

WHEN **TANTRA** AND **MANTRA** COLLIDE

As one walks into an opulent bungalow, Swami Shivanand Saraswati emerges from the backyard. Wearing a crisp white *kurta-pajama*, red *tikka* on his forehead and the sea crashing behind him, he does look a wee bit mystical and well, magical. A well-modulated voice greets you with a "namaskar, hope you found the place easily".

As he settles down on a swing draped in saffron cloth, your eyes take in the paintings behind him. Mystical and vibrant at the same time, the orange and black motifs are arresting and in a strange way, in perfect congruence with the painter. However, to call him a painter would be a mistake, as he hastens to correct you. "I am a spiritual artist. Painting is a meditative process for me. I just paint my own inner landscape," says Saraswati, who till a year ago — when he took his

diksha — was known as Udayraj Gadnis.

He has been painting since the last 10 years. What started with a blinding flash of lightning, literally, is now well on its way to being established as a new movement altogether — the spiritual art movement. And Saraswati, who is a qualified psychologist and who worked with the Tata group in the human resources

department before he started painting, has been lambasted on numerous occasions because of his so-called provocative paintings and his belief and adherence to the tenets of *tantra*. "I have lived with *tantriks* and I have studied *tantra* minutely. I have learnt that the body is an existing living form. How can you deny it and go beyond it? I am amazed how new age spiritualism is minus eroticism and *tantra*. Everything is sensuous and sensuality is the essence of spirituality," he explains, giving you an insight into why the conventional vanguards of religion and spiritualism glare at him with daggers drawn.

For Saraswati, his paintings are an extension of his spiritual beliefs. According to him, there are days when he can't put the brush down as the magnitude of the 'force' guiding him is too strong. His paintings have been exhibited at Mumbai's ANZ Grindlays Art Gallery, Artist centre Art Gallery and Bajaj Art Gallery, as also the Golden Gate Art Gallery and the 90102 Art Gallery in the USA, among others. He has also been awarded the Yuva Ratna Award in 1993 and the Young Achievers Award in 1997. Quite an achievement for this 35-year-old Bramhin from Kashmir. But the modest swami says, "It is 99 per cent God's gift and one percent

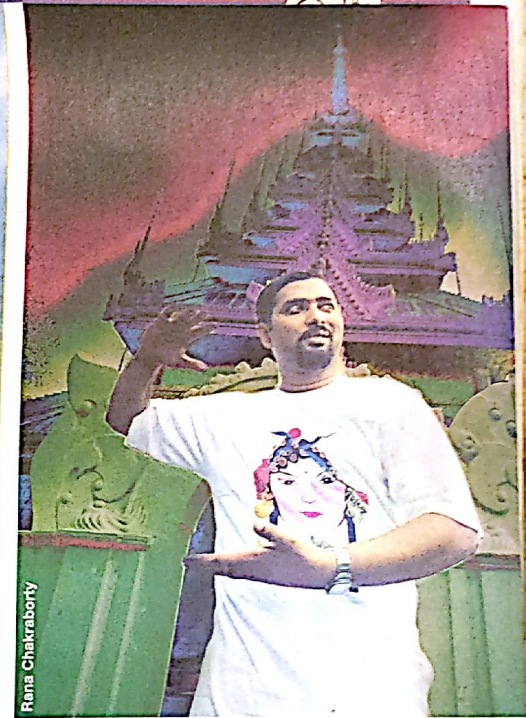
hard work. But that one per cent has been very hard."

And Saraswati's hard work is now paying dividends. He has started a *gurukul* in Goa called the Raj Gurukul, which is open to all those who have a creative bent of mind. Artists and other like-minded people can stay there for nine months, discover nature and work within its parameters. According to Saraswati, "The *gurukul* has been set up to impart higher spiritual learning in the field of art and culture." To further his cause, he has also penned a book, which, as usual, has become very controversial.

And now, the spiritual world and the world of make-believe shall have a strange union. Shivanand Saraswati will be acting in a movie called *tanman.com*, which also stars Manisha Koirala. "The film will be very interesting. It is a dark film about the occult and *tantra*."

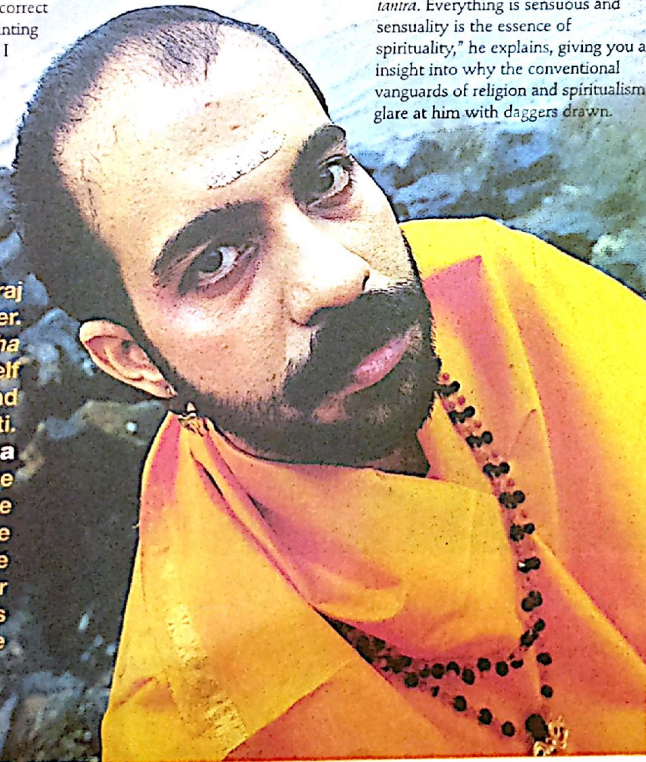
Now the film will be the swami's latest project. But he vows that no matter how busy he is, his painting shall continue unabated. Shuttlng between Goa and Mumbai and taking time out from his *satsangs*, this founder of the spiritual art movement will walk his path with his characteristic strength and determination.

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Rana Chakraborty

He was once Udayraj Gadnis — the painter. Now he's taken *diksha* and calls himself Swami Shivanand Saraswati. Abha Srivastava finds that although the medium may have changed slightly, the way he expresses the brilliance of his inner landscape remains the same



Sudharak Olive

Here's more evidence that sheer confidence works better than meticulous technique, at least where sexual relationships are concerned. A new survey of more than 2,200 adults in Finland shows that factors such as age and confidence in one's sexual prowess help determine how often men and women achieve orgasm.

Overall, individuals 'who have developed a perception that they are skilled and experienced lovers are more orgasmically responsive' than those with less sexual self-esteem, conclude Dr Carol Anderson Darling of the University of Florida in Tallahassee, and colleagues at the University of Helsinki and the Family Federation of Finland.

Darling's team reports that 96 per cent of men said they 'almost always' or 'always' experienced an orgasm during sex, compared with about 55 per cent of women. Rates for consistent orgasm were highest among young men, lowest among older women. Young men were more likely than young women to say they felt 'sexually skilled', whereas young women tended to 'feel more sexually attractive' than their male peers did. This type of sexual self-confidence — which was closely tied to frequency of orgasm, especially among women — was somewhat less common among older men and women, however.



Don't talk, just eat

When is watching a movie or speaking on the phone harmful for women? When they are on a diet, it is, report in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

Women who normally control the amount of food they eat to consume fewer calories when they talk on the phone, the researchers conclude from their study. Talking on the phone, listening to music or watching TV are all distractions that could undermine a dieting effort.

The study was conducted by researchers at the University of Paris, France, and the University of Lille, France. The study authors were Dr. Michel-Martin Darlix, University of Lille, France.



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Compiled by Priya Pathiyam