

THE BACKDROP

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1. Soloman Joseph Soloman, *Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III*, 1926, oil on canvas, courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)



2. Ranjitsingh Gaekwad, *Laxmi Vilas Palace*, 1994, ink on paper, 56 x 76 cm, coll.: arIsi

Historically, the art of Baroda stretches back to antiquity. The discovery in 1949 of a hoard of bronze sculpture at Akota,¹ now a residential suburb to the west of the city, corroborates this. The sculptures in the celebrated gateway of the Solanki era at Dabhoi and the magnificent monuments of the Sultanate period at Champaner also fall within the boundaries of the erstwhile Baroda state.

Modern Vadodara, which derives its name from the older *Vatapadraka*—literally, 'a dwelling by the banyans'—seems to have grown in prominence in the eighteenth century, although most of it was built in the nineteenth. The vast complexes of the Laxmi Vilas and other palaces, the campuses of the Baroda College and Kalabhavan, the massive austere structure of Nyaya Mandir, the Mandvi tower, Leharipura gate and bridges across the river Vishwamitri bear testimony to large-scale building activity during the reign of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III (1881-1939). He was the chief 'architect' of modern Baroda in more than one sense of the term. Deeply interested in town planning, the enlightened ruler saw to the inclusion of parks, lakes, *maidans* for sports and recreation, and wide roads lined with trees along with the building of civic and domestic structures. He appointed the well known British engineers R.F. Chisolm and Major R.N. Mant as state architects and even established an *imaratkhan*

for the upkeep of public buildings. Chisolm designed the central hall of Baroda College with its imposing dome, possibly the second largest in the country. It was Mant who chose to have a squarish tower with small *chhatris* to crown Laxmi Vilas palace, the royal residence. The two structures which rise in prominence over the Baroda skyline, now rivalled by the mushrooming 'modern' high-rise, complement each other and characterize the emergent cultural ethos of the Sayajirao era.

Besides these architectural landmarks, the stately palaces of Makarpura, Nazarbagh and Lai Bagh, the General Hospital, the spacious Khanderao market with *shikhara-like* towers and the monastic building with a cloistered courtyard now known as D.N. Hall (which faces the university cricket ground) indicate the varied architectural choices of the pre- and post-Sayajirao periods. Chisolm and Mant collaborated on the design of the elegant Museum and Picture Gallery, combining the elaborate wooden framework of the Marathi *wada* with elements of European design—including a glass roof—in Kamati (committee) Bagh. The brick-faced structures along the periphery of the Sursagar lake, including the one that houses the Faculty of Performing Arts, reveal similar influences. The now ramshackle Residency, with its faded neo-classical grandeur, strikes a note different from the so-called 'Indo-Saracenic' mode² employed almost everywhere



3. Laxmi Vilas palace, Baroda, 1890, courtesy Comptroller of Household to Gaekwad of Baroda (photo by Jyoti Bhatt)

else; it is a symbol of the protracted presence of the British ruling elite in Maratha Baroda.

These surviving structures enable the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to be present in our midst today. At the time of their construction, they represented a new culture: the increasing use of industrial material and technologies had a profound and far-reaching effect on architecture. Metal and brick had supplanted the older components of traditional structures, materials which could be carved for specific architectural use. The emergent architectural aesthetic prized structural 'purity' and used comparatively plain facades, with masonic joints forming units. The use of brick facades in a large number of public buildings in Baroda bear out this functional attitude. More telling is the token acknowledgement the vast brick-faced structure of the Baroda College pays to sculpture by including tiny terracotta figurines in its lower skirtings. The separation of structure and ornament was rooted as much in the post-Renaissance rationalism that sought to sweep the western world free of its ornate Gothic 'bias', as in the new architectural materials. New boundaries between the now specialized professions of architecture and art often relegated the latter to the status of 'decoration' in the service of the former. So while sculptures on pedestals decorated parks, fountains and road junctions and painting was assigned a hanging place on the wall, the discipline of architecture sought to remove or reduce 'externals'—sculptural or pictorial 'ornament'—from its body.

Laxmi Vilas Palace

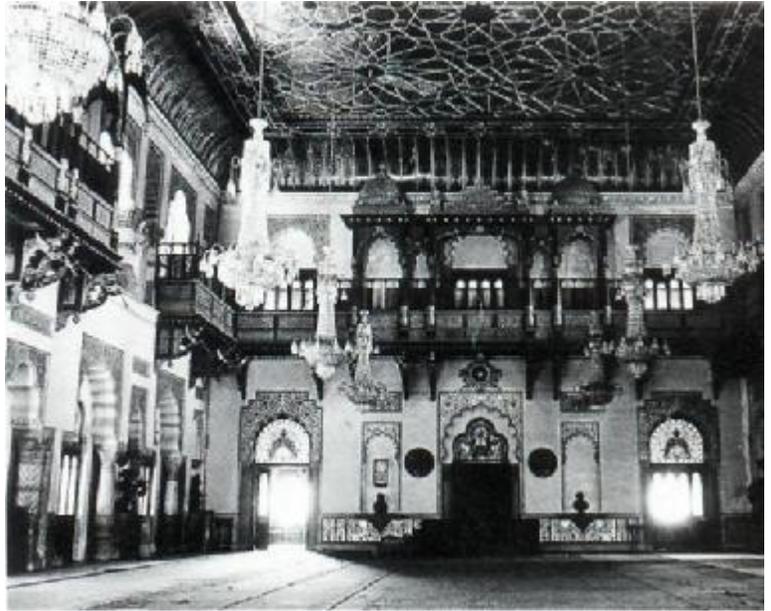
The design of the Laxmi Vilas palace stands at the crossroads, so to speak, of these two approaches. Its dramatic facade, profusely carved with sculptural ornament, is meant to lend embellishment to more austere interiors. With the avowed ideal of synthesizing the best of the east and the west, it combines oriental pattern with European design, a characteristic of the 'Indo-Saracenic' mode that Mant and Chisolm had espoused. The role each tradition was expected to play within its respective place is thus subtly suggested. Built in 1890 in honour of the young maharani Laxmibai (whose name was changed to Chimnabai on her marriage to Sayajirao and who did not live to see its completion), the yellow sandstone palace comprises 170 rooms. It is 512 feet wide and is set in 744 acres of woodland that now adjoins a blackbuck sanctuary.³ Its 212-foot high four-cornered tower incorporates multiple legacies, including those of a Rajput *kirtistambha*, a Mughal *minar* and a medieval *campanile*. While its arches, domes and floral patterns claim kinship with the royal residences of the Rajputs and Mughals, the overall planning of its structure, especially its internal spaces, reflects that of the palaces of the Europe of its day. A marble fountain and a staircase with sculptural replicas of Bacchus and Venus; rooms, halls and passages with stucco mouldings; and a pond in front guarded by gladiators (fig-leaf and all) complete its ostensible western ambience. Planned while



4. *Couple on a Simhasana*, east wall, Darbar Hall, Laxmi Vilas palace, (Murano "Workshop, Venice), 1890, mosaic, courtesy Comptroller of Household to Gaekwad of Baroda (photo by jyoti Bhatt)

the maharaja was a minor, the grandiose dimensions of the palace were meant to induce in the budding king a sense of awe for western culture. Sayajirao, however, later developed a distaste for extravagant structures. He felt ill at ease with the mould cast for Indian rulers by their British overlords.⁴

The place of sculpture and painting in the architectural scheme of the palace was defined in terms of the square and rectangular masonic modules fitted into facades, balconies, towers and empty walls. Broadly, one could say that the patterned motifs were drawn from Indian prototypes and the figures from European models. The 'decorations' incorporated motifs of diverse origins. For instance, the facade has Rajasthani *jarokhas* and a canopy drawn from a Bengali roof-style; the terrace has Rajasthani *chhatris*, a Mughal dome and a medieval temple *shikhara*—with Roman heads jutting out of the *amalaka*. The figural sculptures representing muses of various kind were specially designed by the resident court artist, Augusto Felici from Italy.⁵ Inside the entrance hall, there is an allegorical representation of the 'spirit' of architecture in the form of a semi-nude lady with a compass in hand and tiny little wings sprouting from her cerebrum—



5. Interior, Darbar Hall, Laxmi Vilas palace, 1890, courtesy Comptroller of Household to Gaekwad of Baroda (photo by Tejal Parikh)

a proud display of the conventions of academic sentimentalia!

The spacious Darbar Hall offers further food for thought on the east-west *jugalbandi* of art and architecture. It might well serve as a leitmotif of the cultural climate of the time. Its tone is set by a large mosaic on its outer facade which depicts a royal wedding in what could well be termed a marriage of styles. The coy bride, ostensibly unmindful of her undraped bust and gazed at intently by her Marathi spouse, is dressed somewhat ambiguously. The couple are seated on a modest marble *simhasana* and are attended upon by a Marathi maid holding a peacock feather fan, a Gaekwadi guardian soldier in the posture of a Roman athlete, a blonde semi-nude angel showering roses from above, and a pair of rather lackadaisical monkeys. A flaming stack of logs on the left casts thin veins of smoke in what appears to be a huge dark grey-green screen of cloud and foliage set against a golden sky. The unrealistic theatricality of conventionalized postures disguised in 'realistic' rendering stems from the conventions of the academic ateliers of Europe, whereas the ethnic costumes and jewellery come from the colourful 'Crown of the Empire'. The designer of the mosaic, and the Murano Workshop of Venice which executed it, seemed not to have been conversant with the Hindu marriage ritual and its symbolic aspect. More significantly, the awareness that such heavy-handed realism with flames rising from a log-pile and emitting ominous dark smoke-clouds might not be conducive to the evocation of an auspicious ritual was also absent. Such incongruity notwithstanding, the mosaic shows greater skill in the portrayal of embers, flame and smoke than in the stereotyped figuration.

To return to the Darbar Hall: its interior has a richly enamelled painted ceiling vying for attention with the elaborate



6. Augusto Felici, Marble Relief, interior, Laxmi Vilas palace, 1890, courtesy Comptroller of Household to Gaekwad of Baroda (photo by Jyoti Bhatt)

marble and ceramic flooring. On its western side hang delicately carved screens set in wooden balconies. These enabled the royal ladies to observe the ceremonies below without being seen. The screens are supported by sari-clad winged caryatids blowing trumpets from the brackets. Marble muses, including one in a sari, holding variously a brush, lute, scroll and hammer, waft between the balconies; they presumably represent painting, music, law and engineering respectively. The eastern wall blazes bright with the acidic hues of four stained glass windows portraying muscular deities rendered in hard chiaroscuro, like latterday oleographs. The lower half of the walls accommodates black or white marble busts and medallions of nobles and notables arrayed on alternating relief columns. These in turn are framed by squared stucco vaults lined with golden bits of ceramic mosaic.

The decorations, designed to display skills rather than to achieve a unity of diverse elements, project the unique features of each craft. The devices and motifs, illusionistic or otherwise, and forms which may be organic or geometric, plain or ornate, are assembled with an intent to interject into each other and are curiously held together in what appears to be a heterogeneous whole. Perhaps the matching compatibilities of skills and designs neutralize their

angularities to form an eclectic togetherness. The mixture of multiple modes, methods and materials, for all its seeming arbitrariness, serves the purpose for which the Darbar Hall was designed: to serve as a backdrop, a setting flexible enough for any gathering—a coronation or the daily court, a formal meeting or a concert or dance soiree; as such, it was not to obtrude upon the eyes of the audience with any awe-inspiring opulence. In essence, it was intended to provide each performance with a choice of trajectories from the multifarious spaces and emblems on its walls.

The eclecticism of the Laxmi Vilas palace therefore need not be taken at face value. It provides opportunities to view the contemporary context in a larger perspective. The complex polemic of motifs interwoven in its design is full of meanings other than architectural ones; perhaps it hints at the role the state can play in changing times; perhaps it subtly suggests a blueprint for a broad polity. Sayajirao, who saw himself standing in the gap between two civilizations—western 'progress' and Indian 'tradition'—must have realized the need to turn the conflict of cultures into a dialogue. Here, the state could offer liberal spaces through reform and tradition for diverse communities and cultures to coexist. The princely ruler knew that reform could be effective only provided it did not enter into a conflict with tradition. Hence he chose education as the spearhead of reform; education, with its long-term implications, would ensure a measured pace rather than the speedier progress he personally might have preferred. And by education he understood something larger than mere verbal literacy; he encouraged visual and aural education by establishing and promoting music and visual art fora and institutions. Interestingly, the establishment of a college of Indian music reinforced the sustaining of tradition while the art school at Kalabhavan exemplified 'reform' within the existing system.

Sayajirao saw to it that public places in the city were embellished with sculptures. The equestrian bronze statue of Sayajirao by Derwent Wood (1920) in the square facing Sayaji (or Kamati) Bagh is among the most accomplished monumental sculptures anywhere. It is no wonder that the *Kalaghoda* has acquired the status of an outstanding landmark of Baroda. The more austere enthroned image of the ruler by Bertola from Paris (1934) in the park facing the railway station has a regal demeanour and is no less distinguished in execution. A highly dextrous equestrian figure of Shivaji by Ganpatrao Kashinath Mhatre (1934), south of the Museum and Picture Gallery, has an imposing presence. Strolling about the parks and squares, one encounters a number of busts, full figures, even neo-classical nymphs and Greek gladiators. Two statues in Sayaji Bagh, each titled *Brave Boy of Dhari, Amreli*, by V.P. Karmarkar and G.K. Mhatre respectively, are a touching counterpoint valorizing the courageous fight of two village boys against a tiger during one of the hunting expeditions of Sayajirao.



7. Courtyard, Sureshwar Desai *haveli*, Ghantiada, Baroda, constructed in 1790 (photo by jyoti Bhatt)

Few princely states in India used culture as a means to reach out to the populace as seriously as did Baroda during the reign of Sayajirao. The sagacious statesman knew that while an eclectic cultural policy might help cement the rift between the traditional east and the modern west, it might also ensure a lasting place for the Gaekwads in Gujarat. With its long tradition of pluralism, of absorbing diverse cultures, Gujarat could accommodate, or even welcome, a Marathi guest in its fold.

The *Haveli*

Architecturally, this multicultural setting ruled out any sense of incongruity in the presence of an ornate wooden *haveli* in the company of austere civic buildings. Rooted in a wider pan-Indian context, the tradition of wooden mansions has a long, unbroken history in Gujarat. A counterpoint to the colonial bungalow, the indigenous *haveli* had evolved a collective functionality appropriate to the needs of a joint family system and to the domestic patterns of middle and upper class urban communities. It followed the format of a *khadki* where several families of a community lived in close proximity sharing both a common open veranda and a surrounding wall; the latter ensured both security and a definite identity.

A *haveli* too would be situated within a *pol* or lane inhabited by kinsfolk sharing the same customs, creed and professions.

Inside its three- or four-storeyed structure there were fluid spaces for impromptu variations of sleeping and business requirements. The movements of male and female members in most Gujarati brahmin-vaishya households were less strictly demarcated than they were in Rajput and Muslim homes (where the *zenana* was assigned a definite space). The functions of traditional architectural features such as *parsal*, *osari* (veranda) and *ordo* (living or bedroom) varied according to changing needs. Women might move forward to the *parsal* from the kitchen or congregate in the *chowk* (central courtyard) for washing clothes and utensils while the men were away. Community customs or seasonal variations would influence change in sleeping spaces—from the *ordo* to the *parsal* or vice versa. The accommodative principle being central to such a system of living, the possessive impulse as well as privacy were hindered.

With its doors generally open throughout the day, the *haveli* overlooked the neighbourhood, which in turn spilled into the interior—leaving spaces in a state of continuous flux and boundaries between the inside and the outside diffused. Interestingly, the *haveli* invariably included a cistern but no garden. Its wooden exteriors were made up of

exquisitely carved sculptures but there was hardly any permanent furniture except a moveable cot or *hinchko* (swing). Occasionally, murals decorated its walls but the hanging of pictures was alien to the system. Improvisational propensities would allow a living space to turn into an office or a *kacheri*; the *haveli* of Sureshwar Desai and its likes in Baroda and Vaso follow the standard pattern.

Broadly speaking, any architectural spatial unit of a *haveli* could project sculptural ornament but embellishment was profuse on the facades, balconies and courtyards. Motifs of elephant heads, composite *vyala* figures, dancers and musicians, celestial or earthly, interspersed with iconic images and geometric floral patterns, covered most external surfaces in a play of intricate and broad rhythms. It is customary to attribute figural imagery to Hindu sources and geometric patterns to Islamic ones, but the Baroda *havelis*, including the temple-types (for example, the Mairal), reveal shared use of motifs without sectarian considerations. This coincides with the continued and free incorporation of certain images conventionally debarred from the repertory of residential structures. Despite the strictures passed against the portrayal of *yakshas*, *nagas*, *gandharvas*, chariots, horses, elephants, lions, and so on in the *Sarnaranganasutradhara*, these motifs find a place in the carvings of the *haveli*.⁶ Since the inventory of the carver contained a vast repertory of religious and secular motifs, the alternation of these between temple and house would be a natural outcome; even if it was not approved of, it was not objected to, either. This overlap brought into the precincts of the temple images of human concern, just as it brought the sacred home to guard against evil eyes. It is in fact characteristic of all motifs of sculptural embellishment—elephant or creeper, musician or intricate geometric pattern—to be in a state of continuous animation, suffused with a living presence to suit all abodes, divine or domestic.

It is difficult to ascribe the widespread use of wood in this architecture simply to a surplus of timber or to scarcity of stone in the region, for records prove otherwise.⁷ With a few isolated pockets, such as Dang in south Gujarat producing a rather inferior quality of timber, the best teak came from nearby Daman or distant Malabar or was even imported from Burma by sea. Was it that a traditional love of a resilient and sensuous material caused its continued use through centuries? Or was it the availability of structural and craft expertise in wood? Or was it both? An interchanging relationship existed between wood and the more durable stone, in woodcraft and masonry. The interaction was strengthened by the collective work-practice of the artist-craftsmen's guilds of medieval India. The stone carvings of the *vav* (step-well) of Adalaj, the Sun temple of Modhera and the Sultanate monuments of Ahmedabad indicate a sharing of craft techniques, design and even structural devices between these and the wooden *havelis* of Patan, Vaso, Ahmedabad and Baroda.



8. Facade Mural, Trambaklal Dave's *haveli*, Sojitra, tempera on lime plaster (photo by Ranjit Contractor)

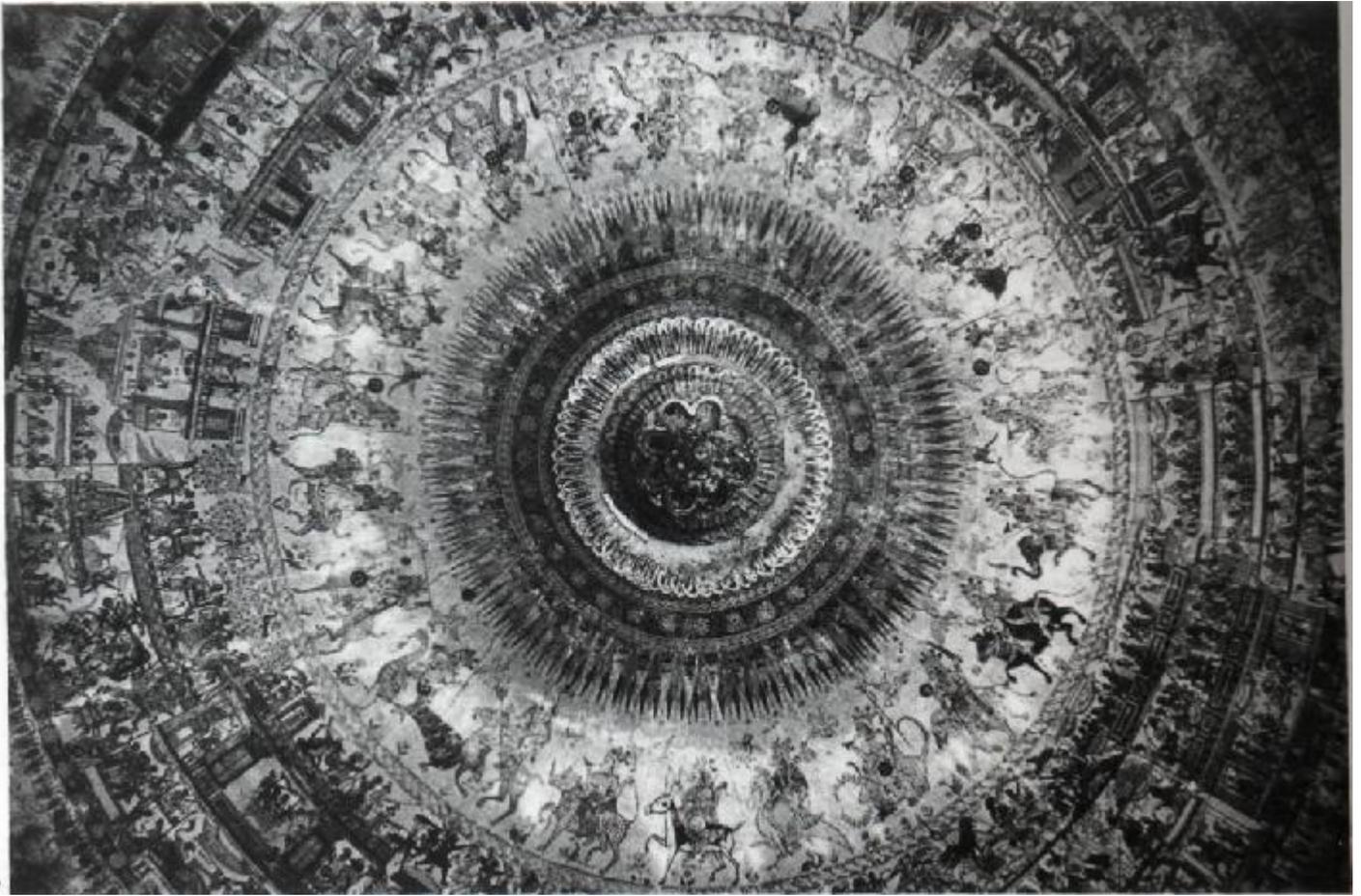
Wood being its principal material, a *haveli* was as much carved as built, facilitating internal integration of sculpture in the architectural form. Moreover, in consonance with most sculptural traditions of the world, all exposed surfaces of the *haveli* were painted. So, besides sculpture, even painting was not viewed as an external 'decoration' but rather as part of the planning and execution of a building. While sculpture—carved or uncarved—performed the functions of structural components, painting and lacquering served the dual functions of preserving and embellishing wooden surfaces. The wall, too, attracted as much embellishment as the rest of the architectural structure, making the domestic interior a virtual repository of visual form. The traditional belief that blank spaces are devoid of beauty, that the empty could be equated with the inauspicious, left nothing of the living environment uncarved or unpainted.



Murals

Outstanding among the fully painted structures in Baroda is what remains of the mid-nineteenth century Tambekar Wada situated in the heart of the city. Presumably not an isolated example, the painted house was part of a larger tradition. The domes of the Kamnath Mahadev temple at the northern edge of Kamati Bagh and the Suryanarayan temple in the city, and those of Kashivishwanath and Girijashankar at Chandod and Bhilapur⁸ respectively, provide evidence of an extended tradition of painted architectural environments. Another example of this tradition at Hampheshwar is now threatened with submersion when the Sardar Sarovar waters

evidence has emerged in recent years⁹ of a flourishing tradition of domestic murals in the adjoining towns of Bharuch and Kheda districts, once part of the Baroda state. It is difficult to establish if there was a Baroda 'school' of painting¹⁰ in the absence of sufficient data, but the indications are that there existed a wide network of guilds of artists and masons in and around the city. The semi-professional group who are inconspicuously engaged today in making and embellishing roadside shrines are a surviving remnant of the more professional collectives of the bygone era. Whereas Tambekar Wada refers clearly to a more sophisticated 'court' culture of miniatures and palace mural of Rajasthan, the temple murals fall into the category of



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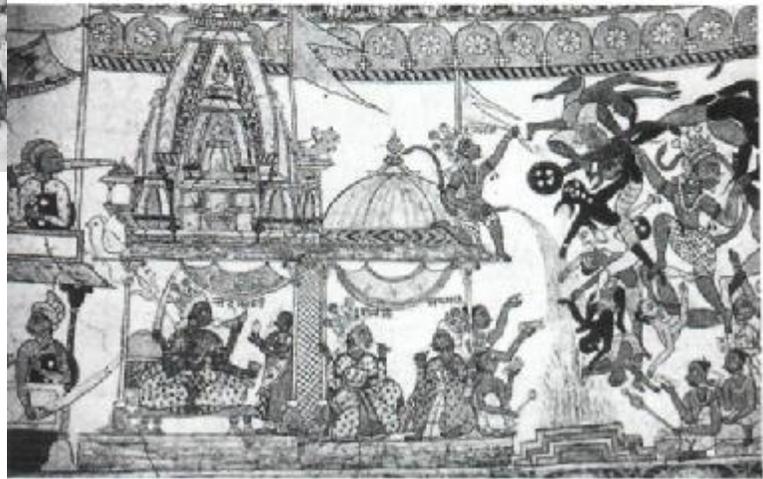
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9. Mural, dome, Kashivishwanath temple, Chandod (architect: Bhagwan Salat), 1782, tempera on lime plaster (photo by Jyoti Bhatt)

10. Jashbhai Ratilal Soni's house, Sojitra, tempera on lime plaster (photo by Ranjit Contractor)

operating at other social levels and mixing 'folk' and 'classical' with ease, the 'popular' tradition thrived on impromptu improvisations. That it could combine diverse conventions, even of the 'sacred' with the 'profane', speaks of the expansive nature of this often misunderstood and neglected genre. Indeed puritanical thematic segregation had little effect on the popular mind, which saw nothing incongruous in railway trains, *firangis*, lovers, wrestlers, even criminals being portrayed alongside episodes from the *Ramayana*, *Krishna-leela* or the Puranas. Like a vast panorama, somewhat like a processional congregation, the murals could accommodate everything, without fear of profanity or sacrilege. Each of these images had a place of its own in the scheme of things as a vignette of life or a witty *sanchari* aside¹¹ for the individual viewer, visitor or inhabitant of the house. In another sense it can be posited that life amidst the milling and multifarious crowds outside the threshold was reflected in the painted *samsar* indoors, in the murals which linked the outside with the inside as they did the profane with the sacred.

The research undertaken by Ramesh Pandya¹² shows that a pronouncedly Gujarati character is evident in this popular tradition of murals. Use of the motif of *ramandip*, a ceremonial lamp carried in marriage processions, and depiction of figures with the typical *Amdavadi pagadi* in the Bhilapur

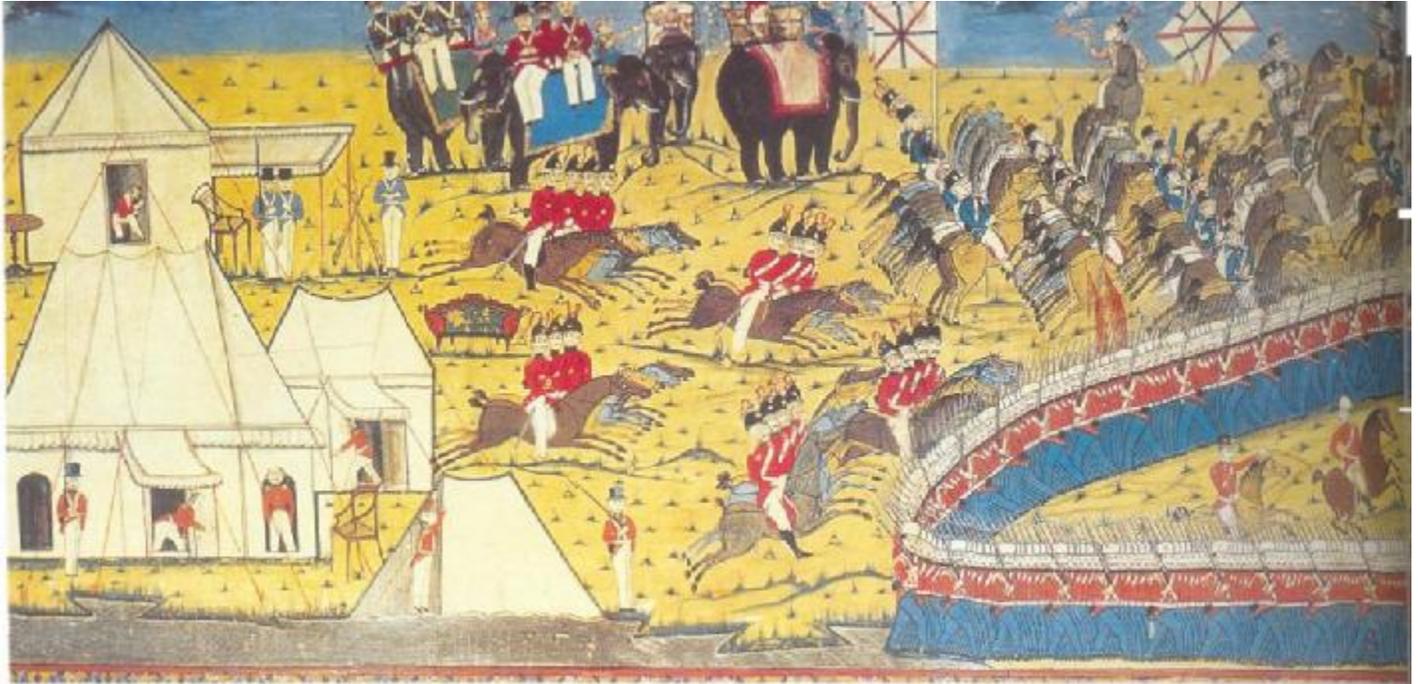


11. Mural, Kamnath Mahadeo temple, Sayaji Bagh, Baroda, tempera on lime plaster (photo by JyotiBhatt). 12. Mural, north wall, Manubhai Somabhai Patel's house, Dharmaj, tempera on lime plaster (photo by Ramesh Pandya). 13. *Hanuman Desecrating Yajna*, Mural (detail), Kashivishwanath temple, Chandod, 1782, tempera on lime plaster (photo by jyotiBhatt)

mural are indications of this. The local goddesses of Gujarat, especially Bahuchara, also appear frequently. More characteristic, however, are the mythical creatures. A gigantic bird, *Anal*, that picks up seven little elephants in its talons and feathers to feed the insatiable appetites of its seven fledglings, illustrates a locally prevalent tale based on older traditions. A fantastic composite creature, *Ajab Guljohari Janvar*, with its four-legged fish-scaled body, peacock feet, tiger-thighs and female upper body, depicted blowing the *shehnai*, must also have been a local concoction despite its links with characters in wider popular lore, including *The Arabian Nights*.

All this is improvised with a full-blooded *joie de vivre*, often with robust visuals. Sparkling with bold humour or back-handed innuendo, the inventive visuals must have lent levity to the grave tenor of more 'serious' narratives. A pet dog placed between the legs of a saluting *firangi* soldier, or Ganesha's presence in the marriage procession of his parents are expressive of this kind of fun. Eccentric figuration and improvisation ranging from idiosyncratic caricature to naturalistic representation are employed without self-consciousness, giving the murals a disarming, life-loving buoyancy. The nameless artists of these murals also bring home the truth that a conventional society need not be closed and rigid. The murals demonstrate that it responded to changes and was capable of incorporating them into its scheme of things.

The urban murals were unabashed in their use of



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14. *Battle Scene* (siege of Dabhoi?), north wall, Tambekar Wada, Baroda, AD 1849-54, tempera on lime plaster, © Archaeological Survey of India. 15. *Krishnaleela* (detail), east wall, Tambekar Wada, Baroda, AD 1849-54, tempera on lime plaster, © Archaeological Survey of India. 16. *Sbeshashayi*, north wall, second floor, Tambekar Wada, Baroda, AD 1849-54, tempera on lime plaster, © Archaeological Survey of India. (All photos by jyotiBhatt.)





17. Mural, Girjashankar temple, Bhilapur, 1731, tempera on lime plaster.
 18. *Analbird and Ajab Guljohari Janwar*, Mural, Shantilal Mithalal Patel's house, Karakhadi, tempera on lime plaster. (Photos by Ramesh Pandya.)

eclecticism as a means to expand their visual repertory and their popular appeal—which must have provided the means for their survival. For obvious reasons, murals in the temples were more circumspect but nonetheless not averse to appropriating new values. The ritual space of a temple could not fling its doors open to winds of change, yet a closer look at the magnificent murals on the dome of the Kashivishwanath temple at Chandod reveals a discreet overstepping of convention to introduce contemporary ideas. The sculptured divinities on the outer circle strike the austere stances required of iconic images but the figures in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* panels are more human, vulnerable and endearing. The principal protagonist here could even assume the persona of a local princeling, gesticulating, and flaunting *jamās* with a moustache to match. Though Ravana conforms to his recognizable ten-headed, twenty-armed *svarupa*, his rifle-toting soldiers don *firangi* uniforms and are provided with firearms and cannons. These quasi-playful characters, rendered with zest and humour evoke their equivalents in local theatre forms, especially the *Bhavati* of which Chandod had been an important centre. The serial laying out of successive episodes, overlapping sometimes, with the names of characters inscribed in the manner of a *sutradhar* announcing their entries on a stage, bear out even formal affinities.

The convention of circular panels depicting stories from the epics and Puranas in tiered registers is older and wider; it shares attributes with such Rajasthani murals as those of Parashuramapura in Shekhawati. The Chandod dome-mural appears to have been conceived as a grand ornament. Populous and executed in exuberant detail, it is painted in bold black linear forms on a white lime ground intervened with ochre. The painted images of circulating panels zoom out from a deep floral orb at the centre of an overhanging ceiling to assume physical *avatars* in the sculptural emanations at the rim of the dome's inner base. These ambulating visuals in revolving rings magically lift the concave canopy, a *vitana*, to make its weighty dome levitate. The viewer caught in the process of reading the episodes ends up circumambulating the central orb. The pace of his or her movements is guided by the slow or fast rhythms induced by the varying scale of figures and the punctuating architectural motifs. The dizzying continuum of the circulating movements has the viewer seek relief by stopping to examine odd details. And he or she discovers that the vast epic narrative includes episodes surely barred from a conventional repertory. The portrayal of Hanuman brazenly urinating upon a *yajna* being performed by Mahiravana for the victory of his brother Ravana speaks volumes for the vast capacity of the complex tradition to absorb a variety of deflective, even subversive influences. Just as the *Bhavai* uses wit, sarcasm and bawdy humour to deflate puritanical beliefs, so too its counterpart tradition of painting upturns hypocritical notions of propriety.



19. *Pilajirao Gaekwad*, 19th century, gouache (?), 49 x 41 cm, courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)

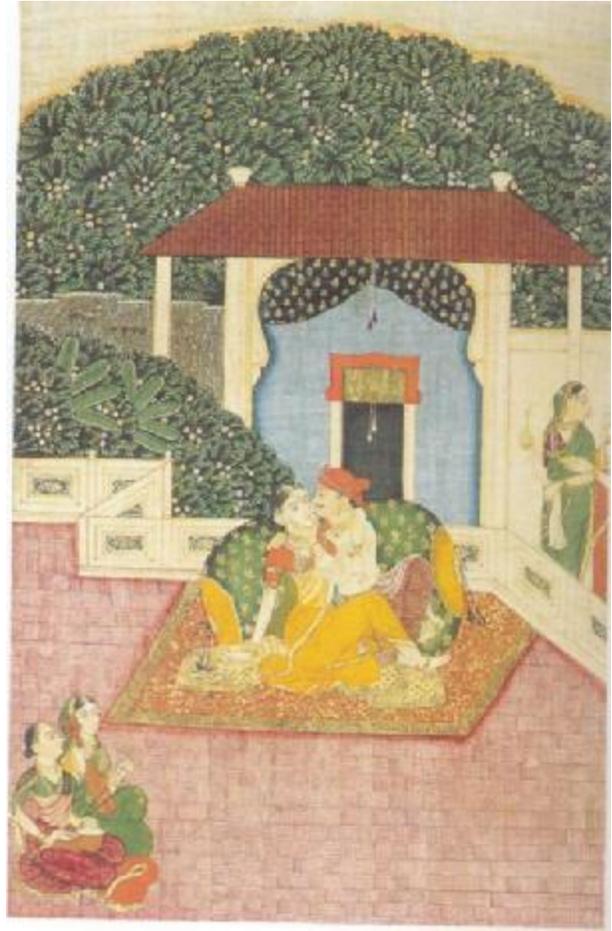
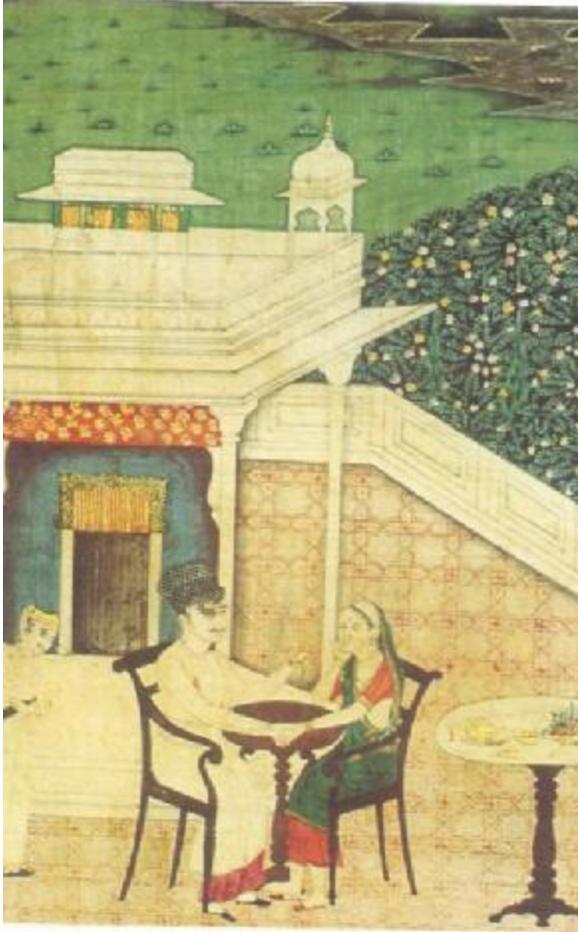
of the house, is thus separated from the hall, where guests must have been received. Worked in *secco* or *tempera* on a dry lime ground, the subsequently burnished walls glisten like marble, a technique similar to that employed in the *havelis* and palaces of Rajasthan. All wooden surfaces are painted in opaque water-based pigments varnished with lacquer.

The surviving murals evince the presence of several hands or 'schools', not to mention the number of genres and themes they represent. While the upper portions of the walls portray narrative episodes, the middle spaces bear individual figures. The door-frames have ornate floral patterns with occasional little fairies woven into them. On entering the first floor one finds a north wall covered with an unidentified scene from the Maratha-British battle¹⁴ in the 'Company' style.¹⁵ The eastern and western walls have the *Bhagavata-purana*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, respectively, painted in a broadly Rajasthani *qalam*. The walls of the enclosure at the southern end are covered with the *Mahishasuramardini*, *Draupadi Vastraharan* and puranic themes in a looser Mewar mode. Between the doors, against a pale yellow ground, are posted uniformed European and Rajput soldiers

Besides those at Chandod, the circular panels depicting the *Rasaleela* at Hampsheshwar have the charm of a latterday *Pichhawai*. The murals in the temples at Bhilapur and Kamati Bagh in Baroda display the same degree of change in the methods of improvising a common theme as might be produced by two different groups of narrators. The Bhilapur rendering is denser, with an accelerated pace, whereas the Kamati Bagh temple is painted in a broader, and somewhat looser *qalam*. While this may indicate a slight weakening of pulse the latter temple is clearly a viable example of the surviving idiom of the Baroda 'school' of murals.

Tambekar Wada

Tambekar Wada, the painted house of Bhau Tambekar (Vithal Khanderao), Diwan of Baroda (1849-54), belongs to the pre-Victorian era. The lone survivor of the *wada* tradition of Maharashtra, its quadrangular three-storeyed structure with a central courtyard resembles the floor-plan of *havelis*, but it does not contain any carvings. Two rooms in its eastern wing have murals painted all over; the rest have been lost or effaced. The interiors, the painted walls, columns, doors and windows (right down to the jambs and sills), are specimens of a total visual environment. The first floor is divided by a carved screen; a narrow enclosure, presumably for the lady

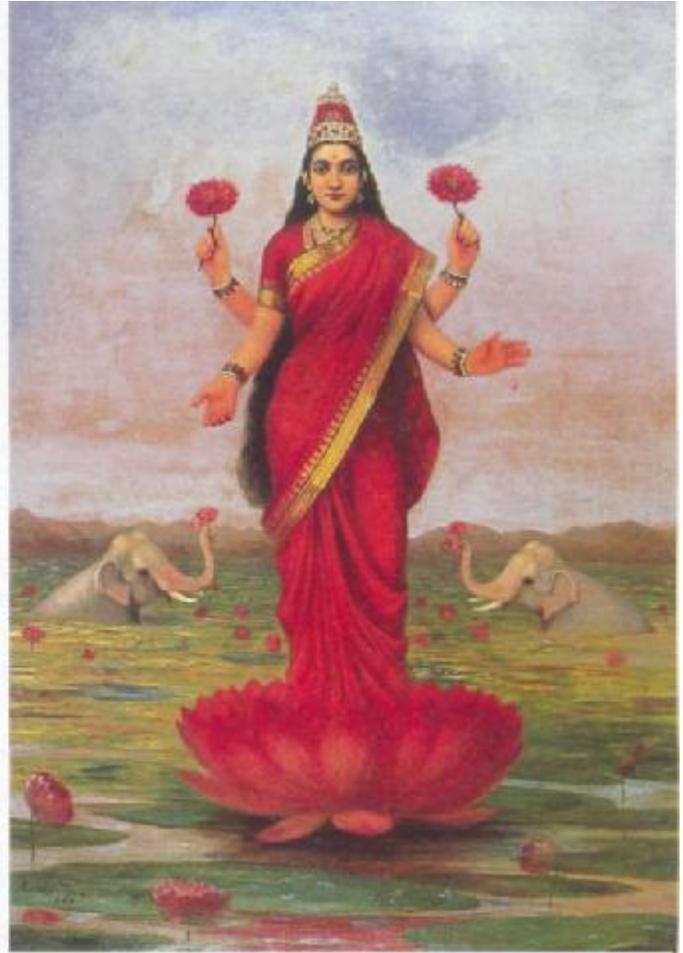


20. *Parsi Couple*, east wall, Tambekar Wada, Baroda, AD 1849-54, tempera on lime plaster, © Archaeological Survey of India (photo by jyoti Bhatt).
21. *Amorous Couple*, west wall, Tambekar Wada, Baroda, AD 1849-54, tempera on lime plaster, © Archaeological Survey of India (photo by jyoti Bhatt).
22. Ravi Varma (?), *Maharaja Malharrao*, 19th century, painted photograph, 53 x 37 cm, courtesy Maharaja Fatesingh Museum Trust (photo by Himanshu Pahad)





23. Ravi Varma, *Saraswati*, 1890s, oil on canvas, 176.5 x 127 cm, courtesy Comptroller of Household to Gaekwad of Baroda (photo by Himanshu Pahad).



24. Ravi Varma, *Laxmi*, 1890s, oil on canvas, 176.5 x 127 cm, Comptroller of Household to Gaekwad of Baroda (photo by Himanshu Pahad).

alternating with local beauties. The door-frame patterns are sumptuous like the textiles and garments of the period which must have once adorned the interior. On the second floor, a smaller room has puranic tales on the upper wall and two panels on the south wall have copies of British prints. The quadrangular insets of wooden doors feature wrestlers, lovers and animals with their prey, suggesting the covert similarities of combat, erotic or otherwise.

Diverse modes are employed at Tambekar Wada to deal with equally diverse themes. Most characteristic is the battle scene which uses dual modes on a single plane. While the Maratha bastion is represented as a riot of colour planes, the British encampment is painted in muted greys and with a naturalistic perspective. The ease displayed in the use of exuberant golden yellows, vermillions and vegetable greens in the epic and puranic themes is indicative of a practised and well-worn idiom. In contrast, the eyewitness accounts of British officers seem to muster style through inventive observations. Even the painted 'copies' of original paintings or prints meant to emulate the 'realism' of the foreign prototypes are not without subversive intent. The row of houses with red roofs and white walls forming the backdrop to the puranic episodes on the second floor obviously derives directly from the landscape of Baroda: hence its rendering is in a category apart. Continuous narration is used for traditional themes with several episodes portrayed on a single plane. Set in horizontal rectangles, the stories run across the intervening wooden columns. A chariot at the end of one panel reappears at the opening of the next. In the *Bhagavata-purana* panel, the dark waters of the Jamuna flow diagonally, reminiscent of the device employed in Mewar miniatures.¹⁶ The *Ratna-yana* has Hanuman in hop-and-stop flashes jumping across the terraces and balconies of a golden Lanka. The *Rasaleela* scenes are more stereotyped despite the opulent pictorials.

The representation of battle provides food for thought. Immaculately attired British officers stepping out of or peering through tents and planning military manoeuvres are drawn with a degree of solemnity, even awe, but not without comic quaintness either. A stray wooden chair or two, an empty sofa laid ceremoniously next to sentries in top hats and tights standing at attention are portrayed tongue-in-cheek against the din of the war. A precariously perched trio of officers, bundled like a bunch of inexperienced schoolboys on an unwieldy pachyderm manned by an Indian *mahawat* has one wondering about the metaphoric implications of the image in the context of rising colonial power in the subcontinent. The elephant is viewed frontally, unusually so for an Indian artist, but as it might appear to the western eye accustomed to frontal portraiture. This manoeuvreability from one vantage-point to another indeed upturns conventional codes and suggests new meanings. A frontline officer's carriage, guarded by rings of drummers and buglers, foot-soldiers, cavalry and cannon-lines is shown being pulled by bullocks in the re-

treating direction, while the hairpin formation of a disciplined infantry platoon made of soldiers sewed up together stretches back and forth like the bellows of an accordion. Even the depiction of two *palkhis*—one bearing the ubiquitous breeches of the Englishman—moving out of the scene of a Maratha cavalcade above, is not without an element of gleeful parody.

The Maratha fortress has a British officer (resident?) seated on a chair facing the gesticulating 'native' ruler, who appears again in the scene, interspersed with vignettes of life in his palace and town, including one of a caged tiger! The valorous yet anarchic Maratha army and allies as they storm out of the besieged bastion are shown in brave but chaotic confrontation. The loyal artist portrays the do or die resistance of the Maratha contingent with touching sympathy, yet he cannot conceal his awe for the mighty, scheming adversaries. The monochromatic tones and informal 'realism' he employs to delineate the likeness of alien officers make him take risks any traditional rendering would disallow. Used to rendering his figures in profiles, he snatches a frontal or three-fourths view of an English face here and there, and tries similar tricks elsewhere.

Copies of two unidentified engravings in virtual monochrome afford the artist of Tambekar Wada an opportunity to match his foreign peers at their game. With an eye on accuracy, he draws the scale and details of the original with admirable skill. Copying, however, does not stop at producing a look-alike. As his archetypal improvising instincts intervene, he cannot but effect a change, subtle but not inconsequential. The scene of what appears to be a small family party in a palatial setting copied on the right wall, would appear innocuous if one failed to consider the scale of the protagonists in the absurdly grand interior. Was this part of the original intent, or did the copyist combine figures and architecture from two separate prints? Whatever the answer, the copy on the left wall leaves us in little doubt about his intentions. It depicts a group of mischievous boys in a classroom mimicking their master who appears, swinging his cane, at the door—and the commotion that follows. The figures of the clowning boy and two others flat on the floor are rendered with the resilient plasticity of a latterday Hogarth, while the fox-like grin of the teacher conjures a wily, indigenous Bosch. One wonders if such allusions were present in the original prints. What is most interesting in the copies is the painting of an 'arabesque' pattern on the floor in a tilted up format which renders the linear perspective of the scene somewhat redundant. This 'flattening' of space (often dubbed 'misunderstood perspective') need not be taken at face value. The flat patterns that tip the frontal plane above the ground have the effect of throwing the figures, fleeing boys and all, out of the surface of the picture—hinting at their probable escape, while keeping the unwanted teacher at bay—within naturalistic distance. Not only does the painter (copyist) make a partisan intervention, he also radicalizes a western genre by using a



25. *Draupadi Vastraharan*, inner enclosure, west wall, first floor, Tambekar Wada, Baroda, AD 1849-54, tempera on lime plaster, © Archaeological Survey of India (photo by jyoti Bhatt)



26. *Classroom Drama*, south wall. Tambekar Wada, Baroda, AD 1849-54, tempera on lime plaster, © Archaeological Survey of India (photo by jyoti Bhatt)



local traditional device. Such 'uncalled for' initiatives puncture the pomposity of academia and ultimately leave the hallowed classroom a trifle violated. The tactics of foregrounding figure by lifting spatial planes with elaborately 'flat' patterns were used earlier by Mughal painters, especially Basawan in his copies of European prints. These devices often make the copies far livelier than the run-of-the-mill originals.

The 'traditional' artist uses similar special effects to contemporize and localize ancient myths. The celestial ocean that recumbent Vishnu rests on looks more like a local lake (Sursagar, possibly) with an old Baroda skyline. And the saris Krishna supplies to Draupadi in the *Vastraharan* scene come as neatly twisted bundles reminiscent of the Marathi custom of folding saris. Besides architecture and costumes, the mythic figures also conform to local physiques, customs and living habits. Nothing, however, captures the turn of times more tellingly than the pair of couples painted next to each other: what appears to be a second-floor bedroom. On the right, traditional lovers attired in gorgeous garments and finery are locked in an amorous embrace on a carpet laid out on a marble terrace. The scene of open sexuality is complete with a breeze from a grove, sweeping landscape, female musicians and attendants 'required' for the occasion. This could be a local improvisation of the hundreds of amorous couples portrayed in the miniature and murals of Rajasthan.

In the painting on the left a Parsi gentleman in a striking silver turban and spotless *jama* is shown entertaining his lady love by offering her a golden cup across a wooden table. He presses the hand of his reluctant companion, who is suitably dressed in a sari with a headband (*mathabanu*) and *mojris* to match for the occasion. To the right, on a marble-top table, are laid what appear to be golden teapots, cups and a flower vase. Before one settles down to a genteel picture focused on 'the taking of tea, one might do worse than observe the attendant on the left pouring liquor from a dark bottle! Whereas the physical setting of a balcony, blue sky and thick foliage remains constant in the two portrayals, the attitude to sexuality and love differs quite sharply. A new sample is portrayed: new customs, behaviour perhaps a new social order that does not exclude western from Indian ways of life. Parsis, who embraced westernization earlier and more willingly, are presented here as symbols of that change.

Raja Ravi Varma

With these cultural transformations, conditions were ripe for the throwing up of precocious individual expression. Of these, Raja Ravi Varma was both the first and the best known. This prodigious and prolific artist, who had been virtually banished from his home state of Travancore,¹⁷ was elated at the prospect of working in a state as illustrious as Baroda. On arrival, he was treated with great respect and given a studio in the palace complex; and the paintings he produced



27. *Laxmi*, Ravi Varma Press, oleograph

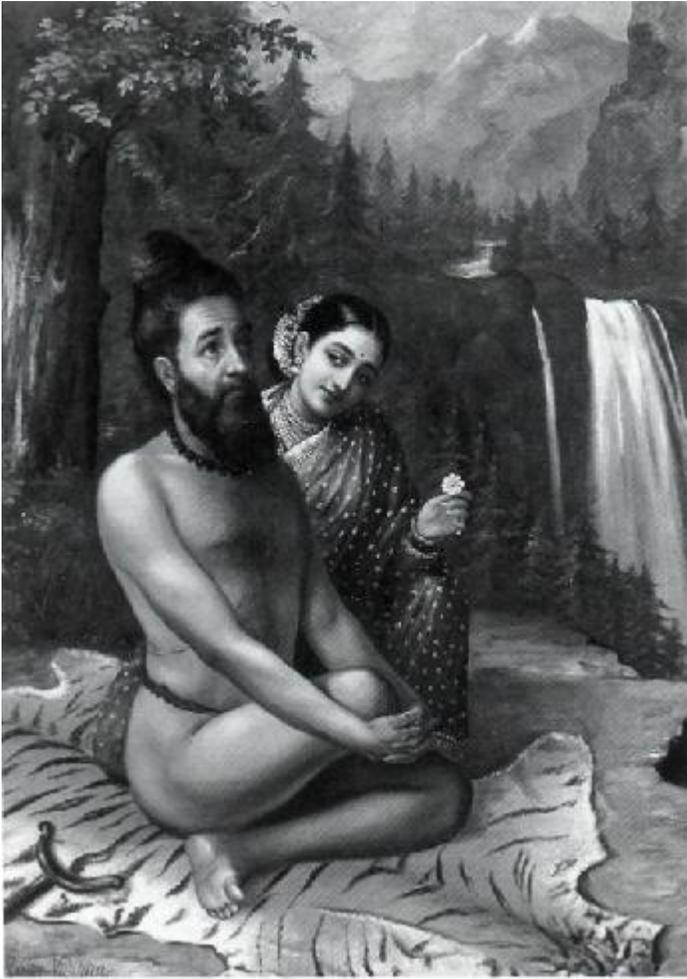
were prominently displayed in the palace and acquired by the state. They are now in the Laxmi Vilas palace and the Fatesingh Museum collections. Ravi Varma was in fact bestowed the rare honour of being a state guest at the investiture ceremony of Maharaja Sayajirao in 1881.¹⁸

Ravi Varma painted some of his most important pictures during his repeated visits here. Baroda, in fact, seems to mark a turning point in his career and in the course of contemporary Indian art which he influenced in many respects. Large oil paintings of the figures of Laxmi and Saraswati (the latter based on a convention of painting lady musicians seated on thrones or chairs) were painted during his first visit. These became prototypes of the innumerable versions produced thenceforth, nearly removing all traditional icons of these goddesses from the popular mind. The artist's decision to embark upon a tour of the country with the express purpose of devising a 'common costume which would satisfy every class equally'¹⁹ was necessitated when he received a commission from Sayajirao to paint fourteen puranic pictures for the Laxmi Vilas palace under construction. This initiative indicates the quest for a nationalist

identity, and of understanding the importance of visual iconography in recognizing it. The subsequent use of the sari endowed the female figure with heroic and sublime grandeur and widened the appeal of his pictures on a national scale: he was perhaps the first individual artist to have achieved the distinction of winning pan-Indian approbation.²⁰ The famous letter of the diwan of Baroda, T. Madhav Rao, bidding Ravi Varma to have his paintings oleographed,²¹ was catalytic in initiating what turned out to be a landmark in the use of the mythological reproduction. This initiative eventually generated a spate of ephemera which continue to haunt the Indian street and average homes even today.

In certain respects, Ravi Varma provides a counterpoint to the artist of Tambekar Wada. The anonymous traditional artist had tried to absorb aspects of western art and culture, albeit reluctantly, into his oeuvre, but *on his own terms*. The world he portrayed, including European imagery and scenery, appeared as an indigenous eye saw it from within an age-old tradition. His predecessors too had resisted full-scale illusionism despite opportunities of that kind in the past.²² Ravi Varma embraced not only the technique of oil painting but also aspects of illusionism that came in its trail.²³ His detractors saw in this an unabashed conversion to westernization, whereas his admirers found in him a true 'Indian' projecting the virtues of ancient culture. His immediate patrons, the princely elite, idolized him for having seized the weapon of 'realism' from the 'perennial power of the superior race' to be wielded against it with equal ease. The evocation of the 'golden age' of ancient India in his painted mythologicals must have aroused a nostalgia for past glories in the days of princely decline. Interestingly, the content of his paintings was paramount in the eyes of his admirers, whereas his critics identified him more with the form and style he used.

What Ravi Varma painted was neither wholly 'Indian' nor 'western', neither realistic nor fictitious, as was claimed variously by admirers, critics and antagonists. It was patently eclectic in intent and import. He offered the means to clothe mythical figures in believable garb and place them in credible settings as was the case in contemporary Parsi theatre. He was indeed as obsessed with theatre as his traditional counterpart was, but the means he used were considerably different. The traditional artist had portrayed the theatre of life in a continuum, using devices of continuous narration, open-ended structures and free, metaphoric, rather than local, associations of colours. The language of painting he had evolved over the centuries did not deal with the polemics of the 'real' and its opposite. What was shared with the art of theatre was the multiple inputs and import that provided the nucleus for the basic creative impulse. The alternative Ravi Varma offered externalized the forming nucleus to focus on physical appearances. Using illusionistic effects in the representation of retinal experience, Ravi Varma claimed to 'materialize' or 'bring to life', as a magician might, what was in the realm of



28. Ravi Varma, *Vishwamitra-Menaka*, 1890s, oil on canvas, 170 x 127 cm, courtesy Maharaja Fatesingh Museum Trust

myth, memory, or imagination. The dramatic way he made his models assume the roles of Lakshmi or Saraswati conjured up the illusion of flesh-and-blood divinities. The recipe proved to be hypnotic. The new 'realistic' *avatars* of the goddesses met with such overwhelming response that their earlier forms disappeared from public memory. From the archetypals of Ellora or Akota to the stereotypical Tanjore, the images of the two goddesses became a thing of the past.

This theatrical illusion of materiality served both religious and secular purposes. For the 'new' iconography of his divinities he chose props and costumes dramatic and simple enough to be recognized even by the lay person. With 'classical' columns and drooping heavy curtains he would conjure up palace interiors, and with heroic gestures, the valour of the kshatriyas. He used a tall, muscular, moustachioed youthful type with heroic postures to fill the image of the valourous male. And a fair, well-endowed young woman, often bare-breasted, enacted the role of a mythical beauty. Take, for instance, the female figure on the left in *The Court of Indrajit*: her figure and posture simulate a classical 'Venus'; she wears her sari, uncharacteristically baring her breast, like a neo-



29. Ravi Varma, *Ganga Leaving Shantanu*, 1890s, oil on canvas, 145 x 102 cm, courtesy Maharaja Fatesingh Museum Trust

classical drape. In his portraits Ravi Varma highlighted costumes and jewellery to such an extent that they glitter brighter than the sitters they adorn. In times of growing economic uncertainty and want, the seductive exposition of personal possessions and tantalizing props as commodities²⁴ met with instant success. The same applied to his portrayal of suggestive sexuality in taboo-ridden late nineteenth century colonial India. What Poynter and Tadema achieved in Victorian England, Ravi Varma accomplished here with greater success. Yet the role Ravi Varma played as an artist of immense influence is not as simple as it might appear to be. What he achieved was not always an outcome of his intent but often a byproduct of his limitations. He was short of the mastery he is credited with in rendering 'realism'. A tour of the galleries of Ravi Varma and his European contemporaries in the Fatesingh Museum would reveal, for instance, quite glaring inaccuracies in Ravi Varma's handling of foreshortening. He had problems with relating moving figures to a perspectival space and in depicting outdoor scenes,²⁵ probably because of the practice of drawing static models in indoor studios. Yet it is likely this naivete gave him an edge over



30. Capt.R.M. Grindlay, *A View of Bridge at Baroda*, 1806, lithograph, 22 x 28.5 cm approx., courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)

more competent contemporaries in evolving a personal rather than a purely 'professional' but colourless mode. The shortcomings he felt made him turn to devices other than the naturalistic. The over-darkening of contours, heavy modelling, and conventions like the conspicuous highlighting of gold or gems from his Tanjore training enabled him to add that extra bit of sensuality his Victorian counterparts lacked.

Ravi Varma's most interesting innovation relates to his choice of themes. He virtually invented the visualizations of the legends of Harishchandra-Taramati, Shakuntala and Vishwamitra-Menaka, among others, of which there were hardly any traditional prototypes. With a bias towards theatrical tableaux and the physical freezing of scene, he was adding a new dimension to portrayals of traditional narratives. Traditionally, continuous narration had avoided the projection of a climactic moment. In looking for new themes to paint, Ravi Varma seems to have unearthed many with a vast potential to feed the kind of nostalgic sentimentalism favoured by the Indian middle class. He must have been surprised, in fact, that the ideas he posited, shrouded in his massive oils,

gained acceptance sooner than might have been expected in a period of conservatism and dwindling patronage of art. That he was eulogized in his own lifetime speaks of the lacunae that existed, of the unfulfilled desires of his audience, Ravi Varma's work would have repercussions on ensuing cinematic movements. The pioneer film-maker Dadasaheb Phalke (who had later studied at Kalabhavan in Baroda), began the ferris wheel of a new cinema from where Ravi Varma left off, and the popular Hindi cinema of today gained several of its tricks and recipes for mass appeal (including the conflation of the sentimental and the theatrical) from the oeuvre of the persuasive artist-conjuror,

Impact of Photography

After Ravi Varma, the influence of illusionism became more widespread than ever. The Marathi elite responded to its new effects with an enthusiasm that was surprising, considering their approbation of tradition in the field of classical Indian music. A logical corollary now was the introduction

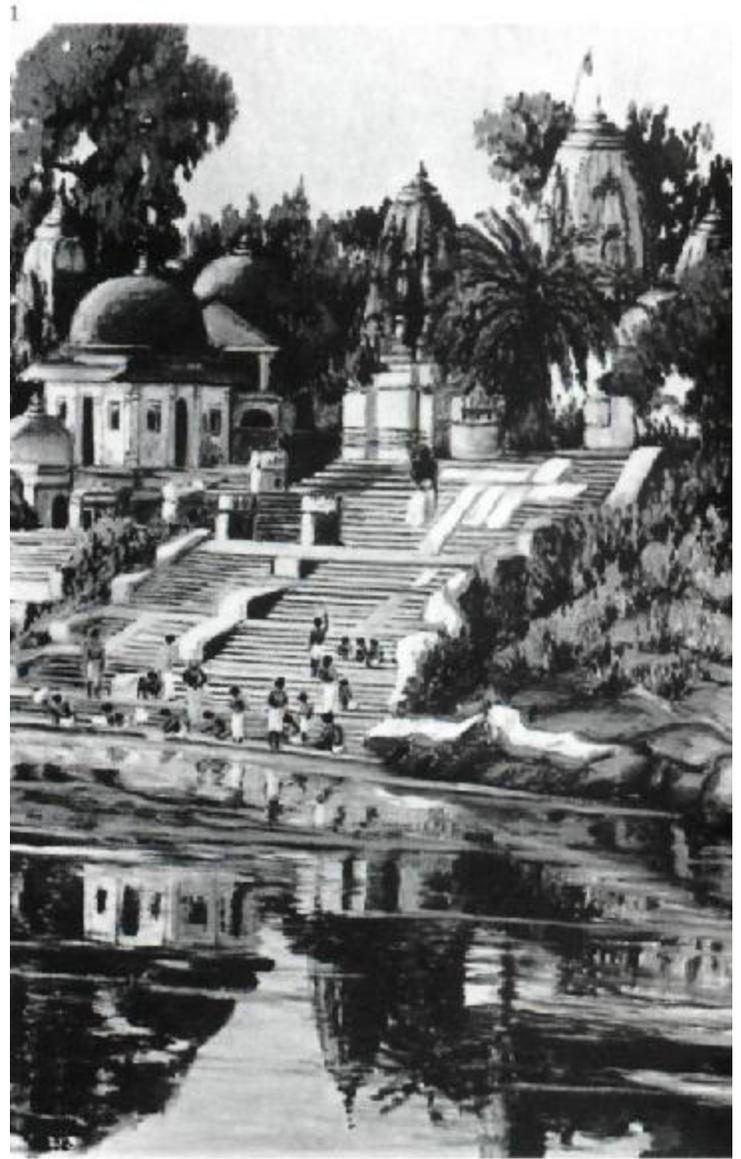
of photography as an expressive extension. The artist who saw in the new medium a worthy successor to painting was quick to respond to and adopt it. The magic machine seemed to render illusionism more 'faithfully' than what his hand had tried with limited success and his tradition disallowed for centuries. Some of the early photographs show a wide-eyed fascination for the 'obscure hole in the black box'.

Judith Mara Gutman, however, speculates that the Indian mind continued to resist the effects of full-scale illusionism even in photography.²⁶ She has demonstrated how a certain pictorial sense of light made the photographer see space in a tiered or more schematic way, rather than reproducing its three-dimensionality. In some of the early photographs, including those of Raja Deen Dayal, the artistic eye revels in patterns on textiles and floors to counter the effects of linear perspective in a manner similar to the device used in the Tambekar Wada murals. By softening dark shadows and heavy tonalities to achieve an even tone (a technique quite different from Ravi Varma's), the impact of illusionism was somewhat tempered. There are also examples of portraits in oil, based on photographs, in the Fatesingh Museum collection where in fact the contrary device is used to achieve similar results. The artist here accentuates linear contours from all points to counter the logic of cast shadows, and virtually carves the image out of the dark space. The devices of manipulation intrinsic to pictorial art disarm the 'mechanical' apparatus. The rigid postures of the protagonists exude a sense of power and achieve individual characterization by strengthening and manipulating linear propensities.

Photographs were also used for painting over: there is, in fact, quite a genre developed around this device. Here, too, the painter effects a radical change in the photographic image by introducing and highlighting patterns. The working over of stereotyped poses of models with bold and bright patterns lends these otherwise mundane photographs a quaint otherworldliness. It is quite likely this genre flourished as much in Baroda as it did in other centres of photography in India. A few examples are on display at the Fatesingh Museum. The improvisatory impulse however weakened in subsequent years as artists acquired more proficiency in rendering illusionism, and photography took its own independent course—which deserves a separate account. But somewhere along the line, the need to effect change on a given image became synonymous with the inability to reproduce a look-alike. Consciousness of this weakness left the artist in a perennial state of awkwardness even in his most accomplished performances, illusionistic or otherwise.

Landscapists

'Perfection' in rendering scenery with accuracy was generally considered to be the preserve of the European hand. Not even Ravi Varma attempted landscapes. In the absence of



31. Sass Brunner, *Baroda Landscape*, 1930, oil on canvas, 62.x 47 cm approx., courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)

originals by major landscapists like Constable, the prototype was provided by visiting amateurs and fairly competent British professionals. This trend had started with the consolidation of colonial power in the late eighteenth century. Through their machinations the colonial rulers had inveigled the state of Baroda into following the British diktat in all its affairs. Obligated to the British for freeing it from the stranglehold of Arab Sardars, the local rulers had in the bargain virtually pawned the state. The state earned the 'honour' of being loyal to the Crown after Khanderao suppressed revolts during the 1857 uprising. All this must have made Baroda hospitable terrain for visiting military officers, some of whom were amateur artists. Mildred Archer provides the following account of the times to which these early chroniclers of Baroda belonged.



32. Fanindranath Bose, *Boy with Falcon*, 1920, bronze, 112 cm high, courtesy Maharaja Fatesingh Museum Trust (photo by Himanshu Pahad)

In the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, many of the British who went to India were enthusiastic amateur artists making water colour drawings of the people and places they saw around them. At this period both men and women of the upper and middle classes received instruction in water colour painting as part of their education. Army officers bound for India were taught drawing during their military training at Addiscombe and civil servants at Haileybury College. Drawing was needed officially for map-making and survey work, while for women it passed many lonely hours. The eighteenth century was the age of the 'enlightenment', an age of eager research into natural history, the races of man, the study of religion, manners and customs, in artistic circles there was a vogue for 'the Picturesque' and 'the Sublime'. It was not surprising, therefore, that on arriving in India many of the British were excited by the scenes they saw around them and were anxious to record them with drawings.²⁷

Officers like Captain R.M. Grindlay (1806), Thomas Postans (1823-39) and John B. Bellassis, all amateur artists, made drawings and water colours of the city and its environs while posted at or passing through Baroda. Grindlay, the more accomplished and the best known, published his aquatints. He seems to have responded to the 'picturesque' in the vein of his famous predecessors, the Daniells; his *A View of Bridge at Baroda*, showing the *ghat* on the Vishwamitri river, takes certain liberties with proportion. Set in a similar environment, *Preparation for a Suttee* depicts a rather incredible canopied structure in an otherwise unremarkable scene. Grindlay was basically a chronicler. His yearning for the picturesque conditions the actuality of the scene he might have sketched; it lends his matter-of-fact scenery a romantic, even exotic aura.

Postans' *Part of Hindoo Temple at Baroda* is probably an early view of the complex which includes the Kamnath Mahadev temple at Kamati Bagh. His abilities as a dextrous documentor are also revealed in *Bulwant Rao's Palace; Baroda River in Foreground*, painted in water colour. Bellassis, on the other hand, is clearly more romantic; he obviously enjoyed the scenery he painted. *The Sanatorium, Jowaghur, Looking toward Baroda*—almost certainly a view of Pavagadh, a hillside resort about 40 kilometres from Baroda—displays a passion for dramatic, 'sublime' landscapes. This and his *Major Shaw's Garden, Baroda* also reflect a personal choice in the selection of the view as well as in the execution of the painting. His sensitive water colour *Large Home and Garden in Camp, Baroda*, indicates an individualized observation. Interestingly, these chroniclers, whether of the 'sublime' or of the mundane, chose places rather than people to paint; the genre of landscape obviously provided the visiting officer-artists a safe and 'necessary' distance from the 'natives'.

Court Artists

The professional artists who took employment at the court of the Gaekwads, especially that of Sayajirao, were guided by different considerations. Concentrating on portraits of the royal family, nobility, or other subjects, their preferences centered on the human image. The Italian painter and sculptor Augusto Felici worked as a court artist for Sayajirao between 1892 and 1896. He produced bronze busts and marble reliefs for the Laxmi Vilas palace, the life-size marble statue of Chimnabai I (currently in a state of neglect) in the central hall of the Nyaya Mandir, and a number of bronzes now located in the Fatesingh Museum. Of the last, *Cheeta with Their Keepers* and *Tanjore Dancing Girl of the Palace* are accomplished by their virtuosity. His paintings are equally dextrous. He was assigned to supervise works for Sayajirao in Venice, and he might well have prepared the sketch for the Murano Workshop mosaic discussed earlier.

Itinerant artists to have flitted in and out of the royal precincts included a Captain H. Hime who is known to have both painted and restored pictures at Baroda.

Two Indian artists who acquired comparable esteem in the eyes of Sayajirao were the highly accomplished Bengali sculptor Fanindranath Bose, reportedly appreciated by Rodin²⁸ and Fyzee Rahamin, who was trained by Sargent in London. Fanindranath, who went to Europe at the age of sixteen and studied in Florence, Edinburgh (Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy) and Paris, was invited by Sayajirao in 1920.²⁹ His bronzes in the Baroda collections, notably his *Boy with Falcon* and *On the Way to Temple*, reveal his unerring academic skills, surpassed by few artists of that genre in India. The Fatesingh Museum and the Museum and Picture Gallery at Baroda are the only places outside England, Scotland and Australia ('a huge memorial shrine at St John's Church in Perth'³⁰) where the work of this early Indian sculptor is preserved. He migrated to Scotland and died there in 1926. Fyzee Rahamin from Bombay is known for introducing traditional 'Indian' elements in his paintings. He painted mostly portraits during his tenure as art advisor to Sayajirao during 1908-18.³¹

The trail of visiting European artists included the Hungarian mother-daughter duo, Sass and Elizabeth Brunner. These enterprising women had coursed through Italy, Africa and Egypt before landing in India in 1930. Sass Brunner spent two years in meditation, and painted stylized images of an exoticized mysticism in a rather sentimental idiom. These spiritual forays, prefiguring neo-Tantric imagery of locked or overlapping figures with misty 'atmosphere', must have earned the two women many admirers in India. They moved in hallowed circles. They met and painted Tagore and Krishnamurthi; even Gandhiji gave Elizabeth half an hour to draw him. With their courage and charm they befriended royalty and painted exclusive pictures of the



33. Augusto Felici, *Tanjore Dancing Girl of the Baroda Palace*, 1896, bronze, 175 x 46 x 58.5 cm, courtesy Maharaja Fatesingh Museum Trust (photo by Himanshu Pahad)



34. Hermann Goetz

34

'veiled beauties' of the *zenana* to which they had access.

About fifty of the pictures they painted in Baroda were formerly on display in a special Brunner Gallery in the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery. These betray other aspects of their painting skills and painterly personalities. While both painted in a post-Impressionist palette, Sass concentrated on landscapes and Elizabeth on exotic ethnic figural types. Sass Brunner's landscapes have a certain resonance of colour despite a rather restricted, literal rendition of scenery. Elizabeth, somewhat less professional but freer in her brushwork, would strike a Fauvist note at times. It is interesting to consider that while the Hungarian women were quietly extending the language of European modernism in the early thirties at Baroda, a charismatic compatriot, Amrita Sher-Gil, was blazing a trail of radical change in the academic echelons of northwestern India. A sense of sadness surrounds the subsequent eclipse of the daring Brunner ladies. Elizabeth has settled in India, living a quiet life in Delhi. Sass passed away in 1950.

Hermann Goetz and the Baroda Museum

The most important European emigre left his homeland, Germany, just before the second world war. He was Hermann Goetz, distinguished art historian and Indologist.³² Goetz re-organized Baroda's Museum and Picture Gallery, turning it

into a veritable art history museum, after becoming its director in 1941. Every phase of world art history was represented, with originals and replicas displayed in 'rooms in colours characteristic, for the respective countries and times'.³³ The Museum thus achieved the distinction of being a comprehensive educational institution. The European collection was made by Sayajirao during his foreign trips or through his emissaries in England.³⁴ Marion H. Spielmann, editor of *Connoisseur*, and Rimbault Dibdin, director of the Liverpool Art Gallery, were assigned the task of collecting works from London. The opening of the Picture Gallery was delayed by seven years, after it was completed in 1914, by the outbreak of the first world war; the delay may have made it possible to acquire what would be worth millions now at prices low even for those days. Goetz wrote in the *Bulletin* of the Museum in 1952, 'The Picture Gallery has the best collection of old masterpieces of European painting to be found not only in India, but in the whole of Asia. In several cases, the Baroda paintings are even better than their counterparts in Europe.'³⁵ With its sole surviving copy of *The Death of St Peter Martyr* after Titian (the original in San Giovanni e Paolo in Venice was destroyed by fire in 1847), and its originals of Agostino Carracci, Pietro Longhi, Salvatore Rosa from Italy, Jusepe de Ribera (*Christ in Emmaus*) from Spain, a portrait by Rubens (*Frederic de Marselaer*), and *Flight into Egypt* by Martin Rykaert, the Museum lives up to that claim.

There is the only surviving replica of a portrait of Isabella de Valois, the queen of Philip II, by A.S. Coello. A portrait in original of the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza by Dirk Stoop who, on her marriage to Charles II of England, brought Bombay as part of her dowry, too is of considerable historical value. The English section is more substantial and includes such painters as Hogarth, Nollekens, Lely and Zoffany. Zoffany's portrayal of *Macbeth*, featuring the famous actor David Garrick in performance, has qualities of dramatic flourish that the artist flaunted. *The Stream of Life* by Nollekens is somewhat unusual in content and treatment. E.J. Poynter's *Queen Sheba's Visit to King Solomon* exemplifies the Victorian taste for ancient mythologies painted in grandiose settings—a dramatic genre which inspired Ravi Varma. *The Race for Wealth* by William Powell Frith, a series of five pictures narrating the tale of a swindler, represents the narrative British genre of the time at its illustrative best, Sketchbooks of Romney, containing the numerous informal asides and visual jottings by this highly accomplished artist, are prized objects at the Museum.

Besides the European paintings, there are originals in the Egyptian, Greek, far eastern, Islamic and Himalayan art galleries. The section on Indian sculpture, with its *matrikas* of Devni Mori and Jaina images from Akota which includes the exquisite *Chauri Bearer*, contains numerous other marvellous pieces. It has been pointed out that but for Hermann Goetz's efforts, the celebrated bronzes would not



35. William Powell Frith, *The Spider at Home*, from the series *Race for Wealth*, 1880, oil on canvas, 71 x 91.5 cm, courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)

1880, oil on canvas, 71 x 91.5 cm, courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)

have come to the Museum. Other impressive exhibits include a Jaina wooden *mandap* from Sinor with its exquisite figuration; the ceiling of Shaikh Farid's tomb from Patan with its massive whirling creeper; and an impressive Chola *Nataraja* and *Dancing Shakti* of the Solanki era in Gujarat.

The collection of Indian paintings includes an undamaged folio of the *Hamzanama* of the Akbar period; this is one of the surviving one-tenth or so of the original 1,400 folios, about five of which are in Indian collections. Also to be seen are a rare *Pichhawai* from Krishengarh and the *Kangra Bhagavata* from the Jagmohandas Modi collection. A gorgeous collection of textiles, metal and ceramic ware and jewellery enrich the Museum.

Hermann Goetz also saw to it that the Museum did not remain exclusively historical and included a number of contemporary paintings and sculptures. In fact, in 1949 he invited the Progressive Artists' Group of Bombay to hold an

exhibition in the Museum and acquired several of their works. The two early Souza's on display, *Blue Lady* and *Bathers*, contain the seeds of the painter's growing angst and sexual preoccupation. Raza's landscape displays independence from the tricks and gimmicky water colour effects popular in his times. There is a sensitive portrait sculpture by S.K. Bakre and a painting by H.A. Gade. Besides these, the collection includes works by B.C. Sanyal and Dhanraj Bhagat and by those belonging to the 'Gujarat school'—Rasiklal Parikh, Somalal Shah and Kanu Desai. Nandalal Bose, A.R. Chughtai, Magda Nachman, Jamini Roy, K.K. Hebbar, Siavax Chavda, N.S. Bendre, Jyoti Bhatt, among others, are also represented.

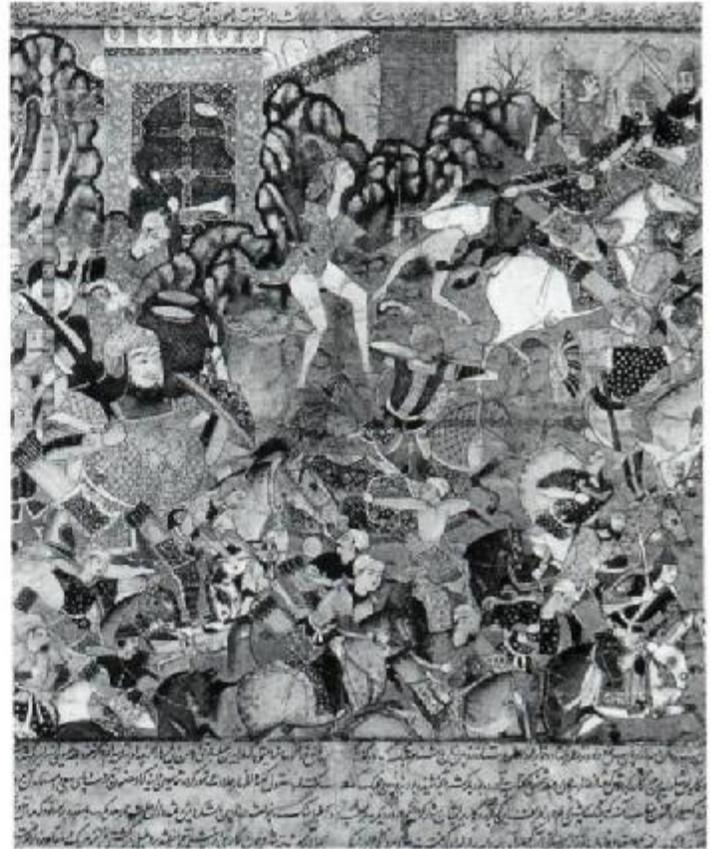
The Maharaja Fatesingh Museum was set up in 1961 in the Laxmi Vilas palace complex from the miscellaneous collections of various royal palaces. It comprises a variety of objects including nineteenth century oils, bronze and marble statuettes, and chinoiserie. Most notable of these are the



36. *Shiva*, Shamlaji, north Gujarat, AD 400, 115 x 45 cm, courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)



37. *Chauri Bearer*, Akota, 8th century AD, copper alloy, 22.5 x 6 x 4 cm, courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)



38. *Krishnaleela Pichhavai* (detail), Kishengarh, AD 1820, tempera on cotton. 193 x 137 cm, courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)

39. Folio from *Hamzanama*. Mughal, AD 1562-77. gouache on cotton, 70 x 55 cm, courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)

paintings of Ravi Varma, his well-known mythologicals and royal portraits displayed alongside the bronzes of Augusto Felici and Fanindranath Bose.

Goetz not only set up an exemplary educational museum, he also set exacting standards of art historical scholarship through his writings.³⁶ His lasting contributions included the initiation of studies in museology, resulting in the formulation of a postgraduate course, and eventually, a full-fledged department as part of the Faculty of Fine Arts. V.L. Devkar succeeded Goetz as director of the Museum and V.S. Bedekar, also trained in museology, taught there; the latter expanded and organized the course to suit the requirements of Indian museums. The department now publishes its own journal and has built up a collection of originals which include the marvellous *matrika* images from Shamlaji, discovered and donated by R.T. Parikh.

Besides being an able administrator and scholar, Goetz was deeply engaged in education. The Museum as he visualized it (which was very much in line with what Sayajirao would have desired), was to serve as a forum by which the populace as a whole could gain visual education. The studies in museology were intended to initiate advanced research and training at a formal level. The ambience of scholarship which surrounded the Museum included other scholars, such

as U.P. Shah and R.N. Mehta, who were building research repositories of Indian studies from the collections of the Oriental Institute and the Department of Archaeology of M.S. University,

By the time Goetz became director of the Museum, the purchase of original European works of art must have been out of monetary reach. While he lauded the pre-nineteenth century collection, he noted by way of regret in the Museum *Handbook* that 'developments since Impressionism are not sufficiently represented'.³⁷ The lament hints at the conservative nature of collectors who could not see beyond salons and academies—at a time when European art had embarked upon a radical path of expression. One recalls how a maverick American collector, A. Barnes, was buying Cezannes, Soutines and Matisses from the artists' studios in Paris at prices much lower than what the London-based Spielmann and Dibdin were ready to pay for copies. The hypothetical question inevitably arises, suppose a Goetz had been there instead? And the prospect of viewing the great modern masters in the Baroda Museum, too, remains a missed opportunity. That regret also underpins the fact that modern western art was accessible only through the mediation of the reproduction, involving a neutralization of scale and surface, in Baroda as in the rest of India.



40. N.S. Bendre, *Future?*, 1950, oil on board, 70 x 95 cm, courtesy of Department of Museums, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroua (not to be reproduced without prior permission of the Director of Museums)

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The Murals of Nandalal Bose

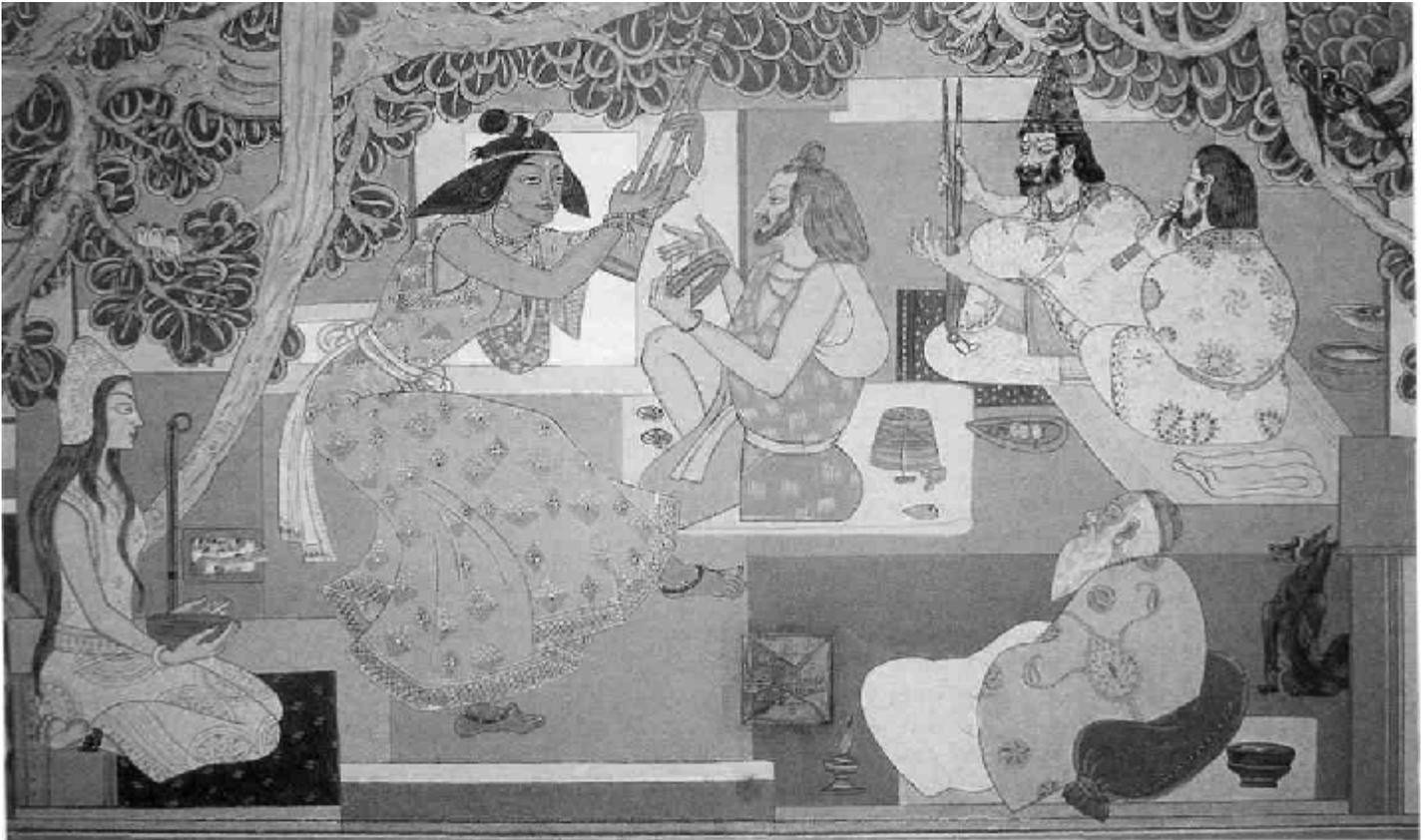
What prefigures the beginning of the movement of modern art in Baroda, besides the work of Ravi Varma, are the murals of Nandalal Bose in the cenotaph of the Gaekwads called Kirti Mandir.³⁸ Their images are of yet another alignment of contemporary expression with traditional ideas. The attitude towards striking a synthesis, from the painters at Tambekar Wada to Ravi Varma and on to Nandalal Bose, was increasingly willed and conscious. For Nandalal, the questions of nationalism and the visual language of painting were intertwined.

Nandalal Bose's initiation into the painting of murals can be traced to his joining Lady Herringham's team to copy the Ajanta paintings in 1909- In 1921, he led an expedition to the Bagh caves; upon his return, he is known to have painted murals all over the walls of a room. On settling down at Santiniketan at the invitation of Rabindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose tried his hand at various techniques ranging from the Jaipur fresco to the Italian *buon fresco* and painted several murals on the campus. The Haripura posters, prepared

with the help of associates for the 1938 Congress session at the behest of Mahatma Gandhi, might not be termed murals in the conventional sense. Comprising 400 panels, each 60 cms wide (of which Nandalal himself painted a hundred or so), they, however, constituted a sort of portable mural.

The Kirti Mandir murals mark a mature phase in the career of Nandalal Bose. Invited by Sayajirao to decorate the newly built memorial housing relics of the royal family, he completed the four panels during four visits made between 1939 and 1946. The *Gangavatarana* panel on the west wall was executed in 1939, *Life of Meera* on the east wall in 1940,

Natir Puja on the south in 1943 and *Abhimanyu Vadha* on the north in 1946. The version of *Natir Puja* he painted on the walls of Cheena Bhavana at Santiniketan in 1942 contrasted in both mode and method to the mural at Baroda; it was 'executed with only a piece of rag dipped in colour which served as a brush', and its striking if cryptic figures were 'drawn with generous sweeps of the hand'. In the Baroda mural, however, due to 'limitations imposed by architecture and time', Nandalal 'played safe in matters of



41. Nandalal Bose, *Meera* panel (detail), Kirti Mandir, Baroda, 1940, tempera on wall, courtesy Devasthan Trusts, Baroda (photo byjyoa Bhatt)

technique and design. He did not venture on experiments and preferred to work in the well-tried medium of egg-tempera. In his design also, he simplified the process by getting colour areas laid out in flat patches.³⁹

To paint mythological pictures in a convincing contemporary mode—different from the one adopted by Ravi Varma earlier—was a challenging proposition for a painter like Nandalal Bose. Painting in a public place with a defined architectural style was no less formidable a task. The images and episodes he selected had rarely been painted before, although they belonged to collective traditional lore. Like Ravi Varma, he had to visualize them all anew. He was, however, not averse to drawing from earlier pictorial conventions; he had first-hand knowledge of a great many traditional forms (including the east Asian) gathered during his travels in India and abroad.

Life of Meera portrays the assembly of holy men whose company the ascetic poetess cherished. The central dancing figure gives visual representation to her ecstatic lines '*paga ghungharu bandh Meera nacht* while alluding to a free-wheeling *baul* dance. The *Natir Puja* panel illustrates the stage-by-stage transformation of the court dancer Tagore created. Borrowing certain features of the Ajanta types that served him as models of posture, stance, costume, coiffure, Nandalal sought to capture the Buddhist ambience of the story.

The *Abhimanyu Vadha* panel is pictorially more complex; it portrays the great movement, violence and high drama of the *Mahabharata* war. K.G. Subramanyan aptly describes the gradual unfolding of episodes: 'preparation of fight, the fight, the review and the requiem'.⁴⁰ Here, Nandalal has drawn upon multiple conventions of the visual and performing arts; his sources range from Indian and Japanese narrative scrolls to the broadly Mannerist conventions of European origin. This adventurous and ambitious eclecticism has its hazards, however: his valiant heroes are shaped with graceful contours somewhat at variance with their heavy musculature, while the pale tones of the colours tend to water down the inherent drama of the theme. These are perhaps the pitfalls of devising style from diverse sources, an experiment that Nandalal was courageous enough to attempt. The panels indicate his capacity to marshal modes and motifs from a wide range of sources to evolve a highly individual idiom, Baroda's direct encounter with the Bengal School idiom proved catalytic; the impact was felt all over Gujarat. There emerged a technique of flat, opaque colour to serve indigenist aspirations, but used in a rather schematic way by a number of artists. The paintings of Jamini Roy were another prototype available to them, initiating a neo-folk idiom that certain Gujarati artists subsequently came to practise. This idiom, though somewhat at variance with the Gujarati *gharana*

of the Bengal School (wash painting in the lineage of early Nandalal, Kshitindranath Majumdar and Asit Kumar Halder) had a wider and stronger appeal owing to its mild mannerism and 'folkish' appearance. The flat doll-like figuration with accents on simplified motifs and patterns coincided with a trend of folksy rhythms in Gujarati poetry of the fifties that seemed to meet a desire for an identifiably Gujarati *qalam*. Senior artists like Somalal Shah and Rasiklal Parikh absorbed this into their work. However, it was pursued with greater commitment by their younger contemporaries. Kumar Mangalsingh and Khodidas Parmar—both from Bhavnagar—and later Pradumna Tana from Bombay, evolved a schematic, if somewhat mannered, figuration that combined the effects of the village and palace murals and the motifs of the rural textiles of Saurashtra. Manhar Makwana and Bhupat Ladva, based in Rajkot, and a host of young aspirants in the art schools of Gujarat came to identify this idiom with a Gujarati sensibility. The highly influential journal *Kumar*, founded by the veteran artist-educationist Ravishankar Raval, and nurtured with dogged determination by his successor Bachubhai Rawat for nearly half a century, made the idiom known throughout urban Gujarat. In Baroda its effects (in varying degrees) can be observed in early Jyoti Bhatt (*Krishnaleela*), Prabha Dongre, Bihari Barbhaiya, Kumud Patel and Jamu Chaudhary, among others.

Art Schools

Before considering the setting up of Kalabhavan in Baroda, let us return to the story of the establishment of art schools. The impact of British academic art was felt more directly through institutionalized education than through any impromptu borrowings traditional Indian artists may have made from available stray sources. The earliest school of art appears to have been started at Poona during the reign of Peshwa Sawai Madhav Rao in the 1790s. Its foundation was at the instance of a visiting Scottish painter, James Wales, who was in India between 1791 and 1795. A school of drawing was situated in the compound of Shanwar Wada. This trained a number of young pupils, including Gangaram Chintaman Tambat, later one of Wales' assistants. Considering that Tambat's drawings of the Ellora caves were presented to the governor-general when he visited Poona in 1791, he must by this time have attained a degree of proficiency.⁴¹ In lieu of Wales' own interest, Tambat and other pupils presumably learnt portraiture and landscape painting. Wales painted his attractive *Rajput Lady Companion*, a portrait of Beebee Amber Kooer, 'companion' of the British resident, in transparent muslins and glittering jewels. This can be seen to anticipate the royal portraits of Ravi Varma and his contemporaries. These experiments in formalized art education, however, came to an abrupt end following Wales' premature death in 1793. For the next half century there were

no art schools as such, only a handful of coaching classes run by individuals. In 1822, a Signor Constantino Augusto opened a 'School of Art for Ladies' in Bombay; he described himself as being 'well-versed in the doctrine of animo-anatomic proportion, and particularly correct in his treatment of landscape with chaste colouring and perspective'.⁴²

A more enduring institution was established in Madras by Dr Hunter, a physician who in 1850 gave up his medical practice to start a private school of art and crafts. On the basis of his advice, the Sir Jamshedjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art and Industry was founded at Bombay in 1857; the School of Industrial Art at Calcutta had already begun functioning three years earlier. Lahore, Lucknow and other cities followed suit. The schools began as private enterprises funded by individual or collective donations, but were eventually taken over and ran by the provincial governments.⁴³ None of the schools, as their names suggest, was originally designed to impart training in painting and sculpture. Rather, they were visualized as workshops for craftsmen for 'the improvement and augmentation of Industrial arts'.⁴⁴ The first annual report of the newly established Kalabhavan at Baroda in 1891 categorically stated that 'pure art' was a 'luxury both in economic and intellectual aspects', and decreed therefore that the 'inclination of the students towards the humble work of Industrial arts is a good thing in the present condition of the country'. An irony indeed after the runaway success of painter Ravi Varma, a freelancer, in Baroda itself!

The desire to promote indigenous crafts was what was dominant in the mind of Sir Jamshedjee when he made a generous endowment of one lakh rupees to start the school in Bombay. Himself the son of a weaver (and his junior colleague Shankershet was a goldsmith), Sir Jamshedjee was deeply concerned about the plight of craftspeople in the wake of the steady mechanization of industry. He viewed the starting of powerlooms in 1850 as a seismic event. A firm believer in the superior workmanship and design of Indian crafts, he dreamt of a class of artisans being able to challenge the inferior industrial goods pouring into the Indian market. As a businessman, he considered it expedient to train craftsmen to sustain local industry.⁴⁵

The schools of art at Madras and Calcutta were set up on similar lines, with vocational crafts forming the basis of the teaching programme. Training was imparted in pottery, metal repousse, wood engraving, lithography, photography and even fresco painting, along with drawing, painting in oil and modelling. The syllabus and expertise received from the science and art departments of South Kensington in London, however, emphasized academic art as the basis for all instruction. As the Indian schools grew they developed an ever-increasing appetite for 'high art'. Drawing from life or still-life (figure, ornamental and architectural renderings) with or without models, painting in oil and 'plaster-casting' displaced the training in crafts. The practice of crafts, too,



42. Nandalal Bose, *Abhimanyu Vadha, Mahabharata* panel (detail), Kirti Mandir, Baroda, 1946, tempera on wall, courtesy Devasthan Trusts, Baroda (photo by jyoti Bhatt)

was 'oriented' to conform with the standards of contemporary academic taste. The studio practice was designed to encourage the study of 'European methods of imitation . . . to the representation of natural scenery, architectural monuments, ethnical [*sic*] varieties, and national costumes'.⁴⁶ Thus, the accuracy of optical observation became the supreme criterion of art school art.

It is not surprising that the new schools failed to attract 'the children of artisans, for whom they were in the first instance designed',⁴⁷ as the teacher of the Sir J.J. School of Art lamented in the years that followed its inception. Problems of communication with English teachers or doubts about the unremunerative nature of the profession alone were not responsible for the situation. Traditional craftsmen were intuitively opposed to the straitjacket of formalized education. They also did not want to lose their independence or the income they derived from working on the farm during their spare time.⁴⁸ Conversely, at Calcutta the art school failed to appeal to the *bhadralok*, who considered art as the profession of the lowly *patuas*. The parents of Annoda Prasad Bagchi prevented him from joining the School of Industrial Art in 1863 on these grounds.⁴⁹

With their limited appeal to craftspeople and the educated elite alike, the art schools were able to recruit only inexperienced young people with no exposure to art or craft practice. For them, the new pattern of education became a source of pride to which they succumbed unthinkingly and with greater servility than even their own teachers might have expected. Despite initial problems with the rules of perspective⁵⁰ and with drawing from 'nature' and 'life' (which were conducted in the studios), in less than two decades the students of art schools in India attained technical standards comparable to those of their British counterparts.⁵¹

The British teachers discovered to their surprise the talents of their pupils in copying traditional Indian painting. Their deficiencies in illusionistic rendering were ostensibly complemented by their ability to reproduce the sinuous lines and sombre hues of Ajanta. The excellence of Indian pottery equally bewildered them, because examples of the imported manufactured pottery they introduced at the J.J. School 'did not equal—much less excel—the Indian samples in many respects'.⁵² The well-meaning Griffiths and his associates who led expeditions to Ajanta encouraged the students to learn from the example of the murals they copied so well (and

which brought prestige and popularity to ancient Indian art in Britain). Ironically, the students showed no interest in emulating Indian art and even doubted the bonafides of their advisors—alleging that their talents in the field of 'realistic' art were being suppressed by their teachers for fear of potential rivalry. Pestonjee Bomanjee, a bright student in charge of the Ajanta project for ten years, during which time he had copied the murals, had no inclination to follow the Ajanta example. In fact, he continued to paint some of his realistic pictures in the 'English classical realistic style' in the camp at Ajanta.⁵³ Later, in 1885-86, Olinto Ghilardi, the assistant principal of the Calcutta School, experienced a poor response from his students when fresco painting was introduced for 'reinstating Indian decorative art in its original brilliancy'.⁵⁴ In 1897, E.B. Havell's efforts at introducing oriental art as the basis of all instruction met with more outspoken protest from his students. A group of students led by Ranada Prasad Gupta left the school and started another called the Jubilee Art Academy, named after the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign which fell in the same year! Later, during the years of the first world war, M.V. Dhurandhar painted an armed 'Mother India', *Safe under the British Flag*. Both Thomas Macaulay's and Charles Trevelyan's dreams were fulfilled earlier than expected.⁵⁵

With the efforts of Griffiths and Havell thus thwarted, the art schools became repositories of academic art. The subsequent impact of institutionalized academicism was faster and broader than is generally assumed. The newly established system of annual exhibitions and awards (often presided over by official British dignitaries); the commissioning of illustrations for scientific and archaeological publications; and the murals executed by the students in public buildings, influenced the tastes and values of the urbanized, literate class. At a popular level, trained students who were subsequently employed as lithographers, wood engravers, modellers, designers and architectural and mechanical draughtsmen, diffused art school ideas among the general public. Those who joined art schools as teachers were able to influence young minds directly.

As publishing and architectural activities increased (in the wake of the declaration of Queen Victoria as Queen Empress of India), helped by improved printing techniques and large-scale building of government offices and monuments, illusionistic techniques and popular motifs of western art and architecture found their way to the Indian street and home alike. A lithographic print served as substitute for an oil painting and the plaster-cast supplied a cheaper alternative to marble. Traditional craftspersons, disoriented by the continuous inflow of visual motifs and formulae, hurried to incorporate them in their repertoire. Neo-classical nymphs with baskets of flowers; cupids holding wreaths around a family coat-of-arms as nude children with wings; gargoyles and grotesques; and classical capitals with or without caryatids

littered the interiors and exteriors of the new buildings.

The Kalabhavan in Baroda was also set up with the objective of advancing technology and technical education, in conformity to the models of the day. Initially, it offered courses in drawing, dyeing, calico printing and carpentry. Subsequently, courses in architecture and pure or applied photography were added. The art course included portraiture, landscape, design in oil and water colour. Commercial artists were trained to cater to the demands of publicity firms, process studios, the cinema industry, and so on. The school offered diplomas following the pattern of the J.J. School of Art and conformed to its standards of teaching and assessment. It is, however, important to note that the institute (Kalabhavan) at the outset specified its objective of combining practice and theory courses 'so as to turn out a more skilful artisan than at present'. Also, the emphasis on imparting education in the vernacular (i.e. Gujarati), which got reverted to English in subsequent years, is of special significance.⁵⁶ A recommendation was made in 1908 about 'the teaching of fine art subjects in an independent school of art, preferably forming part of the Museum and Art Gallery attached to Kalabhavan'. It is also worth noting that in the initial years, i.e. prior to 1910, the number of students joining art was almost as high as those of mechanical technology. A record cites that 'the State sculptor, the late Mr Fanindranath Bose, inspected the Art School. In pursuance of his suggestions an Indian Art section was opened and Mr P.K. (Pramod Kumar) Chatterjee was appointed head master of the School of Art'.⁵⁷

Among those who were trained at Kalabhavan were pioneer film-maker Dada Saheb (Dhundiraj Govind) Phalke (who joined the school in the very first year and impressed the principal with his photography), artist, educationist and editor of *Kumar*, Ravishankar Raval, painter Somalal Shah, and sculptor M.K. Kolhatkar (who made several portrait busts in the Darbar Hall of Laxmi Vilas palace). U.P. Rao and N.B. Joglekar taught there till the entire art department was transferred to the newly established Faculty of Fine Arts at M.S. University in 1950. Eventually, Kalabhavan became an institution exclusively for training engineering students, incorporating the various branches of technology and architecture.

It is obvious from the above account that the art school system left little scope for innovative, creative expression, let alone experimentation. The school of art run by government funds often functioned as a constituent unit of a polytechnic or an engineering institution, barely achieving a status equivalent to the decorative artefacts it produced; even if it possessed some autonomy, it could not escape these policy guidelines. The designers and illustrators it produced for various industries fitted into slots cast for them—as made-to-order *babus* fitted into the labyrinth of the bureaucracy. The lethal combination of academicism with utilitarianism produced servility to the conservative ideas the art school system chose to perpetuate. In the end it served neither

industry nor the cause of art that it pretended to espouse. Instead, it consolidated the power of Eurocentrism and colonial designs. The emphasis on crafts endorsed the view that the Indian hand, so dextrous in manual crafts, was incapable of achieving anything concerning 'mind or deep feeling'.⁵⁸ Even what came to be known as 'high art' rarely crossed the boundaries of conformist academicism.

Perhaps it would not be out of place here to examine the pedagogic system. With courses in portraiture, still-life, life-study, nature drawing, memory and freehand drawing, anatomy and perspective designed for annual and diploma examinations, an average school of art procured objects, live models and devised 'typical sights' as aids to condition the eyes of students to a conservative routine. Standards of assessment depended upon accuracy, relative proportions and tonal effects—in effect, adherence to the illusionistic rendering of appearances. Neo-classical plaster-casts provided poses for the sari-clad or dhoti-clad models to emulate. For reasons best known to the inventors of the term, drawing from figures posing on pedestals was called 'life-study', while plaster-casts were used for learning anatomy. The presence of white plaster gladiators and semi-nude Roman nymphs amidst physiognomies of different colours and designs lent an art class the appearance of an exotic and absurd stage show. 'Still-life'—itself a contradiction in terms—meant a window display of objects and invariably included a ceramic flower vase posed against a hanging coloured cloth. Nature drawing was almost always a microcosmic replica of nature: for example, a pruned twig, more often than not of a red or white oleander. Memory drawing included 'subjects' one could prepare in advance before the examination, such as 'Going to the Temple', 'At the Well', 'Village Scene', 'Toilet' (which decoded meant a lady dressing up), and half a dozen more. All this was taught in stages, in a hierarchical order beginning with the rendering in pencil, graduating to water colour and culminating in oil. The drawing with cross-hatching, water colour with fluid washes and oil with layers of opaque paint was meant to achieve 'total realism'. These ideas were exemplified in the pencil portraits of M.R. Achrekar, the water colour landscapes of P.A. Dhond or the oils of an Abalal or a Pestonjee in the annual salons of the Bombay Art Society or its likes elsewhere.

This formula of art training was gradually enlarged in scope via a network of voluntary centres in the schools of provincial towns. An average diploma-holder with the additional but dubious qualification of art master would earn his living as an art teacher in a school by often doubling as a sports instructor. Most schools, private or public, had (and still have) little use for art. Viewed as a 'hobby' rather than as a professional discipline, it was rarely included in the curricula as an examination subject—with the result that most students dispensed with it as soon as they could.

Is it surprising that the situation has not changed much

even today? Not to speak of schools, even governments and ministries combine culture with sports. Few schools have a place for art; few art schools have space for creative expression. Most art teaching still revolves round standards set by government art schools of the British era. Many schools remain part and parcel of 'technical' education. The ubiquitous ghost of illusionist academicism that haunts the urban public psyche obstructs appreciation of any alternative form of expression, whether traditional or contemporary.

The configuration of a group of artists and art historians around a visionary educationist, Hansa Mehta, in Baroda—a configuration which heralded a radical intervention in the existing educational system—assumes national significance in this context. It envisaged study of art (*kala*) at par with knowledge (*vidya*). It saw the artist as someone aware of his history and art's transcendence of it. It provided an institution open enough to allow the winds of the world to blow through its corridors, yet rooted in a firm soil. The ideal was formidable and the task encumbered with bureaucratic impediments and a chronic lack of funds. There was also the indifference, if not hostility, of a provincial town to ideas modern. The story of such an institution follows.

Glossary

imaratkhana (P) office for upkeep of buildings; *chhatri* (H) kiosk with umbrella-like dome; *shikhara* (S) spire, temple tower; *wada* (M) residential building; *kirtistambha* (S) victory tower; *minar* (P) tower in Islamic architecture; *campanile* (I) bell tower; *jharokha* (H) balcony; *amalaka* (S) coping stone of Hindu temple; *jugalbandi* (H) duet; *simhasana* (S) lion throne; *haveli* (P) mansion; *khadki* (G) enclosure of residential houses; *pol* (G) lane; *zenana* (P) women's quarters; *parsal* (G) front porch; *osari* (G) veranda; *ordo* (G) living room or bed room; *chowk* (G) central courtyard; *hinckho* (G) swing; *vyala* (S) a composite animal form, often lion with elephant proboscis; *yaksha* (S) nature spirit associated with fertility; *naga* (S) snake spirit; *gandharva* (S) celestial musicians, divinities of the sky and air; *vav* (G) step-well; *Pithoro* (G) tribal god of the Bhils; *firangi* (P) foreigner, usually European; *sanchari* (S) fluctuating, secondary emotional state in Bharata's Theory of Rasa; *samsar* (S) unending cycle of life and rebirth; *pagadi* (Amdavadi) (G) turban in the Ahmedabadi style; *shebnai* (H) a wind instrument; *jama* (?) garment or dress, specifically an over garment; *svarupa* (S) intrinsic form; *sutradhar* (S) conductor or director in a theatrical performance; *avatar* (S) 'descent' or incarnation; *vitana* (S) canopy; *yajna* (S) ritual sacrifice; *Pichhavai* (H) painting used as backdrop to the idol in Vaishnava shrine; *Rasaleela* (S) Krishna's cosmic dance with *gopis* (shepherdesses); *qalant* (P) literally, pen or style; *Mahishasuramardini* (S) an epithet for Kali-Durga, in the aspect of killing the buffalo-demon Mahisha; *Draupadi Vastraharan* (S) the forcible disrobing of Draupadi by Duhshasana in the Mahabharata; *mahawat* (H) elephant driver; *palkhi* (G) palanquin; *mathabanu* (G) headband; *mojri* (H) shoe; *ghat* (H) bathing steps by the waterside; *Chauri Bearer* fly-whisk bearer; *mandap* (S) temporary canopied structure, porch; *Nataraja* (S) Shiva as Lord of Dance; *Hamzanama* (P) set of large cloth-backed paintings commissioned by Akbar in the third quarter of the 16th century; *(Dancing) Shakti* (S) the mother-deity in her powerful aspect; *matrika* (S) mother goddess; *buon fresco* (I) 'true fresco' practised in Italy after 14th century, technique of mural painting on wet plaster; *Gangapatarana* (S) the descent of the river Ganga to earth, into the hair of Shiva; *NatirPuja* (B) 'Devotion of the Dancer', a play by Rabindranath Tagore; *Abhimanyu Vadha* (S) the killing of Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna and Subhadra, in the Mahabharata; *baul* (B) Bengali mystic-minstrel; *pagaghungharu bandh Meera nachi* (H) literally, 'Meera danced with anklets on her feet', opening stanza of a devotional song by Meera; *gharana* (H) traditional mode of music or art often denoting family conventions; *Krishnaleela* (S) life of Krishna; *bhadra-lok* (B) term for the elite in Bengali; *patua* (B) itinerant scroll painter, narrator of rural Bengal; *kala* (S) art; *vidya* (S) knowledge

Note: (B) stands for words of Bengali origin, (G) for Gujarati, (H) for Hindi, (I) for Italian, (M) for Marathi, (P) for Persian, and (S) for Sanskrit.