



Chamba

FOLKLORE RENDERED ON MUSLIN

Text: SANDEEP SILAS
Photographs: SATBIR SILAS

Like the beauty of a Chamba rumal is the mountain city itself – richly embroidered on fine muslin. The first look on approach, above the green contoured carpet towards a housing cluster, is uplifting.

The town of Chamba is situated on the eastern bank of river Ravi in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. It rises up the hill like a temple spire, all shine and piercing the sky. Though man has found habitation on all possible locations both sides of the river, on mountain tops and plateaus, the hubbub is in the centre. The town owes its name to Champavati, daughter of Raja Sahil Varman, the founder king. The town was laid in 920 A.D. and since then the exquisite embroidery of city life has grown tremendously. River Ravi meanders in this huge valley, as if the mountain and river are engaged in a romantic ballet, steps rising and falling rhythmically. Sometimes they come dangerously close to each other, at others fall back with the music, never for once disengaging from clasp. The numerous plateaus visible on the western mountains of the valley are green running spaces, delightfully flat. The deep gorges created by two such plateaus fall straight to the rounded rocks and pebbles of the riverbed.

The palace of Chamba rulers, though shorn of regality, is still the

Envious greens...

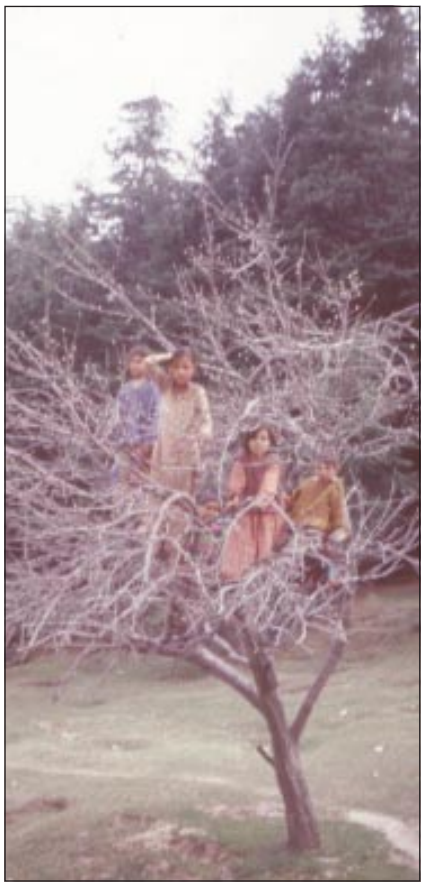


Above: Chaugan – sprinkled with wild flowers.
Facing page: Children growing on trees? and Chamba's famous Chamunda Devi temple (right).

signature building of Chamba. The bazaar is a straight line of shops, not showrooms to be precise, and articles of daily use are stocked, not displayed. Mother necessity rules all considerations. The most attractive point about this market is the view of a snowy Pirpanjal peak that seems to squat grandfatherly right in the midst of lane at the far end. Though it is quite a distance, it is yet so tantalisingly close.

The Chaugan, a flat huge ground is laid next to the market. Beyond is a gradual drop to the river Ravi. The slope is also dotted with fine buildings and a bridge over the river is visible in the distance. You have to cross this bridge for entering Chamba town. The old suspension bridge sighs as you pass and no pauses are permitted. Back to the flat, the Chaugan is venue to many seasonal fairs and festive celebrations in the city. In July/ August each year resident gods and goddesses blessing the valley leave their temple precincts for the Minjar fair, and come to Chaugan as homage to Lord Raghuvira. Drums, cymbals and other rudimentary hill musical instruments proclaim the visit of the deities.

All ancient towns have a rich religious tradition. So much so that city life is collectively and individually ruled by temple traditions. This inter-dependence of temple and cityfolk was evident as an undercurrent at Chamba. The six main group of temples, three dedicated to Shiva and three to Vishnu, are built in the same complex in the Shikhara style. The





temple of Lakshmi Narayan and Radha Krishna were built in the reign of Raja Sahil Varman, sometime in the 10th and 11th century A.D. The white marble image of Lakshmi Narayan, also called Vaikuntha, is in Kashmiri style. A white diamond shines from the forehead of the impeccable statue and it is adorned by ornaments donated by devout kings of Chamba. Picture-frame necklaces called *Sabih*, bear the photo images of devout kings. These temples were renovated during the reign of Raja Pratap Singh Varman in 16th century A.D. The brass image of Gauri Shankar (Lord Shiva and His consort Parvati) is a picture of a perfect couple – composed, confident and devoted. The posture instantly catches your attention.

The temple of Chamunda Devi, built high on a mountain, beckoned us. From the roof of the temple are hung scores of brass bells in different shapes and sizes, as wishes made here by devotees, took human and real form. They are testimony to fulfilment. Interestingly, the outer beams carry carvings displaying yogis in different yogic asanas. On the central beams are carved in wood several gods and goddesses along with other representations - a king holding a spear in one and a flower in the other, a flying apsara blowing a conch shell and winged busts of men and women, rendered exactly in the style of Egyptian Pharoahs, among many others. The wood ceiling is an interesting study in religious influences and intermingling traditions of the time.

The king holding a flower, and the winged busts are definitely images which have creeped in from the middle-east, perhaps as a result of trade or travel exchanges. Inside, the image of goddess is installed regally, sitting over two lion faces, smiling over devotees benevolently. The view of Chamba town, the Ravi river, and that of Pangi valley to the left, is stunningly beautiful.

Jhamwar, 12 km uphill, is a nature lover's delight. Shorn of the royal crest and insignia, only nature had been left to own the place. The Pirpanjals, closer than ever, snowy peaks gaining prominence, seemed to consolidate their hold.

Back in town, the Bhuri Singh Museum preserves the rich tradition of the valley encapsulating life, riches and styles. On display are



Mulk Raj Sidana

Gaddi dance of Chamba.

various necklace styles – *Champakali, Sabih, Laumala* and the *Dodmala*. The *Dedhku* (ear-tops), *Pher* (ear-rings), *Arsi* (mirrored thumb-rings) speak of the longing and effort of Pahari women so involved in the tradition of beauty. The miniature Chamba paintings – Basohli style (1765) and Kangra style (1780-85) are executed with fine brush strokes to render bewitchingly folklore, portraits, royal durbar and hunt scenes or the Radha Krishna episodes. So fine is the work that even ornamentation in a crown is clearly visible. More so, the natural colours have yet not dimmed in their richness. One can revel while watching *Ramayana* stories, hunt scenes, portraits, other religious themes, the exploits of Krishna and stylised images of goddesses rendered in folk style – slender and sharp. The exquisite Chamba rumal boasts of difficult embroidery, done finely on themes like *Ashta-nayika* and *Rasamandala.* The beauty of a Chamba rumal rendered in rich silken colours, executed with precision, peers at you enticingly. There is no way but to take this folklore home.



Mulk Raj Sidana



Dileep Prakash

The making of Chamba Rumal – handkerchief (top) & Raslila of Lord Krishna depicted on the Rumal (above).

The most striking, are however, the fountain slabs. These are carved stone slabs placed earlier at points where springs had erupted. Some were set up by grateful citizens for societal benefit. Some others were planted in memory of a dead spouse - funerary significance. They depict figures of deities, lesser mortals and even persons for whose future bliss they were set up. Decorated with ornamental scrolls and mostly enclosed within the border of interlacing snakes, they mystify initially, then attract you strongly. Wherever inscribed, the iconography is of generic type on slabs recovered from Ravi valley. Later on, horsemen, archers, swordsman and female water carriers found themselves on these slabs. The flat carving on fountain slab is unique. It fulfilled a dual purpose – societal use and promotion of art.

There are coins of different kingdoms discovered in this valley which reveal a prosperous trade link. The copper plate inscriptions recording grant of land on the occasion of initiation ceremony, marriage, or as thanksgiving by a grateful person, or for temple construction, dating to 10th-11th century A.D. speak volumes about strong administrative and land revenue structures. These plates, bearing the seal of rulers are as vibrant and alive as the earth they transferred.

Come night and the giant leviathan like mountains again settle to sleep. Some sequin spots of light reflected on their person only establishes their presence. As they recede and the town prepares to indulge into deep slumber, the Ravi river becomes articulate. It is the only constant presence, that is heard.

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The author, a civil servant, is a noted travel writer.



Sacred 'Ashok'

SAMAR SINGH

Among the flowering trees of India, the Ashok, also called Sita Ashok, (Latin name: *Saraca indica*) has a very special significance. It has been considered sacred since time immemorial and finds honourable mention in several ancient scriptures and the famous epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat*a.

According to a legend mentioned in the *Matsya Purana*, Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva, planted a sapling of Ashok. When the deities enquired about its significance, Parvati is said to have replied that making a *vapi* (step well) was equal in merit to digging ten wells, a pond to ten *vapis*, a son to ten ponds and planting a tree was equal to having ten sons. Apart from signifying the importance of the species and the merit of tree planting in general, this story indicates the ancient way of family planning: plant trees instead of producing several children.

The name Sita Ashok is derived from the association of the tree with Sita, the heroine of *Ramayana.* It is believed that when Ravana abducted Sita and took her to Lankapuri, Sita chose to stay in a



garden of Ashok trees and was successful in preserving her chastity. Ever since, the Ashok tree is believed to safeguard the chastity of women; hence, the name Sita Ashok.

In Sanskrit, 'Ashok' means one who has no sorrow. Sanskrit poetry and other literature has many references to the Ashok tree and it is described as so sensitive that the very touch of a beautiful damsel makes it burst into flowers. In *Ritusambhara*, Kalidas describes the blossoms of the tree as that which made young women burn with desire. This explains why the Ashok is also considered a symbol of love, being associated with Kamadeva (Cupid), the god of love, who is believed to use its flowers as one of his arrows.

The tree is also considered very sacred among the Buddhists and the Jains. This is mainly because it is believed that Siddharth Gautam (later known as Gautam Buddha) was born under an Ashok tree at Lumbini near Kapilvastu. Likewise, it is believed that Mahavir, the founder of Jainism, attained omniscience under an Ashok tree.

For all these reasons, the Ashok became a favourite in India and other countries like Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand for raising as an ornamental tree in the gardens and parks, specially near temples and monasteries. Its leaves and flowers were also depicted decoratively in the sculpture of several ancient temples and monasteries, notably in central and eastern parts of India. During the Kushan period and for some time thereafter, the tree motif became very popular and among the trees that found favour was the Ashok. The best examples are to be found in the temples at Mathura and its



surroundings as well as at Sanchi and Bharhut.

Ashok is a leguminous species, native to India, which explains the second part of its botanical name. It is also found in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia and some other countries of South-East Asia. In appearance, it is a handsome medium size tree, with branches spreading in all directions and forming a dense shapely crown. The trunk is covered with a bark that is smooth and greyish brown. The foliage is deep green and shiny. Each leaf is about a foot long and has three to seven pairs of wavy-edged leaflets. The leaves grow alternately on the branches. The tree flowers during the months of February, March and April in large compact orange-red clusters that are fragrant and present a very pleasing sight. They are used by women to decorate their hair and also in temple decoration. The leguminous fruit pod of the tree is fleshy when unripe and resembles the tamarind pod.

There is no doubt that Ashok is one of the prettiest Indian trees, generally found growing wild, mostly along the streams. However, from the earliest time, it has been cultivated as an ornamental tree in the gardens and parks. It is quite hardy and grows well in warm and humid climate, but needs protection from the hot winds during the summer season. It can be propagated quite easily from seeds.

In recent times, some confusion has arisen on account of the fact that another species, somehow also called Ashok, has been patronised widely in horticulture. This is actually the Mast Tree (Latin name: *Polyalthia longifolia*), which is better known as Asupala. It is a tall evergreen tree with a straight stem, slender branches and a symmetrical pyramid like crown. Its yellowish-green flowers are inconspicuous and not fragrant. It is well suited as an avenue tree and is being cultivated extensively these days all over the country.

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The author is the President, World Pheasant Association, and a noted writer on flora and environment.

Photographs: Dr Naresh Kapoor

ISRO

EXPLORING FINAL FRONTIERS…

RADHAKRISHNA RAO

The successful second developmental flight of India's three-stage, cryogenic fuel-driven Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) which took place in May 2003 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) in Sriharikota island has given a big thrust to the plan of ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) to build "heavier and more powerful boosters of the future". The 414-tonne 49-metre tall GSLV performed the task of placing 1825-kg G-Sat-2 experimental satellite into orbit with a "text book precision".

After its third test flight slated for late 2004, GSLV will be declared operational and used for the routine launching of the INSAT class domestic spacecraft. During its third flight, GSLV will launch Edusat, a satellite dedicated to support the educational programmes in the

PLSV – with its three spacecrafts – readying for launch.

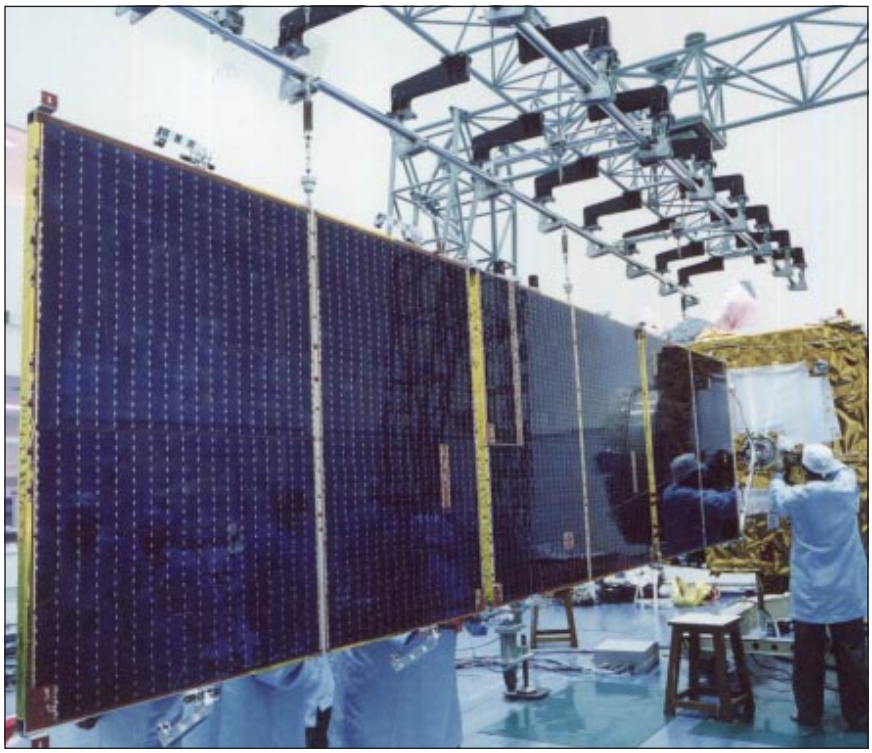




country. Significantly, the operationalisation of GSLV would help India end its dependence on the European launchers for orbiting its INSAT series of satellites. Technologically the most challenging project of ISRO, GSLV had its debut flight in April 2001. According to Dr. K. Kasturirangan, Chairman, ISRO, six countries including India have this kind of capability in the world. He is clear in his perception that a large country like India needs to be self-reliant in space. He also revealed that countries like Malayasia and Thailand have shown interest in using Indian capability in satellites and launch vehicles. Meanwhile ISRO has established a second launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre with a view to cater to the increased frequency of launches envisaged for the Indian space programme.

In keeping with its philosophy of progressively upgrading the launch capability through technological innovations and use of novel materials, ISRO has taken up a project to build an uprated version of GSLV which would be capable of launching a 4-tonne class satellite payload into a geosynchronous transfer orbit. This vehicle is expected to take off before the end of this decade. ISRO has also covered much ground in developing, an indigenous cryogenic engine. As envisaged now GSLV equipped with the Indian-made cryogenic engine upper stage is expected to fly in 2005. This fully home-grown cryogenic engine will have a thrust of 7.5-tonne and would

PLSV on the launch-pad.



Solar panels of the spacecraft.

carry 12.5-tonne of fuel in the form of liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen.

ISRO, which has successfully marketed the capability of its earlier generation Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) featuring alternate liquid and solid fuel stages, is also planning to offer the GSLV services to the global customers for launching two tonne class communications satellites. The Bangalore based Antrix Corp, the commercial arm of the Indian space programme, has singed an agreement with Nanyang Technological University (NTU) of Singapore for launching its earth observation micro satellite X-sat onboard PSLV sometime in 2005. Antrix would also extend support to NTU for developing the satellite.

Antrix has also supplied spacecraft hardware for Japanese MTSAT-2 satellite. Further, the company clinched a deal with German aerospace outfit DLR for supporting two of its satellite missions. On another front, Antrix has further expanded the international marketing of the data received from India's highly successful IRS series of earth observation satellites. It has also a tie up with the US-based Space Imaging for the worldwide marketing of IRS data that is currently being received by five ground stations in USA, two in Russia and one each in S. Korea, Argentina, Germany, UAE, Japan, Thailand, Myanamar and Spain. Plans are afoot to set up IRS data reception stations in Zimbabwe, Venezeula and Taiwan. As part of its plan to strengthen Indian presence in the multi-million dollar space market, Antrix has made exploratory proposals to market medium class satellites to developing countries.

India's first unmanned scientific mission to moon is likely to take off before the end of this decade. ISRO has already submitted a proposal for this mission. A lunar mission task force set up by ISRO has pointed out that it is feasible to launch a lunar polar orbiter using the Indian launch capability. India has the wherewithal to build sophisticated lunar probe with indigenous expertise. The major objective of the Indian lunar missions would be to realise the technological capability for undertaking more ambitious planetary missions in the future. While the Indian probe to moon will study the hitherto unexplored regions of moon, it would at the save time help the country become a major scientific and technological power.

Another innovative mission that ISRO is planning concerns the launching of a 500-kg reusable capsule by means of PSLV. The main goal of the Space Capsule Recovery Experiment is to carry out micro gravity experiments in orbit and demonstrate technology to deboost from orbit for reentry and recovery from sea using floatation system. This experiment would also give a thrust to ISRO's plan to develop reusable space vehicles.

ISRO is also working on building advanced earth observation and communications satellites. Sometime later this year, an earth observation satellite codenamed Resourcesat-I will be launched by means of PSLV. This satellite will



enhance the data collection capability in the area of agriculture, disaster management as well as land and water resources. The launch of Resourcesat-I will be followed by orbiting of an exclusive cartographic satellite Cartosat-I in 2004. A second generation Cartosat with one metre resolution and microwave remote sensing capability for day and night observation and the ability to look through the cloud cover is also being developed by ISRO.

Parallely, ISRO is also working on developing advanced communications satellite in INSAT-4 series made up of seven satellites. INSAT-4 series would feature many innovations in satellite communications technology.

Thus the Indian space programme which took off with the launch of a 9-kg sounding rocket from a modest research facility in the fishing hamlet of Thumba on the outskirts of Thiruvananthapuram in November, 1963, is now poised for a quantum leap in its quest to explore the final frontiers.

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The author is a noted freelance writer on scientific subject.

The GSLV lift-off.



Buddha shown with thick garments, Kushana.

Gandhara School of Art
FUSION OF INDO-GREEK TRADITIONS

K.K. KHULLAR

Popularly known as Greco-Buddhist art, the Gandhara School of art is distinct from the aniconic tradition of early Indian sculpture and the anthropomorphic tradition of Greco-Roman art. The Gandhara artist, it is said, had the hand of a Greek but the head and heart of an Indian. Although the process of production and the manner of his using the material was Hellenistic, the basic urge, imagery and iconography remained Indian. The school is represented in sculptures, stucco, clay as well as in mural paintings. Originally, the Gandhara sculptures were painted and covered with thin layers of gold.

The Gandhara School of Art flourished in the north-west of undivided India and the eastern Afghanistan for nearly eight hundred years, between the first century B.C and the 7th century A.D. Ruled by the Persian dynasty (Iran) in the 6th to 5th century B.C, Gandhara absorbed the Indian and Mediterranean

influences in art and culture. It is here that the fusion of civilisations took place; it is here that the rhythm of civilisations was maintained. A typical characteristic of Indian culture is its capacity of absorption, assimilation and synthesis. It is surprising how invader after invader came to India, only to become its part.

Gandhara was conquered by Alexander of Macedonia in the 4th century B.C. During the reign of Ashoka, it was a part of the Mauryan empire and one of the biggest centres of Buddhism. It is said that Buddhist missionaries used to be welcomed there with the beat of drums. Again it was a part of Kushan empire under Kanishka in the first century A.D when Gandhara and Mathura Schools of Art moved towards excellence unmatched by any other art movement or school.

The Kushans fostered a composite culture so exquisitely exemplified by the artistic creations of the Gandhara school of Art, as also on the Gandhara coins where all deities – Indian, Iranian, Buddhist, Greco-Roman, Bectrian, Parthian

The massive lower half of Buddha, dated Kushana year 93.





Kambojika/Hariti, pre-Kushana, Gandhara.

were invoked, The Kanishka statue found at Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan embodies the best of Kushan style in Gandhara iconography. The Kushan period marks an important epoch in Indian history because India came into close contact with the outside world during their rule. It also marks the beginning of the golden age of Gandhara art.

Kushans had intimate contact with Rome and Greece. In their interpretation of the Buddhist legends, the Gandhara artists leaned heavily on classical Roman art with plentiful of Greek mythology such as angels with garlands, Tritons with the fish tails and horse's forefoot, Centaurs with human heads, arms and the body, spiral and flowing lines, scrolls and stuccos. The result is that we have Buddha with curly hair, muscles and moustaches. Gautama is made to look like the youthful



Standing Buddha.

Apollo, the Greek sun-god symbolising beauty and strength dressed in loose attire. A large number of clay Buddhas have been excavated in eastern and central Afghanistan which was under the influence of Mahayana Buddhism after the historic Buddhist split at Parishipura (modern Peshawar in Pakistan) in the days of Kanishka the Great.

The Gandhara School of Art bears testimony to the fact that the political boundaries between India and Afghanistan simply did not exist under the Mauryas, Indo-Greeks, the Sakas, the Kushans, the Parthians and even the Mughals. The last wish of the dying Mughal Emperor Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India, was that he should be buried in Afghanistan. And he lies buried in a Kabul garden.

In Afghanistan, excavations at Bamiyan, Begram, Hadda, Kandhar and Kunduz have brought to light several Buddhist settlements. In the modern village of Hadda, 531 stupas and 3000 statues of Buddha and Boddhistvas have been found in clay and stucco. Hadda's ancient name is "Nagarahara" which was visited both by Fahien, who visited the settlement around 400 AD, and by Hieun Tsang who camped there in 630 AD. Both these pilgrims came from China via Afghanistan to visit the land of Sakyamuni. Hieun Tsang stayed here for 18 years, first as a student, then as a teacher at Nalanda University where students from all parts of the world, including Afghanistan and Iran, came for learning and enlightenment. Art education formed part of Nalanda curriculum and admission in art school there was very difficult. It is said admission-seekers waited for years at the gates of Nalanda to pass the entrance test.

In the early Buddhist art we have evidence that Buddha was represented by various symbols such as Bodhi tree with 'Vajrasana' beneath it, footprints of Sakyamuni and above all, the viharas and the stupas. In Buddhist lore, *Vihara* signifies something which is associated with the life of Lord Buddha while *Stupa* symbolises an event connected with his death. The Stupas of Sanchi, Bharhut and Amravati testify to this. So do the Viharas of Nalanda, Rajgriha and Vikramsila. Many historians believe that the Hellenic sculptors of Gandhara were the earliest image-makers of Buddha while others give this credit to the iconographists of Mathura school which flourished in the second century B.C to the 12th century AD.

At Mathura, the Buddha image was cast in the red-sandstone obtained

from Sikri quarries. The Mathura school excelled in *Yaksha* (male spirit) closely resembling the collosal standing figure of Buddha of the Gandhara school. Both the schools also produced seated Buddhas with broad shouldered, shaven head, smiling face and right arm in a gesture of *'Abhaya Mudra'*. While in Gandhara, Buddha is seated on a lotus throne, in Mathura the Master rests on a lion throne. Again while the Gandhara Buddha is draped in the central Asian fashion, the Mathura figures wear Indian dresses. The female figurines of Mathura (*Yakshis*) are sensuous and eye-catching.

Thus we find that the journey between the an aniconic tradition of the early Indian art and the gradual appearance of cult icons is an important and interesting chapter in Indo-Greek iconography. Perhaps these two schools flourished simultaneously and evolved their own image of Buddha in which both excelled and influenced each other. When Fahien, the Chinese pilgrim, saw the two gigantic Buddhas at Bamiyan, he became ecstatic; he had never before seen such a tall Buddha anywhere. Similarly, Hieun Tsang (630 AD) said that Bamiyan Valley is not only famous for its two collosal Buddhas measuring 175 ft and 120 ft respectively, but also for its hundreds of cave-shrines and monasteries. For two thousand years these Buddha sculptures kept the world spell-bound. Sadly, in March, 2001, they were blown up by the Taliban on the ground that they were pagan. A Swiss team is planning to reconstruct one of the two Buddhas as a symbol of hope.



A fine image of Buddha from Gupta year 115.

Alberuni, who accompanied the hordes of Mahmud of Ghzni several times during tile early 11th century, was wonder-struck to see the Buddha statues not only at Bamiyan but also at Taxilla, Peshawar, Multan and Mathura. Writing about the super-excellence of Indian sculptors in his famous book *'Kitab-ul-Hind'*, he says: "They have attained a very high degree of art in this; so much so that when our people (Muslims) see them, they marvel at them and are unable to describe them – much less construct anything like them". This is high praise and coming as it does from a scholar-extraordinary like Alberuni, speaks volumes of the Indian genius which conceived and sculpted such Buddhas.

In a larger analysis of Indo-Greek and Indo-Afghan art, it can be safely said the Gandhara artist made a lasting contribution to the Greco-Buddhist art by striking a balance between the real and the ideal, the sensuous and the sacred, between evolution and ethics, between a smiling and a suffering Buddha, between a standing and a seated Bodhisatva.

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The author, a noted freelance writer, is also a historian.

What's in a name?

ANOOP VERMA

Suchita was in living room watching TV when doorbell rang. It was 6.30 pm, the usual time for her husband, Vijay Singhal, to return from office. As she rose to let him in, the doorbell rang again and then again. My God, he is so impatient, she thought and quickly unbolted the door. 'You always keep me waiting,' he hissed and marched in.

'I came as hastily as I could,' Suchita protested, 'but you are so impatient.'

'Impatient!' he glared flinging briefcase and sheaf of papers on sofa, 'you don't know what I face in office?' He picked up the remote and switched off the TV.

'Hey, I was watching that programme,' Suchita protested feebly.

'Not while I am at home,' he said gruffly and settling on sofa started removing his boots. Suchita looked at him with an air of resignation. 'Tapping computer keys, day in and day out, this job is getting on my nerves.'

'Why don't you do something about it, if it is getting unbearable?'

'Do what? I can't resign and sit at home and watch worthless soaps. You don't know how miserable I feel,' he said.

'Of course I know. You have told me many times that you are not satisfied with your job. But creating scene at home isn't the solution.'

'Those management guys rake in all the cash and throw a pittance at me.'

'It is not pittance that you earn. You are one of the most highly paid individuals in your company.'

He shook his head contemptuously and said, 'you have no idea what the management guys get. Their salaries, expense accounts, stock



options make my income look like chicken feed.'

'But why should we bother about what they get. We get enough to lead a comfortable life - that is all what matters to us. Your salary provides us a cozy bungalow, two cars, nice bank balance. It enables you to send your daughter to a prestigious school. What else do you need?'

'I am not getting what I deserve.'

'Then get your company to increase your remuneration.'

'As if I haven't tried that already,' he said sarcastically. 'I have discussed my salary with the management many a time but they won't listen. They maintain that budget constraints don't leave any scope for increased remuneration. It is amazing that there aren't any budgetary constraints when it comes to their own perks. A vice president recently bought himself a Ferrari with company money, and another vice-president has gone with family on vacation to Shimla- all expenses paid by company. They are so lavish on themselves but deny me a small raise.' He paused for a moment and then said, 'I would like to be vice president of my company.'

This was news for her. 'A vice president,' she gasped in surprise.

'I am fed up of being a scientist. No one cares for scientists these days. I want to change track and join the management team.'

'Are you making any efforts to get into management?'

'I spoke to the company president once. He says my services as a scientist are too valuable and he won't dream of wasting me in management.'

'But there must be some way...'

'Oh there isn't any. I am only 37 years old and already I am tired of life.'

'We shouldn't give up like this.'

'There is nothing left to do except giving up. I am chained to dissatisfying and low paying job for life. Now things can't be changed,' he said getting up from sofa.

'Where are you going,' Suchita demanded. 'This conversation isn't over yet.'

'For bath,' he said and went out of the room.

'Suchita remained on the sofa brooding over the difficulties her husband was facing. She thought her family could be in for serious trouble if some solution was not found soon. She was pained to see him so dejected.

After dinner, she tried to comfort Vijay. 'You should not be so dejected. If we put our heads together we can find a solution.'

'I am not in a mood to talk right now,' Vijay grumbled.

Suchita lapsed into glum silence. How could she be of help when he even refused to listen? Her mind filled with diverse thoughts, she was tapping at the remote browsing randomly through channels. On one of the channels an astrology-based programme was on. An astrologer was explaining how planetary configurations affect the life of people. Suchita did not care much for astrology, but as there was nothing better to watch, she decided to listen to astrologer's mumbo-jumbo for sometime. The astrologer was saying, '...depression, problems at job, lack of success, quarrels with spouse, and many other problems that

plague people are in fact the result of being born under inauspicious planetary configurations. There are ways to control the negative effects of planets. That is what astrology is all about. It is the science of improving one's life by appeasing the planets…'

It was her down-in-dumps state that made her see ray of hope in the astrologer's claims. Did Vijay's problems result from his being born under inauspicious planetary configurations? She tried to laugh off the question, but could not. The astrologer was claiming that by wearing certain precious stones, by prayers and at times even by changing one's name could change the fate. Maybe this sort of thing will work in Vijay's case, Suchita told herself. Maybe she should make him consult an astrologer. But would he take her suggestion. Most probably he wouldn't. She knew he considered astrology a craft of charlatans. But what if there was truth in astrology? Shouldn't Vijay give it a try? After all he had nothing to lose by consulting an astrologer.

Next day in the morning when they were having breakfast she said probingly, 'have you considered seeing an astrologer?'

Vijay eyed her quizzically and said, 'astrologer! What for?'

'Yesterday I was watching a programme on TV that showed how astrology can solve problems.'

'Let's not make bad situation worse by getting involved in hocus-pocus,' he said heatedly.

'But many people consult astrologers. Why can't we do the same.'

'I am a scientist and not a superstitious bumpkin.'

'Sometimes these things do work,' Suchita persisted, 'many people have improved their lives...'

'Let me have my breakfast in peace,' he interrupted, 'I have had enough silliness for the day.'

Fearing that if she went on he may leave without finishing breakfast, she let the matter rest for the time being.

He returned at usual time in the evening, looking as harried as ever, and sat down on sofa muttering about unfairness with which his company treated him. After they



had tea, Suchita said, 'I visited our neighbour, Mrs. Gulati, today.' He did not react to her statement. 'She is a firm believer in astrology. Five years ago when her husband suffered huge losses in business, she took him to an astrologer who gave him an amulet to wear. Since then his business has prospered.'

'You expect me to act like Mrs. Gulati's husband and go about wearing a ridiculous amulet,' he thundered.

'Astrology may not be all nonsense.'

'Are you sure it isn't,' he asked sarcastically.

'The truth is I am not sure,' she accepted, 'but is there any harm in giving it a try.'

'I will appear like a fool if people come to know I consulted an astrologer.'

'No one will know. I have contacted an astrologer who is known for his discreetness. He has agreed to see you tomorrow at 10 AM. He lives close by, just few blocks away from us.'

'At 10 AM! I am in office at that time.'

'Tomorrow is Sunday, your weekly off,' Suchita reminded quickly. 'Meet him for my sake. Let's see what advice he gives.'

'How did you learn about this astrologer?'

'From Mrs. Gulati, same astrologer gave her husband the amulet to wear five years ago.'

'OK, let's see this astrologer tomorrow, but I won't follow any foolish suggestion that he makes.'

'That will be fine,' Suchita said, pleased that her effort had paid off, 'we shall see what he has to tell and then we will decide for ourselves.'

The astrologer, Mr. Govind Swaroop, was thin and tall, his wide forehead, piercing gaze, pointed nose and thin lips made him a picture of severity and stoicism. His living room had a large shelf filled with rows after rows of books on Hindu mythology, astrology, and like subjects. Vijay and Suchita, ensconced on a comfortable sofa were having audience with Govind Swaroop. 'I know you don't believe in astrology, Mr. Singhal,' Govind Swaroop said.

'It would be a lie if I told you I did,' Vijay said mildly.

Govind nodded and said, 'Being a scientist, it is your nature to accept as truth only those things which can be scientifically proved, and astrology cannot be scientifically proved. But I insist that astrology is no hocus-pocus, it is science.'

'Then why do predictions by most astrologers fail to materialize,' Vijay asked bluntly.

'In any scientific experiment larger the number of variables, greater is the chance of some mistake in calculations,' Govind explained. 'The problem astrologers face is that they have to deal with vast amount of variables. There are billions and trillions of stars, planets and moons in universe, all of which cast some influence on destiny of human beings. Obviously there is no way any astrologer can take into account the position of all entities in the universe. So they arrive at an approximate prediction by taking into account only entities that lie close to earth – sun, moon and the other planets of our solar system. Sometimes their approximation turns out to be correct and

sometimes it is way off the mark. It is my belief that some day we will be able to take into account the whole universe and then astrology will become a precise science.'

'You hold interesting views,' Vijay said.

'I have with me your date and time of birth, and place of birth. On the basis of this data I will make calculations and then I shall let you know what you can do to improve your fate.'

'How much time do you need for calculations?' Suchita asked.

'At least one week,' said Govind, 'by next Sunday I will be in a position to let both of you know what can be done.'

In the days that followed they carefully avoided talking about the astrologer, even though he remained very much on their mind. Secretly both hoped that he would be able to suggest some solution to their problems.

Finally the much-awaited Sunday arrived and Vijay and Suchita were once again in Govind Swaroop's living room. 'I gave your case a great deal of time Mr. Vijay Singhal,' Govind Swaroop began, 'you have been born under difficult planetary configurations.' Vijay and Suchita listened with anticipation. 'My calculations make me conclude that there is only one way out for you,' Govind said looking at Vijay.

'What?' the couple asked in unison.

'Your name is unlucky for you. You must change it. Your first name Vijay is all right, you can carry on with it. The problem stems from your last name, Singhal. You must start spelling it as S-I-N-J-H-H-A-L. This spelling change should appease the planets and change your fate.'

A frown descended on Vijay's face and he said irately, 'whoever heard of Singhal being pronounced as Sinjhhal. You suggestion is ridiculous.'

'I am sorry,' the astrologer said coolly, 'but that is the only way according to my calculations.'

'It is my fault that I came to an astrologer with my problems,' Vijay said and turning towards his wife said, 'let's go. I have had enough of it.'

Suchita, embarrassed by Vijay's discourtesy, apologetically said to Govind Swaroop, 'I am sorry that an understanding couldn't develop between us.'

'I too am sorry that I couldn't satisfy your husband but I only spoke the astrological truth.'

'Thank you for your trouble,' Vijay said and marched out of the room. Suchita followed him.

When they were inside their car, she said, 'you should not have behaved like that with Govind Swaroop, he was only trying to help us.'

'Help us! My foot,' Vijay hissed, 'that man was making a damn fool out of us.'

'OK then let's forget it,' Suchita retorted angrily, 'it was my fault that I got you to an astrologer.' They sat in the car and drove back in silence.

Next day Suchita expected Vijay to be tense, but was surprised when she found him absurdly relaxed. She was even more surprised when he said while they were having breakfast, 'you know, I have decided to follow that damned astrologer's advice. I will start spelling my last name as S-I-N-J-H-H-A-L from today.'

Suchita's face lit up. 'My God,' she gasped, 'that's great. I am sure your luck will change for better once you make that minor change in your surname.'

'Oh, don't read too much into it. I am doing this just for the heck of it. I don't expect any miraculous change in my fortune by this spelling change,' Vijay said trying to play down the issue.

When he reached office he told his secretary to circulate an internal memo to the effect that his surname was to be spelled as S-I-N-J-H-H-A-L from now onwards. When the surprised secretary wanted to know the reason for this change of spelling, Vijay got livid. 'I don't have to give reasons to anybody,' he snarled, 'its my surname and I will spell it the way I want.' The secretary hurriedly typed and circulated the internal memo.

A fortnight passed. The president, two vice-presidents and the chief executive of Eagle Software had gathered in boardroom. Something very grave was being discussed. 'So what is the problem with Vijay Singhal?' the president asked.

'His surname is no longer Singhal,' ventured a vice president, 'he insists that he is 'Sinjhhal' nowadays. Sinjhhal, spelled as S-I-N-J-H-H-A-L.'

'Vijay is constantly telling everyone to refer to him as Sinjhhal but he doesn't give any reason for his change of name,' second vice president said thoughtfully.

'There is something fishy going on,' the chief executive said suspiciously.

'Fishy!' the president injected, 'what do you mean by fishy?'

The chief executive cleared his

throat and spoke in a smart-alecky tone. 'It has come to my knowledge that our main competitor in the software business, the Crow Software, have a Singhal working for them as senior scientist.'

'So what!' said a vice-president scratching his bald head, 'there could be any number of people in world with the surname Singhal. Some of them could be employed by Crow Software.'

'In this case it means nasty business,' the chief executive retorted.

'What nasty business?' the president thundered.

'I have found out that the Singhal scientist employed by Crow Software is the second cousin of our own Vijay Singhal,' the chief executive declared. 'It's obvious that our Singhal is passing company secrets to Crow Software's Singhal.' The mood in the room changed instantly at this revelation.

'O my God,' gasped one vice-president.

'A traitor in our midst,' declared another.

'I will nail Vijay,' the president was red with anger. 'I will be completely ruthless, I will crush him, I will destroy him.'

'Vijay is very smart. He has covered his tracks well. There is no clear evidence of his nefarious activities, except for the fact that he has suddenly decided to change his surname' said the chief executive, and then smacking his lips delivered the punch line. 'He does not want anyone of us to know that he is related to Crow Software's Singhal and that is why he is changing the spelling of his surname.'

'You acted like a real Sherlock Holmes and caught a master criminal,' declared the president.

'Thank you sir,' beamed the chief executive.

'I always had a feeling that this Vijay was no good,' said a vice-president, 'few days ago he criticized me for going on a company-paid vacation to Shimla.'

'I never was comfortable with Vijay,' grumbled the second vice-president, 'I have caught him many



a time casting jealous looks at the new Ferrari that the company has gifted to me.'

'The question is what are we to do with this traitor,' asked the president.

'We should have him arrested,' suggested one vice-president.

'And of course we will have to throw him out immediately,' offered the second.

'I don't think we should have him arrested or throw him out,' the chief executive ventured slyly. 'First of all we don't have enough evidence to have him arrested and second if we throw him out he will openly go over to Crow Software with all our trade secrets. Crow Software will only be too happy to have him.'

'My God, you are right. Vijay knows all about the new products that we are developing in our research facilities and if he goes over to Crow Software, it will be a big disaster for us.'

'Vijay can't be allowed to leave our company at any cost,' said the chief executive conspiratorially.

'But if we let him continue he will go on passing research information to his relative in Crow Software,' said the president.

'Yes, it is imperative to get him out of the research facility urgently,' the chief executive agreed, 'but without giving him reason to leave our company and walk over to Crow Software. There is only one way to achieve that. I think we should make him vice president.'

'A traitor as vice president,' the two vice presidents hollered in unison.

'We can't reward a turncoat by making him vice president,' the president thundered.

The chief executive explained, 'sometimes it is necessary to reward traitors to win the battle. Our main problem is how to get Vijay out of research facility without letting him walk over to our business rival Crow Software. If we give Vijay lesser post I am sure he won't accept, but a vice president's post he will accept with alacrity. As vice president in charge of some administrative functions, he won't have access to our research secrets but at the same time he will have sufficient inducement to stay on in the company.'

The president nodded shrewdly, 'I think your suggestion is on the mark. It makes my heart burn to promote a traitor as vice president. But in the larger interests of our company we must do that.'

'We should send him to a month-long vacation to Shimla immediately after he is made vice president. While he is in Shimla we will have enough time to assess the damage he has done to our company by spying for Crow Software,' said the chief executive.

'Yes, maybe we should also buy him a Ferrari because that will give him even more inducement to stay with us,' the president said, 'we can't afford to lose him.'

'Yes, it would be prudent to hand him a Ferrari,' the chief executive nodded his head.

Few hours later Vijay was promoted as vice president and was offered all expenses paid family vacation to Shimla, and presented a brand new red Ferrari.

So? Want to spell your name differently???

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The author is a freelance writer.



The plaque recalls what Gandhi was doing prior to his arrest in January, 1932.

Mani Bhavan
ODE TO MAHATMA GANDHI

Text: BRINDA GILL
Photographs: SATYAJIT S. GILL

Along a quiet green road shaded by laburnum trees that burst into yellow blossoms in the summer stands Mani Bhavan, an old-world double-storeyed building. Witness to a critical period in Indian history and politics, today it is a serene oasis in the bustling metropolis of Mumbai that takes visitors back to the early 20th century to a time when Mahatma Gandhi often lived here. It was here that Gandhiji (between 1917-1934) met with national leaders and spread the message of truth and non-violence that went on to influence a generation of Indians seeking freedom. During this period, Mani Bhavan, a springboard for important political events, was also the headquarters of the Indian National Congress. After the tragic death of the Mahatma, it was dedicated to the nation as a Gandhi National Memorial. And in today's turbulent times, Mani Bhavan reiterates Gandhiji's message of peace.

At the reception area is a display of photographs, letters, currency notes and postage stamps featuring Gandhiji, issued by different countries, indicating his exalted stature among people across the world. Among these displays are 14 interesting exhibition sheets of stamps spanning events related to Gandhiji's life, presented by



The room where Gandhi lived and worked – preserved in its original form.

Harjeet A. Singh which formed a part of his award-winning exhibition "Our Freedom Struggle" at the state level philatelic competition in 1998. On the ground floor is the Research Room and Library, which has more than 50,000 books by and on Gandhij, on Gandhian thought and related subjects. Visitors can procure stamps, books and literature on Gandhiji at the counter here.

Wooden steps lead to the first floor with their adjoining walls bearing photographs of Gandhiji conveying vignettes of his formative years, including his years spent in South Africa as volunteer of the Indian Ambulance Corps (in 1899) and with settlers at the Tolstoy Farm (in 1910). On the first floor is a Picture Gallery, that traces Gandhiji's life story in photographs, his articles, letters to prominent persons as well as his enduring quotes urging his countrymen to bury differences of caste and creed and instead forge a common Indian nationality. Amidst his correspondence with world leaders is a letter to Herr Hitler, dated 23.7.39 in which Gandhiji, indicating the need to avoid war, writes, "It is quite clear that you are today the one person in the world who can prevent a war which may reduce humanity to a savage state". Films on Gandhiji as well as recordings of his speeches are played on request at the auditorium here.

From the Picture Gallery, the flight of steps with photographs of Gandhiji along the walls continues to the second floor. A neat room, where Gandhiji lived and worked, preserved in its original setting bears a few spartan articles - his spinning wheel, hand-fan, sandals, desk, books- that speak of his simple living. Gandhij received his first lessons in carding in 1917 at Mani Bhavan, and learnt to spin thread



Photo from a section "Glimpses of Gandhi".

from raw cotton. In the next room are replicas of a few of his belongings including Boer War medals, hand spun yarn, jail bowl and tumbler, his footwear and simple cutlery. From Mani Bhavan, Gandhiji organized the first mass movement against the repressive Rowlatt Act in 1919, sold prohibited pamphlets of his writings "Hind Swaraj" and "Sarvodaya", called for a countrywide strike to mark the beginning of the Satyagraha campaign, supported the Khilafat agitation, published "Satyagrahi" an unregistered weekly, took over "Young India" and "Navjivan", weekly journals in English and Gujarati respectively. In the context of his pursuing the policy of non-cooperation, he decided to return the *Kaiseri-i-Hind* medals and Boer War medals he had received in 1920.

The next room features "Glimpses of Gandhi" in small figures crafted by Mrs Susheela Gokhale Patel that depict different important moments and events in Gandhiji's life from his youth till his end. The last flight of steps leads to the terrace where on the morning of January 4, 1932, at 3 a.m. Gandhiji was arrested when in a tent here and imprisoned without trial. Three plaques at the site recall the moment. Gandhiji last visited Mani Bhavan in June 1934.

Over half a century after India's independence and Gandhiji's passing away, Mani Bhavan continues to convey the Mahatma's ideals.

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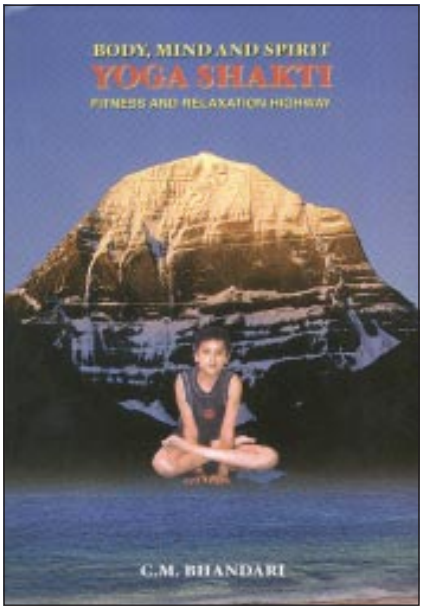
The author is a noted freelance writer.

MANAGING STRESS THE YOGA WAY

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Yoga, the much acclaimed Indian philosophy enunciating how to achieve mental and physical discipline, is as relevant now as it was in the past. In fact, it has acquired more significance in the present context when most of us are faced with stress – primarily because of the modern lifestyle. C. M. Bhandari's book on "Yoga Shakti" seeks to demystify Yoga and present it as a 5000-year old universal science of the Vedic times that helps us realize the true nature of "self". It also tells us how to deal with stress and lead a relaxed life. The author, a career diplomat, says his "exposure to Vedic literature" helped him explore the mysticism of the East and combine it with the scientific enquiry of the West. By showing how to execute certain Yogic postures in the book under review, the author explains how one can reduce the stress in our daily routine and reduce or completely eliminate production of toxins in the body. He even goes on to say that if followed properly and sincerely, Yoga can help the children in improving their performance in schools.

Understandably, Yoga is becoming an integral part of lifestyle in the western world. It is estimated that there are about 100,000 (one lakh) Yoga centers in the Unites States alone – an industry worth ten billion US dollars. And there are 15 million Americans who practice Yoga on a regular basis.



Profusely illustrated, the book provides an invaluable overview on the usefulness of Yoga in our day-today routine so that we can lead a healthy and relaxed life.

BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT: YOGA SHAKTI – FITNESS AND RELAXATION HIGHWAY by C. M. Bhandari; published by Devamber Prakashan, New Delhi; Price: US$ 18 (Rupees 900).

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"India Palace" Creates Waves in UAE

"India Palace" – an Indian restaurant in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi – has earned well-deserved kudos. This is primarily because the restaurant not only provides the best of Indian cuisine to its customers but also showcases India's rich cultural heritage. Every decorative piece that adorns the hotel has specially been made in Lucknow, capital of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The hotel displays the portraits of Indian kings and queens carved on metal pots that have been strategically placed. Besides, it also has a rich repertoire of "musician dolls" – despite it being not a doll-house.

The hotel also takes pride in showing to its customers how Indian bangles are made. The elaborate process of bangle-making is executed right in front of the customers.

Manager Shetty says,"eighty percent of our customers are Arabs, ten to fifteen percent are French and British and the rest are Indians". This speaks volumes for the popularity of Indian cuisine among foreigners.

– Shylaja S. Rao

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Indian Mangoes for China

India has become one of the first countries to export its world-famous mangoes to China's potentially huge market. An agreement to this effect was reached between India and China during Prime Minister Vajpayee's recent visit to that country. The first consignment of six tonnes – three each for the Chinese capital Beijing and the eastern metropolis Shanghai – has already reached China.

"The initial market response to the Indian mangoes is very encouraging", said a Chinese official. With this, India has become the first South Asian country to export mangoes to China which follows a strict import regimen.

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Well-carved doors at the entrance (top); painting of Emperor Akbar adorning a hotel wall (above) and a variety of hand-made bangles displayed in the reception area (left).



JEWELS OF INDIAN SKY

Warblers

Text & Photographs: BHAGAT SINGH

Warblers are small birds with slender bills, known for gleaning insects from leaves, grasses and twigs. Because most of warblers look alike, the several different species are not given individual names in Sanskrit, and are referred to as *Chatika* – 'little bird' and *Patingika* – 'little sparrow'.

Warblers make up a huge family of several species, most of which are scattered throughout the Indian union, both in deciduous and moist deciduous areas, including reed beds. A few species inhabit at higher altitudes upto 10,000 feet in the Himalayas. Most of the species of these birds have drab brown and grey plumage. In the main, these are insectivorous and feed chiefly on insects: caterpillars, ants, small beetles etc.

The warblers, as their name indicates, are renowned for the quality of their songs. These birds utter in gentle, continuous trilling manner. It appears as if they speak in verse or give expression to their passions in songs. They keep singly



or in pairs or in small groups in scrub jungles, gardens and orchards. These tiny birds are mostly seen flitting jerkily from bush to bush with constant flicking of the tail.

In breeding season, the males give a spirited performance from an exposed perch excitedly warbling their squeaky songs. The breeding takes place over a prolonged period from March to September. Different species build different types of nests, depending on the vegetation growth and the climatic conditions of their respective habitats. Reed warblers construct a deep massive cup of dry reed leaves slung between several reed stems above water. The nests of scrubland birds are a rough cup of twigs, grass, root and stems, lined with fine grass, wool, hair and fibres, well hidden in low thorn bushes or clump of grass. Some



species build a rough dome or oval pouch of grass, moss etc. close to the ground, while a few make a ball of moss, lichen and dead leaves, and place it among the roots of trees or hollow tree trunks. One of the strangest warbler nests is that built by the Tailor bird. The cup-shaped nest is made by sewing together the edges of one or two leaves with either plant fibres or spider's silk.

These small birds lay several eggs ranging from three to ten. The eggs



are glossy and of oval shape and in most cases profusely blotched with brown or red. Both the sexes take part in the performance of parental duties.

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The author is an eminent writer/ photographer on wildlife.



A procession of women in Varanasi.

India
IMPOSSIBLE TO RESIST…

MONIKA ESPINOSA

I am a ceramic artist from Argentina. I had heard about occidental and European art during my many years of arts apprenticeship. We knew very little about the orient art, excepting some references to Japan and China. That's why, when I decided to apply for the UNESCO Aschberg Scholarship for Artists, I didn't hesitate in choosing the destination: it would be India.

After going through the preliminaries, I was informed that I had been granted the scholarship. I travelled to India a short time after the attack on the Twin Towers in the US, i.e. in mid-September, 2001.

From the very moment I arrived at the Indira Gandhi airport, New Delhi, India embraced me warmly. Impossible to resist... this warmth that the Indians exude.

I lodged in the hostel of the Sanskriti Foundation at Anandagram, a neighborhood of Delhi. It is really an oasis of peace where artists can develop their





Exhibits at the "Undressing" exhibition organised at the Sanskriti Kendra (top) and the terracotta horses (above).

creative pursuits in an ideal manner. During the next three months, I got acquainted with the potter's art of the country, the India of the huge terracotta horses!!!.

It wasn't necessary to travel over the whole subcontinent to be able to become acquainted with all the different ceramics manifestations; in the Sanskriti Kendra, there is the "Museum of the Terracotta", with pieces of work of each zone.

Besides, the National Museum and the Crafts Museum in New Delhi also have terracotta representations.

While travelling through Delhi, Khajuraho, Agra and Varanasi I discovered the ceramics of everyday usage, women carrying earthen pots full of water, the small oil lamps, the tea *(chai!)* served in the street in terracotta cups and the hundreds of Gods and Goddesses in terracotta.

I met several acknowledged ceramists: Kristine Michael, Leena Batra and the Blue Pottery Studio, and the works of the most important ceramists in India, Gurcharan Singh, Devi Prasad, Promila Pandit and many more whom I have seen at work with clay, showing a deep respect and skill.

Another thing that appealed to me most is the feminity of the Indian women – revealed through their colourful saris, the tinkling of their bracelets and anklets. I Think women expressed themselves more by these adornments than by words. This has helped me design the patterns of dresses, made of clay, which could well combine with the characters of the Indian iconography. They are like walking- books for me.

During my trip to Benares, I observed how children played with kites *(patang)* on the banks of river Ganga. That image, the kites symbolising connection between earth and sky, was felt by me as a prayer. And, of course, I got back to Sanskriti with 60 kites to work on.

In India, every person I met, every place I visited has helped me inspire not only in my work but also in knowing myself a little more. I wish this interchange could be more continuous and extensive. There are so many things to share, to learn from each other...
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Ooty Library

DREAM LIVES ON…

VIDHU GANJOOR & BUZZ BURZA

In a letter written to the government in September, 1829, a gentleman named Sullivan emphasized the need for library facilities in Ooty. It would be three decades before definite steps would be taken towards the realization of such a dream. Today, the manifestation of that dream lives on in the form of an architectural and cultural gem, i.e. The Nilgiri Library. Its original motto, "Reading moulds one's habit and character", still rings true.

The sylvan glades of Ootacamund had become one of the most important sanatoria for British India. The residents of this lovely place were two types: permanent and transient. The latter were either on government duty or in search of restorative cures Ooty was known for. Everyone though needed reading material.







On the 22nd of July, 1858, a provisional committee of 24 members met for the first time to discuss the establishment of a public library in Ootacamund. In addition to the library books, a request was also made for the establishment of a reading room furnished with periodicals and newspapers.

Initially the scheme was to combine a library with a government museum and the committee estimated that the cost of constructing a building housing both institutions, plus a stock of standard works, would amount to Rs 15,000 (a fortune in those days). It was therefore proposed that the government grant half this amount, and the rest to be raised through private contributions.

The government did not agree to this; it only condescended to provide a building site plus a monthly grant of one hundred rupees to maintain both a library and a museum.

The committee was undaunted by the rejection of their request and decided that most of the money they raised be earmarked for the construction of the building so that they could avail of the proposed monthly grant of Rs100 for the maintenance of the facility.

The collection of books commenced almost immediately because a room in the local court-house had been made available to house the library's growing collection of reading material. As men of science were coming in increasing numbers, it was recommended that among the first books to be acquired would be the best works of reference in the various sciences.

The subsequent years saw flip-flop on the part of the government in honouring its commitment for the construction of the library building. However, after many ups and downs, the library was finally built and inaugurated on May 8, 1869. The architectural detailing of this high gothic building remains to this day a prime example of the lengths colonial designers would go to recreate a little bit of "back home".

The fact that despite its chequered history the library was able to survive speaks volumes for the wisdom and tenacity of those responsible for its running. No trip to Ooty is complete without a visit to this dream that would live on…

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Buzz Burza, an American freelance writer, lives in New Delhi with his writer wife Vidhu Ganzoor.

Indian Handicrafts
MUCH SOUGHT AFTER

GARIMA SHARMA

Exquisite designs, attractive colours, unmatched workmanship and subtle elegance are the distinguishing features which have put Indian handicrafts on world map. Steadily climbing the popularity chart, their exports shot up to a staggering Rs. 83,430 million in 2002-2003. This sector has more potential for earning substantial foreign exchange. As a rural and cottage industry, it provides employment to lakhs of people from the weaker sections of society. Low capital investments, higher value addition and highly labour intensive are highlights that make the sector significant for the country's economy. Central and State governments have been paying extraordinary attention to ensure high growth rate and









development of the handicrafts industry.

Handicrafts bear the stamp of each particular region and culture. With India's great diversity and rich culture, we have a unique treasure of handicrafts to boast of. These works of art are executed through a variety of mediums such as metal and wood, stone, papier-mache, pottery, silk, cotton, brocade, natural fibre from plants etc. The tribal and rural artisans have inherited various techniques and processes from their forefathers in the creation of their art.

Metal has been part of Indian life and culture since time immemorial. The iron beams of the Konark Sun Temple in Orissa and the iron pillar at Qutab Minar in Delhi are evidence of the early skills achieved by the Indians in the field of metal-casting. Copper and bronze are the two most popular non-ferrous metals shaped into tools, bronze-casting in India being as old as five million years.

The scope of metal art is immense, what with the variety of decorative techniques practiced such as inlay, metal casting, carving, appliques etc. Work done in Moradabad, Jaipur and Delhi is representative of this. Moradabad, in U.P., is especially noted for its coloured enamelling and intricate engravings in niello. Metal wire inlay work, found mostly in U.P. and Kerala, has panels and pictures depicting attractive scenes. Metal engraving practiced in Kashmir is usually done on walking sticks, nutcrackers, cutlery, decorative pieces etc. Rajasthan artisans do outstanding work in silver-spice



boxes, caskets, birds, animals and jewellery boxes with intricate designs. These are marked both for their utility and ornamental value.

Papier-mache items are made of thick layers of paper pulp mixed with starch and given different shapes and designs on wooden moulds. Imagination runs wild as craftsmen breathe life into the moulds, bringing out variety of expressions. Kashmir turns out a variety of utility items of papier-mache, as also decorative pieces.

Woodcraft too has played its part in making the Indian handicraft treasure richer. Since time immemorial, wood has been used to make utensils. In Himachal Pradesh, water pitchers are made of wood. Walnut wood, found in Kashmir, is used for making trays, book stands, wall decorations, fruit bowls etc. Gujarat has a rich tradition of woodcarving; famous are the traditional wooden swings, chairs and tables. Karnataka and Maharashtra are famous for wood lacquering. Painted traditional cradles, boxes and 'ganjifa' sets of playing cards are painted with religious and mythological figures. Hand fans made of strips and slices of sandalwood are great utility items, spreading their refreshing aroma in the room.

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The author is a freelance writer.

Muddupalani

SCHOLAR DEVADASI

PRAN NEVILE

Urvashi, peer among the *Apsaras* (fairies) is said to have been born on earth as a *devadasi* and imparted the divine knowledge of dance and music to human beings. Chinese pilgrim Hieun Tsang, who visited India in the 7th century, testified to the existence of a well established institution of temple dancers, *Devadasis,* all over India. After the advent of Muslim rule, devadasis disappeared from the scene in North India but the practice continued in the South until the beginning of the 20th century.

In their heyday, under the generous patronage of the Pallava, Chola, Pandya and Nayaka Kings, *devadasis* were honoured with titles and gifts and their names are even mentioned in temple chronicles and inscriptions. They were trained from childhood in the arts of dance and music and were also taught classical literature in Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu. *Devadasis* commanded respect in society and were treated as symbols of good luck. The exchange of *devadasis* between the temple and the court was an accepted practice. Though married to the temple deities, some of them gifted with rare beauty and accomplishments became royal courtesans and consorts of kings.

Devadasis from Andhra Pradesh dominated the cultural scene in South India. The classic example was the celebrated *devadasi* Muddupalani who adorned the royal court of the Nayaka King of

"Devadasis in Madras" by Tilly Kettle, c. 1770.







Tanjore, Partapsimha (1739-1763), a great patron and lover of music, literature and the arts. He honoured and rewarded Muddupalani not only for her accomplishments in performing arts but also for her scholarly achievements as a learned poet, being well-versed in Telugu and Sanskrit. At that time, Tanjore court was one of the few surviving Hindu patrons of arts in India and therefore attracted best talents from other parts of the country as well. Muddupalani's marvellous erotic epic *Radhika Santwanam* (consoling Radha), a mid-eighteenth century literary masterpiece and virtual gem of Telugu literature, was little known outside Andhra Pradesh. Credit goes to Susie Tharu and K. Lalita for bringing to light this great work through their excellent compilation, *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present* published in the early nineties. *Radhika Santwanam* consisting of 584 poems is replete with *Sringar Rasa* or eroticism and presents the story of Radha and Krishna in a new light. Muddupalani is totally unconventional in her perception and treatment of the subject. She highlights the woman's gratification that takes precedence and forms the central theme of this great literary work. There is also an absorbing account of a young girl's coming of age and her maiden sexual encounter.

Hailing from a family of *devadasis*, Muddupalani speaks with pride about the literary achievements of her mother and grandmother who were both poets. In her autobiographical prologue, she proclaims her own eminence and popularity as a poet and scholar.

"A nautch by native dancers at Vizagapatnam" by Capt. Crockatt, c. 1800.



"Devadasi holding a rose" by a Tanjore artist, c. 1790 (above) and "Devadasi and musicians" by another Tanjore artist, c. 1805 (facing page).

She also describes with confidence and pride her physical beauty and charm, her gracious personality and her generous patronage of young artists and writers. She introduces herself with the following verses:

Which other woman of my kind has
Felicitated scholars with gifts of money?
To which other woman of my kind have
epics been dedicated?
Which other woman of my kind has won such acclaim in each of the arts?
You are incomparable,
Muddulapalani among your kind.

She further adds:

A face that glows like the full moon
Skills of conversation, matching the countenance
Eyes filled with compassion,
Matching the speech.
A great spirit of generosity,
Matching the glance.
These are the ornaments that adorn Palani,
When she is praised by kings.

There is an interesting story about the publication of Muddupalani's classic. The first version of *Radhika Santwanam* as edited by Venkatanarsu was published in 1887. It omitted couplets of several poems as also Muddupalani's autobiographical prologue which informed the readers about her accomplishments and eminence as a poet in the royal court. Later Nagaratanamma, a learned *devadasi* from Bangalore, not satisfied with the published version, decided to bring out the classic work in its original form after extensive research. She finally succeeded in tracing the original palm leaf manuscript of this work and the new edition was published by her in 1910. Speaking about her determination to bring this masterpiece to the attention of the intelligentsia and general readers, she wrote in the Preface. "No matter how many times I read the book, I feel like reading it all over again. This epic brimming with *Rasa* was not only written by a woman, but by one born into our own community". Muddupalani is perhaps the only woman scholar in the world to have written so boldly and candidly on a sensual theme.

The publication of Muddupalani's classic work aroused a lot of controversy and outright condemnation by the contemporary social reformers. Many of them denounced it as obscene and labelled its author as a fallen woman. Nagaratanamma strove hard to defend this great literary work but to no avail. The British Government in their anxiety to protect the moral mores of their subjects, yielded to the demand of the reformers and banned the publication in 1911.

Though all the copies were seized and destroyed, yet the copies of the book continued to circulate. It was only after Independence in 1947 that the ban was withdrawn by the enlightened Chief Minister of Madras, T. Prakasam. What a boon it would be for the lovers of literature not only in India but also abroad if this supreme gem of Telugu literature is translated into other Indian languages, as well as into English.

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The author is a noted writer.



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India Perspectives



From the Editor…



In his Independence Day address to the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi on August 15, 2003, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee declared that India would send on unmanned spacecraft to the moon by 2007 to explore the "obscure part of moon's surface". Mr. Vajpayee's commitment to the nation, spurred by the relentless successes achieved by India's Space Research Organisation (ISRO), speaks volumes about the confidence he has in this premier scientific research organisation. This confidence is not misplaced: ISRO has repeatedly demonstrated that no frontier is final for it... its Polar Satellite Launch Vehicles (PSLVs) have put into space not only Indian but foreign satellites as well, and the more recent GSLV's second development flight, fuelled by a cryogenic engine soon to be manufactured indigenously, seeks to demonstrate that ISRO can build heavier and more powerful boosters for the future. When the GSLV (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle) finally becomes operational by late 2004, it will signal an end to India's dependence on outside launchers for orbiting its INSAT series of satellites. The outgoing ISRO Chairman K. Kasturirangan says only six countries in the world, including India, have this capability. No wonder that some South-East Asian countries have shown keen interest in using Indian capability in launching satellites.

The satellites that ISRO has launched so far seek to bolster India's communication network, help spread eduacation, teach advanced farming methods to the agriculturists and help make accurate weather forecasting, besides other uses. ISRO's commercial arm, Antrix Crop., has supplied spacecraft hardware for Japan's MTSAT-2 satellite, clinched a deal with Germany for supporting two of its satellite missions and expanded the international marketing of the data received from India's highly successful IRS series of earth observation satellites. All this forms part of India's commitment to forge international cooperation in the exploration of space and the benefits that accrue therefrom.

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Editor
Bharat Bhushan
Assistant Editor
B. Bhushan



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Telephones: 23389471, 23388873, Fax: 23782391
email: editor_ip2002@yahoo.co.in
Website: http://www.meadev.nic.in

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