ART CONNECT

An IFA Publication

Volume 5
Number 2
July-December 2013

Rs.150

Contents

ArtConnect

An IFA Publication

Volume 7 Number 2

July - December 2013

Editor

C.K. Meena

Co-Editor

Rashmi Sawhney

Design

Mishta Roy

Printed by B Narahari, published by Arundhati Ghosh on behalf of India Foundation for the Arts and printed at Manipal Press Ltd., Press Corner, Tile Factory Road, Manipal, Udipi, Karnataka - 576 104 and published at India Foundation for the Arts, 'Apurva', Ground Floor, No 259, 4th Cross, Raj Mahal Vilas IInd Stage, IInd Block, Bangalore - 560 094. Editor - C.K. Meena

Photo and Text Credits

Yousuf Saeed, Abhishek Hazra, M.V. Bhaskar, K. Thanigaimani, Rajiv Kumar, D. Samson, C.P. Satyajit, Vidyun Sabhaney, Shohei Emura, Alexandra Moskovchuk, Aditi Chitre, Tshetsholo Naro

Cover Image

The cover of *The Tiger*, an illustrated book of stories created by Eyete Kapfo of Chizami, Nagaland during an IFA-supported workshop held by Aditi Chitre in 2012.

Editorial

An emphasis on the visual arts characterises this issue—sixteenth-century murals given new life through digital technology, traditional picture-storytelling used to extend comic book art, visual imagery in nineteenth-century Urdu magazines, and the amazing creations that spring from children in Nagaland who have never been to formal art classes.

Many have lamented the decline of Urdu, a language that was once vital to northern Indian intellectual life, but Yousuf Saeed reminds us that it was also a language connected to mainstream media, industry and politics. Through his analysis of the visual imagery in popular Urdu magazines of the past, he demonstrates how Urdu's early print culture was an inclusive medium for mainstream secular communication, and not restricted to Islamic themes as it is today.

Time has dealt harshly with the ancient murals of the Venugopala Parthasarathy temple at Chengam in Tamil Nadu. M.V. Bhaskar explains how, through his novel method of conservation that involves photographing, scanning and digitally tracing the images, he plans to breathe fresh life into them by using them in an animation film.

In an attempt to extend her practice as a comic-book artist, Vidyun Sabhaney has been examining the relationship between the oral and the visual in the telling of the epics. She and her collaborator Shohei Emura have been documenting how stories from the Mahabharata are told in three picture-storytelling traditions—from Karnataka, West Bengal and Rajasthan. Sabhaney's essay brings out the evolving nature of these traditions.

Visual arts practice among the young in Nagaland has been strangely neglected, as Aditi Chitre discovered when she worked closely with the North East Network to hold an art workshop in Chizami in 2011. She nurtured the untapped potential of the children, none of whom had had any formal training in the arts, when she returned in 2012 to hold a storytelling and visual arts workshop. Through a photo-essay, Chitre walks us through the children's creative journey that resulted in an illustrated (as yet unpublished) book of stories.

If there is a wild card in this pack it would have to be Abhishek Hazra who takes on the persona of one Pratyut Panna interviewing a notional author Anuprash Joshi who has written a series of books about his unwritten books. Each book in Joshi's FailBook project is a detailed description of several books he has failed to write. Readers of Hazra's piece may be forgiven for believing they have stumbled into Borges territory. We predict that it will also bust their guts, and therefore extend our sympathies in advance.

C.K. Meena
ckmeena@gmail.com

Ishtihar Tasveeren: Visual Culture of Early Urdu Magazines

Yousuf Saeed

All images courtesy the author

The nineteenth century witnessed a boom in commercial publishing in Urdu, a language that was vital to northern Indian intellectual life, a language of both courtly poetry and popular prose. Its decline began soon after India's independence, however, since it was no longer taught in most schools. After 1947, as Urdu-literate generations dwindled, Urdu's connection with mainstream media, industry and politics was affected. Today, most Urdu publications in India are restricted to religious themes or to issues of the Muslim community. Through his analysis of popular visual imagery in Urdu magazines and journals, Yousuf Saeed demonstrates that Urdu's early print culture was not restricted to Islamic or Islamicate themes and was a more inclusive medium for mainstream secular communication.

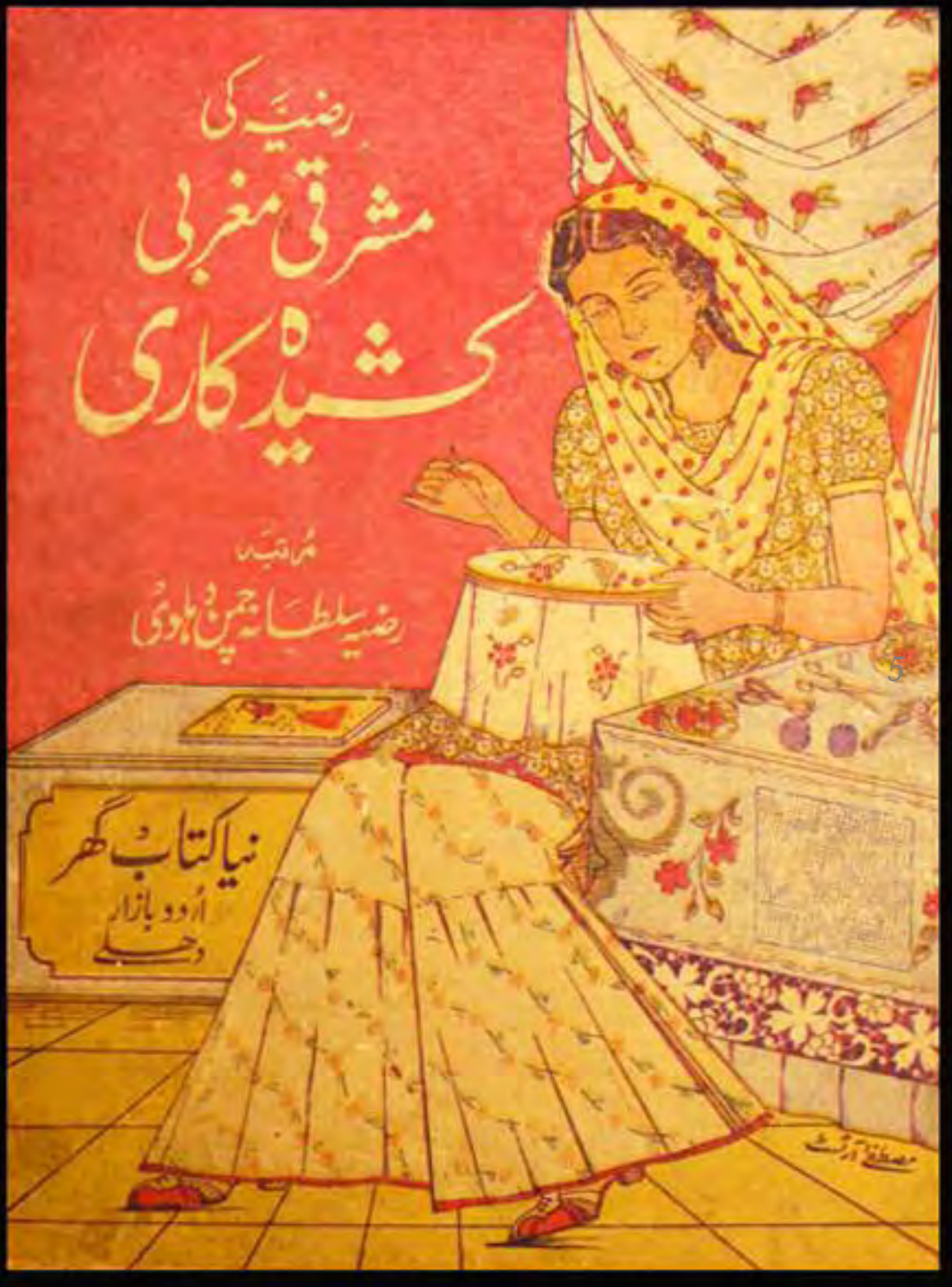
Cover of an embroidery book *Razia ki maghribi mashriqi kasheeda kaari* (Razia's eastern-western embroidery), published by Naya Kitab Ghar, Delhi. Circa 1940s.

رضیہ کی

مشرقی مغربی کشیدہ کاری

مرتبہ

رضیہ سلطانہ چمن دہلوی



نیا کتاب گھر
اردو بازار
دہلی

Advertisement for perfume products from Asghar Ali Mohammed Ali of Lucknow. Published from Lahore in 1931.

In India, printed Urdu literature and Urdu language have in recent times been associated with Muslims and Islam. They are often assumed to reflect religious orthodoxy and austere iconoclasm because of an apparent absence of images—or at least of images of the human figure—in its contemporary printed examples. Ignorance about Urdu's eclectic and celebratory past is often so acute that it can create absurd situations, as a recent example shows: Mumbai Police claimed that couplets of nineteenth-century Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib incited hatred and terror.[1] But this narrow stereotype of Urdu may not necessarily be a construction of non-Urdu-speakers alone. Even many 'Urdu-*wallahs*' or Muslims consider it not only *their* language but also a symbol of their religious identity rather than a shared cultural entity. A handful of Urdu speakers, though, do make an effort to dispel this identity myth.[2]

Urdu was not always typecast in India, however. Urdu, spoken or written, was the most common medium of mainstream communication, especially at the time when print culture began thriving in north India. While today's Urdu printed literature such as books, magazines or other ephemera may reflect a lack of liberal visuals or artistic creativity, probably due to a decline in its readership, Urdu printed ephemera before the early twentieth century was the main carrier of ideas, news, business and

European-looking man and woman in an advertisement for Okasa, a health drink, printed in *Musavvir*, 1941.

education, with a large pan-India readership that was not restricted to Muslims. Its popularity can be gauged by the fact that Urdu magazines carried the advertisements of almost all mainstream commercial brands just as today's major newspapers and magazines do. Most importantly, the advertisements and the illustrated features in popular Urdu periodicals depicted culture, arts, cinema, glamour, women etc. in a totally unrestrained manner. The magazines also catered to the religious or cultural needs of Hindus and other communities as much as they did to those of Muslims. Similarly, Urdu was one of the first Indian languages in which 'progressive' ephemera such as greeting cards, calendars and business stationery were printed and used widely.[3]

Soon after India's independence in 1947, however, one witnessed a decline in Urdu's print culture, primarily since Urdu was removed not only from being a medium of education but also as a subject in most schools in north India, mainly in Uttar Pradesh, which ironically was its birth place and natural home. In short, all subsequent generations were deprived of a language and script that had been essential to their ancestors.[4] Naturally, the first thing to be affected was Urdu's connection with mainstream media, industry, politics, and people's professional lives. Slowly, as the Urdu-literate generation dwindled, so did the liberal and inclusive image of the language and its printed literature. And today, most Urdu works published in India are restricted to religious themes or the issues of the Muslim community, and are devoid of any liberal visual depictions.

However, in the nineteenth century, Urdu played a crucial role in almost every sphere of northern Indian intellectual life. It emerged as a language not only of courtly poetry but also of popular prose, a language to spread religious values, mould public opinion, and transmit knowledge and education. In the nineteenth century there was a boom in commercial publishing, to cater to elite Urdu and Hindi readers as well as to neo-literate non-elites who had thus far not accessed the written or printed word. According to Francesca Orsini, a large repertoire of popular literature such as detective novels, theatre transcripts, songbooks, saint biographies, serialised narratives, and popular poetry, printed on cheap paper, provided an activity of pleasure for thousands of new readers.[5] Moreover this early print culture also reflected a considerable hybridity and fluidity between Urdu and Hindi. In the 'commercialisation of leisure', according to Orsini, the boundaries between Urdu and Hindi had collapsed somewhat. Most of these chapbooks also contained attractive illustrations, some on the covers and many inside, resembling those depicting characters or scenes in works of fiction. The word *ba-tasveerat* (with pictures) was added to the titles of many of these books to attract buyers. Some of the famous publishers of such illustrated Urdu literature were in Delhi, Kanpur and Lahore, and they included Matba' Naval Kishore from Lucknow. Naval Kishore Press, in fact, was the most prolific publishing house, bringing out a large number of titles in Urdu, Hindi, Arabic and Persian.[6]

Along with print technology from Europe, there entered European commercial products, and their advertising images that appeared in newspapers and magazines in English and in local languages. When one looks at a few mainstream advertisements published in the English press in the early twentieth century, one finds that a distinctive feature of representation seems to be the contrast between European and Indian facial features and lifestyles, as if different products were meant for clients of different classes or identities even if the product was imported from Europe. This is interesting because the two contrasting advertisements were often published in the same English periodicals or printed spaces that were seen or read by both Europeans and the Indian elite.[7] But often, the European dress or mannerism is also presented to the Indian readers (such

Ismat, the cover of an Urdu magazine for women, issue of February 1938, published from Delhi by the editor Rashidul Khairi.

as in a 1930 Urdu advertisement for a health supplement drug *Okasa*) as a role model of modernism which the Indians (or Urdu readers) ought to adopt. The style of art or illustration used in much of this print culture is clearly influenced by photography; however, photographs have not been liberally used because of technical limitations. Much of the colour printing in early era was done in Europe since colour presses were rare in India until the twentieth century.

Many illustrated Urdu newspapers and magazines had started appearing in north India in the mid-nineteenth century. They were mostly published from Delhi and Lahore, and among the first were *Avadh Akhbar*,[8] and *Dehli Urdu Akhbar* started in 1836 by Maulvi M. Baqar. Soon there appeared some women's magazines too, catering mostly to the *purdah* women in *ashraf* or elite families of north India. *Tahzib un-Niswan* was started at Lahore in 1898, *Khatun* of Aligarh ran from 1904 to 1914, and *Ismat*, started by Delhi's Urdu novelist Rashid-ul Khairi in 1908, ran the longest, until the 1950s. These magazines raised important social issues such as the low social status of Muslim women, even as they reaffirmed women's domestic roles by dealing with topics such as sewing, cooking, child-rearing and home economics.[9] Many of them carried images not only to illustrate the topics but also as decoration. This popular print culture also featured illustrated Urdu books on cookery, embroidery and similar topics much sought after by families. The images reflected a somewhat European style of human features

Photograph of an unidentified film actress printed along with Urdu poetry in the Urdu magazine *Alamgir,* Lahore, 1935.

and backdrops, and there was no hesitation in the depiction of bodies, even those of women.

In some of the early Urdu magazines, 'beautiful' images were not used purely for their sensual value; there were efforts to connect or complement them with ideas through the written word, especially poetry, which is said to enhance the meaning of images. Many magazines carried images of natural beauty or pretty women, usually in colour, accompanied by creative captions and often poems that paid tribute to the images. Some magazines such as *Alamgir* of Lahore (circa 1920-30s) carried reproductions of oleographs depicting scenic beauty (often painted by the local artists such as Hakim Faqir M. Chishti or Prof. Allah Bakhsh), which were 'commented upon' in romantic poetry by well-known poets.

Delhi and Lahore were major centres of print production that also had business relations and heavy mutual postal traffic until 1947.[10] These two centres produced, besides books and magazines, popular ephemera such as religious and decorative posters and calendar art that were sought after all over India.[11] But the 1947 Partition of India came as a big blow to these large business centres as they were cut off from one another. The family business of *Ismat* magazine was transferred from Delhi to Karachi by Rashid's son Raziq-ul Khairi, and continued there for long. But Partition also reoriented many businesses on both sides of the border, and after a brief lull, Delhi's Urdu print culture picked up slowly. There appeared many other popular magazines in Urdu from Delhi around

Advertisement for Jharan hair-oil, printed in *Musavvir*, 1941.

An advertisement for His Master's Voice gramophone player published in 1935 in an Urdu newspaper.

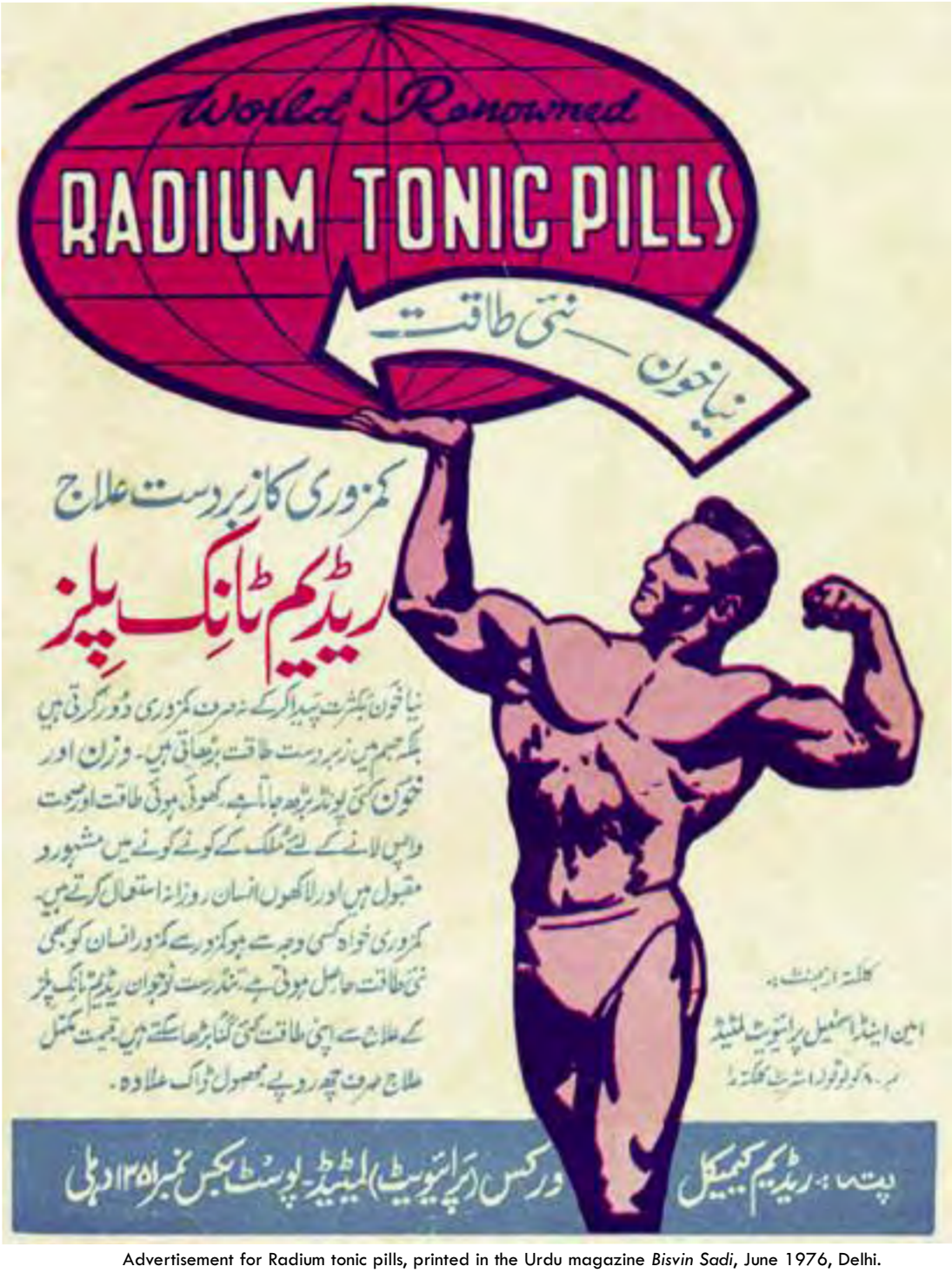
1950, some of them lasting till the end of the twentieth century.

Whether in general-interest magazines or those meant specifically for women, the female body has been used as a staple feature in advertising to attract potential buyers towards a product, right from the time commercial advertisements started appearing in India. Urdu magazines and their advertisements were not devoid of such gender stereotypes,

Advertisement for Murphy radio featuring India's beauty queen Miss Naqi Jahan, printed in the Urdu magazine *Shama*, June 1967, Delhi.

Advertisement for Woodward's gripe water in Urdu, published circa 1930s.

either. The female body not only solicited the attention of the male viewer but it also assuaged masculine anxiety in reproducing and reaffirming traditional roles for women. This regressive tendency in the media is at odds with the advertising industry's self projection as the face of 'modernity' and 'progress'. In Urdu printed literature, most of the images and advertising messages reflected a romantic notion of the female body and largely promoted cosmetics and beauty products. Moreover, the modern woman was shown as having many chores to do in her daily life—maintaining new standards of domestic cleanliness, handling the new gadgets of kitchen and laundry, and



Advertisement for Radium tonic pills, printed in the Urdu magazine *Bisvin Sadi*, June 1976, Delhi.

using newer ways of keeping the husband and children happy.[12] In a popular nineteenth-century Urdu novel, *Mirat ul-'Arus* (*the Bride's Mirror*) the protagonist Asghari's house was in perfect order "as if the house were a machine, with all its works in good order".[13]

Studying the images and advertisements of commodities in late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Indian print is like conducting an archaeological search of the times. Each product and its promotion tells us so much about the development of society in colonial India, the likes and dislikes of people and even the social hierarchy being addressed in the advertisements. A large number of printed ads are about wonder drugs and magic pills that can treat all your ailments and miraculously bring back your youth. Many of these products are European while some also use traditional Indian medical systems such as Ayurveda and Unani. There appears to be some sort of mass anxiety about bringing back one's health by using oils, lotions, potions and tablets. From these magazine advertisements, one gathers that an active culture of mail-order purchases was already common then, since most advertisements provide the option of sending the product by post, and payments by money-order.

Advertisement for United pressure cooker, printed in *Bano*, April 1976.

The wonder drugs included potions for enhancing sexual vigour and virility, and treatments for infertility. There are drugs "guaranteed to make women give birth to a male child only", stressing on the "misfortune of families that have not had a son despite trying hard for many years". There are advertisements for illustrated

Cover of a popular chapbook of Urdu poetry *Ghalib ki Ghazlein* published in 1970, Delhi.

Advertisement for Surf printed in *Bisvin Sadi*, October 1969.

chapbooks such as *kama-shastra* and *kokh-shastra* that explain to newly-wed couples the secrets of a blissful married life in simple Urdu. Then there are naughty and secretive booklets with erotic tales of a beautiful woman's nuptial night and so on (with titles such as *Suhagan ka Suhag*). All these books could be ordered by mail and "will arrive at your doorstep in an unmarked parcel for secrecy", said the ad.

A number of mechanical devices and commodities that had just arrived from Europe became not only a craze but also a symbol of high culture. Radio and gramophone were the most common forms of mediated entertainment, and such gadgets were commonly advertised in Urdu periodicals. Many other innovative imported products were available in the market to inspire awe and wonder in the buyers, such as alarm clocks, portable printing machines, shaving machines, toy pistols, torch-lights, movie projectors and even devices that

Advertisement for Lux soap featuring Indian film actress Sharmila Tagore, printed in *Shama*, June 1967. A byline of the advertising agency Lintas can be seen in Urdu at bottom left.

claimed to make you invisible!

Gramophone records were especially popular among the Urdu readers as a large number of recordings of qawwali, Urdu poetry and Islamic devotional music was made available on from early on, and their advertisements regularly featured the latest released discs.[14] From the pre-1950s era we move on to the second half of the twentieth century where new magazines and Urdu publishing houses started emerging. Old Delhi or Shahjahan had a large business of *hakim*s or traditional doctors, some of whom hailed from families that served the Mughal rulers. New businesses emerged from such families, with brand names such as Hamdard and Sham'a Laboratories that are active till date. Besides selling their traditional pharmaceutical and health-related products, such companies also helped establish a vibrant culture of popular print. Urdu periodicals *Bano*, *Biswin Sadi* and *Sham'a* emerged as among the best-selling family magazines in north India. They came with small-sized 'digests' such as *Huma*, *Huda*, *Shabistan* and *Mehrab* that focussed on general and sometimes religious topics. While *Bano* and *Biswin Sadi* catered to women's issues, *Sham'a* (along with its Hindi counterpart *Sushma*) was the most popular magazine devoted to Indian cinema, which freely provided gossip as well as glamorous images of actors and actresses. Of course, these magazines also printed advertisements of the products from their parent companies.

The female body continues to remain a prominent feature in much of later twentieth-century print culture.

Images and art styles change but the older domestic roles of women get reinforced with newer products and services. The women in Urdu advertisements work in offices, drive scooters and attend parties with male friends; however, they also have to use more advanced types of detergent powders and futuristic pressure cookers at home.

Among the various commodities, soap has been the most evident symbol of modernity, hygiene, and a projected beauty which has been represented in popular print literature through its advertisements, specifically that of one soap brand—Lux.[15] It was projected as the soap used by the film stars and there was hardly any famous Indian cinema actress who did not appear in the Lux soap advertisements. Since popular cinema represented the dreams of millions, the image of luxury soap too allowed them to imagine themselves like the film stars.

There were plenty of periodicals devoted to detective stories and novels right from the late nineteenth century. But from the mid-twentieth century, *Mujrim* and *Jasoosi Duniya* emerged as the most sought after digest-sized volumes with popular detective characters such as Imran. *Jasoosi Duniya*'s author Ibne Safi was born in 1928 near Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh) and later moved to Pakistan. These detective novels are characterised by colourful cover art that itself could be documented and studied.[16]

The cover of an Urdu detective novel, *Wardatein*, published from Delhi, 1940.

The covers are bursting with pretty women, guns, blood and gore that, besides reflecting the plot, also catch the eye of those who might buy them at bookshops on railway platforms or the roadside shacks.

It would be incorrect to assume that twentieth-century Urdu print culture was only filled with liberal images of women and sensuality. One cannot ignore a large volume of literature devoted to religion and Muslim identity. Delhi's publishers produced periodicals such as the monthly *Molvi* (1950s to1960s), *Aastana* (1970s to 1980s), and the digest-sized *Huda* that focused on devotional literature—inspiring stories from Islam's history, religious poetry, and sermons. There were images too—mostly of the Mecca and Medina shrines and also those of Indian Sufi shrines. The magazines also carried art work based on calligraphy of Qur'anic literature in Arabic. But even these magazines, until the 1980s, were liberal enough to carry advertisements of commodities such as clothes, shoes, clocks and all other worldly objects required in daily life. However, they did carry ads for fashionable *burqa*s (veils) meant for modern Muslim women, stressing yet again on ideas of modesty and chastity of women in the Islamic society.

Looking at these advertisements in Urdu magazines one may wonder what is so special about them. After all, most of them are simply Urdu versions of the mainstream product advertisements in English or any other Indian language publications. What is special is that most examples presented here are from the early- and mid-twentieth century, and one doesn't see them any more in Urdu print culture. They belong to a 'golden era' of Urdu print culture, which reveals the openness and eclecticism of Urdu readers.

It is important to document and study these images because many of those liberated periodicals are no longer printed, and the Indian industry and commercial establishments do not consider the current Urdu magazines commercially rewarding enough to advertise in. Until the 1980s, almost all major advertising agencies in India had creative staff or resources in Urdu; most ad campaigns were originally conceived and designed in Urdu rather than simply copied from the English templates. Their artists too often came from a lineage of practitioners in the Indo-Muslim artistic tradition, such as calendar art, which too is almost extinct. The decline of Urdu print culture may have occurred parallel to a process of 'ghettoisation' of the Indian Muslim community in India since 1947.[17] These have been complex processes and no single factor can be considered

responsible for them. But Urdu language and its print culture is not dead yet. New magazines and popular literature is being published, but the tendency has mostly been to impart values of a rather sanitised religion among the new generation of Muslims. The visual culture of these magazines reflects icons and motifs of the Arab world rather than of India, as the new global Muslims increasingly seek their cultural identities in west Asia.

Yousuf Saeed is a filmmaker and author whose documentary films and research has focused on South Asia's shared cultural traditions and popular visual culture. His films* Basant *(1997),* Khayal Darpan *(2006), and* Making of the Taj *(2013) have been shown internationally. He is the author of* Muslim Devotional Art in India *(Routledge, 2012), and co-manages* Tasveer Ghar*, the online archive of South Asia's popular visual culture.

NOTES

1. Gilani, Iftikhar, 'Mirza Ghalib is fanning hate feelings: Cops' theory', *Daily News and Analysis* (*DNA*), Mumbai, 10 April 2012.

2. Safavi, Rana, 'My name Is Urdu and I am not a Muslim', *Tehelka* blog, 24 April 2013, http://blog.tehelka.com/my-name-is-urdu-and-i-am-not-a-muslim

3. Saeed, Yousuf, 'Eid Mubarak: Cross-cultural Image Exchange in Muslim South Asia,' *Tasveer Ghar*, March 2011, New Delhi. http://tasveerghar.net/cmsdesk/essay/117/

4. Farouqui, Athar, 'The Problem of Urdu in India—Political or Existential? An Interview with S.R. Faruqi', *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol.10, 1995, pp.157-67.

5. Orsini, Francesca, *Print and Pleasure: Popular literature and entertaining fictions in colonial north India*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2009.

6. Stark, Ulrike, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in*

Colonial India, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007.

7. Saeed, Yousuf, 'Setting Gender Roles in Early Indian Print Advertisements', *Marg*, Mumbai: Marg Publications, Vol.62 No.4, June 2011, pp. 84-91.

8. Stark, Ulrike, 'Politics, Public Issues and the Promotion of Urdu Literature: Avadh Akhbar, the First Urdu Daily in Northern India', *Annual of Urdu Studies* 18, 2003, pp. 66-94.

9. Minault, Gail, 'Urdu Women's Magazines in the Early Twentieth Century', *Manushi*, No. 48, September-October 1988, pp. 2-9.

10. Sunaga, Emiko, 'A Study of the Urdu Print Culture of South Asia since the Late Eighteenth Century', *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies* 6, March 2013, pp. 136-144.

11. Saeed, Yousuf, *Muslim Devotional Art in India*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2012.

12. McGowan, Abigail, 'Modernity at Home: Leisure, Autonomy and the New Woman in India', *Tasveer Ghar*, http://tasveerghar.net/cmsdesk/essay/95/

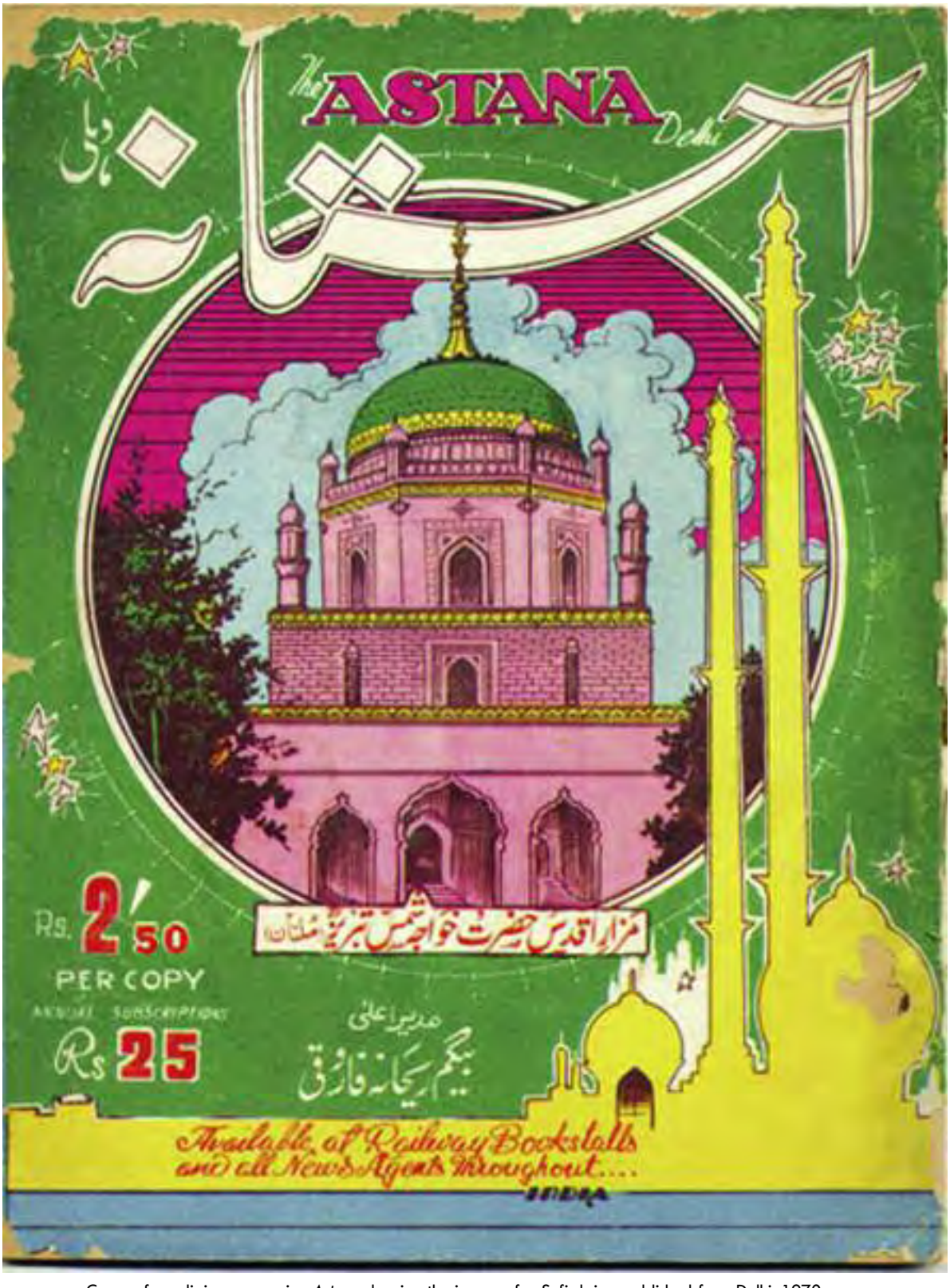
13. Ahmed, Nazir Ahmad, *The Bride's Mirror: A Tale of Life in Delhi a Hundred Years Ago*, trans. G.E. Ward, Delhi: Permanent Black, 1869.

14. Qureshi, Regula Burckhardt, 'His Master's Voice? Exploring Qawwali and 'Gramophone Culture' in South Asia', *Popular Music*, Cambridge University Press, Volume 18, Issue 01, January 1999, pp. 63-98.

15. Gadihoke, Sabeena, 'Selling Soap and Stardom: the Story of Lux', *Tasveer Ghar*, http://tasveerghar.net/cmsdesk/essay/104/

16. Several of Ibne Safi's detective novels have recently been translated and published in English along with their cover art by Blaft Publications, Chennai. See http://blaft.com

17. Ali, Imran and Yoginder Sikand, 'Ghettoisation of Muslims in India', *Counter Currents*, 7 January 2005, http://www.countercurrents.org/comm-sikand070206.htm



Cover of a religious magazine *Astana* showing the image of a Sufi shrine, published from Delhi, 1970.

The Tacoma Narrows Conversation: Episode 27

Abhishek Hazra

Like all good introductions, this too will begin with an invocation, one that will channel the presence of someone who deeply informs our practice:

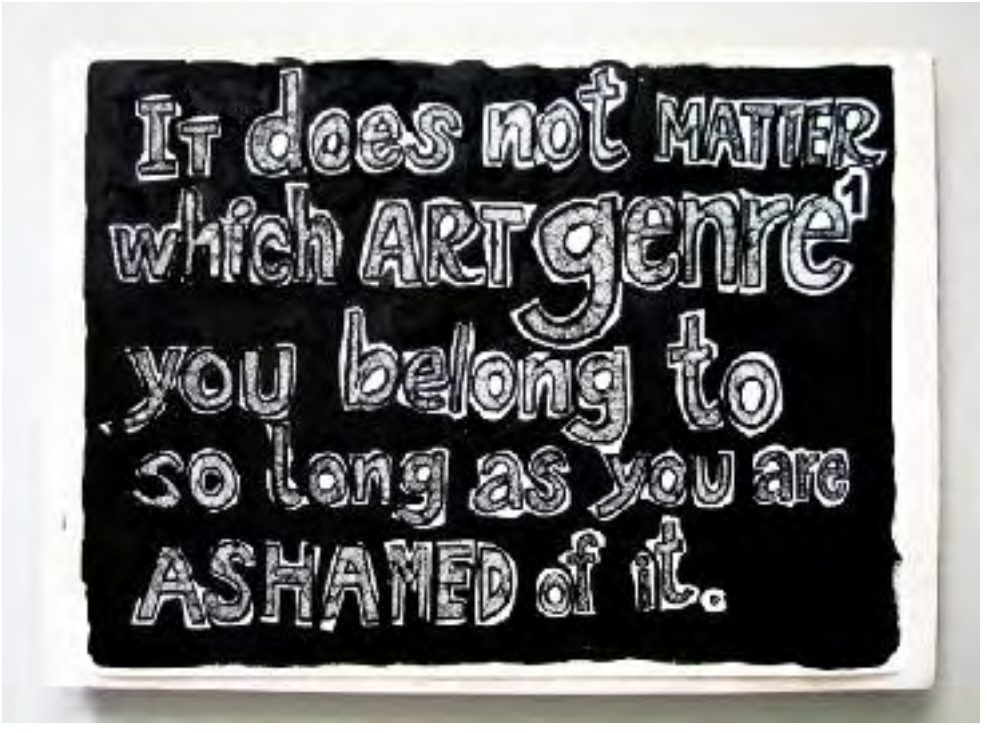
Failure-Art. Non-Failure Art. Ecological Art. Kinetic Art. New Media Art. Performance Art. Text-Based Art. Slide Show Art. Pretentious Art. Blood Art. Dust Art. Verbose-interviews-masquerading-as Art. Well, it doesn't matter which art-genre you belong to, as long as you are ashamed of it.

(The following is a short excerpt from an online radio show called the *Tacoma Narrows Conversation*, in which the writer Anuprash Joshi was interviewed by Pratyut Panna, the show's host.)

Title: For Barney (no, not that Rotunda Climber but the Command Language one)

Subtitle: Featuring among other others, Bio Art, PoCo Art, DoCoMo Art, LeftOver Art, Ugly-Looking-Ethical-Art, CCTV Art, Cheap-To-Transport-Art

Artist: Abhishek Hazra
Year: 2010
Medium: Mixed Media
Dimensions: Variable



For today's edition of the *Tacoma Narrows Conversation*, we will be talking to Anuprash Joshi, who has been pursuing his FailBook project for the last ten years. The FailBook project, as many of you might know, is an ongoing book series, where each book is a detailed description of books that Anuprash has failed to write. There have been five books in this series so far, with the sixth one due for publication next year.

Typically, each book in the project speaks about eight failed books in great detail: eight books that Anuprash has failed to write. While the range of topics covered in each of these unwritten books is definitely interesting—from the history of lepidopterists' field accessories to the chemistry of paper pulp—each FailBook is also marked by the way these failed or unwritten books are themselves described. 'Description' is perhaps not an accurate word to use here, as they are not simply descriptions and neither are they a summary of his research notes. Perhaps one could call them deictic invocations?
Let us hear Anuprash tell us more about them.

PP: Hello Anuprash! Welcome to the show.

AJ: It's a pleasure to be here at Tacoma Narrows.

PP: Anuprash, apologies for indulging in the 'origin-fetish', but how did you get started on your FailBook project?

AJ: Well, as you will realise, the idea itself is nothing particularly novel. Many writers have spoken about their unwritten books. And in fact, a history of unwritten books is the topic of an unwritten book in the third book in the FailBook series.

So, around ten years back, I was trying to finish a book about this entire olfactory aspect of bibliophilia. I had structured it around five apparently disconnected chapters, each of which elaborated on a particular area—for example there was this chapter on how to analyse the Raman spectra of printing inks and related dyestuffs, and there was another one on ways to tweak the filters in those heavy duty industrial masks so that you can inhale the aroma of really old books without getting into some health hazard.

Now, expectedly enough, I was having real difficulty in completing each of these chapters—they were perpetually in various stages of revision and re-revision and drastic re-writes. At some point, I think, I realised that perhaps each of these chapters were meant to be a separate book by itself. And with that realisation I also quickly figured out that, for various reasons, I won't be able to write those books. Or rather, I won't be able to finish them within the practical frameworks of finishing books.

PP: Was talking about that failure then a way of coming to terms with it?

AJ: Yes, absolutely. At least for the first FailBook that was very much the starting point, and this influenced the entire structure of it. This decision to include my research notes, and other preparatory material in the final published book, was motivated by this entire 'coming to terms with the failure thing'. The idea was that let someone else write the book that I won't be able to. Let their success redeem my failure and all that sort of stuff. And it is only when the first book was published, and I held the actual book in my hand, did I realise the problematic aspect of that position. I mean, where do you draw the line between writing and not-writing? At what point does a detailed chapter summary become a chapter?

Now, you might say that it's a pretty

obvious question, and I realise that at a practical, pragmatic level, perhaps it is, but I still think that this threshold is an extremely slippery one. Think about dead authors and their unfinished books and how astute and diligent editors find ways to clothe those unfinished chapters in the proper attire of publishable text. Or how, once a particular text has been canonised, there is an almost interminable search for alternative, unpublished versions of the text—the various draft versions spread across scratched-over manuscripts and mutilated notebooks. And often when you go through these alternative versions, you encounter that classic forking path moment: where the singularity of the published text gives way to alternative universes, that are also interconnected in some strange way.

And it is this interconnection that perhaps makes this bifurcation scenario slightly different from a Many Worlds Hypothesis kind of context. As a reader when you traverse the dense network of these variations, you realise that in some way, each node, or variant, telescopes all the other nodes. One could dismiss this as a hallucination of readerly affect, stemming possibly from one's deep engagement with this universe of texts. However, that acute and often overwhelming feeling of reading all the variants simultaneously is actually quite a real thing.

PP: Is this why from the second book onwards, you do away with the research notes alltogether?

AJ: Well, in a way yes. But they don't really go away. I still do have to make these notes for myself to make sense of the subject that I am grappling with. The only difference is that they don't enter the space of the book—at least not within some ethical framework of material evidence: "*Look! Here, I have done the research to backup my claim of failure. You can't tell me that I didn't try.*"

This material evidence of effort is tied up to the typology of Good Failures and Bad Failures: perhaps there can even be a category of Lazy Failure? This demonstration of sincere attempts is one more way in which failure gets rehabilitated as process with a capital P. Any suspicion of a lack of conscientiousness also immediately casts a doubt on the authenticity of this failure one is claiming to have achieved. How can I say I have failed in something if I haven't even tried?

PP: But there can be other sources of failure too, can't there? For example, if we look at the enthusiast, then we witness this irresolvable gap between his enthusiasm for a subject and his actual competence in it.

AJ: Which is why the figure of the incompetent enthusiast keeps coming back to me. In fact, it was the title of an essay I had written earlier this year. There I was trying to think about this amateur mathematicians' club in Bhopal whose members try to memorise all the questions in the Mathematical Tripos from 1820 onwards.

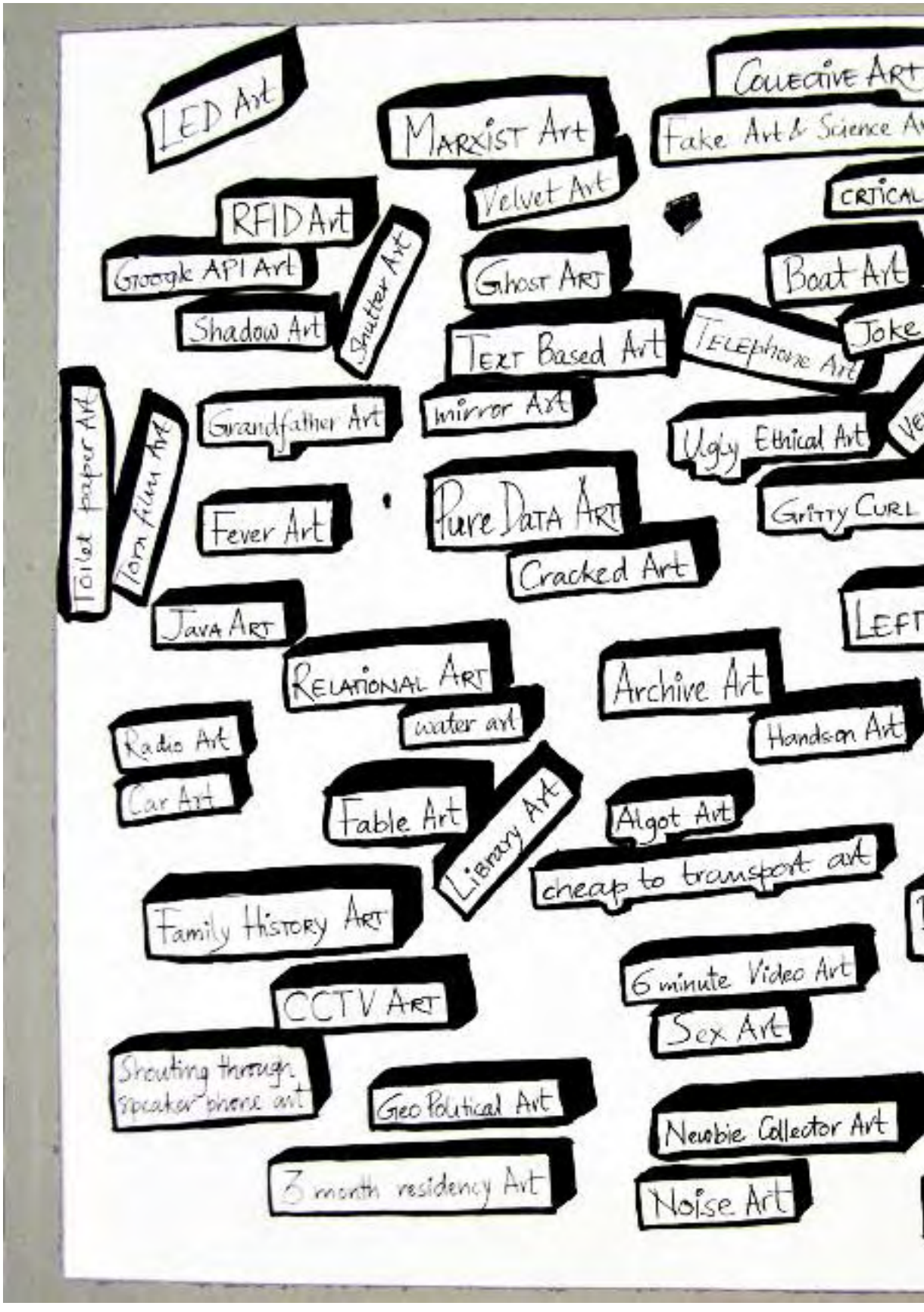
PP: The Cambridge one?

AJ: Yes, that one!

So, yes, this club has around fifteen members and only some of them are formally trained in maths—even then they would at the most have an undergraduate degree. Most of them have very different professional lives—one is a horticultural expert, another is a librarian at Bharat Bhavan—but they all have this strange fascination with mathematics. In their weekly meetings they quiz one another on the questions for a given year and when they are all ready they really perform like a band. One of them shouts out the question number and the others recite out the questions in unison. It's quite a remarkable sight. The week I was there they had chosen the 1854 Tripos papers—the year that the physicist Maxwell was the second Wrangler.

After spending some time with them, I am not even sure if it's really mathematics that is the object of their affection. Although if you ask them they talk a lot about architecture—and inhabitation. For them, this seemingly absurd act of memorising all these really difficult questions is a way of spending time in the House of Maths. And of course, you can't really explain it logically—the sensible response would of course be to tell them to go and learn some real maths and thrust Spivak's Calculus at them.

But in a way, they have a certain, almost textural sense of the terrain of the discipline. They are quite alert to the actual texts of the questions themselves and you can sense that they are thinking about the transformations within the discipline of mathematics or even trying to postulate their own theories for those transformations. For example, one of them had his pet theory that the 1938


LED Art
Marxist Art
Velvet Art
Collective Art
Fake Art & Science
RFID Art
Google API Art
Shadow Art
Shutter Art
Ghost Art
Text Based Art
mirror Art
Telephone Art
Boat Art
Joke
Toilet paper Art
Torn film Art
Grandfather Art
Ugly Ethical Art
Fever Art
Pure Data Art
Cracked Art
Gritty Curl
Java Art
Relational Art
water art
Archive Art
Hands-on Art
Radio Art
Car Art
Fable Art
Library Art
Algot Art
cheap to transport art
Family History Art
6 minute Video Art
CCTV Art
Sex Art
Shouting through speaker phone art
Geo Political Art
Newbie Collector Art
3 month residency Art
Noise Art


European Foundation Art
BRIC Art
Tactical Art
3rd World Art
Practical Art
Fodder for bad Theory Art
military uniform art
Angry Art
Victim Art
Mosquitoe (sp?) Art
Pomo Art
Poco Art
DoCoMo Art
Voga Art
Stamp Art
Basic Human Emotion Art
Bacteria Art
Photoshop Filter Art
Cooking Art
Water Art
Processing Art
Utensil Art
Bio Art
cheap to transport art
Jaded Collector Art
Furniture Art
Oriental Art

Tripos questions had a strong influence of the French Bourbaki group. I didn't really follow up this particular observation, so I can't testify to its veracity, but in this case that's not the point. What excited me is that although they have this close focus on Cambridge, they are really engaging with the larger history of the discipline.

PP: Did you see them in some way as kindred spirits? It is interesting that in an interview you gave after the publication of the second FailBook—the one which is marked by a total absence of any research notes—you also spoke about this quality of inhabitation.

AJ: In some way, perhaps I do. And yes, this aspect of inhabitation still interests me—although I am not sure how much the FailBook series really succeeds in producing that feeling of inhabiting a discourse. There, you have it again—the fundamental irony of speaking about failure, which of course is one of the running themes in the entire series.

And while you can reduce this irony to a formal problem in logic or set theory, or even point to the constituent contradiction in any binary configuration, in my mind it doesn't really lessen the complex nature of this irony. One could say that this is even infinitely generative—that it compels someone invested in thinking about failure, to produce a series of attempts that continuously grapple with this irony.

PP: How did BURP (Brihannala University Regional Press), the publishers for the second FailBook, respond to your decision to print only the rejection letters of other publishers and not the actual manuscript which was rejected?

AJ: Oh! They took it quite sportingly —very much in the spirit of the project. Oarseed, who was my editor then at BURP, was a huge supporter of this project. And of course, he was the one who selected this almost heavily rejected manuscript.

PP: But are all those detailed rejection slips for real? Or is it a sly homage to Umberto Eco? Since anyone familiar with publication is immediately suspicious of the length and quality of those rejection letters. They are indeed more like letters, or even like blind reviews.

AJ: Perhaps they are blind reviews masquerading as rejection slips. Who knows! However, I also realise that irrespective of whatever I say, this spectre of the fictional will always haunt those rejection letters. So really, it is up to you to decide on their authenticity.

Also, I have to disappoint your attempt to trace a lineage of influences. While an obsession with paratextual epiphenomena has itself a long history, my specific interest in failure stems more from my uncle. Till his last day, he practised the difficult art of resonant singing. Which as you would know, involves producing a kind of rhythmic, voice-based pattern-making. These aural patterns are then directed towards a variety of small household objects. The idea is to find, by trial and error, the natural frequency of a particular object—a coffee cup for instance—and sing to it in its natural frequency. Typically, for most small objects, even a few minutes of resonant singing throws it into violent spasms of sympathetic resonance. They oscillate wildly with enhanced amplitude and ultimately shatter into a thousand little pieces.

Postscript

Anuprash was very keen to intersperse an advertisement for CIDEFA, one of his new entrepreneurial projects, throughout the show. He had even got one of his collaborators to produce some interesting spoken-word snatches that worked as a strange hybrid of retro radio jingle and peppy-yuppy Kickstarter promotional video. While these jingles were quite interesting as audio material, as the producer of the show I felt they might be a bit too interruptive: although perhaps that is precisely what Anuprash wanted. Anyway, he graciously agreed to stick to the main conversation while promising to come back later for another show that would focus only on CIDEFA, his citation database project. However, given his busy schedule, we suspect that is not going to materialise anytime soon. So, in the interim, we are publishing here a brief note about CIDEFA. We hope to bring you a more extended text on CIDEFA soon.

Project CIDEFA

CIDEFA aims to extend the web of citation metrics firmly established in the world of scholarly publication, in

the sciences as well as in the humanities, into the world of artistic practice and production. As we all know, the citation index of an article published in an academic journal or any other 'reputed' publication gives an account of the number of times that particular article has been cited by other authors. A comprehensive indexing system coupled with a granular querying interface, allows us access into the hidden orchards nestled within academia's charmed matrix. For example, according to initial estimates, while Ashis Nandy's paper 'History's Forgotten Doubles' has been cited around 146 times, at least five of those citations are in instances which themselves have three-digit citation counts.

Now, of course, metrics obsessed bureaucrats have seized-upon such succulent numbers as IF (Impact Factor) and H-Index with an unprecedented intensity and interest. While we don't believe that scholarly work can be reduced to mere numbers—and after all, there has to be space for a reader who is just a reader and not a compulsive citation-emitter—we also realise that if things like your shoehorn can have their own internet (communicating with other shoe horns or even with a paper trimmer) then massive network integration with a quantifiable footprint is inevitable.

The new database, and the accompanying regulatory protocols proposed by the Tacoma Narrows Repository, the informal consortium of artists and academics who have conceptualised CIDEFA, will record the number of valid citations (to other artworks) that any given artwork makes. The artist can submit her artwork along with its citational metadata—i.e. information about the nature and number of other artworks her piece makes a reference to, be it Sukumaran's Post Office or Swaminathan's crows—to a regulating body, who will then authenticate the validity of metadata or the artist's citational claim. Every time a given artwork is published (or in other words exhibited) its record in the database is updated. Here, roughly speaking, an artwork is treated as an equivalent of a scholarly paper, and correspondingly an exhibition is equated with a journal. The validated citation record will be made publicly available in an open access website.

The immediate practical benefits of CIDEFA are clearly quite evident. Many artists are increasingly finding

themselves within a formalised academic context, competing for the scarce resources of grants and research funds. Often the other academics they compete with are not artists and come from disciplines that already have a flourishing citation indexing system, which then allows them to drape the significance of their research with the legitimising aura of these citation metrics. CIDEFA will help to address this lack. Secondly, while we all know that artists are already subjected to fine-grained quantitative analysis—sharp eyes on the look-out for who appreciates and who depreciates—the criteria of analysis in such metrics are often far from artistic and scholarly interests.

Do we hear you groaning in exasperation at the sight of such exhausted binaries as market and non-market? While many of us at Tacoma Narrows Repository no longer pursue the locational co-ordinates of outsider positions, almost all of us ambivalently nurse the idea that perhaps metrics are not inherently tainted, and that there might be ways to tinker with them. Many of you have also expressed concern about CIDEFA's feasibility. We appreciate your concern. However, since the Tacoma Narrows Repository is voluntary and entirely self-funded, we didn't have to suffer the ignominy of doing a feasibility analysis for a grant application. We know that this piece of information is making you even more worried about CIDEFA's fate. We can only suggest that you keep an eye out for the notification alerts that pop up in your favourite social media feed system.

CIDEFA 1.6 is still beta and that's our current version.

And we have updates in the pipeline.

You can reach us at: boilrgroilr@gmail.com

A shorter version of this text was performed for Failure Room curated by Meera Menezes (part of Sarai Reader 09: The Exhibition)

Abhishek Hazra is an artist and occasional writer based in Bangalore. Although he can't converse with his angular momentum his favourite bicycle is a Carnot.

Dance of the Dying Murals

M.V. Bhaskar

The seventeenth-century murals of the Venugopala Parthasarathy temple at Chengam in Tamil Nadu are fighting a losing battle against time. Parts of them are badly damaged, and M.V. Bhaskar was given an IFA grant to photograph, scan and digitally trace them. In this essay, Bhaskar explains how, through his novel method of conservation, he plans to give these ancient images new life by using them in animation and for Kalamkari work.

My first involvement with mural paintings began in 2003, when I was asked to manage the image archive of a mural painting documentation project that covered eleven locations in Tamil Nadu.[1] It was evident right at the outset that one of the logical outcomes of my engagement would be an animation film based on the stories painted on the walls and ceilings of temples and palaces.

Ten years later, a Ramayana is taking shape. The music is getting done. The cast is getting rigged. There is plenty more to be done.

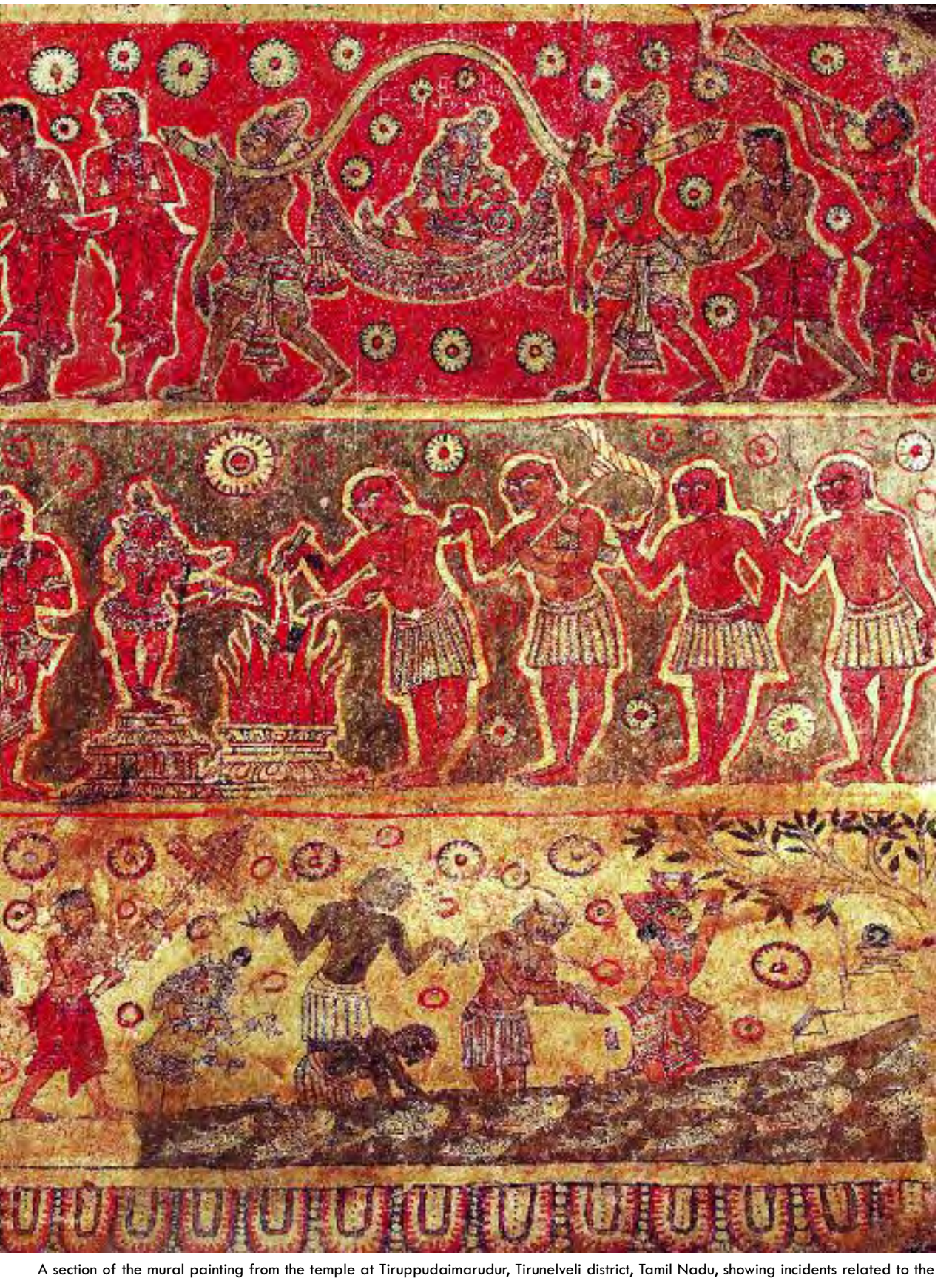
I had a bit of a headstart, beginning with a beautiful story—many stories, in fact, illustrated by master muralists and handed to me on a platter as storyboards. Among the most accessible of the narrative murals that I eventually got to see and document across forty-two known locations in Tamil Nadu were the Ramayana murals—in particular, those found on the ceiling of the forecourt of the Venugopala Parthasarathy temple at Chengam on the Bangalore-Tiruvannamalai highway (Fig.1). The murals are of seventeenth century vintage (Nayaka period) and carry bilingual Telugu-Tamil label inscriptions. I wanted to

Fig. 1: The ceiling on the forecourt of the Venugopala Parthasarathy temple at Chengam, Tiruvannamalai district, Tamil Nadu, with traces of the murals painted around a central decorative relief, in three registers. The scenes depict the Book of War from the Sri Ranganatha Ramayana (Telugu). Size: approximately 14.5' x 14.5'.

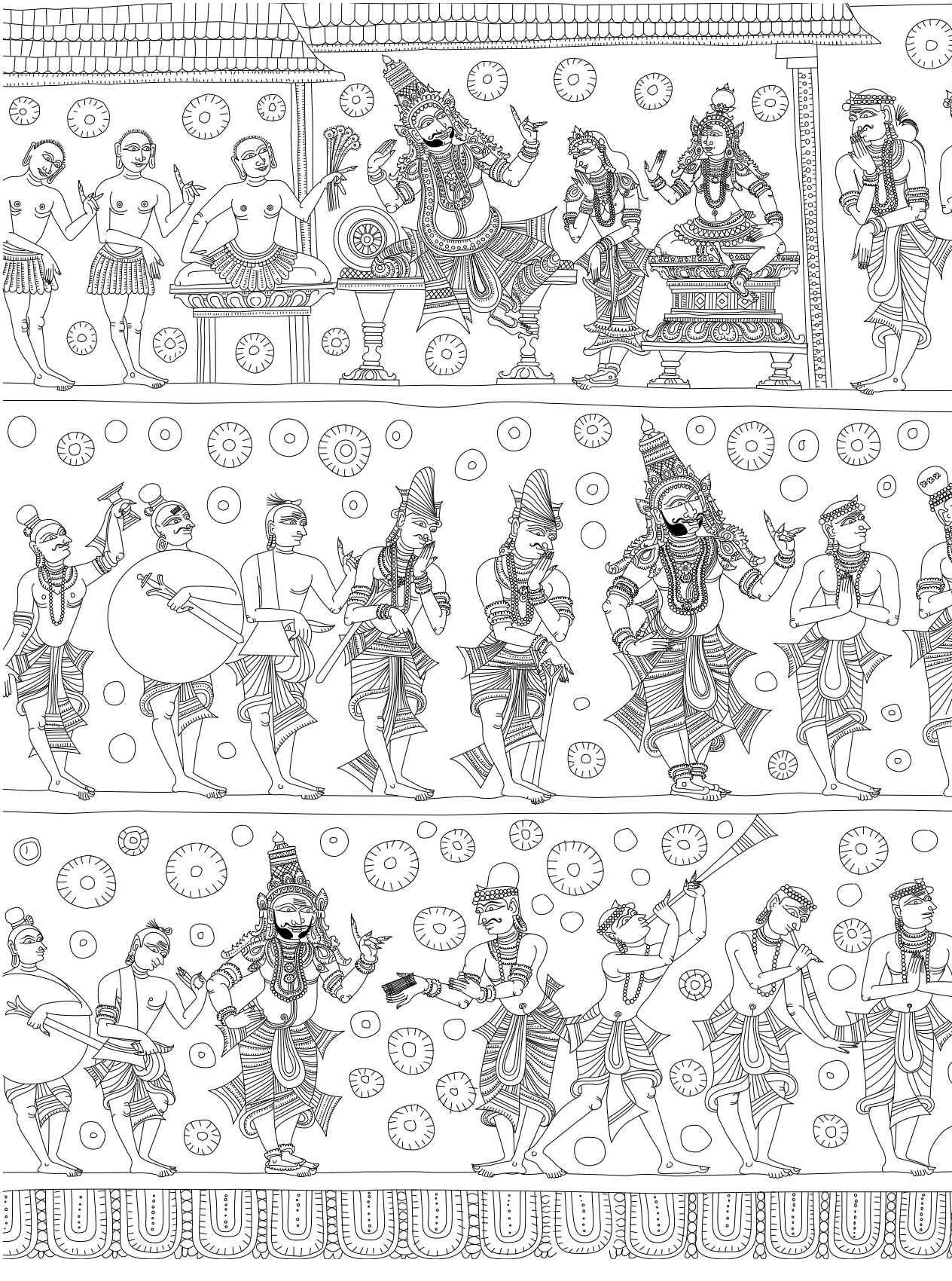
animate them and I had no idea how.

I went to Mumbai in August 2012 to participate in an IFA event, and at the end of the session, a young woman came up to me and asked if I had seen Lotte Reiniger. I asked her to spell the name for me. Back in Chennai, I saw the wonderful 1920s silhouette animations of German film director Charlotte "Lotte" Reiniger and discovered that she had taken the same route as I much after her.

As parallel reference, I had been recording leather puppet performances of the Ramayana by



A section of the mural painting from the temple at Tiruppudaimarudur, Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu, showing incidents related to the ascent of Saivism and the decline of Jainism in early medieval Tamil country. Photograph: Rajiv Kumar. The tracing (by D. Samson) and the reconstruction of the damaged parts of the mural are featured overleaf. Full story on http://tnmurals.org



Khande Ramadas and Party of Dharmavaram (Fig. 2). For Lotte, the starting point had been Chinese shadow puppetry. I first sought to record leather puppets for use as soundtrack. Slowly, dimly, I began to see that the mural cast could be rigged for animation just as the puppets are, with hinges at the shoulder, elbow, wrist, crotch (male), hip (female), knee and ankle. The head is mounted on a stick held in another hand by the puppeteers, so the head is free to turn forward and backward, and this concept would work just as well. There are no rigs for jaw, eye and finger movement and that is the boundary of leather puppet theatre. Leather puppetry also avoids, for obvious reasons, bow-and-arrow combat, and yet fight sequences are the most fun. The puppeteers work up a form of dive-wrestling with fantastic sound effects from behind their white screen, which has the audience in splits. Monkeys and demons somersault in mid-air and fall on and crush one another.[2] I expect to feature a lot of dive-wrestling in my forthcoming film.

Fig. 2: Khande Ramadas and Party, leather puppeteers from Dharmavaram, Andhra Pradesh, performing the Ramayana. As part of the IFA project, I have documented their performance thrice, at Dharmavaram, Chennai and Pune (in the picture), in that order. Photograph by K. Thanigaimani.

Fig. 3: Ravana performs his underground fire sacrifice under an arch, the artist's representation of the barrier to the netherworld, which the monkeys must cross in order to destroy Ravana's ritual. The text of the Ranganatha Ramayana alludes to a smoke-filled Lanka of zero visibility where nothing, let alone Ravana, can be found. Photograph by C.P. Satyajit.

Another aspect of the animation that has held me continuously interested is based on a particular scene depicted in the Chengam Ramayana narrative. The mural is badly bruised and neglected. The narrative, based on Sri Ranganatha Ramayana, the Telugu version of the epic which acquired written form apparently in the fifteenth century, features Ravana (Fig. 3) in a *paataala hoomam* (underground fire sacrifice). The story goes that even a thousand Ramas cannot defeat Ravana if he completes his underground fire sacrifice, and therefore he cannot be allowed to do so. The monkeys try to disrupt the sacrifice. The mightiest generals of the monkey army—Angadha, Sugriva, Nala, Nila and the invincible Hanuman—try to break the barrier to the netherworld of Ravana. The ten-headed demon cannot be moved. Animating the immoveable seemed like a good idea, but I needed soundtrack.

If Ravana was doing a fire sacrifice, he must be uttering some mantra: what could it be? The texts offered no clue. Years earlier, I had heard a lecture demonstration on the unique form of ritual temple music called *mallaari* (practised to this day though in decline) performed by the *periya meelam*, as the tavil-and-nagaswaram ensemble is known. It is played at different times of the day, coinciding with temple activities such as procession or bath of the deity.

Fig. 4: Sita, in the palanquin, is returning to Rama after the war. Vibhishana, fourth from left, is leading Sita to Rama. Three royal musicians announce Sita's return. The scene has been inspirational and instrumental in leading me to look for and record the music portrayed in the murals. Photograph by C.P. Satyajit.

Now, in nagaswaram performances the percussion always enters first. The tavils begin to play, set the tempo and invite the melody to join in. This invitational piece to *mallaari* is called *alaarippu*. There is a vocal base to this *alaarippu* and its *col* or *bol* has never left me from the first time I heard it.

kuṇṭa kuṇṭākkik kurutak kuṇṭākkikuṇṭa kuṇṭākkik kurutak kuṇṭākkikurutak kurutakkak kuṇṭak kuṇṭākkikurutak kurutakkak kurutak kuṇṭākki

... and so on. This is set to five beats and carries no meaning.[3] Ravana utters this 'mantra' in the animation, his ten heads concatenating it polyrhythmically. All the while, the monkeys kick and scream offbeat, trying to break into the netherworld. Look south on the ceiling at Chengam, and you find the most peaceful part of this war- and time-ravaged Ramayana. Sita is returning to Rama (Fig. 4). Vibhishana, with staff in hand, and his three royal musicians playing the drum, the oboe (no finger-holes) and the horn, lead the procession. Trijata, Sita's confidante, is walking with the queen-to-be. In April 2011 we visited a few villages within three-to-four hours' drive from Chennai and recorded these instruments. Permission from the temple authorities to digitise the murals was pending at that time, and wouldn't arrive for another year. The project had reached a stasis. My enthusiasm had ebbed away. Luckily, it occurred to me to go after and gather the music featured in the murals. If I couldn't shoot, I could record. Adrenalin began to flow again. Our crew headed to a Mahabharata Terukkuuttu (street play)performance, chasing the musicians who perform

for the Kuuttu (play), hoping to find among them the instruments themselves or knowledge of such instruments. They took us around and found every one of these instruments, instrumentalists, and more (Fig. 5). In just one day of field recording and with no real preparation we came away with a rich cache of authentic sound. Thereafter, finding the instruments featured in the mural paintings and field-recording them, rather than composing in the studio, became a central strategy. Going after the leather puppeteers was an extension of this logic, which, as it turned out, had far-reaching consequences on the way the film would approach the techniques of animation.

The delay in getting permission to digitise the Chengam murals was fortuitous for another reason. When we ultimately documented the murals more than a year after I had originally planned to do so, I had access to much superior technology. My photographer-friend C.P. Satyajit, who specialises in automobile photography, had just acquired an eighty-megapixel camera, four times as high as was available a year earlier. For the first time, I was able to see everything the murals had and didn't have, and I was able to read every extant letter in the label inscriptions.

The visual canvas of the film was storyboard-ready alright, but not quite. The murals are more lost than preserved; there's hardly a figure in

Fig. 5: Processional instruments such as featured in the mural and as seen in this photograph, which are hundreds of years old, can still be found in common use. The instrumentalists have other jobs, but come election time or local festivals and they pull the old brass out and tune them up.

Fig. 6: A picture of a mural from the seventeenth century as it exists in the Narumpunathaswamy temple at Tiruppudaimarudur, Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu. In the walls inside the temple tower of five tiers, there are mural paintings, among them depictions of Arab/Portuguese traders selling horses to the local king ahead of his war with the invading army of Krishnadevaraya. This mural is from this 'horse-trading' series. Size: 2' x 6' (w x h without border). Middle: A digital tracing of the mural, outline only. Right: A cloth replica produced by powder-tracing the line drawing and then by drawing and dyeing it using Kalamkari techniques.

them that can be seen in its entirety. Animating them makes it mandatory, at some level, for the broken, peeled and distressed figures to be first brought back to near-original form in a way that nothing is imagined. In other words, take the guesswork out and look for the most appropriate methodologies to reconstruct the narratives in their entirety.

The Tale Reconstructed

I began with some low-hanging fruit. I picked for reconstruction those murals that were relatively well preserved,

such as the one featured on the doublespread pages of this article. Such gifts were very few. I brought the results of the *in situ* digitisation into the computer and viewed them at magnifications that the first-generation digital SLR cameras allowed. The pixel density was barely enough, but we had proof on hand that digital image acquisition and the methodologies we used were better than anything done up to that point with mural painting documentation.

Working with the photographs, I began to trace the line segments of the murals which, it must be noted, are primarily linear and atonal with flat pigments filling the spaces enclosed by the lines. The digital (not automated) tracing obtained is in the form of what is known as Scalable Vector Graphic (SVG). In this effort I am supported by D. Samson, my illustrator-colleague, and a department of over twenty graphic artists at TNQ Books and Journals, a Chennai-based company that I work with, which provides publishing services to publishers of scientific, technical, medical and scholarly content.

SVG is a digital file format in which line art behaves like a font in the sense that no matter how much you enlarge it, it does not break apart, unlike photographic images, which pixellate and disintegrate when magnified beyond a threshold. An SVG is a mathematical expression of lines and curves, and is therefore a machine-readable drawing that a computer attached with an output stylus can practically print or carve on any surface—paper, metal, plastic, wood—and to any size.

However, it was not machine reproduction but high-fidelity reconstruction that I was interested in. As Samson and I were struggling with the tracings, it appeared to me that I should involve some native craftsmen who were familiar with the themes and the grammar of the characters and composition.

Eighty kilometres from Chennai is Kalahasti, in Andhra Pradesh, which is home to hundreds of Kalamkari artists who could paint Ramayana in their sleep. I approached one of them, Patalam Ramachandriah, with actual-size printouts of some of my delineations, gave him colour references and also took him to some locations so that he could see the murals for himself. The idea was that the Kalamkari artist would powder-trace the black-and-white printout

onto cloth, and then infuse the colours, using resist-dye methods characteristic to Kalamkari, achieving as close an approximation to the mural-pigment colour-space as possible (Fig. 6) in actual size. The exploratory work of having the Kalamkari artist replicate it on cloth made me realise the greater value that the traditional artist could bring to the reconstruction process.

As a next test, I traced parts of the mural as they were present and began to seek the expertise of the Kalamkari artist to interpolate the missing parts. To give a simple example, if we look at the composition of the coronation of Rama, it always features a particular ensemble of characters, with some local variations. Now, if there are seven sages in the composition blessing Rama and three of them had peeled off, the Kalamkari artist knew exactly which three went missing and how to put them back. And so, the Kalamkari artist became not just a replicator, but a valuable contributor and collaborator in reconstructing the narrative.

Kalamkari had another appeal—its agelessness. When a photographic documentation project is conceived, photography is often deemed to be an end in itself. However, from experience, we know that photographic print and film have only a limited life, and as for digital archives, it is too early to tell. Kalamkari, on the other hand, has proved that it can last a millennium or longer, if we go by examples of exhibits of textile art that we see in museums all around the world.

Why Another Ramayana?

It is said that the Ramayana makes saints out of thieves and liars. From having once been in advertising to now being in conservation of sorts has been a journey. The Ramayana is self-perpetuating. It does not need a Bhaskar, but if he is there, the story will find him. As it unfolds in many forms, I owe it to the reader to inform him/her that my obsession with animating the Ramayana is merely to bring a popular perspective to the more fundamental aspects of reconstructing the mural, and this should be seen as the true intent of this project.

Reviewing the project proposal two years ago, Anupam Sah, Head of Art Conservation, Research and Training, at CSMVS Conservation Centre of the Chhatrapathi Shivaji Maharaj

Vastu Sangrahalay, Mumbai, pointed out: "Digital stitching in full colour depth, to actual size, is a very useful documentation technique necessary for the planning of actual physical conservation of mural paintings. Digital tracing to scale prepares the base format on which a distress mapping or graphic condition report is prepared. Both these aspects that the project proposes are often not done by the custodians who are supposed to be responsible for the upkeep of the site principally because of lack of awareness of the practicality of this documentation technique."

The Ramayana chose itself for the reason that the Ramayana alone can be retold and reconstructed, both reliably and creatively, by vast sections of Indian society, be they craftspersons, conservators or novices. It happens that there are seven visual narratives of the Ramayana in mural painting form in Tamil Nadu, and I have been part of documenting six of them, opening up the possibilities for rich cross-referencing, disambiguation and verification.

M.V. Bhaskar works in academic publishing. He has experience across print, film, web and technology and combines it to construct multilevel documentation of subjects that he gets exposed to.

(The author can be contacted at:
mvbhaskar@mac.com
Web pages of interest:
www.chengammurals.org,
www.tnmurals.org,
www.kalamkariepics.org)

NOTES

1. A project of the Centre for Plants, People and Ecosystems (CPPE), Chennai, with Prof. S. Balusamy as Project Coordinator. A partial report of the project can be accessed online at http://tnmurals.org.

2. See http://www.youtube.com /watch?v=MJwsi8Q26ps. This article attempts to express in print aspects that belong to the more complex online and film media. For this reason, elements of the article that cannot be featured here in print are cross-referenced to a companion website, http://chengammurals.org, which features audio, video, interactive materials and links.

3. See http://youtu.be/Lj8X6zcHBkg.

Of Image and Word: Tracing Evolutions in Storytelling Tradition

Vidyun Sabhaney

In an attempt to extend her practice as a comic-book artist, Vidyun Sabhaney has been studying how stories from the Mahabharata are told in three picture-storytelling traditions: Togalu Gombeyatta in Karnataka, Patuachitra (painting and performance) in West Bengal and the Kaavad from Rajasthan. From 2012 through 2013, as Sabhaney and her collaborator Shohei Emura travelled to meet practitioners of these traditions, they realised that no tradition was monolithic, and that there were differences across villages, artists and generations. Why do these differences exist? What are some of the newer developments in the form? These questions shed light on the evolving nature of traditional art practices, and helped Sabhaney in her attempt to understand the relationship between the oral and the visual in the telling of the epics.

A *haathfiruthalibaavli* puppet from the collection of the puppeteer Ramaiah.
Puppets with movable arms are now in vogue. Photograph by Vidyun Sabhaney.

It is a long journey from Hassan to Koppal, one that requires the traveller to change buses twice—first at Harihara and then at Hospet. Both are frenetic small towns in north Karnataka. Hospet, which is the better known of the two as it serves as a gateway to Hampi, is rife with a fluctuating energy that characterises tourist centres, the kind of energy that peaks with the arrival of a busload of people. Everywhere, there are eyes making contact, men and women following your shadow and demanding money, pushers of taxis and hotels who always claim to have the best deal, tiny shops selling millions of tiny plastic knick-knacks, forced conversation in broken English and questions that seem all too personal ... . This energy wanes as soon as the bus empties and its former inhabitants disappear into the night. Until, of course, another set of wheels turns into the station and the cycle begins anew. The frenzy of Harihara, on the other hand, is the harmless kind—the kind that plays *Kolaveri Di* loudly and repeatedly till every shop and every house seems to sway to its sweet, laconic beat.

Between these two stops are long periods of calm. It is an opportunity for the idle traveller to watch, through rusted bus windows, Karnataka transforming painfully from lush fertility to barrenness. You find yourself in a land prone to dust storms, where sudden patches of green grass seem unnatural. Scarecrows standing arm-in-arm endlessly guard the empty fields. When Koppal does finally appear on the horizon it feels as if nothing, let alone a story, could grow there.

And yet, stories were precisely why my collaborator Shohei Emura and I were there—or rather, one story, perhaps the longest ever told: the Mahabharata. Its sudden turns and secret passageways have seduced many, and led them to a lifetime of study. Our own foray into its complex narrative has been through the medium of comics. Comics require the artist to break down a visual narrative into image blocks called panels which, when seen in sequence, must tell a complete story with or without words. While conceptualising our project, however, we felt constrained by the finality of the comic medium. The Mahabharata is an epic that has grown and spread orally; the transience of the spoken word, the pauses in conversation through which another story may be teased out, the strain of unreliability in memory—all

are players in this grand epic. How does one capture this quality in the comic? Should the attempt be made through content, as we did in our 2012 comic *Chilka*,[1] or through a new visual language? This question led us to study three picture-storytelling traditions in India that tell stories from the Mahabharata: Togalu Gombeyatta in Karnataka, Bengali Pata (painting and performance) in West Bengal and the Kaavad from Rajasthan. From 2012 through 2013 we travelled to meet artists who practise these traditions. Our primary means of inquiry were interviews, and documentation through sketches, photographs and videos.

Coming as we did from Delhi, where the mythology of the creator casts its shadow widely over the art world, we were not prepared to see tradition as anything other than inherited cultural practices maintained by specific communities. We imagined that these practices had kept a safe distance from the seeming complexity of our urban lives, and that they could serve as a 'window' into narratives of the past. We could not, as the story usually goes, have been more wrong. Our most significant realisations were that none of these traditions are monolithic; that the knowledge base of one artist cannot be traded for another, even if they were born into the same tradition; and that there are differences across villages, practitioners and generations. Further inquiry into the differences led us, rather unceremoniously at times, to quasi-biographies of these forms. We were asking ourselves and the artists: Why do these differences exist? Are they anomalies? What are some of the newer developments in the form? These questions shed light on the continuous process of evolution within what is constructed as 'tradition'.

Togalu Gombeyatta

Koppal is a district in Karnataka which is home to the only family that still performs using the beautiful *jamkatbaavli* puppets of the Togalu Gombeyatta leather puppetry tradition, which is said to be at least 400 years old. We had travelled all the way to watch and record one of these rare performances. We chose the strong and silent Yenkappa, who had learnt his craft from his father, the famous Doddballapa, with whom he toured the world in the late 1980s. Since performances are hard to come by, Yenkappa spends most of his time farming corn. He claimed at one point

A Togalu Gombeyatta performance in Mandeya, Karnataka, sketched by Shohei Emura.

that it gives you a more visceral strength than wheat or rice does. When he said this, we had a laugh about how that kind of strength—stamina, even—is needed for a performance using the *jamkatbaavli* puppets. But we were to realise the truth of that statement.

Togalu Gombeyatta combines song, dialogue and the play of puppets to tell stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Its practice is restricted to one particular community—the Killekyathas. The puppets are made from the crisp, translucent leather of goat's skin, which allows light to pass through it—a quality that makes it ideal for night-time storytelling. There are two kinds of puppets within Togalu Gombeyatta: the *haathfiruthalibaavli* and the older *jamkatbaavli*. The *jamkatbaavli*, which were widely used till thirty-odd years ago, are on their way out. The lynchpin of a performance with these puppets is the male head of the family. Occasionally, the puppeteer and his family will even indulge in friendly, if inappropriate, banter across the screen that separates them. Yenkappa, for example, seemed particularly fond of making jokes about his aged mother's equally aged digestive system. His role is all-encompassing: to move the puppets against the thin-cotton screen, deliver all dialogue as well as initiate songs. The stage, traditionally made from bamboo, fits just one person; the rest of the family sits outside, maintaining the *taal* and singing along to songs. Most performances follow a standard format but there is much room for experimentation during the interplay of characters.

The *jamkatbaavli*, also referred to as compositional puppets because they are not limited to depicting just one character, can be loosely divided into three categories: puppets that depict entire scenes, those that are specific to characters yet retain a narrative quality, and those portraying 'everyday life'. The last category is used to illustrate the humorous lives of minor characters within the larger epic narrative, and is believed to strongly reflect the lives and practices of the puppeteers themselves. The images painted on these puppets are so specific that each performance requires a different set of puppets for each scene. Puppeteers reminisce over a time when a single performance of the Ramayana had a collection of fifty puppets for the scenes related to just Rama.

Gunduraju, a master-puppeteer from

Hassan, links this particular characteristic to Chitrakathi, a form of storytelling practised in Maharashtra. (All Togalu Gombeyatta practitioners claim that their community migrated from Maharashtra several hundred years ago; even today they speak Marathi amongst themselves.) In Chitrakathi, the performer shows images painted on loose sheets of paper and narrates the story. Pointing to the similarities in the visual styles of the Chitrakathi and the *jamkatbaavli*, Gunduraju opines that the former is a day-time substitute for the latter; as he points out, leather puppetry can only be brought to life by the light of a lamp.

The style and rhythm of the *jamkatbaavli* performance differs from what is commonly understood to be 'puppetry'. The puppets slowly enter the stage, dance softly from left to right, and bend respectfully as they deliver dialogue to each other. This is far from the style of the generation that actively practises Togalu Gombeyatta, a generation that uses the *haathfiruthalibaavli* puppets, which are animated not by the composition of the images painted on them but by how they are moved. They have three sticks, two of which move the arms, unlike the *jamkatbaavli* which requires only one stick. Humanoid gesticulation is a key technique in this style and, simultaneously, the sharpest point of departure from the old performance style.

Nagaraju, a sixty-year-old puppeteer from Mandeya (and Gunduraju's father-in-law), says that leather puppetry was infused with speed and vigour in order to compete with television, an opinion voiced by many puppeteers we spoke to. Television, when it arrived, was not only more seductive but it also told stories from the epics, taking away audiences who might have patronised performances for their socio-religious content. This lack of interest has spurred active adaptations of the form. The old style of performance of leather puppeteers of Karnataka has given way to a format that now requires—rather, needs—women to deliver dialogue, sing and manipulate new puppets. The stage has been expanded to seat all members of the troupe on it, with the women and children on the frontline managing the puppets. The male head of the family sits at the back with the musicians, directing the performance and often, playing the harmonium. While he no longer controls the puppets he is still very much the puppet-master; his troupe is expected

A *jamkatbaavli* puppet of a queen. These puppets, and the style of performance that accompanies them, are very rarely used today. Photograph by Vidyun Sabhaney.

to carefully follow his instructions. The gender shift is, nonetheless, significant. Gunduraju explained that women were not allowed to enter the stage until very recently; he implied that menses was thought to make them impure. When one views the gulf between the new style and the old, it seems that modern entertainment has dramatically altered the practice of this centuries-old tradition.

Though it is difficult to pinpoint when Togalu Gombeyatta took birth, every puppeteer you meet will insist that it was devised when Rama himself was leaving earth for heaven. Moments before his departure (though the details of how this transpired vary in each account), Rama is said to have given his painted image to a man called Guha. Guha was then told by the Lord to spread his story among the people, and ensure that it never be forgotten. The community that considers Guha to be their first father, and therefore practise Togalu Gombeyatta, are the Killekyathas (or alternatively, Shillekyathas). While they do not often agree on the origin of their community, the Killekyathas have developed a strict, mutually agreed-upon system of territory by which other, more dangerous, disagreements may not arise.

Gunduraju explained this to us during our very first encounter at his home. Each puppeteer, he said, inherits a set of villages from his father which are his property, and in which only he is allowed to perform.[2] He is expected to perform in each of his villages at least once a year, as Togalu performances are said to bring blessings and keep evil spirits at bay. In return, he has a right over a certain amount of rice or ragi from every house of the village, which must be collected door to door after every performance. Unfortunately, these days, few are at home when the puppeteers come knocking because most people now work in the services industry in neighbouring towns and cities. Consequently, a puppeteer could have to wait days for his share.

Few do. Most carve out their own niche from the various permutations and combinations that exist within the nexus of tradition and adaptation. Gunduraju from Hassan prefers to perform for government and developmental programmes, which give him the option of staying at home and educating his children. His father-in-law Nagaraju still travels from village to village but has left behind

the compositional puppets. Another puppeteer we met in Mandeya is visibly trapped by the occupation, unable to perform effectively but unwilling to give it up. Doddballapa's family in Koppal, encouraged by researchers,[3] has retained the compositional puppets but they rarely get the opportunity to perform. When they do perform, however, they draw a larger audience than I have seen elsewhere. One that does not dissipate after the first hour, one that laughs at all of Yenkappa's jokes and one that seems more concerned, for a change, with the performance itself rather than with the visitors who have requested it.[4]

Bengali Pata

Our travels in Karnataka led us to believe that traditions of storytelling could be understood in terms of old and new—what could have been in the past and what is unequivocally in the present. But where Karnataka was stark, Bengal, home to a Pata tradition, was dense, humid. We were there when the state was still deep in the clutches of a muggy summer; the month of May was taking a slow turn before handing over its burden to June. We lumbered from interview to interview, seeking not just information but some kind of clarity, but it soon became clear that the contemporary practice of the Bengali Pata would offer none of the conveniently neat distinctions between 'then' and 'now'. Art historian Kavita Singh's assessment of the "unexpected richness and the sometimes frustrating complexity of the Bengali *pata*"[5] holds equally true for other contemporary manifestations of the form. It is evident that this particular tradition will not yield so easily to definition, especially when one observes Dukusham Chitrakar's scroll on political party symbols, made in the 1960s, sitting casually beside t-shirts that his son painted in the Pata style last week, even as Dukusham discusses, through the Saheb Pata, the involvement of his community in the movement against British occupation of India.

The Bengali Patuachitra uses pictures painted on a paper scroll to tell stories. The pictures serve as an aid to the song sung by the artist, which is the primary vehicle of the story. The stories told in this form are extremely varied, ranging from popular local stories (Behula and Lokhindor) to the Sindubad episode of the Ramayana to the story of

Panels from a scroll known as Saheb Pat, which was performed in villages across Midnapore during the Indian Independence movement. This scroll belongs to Dukusham Chitrakar, of Naya village. Photograph by Vidyun Sabhaney.

Satya Pir (a Muslim *pir*). Lately, specific events of international significance such as the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Towers in New York and the tsunami in 2004 that affected the Indian coastline have started gaining popularity. This is often spoken of as a new trend, but there are artists like Dukusham Chitrakar who have been, for years, creating performances that respond to contemporary events. And yet it is difficult to say with certainty that experimentation itself is deeply intertwined with the tradition, as some artists still adhere strictly to

Arun Patua, a Patuachitrakar from Bhirbhum, performing at 'Image & Word: Workshop On Storytelling'. Photograph by Alexandra Moskovchuk.

what their fathers taught them. Recently, a number of younger artists from this tradition, with the help of developmental organisations, have been able to migrate and adapt their painting style to a variety of surfaces and formats that can be sold to generate income. Some of these adaptations have successfully retained a strong narrative element, and can even be seen as an evolution of the form itself. In this dynamic environment, how do we delineate the thrust of the past and the present?

For us, whether or not performance is the primary occupation of the Pata Chitrakar became an important consideration. Our first encounter with the shy Arun Patua, from Bhirbhum, was in 2011 at the Dastakaar *mela* in New Delhi where he had been invited to sell his scrolls. Quick to grasp the scope of our interest but unable to respond in a language we would understand, he invited us to the IIT Delhi campus, where he was performing at the behest of a Bangla-speaking professor. There, he said, we would understand everything. The prospect of understanding 'everything' at the outset of the project in a setting as conventional as a classroom in an engineering college was unsettling but, nonetheless, we went. Arriving a little earlier than Arun and desirous of hearing him clearly, I took a seat in the front row of the class. Quite unconsciously, I had judged the volume of his voice based on his physical presence—he is a slim and unassuming man. This impression was rudely shattered within the first few seconds of his performance. His voice, loud and even, transformed the classroom into a lush, green hamlet. It called out to women and children to leave their daily chores—or, at least, turn an ear to his song and an eye to his scroll. Those who walk from village to village singing for alms rely on the traditional relationship between the artist and his audience, wherein the artist is to be seen as something of an educator and moral compass. The Pata performer could be sure that audiences would compensate him for the knowledge he has passed on. His primary vehicle for telling, and consequently for his income, is his song. It must always ring true.

Here again, the advent of television has eaten into the performer's 'market'. Visual narratives that would be possible only by a Pata Chitrakar can now be seen and heard

on television. According to Arun, wealthier women who can afford television sets no longer leave the comfort of their homes for stories. While some have taken to finding alternative audiences—for example, villages too poor to afford a television—other artists have begun to take forward the painterly aspect of their form to supply entirely new markets. The Pata style of painting and their accompanying narrative images have found their way to wall-hangings, fans, t-shirts, coasters, saris, books etc. This shift is stronger in some villages than in others. There are more performers to be found in Satpolsa, where Arun hails from, and his *sasuraal* Itaguria (both in Bhirbhum, West Bengal). The famed Naya (West Midnapore), on the other hand, is bursting with highly adept painters. Despite being the most famous *patua pada* (village of Pata performers), the younger artists there often do not know how to write songs or perform. The steady demand for painted items means that they need never perform for a living, except perhaps to demonstrate the use of the scroll. The older generation in the same village, on the other hand, is proficient in singing (though they might not have much practice of late) and the song is an important part of their creative process.

There appears to be a shift towards the painterly aspect of the tradition. The most telling piece of evidence is the variety of scrolls—primarily in terms of shape and size—that artists in Naya stock, compared to those in Satpolsa. Scrolls in Naya are intended to meet the requirements of any kind of customer that might happen to drop by the artists stall at a *mela*: big, medium, small, stylised, imaginative, authentic, old, colourful, black-and-white etc. Artists in Satpolsa and Itaguria, on the other hand, have a limited number of scrolls in their possession, each bearing the scars of daily wear and tear. If one would like to purchase a scroll from either of these places, it would have to be specially made by those with time at hand. Indeed, most of the scrolls documented by us in Satpolsa had ten to twelve panels, each of which had to be seen in performance to be understood fully. On the other hand, scrolls in Naya tended to be smaller, with four to six panels. This is not to say that the Pata Chitrakars do not make longer scrolls there, but they often choose to make smaller ones. Mayna Chitrakar informed us that these are

easier to sell at fairs such as Dastakar and Hasta Shilpi Mela. The larger scrolls, according to him, are used to attract the attention of potential customers as they are visible from afar but the real sales are from the smaller ones, the ones that can be easily hung up on a wall at home.

A natural question that emerges from this discourse is this: why are these adaptations taking place in Naya, and not Satpolsa or Itaguria? While travelling with a Japanese illustrator and armfuls of documentation material, you grow accustomed to people staring wide-eyed at you, wondering, at the very least, who you are and why you're there. However, on the train journey from Howrah to Balichak (the station closest to Naya), it seemed we were not worth a second look—except perhaps to check if we'd be willing to give up our seats. I should have guessed that we were not amongst an elite few who had travelled down; this particular *pada* is, after all, just a day trip from Kolkata. Daily travellers on the train route must have long acclimatised to the presence of strangers. Naya, with its forty-five closely-knit Chitrakar households, has become something of a hotspot for business and research, as well as for the inevitable overlap between the two. The flow of visitors is steady even in the hottest of months, with artists often hosting two or three groups at a time. Entrepreneurial artists like Mayna Chitrakar and Khandu Chitrakar have even built extra floors above their homes to offer board and lodging to visitors like us whose work requires them to stay on for a few nights. Understandably, most opt for the intimacy of the artists' homes and home-cooked food over the fare at Balichak, which would no doubt burden both the heart and the pocket. Tellingly, when I asked Arun when a visitor had last come to Satpolsa he could not remember, and tentatively guessed that it was eight years ago.

*Patua pada*s with links to researchers, craft *mela*s, charitable organisations, publishers and designers seem to be moving, or have already moved, from performance to the painterly practice. As the market for products and art-works (including books) in the Pata style grows and diversifies, understanding a Pata Chitrakar's work will increasingly depend on knowing where he is from and the influences that come with this location; the contexts of all artists, despite their ostensibly being from the same community, are not comparable.

Rajasthani Kaavad

Umi Ram met us at Ramdevra, a popular temple near Pokhran in Rajasthan. A few feet away from where we settled down to interview him, busloads of people were disembarking and bringing their pilgrimage to an end by dusty foot. The Kaavad, he explained, is both a record of the gods, and of people. It is a shrine, a wooden temple on which images from stories of gods and goddesses are painted. Usually, each story is represented by one panelised image which the performer points to as he recites, similar to the Pata tradition. The Kaavad itself is comprised of multiple wooden panels or doors that fold into one another other to make it compact, portable. The Bhat, as the performer is known, periodically takes this shrine to his patron families, which he refers to as his '*jajmans*' (hereditary patrons). Like his forefathers before him, he maintains a record of all births, deaths and marriages in these families; their relationship goes back several generations. In exchange for a special *daan* (alms), he will have their image painted on his Kaavad, where they can be shown in the sacred act of pilgrimage to places such as Ramdevra. In older Kaavads they are shown on horses, camels and elephants; lately, however, aeroplanes and cars have become the preferred vehicle for *darshan* (act of 'sight', usually referring to the viewing of a holy person or image of a deity). As with the Bengali Pata, location is an important consideration when trying to understand the Kaavad. It is one of the few traditions in which the maker and the performer come from different communities, and are physically separated by hundreds of miles.

The Suthar community in Mewar, which uniquely combines the skills of carpentry and painting to make the Kaavad, lives in a town called Bassi in Chittor. This district is a hotspot on tourist maps for its sprawling fort, which has stood unshakably over the area since the seventh century. The performers hail from Nagaur, close to Jodhpur. Motivated by the availability of cheap land for farming or a job opportunity that would supplement their income, some of these Bhats have chosen to settle in towns along the Indo-Pak border. From there, they travel widely in Rajasthan in the dry seasons to meet their *jajmans*. Their traditional occupation is deeply tied to the lineage of these upper-caste families. While the practice does not support them entirely, it is still going

A traditional Kaavad, which records the genealogy of the Bhat's patron families. Photograph by Alexandra Moskovchuk.

The Kaavad now comes in a variety of sizes. Photograph by Vidyun Sabhaney.

strong. According to Nina Sabnani, each of these communities—the maker, the performer, and the patrons—continue to draw a strong sense of identity from the Kaavad. This, she says, accounts for the survival of its traditional form.[6]

But what of the tiny Kaavads that pepper shop-windows across Rajasthan? Being carpenters as well as painters, the Suthars of Bassi need not depend on the Kaavad for their income; besides regular carpentry work they have traditionally made toys, chowki, Gangaur, and painted *chitram* on house walls in the festival season. But sales from the Kaavad have been very good of late. According to Kaavad-maker Dwarka Prasad, the community now makes a clear distinction between '*banchane wala*' Kaavad (meant for performance) and '*bechne wala*' Kaavad (for sale). The former is of a standard size (one-and-a-half feet) and colour scheme (mostly red and yellow) but has variable aspects. While a standard set of narrative images on the lives of gods and saints must be painted onto every Kaavad of this kind, each Bhat has his own set of patron families on whose request he will paint their images on his Kaavad. These images are, as mentioned earlier, of the family on a pilgrimage. The family may chose the number of members that are to be represented, and their mode of transportation. For this reason, Kaavads intended for performance are made-to-order, a process for which the commissioning Bhat will likely travel down to Bassi himself, or at the very least send a trusted representative. Once it is ready, the Bhat will paint the names of the patrons depicted on the Kaavad, as well as the amount donated by them. This is written in a language called Pingla known only to the Bhats. Kojaram, a Bhat, reports a new trend: each family unit now wants its own panel whereas earlier they were happy to share with the larger, joint family.

Experimentation has taken place specifically within the format of the Kaavad intended for sale, in terms of size, colour and, most interestingly, content. The reason for this, most Suthars say, is that the Kaavad has become a very popular tourist souvenir. Kalu, one of the younger artists, claims that in a year he makes almost 600 Kaavads, which are then distributed to tourist centres and craft *mela*s across the country. Most of these Kaavads are small, i.e.

Newer stories are emerging in the practice of Kaavad. This new Kaavad tells the story of a girl named Meena who travels across the world to study and ultimately returns home to take care of her family. Photograph by Alexandra Moskovchuk.

between three and twelve inches. The most popular size is around six inches, as it is ideal for tourists to fit into their suitcases, even as it maintains the integrity of the image. By comparison, the traditional Kaavad is approximately one-and-a-half feet tall. Prem Singh, who also lives in Bassi, has begun supplying Kaavads along with silver-work to destinations such as Bikaner, Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Udaipur. This is surprising, not because these items do not travel but because the distribution is usually managed within the artists' family. Like Bengali Pata, an economy has begun to develop around the commercial Kaavad. And, like the Bengali Pata, 'new' content has begun to emerge.

Though they are not the storytellers of the tradition, some of the older Kaavad-makers have begun to develop and paint new, and somewhat clumsy, visual narratives on the traditional structure of the Kaavad. The result is Kaavads on Guru Nanak, Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, selections from the Panchatantra, and even a girl named Meena who travels abroad in search of education. These artists say that when they go to *mela*s they find that some potential customers cannot relate to their traditional content. A Kaavad on Guru Nanak, for example, was developed especially by Mangilal Mistry for a *mela* in Chandigarh where, he predicted, a large number of attendees would be Sikh. Other new stories are based on similar logic, though there are some commissioned works as well. The plot of these is very often derived from locally published educational picture-books. The Kaavads that result from this process, however, are never performed by the Bhats. In fact, it is likely that they would never see them.

Eye to the Future

I have heard it said, quite often, that the storytelling tradition in India is dying. This is not untrue. There are a significant number who have left the occupation in favour of more lucrative jobs, particularly in the case of Togalu Gombeyatta. There are artists who, famously, have sold their entire collection of puppets or dumped them in the river, and moved on to pick up jobs varying from teaching to military service. There are other artists who complain, often loudly, of their children abandoning their heritage. On the other hand, there is also willingness on the part of some artists to experiment with

form—a hunger, even, to make what new markets would relate to. These markets are populated not by audiences but by customers looking to purchase decorations, picture books, clothing, souvenirs etc.

It has now become possible to simply look at a Kaavad and accurately deduce its function in society: genealogical document or decoration/gift. The needs of the communities involved—the maker and his new customers, the performer and his patrons—are so specific that they do not overlap. The traditional Kaavad, because it is so strongly tied into the identity and lineage of the *jajmans*, is not likely to 'forget' its founding narratives in a hurry. Tellingly, the *'bechne wala'* Kaavad and the Bengali Pata painting style, and consequently the stories that have traditionally accompanied them, travel further and wider today than their songs ever have. Togalu Gombeyatta, on the other hand, needs performance to keep its stories alive. In a world that seems to be moving away from live performance, its practice offers little incentive by way of livelihood. The markets that have come to support other traditions do so through their visual manifestation. While some members of its community make products such as leather lampshades, a robust market has not developed for these. And so, Togalu suffers.

When viewed together, the aesthetic content of these objects made for the market, often simultaneously 'traditional' and 'modern', is of great significance. It is a mirror to the constant flux in our everyday life. It also mirrors the change that all artists across media are experiencing today. The medium of comics, for example, has developed hand-in-hand with printing technology; a slow process of evolution that was guided by the mechanisation of printing. Today, those who live with an eye to the future are bidding adieu to printing itself; they are seeking ways to migrate the forms of expression that it birthed—whether text or image or both—onto laptops, mobiles, iPADs, Kindles etc. This migration, at least for comics, will change its formal qualities, which have developed around the physicality of the book, such as the page-turn and the double spread. Indeed, speaking comics are already a reality on touch-screens, heralding the potential for a return to a show-and-tell with pictures similar to that of Patuachitra.

The future is uncertain. In the years to come, which formats will be popular and why? What will their antecedents be? How will they be read? The evolution of form has inspired us to develop new comic narratives. As the form moved towards a manifestation that heavily favoured the visual and gradually relegated performance to memory, it affected our attempt to understand the relationship between the oral and the visual in the performance of the epics. This change will possibly define how epics and local folk tales occupy and shape everyday lives in the future. It is unlikely that stories that have travelled from tongue to tongue, from brush to brush, will disappear completely. They have their own pulse, which we seek to examine through our forthcoming travelogue.[7]

Vidyun Sabhaney is a comic book writer based in New Delhi. She is currently writing a travelogue based on her experiences researching traditional forms of storytelling across India.

NOTES

1. *Chilka* refers to a thirty-nine-page comic that Shohei Emura and Vidyun Sabhaney contributed to the *Pao Anthology of Comics Volume 1* (Penguin India, 2012). Set in the time of the Mahabharata, *Chilka* is the story of Baba and his rebellious grandson. With the help of *rishi* Narada, Baba stumbles upon a 'secret weapon' that he believes will save Arjuna the Pandava from death at the hands of Karna. The comic experiments with the possibility of new characters and new stories within the known epic narrative.

2. In his book 'Karnataka Puppetry', S.A. Krishnaiah (MGM College, Udupi) also mentions boundary stones which were used to mark out the 'territory' of each puppeteer: "The stone is called 'Ellekallu', 'Hadbastinakallu' or 'Gomberamakallu'. The term refers to a stone which was installed to mark the boundary of a puppeteer's family or the puppeteer's area of right of operation. It throws light on rite of installation, the purpose and ownership etc. Usually on such stones one can find either the name of the puppeteer family with figure of 'Killekyatha' or line drawings of a male

figure with a hair tuft." The same book provides details of the practices and rituals of the Killekyatha community.

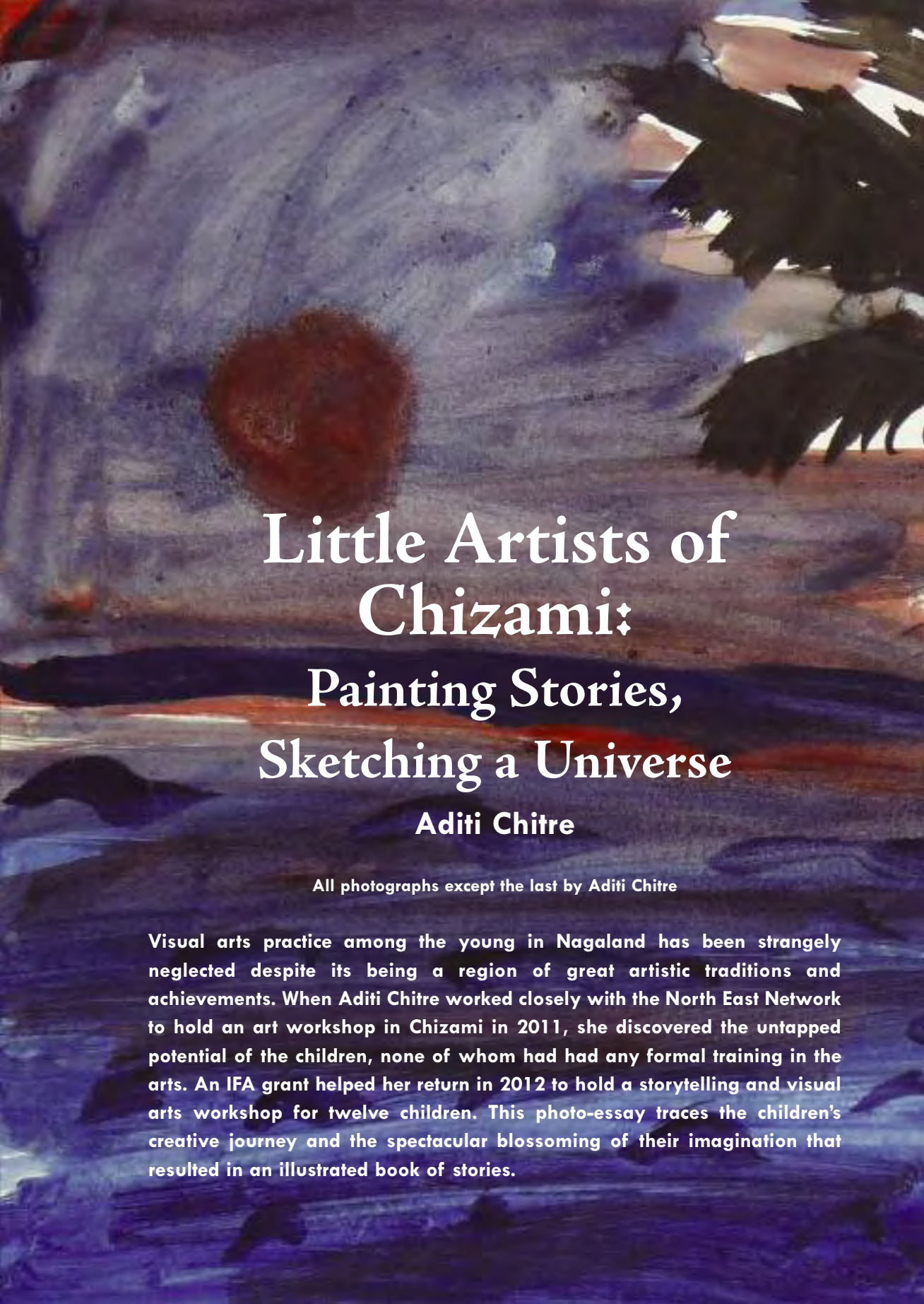
3. Doddballapa's family, in particular, has been encouraged by S.A. Krishnaiah (of MGM College, Udupi) to retain the *jamkatbaavli* style of performance.

4. Traditionally, puppeteers regularly performed at villages that fell within their respective territories. However, as local interest in puppet shows has declined in recent years, performances are not as frequent as they used to be. If a performance is not expected in the near future, researchers (such as ourselves) are inclined to request for a special performance. Similarly, puppeteers are often requested to perform at weddings and other auspicious events. In both circumstances, a fee must be paid to the performers.

5. Kavita Singh, 'Stylistic Differences and Narrative Choices in Bengali *Pata* Paintings' in *Journal of Arts & Ideas*, March 1995. The full quote: "In fact it is erroneous to speak of the tradition as *a* tradition. On seeing a number of scrolls, both contemporary ones in the hands of the *patuas* and older pieces in museums, one comes face to face with the unexpected richness and the sometimes frustrating complexity of the Bengali *pata*."

6. Nina Sabnani, 'The Kaavad storytelling tradition of Rajasthan' in *Design Thoughts*, July 2009. The full quote: "The Kaavad offers an identity to all the communities that are connected to it. Each community has multiple identities but in this specific one concerning the Kaavad they are all related. The makers get their uniqueness as they are the only ones who make them and were created to make them. They depend on the tellers to some degree to continue making the Kaavads. The tellers get their professional identity from the very name and depend on their patrons to continue the tradition. The patrons 'recognize themselves' and their ancestors in the images that the Kaavad mirrors. The myth in a way explains the reality and reinforces the dependence and synergy."

7. This proposed travelogue will be in the form of a comic book; it will combine information on these traditions with the experiences that Sabhaney and Emura had while researching them.



Little Artists of Chizami:
Painting Stories, Sketching a Universe

Aditi Chitre

All photographs except the last by Aditi Chitre

Visual arts practice among the young in Nagaland has been strangely neglected despite its being a region of great artistic traditions and achievements. When Aditi Chitre worked closely with the North East Network to hold an art workshop in Chizami in 2011, she discovered the untapped potential of the children, none of whom had had any formal training in the arts. An IFA grant helped her return in 2012 to hold a storytelling and visual arts workshop for twelve children. This photo-essay traces the children's creative journey and the spectacular blossoming of their imagination that resulted in an illustrated book of stories.

Tshenyi-u's unbridled brush strokes in the pages of her sketchbook.

Travel anywhere within Nagaland and your eyes are certain to absorb more beauty than your heart can possibly contain. A two-to-three-hour drive, winding up the hills from Kohima, will bring you to Chizami in Phek district.

Perched on a hilltop is the North East Network (NEN) resource centre. NEN is an NGO that works towards empowering women of conflict zones, through advocacy and training. Their method of working through conflict impact is farsighted. In order to build a future society from within the social and political issues that north-eastern India faces today, NEN is trying to empower the youth with a space where they can explore their personal potentials and practise a freedom of choice in careers. It has been encouraging the youth to participate in conferences, workshops and sports training (in a football-loving region) and to join eco clubs that train kids to document the biodiversity of their neighbourhood. It has been successful in inviting village elders to share their knowledge with the young, and is working towards conservation, as the land itself is Nagaland's richest potential for prosperity.

In 2011, with support from NEN, I conducted an art workshop for children from Chizami and the neighbouring Enhulumi village. Over six days, twenty-one kids and I messed around, painting and drawing and telling stories in the warm sun of a chilly Naga winter.

I had begun visiting Nagaland some three to four years earlier. The very first journey had begun with a stomach-full of stories by an elder from Chizami village, grandpa Nipelo. I sat before him, entranced by his tales of humans, spirits, animals, gods and World War II. Ever since, I have kept going back, summoned by hills and stories.

With the same clarity of thought with which an old man or woman would narrate a story, so did the children lay paint upon paper, re-creating the world they had seen, the stories they had heard. Besides taking part in the formal workshop activities they had worked intensely in their sketchbooks. The sketchbook was offered to them as a space for private meanderings, a space in which to work independently and unrestrictedly. Most kids had worked their way through two sketchbooks each in just six days! On the day of the final display, as proud parents gazed in awe at the children's body of work, the full impact of their masterful confidence with paint and design sank in. These

were not kids who were too distracted to carry out an idea to fruition. They had patiently worked on their ideas, layer upon layer, commanding perspective and colour.

This was my first workshop in Chizami. NEN's Chizami programme head Seno Tsuhah and I both agreed that there was no stopping now. The seeds had been sown, of what went on to become a more intensive project with IFA in 2012.

The focus this time was on weaving tales, learning to be disobedient with the aid of art, seeing through different perspectives and painting without instruction (since they are better painters than I am). The children were fed many doses of strange animation, and there was much storytelling within the group and several games to melt inhibitions. Once they were given respect for their knowledge and the physical space to quietly disappear into their strokes, they created and illustrated their own stories. Looking sharp in their winter jackets and boots, they enjoyed a day-long picnic to Kohima, relaxing and frolicking after their 'study tour' of the Kohima state museum, from where they gathered ingredients for stories they would write during their next session.

Finally, the work created by the children over ten days was exhibited for their parents. They were as awed and impressed as before, on seeing the staggering body of work created by free-thinking children who had never received a day's art training in their lives. In many ways their work confirmed that not practising art as a subject in school had allowed their imagination to escape the numbing effect of training that is invariably structured from an adult perspective, and which regards a child's imagination and knowledge as naïve and unformed.

The illustrated stories they created have been captured in a book—a book of stories they can call their own. This book along with the original work was exhibited in Dimapur. It was a platform that gathered teachers, parents and children of the town and encouraged them to look at children as independent artists who didn't need 'teaching' so much as an atmosphere where their personal experiences, quirks and inclinations could be respected and encouraged and shared with one another.

Aditi Chitre is an animation filmmaker from Bombay.

A magic lamp that practises free will approaches a Naga character in Lhika's retelling of the magic lamp story.

A closeup of one of Whezokhro's paintings. I have often watched him as he painted with the patience of a saint, building up detailed strokes with texture, and gradation in highlights and tones. It is amazing how such unwavering attention can be displayed by the cheekiest, naughtiest kid in the group.

A character in Wako's story made from the museum ingredients.


They started
each other

A mid-action shot in a high-drama story created by Wako, composed and painted with his typically calm command over the medium.

One of Wako's sketchbook explorations from the previous year's workshop with NEN.

I am a mosquito. I am very small. I like to drink human blood
walking here and there. I was shocked that I never saw so m
When I came close to her she told me that her father and m

I decided to help her. I asked her that what can I do for you
father and mother. As we fly inside the house of that man I s
with his hand I was very angry. When I came close to him he
was kill there.

d. One day as I was flying down the city I saw many people
nany people. As I fly near a car I saw one mosquito crying
other were killed.

u. She told me that she want to kill the man who had kill her
saw many mosquitos dying. As I saw the man killing mosquito
e was very big like a giant. When I bit him he saw me and I

The exercise in perspective shifts, meant for expanding one's visual perspective options, evolved into an exploration in emotional perspective and identity. Here, Whezokhro describes the plight of a mosquito persecuted by humans.

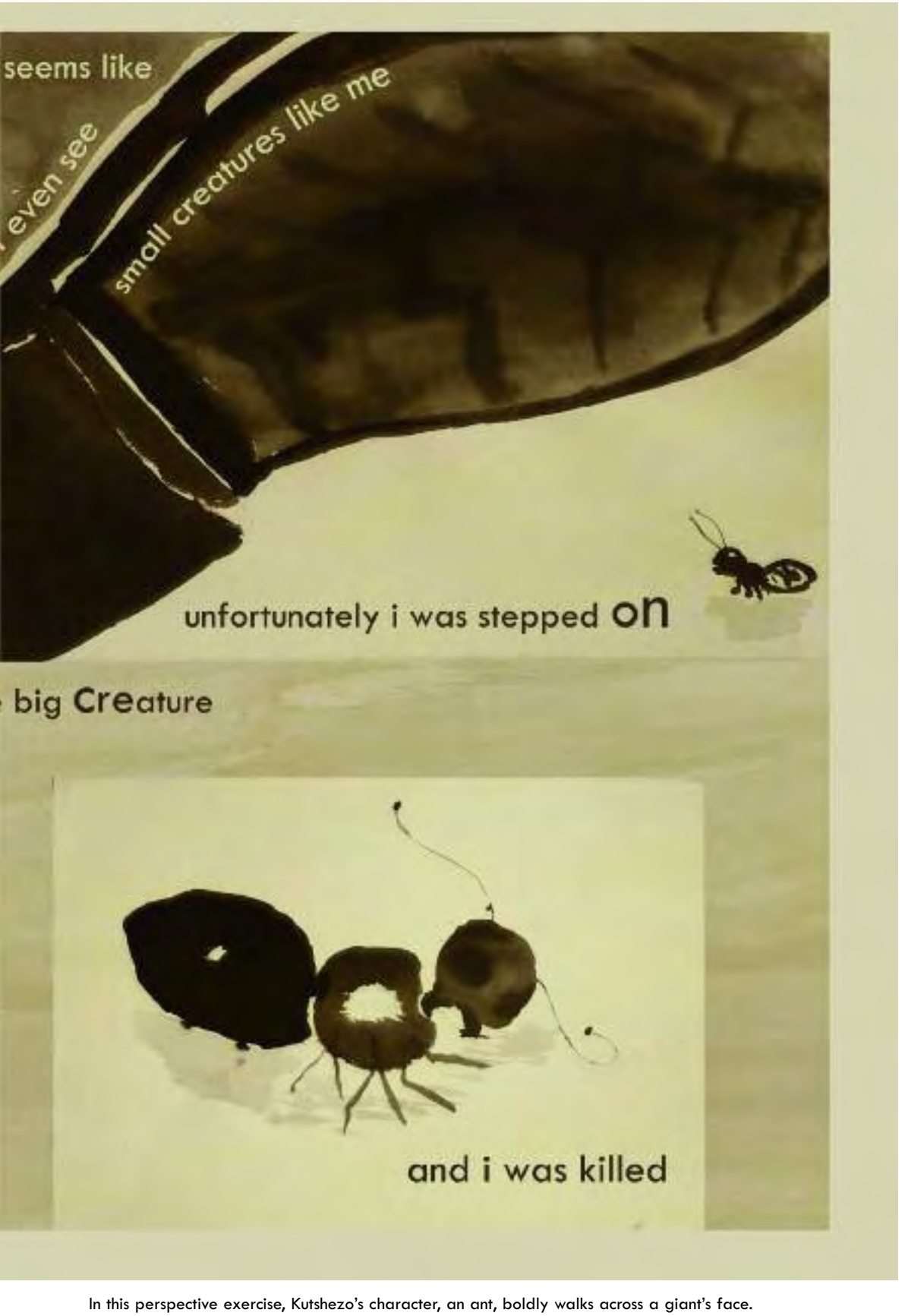
the nose of that big creature is very big and i can crawl inside it easily. it had an eye which seems like the

it seems like it didn't even see me with its big eye. i thought that it could see everything, even the smallest creature in the world

but it

it can't

by the



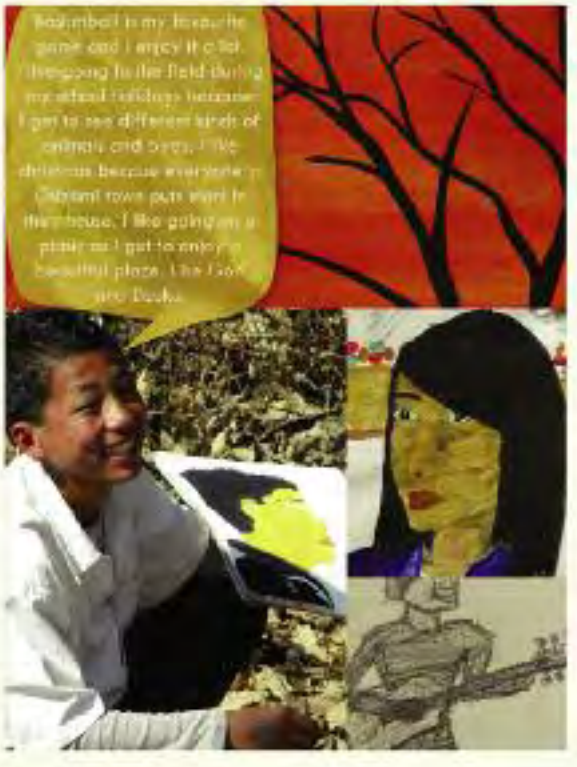
In this perspective exercise, Kutshezo's character, an ant, boldly walks across a giant's face.

Lhika narrates an entire story through one image, inviting the viewer's eyes to travel across the expanse of the paper, following the character's activities.

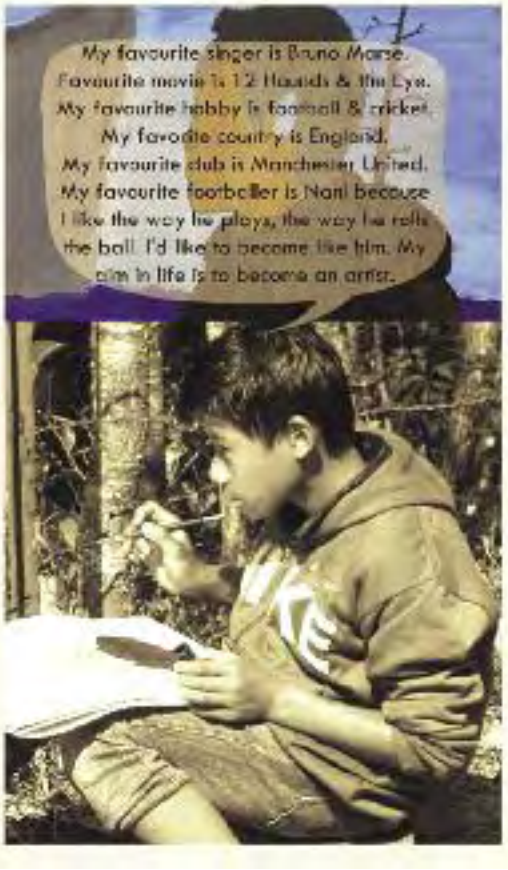

She

A character in Ethuli Tshuhah's story who leaves her home and travels across many villages in search of a better life.

A sketchbook painting from the 2011 NEN workshop.



In the final book, each child's selection of stories was introduced by a short note they'd written about themselves.



Tea break at the workshop. The NEN weaving centre, which lent us the space for the workshop, is where women of the village execute some of their products, and from where those who prefer working from home collect the wool they require. Chizami Weaves, their brand for the products they weave, is a women's collective.

Alo, who documented the workshop, amused the kids with his wisecracks and clicked the whole bunch at the end of the workshop. They look as though they could go on for another ten days. Photograph by Tshetsholo Naro.

About IFA

India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) is one of the country's leading independent arts funders, championing the cause of arts philanthropy and advocating the importance of the arts in public life. In the last decade and a half we have substantially enriched India's cultural landscape and infused passion and professionalism into the business of arts philanthropy.

IFA was set up in 1993 to focus on urgent but unattended needs in specific areas of the arts. Since we began we have committed eighteen crore rupees (approximately three-and-a-quarter million US dollars) to projects located in almost every corner of the country.

Our support has gone out to independent research and teaching institutions, cultural and development organisations, scholars and artists. Musicians and choreographers, writers and visual artists, filmmakers and film scholars, architects and conservationists, sociologists and art historians, craftspersons and folk performers have been among the beneficiaries of our support.

Today we fund cutting edge artistic practice, support initiatives to bring the arts into the classroom, assist in institution development and infrastructure creation, fund research in the arts, help in the preservation and transmission of valuable cultural knowledge, and create public platforms for the dissemination and advocacy of the arts. We also act as a source of information and expertise to those in the arts community and beyond.

To receive regular information about our activities, send an email to contactus@indiaifa.org asking to join our mailing list.

To support our activities and in turn receive *ArtConnect* and other IFA material for free, become a **Friend of IFA**. Visit **www.indiaifa.org** for more information.

REGD. NO: KARENG/2009/29264

ArtConnect

An IFA Publication

Volume 5, Number 2
July-December 2013

Contents

I F A

India Foundation for the Arts
'Apurva' Ground Floor, No 259, 4th Cross
Raj Mahal Vilas IInd Stage, IInd Block,
Bangalore-560 094
Phone/Fax: 91- 80 - 2341 4681/82
Email: contactus@indiaifa.org
www.indiaifa.org