



Raza Foundation is an arts and culture organization created by the Indian artist, Late. Sayed Haider Raza who set an example that fame and glory are not lonesome attainments but things to be liberally shared with the broader creative community. The Foundation has been instrumental in creating spaces for various art and culture programs, publications and fellowships to the younger talent and also carrying a deeper research into the work of the masters.

THE LAST STUDIO

Sayed Haider Raza had a long painting career beginning in Nagpur, moving on to Bombay, shifting to Paris and Gorbio and finally settling at last in Delhi. In all these locations he worked in many studios. His studio in his residence on Rue de Charonne, Paris was so rich, intense and big that it looked like a shrine or a small temple. When Raza shifted to Delhi in December 2010, he occupied two rooms in the Raza Foundation. One of them, the drawing room very soon was converted into a studio besides remaining the space where he received guests. Until he was terminally taken ill, he was working regularly in this studio. More than 400 artworks were created by him in this studio.

Besides having an easel and space for paints and brushes, some sitting sofas, etc, the studio contained photographs of his school and art teachers, some images of Hindu gods, some antique Indian art, stools completely covered by the left over paints. Sadly, this turned out to be the last studio of the master. The Raza Foundation, to whom he bequeathed everything that he had, decided to keep the place as 'The Last Studio: Antim Studio' along with the last unfinished canvas on which he was working before he was taken ill.

It is sad that none of his earlier studios in Paris and Gorbio has been preserved though innumerable friends, artists including a Prime Minister of France happened to visit them.

THE RAZA ROOM

While in France for nearly 60 years, Raza grew very fond of old French furniture. His last home in France at Rue de Charonne, France was full of such furniture which Raza and his French artist-wife Janine Mongillat had acquired. Some of this furniture including a dining table shifted to Delhi where he settled down to spend the last five and half years of his life and artistic career.

While alive, Raza used another room in front of the drawing room as his bedroom. After his sad demise this room has been named as the Raza Room and all the French furniture has been moved in there. It also contains some memorabilia relating to Raza. The room is functional and Raza Foundation Trust holds its meetings there. It is yet another room in the Raza Foundation building on C-4/139, Safdarjung Development Area, New Delhi-110016, to perpetuate the memory of the master who spent his last days in this building.

Ashok Vajpeyi



Swasti, Acrylic on Canvas, 100 x100cms, 2016

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Vak- The Raza Biennale of Indian Poetry

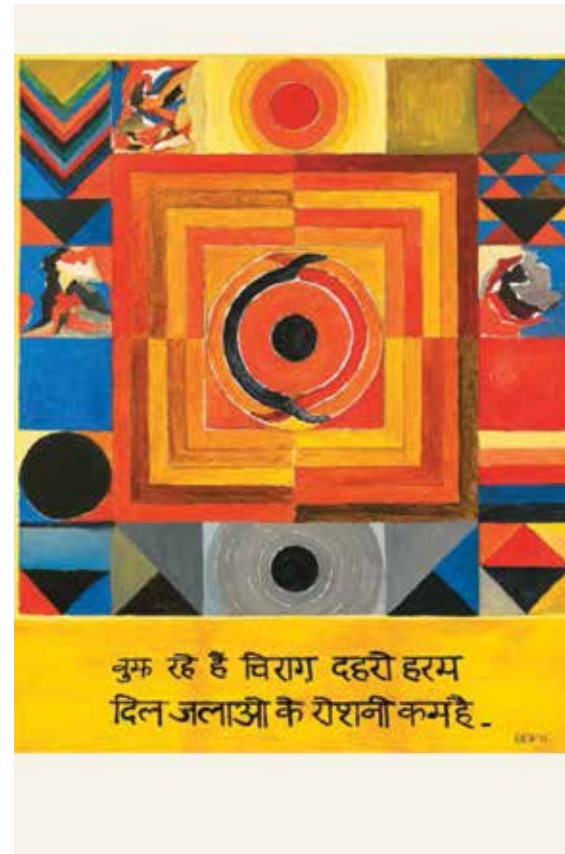
POETRY MATTERS

A few months back to my surprise and utter delight, I was invited to VAK-The Raza Biennale of Indian Poetry 2017, a tribute to a major artist's love and concern for poetry. It was also India's first poetry biennale. There were nearly forty-five poets from various parts of India covering fifteen languages and some public thinkers of repute. So, for two and a half days I was thrown in an atmosphere of words and words only, biting, caustic, lulling, loving. The words blurred but it left me contemplating, a bit like in what Tocqueville calls touching the 'hidden nerve'. I was transported to a universe which was expansive, spontaneous, artless and also self-indulgent. So it is not surprising that I wished to tackle one of the most less talked about but intensely engaged and argued topic that is in the gathering, poetry. I am not going into the dusty, distancing powers of theory but rather airing my thoughts aloud as the chalky, crumbly sentences join hands transforming into crimson geranium and the thin wispy floating cirrus clouds or the silent, gnawing agony of unbroken silence.

VAK gave me the opportunity to reaffirm myself in the power of words, in fact, in poetry. It is a journey punctuated with dialogue, debate, monologue, interrogation, contemplation (an unending list) seeking an answer to a question, sometimes fulfilling, sometimes not, but never a full stop. It is also an indulgent nostalgia, picking up some long-forgotten wanderings, a page here, a reminiscence there. Proust said, it is only in remembrance that things come into being. It is a terrain where tangible and intangible cross swords, where choices are aired and divisions take birth. That is why it counts. The self as a decision maker makes itself apparent. It is for this reason it is adored, admired, slandered and hundred other tags get attached. And this is not an easy job because you are baring yourself, naked, you are taking the plunge to open the self a little more so that a space of different imagings is born. You are holding a flame- torch to create forms in an otherwise primitive darkness. You have burnt your bridges.

The participating poets whether from Kashmir or Kerala, Manipur or Gujarat, or for that matter from any other part, in spite of their diversity in language, in everydayness, had something common that was touching, humane, translating the ordinary into creative uncommon. Perhaps, poetry is the nostalgia for the exclusive, in a world where duplicates multiply only to vanish, sucked by the maelstrom of change.

I felt a profound sense of fellowship with the poets, with most of their ideas, their dreams and visions. The two



days of poetry were a kind of a voyage, going backward and forward, trying to explore the unexplored, undiscovered spheres of being, in the discovery of the wayside, every time anew, in realizing the bond of language in silence, the futility of our mad rush, and most of all, in the spread of life-giving absurdity. It is this terrible force of absurdity, of illogic – once you have responded to its lure – that I suspect makes us love the witching hour when the night becomes a slab of stillness, when invisible islands become more green than any monsoon leaf and the water bluer than all the lapis lazulis of the world put together. Somewhere a song rises, it is the melody of a poem, a hymn, rising from our depths to celebrate what is simple and natural. We realize, that poetry lies everywhere. Poetry is the home we carry within us, a much denied but irrefutable home. All of a sudden we understand our melancholies, pain and friendship. We open to other's



suffering with what Levinas called infinite, absurd compassion. It is absurd for it is not based on any ratiocinative calculation of blame and responsibility. It is infinite for it engulfs the I into oblivion, at least for that moment.

The poets made it clear that poetry matters, it is a sharp tool to thwart any muzzling of the freedom of expression. Never, perhaps have they in isolation or in group, in solitude and noise have painfully experienced this brutal responsibility. To keep this freedom in poetry alive, I believe, one needs to write, move on, even if massive buttresses in the name of priests of religion, priests of politics, priests of society bar the way. The apostles of violence resting on the power of money, force, coercion and cruelty, covered with an apparent beneficent shroud, occasionally hypnotic, have to

be addressed. They cannot be the keepers of our liberties. In the world outside, peace and turbulence will come and go, and life will carry on, at times, with pretences. Even then, violence cannot wear the armour of a knight and to feel bitter about the other does not legitimate annihilation. I wonder what the hell are we doing? The cruelest thing is, there is no answer. And more: we have become, abnormally enough, used to this silence. In this truncated world of missives and video games, illusions disappear, the pastoral world of demons and kings under grandma-blanket have become superfluous. Departures, tears, bereavement—a silly waste of time. Our existence have become soulless. Man is a very delicately balanced animal. The prime concern is to survive at any cost. But that does not mean a slave like existence. He has to do



FRUIT, AS IT IS

She who paints,
draws jackfruits
on the branches of the jackfruit tree
and on the roots
just as they are,
not fashioned as breasts on the female trunk

Not as split body parts
as openings and wounds
but
as if two minutes ago
Mother had
cut it in two with a knife
and laid it on the bare floor

Its skin, innards,
flesh, seeds,
the slippery seed—
husks none of them drawn separately

The body fully built in thorns
the burden a woman straightening herself bears.

The sticky stain
that refuses to be erased —
the seed that falls at the foot of the jackfruit tree
that rots and sprouts —
the smell that spreads all around —

When women who do not paint —
women with babies growing inside their bellies —
when they look, they see fruits for real, stuck to the
jackfruit tree trunk.

Anitha Thampi (Kochi)

(Translated from Malayalam by Dr. C.S. Venkiteswaran)
(Anitha Thampi (born 1968) is a Malayalam poetess. Her first book, *Muttamatikkumbol (Sweeping the Courtyard)*, published in 2004, was chosen as “the best poetry book of the year” by the influential Malayalam newspaper, *Mathrubhumi*. She recently presented her poetry at *Vak-The Raza Biennale of Indian Poetry-2017*)

MAHIMA



Ustad Shujaat Khan at Mahima

Classical Dance–Music Fest

A sitar crescendo by Ustad Shujaat Ali Khan followed by a sublime recital of Nangiar Koothu, the ancient solo Sanskrit dance-drama from Kerala, by Kapila Venu cut through the biting winter chill of Delhi at the inauguration of the classical music and dance festival ‘Mahima - The Return of the Guru’ on 17th January 2017.

The two-day festival was held in memory of the Modern Indian painter Sayed Haider Raza. The event emphasised on the presence, meaning and relevance of the teacher or guru in classical performing traditions of music and dance. The festival opened with a mesmerising recital by maestro Shujaat Khan from the Imdadkhani gharana, accompanied by tabla players Amjad Khan and Arunangshu Chowdhary who gave a rousing performance of Raaga Pancham, a classic melody, that he said, was employed by very few musicians nowadays.

“Artists play according to their moods. There is no one piece of music that I can pick as having been taught to me specifically by my guru. Everything I have learnt has been passed down by my teachers and I acknowledge their

contribution every time I play,” said the sitarist. The seventh generation musician and prodigy son of legendary Sitarist Ustad Vilayat who began playing at the age of three, introduced the raga as one, which was often performed by Pandit Ravi Shankar, who used to call it by another name, Raag Hemant.

Beginning the evening on a mellow note, Ustad Shujaat Khan played solo for about half-an-hour raising the tempo gradually before being joined by tabla players Amjad Khan and Arunangshu one by one, the latter injecting a playful beat before a final soaring finish that was greeted by loud and sustained audience applause and a standing ovation.

The second performance of the evening was the Nangiar Koothu by Kapila Venu. Dressed in typical elaborate garb, Kapila took to the stage to enact ‘Saundarya Lahari’ (The waves of beauty), the first verse from the famed Sanskrit literary work believed to have been penned by the mystic Indian philosopher, Adi Shankara. Kapila, the daughter of Mohiniyattam danseuse Nirmala

Paniker and Koodiyattam exponent Gopalan Nair Venu has trained under Guru Ammannur



Kapila Venu at Mahima

Madhava Chakravarthy, Usha Nangiar and under Japanese dancer Min Tanaka. The Nangiar Koothu is the female counterpart of Koodiyattam, which has been described as an intangible heritage by Unesco. “The performance has been choreographed by my father G Venu who conceived this piece around 10 years ago,” Kapila said. Accompanied to the beats of the ‘mizhavu’ or copper drums, Kapila gave an abridged performance of the dance drama form which usually runs into hundreds of nights.

Employing the navarasas and highly stylised hand gestures Kapila delineated the first verse of Adi Shankara using imagery borrowed from Kalidasa’s Kumarsambhava. In true Koodiyattam style, the performance used virtually no props, except for the sole exception of a wooden stool which was used by Kapila to sit on during the enacting. The verses in this performance talked of the union of Shiva with Shakti and the inseparable nature of their union. Kapila enacted a variety of characters ranging from Shiva, Parvati, the demon Tarakasura, the god of love Kama and others.

The second day of the festival today began with a kayal recital by Ashwini Bhide from the Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana followed by a performance by Odissi dancer Madhavi Mudgal who paid homage to her guru Kelucharan Mohapatra. Famed in the music circles for her renditions of kabir bhajans,

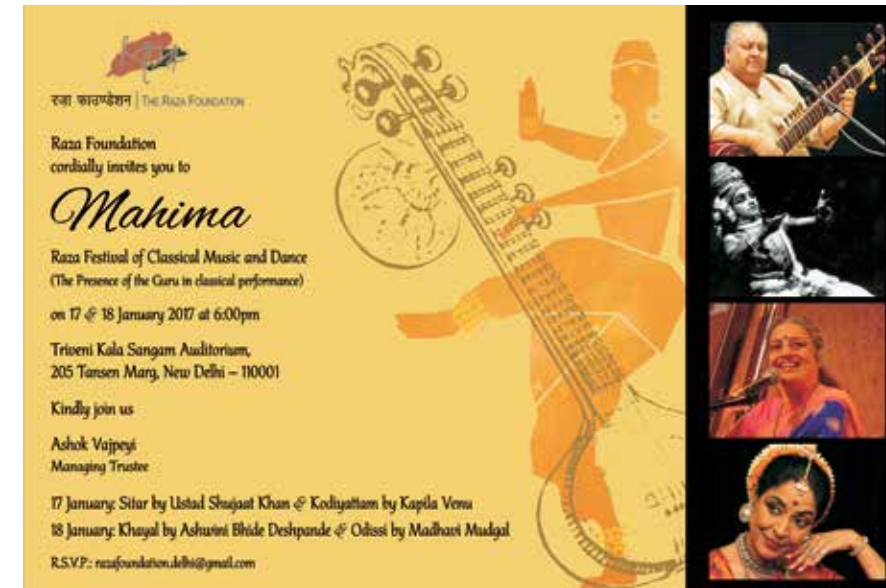
the famed vocalist Ashwini Bhide from Mumbai has been trained under Narayanrao Datar as well as her mother Manik Bhide. Pandit Ratnakar Pai continued to be her mentor till he passed away in the year 2009. The festival concluded with a performance by renowned Odissi dancer Madhavi Mudgal who will focus on her guru, Kelucharan Mohapatra: “I showcased his choreography which I learnt from him many, many years ago. It is a special work and comprises of different pieces. We are only extending the boundaries of what he taught us,” Madhavi said.

Talking about the humble beginnings of this two-day Festival, Ashok Vajpeyi explained that the event was first organised last year as a private initiative of a gathering of friends. It then led to the creation of this annual platform in Delhi.

“It brought into focus the centrality of the Guru which is now being undermined, though lip service continues to be paid. Raza Sahab had great regard for his school and art teachers. He kept their photographs in his studios both in Paris and Delhi. He never taught except briefly in Berkeley (USA) but many treated him as their Guru,” Vajpeyi said.

(The two-day annual dance-music fest was organized by the Raza Foundation on the 17th and 18th January 2017 at Triveni Kala Sangam)

MAHIMA



The Music Mirroring the ‘Mahima’ of the Guru

The Guru has been perhaps the most authentic source and interpreter of knowledge and wisdom in India, from ancient times, where primarily an oral system of transmission prevailed. Despite the textual sources and commentaries on treatise, the prime tradition in the transmission of knowledge has always been the ‘Guru-Shishya Parampara’ or the master-disciple tradition. Indian classical music has kept this preferred and time-tested tradition till date; hence the Guru continues to play a vital role in the life and grooming of a disciple. It is the Guru who can unravel the mysteries of the theory, practice and philosophy of music, handing it down to the disciple.

Evoking the pre-eminence of the Guru in our inheritance, the Raza Foundation has instituted two very significant festivals, the ‘Uttaradhikar’ and ‘Mahima’ Festivals of Music & Dance. Uttaradhikar focused on disciple, underlines the transmission of legacy to the worthy inheritors of the classical art and ‘Mahima’ highlights the importance of the Guru, who transmits the rich heritage to his worthy disciples. Mahima- Raza Festival-2017, underlining the presence of the Guru; was presented at the Triveni auditorium on 17th and 18th Jan this year, featuring Ustad Shujaat Khan in a Sitar recital and Vidushi Ashwini Bhide Deshpande in a Hindustani vocal recital on the two consecutive evenings.

Ustad Shujaat Khan, the gifted son and a deserving disciple of the legendary Ustad Vilayat Khan, belongs to the seventh generation of the illustrious Etawa Imdadkhani Gharana of Sitar,

known especially, for its vocalized idiom, the ‘Gayaki Ang’. Shujat has imbibed both, the tremendous technical virtuosity and the sensitive romanticism of his Guru. That he executes it with his own discerning attitude and perceptive temperament; was evident in his concert on the inaugural evening of the Mahima Festival-2017. One felt that his performance this evening, was quite different from his usual concerts, which offer more of singing and less of Sitar. There was no singing this evening, just the Sitar; and Ud. Shujaat Khan cast a magic spell with the immaculate handling of the instrument and at length exposition of the Raga.

The choice of the raga itself was especial. He presented ‘Pancham’, an alluringly delicate raga with a heady mix of Kaushik Dhwani or Bhinna Shadja that became synonymous with love, hope and life this evening. Introducing raga ‘Pancham’ he disclosed the fact that it was recorded by his Guru Ud Vilayat Khan way back in the year 1952, which was later given the name Hemant, by some other Sitar exponents. No wonder, there was a marked resemblance with Hemant one of the favourite ragas of Maihar Gharana.

The detailed Aalap initially tend to open up the raga across the melodic canvas in one go, but then it went step by step approach of melodic progression through the Jod, Jhala sequences displaying his impeccable

understanding of the logically conceived raga with scholastic insight and artistic approach. The soul nourishing Alap was followed with a Masitkhani and a medium tempo Gat composition in Teentala, adorned with pleasing Taans of myriad hues and varied rhythmic gaits. Ud. Shujat Khan accompanied on Tabla by Amjad Khan and Arunangshu Chaudhuri on either side, gave both of the Tabla players ample opportunity to show their proves. The refined recital had an old world charm with emphasis on lyricism, rather than virtuosity and it would be remembered for a long time.

The next evening, Mahima Festival-2017 showcased the versatile vocalist and creative composer Vidushi Ashwini Bhide Deshpande. One of the most authentic representatives of the Jaipur Gayaki in the present generation; Ashwini was initially trained under Guru Narayan Datar. She was further groomed in the famed Jaipur Gayaki under her mother Smt Manik Bhide, a renowned vocalist of the Jaipur Atrauli Gharana.

Vidushi Ashwini Bhide Deshpande opened her vocal recital with the timewise appropriate evening melody 'Jait-Shree', one of the most challenging Jod-Ragas, this Gharana is famous for. Normally the Jod-Ragas of this Gharana are, as the name suggests, a combination of the two composite ragas; but this intriguing raga has just three notes with long gaps in between. It is a challenge to sustain it as the main raga, elaborating it at length with the Alap, Barhat, Behlawa, Bol-Alap and Taans in the Vilambit or slow-tempo Bada Khayal followed by a Chhota Khayal replete with multihued Taans; without being repetitive.

The form, content and design of her delivery of Jait-Shree was reflective of the intense training she must have gone through, under the watchful guidance of her mother/mentor. What made her presentation of Jait-Shree as the main raga so cherishable, was the high sense of classicism and the meticulous care she showed in shaping her Khayals in perfect accordance with the Jaipur Gayaki. Her powerful urge for originality, along with due reverence to the tradition she has inherited, was admirable.

The thoughtful choice of Bageshri for her next raga, was a comely contrast to the previous one. This also showcased her gift as an imaginative composer in the couple of composition she presented in this raga, set to Vilambit Jhap-tal and Drut Ek-tala respectively. Ashwini takes care that

A tradition and talent



A Tradition and Talent, Statesman, 2nd February, 2017

the emotional theme of the Bada Khayal continues through the Chhota Khayal too. In Bageshri, for instance, both her compositions revolved around Krishna. If the first one eulogised His physical attributes like the Pitambar or the yellow attire and Mor-Mukut, the Peacock feather headgear etc and the next composition praised His divine Flute and it's magical music.

The two other significant features of her compositions were also discernable in Bageshri. She loves to compose in different Talas to match the 'Bhava-Bhoomi' or the emotional fervour of each composition and secondly she never mentions her name 'Mudra' or pseudonym as a composer. Here the first slow tempo composition "Shyam Sundar..." was set to Vilambit Jhap-Tala whereas the next one describing His mesmerising music, suited the vibrancy of Drut Ektal. The conventional 'Mudra' or pseudonym of the composer was totally missing in the Antara, instead her own musical signature disclosed the secret that both, the slow and fast tempo 'Bandish' were her own compositions.

Ashwini, with her delicately nuanced voice, uncanny sense of proportion, impeccable diction, design and delivery, made her performance an emotional experience for the fascinated listeners, whether lay or discerning! The two-day festival mirrored the Mahima of the Guru in the mesmerising music of the worthy disciples.

Manjari Sinha (New Delhi)

(Manjari Sinha is a noted music critic who writes regularly for The Hindu.)

ART CAMP

THE POWER OF PAINTING



The Raza Foundation organized an Art Camp for School students in Mandla, Madhya Pradesh on 15th and 18th February 2017, to commemorate the birth of the legendary Indian artist, Sayed Haider Raza. Students from classes VI to XII from sixty schools in and around Mandla let their imagination fly in vivid colours. The organisers divided the camp into three groups based on the age of the students. The competition was held in two phases. On the 15th of February, school students from Classes I-V of different schools gathered in Kakaiya Middle School (where Raza Saheb had completed his primary education) to paint.

The second phase was organized in the Townhall in Mandla where school students from classes VI-XII gathered under two groups to paint. Each participant (regardless of age) was given one and a half hour to paint after which a short documentary on S.H Raza was shown to the students followed by the prize distribution ceremony. Ayush Soni, Ritesh Namdev and Mohit Pehapalkar won the painting competition in their respective Groups.

(The Raza camp for School Students shall take place every year at Mandla in the month of February.)



Press coverage in Swatantra Mat on 16th February, 2017

MUSEUM TALK

CONNECTING THE DOTS



An experiential journey: A photograph of M.F. Husain by Parthiv Shah; (below) the Hall of Nations designed by Raj Rewal at Pragati Maidan in a photograph by Madan Mahatta.

After showcasing a series of well-documented retrospectives of prominent artists, the exhibition, ‘Stretched Terrains: A String of Seven Exhibition’ at Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA)— both in thought and execution — took viewers on an experiential journey where they saw how artists, architects, and a photographer responded to the societal and cultural milieu through their works.

“We had already done so many retrospectives and highlighted an artist’s artistic journey in a detailed manner that this time I decided to do it the other way round. The idea was not to draw precise boundaries, but to create room for fluid conversations and have counterpoints and juxtapositions,” says Roobina Karode, director and chief curator, KNMA.

“The only way to execute this thought was to have separate exhibitions under one roof,” she adds. It was important, she said, to look at art as an entity and not in isolation. This is why, over five-month-long exhibition brought out textures of modernism in Indian art through three exhibitions of M.F. Husain, F.N. Souza and S.H. Raza, and an exhibition highlighting the works of five architects and seminal architectural buildings in Delhi. On another axis, it strung together works of contemporary artists Atul Dodiya, Mithu Sen, Pushpamala N. and Navjot Altaf. And in between these two approaches

were Parthiv Shah’s photographs of Husain and the films and documents from the Vision Exchange Workshop held in Bombay between 1969-1972.

While each exhibition was disconnected and though every artist followed the different practice, the exhibition managed to bind them together in a thread, which is to see how they perceived the view of modern India. For instance, a major section of the exhibition ‘Yatra: The Rooted Nomad’ brought together the early works of Husain from late 1940s and 1950s that projected the scale of India’s vast rural and agrarian society, giving a glimpse of transforming India. Likewise, ‘The Black Sun’ exhibition revealed facets of Raza’s early practice, which according to Karode, “is relatively less viewed in his array of landscapes, cityscapes, and those works etched out of his memories of Malabar, Rajasthan or even imaging of an Italian village.”

Iconic buildings

The string continues with ‘Delhi: Building the Modern’ that addressed the architecture of modern India that included models, structural and engineering drawings, photographs of five architects Raj Rewal, Mahendra Raj, Kuldip Singh, Habib Rahman and Kanvinde, covering a period of two decades between the 1960s and 80s. This section was organised in collaboration with artist, photographer, and curator Ram Rahman and he in the curatorial note wrote, “The iconic buildings

such as the Hall of Nations by Raj (Rewal) at Pragati Maidan and Rabindra Bhawan by Habib (Rahman) are extraordinary experimentations, uniquely indigenous and remarkably global in nature.”

Through the photographs of Parthiv Shah in the exhibition ‘Sadak.Sarai.Sheher.Basti’, a playful and exciting aspect of Husain was presented. In the series of images, one can see Husain in different moods and actions — from reading a newspaper in a busy market to roaming the streets of Nizamuddin, and from listening to the poetry of a poet who lives near the dargah to drinking tea, watching the modernist master in his candid demeanour was a real treat.

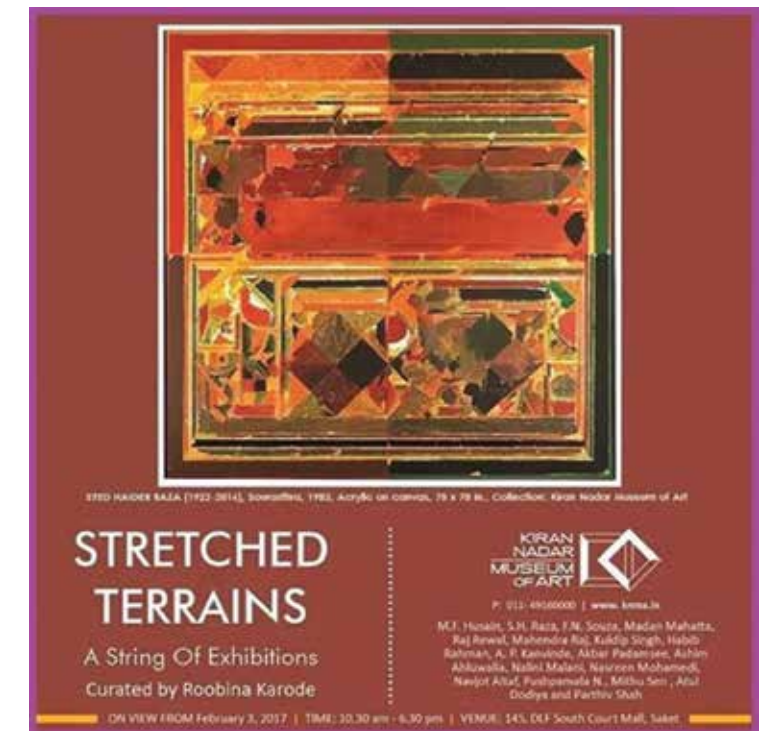
The exhibition as a whole looked magnificent, but Roobina, who has also curated this exhibition, admits that it indeed was one of the toughest curatorial tasks she has ever laid hands on. “Curation is an interesting field because it gives you freedom to be courageous and try different things,” she says. So, when she started working on this show, Karode decided to explore the ‘corners’ of the space to let works engage in a conversation. “Usually, in art exhibitions, you will not see works being put on the corner, but I looked at corners as spaces of transition,” she adds.

This exhibition, she admitted, was ‘bold and symbolic’, in many ways and she has taken the liberty to try out different things and experiment. This factor is very much visible as viewers will see how walls have been painted in different hues to lend a certain kind of mood and ambiance for a particular exhibition.

After everything fell into place, giving an apt title to this diverse and disparate show was a gargantuan task. “My entire team, including me, had lost sleep over giving a title to this exhibition. The problem we were facing was how to put these exhibitions, with so many connotations under one name. But, finally, the word terrain came to my mind at some point in time, and I thought the word itself meant many things like nation and homeland. So, finally the problem was solved,” she said.

Shilpa Raina (New Delhi)

(Shilpa Raina is a journalist based in New Delhi)



GALLERY EXHIBITION



The French Ambassador to India, M. Alexandre Ziegler inaugurating the exhibition

Gandhi in Raza

“I always responded to art, but this was the first time that I stood before each of these 7 works, by Raza and found myself in a serene, silent, pleasantly cold, unfathomable space, a space my teacher would call ‘Noble silence’. It was a very profound moment for me to discover that silence within me. In that hour I spent before these paintings they opened a 3 dimensional door in front of me, which is unexplainable, leaving me speechless, spell bound, as if I had experienced bliss.”

(A comment by K.V., a visitor who came to view the exhibition titled “Gandhi in Raza” held on 22nd February 2017, at the Visual Art Gallery, IHC, New Delhi on the occasion of the 95th birth anniversary of S H Raza (22 February 1922 – 23 July 2016), held in collaboration with Akar Prakar and Raza Foundation.)

“Gandhi in Raza” is a group of 7 works by the renowned artist S H Raza created as a tribute to Gandhiji, in 2013. We had the privilege to exhibit and handle these works, for the Indian Modern Master, Sayed Haider Raza, and felt truly honoured by this wonderful task which further confirmed our conviction in the power of art.

Raza visited our home and city every year since 2010, without exception and our interactions with him enriched us and our audiences both. Raza had an aura about him, somewhat like that of a pure soul. He was immersed in his art and had

reached an effortless state of action where his art was concerned; He would wake up every morning at 4 am to paint, and only begin interacting with people after his morning routine of painting on the canvas for a few hours at a stretch (in spite of his failing health). He was a man of few words but a man with great discipline and a great mind, who lived for art, poetry and music. For Raza, meditation was painting at any point of time in the day!

Raza always acknowledged his source of inspiration and this included many great saints, thinkers, people, writers, and poets in his work, especially Rilke, Kabir, Ghalib, Agyeya, and Ashok Vajpeyi, to name a few. In 2013 at the age of 91 he decided to do a set of works as a tribute to Gandhiji. This was a kind of returning to the roots for Raza. He was always proud of his nationality, of being an Indian, who kept his Indianness intact, through his language (though he also wrote and spoke French fluently), his art and his Indian Passport, in spite of living in France for 60 years!

This tribute to Gandhiji was a homecoming for Raza; it was a mark of his physical return to his motherland, back to his roots, back to his origins. He left France to return to India in 2010, “Back to my Watan” as he would say. Raza followed Gandhiji’s ideals in his life and often referred and read his writings and even quoted from them as does a disciple, his Gurus words. For the artist,

Gandhiji was the reason for him to stay in India whilst his entire family including his first wife moved to Pakistan during the partition in 1947, he felt he would betray Gandhiji if he left at that time. Such was the feeling and regard that Raza had for Gandhiji that every visit to India would definitely include a visit to Rajghat, Sewagram or Sabarmati to pay his respects to the Mahatma, by going down on his knees and touching his forehead in reverence before his samadhi, says Ashok Vajpeyi “For him, visiting a Gandhi place was like visiting a temple or mosque or any holy place.” In another quote he says “A group of seven paintings is a kind of parikrama, (Circumambulation) by a painter around a great soul, a Mahatma who always inspired him; a noble venture around an ennobling theme”

Nandalal Bose considered a pioneer of modern Indian art had this to say for Gandhiji “From Bapuji’s life-style artists may find inspiration and develop their own character. Bapuji, is indeed an artist, and his creativity finds expression in the building up of his own self, in his attempt to transform himself from a man into a divine being, as also guide others in that direction. It is common knowledge that through his contact a large number of people have reached divinity. His thoughts have definiteness and clarity, his heart is pure.....he practices himself what he preaches.”

The following excerpt from an essay by Gopal Krishna Gandhi will help clarify the connection that both Gandhi and Raza shared. Says Gopal Ji for Gandhiji,

“A person who holds his or her self intact is a person of integrity. There is a wholeness to that an inner cohesion, a collectedness. An integer of thought or experience holds that person together. Whether that indivisibility is or is not a moral attribute. It certainly has an aesthetic dimension to it. Any artistic expression has to hold together. A person with an inner resolve and a propulsion that takes it forward must express that resolve through words or actions that stand intact. Holding oneself intact means having a clear selfness, being brave enough to express that selfness, unafraid of the smile of derision, the laceration of cynical laughter or the loneliness of inattention. It also means being indifferent to acclaim.”

To quote Raza here:

“To my mind if you concentrate on an idea, develop it; a metaphysical and spiritual



SH Raza, *Sanmati*, 150 x 150cms, Acrylic on canvas, 2013

communication will ultimately help in the creative process “.

So what do these 7 works of Raza “Gandhi in Raza” mean to each of us? Gandhiji continues to be a part and parcel of our lives and culture even today, but can we distill the essence of Gandhiji in our world, through these paintings? Can we, only if for a moment, stand before these 7 works and discover the Gandhi that resides within our memory, to connect to the truths that each of us search for peace, harmony, love, non violence, and universality of all religions?

Raza’s tribute will certainly evoke these truths for you as it did for numerous others who viewed this body of work. We invite you to discover the Gandhi in you through these 7 brilliant works in shades of white, grey and earth colours.

“It was a deeply moving moment and experience for me to stand before these 7 paintings by Raza” (Ram Singh)

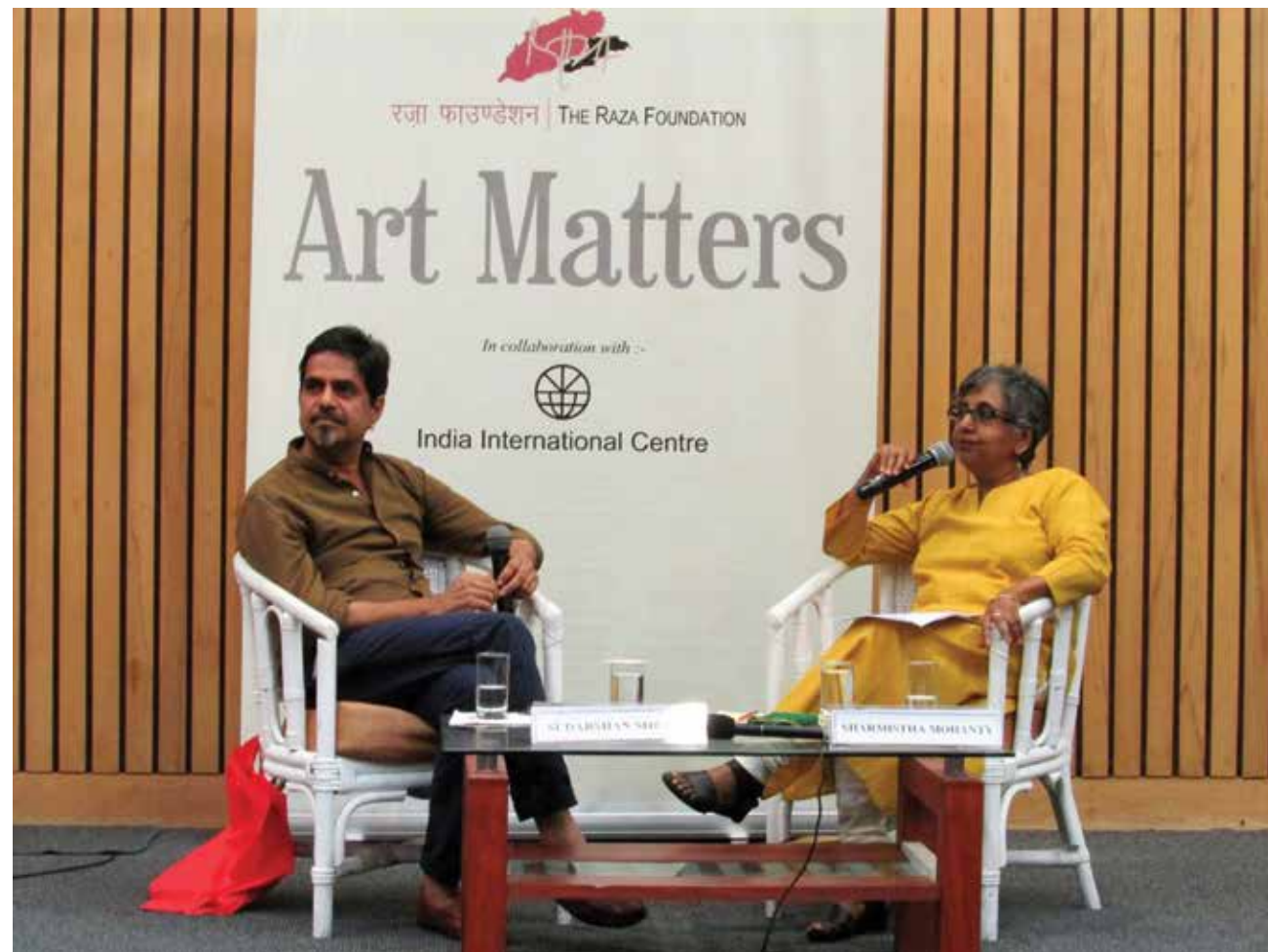
“I have an unexplainable connection with Mahatma Gandhi, even though I never met him but he has influenced me through his deeds and writings, these paintings by Raza, are truly a tribute from a master to a great soul. I salute Raza for being able to bring the ideals of the Mahatma come alive through these paintings” (Keerthan P)

Reena and Abhijit Lath, (Kolkata & New Delhi)

(Reena and Abhijit Lath established Akar Prakar (meaning Form in all its Variations) in 2004. The gallery in New Delhi and Kolkata one of the leading galleries and promoters of Indian art today.)

IN CONVERSATION

Opposing ideas interest me :Sudarshan Shetty



Artist curator, Sudarshan Shetty in conversation with Sharmishta Mohanty

*In the empty fort, a city
In the city, a settlement.
Who sleeps? Who wakes?
My love is mine, I am my love's.
The body sleeps, the spirit wakes.
In the empty fort, a city
In the city, a settlement.*

(Gorakh, 'Shunya gadh shahar shahr ghar basti')

(Translated by Linda Hess, Singing Emptiness-Kumar Gandharva performs the poetry of Kabir, Seagull Books, 2009.)

Well-known contemporary artist Sudarshan Shetty outlined the seeming paradoxes, concerns and processes that inform his unique art practice at a discussion of Art Matters at India International Centre, New Delhi.

He defined his art practice as an enquiry on the possibility of engaging deeply with a material in such a manner that it acquires multi-layered meaning only to then suggest its meaninglessness. "My work *Shoonya Ghar* (Empty is this House) draws from a nirgun poem by Bhakti saint Gorakhnath. If you look at the idea of a doha (couplet), the first line establishes an image while the second line conveys another image, often opposing in character. These opposing ideas interest me," said Shetty, who curated the of Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) in 2016.

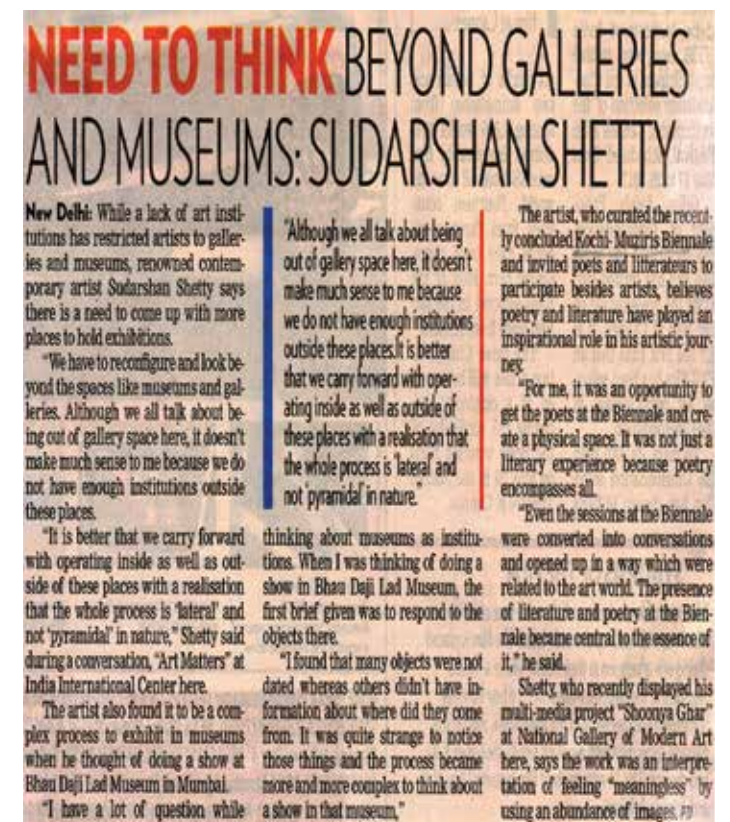
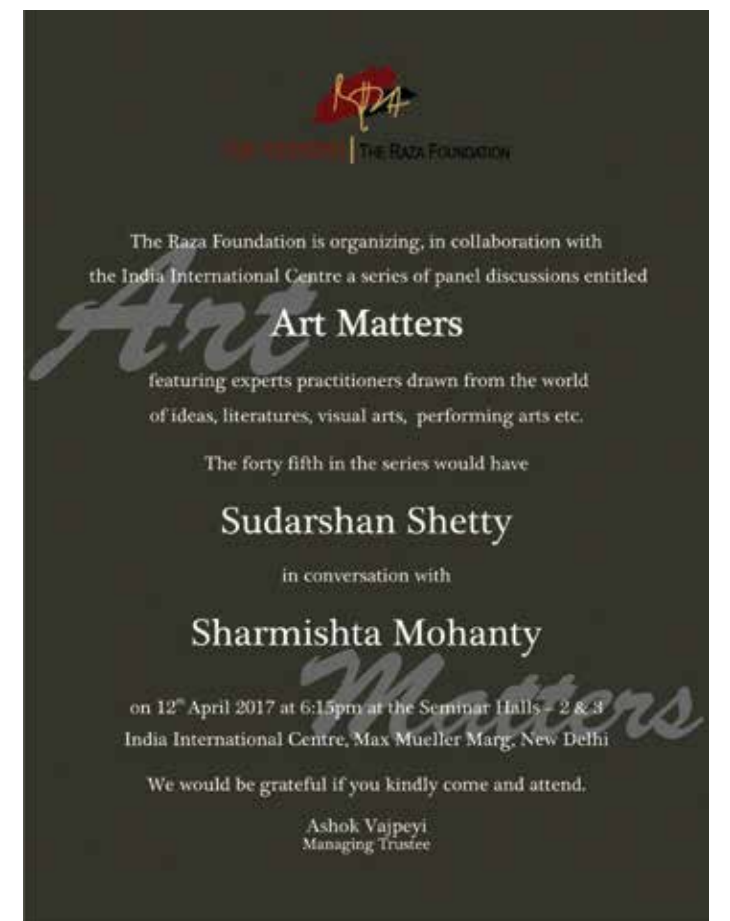
Over the course of the conversation with the noted poet, Sharmishta Mohanty, Shetty noted how his interest in such apparent contradictions and his obsession with the concept of prolonged engagement with an object had carried forward into his curatorship of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale's third edition.

"You need time to follow the various process informing artistic expressions and unravel things. If you didn't spend enough time with the artworks showcased during the Biennale, you would not 'get' them," he said.

Noting that the Biennale had been an opportunity for him to bring multiple practices, including poetry, onto a visual arts platform, Shetty said it offered a physical space for literary experiences. "It opened up ways in which I could look at the art world in a very different way. It became my guiding spirit in many ways and allowed me to sidestep my own limitations of looking at the idea of a Biennale," he added.

Voicing her thoughts on the Biennale bringing multiple practices into its fold, Mohanty – a participating artist at KMB 2016 – admitted that the visual arts platform had been a learning curve for her. "Participating in the Biennale was a wonderful opportunity for me to make my poetry physical. A poem accrues additional meanings and nuances when it interacts with the space," Mohanty said.

(Held on 12th April 2017, the discussion was the XXXXVth edition of Art Matters series organized by the Raza Foundation in collaboration with India International Centre, New Delhi.)



Sudarshan Shetty, *Need to think beyond galleries and museum*, Sakal Times, Pune, 14th April 2017

ART DIALOGUE -I

Gandhi in our times



Suresh Sharma, Ashish Nandy in conversation with Udayan Vajpeyi

The Raza Foundation organised a panel discussion on “Gandhi in Our Times” in its first edition of Art Dialogues series in New Delhi. The first panel discussion featured intellectual and academician Ashish Nandy, the well-known social scientist Suresh Sharma and Iranian philosopher Rahim Jahanbegloo.

The panel was moderated by Hindi poet and fiction writer Udayan Vajpeyi who brought the discussion into perspective by explaining that M.K Gandhi was perhaps the first Asian thinker to objectify Europe as an ‘object’ of study. Udayan urged for a deeper understanding of Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj, in which India has been identified as a superior civilization. Gandhi found that all Indians, irrespective of their religion, caste or creed, were connected at a deeper level by some common values (which constitute the Indian civilization). Another

surprising aspect of this book is Gandhi’s emphasis on rashtraprem over rashtravaad. For Gandhi, the underlying principles of all religions, which is the source of the values, has always been above the Nation. For the Nationalists (of the other kind), the Nation becomes the arbiter of all the values. By calling Gandhi one of the most non-ideological persons, Udayan Vajpeyi brought to front the disadvantages of having ideologies. According to him, by allowing his mind to experience reality, Gandhi was able to wonder, question and create ideas. In the true sense of the word, Gandhi was a vicharak; who celebrates the true movement of the mind. Ideologies don’t allow such movement. Gandhi’s ideas remain fresh and relevant even today due to his disdain for stern and retraining ideologies.

Ashish Nandy began his argument which the observation that the



Gandhian values seem to be forgotten and then revisited in history. According to him, the ideas of Gandhi gatecrash into the Indian imagination time to time, like the Hong-Kong flu: once in a few years or once in a generation. The last time the ideas of Gandhi gatecrashed was in 1975-77 when many scholars, thinkers and activists were looking for new theoretical grounds and inspiration outside standardized ideologies: when even the Left looked at Emergency as a necessary evil in India. This renewed interest in his thinking lasted till the late nineties.

It is hence, not an accident that today, after around twenty years, we find a burgeoning interest in Gandhi. This time, as well, Ashish Nandy fears that the Indian mind will only look at the mirage of Gandhi as a Patron Saint of the Indian Republic. At the moment of course, he is being regarded as the Step Father of the Nation. He adds “It seems the real father of the nation, at the moment is Vinayak Damodar Savarkar; whom you can consider as an anti-mod of Gandhi. Savarkar was much more scholarly, modern and in touch with world politics compared to his opponent”. Savarkar, he explained, considered his constituency to be full of Hindu supporters failed to gather patronage from the Nation’s Hindu population. He presented three logical arguments against Gandhi: Gandhi was superstitious and anti-scientific. Savarkar, himself was a committed nationalist, an atheist and believed that his Hindutva was not Hinduism. He also grudged that Gandhi brought into Indian Politics, apolitical means such as fasting, dharnas, satyagrahas, marches, non-violent demonstration, etc. Savarkar’s final grouse with Gandhi was that the Nation’s “step father” was not at all acquitted with Modern European political thinking that championed institutional checks in a society over individual responsibilities.

On studying world history, one finds that finest heroes of the last 75 years owe their thinking to the actions and writings of Mahatma Gandhi: Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Dalai Lama, etc. According to Nandy, somewhere there is an awareness today that the Gandhian vision was not all 19th century romanticism (of Savarkar), or an attempt to go back to the Past or to shut the door to Progress but rather ammunition to supply conviction to have a critical vision of all man-made institutions including modernity, progress and development. After all, anything human has the potential of being misused. All ideologies



Photo: Ashish Nandy

ultimately turn into killers including the ideology of Nationalism. He further explains that if we look at the history of mankind, most genocides have also been acts of nationalism.

Historian Suresh Sharma elaborated on the the politics of ethnicity and identity, often seen as the marker of under-development. According to him, this kind of politics has acquired in recent years even in the affluent developed West the kind of salience no one imagined as likely, barely fifteen years ago. That, in India has meant certain telling reversals in current practice of Hindutva as enunciated by Savarkar. Consider in this context, he enunciated three cardinal propositions. Firstly, that Savarkar recognized Indian Nationalism as a higher ideal-aspiration than Hindu Rashtra; and Hinduism as something distinct and different from Hinduism. Secondly, Hindutva’s current practice insists upon equating Hindu Rashtra and Indian Nationalism; and conflating Hindutva and Hinduism. Finally, China’s determined attempt to re-enunciate and re-shape the contemporary world order seeks to overshadow the idea-imaginary of the demos with the dazzle and power of sheer efficiency, and is marked by a complete absence of any universal ethical proposition.

Rahim Jahanbegloo brought back the discussion to the relevance of Gandhi with the question on Gandhi’s place in history as always in the future and not in the past. According to Jahanbegloo, Gandhi is perhaps the only political theorist who dealt with Universal peace and non-violence. Hence, Gandhi is relevant because he has become an antidote to the rising populism in the West and to tyrannical rule around the world.

ART DIALOGUE -II

Novelty in Art



In Discussion- Hindi Poet Udayan Vajpeyi, Dance Guru Rama Vaidyanathan and Architect Vikram Lall

At an open discussion of the Art Dialogue series, a panel consisting of renowned architect Vikram Lall, Bharatanatyam dancer Rama Vaidyanathan and poet and filmmaker Udayan Vajpeyi discussed the concept of “Novelty in Performing Arts”. The experts expressed their discontent over the state of performing arts in India.

The Indian cultural and art forms that have preserved their core traditions for millennia are being reduced to a mere “spectacle” in the race to keep up with the times, according to leading art practitioners.

According to Vikram Lall, who is

famed for designing Delhi’s Akshardham temple and Patna’s Buddha Smriti Park, India is remarkable in having musical and other art traditions that have evolved and changed over time, but these continue to have a line that ties them from ancient to modern times. “In architecture, we talk about transforming ideas and not transferring them. Change and innovation is what make art forms survive,” he said. However, the modern tendency of making a show and a spectacle out of everything is diminishing both art and the idea of innovation, he added.

“A spectacle presumes a stupid audience,” said Udayan Vajpeyi. He noted that the ‘rasik’, the appreciative

audience member, is an integral part of an Indian performance or concert. “We tend to copy the West mindlessly in so many things. For instance we dim the lights in a concert hall for a classical music performance, but in India the artist responds to the audience, they improvise according to audience reaction, it is spontaneous.” He said the novelty in Indian art forms comes from the teaching of the art. Western traditions aim for sameness, but the Indian guru lets the disciple learn according to their own understanding and disposition, which is a great method of learning and encourages innovation.

Dancer Rama Vaidyanathan said artists have to look beyond classroom, gharanas and tradition and have to be shackle-free to bring freshness to their art. “For a dancer novelty does not happen forcefully or overnight,” she said. “It comes after years and years of creating dialogue with the dance form and with practice. That lays the foundation to create new things and push boundaries. It is an organic process and it is good for the art form.” She added, “When I work with Kathak or Odissi artists, I learn things, I have to look beyond my dance form to create something new in my dance form. But that does not mean you are abandoning the core principles of your dance form, because it is already a part of who you are.” She hopes to make dance secular, transcending the boundaries of cultures and religion, and use it as a medium to address social issues.

Eminent Hindi poet Ashok Vajpeyi, while introducing the panelists and the subject, noted that people in the modern times tend to see performing arts as very repetitive, because as an audience they are moved by “a questioning of traditions”. “But in the Indian context, the deviation and questioning takes place within tradition. One doesn’t have to go out; and this is seldom understood,” he said. “Years ago, when Pandit Ravi Shankar started having long alaaps on the sitar, it was something not done before. He did that on his own, as an individual artist, but that has now become tradition.”

(Held on 7th May 2017, the discussion was the second edition of the Art Dialogue series organized by the Raza Foundation in partnership with the Civil Services Officers Institute.)



Rama Vaidyanathan
(Photo courtesy- www.ramavaidyanathan.com)

ART DIALOGUE -III

Origins in Art



In Conversation Paramjit Singh, Udayan Vajpeyi and Navjyoti Singh



At an open Art Dialogue conversation, organized by the Raza Foundation in collaboration with the Civil Services Officers' Institute, Prof. Navjyoti Singh, an aesthetic thinker, Paramjit Singh, a practicing painter and Udayan Vajpeyi, a poet shared their thoughts on the founts of creativity as experienced and observed by them. The panelists agreed that it is the urge to provide a material existence to "bodyless" things such as memories, imagination, experiences and angst that is the basis of all creative expression.

At the discussion on the 'Origin of Art' of the Art Dialogue series, Prof. Navjyoti Singh, the scientist-philosopher and the founder head of the Center for Exact Humanities, said what people experience in actions and deeds are transient, but the impressions of it in their subconscious is permanent. "The memory translates into imagination, then to resolution or desire and finally to creativity. Art is the process of telling the truth in a form that is removed from reality," he said.

He spoke of the myths and legends the world over that portray this process; the story of Nagnajit who was brought back to life by Lord Yama of the Netherworld through a painting signifying the origin of 'Chitravidya' in India; Greek philosopher Pliny's recounting of the tale of Kora of Sicyon on the origins of modeling in relief; and the legend of Narcissus whose tragic angst, has been celebrated by artists across centuries.

Poet and film writer Udayan Vajpeyi noted the dualist nature of humans that triggers creativity.

"There is a biological birth and there is birth in memory where people are 'Nagna' or 'bodyless'.

Art is giving a form to this 'bodyless' existence. All forms of art, be it poetry, sculpture or painting or theatre arise from people giving a shape to their own understanding of the human condition."

Renowned Indian contemporary artist Paramjit Singh noted that people's background and childhood experiences impact their creativity in a very significant way. "These things sit in your subconscious and impact your artistic language and technique. The essence of what you see remains in your memory. Your art originates because you are able to recreate it," he said.

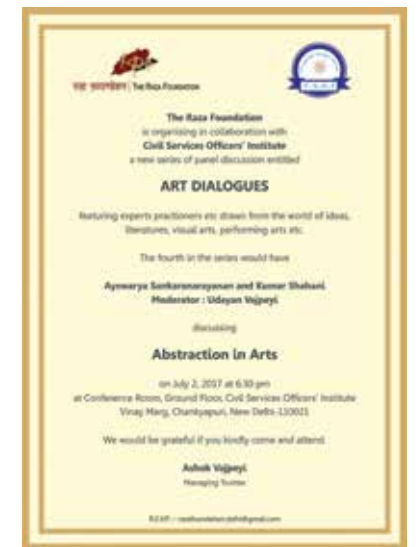
(Held on 18th June 2017, the discussion was the third edition of the Art Dialogue series organized by the Raza Foundation in partnership with the Civil Services Officers Institute.)

ART DIALOGUE -IV

Abstraction in Art



Noted filmmaker Kumar Sahani, animator and illustrator and screenwriter Ayswarya Sankarnarayanan in conversation with poet and thinker Udayan Vajpeyi



The tendency of modernism in art to focus on style and form does not represent the process of abstraction, which is the spiritual experience of an artist in search of deeper meaning to visible material objects, and their attempt to free the viewer's mind from bias. This was the conclusion of a much intense talk between the noted filmmaker Kumar Sahani and animator, illustrator and screenwriter Ayswarya Sankarnarayanan with poet and film-writer Udayan Vajpeyi on 'Abstraction in Art'.

At this fourth discussion of the Art Dialogues series organized at the Civil Services Officers' Institute, the screenwriter, Ayswarya, who presented a paper on the idea of abstraction in art, noted that the very idea of creation involves abstraction. "It is an attempt to extract sense from reality and non-reality," she said. How abstraction is expressed and perceived by people changes continuously as civilizations rise and fall, but what has been common throughout the ages is the relation of abstraction to the spiritual, it is always a search for the unknown, and it cannot die because of the constant quest of humans for meaning, she explained further.

"Abstraction in art cannot merely be in style. The tendency of modernism is to search for form. However, what is abstraction for one culture may be a faithful reproduction for another. Mere formalization does not amount to abstraction, no matter how successful they are. The function of abstraction is to free the mind from bias," she added.

Udayan Vajpeyi took this discussion a bit further, into the realm of truth seeking. "In art you don't start with an idea, you seek the truth," said Udayan Vajpeyi. "In India, all our traditions are in fact abstract. It becomes dangerous when you start to literalize traditions, you lose

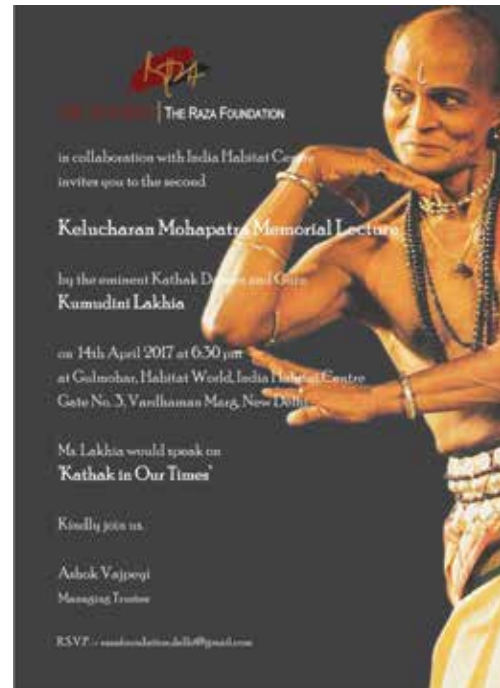
the truth." The poet Surdas, for example, wrote in the abstract; his writings cannot be taken literally or we'll never find the meaning in them, he indicated..

Kumar Sahani, known for his avant-garde films like *Maya Darpan* (1972), *Tarang* (1984) *Khayal Gatha* (1989), and *Kasba* (1990), said there was no dichotomy between narrative and abstraction in cinema. "They are not only capable of existing together, but in the epic form of art they are together, he said. The experience of art in India is deeply connected to the joy of knowledge; it is in itself self-realization.

(Held on 2nd July 2017, the discussion was the fourth edition of the Art Dialogue series organized by the Raza Foundation in partnership with the Civil Services Officers Institute.)

KELUCHARAN MOHAPATRA MEMORIAL LECTURE

Modern day kathak is more about skill than art



Kumudini Lakhia

Kathak maestra, Kumudini Lakhia explores concerns and challenges to the practice and performance of the classical dance form in a candid talk at the Kelucharan Mohapatra Memorial Lecture talk.

From the effects of technology on contemporary kathak training and performance to shifts in the traditional mentor-disciple relationship, kathak pioneer Kumudini Lakhia examined a number of emerging challenges faced by the classical dance form at the Kelucharan Mohapatra Memorial Lecture Talk on 14th April 2017 at the India Habitat Centre, Delhi.

“Modern day kathak seems to be more about skill than art. Today, kathak is more competitive than ever before and there is also the increasing tendency of bringing the classroom to the stage by its practitioners,” said Lakhia, a Padma Bhushan awardee who established and continues to run the Kadamb Dance Centre in

Ahmedabad – widely regarded as an outstanding training institution of classical dance choreography.

Over the course of an engaging and candid discussion, titled ‘Kathak in Our Times’, in the presence of her illustrious students, critics and fans at the India Habitat Centre, the Kathak doyenne observed how the teaching of kathak needs an overhaul in institutions, universities and classrooms.

“Scant attention is paid to costumes and practitioners lack basic aesthetics. Absence of abhinaya (the art of expression) is another major area of concern,” she said.

“The biggest difficulty for kathak dancers today lies in teaching. Rather than focusing on the body language of students, teachers start adhering to curriculum right at the onset. The guru-shishya parampara (the mentor-disciple relationship) has changed. The student-teacher ratio too has

The next generation of dancing stars

CHANGE SERIES
NOTE WORTHY
A spotlight on the world of Indian performing arts

Though the soloist tradition seems to be declining in most forms, Bharatanatyam offers a ray of hope

BY VIKRAMJI

We are at the cusp of yet another World Dance Day (29 April) and cultural organizations are pulling out all the stops, planning events that pay homage to classical dance forms. My thoughts, however, return to a recent public lecture series conducted by the Raza Foundation at Delhi's India Habitat Centre, where the Kathak veteran Kumudini Lakhia, speaking about the decline of the soloist tradition across Indian classical dance forms, lamented, “Today we have a number of dancers, but not much dance!”

It's a statement that resonates with the classical dance fraternity. Indian classical dance as a full-time profession is highly demanding. If you look at the things a dancer is supposed to be thoroughly proficient in, it would alter your experience of witnessing a recital. Comprehensive knowledge of classical music, the vocabulary of the particular dance, and an idea of other styles, is essential. Then, one needs a thorough ground-

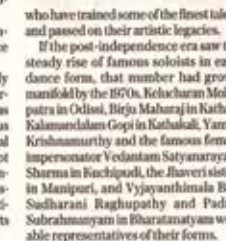
ing in rhythm and physical fitness that allows for the implementation of complex rhythmic patterns. Absorbing a knowledge of history and mythology (which comprise the maximum content of most classical dance forms), a decent acquaintance with some of the seminal treatises on dance like the *Natyashastra*, *Ahimsya Darpana* and others, a mastery over several native languages, an aesthetic in costuming and make-up, a home and family conducive to the growth of the art form, a generous guru who imparts knowledge at the right time, and last but not least, a fair amount of financial security. This is a list of the “very basic requirements” for a dancer.

To then pursue a dance form with blind passion and evolve into a soloist of high merit is another journey in itself. After this comes the feedback from a discerning audience and specialists like expert commentators, scholars and critics.

A successful dancer is one who combines all of this into her or his art practice and life.

Indian classical dances are essentially meant to be solo affairs. It may not be surprising, then, that institutions such as Kalakshetra in Chennai, Kerala's famous Kalamandalam, Santiniketan in Bengal and Kathak Kendra in Delhi have not managed to produce an impressive number of soloists in their decades-long existence. Proving, time and again, that institutionalized training in the classical arts can only serve a limited purpose.

Classroom exercises are good to bring in a sense of discipline when a child starts learning the art form. They also help build a sense of community. However, once this training in the basics of the dance form is over, a serious dancer needs to pursue her or his art form under the guidance of a single guru. The 20th century saw some phenomenal gurus



(From top) Arushi Madgal is one of the stars of modern Odissi, and Parshwanath Upadhye's Bharatanatyam performances marry technique with unique choreography

while Manju Bhargava and Shobha Naidu were experts in Kuchipudi. Kathak exponents Aditi Mangaladas and Rajendra Gangani and Mohiniyattam dancers Bharani Shivaji, Neena Prasad and Gopika Varma and were named to reckon with.

But the last two decades have seen a steady decline in the number of soloists—it can be blamed on the increasing commercialization of classical dance, or the abuse of technology.

However, among all the classical dance forms, Bharatanatyam continues to be better placed, with a host of young soloist stars. Among the male soloists are names such as Vaibhav Arekar and Pavitra Krishna Bhat from Mumbai, Praveen Kumar and Parshwanath Upadhye from Bengaluru, and Rishabh Babu and Bhavani Kumar from Chennai. Among the women are Meenalokhi Srinivasan, Mythili Prakash, Navia Natarajan, Vijnay Vasudevan and Uma Sathyasriyan.

It might be the popularity of the dance form or the sheer commitment of the artists, but Bharatanatyam does have the highest number of soloists today. In fact, for a dancer with a keen sense of rhythm like Parshwanath Upadhye, there is almost no equal in the field. He is the uncrowned prince of the Bharatanatyam scene today and his Facebook page has more followers than those of some minor Bollywood stars, over 13,000.

One can find but a handful of names with equal heft in other dance styles. Odissi has Arushi Madgal from Delhi and Rahul Acharya from Ithubaneswar. In Kathak, the names include Prashant Shah, a student of Kumudini Lakhia, Gauri Divakar, a student of Aditi Mangaladas, and Vishal Krishna, who represents the Benares gharana. In the North-East, dance forms such as Manipuri have young stars such as Simam Issa and Sadip Ghosh from Kokota. Kuchipudi is prob-

ably the worst-represented classical dance form, with less than a handful of names to reckon with countrywide. Amrita Lahiri, Jaikishore Mosalikanti from Chennai, Prateeksha Kashi from Bengaluru, Reddi Lakshmi from Delhi and the current and probably last of the female impersonators from a traditional family of dancers—Ajay Kumar from Vijayawada. The decline of Kuchipudi is a tragedy worth writing about separately.

The real flag-bearers of Indian classical dance, then, are those who have worked hard, passed the rather tough litmus tests of quality and standards and made a name for themselves. A solo career is a tough bet. With increasing costs, the reduced availability of trained musicians and orchestra members and lack of serious state patronage, the challenges in the field have increased.

So what keeps the current generation of soloists going despite all the odds? It seems to be their determination to pursue the art, the guidance of their gurus and the gumption to take on the world without compromising on quality. They are all well educated, with basic qualifications to keep them going in case dance cannot. They are social media savvy and full of ideas. While their training in the classical form is based on what they learn from their gurus, the addition of modern themes and contexts expands the traditional repertoire of the dance form. In this too they continue a long legacy inherited from their gurus.

We can only hope that these young soloists will prove Lakhia's fears wrong in the time to come.

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Kathak Guru Kumudini Lakhia speaks of the need for excellency in dance, Mint, 22nd April 2017

moved from 1:1 to 30:1,” she said, adding that along with the existing Jaipur, Lucknow and Benares Gharanas, there now seems to be a fast-emerging “YouTube Gharana” in the world of contemporary kathak.

The two-hour address was part of the annual Kelucharan Mohapatra Memorial lecture series, which aims to air concerns relating to Indian dance. It is conducted as tribute to Padma Vibhushan Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, one of the most important and influential exponents of Odissi who is credited with reviving the classical dance form in the 20th century.

Acknowledging the power of kathak's poetry, Ashok Vajpeyi said, “Just as the dance form should not entirely lean on stories, it shouldn't also bank on poems from extraneous sources. Instead, it can make potent use of its own poetry.”

Noting that dance is only the realm of fine arts that can boast of a bold, functional streak with “every other artistic discipline struggling with questions of mediocrity and hopelessness”, he added, “Our aim at the Raza Foundation is to keep these embers of disquiet burning.”

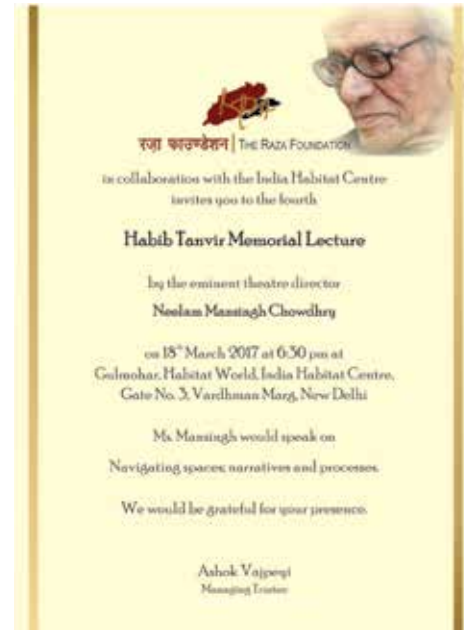


Asian Age, 18th April, 2017

HABIB TANVIR MEMORIAL LECTURE



The play "Naked Voices"



Theatre is a practice oriented art

I have been running my theatre company since the last thirty two years. Earlier my work was based on what we would call the well-made play, where roles would be distributed and it would be blocked during the rehearsal period. At the present moment I am guided more by what I don't want rather than what I want. What I want still remains unclear. I don't tell actors do this, but rather don't do that. I think a lot of directors write what they want before actually directing a play. In my case, I write after I have directed a play. The method that we use for creating a play is based entirely on improvisations.

Improvisations became the common language. An idea or text is shared, but the actors are not required to learn the lines. They must comprehend the situation and have some idea of the context and the given situation. But even within that there are many risks that I wish them to take in the hope of discovering the unwritten text (like a travelling kit). I give certain suggestions that are both physical as well as conceptual. I also provide them with possible objects and certain costumes. Most times, the actors produce something entirely different from what I suggested. The actors provide the raw material. Some actors create, through their improvisation, a fully realised idea,

and sometimes it becomes a sort of sketch which can be pulled out and developed for the final production. In an improvisation, each participant has the same power in the creation of an event. The aesthetic thinking is also nonhierarchical. An object would have the same importance as the human body. The spoken word could be on equal footing with the gesture. One idea could hold the same importance as another.

Theatre is a practice oriented art, and during the course of my work I have realised that every aesthetic choice I make needs to be a practical one as well. What sort of costume should the character wear? What kind of stage business do I give the character? If I edit a speech will it disturb the meaning? How do I position the actors on the stage? Rehearsals are a way of setting an exact sequence of events. Preparing for a role is a constant state of training, so that when a situation arises, one is ready to do that which is appropriate for the scene. Improvisations are considered a valid process for preparing a role, but this should not in any way suggest that only the spontaneous response of the moment is needed to create theatre.

The response of the moment occurs through a complex ballet between the mind and the heart. When this occurs intuitively and without

tension, it releases a feeling of sheer spontaneity. As Stanislavski said in his book *An Actor Prepares*, "one has to work very hard to appear spontaneous on stage." What he meant by this was that a performance is not only rehearsed and performed but is also prepared through a complex journey that is physical and internal.

Most of my work begins on the level of intuition, as directing for me is not about control. I do not enter the rehearsal space with any definitive ideas and then expect the actors to make those ideas visible and concrete. Directing is about feeling, about being in a room with other people; actors and musicians. It's about a feel for time and space, about breathing and responding. To be able to plunge into the unknown and to encourage the actors to also take that plunge. Theatre is not about understanding what's going on. It's about meeting something you don't know. It's about uncertainty.

That is why I always believe that certain aspects of the production are set and a lot of them are open. In other words, do you set the form or the content? Do you set the action or the emotion? Rehearsals are about eliciting these emotions and then fixing them. However, human emotions are ephemeral and can they really be fixed and then summoned during the course of the show? Therefore, I am convinced that it is better to set the exterior elements; the choreography, the action, the objects, and the movement, and allow the interior (the ever altering inner landscape) to move and change. The set may be conventional

or realistic and may swerve more towards the suggestive but I like the performance space to be animated by objects. These elements are not merely 'props' as much as they are elements of a production with their own voice. They speak without the actor having to give them a name. A tray of water can suggest a river, a burnt car, genocide or a tinsel cloth a snake.

No text can be dreamed by different directors in the same way. It will always be imagined by different directors in different ways at different points of time. To take a text and assign a single, corresponding interpretation to it is to impose a limit on that text. Every work is written here and now, and with each rereading fresh meaning will emerge. Meaning is not determined by "language itself" but by its impact on the actors; how he internalizes it and makes it his or her own.

A text is, for me, dead, only when it is connected to a process of closure; to an absence of exchange. In other words, a text becomes dead when it does not does not travel, change, and evolve. A playwright is the poet, the metaphysician, the historian. However, once the play has been written, it has a life of its own that goes beyond the intentions of the playwright alone. The play comes alive differently in the mind of the director and in the body of the actor.

The play
"Bitter Fruit- Stories from
Saadat Hasan Manto"





The play
"Naked Voices"

Is it possible to talk about Indian culture as a monolith? A country which speaks in so many voices, that lives simultaneously in so many eras, and that has a complex and rich history, cannot be standardised or encapsulated by singular notions of identity.

In a nation where history has so much power and beats through our blood as much as the modern, the only solution is to create without subordinating one to the other. The truth is that the past persists, and the modern persists, and the future is not a victory between these two. The material that enters into performance comes from dreams and memory, and these are not exclusively modern or traditional.

If we look to our nation's most popular sports, clothing and music we will find that all of these have a long and complex cultural heritage that travels far beyond national borders. Yet, the dominant and popularised narrative about our cultural identity is one monolithic concept of belonging, whose values of purity, authenticity and homogeneity are all based on a negation of the dynamic exchange that brings all cultures into being.

Can there be limits to ones influences? Can I erase histories, cauterise experiences, bleach memories and pick a single thread from a rich and multi-layered tapestry to define myself through my work? Notions of identity are complex and to try and weave a standardised, sanitised version of the self is frightening and soulless. Being an Indian makes me into a multitude: perhaps a multitude of

singularities, multitudinous and contradictorily .

When I direct a play: a Racine, a Lorca or Tagore, I bring the play to the present moment, to bring the characters in a context in which they might unfold and reveal the stories of mankind. Is it the present? Is it a historical moment of the past? Is it an imaginary country or society?? Because each play carries a baggage of its own histories. Interior context becomes the issue for me that need to be explored. The story need not connect to any immediate dilemma within me or what the world is undergoing, as sometimes what we need and yearn for is the fantastic, is the impossible, is the imaginary . People want to travel outside themselves, hence the need for fantasy, the need for an imagined world! Yet can the imagined world exclude the realities that we are surrounded by or the dark forces that threaten our existence our safety our freedom?

My work with my theatre company does not set out to tell a moral story, to sway public opinion or to champion a cause. It attempts to provide a glimpse of an alternative existence animates reality, explores its vulnerabilities. A space where one must avoid falling into an idea; and search for the true not the realistic. The true is not always realistic. To enter the stage is to enter into a symbolic place, where everything is imagined.

"What is that one moment that alters your life?" is a question I ask myself. Is it the people I met or the details of experiences that touched my life and changed me? I suppose what I am today as a person and a director is a mixture of what I have

seen, heard, smelt, experienced, eaten, remembered and forgotten. It's all stored within me and spills out in my work space.

When we talk of influences, many things impacted me. The list is long. But I think the experience of seeing the work of Pina Bausch at the Siri Fort Auditorium. *Nelken* (Carnations) changed all my tidy and safe definitions on what was possible on the stage.

A stage covered with silk carnations and dancers in flowing gowns are crawling among the flowers, giggling and playing leapfrog before they were confronted with passport officers and snarling dogs. Men sniff onion slices and pour coffee on their head while a nude woman carries an accordion, but doesn't play it. It met with immediate rejection as I had no tools to access the experience unfolding before me.

But the show clung to me, haunting me, making me restless. The work was incoherent with a dream like landscape strung together by powerful non sequiturs. But, something snapped within and I recognized that anything can be made possible on the stage. Somehow this experience made me realize the immense potentiality of the stage. It showed me how boundaries dissolve, space magnifies and transforms in unimaginable way.

I have been able to lead multiple lives through my work. In *Naga-Mandala*, I reflected on how moments of love and happiness are imagined. In *Yerma* I learnt that the artist, and particularly the poet, is always an anarchist in the best sense of the word. He must heed only the call that arises within him; the voice of death, the voice of love and the voice of art. In *Phaedra* I understood systems of patriarchy when *Phaedra* wails, "How these vain ornaments, how these veils oppress me." *Kitchen Katha*, a play about food, suggested to me that "Each of us is born with a box of matches inside us but we can't strike them all by ourselves."

Working on these plays was my way of leading many lives, of becoming many people and understanding myself. In my work I try to place the ordinary as unfamiliar, the absurd as meaningful, cheek by jowl.

Through the work we do, we are reflecting our concerns, and most times while working and making a performance we ourselves do not know to what extend we would be talking about ourselves, about our times, our divisions, our intolerance, our hatred. It's difficult to be always be pushed by actual events as most times it has to do with passion and humanity. Our struggle is always a search for an improved means of expression before trying to express anything important.

The theatre, even as it entertains is always a search for meaning, a quest as well as a struggle. One of the basic functions of art is what the Greeks named catharsis. According to Aristotle, catharsis is the purifying and cleansing of emotions, by evoking a sense of fear and pity in the audience. The etymology of the word catharsis is 'to shine through dark spaces'.

Yet, when we try to explore the dark spaces in our soul through our work, very often we have a tendency to shut the issues with the busy work of the daylight hours. But without looking into those dark spaces, as Carl Jung said, we will lose touch with our essential humanity.

We know the world to be unjust vicious and unbearable. But within that I know my development as a person is directly proportional to my quality of discomfort. When I am constantly confronted by conflict, I feel I have to do something. My chosen field of action is the theatre, because it not only about narratives and entertainment, but about something that reminds us of the wonder and passion we have always had for the world, but may have forgotten.

Neelam Mansingh (Chandigarh)

(Dr Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry is a Chandigarh based theatre artist. She was awarded the 2003 Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. She is also the recipient of the 2011 Padma Shri Award and the 2004 Shiromani Bhasha Vibhag Award of Govt. of Punjab. She has taught at Panjab University, Chandigarh and worked at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal. With her theatre group called 'The Company' she has produced many plays and staged them in many cities of the world including London, Perth, Los Angeles, etc. Her most recent work has been with the artist of the National School of Drama, Delhi.)

Curator's Corner

Part Narratives: A Brief Introduction



Atul Bhalla
Objects of Fictitious togetherness - I
 2017
 Wood, brass, marble, water
 Variable dimensions
 Courtesy: sepiaEYE

At the end of a long exchange where they debated the origins of the senses, the philosopher Yajñvalakya asked King Janak “If a person such as yourself, equipped with wealth and knowledge wishes to make a long journey, furnished with a chariot or a boat, where would you go, from here? What later region would you go to, being released from the former region?” Due to his ignorance, the king answered “I do not know”.[1]

One may wonder why the king in his discourse with Yajñvalakya said I do not know, unsure of where the journey would lead him. Was it ignorance or was it because he could not commit to being released from “the former region,” the land of his ancestry. What does release imply, is it ever complete?

Coming after the famine of Bengal and the Tebhaga movement, Partition created decisively an aesthetic of toxicity and trauma. As a subject of engagement Partition has been a highly productive site in art and cinema, television, fiction and biography. It fostered artist movements like Delhi Shilpi Chakra, and influenced gender reforms, and other concerns of the new nation. Seen decades later, as an historic imperative, it becomes subsumed in the larger history of forced migratory flows in different parts of the world.

But despite the enormity of the event, in which 14 million people were displaced, marking the largest migration in human history, and 500,000 are believed to have lost their lives, the artistic response to the event



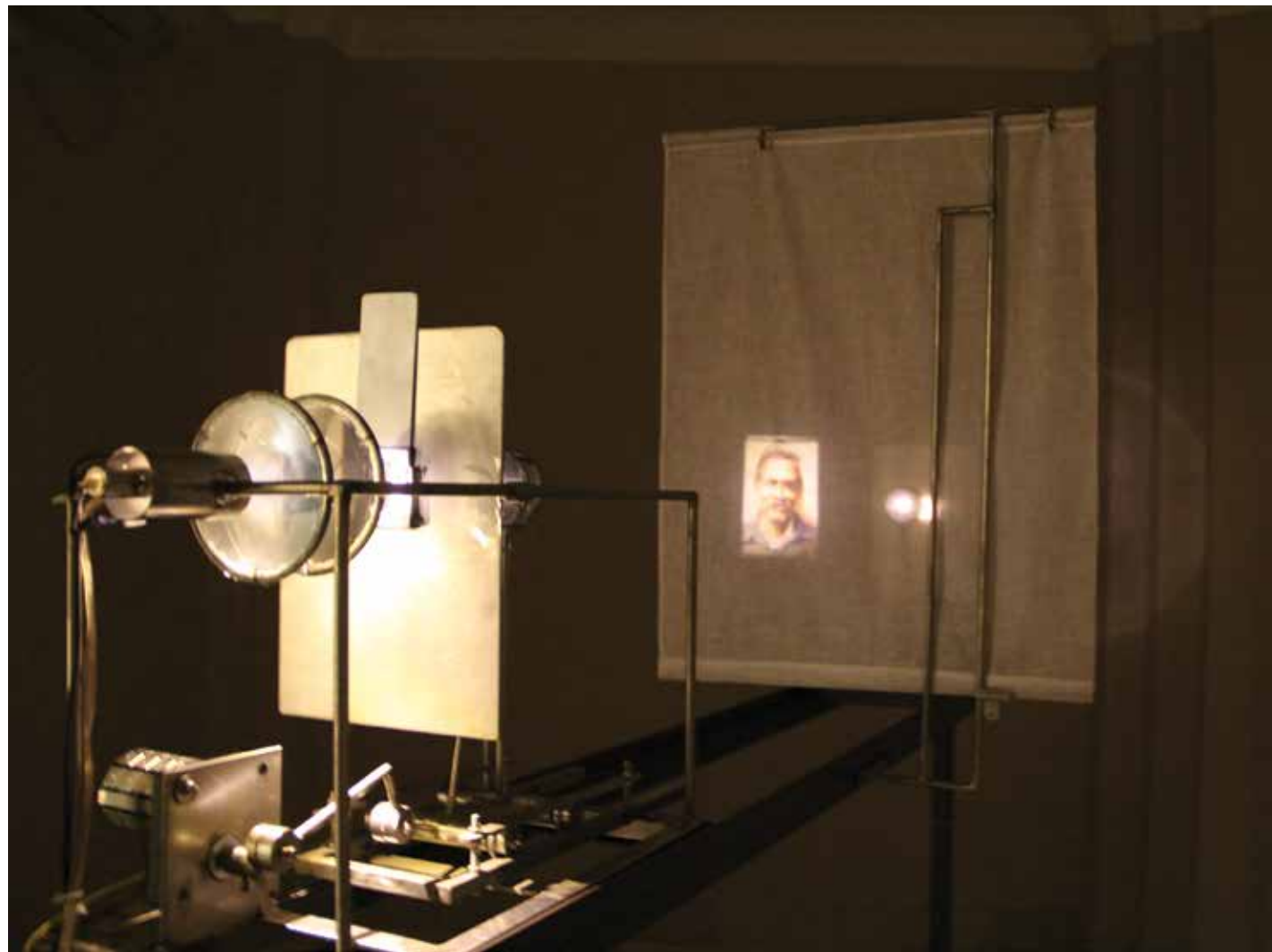
has not been registered or documented. Indian institutions have ignored largely the productive output, the family memorabilia, the archival material generated by the cataclysm—the absence of monuments to trauma or mourning extending well into the modern period. This despite the fact that Partition as a subject has persisted and leaked through the decades, extending from the eyewitness sketches, of the artist as diarist in the 1940s to the conceptually universal art works of the present time.

Even as the long shadow of Partition has spread over seven intervening decades, India is home to a rising tide of internal migration, second only to China in the churn of uprooting and resettling patterns. Migration to and from centres of capital, and its narratives, extending most conspicuously in popular cinema has fostered a language of the pastiche of historic change. In this movement from village to city and then back again, an entire poetic lexicon of *des-pardes* has been spawned, in the studios of Bombay films and the penumbra of poetry that supports it. In the work of Madhusudhanan, Sheba Chhachhi, and Nandita Raman, cinema as archive and its space as repository of memory is seen. Across much of North India, if *des* or *desh* is home and community, *pardes* could be a distant Indian state, as well as a foreign country and the *pardesi* fellow countryman or foreigner. The earlier fears of pollution that bedevilled travel beyond one's borders have slipped and elided at different times into a suspicion and rejection of modernity and the metropolitan. Cinema from the 1950s onwards has been replete with narratives of the city or *pardes* as a site for pollution and the *desh* as the locus of the pure. In the last two decades this narrative has see-sawed with the diaspora injecting a different scale to the value of place, with the voluntary migrant—the NRI. If the expatriate Indian was the caricature of westernism in the 70s and 80s, he has grown in the period of global exchange to “a kind uber Indian able to assert his ethnic and national identity in a globalised world; successful, capitalist, male, family-oriented, technology savvy and a devout Hindu all at once.”[2] Migration to the West is justified through the retention, even the exaggeration of values of the ‘pure’ and the conspicuous enactment of tradition, rituals and festivals. Bombay cinema's high chroma images of diaspora capitalists, is offset by images of migrating, mobile labour that is drawn to but must periodically leave sites of capital: as they



Sheba Chhachhi
Temporal Twist, 2016, Wood, motors, 35 mm film stock,
 288 x 96 inches

constantly redefine place, the laws of the polis and the settled city constantly unravel and then stitch up again. What Said spoke of as “the politics of dispossession” is in the popular imagination, a vast subject that engages kinds of movements, from the condition of migrant labour, the culture of diaspora and exile to the affective states of migration. Movement is seasonal and circular, and allows large numbers to be in a perpetual state of the unlocated, the unstable, moving between the loci of ‘home’ and the quest for capital. Migration also compels artistic change and mutation. The artist Sardari Lal Parasher, crossing over at the height of the violence in 1947 with a copy of a Rabindranath Tagore in one pocket and his sketchbook was to mark a sharp rupture with what he now saw. The early sketches on view reveal precisely the struggle to arrive at a figure that marks trauma and mourning, to arrive at a form when nothing like it exists. The sombre yet contained of Amrita Sher-Gil, that create a typology of the North Indian woman must now mutate into the keening, mourning woman. Homi Bhabha writes about the singularity of the image of Alan Kurdi, who swept up face down on the shores of the Turkish coastline becomes in death the



Susanta Mandal
Naukar ki Kameez, 2015,
 Iron, steel, lenses, LEDs, 2rpm motors, slides and timer, 76 x 60 x 20 inches

face of the refugee crisis for the world. The history of migration is then off set by the image of the migrant and produced by the migrant, as marker of time.

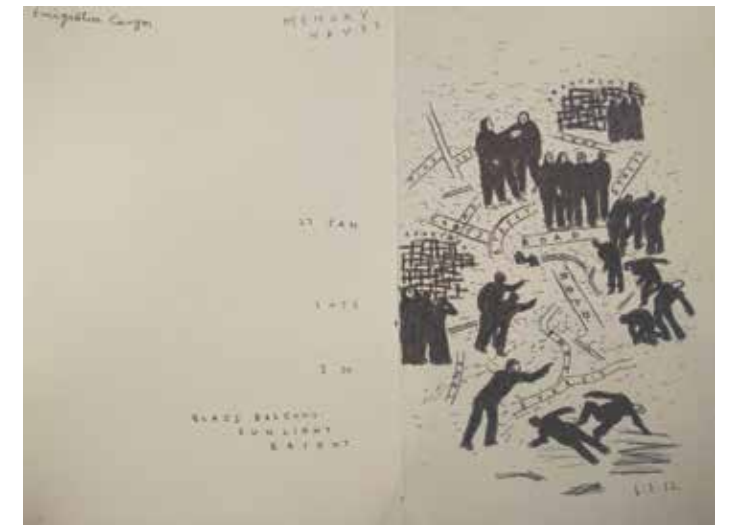
Appadurai has argued that media and migration both affect the work of the imagination, a fundamental aspect of modern subjectivity. [3] While electronic media has the power to compress, expand and distort our sense of distance, there are migrating patterns of other contrary dimensions, and the creating of a sense of disorder, these may challenge the nation state but also become sites of bitter contestation. The migrations to the metropolis as capitalist centres have generated one kind of political and social resistance in several Indian states. Migration serves as a political and electoral issue, involving state agencies, military forces, political parties, border tensions and issues of legality. The migration of opinion fields on twitter – India has twenty two million users, -- represents another field of movement. On the ground and in cyberspace, the migratory patterns

imply a kind of unchecked movement, pause and then further movement. Under the present regime of demonetization, another form of mass migration away from the centres of capitalism is currently underway, the implications and extent of it will play out only over the coming months and years.

In staging the exhibition, what appears as a referent is the archive—frequently unruly, poorly documented, and uneven, but nevertheless, resilient, and accessible. Against the backdrop of the deep roots of popular presses and mass based photography, the publishing of tracts across sects and institutions and the making of epistolary collections, India has built up a substantial if uneven ‘unconscious’ or accidental archive. Four artists within the exhibition represent the artist as eye witness. Krishen Khanna dedicating decades to the principle of exitus and reditus, of departure and arrival, comprehended entirely through his drawings, of the journey. Arpita Singh, who witnessed Partition as a 10 year old girl in Delhi,



Somnath Hore
Wounds 4, 1970, Trial proof. Pulp print, 19.25 x 24 inches
 Courtesy: Akar Prakar



Arpita Singh
Untitled, 2012, Ink on paper, 8 x 10.3 inches

and Somnath Hore who conflated his memory of the Partition of Bengal with the birth of Bangladesh are on view. In periods of change, as the grand narratives of nationhood and its determining ideologies gradually recede, it is the accidental archive that may be excavated to create multiple, alternative histories.

In a heraldic piece in the exhibition, *Homage to Bade Gulam Ali*, artist K M Madhusudhanan evokes a sense of change and shift in Indian history, with regard to migration. Bade Gulam Ali believed that musical notes were distributed spatially, in an interview before his death he spoke of music as migratory, of travelling between the regions of the subcontinent. “Sheheron mein sur baante gaye” is how he spoke of the migration of Raag Bilawal to Kashmir and Bengal, Jaijivanti to Sindh, and other distributions across the subcontinent. Singing Shubh Din Aayo in 1960 virtually at the end of the Nehruvian period, Bade Gulam Ali, revelled in this knowledge, of music crossing geographies, even as he mourned loss and separation from the beloved ‘sur’. Madhusudhanan’s work hangs across the gallery space from a faux photocopy of Nehru’s desk, that bears video testimonials of migrating families, by Annu Matthews. It was on a desk such as this, that perhaps the biggest migration in human history was contemplated.

Gayatri Sinha (New Delhi)

(The exhibition, ‘Part Narratives’, held at the Bikaner House (from 7th January-21st January 2017) put together a collection of works that portrayed the experience of Partition and the characteristics of memory. The exhibition is traveling to the Dr. Bhanu Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai, the exhibition is on view from 13th August to 19th September, 2017)



POHON BUDI-Tree of Life



Pohon Budi- The Tree of Life exhibition featured over 100 pieces of creative art expressions of established artists from 30 countries, across the Asia Pacific Region, the Americas and Europe. Among them are recipients of the World Crafts Council Award of Excellence.

The exhibition was first held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, then in India at Bikaner House (New Delhi) before traveling to the East-West Centre, Honolulu, Hawaii. It showcased the use of natural and sustainable material in creative art expression from 38 countries. The exhibition is a sequel to the highly successful World Eco Fibre & Textile (WEFT) exhibition held in early 2013 at the Brunei Gallery London and in Nantong, China in 2014.

The word 'pohon budi' stems from the manifestation of creative energy derived from the word 'budaya' which means 'culture' in the Malay Language, poetically conjured between a combination of two lexis, 'budi' which means 'good practice' and 'daya' which means 'energy'. 'Pohon budi' symbolises the ideology of the universal Cosmic Tree.

In Hindu mythology 'Kalpavriksha' also known as 'kalpataru', is a wish-fulfilling divine tree. It is mentioned in Sanskrit literature from the earliest sources. The Kalpavriksha originated during the Samudra manthan or "churning of the ocean of milk" along with the Kamadhenu, the divine cow providing for all needs. The king of the Gods, Indra returned with this tree to his paradise. There are references to the Tree of Life in Mayan, Sumerian, Assyrian, Egyptian cultures, mythology and literature.

The Mayan believed heaven to be a wonderful, magical place on Earth hidden by a mystical mountain. They called this place Tamoanchan. Heaven, Earth, and Underworld (Xibalba) were connected by the 'world tree'. The world tree grew at the locus of creation, all things flowing out from that spot into four directions. These were: East associated with red, North represented by white, West that is black and South that is yellow. The Mayan tree of life is a cross with its centre being the point of 'absolute beginning', the source of all creation and its branches passing through each of the three layers of existence - underworld, earth, and the sky.

The oldest name of Babylon, 'Tintir-ki', meant 'the place of the tree of life'. To the Babylonians, it was a tree with magical fruit, which could only be picked by the gods. The earlier Sumerian traditions played a major role in Babylonian culture. The early Sumerian art (around 2500 BC) depicts pictures of a pole or a tree called the 'axis mundi'. Guarding this tree is a snake or a pair of intertwined snakes. Babylonians have the concept of the 'navel of the world', the place of the connection of different spheres. This vertical dimension, axis mundi, is the connection between three



Embroidery of Asif Shaikh on display at the East West Centre, Hawaii



Indian craft showcased at the exhibition Pohon Budi-Tree of Life exhibition

cosmic spheres: heaven, earth and underworld. The sacred mountain, the temple, the sacred city are all considered to be this Sacred Space, the axis mundi, the connection of the three cosmic dimensions.

Assyrians substituted the tree for the caduceus with coiled snakes circling around the wood of the wand. Here we see a snake symbolising an underworld consciousness, passing through earth, climbing a stick, transcends to a winged reality, a heavenly creature. Wings on a wand became a symbol of transformation and transcendence.

In Egyptian mythology, the first couple are Isis and Osiris. They have emerged from the acacia tree of Iusaaset, which the Egyptians considered the tree of life. Egyptians considered the Tree of Life to be the tree in which life and death are enclosed. The direction East was associated with the direction of Life, the direction of the rising Sun, and the direction West was seen as the direction of death, of under-world, because Sun sets in the West. Egyptian creation myths refer to a serpent and a primordial egg, which contained a bird of light.

In Chinese mythology, a Taoist story tells us of a peach magical tree that produces a peach every three thousand years. The one who eats the fruit becomes immortal. At the base of the Tree of Life is a dragon, and at the top is a phoenix (a bird). In Chinese cosmology, there are four Dragon Kings (Qin, Kuang, Jun and Xun), each with his own elemental domain.

A Tree of Life in various religious interpretations, within myths, and as a mystical concept represents the interconnectedness of all life on our planet. The Tree of Life connects all forms of creation and is considered to be the symbol of 'Creator' and the universal symbol in all religions from times immemorial.

"The roots of the tree are our beliefs the trunk is our mind and body the branches are our wisdom."

(An interpretation of the Tree of Life by Shannon Talbot) the exhibition aims to create greater awareness about the importance of ecology to stimulate creativity and innovation while highlighting natural as well as cultural sustainability. Individually hand-crafted from natural and sustainable materials, the fine works of art focus on traditional and contemporary expressions. The exposition presents various genres of art objects ranging from textile, stone, ceramics, metal, wood, paper, bead works and lacquer wares keeping in mind the ideology behind the Tree of Life.

Pohon Budi-Tree of Life showcases the remarkable skills and talents of the artist from various countries and also introduces the audience to some of the world's indigenous art making traditions that are in danger of extinction. Among the Co-partners of the Pohon Budi-Tree of Life exhibition are the World Craft Council, World Crafts Council Asia Pacific Region and Society Atelier Sarawak and the Raza Foundation.

Manjari Nirula (New Delhi) and **Edric Ong** (Malaysia)

(Manjari Nirula is the Vice-President of WCC-APR (South Asia) and Edric Ong is the Advisor to WCC-APR. Together, they curated the exhibition Pohon-Bud-Tree of life which is now set to travel to Lipont Gallery, Vancouver, Canada.)

A LETTER FROM BHOPAL

Raza Memorial Lectures in Bhopal

The Raza Foundation and the magazine published by it, *Samaas* organised Raza Memorial lectures in Swaraj Bhavan, Bhopal. The first of such lectures was of a well-known philosopher Professor Navjyoti Singh of IIIT Hyderabad. He has studied in IIT Kanpur for his B.Tech and M. Tech and then later worked in Vaisheshik philosophical tradition. He was one of the important organisers of Peoples, patriotic Science and technological congresses. He is now working on the ontology of the arts. It was on *Chidaakaash chitran and chitrakala*.

In his lecture, Prof Singh said that painting is seen in the *chidakaash* which broadly means space of the mind. It unfolds there and thus painters find various ways to make it unfold in unique ways in the *chitta*. Painters are trying to show their interior to the spectator in the act of painting. He quoted Sayed Haider Raza and said he too had understood that the painting is an attempt to express the interiority of the painter's self. Navjyoti elaborated on the process by which the marks or the brush strokes on the canvas unfold into a painting inside the *chitta* or mind of the viewer. He said that those forms which are impossible in the reality get realized on the canvas precisely because the space where painting is seen is the physical space of canvas which is two dimensional but the infinitely dimensioned or dimensionless space of *chidaakaash*, the space of the mind. He showed few famous paintings of old masters which are impossible in reality but get realized in the space of mind through imagination. He added that act of seeing a painting is not only an act of imagination but it also involves a certain kind of individuated ethics. It is because of this that the coming time

would need more and more of arts and their actual appreciation for the society to become more responsible to itself and others. The lecture lasted for more than an hour. The lecture was held in Swaraj Bhavan on 26th of March 2017 and attended by a good number of painters, writers, other artists, intellectuals and students. Navjyoti also replied to some questions from the audience.

On 30th of April, the second Raza lecture was organised in Swaraj Bhavan Bhopal. It was delivered by young Environmentalist and journalist, Sopan Joshi from New Delhi. He gave his lecture on the cycle of life and the place and circulation of the waste in it. He made a significant point in suggesting that there is no absolute waste matter in the world. What is waste for one species is a food for another. He said that very early in the history of life on Earth a certain waste matter was produced by unicellular beings and that caused a kind of crisis in the life. This pollutant was oxygen. But the later forms of life developed new means to use this same pollutant as a source of energy. Thus the life on Earth creates a very creative cycle of waste material and the food. He showed some shot video clippings in the course of his lecture. In one of the videos he showed a case of reentry of wolves in a natural park of a city of United States. Once the wolves were introduced back into the park it was noticed that the whole cycle of life started changing and not only that but the river which was lying almost dry in the park also started getting filled and flowing. His lecture was suggestive of the fact that all creatures except perhaps humans live their lives feeling themselves to be part of a larger web of life involving many other species but humans do not do it. Unless human beings too become conscious of such interrelation in their

living, human life on this planet would not last long. Sopan Joshi's lecture was attended by kind intellectuals, writers and journalists of the town. It was also being attended by volunteers working in the field of waste management and water.

Mr G R Subramanian gave his Raza Lecture on 8th July 2017 on *Kalidas ka Bhagawatchintan, Thoughts on God of Kalidas*. Subramanian had come from the town of Kumbhkonam of Tamilnadu. He lived there with his 103 year old Vedic chanter and scholar father Ramchandra Shastri and is learning *Prasthan trayi*, i.e. three beginnings i.e. *Upanishads, Bhagwat Gita* and *Brahmsutra* and their commentaries of Shankar. Ramchandra Shastri is a great scholar of Vedas but also a theoretician of music. He has written a book on Indian music in Sanskrit. Subramanian quoted many *shlokas* from tenth chapter of Kalidas's *Raghuvansham* to show that the great poet has proposed a miraculously detailed image of Lord Vishnu. Kalidas approached the image of Lord Vishnu in many ways in that chapter. He also elaborated on the process of traditional learning of the philosophy. Lecture was followed by many questions-answers and comments. One person in the audience said that literature of Kalidas is much respected in the tradition that it was given the status of a *smriti*. There were scholars, painters, writers and young students in the audience.

Readings in Bhopal

Samaas of Raza Foundation organised on 11th June 2017 reading of and conversation with eminent Urdu novelist Khalid Javed. Javed read portions of his newly published novel, *Nematkhana* to a very discerning audience. *Nematkhana*, he told the audience, means kitchen and his novels try to go into details and connotations of kitchen. In the pages that he read a narrative very nicely woven emerges which was very poetic in its suggestivity and beauty. After the reading young Urdu writer and translator Rizvanul Haq spoke to him about his writings and readings. He said that he was initially trained as a philosopher and he taught philosophy for few years in Bareilly of Uttar Pradesh. Later on the suggestion of a writer friend he did his masters in Urdu literature and started teaching it in a university. Khalid Javed also replied to the questions of the audience.

Udayan Vajpeyi (Bhopal)

(Udayan Vajpeyi is a Hindi poet, essayist, short fiction and script writer. He has published two volumes of poetry, a short story collection, a book of essays and other miscellaneous publications (including a book of recreated folktales and an account of an extended conversation with filmmaker Mani Kaul). His work has been translated into Bengali, Tamil, Oriya, Kannada, English, French, Swedish, Polish and Bulgarian. He teaches Physiology at Gandhi Medical College, Bhopal.)

ARTIST BLOCK

PARAG'S PEOPLE

I was first introduced to Parag Sonarghare's paintings of nude bodies and faces in Gallery Maskara. Led by Abhay Maskara it was Gallery Maskara's final exhibition titled "TIME". In "TIME" Parag's paintings of nude men fascinated me not for the application of skill but for the way it tried to capture a facet of society ignored through relentless unstoppable progress. I had the opportunity to include Parag in the Young Subcontinent project that I curated for the Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa.

Parag's meditative practice of achieving realism on canvas has the potential and the very real danger of entrapping the viewer only into the primary response, and easily available categorisation, of 'hyperrealism'. But within it also lies the anguish of an artist trapped inside the dilemma of struggling to stand out in an image-obsessed and image-sickened society. Often mistaken for photographs, his paintings of faces and naked bodies design a carefully linked chain on the compelling ways that material, subject, and sensibility can align on canvas.

Each painting is built over a period of weeks in a process of gradual accumulation. The reality is elicited not only through intense detailing and realistic representation but also through the conceptual layering of socio-political contexts that make the men in these paintings 'more real'. His subjects are the ordinary people, but his paintings don't have the patience for sweeping sentimentality or feel-good liberalism. Response to his subjects also relies on the viewer's knowledge and assumptions of notions of the working class men and the weight of the normal every day to enhance the feeling of life and act as a stimulant to it. The 'real' in these works are derived from the rawness permeated through detailing. It captures the lament of the 'ordinary' - who are cast out and excluded from the political processes, who are quarantined from progress and inclusion in the march to build a new India. Parag casts them with extraordinary sensitivity and draws our faltering attention to the people who we leave behind in the wake of modernity, to the people who are not only isolated from 'progress' but progress itself depends on their very isolation from it.



Title - Untitled,
Size - 7.5 x 5.5 ft (90 x 66 inches)
Medium - Acrylic on canvas
Year - 2016

In Parag's paintings, the shock is in the unexpected. In them, naked men sit comfortably with a steady gaze directed at the viewer. The gaze of the portrait toward the viewer remains constant, direct, and hypnotic as if inviting them for a conversation however uncomfortable it may be. They impart a sense of calmness primary because they seem uninhibited by their nakedness, sitting there as if it's the most natural thing to do. This loss of inhibition is compelling and strange at the same time, for the subjects are not models or people who should be comfortable posing for an artist let alone with their clothes off. The artist removes all trace of context by reducing the background to an abstraction. The primary and the only focus here is their bodies - old, naked, ordinary, scarred with life, about to drift off into mortality's shade.



Title - Untitled
Size - 6 x 4 ft (72 x 48 inches)
Medium - Acrylic on canvas
Year - 2015

When the popular culture has desensitised the naked body, this deliberate provocation of indecency (of the act itself) not only eschews the expectation of established social constructs of class and spectatorial voyeurism but also problematises the so-called pragmatic modern liberal thinking. Through this expose, and externalisation, he highlights the vulnerability, not only of them but of the human body itself - unmaintained, decaying from the effects of life and time. But for the artist to believe that he could capture the vulnerability of his subjects implies that his eye could see their weaknesses, their absurdities, their lives. If so, then these paintings open up wider readings into the society and class structures around the artist. Their battered bodies become our only clues to understanding their life. The body becomes the being, the skin as a map of their soul.

On this account of the body in political, cultural and social space, how do we make sense of these

figures who are excluded and can never be part of the concerted actions - of the political process, the socio-cultural sphere, and the art world that turns them into a narrative?

Even as selfies make spectacles of ourselves, there is a population out there, unseen, unassuming, unwanted, who toil away their lives in the service of the more privileged. Parag brings these bodies out in the real-world as a testament to the will of these people. Parag's work demands the viewer to move past their safe zones of understanding and established notions of looking and seeing. Though 'bodies' carry with it the entwined baggage and ideologies of sexism, casteism, classism, colonialism, and other systems of oppression, nakedness in these works is not the end-product, but a construct to articulate and represent politics, and a freedom that existed prior for the State-individual dialectics.

At a time when political and communal groups long considered to be too niche and extreme to ever enjoy mainstream status not only find themselves with unrestricted power to shape the future but also make no apprehension about finding certain sections of the populace the central roadblock to carrying out their agendas of progress, inevitably it targets and victimises people from the margins of the society, like Parag's men. Fractured by the machines of capitalism, media, technology, and exploitation, it's all too easy to take our eye off the grid, to be distant to the suffering of people outside our homes, in the streets, and feel distant from the stories of violence that dominate our current politics and political histories.

But for politics to take place, the body must appear. The bodies on Parag's canvas are not romanticised notions of the marginalised or the poor but are portraits of enduring resistance. And it's this enduring, this resistance against the system, against an established order of cultural and social ways of seeing that the artist highlights. For them sitting casually, as if the most normal thing to do, is to stand up and strike back.

Riyaz Komu (Kochi)

(As an artist, Riyaz Komu is known for his political art, depicted through expressive portraits of people's faces. Issues faced by contemporary India, politics and critical social issues are some of the major concerns in his artworks. He is the Co-founder of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale.)

ATELIER HAUNTS



Himmat D Shah with his terracotta works
(Image courtesy: www.himmatshah.com)

Himmat D Shah: Through Sacred Terrains

Breaking away from conformist techniques, Indian sculptor Himmat D Shah's sculptures stand as reflections on the human form and in the process, tap into the nature of human existence.

"The artist's eye sees,
From heart to hand to material.
The vision transforms
Everything it touches"
(Unknown!)

There is no doubt that artworks of enduring value are an outcome of complex and persistent contemplation on the human form and the tireless documentation of the nature of human existence. Artists and sculptors across centuries have tried to delve into the essential of human form through a variety of techniques, new perspectives, new art values and discovery-later invention of new materials.

In this quest for essential form, no sculptor worth his salt could ignore the allure of terracotta, the most ancient material known to man. The material, its nature and its availability has allowed sculptors from as early as the Stone Age to mould the human form as they perceived it, instinctually: as if the hands saw what the mind unconsciously discerned. The iconic *Venus of Dolni Vestonice*, the oldest known work in terracotta celebrates this essential in form. The Romanian Master sculptor,

Constantin Brâncuși understood this thought. "Simplicity", he explains, "is at the bottom of complexity, and one must be weaned on its essence to understand its significance". If it is through the refinement of technique, form and medium that one can grasp the essential, then the terracotta works of the Indian contemporary sculptor, Himmat D Shah is an ode to this philosophy.

Celebrated playwright Peter Brooke explains that it is through perseverance, that one attains purity in execution and thought: "When life was at its crudest state, a process exists through which the coarse can become fine" (Peter Brook, *Threads of Time*, 1998). The life and art of Himmat Shah are not separate from one another: be it the discovery of broken terracotta pieces in childhood in Lothal or his intimate understanding of human nature and form seen in his works.



Himmat D Shah, Untitled, Bronze.

Born in Lothal, Gujarat in 1933, Himmat came in contact with the economical and easily available medium of terracotta in the remnants of an Indus Valley civilization excavation site near Lothal, as a child. A restless soul, Himmat travelled extensively during his formative years and explored his sculptural vocabulary during this period. He moved to Bhavnagar as a young boy and studied at Gharshala, a school affiliated to Dakshinamurti, the intellectual and cultural centre of the nationalist renaissance in Gujarat. He later joined the Sir J.J School of Art in Bombay, and then moved on to Baroda on a government cultural scholarship from 1956 to 1960, taking in only what was necessary for his art practice. He honed his skills under the watchful eye of N.S Bendre and K.G Subramanyan in Baroda. His firm belief in the imaginative power of art in presenting reality led him to Group 1890 (a short-lived artists' collective founded by J. Swaminathan) of which he became a member. The group dispersed soon after its first exhibition in 1963. Himmat went on to study at Atelier 17 under S.W Hayter and Krishna Reddy in Paris in 1967 on a French Government scholarship. While the artist, after his return explored a variety of unconventional mediums like paper, cement, bronze and other metals, terracotta remains elemental, even sacred.

The most significant works of the artist, apart from the *Burnt Paper* collection (that are yet to be shown in an exhibition) and the pencil and ink drawings, are the *Human Heads* in terracotta and bronze. While the subject has been explored by master sculptors across centuries and the world, Himmat's work hold

its own with master sculptors like Giacometti and Isamu Noguchi. The allusive minimalism of the human heads reveal the artist's debt to Constantin Brancusi whom along with Giacometti and Isamu Noguchi, the artist evokes repeatedly as the most significant artists of the century. His subject is not the abstract, but rather primal form, deeply rooted in society's collective conscious. The works does not express mere emotion but communicates universal truths.

The terracotta works of this 84 years old contemporary Indian master reveal a refinement or rather a purification of form and the medium. Terracotta is usually made from a fairly coarse, porous type of clay. This is first shaped (or sculpted), then fired until hard. In the ancient world, it was left to harden in the hot sun; later, it was baked in primitive ovens created in the ashes of open fires. Ultimately, it was fired (at about 1000°C) in special ovens, known as kilns. Once fired, the clay assumes a brownish orange colour, ranging from earthy ochre to red. Himmat, however allows his clay to rest for years, some for ten years and some for twenty, so that the true nature of the material is revealed in the process of slip casting.

While the basic anatomy of the head is limited to the essential, the artist reimagines it in a variety of ways while working on the mould and the semi-wet fragile layer of clay: often scrapping off the outer layer of the surface to reveal the inner recesses.. The scrapping away of a layer of skin at places, often leaving the whole face corrugated so that the bottom layer peer through the surface, speaks to the viewer of the myriad layers of distinct experiences, both joyful and painful that makes a human being: the effect of the passing of time on the lines, the wasting away of moments: each head, a memory or witness to the moment in an effort



Himmat D Shah, Untitled, Bronze.

to retain that which is in danger of being forgotten.

With only his instincts to guide him, he works away, aware of the strength of time and nature and their effect on the lines, punctures, scratches, fractures, pores and wounds his tools shall create on the fragile clay surface. For artists like Himmat, working with the medium is meditative: a catharsis of all the experiences, both joyful and painful etched into the pliable medium of terracotta. It is almost a frenzy to record every touch of emotion felt by a man, making his art a testimony of emotions and conscience, of memory and intention, of sensation and emotion. His work is a result of the struggle between self-expression and the chaos of the unconscious burdened with layers of history and experiences.

The well-known sculptor, Isamu Noguchi perhaps could best explain this effect of Art when he says; "Art has to have some kind of humanly touch and memorable quality. It has to recall something which moves a person, a recollection, a recognition of his loneliness

or tragedy, or whatever is at the root of his recollection" (*Isamu Noguchi: Essay and Conversations*, Harry N Abrams, 1994)

It was through the practice of drawing on paper, then onto the terracotta and bronze that he distilled his ideas. While experimenting with human heads he worked on expression, refining them until he reached a perfect pitch of emotional intensity. All the work on the surface are according to the artist, instinctual and unconscious: "The work comes into the world at an undetermined hour, from a source still unknown, but it comes inevitable". As if a life time of experiences amassed into the hands that mark the sculpture, making it in an act of the moment: a lifetime lived in a moment. He explains "A piece of art is created because you allow it to happen, it cannot be forced. "I" am not creating, it is my hands that are creating, for when they have clay beneath them, "I" am lost." (*India Magazine*, 1994)

Himmat's bronzes are a result of years of mediation on the medium of terracotta. Despite his involvement with clay, what he produces in bronze and now silica bronze are extraordinarily assured and imaginatively diverse. They blend modern techniques with the craft tradition of the country. Even after each bronze sculpture is cast, using the lost wax technique, he is often tempted to work on the 'heads' with his tools: puncture marks, cuts and neat, surgical incisions are carved into the surface, to create a form that absorbs into the medium, the ravages of time and nature. He explains creative instinct as something that is hidden: "There has to be a strong urge within you to create. That strong urge will let your craft develop. There are many crafts that already exist. But to express my experiences, I have to find my own craft. Without craft, art cannot be expressed. I will always remain in search of my own craft."²

In his search for the hidden essence of human form for nearly sixty years, the medium became immaterial and only the process, the craft and the experience remained. The admirable evolution of Himmat's art is proof that only an absolute purity of intent and triumph over technique can make it possible to break away from the known and point the way to discovering the nature of human existence. Himmat challenged the traditional convention of the medium and in doing so, created a stylistically diverse body of work that introduces radical new direction in art and literally shifts the Indian art world's view of sculptures, from mere figurative to reflective, expressionist primal form.

Shruthi Issac (New Delhi)

Footnote

¹ Himmat Shah, *High Relief*, OpenSpace Books LLP, 2014.

² Himmat Shah, *High Relief*, OpenSpace Books LLP, 2014.

PUTTING PEN TO PAPER



Krishen Khanna with S.H Raza

Old Soldiers Never Die

"Old Soldiers never die", so goes an old song. There doesn't seem to be an equivalent expression or wish for artists who I suspect like most other creatures are expected to bide their time here and say a final good bye. However, looking at the lives of some of my departed friends and some others who left a long time ago and should by now have been forgotten, their presence persists even though they are physically absent. I'm thinking of Raza who left us recently leaving behind drawings, paintings and a heap of calligraphed letters which evoke their presence every time they are read. In some of us who knew him intimately, his presence is palpable and there is almost a never ending dialogue.

I for one am aware that this can also be ended. On the other hand all of this may be extended in many others. In any event, his work, done with zest and patience over a long period and now scattered amongst many different people on this

earth will continue to bear witness to the qualities and values which are so indelibly enshrined in the many phases of his work.

To my mind there is an inextricable relation between all the faculties which exist in a human being. In the ones who are more developed, there is a far greater complexity in the mixture. Raza, for instance was an extremely generous human being. He never talked about generosity; it was in his actions that it was expressed. Whilst he was a resident of Paris, he came home to India every year and spent a great deal of his time meeting young artists and discussing their work with each one. Maybe he felt a moral obligation to do so not because of any sense that he has been denied such an opportunity in his formative years, but precisely because he had the great privilege of long discussions with people like Leyden and Langhammar and had realised the importance of an open mind. At the risk of being a bore, I

POETRY AND THE ARTS



Correspondence between Krishen Khanna and S.H Raza

must mention the episode of Manuel Fernandes whose work he had seen and had encouraged him, expressing the hope that he would come to Paris one day. Manuel out of excitement or a misunderstanding turned up and knocked on Raza's door. Raza did not turn his back and assumed responsibility though he could ill afford to. As he said to me at the time "We had decided not to raise a family but "the best known schemes of mice and men....." he smiled as he quoted Burns, much to my surprise! His knowledge of English poetry was a bit limited.

He would urge me to recite Eliot's "Pruffrock" and Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium". He was a man of great refinement. In his two room apartment, he has an old hand crafted church pew instead of a sofa and an old all-purpose table which acted as their dining table and when not in use, served as a drawing board.

I recall on one of my visits, we sat up late, drinking a rather fancy whiskey. Our talk varied about matters of art and the strategies to be followed and some frivolous matters which evoked loud laughter. In the morning he received a note from his neighbour who lived a floor above. The man was at pain to tell Raza that he was a very hard working man and deserved a quiet night's rest of which regrettably he was deprived by the loud laughter he heard throughout last night! I had quite overlooked the fact; I was in Paris and not at home in India where I could give ample expression to my mirth. Raza read out the letter and translated it to ensure that I understood its gravity-the epistle ended with his signature and

underneath was inscribed:

"I have the honour to be.....
A butcher of Horses."

I could have burst out laughing again but for Raza's gesture to keep silent. What a marvellous way to end a long discussion on ART!

Well, controlling my loud laughter was not the only lesson I learnt. More was to follow. We planned to visit the Louvre one day. Before entering the portal of that great Mecca of Art, Raza told me to hang on to his left arm and shut my eyes which should remain shut till he told me to open them. "That's a great way to see Art" I retorted. He nodded with a smile and said. "You'll see!"

So we passed through zigzag passages, the enlightened leading the blind finally stopping. Raza bade me look. There before me was "Pieta d'Avignon"-a masterpiece if ever there was one. I couldn't move. My eyes wide open, hypnotised at such purity/. There was no talk nor did I want to know the name(s) of the artists who had painted it. I don't think that I have ever experienced such a moment. Lapsed Time has not eroded the luminous moment. We sat quietly for a long time and then Raza arose. It was time to go. "Shut your eyes again and don't look at anything else" he said. "That will sully your experience". In hindsight, I think that single experience was one of the greatest gifts I received and my sense of gratitude for that enlightened moment is endless!

I have chosen but one such episode in our long and lively relationship. There was so much give and take. The greatest virtue was the honesty of those exchanges. To be sure there moments of critical disagreements but we had the good sense not to let such tense episodes undermine our deeply tethered friendship. That doesn't happen too often. When death appears as it must and disrupts a friendship, it cannot take away the residue which lingers and reasserts itself.

Krishen Khanna (New Delhi)

(Krishen Khanna is perhaps one of the most versatile modernist of our times, whose life and art has borne witness to some of the most turbulent times of India's political history. Krishen Khanna's works range from carefully constructed compositions to gestural, spontaneous works: from the trauma of Partition to the grandiose bandwallahs.)

Tasveer-o-Musawir[1]

تصویر

کہا تصویر نے تصویر گر سے
نمائش ہے مری تیرے ہنر سے
ولیکن کس قدر نا منصفی ہے
کہ تو پرشیدہ پر میری نظر سے

Picture

Said the image to its maker
I display your craftsmanship
But yet what a regretful injustice it is that
You are hiding out from my eyes

مصویر

گراں ہے چشم بیذا دیدہ ورہر
جہاں بینی سے کیا گزری شورہر
نظر درد و غم و سوز و تب و تاب
تو اے نادان قناعت کی خیر پر

Picture maker

Tyranny, says the maker is the fate of keen eyes
As fire sparks, eager to see the world perish within
Vision, pain, burning, and razzle-dazzle are destinies of vision
O naïve one! Restrain yourself to reason

تصویر

خبر عقل و خرد کی ناتوانی
نظر دل کی حیات جاودانی
نہیں ہے اس زمانے کی تگ و تاز
سزاوار حقیقت کی ترانی

Picture

Reason, says the image, is just weak wisdom
While the potion sustaining life, is vision
Not the hustling time which hinders my vision
Is you who choose to remain unseen

مصویر

تو ہے میرے کمالات ہنر سے
تہ ہو تو امید اپنے نقش گر سے
مرے دیوار کی ہے الہ یہی شرط
کہ تو پنہاں نہ ہو اپنے نظر سے

Picture maker

With best of my skills, I crafted you, my creation!
Do not lose hope from your maker
The only condition to behold me is
Do not conceal sight of the self of your own

BY THE BOOK

The poem, composed by Allama Iqbal[2] is a dialogue between tasveer (picture) and tasveergar (picture maker).

W.J.T. Mitchel in his essay, “What Do Picture “Really” Want?”[3] questions the need to respond to an art-work as if they are living entities; possessing the power to influence us, behold us, to persuade us, seduce us. Art evokes powerful fears; desires and sometime it illuminate our everyday lives.

Roland Barthes in his article titled “Death of the Author”[4] counter argues that the ‘author’ is not really an author, but a ‘scriptor’ who juxtaposes ideas. He believes the work should be independent of its writer or author. The task of the writer is to create. It’s upon the reader or the viewer to make sense of what they read and perceive of the work.

Michel Foucault in the first chapter of his book, “The Order of Things”[5], talks about a painting titled “Las Meninas”. According to him the painting raises questions about reality and illusion and in the process, creates an uncertain relationship between the viewer and the art-work. He questions the systems of thoughts or looking into an art-work or painting. He has brought to light a different way of seeing of an artwork. However the painting raises questions on what is seen and what has been left unseen?

The novel, “My name is Red”[6] by Orhan Pamuk describes a ‘hastily painted tree’ on a dislocated miniature leaflet of a miniature album. The painted tree of the leaflet separated from album recounts its birth, anger, happiness, journey and excitement. The leaf wishes, “I am a tree and I am quite lonely. I weep in the rain. For the sake of Allah, listen to what I have to say”. [7]

The reason behind translating this nazm[8] (poem) is not that it is composed by a renowned poet and philosopher. We are so used to reading Urdu poetry in specific way such as romantic,

religious, and spiritual. It is also believed by many that Allama Iqbal was a religious and spiritual poet and this nazm is often read and interpreted as a religious piece of literature.

The translation opens up a new perspective, which would perhaps be beyond the confined ways of reading Urdu poetry. There are several Urdu poets such as Kaifi Azmi, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Razi Akhtar Shauq, Naseem Sayed, Shakeel Badayuni and many more who have talked about rang (color), tasveer, Naqshgar or Tasveergar (craftsman or picture maker) in their poems.

In this nazm ‘Picture’ (tasveer) has a wish, a desire, a story of loneliness, attachments, detachments, and it dares to speak out. The nazm helps us to review and rethink on the unheard or the muted voice of the picture.

Shaista Anwar (New Delhi)

(*Shaista Anwar is a researcher with an interest in Islamic Art History and Architecture.*)

Footnote:

[1] *Idea derived from one of my paper titled “A Painting’s Ego and Ambition” which I presented at Balwant Parekh Memorial Lecture III in 2015.*

[2] *Allama Iqbal “Tasveer wa Mussweer”, “Kulyat-e-Iqbal”, (Aligarh: Maktaba-e-alfaz, 1984), 659-660.*

[3] *W.J.T. Mitchell, “What Do Picture “Really” wants,” October 77 (1996): 71-82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3257647>*

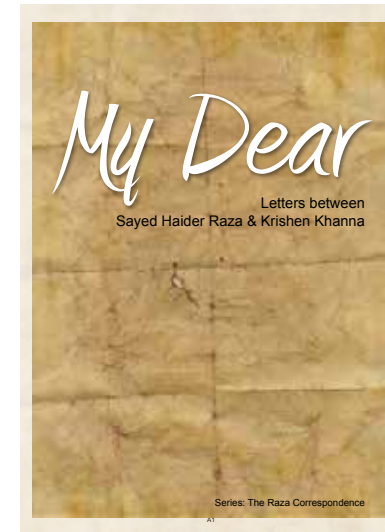
[4] *Barthes, Roland. “The Death of the Author”, Image, Music, Text. Transl. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-148*

[5] *Foucault, Michel. The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994),*

[6] *Orhan Pamuk, “My name is Red”, Transl. Erdag M. Goknar, (New York: 2001) PP 56-61.*

[7] *Pamuk, “My name is Red”, pp. 56.*

[8] *Nazm is one of the prominent genre of Urdu poetry. They often have couplets one after the other, but it is not necessary as nazms may also have paragraphs of four sentences or more.*



Warm Pen Strokes of 44 years by two Iconic Modernist Indian Painters

One may think that when the two art titans of their times forge a strong bonding and correspond frequently through handwritten letters, their epistolary contents have to largely move beyond the realm of banality. They did discuss their arts and worldviews copiously and in an enthralling manner. But their letters also bristle with a strong camaraderie and a genuine appreciation for each other’s works. To top it all, there was a dash of gossip besides occasional banter that were never rancorous.

In a close friendship that lasted more than six decades, S.H. Raza and Krishen Khanna corresponded warmly between themselves while being stationed in faraway lands where they struggled initially to eventually flourish as artists. Both were largely busy with their profession, yet the world-renowned painters took time off to write mostly long mails that would travel across continents to reach their destination. Raza died in the monsoon time of 2016 at age 94, while Khanna, three years younger, is a living legend in India’s modernist art that flourished in the 20th century.

A recently published book, featuring the close camaraderie between Raza and Khanna, strings together a select bunch of detailed and

occasionally short letters the two exchanged over four-and-a-half decades from 1956. In fact, the last mail in *My Dear — Letters between Sayed Haider Raza and Krishen Khanna* dates to the turn of the 21st century. To be precise, 2000, which is ten years before Raza decided to return to his native country, having spent his prime abroad.

It’s not as if Raza, whose formative years were in central India, remained a stranger to his motherland during his profession-defining stint in the West with French wife Janine Mongillat. The 224-page book, brought out by the nascent Raza Foundation in collaboration with Vadehra Art Gallery, also of Delhi (where the artist died, spending the evening of his life), mirrors the close watch that Raza kept over cultural developments in the subcontinent, no matter in whichever part of the world he lived.

The letters show a logical strengthening of the bonding between the pals, whose common interest converged largely on visual art. The correspondence, by and large, doesn’t make too obvious the admiration Raza and Khanna had for each other. Even so, there are glimpses of it. For instance, an early 1990 letter from Raza begins thus: My dear Krishen, Indian art, without you, will lack its backbone.

Variety Sambodhana

The way the duo addresses each other itself undergoes an amusing metamorphosis over the years. “My dear Khanna” is how Raza, in the book, begins his Paris-dateline letter in August 1956. And slightly different is the status a good three years later: “My dear K.K”. Two months preceding that, Khanna’s mail to Paris also starts by addressing his pal with the second name: My dear Raza. A year later, it’s “Dear Krishen”, while Khanna’s reply a couple of months later (from Roma) begins with “Dearest Raza and Janine”. The same year, by November, Raza apparently gets a bit more jovial and calls Khanna “My noble friend”. From there on, it’s a whole range of stuff: “Krishen”, “My dear Krishen, my dear Renu”, “Dearest Raza and Janine”, “Raza and Janine, you dear people, hello!” to at least once (1967) “Monsieur le Commissaire and cher ami”.

Interestingly, the places of writing the mail, too, change. It is more so from 1925-born Khanna, whose datelines are seen as Delhi, Washington,

Kanpur, London, Shimla, New York, Chandigarh, Seattle, Bombay, Tokyo.... Vis-à-vis this, Raza is largely Paris-bound, with an occasional wind blowing from eastern America's Berkeley, during the artist's stay at University of California as a visiting lecturer.

As for the endings, the mails would invariably refer to the other's wife—"Love to you and Renu, from Janine and myself", being an example from Raza. Yes, at times, the spouses feature in the opening or middle parts of the letters; for, solid reasons. Like, in a 1962 letter from Chandigarh, Khanna's second of a six-paragraph mail goes thus: "I was delighted to read about Janine's award. Congratulations Janine! All of us feel very happy and proud."

Worldviews

Beyond the profile of a friendship gaining momentum, the correspondence often banks on how their works are progressing and where all they are being shown and how, and the kind of feedback. Seldom do the two artists get into conversations about a general take on art, emerging trends or (un)healthy practices in the field, if any. They are predominantly centred round one's own artistic travails and achievements (often exchanging samples of artworks as slides and photos) and personal issues (that are sometimes professional too). There were occasional traces of gossip too.

That's how a leading fellow artist once comes up as a character. "The last visitor we received from India was Ram Kumar," writes Raza from Paris in February 1963. "If not our guest, I would have taken the life out of him. He is so imperfectly stupid: pretentious snobbism. However, I gave him a bit of my mind and am convinced he will never visit us again." The same year's Indian summer, Khanna writes from the Himachal capital, saying "Satish Gujral and his wife are here and I have spent a day with them.... He is a complex character, really not a bad fellow, though his particular handicap creates unnecessary misunderstandings in his own mind."

The letters teem with references to local weather. "Here we have bright sunshine these days," Raza writes to Khanna in end-November 1959. Khanna later says, "Paris must be cold now. It is cold here (Kanpur)." Another time, years later in August 1987, he writes from Gorbio (southeastern France): "I am sitting under my beloved olive trees, in front of a small red canvas, and paints

and brushes that are calling to me irresistibly." It turns out to be a 12-para mail drafted "in a single writing".

The ethos of a pre-email period comes in fascinating vividness when a letter would end thus: "I am in a hurry to post this letter and I do hope you get it before Renu leaves for India." Khanna would write, "I turn to you after nine years of banking, playing with my children and painting a masterpiece." Well, Khanna, born in Lyallpur near what later became a Pakistan town near Faisalabad, did resign from Grindlays (in 1961) to get into full-time art.

The necessity for artists to make money also finds a mention. "Regarding the prices, I am very surprised they are finding them high. I am selling here (Paris) at 100 new francs a point," says Raza, while Khanna in 1961 speaks of a top artist who has a private secretary receiving a "pretty good salary (Rs 500!)." It becomes clearer when Raza writes in March 1964 that his "struggle to get a studio always reminds me of Do *Bigha Zameen*," referring to the 1953 neo-realism Hindi film.

As they succeed in life, both artists show keenness in charity and national welfare. "The best thing would be to give all sale proceeds to the War Relief Fund or the Indian Red Cross," Raza tells Khanna from Paris in end-1962 in the context of the Sino-Indian War. Later, in 1965, Khanna writes: "I organized an auction of paintings and got Rs 21,500 for the Jawan's Welfare." Social consciousness and political views too find space. A 1987 mail has Raza speaking of a 'Help Age' project in which "I will be with you all".

Off and On

Occasionally when the other turns unresponsive for a while, one would joke: "Dear Raza, what a noble friend you have in me for writing in spite of not receiving anything in reply." (Kanpur, 1960, August 9) At times it is Raza's turn to feel miffed. "No news," starts a 1963 mail. "This is frankly depressing. Are you painting a lot or lecturing?" I think we should get used to short, precise notes sent at the right time rather than waiting for long letters that get written when the mood permits."

A long 1960 mail from Raza suggests a "bed cover" as the couple's preferred wedding gift from Khanna, who promptly sends his friend an aesthetically done one. It's in the same year Raza replies to Khanna's enquiry about where he could stay in Paris during an upcoming ten-day stay.

"Do not worry about accommodation. We shall be delighted to have you stay with us..." The very next day, Raza again writes, "...It's a pity that Renu is not coming."

The friends go on to become freer about highly personal matters. "I don't want to sound like a saint...but I am not tempted," says Khanna, about his sojourn away from family. "Not that I have lost my sex drive, but I am still very much in love with my wife."

The first bit of tension in personal life comes in 1965 when Raza tells Khanna about a problem the former had developed with vision. "Since this summer I have been very worried about my right eyes," he writes, to which the reply comes promptly: "Renu and I are deeply distressed at the trouble..."

The book, naturally, revels in an array of names, some of whom are tough to locate. Bal, Raman, et al do find themselves places contextually, but later come up as stray references—a problem that could have been solved with their full names given either as footnotes or in the glossary at the end. After all, not all are like the famed writer Mulk (Raj Anand) or artists Maqbool (M.F. Husain), Akbar (Padamsee) and (V.S.) Gaitonde.

By 1987, subtle references to their ageing come. Khanna says, "I hope we can meet before we become too old (which in my parlance means 100!)" and Raza borders on nostalgia when he speaks (in 1982) about a 1948 art show he first attended in Delhi. Press reports sometimes irk the two: Khanna writes about a famed Indian magazine reporting on "the high prices" fetched by expatriate artists. "It was a bunch of rubbish and I wonder what kind of satisfaction it gave the person who wrote it."

By the year 2000, there is a reference to phone talks—something that became common in conversations in a fast-changing world thence.

Publisher's Grace

Aptly, the publishers come up with pertinent quotes that are globally acknowledged. At the start of the book comes a black page which carries an extract from William Shakespeare: "A friend is one that knows you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts what you have become and still, gently allows you to grow." Related ones come from German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche

and Paris-expatriated 20th-century American writer Henry Miller and even Italian Renaissance polymath Leonardo da Vinci and modern novelist Ernest Hemingway.

The book, also for the sake of authenticity, shows select letters in their original format—either independently (in singles or collages) or imposed below the printed lines. They act as windows to the handwritings of the two masters, what with Raza's looking a bit arty compared to Krishen's, whose rather clumsy cursive letters ironically tend to contrast his deftness on the canvas.

The publishers have added images of also the postal addresses of both artists written on the envelopes and a later-age colour photo of them sitting together—both in white summer dress, with Raza holding a mobile phone into which he gazes. Occasional highlights appear in bold fonts on left pages (black colour) or as big-size sentences in different hues. (For example, Khanna: "I realise that I haven't congratulated you and Janine on your marriage!" Or, "I am desperately interested in my own work and that takes up all my energy." Or Raza noting, "I am convinced that some fundamental problems are common to any part of world in relation to human beings or working of institutions, it is not false modesty when I say that I would like to get acquainted with local realities that have escaped me.") The inside flaps of jackets bear a decent description of both artists, while there is also a paragraph each on the Raza Foundation and Vadehra Gallery, besides a sample or two of their artwork.

Poet-essayist Ashok Vajpeyi, who was close to Raza and is the Founder-Trustee of the organisation named after the artist, notes that the correspondence "also constitutes an informal record of what some of most creative minds of India thought and felt about their times, its anxieties and struggles and emerging aesthetics." Vajpeyi uses the word "their" in a sense beyond the two, because the foundation is proposing to publish more such documents: Raza's letters with artist-friends M.F. Husain, F.N. Souza, K.H. Ara, Ram Kumar and Tyeb Mehta. Evidently, more is to come!

Sreevalsan T.K (New Delhi)

(T.K. Sreevalsan is a senior journalist. In 23 years of journalism in various Indian cities, he has been with a wire agency, magazine, three dailies, a pink newspaper and a PR firm besides having worked as a freelancer.)

By the Book

On Samas

By the Book

On Samas

A Letter

Krishen Khanna

1-48/11 A, DLF Phase I, Gurgaon - 122 002

16th June 2013.

Raza, dear friend,

As we corresponded over many years, neither of us even vaguely realised that our letters would become public. It's a good thing that they did as there was no effort by either of us to put on a face before a public. Our letters are as straight forward as the work we do. I have received flattering accounts from young art critics who see in our correspondence a story of our time. Be that as it may, like all wonderful events, these just happened and are a faithful testimony of our relationships. And this brings me to the reason for writing this to you. Both of us have grown since then & reading some of your letters now, after this large lapse of time, I have looked back, quite dispassionately at some events which caused anxiety & a heart-ache. I'm referring to the aftermath of the First Triennale in 1968, in which I was deeply involved & particularly with the assembling of the Indian Section. In your letter to me you said that I had acted like a daroga - an inspector picking & choosing. I vindicated myself by thinking that the Indian Section as chosen was much applauded by the International Jury & by most other people. Now... years later I am able to realise that as an artist I should not have given in to Malk & the entire committee who had urged me to be a Commissioner. That job, if I can call it that, was sprung out to me as it was believed that I had the ability to organise & the necessary knowledge to pick outstanding work. I don't think that it was any sense of vanity or self-aggrandisement that made me accept the post.

In truth, there were not many people around who could have undertaken that task. Today, the situation is almost overripe! The truth is that I do think that people should perform the functions that they have selected & not venture into other venues, even if performed efficiently. W.H. Auden has a beautiful line which reads:-

"These moods give no permission to be idle
For men are changed by what they do"

So dear friend, I belatedly thank you for your just reprimand at the time. I've no doubt that it was given with the warmth of friendship. I am a much chastened person now.

Let this epistle be the last in the book, but remaining so just between you & me!

As always,
Krishen

(This Letter was the last letter written by Krishen Khanna to Late S. H. Raza)

The Critic spoke

RAZA

"With Sayed Haider Raza, India bursts onto the scene of contemporary art. For the first time an Indian painter takes his place among the leaders of the School of Paris. Raza represents, in Western art, that East of the soul which corresponds to our longing attempt to recapture dreams and mirages.

If Asia has left a strong imprint on him, and if he still shows traces of it, the lyrical style, whose herald he is, is not blemished by the slightest Orientalism. His starting points, his themes and his motifs are not exotic. The texture of his painting reveals a great artist, whose school has been France. But his vision, which bears the stamp of irrealism, his use of space, with its suggestion of infinity, and his colouring, fantastic rather than literal, attest and reveal an archangel who was born near the point of the compass where the solar star rises at the equinox. His forms transmit no feeling of weight, no feeling of physical density. They float in space. However rich their basis of colour, they remain unrealistic.

Raza's relationship with the world of nature which surrounds him consists of projections of his personality on objects. No landscape painted by this young seer is an exact copy of the sights which unfold before the spectator. He transfigures everything he sees, and this process assumes, under his brush, a magic character. Villages are detached from their earthly support and seem to move in the cold light of a night of fantasy. Houses shaken by earth tremors disintegrate and collapse. Churches glide down on beds of cloud. The vault of the sky has spectral lights of dawn or dusk. It also has the shimmering brilliance of stained-glass windows, or Limoges enamels and the mosaics of St. Apollinaire. It is starred with pigmented tones. It is lit up with them like a reliquary studded with precious stones.

As he gradually masters his art, Sayed Haider Raza is freeing himself from the constrictions that he was subject to in his early works. He gives free rein to his imagination. He has managed to elude an art bound to fleeting appearances. He looks at nature with dazzled eyes. His images overlap each other, become intermingled, vanish and dissolve in the ambience of the air. But Raza, this knight errant, cannot bring himself to annihilate them. He makes them arise again by giving them wings. He metamorphoses them, masks them, disguises them. His sense of the marvellous justifies these bold strokes and these games forbidden by the masters of prose and logic. The baleful light which rends and bursts open his apocalyptic skies casts lurid reflections.

The cottages, the shadows, the chance configuration of the ground, and the trees are bent to the same movement, are made from the same mould and form part of the same plastic system. Rays of incandescent red sometimes light up his lapis-lazulae nocturnes with a fantastic splendour. Backgrounds of gold or yellow ochre give dramatic significance to the ruins of a country church whose tower, surmounted by a cross, keeps watch over the troubles of mankind... The sign of this cross is outlined in space, the point facing God. Shacks with broken-down façades are superimposed or piled up on top of each other.

Strips or trails of bauxite-laden earth stretch rhythmically across strange and disquieting canvasses. Certain pictures by Raza give out an acrid whiff of sulphur of coal and volcanic lava. A fire ravages the hillside from which emerge the ruins of a village balanced between the sky and a circle of rocks.

The palette of the artist of whom I am speaking

to you, and whom I am introducing to you, is composed of shades which evoke) one after the other, metals in fusion and the cinders beneath which the fire smoulders. Calvaries rise up like gibbets in a landscape of crystal and frost, where the sun has the tragic beauty of the Northern Lights.

The universality of this unusual painter, forerunner of the world-art of tomorrow, puts an end to the dilemma (and the opposition) between Western and Eastern art. The legitimate heir of the craftsmen of Graeco-Buddhist art, spiritual son of El Greco, that Byzantine transplanted to Toledo and adopted by the Catholic Spain of St. John of the Cross, Sayed Haider Raza proclaims by his works, whose dominant characteristic is ecstasy, the birth of a new cosmopolitan spirit and of a modern Euro-Asian art."

Waldemar George (Paris)

(Excerpt from Peintures et Gouaches, Galerie Dresdnere, Montreal, 1959, translated from French by Shruthi Issac)

(Erzed Waldemar Jarocinski, known as Waldemar-George, was a Polish art critic born died in 1970. Waldemar-George settled in Paris after the war where he married Claude Lavalley, the daughter of the painter Louis Lavalley. He authored numerous monographs. He contributed immensely to Neo-Humanism (along with Jean-François Laglenne, Christian Bérard, Léon Zack) and was a keen promoter of international artists such as Chagall, Soutine and Raza. In 1958, he edited the Encyclopedia of Contemporary International Art.)



The Polish-French art critic, Waldemar George

The Artist

S.H RAZA: Prayer and Nature



Raza in his studio in Paris, 1980.

“I opened my eyes in the village of Kakaiya, in Madhya Pradesh. My most vivid memories are those of the forest of Mandla. It is there that I began to see.

We were a big family from Delhi, an old well known family. Our ancestors were in Delhi in 1857. They knew that they must leave Delhi because they opposed the British rule. Some left to begin their life in Bundelkhand. My grandfather subsequently left for Mandla because he loved forests. He became the Advisor to the Gond chiefs of Mandla. Father also loved the forests. He completed his studies at Balaghat and became the Deputy Forest Ranger. He was well known for his honesty and an unfailing sense of justice. He had a passion for stones. He used to collect stones from rivers.

Father was a man of total integrity. Even though he was deeply religious, he was very liberal and was open to all religions, especially to Hinduism. We were completely immersed in the local ambiance, first of all at Kakaiya, then at Mandala where we completed our primary education, and

later at Damoh, our secondary school. We frequented the Hanuman temple, other Hindu temples. We recited the chaupai and the doha from the Ramacharitmanas and my father expressed the least objection on this subject. I can say that the universal approach to religion, to faith, to spirituality that came to become my lot came from this extraordinary childhood experience. Today, I am at ease in churches in France as well as in other places and I find a huge spiritual satisfaction, a deep feeling of peace and of well-being when I go to the Mass on Sunday in the neighbouring church, where my wife Janine was baptized. I believe in order to pray, the most important thing is the space where one can communicate with, what I consider



Bindu Panchtatava
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 120 cms
1996

as the higher powers, in total submission, in silence.

At home, when Father used to say the Namaz five times a day, we would love to join him and this became a habit. We would have our minds elsewhere, were lacking concentration, but he insisted, he said that one of the most important things in Islam, is Namaz. I was a believer, and I feel that one has the gift of belief or one does not, one has faith or one does not have it. When one has the gift, one feels it deeply, and it is for life, it is the immense support in happiness and in sorrow. When my wife fell sick, I went to the church to pray to Saint Antoine, lit some candles; it is a ritual but it is also my faith. After having prayed, and expressed gratefulness, in a church, in a mosque or in a Ganesh temple, I experience an immense sense of well-being, a tangible reality, the hope that the higher powers have penetrated me, that they accompany me. I will also go on to say that prayer, is a part of my daily life.

Work at my studio starts with a prayer, a prayer that is not a request, which lasts some seconds, some minutes- a concentration: sometimes a verse, sometimes nothing at all, a simple request for blessing, of reprieve. I do not deny the process of thinking which goes into creating a work. It is necessary to think, and a lot but thought alone is not sufficient. The technique and the mastering of the medium (the sense of proportion, of

construction, of structure) are not enough. I am convinced that sadhana, the perseverance, and concentration, ekagrata, are vital for painting. It is necessary to concentrate on the image, on the thing with which one lives; one has to live with the work. That is how one reaches to this point, to this moment that the Germans call ‘Stimmung’, the climate, the method, and the French ‘the state of grace’, a state in which direct perception (Manasa pratyakshata) takes over. I have gone through this experience myself, it happens, for days and days at a time, and then it does not happen; it is something about which one cannot have perception, which one cannot see. The interior vision does not truly develop itself; it is not even present. I believe that one cannot truly create without divine support; an artist absolutely needs the help of the divine power. Like Rilke, these extraordinary verses in the form of prayer to the Creator, on whom the seeker can concentrate completely in such a way that his entire self could be invested on a single image, without external intervention that could disturb him in the metamorphosed state.

When my father was in Mandla, I began going to elementary school. From our residence, we could see the Narmada flowing some kilometers away. Narmada-ji nearly encircled the city of Mandla like an offering of flowers, pushpanjali.



Bindu and Earth
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 60 cms
1996

The ghats were superb. There was a Gond fortress, some splendid temples with statues. Our residence was on the edge of the city, from where the forest began, without any construction between the two, and one could see the Narmada. It was very beautiful. When it rained a lot, one had floods, people would be terrorized and we too. Especially me, who found something supernatural, incredible: something that I loved could become a source of anguish, could even kill. The flood would last some days, the rains would subside, the waters would recede, all would return back to order.

We had a garden, Father cultivated some vegetables, with a gardener who used to help us and I loved to work with him. Father often recited poetry. He loved Urdu poetry, Ghalib, Iqbal and many other poets. Mother also came from a refined cultural background. Everybody at home was interested in poetry, in religion. When I said that my internal voyage began in 1975, it is of these things that I think of, this universe with which my spirit reconnects. It is there that I began to love nature, to see beauty in it, to find pleasure in it, closely intertwined in one another, beauty with terror- and to discover the Hindu culture, at school and Urdu at home.

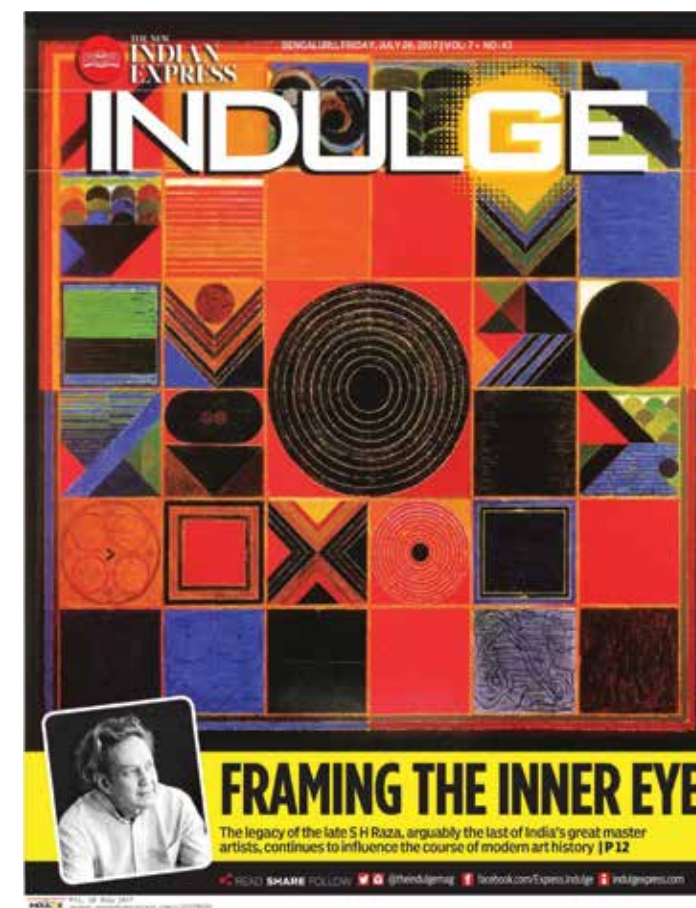
Partition was an extremely difficult time for us. Our family was absolutely against the division of the country. For us at Damoh, at Mandla, for me in Bombay, the atmosphere was always cordial, we had excellent and affectionate relations with the people around us, and our family was well respected. Then my brother-in-law had some trouble with the Mayor, people made some remarks that he did not appreciate. Tensions mounted. After the Partition, there were killings in the region of Damoh, and it became very difficult for my sister and her family. My older brother, Yusuf Raza, who worked as Editor of the Hindi journal, Vishwamitra, was well informed on what was happening. He stayed with my two other brothers. As the tensions increased in Delhi, they decided to leave their homes one night. The house was burnt; they found shelter elsewhere and finally arrived in Lahore in Pakistan. My brother had completed his studies in Sanskrit; he was very rooted in the ethos of Hinduism, much better than me, and in Hindi poetry, the Hindi culture. For my sister and her family, life was really degraded at Damoh and they joined the refugee camp, first at Bhopal, then in Bombay and they finally left for Pakistan. Even though the Partition was a tragedy in my eyes, I decided to stay and I never regretted staying back. I am happy to have kept my name, my religion, my passport and to remain an Indian citizen even after fifty-two years in France.”

S.H Raza (Paris)

(Extract from S.H Raza-Seeing Beyond, Vadehra Art Gallery, 2016)

THE LAST STUDIO

Framing the inner eye: The last of the great masters, S H Raza



Cover of Indulge, 28th July 2017

"Sunset by the River Narmada is a sight to behold, and a joy to cherish. The glowing disc of the sun slides gently into a neck of the hills of the Satpura Range, like a gold coin slipping into a fold of a regal cloak, with the most resplendent natural hues and shades.

Such was the experience that I, along with a handful of guests, got to soak in on a gloomy evening last weekend. Such were the settings, doubtlessly for more magnificent, in which the late Syed Haider Raza spent his growing years.

In a quiet ceremony on the Sunday morning of July 23rd, by an as-yet unmarked grave in a burial ground at the municipality of Mandla, a handful

of his loyal followers and friends gathered to pay their respects, and observe the first anniversary of the artist's death.

In the July before that, in 2015, Raza was conferred the French civilian award, the Commander de la Legion d'honneur (Legion of Honour). Having lived and worked for six decades in Paris – the only Indian with such a long tenure, Raza returned to India in 2011, nine years after the death of his wife, the French artist Janine Mongillat.

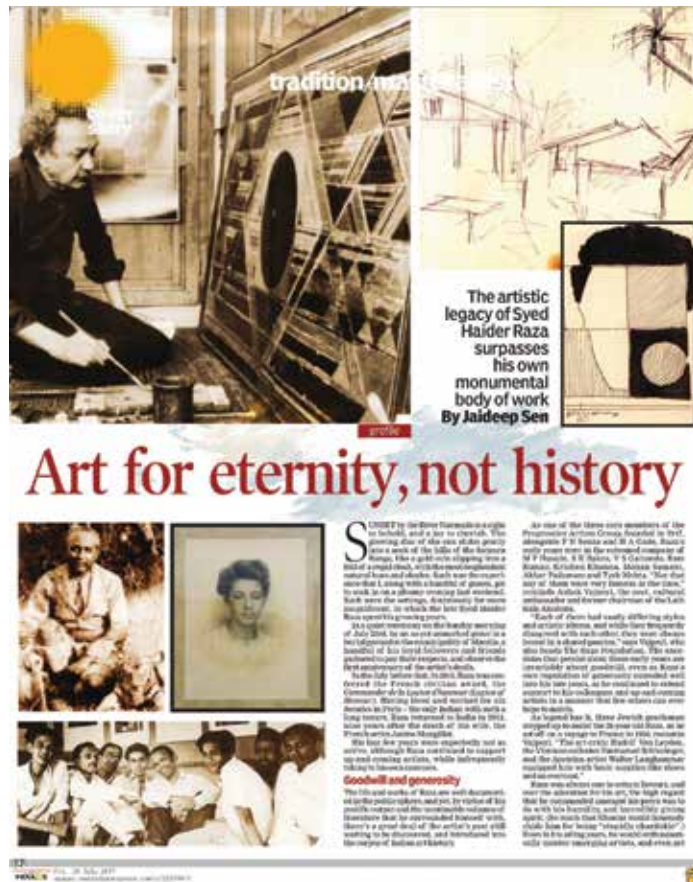
His last few years were expectedly not as active, although Raza continued to support up-and-coming artists, while infrequently taking to his own canvases.

Goodwill and generosity

The life and works of Raza are well-documented in the public sphere, and yet, by virtue of his prolific output and the inestimable volumes of literature that he surrounded himself with, there's a great deal of the artist's past still waiting to be discovered, and introduced into the corpus of Indian art history.

As one of the three core members of the Progressive Artists Group, founded in 1947, alongside F N Souza and H A Gade, Raza's early years were in the esteemed company of M F Husain, S K Bakre, V S Gaitonde, Ram Kumar, Krishen Khanna, Mohan Samant, Akbar Padamsee and Tyeb Mehta. "Not that any of them were very famous at the time," reminds Ashok Vajpeyi, the poet, cultural ambassador and former chairman of the Lalit Kala Akademi.

"Each of them had vastly differing styles and artistic idioms, and while they frequently disagreed with each other, they were always bound by a shared passion," says Vajpeyi, who also heads The Raza Foundation. The anecdotes that persist about those early years are invariably about goodwill, even as Raza's own reputation of generosity extended well into his late years, as he continued to extend support to his colleagues



Art for eternity, not history, Indulge, 28th July 2017.

and up-and-coming artists in a manner that few others can ever hope to match.

As legend has it, three Jewish gentleman stepped up to assist the 28-year-old Raza, as he set off on a voyage to France in 1950, recounts Vajpeyi. “The art critic Rudolf Von Leyden, the Viennese collector Emmanuel Schlesinger, and the Austrian artist Walter Langhammer equipped him with basic supplies like shoes and an overcoat.”

Raza was always one to return favours, and over the adoration for his art, the high regard that he commanded amongst his peers was to do with his humility, and incredibly giving spirit. (So much that Khanna would famously chide him for being “stupidly charitable”.) Even in his ailing years, he would enthusiastically mentor emerging artists, and even get them to join him in group shows, thereby helping them gain visibility – another indication of his largehearted outlook.

How and what to paint

The decision to sail overseas happened after a chance encounter with the French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, who urged him to study the works of Cézanne. “The suggestion had a lasting impact, although Raza didn’t realise who Cartier-

Bresson was at the time,” recalls Vajpeyi, who has authored a number of books on the artist’s life and works, and remained close to him until his final days.

“Over the years, Raza was known to declare, ‘I learned how to paint in France, and what to paint in India,’” recalls Vajpeyi. Even as he found himself in the midst of tumultuous times in Paris, witnessing “the infamous (Albert) Camus and (Jean-Paul) Sartre dispute”, for instance, Raza’s works belied any air of conflict. Instead, he stuck to his originative conceptions of unity, harmony and universal consciousness – all aspects that were inextricably linked to his unfathomable love for the natural world.

Raza was exposed to the jungle from an early age, noted the poet-writer Udayan Vajpeyi, at a dinner gathering in the Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh, 77km from Jabalpur, where the young artist spent much of his childhood. Born in the remote village of Babaria, in the home of Tahira Begum and Sayed Mohammed Razi, a Deputy Forest Ranger of the district, Raza went on to complete his education at the Government High School of Damoh.

“The shades of darkness, and deep silence, were always apparent to him, and he sought to convey that sense of divine calm and serenity in his art,” offered Udayan, who is one of the Raza Foundation’s trustees, along with Arun Vadehra (of Vadehra Art Gallery), the artists Akhilesh and Manish Pushkale, the Kathak dancer Prerana Shrimali, and the cultural critics Ranjit Hoskote and Sadanand Menon.

Indeed, the hallmark of Raza’s oeuvre is his distinctive style, which he often paired with textual elements in the Devanagari script, at times even bringing in poetic texts of Rainer Maria Rilke. The concepts of the cosmic “bindu” as a symbol of primordial genesis, the meditative elements of yantras and mandalas, and the Kundalini, representative of an awakening of dormant energy, were central to his artistic output.

In that sense, Raza, a recipient of the Padma Shri, the Padma Bhushan and the Padma Vibhushan, remained intent on making art with an everlasting point of view, especially in terms of spatial relation, explained Ashok Vajpeyi. “He was a lot more interested in making art for eternity, rather than for art history,” says Vajpeyi.

A humble heart

At the state government-run middle school of Kakaiya, where Raza spent a few months studying in the fourth grade, the faculty members (mostly descendants of Raza’s tutors) fondly recall the artist’s visits. “He immediately prostrated at the school gates,” narrates one of the teachers. “He smeared mud from the ground on his forehead, and didn’t bother about the dust on his clothes.”

The origins of Raza’s “bindu” works find home in this school. As legend has it, to quell his restless nature, Nandalal Jhariya, one of his teachers, drew a circle on a blackboard and asked the boy Raza to concentrate. On his return to Mandla a few years back, Raza immortalised that lesson in a frame that he gifted to the school.

Raza’s self-effacing, humble manner continues to find praise, and is a standing testament among the school’s teachers, to his roots and honest-to-goodness manner of interacting with people. “Few people realise that Raza would regularly visit the temple and the church, while being a practicing Muslim. In that sense, he followed different religions, but stopped short of being overtly religious, and in addition, maintained a trilingual approach to his work and life – being equally fluent in French, English and Hindi,” explains Vajpeyi.

As Sanjeev Kumar Choube, Raza’s longtime confidante recalls emotionally, “I never heard him address anyone as ‘tum’. He always said, ‘aap’, according respect even to strangers.”

Raza’s paintings perceptibly avoid ulterior religious persuasions, and instead emphasise messages of freedom, spirituality, self-awareness, expression and the idea of opening one’s “third eye”. Played out in a vibrant colour palette, Raza’s canvases are as revelatory and transfixing as they are enlivening and enlightening.

All said, with a host of events lined up by The Raza Foundation, the artist’s legacy is set to extend well beyond his own body of work. But to completely comprehend the emotional depth in his works, there’s no better way than to take in the swell of the Narmada from a seat by the river’s banks.”

Get involved

The Raza Foundation’s events commemorating the artist’s first death anniversary

- ◆ The 11th KRITYA International Poetry Festival 2017, Thiruvananthapuram, hosted in collaboration with The Raza Foundation and Bharat Bhavan.
- ◆ A seminar on the works of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, to be held in Raipur. Dates to be announced.
- ◆ Aaj Kavita, a new series of poetry reading, starts July 2017.
- ◆ VAK — The Raza Biennale of Asian Poetry, slated to be held in New Delhi in 2019.
- ◆ Aarambh, a series of events for young practitioners in classical music, dance and theatre. Begins in August 2017, New Delhi.
- ◆ Uttarahdhar, The Raza Festival of Young Classical Artists, featuring disciples of eminent gurus. October 2017, New Delhi.
- ◆ Art Matters, a monthly programme of panel discussions with esteemed names from the fields of arts, literature, academics and performing arts.
- ◆ Seven annual memorial lectures named after the masters V S Gaitonde (visual arts), Agyeya (poetry), Habib Tanvir (theatre), Kelucharan Mohapatra (dance), Kumar Gandharva (music), Mani Kaul (cinema), and Daya Krishna (philosophy). Art Dialogue, another series of panel discussions featuring speakers from the worlds of literature, visual arts, performing arts and other disciplines.
- ◆ The fourth edition of the series, Raza in Correspondence, is set to be published, bringing to light the letters between Raza and his artist-wife, Janine. The 80-odd letters from 1952-1956 reveal the artist’s emotions and struggles in his initial time in France. Expected in 2018.
- ◆ The Raza Foundation also publishes three journals dedicated to the arts and culture — Aroop, a Hindi journal of literature and the arts; Samas, an English publication dedicated to the arts, poetry and ideas; and Swarmudra, with a focus specifically on performance arts and music in Hindi.

Jaideep Sen

(A writer, art enthusiast and compulsive doodler, Jaideep Sen is a journalist based in South India, a former editor of the arts and culture publications Time Out Bengaluru, RAVE and The Voice (WorldSpace) and an eager wayfarer who likes to travel with little more than a pen and a sketchbook.)



Regarding The Authentication of Artworks of Late. Sayed Haider Raza

The issue of authentication of the works of Shri Sayed Haider Raza needs some clarification especially since there have been, unfortunately, some rumors and deliberately engineered misinformation spreading around.

Firstly, as long as Shri Raza was alive i.e. till 23rd July 2016, he was the sole person, the artist himself who was legally and morally authorized to authenticate his works. This he was doing to the best of his abilities and in keeping with his perception, vision and memory.

Secondly, while Shri Raza was alive and even after his sad demise, the Raza Foundation has not issued a single authenticity certificate to any person or institution about any work of Shri Raza. If any such certificate to any person has been presented or shown or used in any transaction, it is completely fake, unauthorized, illegal and unethical.

Thirdly, during his life time, the Raza Foundation had neither the authority nor any need to do anything with Shri Raza as a painter. The two were distinctly separate. No doubt Shri Raza had founded this non-profit trust, the Raza Foundation and exclusively funded it from his personal income but he did not use nor allowed the Raza Foundation to do anything by way of projection and promotion of his work as an artist. It was absolutely clear that the Raza Foundation was meant for others.

The building that he bought with his money in Safdarjung Development Area, New Delhi was registered in the name of the Raza Foundation and when in 2010 he came to live in Delhi and India in a part of his house, he started paying a monthly rent to the Raza Foundation. Some books published on behalf of the Raza Foundation on Raza including the correspondence with other artists, his notes, etc have all been funded by Vadehra Art Gallery and not by the Raza Foundation.

Fourthly, Raza Saheb authorized the Raza Foundation, in writing the full copyright of his works to the Raza Foundation.

"I hereby authorize the Raza Foundation to hold copyright of all my works throughout the world. This authorization supercedes, cancel and overrides any other previous authorization that the sole and exclusive holder of the copyright of all my works anywhere in the world is now the Raza Foundation and no other person or body anywhere would be entitled to dispute this in any manner. I am assigning copyright of all my works to the Raza Foundation out of my own free will and with full faith in the Raza Foundation, a charitable trust I have founded, funded and run with many friends for nearly 15 years."

Fifthly, in his registered will, he bequeathed all his movable and immovable properties to the Raza Foundation:

"I also bequeath & Will all my other belongings, property (movable and immovable) materials leftovers, furniture, money, artworks (original and prints) etc exclusively to the Raza Foundation and wish to do so without any encumbrance or hindrance in such gift that I make to the Raza Foundation. I wish to state clearly that, none of my distant relative nor my adopted daughter Devina Rughoobar, who resides in Paris, shall have any right or claim on any ground whatsoever to any of my personal belongings, materials leftovers, furniture, money, artworks (original & prints). I further wish to clarify that,

This is my first and the only Will and I wish to state categorically that I have executed no other Will. In the event any other Will is found to be in existence, the same shall stand superseded by this registered Deed of Will, which I have executed with full mental capacity, without any influence, coercion or any allurements or any pressure and out of my own free will and desire."

Sixthly, the Raza Foundation now as the sole heir of Shri Raza, considers its moral duty to now set up a transparent procedure for authentication of his works. Consultations with experts, including legal are on and soon the procedure would be publically announced. Thereafter, all requests for authentication would be dealt with by the Raza Foundation in a transparent manner.



The Raza Foundation
New Delhi

The Raza Foundation invites the application for Aarambh

Raza Sahab in his life time always felt deeply concerned about the struggles of and inadequate opportunities for the younger generations of artists in his native country. On his almost annual sojourns to India, he would always find time and energy to meet young artists, see and discuss their works, and would invariably acquire the ones he felt had some substance of either idiom or vision. His mansion in Paris had a large and growing collection of such works. He never failed to recall the hard times he and his other artist comrades including MF Husain, FN Souza, HA Gade, SK Bakre and Krishnaji Ara had when they were young putting together the path-breaking Progressive Artists Group in Bombay.

During his Indian visits Raza Sahab also had a series of shows for several years in which he showed jointly his works with a young artists' works. The Raza Foundation established and funded by him was aimed at promoting creativity of younger generations in the world of Indian arts, music, poetry and dance.

In continuation of Raza Sahab's legacy the Raza Foundation is happy to introduce its new series "Aarambh" from August 2017 for young practitioners in the field of classical music, classical dance and theatre. The Raza Foundation would provide platform to the artist to perform at two different places in Delhi with different audience. Every month two artists would be invited to perform from different forms. The Raza Foundation may also offer a modest remuneration for the performances. Interested artists/ performers could contact The Raza Foundation on razafoundation.delhi@gmail.com with their CVs, performance photographs and video etc for possible inclusion in the series. The decision about the selection or otherwise by the Raza Foundation shall be final and binding on all sides.

CREDITS

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राजा फाउंडेशन | THE RAZA FOUNDATION

About the Raza Foundation

Raza Foundation is an arts and culture organization created by the Indian artist, Late. Sayed Haider Raza who set an example that fame and glory are not lonesome attainments but things to be liberally shared with the broader creative community. The Foundation has been instrumental in creating spaces for various art and culture programs, publications and fellowships to the younger talent and also carrying a deeper research into the work of the masters.