

Folks Wagon

Prateek Chandra

You have been in hibernation for a while. What are you currently working on?

● On 30th of April, Buddha Purnima Day, I will be opening a gallery called Kamadhenu in Lokhandvala which will, for the first time, show the source of my art. There is a lot of speculation about the origins of my work. I am, therefore, going to actually display in that gallery all my sources, something that artists always keep secret and hide. I want to say: This is where it came from. There is no mysticism, no mystery, no secret. It is only spiritual. It is honest. I am going to unearth the entire *yantras* and the *sufi tabriz* that inspired my work. I am going to show everything that led to the three phases of my work as a tantrik, a sufi and, finally, a monk.

Why did you feel the need to express your spiritual quest in terms of art?

● It had a bit of parapsychology involved. You could call it the twilight zone of my life. I had absolutely no base in art. It was truly magical, in that sense. One fine morning I got up and just started painting.

When was this?

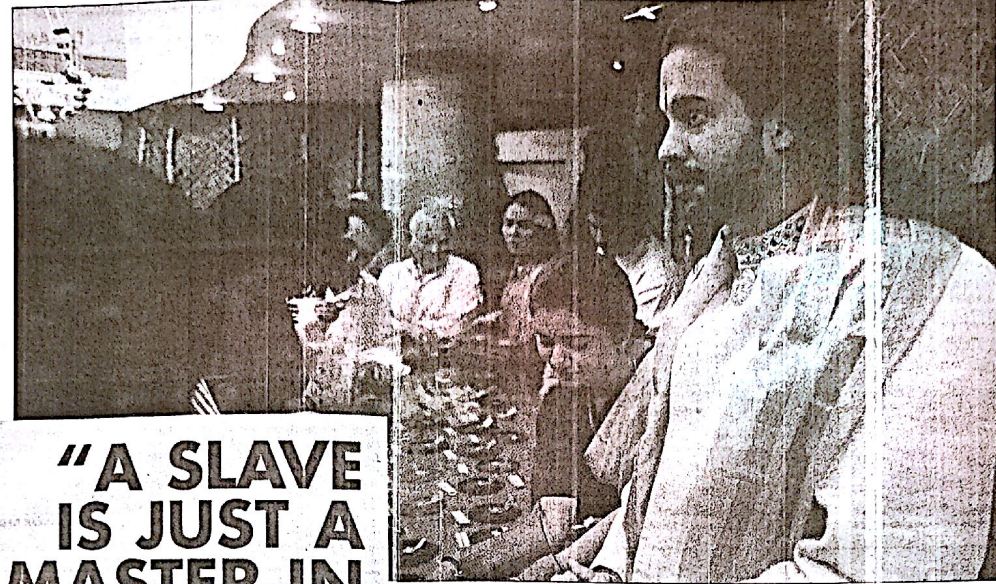
● In 1991. The first two paintings I ever drew were of the sun and the moon. They were bought by the Taj for their Udaipur hotel. I could not figure out for months how I painted these two works and why.

What was the medium? How big were they?

● They were oil paintings on canvas. Three feet by three feet. Those two works changed my life. I gave up my job with the Tatas, where I was working as a recruitment officer for five years. I gave up my 9 to 5 existence, my Silver Oak grey suits and ties, my entire corporate existence which had meant so much to me till then, and opted out. My destiny was decided. I kept painting and did not go to work again.

You left your job for art or for the spiritual quest?

● Purely for the spiritual quest. The first exhibition that I had was at the ANZ art gallery in Breach Candy. I showed them my works and they said: We are opening a gallery next week. Why don't you come and show them? That's how it all began. People saw my work. They liked it and life just changed overnight. You could say, it was no longer possible for me to continue in the corporate world.



"A SLAVE IS JUST A MASTER IN DISGUISE"

Some call him a tantrik. Others, a psychic. Still others, a cult guru. But what exactly is this strange painter, who describes himself simply as a psychologist? Udayraj Ghadnis continues his controversial streak by now opening his own art gallery in Lokhandvala and announcing a gurukul in Goa, where he claims he will seek permanent renunciation from January 1, 2000.

Now you want to opt out again and start a gurukul of your own in Goa?

● That would not be opting out. It would be an evolution. From the roots to the branches and the leaves and may be some day to the fruit. The whole journey has been entirely inwards over the past decade.

What does your gurukul hope to achieve?

● This is the first gurukul which will have no guru, no shishya. It is just space that I have created. In complete mud. It does not have the imposition of RCC, glass, wrought iron. Everything is in mud. The walls, the roots, the vessels, even the bed. It will be the first gurukul that will not have a guru to tell you what to do. It will be a place to rejoice, to live. A bit futuristic, you could say. A bit ahead of time. There will be no master, slave relation. Because a slave is, after all, just a master in disguise. I am a slave of art.

I have only one condition for all those who come there. No one will be allowed to stay for more than 9 months. That is the maximum gestation period for which you can stay in the gurukul. You can cook on your own. Sit beside the lotus pond and meditate. Spend time with yourself. Then you must go.

How will you run this gurukul, sustain it?

● This gurukul will be completely maintenance free, Prishthi. I do not want a gurukul that I will have to run, maintain, organise. I want to be free.

How much time will you spend there?

● That will be my permanent base.

Will you travel?

● Enormously. One of the saddest things about most gurukuls is that those who create them get trapped out there. I am the first to try and

create a gurukul which will not trap me. I will be free. I will travel extensively. I will not be a part and parcel of its running and maintenance. I do not need to be there. This is not a cult. No one will tell you what to do. You have to explore your own inner journey out there. No one will tell you it's time for meditation or time for food.



Who has designed the place?

● It is completely conceptualised and designed by me. It does not hold on to any parameters of architecture or anything like that. It is a small space. Its entrance has the traditional *gajadwar*, where people can sit down and play the *sheshna*. That door is symbolic. It shows how to transcend the traditional and enter the very modern.

How small is small?

● The nucleus is 5000 square feet. The opening is on 1st January 2000. Come and see it for yourself. From 9.99 that is 9th September this year, which is barely four months away, I will stay there permanently. I will seek renunciation, as they say. I will be painting the entire interiors of the place to begin with. The view from there is truly spectacular. It overlooks the largest lake in Goa, where the

Siberian cranes come every year.

How did you find the site? Did you see it in your mind or were you travelling that way and merely stepped off the train, as they say?

● It was a bit mystical. I was looking out for a space which was in my mind for five years, a space I could not find. Suddenly, we were crossing old Goa, I chanced upon this place. I took an instant decision that this was it. It was coincidental. I somehow felt that the space must have certain schools or thought attached to it, centuries old. I was proved right when I looked at the archaeological records. It had a school of Vedic learning right there, years and years ago. Even in the place where I am building the nucleus has a hundred ground tunnels and countless hidden wells. It still has jet black long nagas starting at you, despite all the construction work.

Any sponsors?

● None. It is funded purely from the sale of my works of art. Every bit of it.

How many people helped you build it?

● I did it single handed to begin with. Now I have contractors there. My father travels there on and off to supervise the work. I cannot entrust the work to anyone else. It is like a painting. Every stroke matters. Every tree, every plant. After all, I am going to live there for the rest of my life. I cannot afford any short cuts. That is going to be the beginning of the next phase of my life.

Thank God. I will not have to worry about why the Jehangir Art Gallery banned me. I will not have to worry about the financial demands. I will be free to do my own things out there. To discover art, myself, my future.

Mumbai, Tuesday, April 27, 1999

Bennett, Coleman & Co., Ltd.

34 pages including Bombay Times * Inquire Rs. 2

ICICI Bank
Your Savings Account. Just when you need it. ANYTIME.
We make banking a pleasure.

THE BOMBAY TIMES OF INDIA

ESTABLISHED 1838

Ring-fence all of these. A person is asked to be all down. -Mason/Prave

ICICI Bank
Your Savings Account. Just where you need it. ANYTIME.
We make banking a pleasure.



e-mail all your friends in pairs to access the times of india on <http://www.timesofindia.com>