


Guess the grand prize

 In the recently held Air Guitar World Championships, the winner was Nanami 'Seven Seas' Nagura from Japan for her Cinderella-themed performance. Her prize: a guitar!

A CONFLUENCE

Canvas change

After the floods washed away Tejasmi Das's paintings, a new form of painting that combined the styles of Odisha patachitra and the Tanjore painting emerged. The artist shares her story with REJI VARGHESE

I'm sitting in Tejasmi Das's house in a quiet area near Porur, on the outskirts of Chennai. Close by, the Adyar river meanders just before it enters the main city. Tejasmi Das comes into the drawing room, we exchange pleasantries, and start talking.

Tell us about your early years and how you started painting?

I discovered painting while growing up in Odisha. In fact, at the time, my hobby was writing poetry and I wrote poems for many local magazines. I was also actively involved in student politics in college, and painting was just one of those things that I loved and dabbled in, but never had the time to pursue seriously.

So when did you actually discover that painting was your first love?

After marriage, my husband Ashok Kumar Das, who's an IPS officer, was transferred to Madurai. For someone who had lived all her life in Odisha, this move to interior Tamil Nadu was a big change. But my fears were allayed when I settled down in Madurai. I found the people warm and friendly, and in a matter of months, I had fallen in love with Tamil Nadu, its rich culture and its people. I learnt to read and write Tamil, and I started cooking dishes like *puli kozhambu*, *pongol*, *rasam* etc.

Later, my husband was transferred to Ramanathapuram and that's where I discovered the beautiful art of Tanjore paintings. I started spending a lot of time with the local artisans, learning their centuries-old techniques.

After a four-and-a-half-year stint at

Ramanathapuram, my husband was again transferred, this time to Thanjavur. I continued spending hours every day with Tanjore artists, learning their techniques and honing my skills.

In 2015, my husband was transferred to Chennai, and we moved to this house. I had done a series of 18 paintings by then, in Tanjore style, and I was planning on having an exhibition in early 2016 when the calamity struck. The Chennai floods of December 2015 submerged my house. My family and I were not in Chennai at that time, so I lost all my paintings. Years of love, labour and toil were gone in the blink of an eye. I was heartbroken. I decided to quit painting.

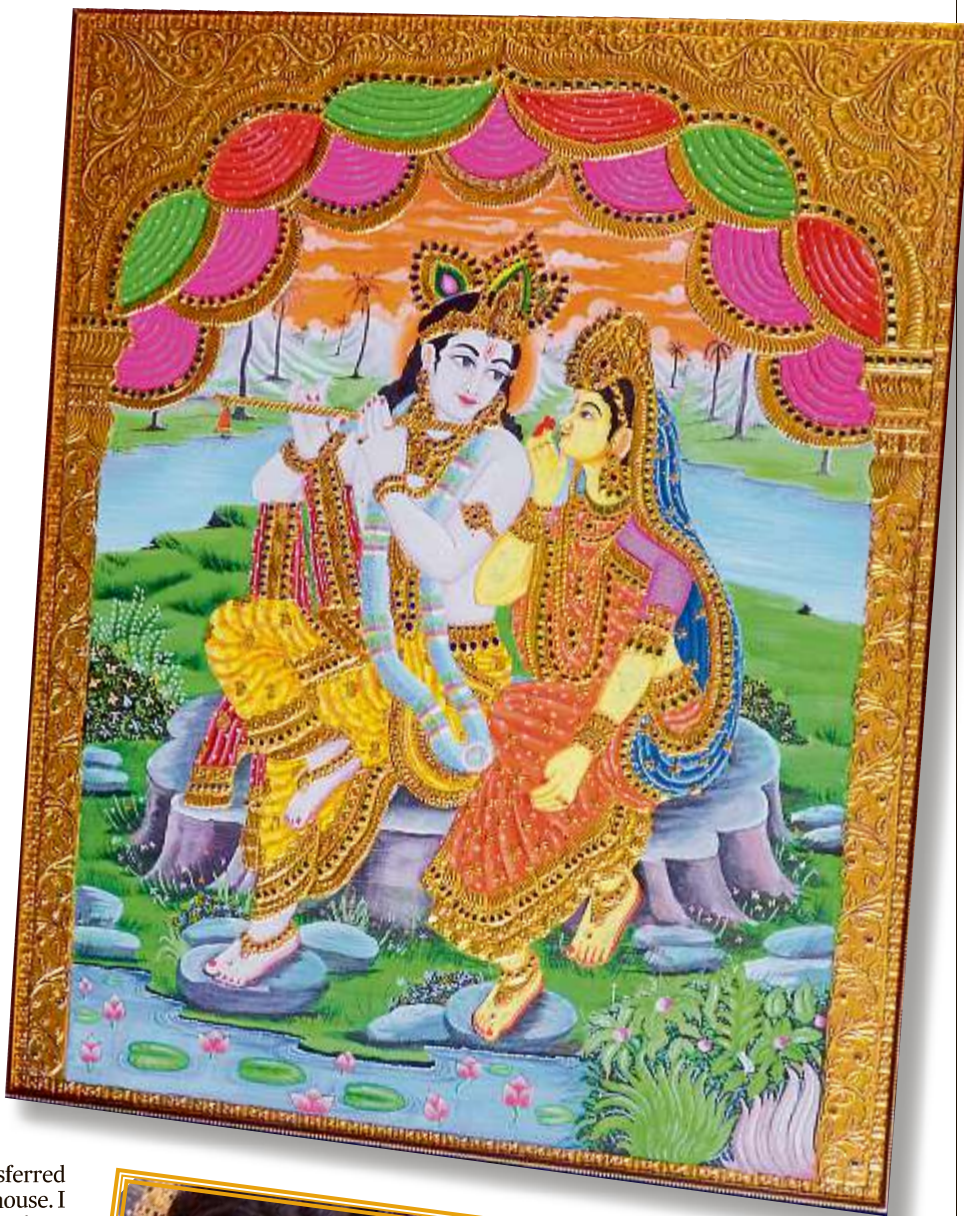
When did you start painting again?

For many months after the floods I didn't touch the canvas, but my daughter and husband kept encouraging me to start painting again. When I did start painting again, I started experimenting and mixing the styles of Tanjore from my adopted state, with intricate brush strokes, and drawings of Odisha patachitra, my home state.

This fusion of ideas and techniques had the effect of a dam inside of me bursting open, and I painted with a fervour I hadn't felt before. In a short period of time I had completed a series of 37 paintings.

Tell us more about the two different styles of paintings and how you combined them.

The name patachitra has evolved from the Sanskrit



PHOENIX-LIKE
Artist Tejasmi Das and her paintings.

words 'patta' meaning canvas and 'chitra' meaning picture. Patachitra is a rich colourful painting done on canvas, depicting mythological and folk stories from the *Panchatantra*, the *Puranas*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In the days before *Amar Chitra Katha*, parents read out stories to their kids from patachitra paintings.

Tanjore paintings were originally done for royalty. These paintings are done on wooden planks and hence referred to as *palagai padam*. In Tamil, 'palagai' means wooden plank, and 'padam' means picture. Tanjore paintings are full of vivid colours with gold foils overlaid on extensive gesso work and inlaid with glass beads and pieces or semi-precious gems. In the early years, rubies and diamonds were also used. Because of the inlaid stones and the relief work, Tanjore paintings have a 3D effect.

In my paintings, the visuals, detailed brush strokes, exquisite borders and intricate drawings are predominantly done in the Odisha patachitra style, while the gold-foil work, inlaid stones, wooden plank and gesso work are all done in the Tanjore tradition. The theme of these 37 paintings is of Radha and Krishna as seen through Radha's eyes. I've invited the viewer into the mind of Radha and all the paintings are done from this perspective.

Are you the first artist to combine the techniques of Odisha patachitra and Tanjore?

As far as paintings are concerned, the answer is yes. But there is a deeper and much older connection between Odisha and Tamil Nadu. About 500 years ago, a Kanchi princess called Padmavati married Purushotama Deva, the King of Orissa. The story of how Purushotama married Padmavati is folklore. Padmavati's Tamil influence is still felt in the kitchens of the Jagannath temple in Puri where they serve Tamil delicacies like *murukku*, *medhu vada* etc.

What are your plans for the future?

I would like to experiment with different styles of other states, too. Patachitra paintings are not restricted to Odisha, there is patachitra in Bengal, too. And as for Tanjore paintings, it was started under the rule of the Cholas, was furthered by Telugu-speaking artists working under the Nayaks, and later given patronage by the Marathas.

All our art forms are an amalgamation of various influences over thousands of years. The richness of Indian art is its pluralism and diversity.

ART CORNER

Of fiery reds, bold beliefs

Just free from his exhibition at the Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre in New Delhi, artist Mrinmoy Barua is anything but relaxed. "Now there will be more work as people will begin connecting with me for buying these artworks," he says contentedly. And rightly so. His show, *The Vivacious*, drew people from far and wide thanks to the huge hoardings across the city prior to the show, held from July 28 - 31. The works displayed, a mix of divine figurative and vibrant abstract paintings, only added to the charisma. Done in rich hues of reds, blues and oranges, the works simply seem to have lit the gallery.

There is a story behind why Barua uses rich reds and oranges in his works. "There was a time when these bright colours scared me. I used them scantily. Then, in 2004, my father fell sick and during this period, I donated blood so many times that my fear of red vanished," he says.

"The works on display here are all about showing living with art with peace, love and respect, whether at your workplace or home. It not only complements a space but creates a unique personal experience within both your inner and outside worlds," he says.

Women are stronger

Barua's bold lines speak for themselves. A number of his paintings are dedicated to women, each with a lot of fluidity and energy that are shown through rich red shades with no baseline. He paints the female form in all its hues and aspects, celebrating its energy, vitality and passion, portraying it as infinite, determined and sensual.

"I genuinely feel women are the more stronger sex than men, and through my bold lines, I try to show that," says the artist who is inspired by his mother, Priti Rani Barua.

Figurative is more close to his heart, though it is his abstract work that sells more, and the artist is not very happy about it. "Maybe because an abstract painting can fit in any place, any room, and on any wall, but a figurative work needs to have those sort of surroundings," he opines.

Born and brought up in Delhi, Barua joined as an art teacher at his alma mater, New Delhi's Raisina Bengali School (he heads the school's art department) after completing his



education because "no matter how good an artist you are, you need to have a job to sustain you, otherwise even your art work will suffer."

A resident of Dwarka (Delhi), Barua has held many solo and group shows, and sold a lot, too. His works can be seen in many public and private collections, and corporates are his dedicated clients, as also actor Madhuri Dixit. But he rues the fact that those who understand art can't buy it, while the ones who buy it have no understanding of art. Art isn't valued much, and that's because art is not taken seriously at the school level, he says.

But we need arts

"It is cities like Kolkata and Mumbai where art thrives; Kolkata because people there are genuine art lovers, and Mumbai because people have a larger buying capacity. In Delhi-NCR, it is Gurugram that shows more promise," he says.

One thing that stands Barua apart from other artists is that he works only with acrylic on canvas, rarely using any other medium. And he works for just about three-four hours a day. "That's more than sufficient," says Barua. Even these huge works (some of them are life-size) that he creates take about 10-20 days for their completion. He feels that emotions and thoughts that go into a work can be sustained only for a maximum of 20 days. "After that, your thoughts change and spontaneity is lost," he says.

If you happen to browse through his website, you will find under the 'Shop Now' section a rather innovative way of presenting your creativity to prospective buyers. So, if one of his artworks does not fit into your scheme of things, or you need more greens to buy it, you can have the same creative wonder on perhaps a fleece blanket, beach towel, tote bag, portable battery chargers, t-shirts, coffee mugs and much more.

RAJKUMARI TANKHA



COLOUR OF FEAR A red-dominated painting by Mrinmoy Barua (above).

HISTORICAL BOUQUET

The scent of flowers

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The poppy

The sunflower travelled with pride, but another flower travelled in infamy. The opium poppy, the source of one of the world's oldest medicines, has also been the cause of great sorrow.

The earliest known records for opium poppy show that it was first cultivated in 3400 BC in lower Mesopotamia, where the Sumerians called it Hul Gil, or the 'joy plant', because of the intoxication it produced. The latex produced from seed pods is dried to make opium, which can be further purified to make heroin.

Healers through the ages have known the medicinal benefits of opium. Termed laudanum, the tincture of opium in ethanol was used to 'relieve suffering' of patients suffering from pain, sleeplessness, diarrhoea, bronchitis, tuberculosis and rheu-



matism. During the 18th century, it was used as a sedative and tranquiliser. However, doctors everywhere began realising its extremely addictive powers, especially when it was used for recreational purposes. And that is where the trouble lay.

In the 1800s, China had a trade surplus with Britain, thanks to its export of tea. Britain sought to destabilise this situation, with Indian-grown opium. The British forced Indian farmers to grow opium, and through the East India Company, amassed vast resources of opium and cotton which it began to export to China in return for its import of tea. This resulted in more Chinese opium addicts, and reduced their trade surplus. Therefore, China banned the opium trade. This led to the First Opium War, which resulted in, amongst other things, Hong Kong being ceded to the British Crown.

Today, opium usage has become a distressing epidemic throughout the world. It is also financing terrorist outfits like the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The rose

Finally, the flower that has captured the hearts of human beings since time immemorial: the rose. Roses are known to have flourished 35 million years ago, and petrified rose wreaths have been found in ancient Egyptian tombs. They were grown for their fragrance as well as their medicinal powers, and are used in a number of



poultices and beauty treatments.

In the 1st century AD, Emperor Nero of Rome is said to have dumped tons of rose petals on his dinner guests. Cleopatra of Egypt had her rooms filled with petals of fragrant roses so that when Marc Antony met her, he would be overcome, and thereafter, remember her every time he smelled a rose. Her ruse worked perfectly!

However, the rose was immortalised by the War of the Roses, a civil war that took place in England between 1455 and 1487. The nobles of York adopted a white rose, while the House of Lancaster decided to

take a red rose to represent them. Tudor Henry VII of Lancaster won the war, but married into the House of York, merging his Lancastrian white rose with the red rose of his York bride, and creating the Tudor Rose of England. This Tudor Rose is now the plant badge of England.

"When you take a flower in your hand and really look at it, it's your world for the moment," said American artist Georgia O'Keeffe. The next time you look at a flower, really look at a flower, just be aware that you may be looking at a game-changer in history!

BLONDIE

