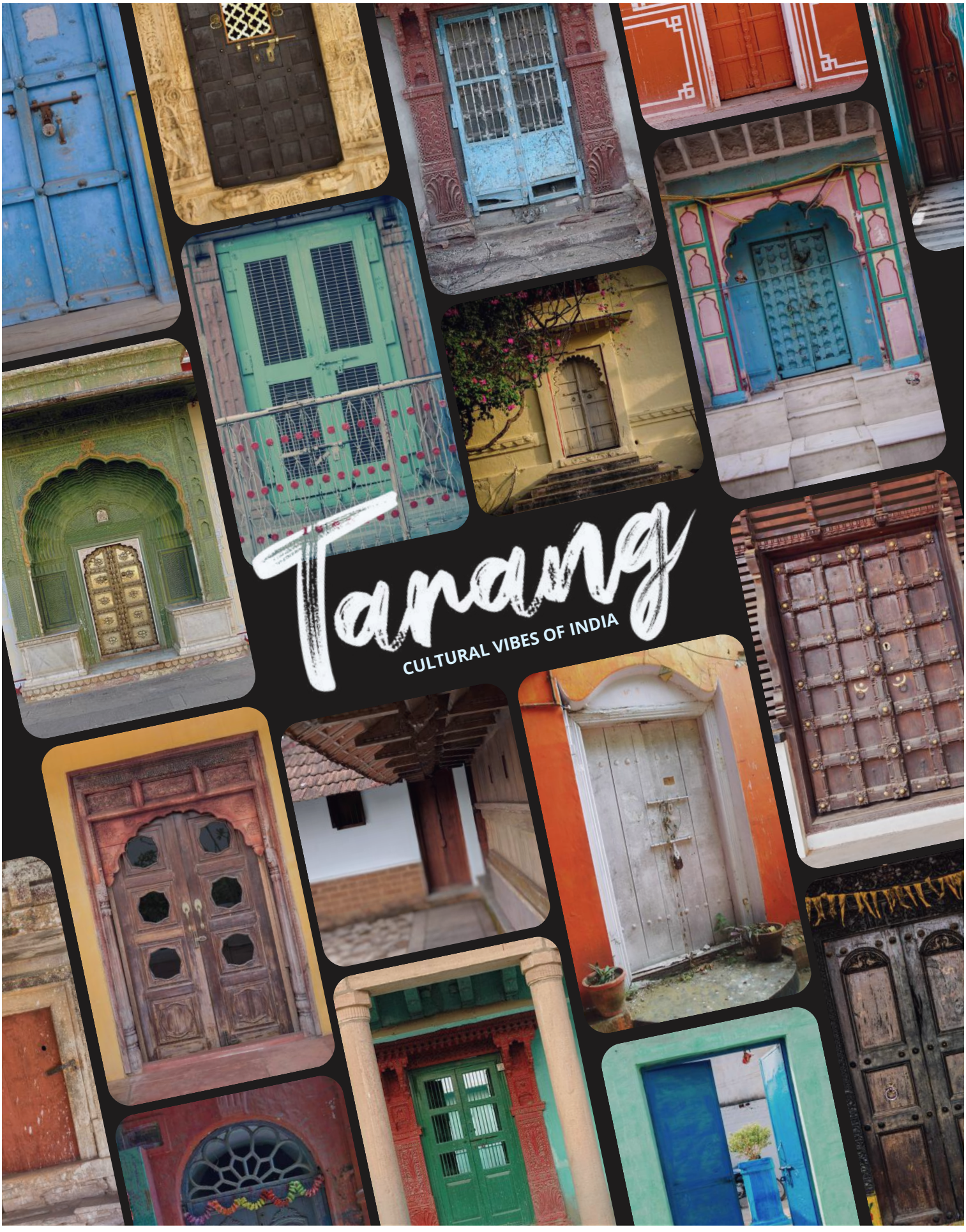
Edition 13 | September 2024





Breathe In. Breathe Out.
Breathe In. Breathe Out.
Breathe In. Breathe Out.
Breathe In. Breathe Out.

Relaxed?
Now, enjoy this edition...

From The Editor's Desk

Alexa, who am I?

Countless philosophers, and drunkards, have pondered this question from time to time - who am I?

A question about one's identity seems easy on the surface. After all, we all readily have an answer when we meet someone at a party or while introducing ourselves to an interviewer.

After a lifetime of pursuits through education and work, it is only natural that we identify ourselves with that facet more closely than anything else. Therefore, we introduce ourselves as engineers, astronauts, paleontologists, or even otorhinolaryngologists. But is that the answer to the question, who am I?

Digging deeper, we may find ourselves with other aspects that defines us. Religion, sure. The place where we were born, yes. The language that we fondly call mother tongue, indeed. All these are inborn and play a significant role in how we lead our lives and our worldviews. So, it is but natural that we identify ourselves as belonging to this religion or being from that place. And we wear that as our identity with pride and honour. We practice traditions and rituals that tether us to that identity. But is that who we are?

What would we find if we continued digging deeper and deeper? Is there something more that one may unearth? Something more beautiful and central to our identity? Some believe that such an expedition in knowing oneself will eventually take us to a place where there is no self to identify with, a space where we coalesce into the beautiful soul that inhabits the universe around us.

We hope this edition of Tarang takes you to a deeper space. In the upcoming pages, we celebrate stories from different times and tracks of our past and present. Feel the softness of the Indian Muslin cloth, the soulful voices of renowned artists, storied places and much more in these pages. Our eclectic mix of articles even encompasses thoughts on fountain pens and food. A lip smacking platter no doubt.

So, the next time you search for an answer to who you are, it is best to ignore what Alexa or anyone else has to offer and follow your inner voice instead. We can only wish you a happy Search!

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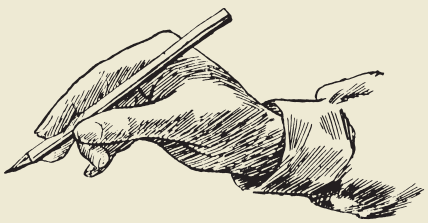
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Interested to contribute your thoughts to Tarang?

Check page 14 to see how you can contribute to our next edition.



THE WOVEN WIND

A brief history of Muslin



By Pritha Dasmahapatra

Painting by Francesco Renaldi (1789)



> *“The fineness of the cloth is difficult to describe. The skin of the moon removed by the executioner star would not be so fine. A hundred yards of it can pass through the eye of the needle, so fine is its texture, and yet the point of the steel needle can’t pierce through it easily. It is so transparent and light that it looks like one is in no dress but has only smeared the body with pure water.” Wrote 14th century Sufi scholar Abul Hasan Yamin Uddin Khusrow about a textile of legendary repute, the muslin.*

The epic Mahabharata mentions muslin among gifts received by King Yudhisthir. Ancient sculptures from the 2nd century bear evidence of the diaphanous fabric barely hiding the modesty of the wearers. 7th-century Sanskrit writer Banabhatta mentions the royal robes of Emperor Harsha in embellished muslin.

The name muslin was possibly coined by Venetian merchant Marco Polo, who wrote about a fabric made in Mosul, Iraq. There is evidence of muslin production in Bengal from the pre-Christian era, though its trade route to the Ottoman and Roman regions popularised its Persian name. Chambers Cyclopaedia of 1728 describes ‘Muslin, or Mousselin’ as a fine cloth with a downy surface, described as ‘mousse’ in French. Technically, Muslin is an open-textured cloth with a mythical extent of sheerness, though various qualities have been manufactured over the ages depending on the type of yarn and skills of both spinners and weavers. The finest muslin was almost exclusively made for the Mughal court. It is said that Aurangazeb had once castigated his daughter for roaming naked when she was, in fact, donned in seven layers of muslin!

MAKING OF BENGAL MUSLIN

Historically, Indian muslin was made with a type of cotton grown from Gossypium arboreum, native to Arabia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Bengal and Coromandel began their cultivation and became

prime production sites of muslin. The best variety of cotton plants was found in the Gangetic delta around Dacca (now Dhaka). Locally called ‘phuti karpas’, Gossypium arboreum Var. Neglecta, this could make the most superior quality of cloth, one that felt like ‘woven wind’. Every year in spring and autumn, two lots of crops were produced, with the first one being of superior quality. Seeds were stored in oiled earthen pots hung above the fire to protect them from the monsoon. Raw cotton was teased out using the jawbone of ‘boal’ (type of catfish), iron rolling pin was employed to separate fibres, following which a bamboo hand-bow was used to obtain downy fleece. This was kept on the smooth skin of ‘kuche’ (local mud eel). Humidity was essential to the spinning process to enable short stapes to stretch. Hence, it could only be performed at certain times of the day in closed rooms with damp floors. A spinner working every morning for a month could produce a maximum of 5.8g of yarn. Weaving was done in a pit loom, additional space beneath the loom was needed to control vital pieces of the instrument with feet. To weave a length of fabric 18.3m x 0.9m, two weavers would take 10 to 30 days, increasing to six months for finer qualities.

Muslin production was laborious and time-consuming, requiring many categories of skilled workers. After spinning, threads were prepared by soaking, starching, twisting, and bleaching. ‘Dhobis’ or washermen removed stains from cloth and ‘rafugars’ or darners repaired. ‘Kundigars’ or beetlers smoothened cloth by beating with conch shells before handing it over to ‘istriwallahs’ for ironing, following which ‘nurdeahs’ folded them. Finally ‘bastaband’ workers piled them into bales, which then reached the supply chain.

The value of muslin depended on its length and number of warps compared to its weight.




Catfish. Image Source:aramcoworld


Image Source:getbengal


Image Source:bandhej



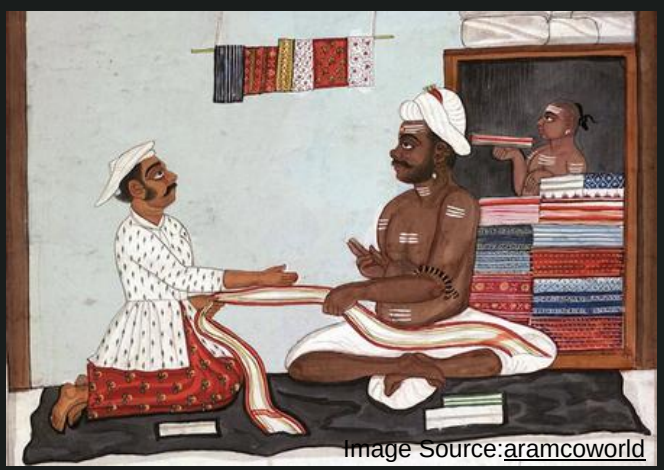


Image Source:aramcoworld

As early as the 10th century, one Arab traveler observed that “these garments ... [are] woven to that degree of fineness that they may be drawn through a ring of a middling size.”

The greater the length and thread density and the less the weight, the higher the price. The best quality fabric could have 1800 warp threads per length. Decorations involved inserting extra-weft patterns of the famous Jamdani. Refined embroidery with white threads called Chikankari was sometimes used as a less expensive alternative.

THE RISE

Since ancient times, the legend of muslin has captured the imagination of textile connoisseurs worldwide. For centuries, it remained a prime export commodity that brought substantial wealth to Bengal. Romans sent no less than 120 ships in a year and exchanged bullion for muslin. Later, trade routes to the Middle East were established, which strengthened during Ottoman rule. It is suggested that the word turban is derived from the Turkish word tülbent, meaning muslin.

Muslin from Bengal was highly coveted and popularly referred to as Gangetic muslin. Chronicles of historic scholars like Megasthenes, Hiuen Tsang and unnamed Arabian and Greco-Roman travellers demonstrate the role of muslin in the royal courts of South Asia.

In 1576 Bengal became a Mughal province, and ruler of Murshidabad was required to annually gift 500 pieces of finest muslin to the emperor. A horn would blow to mark the end of six months of labour as weavers finally packed them in ceremonial boxes, which would then be paraded down the streets of Dacca before making their journey to Delhi. Mughals introduced poetic names of muslin based on their quality and utility. They could be abrawan (running water), shabnam (evening dew), doorea (striped), tanzeb (ornament), sirkar ali (for rulers), jhuna (for courtesans) or the finest kind, malmal khas. Only top-tier noble families reserved right to wear malmal khas, and often would discard them after barely a day’s use.

> ***Mughals introduced poetic names of muslin based on their quality and utility. They could be abrawan (running water), shabnam (evening dew), doorea (striped), tanzeb (ornament), sirkar ali (for rulers), jhuna (for courtesans) or the finest kind, malmal khas.***

MUSLIN IN BRITAIN

From the mid-16th century, the Portuguese dominated maritime trade with India and were soon joined by the Dutch, French and British. Muslin weavers who were hitherto working in Mughal karkhana (workshops) found new patrons. On 31st December 1600, the British East India Company was granted a royal charter to trade with India. Bengal, with its treasures of muslin, silk, and saltpetre, presented immense economic opportunities. Initial obstacles of navigating the riverine delta, tropical diseases, competition from other European settlers and corruption of local officials were suitably dealt with, and Bengal became Britain's key trading partner. By 1680, the Company had invested more than £150,000 annually in Bengal. Textile factories and workshops were constructed, and the protection of assets necessitated fortification in Calcutta.
By the mid-17th century, the East India Company had monopolized the muslin trade, and with the establishment of muslin as an object of sartorial desire, huge wealth was created. European upper-class women were enamoured with the idea of discerning bodily structures through a delicate web of fabric, similar to depictions in classical Greek and Italian sculptures. Concerns were raised about a breach of modesty even as aristocratic women of France and England paid no heed to the scandals.

In England, Jane Austen was among the many admirers of muslin. In 1811 she wrote to her sister expressing buyer's remorse after spending their savings on muslin at seven shillings a yard. In her novel Northanger Abbey, protagonist Henry Tilney professed to be an expert in muslins. Despite being inappropriate for British weather, muslin gowns were popular among women of the Regency era. The sheer appearance evoked strong emotions among social watchers that ranged from slander to ridicule. Layering with shawls, particularly pashmina from Kashmir, protected from elements of nature and disagreeable gazes. Muslin, nevertheless, was held responsible for an apparent rise in cases of pneumonia among young women, which came to be known as ‘Muslin disease.’



Potrait thought to be of Jane Austin. Image Source:Wiki

In 1851 London hosted the Great Exhibition, a grand affair showcasing the finest items from across the globe (where Koh-i-Noor was publicly exhibited for the first time). James Taylor, Chief

of East India Company at Dacca, supplied muslin for the exhibition and wrote a detailed account of its production. John Forbes Watson, the Scottish doctor and curator of the India Museum (which later became the Victoria & Albert Museum), published 18 volumes of a comprehensive collection of Indian textiles with over 70 swatches of muslin.

THE FALL

However, once colonial greed and ruthlessness were unleashed, the path to the decline of muslin was paved. As early as 1676, East India Company officials began looking for cheaper alternatives. The Bengal famine of 1759-1763 caused a short supply of cotton, and trouble with the French between 1792 and 1815 affected shipping routes. The Company strategized muslin production and supply chain to suit its own commercial interest. Under the system, weavers would invariably end up in debt bondage with all their possessions effectively mortgaged. They were forced to work under physical duress in abject poverty to produce impossible quantities.

British consumers were not always keen subscribers of handloom, which is characterized by minute irregularities and individuality. The standardization and large volumes they desired were only possible in mass-produced fabrics manufactured in mills. Protective duties on imports from India were levied to boost Britain's industrial revolution and assuage protesting workers, making muslin exorbitantly expensive. Gradually, imperial masters converted India to a sourcing centre for raw cotton, and by 1817, for the first time, Bengal's export to Britain was overtaken by imports of goods made in Britain, and the Dacca muslin factory closed. The common belief that weavers had their thumbs severed and huts torched to prevent them from competing with British products is possibly a myth, though they could have inflicted self-harm to escape further subjugation.

In 1866 EIC officer John Forbes Watson admitted, “With all our machinery and wondrous appliances, we have hitherto been unable to produce a fabric which for fineness and utility can equal the woven air of Dacca.” American cotton, which continues to be widely used, is incapable of replicating features of muslin. ‘Phuti karpas,’ the Indigenous short-stapled cotton that could only be spun and woven by hand to make a muslin, became extinct due to environmental changes. Whilst other weaving regions of India continued production, albeit with lower qualities, the legacy of Bengal muslin was relegated to the pages of history.

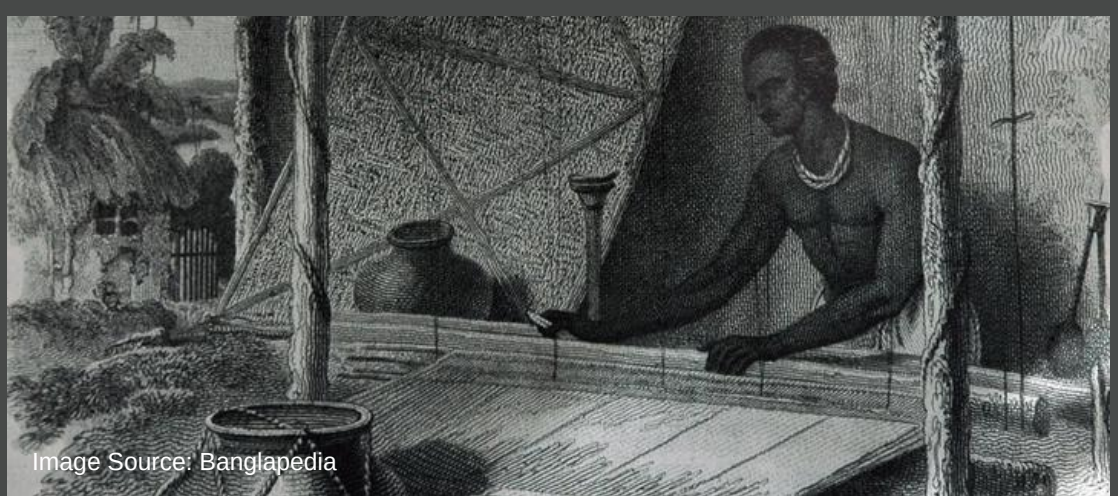
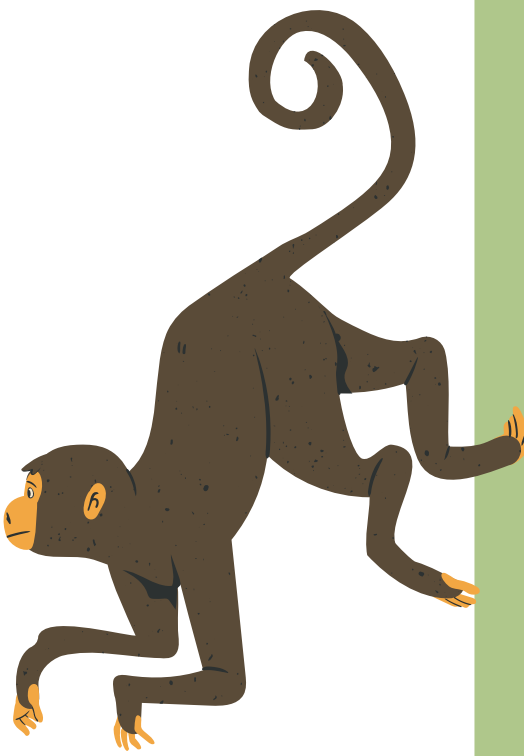


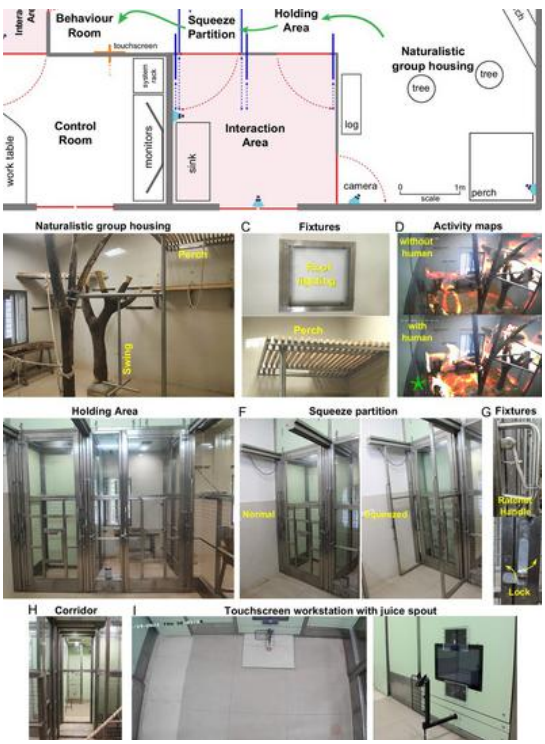
Image Source: Banglapedia

Science Corner

TURNING A MONKEY LAB ON ITS HEAD



There is a species of monkey called the Rhesus Macaques which are frequently studied in cognitive neuroscience research. These monkeys are studied in research labs across the world because they possess brain structures that are fairly similar to those of humans. However, there is something very unique about the monkey lab at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru. They have turned the idea of a research lab on its head! Usually, monkey labs have infrastructure that is very restrictive socially and physically. Animals are kept in individual spaces and are trained on tasks to study brain processes responsible for attention, perception and movements. However, the lab at IISc thought of going a different way. They have created a facility where monkeys are kept together in a large area built to mimic the real world. Not only are the monkeys allowed to move freely and interact, their facility also possesses trees, and a play area. The scientists at IISc believe that this setup allows perceptual capacities to be studied in a more realistic setting.



For experiments, the lab area has a touchscreen setup that monkeys can approach on their own time. On the screen, they learn to do various perceptual tasks, while a camera records their eye movements. The patterns of eye movements help scientists understand various cognitive markers like the span of attention, speed of reactions, and motor planning. In return, the monkeys get a juice reward for completing the task correctly. Moreover, since monkeys are housed in groups, it is easier for the scientists at IISc to get the animals to learn this task. This is because monkeys are great observational learners, and can pick up instructions from seeing another monkey performing tasks. Thus, a small innovation turned the concept of monkey labs on its head! It allowed the scientists of IISc to not only house monkeys in a more natural manner, but also improved the precision of their data!

Science Corner

Predicting the unpredictable: Monsoons of India



It's that time of the year again when everyone has their eyes peeled on weather forecasts. Across cities in India, people wait at different junctures waiting for the Indian Monsoon Express to arrive at their station, and relieve them from the heat. Beyond this, there are farmers waiting to time seed sowing to the onset of the monsoon. Civil workers chasing construction deadlines, municipalities preparing roads and drains, all just in time before the rains. Climate and atmosphere scientists in India have been taking major steps to be able to predict not only the onset of rainfall but also its duration and intensity. Another step in this direction was the recent installation of a new facility near Bhopal. This facility, literally housed in Madhya Pradesh (middle region), is placed at the geographical centre of the SouthWest monsoon winds that bring rain to most of India. Housing more than 30 meteorological instruments to measure changes in air pressure, direction of winds, and depressions emerging over either the Arabian Sea or the Bay of Bengal, this facility is a super-site that possesses it all. It can also measure existing soil moisture from a single location for a variety of Indian states. This year, it is tasked with measuring the variability in cloud formations as the monsoon progresses from Kerala to the north of India. This facility will also act as a validation of satellite-based predictions on the ground.

With climate change making rainfall erratic, this facility allows scientists to generate and obtain better long-term observations on cloud microphysics, precipitation, convection, and land-surface properties, among a host of other parameters. This information can help weather models to give better forecasts. More accurate forecasts will ultimately help communities and industries across the country plan their pre-monsoon and monsoon-related activities better.



9 Stupas at Thiksey Gonpa- Thiksey, Leh District

What inspires you about our culture, history, arts and music?

Send us your article excerpt / idea for consideration for our next edition at

editor.tarang@gmail.com

HISTORY OF FOUNTAIN PENS IN INDIA

By Nikhil Priyatam



I was first introduced to a fountain pen when I entered Grade 5 in my school. I was fascinated to transition from pencil to a pen. My teachers and parents were of the opinion that using fountain pens in the early years results in better hand-writing than using ballpoint pens. As the school opened after summer vacation, all my friends were sporting their pens in the class. It was the first time I was exposed to the vast variety of pens. The subsequent months were full of memories of “filling” ink into my fountain pen everyday before going to school.

Before leaving for school, I used to keep my pen in my shirt’s pocket. By the time I returned home, my shirt and my hand would have blots of blue ink. In school, We used to share/donate ink with our unlucky friends who ran out of ink. Sometimes we used to shake the fountain pen to overcome irregular ink flows and that would occasionally spill some ink on us. In the next few years, I tried several fountain pens and some of them were just magical - I used to enjoy the butter-smooth experience of writing to the point that I started worrying about what I would do when I run out of ink - *I mean the whole world would run out of ink!*

I used to then reconcile with myself, thinking that such a day is too far and I would never run out of ink in my lifetime. Such was my obsession with fountain pens. By the way, I used to lose the pen within a few months!

As time passed and student life became busy, I got drawn to the convenience of ballpoint pens and finally to the smoothness of gel pens. Like many incredible things that we forget in the desire of convenience and novelty, I completely forgot my childhood love for fountain pens. Perhaps, I was also in a hurry to grow up.

However, the love bug for fountain pens resurged during my Ph.D. It is then I learnt that I’m not alone - there are several people (not just children) who are fond of fountain pens and people spend good money for their writing passion.

One of these people was my uncle who during his world travels, tried a variety of fountain pens and whom I consider a fountain pen connoisseur. What else explains his proudy purchase of a fountain pen worth a thousand euros!!

Though I share his passion for fountain pens, a thousand euros did seem crazy! I could not come to terms with why someone would spend such a large sum on a mere pen. I had a brief discussion with him, and his response in a nutshell was - these days, It is common for people to spend such amounts to purchase a smart phone which only lasts a couple of years even though the same functionality can be experienced at a much lower price. On the contrary, fountain pens last a lifetime and writing is a very dear, personal and creative exercise for him - which is a part of both professional and personal spheres - something that he touches everyday, so if an instrument enhances his writing experience in daily life then it is indeed a worthy investment. I got my answer.

Although I understood why he would be willing to spend such moolah on a fountain pen, I was dumbfounded on why some of these pens cost so much? After some web research, I discovered that workmanship / craftsmanship and the materials used are the two most significant factors leading to such otherworldly pricing. The materials used in fountain pens should possess certain desirable properties. For the pen body, materials like ebonite, acrylic, resin, or metal are often chosen for their durability, aesthetic appeal, and ability to withstand the rigors of daily use.

The nib, typically made of gold, stainless steel, or iridium, should be resistant to corrosion and provide a smooth writing experience. Additionally, the materials used for the pen's grip should offer comfort and a secure hold.

Not only the pen, the quality of the ink used in the pen also determines the nature of writing experience. Ideal ink for fountain pens should possess specific properties. It should have a consistent and balanced flow, neither too thick nor too thin, to ensure untroubled writing. The ink should be free-flowing to prevent clogging of the pen's nib. Furthermore, it should be quick-drying to avoid smudging and provide vibrant and long-lasting color on the page.

The nib is perhaps the most important part of the fountain pen. It is THE determining factor of the writing experience. I found that across the world people were fond of Japanese nibs. People had diverse opinions on Chinese [Jinhao], Japanese [Sailor], German [Montblanc] and American nibs. Not finding India on that list, I began my quest to understand the history of fountain pens and their origins in India.

From the early days of British colonial rule to the present, fountain pens have played a significant role in India's cultural and educational landscape. The origins of fountain pens cut across many ancient civilizations, but it was during the 19th century that they gained popularity in Europe and subsequently found their way to India.

The British, who introduced modern education to India, brought along their writing instruments, including fountain pens, which quickly caught the attention of the Indian elite. Rabindranath Tagore, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi were few of the avid users of fountain pens.

The story of the early Indian fountain pen is fascinating. It is known that during India's freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi encouraged the use of products manufactured in India. When he met K.V. Ratnam in 1921, Gandhiji advised him to make a product using solely Indian components. He asked Gandhiji, "what is the item I have to make and was told, you can make anything from a pin to a pen."

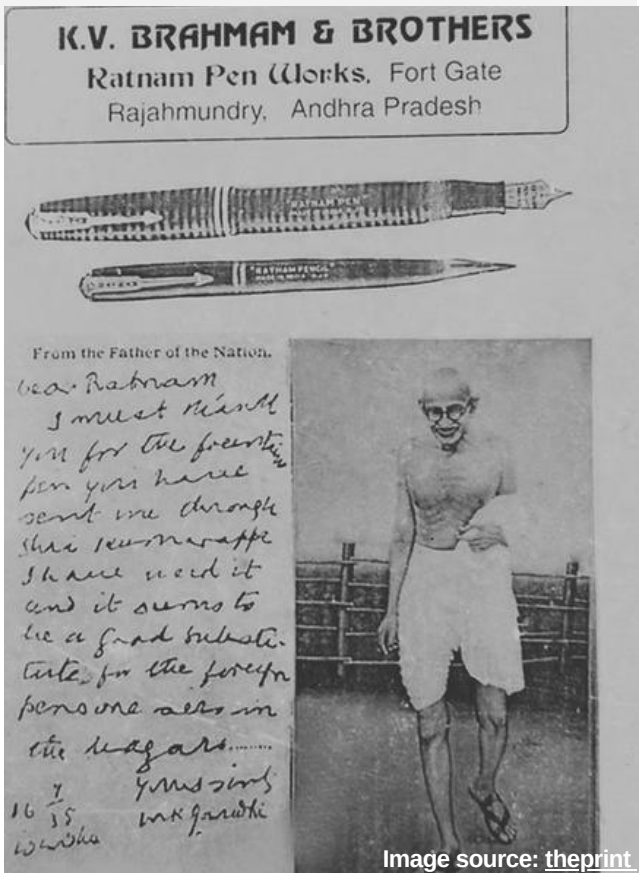
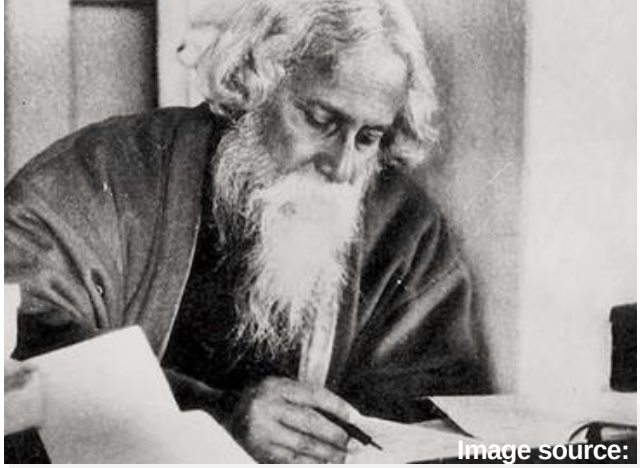


Image source: theprint


Image source:

In 1933, after meticulously breaking down a fountain pen and studying its intricacies, Ratnam sent Gandhi a pen he made, only to face rejection. Given its raw components were imported, it fell short of the requirements put forth by Gandhi — the pen was not truly 'Indian'. A year later, after J.C. Kumarappa, secretary of the All India Village Industries Association, visited Rajahmundry and decided to help Ratnam in his venture, the 'swadeshi' pen was created. Thanking Ratnam for his efforts, Gandhi wrote him a note which said,

"Dear Ratnam....
I have used the fountain pen and it seems to be a good substitute to the foreign pen one sees in the bazaar." (1)


Image source:

Recently, Prime minister Narendra Modi gifted a Ratnam pen to German Chancellor Angela Merkel [1]. While Ratnam pens became popular due to their shared history with stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi, there are over 50 Indian fountain pen brands [2]. Similarly, India boasts several renowned ink brands that cater to fountain pen enthusiasts. Some notable Indian ink brands include Camlin, Sulekha, Krishna Inks, and Bril. These brands offer a wide range of colors and formulations, including both dye-based and pigment-based inks, meeting the preferences of diverse writers.





Despite such historic legacy, Indian pen brands have a very poor market presence. Fountain pens are perceived to be collectors' items, with shades of nostalgia. They have been ousted by ball pens and gel pens, as well as technology that has rendered redundant the art of writing by hand. Alternatively, fountain pens cross the fuzzy line and become items of jewelry. So runs the perception. Yet, in the market for writing instruments, fountain pens still retain a 10% market share.

Among that market share, where are Indian fountain pens and brands? In the world of Mont Blanc, Parker, Cross, Pelikan, Sheaffer, Waterman, Sailor, Aurora, Lamy and Pilot, where is the Indian version of Scrikss (Turkey), TWSBI (Taiwan) or Jinhao (China)?


Image source: theprint

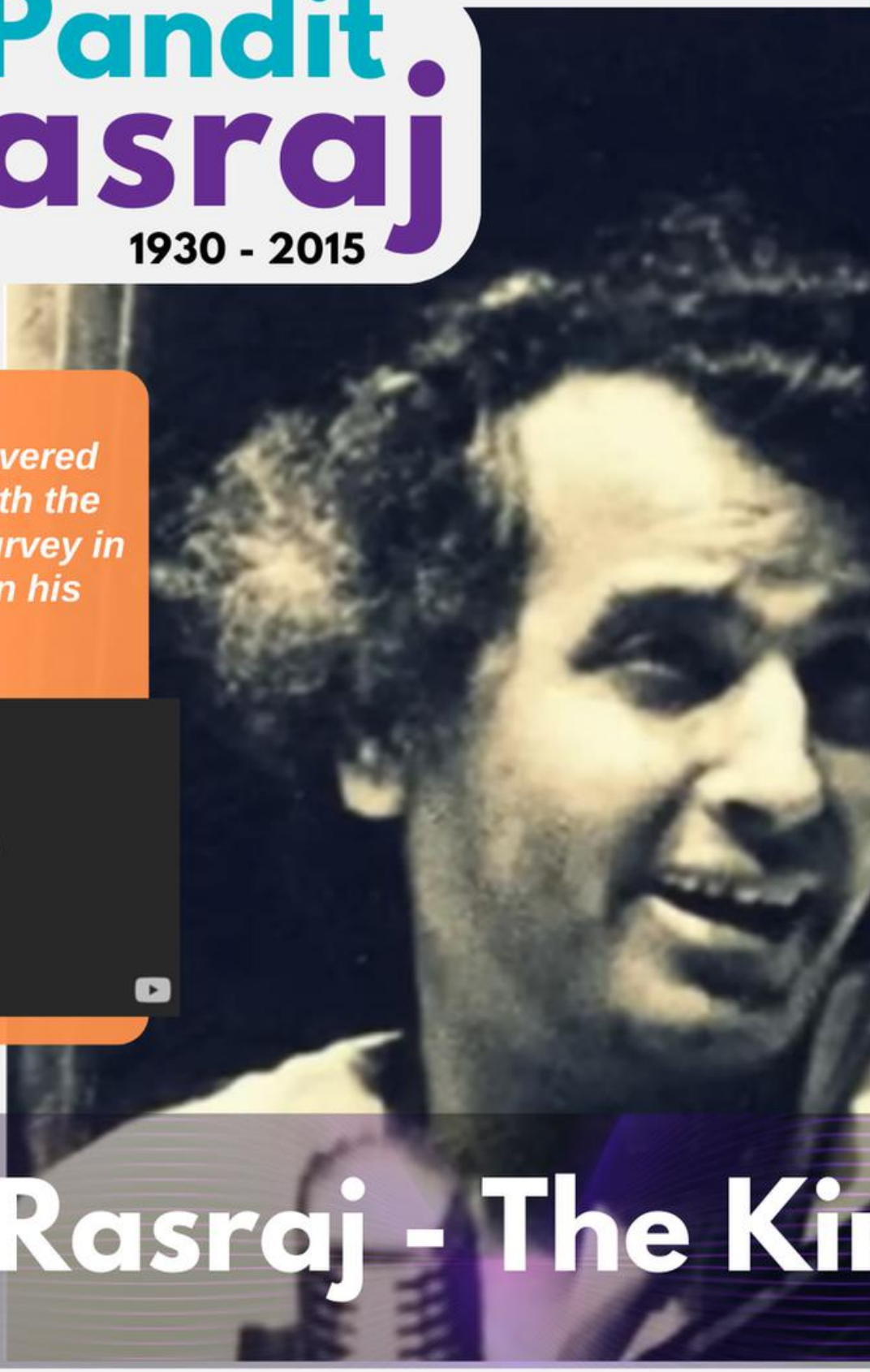
Note that unlike India, Turkey and Taiwan are relatively recent entrants in this market. The irony is that India had a head start. Officially, the first Indian fountain pen was made by Ratnam Pen Works in 1932, with a complete swadeshi version handed over to Gandhiji in 1935. Even earlier, in 1911, R.N. Saha took out several patents in India and abroad and started Luxmy Stylo Pen Works in Varanasi. That was the time when Sailor Pens started in Japan. Fact is, at the stroke of the midnight hour, there were many Indian brands—Ratnam, Ratnamson, Guider, Deccan, Sultan, Gama, Penco, Wilson. There were also many brands of fountain pen ink—Krishnaveni, Horse/Camel, Sulekha. Clearly, there was an incipient Make-in-India story for fountain pens and ink. It dissipated because of policy-induced distortions— import duties, quantitative restrictions on imports, small-scale industry (SSI) reservations and the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA). This story [3] shows how India messed up a competitive advantage and what lessons it holds for the country's economy even today.

India needs to work on various aspects of fountain pens: Design, production, marketing, distribution, improve quality and standardization. Most importantly, we must ensure competition. In its absence, we don't have a shot at greatness!

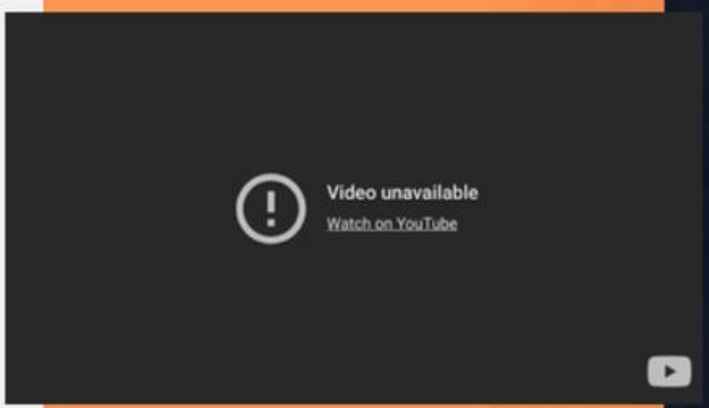
centre

Pandit Jasraj

1930 - 2015



Asteroid 300128 Panditjasraj, discovered by astronomers with the Mount Lemmon Survey in 2006, was named in his honour.



Rasraj - The Ki

stage



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Timeline

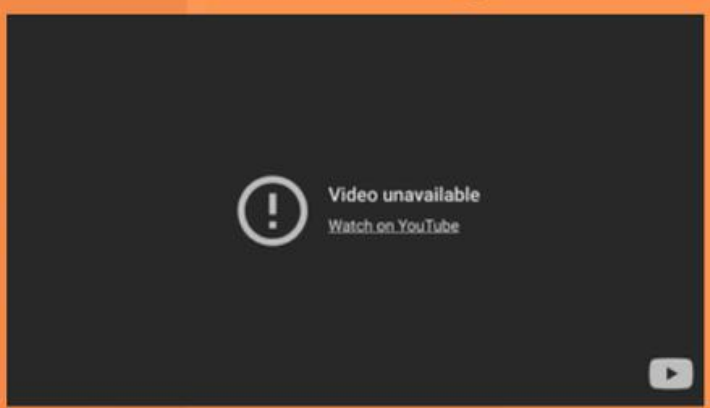
Padma Shri
1975

Sangeet Natak Akademi Award
1987

Padma Bhushan
1990

Padma Vibhushan
2000

Listen to Pandit Jasraj



Source: Wikipedia, Facebook

Issue spotlight



The voice that put our classical music in space.

Kesarbai Kerkar



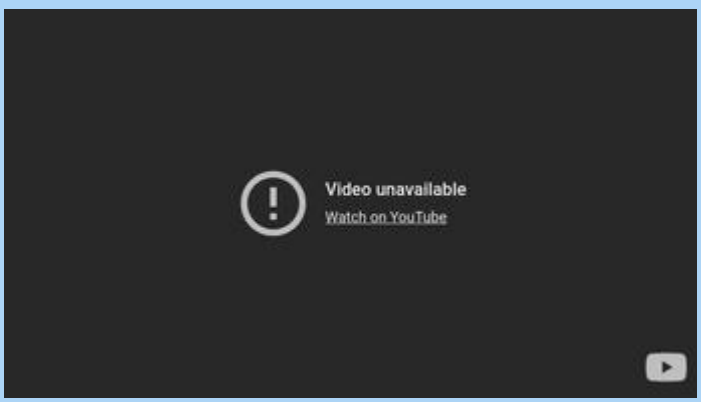
A Hidden Gem

The depth and breadth of our classical music is such that even an ardent listener, one who has spent a lifetime hearing and learning about the past and present masters of this trade, can be positively sure that there are many more gems still hidden to be discovered and savored.

A true connoisseur, one who has that insatiable urge to continue unearthing voices, is eternally in search, much like an archaeologist digging deeper and deeper to discover some hidden treasure from the past.

In this edition of Tarang, we profile one such melodious voice. Though she may not really be an *unknown* for the nuanced listener, it is perhaps possible that some of us may not have been blessed to hear her voice or come to know her thus far.

> *I consider myself fortunate ... listening to Kesarbai's singing which is an artistic phenomenon of exquisite perfection*
>
> ***Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore on hearing Kesarbai's voice***



A compilation of the songs by Kesarbai Kerkar

A hidden gem, if one can call her that, is what Kesarbai Kerkar is; a gem that has been stashed away, safely, in the jewel box that is our carnatic music.

Many may not have been as fortunate as Rabindranath Tagore was to hear her live, but her genius lives on for us to join him in regaling at her music.

Goa to Gharana

Born in Goa, a place known more for its beautiful beaches, Kesarbai moved to Kolhapur at the age of eight where her musical journey took root. She was initiated into music under the tutelage of Ustad Abdul Karim Khan, the founder of Kirana gharana. But after a short duration she returned back to Goa and continued her learning under the vocalist Ramkrishnabuwa Vaze.

With the changing landscape of music patronage, Kesarbai moved to Bombay where she studied under many teachers before eventually becoming a disciple of Ustad Alladiya Khan, the founder of the Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana and credited with the creation of many rare ragas and compositions.

Such was her talent and dedication to the art that it is said that she was one of a handful chosen as disciples by Ustad Alladiya Khan. Kesarbai Kerkar perfected her craft under his guidance for almost of a quarter of a century until his death.

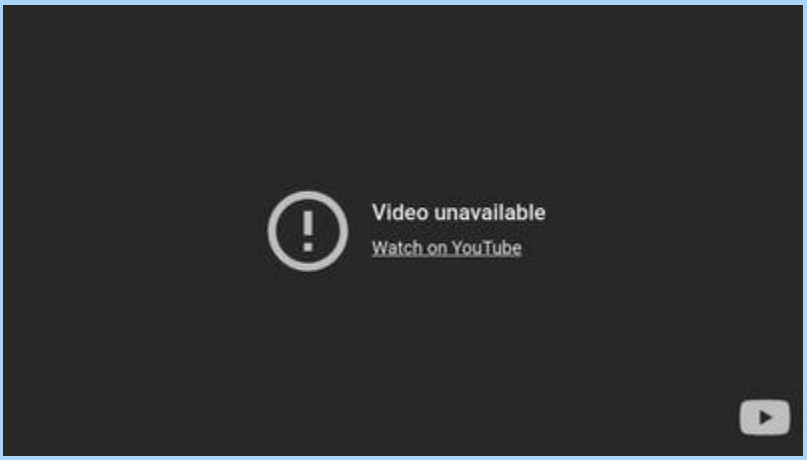
She became a professional vocalist and was immediately recognized by the public for her mastery over the voice culture which she acquired over two decades of intense practice and sadhana with her guru. She became known throughout the music circles and performed at all the music conferences.



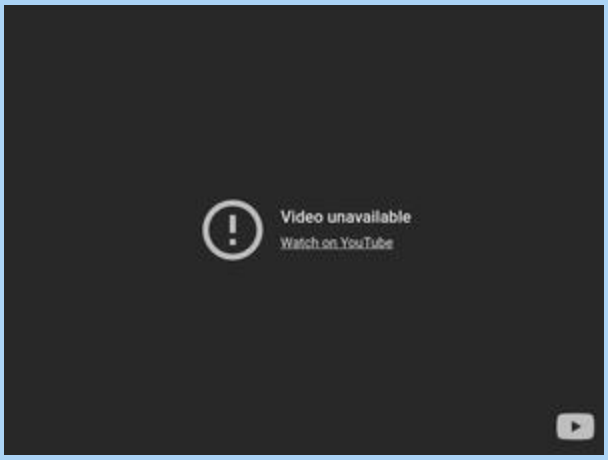
A photo from the first music conference after India's independence. Kesarbai Kerkar, the lone woman, among many other stalwarts from the world of music.

Source: Internet

Gaana Tapasvini



Kesarbai Kerkar's presentation of the Vibhas Todi Sughrai



Kesarbai Kerkar's song that was sent on the Voyager

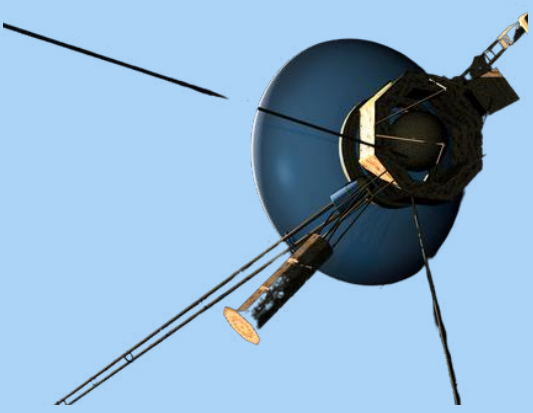
Source: Youtube

Along with the female vocalists of her time, prominently Mogubai Kurdikar (mother of Kishori Amonkar), Hirabai Barodekar and Gangubai Hangal, Kesarbai Kerkar took Classical music and her Khayal presentation to newer heights. They moved the appeal of classical music from just for private gatherings to the wider public through their performances.

She was bestowed with many awards and top honours including the Rajya Gayika by Maharashtra government, the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1953 and the prestigious Padma Bhushan, India's third highest civilian award, in 1969.

Indian Sur in Space

Kesarbai Kerkar has the unique distinction of having one of her recordings, "Jaat Kahan Ho", an interpretation of raga Bhairavi, included on the Voyager Golden Record, a gold-plated copper disc containing music selections from around the world, which was sent into space aboard the Voyager 1 and 2 spacecraft in 1977.[13] The recording was recommended for inclusion on the Voyager disc by the ethnomusicologist Robert E. Brown, who believed it to be the finest recorded example of Indian classical music.



Source: Wikipedia

Surashri - Queen of Melody



It is believed that Kesarbai placed her music above everything else and did not give in to the temptations of bigger audience or fame. She stayed true to her devotion to classical music and worked on her perfection of it.

This pursuit of hers meant that one had to be really blessed to hear her.

Kesarbai Kerkar receiving Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in March 1953

Source: Wikipedia

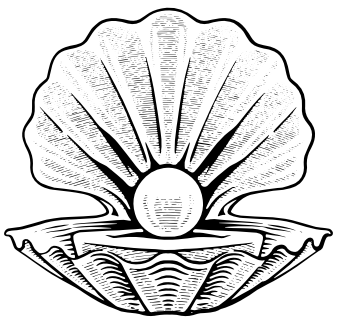
This pursuit also meant that the *stone* had been refined over the years of discipline into a shining gem by the time she had begun her professional career as a musician. She was bestowed with the title “Surashri” - the queen of notes - by the few lucky ones who got to listen to her in the two decades that she actively performed around the time India got its independence. It is believed that she withheld her recordings from being published since she was not very happy with it and wanted them recorded which never happened depriving the generations hence of her music.

Even though there are some digital remnants of her voice that we can listen to, the many of us who could not listen to her live can only dream of what that voice may have sounded like in person.

Want more? Read on...

There is a unique feeling of joy which one experiences when one chances upon something vast and useful. We felt such a rush of joy in researching more on this legend, when we stumbled upon the *Vijaya Parikkar Library* maintained by Shri Rajan Parikkar. This site catalogues the many masters of our beautiful music.

For every classical music lover this site is a treasure chest to get lost in. We thank him for his contribution in preserving these timeless heritage.



CLICK HERE

Monsoon Musings

By Ramya Mudumba



"What the four seasons of the year mean to the European, the one season of the monsoon means to the Indian. It is preceded by desolation; it brings with it hopes of spring; it has the fullness of summer and the fulfillment of autumn all in one." **— Khushwant Singh, I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale**

What heart doesn't stir at the sight of rain? Each day during the monsoons, on nature's stage, there is a new drama with endless combinations of light, sound and action. It scares yet charms and soothes yet agitates. It is not surprising that in Malayalam, there are numerous words for rain that capture its many forms. For example, Perumazha is the torrential rain while chattalmazha is the light and playful one. Venalmazha is the unexpected summer rain and thorathamazha is the relentless downpour. (Source)

In India, rains are intricately tied to our hopes and fortunes. They bring in a mix of sorrow and joy, plenty and want, poverty and prosperity. The season never goes by without each of us sharing the prayer for a good rain, despite who we are. So naturally, if we trace our cultural history, rain becomes the motif of various festivities at this time of the year.

Across our history, there is an abundance of poetry, musings, and songs about the monsoon. Folk songs were sung by everyone, not just artists on a stage, so the melodies are simple, and words are connected to lives. Not only do they give us a peek into people's sensitivity and lifestyles, but they also show us the commonalities we share.

Jaggery clouds of Kerala

There is a phrase in Malayalam on how to tell whether the clouds bring rain: "Chakki mukha chakrai vachonam karu" which translates to "When the clouds begin to take the shape of jaggery, the rain will come." (source).

Karukare Karmukil is a folk song written by dramatist and poet Kavalam Narayana Panicker for the play Kummatti. The song is used in Mohiniyattam dance renditions. A loose translation follows:

"The rain arrives on the darkest cloud resembling a tusker elephant.
The rainbow appears in the sky
Which, lit by the sun, looks like a golden temple It moves and spreads, and when rain comes, disappears, shatters." - Kalidasa (espiritodanca.blogspot.com)



Kajri of UP & Bihar

Kajri is named after "kajal" or "kohl," evoking the colour of rain clouds. It is a folk-style music sung predominantly in the areas of Uttar Pradesh & Bihar and Braj, Banarasi, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, and Maithili. In this Sawan season, songs are inspired by the rains, including various imageries of Radha-Krishna's love, women swinging on flower-decked jhoolas, basking in the viraha of lovers separated. Kajri songs often have a deep emotional dimension of longing, which are tied to imageries of migrating and mating birds like peacocks and papihas, sending messages through the rain clouds to loved ones, conversations between different family members, etc.

Ayi re jijiya kajariya more sam,
kajariya more sam
Kajariya khelei ja vai re naiharava ,
kajariya khelei ja vai re
Jab tum raniya kajariya khelei ja¯yau,
tikuliya¯dhare jaye re
sejariya¯Nathuniya¯dhare jaye re

Translation: It's the rainy season, love, the season of kajri. I go to my natal home to frolic in the rain, and to play kajri, I go.
When you go, my queen, to play kajri, be sure to leave your forehead ornament on the bed...

Women taking off their jewelry here might be suggestive of a temporary break from the traditional roles that often involve being duty-bound.

Maharashtra

Bhilari and shetkari songs about sowing and tilling are sung by the farmers, calling for good rains to come. The songs also generally depict the mood depending on the amount of rain that the region might receive. For example:

"Pad ra panya, pad ra panya, kar pani pani, shet mazha lay chalala chataka vani".

In this well-loved folk song, a farmer conveys his yearning for the monsoon rains by comparing his dry, barren fields to the chatak, an Indian bird that drinks only rainwater coming from the skies.



The season ends with 'Narali Purnima', where people living by the coast offer coconuts to the sea in prayer to the sea to allow safe navigation. They mark the festival with singing and dancing.

Mangiars of Rajasthan

In the deserts of Rajasthan, every drop of rain is treasured. People also hold a sacred relationship between music and the rain in this region. The Manganiars are the traditional folk musicians of Rajasthan whom the Rajput rulers asked to sing in prayer for the rains. When they sang in the temples, it was a celebration in the community. Several instruments accompanied the songs like dhal, khartaal, harmonium etc. The most prominent ragas one gets to hear are the Megh Raga (made of 6 main ragas and 36 raginis), Raag Malhar, which is crowned as THE raga and would make rain descend from the heavens.

There is a lovely story about Tansen. When Akbar asked him to sign Raag Deepak to light lamps, his body became so hot that he thought the heat would consume him. But then two sisters, Riri and Tana, sang Raag Malhar to cool him down (source - Firstpost article). Folk songs here contain the themes of love, beauty, and longing.

Chanda thhanre hanji chandne jhilwa gayi talab,
Pardesha mai bheege balmo,
Ghar mai bheege thhanri naar...

Translation: In the middle of the night, she goes by the moonlight to the lakeshore to bathe in the rain, wondering if the same rain will touch her beloved wherever he might be.

Himachal Pradesh

Did you know that each district in Himachal Pradesh has its own unique folk song about the monsoon? (source: sutradhar.parogoodearth.com)

Kunjari (bird) and Malhar (monsoon) songs are sung, especially in the Chamba region, during the Minjar Mela (Maize Fair), which has been celebrated for over 1,000 years. The songs are addressed to the bird Kunj (found in the Himalayas), are written generally in Awadhi and Braj, and are composed in Raag Malhar and Desh.

“Jaa meri Kunjariyo, barsat aave mere Rama,
Udi ke mila, kaiyon udi ke mila, mere preetam, ho Rama...”

Translation: The lyrics are pleasing to the Kunj bird to carry her message to the loved one, in turn receive gifts from her.

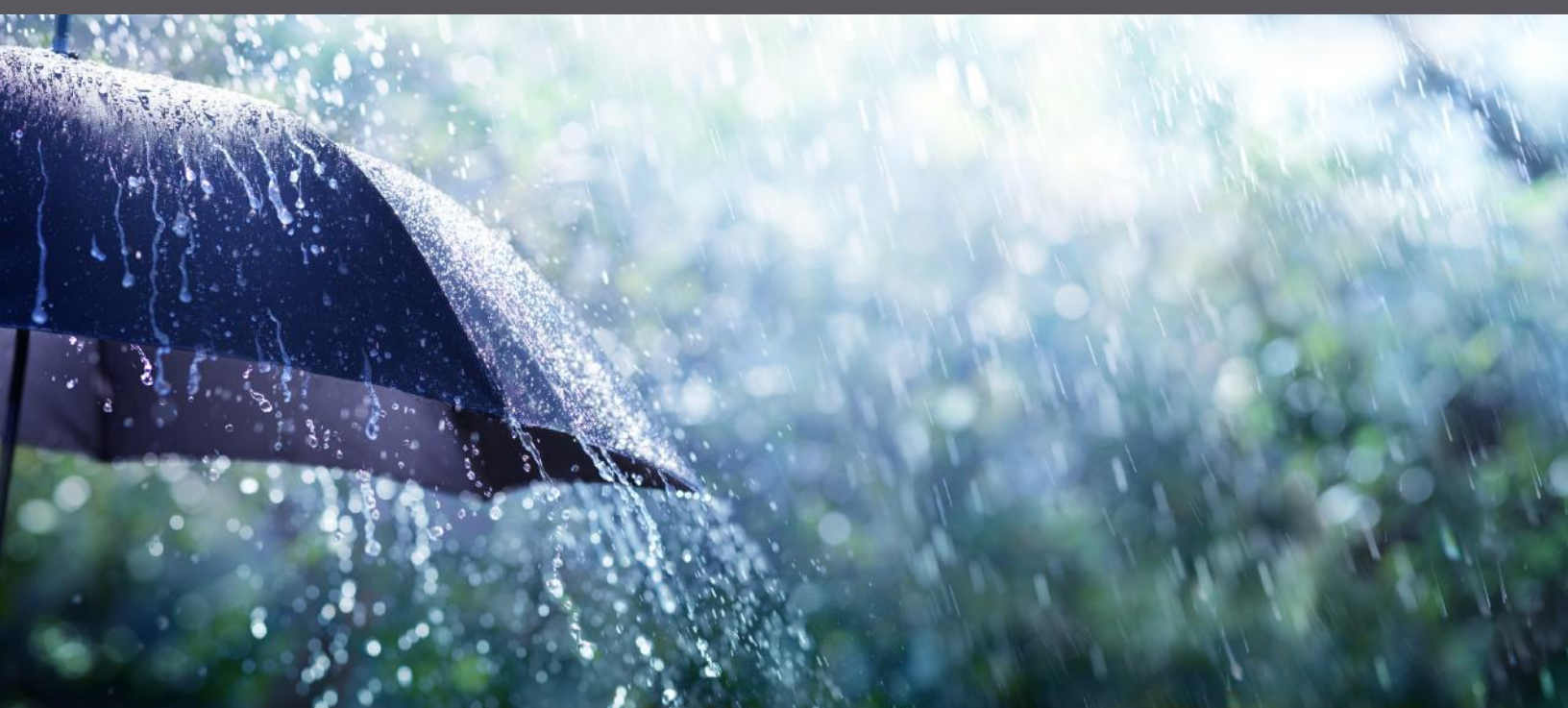
In the regions of Mandi, since the landscape was dangerous, men used to leave the region for employment. And so the birah songs are popular in this region where imagery of migratory birds becomes a motif. Women sang in the paddy fields, thinking of the husband's return, the beauty and the turmoil rains bring. (source: firstpost article)

Gaddi songs are also folksongs in the Chamba and Kangra regions, usually composed in Raag Tilak Kamod, Desh, or Malhar. One song goes like this:

O re badra, mera piya gayo pardes/ sawan aayo, aayo re sainya, tora laiyan, badra mera piya pardes/ na main nhati na main dhoti, na main kita singar/ na main sej chadhke suti/ve mera saiya gayo pardes, sawan aayo re...

Translation: This loosely translates to the nayika (or the woman singing) talking to a cloud about losing her enthusiasm for doing the daily chores since her separation from her loved one.

Rains have a way with us all earthlings. The earth rejuvenates from the heat; the clouds wear a mood of poetry, and the heart rejoices in bounty. They also stir emotions that are not very pleasant. Monsoons can also be intense, sometimes taking everything near and dear to us. It is a season of multitudes, and by tracing history, we see the varied moods and expressions of humanity, sometimes transporting us back into time, sometimes resonating with the present.



INDISCOPE

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IDENTIFY THESE BEAUTIFUL PLACES FROM ALL
CORNERS OF OUR COUNTRY.

1

2

3

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7

8

1 - Rock Garden, Chandigarh 2 - Amber Fort, Jaipur 3 - Arch, Leh, Ladakh
4 - Red Fort, Delhi 5 - Auroville, Puducherry 6 - Elephanta Caves, Mumbai
7 - Railway Station, Coonoor 8 - Brahdeeshwara Temple, Thanjavur



The indigo-coloured Dal Lake is surrounded by blue and lavender mountains, chirping birds, and colourful shikaras. I hope you enjoy a few memories from a trip that is etched in my heart and hopefully touches yours.

Kashmir, Kashmir...

By Priyanka Banerjee

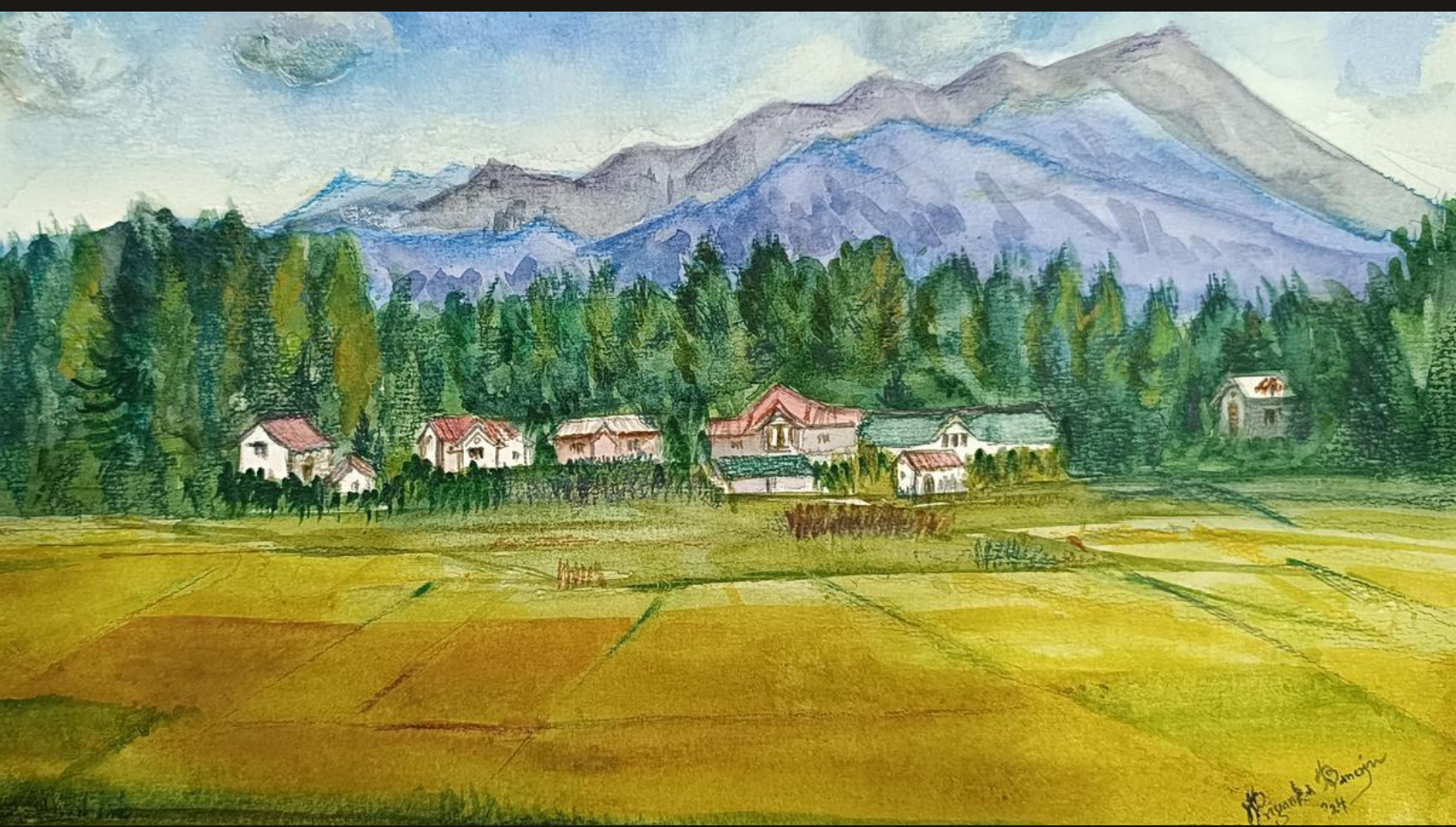


The majestic valley of Sonmarg is situated 81 kilometres from Srinagar. At an altitude of 2730 metres, it proudly showcases the enchanting snowy mountains against a cerulean sky. Watching the snow-capped peaks and the whiff of clouds playing hide-and-seek can make one's spirits soar.

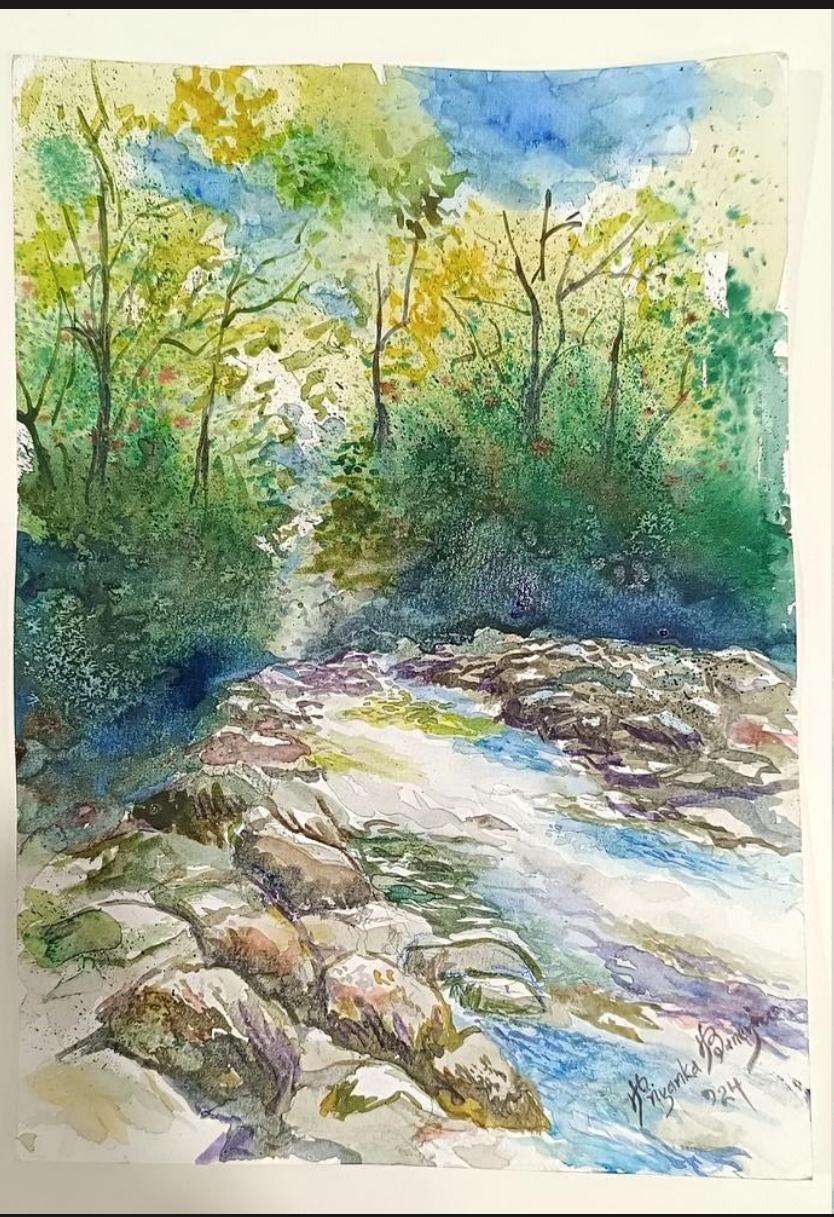


Sonmarg

A settlement that was visible from the National Highway.



One of my favourite visits was to the Dachigam National Park, where diverse flora and fauna coexist in abundance. As a wildlife enthusiast, I was thrilled to visit the place. Famous for the Kashmiri Hangul or Stag, the park has a varied landscape that ranges from gently sloping grasslands to sharp rocky outcrops and cliffs. The region is interspersed with alpine pastures, meadows, waterfalls and scrub vegetation with deep gullies to help its luxuriant flora and diverse fauna flourish.



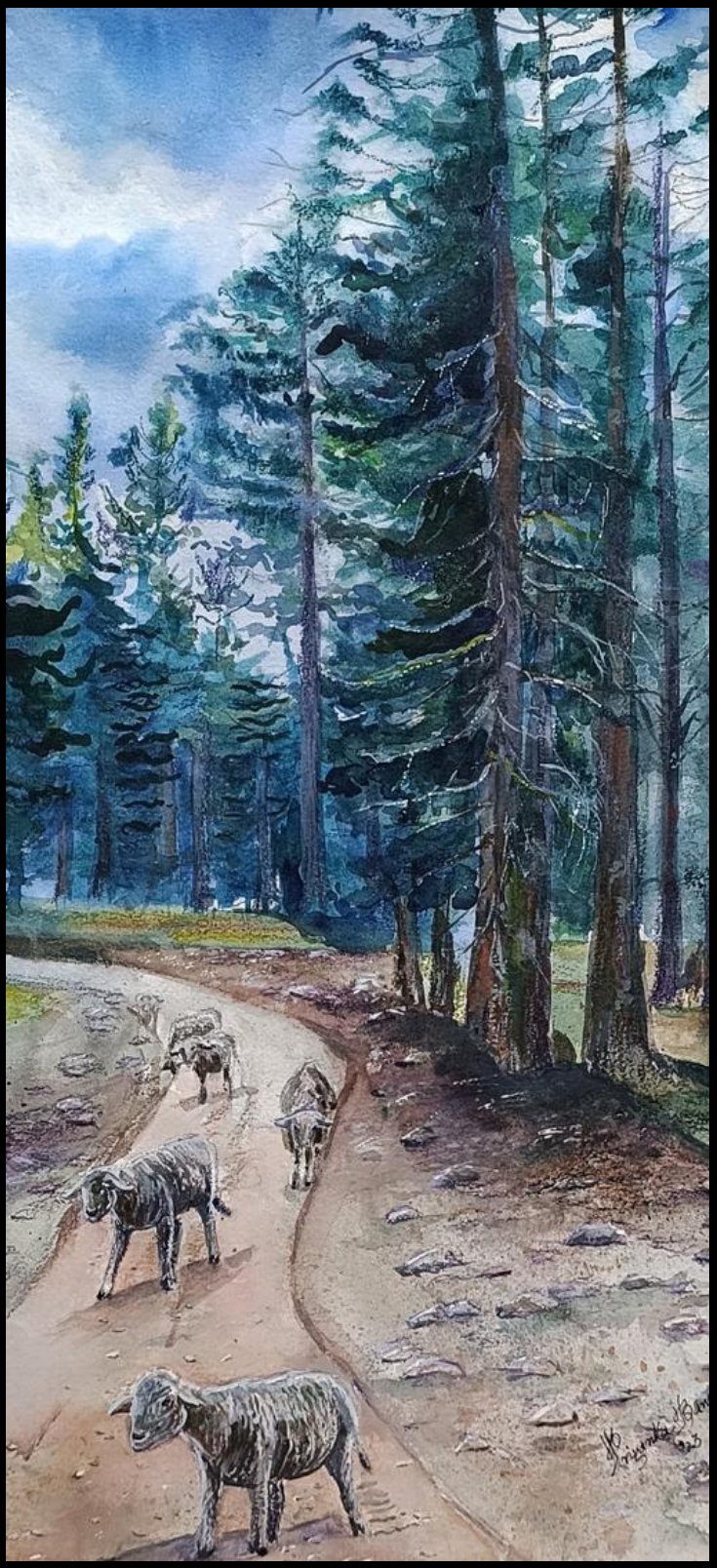
Stream in Dachigam National Park.



Kashmiri Stag







The fauna made me feel that there may not be a heaven on our beautiful planet,
but Kashmir indeed comes close.



THE FRAGRANT JOURNEY

By Nikhil Priyatam

SAVORING THE SPICE-LADEN TAPESTRY OF INDIA'S BIRIYANIS

For centuries, the name Biriyani has had the power to fire up the salivary glands and captivate the hearts of food lovers. From the regal kitchens of the Mughal emperors to the bustling streets of modern-day cities, Biriyani has evolved into a culinary masterpiece that is a crown jewel showcased in Indian gastronomy. Biryani is the single most-ordered dish on Indian online food ordering and delivery services and has been labelled as the most popular dish overall in India [1].



THE ORIGINS

Biryani is derived from the Persian word Birian, which means ‘fried before cooking’ and Birinj, the Persian word for rice. There are several theories about the origins of the modern Biryani dish [2][3]:

Historian Lizzie Collingham suggests that Biryani developed in the royal kitchens of the Mughal Empire, combining Indian spicy rice dishes with the Persian pulao.

Some experts like Kris Dhillon and Salma Hossein believe Biryani originated in Persia and was brought to India by the Mughals or even before their era by travellers.

Food scholar Pushpesh Pant argues it originated in Iran and was likely brought to the Deccan region of South India by pilgrims and nobles, not necessarily the Mughals.

Another theory claims Biryani existed in India before the Mughals, as Mughal texts like Ain-i-Akbari mention the word's older usage in India.

Pratibha Karan's book suggests Biryani is derived from pulao varieties brought by Arab and Persian traders, evolving from an army dish in medieval India.

Vishwanath Shenoy proposes two branches - one from the Mughals and another brought by Arab traders to Malabar, South India.

Historians have found Biryani recipes only from the later Mughal period, around the 18th century, though the dish likely existed earlier.

Some claim the South Indian "oonchoru" dish from Sangam literature (200 BCE-200 CE) is a predecessor of Biryani, made with local spices distinct from the Middle East or North India.

TYPES OF Biriyanis



Biryani, the regal dish that has captivated the hearts and palates of countless food enthusiasts, is a true embodiment of India's rich cultural tapestry. This iconic rice-based delicacy, with its roots tracing back to the Persian kitchens of antiquity, has undergone a remarkable journey across the Indian subcontinent, assimilating local flavours and traditions along the way. As it traversed the diverse landscapes and communities of the region, Biryani evolved into a kaleidoscope of regional variations, each boasting its unique blend of spices, cooking techniques, and cultural influences. From the coastal enclaves of the south to the arid deserts of the north, from the bustling cities to the remote villages, every region has left its indelible mark on this gastronomic masterpiece, crafting a symphony of flavours that celebrates the subcontinent's culinary heritage.



Kolkata Biryani

This variant originated in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) when the Nawab of Awadh brought his royal chefs. It is milder, with subtle flavors and unique ingredients like potatoes and eggs.

Lucknow Biryani

Biryani from Lucknow is known as ‘pukki’ Biryani. In the 'pukki' style, meat and rice are cooked separately and then layered in a copper vessel for the finish. Also known as Awadhi Biryani, the cuisine is widely influenced by the Nawabs of Awadh, who were of Persian origin.





Hyderabadi Biryani

A traditional Biryani from Hyderabad, known for its rich blend of spices and the dum cooking method. It comes in two varieties - Kacchi (raw marinated meat) and Pakki (pre-cooked meat).

Malabar Biryani

Hailing from the Malabar region, this Biryani uses short-grain kaima rice and a unique blend of spices from the Western Ghats. It is cooked with generous amounts of ghee and flavoured with rose or kewra water.





Sindhi Biryani

This spicy and tangy Biryani originated from the Sindh province of Pakistan. It is known for using dried plums (aloo bukhara), a significant amount of green chillies, and unique garnishes like fried potatoes and boiled eggs.

Ambur Biryani

Also known as Arcot Biryani, this variant is popular in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. It uses the short-grained Seeraga Samba rice and is known for its unique spice-infused oil/ghee and the addition of a brinjal curry side dish.



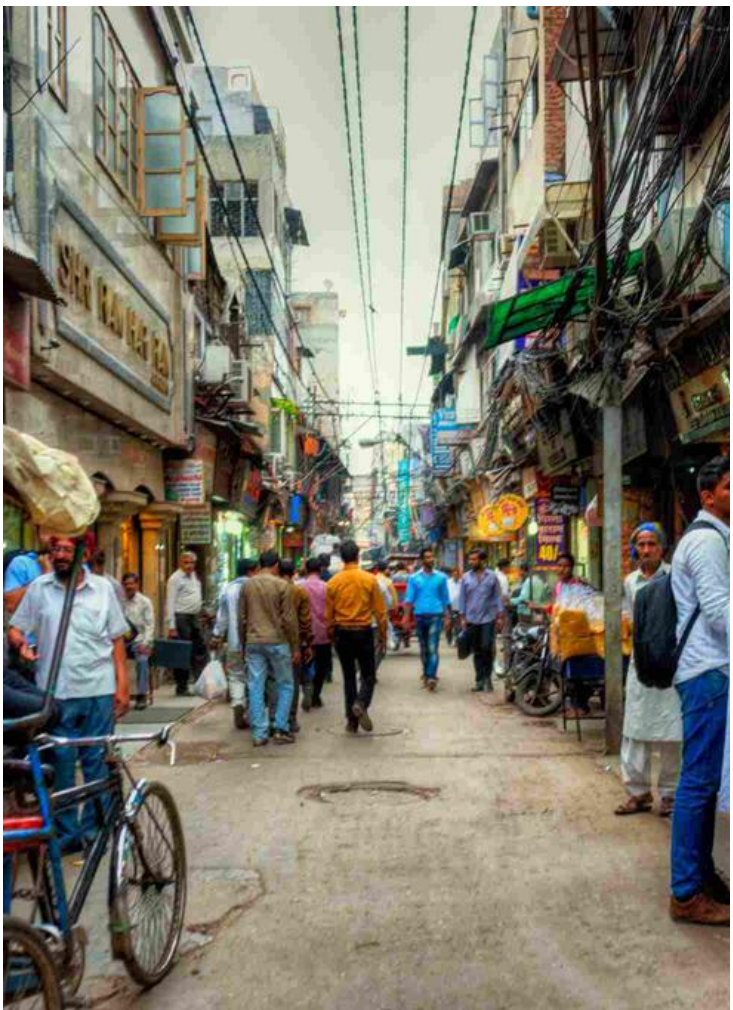


Vegetarian Biryani

While Biryani traditionally features meat, India's diverse culinary landscape has led to the creation of vegetarian versions, including the popular vegetable Biryani and paneer Biryani.

It transcends borders, delighting palates from India to the Middle East and beyond. So, the next time you savour a plate of Biryani, remember that you're enjoying a taste of history that has been perfected over generations.





Oh Ri Dilli

Part 1

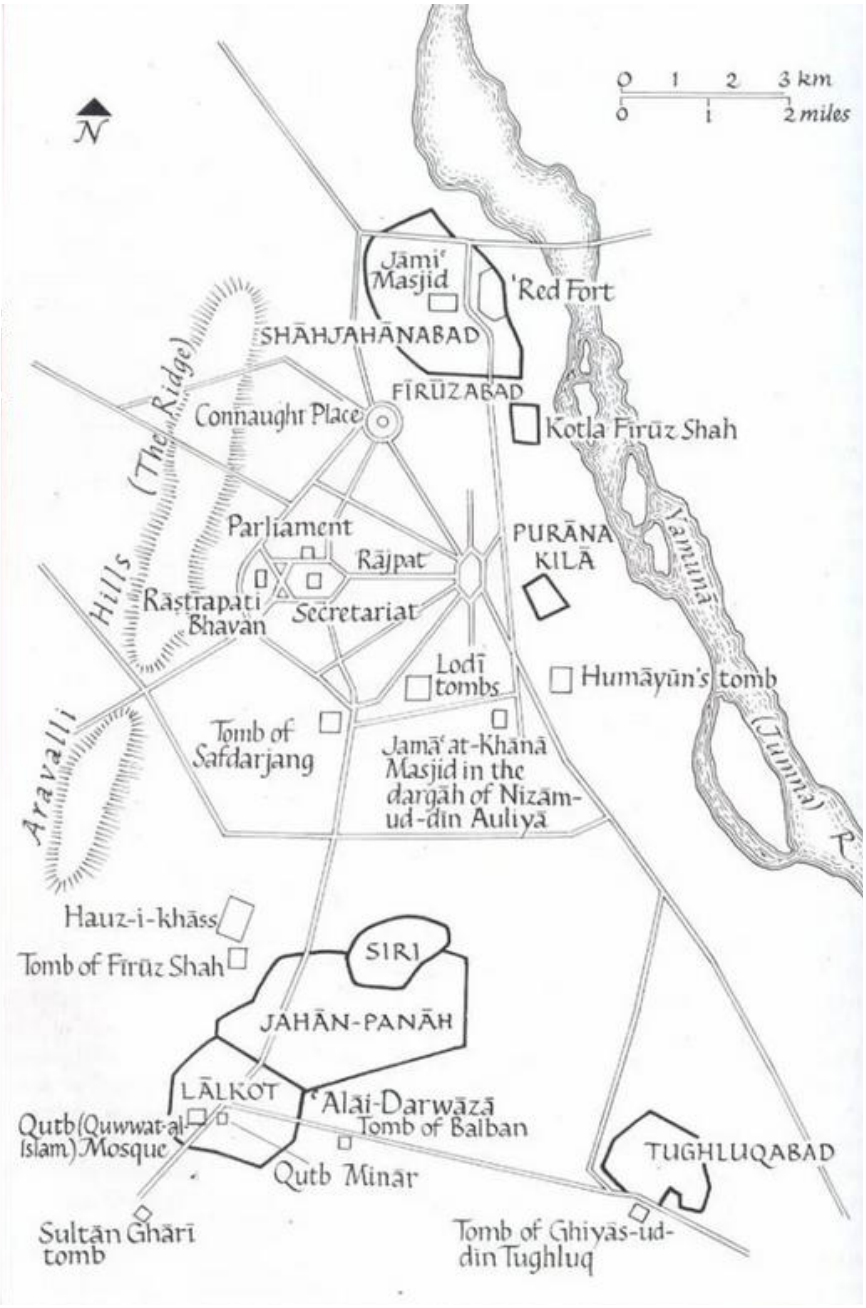
By Satyameet Singh

How does one begin speaking about Delhi? Like many, I have fond memories of the foggy winter days of the 90s, lip-smacking carb-heavy meals, celebrating Gurpurab, Holi and Diwali (and food at Eid) until the cows came home, and the ever-beautiful moments of playing gully cricket and gully badminton till a neighbour or one's parent came out yelling.

It's the city where I grew up, specifically North Delhi, where life happened at the community level first and individuals came second. This way of life felt inverted to the South Delhi lifestyle, where individual freedom came first. So fascinating was this contrast that talking about South Delhi people was a favourite pastime amongst people. Putting down South Delhi folks for their dubious morality while enviously looking at their women and foreign cars spoke to our frailty and double standards. It was not central to our identity to proclaim the higher moral ground, but it was an important aspect of our way of life.

Such divides were and still are a default in this megapolis. Class, religion, and traditions come in so many shades and are so intertwined that if one drew a portrait of a Delhiwallah, the output would be abstract, unyielding, albeit bold and colourful.

Just like a mischievous and sometimes (dangerously) disobedient student who stops trying because the subject is dense, the average Delhi resident lives in willful ignorance because they know the city has an incredible history, but the syllabus is vast and demanding.



This vast history leads to an unexpected commonality: Many citizens express their enjoyment and love affair with life through food and their lust for life through the pursuit of power. I feel this is why the phrase 'Tu Nehi Jaanta Mera Baap Kaun Hai' (you don't know who my father is) has become so mainstream!

Does Delhi thrive on toxic masculinity, gluttony, and hedonism? Perhaps all power centres in the world run on the same fuel.

Parts of Delhi closely resemble parts of Beijing, London, New York, Hong Kong, and Tokyo, and the gulf between those parts of Delhi, in contrast to a locality 3 km away, is generational.

The way wealth, ego, and brokering of destiny play out in the living rooms of a few makes me wonder if it has always been like this.

Delhi has been built many times over – seven or eight (, to be precise. Indraprastha is believed to be the first city founded by Yudhishthira (the eldest of the Pandava brothers, as recorded in the epic Mahabharata).

Seven more cities came alive adjacent to Indraprastha: Lal Kot, Siri, Tughlakabad, Dinpanah, Ferozabad, Jahanpanah, and Shahjahanabad.

LAL KOT
(1052 AD)

The first known dynasty to have founded Delhi is the Tomar Dynasty, a Rajput clan whose king Anangapal founded the city in 1052.

Pasanaha Chariu of Vibudh Shridhar provides the first reference to the legend of the origin of the name Dhilli for Delhi.

हरियाणए देसे असंखगाम, गामियण जणि अणवरथ काम
—परचक्क विहट्टणु सिरिसंघट्टणु, जो सुरव इणा परिगणियं, रिउ रुहिरावट्टणु बिउलु पवट्टणु,
ढिल्ली नामेण जि भणियं

Translation: There are countless villages in Haryana country. The villagers there work hard. They don't accept the domination of others and are experts in making the blood of their enemies flow. Indra himself praises this country. The capital of this country is Dhilli.

Most knowledge about their rule comes from inscriptions, coins and medieval bardic legends.

The Tomars built the first regular defence fort, later known as the fort Lal Kot, which was taken over by King Prithvi Raj Chauhan (also known as Rai Pithora); however, it was not for long. Prithviraj Chauhan's reign ended when the Afghan invader Muhammad Ghauri defeated him in the Battle of Tarain (1192).

This was a pivotal point in the city's history as it brought the onset of Muslim rule to India

Following Ghauri's death, his slave general, Qutbuddin Aibaq, became the first Sultan of Delhi and built the capital on the site of the Rai Pithora fort, called Lal Kot and later Mehrauli. The Delhi Sultanate was established in 1206.

Many slave sultans later, the Khalji dynasty came into being when Jalal ud din Firuz Khalji overthrew the last of the Slave dynasty rulers, Muiz ud din Qaiqabad. Delhi had a new ruler.









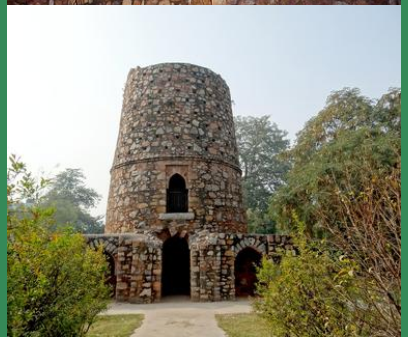
SIRI

(1297-1307 AD)

Alauddin Khilji is credited with building the second of the seven cities of Delhi in 1303. Between 1297 and 1307, he built Siri to protect India and Delhi from Mongol incursions. Legend has it that Alauddin beheaded 8000 Mongols living in the settlement now called Mongolpuri and built the foundation of his city on these heads.

Thus, the first Muslim city of Delhi was built in 1303 and called Siri ('Sir' is Hindi for head) as a homage to all the severed heads. Alauddin Khillji is also credited with building 'Hauz Khas' for the Siri fort. It is hard to fathom that today's Hauz Khas, a bustling neighbourhood with boutique fashion labels, bars, and handicrafts, was the royal reservoir of the city.





TUGHLAQABAD

A king and a curse - 1323







Alauddin Khilji's general Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq founded the Tughlaq dynasty and the third medieval city of Delhi, Tughlaqabad. Unfortunately, his cherished city did not survive for long. He chose the rocky site of Tughlaqabad to build the city so that it could be defended easily, but he could not defend it from the curse of a revered Sufi – Nizamuddin Auliya.

The story goes that Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq had ordered all workers in Delhi to construct his fort, however at the same time, Nizamuddin Auliya was building a baoli (step-water) near his dargah. While the workers toiled in the day at the fort, they worked the nights in building the baoli. This was not acceptable to Tughlaq who banned the sale of oil lamps to workers so no lamps could light up the construction site at night. The saint then magically turned the water in his tank to oil, and cursed Tughlaqabad: ***Ya base Gujar, ya rahe ujar*** *(May this be inhabited by herdsmen or remain unoccupied).*

Whether this is what really happened or not, no one knows, but we do know that Tughalaqabad never flourished, whereas the saint continues to occupy the hearts of countless people even today, and his dargah brings in countless people.

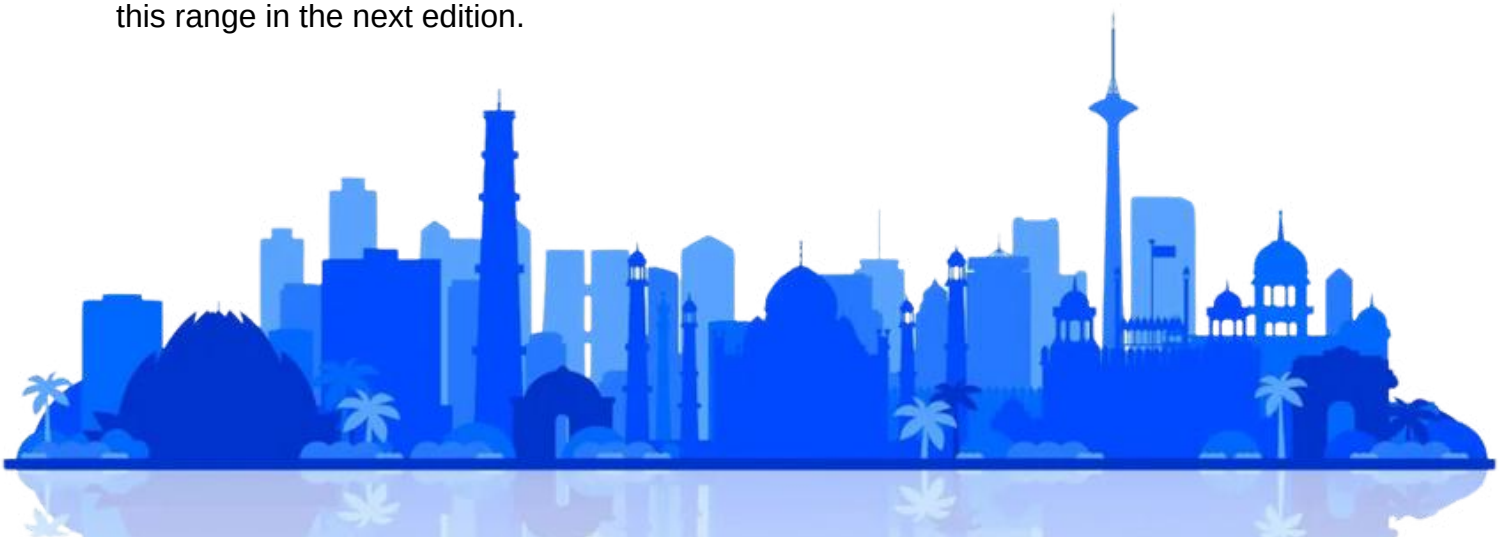
The closest disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya was the mystic poet Amir Khusrau. A poet of Persian and Hindavi, he is regarded as the father of the Urdu qawwali and ghazal. His poetry is still sung throughout the subcontinent with great passion and fervour.

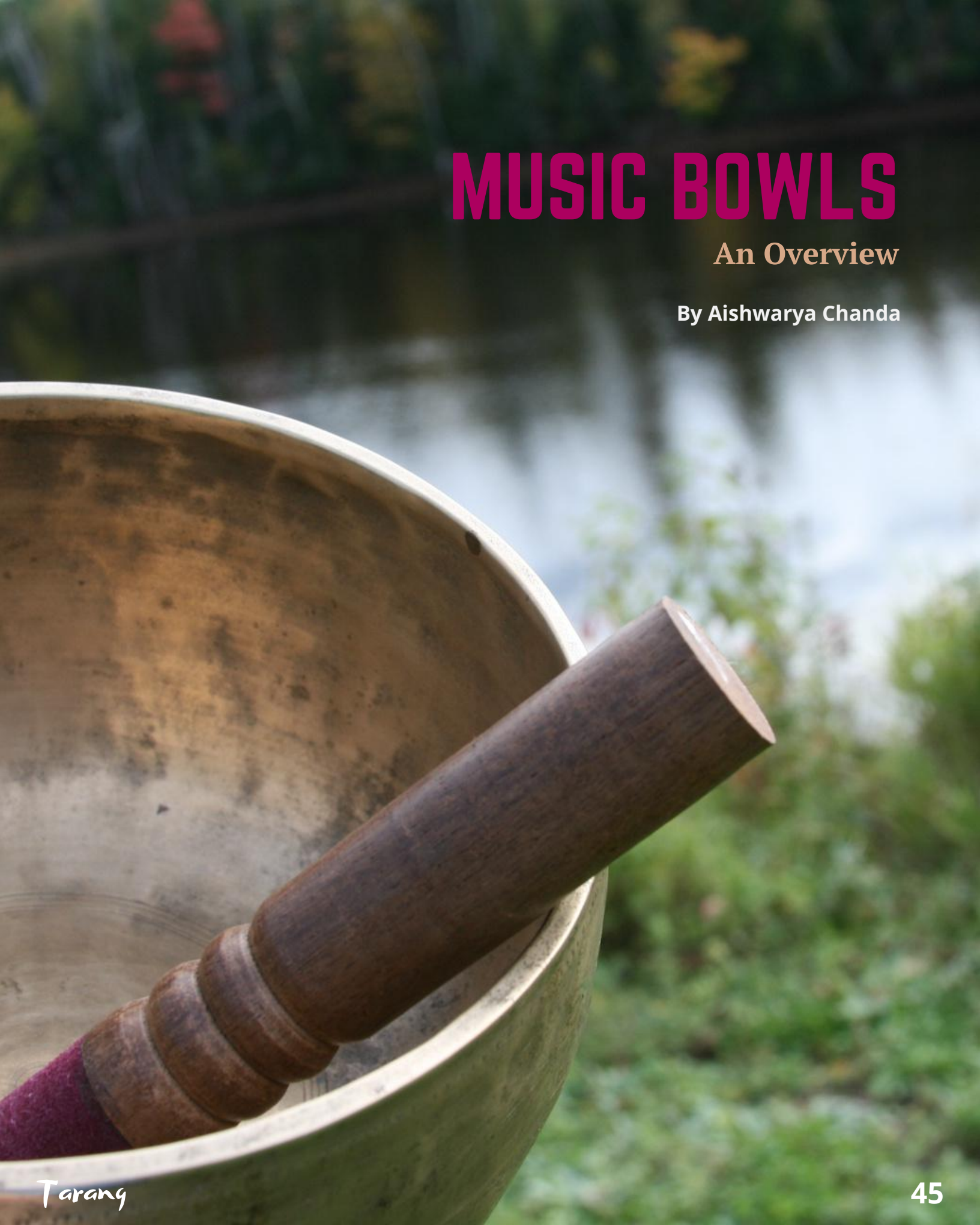
Aaj rung hai hey maa rung hai ri
Moray mehboob kay ghar rang hai ri
Sajan milaavra, sajan milaavra,
Sajan milaavra moray aangan ko
Aaj rung hai.
Mohay pir paayo Nijamudin aulia
Nijamudin aulia mohay pir payoo
Des bades mein dhoondh phiree hoon
Toraa rung man bhayo ri,
Jag ujiyaaro, jagat ujiyaaro,
Main to aiso rang aur nahin dekhi ray
Main to jab dekhun moray sung hai,
Aaj rung hai hey maa rung hai ri.

Translation-

What a glow everywhere I see, Oh mother, what a glow;
I've found the beloved, yes I found him,
In my courtyard;
I have found my pir Nizamuddin Aulia.
I roamed around the entire world,
looking for an ideal beloved;
And finally this face has enchanted my heart.
The whole world has been opened for me,
Never seen a glow like this before.
Whenever I see now, he is with me,
Oh beloved, please dye me in yourself;
Dye me in the colour of the spring, beloved;
What a glow, Oh, what a glow.

Lyrics and translation courtesy: allpoetry.com
Delhi is not a mountain of a city but a mountain range which can be looked at individually for its peaks or, if looked at in its entirety, leaves one without words. Let's look at other parts of this range in the next edition.





MUSIC BOWLS

An Overview

By Aishwarya Chanda

Moments with Mountains..

Anklet chimes with the rhythm of hills, to the tunes of the dawn and the dusk, and all the art in between. The childlike winds, soft and swaying, and the chain of hilltops glorified by morning greetings, send an aura that's hard to hide!

Words fall short to admire the poetry of nature, and of the mighty Himalayan ranges in particular. When asked about the moments with mountains during their recent Muktinath yatra, the speechless smile on our elders' faces, the content, and the joy say it all.

"India is a beautiful land with innumerable wonders to witness and enjoy", they say with all their spirit. The words thus tried to take shape out of their time and my imagination.

The stories of streets, the mornings, the temple shikhara, and the wholesome memories are treasured dear, as the journey turns back to everyday life. Of the few souvenirs that are bought as gifts, the Singing bowls instilled a sense of curiosity within us. Musical tones started to emerge, as we made a gentle movement of mallet around the rim of this unique bowl-like structure.

This article is an attempt to introduce and appreciate the story behind these musical entities from the mountains.

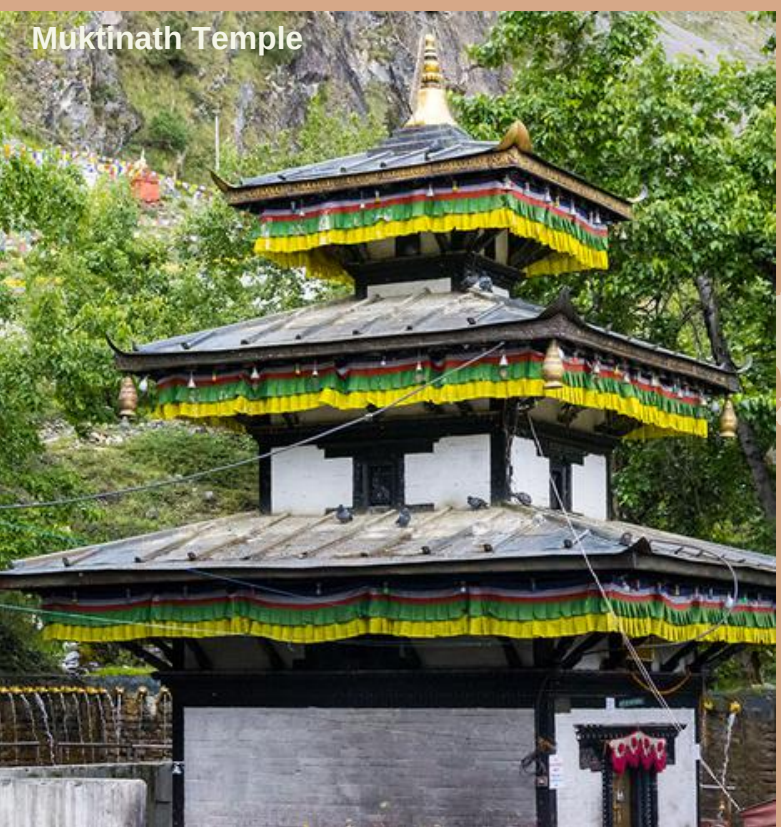
Image source:
Mountain Adventure Nepal

Journey through time



Since time immemorial, music and sound have been sources of relaxation, meditation, and healing. One of the early instruments used for this purpose was Singing Bowls, also known as Himalayan Singing bowls, Healing Bowls, or Music Bowls.
The origin dates back to ancient times, as varied and complex as the music they make. Few historical suggestions state that Singing bowls have been made all across Asia and their legacy began over 1,000 years ago.
Source: singingbowlmuseum.com

Historians confirm that singing bowls were also made in Mesopotamia, Japan, China, Afghanistan, Vietnam, and many other nations. Each geography and culture has a fascinating story of its origin and an acquaintance with this beautiful instrument, which you can read more about here: theohmstore



Muktinath Temple

The Singing Bowls association with the Nepalese, North-Eastern India, and the Tibetan spiritual tradition is depicted in their profound importance in Buddhist ceremonies and rituals.
There are also a few amusing mentions of the early singing bowls being used to measure grains or as home-use bowls, a few being used as currency owing to the presence of precious metals in them, and others add to it by saying, “It must’ve been offered as a dowry or wedding gift.”

Image source: Eco Holidays Nepal

The Craftsmanship

The making of the Music bowls highlights an age-old tradition deeply rooted in skill and rich folklore among the early artisans. Metals are selected based on the required characteristics, as each metallic composition can offer a unique experience in terms of pitch and tone.

Bronze and Brass were the usual choices. For bronze-based bowls, a metal piece of bronze is heated to make it malleable. The shaping of the bowls takes place after a meticulous sequence of hammering while the metal is hot. Indigenous bowls are often handmade by skilled artisans with generational knowledge and practice.

On the other hand, for brass-based bowls, the molten metal gets solidified in a pre-made mold upon cooling. Then it undergoes a series of finishing steps of polishing & engraving the intricate patterns.

The process of making is crucial for attaining the desired shape and size, acoustic properties, and for the unique sound produced eventually. The various types of Singing bowls include Thadobati, Jambati, Naga, Mani, Ultabati, Manipuri, Lingam, Remuna, and others.

Click below to know more:







Remuna



Lingam



Jambati



Thadobati



Naga



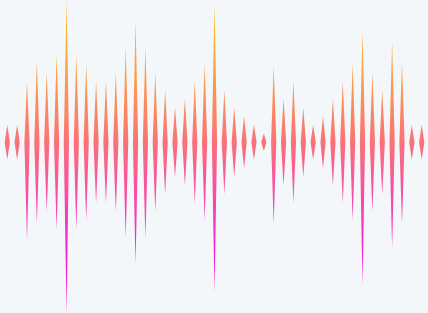
Mani

Images source: bellsofbliss & yunahandicrafts

SCIENCE BEHIND THE SOUND

RESONANCE

- The magic behind musical bowls is based on the fundamentals of Resonance.
- As we rotate the wooden stick (called ‘Puja’ in Nepali) around the outer rim of these nearly symmetric metal bowls, the vibrations emerge out of friction. Upon persistent movement, the energy builds up by means of resonance with the surrounding air, thereby creating a beautiful and harmonic sound.





PARAMETERS

- Various parameters such as diameter, density, shape, material, and thickness all influence the frequency of a singing bowl. For example, a larger diameter results in a deeper pitch, while a thicker bowl produces a higher pitch.

IMPACT OF SOUND

- Appropriate and guided exposure to these sounds is known to enhance one’s psychological and physiological state of being, whose intriguing study is under potential research.



Click to know more

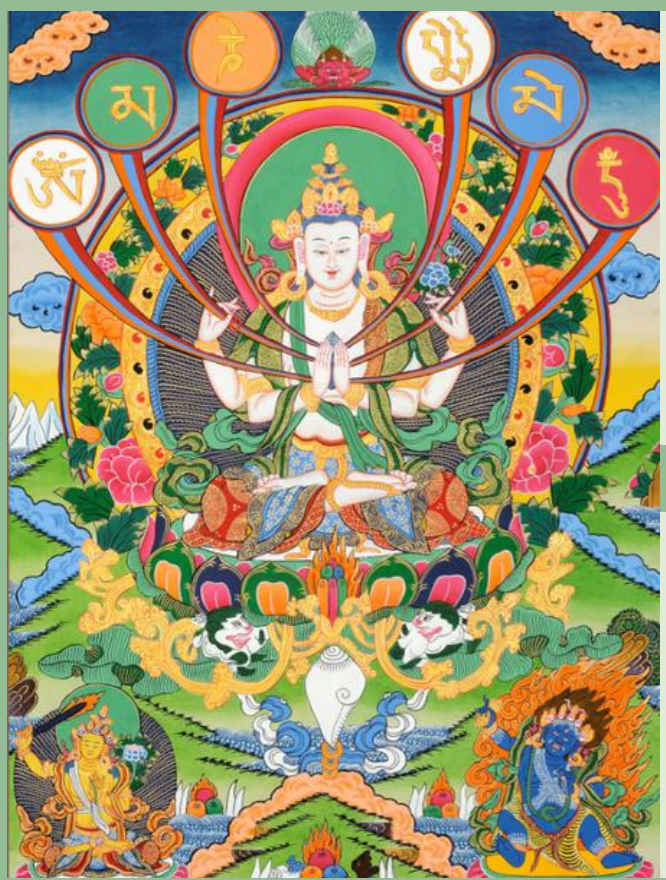
PROFOUND PATTERNS

Observing the patterns and writings engraved on a few typical Himalayan bowls reveals what are called the Six True Words, the Third Eye, and more.



The Fascinating Syllables

The Sanskrit Mantra- "Om Mane Padme Hum" which means "the jewel in the lotus", is called 'the six true words' by monks. Around Buddhist areas of Tibet and Nepal, it is written as "Om ma ne pad ma hum", and is found to be engraved on things around, from rocks to prayer beads. It can also be written in several other forms like 'om mane padme hun', 'om manepadmi hung', and 'om mani padme hung'.
Mantra in different languages - ॐ मणिपद्मे हूँ (Sanskrit), ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་པདྨེ་ཧཱུྃ (Tibetan), ॐ मणि पद्मे हुँ (Nepali). Source: wiki



Each syllable of the mantra depicts its purification symbolism, with "Om" cleansing the body, "Ma" cleansing speech, "Ni" cleansing the mind, "Pad" cleansing emotions, "Me" cleansing the subconscious, and "Hum" cleansing the veil of wisdom.

Source: www.theohmstore.co/blogs

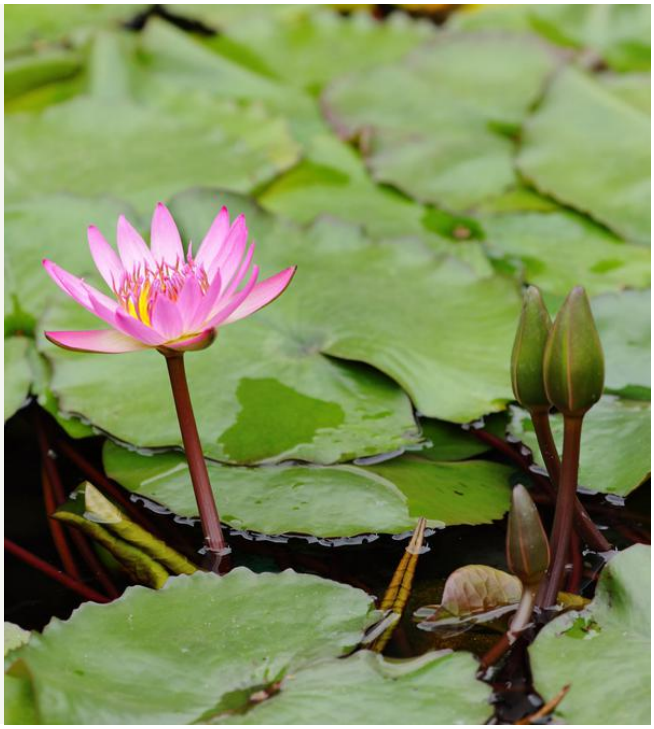
The Patron Deity of Om Mani Padme Hum
A thangka painting, dedicated to Shadakshari Lokeshvar, a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion and wisdom.

Source: www.exoticindiaart.com/product/paintings

The Ideology

The essence of a lotus flower is beautifully conveyed in this Sanskrit mantra. As a lotus that emerges from the depths of the pond without a speck of dirt, so pure is the form a human attains by shaking off the impurities, shattering the walls of negative traits of confusion, anger, jealousy, and hatred.

Hence it is known to be engraved on the singing bowls to encourage the practitioners to meditate on this thought while playing the bowls, as it is believed to awaken the compassionate energy, collective consciousness, and wisdom.



Pattern denoting *Buddha Eyes*



- The singing bowls are also noticed to contain symbolism denoting Buddha's eyes. They look out in the four directions, depicting Buddha's omniscience. They are also found to be etched and painted on rocks and buildings.
- The small dot between the eyes represents the "third eye," symbolizing spiritual awakening. The curly mark between the eyes is the Sanskrit numeral one, which denotes the unity of all things and the one path to reach enlightenment through the Buddha's teachings.

Source: heavenofsound.com/pages/symbols-on-singing-bowls-and-tingsha

While the singing bowls aid in meditative practices, sound healing, and prayer rituals, they can also serve as a pure medium of the musical experience, for the joy of playing it, for the joy of making it by the artisans.
For the ones seeking new ways to relax, to inculcate the practice of self-reflection, or to just interact and experiment a new flavor of sounds out of it, the moment is yours!

Nalanda University
Source: Wikipedia



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Founded in 2005 by Guru Violin Vasu and friends, the mission of Sanskriti Foundation is to promote Indian art, culture, and values by conducting training, workshops and an annual Tyagaraja Aradhana music festival. Foundation members benefit from meeting like-minded people, attending cultural seminars and bi-monthly concerts.

If you would like to learn more and become a member, you can reach us here: http://www.sanskritifoundation.in.

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