

# SACH

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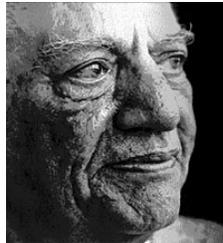
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In the last issue of SACH we produced English translation of Bidrohi by one of the greatest Bangla poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. This time we are presenting poems of another great poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz. These poems of Faiz depict the pain and agony faced by people living in the subcontinent. Some of these poems could be specific to Pakistan but things are no different in rest of the South Asian region. If we share the joys of life we also share the pains. We attained freedom from Britishers but our own people became colonizers. This was beautifully depicted by Faiz in the first poem being presented here. The situation after 1947 could easily be identified in the remaining two poems. It should be noted here that common struggles have also been our Composite Heritage. Freedom struggle is a shining example of such Heritage. People like Faiz Ahmed Faiz aspired always for another common struggle. This time for liberating us from our own people.



*Faiz Ahmad Faiz*

## The Freedoms' Dawn

(August 1947)

This leprous daybreak, this night-bitten dawn,  
this is not the dawn we awaited with longing sighs;

this is not the dawn that drew our friends on  
believing that, somewhere in the desert of these skies,  
they would find the resting-place of the stars,  
somewhere find where night's sluggish tides reach shore,  
somewhere find the boat of heartache and drop anchor.  
When we friends set out by the secret byways of youth  
how many hands bid us stay, pulling at our hems!

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From eager bedchambers in the palace of truth,  
sweet arms kept crying out, flesh calling us to come;  
but dearer was the seductive face of daylight,  
dearer still her robe aglow with sprites:  
my longing seemed to buoy me, my weariness grew light.

It is said that the division of day from night is done,  
it is said our goals are realized and unflawed;  
but only the ways of our hurtful leaders are new-sprung,  
collective joy decreed, the anguish of separation  
outlawed.

The fire in our livers, the burning in our hearts, the riots  
in our eyes—

this severing cannot cure any of these.

When did that dear morning wind arrive—and must it  
go yet?

The lamps on these byroads have not felt its breeze;  
no one has come to lighten this night's heavy load yet,  
our heart's inheritance has not been bestowed yet.

Come with me, come, our goal lies down the road yet.

## Bury me under your streets

Bury me under your streets, O my beloved country,  
where today men dare not pass with heads held high,  
or where lovers of you who wish to pay tribute,  
must fear for their lives and come around on the sly.

Good men suffer this new law and decree  
where stones are locked up and dogs run free.

It is too much for tyranny's trigger-happy hand,  
if your name is invoked even by extremists.  
When power-starved men are both accuser and judge,  
who will defend us, where can we seek justice?

But man somehow spends the days he must spend,  
away from you, as mornings come and evenings end.

As the prison grating darkens, my heart remembers  
that somewhere under these stars, you brush out your  
braids.

When the links of my chain begin to shine, I think  
that somewhere day breaks over your sleeping face.

I live, in short, in the fantasies of nightfall and dawn;  
I live in the shadow of walls, in the gate's closed palm.

This is the same war tyrants and true men have always  
fought;

their tactics are not new, and neither are ours.

They have always set fires and we turn them to flowers;  
their tricks are not new, and neither are ours.

That's why I don't complain about my fate;

or let my imprisoned heart start to quake.

If today I am away from you, tomorrow we'll be together;  
this separation of one night is nothing to us.

If today our enemies ride high, playing God, so what?—  
their reign of four days is nothing to us.

Only those who hold to their vows under such scrutiny  
are safe from night-and-day's endless mutiny.

## An Evening in the Prison

Rung by rung, night descends  
its spiral staircase of stars.

A breeze passes gently by,  
as if words of love had been whispered.

Trees in the prison courtyard, like exiles  
with heads bowed, are absorbed  
in embroidering arabesques on the skirt of the sky.

On the crested roof are glittering  
the beautiful fingers of moonlight,  
dissolving star-shine into dust  
and washing the blue sky into white.

In the green corners, dark shadows collide  
as if the ache of separation  
might eddy and fill my mind.

But one thought keeps running through my heart—  
how sweet these moments are. Though  
there are those who may concoct tyranny's poisons,  
they will have no victories, not today or tomorrow.  
So what if they douse the candles in rooms  
where lovers meet? If they're so mighty,  
let them snuff out the moon.

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## Bhagat Singh As I Knew Him



*(One of the Greatest Revolutionary Composite Heritage of South Asia is Martyr Bhagat Singh. He was hanged along with his comrades on March 23, 1931. This Article was written by his close friend Ajoy Ghosh. We are reproducing this article in the memory of Bhagat Singh. Who belongs to whole of South Asian region)*

*Ajoy Ghosh*

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I believe it was sometime in 1923 that I met Bhagat Singh for the first time. A young boy of about my age—I was fifteen at that time—he was introduced to me by B. K. Dutt in Cawnpore. Tall and thin, rather shabbily dressed, very quiet, he seemed a typical village lad lacking smartness and self-confidence. I did not think very highly of him at that time and told Dutt so when he was gone.

A few days later I saw him again. We had a long talk. Those were days when we used to dream boyish dreams of revolution. It seemed round the corner—a question of a few years at most. Bhagat Singh did not seem so confident about it. I have forgotten his words but I remember his speaking about the torpor and apathy that prevailed in the land, the difficulty of rousing the people, the heavy odds against us. My first impressions about him seemed confirmed.

Our talks drifted to past attempts at revolution and a change came over Bhagat Singh as he spoke of the martyrs of 1915-16 and especially of Sardar Kartar Singh, the central figure of the first Lahore conspiracy case. Neither of us had met Kartar Singh, he had already been hanged when we were yet kids but we knew how he, then a mere youth of 18 and a comrade of Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, Baba Rur Singh and Prithvi Singh Azad, had become the undisputed leader of the Ghadr Party men who came to India in 1915-16 with the aim of organising armed revolt against British rule. A fearless fighter and a superb organiser, Kartar Singh was a man admired even by his enemies. I

literally worshipped him and to hear one talk inspiringly of my hero was a great pleasure. I began to feel a liking for Bhagat Singh. Before he left Cawnpore we were close friends though I never ceased to make fun of what appeared to me his pessimistic outlook...

**ONE day in 1928 I was surprised when a young man walked into my room and greeted me. It was Bhagat Singh but not the Bhagat Singh that I had met two years before. Tall and magnificently proportioned, with a keen, intelligent face and gleaming eyes, he looked a different man altogether. And as he talked I realised that he had grown not merely in years.**

He was now, together with Chandra Shekhar Azad—the sole remaining absconder of the Kakori conspiracy case—the leader of our party. He explained to me the changes that had been made in our programme and organisational structure.

We were henceforth the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association with a socialist state in India as our avowed objective. Also the party had been reorganised with a Central Committee and with provincial and district committees under it. All decisions were to be taken in these committees, majority decisions were to be binding on all.

As for the most important question, however, the question in what manner the fight for freedom and socialism was to be waged, armed action by individuals and groups was to remain our immediate task. Nothing else, we held, could smash constitutionalist illusions, nothing else could free the country from the grip in which it was held. When the stagnant calm was broken by a series of hammer blows delivered by us, at selected points and on suitable occasions, against the most hated

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officials of the government, and mass movement unleashed, we would link ourselves with that movement, act as its armed detachment and give it a socialist direction.

Our very contribution towards ensuring the success of the movement would ensure that free India became socialist India.

**All those who meet Bhagat Singh then and afterwards have testified to his remarkable intelligence and to the powerful impression he made when talking. Not that he was a brilliant speaker. But he spoke with such force, passion and earnestness that one could not help being impressed. We talked the whole night and as we went out for a stroll when the first streaks of red were appearing in the grey sky, it seemed to me that a new era was dawning for our party. We knew what we wanted and we knew how to reach our goal.**

Such was our socialism in those days. We had lost faith in the existing national leadership, its constitutionalism, its slogan of boring from within disgusted us. And we looked upon ourselves as men who by their example would create the basis for the rise of a new leadership. Socialism for us was an ideal, the principle to guide us to rebuild society after the capture of power...

IN April 1929 streamer headlines announced the arrest of Communist and trade union leaders all over the country. P.C. Joshi, then a student in the Allahabad University and a Youth League leader, was arrested; his arrest being followed by a huge protest demonstration of students.

Bhagat Singh and some others among us had already met a number of Communist leaders. We felt sympathetic towards them and at one time even contemplated some sort of a working alliance with them—Communists to organise the masses and conduct the mass movement, we of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association to act as its armed section. But when we learned that Communists considered armed action by individuals to be harmful to the movement, we dropped the idea. While we did not look upon Communists as revolutionists—revolution for us meant primarily armed action—we felt one with them in many respects: in their hatred for imperialism, in their opposition to constitutionalism and insistence on direct action, in their striving for socialism.

And so the countrywide arrests of Communists were felt by us to be a matter of vital concern for the revolutionary movement. It was imperialist attack against a cause which was our own, against a movement which had our love and sympathy. We resolved to protest not merely against the arrests but against the whole imperialist policy of fostering the growth of constitutionalist illusions on the one hand and unleashing terror against the people on the other.

A few days later bombs exploded on the official benches in the Central Assembly just after the Trades Dispute Bill—a measure directed against the working class movement—had been passed. Bhagat Singh and Dutt were arrested on the spot.

In a ringing statement that revealed the powerful pen that Bhagat Singh wielded, they admitted their responsibility and explained what had led them to it. They were sentenced to transportation for life.

Soon followed the accidental discovery of our bomb factory in Lahore and the arrests of Sukhdeo, Kishori Lal and others. Jai Gopal confessed, then Hansraj Vohra, and the result was more round-ups, more confessions and within a few weeks most of our active workers and leaders of Bihar, United Provinces and the Punjab were in the hands of the police. Others went underground. My arrest came just when I was preparing to go underground.

It all seemed over, our dreams and our hopes. More depressing than anything else was the shocking fact that, unable to stand police torture, no less than seven, two of them members of our Central Committee, had turned approvers.

#### **THE TRIAL BEGINS**

IN July 1929 we were produced in court—13 of us<sup>1</sup>—and there we met Bhagat Singh and Dutt again. No longer was he the Bhagat Singh of the magnificent physique whose strength had been a byword in our party. A shadow of his former self, weak and emaciated, he was carried into the court on a stretcher. For months he and Dutt had been tortured by the police and now they were on hunger strike demanding human treatment for all political prisoners. Our eyes filled with tears as we greeted them.

Though sentenced already to transportation for life Bhagat Singh and Dutt were our co-accused in the new case that now began—the Lahore

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conspiracy case of 1929. For three days we paid no attention to the proceedings but held prolonged discussions in which Bhagat Singh, though so weak that he had to recline in an easy chair all the time, took the leading part.

The first thing, he emphasised, was the need to get rid of the idea that all was over. Ours was not to be a defence in the legal sense of the word. While every effort must be made to save those who could be saved, the case as a whole was to be conducted with a definite political purpose.

Revolutionary use was to be made of the trial, of every opportunity to expose the sham justice of the British Government and to demonstrate the unconquerable will of the revolutionists. Not merely by our statements when the time came but even more by our actions inside the court and prisons we were to fight for the cause of all political prisoners, hurl defiance at the government and show the contempt we had for its courts and its police. Thus we were to continue the work we had begun outside—the work of rousing our people by our actions.

These talks had a galvanising effect on us. As a first step we resolved to join the hunger strike that Bhagat Singh and Dutt had already begun. Our central demand was the placing of all political prisoners in a single class, better diet for them, newspapers and reading material and writing facilities.

### **THE HUNGER STRIKE**

THUS began the great Lahore conspiracy case hunger strike that continued for 63 days resulting in the self-immolation of Jatin Das and stirring the country to its very depths.

In the beginning the government and the jail authorities did not take the strike seriously. They believed it would peter out in a few days and this belief on their part was strengthened when two of the prisoners gave up the strike after a few days. Some of us were none too confident either and I for one wondered how long it would be possible for me to remain without food. All of us had undergone hardships before, physical conflict with the police now did not frighten us, but the prospect of starving ourselves for days, weeks and even months—this was a chilling prospect indeed.

For ten days nothing big happened. Hunger grew and with it physical weakness. Some had to take to bed after a week and, as the trial continued,

it was a real strain for them to sit in the court room. But our first terror had gone. Hunger strike did not seem such a hard job after all. But we did not know that the real fight was yet to come.

After ten days forcible feeding was started. We were all in separate cells at that time. Accompanied by a number of tough and strong nambardars (convict overseers) the doctors came to each cell, the hunger-striker was thrown on a mattress, a rubber tube was forcibly pushed into his nostril and the milk poured into it.

Violent resistance was offered by everyone but with little effect at first. It almost seemed as if they had already beaten us.

In the night on the thirteenth day of the strike news reached me in my cell that Jatin Das was in a bad state and had been removed to the jail hospital. At first I could not make out what had happened for Das had appeared quite fit only a few hours ago. Then the man who had brought the news—he was a subordinate jail official—hesitatingly told me that something had gone wrong during forcible feeding and Das was now lying unconscious.

This was shocking news indeed. I, like most others amongst us, had never met Das before my arrest. But during the few days that we had come to know him in prison he had won everyone's affection. Though quiet and unassuming, he had a keen sense of humour and a fund of stories and anecdotes which he used to narrate to us and make everyone laugh.

I called the jailor and by bullying him got the permission to visit the jail hospital.

Das was lying there on a cot, unconscious, with doctors attending on him. They feared he might die that very night. He recovered but developed pneumonia and that weakened him so much—he refused all medicines and nourishment—that forcible feeding was now out of question.

From now on the strike became grim and determined. Das was followed by Shiv Varma and others. Soon the hospital was full. Court proceedings were now adjourned.

It was a veritable race for death that now began. Who would be the first to die—this became the subject of competition.

Many were the methods we devised to defeat the doctors. Kishori swallowed red pepper and boiling water to cause sore throat so that the

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passage of the tube led to such coughing that it had to be taken out lest he might die of suffocation. I swallowed flies immediately after forced feeding to induce vomiting. These devices came to be known to the doctors and guards were kept on us.

Determined to break us the jail officials removed all water from our cells and placed milk instead in the pitchers. This was the worst ordeal imaginable. After a day thirst grew unbearably. I would drag myself towards the pitcher, hoping every time to find water but drew back at the sight of milk. It was maddening. If the man who had hit upon this device had been there before me, I would have killed him.

Outside the guard sat—watching every move—ment-mute, impassive. I could not trust myself much longer. I knew that a few hours more and I was bound to give way and drink the milk. My throat was parched, my tongue swollen.

I called the guard. As he stood outside the barred door I asked him to get me a few drops of water at least. His reply was: "I cannot do it. I have no permission."

Fury took possession of me. I snatched the pitcher and hurled it against the door, breaking it to pieces, spilling the milk on the guard. He recoiled back in horror. He thought I had gone mad. He was not far from right.

The same torture was being undergone by Kishori and others who were then in cells. And everyone, as I learnt later, had done the same thing—broke their pitchers before their guards.

The jailor gave away. Water was brought to our cells. I drank and drank. Then I fell sick and vomited out every drop.

In the meantime sympathetic hunger strikes were taking place wherever there were political prisoners. A powerful mass movement had grown to back our demands. Mass meetings and demonstrations were taking place in every part of the country.

The Meerut conspiracy case prisoners went on hunger strike after a few days. The news was flashed across the seas. It created a stir in England. World attention was now focused on conditions in Indian prisons.

Several times during the hunger strike Bhagat Singh came to our jail on the plea of consultation but really to meet us and know how we were faring. Though himself weak and emaciated he

would sit by the side of Das and other comrades and cheer them up. His very presence infused new life in us and we looked forward eagerly to these visits.

At last when Jatin Das was on the point of death and the conditions of Shiv and others were very serious, the government yielded. A committee with a non-official majority was appointed to recommend changes in jail rules. The committee met us in prison, assured us that most of our demands would be conceded and on the basis of its assurances we resolved to end the strike.

Jatin Das was now beyond any hope of recovery. He could no longer talk or even hear. Victory, so it seemed at that time, had been won but the man who had more than anyone else contributed towards it was not to live to share its fruits.

There he lay, with all of us sitting round him, and a lump rose in my throat. As he passed away and I lifted my head, I saw tears even in the eyes of hardened jail officials. When his body was borne out of the jail gate, to be hauled over to the huge crowd that was waiting outside, Hamilton Harding, Superintendent of Police, Lahore, bared his head, bowing in reverence before the man whom all the might of the British empire had failed to defeat.

The promises made by the government on the basis of which we abandoned the strike were not kept forcing us to resort to two more hunger strikes and even afterwards the new rules were interpreted in such a manner as to exclude the vast majority of political prisoners from any benefit. But public attention was focused on the terrible conditions prevailing in the jails—conditions far worse than today. The sham pretensions of the government stood exposed.

One event during the hunger strike moved us deeply. Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, the founder of the Ghadr Party and a hero of the Lahore conspiracy case of 1915-16, who was then in the Lahore central jail, joined the strike; he had already served 14 years in the Andamans and in Indian prisons and was about to be released. We were informed by the Superintendent that if he persisted, he would lose his remissions and would have to remain in prison much longer. Moreover, Babaji was old and in ill health, 14 years of hell had shattered his body and the hunger strike might end disastrously for him.

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In vain, however, Bhagat Singh saw Babaji and pleaded with him—he was in tears when he reported the interview to us—to desist. Babaji continued the strike as long as we did. He lost a good part of his remissions and had to remain in jail for a year more.

### **THE MAN AND HIS IDEAS**

BHAGAT SINGH had none of the characteristics of the traditional terrorist leader. We had differences amongst us on many occasions; several of the meetings we held were stormy and more than once Bhagat Singh had to follow a course of action with which he did not agree. Impetuous and strong-willed, he lacked the coolness and imperturbability of Azad and would at times fret and fume and lash at those who seemed to vacillate. But only seldom did he give offence and whenever he did so he felt mortified and begged forgiveness with such candour and sincerity that one could not bear any grudge against him. Of affectionate nature, tender towards ailing comrades, frank and open-hearted, with no trace of pettiness in his make-up, he was a man who claimed the love of all who were even acquainted with him.

**Always passionately fond of studying Bhagat Singh spent most of his time in prison reading socialist literature. Perhaps the first among us to be drawn towards socialist ideas, he was an avowed atheist and had none of the religious beliefs of earlier terrorists. It would be an exaggeration to say that he became a Marxist, but more and more as a result of his studies, of discussions which we held frequently and under the impact of events outside—stirring events took place while we were in prison: the Sholapur uprising, the Peshawar upheaval, the heroic stand of Garhwali soldiers led by Chandra Singh—he began to stress the need for armed action only in coordination with and as an integral part of the mass movement, subordinated to its needs and requirements.**

Studies in prison deepened the love that we already cherished for the Soviet Union and on the occasion of the 1930 anniversary of the November Revolution, we sent greetings to the Soviet Union, hailing its victories and pledging support to the Soviet State against all enemies...

IN October 1930, after a farcical trial lasting five months, the judgment was announced. Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdeo were sentenced to

death, seven to transportation for life, others to long terms of imprisonment. I was among those acquitted because the only evidence against me was that of two approvers, the third approver who had deposed against me having retracted his confession. As the jail gates closed behind me and I stood on the street outside, I felt like a man who had deserted his comrades.

What Bhagat Singh had come to mean to our countrymen I realised only when I was out. "Bhagat Singh Zindabad" was the slogan that rent the air wherever a meeting was held. "Inquilab Zindabad"—the slogan he had been the first to raise—had replaced "Bande Mataram" as the slogan of the national movement. His name was on the lips of millions, his image in every young man's heart. My chest swelled with pride as I thought of my long association with such a man.

Hopes there were still of saving Bhagat Singh and his comrades. Everyone expected that the release of the Lahore case prisoners or at least the commutation of their death sentences would be one of the terms of any agreement between the Congress and the government. That expectation was belied. We had been guilty of violence and so while the Congress leaders desired to save Bhagat Singh that could not be made one of the conditions of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

In April 1931, just on the eve of the Karachi session of the Congress, the death sentence were carried out. Bhagat Singh was barely 24 at that time.

I was then on my way to Karachi. Men who heard the news wept like children. As for me I was too stunned even to think.

Like a meteor Bhagat Singh appeared in the political sky for a brief period. Before he passed away, he had become the cynosure of millions of eyes and the symbol of the spirit and aspirations of a new India, dauntless in the face of death, determined to smash imperialist rule and raise on its ruins the edifice of a free people's state in this great land of ours.

### **REFERENCE :**

1. *Bejoy Sinha and Rajguru were arrested after the trial had begun. Bhagwan Das and Sadasiva (now members of the Communist Party) were arrested at Bhusawal and sentenced to long terms. A number of comrades were tried in Bihar separately in a dacoity case.*

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# 1857 In Our History

P.C.Joshi

The few contemporary Indians who wrote on 1857 did so for the British. The dominant British attitude is revealed in entitled, "The Bengali Press, How to Deal with It", published on August 9, 1896, in Pioneer, a very influential British organ of the times:

We know how Englishmen within the memory of living men treated their own newspaper writers... If a gentle and graceful writer forgot himself so far as to call the Prince Regent 'an Adonis of forty' he got two years' 'hard'. If a clergyman praised the French Revolution and advocated Parliamentary reform and fair representation, he was condemned to work in iron manacles, to wade in sludge among the vilest criminals.

The writer advocated the infliction of the same punishment on an Indian who dared to write on the Indian Mutiny of 1857.

Indians thus had no say in this controversy but our rebel ancestors with their heroic deeds and by shedding their warm blood had made their contribution more eloquent than words....

It is inspiring to recall here what Marx thought of the 1857 national uprising. As early as July 31, 1857, on the basis of Indian mail carrying Delhi news up to June 17, he concluded his unsigned newsletter to the New York Daily Tribune with these words:

*"By and by there will ooze out other facts able to convince even John Bull himself that what he considers military mutiny is in truth a national revolt."*

India's historians may go on arguing and differing about the character of the 1857 revolt but the mass of the Indian people have already accepted it as the source-spring of our national movement. The hold of the 1857 heritage on national thought is so great that even Dr R. C. Majumdar concludes his study with the

following words:

*"The outbreak of 1857 would surely go down in history as the first great and direct challenge to the British rule in India, on an extensive scale. As such it inspired the genuine national movement for the freedom of India from British yoke which started half a century later. The memory of 1857-58 sustained the later movement, infused courage into the hearts of its fighters, furnished a historical basis for the grim struggle, and gave it a moral stimulus, the value of which it is impossible to exaggerate. The memory of the revolt of 1857, distorted but hallowed with sanctity, perhaps did more damage to the cause of the British rule in India than the Revolt itself."*

The controversy whether the 1857-58 struggle was a sepoy revolt or a national uprising can be resolved only by squarely posing and truthfully analysing the character of the contestants on either side and the nature of the issues—political, economic and ideological—involved in this struggle. In short, a sound historical evaluation demands that who was fighting whom and for what be correctly stated....

THE British conquest of India implied not only the imposition of alien rule but, something worse still, a pitiless destruction of the traditional Indian social order itself and disruption of its own normal development towards a new order. Marx was the only thinker of the period who studied this tragic phenomenon scientifically and formulated the role of British imperialism in India in such a correct manner that his conclusions were borne out by the subsequent researches of Indian scholarship and they helped Indian patriots to understand Indian reality better and give a progressive orientation to Indian national thought.

As early as 1853 when the Indian situation was being debated in the British Parliament on the occasion of the renewal of the East India Company's Charter, Marx stated in an article entitled "British Rule in India": *"All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions,*

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conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid and destructive as the successive action in Hindustan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu, and separates Hindustan ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history... It was the British intruder who broke up the Indian handloom and destroyed the spinning wheel... British steam and science uprooted over the whole surface of Hindustan, the union between agriculture and manufacturing industry."

After the conquest of Bengal and eventually throughout India, the method of enforced and unequal trade was used to loot India and this led to its economic ruination. R. P. Dutt states how the situation underwent a qualitative change after the British became the ruling class in India, how methods of power could be increasingly used to weight the balance of exchange and secure the maximum goods for the minimum payment.

By the end of 18th century and much more clearly by 1813-33, a shift had come over British policy towards India. After a period of primitive plunder and the systematic ruination of Indian trades and crafts, the British bourgeoisie, with the completion of their Industrial Revolution, began to use India as a dumping ground for its industrial manufactures and, above all, textiles. Marx noted this sharp shift, and, in one of his articles during 1853, wrote:

*"The whole character of trade was changed. Till 1813 India had been chiefly an exporting country while it now became an importing one; and in such quick progression, that already, in 1823, the rate of exchange, which had generally been two-sixth per rupee sunk down to two per rupee. India, the great workshop of cotton manufacture for the world, since immemorial times, became now inundated with English twists and cotton stuffs. After its own produce had been excluded from England, or only accepted on the most cruel terms, British manufactures were poured*

*into it at a small or merely nominal duty, to the ruin of native cotton fabric once so celebrated."*

The policy of the East India Company also annihilated the independent merchant bourgeoisie as well as the artisans and craftsmen. Prof Ramkrishna Mukherjee describes the process in the following words:

*"Along with thus turning the Indian artisans 'out of this 'temporal' world', as Marx remarked caustically, proceeded the liquidation of the Indian merchant bourgeoisie. Monopolising Indian products for the English meant that the Indian merchants could no longer survive. Only those could maintain their profession who acquiesced in becoming underlings of the Company or of its servants engaged in private inland trade in India or of the private English merchants residing in India for the same purpose. Otherwise, they had to find a new source of livelihood. Not only were the Indian merchants prohibited from buying commodities directly from the producers which were monopolised by the English, but the agents of the Company and its servants forced such goods on the Indian merchants at a price higher than the prevailing one."*

By annihilating the independent merchant bourgeoisie, which to some extent also fulfilled the role of the manufacturing bourgeoisie, the monopolist East India Company destroyed that very important class in Indian economy which could be their rival.

Another aspect of this phenomenon is noted and analysed by K. M. Panikkar in the following words:

*"With the establishment of European trade centres in the main coastal areas of India, there had developed a powerful Indian capitalist class, closely associated with the foreign merchants, and deriving great profits from trade with them... The Marwari millionaires of Bengal have become the equivalent of the compradore classes of Shanghai of a later period ...The emergence of this powerful class, whose economic interests were bound up with those of the foreign merchants and who had an inherited hatred of Muslim rule, was a factor of fundamental importance to the history of India and of Asia."*

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These Indian agents of the Company and of the British merchants were called gomasthas and bannias and played the role of sub-agents of foreign capital and a pro-British role in the 1857 uprising.

How did intelligent Indians react to the above economic situation and policies?

It is useful to quote Allamah Fazle Haq of Khayrabad, an eminent Muslim scholar of the traditional school who took a leading part in the 1857 revolt and was transported for life:

*"Having seized power they (the British) decided to bring under their hold the various sections of the people by controlling eatables, by taking possession of the ears of corn and grain and giving the peasants and cultivators cash in lieu of their rights of farming. Their object was not to allow the poor men and villagers a free hand in buying and selling grains. By giving preference to their own people, they wanted to control the cheapening or raising of the rates so that the people of God might submit to their (Christian) policy of monopoly, and their dependence on them (Christians) for their requirements might force them to meet the purpose of the Christians and their supporters, and their desire and ambitions which they had in their hearts and the mischiefs and evils which they had concealed in their minds."*

In the above background, the appeal of the manifesto issued by Bahadur Shah on behalf of the insurgent centre at Delhi had its own significance. The manifesto appealed in the following words to the merchants: *"It is plain that the infidel and treacherous British Government have monopolised the trade of all the fine and valuable merchandise such as indigo, cloth and other articles of shipping, leaving only the trade of trifles to the people and even in this they are not allowed their shares of the profits, which they secure by means of customs and stamp fees, etc., in money suits, so that the people have merely a trade in name. Besides this, the profit of the traders are taxed with postages, tolls, and subscriptions for schools, etc. Notwithstanding all these concessions, the merchants are liable to imprisonment and disgrace at the instance of complaint of a worthless man. When the Badshahi*

*Government is established all these aforesaid fraudulent practices shall be dispensed with and the trade of every article, without exception, both by land and water shall be opened to the native merchants of India who will have the benefit of the Government steam-vessels and steam carriages for the conveyance of their merchandise gratis; and merchants having no capital of their own shall be assisted from the public treasury. It is, therefore, the duty of every merchant to take part in the war, and aid the Badshahi Government with its men and money, either secretly or openly, as may be consistent with its position or interest and forswear its allegiance to the British Government."*

The economic and political operation of the East India Company in India led to a systematic squeezing of our national wealth which has been described by India's economic historians as the economic drain. Let us examine this as it existed on the eve of the 1857 revolt.

There was the so-called Indian Debt, which was incurred by the Company in order to consolidate its position in India and to spread its influence further through expeditions and wars, and at the same time, paying high dividends to share-holders in England, tributes to the British Government since 1769 and bribes to the influential persons in England.

R. C. Dutt makes the following comments as regards the genesis and mechanism of this Indian Debt:

*"A very popular error prevails in this country (England in 1903) that the whole Indian Debt represents British capital sunk in the development of India. It is shown in the body of this volume that this is not the genesis of the Public Debt of India. When the East India Company ceased to be the rulers of India in 1858, they had piled up an Indian Debt of 70 millions. They had in the meantime drawn a tribute from India, financially an unjust tribute, exceeding 150 million, not calculating interest. They had also charged India with the cost of Afghan wars, Chinese wars and other wars outside India. Equitably, therefore, India owed nothing at the close of the Company's rule; her Public Debt was a myth; there was a considerable balance of over 108*

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millions in her favour out of the money that had been drawn from her."

Montgomery Martin, an Englishman with sympathy for the Indian people, wrote as early as 1838:

*"This annual drain of £ 3,000,000 on British India amounted in 30 years at 12 per cent (the usual Indian rate) compound interest to the enormous sum of £ 723,997,917 sterling; or, at a low rate, as \$ 2,000,000 for 50 years, to £ 8,400,000,000 sterling! So constant and accumulating a drain even on England would have soon impoverished her; how severe then must be its effect on India, where the wages of a labourer is from 2d. to 3d. a day?"*

Prof Ramkrishna Mukherjee goes even further and states:

*"A total picture of this tribute from India is seen to be even greater than the figure mentioned by Martin in 1838. During the 24 years of the last phase of the Company's rule, from 1834-35 to 1857-58, even though the years 1855, '56 and '57 showed a total import-surplus of £ 6,436,345—(not because the foreign rulers had changed their policy, but because some British capital flowed into India to build railway in order to prepare her for exploitation by British industrial capital),—the total tribute which was drained from India in the form of 'home charges' and 'excess of Indian exports' amounted to the colossal figure of £ 151,830,989. This works out at a yearly average of £ 6,325,875, or roughly half the annual land revenue collections in this period!"*

The above was the grim reality, grimmer than any ever witnessed in the whole course of India's age-old historic development. As Marx stated, there cannot, however, remain any doubt but the misery inflicted by the British on Hindustan is of essentially different and infinitely more intensive kind than Hindustan had to suffer before.

The British, under the East India Company's rule disrupted the whole economic order of India, they turned the traditional land system topsy turvy, they smashed the trades and manufactures of the land and disrupted the relationship between these two sectors of the Indian economy,

systematically drained the wealth of our country to their own, and destroyed the very springs of production of our economy. Every class of Indian society suffered at this new spoliator's hands. The landlords were dispossessed and the peasants rendered paupers, the merchant bourgeoisie of India liquidated as an independent class and the artisans and craftsmen deprived of their productive professions. Such unprecedented destruction of a whole economic order and of every class within it could not but produce a great social upheaval and that was the national uprising of 1857. The all-destructive British policy produced a broad popular rebellion against its rule.

Within Indian society, however, those productive forces and classes had not yet grown (in fact early British policy had itself destroyed their first off-shoots) that could lead this revolution to victory. The revolt of 1857 as also its failure were both historical inevitabilities. But it also was a historical necessity, for after it followed those modern developments..., from which emerged the modern national liberation movement of the Indian people and those new social forces which led it to victory.

THE religious factor played a big part in the revolt in 1857. The British statesmen and chroniclers exaggerated and deliberately misinterpreted the role played by this factor to prove their thesis that the 1857 uprising was reactionary, revivalist and directed against the progressive reforms that they were introducing in Indian society. The early generation of English-educated Indian intellectuals swallowed this imperialist thesis uncritically because they themselves had suffered under the old reactionary religious influences. A true historical outlook demands that we do not forget the historical stage which Indian society had reached on the eve of 1857, the ideological values which would be normal to this society and the ideological forms in which the Indian people could formulate their aspirations....

It is abundantly clear... that the British rulers purely for their imperialist motives were out for some decades preceding 1857 to culturally denationalise India by the method of mass

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conversion to Christianity. This was seen as a menacing danger by the mass of Indians, irrespective of their viewpoint whether it was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan or Bahadur Shah, whether it was the enlightened Bengali intellectual in Calcutta or the Nana Saheb at Bithoor, by the mass of sepoys both Hindu and Muslim. Thus when the religious factor played a big role as it did in the struggle of 1857, it was as a part of the national factor. The mass of Indians took up arms to defend their own religions and they were fighting not only in defence of their religion but to defend their way of life and their nationhood. Of course, there were several reactionary features within Indian society but then the only healthy way to change them was through the struggle of the Indian people themselves.

This is not all. Our rebel ancestors used religion to advance the revolutionary struggle. They did not let religion stupefy them. But they used religion to get the strength to fight the Firinghis.

A proclamation was issued at Delhi with royal permission urging upon the Hindus and Muslims to unite in the struggle in the name of their respective religions.

To all Hindus and Mussalmans, citizens and servants of Hindustan, officers of the army now at Delhi and at Meerut send greetings:—it is well known that in these days all the English have entertained these evil designs—first, to destroy the religion of the whole Hindustani army and then to make the people by compulsion Christians. Therefore, we, solely on account of our religion, have combined with the people and have not spared alive one infidel, and have re-established the Delhi dynasty on these terms. Hundreds of guns and a large amount of treasure have fallen into our hands; therefore, it is fitting that whoever of the soldiers and people dislike turning Christians should unite with one heart, and, acting courageously, not leave the seed of these infidels remaining.

When the struggle in Oudh after the fall of Lucknow was on the downgrade, and insurgents were heroically fighting defensive and mostly losing battles, the captured sepoys used to be

asked by the British why they had joined the revolt. Their answer used to be:

*“The slaughter of the English is required by our religion. The end will be the destruction of the English and all the sepoys—and then, God knows!”*

The Rajah of the Gond tribes was living as a pensioner of the British at Nagpur. He had turned a traditional Sanskrit sthotra recited in worshipping the devi into an anti-British hymn. The London Times of October 31, 1857 gives the translation of the prayer: *“Shut the mouth of the slanderers and Eat up backbiters, trample down the sinners, You, “Satrusamgharika” (name of Devi, ‘destroyer of enemy’) Kill the British, exterminate them, Matchundee. Let not the enemy escape, not the wives and children Of such oh! Samgharika Show favour to Shanker; support your slaves; Listen to the cry of religion. “Mathalka” eat up the unclean, Make no delay, Now devour them, And that quickly, Ghor-Mathalka.”*

During the siege of Delhi, British agents repeatedly tried to transform the joint Hindu-Muslim struggle into a fratricidal Hindu-Muslim civil war. Even as early as May 1857, British agents began inciting the Muslims against the Hindus in the name of jihad and the matter was brought before Bahadur Shah.

The king answered that such a jihad was quite impossible, and that such an idea an act of extreme folly, for the majority of the Purbeah soldiers were Hindus. Moreover, such an act could create internecine war, and the result would be deplorable. It was fitting that sympathy should exist among all classes... A deputation of Hindu officers arrived to complain of the war against Hindus being preached. The king replied: ‘The holy war is against the English; I have forbidden it against the Hindus.’

Thus did our rebel ancestors use religion to organise and conduct a united revolutionary struggle against foreign domination. In the historic condition of 1857, the ideological form of the struggle could not but assume religious forms. To expect anything else would be unrealistic and unscientific.

*To be continued...*

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# Folk Painting Traditions of India

*Sarita Chauhan*

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India's identity and strength is in its diversity- each region being so different from the other. If we see the landscape we will see on one-hand the snow-peaked Himalayas and on the other hand deserts of Jaisalmer in Rajasthan and the clear blue sea waves of Puri in Orissa. And, then, with the change in the weather and seasons there is further a colourful change. Every season has its beauty.

In villages different stages of agricultural process also depend on the change of seasons. These stages like plowing of the fields, the sowing, the reaping and gathering of grains, the stacking and threshing or replanting- all are done with a ritual and celebration. So all the phases of the yearly cycle- the rainy season, the autumn, the winter, the summer or the spring- they all are welcomed and celebrated in form of festivals.

The festivals are also occasions when the whole village acts as one family and all the villagers come together. They sing and dance together. They paint the walls of their houses; prepare colourful sweets and the whole community shares the festive spirit. All these traditions and crafts are passed from one generation to the other.

The folk culture of India represents rural and tribal culture of India. Tribal and rural people, whether they are living in villages, forests or are nomads have great talents and art is a part of life for them. Their lives are imbued with the sense of beauty. They are the people who make their own houses and then decorate them with their paintings. With their skill and creativity they make their simple lives so colourful and vibrant.

Women have a lot to contribute in the folk art tradition. Women paint on their walls naturally. They weave exquisite patterns and designs. They create a colourful world of myths and legends on the cloth through their embroideries.

The folk people make everything with hands and all the art is made mostly by the material

available to them like earth colours, clay, coal, stones etc- anything that is around is used for the creative purpose.

They live very close to nature and their whole process and attitude makes man an integral part of nature, one among many others like trees, birds, insects, mountains, river and sea. Even if they have to cut a part of a tree they will take permission and ask for pardon from tree by performing a ritual. They communicate with soil, with grass, with trees, with birds, with sun and moon, with known and unknown.

The process of creativity is very important and the process is very holistic where the participation of the community is equally important. Like painting on the wall is a complete ritual where there are two-three persons constantly narrating and singing the stories and thus providing background and inspiration to the hands that paint. Whether the hands carve, weave, mould, paint or sculpt- anything big or small it may be is created with devotion and genuine love. As they worship nature and believe everything has a soul, so once the form is created it becomes alive. Each character in their painting has a significance and power to perform miracles.

Folk art and traditions in India were never for a privileged few. They were 'Desi' or vernacular and have instead been the medium of communication for the masses. They have originated from the beliefs of the people living in primarily, rural and tribal societies unlike classical arts rooted in 'Silpa' texts that flourished under the patronage of royal courts. Classical or temple arts provided records of the kings and their kingdoms, their lives and their Gods and Goddesses whereas, folk arts are the records of the lives of the masses, their myths and legends, their Gods and Goddesses.

Parallel to Brahmin philosophy and orthodoxy, folk culture existed accepting people from all communities and castes, bringing people together and supporting liberal views.

The prime concern for these people doing agriculture has been with rains and crops. For

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them it is the day-to-day struggle so they believe in appreciating and enjoying their lives. Their love for life is evident from their paintings that stand out with bold lines and imageries, both colourful and playful.

It is true, they live in their own world unaware of the competitiveness and mad rush of the modern times, but they live close to nature, doing work by hand and living with their hearts, they are the artists who have added colours and richness to traditions. There is a lot a modern man can learn from them.

In Indian villages and tribes different painting traditions have existed and they are our pride and wealth. But it's a big loss that due to increasing urbanization they are gradually vanishing. Another big threat to them is from globalization, which believes in uni-polar culture. And the one culture that is spreading is the western culture dominated by monetary relationships and commercial values that is replacing traditional social relationships and family values.

Under the western influence, the pace of life has become fast, the want for more never ends and there is this increasing obsession of acquiring new mechanical and electronic gadgets. Plastic and electronic toys have replaced our indigenous wooden toys. Machines are replacing the handiwork. Life is becoming more mechanical and we are becoming like machines. But we must not forget that machines are for us and we are not for machines. If latest technologies mean development, these art forms represent our rich and vibrant culture. For a truly developed civilization along with science and technology, its art and traditions have to be valued and should be taken pride in. In fact, the technology and modern means can be used in form of spreading awareness through media and other means to save these dying traditions.

Today when in no time you can digitally produce as many images as you want- it has become more worthwhile to look into the lives of these simple folk people, to understand how their colours and forms emerge, to appreciate how painstakingly and also effortlessly they create a single work of art.

Here we will go through some of the prominent folk painting traditions we have had

with their rituals and beliefs. They have survived through ages but are now threatened to extinction. They are the Pithoro Paintings of the Rathvas of Gujarat, the Paintings of the Bhilala tribes of Madhya-Pradesh, the Warli paintings of Maharashtra, Madhubani painting of the Mithila region of Bihar, the Phads of Rajasthan, Nakashis of Andhra Pradesh and the Pat paintings of West Bengal.

### **PITHORO PAINTINGS OF THE RATHVA TRIBES OF GUJARAT**

Rathvas are an important community of the Panchmahals and Baroda districts. A part of Chhota Udaipur is locally known as Rath area and it is possible that the name Rathva is derived from the name of the region.

The folk painting tradition of the Rathvas is to install on the wall of their houses the myth of creation and their deities Pithoro and Indi Raja. Pithoro is their most respected God connected with protection and welfare. He is the sacred character of their sacred lore. His birth is through an unwed mother Kali Koyal who is the sister of the agricultural deity, Indi Raja. Indi Raja renounces his kingdom in favour of his sister's son (Pithoro). This is the core of the myth of Pithoro.

It is not clear from where the cult of pithoro originated. Whether it was basically a royal cult and came to the Rathvas through the royal families or whether it was an ancient tribal cult.

In the sacred enclosure, the uppermost section above the wavy line represents the world of Gods and heavenly bodies. Below this line is the procession of the marriage of Pithoro. The lower half of the enclosure depicts the actual myth of creation wherein the earth, the mythical farmer, the cowherd, the kings, the bania, the badvo, the goddesses of destiny, the cow and the bull, the various creatures of the forest and minor deities are shown.

**PREPARING THE WALL**—Generally the main wall of the verandah is kept dedicated to Pithoro. When the family decides to install Pithoro the first step is to apply for nine days the plaster of mud and cowdung on the wall. Naghanya(nine boys selected for this task) have to observe fasting for nine days and on last day the water based coating of white clay is applied. On the early morning of next day the wall is ready for painting.

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Materials required- Very simple and basic materials are used for painting. Pieces of tender stems of green bamboo are used for making brushes. Kitchen knives or arrowheads are used for incised drawing, colour powders and milk and mahudo alcohol for preparing pigments. Red, green, blue, yellow and orange are the main colours used in painting. The use of wooden stencil for drawing the torso of the horse is very common.

Several painters but only men paint Pithoro. The more experienced painters work on dividing the spaces and drawing and painting the main horses and deities. The less experienced ones work on the border of the enclosure and the drawing of the small minor figures like owls, pigs, cocks, trees etc. The absolute novices paint the characters in the secondary spaces outside the main enclosure.

When the painters paint, a group of singers at intervals sing and recite the portions of the myth of creation, Pithoro and Indi Raja. The singing is done with the accompaniment of dhak drum.

After the completion of the painting another ritual of approval comes where the badva(master of ritual) possessed by Pithoro in trance examines the painting in detail and points at each character and pronounces its name. If there is any mistake he refers to it and orders rectification. After the sanction is granted, a goat sacrifice is made to the painting, which leads to its consecration. The goat is cooked for the ritual meal and served to all the guests.

### **BHILALS OF MADHYA PRADESH**

The Rathvas of Gujarat resemble the Bhilals of Madhya Pradesh who are sometimes described as Rathva- Bhilala. The Rathvas and Bhilalas seem to belong to the same community, often bound together by marriage ties, atleast in the area close to the border.

There is also great deal of similarity in their general appearance as well as their beliefs and practices. The mythology of the Rathvas of Gujarat is rooted to some extent to the geography of Madhya-Pradesh and therefore there are references like Malvi ghoda, Raja Bhoj. On the other hand majority of potters in Bhilala have migrated from Gujarat.

Babo Ind and Babo Pithoro are also held in equal esteem by the Bhilals of Madhya Pradesh

and they also install their deities in their houses by doing elaborate wall paintings and consecrate them by similar rituals and sacrifice.

Only their paintings are much simpler and archaic. They do not have any surface ornamentation and are less colourful. There is absence of royal procession and most of the figures are painted in white with very less decorativeness. Very few figures are in other colours like blue, yellow, green or red. The paintings also have horses, monkeys, the equestrian figures, the farmer with bullocks, the cow and the calf, the camel, Raja Ravan, all the similar images that we see in Rathvas but the rendering is much simpler. Because of their simplicity they look of an earlier phase than that of Gujarati ones.

### **THE WARLI ART OF MAHARASHTRA**

The Warli tribe dwells mainly in the forests of the Sahyadri Mountains in Thane district of Maharashtra. The name Warli comes from the word "Waral" which means a piece of land or a field. Farming is the main source of livelihood for Warlis.

Warli Art was 1st discovered in early 70's. They are not in primary colours like other folk paintings in India. Instead they are painted on brown surface with the use of only one colour-white. The only exception is red and yellow auspicious dots that are used to decorate the paintings. The themes are their deities, nature and scenes from their day-to-day activities.

Warlis believe without the painting marriage ceremony can't take place. The general format is a central figure of a mother goddess surrounded by an elaborately decorated square. Surrounding the square is generally a landscape of soaring trees through which animals and men weave in and out, preparing for a wedding. The 'savasini' is a woman whose husband is alive can only paint the main portion of the painting consisting of the caukat, the central square and mother Goddess, Palaghata.

Warlis believe that actions of men affect the entire cosmic order and vice versa. Every form of life is of great wonder to them. Their chief gods are the elemental nature Gods- the Sun and moon Gods, God of thunder, of lightning, of the wind, of the rain and many others.

They worship God appropriate to each season. Each year is born in the monsoon, reaches

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its full bloom during harvest and attains maturity and finally ends after the last corn has been thrashed and sold in the market. They don't offer daily worship and their worship means great deal of festivity when they drink and dance for three to four days abandoning all work. During these festivities the sacrifice of goat or chicken is made to the God concerned and there is Bhagat or priest in trance who is possessed. Their paintings are the visual records of these celebrations.

In monsoon rain God naranadeva is worshipped, when the crops reach ripeness, the household gods Hirva, Himai, Jhoting and Narandeva are worshipped, harvest time Cheda or village guardian followed by the festival of Vaghadeva, the Tiger God as great is believed to be his wrath if no offering is made to him. After this is the corn goddess, Kansari is worshipped. It's only when the crop has been stacked and stored that their wedding season is there when they celebrate individual marriages by worshipping the vegetation and fertility goddess, Palaghata.

The cult of mother goddess is central to Warlis. They believe in the power of womb and mother goddess is worshipped in form of Dharatari, the earth mother, gavatari, the cow mother and kansari, the corn goddess. Women are believed to have especial creative powers since it is they who give birth to life. It is only the women (Savasini) who do marriage painting and it is dhavleris, the priestess who get couple married. Warlis see in women both constructive and destructive powers.

#### THE PROCESS OF PAINTING

As only Savasini paint the main portion that consists of caukat and palaghat they first prepare the wall with cowdung. The rectangular part of the wall is given the coating of geru (red mud). When it dries, a brownish-red surface is created over which the savasinis paint with sticks dipped in rice-paste.

The women who are not married can also join them and can paint everything else except the central square. Savasinis do more intricate works inside the square and all the women also sing in chorus and in-between they drink and dance in front of the painting.

In painting they bring in the world of trees, humans and animals. The dhavleris or wedding priestess come and sit in the row adjacent to

painting, they begin singing. The real ceremony of invocation takes place only in the night. The painting is covered with white cloth and the dhak bhagats sing songs of God Hirva and when they reach a state of possession the painting is uncovered. Now it is animated with life, fully potent and serves the ritual purpose of enabling a marriage to take place.

When the Warli Art was first discovered some old Warli women were asked to copy on paper what they made on hut wall. The idea was to make it available to a wider audience. The result was very exciting and it soon won acclaim. But gradually the paintings, which were earlier in 70s so alive, started becoming mechanical and their quality deteriorated.

Jivya Soma is one Warli artist whose work are not like Ritual Warli Paintings but he has won lot of acclaim as an artist who has been able to make a break from his tradition and at the same time carried it forward. His works concern primarily with men of his village, their activities and their lives.

#### MADHUBANI PAINTING OF THE MITHILA REGION OF BIHAR

Mithila, known to be the birthplace of *Sita*, whose other name was also *Maithilee* is one of the first kingdoms to be established in eastern India. The region is a vast plain stretching north towards Nepal, south towards Ganga and west towards Bengal. The present districts of Champaran, Saharsa, Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Supaul, Samastipur etc. and parts of Munger, Begusarai, Bhagalpur and Purnea of Bihar cover Mithila.

Madhubani is the heartland where the paintings are more profuse than elsewhere. Madhubani literally means a 'forest of honey'. In this mythical region *Rama* married princess *Sita* and it is believed King *Janaka* had asked for paintings to be developed for his daughter *Sita's* wedding. Even *Tulsidasa* in *Ramacharitmanas* gives a vivid account of Mithila painting decorated for the marriage of *Sita* and *Rama*. Impressed by the wonderful pair- *Rama* and *Sita*, *Gauri* the wife of *Siva* desired to participate in the actual marriage ritual and wanted to paint the *kohabar* or *kohbar ghar* where the *sumangalis* had to perform songs and related rituals for this divine couple. This means this ritual and the painting tradition existed from the epic times.

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There are three types of painting- Kohbar Ghar, Aripan and Gosain Ghar. The *kohbar Ghar* is designed to bless the couple and is done on the whitewashed walls of the nuptial chamber with vegetable dyes and homemade *Pitua* or a brush of cloth wrapped with some strips of cloth. It has representations of lotus (*purain*), bamboo grove, fish, birds and snake in union, symbols of love and fertility. Women members of the bride's family, village and caste paint them on the occasion of a wedding.

The Kohbar painting is filled with rich images and together all the images in kohbar contribute to the importance of the wholeness. The dominant theme is the pond life, filled with life forms like parrot carrying a leaf in its beak while an insect is in a blossom and the pond life is meant to be full with productive powers. The painting seeks to insure fertility of bride and groom.

All the paintings of the Kohbar are in the interest of bride and groom. They are meant to assure a romantic bond and an eternal love between the two. Faces in the six leaves of the lotus plant represent the bride, whose fertility is likened to lotus itself, rooted in the life source, the pond. The scene of Gauri Puja, as Gauri and Shankar are considered the ideal pair and the bride worships Goddess who has brought her this husband. Various motifs each with a different symbol are used: Bans (bamboo), Bidh-bidhata (a male and female bird facing each other), Nag-nagin (entwined male and female cobras), sun and moon and the nine planets.

In Mithila painting on the floor is called *Aripan* and is done with the paste of *arva* (crude) rice. This rice paste is called *pithar* in the local language. Women paint Aripan floor paintings on specific sacred days according to lunar calendar. In *tusari puja*, a festival celebrated by the unmarried girls in order to please *Gauri* and *Siva* to have a suitable husband; an *aripan* is made with dry rice powder in white, yellow and red colours. *Aripan* is of different type according to different occasion.

*Gosain Ghar* were elaborate wall paintings meant to decorate the walls of a room that housed the *kuladevata* or the clan deity. Every family have their own kuladevatas and unlike Kohbar-Ghar that is only in Brahmin and Kayastha (the higher castes) the Gosain Ghar paintings are found in the houses of all castes as all believe in kuladevata

and installing them in their houses.

Along with painting there are women who accompany the painters by narrating the stories or singing along. For e.g. an elderly and experienced lady who is usually well versed in the art of narrative narrates the Katha before a newly married bride on the occasion of *Madhusravani* for thirteen to fifteen continuous days. She dramatizes the stories in a very lively manner and narrates the origin of earth and various stories like that of *Mansa devi*, *Pativrata Katha*, etc. and the paintings are done based on these themes. The festivals are celebrated with songs, dance, ritual paintings, spell of mantras, etc.

The *madhusravani* is celebrated in the rainy month of *Savan* when everywhere snakes are found in abundance. People try to please the deities and serpent deities by way of offering Puja, singing songs, narrating katha and where the katha is narrated that place is decorated with ritual paintings.

Wall Paintings are colourful using natural and vegetable colours on freshly plastered or mud wall. The women offer sincere prayers to the deity before starting the work. Themes are from nature and mythology and the deities widely painted are *Krishna*, *Rama*, *Siva*, *Durga*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, *Sun and Moon* and *Tulasi* plant, floral, animal and bird motifs are used to fill up all the gaps. There is hardly any empty space in this style.

The present form of Mithila paintings also called Madhubani paintings are the translation of the wall paintings and floor painting onto paper or canvas.

The ecological and economic crisis resulted from a prolonged drought in 1966-68 struck Madhubani and the surrounding region of Mithila. In order to create a source of non-agricultural income, the All- India Handicrafts Board encouraged the women to translate their art from walls and floors to the paper. They did it and it opened a new world of art appreciators and also potential buyers of their artworks in the world.

In the beginning only a few Brahmin women were given the opportunity to practice this art but after a decade some women of the Kayasthas also came forward with a new style. During draught the lower caste women were however helping their husbands by working in the agricultural fields or as maid servants of better

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off people. Brahmin women who never moved out of their houses also wanted to do some work to generate finance to run their families. This time Mahatma Gandhi's experiment with *Charkha* came as a respectable opportunity for the Brahmin women and then the second experiment was Mithila paintings.

The women of Mithila Brahmins painted using bright colours- pink, green, yellow, lemon, blue and black. Their works are characterized by absence of shade. They painted mainly *kohbar Ghar* and Gods and Goddesses. The use of variety of colours along with their familiarity with Hindu scriptures and mythology enabled them to bring to life vividly the Hindu pantheon and mythology in their paintings. A lot of their art is devoted to the depiction of Hindu deities in different poses and their sacred symbols.

Some women of the Brahmin caste such as Sita Devi and later Bawa Devi and her daughter Sarita Devi made important contributions.

Another social group, the women of the Kayasthas were landless community and their women also got attracted to this form to make some income as they were also facing the similar problems. They got recognition in 70's. The Kayastha women earned their name for their elaborate line paintings. Their tradition is dominated by extensive use of red and black and they opt for muted colours. *Kohbar Ghar* paintings were a speciality of this tradition with elaborate representations of lotus plants, bamboo groves, fish, tortoise, parrots, birds and symbols of fertility. Also they depict village or religious scenes in fine details such as late Ganga Devi, Karpoori Devi, Pushpa Kumari, Mahasundari Devi and Godawari Dutta.

These two forms of Mithila expression, both due to women from higher castes embody traditional Mithila Art.

The third group the Dusadh or Harijan women came forward in the 1980s. The women from this group were doing all kind of traditional painting for ritual purposes and for decorating their dwellings. Influenced by Brahmins and Kshatriyas they experimented the *godna* and other bright colours in their paintings. Their style was very different involving pictorial alphabet like lines, waves, circles, sticks and snails, opening the way to more abstraction. Their works were more stylized also. But in spite of that they were liked a

lot. Jamuna Devi and Lalita Devi are famous Harijan painters.

The women from lower castes also do *godna* painting, meaning tattoo painting. In this painting technique, stick figures with upturned arms and elephant of varying sizes were roughly drawn but later the practice grew of first covering the white paper with *gobar* (cow dung) and after it dried, small regular figures were painted in rows from edge to edge. Lord *Salhesh*, the deity of the Dusadhs is the repeated image, with his brothers, their elephants and horses. The high Gods of Brahmins and Kayasthas were never painted.

The artists in Mithila rely on nature for colours, derived from clay, bark, flowers and berries. Nowadays synthetic colours are available in powdered forms and most of the artists are using that. They mix it with goat's milk and use it. Once the paints are ready two kinds of brushes are used, one for the tiny details made of bamboo twigs and the other to filling in space is prepared from a small piece of cloth attached to a twig.

In Mithila women have always done paintings on the walls but with paintings on paper and it becoming a source of income gradually men also got attracted in practicing this art form. And nowadays women and men both paint. The art of tantric paintings is practiced by only Krishnand Jha in the entire area as it is believed that tantric art can not be done by anybody and person drawing tantric symbols must have the thorough knowledge about tantra otherwise there are the reverse repercussions. Krishnand Jha son of a tantric priest along with his brother Batohi Jha began to paint tantric images of Gods, Goddesses and especially the ten avatars of Vishnu, accompanied below by their respective tantric yantras. Batohi Jha had stopped painting but Krishnanand Jha has continued painting to the present.

Earlier because of their distinct style it was easier to tell the caste affiliation of the painter but nowadays some of the distinctions described above are disappearing as because of market demands painters are not sticking to their own style like *godna* paintings which was associated with only Harijan community of painters nowadays even in Kayastha we find them doing *godna* paintings.

*To be continued...*

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# A Thread of Faith

*Sarita Chouhan*

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**GOD, ISHWAR, ALLAH, WAHEGURU or you call Him by any other name.** He is there in all the names. He is there everywhere. He is there in your heart. He is there in my heart. He is in each one of us. Only we should have heart pure like a child and faith in Him.

For faith is so important. Religion, for that matter, any religion tells us to put all our faith in the Almighty whose powers are limitless. As Mahatma Gandhi said of God "There is an Unknown Power that is omnipresent". This Unknown Power is pervading from the small particle to the Infinity. And in front of His Infiniteness, His Creation- that includes all form and formless-earth, water and sky, a human being is so small with so many conflicts and imperfection. On the contrary He is complete. He is Perfect and He is imperishable. He has all the powers and we pray to Him.

We pray to bring end to all our sufferings, we pray to fulfill our desires and we pray to see God face to face- to have an experience of becoming one with God, in other words, self-realization. We pray for various reasons and as we meditate upon Him and go deep, we start looking within, we realize our own true self. Faith in God also becomes faith in our selves and faith in other fellow human- beings.

## **AS BIBLE SAYS,**

"Be still and know that I am God"—(Bible, Psalms 46:10)

"The man who is full of faith obtaineth wisdom, and who also hath mastery over his senses; and having obtained wisdom, he goeth swiftly to the supreme Peace."—(The Bhagavad Gita, 4:39)

"If one understands and knows the one True Lord within, And Sees Him, by the Guru's Grace, and cherishes the Truth, one knows that, without the True One, the World is but an illusion."—(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p.930)

As we begin to realize our own inner self, we realize our bondage to ignorance and duality, our false-ego and doubts become clearer and we start loving ourselves, God and all mankind. According to the word " Joti Savroop" in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, it means that God has made man in His True Image, which means, man is divine by nature and in his life he has to realize this divinity.

## **AS JESUS ALSO SAYS IN BIBLE,**

"You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven" —(Bible, Matthew 4: 14-16)

"When I am Thou art not: now that Thou art (within me), I am not."—(Sri Guru Granth Sahib p. 657)

"Allah is the Protector  
Of those who have faith:  
From the depths of darkness  
He will lead them forth—Into light." —(Quran, 2:257)

Even a dacoit called Ratnakar was when asked by Narad to chant "Mara, Mara" – the reverse of "

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Rama, Rama” helped him to evolve so much that he became sage Valmiki who later wrote Ramayana. Faith can transform a human being and we find many such examples. Gautam(son of a Hindu king of a Sakya clan) encountered old age, suffering and death on his way and it changed his course of life. He longed to find happiness that does not decay, the life that knows no beginning and no end. He left his palace with this faith to know the Ultimate Truth. He became Buddha or the “ Enlightened,” who influenced hundreds of millions by his moral and philosophic teachings.

Shri Krishna, Lord Jesus, Prophet Mohammed, the Enlightened Buddha or Guru Nanak -they all had the same message for human race, to enlighten the human being. They spoke the words of love and compassion, of service and devotion.

So can we transform our own inner self? How can we eliminate all conflicts, fears and doubts from our minds and come out from darkness to light. In the beginning of the Holy Quran, it is said

“ He created All, including Man  
To Man He gave a special place in His Creation  
He honoured man to be  
His agent,  
And to that end, endued him with understanding  
Purified his affections,  
and gave him spiritual insight;  
So that man should understand Nature,  
Understand Himself”

God has created we human beings in the most beautiful forms and given us mind and intellect. He has created us virtuous and pure. In spite of all this, we distort our own will and go against His Will. We become self- centered and do all kinds of wrongs. We harm our own selves and the nature around. The five elements- air, water, fire, earth and sky, as our body is made out of these so is the Universe. A balance of these elements within our system is as much essential as it is in the eco-system to maintain the harmony in Nature. We are not separate and just a part of His entire Creation. But, an important part, as all the responsibility lies with us.

In all the religions of the world and in all the scriptures, the emphasis is on the truthful and righteous living. In the Vedas (oldest scriptures written between 2000 and 1000B.C. and considered the most primitive type, characterized by crude nature- worship) it is said

“O Weaver! You weave the divine cotton.  
With your light and knowledge, with your devotion,  
You rise to weave a divine and precious life  
You save this divine art that is dying  
That the learned and wise had strived to create.”—(Rig Veda 16. 53.6)

Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism or any other religion of the world – the essence of their teaching has been “ Recognize all mankind as one family”. They all teach the same truth. They all have said the same only the ways are different.

## **GOD IS ONE**

There is one God above all and He dwells in all. In Islam, in Veda, in the Bhagavad Gita, in Ramayana, in Quran, in Sri Guru Granth Saheb – all the religious texts have said, there is One Truth and there is One God. People worship God in different forms and follow different faith speaking of the same Ultimate reality.

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“Our God and your God is One”—(Quran, 29: 46)

“One God and father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”—(Bible, Ephesians, 4:6)

“He is One and take care of all. Different roads lead to One, the Almighty. Let us come together and sing for Him in one voice”—(Athurv Veda 7.21.11)

“My womb is the great ETERNAL; in that I place the germ; thence cometh the birth of all beings, O Bharata.”—(The Bhagavad Gita, 4:3)

Sikhism emerged from the conclusion of Guru Nanak that “ there is no Hindu and no Musalman,” but that both were united under the One True God of all people. Japji Saheb that Nanak wrote begins with the line

### **IK- OANKAAR**

“There is but one God”

“For the Creator is in the Created, and the Created in the Creator, who fills all, all over. The clay is the same, but fashioned in myriad shapes: So, it avails not to find fault either with the clay- vessels, or with the Potter, who moulds them, each in a different way.”—(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p.1349)

He is the Supreme Creator. When God decided to create, he also created light and sound. The current of divine light and sound moves in a cycle- it flows out from God and also returns to God. We can access this current within us through Shabd meditation. There is reference to this inner sound or music in the scriptures. This sound has been called the word in the Bible, naad and sruti in the Hindu scriptures, kalma in the Muslim scriptures, sonorous light in the Buddhist scriptures, shabd or anahad by the Sikhs.

The divine music is playing within us all the time. It is the sound of silence- the voice of God and is available to all who want to hear it and to all who concentrate and try to hear it, regardless of what religion one belongs to.

“Both the hearers and the utterers become Pure, and they see the all pervading Lord, all-over. Prays Nanak: “Repairing to the guru’s feet, the Unstruck Melody (of the Word) Rings (in your Soul)”—(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p.922)

It is when God casts his Divine glance of Grace over his devotees, When He showers his love- it is then He imparts Internal Truth to the chosen.

### **BUDDHA SAYS,**

“I was born into the world as the king of truth for the salvation of the world. The subject on which I meditate is truth. The topic of my conversation is truth. My thoughts are always in the truth. For lo! My self has become the truth. Whosoever comprehendeth the truth will see the Blessed One, for the Truth has been preached by the Blessed One.”

There is One God, One Truth and that is for all. It is the same light that falls on all of us. And it is the same divine melody that is all around us. Only we need to hear it.

*To be continued...*

## Experience of Composite Heritage workshop in South India

**N**ature of conflict in South Asia is by and large similar and we all face a variety of conflicts from the time we are born to the time we die. There are caste conflict, communal conflict, conflict arising out of gender discrimination, conflict among ethnic communities, between those who own various resources and those who own nothing. You name it and we have it. We face violent conflict, we face non-violent conflict, we experience tensions that are highly explicit as well as tension which breeds and develops in our mentality, our behaviour, attitude that we see in the society at large. However, this is just one side of the coin. There is another side to it as well.

This entire region of South Asia as a whole and India in particular has a huge variety of cultural practices and expressions which are similar yet they are distinct. These cultural forms, practices, secular healthy traditions give us strength and ability to live life as sensitive human beings who believe in co-existence and acceptance of different cultures. These commonalities among people of different communities and cultures, keeps the social fabric intact and allows society to breathe and survive. Similar to Pakistan, Bangladesh, North, West and Eastern parts of India, South India also has its rich cultural heritage, great history along with a long list of conflicts and tensions that characterize its society.

As a part of initiating and introducing the concept of Composite Heritage to South India particularly Tamil Nadu region, Institute for Social Democracy organised a six day orientation workshop in Kaniyakumari with participants working as grass root field workers, as activists covering the region of Tamil Nadu. This group particularly had female and Dalit representation and it was also ensured there is representation of every community i.e. Hindu, Christians and Muslims. This experience was very enriching and fruitful as the group was highly active and eager to learn more and share the experiences they had.

South India has been in a very rigid and strong hold of caste discriminations since decades. Conflict here is not just between the so called upper caste and so called lower castes but also within Dalit community. There are sub caste groups within Dalits that are placed in the lowest ranks of the caste system and they are the most tortured, humiliated, deprived people and are not even worthy of being part of the caste system. They are out-caste. The extent to which caste discrimination in South India is immensely deep rooted is evident with an example shared during the workshop. In certain areas it is not just human beings that face discrimination on the basis of their castes but it is extended even to animals. For example in certain areas the dalits and the out caste people are not allowed to keep male dogs as they might stray in the areas of high caste people and impregnate female dogs of their area, which will then become impure. Another example was shared by a female participant where she told her story of how she belonging to the high caste family was disowned by her relatives and society because she married a man who was Dalit. These examples give us an idea of how people suffer and face humiliation in their day to day lives. Gender discrimination is not alien to this part of world either. Sexual harassment, untouchability, gradual increase in religious conflict with rightist forces getting active in South, all these by and large characterize the conflict that this region faces.

As we often say that a society always has a mixture of people who want to indulge in conflict and benefit from dividing people and those who want peace and co-existence. People who want peace and resist conflict are much more in number than those forces who want conflict torn society. A society would cease to exist if there are no such forces that support people and peace and resist war/conflict/tension. South India has a treasure of rich culture, history, language, cultural expressions, mass movements in favour of oppressed people. The uniqueness of the

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Dravidian culture which is different from the culture North, West, Eastern parts of India is their Composite Heritage and their pride. Tamil one of the oldest surviving language makes it their Composite Heritage. All these and many more connectors and forms of Composite Heritage enable people to relate with each other leading to a society that wants to live in peace and harmony. Friends from Tamil Nadu region of South India were able to understand this strong connector that

they have been living and practicing.

In a society like South India where the roots of caste discrimination along with other forms of discrimination are very strong there are people who are convinced they need to challenge this system and work to empower those who have been deprived of their basic human rights for ages and generations together. In such efforts Composite Heritage is a tool that can be used to face these challenges and bring people together.

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## SACH network and Composite Heritage workshop with PISA partners in Dhaka

Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal have several commonalities. We have society divided on the lines of caste, class, religion and ethnicity. On one hand we have a strong neo rich reaping fruits of globalisation and on the other hand we have social - economic - political insecurities among common masses. We have ruling elite that wants us divided, we have common people who want to be connected. The entire region of South Asia has been struggling against these discriminations from decades now. Apart from these commonalities that connect us from our sufferings, there are commonalities among us that talk about celebrations. Celebration of festivals, of culture, of art forms, of literature, our common struggles for our rights and many more. The list of our positive Composite Heritage can go on and on. The point here is to realise that though we have a history of being deprived of dignity and of being suppressed on one hand, we also have a history of co-existence and respecting different cultures that has lead us to live in peace. This history is our Composite Heritage.

The process of introducing this concept of Composite Heritage was initiated in 2005 June in Dhaka with organization representing South Asia. These were the Peace in South Asia (PISA) partners. As a follow up of the workshop, South Asian Composite Heritage (SACH) newsletter and website was started.

This newsletter was introduced to serve as a platform that can reach out to people to make them aware of our rich shared heritage. To further strengthen this network another round of Composite Heritage workshop was organised at Dhaka this year in the month of February.

This workshop like the previous one was highly informative and an enriching experience where on the first day of the workshop there were various apprehensions among participants from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. These apprehensions and mind set were reflected in the presentations of group work where there were direct indications of how participants perceived India having imperialist attitude towards Bangladesh, how in the past Pakistan army destroyed and attacked Bangladesh. How between India and Pakistan issues like terrorism and Jammu and Kashmir have been unresolved and how political parties have their vested interests in following American way of life and their policies. The success of this workshop could be seen in the gradual change that was felt by the participants within themselves in the way they now could analyse the politics of hatred. This journey of change is not easy, neither for the participants nor for facilitators. Not just among participants that were from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan but also among facilitators from Pakistan and India, there was a sense of achievement and excitement of carrying forward this concept in their work areas.

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