

#print&theatre

If the new Government has no courage to come forward, let all the cultural organisations, dedicated to the cause of propagation of meaningful cultural awareness must take the initiative collectively,

Let all the CULTURAL FORCES UNITE !

Rangbharati, May, 1980

इस देश में कभी कोई  
सांस्कृतिक नीति रही ही नहीं

Untitled Newspaper, 23/07/1989

## The New Cultural Czars

First it was the princes, then it was the government, and now it's the turn of the tycoons...

GAYATRI SINHA reports on the phenomenal increase in corporate sponsorship of the arts, as business houses and industrialists vie with each other to establish themselves as the new patrons of art and culture

Express Magazine. Indian Express, 22/07/1990

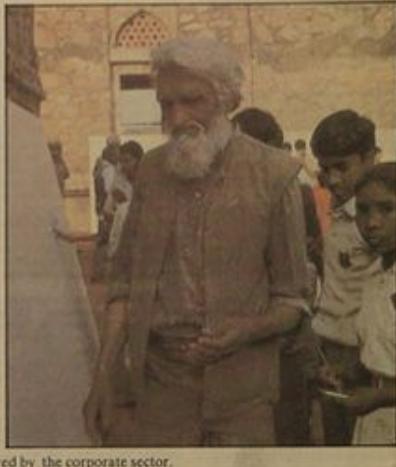
## Contextualizing Theatre and Cultural Policy in India (1980s - 90s)



Alkazi Theatre Archives

# EXPRESS magazine

INDIAN EXPRESS, SUNDAY, JULY 22, 1990



Left to right: Bismillah Khan's concert, the YSL fashion show, M. F. Husain's art demonstration: three major events sponsored by the corporate sector.

**W**HEN Zakir Hussain with a box of sea shells a brand of sea on television, when a diamond merchant in Bombay buys his first ever painting for Rs 10 lakhs, or when 600 people each day pass a Gujral mural on their way to work and back, what does one surmise? The pudgy fat of the corporate sector has begun to delve into the treasure trove of Indian arts, and the cautious patronage of the earlier period has given way to a fresh new interest in inevitable art.

The current Indian example is only one manifestation of a society's way of disposing surplus money after the usual channels of investing in real estate, stocks and gold have been saturated. In the international art scenario, for example, the flourishing yen has catapulted important Japanese collectors and leading companies into the fold as leading bidders for art. Major Indian firms buy original paintings, ranging from Rembrandt and Murrillo to Van Gogh. At home, albeit on a much smaller scale, a spectrum of the arts—be they classical music and dance, or contemporary painting—have ready support among the increasingly prosperous and competitive service and consumer-based industries, be they banks, houses, soft drink manufacturers, or cigarette and alcohol producers.

Just as the government has used on television the cream of stars to hammer home the message of national integration, companies now find the arts and artists a ready channel to win over friends and influence people. And, as a consequence, the portrait of the Indian artist as a lean and hungry man invariably changes.

At the forefront undoubtedly is the acquiring of paintings as a corporate asset. On the investor's shrewd analysis of not only what he can do for art, but what art can do for him, "Offices have become more art conscious; more and more offices are going in for original paintings, instead of the reproductions of earlier times, of graphs of project reports," says Bondona Datta of CRY, an organization that successfully spearheaded the sale of paintings four metres. If the definitive appeal of art is one aspect that prompts acquisition, the prestige it confers is another. "People are buying decorative pieces to show off their images," says industrialist Padam Modi, whose wife Rekha Modi runs the gallery Genesis and Habart in Calcutta and Delhi respectively. Certainly a Husain in the boardroom or an Anjolie Ela Menon mural on the walls lends an image of contemporary chic and acceptable opulence like nothing else does. Similarly, the glamour and dignity of classical music and dance automatically appear to accrue to those sponsors company-made. Their support to such events more and more common.

However, those outside the private sector do not necessarily see such patronage as healthy or altogether beneficial to the cause of art. "Companies making cigarettes and alcohol which are injurious to your health then try and whitewash their images by promoting art and culture," criticised one senior Delhi administration officer, directly responsible for art promotion in the capital. "They pay the leading stars, maybe less but completely neglect middle and junior level artists," he said. Jays Jaitly, a long-time handbook expert and a new diva in Delhi's changing cultural scenario, questioned the motives of the seemingly multifaceted private sponsor: "Is it to sell themselves or to genuinely promote the arts?" she questions. "After all, what are private sponsors doing to sustain art at its roots? Our roots do not lie in Siri Fort auditorium." Similarly, Dr Jyoti-

dra Jain, leading anthropologist on Indian folk and tribal arts, and director of the Crafts Museum in Delhi pinpoints the motives for art patronage as mainly to mop up black money, as well as for "the daughters and daughters-in-law of the business house to come into the limelight, to socialise with those in the art world and thereby gain in glamour."

**W**HATEVER the social forces at work, with a new level of interest designers, collectors, one-time buyers on installations, are all today part of a larger buying public. A conspicuous and major change from the mid-twenties of five decades ago, when the House of Tata began to acquire their first paintings, and set a precedent thereby for other business houses. Today the 105 existing Tata Companies have established their own levels of art patronage in greater or lesser degree, but Tata Services and Tata Steel

are fairly routine. Another company with a high profile in sponsorship of the arts is ITC with its annual Sangat Sammelan and its more recent dance festival Twilight Rhythms. Even more significantly, the ITC founded and ran Sangat Research Academy in Calcutta in since its inception in 1973, the only arts academy in India to have directly supported the dying Guru Shukla parapara. Through its effort to spot and meticulously train talent under some of India's leading gurus, the Sangat Research Academy has produced outstanding artists like Ajay Chakravarty, and the upcoming young vocalist Rashed Khan. In addition, the Academy funds considerable research in the fields of sciences of music, voice culture, development of instruments, and so on. In its twentieth year now, the ITC Sangat Sammelan this year also steps up its activities with a clutch of workshops, seminars, a fraternity meet, symposia et al., while Twilight Rhythms will also be a more enhanced affair.

location. *The Times of India*. Until 1986, the annual Jairath award, the Ashok Jain award for advertising and an occasional concert were the extent of the group's involvement. With the subsequent year 1988-89 came a sea change and an avalanche of events ranging from the annual Spice Springer and his entourage to the restoration of old manuscripts to the prestigious auction with Sotheby's on the training ship Jawahar at Bombay, which fetched returns of over Rs 45 lakhs from the sale of art works. During this time, the paper also began its festivals-with-a-theme scheme which to date has been sponsored in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Dehra Dun, Lucknow, Allahabad, Benaras, Patna and Calcutta. In addition, *The Times* has emerged as one of the most systematic and consistent buyer of art and its offices on Bahadur Shah Zafar in Delhi peppered with paintings, are an index of its burgeoning collection.

Auctions like the Christie's and Sotheby's sales, where paintings were openly sold for lakhs of

lakhs behind as a poor second best in sheer volume of sales, oil painting is widely seen as a sound investment. One apocryphal story dates back to 1953, when in a bid to help an artist in somewhat strained circumstances a young industrialist paid Rs 1000 for a painting and an amateur work of art. Today that painting is valued around Rs 18 lakhs, the painter, M.F. Husain, and the buyer, L.M. Toker, are both witness to this unprecedented boom in art.

Indeed, the industrialist as collector, and the special artist-buyer relationship that gradually grows as an interesting phenomenon. MK Modi of the Modipura group, for instance, has been a good and consistent buyer, consistently for over fifteen years. Manu Mayor of Habart Gallery states that among the regular buyers Govind Hari Singhania of JK Synthetics and Raghavji Singhania of JK Industries have built up impressive collections, and personally select the works of art.

Similarly, Godfrey Phillips, Mukund Ltd., Deutsche Bank and

only become keen art buyers but also leaders in sponsoring art camps in select spots. In the atmosphere of a pampered retreat, with sufficient materials and even the occasional evening entertainment laid on, the buyer's art collection is born. And the buyer, be it a corporate chairman or a collector, is usually contributing grants to the sponsor's collection which can then enhance the corporation's boardrooms, guest houses, calendar, and the buyer, L.M. Toker, are both witness to this unprecedented boom in art.

But present-day leaders in using Indian art to create a new corporate image are undoubtedly the Indian hotel industry. Huge European portraits of flood women in gilded frames, marble statuettes and busts of their mothers and grandmothers dominate hotel decor in the 50s and 60s. These for large Natarajas and Chola bronzes in the 70s and finally for a wide range of Indian art, both contemporary and traditional. In Delta Oberon for instance, Amar Singh Sehgal's bronze set not far from a pair of remarkable Nataraja pichwai, while nearly 600 engravings, mostly statuettes and busts, are displayed all over the hotel. Manu Mayor by Solvyns, the Daniels, Capt. Grindlays and even Emily Eden, sister of Lord Auckland, these prints have been actively acquired by the hotel since 1984.

Even more conspicuous in its patronage of modern art is ITC's Welcomgroup chain, which set the ball rolling with a mural by Krishan Khanna in its Madras hotel Chola. The following year a similar commission to Manu Mayor followed. Delhi made history.

Painted by Khanna after the fashion of a circular Buddhist Chaitya hall, the mural in its Chancery spirit of commenting on life extends over 3000 sq. feet and took two-and-a-half years to complete. The hotel has also com-

misioned some stupendous works on the theme of Indian dynasties like Meera Mukherjee's Ashok, J. Swaminathan's mural Voyage to the Sun, Chancery's trumpet's sculpture and so on. Boman Desai, designer Kanan Parki who designs and also commissions art works for the chain has used a variety of paintings in the hotel's executive centre, making the Maurya one of Delhi's biggest repositories of art.

Looking beyond art acquisition however, some companies are attempting a more comprehensive nature of patronage. "Buying is a one-time exercise," says Akhilesh Mittal of Grindlays Bank. We are not doing that. We do, and we do not do it in a single affair. Grindlays can boast of an art gallery each at our Amritsar Branch in Madras, and the Bhulabhai Desai Branch in Bombay, where artists are from time to time invited to participate in special exhibitions. For over a decade now, the bank has organized Kala Sangams or cultural festivals in different parts of the country, and also supported larger causes like Helpage. Moreover, Grindlays sponsored the opening of the Festival of India in England, an important *guru-shishya* programme series of concerts, as well as the India mela at the Festival of France.

But while there may have been a blip streak in buying in recent years, the actual creation and sup-

port to art institutions lags far behind. The handful of existing centres set up at a time when training centres for dance and music, or museum facilities, were almost non-existent, performed a signal service. But subsequently, there have been no new entrants in a field still dominated by the Birla Academy in Calcutta, the NCPA in Bombay, the Kansara Centre for the Arts, Darpana Academy and the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad, and the Seiram Centre for Art and Culture and the Sri Ram Bharatiya Kala Kendra in Delhi. Numerous top flight artists and scholars have directly benefited from the services of such institutions in training and nurturing talents.

**B**UT even within this small charmed circle there are glaring lacunae. Such centres tend to be controlled by family members especially daughters and daughter-in-law, whose level of interest may not rise above the desultory. An innovative approach to the arts, as well as adequate compensation to in-house reporters, has become a rarity, not infrequently resulting in strikes or mass resignations within reverenties. Worse, there have been cases of such premises being mauled for commercial purposes.

But, after the euphoria of glistering samelans, five-star cocktail jamborees and fashionable art auctions dies down, where is such interest in the arts heading? Is the best artist, the best singer just skimmed to cream off the milk to build a super-rich image for the arts benefitting? Clearly the corporate sponsor, with his substantial purse, pays larger fees, collects larger crowds, hires bigger audiences and thereby creates a kind of corporate art, where the more modest community art once existed. As a result, the small-time impresario, the neighbourhood society, or the seasonal sabbha usually find the finest artists quite beyond their reach. Secondly, the more junior level artists have no place in this star school. Jays Jaitly is equally the big city bias of such arts promotions and says: "Why are we judging art and culture by what some of the upper middle class in Delhi can go to or be seen about? We should not ratify everything."

Moreover, the corporate sector's tendency to sell the preexisting art collection in whatever amounts ensures return, also amounts to creating a caste hierarchy within the arts community. Thus classical and dance are finding ready patronage, while experimentation, innovation or the socially communitative attract no support. It is easier then for a play like "Run for your Wife" to find a sponsor, than it is for a first rate folk ensemble, or a creative dance venture.

It is here perhaps that the corporate sector as a mature and discerning sponsor still has to discover and nurture its role. All that has gone before us is only one small first step, and a gallery owner like Shammi Mehndrihan is cynical in his assessment when he says, "At the age of 70, after 40 years of the patronage of three prime ministers, Husain sells a painting for ten lakhs, so what? Every week, three inch by six inch miniatures are sold in the capital for that price, but nobody talks about them." On the other hand, Dr Jyotindra Jain, comparing the relative merits of the business patron via a via the government believes that "unlike the government, the corporate sector, not constrained by bureaucratic fetters and not necessarily compelled to follow established norms and conventions" would be ideally suited to encourage the spirit of innovation and experimentation, so essential for the healthy growth of the arts.



Yet another privately sponsored performance: dancing is big business.

Interestingly, competition in the market place has spilled over into competition in supporting the arts. On the heels of the ITC sammelan, VST Industries of Hyderabad, another major cigarette company, launched its Spirit of Freedom concert, and the company's Marketing and Corporate Communications Manager, Farooq Shah, reveals that of the Rs 100 million budget VST spends 25 per cent on the arts, and 25 per cent on sports. 1989-90 was an especially active year, with several concerts financed through the country, culminating in the presentation of the Spirit of Freedom award to Pt. Ravi Shankar. Sculpted by Satish Gujral for Rs 45,000 this occasion is perhaps the company's only form of support to the plastic arts.

A relatively more recent but aggressive entrant to the culture caravan has been Bennett Coleman and Co. and its flagship pub-

lic host of other companies have emerged as prominent buyers. Reenu Modi of Gallery Expace, and Sadhu Khular of the Centre for Contemporary Art, both recently opened galleries in Delhi, describe the buying modalities offered by the same. Any serious investor wants to acquire the ten or fifteen paintings as good investments, added against inflation and so on. "After that they get interested, and come back to buy what they like," says Khular.

**I**NTERESTINGLY, even the usually staid public sector, following the example of Air India perhaps, has emerged as an important buyer-patron. The Computer Maintenance Corporation (CMC) with its very successful in-house gallery in Delhi, HUCDO and the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad, have not