gowang, be kind to fields and women
O Gowang, as a woman embraces her lover
May the earth embrace the seed.

In Phagun they all play with coloured water,
But on whose body should I throw my coloured water?



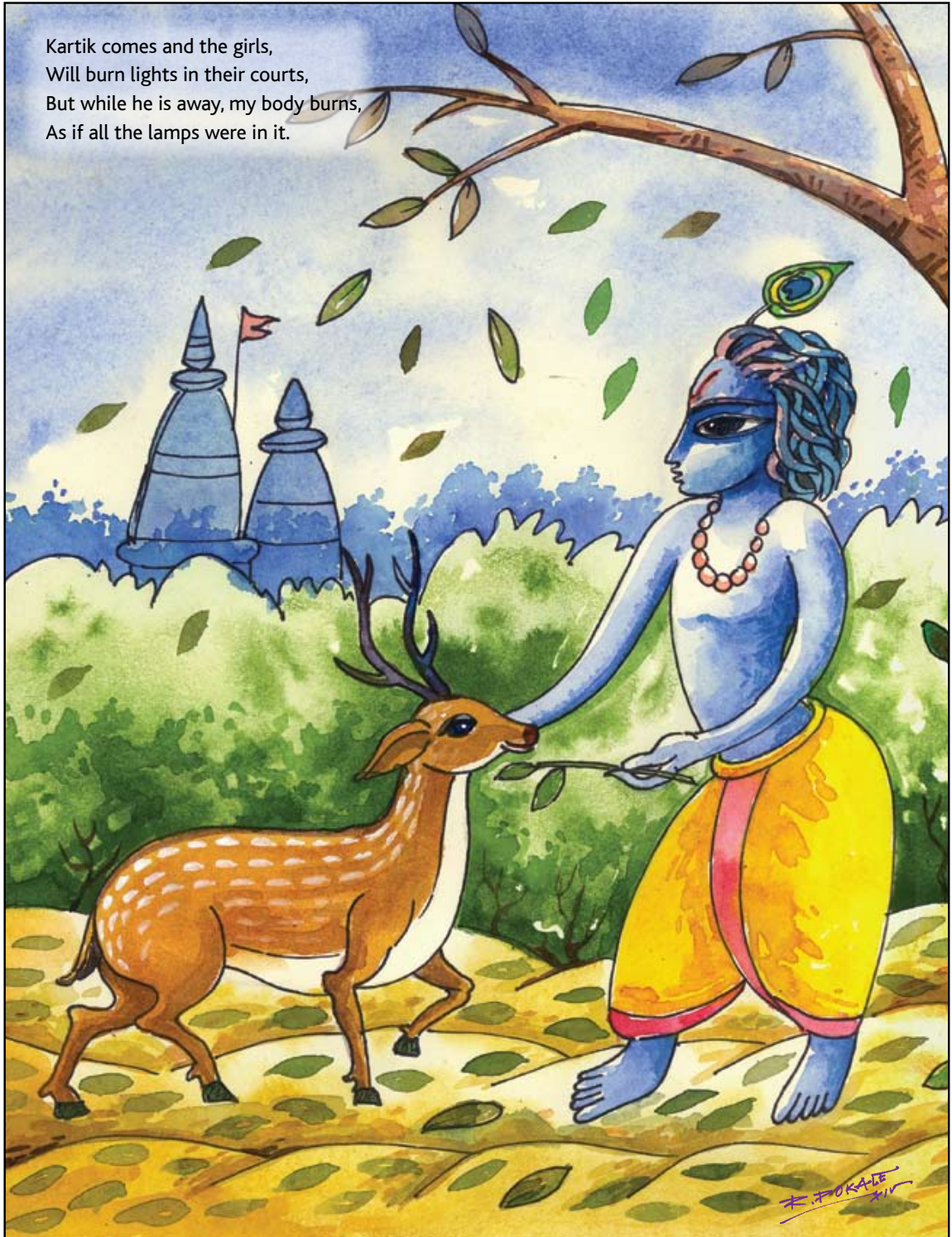
Terrible are the nights of Bhadon, my friend,
No sleep comes to my eyes,
Come, my God, come if you desire me,
But do not trick with false promises.

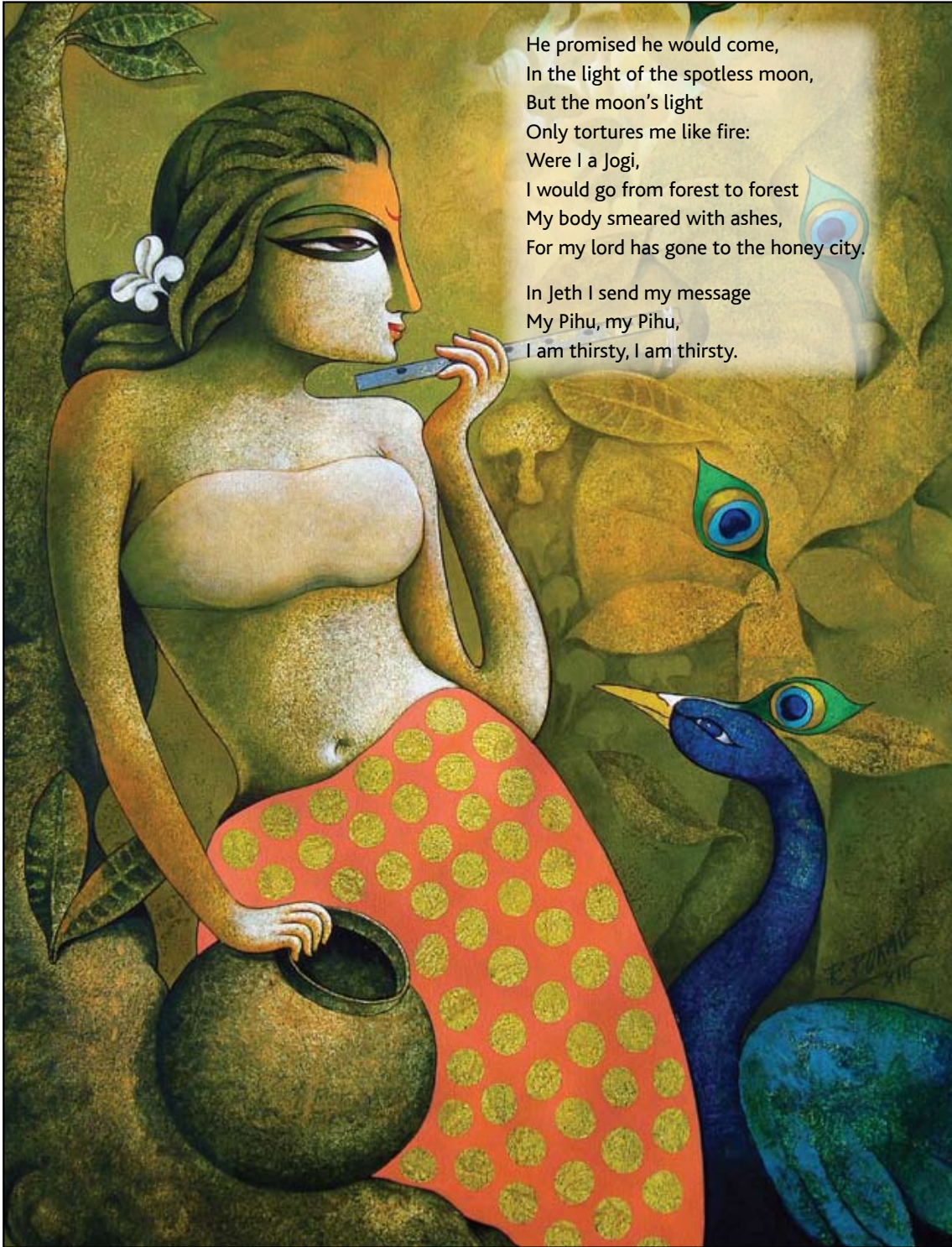


Baiga song
Which cloud rains?
Which cloud roars?
The white cloud roars
The dark cloud rains
The cloud rains and helps the corn
The world lives on the corn

Tamil song
It will rain nicely mother
The country will turn green, it will rain
Shining like the needle
The village will turn green, it will rain,
Shining like the cowrie
The forest will turn green, it will rain

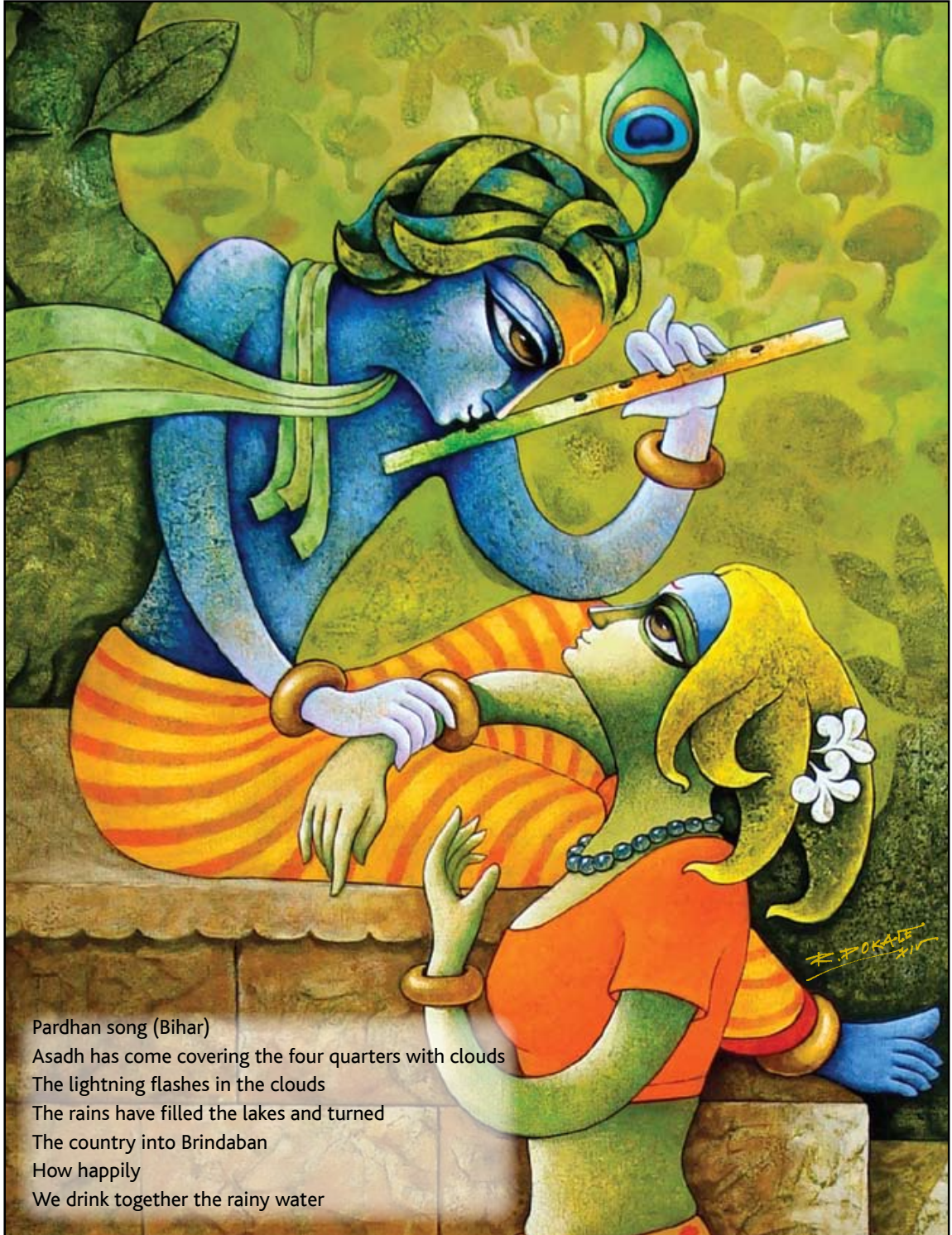
Kartik comes and the girls,
Will burn lights in their courts,
But while he is away, my body burns,
As if all the lamps were in it.





He promised he would come,
In the light of the spotless moon,
But the moon's light
Only tortures me like fire:
Were I a Jogi,
I would go from forest to forest
My body smeared with ashes,
For my lord has gone to the honey city.

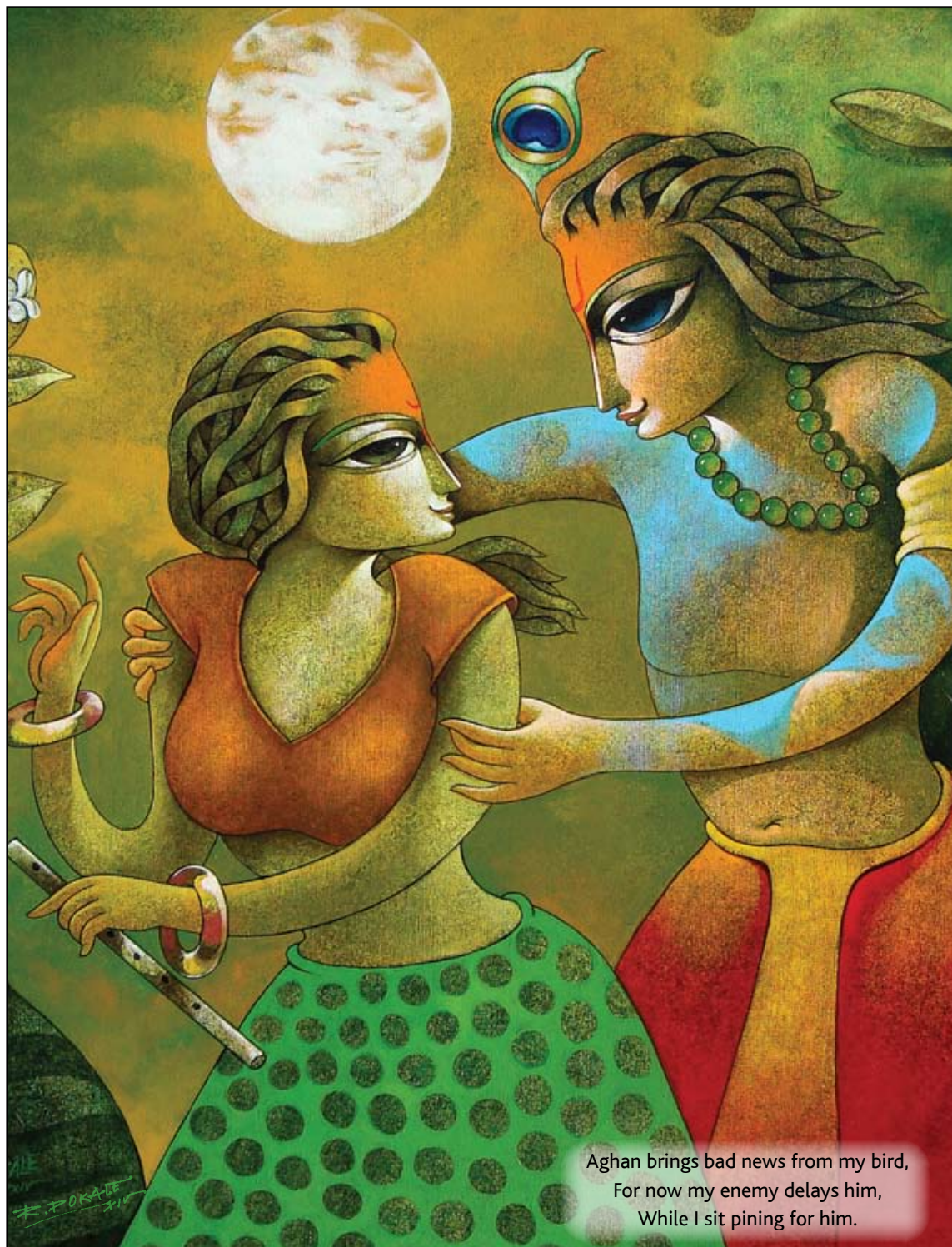
In Jeth I send my message
My Pihu, my Pihu,
I am thirsty, I am thirsty.



Pardhan song (Bihar)
Asadh has come covering the four quarters with clouds
The lightning flashes in the clouds
The rains have filled the lakes and turned
The country into Brindaban
How happily
We drink together the rainy water

Sawan has come, and O my friend,
He is offended with me,
For my enemy, my co-wife
Has aroused his love for her.





Aghan brings bad news from my bird,
For now my enemy delays him,
While I sit pining for him.

The Seasons in the Ragamala

Prof. Pushpa Dullar and Gayatri Tondon

In a unique revolution, in the world of art, the formless conceptions of nature, the seasons and even spiritual elements, began to be personified. This gave a more rounded treatment to the beauties of nature, particularly that of the seasons, which were already being sung about in the musical traditions of the country. Thus the sounds of music were now depicted in a bodily form, comprising eloquent compositions in praise of Krishna and the gopis, the prowess of Shiva or the power of Shakti, among others. In fact, the bodily format of a formless concept such as musical sound, was now made more



Todi Ragini, Ragmala Painting Malwa c. 1650. 15.7 x 19.0 cm, Bharat Kala Bhawan, ACSAA 3916

vocal and comprehensive with this new element. As its subject matter touched upon three aesthetically points, namely music, painting and poetry, it was aptly named the Ragamala or garland of ragas.

Naturally, this trend had created changes leading to yet another revolutionary development; this time in the field of painting. The ragas that had been eulogized through deific forms till then were now used as the subject matter of fine art. The beautiful damsels, the richness of nature during the various seasons, the architecture of palaces and homes, courtyards and darbar halls, ascetic hermitages and bare landscapes became the forms chosen by these painters to compose their understanding of the ragas of Indian classical music. While the subject matter of these works comprised all ragas, what gave it special prominence was its seasonal input. And perhaps its best known part.

Another reason why the Ragamala grew and multiplied across three centuries is the royal patronage that it received. Thus schools of Ragamala paintings depicting classical ragas galvanized into various schools of art. In Golconda, it was the Bahmani patronage; in Jaipur it was Rajput rulers; in Delhi the Mughals; in the hill kingdoms of Punjab and Himachal the rulers, and in far off Murshibad it was the Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah who nurtured these talents through their largesse towards the painters.

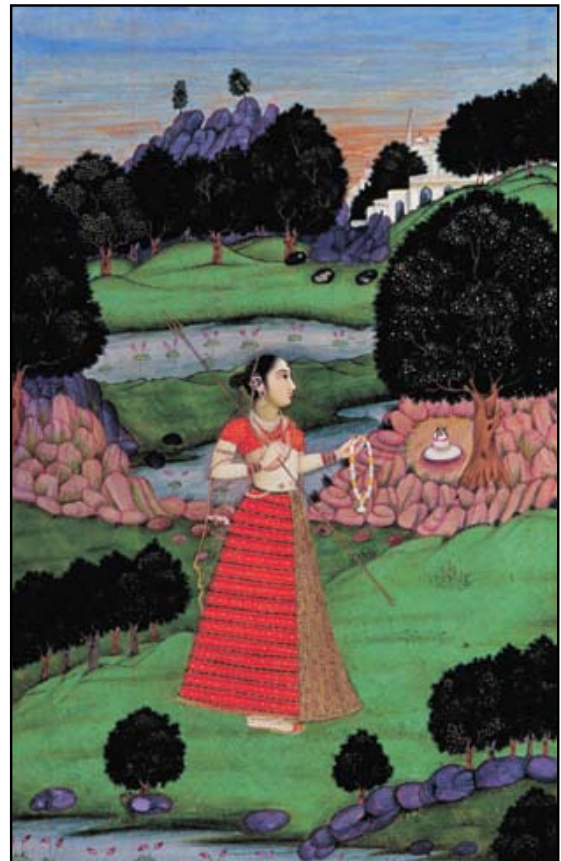
In all these places the art work that was produced had an elegant underbelly. Thus the pictorial raw



Kanada Ragini, Malwa painting Rajasthan, 1700 A.D., British Library, BL-IM 559 (V)

material for their purpose consisted of a courtly angle. Beautiful ladies from the Rajput kingdoms, rulers fashioned after the Mughal court as well as ascetics in their forest became their vocabulary. Compositions were arranged with the use of forms of beautiful Rajput ladies, aristocratic rulers and in their palaces and gardens became the source for depicting the various seasons. The changes in nature, in the countryside as well as indoors, were considered ideal formats for making the seasons come alive in the form of miniature art.

What is unique about the Ragamala miniatures depicting the seasons is that while the subject matter remains constant, namely the seasons, their depiction finds a new avatar in the hands of individual artists and the different schools. This has added to the richness of content in their presentation of the seasons and provides a descriptive layout that is as varied as that of the individual musician's tackling of a raga. In short, the seasonal pictorial of the Ragamala is not just an iconographic layout but also visual dictionary of all the aspects that are included in the raga being painted. Not to be faulted on detail, these erstwhile artists had attached elaborate footnotes either above the main pictorial illustration or below it, identifying the character of their raga on view and even its most prominent notes at times.

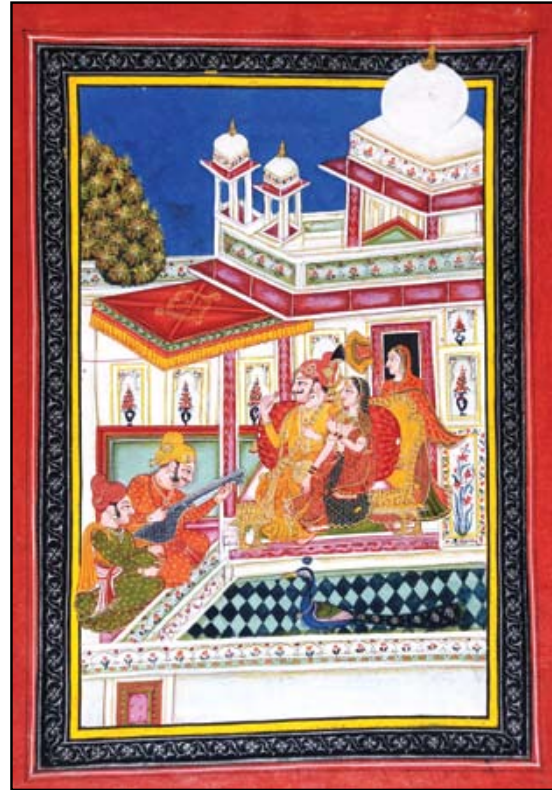


Sindhavi, the fourth ragini of Bhairon, represented by a woman holding a triton, Raza Library, RL-254 Album-VI,f,4a

Another of its plus points is that it is not a single offer on the ragas but one that was interpreted in their own understanding by a plethora of schools during the era of its prevalence. To avoid their creating a mind boggling array of simply pictorial offerings, latter day scholars have formulated the various Ragamala works into a system of codification, whereby the Ragamala paintings fall into one of the three categories, such as the Meshkarna system, the Hanumana system and the Painter's System. Of these, the Meshkarna system was a compilation of earlier Ragamalas done by a Brahmin scholar by that name, in the 16th Century. It was basically a system that found favour in the Plains. In the desert kingdom of Amber, the Hanuman system was used, wherein the musical properties of ragas were included, making it slightly removed from



Gujari ragini: a lady with a vina seated between two trees, Victoria and Albert Museum, V&A IS 36-1960



Sri Raga, Uniara, Rajasthan, 1770AD, photo courtesy: National Museum

the other schools of the region that relied instead on the Painter's system. What basically differentiated these systems was the sequential order in which the ragas and raginis were tabulated.

Also, with the raw material of nature among others, for their paintings, the artists had made a close study of Narada's Sangita Makaranda wherein the Ragas are classified into six male ragas each of which have female ragas attached to it, known as raginis. Then as new ragas were added to music, there came along the concept of putra or sons of ragas. Thus the older ragamalas speak of six male ragas, five each of female ragas and a cache of eight putra ragas. These many modes of depicting ragas impacted favourably on the artist's ability to elaborate on the seasons, thus amplifying the basis of their pictorial subject matter. It therefore gave the seasonal paintings a highly natural look adding to their timelessness for over the

centuries, the characteristics of each Indian season is a constant factor.

The pictorial raw material was also infused with human emotions or rasas. These gave the works their soul and perhaps the reason for their long standing usage. The emotional flavours of joy, sorrow, longing, anger, withdrawal, neglect by one's lover, were the commonly used ones. In addition, the more ascetic ragas made use of the concept of 'dhyana' or meditation as their source. And to show the notes used in a particular raga, these early painters relied on the idea of nature's palette, using their representative colours to 'colour' their images. Hence the peacock, the iconic bird of the rainy season featured in the works as the first note or 'sa' and was painted lotus pink. The cuckoo, in grayish-blue, a symbol of the spring and summer was the note 're'. The golden goat related to the third note 'ga' while the deer, in white, was the note 'ma'. The Indian cuckoo whose call heralds the



Vilavala raga, British Library, BL OR 8838 (10r)

arrival of spring was black and stood for the note 'pa'. The frog and the elephant in yellow and spotted respectively, were symbols of the last two notes of the scale. With these subtle accents, not only was the seasonal raga painted but its essential characteristics were elaborated through a vibrant visual reference.

Even though the sequential order of various Ragamalas show a difference, based on the system in use, the representative seasons of the Ragamala follow the same pattern in all the schools. The Raga Shri is a depiction of autumn, while its counterpart season, autumn is eulogised through the Raga Basant. The intensity of summer calls for the Raga Bhairava to be painted white. The opposite end of the scale is the raga Pancham which is associated with winter. But the most glorious and oft celebrated raga for these painters was those of the rainy season emanating from the Raga Megha, the central male raga, which in turn gave rise to other associated female ragas such as Malhar and gor Malar. For showing snowy wintry conditions, it was the raga Natanarayana that the painters had picked on and in a total round-up of these entire seasonal offerings was the Dipak which could be sung in all the seasons.

In addition to this seasonal formula, there had developed a treasury of several ragas that could be sung in all the seasons and thus gave painters the freedom of the brush and the independence of conceptualization by their very nature. Some of these included the raga Bhairavi, Pahari, Maund, Dani, Gopi, Mira, and Bhatiyar. In a further development, painters began to dissect the seasons in terms of their beginnings, their full import and the final petering out. Ragas too, became further crystalised according to this sub-division and gave artists more reason to elaborate on their seasonal theme. The Raga Vasant found favour when depicting early spring and Bahaar was used to depict the height of the season. Similarly Bhairavi was the raga of early summer, followed by Bhairava for the height of the season. When the rains were accompanied by thunder and lightning, artists painted the Raga Malhaar and the onset was

heralded in the forms of Megh. Ragas Pancham and Bhoplai formed the contents of winter and when temperatures turned to freezing, the Raga Kamod was its representative pictorial form. Autumn saw the emergence of Raga Shri in the Ragamala and the Pahaari became an all-season choice.

All this would have been puerile had the emotional content of the ragas remained untouched in this collective. The raga Shri was the Atman according to this formula of painting. Maun or inner silence had the flavour of Vasant in it. Courage was the stuff that found voice in the raga Bhairava and sound was signified through raga Megh. For viraha or longing for the beloved they used the raga Natanarayana, an all-season concession for obviously viraha is not a strictly seasonal concern. Sorrow was aptly portrayed through the raga Dipaka and knowledge or gyaan was envisioned in the raga Pancham.

Tracing the glories of the rainy season and which is not within the purview of the seasonal chart is the raga Hindol, meaning swing. A highly appreciated illustration of the raga dates to the 17th century Marwar School where the swing is more than just the visual input. In addition, the prince or Krishna, is shown seated on the swing. Several female attendants stand around the central focus and entertain him with wine and music. The rain clouds in it mark the arrival of the cooler season after the harsh summer and the composition in its entirety, exudes the emotion of joy.

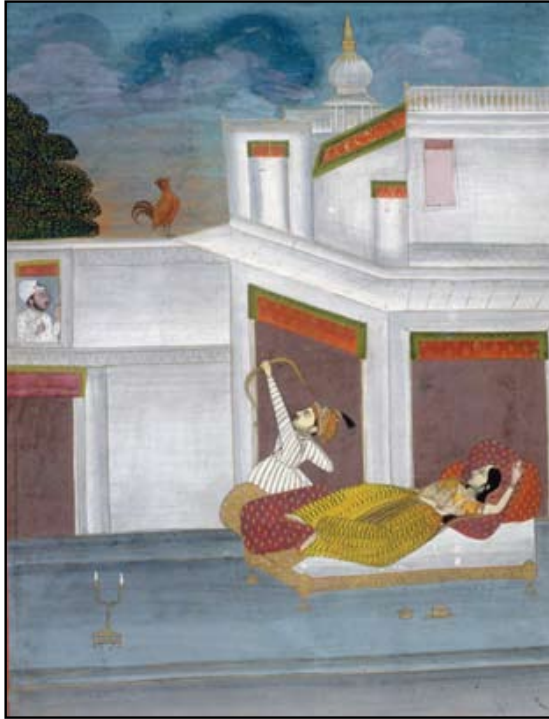
The raga Megh, like the raga Vasant, is also painted around the central figure of Krishna. In the Deccani School of the 18th century for instance, it is a joyous Krishna dancing among the gopis. The body is arched emphasizing the rhythm of the music and his lower garments are painted in shades of ochre. He is aloft a hill being regarded as Giridhar. The entire feeling is that of blossoming, with the peacocks dancing in the rain, the storm clouds hovering above breaking the oppressive heat, which conveys the mood of exhilaration. The clouds are given a unique treatment where instead of just varied tones of grey-black the



Desi, a ragini of Rag Malkos, Raza Library, RL-1570 XIX,f.40b

artist has dipped his brush into pinks and maroons and colours in-between. Since clouds are a prominent feature of the iconography of the raga Megh, this accent gives the work a whole new perspective.

Other variations of the central figure of this raga feature diversity in their choice of forms. In the Pahari tradition, the raga has been given a unique format in that the central figure of Krishna is conspicuous by its absence while in its place is an ascetic seated in a shrine dedicated to Lord Vishnu, and the overall scene is a reminder of the rainy season. According to some scholars there is no other example known of the usage of an ascetic form for purposes of depiction, and thus this painting lends itself at times to being mislabeled, say the experts. Besides this one-of-a-kind depiction, there is of course the Krishna legend used by these artists and they have given the central figure variety by their creative variety. There is, for



Four illustrations to ragas, Victoria and Albert Museum, V&A 6/3257 IS 99-1954

instance the portrayal of the Lord holding a conch shell and standing in the rain, or under the rain clouds. In descriptive elaborations of the work it is stated that Megh is the lord clad in lightning.

Also, Sanskrit couplets ascribed to this raga add further meaning to the depictions in the various schools. In the case of Megharaja, the description states that he is dressed in yellow and is sought by thirsty cuckoos. His complexion is of the blue lotus and his face the colour of the moon. He wears a bewitching smile and is seated in a throne of clouds. He is the one amongst heroes and the youthful melody of the clouds.

With the ending of this seasons and the start of Autumn, painters had turned their attention to the Raga Shri. Depicted in the Bundi, Mewar and 19th century Jaipur School, the central figure is a seated lord listening to two musicians. In other forms, he is surrounded with his consort with the Lord holding a veena. In yet another, there is the presence of a second

musician with a horsehead. In the Malwa depiction incidently, there is another emotion on display as it shows a standing couple in a palace, caressing. In a painting of the Agra region where the text is in Braj, the illustration is a setting in a beautiful mansion, a woman, holding a fly whisk over him, suggesting the feeling of comfort. The Lord, in this form is deep in contemplation about the beauties of Shri raga, creating an aura of serenity.

The literary Braj Bhasha with these depictions speaks of the blue god, who is well built. He is graced by the company of the auspicious goddess Lakshmi while he is seated on a throne of gold. The musician is Narada playing to him on the veena, who has decked himself



Raga Dipaka, Bundi, Rajasthan, 1630AD, photo courtesy: National Museum



Vasanta Ragini, Ragmala Painting Malwa c. 1650. 17.3 x 20 cm, Bharat Kala Bhawan, ACSAA 3932

with flowers and ornaments. Overall, states the text, Shri raga is conceived in sentiment and all learned men sing its praises.

Passing on to winter, it is Raga Pancham that is primarily associated with it. In its Braj Bhasha description, Pancham is a ravishingly beautiful woman. She is attributed as winning the hearts of women by her ways even while her affections are fixed on her lover. She surrounds herself with hilarity and merriment and is subsumed by melody. And she holds permanent tryst with her comrades.

Its pictorial layout in accordance with the Meshakarma Ragamala system, makes the central figure of the raga the dark-skinned god, draped in a yellow garment, and holding in his hands a betel leaf, lotus, a flute, cymbals, while his forehead is marked by the sun and the moon. He is accompanied by Indra and Shiva. Again in the Jaipur School (19th century) Krishna is shown rewarding musicians. A lady listening to music is another form of it, while in a Hindi text of this painting the poet speaks of the fifth note, the Panchama vibrating all over the body on hearing the same and such is the opinion of one Lachmiman.

In the various Rajput Schools too, this raga has found several led to several interpretations. While the provincial Mughal school shows the Lord and his consort rewarding musicians in another, the Lord and his consort are in a room, with the Lord holding a veena, a sword, a flower even while listening to two performing musicians who are rendering their art in another room. The Malwa painters chose as their subject the Lord watching a dance and in an alternative version, he is the audience when two musicians are performing. The Jaipur version however, differs from all the above as the painting shows a lady listening to two musicians placed on either side of her.

Come spring and the artist's pots of paint and fine brush are set to create the beauties of the Raga Basant (Vasant). Painted by Bundi School followers it is the Lord surrounded by the iconic symbols of spring, and listening to the music of the women. The joyous mood was carried forth into the Malwa schools as well, where the Lord and his consort are seen dancing through a garden. Since the festival is associated with Holi, painters of the Jaipur Schools had exhibited the festive colours with creating women squirting coloured water and coloured powder. The floral exuberance of the season also, inspired many a painter, leading to the Meshkarna listing of it as a crowned central figure in a garden, holding a lotus, while the entire painted surface is suffused with blossoms, bees women and laughter.

In the case of the descriptive texts for this raga, the Braja Bhasha inset speaks of Krishna in his most loved form, as the Lord Madana, resplendent as he dances around, enthraling the hearts of mankind, A female musician reciprocates this feeling as she plays on the mridanga. The mango tendrils are a reminder of the blossoms of this fruit during this season and the call of the cuckoo echoing the happiness of this season.

Passing on to the onset of summer, the colour palette illustrates a different vocabulary. According to the Amber tradition, this raga is clothed in the garb of a severe ascetic lacking even the anointing of his body

with sandalwood. In the Meshkarna guidelines, he is painted in white skin and garment, his face akin to that of Shiva, as his throat is painted blue after the swallowed poison, the third eye and bejewelled ears, holding a lotus and a buffalo horn in his hands, while a trident and skull bowl complete the iconography.

The Sanskrit couplet further enhances this imagery by adding that he carries the Ganga and his forehead wears the moon. The body is wrapped with serpents and he draped in elephant skin. He holds a trident and dons a garland of human skulls, while the paean at the end hails his presence as the first of all melodies.

The Hindi couplet on this raga elaborates more than just the pictorial vision, for it delves into the



Ragini Sorathi, Kangra, late 18th century, photo courtesy: National Museum

musicology of the icon going beyond the descriptive content. It states that the raga itself was born of the mouth of Shiva and that it contains the five notes of the scale namely dha, ni, sa, ga, ma. In addition, the raginis surrounding this raga are personified as women and are listed as Sorath, Bhairavi, Varari, Madhumadhavi, Saindhavi and Bangal ragas. Thereafter each of these raga-damsels are described in their visual richness wearing the attributes of their femininity with grace. In yet another of these texts, the Sangita Darpana, written in Hariballav's Hindi translation of the Sanskrit text by Damodara, each of the well known iconic representations of this deity are listed with poetic élan. Harivallabh also adds that Shiva is happy in beating his drum, while the shining quality of this raga is envisioned through this familiar composition.

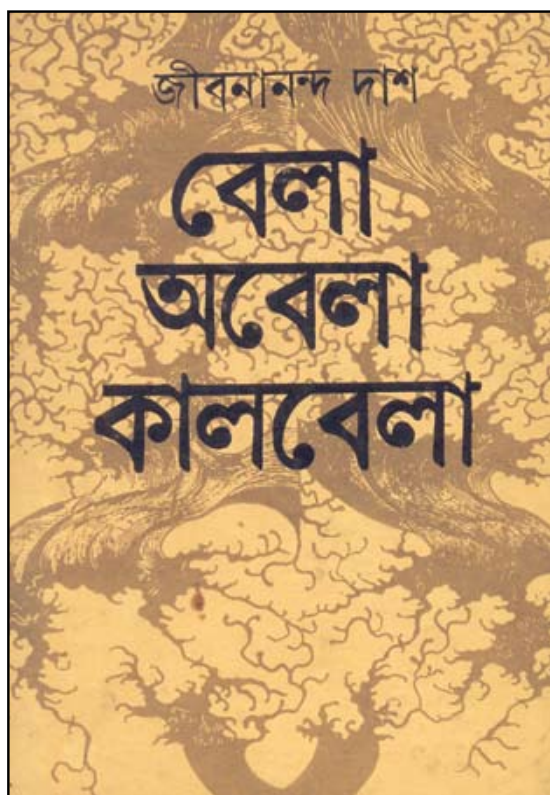
Including the all season raga Dipak as a complete wrapping up process about the seasons, the Sangita Darpana states that the raga demonstrates a lover arriving at the apartment of his beloved dazzling in an array of jewels whose sparkle vies with the light of the sun. The romantic theme is echoed in the Hindi couplet that describes the two as young lovers. The beloved wins over his lady with the Raga Dipak, which becomes the symbol of his fulfillment. The Braja dialect lines too, carry forth the same thought through a more explicit description. In the commanding brush of the Amber School, the raga is associated with Diwali, with the Lord parading before his court in a regal procession. The women walk beside the caparisoned elephant and musicians play along, ahead of the procession, their faces, rather than their backs turned towards their regal dignitary.

Conclusively it is not surprising to determine why the Ragamala has lived on. In its painterly perfection are not just the techniques of painting, or the scansion of poetry, but a deep harmonization born of the integration of all the aesthetics skills that mankind has improvised to express his inner soul.

Three Bengali Poets and the Seasons

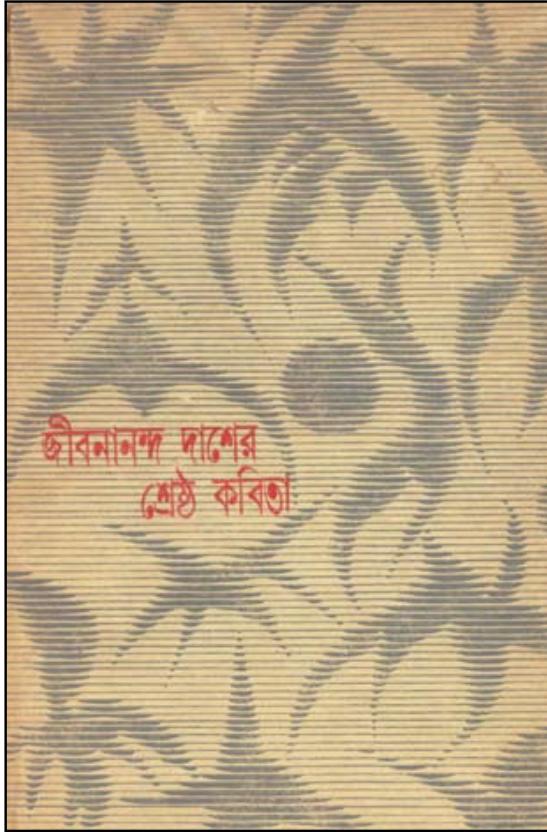
Prof. Shormishtha Panja

The three poets I have chosen for my essay are Rabindranath Tagore, Jibanananda Das and Joy Goswami. All of them write primarily in Bengali. One of the reasons I chose these three is that their writing could not be more different from one another. Although both Das and Goswami are undoubtedly influenced by Tagore who almost single handedly changed the course of Bengali poetry, they are



also acutely conscious of writing under his shadow and strain every nerve to escape from his massive presence in Bengali letters.

The lives of these three poets also take very disparate directions. Tagore was born in 1861 in a wealthy Brahmo household in Kolkata, was homeschooled for the most part, and was surrounded from a very early age with the best talents in music, dramatic arts and spiritualism. It was no wonder then that he was something of a child prodigy, producing an accomplished and sophisticated cycle of poems written in a deliberately archaic style, *Bhanusingher Podaboli*, at the early age of sixteen. He was widely travelled and feted both at home and in places like Russia, Japan, China, Europe, Latin America and America. He was the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, based surprisingly enough, on a badly translated collection of his poems, the *Gitanjali*. He was a polymath, equally adept at writing poetry, novels, drama, dance dramas, short stories, satires, humorous pieces, essays and travel writing. Besides, he was to all accounts an excellent administrator and an energetic player in the nation's freedom movement. Fakrul Akam and Radha Chakravorty in the Introduction to their excellent collection *The Essential Tagore* state that it was Tagore's trip to manage his father's estates in Shilaidaha (now in Bangladesh) in 1890 that first brought him into close contact with nature and with poor people. This consequently brought about a distinct change in his style of writing. However, if a person whose first poem



was apocryphally *jol pore pata nore* (The raindrops fall, the leaves move,) composed when he was still a small child, it is doubtful that an appreciation of nature could have happened as late as his twenty-ninth year.

Nature and the seasons are everywhere apparent in his work. His favourite season is of course, Borsha or the monsoon, but he is probably the only Indian poet who has composed with the utmost felicity poems and songs about each and every season in the Bengali calendar: *grishmo* (summer,) *borsha* (monsoons,) *shorot* (early autumn,) *hemonto* (late autumn-early winter,) *sheet* (winter,) *boshonto* (spring,) even making subtle distinctions between shorot and hemonto which are clubbed together as autumn or fall in the western calendar. Take, for example, his song *jhorojhoro borishe baridhara* where the description of the night rain coming down in torrents is suddenly

interrupted wholly unexpectedly with the line "*Hai pothobashi, hai gotiheeno, hai grihohara*"—alas for the pavement dweller, the one robbed of his gait, the one who has lost his home!¹ Far from being a paean to the music of the rains, watched in comfort from the protection of a verandah, Tagore's heart immediately goes out to those who are not in a position to enjoy or appreciate the beauty of the rains as they have nowhere to go and the rain beats down on their poor, bare heads at night. Even his favourite season does not prevent the poet from being blind to the plight of those who have lost all. One is reminded of Lear's lines on the heath as the storm breaks and the gates of the castle are closed on him by his daughters:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? (*King Lear* 3.4.28-32)

Think also of how unusual the line is coming in the middle of a song where one would expect gently soothing lyrics talking about the beauties of verdant nature, of trees and grass freshly washed in the rains, to go with the lilting melody rather than a jolting, discordant reference to the homeless street dweller.

It is not just the monsoons that inspire Tagore. Even the brutality of an Indian summer feeds his imagination:

I bow to you, O mendicant, free from worldly desires.
Light up your flames glowing with heat,
Extinguish the self, and let the pure light of enlightenment
Arise from the soul.
(*Nomo nomo hey boiragi* trans. Fakrul Alam)²

Tagore correctly identifies the sparseness and minimal quality associated with a burning, parched Indian summer and chooses to personify the season as a mendicant who has given up all worldly desires. There is a clever twist to the association of fire with

desires, particularly those of the flesh. Here the poet urges the fire not of desire but of renunciation to burn up all desires and all ideas of the ego so that the soul can be freed.

He identifies the bleak winter landscape as a supreme being who hides him/herself from view:

O Supreme One, will you be so miserly with yourself
In the midst of your own teeming creation?...
How can cuckoos sing in withered leaves and barren
branches?
Timorously we muse on your mute message and
empty assembly.
(*Eki maya lukao kaya trans. Fakrul Alam*)³

The thing to note here is the familiarity of the address to divinity. Much like John Donne, Tagore addresses the Supreme Being with the informality of an old friend. This is brought out even more clearly in the petulant, child-like refrain of the original Bengali song:



"*Amar shoi na, shoi na, shoi na prane, kichute shoi na je*" (I can't bear it! Oh, I just can't bear it!) (translation mine). And even though the winter landscape is bare and seemingly shorn of inspiration, the poet is able to read and to hear a wordless message (*mouno baani*) even in its voicelessness.

Jibananda Das's life was the exact opposite of Tagore's. While popularity, acclaim and awards were a part of Tagore's charmed professional life from the very beginning, Das lived a life of obscurity, frequent poverty and was practically unknown at the time of his untimely death after a tram accident. He was born in Borishal (now in Bangladesh) in 1899 and the lush, verdant landscape of his boyhood would revisit his poetry again and again. Das, son of a schoolteacher father and a poet mother, was always a loner. Das was influenced by English poetry since he studied English literature at Presidency College, Kolkata, and later taught the subject in a number of colleges, including City College, Kolkata and Ramjas College, Delhi. He was an important part of the Modernist movement in Bengali poetry that began in the 1930s and included poets like Buddhadev Bose and Bishnu Dey. Unlike Tagore, Das was known to only a handful of people in his lifetime. Most of his work was published posthumously and his fame came after his early demise in 1954. The Sahitya Akademi prize was awarded to him shortly after his death.

Like Tagore, Das too was Brahma, but unlike Tagore, mysticism and spirituality play a very minor role in his poetry. The Calcutta riots prevented him from returning to Borishal and this exile from that part of Bengal associated with his boyhood permeates and seeps into his verse like a delicate mist. What is astonishing in his verses about the seasons is that there is a tremendous materiality and particularity about the details of nature come under his microscopic gaze, yet the mood is always nostalgic—as if he writes these lines positioned in a place very far from the scene he imagines. The time of his nature poems is always not now, not the present—it is far off in the future or equally remote in the past. It is almost as

if this is a poet who has mastered the idea of being nostalgic about an event that is yet to take place, an event in the future:

I shall return to this Bengal, to the Dhansiri's bank:
Perhaps not as a man but as a myna or fishing kite:
Or dawn crow, floating on the mist's bosom to alight
In the shade of this jackfruit tree, in this autumn
harvest-land...

Perhaps you'll see a glass-fly ride the evening breeze,
Or hear a barn owl call from the silk-cotton tree...
You will find me among their crowd.

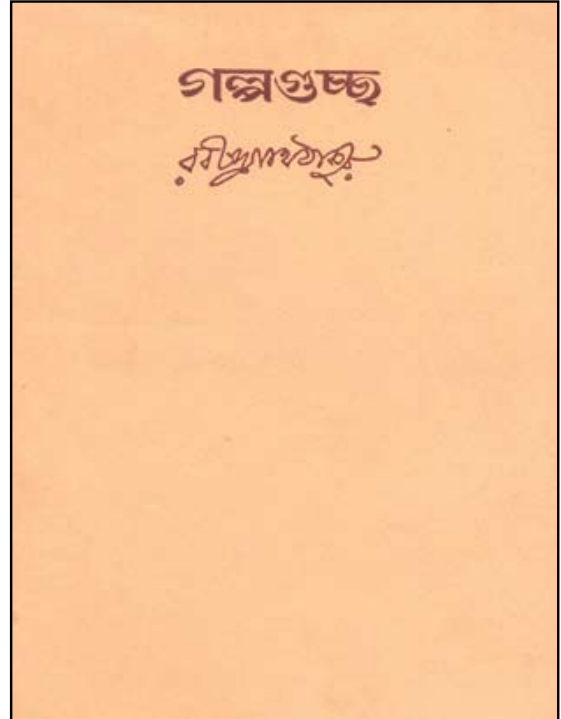
(*Abar ashibo phire*, I shall return to this Bengal *Ruposhi Bangla* Beautiful Bengal (1934), trans. Sukanta Chaudhuri)⁴

Note how the particularity of "this jackfruit tree" is juxtaposed with an imaginary time in the future in which the poet will change his shape to that of a myna or a fishing kite. There is an acute sense of loss in that the poet imagines a time in the future where he will not have his present shape—his companion will endure, but he will be gone. The reference to "autumn harvest-land" brings to the forefront Das's obsession with the fleeting season of *hemonto*. Not the season of mellow fruitfulness, ripe corn and blushing fruits that Keats celebrates in his "Ode to Autumn," the season Bengalis call *shorot*, but the spare, minimal season after the crops have been cut, when the landscape is bare and stubbled and nature prepares for winter:

Here the sky is blue — across the bluish sky there bloom

Sajina flowers, ice-white like Aswin's autumn light.
Here among the akanda flowers in humming flight
Black hornets pass all through the sunny afternoon.
(*Ekhane akash neel* Here the sky is blue *Ruposhi Bangla* Beautiful Bengal [1934], trans. Sukanta Chaudhuri)

If I should see her again after twenty years or so!...
Beside the paddy-stalks, perhaps,
In the month of Kartik—
When the evening crows return to their nests, the
yellow river



Becomes soggy with reeds and rushes and marsh-grass...

Or perhaps the harvest is over,
No longer the bustle of work,
Straw trails from the duck's nest...

(*Kuri bochor pore* Twenty years after *Bonolota Sen* [1942] trans. Supriya Chaudhuri)

The modest trees and creatures that populate Das's verse have never before found a place in Bengali lyric poetry: hijal, akanda, dhundhul trees; the crow, the kite, the owl, the duck and even the mouse and the frog. Another characteristic is the strong sense of smell that resonates through his lines and intensifies the sensory experience of fleeting *hemonto*:

We who have rested our hands in love on the paddy-sheaf,
And come home like evening crows, expectantly; have found

Children's breath-scent, grass, sun, kingfishers, stars,
sky...



We have seen the green leaf yellowing in the autumn dark;
 Light and bulbuls play in windows of hijal-branches;
 The mouse on winter nights coats its silk fur with bits of grains;
 Morning and evening, to the eyes of lonely fish, the ripples
 Fall fair in smoky-rice smell; at pond's edge the duck at dusk
 Smells sleep...

(*Mrityur Aage Before Dying Dhushor Pandulipi* Grey Manuscript [1936] trans. Supriya Chaudhuri)

Another distinctive feature of Das's poetry about the seasons is the way he melds an acute observation of nature with a miniaturist's eye, with a large, all-encompassing vision of huge epochs in history. One of most famous poems, Bonolota Sen, couples the dusk coming "like the sound of dew," the kite wiping off "the scent of sunlight from its wings" and "eyes

like bird's nests" with Vimbisar and Vidharba and the epoch of King Ashok. As a critic puts it, "The private voice of the narrator becomes part of a historical experience of the continuous journey of man and the predicaments of the here and now."⁵ One might add that there is a combination of the specificity, the sights and smells of a certain season, with the continual and eternal cycle of the seasons through time.

Joy Goswami, the last of the three poets I shall discuss, was born in 1954 in Kolkata. His family moved to Ranaghat, Nadia, West Bengal soon after and he has lived there ever since. His family was not well off. His father, a political worker, died when Joy was six, and his mother, a teacher, brought up the children single-handedly. Joy discontinued his schooling in grade 11. He wrote poetry from an early age however, and after publishing his work in Little Magazines was published in the celebrated literary periodical *Desh* early in his career. He has been awarded the Ananda Puraskar in 1989 and the Sahitya Akademi prize in 2000. He is the best-known poet in contemporary Bengal and has achieved a fair degree of success writing fiction as well.

In Goswami's work nature and the seasons never take centre stage. They are the backdrop or the props for the charged human drama that inevitably unfolds. Take, for example, this poem:

An eye had wandered, to another's beloved, her leg.
 When, carelessly, her sari lifted just a little --
 Outside, the rain comes down. A lantern's been lowered underneath the table, in the dark
 Now and then the fair lustre of a hidden foot drifts up...

The fault is not in the eye. There was no choice but to look.

Wasn't there? Why? -- Rainspray rushes in noisily
 Wasn't there? Why? -- Flowering bushes leap on barbed wire

Wasn't there? Why? -- From the one who has no right

Everything is concealed by a fringe of embroidered lace...

Now the rain has stopped. Now she too has left the room.

Only, the breeze returns. Only, like the eye of a powerless man

From time to time the lantern beneath the table trembles.

(*Ekti Brishtir Sandhya* [A rainy evening,] *Ghumiyecho, Jhaupata?* [Are you sleeping, tamarisk leaf?][1990] Trans. Oindrila Mukherjee)⁶

The “rainspray that rushes in” is symptomatic of the overwhelming, illicit feelings that rush up in the narrator on glimpsing the ankle of his friend’s beloved. Not only is she out of bounds—the narrator’s friend’s beloved but that part of her body that is never revealed is suddenly in an instant bare. The rush of feelings that the lifting of this double taboo causes in the narrator is what the rain symbolizes. So the rain here is not just the rain as it so often is in the poems of Tagore and Das but an instrument of pathetic fallacy, making transparent the narrator’s naked rush of feeling.

In another poem, “A branch with dry leaves,” (*Pagli tomar shonge* With you, you crazy girl!) the setting is not that of an autumn or winter day but a spring day.

The narrator sees a crowd of young people playing *dol* (*holi*); a storm erupts and the narrator wants to brush away a dry leaf in a woman’s hair. The storm can take a liberty that the narrator cannot. It can place a dry leaf in a woman’s hair. But the narrator hesitates: “I am her daughter’s friend.” The poem ends

Once more my boughs tremble, my boughs tremble once more

But tell me, o day of spring, can I afford to lose myself in her?

(translation mine)

The juxtaposition here is between the sudden storm whipped up on a spring day that exactly mirrors the sudden tumult in the narrator and the unruly feelings that rise in him towards his friend’s mother. The uninhibited cavorting of the young people playing *dol* also adds to the tipsy mood. There is a parallel too in the strands of silver in the woman’s hair and the dry leaves on the bough. Thus the function of nature is not to be itself in tree and branch and leaf but to indicate human feelings and emotions. There is a constant tussle between the seductive tug of the storm that urges the narrator to release all his inhibitions and the subtle reminders in silver hair and dry leaf that maturity must triumph over youth, measured reason over impromptu desire.

Notes

¹Translation mine.

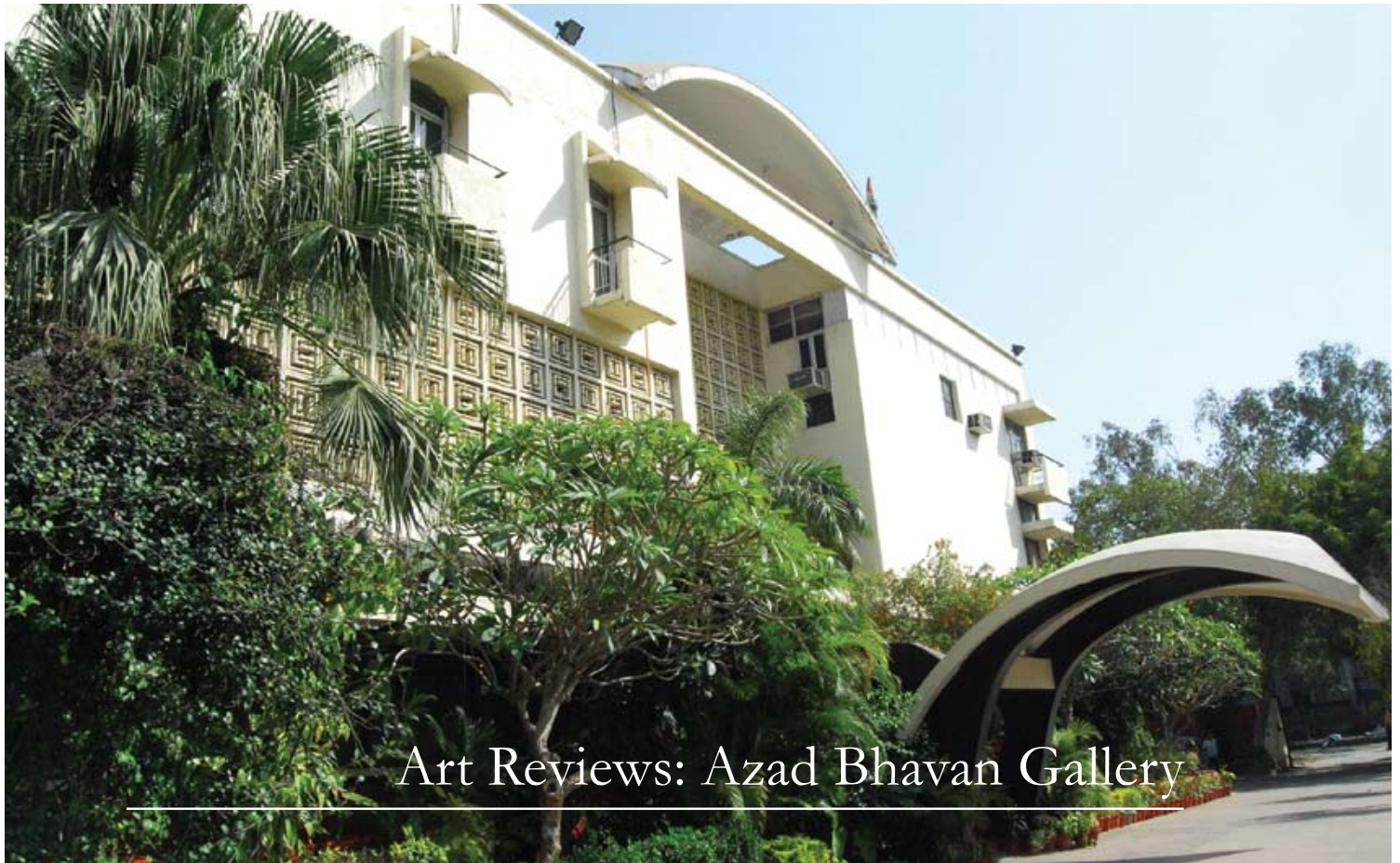
²See *The Essential Tagore* eds. Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati P, 2011), 334.

³See *The Essential Tagore* eds. Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati P, 2011), 348.

⁴All translations of Jibananda Das’s poetry are from *A Certain Sense: Poems by Jibananda Das* trans. ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (Sahitya Akademi, 1998).

⁵See S.K. Das’s Introduction in *A Certain Sense: Poems by Jibananda Das* (Sahitya Akademi, 1998) x.

⁶See http://www.parabaas.com/translation/database/translations/poems/joygoswami_oindrila.html



Art Reviews: Azad Bhavan Gallery

In art it is not unusual to come across renown that is universally recognized jostling side by side with undiscovered gems lying hidden from the light and virtually under the bushel. This phenomena is what gives creative purposes its charm and its engagement. The works that they produce therefore become their voices, their language of communication and for want of a better word, their 'honest' approach to the medium of paints and brushes and many other choices. Their works therefore require viewers to stand before them and see things for themselves, find their own voices giving off a meaning quite their own, which the artist has helped bring out. In short, viewing an art exhibition for the viewer is a way of discovering his inner self and the artist is simply providing the key to unlock the minds of the viewer. It is when this personal interpretation echoes strong sentiments that we are prone to using such expressions as 'gut sense' which, in other words is an outlet of one's own likes and dislikes, a journey of self-discovery that the artist and his work has assisted in one's realisation

of it. In other works, it is the intrinsic quality of the work that possesses the power of endurance and such works live on, in public memory as the voices of an era, of some turmoil or celebration and pass on thereafter, into the realms of history. But whatever be the inner strengths of a painting or art work, it is privileged to remain and though dormant on a canvas, it will resurrect itself immediately on contact with the human mind. Then it is that mundane things like expertise, quality of work and the technicalities



slough off and what emerges is a meeting of souls via the medium of the canvas.

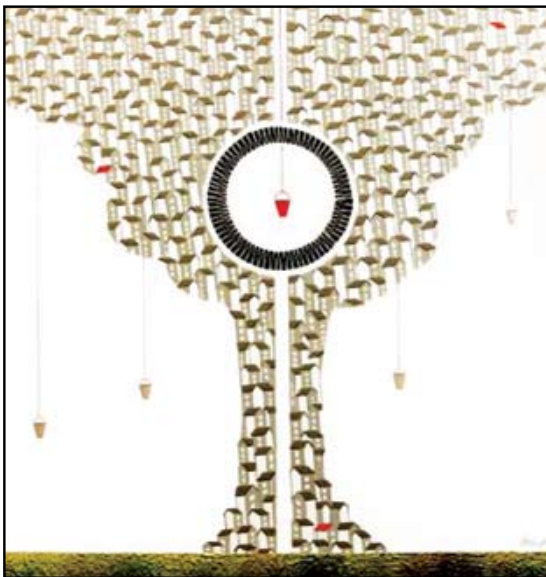
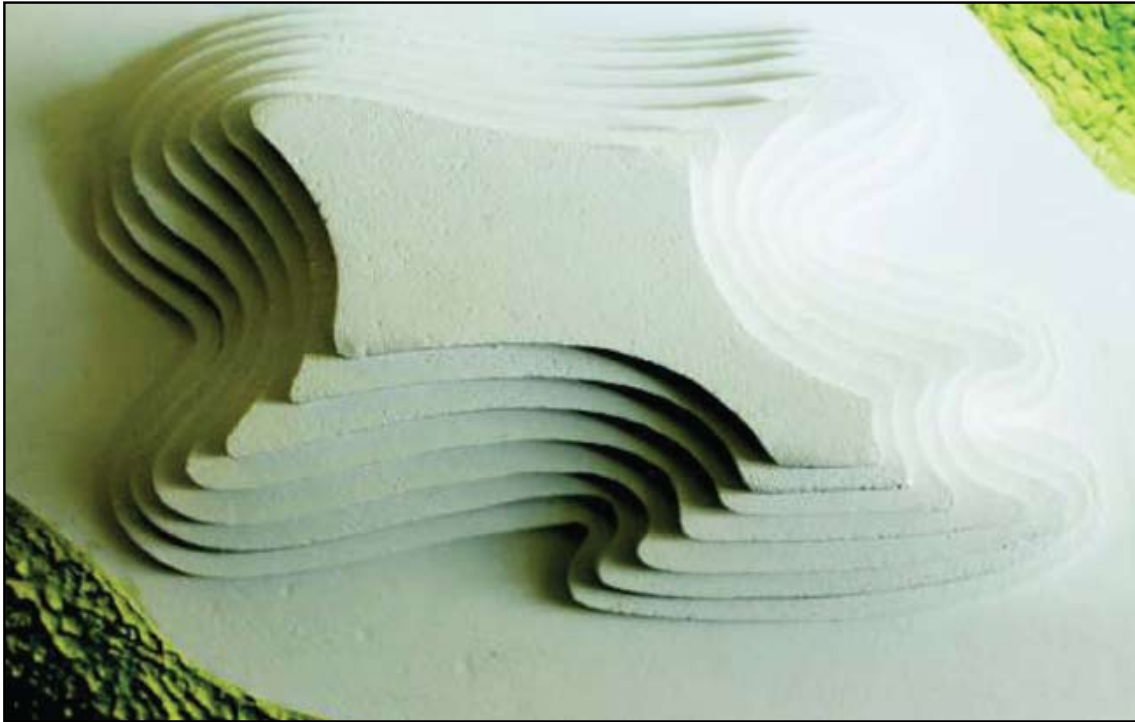
This quarter, the works on view are therefore a way of echoing the above theme in a delightful potpourri of styles, shapes, creations and daring experimentation. All of them have that extra edge to recommend their presence on the walls of the Azad Bhavan Gallery. They are set in dissimilar formats but they exude a taste of the individual artist's innate talents. This is what gives the exhibitions 'colour' in its fullest description for it is not merely the application of the range available on the palette but also the many ideas that swirl in the mind of the artist and which peep through and provide those different strokes by different people. The privileged viewer has the advantage of being privy to this grand exercise encompassing both the mind and the matter of the canvas.

Perhaps the most pertinent example of the above idea is available in the works of artist Ramita Bhaduri of Kolkata whose exhibition of paintings and sculptures is a depiction of the Oscar winning films of the legendary master Satyajit Ray. These paintings have won the artist accolades whenever they have graced gallery walls and the Azad Bhavan Gallery was given a rare opportunity to display this collection. Naturally its debut appearance was in Satyajit Ray's very own city Kolkata, where it was held at Nandan, the West Bengal Government's Film Centre, on the occasion of the 50th year of celebration of the works of Satyajit Ray. Ever since that time, prestigious galleries in New Delhi, London, Mumbai and even Norway, have hosted the show, much to the delight of their audiences. Thus one can safely dub her works as celebrating a pageant of 'form and function' in a made-for-each-other situation.

Naturally it is the iconic films of the Apu trilogy that one first searches for in this collection and sure enough there is the captive moment of domesticity in the

humble home at evening time, with the householder offering his goddess Lakshmi the ritual arti of incense, the smoke pervading across the space where the trio of feminine forms are delicately and creatively arranged in a backdrop with one as a cameo-like impression, another a whiff arising from the incense smoke, and the third a full figure, in the background. These forms seem to speak of the unmistakable presence of the woman in her household and though she never seems to take to the front, she is an intrinsic part of the lives and longings of the human race. In another work, the larger-than-life form of the master himself, in his Rodin-like thinking stance, with forefinger on the cheek and the edge of the forehead, bring back strong memories of the Ray genius and his art of film making.

Apart from the tell tale portrayal of Ray's best loved works, there are a series of unique sculptures done by the artist in a novel medium – chalk. The malleable and fragile quality of the medium has allowed her to draw out the strengths of the medium and allowed her to create a rough textured surface feel that gives the work a strong tactile touch. Without resorting to creating intricate patterns on the surface to enhance surface embellishments, the artist has envisaged a rough stone-hewed feel to her artistry through this adaptation. The linear effect of her forms has also been drawn out of the nature of the chalk pieces which therefore prove the artist's dexterity in exploiting her materials in the best way possible. The elongated look of her feminine form harks back to the Temple architectural forms and thus links the past and present assiduously. Being a musician and a newscaster as well, has allowed Ramita to give her works an extra edge. Thus the art on the walls is a recreation of all these talents in the way that her paintings seem to have a musical quality and her presentational skills on the screen make each work a well finished product for the purpose of a lasting viewership.



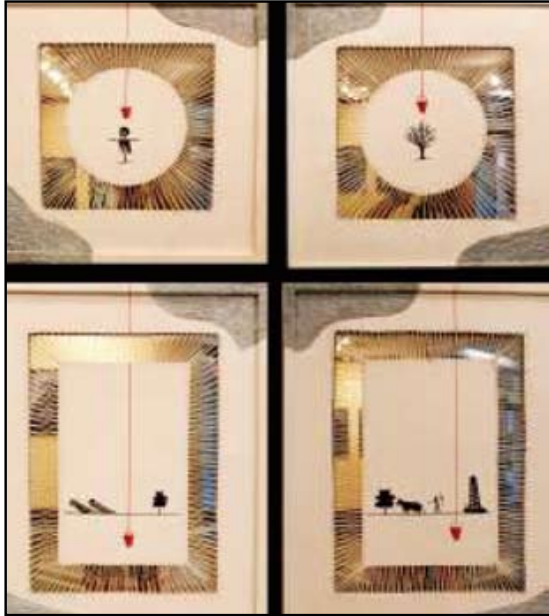
1st "God Save Us"



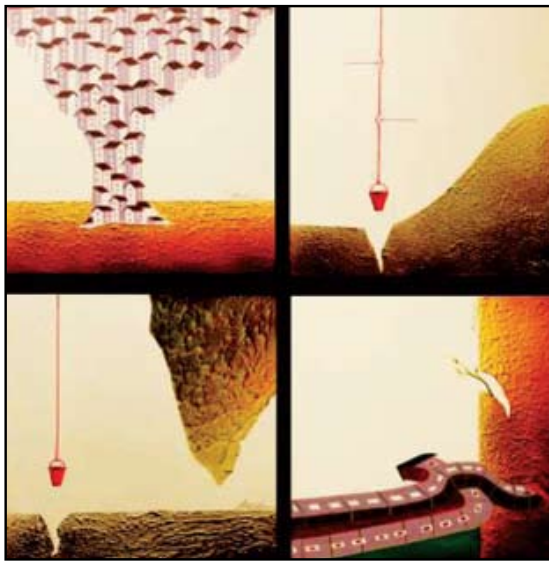
2nd "God Save Us"

A deeply mystical effect marked the works of artist **Arup Biswas**, aptly titled: '*God Saves Us.*' The rather intriguing effect of the title is carried further into the

works that depict a strong geometry without being severe. There is a softness and serenity in the works achieved by the artist after a deep thought process



3rd "God Save Us"



4th "God Saves Us"

behind each execution. Thus the tints of greys, spreads of white, and the concentration of colour in a graphical formation, give off a rare serenity to the works. Also, there is a common angle on which all the works are deftly linked, the symbol of a plimsoll line that drops down towards

the earth, so to speak, symbolically representing the message of the protective hand of the Superior Being, on all of us. It is definitely not the mantle shrouding all the details but just a square niche or a slender touch of a needle sharp line, with an overhanging miniature bucket that hangs down by its own weight. Other symbolic choices of course are the more predictable tree image, a form that is bereft of the clutter of leaves and where the bare branches are conjoined in a composite design effect around an invisible circular concept.

Besides the presence of the miniature there is also the contrasting suggestiveness of the power of might, explained to the viewer through the forms of boulder-like additions, that dominate the canvas surface, in their grandeur. But again, the silky touch of deft designing is not forsaken as even the boulders are not given the front seat despite their bulk. In these works, the bucket is an optional inclusion, but here and there, the human figure stands on the edge, a mite-like creature against the vast landscape all around. The works are technically executed with symmetry and precision dominating the artistic process. Their abstraction is featured through a variety of compositional defects so that everyday human habitations become design touches with an ophthalmology-like quality. The overall pervasiveness of silence that these works impact on the mind, is a quality that the artist has mastered through years of deliberate contemplation and which give the works their strong meditative statement.



10th "1526 to 2014"



Tilak

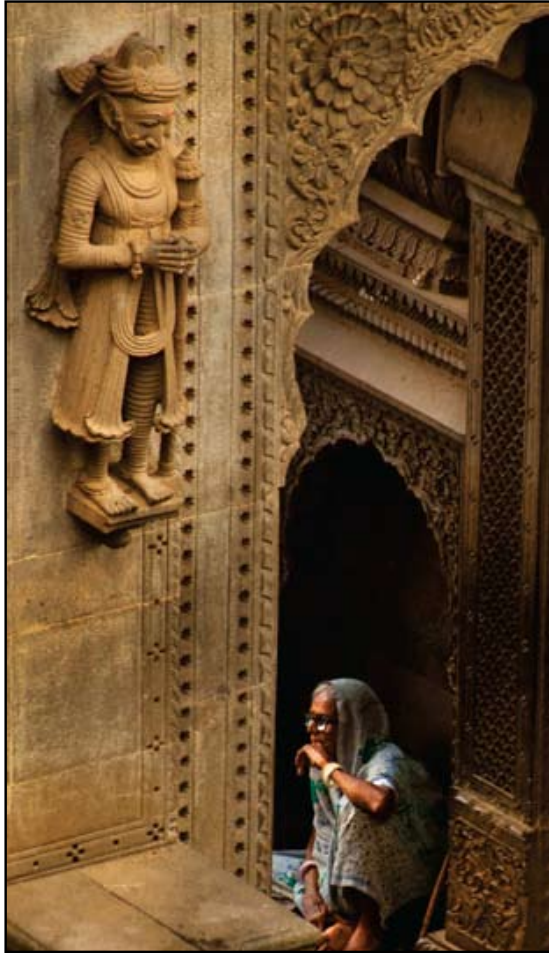
The photographic inclusion this time, includes the works of a young professional in this line. Artist cum photographer **Bhawana Jaiswal** its curator has an eye for the perfect shot and from the right angle and light as is obvious in the works that she has titled , '**The Soul of India**'. Indeed the display becomes a virtual walk through all the essential stoppages of Indian culture, right from the practice of evening aarti on the waters of rivers and lakes to the more esoteric appeal of modern dance. Of course the irresistible draw of the Indian landscape specially at a time when it is



Misty Mandav



Dhyan



Celebration

half hidden from view in a mist filled shroud, is highly appealing, particularly because she has not restricted the viewer's conceptualization of it by boxing it into a specific scenery from a particular space. Thus every one of us at the exhibition was given the freedom to 'caption' it with the familiar note of just such a place one has personally visited. A Raghu Rai fallout in the collection was that of a sadhu at his morning ritual of imprinting his forehead with the typical vermilion, ash and chalky symbolism, a declaration to the world at large of the conviction of his personal beliefs. That sadhus hold her fascination is clear from yet another take on the subject, where the figure is caught on camera as he meditates in the midst of turmoil and



Gulabo

city bustle on the banks of what appears to be a shot from Benaras.

That this art photographer has a sensitive finesse in her work is evident in the silhouette 'Dancing Couple' which is a stylized depiction of crystal clear liquid form, creating the rhythmic pattern of dance steps in perfect coordination. Other dance action shots have such a strong vibrancy that gives out an impression of virtually whirring out of the frame into the viewer's vision. The work titled 'Fusion Dance' captures the psychedelic colours of the costume in a rare delicacy so that the frame appears a studied one of rare beauty instead of a mundane shot of dancers on stage. Perhaps her master stroke is her work titled 'A Morning in Bhagoriya', where the twilight magic is concentrated on the essential focus of a village householder's routine at that time, when the cattle are tethered, the water pot is filled and brought home and the night will bring along its own rituals. A seasoned professional, Bhawana Jaiswal has the added advantage of being a lecturer on photography as well as being a professional and the two aspects of her profession come together in her poised, well composed and unique takes on the everyday scenes of life in this country.

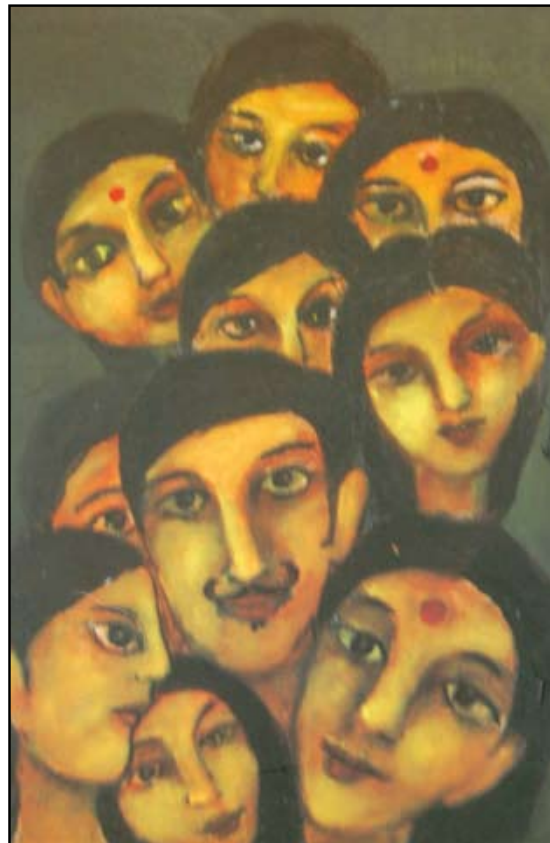


An evening of the terrace

Facial forms are a perfect vocabulary to depict everyday activities and this is proved once again in the works of artist **Sambuddha Duttagupta**, in his exhibition titled '*Reminiscence of Nature*'. Choosing the form of womanhood in varied situations, he brings out the beauty, the silence and the wonders of nature by exploiting the feminine form. Hence the compounded titled of the exhibition becomes justifiable. The female figure that he chooses to portray is the personification of nature's forms personifying freedom from normal existence an attempt to break free of the shackles that bind the woman within a restricted domain. Moving beyond the routine understanding of womanhood, the artist has defined the meaning of womanhood in a unique format. The woman at her toilet in front of a mirror is not just adorning her exterior images but actually glorifying her inner self through the act. Also, his female forms cut across the barriers of age, class,



She & the Flying Bird



The Faces



Romance in the forest I

community and express a universality that is at once familiar as it is unique.

Thus use of bright colours according to the artist is to 'illuminate the soul of the viewer'. For the viewer the many shades give voice to the many moods of womanhood in his varied forms. Besides the indepth expressive content of the works, there is a sense of playfulness that makes viewing his works an experience that takes away from stoic academy and

provides the right admixture of pleasantness to the viewing process. A word about his strokes is worth mentioning as the bold brush that he chooses to express himself, makes every work striking and makes the viewer return for a second look. The compositional expertise is another of his strong points for while the figures are in the forefront, the backdrop, with their colourful palette choices, expounds a balance that is evocative and attractive.



Butterflies

Once more viewers are given a chance to revel in the gaiety of colours in the works of artist **Bindu Ambast** whose exhibition titled *Colour Creations* handpicks just that from the vast offering of nature around us. Looking through the works at first glance what strikes one at once is the fact that the celebratory content of the works have also a reflective facet that introduces the viewer into the inner facets of her imagination. She manages to captures a sense of quietude, despite the riotous abandon of colour all around, and makes the works appear as an image of the inner being of



Three women



The women



Radha Krishna

its creator, the artist herself. For sure, the portrayals have a strong feminine inclusion but even when she has just captured the garden setting of tropical exuberance, there is a deep seated philosophy exuded by the works rather than a facile understanding of the pictorial content of the art. Being an artist who thrives on experimentation, her choice of subjects as well as her forms chosen to express herself artistically, show a varied choice of forms and their placements. While in some cases she has delved into Warli paintings, elsewhere she has drawn inspiration from Jamini Roy's iconic feminine depiction titled 'Puja'.

Besides the richness of cultural references in her art, what is also commendable is her ability to place her forms and backdrop into a creating an overall design element that is both unique and striking. An artist with a bold cultural reference she is not afraid of experimentation that make her art emerge as a play of novelties, even imbibing a futuristic vocabulary that is not strictly according to the rule book of art. That design when blended with fine art can also please the senses is ably brought in her works, particularly in works titled 'Nature' and 'Spring Season'. In short, her works recall the looks we like to recall to mind as pleasant associations, that remain tucked within

us, and which are nudged to the forefront through works such as the artistic creations of artist like Bindu Ambast.



Nature



Spring season



The Race, oil on canvas



Intensity, oil on canvas

When one views the works of artist **Ramesh Nambiar**, it becomes clear that the inspiration for creating art can also have its anchor in the works of a committed

self-taught artist. In fact, the mystical and poised elegance of his works, belie his self-taught condition for every stroke on his canvas wears the mantle of professionalism and deep seated understanding of true art. His paintings got their initial acclaim in the Middle East when he was living and working there. Thereafter his fame and his artistry spread to cities in Europe and north America. Their ability to express true



Look at me, oil on canvas

human feelings sentiments, memories and a sense of possibilities as well as a the strikingly unconventional, bordering on the miraculous, has given his art a unique signature. Whether it is the luminosity of lyrical waters, or the diffused reflection of ice in a jug, or the earthy smell of a green banana leaf, his paintings envelope all these tactile and textured sensations with the ability of a master painter. Thus it is clear, that Nambiar has stood to gain by not being hemmed in by the boundaries of academia and has managed to break free, albeit within a controlled medium, by investing in his true feelings expressed through art.

Perhaps the first thing that strikes the viewer is the unconventional look at the colour palette that



Bouyancy, oil on canvas



Fruits, oil on canvas

this artist employs. There is none of the brilliant extravagance of the primary colours splashed across the canvas. Instead there a controlled muted elegance

that evokes a rare softness in the mind when standing before his works. The sense of perspective that he deploys to his art exemplifies his understanding of the medium as is evident in works such as 'Karuna' or 'The Distant Door'. The works wears a strong contemplative content and though the subjects on view are everyday scenes of south Indian rural life, such as rice planting or bullock cart racing, he has imbued in them something extra that makes them aesthetically pleasing. The portraiture of the face of a labourer, expresses the solidity of a life of labour blending the old wisdom of the permanence of the fruits of labour with that of the graphic representation of it in the lined details of the facial form. There is a sense of truthfulness, a desire to bring out the hard facts rather than couch it in sentiment, that gives the works a rare honesty and elegance.



Composition, oil on canvas



Bird 2, water colour on paper



Buddha, oil on canvas

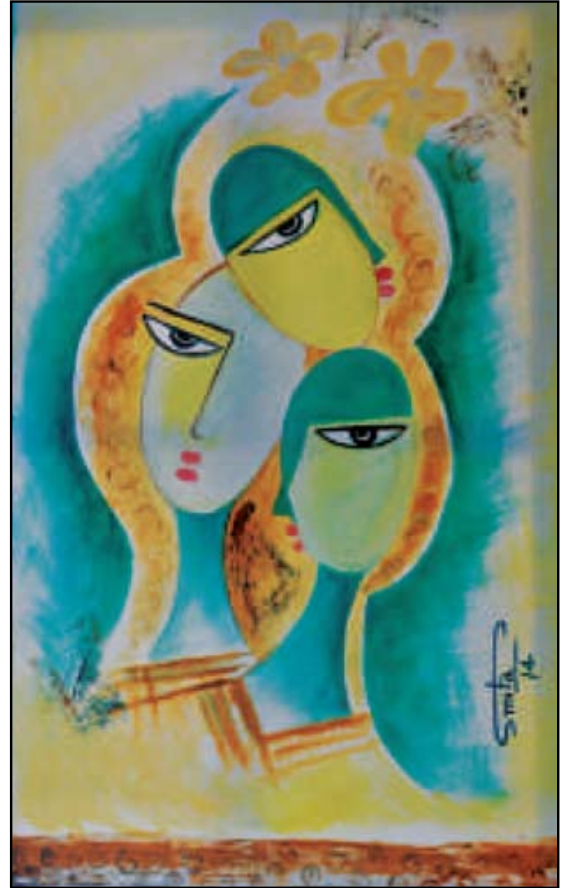
Another artist who believes in fusing her ideas through muted tones is artist **Smita Parashar** whose works '*Women with Nature*' won much appreciation at the gallery. Though the feminine form that Smita uses is not uncommon, there is a freshness in her approach that pleases and excites her viewers. Most of the women are reminders of the rural lifestyle of fetching water, churning butter or even longing for a



With Nature, oil on paper

loved one but it is the deftness of her palette adds versatility to her art and makes one stop and ponder on what this artist as tried to say through her canvas spaces. Besides the realistic format, this artist has also exhibited a few Abstract compositional works, where too, the treatment shows ingenuity and a winning appeal. There is even a narrative quality in her art, as in he work titled 'Woman with Nature' where the atypical symbols of estrangement such as the bird, the lotus blooms in the pond and others, have been age-old symbols heightened through their compact expressiveness ever since miniature art came into being.

Moving beyond the philosophy and the narrative one needs to make a mention of the compositional



Untitled, oil on canvas

command that this artist has displayed. In her work titled 'Ruins of Nalanda' where the viewer has a palpable understanding of the vastness of these ruins and of their elegance despite the passage of the centuries. The realistic choice of colours, leaning on the taupe, beige, brown, and grey-green richness of the site, enables a drama to unfold before one's eyes through this work. Elsewhere the succinct graphic lines suggest a fine hand and exemplifies the in depth thought process that has marked every creation. Her works also prove to the viewer that careful selectivity, whether in the choice of forms or the colours of the painting or even the artistic strengths of an art work, is what makes a mere painting into a true work of art. A close look at Smita Parashar's works prove this point ably.



Shadow of Devdar



Fragrance of Devdar

In the world of art, the ultimate judge of artistic expertise is established by the artist's dexterity in the use of water colours. In particular, artists who like to depict landscapes, are often drawn to this medium for its flowing elegance and its bemused essence. The works of artist S D Shrotriya, are a case in point. A painter of the wide angled perspective of nature in the form of hills, pathways through the mountains lined with deodar and pine and gushing waterfalls carrying down their watery magic in a long shard across the work. The realistic detailing is so grippingly accurate that a viewer can be excused for confusing it with a photographic image. Similarly, the depiction of Village Basla, wears its realistic accents with élan. The large tracts of white colour shows an experienced hand at work, for the entire composition



Village Chwag



Spring

bespeaks ingenuity couple with years of experience. The cubistic study titled 'Varanasi' depicts some of



The flight



Village Basla



Varanasi

the other talents of this versatile artist in its graphic content, its interesting placement, much a like a child's building block arrangement and yet wearing the maturity of the years in its every detail. There is thus a visual and an in depth appeal in the works that marks their professional expertise .

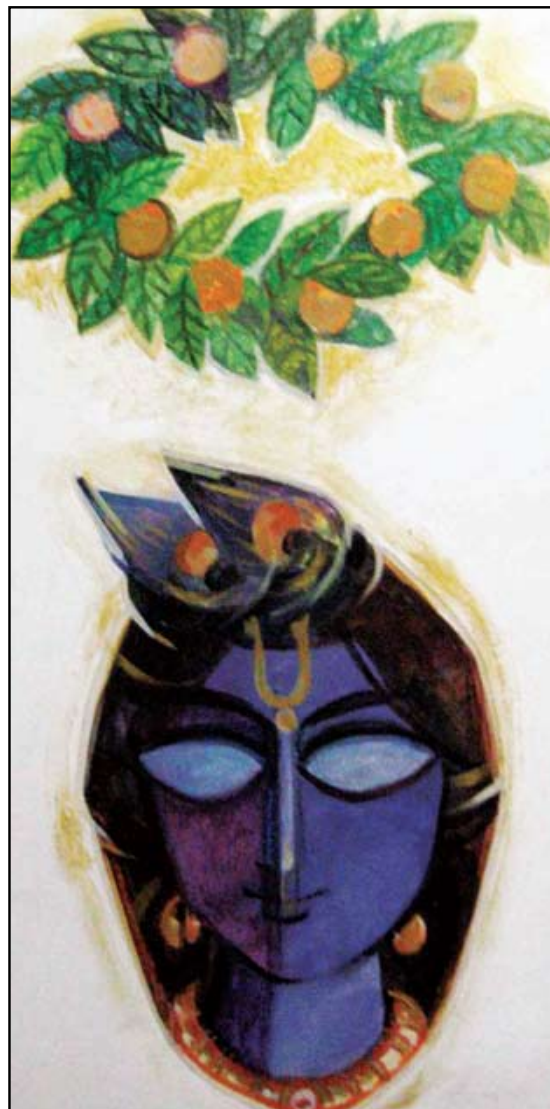
Technique wise the works exemplify the look we strive to achieve when using the water colour medium. There is perfect control of the brush, the depth of paint and the compositional flair, so essential to the success of a water colour work. The colours are unabashedly realistic and that is what gives dignity and honesty to the works. Instead of overarching himself in unnecessary experimentation into what is otherwise a perfect portraiture of the outdoors, the artist has shown confidence in his own expertise and given off his scholarship to the best of his ability. There is poetry, drama and a celebration of realism in the works and the themes and he has devised are those that are well tried out on the water colour palette. What the artist has managed to do is to rescue these well tried themes from sinking into insipid sameness by infusing into them his own originality so that the familiar becomes striking by its undiscovered aspects in the hands of this artist.



20x10 inches, acrylic/canvas

Another seasoned expose was on view in the works of artist **Apurba Pal**, a professional artist who has had a long career in art ever since the sixties. Using acrylic as his medium, this artist creates a layered effect by receding his main figure into the distance while bringing to the foreground a play of strokes and designs giving to the works a decorative and dramatic effect. The smoke smudged eyes of his forms add further mystique to the works and tempt the viewer to have just a little longer look at each work. The

feminine forms that he etches on the canvas show a much practiced hand in their exposition, for not a single stroke is out of place and there is no trace of hesitancy in the ultimate execution. The most striking element is that despite this confidence in his strokes he manages to maintain a softness in the works given his art a rare resilience altogether. Whether in a realistic format or a stylized formation, the elemental grandeur of the figure is always in the forefront and



20x30 inches, acrylic/canvas



18x24 inches, acrylic/canvas

Where he has found a subtle relationship between nature and womanhood uniting these two aspects of life it becomes a rare compendium. The womanly figures draw their solace from natural elements and appear on the canvases in pensive studies amidst the aesthetically original layouts. Aptly titled 'Elements, a reflection,' the works definitely goad the viewer to reflect on his artistry from several angle.



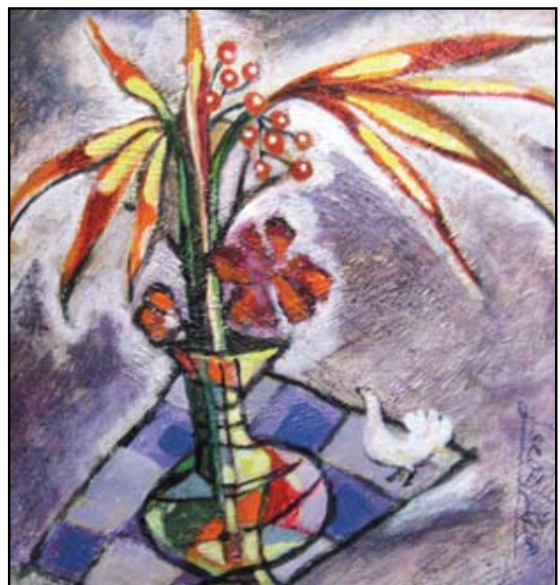
20x30 inches, acrylic/canvas



22x18 inches, acrylic/canvas

attracts the viewer to them through their inherent drama

The eye does not stretch beyond into examining the backdrop with too much concentration for the figure in the forefront contains within it a blend of an experienced approach and the charm of a new composition with the age old feminine form.



13x13 inches, acrylic/canvas



Nature, ink on rice paper. 40.5x58 cm



Butterflies on tree, ink on paper. 24x31 cm



For artist **Sabia**, whose exhibition was a welcome display of a variety of works done across a wide spectrum of mediums, ranging from paints and

acrylics to ink or rice paper, what struck the viewer was the exquisite choice of material to depict the idea she had in mind. Thus when depicting subjects such as 'Butterflies on trees' or 'Girl with Bird' it was rice paper and ink that was the ideal medium, whereas in works such as 'Face' for instance, the depth of her subject could only have been achieved in the artist's chosen medium, namely oil on canvas. In all these works there is a strong leaning towards graphic outlining to give each of her works a finished look, indicative of a confident and well thought out artistic process. The sophisticated appeal of her work is most evident when she defines the ink works, where staunchly resisting a tendency of indulging in a criss cross of lines to etch out ideas, Sabia has used the minimum of lines to carry out the process. This tendency has given her works a spruce look and allowed viewers to appreciate the reflective nature of the artistic depiction.

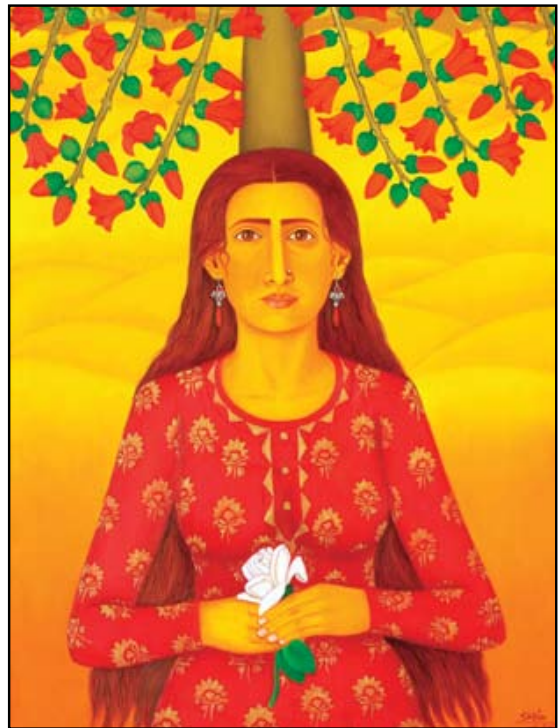


Face 2008, oil on canvas. 24x24 inches

Nature forms the backbone of her art as is evident through her creations. 'I am constantly engaged with the natural elements as they exist around us,' she contends. Through this instrument of her expressiveness, she and become a sources of solace in a strife torn world. Nature for her is the healing touch just as woman is the balm to calm a troubled universe and the fact that she has been able to get such an introspective view of nature is proof of the fact that the artist has spent considerable time in the lap of nature.



Girl watching butterfly 2, oil on canvas. 36x48 inches



Girl with Rose, oil on canvas. 36x48 inches

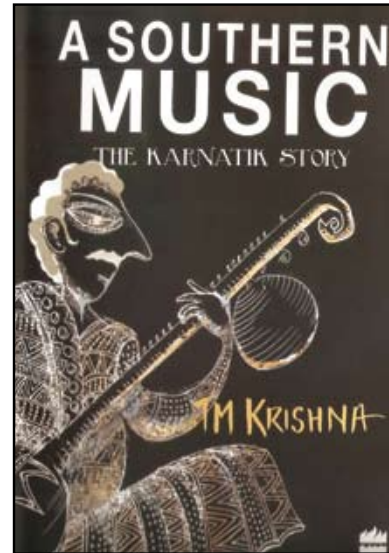
A Southern Music

The Karnatik Story

T M Krishna

Publishers: Harper Collins Publishers India

Pages: 604



Review by Rita Swami Choudhury

A journey when undertaken, envisages a fixed destination, a directional route and a goal ahead. In the collection of 27 essays, by T M Krishna, the writer humbly states that though he had mapped out a route across Karnatik music, there was no destination that he had set out to find. Naturally through the course of this unique foray he has found a riotous array of knowledge unfolding, spilling out and engulfing sensibilities, into a volume that readers will find all-engrossing. It is a story of 'art beauty, philosophy, aesthetics, society and people,' according to Krishna, and helps him unravel, 'why I am standing where I am'. For his readers therefore, the contents unwind all the above, but also include a delightful introduction to the genre of Karnatik music, not as an academic lesson for the uninitiated, but a treatise to be read with interest, ably supported by everyday prose, cutting across lines of scholarly jargon to make it a conversation with a knower. As the depths of its art form unfold across the essays one learns not just the rudiments of the music but also its relationship with the cultural fabric, the chronology, the genres,

the connectivity of this form of music with ancient and contemporary India, particularly in its southern strain.

As for the publication process, it is a professional piece of work executed by Harper Collins Publishers India, as the volume 'A Southern Music The Karnatik Story', remains centred to the main aim of bringing forth how the art of music has impacted on writer T M Krishna, not as a personal record of likes and dislikes but as a candid explanation of what he has gathered and what lies ahead. The volume is arranged into three separate sections titled, 'The Experience, 'the Context' and 'the History', each a self-contained package but linked invisibly to one another. Within the sections there are crossovers, according to the writer, so that the entire experience is grounded to a narrative within a contextuality. Thus the writer brings to the fore the idea that understanding music is a holistic experience wherein sampradaya or tradition provides the intrinsic alignment to a contemporary presentation. It supports the idea of music as a

Much of the music used in early cinema was structured on Karnatik music. Ragas, talas and compositional structures were all borrowed from this art form with such fidelity that if the same compositions were rendered outside the cinema context, they could be seen as pure art music compositions. The brilliant Karnatik music composer Papanasam Sivam (1890-1973) was also a pioneer in cinema music. His music in films was primarily Karnatik in content yet focused on the story. Many Karnatik musicians like G N Balasubramaniam (1910-1965), M S Subbulakshmi and Musiri Subramania Iyer (1899-1975) acted in movies."

continuity, subtly processing the continuum farther, becoming a dam-like condition, that would divert the musical experience.

In the chapter dealing with the 'Intent of Music' diversification of understanding begins to take a serious colour as the author, arranges forth niggling queries that have plagued every seeker. The inquiry into how the music impacts on emotions, the place of conditioning in our understanding of it, the socio-political influences that exist and even the ongoing debate between the sophisticated and folksy angle to our music, come up for due consideration in this segment. In an incisive inclusion, the author brings up the idea of creativity and pointedly asks how it can be differentiated from anarchy exercised by the individual performer, only to decongest the layered patina and expose that what one defines as creativity is actually 'to touch the old world anew' and thus

make the creative journey of the artist a meaningful one.

A more specific approach to the southern style is elaborated after the reader has ploughed through a lengthy discourse of generalizations on the intricacies of swaras, gamaka, laya, raga tala, to establish the aesthetic foundations of this music. Perhaps the cryptic comparison with the Hindustani stream and its approach leaves many a reader wanting a fuller discourse. What is significant though is the author's elaboration of the culture of compositions in the southern format. He has made a mention of notational symbols and clarified its limited application vis-a-vis a full fledged composition of western origin. An interesting tidbit included herewith is the fact that there exist linguistically void texts and he proffers an example of it. For the reader therefore, the fact that sahitya or literature and music can be used to express diversity is brought forth through this reference. The explanation of compositional forms thereafter moves into the scholarly region, making for a closer understanding of it for an interested readership. The arrangement of these forms are subtly linked to the flow of a concert layout and thus readers unconsciously imbibe the formal arrangement of a concert without its direct mention in the text.

A more detailed discussion of the rendering technique is carried forth into the next chapter where the place of each of the performers is given due notice. Interestingly very few works on this subject have given the violinist his due importance and this is where the volume scores over its contemporaries. Not only does the writer speak about the historicity of this element but he also examines his placement on the platform, and his performance role in the lead artist's rendering. Similarly, the mridanga is examined with due credit and the summing up of these musical accompaniments into a rhythmic interplay comes forth lucidly in his write-up. This chapter is therefore an eye opener into the intricacies of southern renderings and offers a novel angle to those seeking to know the whys and wherefores of concert performance today.

In the second lap of this musical journey with T M Krishna, the reader is given a subtle insight into the fact that when Karnatik music is used with other forms such as dance, there is a shift, according to the writer. 'This extraordinary transformation is not in the raga but in the very purpose of this music'. Thus the category of Karnatik form adapts to its new environment through the musical expression it identifies with. The writer very pointedly contrasts the Bhagavat Mela as it is used in Mohiniattam to the meaning that raga kedaragaula brings to the Bhagvata Mela. Thus the meaning is moulded in the aesthetic context according to the writer. An elaborate simplification of this idea then follows as the writer is not in the habit of sweepingly introducing his thoughts without sufficient logical back-up.

The oft asked query about linkages between northern and southern music streams also features in the volume. The writer is candid and forthcoming in stating that : "For the last 500 years musicologists have only complicated our understanding by seeing this connectivity." The author clarifies his theory with rational and well graphed suggestions in that the music is just a 500-year-old product and that the linkages are somewhat nebulous. According to him: "It is true of course that there are terms and ideas that are common to both. But through the ages, all of these terms have been used and understood in completely different ways, based on the musical context of the region and the times. Therefore, while a word that is used today may be traced to ancient treatises, it is quite likely to have meant something else in its cradle years. Any discussion of the two classical music systems of India must begin with an acceptance of this concept – and furthermore must acknowledge that it is quite possible that the musical link we seem to take for granted and seek, does not in actual fact, exist."

Another of the oft heard ideas about southern music is the battering it has assimilated in this age of accessibility. It has been used to pep up various forms of music right from pop and cine art to the

"Once again, Melattur Virabhadrayya is the man of the moment. His tillana is raga pantuvarali set to adi tala must have been one of the earliest tillanas. The dominant view is that this came to Tanjavur from the north, especially considering its closeness to the Hindustani tarana. But there are some scholars who hold the view that the tillana can be traced to the older compositional form, prabandha. Some prabandhas used rhythmic syllables as part of their text. Scholars believe that it may have been the forerunner of the tillana."

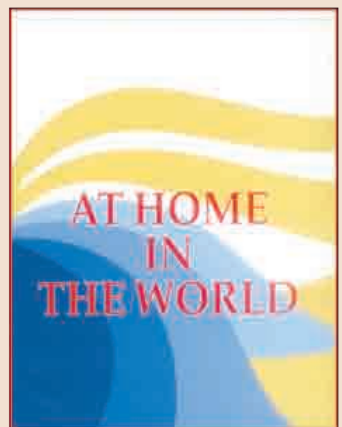
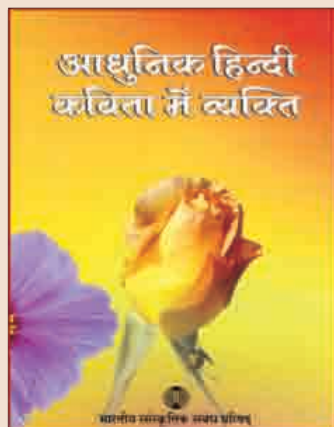
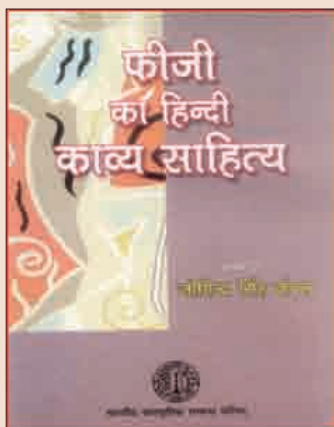
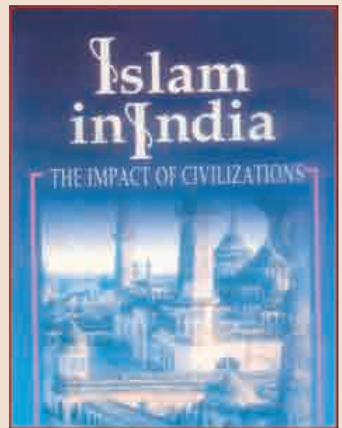
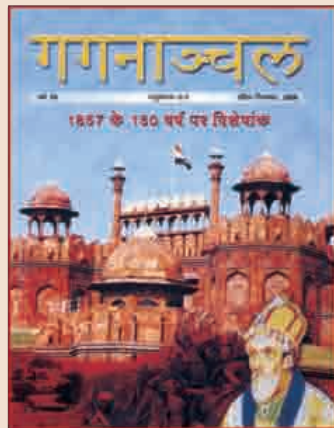
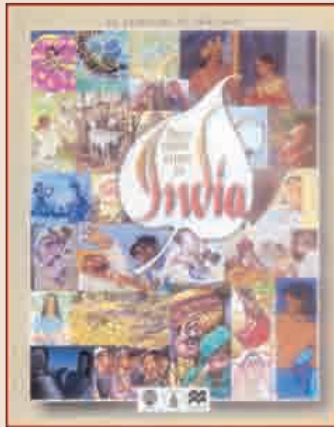
more classical twists it purports. But what the author surmises in the end is that the influences have not shaken the foundations of the original classical stream but simply changed the texture of the experience of the world around us. From cinema influences to the 'worrisome trend' of fusion experiments, he has examined these factors with a candid boldness even going to the extent of saying that the knowledge level of fusionists is questionable and lacking in depth. Of course, the large chunk devoted to its inroads into cinema music is of interest to readers elsewhere as well. Besides the early years and their reliance, the writer has devoted a segment to the 'Ilyaraja' phenomenon and its novelty at the time of its introduction. Other chapters are interesting revelations on the prose literature of the tradition, its links with shrines which are traced as independent essays giving a completeness to the subject under consideration.

The final section of the volume which deals with ragas, talas, compositions and stage music has left

nothing to chance. Each of these aspects have been given their due place by being examined from their evolutionary format. In each one of these essays, the reader is given a concise history of the subject so that one closes the book with a sense of gratification at having learnt something in the bargain. Truly it is a volume that is packed with information but served up with élan. Even a lay reader, mildly inquisitive about this music will find his answers in the pages of the work. Scholars too, can find grist for their mill because many of the views are somewhat radical as they have been stated with conviction and dare

others to debate on them with equally plausible counter defences. That is what makes the volume lively, intellectual and yet highly readable.

The publishers have detracted from a tome-like feel to the volume by making it delightfully lightweight, so one can absorb its knowledge load in a physically portable format without discomfort. Also the language skills of the author show mature penmanship and hold up a testimony to the fact that the alchemy of musicianship must be peppered with a command of presentational skills for the end product to become the work of a true vidvaan.



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