



TRAVEL UNRAVEL

Gurudev's legacy: Shantiniketan

TRISHA BHATTACHARYA

Shantiniketan is a princely tranquil land, and is well-known for its sharp contrast to the cacophonous honking cars, zipping taxis screaming around in cities. It is a town where some students study under trees, where winds blow in quiet and impressive significance, not lost in smog; where statues stand in marked silence bearing witness to the emergence of many a noted humanitarians, Nobel laureates and literary talents of the country.



Uttarayan

ON THE OCCASION OF 150 YEARS OF JANA GANA MANA, WE REVISIT RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S IDYLIC SCHOOL AND DWELL IN ITS SERENITY

Shri Rabindranath Tagore, a world-famous English Nobel laureate from India, had single-handedly initially propelled Shantiniketan to the status that it has now. His father and elder brother before him had bought land here and Maharishi Devendranath Tagore (his father) in 1863 founded an ashram here. Rabindranath Tagore had given up his schooling in his childhood, because he felt education did not come merely by sitting in cramped classrooms and only from textbooks. His elder brother however, later took him to England, where he learnt English classical music and met many famous poets who encouraged him to pursue his literary talents. Once he settled in Shantiniketan, he built within its picturesque surroundings a culture of spiritual emancipation, through the medium of education, music, literature, poetry and other arts. This rise was also brought about by the establishment of Visva Bharati, a university founded by him in 1901, which was clearly like his child, a youngster he nurtured in the warm lap of Shantiniketan. This was a one-of-its-kind open-air university which he had begun only with five students. He inculcated within the culture of the university, an ethos of In-

dian tradition comingling with other diverse western perspectives, which to date, are the hallmark of Visva Bharati. Amongst its illustrious students, are names like Amartya Sen, Indira Gandhi, and Satyajit Ray.

Walking through university grounds, I saw various Bhavans like Kala Bhavan (College of Fine Arts and Crafts), Cheena Bhavan (college where Chinese is taught), Hindi Bhavan, Sangeet Bhavan and Vidya (College of Humanities). Close to one such college, I noticed a boy sitting by the shade of a tree, looking at a playing-swing in deep concentration. He had a peaceful, knowing look on his face, beyond his years. I didn't see the city exuberance in him, but a more subtle frame of mind. That is the Shantiniketan effect I'd say. When I approached him, he looked at me serenely, smiled and then walked into a nearby building. He seemed at one with the quietude of Shantiniketan. That is the influence; this small town will have on you. You will feel at peace with yourself, without the usual stress a fast-paced city life



Tree under which Gurudev sometimes wrote

may engender in you. This small town has many spots that should definitely be listed out in your travel diary. Under an awning of dense trees, is a small park known as Chhatimtala. It is a splendiferous spot, where students study and some cultural events take place. This is where Rabindranath Tagore's father meditated and Gurudev himself taught his students and read from his poems and stories. Another such place to see is the Uttarayan complex. This has five buildings known as Konarka, Shyamoli, Punascha, Udayana and Udichi. This is where the great litterateur lived and wrote for the remaining many years of his life. He would spend some time in each house depending on his poetic mood. As a tourist, you probably won't be able to take your cameras in-

2012
It is not the exotic Hawaii or the enigmatic Costa Roca but India's very own Bengaluru that is among the 'Hot Ten destinations of 2012, according to Lonely Planet. Interestingly, India also features in the countries that are considered 'exciting' to visit this year

side the Uttarayan complex; luckily though, once every year, on the occasion of his birth anniversary; this rule is lifted for all. Buildings within the university and within the Uttarayan complex house frescos, paintings, murals that are breathtaking and are a representation of the versatility of a truly noble virtuoso, in addition to those by Nandal Bose, and several other famous artists. Another place not to be missed is Upasana Mandir, a temple like prayer hall, where Gurudev and his family prayed. Close to Shantiniketan is Shilpa Gram. It houses crafts and handicrafts from various states of the country like Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Mizoram, and several others. There is also a deer park about three kilometres from Shantiniketan. You can hire a rickshaw that will take you from one spot to the other within the university and outside it. Shantiniketan lives in the hearts of all Indians still, and reminds us of the immense talent of Shri Rabindranath Tagore who left behind for us a legacy of beautiful poems, stories, plays and literature that endures and enlivens.

TWICE AS NICE

Art is the common language

RAJESHWARI KALYANAM

3-5-700, Himayatnagar - A popular destination for art aficionados in the 1960s - is the address of a garage that was to gain significance after the then struggling artists Laxma Goud, Surya Prakash and Devraj took it on rent for their studio. This abode of struggling artists became a cultural centre frequented by art collectors, senior artists like Krishna Khanna, MF Hussain, Bendre, poets like Makhdoom Mohiuddin, Charabanda Raju, scientists like Pushpamitra Bhargava and several others interested in art who would not miss a visit to the garage when in Hyderabad.

Coming from a remote village, Nizampur of Medak District, Laxma was totally new to the urban milieu and hardly knew what art meant when he came to Hyderabad. Surya Prakash was relatively more urbane, but he was as ignorant of the city life and art world when he came from Madira of Khammam District. Both entered the College of Fine Arts in the city after their 10th; Laxma was three years junior. They met each other at the college hostel and seeds for a lifelong relationship were sown. The friendship grew over the years, withstood the gales of disruption and crests and troughs of life to attain a unique form.

Unique, because the only thing that binds Laxma and



Laxma Goud

SENIOR ARTISTS SURYA PRAKASH AND LAXMA GOUD ARE DIFFERENT IN MANY WAYS AND DISAGREE ON MANY THINGS, BUT THERE IS ONE COMMON THREAD THAT CONTINUES TO BIND THEM TOGETHER - ART



Surya Prakash

Pics: Hrudayanand

Suryaprakash is art. Both are poles apart when it comes to their temperament, the former being the very aggressive (no wonder his art comes across with innate force leaving a lasting impression) and the latter being calm and mellowed down in his approach. While Laxma's art is figurative, evocative, forceful and grey and mostly comes in small frames, Prakash's art is abstract and over a period of time has leaned towards impressionism, is contemporary, colourful and is usually on huge canvases. Today they are the most respected and popular artists from this part of the country. They may not meet each other on a daily basis, but the mutual admiration and respect prevails.

Laxma Goud: For me it took these many years to be where I am. It was a nice coincidence that I met Prakash when he decided to stay in hostel where I used to stay. We used talk only about art, nothing else. We were very ambitious. I was a little outgoing. He was thin, tall and always wore a white shirt. During weekends we used to go all the way to old city outskirts to paint the landscape. Jagadish Mittalji was our guest lecturer. He would also encourage and guide us.

Surya Prakash: At the hostel, I interacted closely with other students which helped me hone my skills. We did not have many books on art, but would watch films on famous artists of the world.

Laxma: After college I went to Bar-



Devraj, Laxma Goud and Surya Prakash at their studio in Himayatnagar

oda along with Devraj on scholarship. I came back around the same time as Prakash who was back from working with Ramkumar in New Delhi. He had also resigned from the Information Department where he was working for some time. We realised that we wanted our own studio. We found a garage on a rent of Rs 15. I used to live in the garage which had a small toilet. Each morning I would get up, roll the bed, take bath and fill a bucket with water to drink and keep it in one corner when Prakash and Devraj would come and our day would begin.

SP: It was at this garage that I

started painting the auto scrap series. We were also doing batik painting which Jagadish Mittalji was helping us sell so that we make some money. Laxma and Devraj went to Hyderabad Art Society with a proposal to do a graphic workshop which was approved. They would both go to the workshop when I had the garage all to myself. This went on until 1970 when I moved out.

Laxma: In MLA colony, there used to be a small hotel. When there was money I would eat idli and sometimes - the rest of the day I would have to make do with eating nothing else. Those were the days of

hunger, of not being certain, of not knowing what is going to happen tomorrow. To contribute Rs 15 for rent was difficult. Three of us used to share it. It was tough. It is not that Prakash cannot go back to his father or his brothers. But it was more about doing it on our own.

SP: Three artists working from one studio was a challenge. We were very different temperamentally. We also had fun. We have seen some very good English movies at Plaza and Dreamland. We would go on our bicycles to Secunderabad at night for the second show. Every morning we used to hire a cycle rickshaw to go to Taj Mahal hotel.

We used to pay 30 ps for a coffee and pan - It was a ritual like you go to a temple - we would then come back and settle down to work. We used to have a small stove and sometimes would prepare tea at the garage itself.

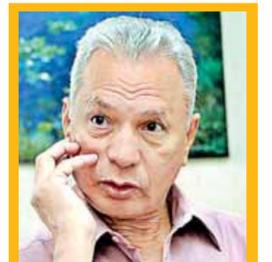
Laxma: We struggled together, we never planned our future. We also left each other free to do what he wants. Prakash being senior would sometimes advise us. We did face rejections. People who saw my art were all disappointed as it was small. Will someone notice your work, what will you ask for this - is what they would say. I priced my work for Rs 15, yet not many were ready to buy. The galleries were not ready to take my work as it was aggressive. May be that rejection made me what I am. I believed in my art. Our first big group show was in Kolkata. Slowly our works were being shown at commercial art galleries and were making way to private collections.

SP: There is a vast difference between our time and now. Today young artists need not go through all those stages of trouble. In those days, galleries in New Delhi had their own preferred artist whose reference is a must for gaining an entry. For many years I did not find a gallery that was accepting my works, though later the same galleries showed and sold lot of my work. We worked and exhibited together for seven years. We prepared our own ground in trying to establish nationally. We were trav-

elling regularly and were known as a group and that really helped us. We were mingling with senior artists and when people thought of Hyderabad they thought of us. Devraj later shifted to New York and chose to join a graphic studio.

Laxma: I don't think I could have asked more than what I am. It is not a myth, not abrupt, not a dream; we gradually came up like anyone else. We were genuine; there was no hypocrisy, no social inhibition. We have our own preoccupations, yet we have contributed to each other's ideas. I and Prakash had differed bitterly on some issues. Even now, if there are areas he is doing something I don't like, then I have to have my difference, but it was never about ego. We are just being human beings. We still love our children and our families are close to each other.

SP: We continue to be where we are because we stay in touch with art on a day to day basis. It is not work, it is a part of our life. We are friends because we are artists. Art is the binding factor, not the temperaments. We were still friends even when I left the gallery; I used to visit them every evening. We used to have a drink together and go around. As we are getting older, at some level it is natural that you are not the same person; I did have a difference with Laxma, which was more about opinion and that can happen to anyone. We travelled together to many countries. It is just total integrity of life with all the differences.



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