

# Art at Home, School, University and in Public Life\*

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## Abstract

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*My generation imbibed the values of Gandhi's thoughts. He impregnated the whole nation with the ideas of dedication, non violence and freedom of speech. With those fervours, while in schools, I joined Seva Dal and did volunteer work. I grew up in a traditional Hindu family and participated in innumerable festivals, puja and rituals, which inculcated in me, without my knowledge, with a sense of arts and aesthetics as a way of life. My home and the town I lived in had the basic components of various forms of art. Home as such is a sacred place. Art was not a separate entity; it was a way of life, embedded in every activity. While growing up, I painted, drew, swam, gardened, and never thought of art as a profession or career.*

*I call my 50 years of work, I have done nothing but devote myself to my work and teach. My childhood Boy Scout temperament is still in me somewhere. Hence my indulgence and concern for art at home, in school, in the university and in public life. This is why and how I made the collection of artefacts, antiquities and handfans; to set up museums and collections for the future generations.*

*I have served in different committees, both governmental and private, raising my voice, giving unsolicited advice for open-ended education, filled with arts and aesthetics, and art in public life. When you look at the interior landscape of Indian culture, there is a rich, holistic upbringing at home and in society. Our rich cultural heritage still survives, but it is unfortunately not linked to contemporary life. My concern is both at the micro and macro levels, beginning at home and extending to public life.*

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### **GANDHI: CHARITY AND IDEALISM**

India being an ancient country has a rich cultural heritage. Great thinkers and seers who went deep into every aspect of life and then made treaties for high quality of human life, eventually aspiring for salvation. There was a deep concern for all species of life in nature to survive together. Gandhiji imbibed the spirit of India and used it for modern times. People in India lived together in cluster and proximity for sharing, comfort, and safety.

Gandhiji was an evolved soul. My generation was born a little before independence. So, the fervour of the freedom movement and its idealism was embedded in our upbringing. Our parents were immersed in the freedom movement. The stalwarts and the role models such as Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru and earlier Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Subhash Chandra Bose, Sri Aurobindo, Jaikrishnamurti and Vivekananda were the visionaries who shaped this country.

Way back in mid'50s when I was in school we revered Gandhiji and Congress Seva Dal. I enrolled as a volunteer in Seva Dal to distribute rice to flood victims. In our mindscape a sense of idealism, commitment, and dedication were engraved.

### **ROLE MODEL AND PARENTAGE**

Art is an integral part of everyday life and not a separate entity. It starts at home.

Home as an institution was very sacred. The parents and grand

parents lived together in a joint family, and their knowledge and expertise percolated down and nurtured little children, and the mother was the nucleus. Mothers breastfed children, children were massaged in oil, bathed in water with turmeric powder heated out in the sun. There were ceremonies for the first grain of rice put in the child's mouth and the first time the child held a chalk stick and made a circle on the floor. This was the beginning of the learning process.

India had a tradition of oral learning and very few had access to manuscripts. The intangible intellect was given as much importance as the tangible knowledge. The eldest were role models for the little children who imbibed everything like a sponge or wet clay. Home is where everything stems: sharing with brothers and cousins, sitting together for meals, cuddling, playing with dogs and cats, where the mother keeps a vigilant eye on the child and the child grew up not only with love, care and affection but soaked in various rituals, puja, arati, chanting in the evening and festivals.

My father named his children after Rabindranath Tagore and his brothers such as Rabindranath, Sachindranath, Jatindranath, Dhirendranath, Birendranath and my sister Sarojini. My mother must have got married at 15 and discontinued her studies. She came to Bombay when my daughter Nandita was born and she recollected that she used to draw in school and had been awarded a Japanese doll for it. She

didn't continue drawing but wrote poems instead all her life. At every wedding whether in the family or in the neighbourhood she wrote a poem which was quickly printed and distributed during the reception. She wrote poems on little scraps of paper or on a used envelope and put them under the mattress.

## HOME

On the walls at home there were prints of gods and goddesses such as Jagannath, Saraswati, Durga, Kali and great men like Vivekananda, Ishwarchandra, etc. Photographs of grandparents also adorned the walls at home. The walls were white-washed every year and nobody brought shoes into the house. The gardens and the fields had all kinds of vegetables, fruits and flower bearing trees and fish in the pond. The rice fields swayed and changed colour from green to golden yellow in the winter. There was enough food for the whole year. Nature, life and art were intermingled, which was a natural way of life.

Today a sea of changes has taken place not only in my home town but in the rest of the country too. The same house and fields are barren. The family buys even green chilies in the market.

In urban living, children are growing up in crammed concrete dwelling units, away from their ancestral homes and open spaces, spending their days with maids,

household helps, or crèches and day-care centres. Of course, there is always an option for those who have children to plan to give up their job and stay home until the children start school. Those first five years are crucial to the child's development. Parents are to participate in the children's activities and their wonderland by drawing, dancing, singing with the children or putting them to bed.

## MAYURBHANJ AND THE GREENERY

We were lucky to be born in a tribal district, and erstwhile princely state. However, a model town is semi-rural with the advantages of both urban and natural ambience. There were acres of land attached to the house, with all kinds of vegetables and fruit bearing trees and groves. I had a fairly sizable garden to myself and I used to look after it. My two younger brothers and I brought buckets of water from the well and watered the plants. I spent all my time in the garden or near the riverbed beyond the mango grove.

There was a Ranibagh— the queen's garden, may be 50 acres of land, with all kinds of fruits and flowers, champa, nageshwar, and magnolia were also there. There were Venetian ceramic stools to sit on and there was a miniature steam engine train for children to ride. This was the childhood of wide range of experience which was a way of life. All of this is gone, the mango grove has become a housing colony, Ranibagh has been plotted and sold.

### **ACHAAR VYAVAHAR AND SANSKAR (SENSE OF AESTHETICS AND REFINEMENT)**

Living in a large joint family with three generations of people, I remember my grandmother saying 'You pluck the flower to offer it to Krishna or for the hair of a lady or to put it in a vase. Otherwise, let the flower be on the plant.' She used to make pickles and badi in the winter, and many women from the neighbourhood joined in. The process takes many, many weeks and the pickle and the badi were dried in the sun in large baskets. So, from the early childhood we had variety of recipes and dishes which have stayed on my palate.

I love cooking for friends and I have done it in many parts of the world though I never learned how to cook. The taste of the dishes I had at home done by mother and sister is retained on my tongue. Incidentally, many artists cook all over the world, and cooking is the greatest art of all. I would even go further and say that anybody who has had tasty food at home will be able to flourish in art. We learned by simple observation to show our respect to the elders by touching their feet and doing pranam. We did not have to be prompted by anybody to do so as children. For example, when my father was talking to his friends; we didn't interrupt and did not walk across between them.

### **MEALS AT HOME**

At meals we sat together on the floor cross-legged on asthna and

ate in large kansa thali with bowls and each one of us had our names engraved on water glasses. We had to eat neem leaves with every meal in the summer. In the evening, at teatime suddenly the Chhau drums would vibrate like thunder, sending reverberations and shivers down the spine, and one would leave the snacks and rush to witness the Chhau dancers.

Many of us must have had similar upbringing at home and some of us might have been luckier than the others. In joint family we shared everything and when the relatives visited we shared our blankets. When 20 kg of fish was caught from the pond 10 kg were distributed to the neighbours and relatives. From all this and much more, a sense of creativity stems.

### **MUSIC AT HOME**

We had a large Philips radio and my sister would tune to classical music so everyday in the house there was music. In the evening my sister-in-law would recite bhajans and we would repeat. Wherever we were, we had to rush at a particular time for the evening prayers. At the same time the Jagannath temple aarti orchestra resounded in the neighbourhood. In the town, during Saraswati, Ganesh puja, etc., there would be cultural programmes for the whole week and traditional music and dance performed in front of the diety and we would sit through the night to witness all of it.

In my home town there were many temples, a church and a mosque, all religions living comfortably together. As a matter of fact, my mother adopted Sher Ali, the tailor, as her son, and he would participate in all our functions. This little town had a large library with rare books, a council hall with Italian marbles and light fittings. There was a museum, a zoo, and a municipality more than 150 years old. The raja's marble statues carved in England were in place, and there was a lake full of lotus flowers. The memory of my childhood is still fresh in my mind. Aesthetics was a way of life, it was not studied. We used to have an annual week-long classical music concert to which A.T.Kanan, V.G. Jog and Bade Gulam Ali Khan and others were invited. I think I was ten or twelve years old, and my friends and I would carry musical instruments to the stage for them. Sanjukta Panigrahi was a little girl and did Odissi dance, and Kalucharan Mahapatra was the guru and Hari Prasad Chaurasia would accompany him on the flute.

Even in an urban setting in Delhi, Mumbai and elsewhere, those who do not have land to grow plants can do so living even in a flat. They can grow plants and vegetables in pots and children can see them being watered, grown and flowered. Frankly, plants and trees are very important. Children should be taken to gardens and parks to roll on the grass and see different kinds of trees and flowers. This is where schools can compensate what

families cannot provide in smaller dwellings. Hang a rope-swing to a tree and a child will enjoy it immensely, and there are many songs pertaining to jhula a teacher can sing. As a matter of fact, in our country there are folk songs for different seasons and different occasions.

### **FESTIVALS, CEREMONIES AND RITUALS**

Coming from a middle class Hindu family every possible cultural religious festivals of the season were celebrated at home and in town—Ganesh Puja, Saraswati Puja and Jagathdhatri and Durga Puja were celebrated. There were larger than life size murtis, first armature with straw and then cladding different layers of clay and finally painted over and the jewellery and the decoration in solarpit. We had witnessed the celebration of these icons in different seasons. There was a Pujaghar in the house and during the Lakshmi Puja beautiful dhokra brass figurine came out of the bamboo basket and cleaned with tamarind and ash and shine like gold. In the evening we all washed our feet and sat cross-legged for aarti. The Pandit came and opened the pothi on a carved bookstand and chanted *shlokas* from *Upanishads* and *Bhagatwad purana* and my grandmother and mother sat listening and I disappeared to the garden where I spent all my time. Though I didn't understand a word, the music of the chanting still rings in my ears.

My grandmother kept muslin dhoti and angavastra twisted in wrinkles on the ulna and my father and I occasionally went to the Jagannath temple bare feet and witnessed the trinity Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra black, white and yellow bodied minimal large iconic sculptures. During the aarti the musicians played their traditional instruments.

### **PUJA, PAINTINGS AND MURALS**

During the Lakshmi puja all over Orissa and Bengal villages, women do 'Chita' and 'jhuti' with rice paste on freshly applied cow dung on mud walls. They were not formally trained in this art, but picked it up through their growing years. My grandmother, mother and sister embellish the walls till late in the night before the puja. The fist and fingers impression was the symbol of Lakshmi pada and the illiterate people also understood the symbolism. This is a very ancient art form which is now gradually disappearing. The Saura tribals in Orissa and Warli tribals in Maharashtra do similar drawings with earth colours on mud walls with rural stories. The Kachhi in Gujarat embellish their walls including their granary with clay low relief. In Madhubani, people make lovely murals on their walls with fine lines with twigs, narrating everyday village stories.

In a wedding the chittrakar comes and does a mandala within which the bride and bridegroom are drawn with some symbolic designs.

Everyday, all over Southern India, women clean their front verandahs and the entrance floor and put a slurry of the cow dung and make various patterns with rice flour welcoming the Gods and the guests.

### **TRIBAL AND FOLK ARCHITECTURE**

The tribal people in Mayurbhanj and other parts make beautiful mud houses with inner courtyards and terracotta pictures with shining bronze-like bodies. They paint their walls in layers of different earth colours.

The Mayurbhanj district in Orissa, bordering Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, has large settlements of tribal people and they come to the town for work as daily labour and a large number come on different days of the week, bringing their vegetables, forest produced crafts, basketry and so on for sale and on their way back they play drums and flute and sing.

A farmer comes back from the field and after his meal spends time on the verandah doing a craft work, and in the evening he takes mridhangam and sings. So, life and art overlap and one flows naturally into the other.

In our traditional holistic upbringing, art was not treated as a separate entity from the day-to-day life. Art was not just painting, dance or music. It was all in one. Each form of art shares aspects with the others because poetics and musicality are inherent in all aspects of art and so is it in life. The so called modern



education system has created much division. Today, a dancer is not exposed to sculpture or painting and the architecture student studies Le Corbusier but has not seen different parts of India as per its diverse climatic conditions. So, various forms of arts are disjointed and completely divorced from life. A teacher in school draws a mango instead of taking the student to a mango grove to smell, draw, and then eat the mango.

### **MY GURU**

There was a head master who was a sadhu. He was a learned man all in one. He was my guru. He sang bhajans, did clay modelling, painted pictures, and taught yoga. He was the one who taught me yoga. He also cooked wonderful dishes and grew vegetables and herbs in his little lush green garden. I have not met anybody like him since.

A friend of my brother who studied art at Tagore Shantiniketan would return home every summer. In the summer, while everybody had their midday siesta, I would go to him in the scorching sun to learn how to paint flowers and birds. My eldest brother used to study at the university and he used to bring Japanese oil pastels for me. All my brothers and sisters used to draw and paint but somehow they didn't continue.

### **SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Every school, I believe, should have a sand and clay pit for children to make clay pinched toys and figurines.

Normally schools have a dedicated place for art class and art rooms where there is coloured paper on the walls on which children's paintings are put up, whereas, there should be boards, which have neutral colours on which the paintings stand out.

Many schools that I have visited only had art in their art class whereas all the school walls are naked and hungry for visuals. The schools should be designed in such a way that classes can be held outdoors under the winter sun because the concrete and cement is cold inside, the building instead of being like an army barrack block should be a cluster of rooms around the inner courtyard with a tree in the middle and benches to sit around. The inner courtyard could be used as an extension to the classrooms. There should be a vegetable patch for children to see them grow and if it's a residential school then there could be a cowshed for milk as well as a gober gas plant for cooking and the cow dung can be used as manure for the vegetable garden.

### **ART CLASS**

Varied forms of art could be taught in the schools. There should be a music teacher, a dance teacher, a painting teacher and also a traditional crafts person should be invited for stone carving, clay modelling, block printing, etc. There should be a carpentry section where children can use pieces of wood to construct and make architectonic structures. When children go to kindergarten they miss

home and the parents as well as their familiar environment. School has to be an extension of home. Amongst the teachers there should be an older woman who the children could go to cuddle and sit on the lap. Schools should pay more attention to art than anything else playfully, like singing on the swing, painting on the floor, and dancing to a rhythm from a dholak. The teachers for painting, dance, and music should work together in structuring the approach in a natural fashion and treating each day and each season differently. Learning could be made a lot of fun. The upbringing at home and in primary school is the most crucial for the child's development. Therefore, as much time as possible should be spent with plants, animals, puppetry and such other creative methods. Teaching methods could be magical so as to hold the child's attention.

### **SEMINARS AND WORKSHOPS FOR THE ART TEACHERS**

The art teachers of different schools should be invited and/or exchange programmes for different schools so that the expertise, experience, observation of teachers can be shared. This alone brings freshness to the approach for the teacher and the school. The music teacher and the mathematics teacher can work together in a structured mathematical, rhythmical cycle. It could be so arranged that while the children are painting there could be soft music playing.

### **THE ART ROOM**

Cheerfulness is the core of an art room. The room should be designed with large windows for natural light. Little children can have low desks with drawers for the art material. Soft pin-up boards should be put up all around the school walls for art work. There should be dedicated boards for the drawings of the day, poems of the week, etc.

### **THE ART TEACHER IN SCHOOL**

Humanities are given less importance than science subjects. Some schools do not have an art teacher. Art as a subject has been abolished in some states. But the fact is that art as a subject can help with the child's development and the child can develop through it more than from other subjects. Art and science are not only both sides of a coin, but also like sugar mixed in coffee. The process is science and the outcome is a piece of art. There is art in nature. Every activity in life involves art and science. The real creator is nature.

The art teacher can help all the other departments for visual aid. Anybody who has done a course on art does not necessarily become a good teacher. The parents' role is taken over by the teachers in school and vice versa. The art teacher in primary school is more important because he has to inspire the children not only to draw, but to dance, sing and play with clay and sand. Little children are natural artists. If you provide them with a blackboard, floor, wall or paper



they draw on it. Whatever comes their way the teacher has to be vigilant, and not to guide them but to provide them with the material and inspiration. A little child puts his hand into the ink, takes his palm impression, and is astonished with the print. That tactile experience is important. Sometimes they even draw on their clothes and get delighted. The teacher should also be careful not to compare the children's work. Instead he or she should inspire and encourage all of them.

Teachers should essentially be a part of the painting group along with the children. As a matter of fact the art teacher should regularly paint, sing, dance, and hold exhibitions every year in the school. Quite often school authorities stop the teachers from continuing their practice whereas, I would like to suggest that teachers have a studio adjacent to their art department. The teacher should never even correct any painting on the surface of the child's work. The teacher should sometimes take children to the garden and show them trees, skies and clouds and encourage the children to draw some objects from memory, some objects by looking at them.

Take for instance objects like banana or mango. The teacher should bring these fruits for the children to draw and offer them to eat so that the experience is complete.

In higher schools, quite often children give up art and more attention is given to science. As a

matter of fact, equal weightage to the arts and to science makes the growth of the child holistic. Our education system seems very dry and does not make learning fun. I think visits to museums should be a part of the curricula so that children can be exposed to crafts, sculpture, paintings, etc.

At the university level, the syllabus is very trite and regimented and there is not much input of traditional art form. There is hardly any concept of visiting faculty and study of medium and material. There should be more exposure to our own heritage like visiting museums and drawing after the master pieces. A senior MFA student does not even know how to clean a brush properly. It seems that even the academy institutes have now been commercialised. Most of the institutions in our country do not have a museum, gallery, or archive. Students should be given a forum to exhibit their artwork inside the university and the market forces should not be allowed to enter the educational institutions. The faculty should be practising individuals. There should be dedicated studios within the institutions for them to continue their own work, and even hold exhibitions and display teacher's works. The government should make special funding for faculty to set up the cluster of auditorium, library, museum, gallery and archive as a must for all schools, universities, and colleges.

### **MAXMULLER BHAVAN—CHILDREN'S ART WORKSHOP**

I did a workshop some 35 years ago in Maxmuller Bhavan in Delhi where I insisted that with children their parents and all teachers participate. We sat around a mango tree and since it was the season for mangoes, baskets of raw and varieties of ripe mangoes were brought. Everybody had the ripe mangoes and the raw ones with salt. Some were circular and others we scooped with a spoon and the mangoes came in yellow and orange colour. I had asked a folk singer to sing songs of the season so we sat quietly under the mango tree, looking at its branches and leaves, even noticing the bird's nest on its top. Then everybody did the drawing in pastels and water colours. The parents were first hesitant but then they were all suddenly engrossed in painting and drawing. There was pin-drop silence. Even the naughty children were busy and quiet. Recently, I met some of those children's parents and somebody approached me, hugging me, and touching my feet, all the while talking about the taste of mango still retained in their mouth.

When we were children we were given khari, a soft stone like chalk, to draw on the floor. This could be wiped enabling us to draw again. The floor was the space for the child. In the urban setting, with limited space parents can put up a blackboard at a low height with different colour chalk sticks for a child to draw. Every child

relishes drawing and even a restless child becomes calm for some time. This is not only true for children but for every human being. Writing is not drawing but still an art and a lot of people do not write letters anymore. They communicate by email and SMS, which to me seems impersonal. This communication system seems mechanical, synthetic and dehumanised.

### **TOYS FOR CHILDREN**

Children put everything in their mouths because their experience is tactile. The toy manufacturers in India have copied the western plastic toys and the figuration is not Indian, toy guns are offered to children. The toys these days are not child friendly, in fact they seem to have a negative and violent effect on the children. There are many colours for children that are toxic whereas, in the entire world the art material for children has to be non toxic and the garments for children has to be made in natural fibres. Yet in our country children's clothes are made out of synthetic polyester and the society and government have not paid any attention to it. So, a child is exposed to all kinds of pollution. Now, there are designer clothes for children with all kinds of writings on the front and back, making children look more adult.

In our country there is a variety of traditional toys made out of organic material in different parts of the country, which are very beautiful and child friendly. The Andhra lacquer

wooden toys, Benaras painted toys. The only family left in Benaras who still makes some only sells a few because there are no takers and people have no interest in these traditional toys. The lacquer terracotta toys in Orissa that I grew up with are no longer available. There are only two families in Orissa who still make them. These toys are waterproof, child friendly and harmless. My grandmother used to take me to the fair and festival markets and used to get me terracotta toys which I kept carefully in my almirah and have continued collecting these toys for 40 years and I am working on a book on the subject.

The Barbie dolls, Spiderman, and Superman toys are manufactured in millions and have taken over the markets all over the world. Chinese manufacturers have cleverly designed toys and guns, tanks for children, making it more attractive with lights and mobility, run by battery, which sell in large quantities, not realising their impact on children.

The books that are produced in the west sometimes are sold by Indian publishers mostly have a hard cover. Not only are they more expensive but actually are not child friendly. There are books with drawings of figures or animals with numbers in it to fill with colour into the area. This particular exercise is boring and limits the child from free expression. Frankly, for little children there should be no art books. They should be given borderless space such as a floor or a wall or a drawing board or sheets of

used paper and be free to paint and draw what they like. The illustration of children's books should be large and simple with primary colours, local storage, and local flora and fauna. The paper for the books should be thicker. There should be no horror stories for toddlers.

In the early 60s, in Bombay, Leela Naidu – the actress who died recently – and I did art classes for children. I recall one child who painted one page completely black with a dot in the corner saying in Marathi “this is bhoot and that dot is me hiding.”

Children are Godly innocent and have no lateral reference. They are spoiled by their environment, parents, society, television, toys and many objects of industrial produce. Mostly a child draws the father or mother or the puppy or draws just from inherited memory.

### **ART CAMPS— CHILDREN'S ART COMPETITION**

I have been to thousands of children's art competitions, art workshops and schools. I have seen beautiful paintings and drawings from the dream world of children up to the age of six or seven. However, older children's painting and drawing become archaic and mechanical simply because the input is given by teachers, parents, and books. Frankly, I think education really destroys the creative pursuit and natural growth of a human being. There are too many do's and don'ts, unnecessary audio, visual, and

intellectual information, and instead of encouraging the natural process we are being regimented to right and wrong, good and bad. Hence 'rubber stamped' human prototypes are produced.

A child draws on whatever surface comes his or her way. Mama scolds a child that he or she is drawing on the sofa and spoiling the walls. Instead they could get a roll of paper and stick it on the entire wall at the child's height that would become the child's universe to draw on. Parents watch adult movies in front of the children and expose them to visual pollution. The child is like a sponge and wet clay, he absorbs everything and gets automatically moulded to not only what he hears but also what he sees.

I smoke a cigarette but I don't smoke inside the house. I smoke in the garden, hiding myself from my child. One day he observed that I was sitting one leg on the other smoking and flipping the cigarette. The next day he sits exactly as I had and flips his fingers, telling me he is smoking a cigarette. When he was five, one day, in my studio he saw me painting with ink. I had a mug of ink, a broad brush and a thin brush. I had wiped the broad brush on the edge of the mug to reduce the ink and painting. The eyes of my child lit up and he wanted to paint. I gave him a sheet of paper and thin brush but he insisted on taking the broad brush and did exactly as I did to squeeze the brush and painted. He is now six and half and I never

teach him anything about painting. I only gave him pastels pencil, crayon, ink, water colour, paper to draw and paint. I don't even disturb him when he is drawing. He is hooked on the Krishna and Ramayana story from television and often he draws the Kalia, the snake and Krishna.

Children should be exposed to nature and all of its elements, the sky, the cloud, birds, animals, trees and flowers and they pick up whatever they fancy.

Once there was an English lady, a friend of mine, who came to my studio with her son who was eight and I gave him some paper to draw and he said 'uncle Jatin I can't draw.' I asked 'Says who?' He said my art teacher told me that my drawing is not good. So, the teachers and parents can be very cruel other than books and television.

Colonial British organised children art competitions with awards. As I have mentioned I have been to many of these but I insisted there should be no awards such as first, second, third, and the horrid consolation prize. Little children's paintings are wonderful. I sometimes envy their naivety, spontaneity and imagination. I have always insisted that all little children who paint should be given a return gift of some art materials.

Now there are thousands of art competitions in India, organised by multinationals and other corporate houses where they give expensive awards such as televisions, watches,

cash, etc. to evade tax and there are some companies who print their logo on three-fourth of the paper and leave one-fourth for the child to draw on. So, everything marketing. Some teachers in school put the name of the child and class on top of the painting and some teachers even sign and give marks to the paintings!

### **MUSEUMS AND ART IN PUBLIC SPACE**

Museums in our country were originally set up by the British and had become merely storehouses of antiquity. They are not connected to our education system even though students of all subjects can refer to museums as a source of information, especially art and architecture students. Sixty-two years after independence, we haven't thought of developing the concept of museum as a learning centre, a resource centre, and how to make it livelier. We have hardly set up five museums and the National Craft Museum has about 10% of the Indian craft. The State Emporium is selling industrially produced figurines and there are not enough publications on the various forms of weaving, painting, architecture, etc. We have economic and political history in our school and university education, yet the cultural history of our tangible and intangible intellectual property has never been exposed in our learning process. Hence, engineers, doctors or politicians have no idea of the ethos and cultural heritage of our country. This is how M.F. Hussein has come

to be threatened by political groups for painting Sita; because the public at large has not been exposed to our sculptures, miniatures, and poetry. In architectural studies, foreign modern architecture is taught and there is not enough input of traditional Indian architecture. During the colonial period, the education system was to make us clerks, and we haven't given enough importance to art and culture as the backbone of our nation. Even today, the folk, tribal, and classical art forms have survived but these rivers are flowing separately and drying up. Traditional artists, we call craftsmen, and the modern artists have taken the centre stage, though there is enough verve, strength and richness in traditional art forms. There was a proposal for setting up district level museums, which has not been implemented, and innumerable artifacts of our country have been pilfered, stolen, and sold abroad. Pandit Nehru promulgated in the Parliament that 2% of the total cost of a building should be set aside for works of art and decorations, which has never been followed. We have the Commonwealth Games, where billions are spent, but there is no concern or any attention given to art in public life, such as murals, sculptures, etc. We erect ugly sculptures of leaders in various parts of the nation leading to no space for piece of art for the public to view, though there are millions of sculptors and painters in the country. The Lalit Kala Academy brings out contemporary artists' books, and

colour reproductions but they are not acquired by schools or colleges. Indra Gandhi National Centre for Arts has numerous publications on art, unfortunately lying in the dark. The Publication Division of Information and Broadcasting Ministry has similar publications. All this should be printed in large quantity, which should reach the libraries of all academic institutions. The metro stations have no works of art. Art

students could be asked, to do murals. The walls of all the buildings and facades are hungry for murals in a country where there is such a rich heritage of arts. The new airports are mere reproductions of other airports round the world, without any art in them, or a display of traditional folk art. We must wake up and not only make ourselves visible to the world but conserve our art form by making our next generation interested in it.