SAARC

SAARC ART

December, 2024 | Issue No. 7

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South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

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Cover page illustration

Temple of the Tooth (Dalada Maligawa) at Kandy, Sri Lanka, created on-site specially for SAARC Art Issue 7 by Dr. Zameer Careem during a recent visit. The artwork captures the historic temple in the city where HRH The Prince of Wales toured during his 1875-76 tour of the subcontinent, in its timeless splendor.

Back Cover

Umā- Maheśvar, 12th century, Western Chalukya | Bronze, National Museum, New Delhi. Image Credit: Ashu Saini

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The role of art in human life is multifaceted. Art serves as a tangible manifestation of culture, history, identity, tradition, and collective memory. South Asia as a region is an apt allegory to this diversity, where many cultural roots in the region offer a sanctuary for creative stimulation. It was against this backdrop that SAARC Art magazine was conceived in the year 2014 as a visual platform to understand the concept of 'art' through a wide range of perspectives. SAARC Art thus focuses not only on the traditional notion of art but also on the contemporary expressions of art and culture that permeate all aspects of contemporary South Asian life.

SAARC Cultural Centre, once again, is delighted to announce the release of the latest issue of SAARC Art magazine. The topics featured are wide-ranging and draw upon insights from various corners of South Asia, including art, craft, sculpture, paintings, music, briefs on cultural heritages, and photo essays.

In addition to celebrating the release of our new issue, I am honoured to take this opportunity to introduce regular on-going activities of the SAARC Cultural Centre. The Centre regularly hosts talks by eminent experts in the field of culture and heritage in South Asia, organises film days featuring films from SAARC Member States, organises seminars, conferences, and workshops on varied themes in South Asian culture, and various other cultural activities in the performing arts. SAARC Cultural Centre, mandated to promote regional unity through cultural integration and intercultural dialogue and contribute towards preservation, conservation, and protection of South Asia's cultural heritage, has been diligently working in bringing together people of South Asia through multifaceted activities and programs since its inception in 2010.

Our regular publication program is one such initiative where a platform is created to exchange the latest research, ideas, and expressions on the cultural scene in the Member States of South Asia. I am happy to mention that the overwhelming number of submissions received for the SAARC Art magazine this year is a testament to the spectrum of experiences the region has to offer in the cultural context. In highlighting the artistic excellence of the region through art, the SAARC Cultural Centre solidifies its role as the only regional centre of SAARC dedicated to the promotion and protection of the region's culture.

As I present you the 2024 issue of the SAARC Art magazine, I hope that the expressions of art transcend simply just appreciation and help capture the enduring beauty of South Asia's art world we all inhabit. This endeavour will no doubt foster connections for artistic expressions in the region and serve as a platform for furthering deeper appreciation and understanding of the South Asian artistic landscape.

Thank you to all our contributors for their invaluable submissions to this issue, and we look forward to engaging submissions in 2025.

Renuka Ekanayake
Director, SAARC Cultural Centre

Umā-Maheśvar Sculptures In Different Periods: 8th - 12th Centuries

By

Ashu Saini

Ashu Saini graduated with a degree in Art History from the College of Art, New Delhi. She then completed a Post-Graduation in the History of Art from the National Museum Institute, New Delhi, and is currently pursuing PhD in History of Art at the Indian Institute of Heritage, Noida, under the supervision of Dr. Savita Kumari. In 2015, she completed a six-month internship in the Archaeological Department of the National Museum, New Delhi. Since 2016, she has served as an Assistant Professor (Guest Faculty) at the College of Art. Additionally, she has held lecturer positions at the Meera Bai Institute of Technology in Maharani Bagh, New Delhi, from August 2017 to December 2020, and at the Kasturba Institute of Technology in Pitampura, New Delhi, from February 2021 to May 2022. In 2023, she has also worked as a scholar guide for six months at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Meaning and Symbolism

Lord *Śhiva* is a Hindu deity, whose worship has been prevalent in Hinduism since ancient times. Under Hindu religion, *Śhiva* is praised in the trinity i.e. *Brahmā*, *Vishnu*, *Maheśh*. *Śhiva* is known as the destroyer of creation among the Trinity. *Maheśh* is the only God among the Trinity, who was worshiped through hymns before the Vedic period. In Hindu mythology, the goddess *Umā* and the god *Maheśvar* (*Śhiva*) represent a divine union which signifies the harmonious convergence of feminine and masculine incentives. Examining *Umā–Maheśvar* meaning and symbolism can provide valuable understanding of the complex nature of both existence and divinity.

The combination is known as *Umā- Maheśvar*. In Hindu cosmology, this holy union is held to be the pinnacle of harmony, complementarity, and cosmic unity. Analyzing *Umā - Maheśvar's* significance and symbolism can provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between existence and divinity. *Umā* sometimes referred to as *Pārvati* or *Shakti*, is a symbol of the holy feminine. *Maheśvar* represents the masculine side of the divine. *Umā* is considered to be the epitome of elegance, beauty, nurturing, and fertility. *Umā* is frequently portrayed as a kind but strong goddess, wearing a variety of decorations that represent her complex personality. In contrast, *Śhiva* is portrayed as the austere

yogi who is covered in ash, encrusted with serpents, and has a crescent moon adorning his matted hair. *Śhiva* is frequently depicted as the universe's transformer and the destroyer of ignorance.

According to *Matasya Purānam*,[1] *Śhiva* should have two or four arms, three eyes, crescent moon on his head and adorned with *Jatābhār* (Crown). *Śhiva's* one hand should rest on *Parvati*'s shoulder, *Śhiva* right hand should grasp a trident, and his left hand should be placed on *Parvati*'s breast. *Shiva* should be depicted wearing the skin, adorned with numerous gems, and dressed in splendid attire. Goddess *Pārvati* should be seated on *Shiva*'s left thigh, her head adorned with jewelry, featuring a beautiful face, earrings, necklace, and armlet, gazing at *Shiva*'s face. *Pārvati*'s right arm should touch *Shiva*'s right shoulder, while her left arm holds a beautiful lotus with a mirror. She should be depicted wearing a sturdy waistcoat. Parallel to this idol, depict *Vijayā*, *Kārtikeya*, and *Ganesha* on the left side of the sculpture. Above the arch, create idols of *Vidyādhara*, *Mālādhara*, and *Apsarās*.

This sculpture of *Umā- Maheśvar* from the eighth century, dating back to the Maitraka region, depicts Goddess *Umā* and *Śhiva* seated on a bull (Plate 1). *Umā* is carved sitting on *Śhiva*'s thigh while *Śhiva* is shown in *Lalitāsana* (seated in royal position) posture. In the sculpture, *Umā* is depicted with two arms: her right arm holds a mirror, and her left arm rests on *Śhiva*'s thigh. *Śhiva* is portrayed with four arms, with his two left arms broken. His upper right arm holds a trident while the lower arm rests on *Umā's* shoulder. *Śhiva* is adorned with *Jatābhāra* (*Jatāmukut*), *Chakrakundal* (wheel shaped earing), an *Ekāvali* and *hāra* (both ornament are for the neck), *yajnopaveet* (sacred thread), *hastvallya* (bracelets), and *Katisutra* (waist-band). *Umā*'s hair is styled in an ornate bun, and she wears various types of jewelry including *Chakrakundal* (wheel shaped earing), a beaded necklace, Breast Sutra on her chest, and *Nupur* (anklet) on her feet. *Umā*'s face is depicted looking towards *Śhiva*. In this sculpture, the artist has also carved *Kārtikeya* and *Ganesha*, the two sons of *Śhiva* and *Umā*, on the lower part of the sculpture. The sculpture emphasizes *Śhiva*'s masculine aesthetic with a portrayal of large and firm body parts. However, due to the loss of facial expressions, faces of both figures appear virtually flat in this artwork.

Plate 1 Umā- Maheśvar
Accession Number 75.963, | Maitraka, 8th Century, A.D | Stone, Western India,

1 Pandit kalicharan gaur and pandit Bastiramji, *Matasyapurānam*, Chaukhamba Vidyabhavan Publication, Varanasi, 2015, Page 901.

This stone sculpture of *Umā-Maheśvar* follows a similar style to other described sculptures, featuring *Lord Śhiva* with four arms and *Goddess Umā* with two arms (Plate 2). Here, *Lord Śhiva* holds a trident and a snake in his upper two hands, while his lower right hand is in *Varada Mudrā* (granting of blessing) holding *Akshamālā* (rosary), and his left hand embraces Goddess *Umā*. Goddess *Umā* has her right hand placed on *Śhiva*'s right shoulder and holds a mirror in her left hand. *Śhiva* is seated in *Ardhaparyankāsana* posture on the pedestal, with Goddess *Umā* seated on his left thigh and her left foot resting on the vehicle Lion. As in other statues, Goddess *Umā* gazes towards Shiva in this sculpture. *Śhiva* is adorned with various ornaments such as *Chakrakundal* (wheel shaped ear-ring), an ornate *Jatāmukut* (crown), *Ekāvali* (necklace), *Yajnopaveet* (sacred thread), intricately designed *Katisutra* (waistband), *Hastavalla* (bracelets), and *Pādavalla* (anklets). The artist has skillfully depicted natural folds in *Shiva*'s ornate attire. Goddess *Uma*'s hair is intricately carved to resemble a bundle adorned with forest flowers. She is also adorned with a crown, earrings, *Ekāvali* (necklace), and *Katisutra* (waistband). The goddess's attire features intricate decorations with parallel lines. The pedestal of the sculpture includes carvings of *Nandi* (bull) and a lion, while *Ganesha* and *Kartikeya* are depicted on either side in the upper part of the sculpture, adorned with all their ornaments. Both *Umā* and *Maheśvar* are portrayed as mature adults in this artwork. Emotionally, gentle and serene joy is expressed on the faces of both *Umā* and *Maheśvar* in this sculpture. Overall, these characteristics illustrate stylistic developments from the eighth to the ninth centuries in sculptural artistry.

Plate 2 Umā- Maheśvar
Accession Number 68.138, | 9th - 10th Century, Pratihar | Stone, North India, | National Museum, New Delhi

This sculpture of *Umā- Maheśvar* from a Pahari region stands out distinctly from the previously mentioned sculpture which is immediately noticeable (Plate 3). Here Lord *Śhiva* is portrayal with four arms and Goddess *Umā* with two arms. Lord *Śhiva* is depicted holding a *Damru* (small hand drum) and *Trishul* (trident) in his upper arms, while his lower right hand is in *Abhaya Mudrā* (gesture of fearlessness) and his lower left hand rests on Goddess *Umā*'s shoulder. Goddess *Umā*', on the other hand, holds a *Matulangā* (citron) fruit and a *darpan* (mirror) in her hands.

Plate 3 Umā- Maheśvar
Accession Number 64.201, | 10th Century, Pahari Region, | Bronze, National Museum, New Delhi

A notable departure in this sculpture is the smaller size of Goddess *Umā* compared to Lord *Śhiva* feature not seen in any of the previously described sculpture. This bronze medium sculpture, crafted in the tenth century, exudes impressive craftsmanship. It includes depictions of *Kartikeya* and *Ganesha* in the lower corners. In this sculpture, *Śhiva* is seated in *Lalitāsana* posture, and all the figures are meticulously carved with intricate details. These characteristics highlight significant stylistic developments evident in sculptures from the tenth century onwards. *Śhiva* is depicted with a circular face, three eyes, a gentle smile, ornate attire, and various ornaments. He wears an ornate *Jatāmukut* (crown), adorned with earrings, necklace, *yajnopavita* (sacred thread), *keyurā* (armlet), *hastavallya* (bracelets), *padavallya* (anklets), and a dhoti (drapery). Additionally, the artist intricately carved the *Prabhāvali* with various designs and engraved *kirtimukha* (glorious face) on the central part, highlighting the uniqueness of this period.

Plate 4 Uma-Maheshwar,
Accession No 66.107, | 11th Century, Pala Period, | Bronze, Bengal | National Museum, New Delhi

This sculpture of *Umā - Maheśvar*, dating back to the eleventh century during the Pala period, is reserved in the National Museum, New Delhi (Plate 4). Similar to the tenth-century statue, it features *Śhiva* with four arms and *Umā* with two arms. The weapons held by *Shiva* and *Umā* in this sculpture are depicted similarly to those in the previous one.

In this sculpture, *Śhiva* is shown affectionately touching Goddess *Umā* breast with one arm and playfully touching her chin with another. The artist has intricately engraved the jewelry and attire worn by Goddess *Umā* and *Śhiva* showcasing a level of detail not seen in previous sculpture. *Shiva*'s hair is stylized in a *jatā-mukut* (crown), and he is adorned with various ornaments such as *Suryavruta Kundal* (circle shaped ear-ring) in his ears, a necklace around his neck, *yajnopavita* (sacred thread), *keyurā* (armlet), *hastavallya* (bracelets), *padavallya* (anklets), and a *dhoti* (drapery). Goddess *Umā*, seated on *Maheśvar* left thigh, has two hands, one holding a mirror and the other resting on *Śhiva*'s shoulder. Her hair is tied in a bun, and she wears various ornaments like *kundal* (ear-ring), *ekavali*, *keyurā* (armlet), *katisutra* (waist-band), and *Nupur* (anklet), etc. The arched eyebrows on the faces of *Umā- Maheśvar*, the shy expression in their eyes, and the expressive features engraved on *Umā*'s face contribute to the sculpture's significance. The artist has showcased a variety of

jewelry in an impressive manner. On the left side of the pedestal, a devotee is depicted sitting in *Anjali Mudrā* (salutation seal) with folded hands, while on the right side, a vessel filled with sweets is shown. Furthermore, the detailed carving of the *Prabhāvali* and the evolution of the pedestal mark new stylistic advancements during this period.

This sculpture of *Umā- Maheśvar*, represents the Chalukya period (Plate 5). In this sculpture, *Umā-Maheśvar* is depicted sitting in *lalitāsana*, similar to other sculptures of the period. *Śhiva* is portrayed with four arms: holding a trident in his upper right arm, a snake in his upper left arm, a *Mātulunga* (citron) fruit in his lower right arm, and embracing the goddess with his lower left arm. *Śhiva* is adorned with a *jatāmukut* (crown), *karna-kundal* (ear-ring), a necklace, bracelets, anklets, and a *yajnopaveet* (sacred thread). *Umā*'s right hand is around *Śhiva*'s neck, while her left hand is broken. On the right side of the *Prabhāvali*, the figure of *Kartikeya* and on the left side, *Ganesha* are carved. Above the *Prabhāvali*, there is a decorated arch with *kirtimukha* in the center. This statue is heavily adorned with fine pearls, giving the impression that the entire statue is decorated with these pearls. *Śhiva*'s circular face, three eyes, serene smile, and elaborate clothing and jewelry are depicted in this sculpture.

Plate 5 Umā- Maheśvar,
Accession No 81.12, | 12th century, Western Chalukya | Bronze, National Museum, New Delhi

Umā- Maheśvar: a Timeless Representation of the Cosmic Harmony

In summary, *Umā- Maheśvar* sculptures are a timeless representation of the cosmic harmony and divine unity found in Hinduism. These sculptures which stand as timeless representations of devotion, beauty, and transcendence, continue to awe and revere audiences with their beautiful craftsmanship, deep symbolism, and spiritual meaning. Thus, after analyzing these sculptures, it is concluded that from the eighth century to the twelfth century, significant stylistic developments took place in the representations of *Umā-Maheśvar*. These developments are evident in the evolution of their physique, jewelry, clothing, and artistic style. Additionally, the form of *Umā- Maheśvar* described in *Purānas* holds considerable significance.

Each sculpture represents its respective era and region through its distinct style. Through analyzing these sculptures, it becomes apparent that each one embodies the specific characteristics and artistic trends of its time and place. This helps in identifying the period and region associated with each sculpture. In this way, it is evident how important and intriguing these sculptures are, reflecting not only artistic evolution but also cultural and regional identities.

The Beginning and Influence of Paper

Around 1390 AD- First began in the north of Alps set by Ulman Stormer in Nuremburg. In 25-220 AD- The first paper like plant-based sheet named as papyrus came into Egypt. Paper making was first introduced to America in 1690 AD. Paper making was brought to Europe where it replaced animal skin based parchment and wood panels. Later it replaced with wood-based papers in Europe. But these were not considered as a true paper, so the plastic coated paper was introduced later. It was also used for wrapping precious objects but soon people used to write on them.

Paper is an inexpensive medium, easily available and is comfortable to work not and it's only a surface for paintings, drawings and calligraphy but began as a medium of communication in ancient times. But now paper itself has also been used as a primary material of Art. It's biodegradable, recyclable and even compostable for centuries. In present times paper has become the forefront of all kinds of art forms. Some bold and unique artists are taking this medium further transforming the paper itself into fascinating art pieces. The individual sees the paper in a different way and try to use it as a less of a canvas and more of the medium itself, rather than placing the art on the page. These artists are exploring the nature of paper and experimenting their emotions in an entirely different format.

Paper as a Medium in Contemporary Visual Arts, Techniques, Aesthetics and Expression

By

Naina Somani

Naina Somani, was born and brought up in Udaipur, Rajasthan. She is currently working as a freelance artist/ printmaker and a research scholar. She has completed her under graduation in the year 2019 (English honors/ Visual Arts) and post graduation in 2021 (Visual Arts), from Mohanlal Sukhadia University, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Visual Arts, Udaipur. In 2023, she was enrolled in PhD as a research scholar in Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur. For the past five years she has been working as an artist and a printmaker, by exploring the medium of visual arts, exhibiting her paintings and doing solo/ group exhibitions around the world. she is really fascinated about the 'provided' concept of 'art' through a wide range of perspectives, which not only focuses on the traditional notion of art but also on the contemporary expressions of art and culture that permeate all aspects of contemporary South Asian life.

Paper is a material tinged with paradoxes. Undoubtedly, Paper is an essential tool for an artist. Even a blank sheet of paper is a gateway to new Ideologies. Paper as a medium seems extraordinary when it comes in the hands of an artist. It is innately fragile even as it demonstrates strength when transmogrified into something that surpasses the two-dimensional. In the case of some artists who uses paper as a surface dates beyond its traditional role. The medium becomes so much important with possibilities to be transformed into new, immersive ideas. Starting from the scripts, manuscripts calligraphy began to be done on paper and now it has majorly expanded as of the paper is used in making installations, architecture, paper pulp and many other art media's. The first paper crafts began in Japan and China through origami in 1797 around this time frame. This method of paper folding used to create intricate art pieces as well.

For every artist, the paper is actually the beginning of every creation. The importance of choosing paper as a medium of expression is in the ancient times to preserve the data or to communicate with one another or in a way of expressing through art or any other form can only be done through the paper itself. If we used cloth as a medium, it would not be that much effective for the purpose of art. Also, it was not that cheaper. If we used caves or walls to express it would also not be that much productive because the caves could not be preserved in a long run, and are also unreachable by all the individuals. If we choose trees as a medium of expression at that time to express, it would be unethical to destroy the nature and also their existence is not been possible for coming ages. So the paper is the only medium that one thought of expressing as it would also be the record of authenticity and as a preserver of memory.

In the context of an artistic journey through paper is that it dates back when it was all started from drawings, manuscripts prints, portraits, court paintings and now the paper has been transformed into large sculptures, installations, paper cutting, collages, print media created through paper. As we can see it is also lighter than bamboo and cheaper than silk. Traditionally artists uses paper with a pencil or charcoal to explore their experimental side, found new strategies or created new structures. This paper can be considered an intimate channel which conveys the mechanisms of an artist psych. Artwork on paper offers a personal journey with where the artist can comprehend their creative process. For Example: Leonardo Da Vinci's intricately drawn sketchbooks with his visions for the future through the images of drawing and sketches the future through the images of winged flying machines, now called helicopter. Another example of the miniature paintings which were created on Vasli paper, a handmade paper made of thin sheets. Paper has long been revered not just as a medium for communication, but as a canvas for expression and a catalyst for transformation. Its tactile nature invites exploration and creation, bridging the gap between imagination and reality. As a medium of expression, paper serves as a blank slate where ideas take shape through words, images, or a blend of both. From ancient scrolls to modern sketchbooks, it has preserved thoughts, stories, and discoveries across cultures and centuries. Whether it bears the strokes of a calligrapher's pen or the strokes of a painter's brush, paper captures the essence of human creativity. Moreover, paper facilitates transformation in multifaceted ways. It begins as raw material, derived from natural fibers like wood pulp or cotton, undergoing processes that mold it into a vessel of human thought and emotion. The transformation continues as ideas are transferred from mind to paper, often evolving in unexpected ways through drafts and revisions. In the digital age, paper persists as a symbolic and practical medium. Its physical presence offers a respite from screens, allowing for a deeper connection with ideas and a more deliberate approach to creation. The act of writing or drawing on paper engages the senses differently, influencing how thoughts are articulated and concepts are developed. Furthermore, paper embodies sustainability and craftsmanship. Recycled and tree-free papers exemplify eco-consciousness, while artisanal techniques like paper-making and book-binding celebrate heritage and skill. Such qualities reinforce paper's enduring relevance in a world

increasingly driven by technology. Ultimately, paper transcends its utilitarian function to become a vehicle for human expression and transformation. It bears witness to the passage of time and the evolution of ideas, underscoring its profound impact on culture, creativity, and communication. In its simplicity lies its power-to inspire, to record, and to shape the narratives of our lives. In the realm of visual arts, paper serves as a versatile and essential medium for expression and transformation, providing artists with a canvas that facilitates both creativity and innovation.

- **Expression through Diversity:** Paper's adaptability allows artists to explore a wide range of techniques and styles. From delicate watercolor paintings to intricate paper cuts and collages, each artist can find a unique way to express their vision. The texture and weight of different papers influence how colors blend, lines form, and compositions take shape, adding layers of meaning to the artwork.

- **Transformation of Ideas:** Artists often use paper not just as a surface, but as a medium to experiment with new concepts and refine their artistic voice. The process of transforming initial thoughts into tangible forms on paper allows for exploration and discovery, pushing the boundaries of artistic expression.

- **Cultural and Historical Significance:** Throughout history, paper has played a crucial role in documenting cultural narratives and preserving artistic traditions. Traditional paper-making techniques vary widely across cultures, each contributing unique textures and qualities to the artworks created. In contemporary art, artists may integrate these traditional methods with modern technologies, creating a bridge between past and present.

- **Sustainability and Innovation:** As environmental awareness grows, many artists are exploring sustainable practices by using recycled or eco-friendly papers. This commitment to sustainability not only reflects their values but also encourages creativity through limitations, prompting artists to innovate with unconventional materials and techniques.

- **Emotional and Conceptual Depth:** Paper's physicality lends itself to conveying emotions and exploring conceptual themes. The act of working with paper-whether tearing, folding, or layering-can imbue artworks with a sense of tactility and intimacy. Artists manipulate paper to evoke specific moods or explore complex ideas, engaging viewers on both visual and emotional levels.

- **Accessibility and Democratization:** Paper's accessibility makes it a democratic medium for artists of all backgrounds and skill levels. Its affordability and ease of use allow emerging artists to experiment and develop their techniques without significant financial investment. This accessibility fosters a vibrant artistic community, where diverse voices and perspectives can find expression through paper-based artworks.

Paper in visual arts is not merely a substrate but a dynamic medium that enables artists to express, transform, and innovate. Its tactile qualities, cultural significance, and sustainability contribute to its enduring appeal, ensuring its continued relevance in contemporary artistic practice. Through paper, artists create narratives, challenge conventions, and connect with audiences in profound and meaningful ways.

Some Artists Working in the Medium of Paper

Indian Artists

- Anupam Sud
- Somnath Hore (paper pulp)
- Zarina Hashmi (Paper casting)
- Aditi Anuj
- Bharti Pitre (paper pulp)
- Samir Bhardwaj (paper art experimentalist)
- Sachin Tekde (paper sculptor)
- Ankon Mitra (origami craft sculptural installations)
- Anupam Chakraborty (handmade paper art)
- Patitapaban Kulu Ojha (paper carving)
- Ravi Kumar Kashi (paper pulp)

Western Artists

- Ingrid Siliakus (paper architect artist, Amsterdam)
- Daniel Papuli (paper installations, Milan)
- Kurt Schwitters (paper collage with scrap)
- Ray Besserdin (paper sulpture)
- Isabelle de Borchgrave (Paper costume Artist)

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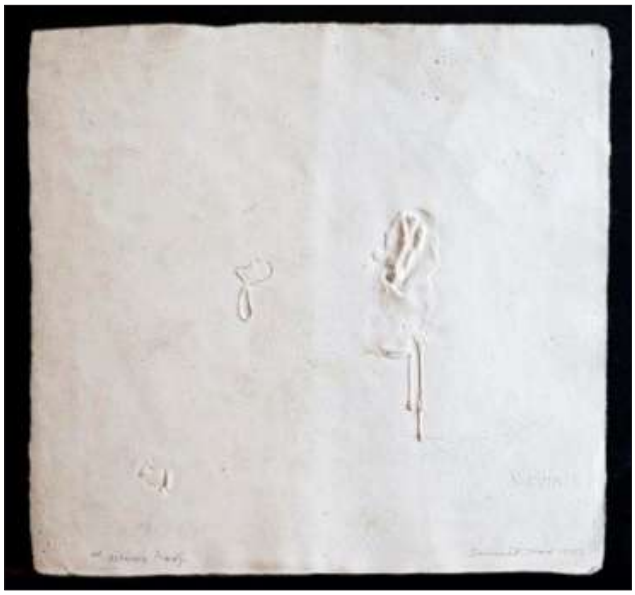
ARTISTS AND THEIR ARTWORKS



SOMNATH HORE

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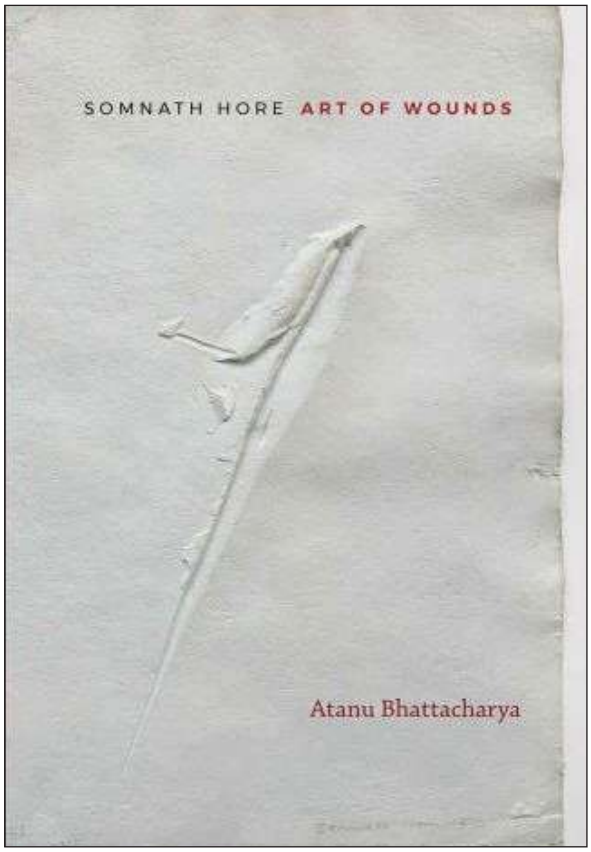

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DANIEL PALPULI

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Magnificence Beauty in Stone: the Hero Gods of Gandhara Sculptures

By

Khushali Jain

Khushali Jain is a dedicated scholar of history and a fervent admirer of art. She is currently immersing herself in the pursuit of her Master's degree in the captivating field of art history at the esteemed Indian Institute of Heritage, previously known as the National Museum Institute. Khushali's academic journey began with the successful completion of her Bachelor's degree in History with Honours from Gargi College, University of Delhi. She has actively collaborated with eminent institutions such as Intach and made notable contributions to the enriching National Museum Exhibition titled Chitram Vastram, channelling her wealth of knowledge and expertise into impactful projects. In addition to her scholarly pursuits, Khushali has led engaging heritage-guided tours for school children, providing them with enriching experiences at renowned sites such as the Red Fort and Rail Museum. Presently, she is lending her expertise as a dedicated research assistant for an influential book project, further highlighting her commitment to the realms of history and art.

The region witnessed the proliferation of Buddhist art, influenced by Mauryan art, which featured significant symbols and religious systems still relevant today.

The Gandhara school thrived between the 1st and 5th century CE, extending into the 7th century in parts of Kashmir and Afghanistan. It drew inspiration from the Indo-Bactrian era and reached its peak in the first two centuries CE. The sculptural art of this period, expressed through reliefs and freestanding works, uniquely combined stylistic influences from Persian and Kushan cultures, and introduced depictions of the Buddha and associated figures. The region of Gandhara comprised two main components—the core area, a rocky region surrounded by hills in present-day Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan,[1] and the greater Gandhara, which influenced art production over a large area from the Oxus basin to Taxila.[2] The region of Gandhara has a rich historical and cultural significance dating back to the 6th century BC. It was initially part of the Achaemenian Empire of Persia, later coming under the control of Alexander the Great and the Mauryan Empire. The region witnessed the proliferation of Buddhist art, influenced by Mauryan art, which featured

1 R.C. Sharma, 'Introduction', in *Buddhism and Gandhara Art*, ed. R.C. Sharma and Pranati Ghosal (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2004).

2 Sir John Marshall, *The Buddhist Art of Gandhara* (New Delhi:Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2000).

significant symbols and religious systems still relevant today. Following the disintegration of the Mauryan empire, Gandhara was successively ruled by various foreign powers, including the Greeks, Bactrians, Scythians, Parthians, and Kusanas. This period also saw a flourishing of Buddhist art, particularly under the Kusanas. Gandhara's early interaction with India is evidenced by its deep historical ties with Buddhism, as well as the artistic exchange between the two regions that began towards the end of the 1st century CE.

A Reflection of Syncretism of Different Styles and Cultures

The artistic representations at the time not only included the Buddha and various bodhisattvas in a range of styles, but also incorporated depictions of foreign hero gods from Greek mythology, such as Hercules, Aeschylus and Dionysius. This blend reflects the evident syncretism of different lifestyles and cultures. The assimilation of these Greek gods into the Buddhist tradition is particularly notable. For example, the symbolic representation of Hercules with a lion's skin draped over his body and head, along with the intertwined and knotted paws of the beast on his chest. The depictions of Hercules on coins, sculptures, compositions, and bas-reliefs consistently adapted to local forms, symbols, and attributes. Notably, in Gandharan art, the images of Hercules found in Hadda, Afghanistan in 1973 were adapted to the local artistic tradition with softened forms. For instance, Hercules was modified to appear as a vajrapani bodhisattva, with his staff transformed into a vajra.[3]

The Taxila volume of Marshall's sculpture catalogues contains detailed listings of over 140 stone sculptures and fifteen stucco sculptures from the Dharmarajika. These remarkable stone sculptures encompass a wide range of elements, including narrative panels and devotional images. Notably, a relatively well-preserved relief was discovered below the surface of the subsidiary stupa.[4]

One particularly intriguing sculpture features the representation of the Greek god Hercules in the role of a Buddhist bodhisattva. This high relief, found at Taxila, showcases the Buddha surrounded by a group of donors presenting gifts to the Buddhist monastery. Standing to the right of the Buddha is Vajrapani, identified as a transformed Hercules. In the sculpture, Vajrapani holds the vajra, symbolizing strength and fortitude akin to a diamond, with a cape covering his body. The artistry in the depiction of the Buddha reflects a high degree

3 Laura Yerekesheva, "Laura Yerekesheva. from Gandhara to Serindia: Cross-Cultural Encounters and Images of the 'Other' in Central Asian Collection of the Museum of Asian Art – Musee Guimet (Paris)," Laura Yerekesheva, Anupa Pande (Eds). *Canvas of Cultures*. Edited Volume, January 1, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/44167823/Laura_Yerekesheva_From_Gandhara_to_Serindia_Cross_Cultural_Encounters_and_Images_of_the_Other_in_Central_Asian

4 W. Rienjang, 'Dharmarajika, Taxila', *Gandhara Connections* website, <http://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections/otherResources.htm>

Buddha attended by Vajrapani and a group of women, Dharamarajika Stupa, Taxila, Punjab, c. 2nd-3rd century AD.

of adaptation of local idioms, including characteristic features such as a moustache and wide-open eyes, indicative of the artistic blend of Gandhara and the Kushan period.

The sculpture depicts the Buddha seated on a cushioned throne, with a larger proportion compared to other standing figurative images, emphasizing his divinity and spirituality as sculpted by the artisans. The Buddha's right hand is in abhaya mudra, while the other hand rests gracefully over his leg. He is clad in a robe in the Gandhara style, and the throne itself features intricate decorative elements. The serene and restful expression on the Buddha's countenance, exuding tranquillity, is complemented by a plain halo. The scene around the Buddha is rich in detail, featuring a group of women adorned with traditional jewellery and attire, offering a glimpse into the trends and social status of the time. One of the women is depicted in Anjali mudra, a gesture of reverence, while others are shown gracefully presenting gifts. Notably, the two figures in the foreground are presented in much smaller proportions, adding depth and perspective to the overall composition. This relief masterfully conveys a palpable sense of depth and perspective, skillfully narrating a scene or event with fluidity and grace, eschewing rigid postures. Each figure is meticulously crafted to embody distinct postures and gestures, contributing to the overall dynamism and richness of the sculptural narrative.

Gautama, Vajrapani and the Reaper. Relief from Mardan, stone. Museum Peshawar.

A Highly Cosmopolitan Culture with Profound Influence on its Art

The museum in Mardan, Pakistan features a captivating relief that depicts Hercules as Vajrapani, adorned in a lion skin cape and shown resting on one leg while holding a vajra. This relief portrays an important tale of the encounter between the Buddha and Vajrapani, where a mower presents freshly cut grass to the Buddha. The bas-relief showcases three figures in different postures, with the Buddha and Vajrapani depicted in frontal body position and slight profile face, while the mower is shown in a three-quarter body profile. The Buddha is adorned in a Gandhara-style robe, barefoot, and exudes a divine presence with a halo outlined around him. Similarly, Vajrapani is depicted in a robe, barefoot, and bears Greek features reminiscent of Hercules. In contrast, the mower is attired in local clothing, wearing a dhoti that reflects Indian influence. Notably, stylized leaves are illustrated on his head, symbolizing his folk or tribal origins. This artistic portrayal harmoniously combines various cultural influences, forming a rich tapestry of symbolism and significance.

The sculpture portrays Hariti, a former demoness who transformed into a goddess, exuding grace and poise as she stands with her hand resting on her hip. She tenderly embraces three children, with two joyfully perched on her shoulder while the third nestles in her arm, gazing up at her with adoration and placing a hand on her breast. Hariti is adorned with a majestic diadem embellished with beaded fillets and a circular pendant drop on her forehead. Her hair is intricately styled in a Greek fashion, adding to

Hariti with three children, Gandharan Art, Sikri, 2nd-3rd Century AD.

her divine essence. She wears elegant earrings and two layers of necklaces – a torc encircling her neck adorned with precious stones and a longer multi-string necklace embellished with a solid precious stone pendant. Her wrists are adorned with multiple bangles, enhancing her regal appearance. Her serene, round face exudes timeless tranquillity. According to legend, Hariti, once a demoness with 500 children, preyed on the offspring of Rajagriha. However, her path changed when Buddha, in a compassionate act, concealed one of her beloved sons under his alms bowl. Confronted by Buddha, she was deeply moved when he pointed out the pain caused by her actions. Touched by his words, she repented and was subsequently revered for her protective nature.

The historical context of the Gandharan region reveals a highly cosmopolitan culture with a profound influence on its art. The art of Gandhara reflects the socio-religious fervour of its people and the convergence of sculptural styles due to the region's cultural confluence. The amalgamation of various religious beliefs fostered a symbiotic relationship, resulting in a flourishing cultural landscape depicted in Gandhara art. Despite the Buddha's absence in human form, exposure to Western art and pantheistic religion led to a rift between traditional and progressive Buddhist followers. The art of Gandhara is an exceptional demonstration of syncretism, combining Indian and Buddhist iconography with Greco-Hellenistic, Roman symbolism, and local cults. This fusion greatly influenced the style, iconography, and creative approach of anonymous talented artists of the era. In Gandhara, a pivotal cultural and historical area in Central Asia, the interaction predominantly occurred at the nexus of Indian and ancient Greek civilizations.

Gifts, Grandeur, and Monuments: The Prince of Wales' Seminal Tour of the Subcontinent

By

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More than seven decades have elapsed since most South Asian countries gained independence, yet the enduring legacy of British colonialism remains palpable, particularly in cities such as Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Colombo, Delhi, Karachi, Lahore, and Dhaka. These urban centres are replete with edifices reflecting European architectural styles, with a smattering of phrontisteries and public spaces still bearing the names of British officials and royals. Among these, a handful still bear or once bore the name and titles of Albert Edward, Queen Victoria's oldest son. He held the title 'Prince of Wales,' from 1841 until his accession to the British throne in 1901, after which he became known by his regnal name, Edward VII. One of Pakistan's premier academic institutions, King Edward Medical University in Lahore, is named in his honour. Likewise, Delhi's Netaji Subhash Park was originally called King Edward VII Memorial Gardens, where, in February 1922, a five-tonne equestrian statue of the King was unveiled by his grandson, Prince Edward, the Prince of Wales. However, the statue was removed in 1968 and eventually sent to Toronto, Canada. Another imposing statue of Edward VII, designed and sculpted by Leonard Jennings, can still be found at its original location in Bangalore's Queen Park; similarly, a bust of King Edward VII, a gift from a Parsi altruist, Seth Edulji Dinshaw, can be viewed at Karachi's Frere Hall. Likewise, in front of the High Court Complex of Balapitiya in Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon),

there stands a monument commemorating the coronation of King Edward VII, in whose honor Albert Crescent and Prince of Wales Avenue (now Sirimavo Bandaranaike Mawatha) in Colombo were named. Moreover, a modicum of post boxes bearing King Edward VII's royal cypher can still be found across the subcontinent, which he extensively toured during his four-month odyssey from November 1875 to March 1876.

When his office announced his visit to the subcontinent, meticulous arrangements were made by both British officials and the native rulers to host the royal visitor, who was accompanied by an entourage comprising several of his friends and staff, including the Duke of Sutherland, Sir Bartle Frere, Lord Suffield, Lord Alfred Paget, and the Earl of Aylesford. The Maharaja of Jaipur at the time, Sawai Ram Singh II, had the entire city painted pink, a colour symbolising hospitality, to welcome Prince Albert, who, during his visit in February 1876, laid the foundation stone for one of India's iconic buildings, the Albert Hall Museum, named in his honour. It was in fact Prince Albert who coined the epithet "Pink City" to describe Jaipur, thereby immortalising it. Similarly, following the prince's visit to Ceylon, philanthropist Sir Charles Henry de Soysa generously endowed his 15-acre estate in Moratuwa and invested an exorbitant sum of Rs. 300,000 for the construction of the Prince and Princess of Wales Colleges, named after Albert and his wife, Princess Alexandra (later Queen Alexandra). Albert Edward's tour of the subcontinent, which was widely reported in the media, was envisaged as a way of forging diplomatic links between the Indian princes and the British Crown. Though it was an official tour, Prince Albert's time in the subcontinent was largely spent on grand banquets, receptions, hunting expeditions, and sightseeing, all organised by the native rulers, with no expense spared. He was also showered with a wide array of priceless treasures, which form a substantial portion of the Royal Collection today, which, aside from serving as a major study for students of history and art, showcase the extraordinary workmanship of the artisans from a bygone era while highlighting the importance of royal tours and gift diplomacy during the colonial period.

From Bombay to Baroda: Prince's Visit to Western India

On the 9th of November 1875, after a weary month-long voyage aboard the iron-hulled vessel of the Euphrates class, *HMS Serapis*, the prince and his suite arrived in Bombay, where he presided over a surplus of social and official functions arranged in his honour. He then departed to Poonah (Pune), where he took part in a number of official and social engagements and visited the famous Parvati temple before heading back to Bombay, where he met with several native dignitaries, including the Raja of Kohlapoor (Kolhapur), the Gaekwar (Gaikwad) of Baroda, the Nizam, and the Rao of Cutch (Kutch), who showered him with more than 400 lavish gifts, consisting of the best specimens of Indian workmanship in diamonds, rubies, gold, silver, and arms. He later travelled to Baroda, where he was entertained in the most lavish manner by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, and after spending a few weeks banqueting and shikaring there, the prince and his party boarded *HMS Serapis* from Bombay on the 25th of November and set sail for Colombo, travelling along India's western coast.

Gifts, Gardens, and Hunting Expeditions in Ceylon

HMS Serapis carrying the prince and his cortège reached the roadstead of Colombo on the morning of the 1st of December, the day of the Princess of Wales' birthday, and to mark the occasion, the Prince sent his wife a telegram from Colombo, wishing her on her 31st birthday. Just like in India, the prince was lavished with some of the finest specimens of Ceylonese workmanship. For example, Mr. Charles P. Layard, the Chairman of the Colombo Municipal Council, on behalf of the citizens of Colombo, presented to His Highness an ivory casket containing samples of spices typically grown in Ceylon and a gold tablet engraved on both sides with an 'Address of Welcome' in English and Sinhala. This intricately carved casket, edged with a chased gold border set with sapphires, garnets, chrysoberyl, amethysts, and pearls, was commissioned

by Mudaliyar[1] G.B. Gomes. The prince was also gifted a gold cigar case inlaid with precious stones by the Municipal Council. During his time in the Highlands, the Prince met with the *Nilames* (Kandyan Radala chiefs) at the King's Pavilion,[2] viewed a private *perahera* (procession of elephants, musicians and dancers) and a performance by the indigenous *veddas*, as well as visited the Royal Botanical Gardens, Peradeniya, where he planted a sacred fig (*Ficus religiosa*) on the 3rd of December 1875, which is one of the oldest surviving plants in the gardens today. To commemorate the prince's visit to Kandy, the coffee planters of Ceylon commissioned a wrought-iron fountain embellished with sculptures of mythical creatures and rococo cherubs. Upon its completion, the floral-shaped, two-tiered Victorian Fountain, aptly named the Prince of Wales Memorial Fountain, was installed in the vicinity of the Temple of Tooth. Today, more than a century later, one can still marvel at this monument, although it is in a forlorn-looking state. Similarly, in honour of the prince's visit, there was a clock tower erected on the Jaffna esplanade to the north-east of the Fort, with the leftover money from Jaffna Prince of Wales reception fund, which amounted to Rs. 6,000. The clock on the tower was gifted by Sir James Longden and Mr. Smither,

Prince of Wales Fountain, Kandy

Sword-and-scabbard presented by Bandaranaike

the government architect who designed this graceful edifice, which was completed in 1882. During his sojourn in Ceylon, Prince Albert indulged in his favourite pastime of hunting wild beasts. He was evidently a crack shot, as he managed to slay a horde of elephants in just a few days. During one of his expeditions to an elephant kraal at Labugama, the Prince proposed that a water purification facility be built in the region. Thanks to his suggestion, a water treatment reservoir was built at Labugama, and the surrounding forest area was declared a nature reserve. In the afternoon of 8th December, the prince visited Leechman's cocoa and Messrs. Walls' coffee factories, where he was presented with a silver casket in the form of a book with a gold medallion set into the front cover. Before his departure from Ceylon, a levee was hosted by the Governor at Queens House, where the prince received deputations, native literates, and learned Buddhists, who presented addresses and presents. Among the native personages he met was Mudaliyar Christoffel Henriques Dias Bandaranaike,[3] who presented the prince with a *kastane*, a ceremonial sword, and a scabbard made of bronze and tortoiseshell. Likewise, the Mudaliyar of Jaffna Kachcheri presented the prince with a gold rectangular hinged case inset with three rubies and a diamond. Following his final reception, he proceeded to the Colombo harbour, where he laid the foundation stone of the South West Breakwater, and in

1 Mudaliyar (or Mudali) was a title held by the native headmen of Ceylon during the Colonial period. It was usually hereditary, bestowed upon wealthy influential families loyal to the British Crown.

2 The King's Pavilion was one of many official residences of the Governor of British Ceylon.

3 Mudaliyar Christoffel Henriques Dias Bandaranaike, was the grandfather of SWRD Bandaranaike, the fourth prime minister of Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

Crown presented by the Taluqdars (landowners) of Oudh to the Prince of Wales

A khanjar (dagger) presented by Jung Bahadur Shah of Nepal to the Prince of Wales

gratitude, the Colombo Harbour Works gifted the Prince with a mallet made of ebony, silver, and ivory.[4] On the morning of 9th December 1875, after an eight-day sojourn in Ceylon, *HMS Serapis* carrying the Prince and his suite left the moorings of Colombo for Tuticorin in India.

A Trail of Splendour: From South India to Nepal

Following his arrival in Tuticorin, the prince of Wales and his suite embarked on a train journey to Madras (Chennai), and enroute, they visited Kovilpatty (Kovilpatti), Madurai, Dindigal (Dindigul), Trichinopoly (Tiruchchirapalli), Karur, and Perambur. At almost every stop, the prince was treated to sumptuous feasts and guided tours by the *zamindars* (landlords) and princes, including the Raja of Pudukottai, who offered the prince elephants' tusks and intricately carved arms along with various other valuables.Not just the landed gentry present him with gifts, but also the common folk.

When he visited Madurai, the inhabitants there presented models of the renowned Meenakshi Amman temple, the accoutrements of religious ritual, a gold basket of very fine workmanship, and various other articles. When he arrived at Royapuram, the prince was greeted by the Duke of Buckingham and other senior British officials, as well as by the Rajas of Cochin, Travancore, Arcot, Vizianagram, and others who presented him with gifts that best reflect the cultural heritage and richness of their princedoms. After travelling the length and breadth of south India, the prince and his party set sail on the 8th of December, from Madras for Calcutta, where he was received and hosted by the viceroy at the government house, where he had private audiences with the Maharaja of Jodhpur, the Maharaja of Jaipur, the Maharaja of Kashmir, the Maharaja of Gwalior, and the Maharaja of Rewa.

After celebrating Christmas in Calcutta, another reception was held at the government house, where he received prominent personages, including the Emissaries from the King of Burma with their Envoy-in-Chief, the Maharaja of Punnah (Panna), the Maharaja of Jheend (Jind), the Maharaja of Benares (Varanasi), and the Maharaja of Nahun (Nahan). From Calcutta, on the 3rd of January, 1876, the prince and his coterie, set out on a grand tour of North India, including modern-day Pakistan and Nepal, where he visited some of the major cities, including Lucknow, Faizabad, Delhi, Lahore, Agra, Allahabad, and Bareilly,

4 The 4212-foot-long breakwater was completed in April 1885 at a cost of £705,207.

where he held audiences with several government officials and native rulers.[5] In Lahore, he opened the Soldiers' Industrial Exhibition at Meean Meer (Mian Mir), where he purchased carpets, furs, *pashmeena*, *puttoos*, and various articles of fine quality. While in Lucknow, the *Taluqdars* (landowners) of Oudh presented the prince with a crown, bespangled with gold, enamel, pearls, diamonds, and cabochon emeralds, featuring a cap embroidered on velvet using the silver-gilt thread technique known as *zardozi*.

The prince also travelled to Nepal, where his two-week sojourn was devoted entirely to hunting expeditions organised by the infamous Jung Bahadur Rana in the Terai regions, where he shot several animals, including a tigress pregnant with six cubs. Among the valuables he received in Nepal was a khanjar (dagger) carved out of jade with garnets arranged in a floral design. As detailed in the travelogue by William Howard Russell, in the princely states of Awadh, Benares, Kashmir, Indore, Baroda, and Jaipur, the Prince of Wales was opulently entertained and provided with every comfort by its rulers, from whom he amassed an impressive collection of gifts.[6]

Peacock barge inkstand gifted by the Maharaja of Benares

Perfume holder presented to the Prince of Wales by Jashwant Singh ii, Maharaja of Jodhpur (1838–95).

For example, the Maharaja of Benares presented the Prince of Wales with an exquisitely enamelled, jewel-encrusted peacock barge inkstand with 19 separate components and his own walking stick, a stout shillelagh with a gold handle and gold studs. Whereas Ram Singh II, Maharaja of Jaipur, presented him with several articles of jewellery and highly decorative paraphernalia,

5 The Raja of Nabha, the Raja of Mundee (Mandi), the Raja of Faridkot, the Nawab of Loharu, the Nawab of Pataudi, the Maharaja of Bikaner, the Maharaja of Bhurtpoor (Bharatpur), the Maharaja of Ulwar (Alwar), the Maharaja of Oorcha (Orcha), the Maharaja of Kishengurh (Kishangarh), the Rana of Dholpoor (Dholpur), Rao Maharaja of Duttia (Datia), the Nawab of Tonk, and the Raja of Tehri are among the native rulers whom the prince met in various cities he visited.

6 The Prince of Wales also presented medals to many Indian princes and senior officials during his tour of the subcontinent in 1875-76. Medal's obverse features the Prince of Wales's plumes within Garter and the chain of the order of the Star of India, dividing A - E and on the reverse, the bust of H. R. H. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales / India / 1875-6.

Goldware presented to King Edward VII, when Prince of Wales, during his tour of India in 1875-76 by Chamarajendra Wadiyar X, Maharaja of Mysore.

including an enamelled gold and diamond perfume holder, emblazoned with scenes of Jaipur's grand palaces. He also received several bejewelled head and ear ornaments, bracelets, cups, and perfume holders from a myriad of Maharajas and Nawabs, some of whom also offered gifts for his wife, Princess Alexandra, and his mother, Queen Victoria. For example, Jayaji Rao Scindia, Maharaja of Gwalior, presented a necklace encrusted with diamonds and precious stones for Queen Victoria. Chamarajendra Wadiyar X, Maharaja of Mysore, presented some of the most ornate gifts that best represent the craftsmanship and artistry of South India, including 10-piece "Service of State" goldware comprising of plates, trays, perfume holders, betel-nut boxes, and rosewater sprinklers; a ring for Queen Victoria; and a hinged waist belt made of a gold framework, inlaid with diamonds, rubies, and emeralds in a Kundan setting for Princess Alexandra. A sizable portion of the gifts he received included items that symbolised valour, power, and manhood, such as swords, scabbards, peshkabs (daggers), katars (punch daggers with broad steel blades), armguards, and dhal (shields) decorated using precious metals, stones, animal hides (including that of elephants and rhinoceros), and ivory. The prince and his entourage returned to Bombay in March 1876, having travelled nearly 7600 miles by land and 2300 miles by sea, and visited twenty-one towns and cities in modern-day India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Nepal during their seventeen-week-long cosseted stay in the subcontinent. At Bombay, he boarded HMS Serapis, laden with an extraordinary collection of South Asian art, and set sail for Britain. Following his return, he had a large chunk of his collection exhibited to the wider public, first at the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria & Albert Museum) and then at nine further venues across England, Scotland, and Europe (Paris and Copenhagen) between 1876 and 1883.[7] In England and Scotland alone, more than 2.5 million visitors viewed the works of art from the subcontinent, which was freed from the clutches of the British Empire in the mid-twentieth century, after centuries of Colonial exploitation, depredation, and outright theft.

Image Source: Royal Collection Trust (online) of H.M. King Charles III

7 From June 8 to October 14, 2018, an exhibition titled "Splendours of the Subcontinent," featuring some of the finest treasures from the Royal Collection that were presented to the prince during his visit, was held at the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace in London.

Chittara
Essence of Nature in the Indigenous Paintings of Karnataka

By

Dr. Gomathi Gowda

Dr. Gomathi Gowda is an art historian and presently she is working as an Associate Professor in the Department of Fine Arts, KL University, Andhra Pradesh, India and also is an art practitioner, educator, researcher and curator. She has served in many art institutions in India as an Art History faculty. Her research interests are varied that includes Indian Classical Art and Folk Art. She specialises in teaching Indian Art and Philosophy of art. She actively takes part in art summits, art workshops and interacts with all sorts of artists, which according to her widens the perspective in the field. She is a regular participant in national and international seminars and has several national and international publications to her credit. She is also the recipient of Senior Research Fellowship from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

The traditional art practice of *Chittara* is a cultural phenomenon of the *Deevaru* community, in Southern India in the village of Sirevanthe, Sagar, approximately 360 kilometres from Bangalore in the state of Karnataka amidst beautiful vales of the Western Ghats. It is no wonder that this community living in the sheer magic of the landscapes of the region with its rich flora and fauna have created exquisite art and craft forms that blend with the natural environment. *Chittara* means 'painting' or 'drawing' in Kannada is a style of painting which represents the indigenous art form. *Chittara* drawings are intricate patterns that represent the auspicious ceremonies and rituals of life symbolized in geometric patterns which requires a certain understanding of geometry, ratios and proportions, which the women of the community have been using with great dexterity. There are no written records about the genesis of the art form, but the tales passed on from generations say that the first *Chittara* drawings were done primarily for marriage ceremonies.

The *Deevaru* are an agrarian community of nature worshipers who hold the element of water in high esteem. They are primarily cultivators of rice, sugarcane, and areca nut and also weave mats and baskets. They are mostly farmland tenants with limited financial means, and a few are economically advantaged landowners. *Deevaru* are a matriarchal society and women command a high status, with

Chittara on the houses of the Deevaru community

the mother playing an important role in all family and community practices. *Deevaru* women folk are extremely hard working. They spend the mornings and evenings doing household chores. During the day they till the farm, weave mats or gather resources from the forest. In many families, the women, rather than men, manage the finances of the household. The power relationship between men and women also manifests in social practices such as marriage ceremonies where the bride's family commands high respect.

As a community, the *Deevaru* are closely knit, with no social rivalry amongst them, and they are proud of their cultural and traditional practices. They have an exceptional practice of widows adorning 'red' bangles and participating in all rituals. This practice enables integration of widows into mainstream society, as opposed to other communities where widows are frequently marginalized and forbidden from adorning themselves with symbols of fertility. These practices not only bind them together but also reflect their profound relationship with the physical environment. One ritualistic practice is *Bhoomi hunnime*, in which they pay reverence to Mother Earth at the auspicious occasion of harvest time (*Bhoomi* meaning earth and *hunnime* meaning full moon). All customary rituals, however, are incomplete without the creation of artworks that basically constitute the traditional art practice of *Chittara*.

The Traditional Art Practice of Chittara

Chittara is an ancient art practice that has been passed down from generations and is engaged by the women folk of *Deevaru* community. *Chittara* paintings are done on the walls of the houses. They are primarily created during marriage ceremonies and festivals such as *Bhoomi hunnime*, and have symbiotic relationship with all ritualistic practices, and are created through a collaborative process. Generally, three to four women get together after finishing their household chores and paint for two to four hours past midnight. They usually make paintings by the light from oil lamps, as electrical supply is scant. Each painting takes about four to five days to complete. The paintings are made with eco-friendly natural resources such as ground rice for white colour, roasted rice for black colour, yellow seeds (*gurige*), and red earth, areca nut fibres (*Pundi Naaru*) are used for constructing brushes. The paintings make extensive use of straight lines, which women use threads to create; at least two people collaborate to make the lines (sometimes men help them in drawing these lines but are not allowed to contribute any further). Crooked lines are not acceptable and erasing lines during paintings is considered inauspicious. During the creation of these paintings, women collectively sing folk songs and immerse themselves in the practice as a celebration of their creativity and talent. The paintings not only require skill, effort, and patience but are also a matter of pride that reflects their identity.

Hase Chittara

We find the wall paintings in the tribal communities all over the country which even today has sustained from the ancient times. We can also find the similarity of these paintings in its delineation and proportions and even the concept also. In Karnataka, we can find the cave paintings from the regions of Bellary, Raichur, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Belgaum, Chitradurga etc. In the Malnad regions of Karnataka the *Chittara* art is famous and done by the *Deevaru*, Vokkaligas, Hasalaru and the Gondaru from Shimoga District and from the Uttara Kannada region done by the Kunubhis, Gondas, Namdharis, Halakki and Mogaveeras.

The Social Narratives in *Chittara* Paintings

The ornate and intricate patterns of *Chittara* are social narratives that reflect the general iconography of the community. The paintings are usually two or three feet in size, aesthetically homologous, and replete with symbols representing the local environment, which includes birds and insects, paddy fields, and agricultural equipments such as sickles, ladders, and musical instruments. Most significantly, these patterns represent the intrinsic socio-cultural constructs of their historical existence. The polygons and straight lines represent the set societal and moral rules that pervade their lives. The stylised figures of *Chittara* painting are generally symbols of brides and grooms, fertility, the sowing of the auspicious paddy, birds, trees, animals etc. Musicians play auspicious music, brides and grooms stand in conjugal harmony. The delicacy in its delineation and its repetitiveness, somewhat reminiscent of Warli art, is achieved with fine jute '*pundi*' brushes. Drawing is free hand and is done with the strictest adherence to the tribal format. *Chittara* paintings not only require skill, effort, and patience but are also a matter of pride that reflects their identity.

Hasegode Chittara Depicting Marriage

Colours used

The colours are white, black, red and yellow. White rice is soaked for three to four days and ground into fine paste for the white colour. For Black, they roast the rice till they become black and soak it for three to four days and grind it to a fine paste. For the Yellow colour the outer pulp of the Gurige Seeds is powdered. Artist lakshmakka says that it is a laborious procedure to make colors and some of the artists have started using the ready chemical paints but she prefers doing it the traditional way.

Hasegode

Hasegode depicts the wedding hall with elaborate details of the *mantap* (the wedding altar), guests, the couple and festive mood. *Hasegode Chittara* is done on the walls facing east and north. We can see these patterns in almost all the houses of the *Deevaru* community. It is primarily done on the wall facing the east

as the entrance to the house is towards east and as soon as one enters the *Hasegode* is visible and becomes the focal point. During the weddings *Hasegode* plays an important role. All the important wedding rituals are conducted below the *Hasegode*. After the wedding ceremony the couple are made to sit on a mat which has *Hasegode* painting done below the mat or on a mat a *Chittara* is drawn with rice and a bedspread is put over it and the couple are made to sit on that. It is customary that seven mats are put over the *Chittara* before the couple are allowed to sit. But nowadays a single mat is spread and the mat has to be presented by the brides' sister and her relatives. The entire community, which is invited to witness the wedding, blesses the couple.

With time medium has changed. Originally these paintings were done on walls in villages. Later, the artists successfully transferred their techniques of wall painting to the medium of paper. Now most of the artists use water or acrylic colours and handmade papers. At the same time they maintain the characteristics and style of paintings although the medium has changed.

The winds of modernization have also transformed this art in another direction, which moves from a traditional customary practice to commercialization. From walls, floors and fields of the *Deevaru* community, the ethos of *Chittara* has now been displaced in posh galleries, on hotel walls, and treated as saleable products. There is a tangential change from a collaborative cultural practice to a commercial proposition and another risk of diluting *Chittara* into modern art, as opposed to the ethos of the patterns in their entirety. Undoubtedly, the wealth of artistic workmanship holds eternal value. Amidst the urban landscape, treasures of folk paintings like *Chittara* will certainly provide enriching relief in our daily life.

Theru Chittara

Artists present various explanations to justify their reasons for making art. Contemporary art has diverse definitions and some of these tend to contradict each other. In reality, this lack of clarity in being able to define what contemporary art is, leads to blurred indicators especially when it comes to art curation and selection. Contemporary art seems to be more to do with 'explanations' of ideologies or ways of thinking than the actual work of art. If one could come up with an explanation that would deem to be an 'issue' which the majority believes or is led to believe as 'valid', 'thought provoking', 'controversial', etc., and additionally if it is claimed by the 'authorities' of the art world as 'contemporary art' then no matter what it is that is displayed; even if it is a banana peel stuck to a shoe sole, then usually it is accepted as 'Art'.

Chamila Gamage and his 'Consumer Society'

This system baffles me. I use the word 'system' deliberately because the 'Art World' is a carefully run system, a system which is integral to the sustenance of a larger system or in other words, a well-oiled mechanism. It is not a secret that the global art market is tremendously corrupt and blood stained. That it is used to launder black money, to suppress dissidents, to create fake, baseless ideologies. To put in simpler terms, the authorities of the Art Market are like the tailors

The Power of Art

By

Asela Abeywardene

Asela Abeywardene is a professional artist: a painter, sculptor, and a ceramicist and have exhibited my work extensively nationally and internationally for over fourteen years. She has won numerous international awards for her three dimensional art and she bagged the first prize in Dubai Ceramics Awards, 2017 which was conducted by the American University of Dubai and adjudicated by the world renowned ceramic artist Magdalene Odundo, O.B.E, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Creative Arts, U.K. Her art has been published in various international art magazines such as the Blue Lotus Magazine edited by Martin Bradley, three poetry publications by Sri Lankan poets. Her work has also been reviewed in leading Sri Lankan newspapers such as the Sunday Observer, Sunday Times, Sunday Morning, Daily News and Daily Mirror. She is also a writer and a poet and her articles on Sri Lankan visual art as well as mental health and wellbeing related initiatives have been published regularly in the prominent state-owned newspaper, The Sunday Observer. Her poetry has been published the international publications such as Fem Asia Magazine, Zimetra magazine and the Sri Lankan publication, the Write magazine.

of the Emperor's new clothes. In their defence, they too are probably the puppets of a bigger, worse and uglier system. How could a system manipulated by a few, maybe even less than ten individuals across the globe, gets to decide how the rest of the world population should think, create, consume? How could we say that we are free humans when our thoughts and actions are not ours? These are the questions that Chamila Gamage, a Sri Lankan contemporary artist attempted to address with his public art project 'Consumer Society' a few years ago.

I have written about Chamila's artistic endeavours a few times prior to this. His work intrigues me, compels me to think. Although he is a career artist who strives to make a living out of his art, Chamila has managed not to deceive himself and everyone else into believing in a projected image or a persona. His art speaks for itself. He does not need to speak on behalf of his art. He does not need to make lengthy statements, give interviews, have a strong social media presence, a fan base or followers to make his art 'seen and heard'. Once completed Chamila's presence is unnecessary for the artwork to fulfill its function. That is what makes Chamila's art exceptional. That is what makes his art deserving of further scrutiny and analysis. That is what makes me write this article.

Chamila's 'Consumer Society' sculptural project was a part of his Master of Fine Arts dissertation. The project consisted of sculptural human figures made

Chamila Gamage, Painter and Sculptor 1

Chamila molding the initial sculptural figures with clay 2

of inner skeleton like structures which were constructed of discarded consumables and outer 'fleshy' structures made of ice. These figures were carefully stored in cold rooms, transported using freezer vehicles and then displayed at a public space, a prominent out door shopping precinct in Colombo. The outer casting was removed while on display to reveal the figurative ice sculptures which slowly started to melt in the tropical heat. Once melted the skeleton like 'inner souls' made out of a range of discarded consumer items were revealed. In the middle of the city of Colombo, the ugly truth of our times was laid bare for the public to view, to absorb or to ignore. The hideous skeletons spoke loud and clear: "In the end this is what we are reduced to. A lifetime of consumption. A lifetime of running after 'things'!"

The ice sculpture melts to reveal the skeletal 'soul' made out of discarded commodities

Melting Human

Chamila elaborates:

"The decision of the then Sri Lankan government to open up its economy in 1977 had drastic and irrevocable socio cultural implications. Since then predatory capitalistic consumerism has replaced true human values such as spirituality and harmonious relationships. Entrapped in this system, artists too have ceased to 'create' art. Instead they 'produce' art to supply to a market which demands a commodity.

If we are honest with ourselves, when we approach a canvas, a lump of clay or any other material, what is expressed should be a flow of thoughts and feelings stemming from our emotions and experiences. Instead we approach the canvas with theories, ideologies and concepts which are seen as trendy or timely. Where is the honesty, sincerity in that?"

I can relate to Chamila's inquiry because it resonates with mine. Who decides on the validity and the timeliness of concepts? Is it really us, the members of the global family, who gets to decide? Or is it someone 'out there' who would like to distract a population by presenting 'a grave issue' in order to fulfil his/her own endless greed for money and power by conquering the world? We are constantly bombarded with issues such as conservation, justice and egalitarianism. We are made to believe that if we subscribe to a 'cause' that we are 'in control'. That we are 'free' to act and instigate change. But are we really?

Ice sculpture displayed at the 'Arcade' public arena in Colombo

Do the African Americans have the same rights as the White Americans? If so why would the American artist Aaron Bell feel the need to create a public artwork in a park which shows the suppression of the African American in today's America, the land of the free? Aaron Bell's art is public because it is FOR the public. The ordinary man, woman and child who comes in front of it would think, ask, debate, analyse. When the Icelandic sculptor Olafur Eliasson displayed his 'Ice Watch', 12 melting icebergs from Greenland during the Paris climate conference, it was for the whole world to see, think and act. Whether it influenced the authorities or not, Eliasson made his point, loud and clear, to the public.

How could we 'give' our art to them humbly and gracefully without intimidating them? Chamila has answered these questions to some extent

The public is everyone. Not just the few who frequent art galleries, theatres, literary festivals, film festivals, poetry readings, and book launches. Not just the ones who claim to be bohemian or radical. The public, to me, is the orange vested, rubber slipper clad cleaner who sweeps the pavements of the Horton Place in front of the JDA Perera Gallery, which is located in the most affluent neighbourhood in Colombo where the skeletal remnants of Chamila's sculptures were later displayed after the icy 'flesh' was allowed to slowly melt away. The public is the tired state sector clerk or the school teacher who commutes in the crowded No.177 bus which stops at the halt in front of the JDA Perera Gallery, to get home after a long and exhausting work day. The public is the security guard who stands for hours and hours for a meagre salary at the gate of the JDA Perera Gallery. What would the cleaner or the177 bus passenger or the security guard receive or gain from our public art? How could we 'give' our art to them humbly and gracefully without intimidating them? Chamila has answered these questions to some extent. His remaining materialistic skeletons symbolizing the distorted essence of humanity, will talk to all those people which consists the public, not just in Sri Lanka but all over the world. Those skeletons will

succeed in giving a glimpse of what Noam Chomsky has been attempting to say for decades:

"The debt burden of private households is enormous. But I would not hold the individualresponsible. This consumerism is based on the fact that we are a society dominated by business interests. There is massive propaganda for everyone to consume. Consumption is good for profits and consumption is good for the political establishment. Consumption distracts people. You cannot control your own population by force, but it can be distracted by consumption. The business press has been quite explicit about this goal." (https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-with-noam-chomsky-the-united-stateshas- essentially-a-one-party-system-a-583454.html)

Those who have read or listened to Noam Chomsky might easily grasp what Chamila Gamage the artist is trying to convey but art is not only for the well-read intellectual. As mentioned before, art is for everyone. Art stems from humanity and is meant to make humans more humane. Graffitti written with a piece of charcoal on a dilapidated building by a street child who knows nothing about Chomsky, still might have the power to convey a message for humanity. If there is one truth which no one can deny, it is that in the end all of us cease to exist. Things said and done will be forgotten. Nothing is permanent. Yet the image of Chamila's materialistic skeletal figures might stay with one or a few or many who might begin to think and eventually decide to live a different kind of life, to regain control, to be more free, and less shackled. If so Chamila's 'consumer society' would have served its purpose. The power of art does not lie in the number of monuments a sculptor has erected, how well the artist is known or how significant his/her gallery representation is. If an art work could influence someone to be even momentarily happier or wiser, if it could be a vehicle for positive change then it would be a symbol of the true power of art.

Aipan: A Legacy of Women of Uttarakhand

By

Sapna Bhatt

Sapna Bhatt is a freelance writer and content creator who specialises in social and philanthropic topics. She has a master's degree in English Literature. She has received awards for her writing. Sapna enjoys making people aware of the current issues which affect society. She also loves art and relishes in finding their meaning and significance. She currently lives in Uttarakhand, India.

Hands stained red with the wet ochre mud tell several stories and a tradition that is exclusive to women, a sort of camaraderie between a mother and her daughter, a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law. A form of art which is a house decoration, an auspicious symbol, a ward from evil and pride of the hills of Uttarakhand - *Aipan*.

Houses made of stones, mud and lime plaster dot the villages of the Himalayan state. They may seem a little out of date to the urban populace, but they fit the aesthetic taking into account the greenery that surrounds them. What makes those houses beautiful without the bright paints we are used to seeing, are their walls and floors covered with *Geru* or red ochre mud with beautiful motifs and patterns made with *Bisvar* or a white paste made of soaked uncooked white rice. The greenery of the world, the smell of a house just plastered with *Geru* makes for a blissful life.

Traditional Aipan made with Geru and Bisvar

The history of *Aipan* goes back to the time around the rule of the Chand dynasty rulers who founded Almora, and it is from there that the art is said to have been spread throughout the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. Traditionally the art of *Aipan* is performed exclusively by women and passed onto the next generation by them and this is

how the tradition still lives, with women being the keeper of a tradition that surpasses centuries.

Aipan is usually drawn as a ritualistic practice to mark special occasions like birth, marriages and every auspicious festival like Makar Sankranti, Shivaratri or Diwali as a way of welcoming divine blessings and good fortune. On the day of an occasion that is of importance, the women of the house wake up early in the morning and sweep the house from top to bottom, then a layer of a mixture made of cow-dung and mud is applied as a form of purification and to level the ground and then it is left to dry. Afterwards, a layer of *Geru* is applied and while it dries, the women prepare *Bisvar* from the rice they soaked the previous night and grind it to the consistency of paint, and then begin the part where the house is decorated with designs. The *Bisvar* is used to create designs which are painted by using the tips of the fingers or by the tip of lime leaves for better precision. The designs are usually common on the floors and walls of *Puja* (worship) rooms and entrances of homes.

Though the designs look decorative they have meanings depending on the occasion and the pattern used. For instance,

● ***Saraswati Chowki*** - This form of *Aipan* is used to mark a child beginning his or her formal education. Goddess Saraswati is considered the goddess of wisdom and knowledge in Hindu religion, so this is a way of invoking her blessings and also a way to celebrate the start of education as a milestone in a child's life.

Women performing Aipan art on an occasion

Saraswati Chowki

● ***Nav Durga Chowki*** - This motif is used in ritual pujas to welcome the nine forms of Goddess Durga to bless the household. It symbolises creation and progress.

Nav Durga Chowki

● ***Shivarchan Peeth*** - Whenever Shiva, the lord of creation is worshipped in a household on an occasion like Shivaratri, this form contains a design of trishul or trident, the weapon of Lord Shiva.

Shivarchan peeth

● ***Acharya Chowki*** - In Indian culture a teacher is considered more important than God, so this motif has a special place in the household.

Acharya Chowki

● ***Ganesh Chowki*** - Any auspicious occasion in Hinduism cannot start without invoking Lord Ganesha, his blessings are considered an important aspect of any occasion.

Ganesh Chowki

● ***Dhuli Argh Chowki*** **-** This is one of the most important designs which is part of the *kumaoni* culture, it is usually drawn by the bride's household to welcome the groom and seek the blessings of the local gods to bless the new couple with good fortune.

Dhuli argh chowki

There are other motifs and designs used just for decorative purposes which represent the daily surroundings; there are drawings of flowers and animals, representation of a mythological tale and mandala designs. *Aipan* is also a community activity, during festivals the temples in the village are cleaned and decorated by the women of the village fostering good relations and a way of sharing their story and their designs.

The art of *Aipan* has come a long way and now is being noticed by the city dwellers too, who are fascinated by the designs and their significance, and their interest has led to the art taking a new and better form which draws more attention to it. *Aipan* has gotten more popular in the past decades because of its use in different settings other than the village houses or temples, now it is not restricted to their walls and floors, it has come to become part of the household, to state a few examples,

Wall hangings - The *Aipan* designs now have become part of the house of urban populace in form of these wall hanging decorations which not only make the house look more beautiful but also tie the people to their roots, having left their villages for work and career.

Household items - The designs are also being incorporated into common use items like ceramics, name plates and worship accessories.

Clothes - Designer clothes and bags are being made, using the age old aipan designs which keeps the tradition alive and spreads it throughout the country.

These new modes to express an art which is centuries old, has become a way to preserve it for future generations, spreading it far and wide, and has also given employment to many women giving them an opportunity to commercialise their art and work from the comfort of their homes. To increase conservation and awareness towards aipan art the state government decided that they will acquire art depicting aipan and display them in government offices and buildings. *Aipan* also received a GI certificate in 2021, the zeal shown by the state to promote the art has contributed a lot to its popularity in past years.

Aipan, an art exclusive to the women of Uttarakhand makes it their legacy. It was just considered another household work and not an art which could make you famous or be commercialised for livelihood, it gave them the confidence that they can also be an earning asset to their families. Maybe *Aipan* does bring good fortune, it did for the women practising it.

A Tryst with Nature, History, Faith, and Flavours

By

Noyonika Bhattacharya

This travelogue photo essay captures the essence of a deeply reflective journey across Pelling, Darjeeling, and Kalimpong. I explore breathtaking landscapes as well as the historical and spiritual significance of these regions. Travel offers a profound connection between nature and history, along with an opportunity to understand the cultural diversity deeply ingrained in local communities. From the serene Khecheopalri Lake, believed to grant wishes, to the majestic ruins of Rabdentse, the experience was enriched by vibrant popular culture, legends, and stories of faith. I traversed monasteries, such as Pemayangtse and Durpin, and witnessed the omnipresent influence of Mahakal, Avalokiteshvara, and other popular deities. The journey was also punctuated by the culinary heritage of the region, from Darjeeling tea to local delicacies. Whether it was walking through the clouds at Ghum or savoring food at heritage spots like Keventer's, the trip unfolded as a rich mosaic of flavors, faith, and nature's magnificence. Through this essay, I invite readers to experience the natural and spiritual beauty of these lands, etched deeply in the mountains and valleys of memory. All photographs have been clicked by the author, unless cited otherwise.

Clouds descending on Earth. Ghum, Darjeeling.

As the clouds neared my being, the mist in my mind cleared further. A week-long trip to Pelling, Darjeeling, and Kalimpong revealed a gushing whirlwind of terrain, flora, fauna, food, and spirituality. The people were kind and replete with wisdom. Their minds are akin to oceans of knowledge that have preserved the histories of Sikkim and Darjeeling. The weather was magnificent and cool. The memories, unforgettable.

My first stop was Pelling, a small, serene town in Northern Sikkim. Nestled in the mountains, I was blessed with a sublime view of the towering Kanchenjunga.

The snow-capped peak of Kanchenjunga as captured from my hotel room. The Pine Crest, Pelling.

I visited Khecheopalri Lake which was a blend of popular beliefs. Legend has it that every boon is granted, if whispered into the lucid waters.[1]

Khecheopalri Lake, Pelling.

Of course, the historian in me was intrigued by a large, ancient rock with 'Om Mani Padme Hum' inscribed in Tibetan script.

The lush forests and thriving flora made it very difficult for me to voluntarily leave the place.

An inscribed rock en route Rimbi Waterfalls.

I traversed a Skywalk (India's first glass walk) with an ethereal view to reach the Chenrezig Statue.[2] It was a representation of Avalokiteshvara – the compassionate Bodhisattva who protects one from all diseases, harm, and penury.[3]

Mid-way, Pelling Skywalk.

1 Kanungo, Pallavi. 2023. "Khecheopalri: The Sikkimese lake that is believed to fulfill wishes." *Hindustan Times*, January 24, 2023.

2 Travel Desk, Times. 2020. "India's first glass skywalk!" *Times of India*, November 9, 2020.

3 Chutiwongs, Nandana. 2002. *The Iconography of Avalokitesvara in Mainland Southeast Asia*. India: Aryan Books International.

Chenrezig Statue

In the medieval era Pemayangtse Monastery, I encountered my old friends Padmasambhava and Avalokiteshvara yet again. Of course, the predominant idols were of Mahakal and Tara. For centuries now, Sikkim has been the foremost centre of Vajrayana Buddhism.[4] Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Maya, Vidya, and Kali are vital components of local belief systems. I had studied religious history before, but witnessing its contemporary impact was a surreal experience.

Pemayangtse Monastery. Cameras are strictly prohibited inside the shrine.

Next, I visited the elevated ruins of Sikkim's medieval capital – Rabdentse. It had been home to the Namgyal dynasty for centuries preceding British colonisation.[5] Following a brief yet rejuvenating hike of 3.5 km spanning forested paths, the breathtaking view was sure worth it.

The ruins of Rabdentse – the ancient capital of Sikkim

But of course, all that walking had to be a prelude to a sumptuous mega-meal. I was ravenously hungry, and gorged on piping hot thukpa, momos, French fries, and fried chicken. Tea, undoubtedly, is essential.

Supper at Friend's Restaurant, Pelling. Photo collage made via Author's Instagram Layout

I took away from Pelling far more knowledge, insight, and energy than any history book could ever impart. The journey from Pelling to Darjeeling was straight out of a postcard. I halted at this beautiful, expansive tea garden and savoured authentic Darjeeling Tea.

4 Mckay, Alex, and Anna Balicki-Denjongpa, eds. 2011. B*uddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture*. Vol. 1. Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.

5 Datta, Rangan. 2022. "Exploring Rabdentse and the ruins of a former kingdom's capital." *The Telegraph* (Pelling), March 30, 2022.

A tea garden, en route Darjeeling

Every Bengali's favourite vacation abode, and yet Darjeeling never recedes to a cliche. My first stop, for obvious reasons, was Keventer's – the haunt of Satyajit Ray's fictional and hence immaculate detective Feluda.[6] I gorged on burgers, sausages and ham, poached eggs, and their iconic hot chocolate. Sadly, the phone on which I clicked these pictures crashed. Even though the photographs are irretrievable, the food was so delectable that the memories are enduring. There are many restaurants and cafes such as Macazzo in Kolkata that try to emulate Keventer's in their menu.[7] Even though they are distinctly wholesome, the iconic quality and taste of Keventer's, Darjeeling is unmatched.

I strolled around Mall Road and ventured into shops that are nothing short of heritage. The Das Studio is where Feluda unravelled the bank embezzler in Murder in the Mountains (Darjeeling Jomjomaat).[8]

Das Studio, Mall Road - established, 1927.]

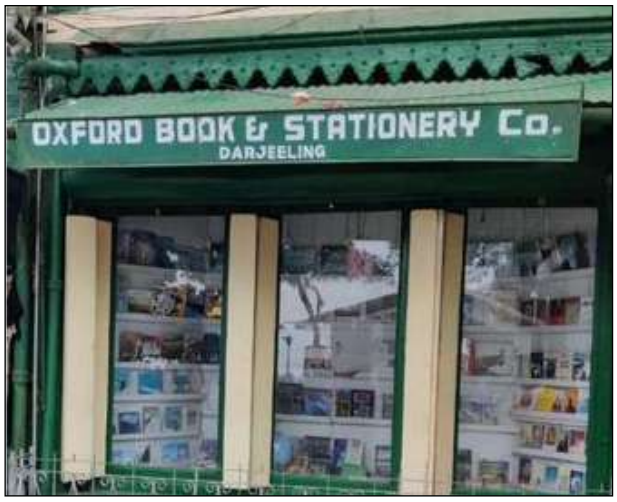
Habeeb Mullick and Sons, Oxford Books- institutions as old as Darjeeling itself.

Habeeb Mullick and Son - a curio antique shop on Mall Road. Established, 1890.`

6 Ray, Satyajit. 1965. "Feludar Goendagiri." In *Feluda Samagra* - Volume 1. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers.

7 A reference to especially these platters on their menu - Darjeeling Chicken and Darjeeling Pork.

8 Ray, Satyajit. 1986. "Darjeeling Jomjomaat." In *Feluda Samagra* - Volume 2. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers.



Oxford Books, Mall Road.

In every curio shop of some renown, two popular deities dominated the masks and idol representations. Mahakal is the Buddhist deity of Time, Destruction, and Protection of Dhamma.[9] Also known as Dhammapala, he's a wrathful avatar of Buddha worshipped by Vajrayana Buddhists. Avalokiteshwara is the compassionate Bodhisattva who doesn't let any disease, mishap, or penury befall his devotees. Ancient and medieval travellers carried idols of this deity on long, precarious sea voyages.[10] Today, the layered histories of faith are omnipresent in artefacts like the one below.

Mahakal mask crafted on wood – a local specialty

"Representative Photo of Avalokiteshvara/Chenrezig," a Vajrayana Buddhist deity with 1000 arms. n.d. The Kartique Store, Amazon

Glenary's was, however, a disappointing institution. It seems to survive on sheer brand name and nostalgia, as the cheesecakes, patties, and scones were stale and not up to the mark. Only the building remains beautiful and exudes nostalgia.

A photo collage of Glenary's, Darjeeling made via Author's Instagram Layout

But you know what never becomes stale? Hope for a new day, better people, and enriching experiences. I woke up at 3 AM to witness an early sunrise at Tiger Hill. Even though K2 wasn't visible, the sunrise brought more than a glimmer of hope for an eventful day. So it was!

9 Linrothe, Rob. 1999. *Ruthless Compassion: Wrathful Deities in Early Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist Art*. London: Serindia Publications.

10 Kulke, Hermann. 2011. "The Concept of Cultural Convergence Revisited: Reflections on India's Early Influence in Southeast Asia." In *Asian Encounters: Networks of Cultural Interaction*, edited by Upinder Singh and Parul P. Dhar, 3-19. N.p.: Oxford University Press.

Sunrise in the mountains, as captured from Tiger Hills

After a wholesome breakfast, I alighted the toy train. The journey was soothingly beautiful. It halted at Batasia Loop, famed for its vibrant blossoms. The Hindi film song Mere Sapno Ki Rani was picturised here.

Bountiful blossoms, Batasia Loop. Originally posted on author's Instagram story.]

The prized Darjeeling toy train coach.

Clouds descending on Earth, Ghum Railway Station.

The last stop was the town Ghum, where the clouds encountered land and captivated me with their magnificence.

Ghum – a scenic town

The Museum of Darjeeling Himalayan Railways was a treasure trove of artefacts and archives – textual and visual.

A collation of textual archives. Collage made on Instagram Layout.

A photograph documenting the Ghum railway station built right after World War II.

Later that afternoon, I traversed through a tea garden and imbibed the aroma and picturesque beauty around me.

Happy Valley Tea Estate, Darjeeling.

The last venture of the day was the Japanese Peace Pagoda. Built under the guidance of Buddhist monk Nichidatsu Fujii, the monument illustrates events from the life of Gautama Buddha. Fujii was a pacifist who was deeply impacted by the US dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.[11] This pagoda is representative of the peace, Fujii believed every nation should embody.

Indo-Japanese Peace Pagoda

11 Kim, Ha P. 1986. "FUJII NICHIDATSU'S "TANGYŌ-RAIHAI": Bodhisattva-practice for the Nuclear Age." *Cross Currents* 36, no. 2 (Summer): 193-203. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24458947.

Thanks to two of my Master's papers on ancient Indic religions, architecture, art, and philosophy; I was familiar with all the motifs illustrated on the pagoda reliefs. This scene, for instance, demonstrates Buddha's cousin Mara who represents deviance from the path of dhamma. Mara embodies temptation while Buddha is the epitome of austerity.

Mara trying to break Buddha's concentration by employing various agents – human and beastly

The day concluded with a delectable Chinese dinner at the Park Restaurant, Mall Road.

A photo collage of the decor and food at Park Restaurant. Made on Instagram Layout.

I set out for Kalimpong the next morning. I halted at the glorious pine forests in Lepchajagat, and tried to process the sheer panorama of the graceful trees. It was like a folktale coming to life.

Pine forest, Lepchajagat

I halted again at Lamahatta village for tea, only to be immersed in the scenic view. The clouds seemed to tell a magical story of their own.

A photo collage of the breathtaking views and delicious snacks at a homestay cafe in Lamahatta village. Made on Instagram Layout

Located in a small ridge above the Teesta river, Kalimpong is a beautiful hillside town. A private nursery named Pine View houses a radiant array of flowers. Over 1500 varieties of cacti alone are grown.

Photo collage of cacti and flowers at Pine View Nursery, Kalimpong – (made on Instagram Layout.)

The Durpin Monastery had a huge complex comprising a stately temple, a theological research center, living quarters for monks and nuns, and a sizeable football ground!

Durpin Monastery, Kalimpong

I encountered my old friend Padmasambhava yet again, as he dominated the sanctum sanctorum. Here's yet another looming statue of him outside (it's disrespectful to take photos of the inner shrine).

Padmasambhava towering over the devotees he protects.

The next and last stop for the trip was Delo Hills. I strolled across a splendid, lush garden teeming with purple primulas and other travellers as awe-struck as I was. The view from atop was glorious.

A view of Kalimpong town from atop Delo Hills

Resplendent Hydrangea.

I am a bookworm, as my books help me travel the world without moving an inch – as Ashoke remarked in The Namesake.[12] But you see, unless you move miles afar, you will have existed in this beautiful world we inhabit, without ever living it. This photo essay has been my attempt to show you the world I travel through my lens. The magic of those hills is still etched in my mind. Here's to galloping winds, and many more journeys that nourish the soul.

12 Lahiri, Jhumpa. 2003. *The Namesake*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Portraits paintings by Koku Family (1700 - 1850): A Study of Pahari Portrait Paintings

By

Dr. Smita Singh

Smita Singh currently resides in Sri Lanka. She has completed her Bachelor's in 2017, her Master's in 2019, and her Ph.D. in 2023 from Banaras Hindu University. Her Ph. D. research focused on the portraits of Pahari painters from the Koku family (1700 to 1850). She had the privilege of learning Pahari painting under the guidance of Padma Shri Vijay Sarma and Dr. Anjan Chakravarty, both renowned art historians and artists from India. Currently she is engaged in extensive research on Pahari miniature paintings, along with creating artwork on related subjects. This year she received an award from the India-Sri Lanka Foundation for her proposal on Pahari painting, a field in which she continues to work diligently. With help of the received fund she is working to educate university students and Sri Lankan artists about this rare art style and build interest in it both in India and abroad.

Pahari painting refers to a collection of vibrant painting styles that flourished in the foothills of the north-western Himalayas, particularly in the hill states of Himachal Pradesh, between the 17th and 19th centuries. These styles include prominent schools such as Basohli, Guler, Kangra, Chamba, Mandi, and others.

B.N. Goswami, who is a renowned art historian, has made a significant contribution to the field of Pahari painting. He approached and understood this art form with a new perspective. One of the special aspects of Pahari painting that B.N. Goswami highlighted is 'manuscript paintings. He thoroughly explored how different styles developed under the patronage of various princely states, and how these styles influenced each other. In his studies, B.N. Goswami not only focused on the royal patrons and styles of Pahari painting, but he also researched the family lineages of the artists. These lineages often passed down the art tradition through generations, where members of the same family became artists and carried forward the legacy of their art[1].

Researchers like B.N. Goswami and Vijay Sharma identified and published work on other lesser-known artist families of Pahari painting. Inspired by their research, I have also tried to shed light on the Koku family and their works. The village of Chadi, located 22 km from Kangra Fort

1 Goswamy, B.N., and Fischer, Eberhard, *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*, Museum Rietberg, Zurich, 1992

and 11 km from Dharamshala, falls under the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. A family of skilled portrait painters, known as the Koku family, once resided in this village. The Koku family's tradition of portrait painting was influenced by Mughal portraiture, particularly in their depictions of Pahari kings.

Historical records indicate that during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, many miniature painters of the Mughal court sought refuge elsewhere due to royal neglect. These artists often travelled to the hill states in search of patrons, carrying with them Mughal portraits and sketches, which were small in size and easily portable. The painters adapted this Mughal style to create portraits of the hill rulers, similar to those of the Mughal emperors[2].

During the reign of Raja Prakash Chand, the painters of Guler faced economic hardship, leading them to seek support from other states. Raja Raj Singh of Chamba emerged as a patron, generously supporting the Guler artists, including the Koku family. Raja Raj Singh granted lands in the fertile region of Rilhu, within his kingdom's borders, to the sons of Nainsukh, Koku family and other Guler painters. As a result, colonies of Guler painters were established in villages such as Nareti, Rajol, Bajred, and Chadi. The Koku family eventually moved from Guler to Chadi village, where their records span from approximately 1700 to 1850 CE.

At the time, Chari village was under the jurisdiction of the Chamba state, as detailed in records kept by priests in Haridwar. These priests maintained family registers for northern Indian pilgrims, and the details of the Koku family are preserved in such documents. The registers contain information about family members' ancestors, including names of grandfathers, fathers, uncles, brothers, and cousins.

Portraits created by artists of the Koku family are sometimes signed and inscribed with details in Persian, Devanagari, and Takri scripts. Names such as Koku, Fauju, Uttam, Harji, and Pragchand appear in the portraits housed at the Chandigarh Museum.

Although the descendants of the Koku family no longer practice painting, they were unaware that their ancestors were renowned artists. Today, the family members have pursued other professions for their livelihood.

In the family register maintained by Haridwar priests, the earliest recorded name is Gunjaru, the father of Koku. The first artist from this family to have his name inscribed on a painting was Koku, son of Gunjaru. Another name associated with the family is "Kuku," which appears on the back of a portrait of Koku, suggesting that the artist may have been known by both names.

Koku's son, Fauju, became an even more renowned artist, with his name appearing in numerous portraits from the 18th century.

The Haridwar records, particularly the Chamba ledger, mention Fauju's four sons: Purkhu, Uttam, Lalman, and Ramji. Chandramani, the priest of both Chamba and Kangra, whose gotra is Chaklan, recorded many details of the Koku family.

For example, in these records, Ramji, the son of Fauju and grandson of Koku, is mentioned as having brought the ashes of his cousin Khyal to Haridwar for immersion in 1818 CE (1866 Vikram Samvat). Khyali's father, Trilochan, is also referenced. Similarly, another record mentions Lalman, the son of Fauju, along with his brothers, Purkhu and Ramji. Khyali made a pilgrimage to Haridwar in 1869 Vikram Samvat.

Another notable entry in the priest's ledger mentions Prag, an artist from the Koku lineage, in 1820 CE (1877 Vikram Samvat). He was the son of Moti and grandson of Kirpu, and the record also details his two uncles. These ledgers help us trace other family members, such as Ganesh, Fauju's grandson, who passed away in 1899 CE, along with Shyama and Sharda, nephews of Ganesh and sons of Siddhu.

These records provide valuable insight into the lineage of the Koku family and their contributions to Pahari art. Many of their portraits are now part of museum collections, offering a glimpse into the rich artistic tradition they upheld.

In the Chamba register of Haridwar, a record written in Devanagari script provides insight into the family lineage of painters

2 Sharma, Vijay, *Kangra Ki Chitrankan Parmpra*, Chamba Shilp Parishad, 2010,p.131

from Chadi village. The entry reads:

1. Tarkhaan chitere basi chadi ke. Likhatam Laalman beta Fauju ka pote Koku ke. Padpote Gunjaru ke. Bardu beta Uttam ka Ugru beta Purkhu Maadu beta Kamlu ka Lalman Ganga Ji aaya saath Gwaalu Kanet Samvat 1868.[3]

Translation: Lalman, a painter from Chari, who is the son of Fauju, the grandson of Koku, and the great-grandson of Gunjaru, came to the Ganges in the year Samvat 1868. Along with him were Bardu, son of Uttam, Ugru, son of Purkhu, and Maadu, son of Kamlu. They were accompanied by Gwaloo Kanet.

2. Tarkhaan chitere baasi chari ke. Likhatam Ugra beta Purkhe ka. Pota Fauju ka. Bhai Jwaale ka beta Siddhu Ugru Ganga ji aaya. Phool Laadi ke lyaya Samvat 1894.[4]

Translation: Ugru, a painter from Chadi, son of Purkhu and grandson of Fauju, came to the Ganges in the year Samvat 1894. He was accompanied by his brother Jwala's son, Siddhu. Ugru brought the ashes of his wife for immersion in the holy river.

3. Tarkhaan chitere baasi chari ke. Likhtam Bardoo va Ugar va Maadoo va Jwalaa bete Uttam ke. Pote Fauju ke. Bardoo Ganga ji aaya. Phool Maata ke va bhai dono ke laaya.

Translation: Bardoo, Ugru, Maadoo, and Jwalaa, sons of Uttam and grandsons of Fauju, came to the Ganges. Bardoo brought the ashes of both his mother and his brothers for immersion in the holy river.

These versions present the records clearly, emphasizing the family lineage and the purpose of their pilgrimage to the Ganges.

3 *Ibid*,p.142

4 Ohri,Vishwa Chander, *A Western Himalayan Kingdom History and Culture Of The Chamba State*, New Delhi, 1989,p.182

Portrait Paintings by Koku Family

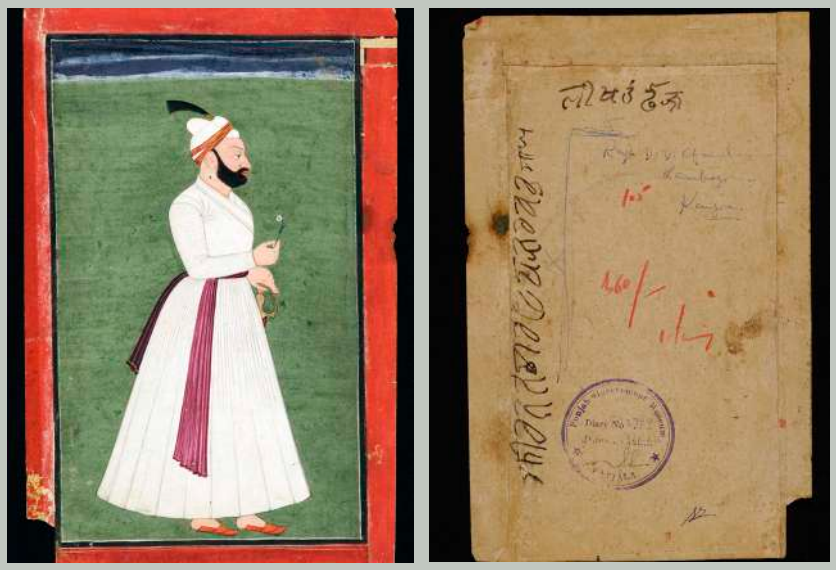
Artist: Koku
Raja Uday Singh of Chamba, | circa 1720 CE, opaque watercolor
8x5 7/8" | Acc. no.2744, State Museum, Chandigarh

This portrait was created by the artist Koku[5], who is also known as Kuku. On the back of the painting, the inscription "Likhitam Kuku" is written in Takri script on wasli paper. In the upper left part of the painting, the name of Raja Uday Singh is inscribed in Persian. The artwork, acquired between 1961 and 1962 from the Raja of Lambagram for ₹50 is currently housed in the Chandigarh Museum. Unfortunately, due to improper maintenance, the edges of the painting have deteriorated over time.

5. *Ibid*,p.181

Artist: Fauju
"Raja Dalel Singh of Chamba," | circa 1760 CE, opaque watercolor
9 1/2x7 1/2" (243 mm with margins 243x188 mm), | Acc. no 2673, | State Museum, Chandigarh

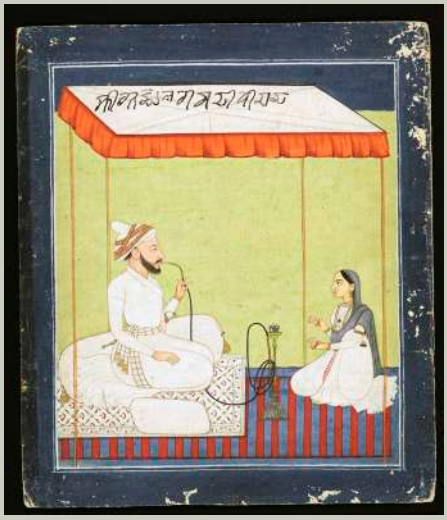
This portrait was created by Fauju, the son of Koku. In the margin of the portrait, "Shri Raja Dalel Singh Chimbeyal" is inscribed in Takri script, while the back bears the inscription "Likhtam Fauju," also in Takri script. The Chandigarh Museum acquired this artwork from the King of Lambagram between 1961 and 1962 AD.

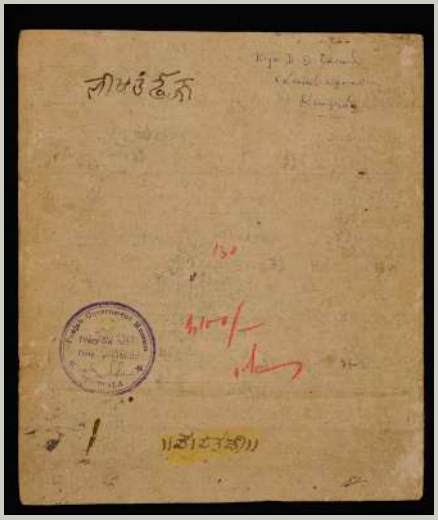


Artist: Fauju
Raja Zorawar Singh, | circa 1760 CE, opaque watercolor
9 ¼ x5 7/8", | Acc. no. 2789, | State Museum, Chandigarh.

This painting was created by the artist Fauju.[6] On the back, it is inscribed in Takri script with the words "Likhatam Fauju" and the name of the king, "Shri Raja Jasrotia Zorawar Singh." The painting is currently housed in the Chandigarh Museum, which it acquired between 1961 and 1962 from the Raja of Lambagram for ₹60.

6. Archer, W.G., *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, Vol.1, London,1973,p.214

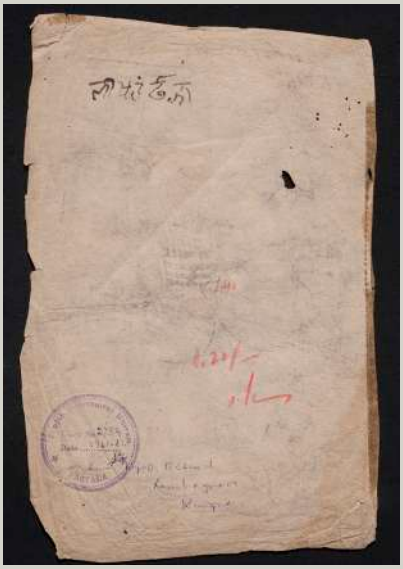




Artist: Fauju

Kahlur (Bilaspur) King Shri Raja Devichand, | approximately 1760 to 1770 CE
opaque watercolor, | 9 1/2 x 8 1/8 inches, | Acc. no. 2763 | Government Museum, Chandigarh.

This painting was created by the artist Fauju.[7] The name "Fauju" is inscribed in Takri script on the back of the painting, while the top features the name of the king, "Shri Raja Kahluriya Devi Chand," also in Takri script. Currently housed in the Chandigarh Museum, this painting was acquired between 1961 and 1962 from the Raja of Lamba village for ₹100.



Artist: Fauju

King Siddh Sen of Mandi, | approximately 1790 A.D.
opaque watercolor, | 9 1/4 x 5 7/8 inches, | Acc. no. 2754 | Government Museum, Chandigarh.

This portrait was created by the artist Fauju.[8] On the back, "Likhtam Fauju" is inscribed in Takri script on wasli paper, while the front features the name of the king, "Shri Raja Siddhsen Mandiyal," also in Takri script. The painting is currently housed in the Chandigarh Museum.

7. *Ibid*,p.239
8. *Ibid*,p.346

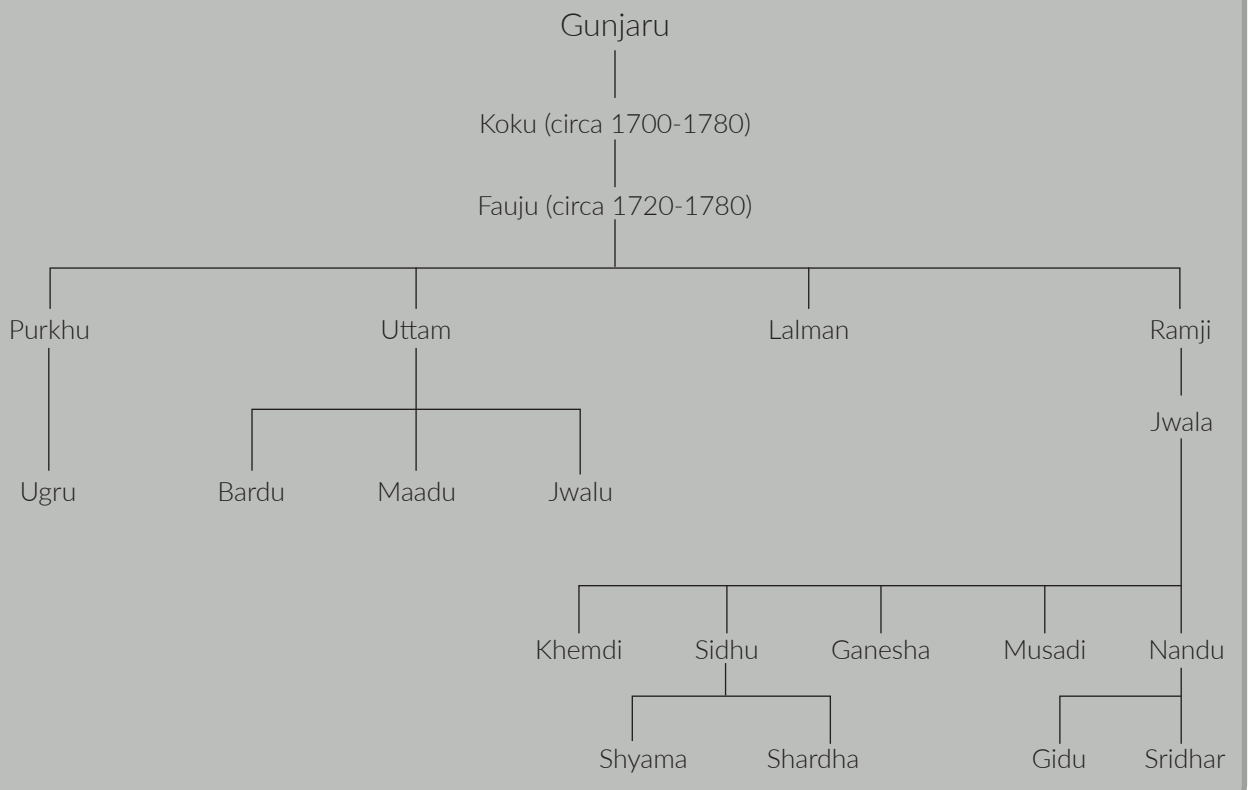
Artist: Uttam

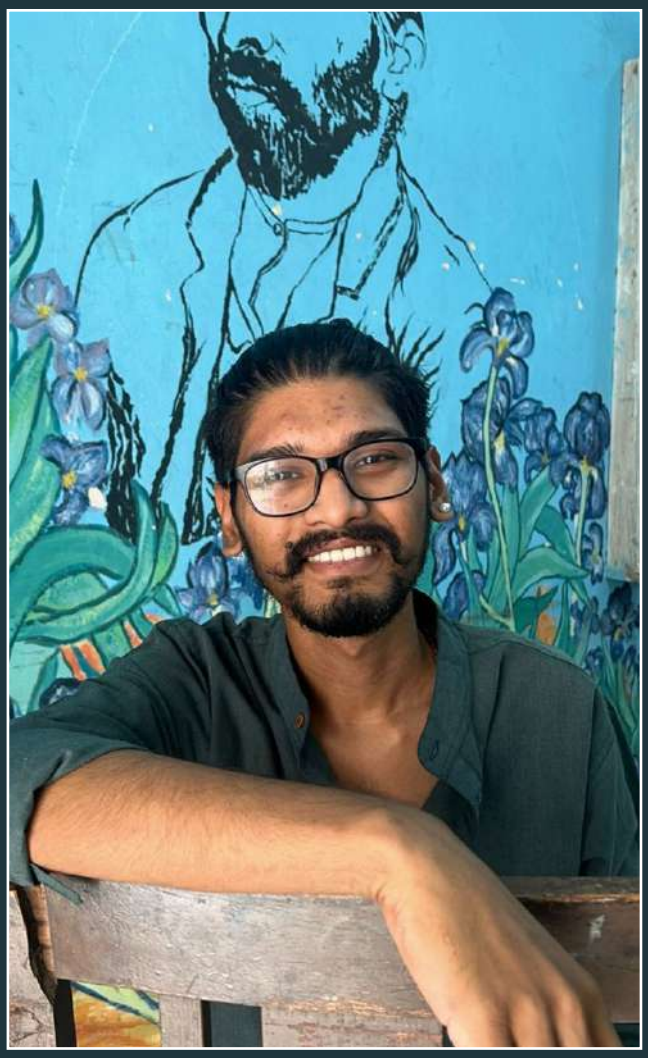
King Bhupchand, | Mid 18th Century

Opaque Watercolor, | 8x5 3/4 inches, | Acc. No. 2738, | Government Museum Chandigarh.

This painting was created by the artist Uttam. On the back, it is inscribed in Takri script: "Likhatam Uttam," along with the name of the king, "Shri Raja Bhupchand Handuriya," also in Takri. The painting is housed in the Chandigarh Museum. It was donated to the museum by the king of Lambagram for ₹30, between the years 1961 and 1962.

The Genealogy of the Koku Family of Chari





Ars Ex Machina: Tracing Cyborg Art Scene in Telangana Changing Definitions

By

Saayantan Chaki

Saayantan Chaki is a student-artist in Jawaharlal Nehru Architecture and Fine Arts University, Hyderabad pursuing his Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Painting. He is currently interested in Post-Humanist theories, Indian Atomism theories and History of Arts. His works carry elements of Dark age Mysticism, Batik, Poetries and the human body as visual text. His works were displayed in 'ASLI' Fest (2024) in 'DUSTBIN' segment of the festival, 'Imagine Art Festival' organized by 'Uneditioned Art', Delhi. He has presented his paper at National Research Conference for Humanities (NRCH), 2024 in the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara. He has been part of the Student Induction Program in the JNAFA University, Hyderabad.

Fine Arts plays an important role in pursuit of being a human. Throughout ages the arts have been classified into various fields such as Performing arts, Applied arts, Literary arts, Fine arts etc. but due to recent developments and changings of definitions, there has been a new term emerging namely, Visual Arts. Visual Arts refers to the broader spectrum of various fields of arts conjoined together. The reason as to why is because Arts is no longer a "Fine" matter. With the blurring of the definitions and creativity of the artists in these post-modern times, it becomes a necessity to update one's vocabulary as well as art institutions and their pedagogy.

Post-humanism is a recent development in Aesthetic philosophy, triggered by Donna Haraway's A Cyborg Manifesto. This explores the notion of the posthuman, a future being that transcends current human limitations through technological enhancement. In a world grappling with issues of identity, privacy, and autonomy in the age of digital surveillance and artificial intelligence, Cyborg Art offers a poignant commentary on the human condition. It serves as a mirror, reflecting our complex relationship with technology and our continuous quest for improvement and self-expression. As technology continues to evolve, so too will Cyborg Art, pushing the boundaries of what is possible. With advancements in bioengineering, artificial intelligence, and nanotechnology, the future of Cyborg Art is limitless. It stands not only as a

form of artistic expression but as a forward-looking commentary on the potential paths of human evolution.

According to Kris Casey, Painting is the plastic art of applying pigment to a surface, typically a woven fabric, such as canvas or linen. The fabric is stretched over a wooden frame and the resulting rectangle becomes a space for representation. The field of painting has significantly expanded from this origin. From the traditional canvas-on-wood-stretcher-object to virtual-digital painting practices (ie. *digital collage*, *hybrid works*, *virtual exhibitions*); to paintings that are free standing, removed from the stretcher; to paintings that blur the line between sculpture, performance and video; to paintings that are executed on the body, projected on the floor, or draped from the ceiling. Paintings have thus-so-far defied such categorical impulses and systems of classification, resisting history's singular hold, and even resisting its own purported "death". Painting is no fixed plot-point or stiff canon. Painting is a practice that maintains its historical integrity (evident through the continued nods to our genealogy- our heroes, teachers, mentors) while, at the same time- like a good cyborg, it has no loyalty to origin stories or makers. Painting as a field is as fluid as the stuff that makes it up. And, like good science fiction, painting can articulate agendas, situate histories and cover territories both emerging and fantastical. Painting keeps forging ahead and trudging through wild frontiers to, you know, *see what else it just might do*.

On Cyborg Aesthetics

Although relatively recent, Casey proposes certain qualities of the Post- humanist artworks such as "Glow" and "Trance" which we shall discuss briefly to get acquainted with these terms. The idea of the gaze, which means 'to look steadily, intensely, with fixed attention' was theorized by Lacan to describe the anxiety that comes from realizing that one is an object capable of being viewed by others (whether human or not). This is an external, object oriented theory- objects witnessing, or gazing upon, the externality of other objects. In feminist aesthetics, the theory of the 'male gaze' was developed and made popular by Laura Mulvey in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in which she describes the male use of the camera objectifying the female in film. In cyborg aesthetics, the 'gaze' becomes the TRANCE, where trance is a flow, a continuous movement that does not distinguish between inside/outside, subject/object. The TRANCE Is also a state of splitting that provokes objective witnessing and partial connection. The trance is a 'state of abstraction', outside of linear accounts of time where physical beauty of an object becomes "satisfying in itself". A half-conscious state characterized by an absence of response to external stimuli, typically induced by hypnosis or entered by a medium.

The glow is Casey's term for re-envisioning Walter Benjamin's 'aura' in the informatic domain of the digital, virtual. The 'aura' can be broadly defined as the quality of an authentic, singular, or original object of art. The aura is the sensation of an object unique to a specific time. The glow, on the other hand, rejects the idea of the need for a singular, original object of art in order to maintain quality and therefore authenticity. The glow is what emerges from the easily duplicated images and objects of information (An information object can be a video, digital image, website, GIF, etc.). Mechanical reproduction broke the work of art from its dependence on ritual and tradition, opening it up to the practice of politics. Glow can be assumed to be the antithesis of aura, or perhaps a need for one, as it democratizes a work of art.

Cyborg Art Scene in Telangana

In India, there have been many developments regarding tech-influenced art in contemporary practices. Especially, in the Indian state of Telangana, we see an amalgamation of multiple beliefs, identities, social commentaries, satires, philosophies, antiquities coming together and manifesting themselves directly or indirectly via technology. We see magnificent developments in the Cyborg art scene in Telangana. Artists like Harsha Durugadda, Mothe Mahesh, Asgar Ali, Tanvir Nagore and many upcoming young artists have been delving into this domain.

HARSHA DURUGADDA

Harsha Durugadda, although not using any visual elements of 'Cyborg' yet, has definitely used technology to achieve his Trance- ic sculptures. As his family belongs to temple architects and sculptors, his take on the digitized version of the antiquity is nostalgic. Although not identified as a cyborg artist, his works have a major role and quality of the Cyborg aesthetics.

His wood sculptures display this role evidently. The process starts with digitally mapping the blueprint of the sculptures. He then cuts plywoods according to the original plan, then layers all of the cutouts of plywood on top of each other to achieve the Trance-ic sculpture.

Images1a, 1b: Works by Harsha Durugadda

MOTHE MAHESH

Mothe Mahesh has a Bachelors in Fine Arts from Jawaharlal Nehru Architecture and Fine Arts University, Hyderabad and a Masters in Fine Arts from the Sarojini Naidu School of Arts and Communication, University of Hyderabad, with sculpture being his chosen discipline for both.

His works are unconscious gestures mediated by mechanical components. These unconscious gestures are perhaps a result of the incompatibility of his reality and the forms of communication. The attempt is to recreate certain elements that he takes from the void within himself and communicate through sensory experiences like visuals, sounds, and mechanical movements.

Images 2a, 2b: Works by Mothe Mahesh

The world around him provides him with a lot of material that is discarded, including both mechanical and electronic material but not limited by that medium. These materials have a possibility of being functional with very little, insightful intervention. He wants to go beyond the usual functions and let the material act in a way that may make us realize the nature of our existence. His work evokes experiences within the viewer through the movement and sounds produced by these materials. He has an impulse to communicate and share what's happening within and around us.

TANVIR NAGORE

Starting his artistic journey in 2017, the desire to create art soon became an unyielding curiosity to explore his creative consciousness and delve into diverse disciplines in the process. Nagore gathered much of his inspiration from personal experiences, the environment and cultures around the world. From digital art to installations, his art is a highly-personal reflection of himself. Blending the world of tech and art is a space he is quite passionate about. Interactive, kinetic and functional art are the niches he specialize in.

Synesthesia, one of his immersive and interactive art installation displayed at the Microsoft Campus, Hyderabad in 2022, presents us, the viewers, Synesthesia as a neurological condition in which the senses are blended or "crossed," resulting in the perception of one sense (such as hearing) being linked to another sense (such as seeing). Synesthesia can take many forms, including the perception of colors or patterns associated with sounds or the sensation of tastes or textures associated with visual stimuli.

Synesthesia combines music, visual projections, and tactile elements to evoke the synesthetic experience. This project aimed to explore and celebrate the experiences of individuals with synesthesia by creating artworks that incorporate and reflect the sensory blending that occurs in this experience. The aim was to create a space where the audience can immerse themselves into a synesthetic experience. A partially enclosed pod was created with reflecting sheets on three adjacent sides with a screen with projection being displayed. The reflective surfaces can create a visually dynamic environment that changes as performers move around and interact with the space . They are also used to create a disorienting or mesmerizing environment that visitors can explore and interact with.

Image 3: 'Synesthesia' by Tanvir Nagore

ASGAR ALI

Hailing from Jawaharlal Nehru Architecture and Fine Arts University, Hyderabad, his works involve lighting, digital manipulation and Radium paintings. His works include a social commentary and a strong sense of identity of being a 'Hyderabadi'. His proud presentation of his identity combined with digital mediums create a sense of Trance within his works. His expression is immersive, visually engaging, thought provoking. He creates a visual explosion within his works which are instantly eye catching. His works do not beg for attention instead they are so immersive, the viewer gets attracted towards it.

One of his untitled works involves an interesting interaction between a gun and barbed wire fencing. Sometimes having peace is about who has the bigger stick than other guys. Sometimes when a barbed wire had enough and tried to retaliate and now attack the gun which is a metaphor for the oppressor. This addressing of oppressor- oppressed relationships questions the very structure of hierarchies and hegemony.

Image 4: 'Untitled' by Asgar Ali

Exploration of the Human Condition in the Age of Technology

Cyborg Art is more than just an art form; it is a profound exploration of the human condition in the age of technology. It challenges us to think about our future, the potential of our species, and the ethical considerations of our increasingly intimate relationship with technology. As we move forward, Cyborg Art will continue to evolve, reflecting the changing dynamics of humanity's journey into the future. The Indian art scene is filled with diverse visual languages, Cyborgism as a language will continue to grow and further have an impact on the lives of people and perhaps even change the societal norms which it advocates.

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Reading Kashmiri Folktales - Tales within a Tale

By

Onaiza Drabu

Onaiza Drabu is a Kashmiri anthropologist and writer. She co-curates a newsletter on South Asian literature and art called Daak (daakvaak.com). Her first book, an anthology of Kashmiri folklore re-told was published in 2019.

Earlier this year, Abigail Tulenko published a piece titled 'Folklore is philosophy'[1] where in a proposition to expand the traditional philosophical canon, she suggests turning back to childhood folktales. Folklore, she quotes, is an 'overlooked repository of philosophical thinking from voices outside the traditional canon' and 'long flourished beyond the elite, largely male, literate classes'. Bringing up the *koans* in Zen and *jataka* tales in Buddism she references lessons most naturally taught through stories.

As someone who works on the folklore of my home, Kashmir, this piqued curiosity in a question I'd long thought about but never thought it my prerogative to investigate. I have considered my role to be a (re)teller of these stories. Every time thoughts on origins and the semiotics behind the stories crossed my mind, I had to shun them away in order to not complicate the art of telling and retelling. The stories from my childhood were my first leads in this discovery into the folklore of Kashmir and one doesn't want to dissect the very enjoyable remnants in an attempt to safeguard nostalgia.

I started my research collecting Kashmiri folktales but soon realized that Kashmiri is not a folklore of stories but one that is lived. Lore is alive in everyday rituals, in conversations and in instinct. While I would seek folktales (*lukh kath*), I would inevitably be veered into

1 https://aeon.co/essays/folktales-like-philosophy-startle-us-into-rethinking-our-values

conversations about folk belief (*lukh pach*). This folk belief is more palpable because while specific tales escape most, almost everyone is be able to talk at length about characters, guardians, ogres, saints, superstitions and food rituals particular to their homes. Roland Barthes, who wrote extensively on myth, seemed to echo loud. When Barthes talks about myth, he says that myth is speech; that myth is a message and that myth is a system of communication. This is what myth feels like in Kashmir. In the tales, there is a whole world of imagination that exists as a separate realm – one that exists solely in the world of oral Kashmiri, alive in the way Kashmiris speak and understandable to a native of the language.

What then can we think these folktales tell us - if I now, many years after the retelling begin a cursory examination of the tropes and hidden messages. Are our folktales, coded with moral, ethical, philosophical, and historical perspectives, passed down over generations?

Kashmir has many contested pasts, but over the years what all can agree on is this - an ancient civilization, many regimes changed hands, cultural transformations, upheavals in language, religion and script, many times over, a large population unlettered with literacy reserved for the elite, rulers and their bureaucrats and a vernacular that survived across time only in the oral sphere taking in influences from every change. Throughout we find little documentation and many divergent narratives, enmeshment of what we can see as myth and history. As the dominant paradigm shifted from Buddism to Hinduism, to Islam, records were passed down through language, in proverbs, in tales, in plays, fables and by a people not used to the written word.

As writer and folklorist, Ghulam Nabi Atash says in his work on folklore- the passing of history and ethics happened *seena ba seena* (from chest to chest/ heart to heart / through word of mouth) from one generation to another. He repeatedly mentions, even today, that the amount of attention the folklore of Kashmir deserves, has not been given. Through a series of arguments and across many books, Atash points out instances of how stories from folklore helped construct history for historians in Kashmir. As each regime replaced the other what persisted was remnants in the vernacular - a local language of the unlettered where transmission happened *seena ba seena*, and the folk, the people, were the source material for anyone looking to investigate.

Philosopher and academic MH Zafar point out how much of Buddhist thought survives in our aphorisms, in our speech - the concept of nothingness, the persistence of suffering. How these allusions percolate into our speech, and into our stories and therefore into our lives and warrants a more serious investigation. A running trope of two cats, Soda Byor Boda Byor, who help lost travelers in the forest has been identified as Siddharth and Gautam Buddha by writers like Akhtar Mohiuddin. The words have religious connotations with Bhagwan Sidartha (Sada Bror) being the wise one (Budda Bror) under the tree.

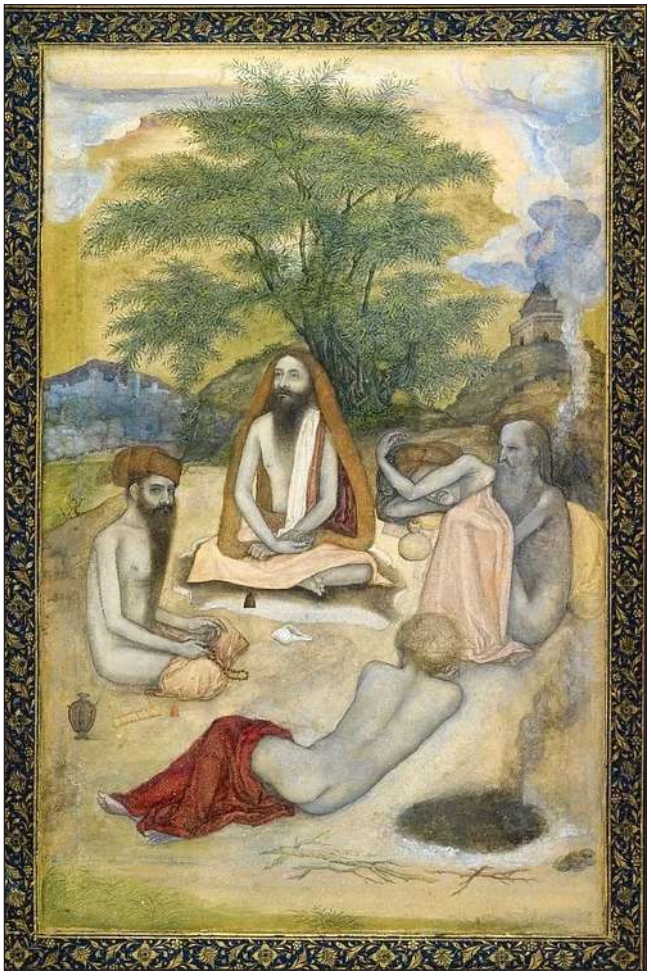
In her book on the Rajatarangini, Shonaleeka Kaul writes of a 'certain civilizational centrality of storytelling in Kashmir'. For long we have used stories and myth to explain nature and breed a sense of social cohesion. Stories right from the 12th century Rajtarangini have had a didactic quality to them. In one of the more recent ones from the 20th century, one ironically named *Ishq* (love), a married girl falls in love with a wan *mohniyu* (a yeti of a sort, a mythical creature in Kashmir). The beautiful tale of love and escape ends in couple being clobbered to death by her husband and brother. A society that weaves itself together through a set of moral codes that if you break you threaten yourself with death.

Akanandun, a popular folktale many a Kashmiri kid hears growing up, is more macabre and traumatizing than what you'd expect of a story for children. A royal couple wants a child. A yogi grants them a wish that he will give them a child but they will have to return it after twelve years. They readily agree to the yogi's demands, raising the child with love and affection and slowly fading away the memory of the conditions. When the boy turns twelve, the yogi knocks on their door to have the child back. Paying no heed to their protests and wails, he orders them to cut the boy into pieces, cook his meat and serve it. The family, distraught and destroyed,

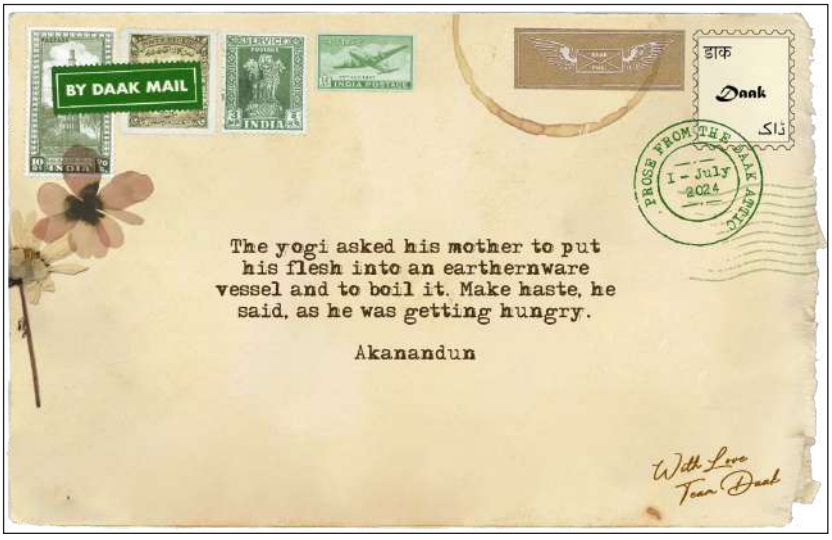
complies. Eventually, Akanandun comes back to life but the story is Abrahmanical in the parallels one can draw and has been rendered into poetry by many a Sufi poets. A story of detachment and selflessness, for a people from the land of Hindu asceticism and Buddhist renunciation but also an illustration of the Islamic concept of *tawakkul* or submission before God's wish. A tale replete with spiritual messages from across traditions.

There is faith, karma and fatalism too. How does that impact the psyche of an average person raised on these stories? In Aftab, Zoon and Hawa an angry mother curses her sons - the sun and the wind - with eternal fire and restlessness, and blesses her daughter the moon with cooling shade because of their deeds. Karma coded in a mother's maledictions and a benediction. Tales with the trope of a *shikaslad* (someone destined to be a pauper) who in every story, no matter how hard he tries is set to meet with failures and destined to be a pauper.

What do these fatalistic tropes tell us about how we submit to the written? Unfortunately, I don't have the answers, at least yet. This is a call for an opening to a conversation in a place that has long forgotten its past - its pre-modern or even recent past. A place where religion and ritual have taken over ethics and philosophy; there is little thought behind the practice; we perform without an investigation, an active investigation of the why. It is only when we do this that we can understand our culture, its norms, its codes beyond blind adherence and hopefully a sense of confidence that lets us imagine a future that is rooted and informed. It puts us in a space to not just codify and preserve but evolve and adapt. A rethink is possible only through conversations across disciplines and with the public. Maybe a psychologist, a philosopher, an anthropologist need to get together for this chat?



Five Yogis, Shankaracharya, Mughal Painting, 17th Century (Source: https://searchkashmir.org/tag/paintings)



Akanandun postcard (Source: https://daakvaak.com/postcards/sacrifice-and-selflessness-explained-through-cannibalism-the-kashmiri-folktale-akanandun)

Art Expressions through Rock Art and Tattoo Culture in the Easternmost Kaimur Range, India

By

Anindya Sanyal | Prity Rawat | Dr. Sachin Kumar Tiwary

Anindya Sanyal holds a post graduate in Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology from Banaras Hindu University in 2023. Currently, he is working as a Project Assistant in an IIT Bhilai - BHU collaborative project funded by DST, named 'Non-destructive Scientific Investigation of Materials used in the Rock Art Heritage of Kaimur Range Nauhatta and Adhuara blocks in Bihar'.

Prity Rawat holds a post-graduate in Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology from Banaras Hindu University in 2023. Currently, she researches independently across the Kaimur Range of Bihar on tattoo cultures amongst the tribal communities, and its relation to Rock Art in the region.

Dr. Sachin Kumar Tiwary is an archaeologist, ethnographer, and a rock art expert. He has worked in Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India in different capacities between 2009-2016. Since 2016, he has been serving as Assistant Professor, department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi.

Art has been a central mode of communication throughout human evolution. Art is the most interesting manifestation of human behaviour and conscience. The paper focuses on art and its various ways of expressions, highlighting how art has been a central mode of communication throughout human evolution. Since ancient times, humans have used art as a means to convey emotions, beliefs, and social values, evolving with technological advancements that expanded human cognition and creativity. One of the oldest forms of such communication is rock art. The primitive humans drew various thematic scenes, symbols etc to express their thoughts. Similarly, tattooing is another form of art continued through ancient times. Tattoos served as more than decoration - these are traditional markers of identity, a way for individuals to communicate their heritage and societal role. Interestingly, the symbols found in rock paintings across various regions closely resemble the motifs tattooed on the body, reflecting a cultural continuity between the ancient rock art and the tattoo culture in these regions. Like in the Kaimur plateau, motifs of flowers, peacocks, etc. are found on different body parts which closely resemble the designs in the Kaimur rock paintings.

With the advent of technological advancements, humans expanded their cognitive abilities and started to create very primitive forms of art. Art derived its various meanings through different eras of human evolution

referring to the immediate social culture and philosophy but it was never meant to refer just to fine arts, paintings, sculptures etc.[1] Any form of creation which is born out of human imagination can be stated as 'art'. The earliest art forms include tools, rock paintings, and then slowly progressing to potteries, coins, sculptures, temples, paintings continuing till today along with forms like tattooing etc.

The human habitation in the Kaimur range of Bihar can be traced from prehistoric rock art in the region. Human inhabitation is proven by the excavations of Belan valley, Senuwar, Sakas etc. through the prehistoric periods to the later periods[2], yielding important evidence that prove human habitation and its socio-cultural development.

The primitive humans expressed their various views, thoughts through rock arts. The various forms, themes, symbol depictions in rock art very well exhibit their advanced artistic and technical prowess. Tattooing is often seen as a powerful "visual language" that goes beyond decorating the body, reflecting the identities, heritage, and artistic preferences of individuals and entire

District Map of Bihar. (After: Sujata Chowdhury, dreamstime.com, Accesed on 29/10/2024.)

A-Labyrinth motif; B-Elephant motif - Petroglyphs, Sasaram Block, Rohtas district, Bihar.

1 González, Alejandro Escuder. "What is art? A research on the concept and perception of Art in the 21st Century." Vienna: Universität Wien, 30 11 2017.

2 Prasad, P C. *Kaimur Archaeological District Gazetteer*. Government of India, 2001 | Singh, B P. *Early Farming Communities of Kaimur (Excavation at Senuwar)*, Vol I. Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 2004 | Singh, Vikas Kumar, et al. "Preliminary Report on Excavations at Sakas, District Sasaram (Rohtas), Bihar, 2018-19 Background and Objectives." (2021)

communities.[3] Tribal communities in the Sasaram block have been relying on nature for its livelihood and subsistence. Their connection with nature is depicted through the continued tradition of tattooing.

Geographical Setting

The Kaimur Range forms the eastern part Vindhya Range - the oldest superstructure in India, which is composed of intra cratonic sedimentary rocks of Meso-Neoproterozoic Eras.[4] Kaimur range stretches over the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In Bihar, Kaimur range covers Kaimur and Rohtas district. The region is flanked by Tons river on the north and Son in the south. Sasaram is the district headquarter of the Rohtas district and is one of the four blocks, where rock art is found, along with Nauhatta, Tilauthu, and Rohtas.[5]

Rock Art

Rock art is the creative dialogue of the prehistoric humans. The ancient humans have been depicting their thoughts, emotions, events of importance like hunting, celebration, family or even general depiction of humans or animals that might have been of high value and regards. The themes of these paintings expand further to abstract forms, symbols, decorative patterns etc. A very advanced technological advancement and the high artistic quotient was involved in the creation of these paintings. Pigments were obtained from available sources like iron ores, kaolin etc. which is readily available in the nearby regions. These were probably mixed with certain organic binders like plant proteins, blood, eggs etc. to ensure its longevity. There are different methods like engraving, pecking, etc. that were used to create art.

All these activities indicate a much more diverse yet intricate human thought process. These hunting scenes, human and animal depictions, decorative patterns, totems, symbols, abstract motifs throw light on the everyday routines and special events in those times.

Tattoo Culture

In India, tribal culture is rich with diverse traditions and beliefs, many of which are practiced with enduring dedication - the practice of tattooing is called *godnā*. This ancient art is deeply rooted in tribal communities like Oraon, Kharwar, etc. where it holds significance beyond aesthetics, symbolizing identity, social status, and spiritual beliefs . According to ancient records, *godnā* has been an integral part of tribal culture for thousands of years and remains prevalent among several

Human figure, Rohtas Block, Rohtas district, Bihar.

Tattoo of peacock and flower figures below the Jāli pattern, Dhoudarh village, Rohtas block, Rohtas district, Bihar.

3 Ghosh, Payel. "Tattoo: A Cultural Heritage." *Antrocom Journal of Anthropology* 16.1 (2020): 295-301.

4 Soni, M K, S Chakrabarty and S K Jain. "Vindhyan Super Group - A Review." *Purana Basin of India*. Geological Survey of India, 1987.

5 Tiwary, Sachin Kumar. "Rock Art Discoveries in Rohtas Plateau Region, Rohtas District, Bihar." *Man and Environment* XXXVIII.2 (2013): 89-91 | Tiwary, Sachin Kumar. "Rock Art in Kaimur Reion, Bihar: A Study." *Purakala* (2019): 37-48 | Tiwari, Shyam Sundar. "Sasaram (Bihar) ke Shailashray and Shailchitra." *Purapravah* (2021): 1-16. Hindi.

tribal communities even today. In today's terms, *godnā* can be equated with tattoos, but unlike contemporary tattoos, *godnā* holds diverse religious and social significance.

Godnā culture in India has deep roots, especially in states like Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and others. Over time, as these communities interacted with communities outside their own, this art form spread to other regions. It is believed that women from the *Naṭ* community were traditionally responsible for tattooing. They carry black ink and a special type of thorn or needle used for tattooing, and they often sing folk songs during the process to distract the women, being tattooed, from the pain. Typically, one woman from each family performs this work, and during the month of *Shrāvan* (a holy month in the Hindu calendar), she refrains from cooking as there is a belief that if she causes pain through tattooing, others would not consume anything she cooks.

Tattoo of different motifs, Dhoudarh village, Rohtas block, Rohtas district, Bihar.

Continuation of Art Tradition

Rock Art was amongst the earliest medium through which humans were expressing their emotions, thoughts and views. It was certainly made with the intention to influence a larger society as well as the upcoming generations. Hunting was an important activity in the prehistoric society which ensured food for the group, proved physical prowess and also, a form of entertainment. Similarly, there are celebration scenes, motifs of animals indicating its importance as food, in the later stages for domestication, or as a totem. Abstract motifs and symbols are much more mysterious and have diverse meanings relating to fertility, totems, deities or to the dead ancestors.

The symbols drawn permanently on the body reflected an ancient continuous tradition. The humans through generations seeded the traditional and ritualistic beliefs through the means of tattoos. Across various communities, folklore, myths, and beliefs strongly endorse the wearing of tattoos, each with unique stories and figures that make tattooing often serves as a required rites of passage for individuals across ages and genders, tightly woven into the cultural fabric of these communities, ensuring its continuity for generations to come.

Interestingly, a lot of symbols and motifs are found commonly used in the rock art as well as in the tattoos of the tribal communities of the region. For example, in the Kaimur range, the symbols like peacocks, flowers and other patterns found on the different body parts closely resemble the motifs in the rock paintings. These rock paintings date back thousands of years, and the sheer resemblance suggests that the *godnā* culture is ancient.

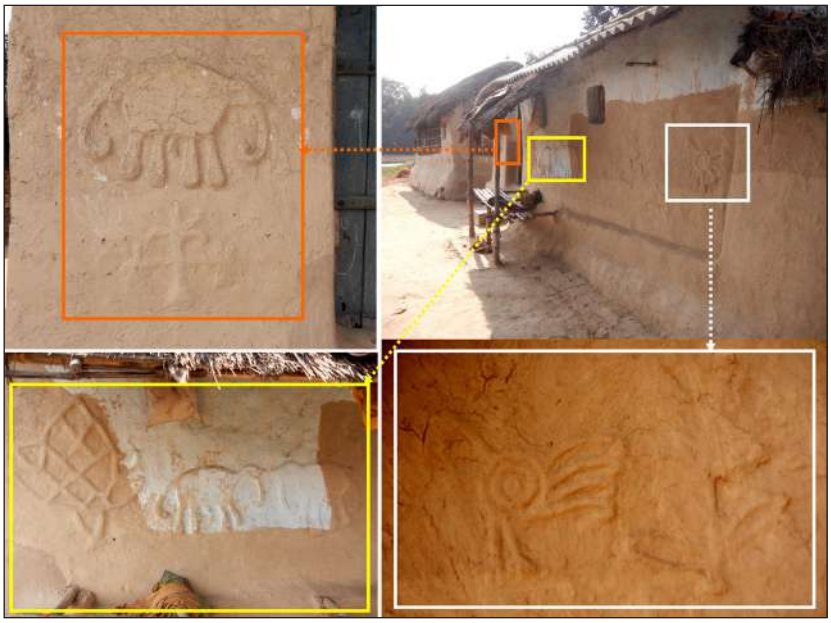
Furthermore, these symbols are not only found in body art but also adorn the outer walls of tribal homes in the Vindhya Range, reinforcing a longstanding tradition. It is quite evident that starting from the prehistoric times till date, the various art expressions were thoroughly imbibed in the humans residing in these areas and through these expressions were multifaceted. The same motif could be for rituals or for well-being or simply as art.

This interconnectedness underscores the ancient origins of tattoo culture among these communities, dating back

centuries. Over time, however, as people migrated and adapted to new environments, the prominence of tattooing traditions began to wane, marking a shift in cultural practices within the region. This continuity suggests that art form like *godnā* is one of our oldest traditions, accompanying human development from the caves to the plains.

"These two forms of art sometimes even draw parallels to each other as the tattoo culture often include abstract designs, certain animal forms, decorative or geometrical designs which indicate a common intrigue for specific art forms thus, forming a timeless continuation of the art tradition."

It is quite evident that the different forms of art have been a continuous tradition through which humans have been depicting its innermost emotions. From primitive times, ancient humans drew their rejoice of hunting, the celebration dances, depiction of important hunting animals, or totems to tribal communities tattooing their skins to celebrate womanhood, motherhood, devotional purposes, or traditions. These two forms of art sometimes even draw parallels to each other as the tattoo culture often include abstract designs, certain animal forms, decorative or geometrical designs which indicate a common intrigue for specific art forms thus, forming a timeless continuation of the art tradition. This correlation also indicates the fact that the natural surroundings have been a very deeply woven part of the human societies that have resided in these terrains. Surely, there is the purest form of love, respect, and compassion for nature as it has been the most important resource house for these human communities. This eternal love and mutual respect between human societies and nature is being depicted in the form of continued art tradition.



Elephant, Flower and Peacock Motifs on the walls of the houses of the tribes, Kaimur Range, Bihar.

Jāli pattern found in Rock Art and Tribal Decorations, Kaimur Range, Bihar.

Ritigala: An Ancient Legendary Spiritual Realm beyond the Visible Universe

By

Dr. Malathie Dissanayake

Dr. Malathie Dissanayake is a Developmental Psychologist and a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Health Sciences at the Open University of Sri Lanka. She earned her PhD in Developmental Psychology from North Carolina State University in USA. She has served in the three main areas of academia: teaching, research and service, for over 20 years in both national and international universities and other institutes. Her academic contributions include the service to the fields such as psychology, counselling and medical education as a senior lecturer, the Head of the Department, a researcher, a student counsellor and a faculty mentor in universities. She has also conducted several research studies and published articles and received awards. In her free time, she enjoys exploring the natural world and human connections, travelling, and volunteering with local communities.

Considering the history of this ancient site, it seems that it goes back to the time of the Ramayana, the great Indian Epic in South Asia. It is believed that it has served as the starting point of Lord Hanuman's leap from Sri Lanka to India in order to inform King Rama of the place where King Ravana imprisoned Queen Sita, wife of King Rama.

Ritigala, one of the most legendary ancient sites nestled amongst the verdant landscapes of Sri Lanka, is renowned for its preservation of an ancient sacred Buddhist forest monastery. Spread over a 3776-acre land, it is located between two the ancient cities, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, in the North Central province in Sri Lanka. In accordance with the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance, on November 17 in 1941, the 1528 hectares of Ritigala Mountain were declared as a Strict Nature Reserve.[1] Ritigala Mountain attracts people from all walks of life who wish to experience its incomparable natural beauty and its rich history. This account will center on the memorable and unique experience we encountered during our excursion to an ancient sacred Buddhist forest monastery in Ritigala in September, 2024.

1 Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC). (2024). *Strict Natural Reserve*. https://www.dwc.gov.lk/strict-natural-reserve/

Entrance of Ritigala Ancient Sacred Buddhist Forest Monastery

Biodiversity

Ritigala, the highest mountain in the Anuradhapura district, is situated in the low plains of the dry zone of the country and its geographic coordinates are 80° 38'–80° 40' E and 8°0'– 8°9'N.[2] Considering the biodiversity of the Ritigala mountain, the most distinctive characteristics are the microclimates that support the growth of different vegetation, giving home to animal and plant species that are found only in the ecosystem of Ritigala. Despite the surrounding plains having an extremely hot climate, this historical biosphere is composed of three distinct types; a dry mixed evergreen forest at the base (lower elevation < 300 m), a tropical highland forest in the middle (middle elevation 300–500 m), and a highland forest (high elevation >500 m) reaching the summit of the mountain.[3] During the Ritigala excursion, we were able to experience the unique types of climate of the Ritigala Mountain through the walkway.

Archeological Value

Considering the history of this ancient site, it seems that it goes back to the time of the Ramayana, the great Indian Epic in South Asia. It is believed that it has served as the starting point of Lord Hanuman's leap from Sri Lanka to India in order to inform King Rama of the place where King Ravana imprisoned Queen Sita, wife of King Rama. According to the legend, Hanuman brought some medicinal plants from the Himalayan Forest to Prince Lakshmana, the brother of Rama, who had been injured in a battle with Ravana. While carrying, Hanuman had dropped off some medicinal plants from the chunk of Himalayan Forest and, as a result, the Ritigala forest range is evergreen.

It is believed that, from the 3rd century BC, Prince Pandukhabaya (377-307 BC), King Dutugemunu (161-137 BC), and King Jetthatissa (7th Century BC) had used Ritigala as a place of refuge.[4] Ritigala ancient Buddhist forest monastery was built by King Sena I in the 9th century for Buddhist monks. It was abandoned because of invasions from the Chola Kingdom in South India. At this time, the capital of Sri Lanka had moved from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa forcing a large community of resident Buddhist monks, known as *Pansakulikas* to relocate from Ritigala. These monks separated from monks in Anuradhapura and practiced extreme austerity by pledging to wear robes made of abandoned rags collected from cemeteries. This ancient sacred place kept untouched since 11th century, until it was discovered in 1893 by H. C. P. Bell, the first Archaeological Commissioner in Ceylon, who made a detailed description of this ancient Buddhist monastery in his excursion. According to the evidence found in rock inscriptions from the 1st century BC discovered in the natural caves at this ancient site, it has been used as a Buddhist monastery by hermit monks who practiced extreme austerity.

2 Gunawardene, K. W. & Wijeyaratne, S. C. (2020). Species diversity and altitudinal preferences of lichens on selected substrata in Ritigala Strict Natural Reserve. *Journal of National Science Foundation Sri Lanka*, 48(1), 49 -56. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4038/jnsfsr.v48i1.9933

3 (DWC) (2008). Biodiversity Baseline Survey: Ritigala Strict Natural Reserve. Revised version.

4 Samarasekara, P. M. D. W. (2022). *The Production of Vishuddhi Spaces and their Subjects: Identity, Meaning, and Space of the 'Ritigala Vishuddhi Haramba' Process and Establishment*. (Master's thesis, Ball State University). Cardinal Scholar. http://cardinalscholar.bsu.edu/handle/20.500.14291/203215

Ruins in the Ancient Forest Buddhist Monastery

encountered the remnants of a man-made reservoir with a circumference of 1,200 feet, named *Banda Pokuna*, surrounded by huge rectangular stones. Most likely, it was used as a bathing pond for those entering the monastery. It is said that the *Banda Pokuna* can once held two million gallons of water. The base of the reservoir is covered with wild greenery and only a part of this reservoir is restored.

Architectural Value

The architectural ruins of the Ritigala ancient sacred Buddhist forest monastery are evidence of its distinguished history. The remnants of ancient monastic structures, boundary walls and stone pillars depict the Buddhist monks' austere way of life in the ancient sacred

Buddhist forest monastery and their unwavering devotion to spiritual life. Walking through these ancient ruins make us feel that we are making a connection with the past. The most ruins that are visible to pilgrims today, have been delicately restored by the Archaeological Department in Sri Lanka.

Banda Pokuna - A Man-Made Reservoir

After passing the Archaeological Department Office, we were able to enter the ancient sacred Buddhist monastery's ruins. As we first entered the ruins, we

Banda Pokuna - A Man-made Reservoir

The indigenous settlement in Sri Lanka was a well-organized system of areas and spaces centered on the management and provision of water, which is essential to all life on earth and the nourishment of all its inhabitants. All life depends on the availability of water, therefore, one of the most highly regarded founding principles of the settlement's organization was the management of water and its qualities. People used to manage water supply from various sources such as natural springs and rainwater. It seems that the remnants of this huge reservoir also depict the similar characteristics. The majority of Sinhalese settlements are represented by two main elements: the *Dagoba* (the temple) and the *Weva* (the lake). These important components were regarded as 'sacred' in order to support and maintain individuals' physical as well as spiritual well-being. The *Weva*, a large collection of water, secured from waterfalls on a forest slope during and after it rains.[5] Similarly, *Banda Pokuna* which can stock two million gallons of water gathered from the monsoon winds from the northeast and southwest that bring rain to Ritigala Mountain, might have helped the hermit monks for the sustenance of their physical and spiritual well-being. Today, under the direction of the Archeological Department, large rectangular stones are being rearranged to restore this huge construction. A stone walkway on the southern bank of the *Banda Pokuna* leads to the entrance of the ancient Buddhist forest monastery after cross a stream.

Stone Walkway

Passing the stream and stone steps, we entered the stone walkway, a unique feature of Ritigala ancient Buddhist forest monastery. The stone walkway is a significant evidence for a piece of the craftsmanship of ancient times. We began the walk to Ritigala ancient Buddhist monastery around 11.00 am. The heat of the midday sun was lessened by the thick canopy of tall trees on both sides of the stone walkway. The stone walkway was constructed with even, foursided slabs of stone that interlocked curbstones that bordered the pathway, and inner edges that had been ground down to make a room for the horizontal slabs.

Stone Walkway

5 Dayaratne, R. (2018). Toward sustainable development: Lessons from vernacular settlements of Sri Lanka, *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, 7(3), 334-346. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foar.2018.04.002

According to historical evidence available on this ancient Buddhist monastery, it had functioned as a center of religious learning and meditation, the monks used this serene pathway through the forest as a long route for their daily meditation practices. Walking along this stone walkway allows us to experience the sacred ambiance that inspires self-reflection as well as serenity that promote mindfulness. Further, the walk through the verdant surrounding signifies the coexistence of nature and spirituality which provides a tranquil experience for both monks and others who seek to deepen and strengthen their spiritual development.

Circular Constructions and *Padhanaghara Pirivena*

The stone walkway had three significant stops, which were circular structures. These structures seem to symbolize distinct phases of a person's spiritual journey toward self-actualization. They may represent varying degrees of understanding or achievement for a person who aspires to gain a basic understanding of life as a transient and an agonising existence that must be conquered.

As one passes each of these circular structures, the stone walkway leads to three remarkable stone sites, a distinctive architectural designs called *Padhanaghara Pirivena* or double platforms that were used by austere monks in this ancient Buddhist Monastery. The sunken courtyards were built below the surrounding areas' ground level. These structures have two elevated platforms oriented east-west and created by retaining stone walls. The western platform is squarer, smaller one with column bases whereas the eastern platform is rectangular, open and lacks column bases. There is a small moat encloses the two platforms which are connected by a stone bridge.

Circular Construction 1

Padhanaghara Pirivena

Old Tree

Forest plays a significant role in preserving the ecological balance. It is considered an integral part of the beliefs of the people and the cultural, social and religious framework of individuals who reside in the periphery. It is believed that forests are important part of people's lives as a result of their interactions

with them.[6] The common belief is that Ritigala forest got its name because of the '*Riti*' trees (*Antiaris Toxicaria*) that grow on the forest's middle slopes. The Ritigala Mountain is home to a wide variety of tall evergreen trees. As one meanders along the stone walkway, one comes across several old trees with incredible roots that evoke the ancient history of bygone times.

After we passed the last stone site, the path led to a large ancient tree with a maze of aboveground roots that solidified into a gigantic trunk. This large old tree had a natural rock formation in front of it. From this rock plain, some visitors to this ancient Buddhist monastery can be seen worshiping. Some of them believe that this location is very special within the Ritigala ancient Buddhist monastery. According to their beliefs, this is because the vibrational frequency there differs from that of other locations.

The Ritigala Ancient Sacred Buddhist monastery is a living evidence of rich historical, cultural and religious legacy of Sri Lanka. The excursion to the natural reserve and its Ancient Buddhist forest monastery was a memorable experience which deepened the understanding of an ancient legendary spiritual realm that connects tangible and spiritual world. The dark shadows pass away but light will remain.

Note : Photographs by the author, Malathie Dissanayake, during the Ritigala excursion on September 26, 2024.

Roots of an Old Tree

The Roots of the Large Ancient Tree

6 Bandara, T. W. (2017). *Environmental Laws and Policies in Sri Lanka*. Dayawansa Jayakody & Company

Exhibiting a Music Archive: Exploring the Contributions of Hindustani Musicians

in conversation

With

Dr. Ranjani Ramachandran

Dr. Ranjani Ramachandran holds a Ph.D in music and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Hindustani Classical Music at Sangit Bhavana, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan in West Bengal, India. She is a well-known vocalist of khyal in the North Indian classical music tradition. She specializes in the Gwalior and Jaipur gharana gayakis. She is a versatile musician equally well versed in other forms such as thumri, dadra and bhajans. Initiated into music by her mother Vijaya, she has been trained by several master musicians of India like Pandit Kashinath Bodas, Dr. Veena Sahasrabuddhe, Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar and Vidushi Girija Devi. Ranjani has performed in major music festivals across India and abroad and is regularly invited to conduct workshops on Hindustani music and has lectured at reputed institutions. She has been recognized with a number of distinguished awards and honours including the Charles Wallace Grant from the UK and the Surmani award. She is empanelled as a performing artiste for ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) and broadcasts regularly on National Radio and Television (AIR and Doordarshan). She has collaborated with ethnomusicologists in India and abroad and has participated in several inter-disciplinary projects with visual artistes.

Santiniketan based Indian vocalist Dr. Ranjani Ramachandran recently curated a multi-media exhibition in Kolkata, India, focusing on the work of three prominent North Indian classical khyal vocalists, Pandit Shankar Shripad Bodas, Pandit Kashinath Bodas and Dr. Veena Sahasrabuddhe.

Can you tell us about the *Khyal* form in Hindustani Music?

Khyal, meaning imagination, is one of the most prominent vocal music genres in Hindustani music today, and it provides ample scope for improvisation and individual creativity of the practitioners. The *khyal* form includes a number of distinct musical styles known as *gharanas*, and musicians in successive generations within every *gharana* bring new perspectives and contribute towards sustaining the *gharana* stylistics. A typical *khyal* performance involves singing a composition in slow (*vilambit*) tempo set to a *raga* (melodic mode) and *tala* (rthythmic mode) followed by another composition in the same raga but faster (*drut*) in tempo. The compositions are expanded through several techniques such as *alaap* (unmetered and metered improvisation) and *taan* (virtuosic runs).

Please tell us about the recent exhibition on musicians and your inspiration behind this curation?

North Indian classical music, more commonly known as Hindustani Music, has a rich history and legacy of musicians who have engaged in multi-faceted roles, and the notion of practice is not limited to performance alone. This exhibition was curated to commemorate the 75th birth anniversary of my guru and well known *khyal* exponent Vidushi Dr. Veena Sahasrabuddhe. I also thought about bringing together the contributions of the larger legacy that she belonged to and hence included the musical contributions of her father Pt. Shankar Shripad Bodas and her elder brother Pt. Kashinath Bodas. All the three musicians embraced multiple roles of performer, teacher, composer and author and considered each of these roles as mutually reinforcing. They were dedicated gurus and acknowledged the role of institutional music education.

The multi-media exhibition entitled 'The Bodas Legacy: Exploring the musical contributions of Pandit Shankar Shripad Bodas, Pandit Kashinath Bodas and Vidushi Dr. Veena Sahasrabuddhe' was organized from 10-14 September 2024 at the Jadunath Bhavan Museum and Resource Centre JBMRC (a unit of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta CSSSC). It was also a collaboration with visual artist pedagogue Sanchayan Ghosh who provided

the exhibition design and gave a dynamic visual interpretation to the exhibition materials. The exhibition was inaugurated by eminent scholar and critic Sri Samik Bandyopadhyay and senior sarod exponent Pt. Anindya Banerjee. Anindya *ji* gave a historical account of Gwalior gharana roots and practitioners in Bengal and Samik *ji* spoke about his experiences as a Hindustani music listener and music culture in post-independent India.

The exhibition featured a variety of archival materials (in fifteen specially designed panels) such as family photographs, photos of old notation notebooks in different scripts (handwritten by Veena *ji*, Shankar Shripad Bodas *ji* and Kashinath *ji*) and excerpts of musicological writings and compositions. Exclusive spaces within the exhibition area were designed, for listening to rare audio and video recordings sourced from private collections as well as the public archives of Dr. Ashok Da Ranade Archives in Pune and Durham University in the UK.

The exhibition was partially funded through a grant from the Indian Council of Social Science Research-Eastern Regional Centre (ICSSR-ERC), Kolkata and supported by Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan.

Can you briefly tell us something about the musicians who have been featured in this exhibition?

Gwalior *Gharana* is one of the earliest *gharanas* in *khyal* vocalism, tracing its roots to Ustad Ghulam Rasool. Ustads Haddu Khan, Hassu Khan, and Natthu Khan, who were descendants of the founding family of the *gharana*, taught extensively within and outside the family and contributed towards propagating the Gwalior *gharana gayaki* (musical style). Pt. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, one of the most prominent luminaries of the Gwalior *gharana*, was a disciple of Pt. Balkrishnabua Icchalkaranjikar, who, in turn, belonged to the teaching lineage of Ustads Haddu and Hassu Khan. The Bodas family traces its roots to Pt. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar.

Pt. Shankar Shripad Bodas (1900-1986) was a direct disciple of Pt. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. At the behest of his guru, Bodas, born in Sangli Maharashtra, made it his life's mission to popularize and propagate Hindustani classical music in Kanpur, Uttar

Pradesh. He taught students of all ages and devised innovative methods to introduce classical music, particularly to children. He was one of the pioneers to include music at the graduate and post-graduate levels in several institutions in Kanpur and co-founded organizations like Sangeet Samaj in 1927 and Gandhi Sangeet Vidyalaya in 1948 and invited eminent practitioners to perform, thereby establishing Kanpur as an important cultural hub. He also frequently contributed articles on music in Hindi, Marathi, and English in several journals like Sangeet Kala Vihar.

Veena *ji*'s elder brother Pt. Kashinath Bodas (1935-1995), was an accomplished vocalist of the Gwalior gharana and a brilliant composer. Trained by his father, he was deeply influenced by Pt. Kumar Gandharva's vocalization and Pt. D.V. Paluskar's emotional appeal. Gifted with an exceptional voice, well-rounded and weighty, Kashinath *ji*'s *gayaki* was a fresh interpretation of his training, presented with a sense of ease and effortlessness. He made significant contributions as a composer and his compositions spanned a wide range of compositional forms including *khyal*, *tarana*, *geet* and *bhajan*. He set to music the works of several contemporary Hindi poets.

Dr. Veena Sahasrabuddhe (1948-2016) was a legendary *khyal* vocalist of the Gwalior gharana and one of the most authentic voices of Hindustani music. Besides training from her father and brother, her other mentors included Pt. Balwantrai Bhatt, Pt. Vasant Thakar and Pt. Gajananbua Joshi. Apart from *khyal*, she was an exponent of *Tarana* (a compositional form comprising of syllables borrowed from instrumental and percussion music like *dani*, *tadani*, *yalala*, *dir*, *dir*, *daani*) and was also well known for her soulful renditions of sagun and nirguni bhajans. As a prolific performer with more than forty labels to her credit, she also taught music at several institutions like SNDT Women's University in Pune and for brief periods at IIT Bombay as adjunct Professor and IIT Kanpur as Artist-in -Residence. She published 'Nad-Ninad', a book of notated compositions of her family and 'Uttaradhikar', a compilation of writings authored by herself, her brother and father.

Several members of the extended Bodas family were eminent practitioners and scholars of Hindustani music. Pt. Shankar Shripad Bodas was the eldest in a family of two brothers and seven sisters, several of whom were deeply engaged in music. His brother, Pt. Laxmanrao Bodas was also a disciple of Pt. V.D. Paluskar, and established a music school in Karachi. Others like tabla player Pt. Anant Bodas, who lived and worked in Siliguri, West Bengal, was vocalist Pt. Narayan Bodas, and eminent scholar musician and ethnomusicologist Dr. Ashok Da. Ranade made significant contributions. The exhibition also included one panel dedicated to the work of the members of the extended Bodas family.

How was the response to the exhibition?

Over the course of five days, the exhibition and the concert on the concluding day, received a very good response and was well attended by a diverse group of audiences including historians, scholars, ethnomusicologists, music and dance practitioners, visual artists and students. It was heartening to see people from different walks of life spending quality time listening to the various archival recordings, and also sharing their own personal associations with the musicians featured in the exhibition.

As a senior disciple of Dr. Veena Sahasrabuddhe and Pt. Kashinath Bodas and as someone squarely rooted in this tradition, the exhibition culminated with a specially curated concert

by me on 14 September 2024 at JBMRC, where I sang compositions of my gurus in Raga Dhani (compositions in Rupak and teentala), Raga Marwa (*a Tarana* in *madhyalaya teentala* followed by a *bandish* in *adachoutala*), Tarana in drut ektala in Raga Miyan Malhar and two nirguni Kabir Bhajans. I was ably accompanied by Shri Ashoke Mukherjee on the tabla and Shri Gourab Chatterjee on the harmonium.

The exhibition provided a close-up look at the transmission of the Gwalior gayaki within a family through many different kinds of sources and adopted a fresh approach towards the representation of gharanas, lineages and tradition, and musical memory.

What is your personal journey as a musician?

I am a Tamilian born North Indian classical khyal vocalist. Initiated into music by my mother, Vijaya, I formally trained with Pt Kashinath Bodas in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, North India, and continued my musical studies with Dr. Veena Sahasrabuddhe in Pune, Maharashtra. I received a resident scholarship to the prestigious ITC Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata where I trained under Pt Ulhas Kashalkar. Apart from *khyal* my repertoire also includes semi classical genres like thumri, dadra and bhajans. My doctoral research focused on studying the stylistics diversity within the Gwalior gharana.

Along with an active career as a performing artist, I explore different ways to share music. I am currently teaching in the Music Department at Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan India and also conduct music appreciation workshops in institutions across the country. Considering my own journey as a cultural traveler, this exhibition, apart from being a tribute to my gurus, also becomes an extension of my research into looking at ways in which musicians have embraced diverse cultures and multiple roles in Hindustani music performance practice.

David Paynter's Boys with Flowers: Representing the Male Body in the Sri Lankan Painting

By

Sewwandika Fernando

Sewwandika Fernando graduated from the University of the Visual & Performing Arts, Colombo with a first degree in art history. She received her Master of Philosophy in art history in 2020 from the University of Jaffna, with a thesis titled 'The Representation of the Male Body in Sri Lankan Art: An Analytical Study based on the Works by David Paynter'. She currently teaches at the Department of History & Art Theory, University of the Visual & Performing Arts. She shares her expertise as a freelance researcher, translator, and amateur art historian. Her research interests are 20th-century art, the male body in paintings, and sexuality and art.

Positioning

This is an attempt to analyse the local male bodies and their representations based on the selected works by a prominent Sri Lankan artist, David Paynter. His affinity for flowers or lotuses is very much the dominant character in his paintings. He painted boys/male bodies with flowers, especially lotus flowers. These paintings can be categorized into two major types: portraits and figure compositions. Furthermore, I want to have a discussion on the only self-portrait done by David Paynter. While he has done many commissioned portraits, he has done one self-portrait in his lifetime. Even in his portraits, he continuously painted lotuses as an image of the represented character. For instance, I have selected paintings; *Self Portrait with Lotuses*, the portrait of *Captain Lancelot Roland John Clennell Wilkinson*, two paintings of *Plucking Lotuses?*, *L'a Press Midi*, and *The Offering*. These sitters were formed according to the artist's perspective and his desire. Sensuous nudes-sitting or standing, romantic dreamy rocky grounds and backgrounds, delicate faces, hands, legs, hair, and silent lips make them more languorous and docile. Therefore, this article examines the aesthetic reaction of David Paynter's art associated with the depiction of the male body; it points out the most important crucial remarks to make links between the male body and its representation, especially that the sexuality in the representation of the male body is what Paynter's interest, therefore he intended to desexualise the

female body and he erased its desirability to the spectator.

Boys and Flowers

He painted two portraits with lotus flowers[1] and some other compositions listed below are inclusive of male figures, flora and fauna:

1. *L'a pres midi* – 1934 (plate 2)
2. Portrait of *Captain Lancelot Roland John Clennell Wilkinson* – 1954 (plate 3)
3. *Self-Portrait with Lotuses* – 1927 (plate 4)
4. *The Offering* – 1926 (plate 5)
5. *Title not known ii* (*representing boys plucking lotuses*) – 1969 (plate 6)
6. *Title not known iii* (*representing boys plucking lotuses*) - Date not known (plate 7)

Both portraits represent male bodies, where one of them is a *Self-Portrait with Lotuses* depicting the artist's body and the other a portrait of *Captain Lancelot Roland John Clennell Wilkinson*, a British army captain who served in the 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards. Another portrait, *Lam Yeng Weng*, was painted in an indoor setting with flowers. Other paintings portray different oriental landscapes (Biblical scenes) containing various types of flora and fauna. It is also important to remember here that Paynter never painted portraits of women with lotuses (*For an example Maureen*, *Margaret Rawlings and Nepalese Mother* and *Daughter*, *Nepali Girls*, *Mrs. Sushila Jayaram* and *The Sitar Player*).

There are two paintings in which David Paynter included lotuses: both represent village scenes - a group of boys plucking lotuses (*Title is not known ii* and *Title is not known iii*), all containing different poses, actions, facial expressions, characteristics, clothes, and compositions. The seven boys represented in the first painting (Plate 6) look as though they are meditating as they pluck flowers in the lake.

Similar to the painting in which these boys pluck lotuses, mural paintings in Sittanavasal, Tamil Nadu, depict a pond full of lotus flowers, ducks, swans, fish, and some other animals that reflect life in the water body. In this impressive location, the Jain monks are plucking lotuses wearing only loin clothes, carrying lotus flowers that evoke similar scenes of the boys plucking lotus. These young monks seem to be enjoying plucking lotuses, and some of these figures show a very close resemblance to those in the mural of A*walōkithēshwara Bōdhisathva* in Polonnaruwa, the Tiwanka Image house or the *Bōdhisathva Padmapāni* in the Ajantha Caves in India (these figures also hold lotus flowers in their right hand). These male bodies (painted by David Paynter) are youthful and effeminate (The boy in '*The Offering*' also holds a small flower in a gentle and effeminate manner).

Flowers as Metaphors

Some artists like to represent their models with flowers: Female bodies with flowers painted by Albert Joseph Moore[2] and Edward Burne-Jones[3] are also intended for the sexual pleasure of the male spectator. These painted women have become a representation of the aesthetic contribution to the fantasy that the artist had envisioned. Some are sitting in flower gardens plucking flowers or sleeping on thorn bushes or flower beds. They symbolise the need of the artist to escape from contemporary life and occupy a fantasy world (Collins 2012: 7). These women in the paintings are very sensual. Not in exactly the same manner, however, Paynter attempts to achieve this sensuality by painting young males with flowers. Caravaggio's[4] painting *Lute Player* which contains an adolescent with a bunch of flowers, and Picasso's *A Boy with a Pipe*, which is of a boy with flowers in his hair as a headdress (the background of the painting is also filled with various kinds of painted flowers and most of them are roses) are some of the examples. All these boys are very effeminate because they have a deep affiliation to the flowers in each painting. Wearing flowers in their tresses, their effeminate faces encounter the viewer in a transgendered or homosexual

1 The symbol of the lotus spread through Iran to Indian and Buddhist customs (Rezania, 2011: 309-312). The meanings of the lotus in different cultures and religions are different, but most of them emphasize the divinity of their gods. The lotus represented the center of the head of the God Nefer-Tem, and symbolizes divinity (Hayes n.d.: 182-184). Moreover, many Hindu gods are depicted sitting or standing on a lotus flower.

2 Albert Joseph Moore was an English painter from the ninetieth century. He painted mostly women in everyday life under the influence of the Art Nouveau movement.

3 Edward Burne-Jones was a Pre-Raphaelite English painter from the nineteenth century.

4 Michelangelo Merisi Da Caravaggio – An Italian Baroque painter from the sixteenth century.

gaze, another perspective of the male body.

Griselda Pollock describes the depictions of women and flowers in *Vision and Difference*. According to her, Dante Gabriel Rossetti[5] used various types of flowers in his paintings (Pollock 2003: 186-187). In the painting titled *Venus Verticordia*, "the figure of Venus rises out of a bower of rampant roses and blood-striped honeysuckles." Pollock suggests that flowers have often been used as a metaphor for women's sexuality or their genitals, and these flowers function as a metaphor which simultaneously recognises and relocates these sexual connotations that cover or make the sexualised parts of the body. While disproportionately covering the genital area, the flowers draw attention to what is concealed and increase the anxiety of the male viewer. The lotus flower is also a symbol of pleasure (Fărcaş' & others 2015: No Page).[6] There was a belief in ancient Roman culture, that the boy who drank the extract of the lotus flower or Nymphaea[7] crushed in vinegar for ten consecutive days would turn into a eunuch.[8] Ancient cultural reading of the lotus flower was therefore linked to transgender boys who have sexual feelings for men. This context fits well with the concept of the effeminacy of the male body, including eunuchs as effeminised males. Even, in Buddhism and Hinduism, the goddess of Prajna-Pāramitā is represented as a male figure with lotus flowers and erect breasts. Although the body structure and the face are definitely masculine, the full breasts indicate a transgendered figure.

Paynter makes a connection between the male figure and lotuses, as is done in the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, who represents the male nude with a bouquet of calla-lilies. Paynter's representations of male bodies with flowers or lotuses are representations of sexual pleasure involving the feminised male. Therefore, Paynter's flower boys are wearing colourful underwear while plucking flowers, relaxing at the beach or fishing, which indicates that they are, unconditionally, unavoidably and undeniably effeminate and freely available for erotic consumption.

These male bodies have a stronger effect, which makes these flowers and lotus flowers more effeminate. Furthermore, Paynter emphasises the lotuses and characterises the male personality underneath flowers. The male body of Paynter is also a vehicle for voyeurism and fetishism. Male figures are similarly represented as poetic or romantic, and this essence of poetry and romance must have come from Paynter's impressions of classical and neo-classical art during his visits to Europe. Hence, David Paynter painted his models as sensual and effeminised invoking shades of sexual desire and homoeroticism, where the representation of homosexuality was only confined to local (Ceylonese) male models.

Paynter's Works and Idealisation of the Male Body

Paynter represented nudes in landscapes where they were least expected and in each representation, he dramatically harmonized the nudes with the local landscape. Several points have been emphasized in this article: Firstly, Paynter highlights the male body through its nakedness. Secondly, the nude male figures are vulnerable because they are naked and all the representations and spaces serve as a framework for the portrayal of nakedness and vulnerability. Thirdly, David Paynter painted his models as sensual and effeminised invoking shades of sexual desire and homoeroticism, where the representation of homosexuality was only confined to local (Ceylonese) male models.

Paynter's works of art clearly reveal his own convictions and beliefs, especially the idealisation of the male body. These representations of male bodies provide a pleasurable visual experience for the male viewer. The painter did capture the physical structure of the

5 Dante Gabriel Rossetti was a poet and a painter– the founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

6 Fărcaş' and others are researchers who published their research in the research gate website. The title of the work is The Symbolism of Garden and Orchard Plants and their Representation in Paintings.

7 The word "nymphaeaceae" and "nymphaea" come from the ancient Greek word "nymphaeacae" and the Latin word "nymphaea" (Fărcaş' & others 2015: No Page).

8 An eunuch is a castrated human male (Britannica, 2002). Eunuchs were employed in Asia as guards and servants in harems since they were considered the most suitable guards for concubines in a king"s palace.

male, but he neglected to portray the masculinity of the local male. In other words, these male bodies (models) may have been more manly or heroic, but Paynter did not examine or find these qualities in the bodies of his models because his gaze transformed these bodies into effeminate, which evoked the sexual desire in the male viewer. The artist used lotus flowers and a variety of floral elements to feminise his male bodies. Though these bodies are male, they become feminised through the artist's gaze, because the artist embodies the masculine characteristics of dominance and control.

Plates

Photographer unknown, David Paynter's photograph, Date not known, Paynter Home

Plate 2

David Paynter, L'a pres midi, 1934, Oil on canvas, Private collection

Plate 3

David Paynter, Captain Lancelot Roland John Clennel Wilkinson, 1934, Oil on canvas, Place not known.

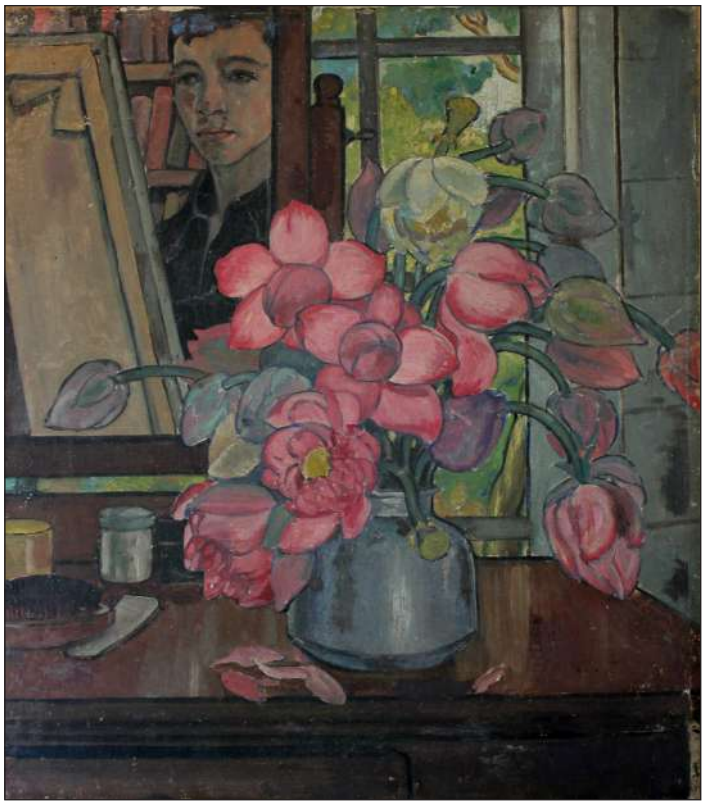


Plate 4

David Paynter, Self Portrait with Lotuses, 1927, Oil on canvas, University of the Visual & Performing Arts' collection, Colombo 07

Plate 5

David Paynter, The Offering, 1926, oil on canvas, University of the Visual & Performing Arts' collection, Colombo 07

Plate 6

David Paynter, Title no known ii, 1969, Oil on canvas, Private collection

Plate 7

David Paynter, Title no known iii, date not known, Oil on canvas, Private collection

A Travel through the Narratives of History

By

Dr. Lopamudra Maitra

Lopamudra is an interdisciplinary university teacher, researcher and author. Her expertise is in research and documentation of developmental work, history and popular culture. She has worked extensively in relation to history, popular culture and communication and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of India and South Asia (especially oral traditions and narratives). Lopamudra has authored seven books from reputed international publishing houses, including Routledge (UK), Aleph Book Company (Rupa Publications Ltd), New Delhi, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS), Govt of India, Bhopal and Doshor Publications, Kolkata. From 2021 onwards, Lopamudra has also been an invited panellist across several international literature festivals across India as an author and also as a translator. Lopamudra has an experience of two decades of teaching at various universities in India and South Asia. Presently, she is a Visiting Faculty at NID (National institute of Design), Gandhinagar, Gujarat- where she teaches Visual Anthropology, Research Methodology, Indian Culture, Oral Traditions and Heritage. She has represented India at various prestigious international conferences, including SAARC conference, Sri Lanka (2014- as official nominee of Govt of India), UNESCO conferences on Intangible Cultural Heritage (2019 and 2020). Lopamudra has been a visiting faculty at various universities in India and Sri Lanka. Lopamudra continues to write columns in various international dailies in her areas of expertise.

Far from the jargons of a structured academic discipline, if one tends to look into the basic ethos about the life that surrounds us, it will be a surprise encounter of a glorious mix of events, incidents and occurrences. These connects us across the narrow and compartmentalised limitations of geographical boundaries and somewhere, often, there lies a strain of connectivity amidst this myriad palette, which leaves faint marks of colour, even long after the richness of the shades have slightly faded. These faint marks are the connecting narrative and the historiography. As an anthropologist, an author and a columnist, it is indeed always a fulfilling journey to travel across this rich spectrum of colours and delve deep into these narratives of society, culture, religion and most importantly, of life, across the Indian sub-continent and the broader spectrum of South Asia- much parts of which remains unknown and least explored. With an experience of two decades as an university teacher, an ethnographic researcher and a writer, my books speaks about these lesser known aspects of the Indian subcontinent and of South Asia.

On the onset, I would like to introduce some significant parts of some of these lesser known narratives, which connects us throughout the regions of South Asia. I would like to mention Dr. Jamini Sen- a search that took me to the offices of several newspapers and archives, but had little success in gathering information. It is thus, not

surprising that people knew nothing about the person. She was a distinguished doctor, who had worked for a considerable number of years in Nepal, where she even attended to the Nepal royal family, infact, she is one of the first women doctors of the country- trained in modern medicines. A Bengali from Kolkata, Jamini had acquired her LMS and MB from Calcutta Medical College in 1894 at the age of 25. Geraldine Forbes mentioned in her book titled- '*Women in Colonial India- Essays on Politics, Medicine and Historiography*' (p-113-114) that she was the only Bengali girl in her batch. She won a distinction in her 4th year with a first in *Materia Medica*. She contributed immensely towards the profession in Nepal and also spent a major part of her life there, where she worked at the newly found Female Wing of the Bir Hospital, apart from attending to the royal family.

Jamini had moved to Nepal in 1899 on Dr. Kadambini Ganguly's recommendation and remained there for ten years. Dr. Kadambini is a well-known name for being the first woman doctor of Asia with an Asian degree, who was also a regular attending physician of the royal family of Nepal. Though we know about Dr. Kadambini, yet, little is known about Dr. Jamini and her work at the Bir Hospital. Dr. Jamini was also a favourite of the Queen, who insisted that she should stay back in Nepal, however, she returned back to Calcutta after a service of a decade and the demise of the Queen Mother.

The photograph from a display at Serampore College in West Bengal- of the Sri Lankan students

There is another interesting example from the archives of Serampore College, in Serampore, around 24 kms from the city of Kolkata in West Bengal. This is a copy of a monochrome photograph, showing few newly arrived students at the hostel of the college. These students are the first arrivals from Sri Lanka to the college and they can be seen to be dressed in both their traditional clothes as well as western suits, standing in front of a horse-drawn carriage, while their suitcases are seen to be piled on top of the carriage. The original photograph is part of the Angus Library and Archive of Oxford and the date of the photograph is marked as 'early 1900s'. These first arrivals from Sri Lanka were to the College of Theology. The tradition continued and saw many other Sinhalese students study at the same place in later years. This College of Theology is however, only a small example as several other colleges and universities across India, have seen many students from across Sri Lanka across more than a century now.

Moving from the pages of history, I would like to mention an interesting connection through the conduits of oral traditions and intangible cultural heritage. A popular story in folklore is about a foolish man, who was a self-styled guru and a teacher and his five disciplines. The teacher sets out to find a few students as he felt he has too much of knowledge to share. Thus, he manages to find five ardent and devoted students. The stories revolve around the antics of the foolish teacher and his disciples. The original story is centred around a teacher – Gooroo Noodle from the folktales of South India –which was written and published by an Italian missionary in Chennai in the mid-eighteenth century in Tamil. Within a few decades, the popularity of this Tamil book encouraged several translations. It was first translated into English by Benjamin Babington (in 1915) and, soon after, this

led to translations into other regional languages of the region. Thus, it became *Niret Gurur Kahini* (The Story of Niret Guru) in Bengali and *Mahadaenamutta Sinhala Katandara* (The Stories of Mahadana Muththa) in Sinhala. Thus, this particular erudite teacher came to be known through his many names across the Indian subcontinent in various folklore. He is known as Mahadana Muththa in Sri Lanka; Guru Paramartan, Gooroo Noodle, and Guru Simpleton across Southern and Southeastern India; and Niret Guru in and around and beyond Bengal in Eastern India. Having their origin in the folklore of Southern India, the set of stories travelled across the region and moved south and reached the shores of Sri Lanka. The stories also travelled north and moved through southeastern parts of the Indian subcontinent toward Eastern and Northeastern India. Folklore follows an interesting feature of revolving within and connecting spaces- within a proximity, which also speaks about definite socio-cultural contexts and represents specific time and periods. A closer study of the discipline of oral traditions thus, aids a lot in understanding a historiography of a region.

This book examines the historical and socio-cultural connections across the SAARC region, with a special focus on the relationship between India and Sri Lanka.

With history, the region of South Asia has grown to be connected through narratives, which basically speaks about the lives across geographical boundaries and through time. Having got opportunities to explore some of these fascinating places across South Asia, I try to highlight some of these through my books on and about South Asia. My books focuses on narratives of India and South Asia and on history, popular culture and communication and a large section of this is also about intangible cultural heritage. I have put together 23 essays in my book '*India, Sri Lanka and the SAARC region- History, Popular Culture and Heritage*' (Routeledge, UK, 2021). This book examines the historical and socio-cultural connections across the SAARC region, with a special focus on the relationship between India and Sri Lanka. It investigates hitherto unexplored narratives of history, popular culture and intangible heritage in the region to identify the cultural parallels and intersections that link them together. In doing so, the volume moves away from an organised and authorised heritage discourse and encourages possibilities of new understandings and re-interpretations of cross-cultural communication and its sub-texts. Based on original ethnographic work, the book discusses themes such as cultural ties between India and Sri Lanka, exchanges between Arthur C. Clarke in Sri Lanka and Satyajit Ray in India, cultural connectivity reflected through mythology and folklore, the influence of Rabindranath Tagore on modern dance in Sri Lanka, the introduction of railways in Sri Lanka, narrative scrolls and masked dance forms across SAARC countries, Hindi cinema as the pioneer of cultural connectivity, and women's writing across South Asia.

I began by tracing of the British colonial times through the waterways and how these helped to connect the two countries together.

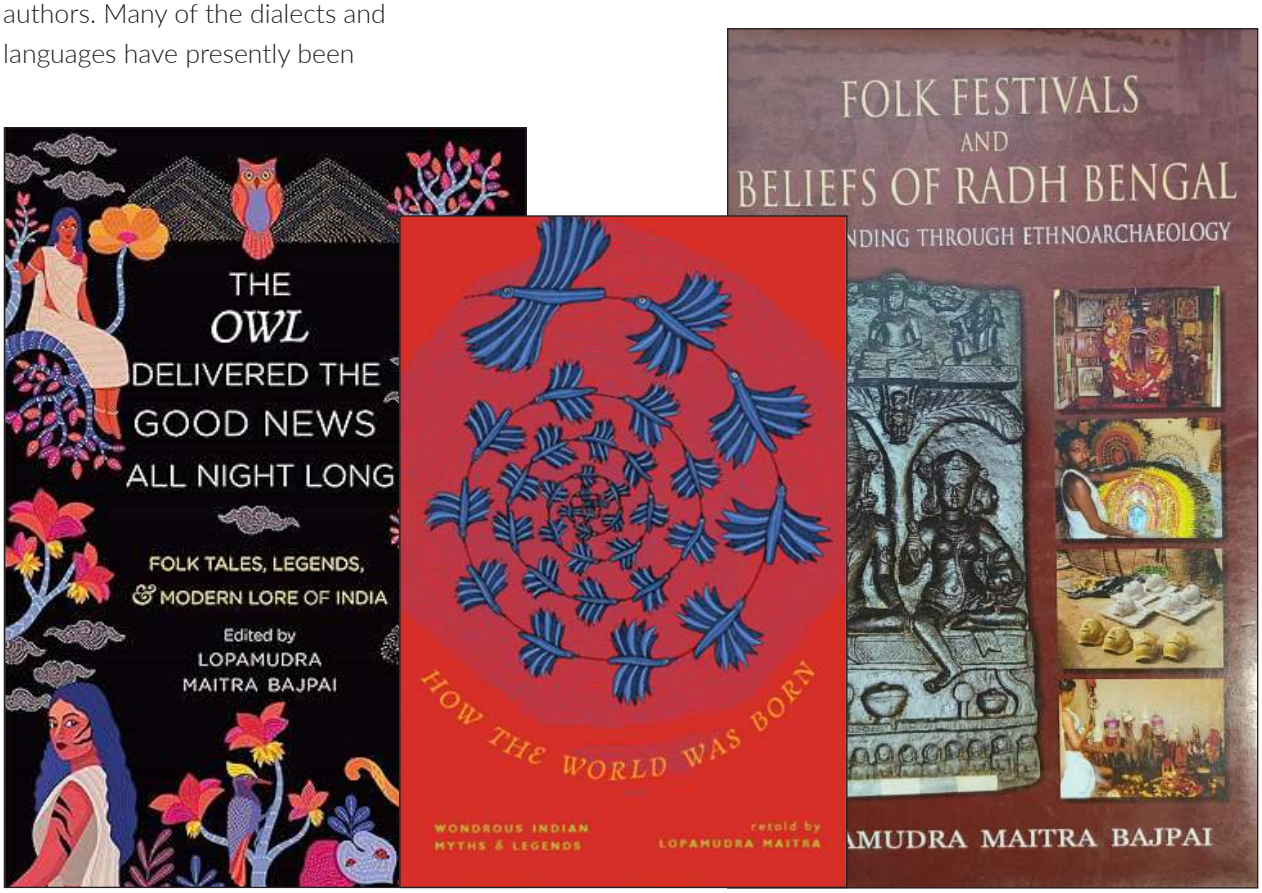
I further explored the area of research across India and Sri Lanka in my book, titled, '*Stories of Colonial Architecture- Kolkata-Colombo*' (Doshor Publications Ltd, 2019, Kolkata, India). In this, I explored how the British public spaces in Kolkata (in India) and Colombo (in Sri Lanka), helped to chart out a specific lifestyle, which gradually saw a spread across the country. I began by tracing of the British colonial times through the waterways and how these helped to connect the two countries together. Colonial times witnessed several new constructions- giving shape to new spaces and interactions. This included both public and private spaces. This work focuses on specific public spaces from the colonial times across the regions of Kolkata (West Bengal, India) and Colombo (Western Province, Sri Lanka). Various similarities lie between these two cities pertaining to the British colonial times of the respective countries as the socio-cultural fabric slowly witnessed many changes within. Numerous public constructions across both cities stand till date, as sentinels to weave a communication of several stories of yore. The work aims to help

in spreading awareness and an understanding about the need for a balance between history and modernity- a continuity from the past that helps to find answers to many questions in the present. This book was the result of a research grant by the India-Sri Lanka Foundation of the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka and witnessed extensive fieldworks across the cities of Colombo and Kolkata.

Furthering my work in oral traditions of the Indian sub-continent, I worked extensively across four years for my book '*The owl delivered the good news all night long- Folktales, legends and modern lore of India*' (Aleph Book Company- Rupa Publications Ltd, New Delhi, 2021). With 108 stories from all 28 states and 8 union territories of India, I worked with 52 languages and dialects and 60 translators and authors. Many of the dialects and languages have presently been declared extinct or endangered and there are numerous languages which, till date, do not have a script. This book was a dedicated effort on my part to represent the linguistic diversity of the nation- which nevertheless has a strain of common tie.

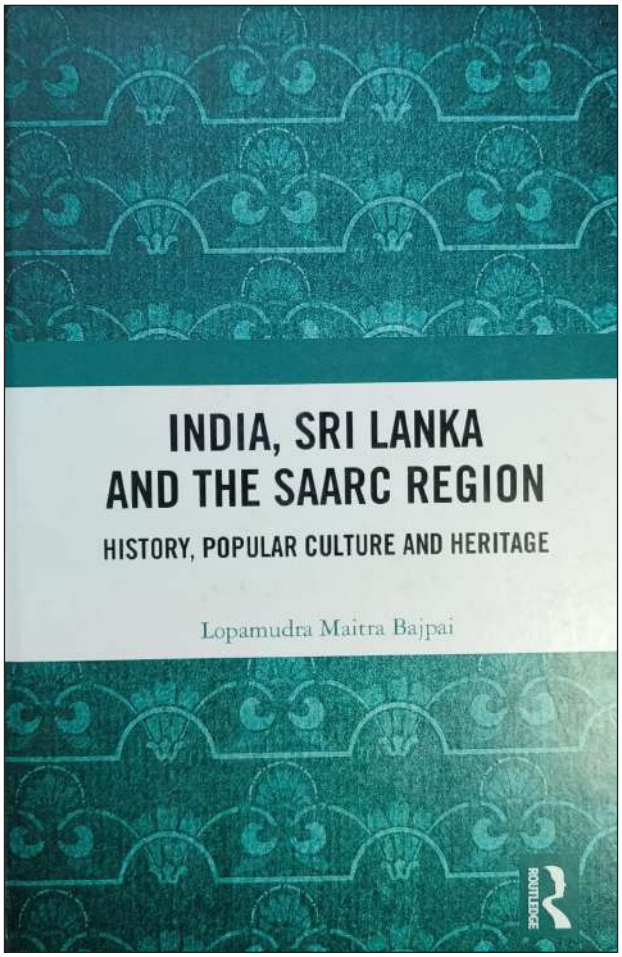
In continuation with my work with oral narratives is *my most recent book- 'How the world was born- Wondrous Indian myths and legends*' (Aleph Book Company- Rupa Publications Ltd, New Delhi, 2024). This also has 108 stories from 7 different geographical divisions of India and covers the length and breadth of the nation through various spiritual and religious beliefs, including various ethnic communities. Many of the communities, dialects and languages presently, have been declared extinct in official sources. An important part of my work with communities of India is also part of my book- '*Folk Festivals and Beliefs of Radh Bengal- Understanding Through Ethnoarchaeology*' (Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal, Govt of India and Kaveri Books, New Delhi, 2022). This is a detailed study of the survival and continuity of folk religion, rites and rituals in the western region of Bengal, referred to as Radh Bengal, especially of the dictricts of Purulia, Bankura and West Mednipur and includes extensive field reports and data about different festivals from across the region.

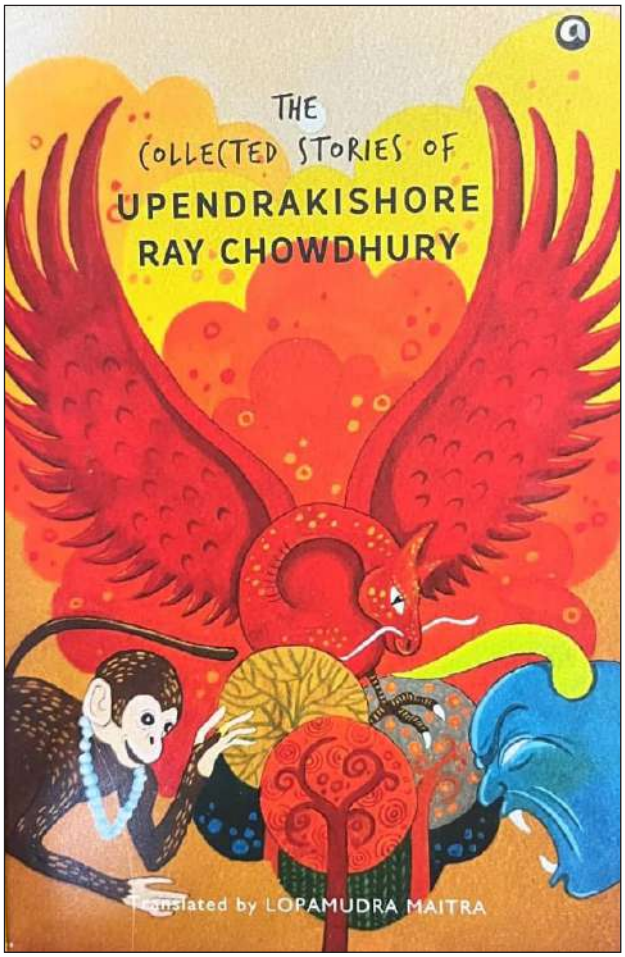
Over the years, my work has also included significantly contributing towards columns in various leading English dailies of South Asia and also an effort to translate various old Bengali works into English and this began with my first work of translation-



'*Collected stories of Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury*' (Aleph Book Company- Rupa Publications Ltd, New Delhi, 2023), which is a complete translation of all 63 stories of two Bengali works of noted author, illustrator and publisher- Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, who was the father of noted writer, poet and artist- Sukumar Ray and the grandfather of auteur, Bharat Ratna. These two Bengali books by Upendrakishore are '*Tuntunir Boi*' and '*Golpomala*' and were published in 1910 and 1911 and are still popular the world over as representing an important part of the folklore of Bengal and most significantly, an erstwhile section of the Indian sub-continent.

As my work as an academic, a columnist and an author continues, I hope to work further in a variety of other areas which will reconnect various dots to guide a path through unknown labyrinths of narratives and history.





Transcending beyond Frames

A Conversation on Capturing the Art of Jute via the Lens of Documentary Film

With

M. A. Malak Milon

M. A. Malak Milon is a photographer, documentary film maker currently working as senior photographer at the Bangladesh National Museum. He holds a Master's and Bachelor's Degree in Social Science, Department of TV, Film and Photography from Dhaka University. Over the years he has directed numerous films, including his notable works such as, Curzon Haller Itikotha, Portrait, and as director of photography in Protiman. These films have garnered attention for their powerful storytelling and their ability to throw light on important societal issues.

Interviewed by: Harishnath Nadarajah, Programme-Assistant, SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Mr. M. A. Malak Milon, a Documentary Film Maker from the People's Republic of Bangladesh has been nominated to make a Documentary Film in 2024 under SAARC Cultural Centre's programme on Digital Documentation of Best Cultural Practices of the SAARC Region. The Documentary Film explores the significance of Rushes, Reeds and Natural Fibers with the aim to underscore the deep connection between traditional handicrafts and the sustainable livelihoods of the communities in their production. In this conversation, Mr. M. A. Malak Milon shares insights into the creative direction of the documentary film offering a glimpse into how the vision is coming to life, and milestones achieved so far.

Could you share a bit about some of your most notable works and how they nourished your career and the way you approach storytelling?

My journey as a filmmaker began with my first documentary '*Karzon Haller Itikotha*'. Following that, I worked on '*Protiman*' as a researcher and DOP. One of the most significant milestones in my career was contributing as a researcher and production manager for the National Film Award-winning documentary '*Bangabandhu and Dhaka University*'. Alongside these, I also directed two short films, '*Potrait*' and '*Meeting Period*' and had the opportunity to collaborate on several other documentary and fiction films.

Each film has been a transformative learning experience. While working on '*Protiman*' I uncovered the untold inner struggles of an individual which deepened my understanding of personal storytelling. In another work, '*Karzon Haller Itikotha*' gave me the chance to explore our nation's rich history and cultural heritage. These experiences, particularly being part of a National Film Award-winning project, have profoundly shaped my storytelling techniques and enriched my career as a filmmaker.

What made you gravitate towards the Art of Jute making under the theme of Rush, Reeds and Natural Fibers for the digital documentation of best cultural practices in the SAARC Region?

The art of jute making holds a deep connection to Bangladesh's identity and cultural heritage. It is a natural fiber that has shaped the livelihoods of millions in different ways and has been an integral part of our traditions for generations. Jute is called 'Golden Fiber' of Bangladesh. When I came across the theme Rush, Reeds, and Natural Fibers it resonated deeply with the rich history and versatility of jute crafts in this region.

I wanted to showcase not only the craftsmanship but also the stories of the artisans who preserve this heritage.

Image Courtesy: Jute Fiber by Biswarup Ganguly - Own work, CC BY 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17426286

Documenting this under the SAARC Cultural Center's initiative provided a unique opportunity to celebrate a sustainable and culturally significant art form that represents both Bangladesh and the broader SAARC Region. It's not just about the craft; it's about preserving a legacy that connects us to our roots while inspiring future generations.

As the documentary explores the art of jute, how would it reflect the South Asian culture and the community engaged in the craft of Jute?

Jute is one of Bangladesh's most significant cash crops, with a rich cultural and economic history rooted in the country. Its legacy extends beyond Bangladesh, encompassing the entire region where it has established a deep connection with the culture and people of South Asia. Additionally, the commercialization of jute crafts, the transfer of human resources, and advancements in modern communication systems are fostering stronger interrelations centered around this industry. We tried to showcase this cultural and community engagement through this documentary.

Now that we understand the central idea at the heart of your documentary film, could you walk us through the narrative style and the kind of story telling approach you would employ?

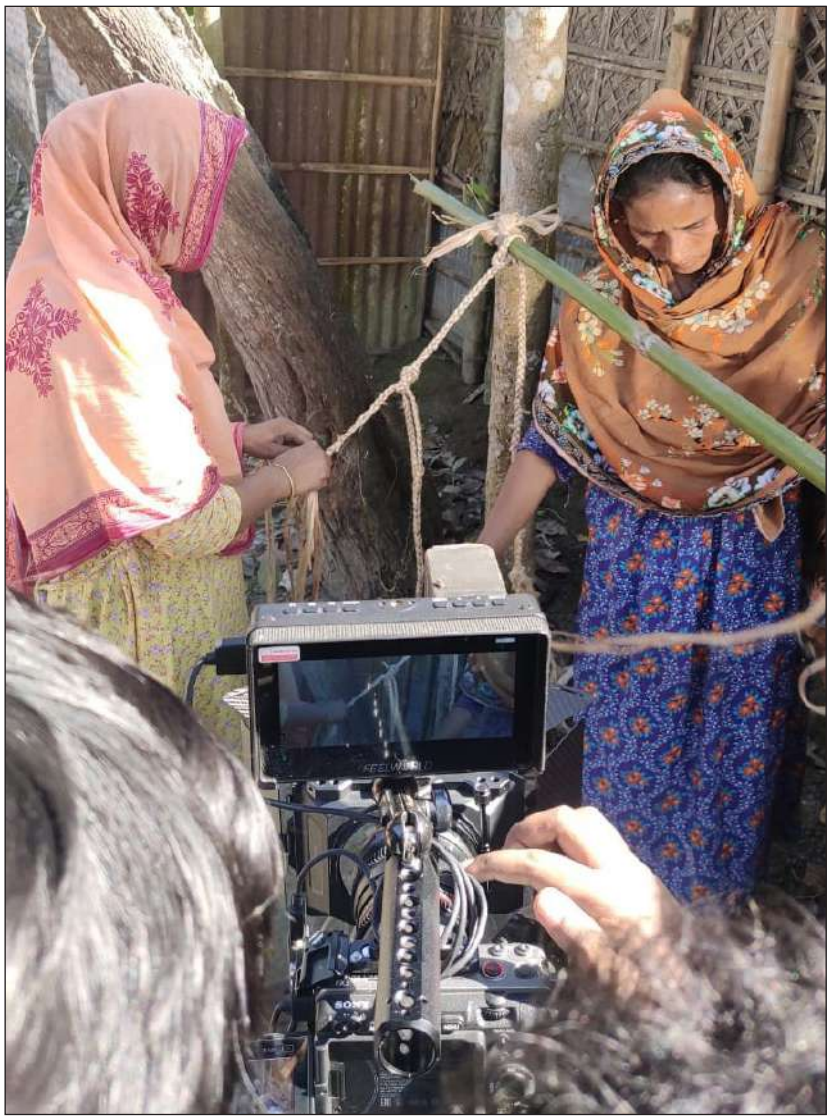
The narrative style of the documentary blends expository and interview driven storytelling. While we focus on providing context and information through voiceover and interviews, we also capture the raw, personal experiences of the artisans, allowing them to share their stories directly. There are also some interviews of researchers and stakeholders related to crafts of jute. This approach will help to create a deeper understanding of both the craft and the cultural significance behind it.

We will combine these interviews with cinematic visuals—detailed shots of the crafting process, the artisans' environment, and their daily lives to bring the viewer closer to the subject. The storytelling style is designed to be both informative and emotionally engaging.

"Documentaries often require a unique blend of equipment and creative use of technology". Could you elaborate on the innovative approaches that you are incorporating to elevate the storytelling in your film?

Indeed, documentaries require a thoughtful integration of both technology and creativity to truly enhance the narrative. For this film, we're using high-quality camera, drone, and various lenses creatively to capture the intricate details of the jute-making process. The drone shots will give us sweeping views of the rural landscapes, providing context to the artisan's environment.

In terms of creative technology, we're also incorporating digital post-production techniques to blend visuals and soundscapes that complement the emotional tone of the documentary. In some cases, we will use AI in post-production. These visual techniques, combined with thoughtful editing, aim to elevate the storytelling by giving the audience a deeper, more intimate experience with the artisans and their work.



Can you talk a bit about the role of colour grading in this documentary film since it can have a significant impact on the mood and atmosphere of the film?

Color grading is key in setting the mood of the documentary. We've chosen a warm, earthy palette with golden and brown tones to reflect the natural essence of jute and its cultural significance. This color scheme enhances the sense of tradition and connection to the land, while subtly highlighting the intricate details of the craft. The grading

helps deepen the emotional impact of the story, immersing the audience in the vibrant world of jute craftsmanship.

As the documentary film is still a work in progress, could you share some of the milestones you have reached so far?

So far, we've completed most of the filming, including interviews and footage of the jute-making process, Researchers and stakeholders. One location shoot is left which will be done this week, after which we'll move into post-production.

This question is more general but feel free to express your views as you like, how do you think digital documentation, like these documentary films can help safeguard cultural heritage for future generations?

Digital documentation, like documentary films, is a powerful tool to preserve cultural heritage, but it's only part of the solution. To truly sustain traditions, we must support artisans, inspire innovation, and provide access to modern and international markets. Blending documentation with tangible efforts such as education, policy support, and market promotion creates a sustainable ecosystem where heritage thrives. The SAARC Cultural Centre's Digital Documentation project is a significant step toward protecting and celebrating our cultural heritage while empowering communities to keep it alive and relevant.

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