

The Meditative Art of Paubha

- Gunjan Verma

I have always been pulled towards Paubha paintings of Nepal and Thangka paintings of Tibet. The fine lines, intricacies of designs, the play of soft and vibrant colors are fascinating. For me it was a style of painting which seemed unachievable.

My introduction to Paubha painting was through my dear friend Hiroko Nagahama. Meeting her by chance at the Embassy and then one thing led to another and to cut a long story short, I started learning Paubha style of painting from her.

Paubha is a very precise painting and the process of painting has been compared to meditation. I do not paint Paubha in the strictest sense of its rules, my paintings are inspired by the Paubha style of painting. Paubha art, on the other hand, is an epitome of Newar art, essentially evolved and developed in the historic Kathmandu Valley.

Paubha paintings can be generally divided in two or three broad formats. The simplest form of Paubha is always in a pure symmetric layout. The principal deity is painted large as the central element – making it the focal point of the whole composition. Most often, the principal deity is flanked left and right by the chief attendant deities.

Mandala & Stupa: The next, popular form of Nepali Paubha painting is called Mandalas. A mandala, which is Sanskrit for “circle” or “discoid object,” is a geometric design that holds a great deal of symbolism in Hindu and Buddhist cultures. Mandalas are believed to represent different aspects of the universe and are used as instruments of meditation and symbols of prayer.

The Wrathful and The Benign: It would be very interesting to note here that deities depicted in Paubha painting are from both – Buddhism and Hinduism. The deities are benign or peaceful or they are in a state of anger or wrathful. It may baffle many lay observers of the fact that most of the principal deities from both the religions say Lord Shiva and Parvati from Hinduism and Lord Buddha or the five celestial Buddhas are always considered to be in peaceful postures. But why do we find that in many of the Paubha paintings, some deities are shown wrathful. It is said that the good and bad of a deity are depicted hence both kinds.

Paubha is painted on a cotton cloth which is stretched and a layer of clay and buffalo fat is smeared on it. Natural stones are crushed and mixed in animal glue and painted in vibrant colors. Specialized brushes are used and it can take two months to a year to finish a painting.

A few of my Paubha inspired paintings...



(Author Madam Gunjan Verma is the spouse of HE Mr. Sanjay Kumar Verma, Ambassador of India to Japan)

Looking Through Ana

- Sougata Mallik

At the threshold of every changing age in life, one wonders how the days ahead will be or how were the days that are now our past. I think we have all wondered about this at some time - you, me, him, her, everyone.

It was one of those moments at a certain age juncture when I too wondered, and suddenly took the decision of doing something I had never done before in all these years of my life. The time happened to be in and around my birthday. I realized the clock is ticking away, and what can I do that I have never done before, that I haven't done yet.

I took an instant triggered decision to volunteer at a homeless housing accommodation for women. The volunteering work there encompassed helping, assisting, attending – all kinds of chores such as preparing food, serving food, running laundry machine, folding towels, preparing bedding, administering Band-Aids, and talking to women to encourage them in availing the facility as they seek shelter for a night. None of the work is what I have never done before. I know how to clean, cook, do laundry, and take care of the sick. But what I have never known is the array of experience and enlightenment that such trivial work can provide.

It all began when I was preparing bedding for an unknown woman who had arrived at the door of the housing. The authorities hadn't turned her away, rather planned for a warm meal, a comfortable bed for the night and some encouraging words to welcome her to the night shelter. At that hour I happened to be the 'to-go' member as they call for the alliance member volunteering between the organization and their plausible resident. The resident for that night was Ana.

Ana was standing at the door, clutching on to a duffel bag and looked disheveled in her appearance. I invited her in, gave her a glass of water and casually started talking about the day's weather. Ana responded with immaculate correct data and spoke of how the global warming effects can impact citizens. She visits the local City Townhall daily to read the newspaper and looks up current news on display at City Hall. A part of me was immersed in awe with her prompt answers, and a part of me questioned if she is so alert how/why she is here. I was a volunteer at the housing accommodation. A volunteer position is a non-salaried, non-organization worker, only to assist. I am not allowed to ask detailed questions. I quickly moved away from the topic and asked Ana if I could show her the bed I prepared for her stay, and where the shower stand was to wash herself. Ana agreed without resistance, followed me unquestioningly, and somewhere it seemed we had become the Cinderella and glass slippers that fit. Ana spilled out a remarkable hierarchy system of street homelessness. And for me I gaped in astonishment, bewilderment, wonder at the new founded revelation.

Ana said she was hesitant to come inside the housing for shelter due to 'street justice'. In the homeless communal, street justice dictates that if somebody gives something to you, you will owe it to them and be willing to pay the price at any time. If you don't, the consequences will be rigid. To enforce street justice the punishments will have to be stiff, like beating on the face that leaves painful marks so other homeless can note the caution seriously. If you get a shirt or sweater from any organization that hands out clothing to homeless, street justice demands that you return it there after use and when it is in good condition. Street justice also demands that you can never give anything to a child or a pet without straight approval

from the child's parent or the pet's owner.

Adding to the street justice system, for the homeless communal there are important figures called 'street dads'. A street dad is also a homeless man but one who has earned the reputation of being nurturing as well as the bold tough guy around. A street dad gets into a defending pledge with homeless women and teaches them the means for living on the street. On her homeless abode, Ana's street dad would sweep off the litter and cigarette in front of business offices to give Ana a clean place to sleep. He would keep awake when the lights faded in the night to protect his daughter from danger or unwanted interference. He would sleep in the morning to make up for the loss of sleep. Ana moderately said if you see a homeless man pushing a cart with large plastic bags filled with items and a dustpan and broom along with it, he is probably a street dad for his street daughters.

Ana connected the exploration for her finding daily new homes. One morning she had woken up near a police station. Early in the morning, she went into the police station to report a pair of stolen branded Clark shoes which she had got from the Church. This was also the pretext to use the police bathroom. That being done Ana headed to the nearby grocery store and to the adjoining Café area inside the store. Ana had her own plastic cup inside a duffel bag. Homeless communal by rule will not carry glass cups or plates. Ana tapped on hot water button on Café machine and found a tea bag inside her bag. The morning tea was ready. Next step would be to loiter around the Deli area in grocery store. Recently expired bread, cheese, ham which are discarded by staff in the morning, are enough for Ana's breakfast, lunch or even more. On statutory holidays when grocery stores are closed, Ana told of places that sell hot water for 22 cents, bottled water for 37 cents, hot dog for 65 cents.

In the homeless communal, having children is not quite encouraged. Babies are little subsists and need care, food, warmth. In spite should they arrive in any homeless 'family', the child is taken care and nurtured by everybody. Alice was one such kid whose parents were the 'wealthy' homeless due to payments which was to be received from a lawful situation. Nonetheless, the homeless communal will not let little Alice go without a Christmas morning excitement. They gave in everything they could to decorate a shelter room, put up lights, buy toy for Alice that is suitable for her age. On Christmas morning, Alice woke up and saw the decoration, lights, toys. Little Alice screamed "Look"!! The homeless communal was standing at the door to witness this joy.

Ana had attended the Christmas mass in Church. Ana had attended the parade organized by City Townhall. Ana had also given up cigarettes, alcohol and had agreed to take up a daily job of sweeping grocery floors, the job which her street dad had arranged for her. His associate, another street dad a few years ago, is now the key-keeper of a local public laundromat. He no longer lives on the street and can pay rent through his frugal but a steady income. Ana's job of sweeping grocery floors daily will fetch her adequate eventually to rent a room for her own and have her own kitchen that can run through overstocks, miscellanies and discards from the grocery store where she will be employed. The homeless communal can have access to such very moderate rent low housing rooms when that time comes for them. Sooner or later Ana can be out of the streets like the friend of her street dad and

have a small home of her own.

Ana had come to housing accommodation so she could use their phone to call the Free Medical Crisis Line. Ana knew it would be a lengthy call involving transfer of departments and extensions. She did not have money at that time to make lengthy call from a public phone. Ana wanted to reach the nice lady at the free medical crisis center. When Ana was very despondent in her state, a sudden bright morning unexpectedly gave her the voice to ask for help. Ana's street dad handed her a cell phone to make a call. The cell phone was borrowed from one who now has his own rented room, a job at warehouse loading and a cell phone. Ana was given an hour's time on that phone. Ana made the call to Free Medical Crisis Centre, said she wanted help to breathe freely like everybody else.

A kind professional lady counseled Ana every week and provided free medication that was needed. Ana took the help; she truly wanted to live in a different way than her usual way till then. Ana had started to breathe more freely. She was able to smell the air around, she was able to feel the warmth that sunrays gave every morning. Ana had come to the housing to make the call in-person to tell her therapist that she has a job from the next day, that she is not so despaired anymore, that she will have her own small, rented room closeby.

The bed that I had prepared and the meal that I arranged for a strange woman at the housing accommodation was not needed that night. Ana would not accept a night's accommodation or a night's meal there. That night she was still a part of the homeless communal where a favor received had to be returned in the right way. Ana would not violate 'street justice' which she was still a part of that night.

This was one diurnal out of my standard and regular

time, but the day's experience astounded me in the most surprising way. I had come to the housing accommodation with the honest intention to help. But what I hadn't prepared myself is that there could be so much to learn in the process. The allegiance to communal justice, the sense of gratitude and pride which Ana displayed then was not something that required any assistance at that moment. My preconceived notions, defined views that had etched itself markedly for a long time were shook to the core. Ana has opened my eyes to the uniqueness, solidarity that can lie within. I had wanted to do something different. I have done it now – I have looked intently through Ana's eyes and have found a richness I had never experienced before.

I had come here to support the women in need. Maybe someday soon during my volunteering tenure at the housing accommodation, I will help a woman in need. But I also know that I will assist her with an entirely different mindset of mine. I have learnt the formulation and survival of residents in the homeless communal. Possibly not everybody is Ana, but there can still be the hope that another Ana is somewhere near, mingled somewhere not too far away. Irrespective of whether I find another Ana or not, conceivably in my mind there will be a salutation before I help them.

The sun will shine the next morning and set as usual in the evening. Also, it will bring disparity for some and uniformity for the other. But for Ana, she will take the sunrays and bask in the shine with her new life fluttering its wings ahead. The hope, the newness will be her fresh air to breath. Ana wanted to breathe freely, and sure she will. And for me, I will take a part of Ana and keep with me till perpetuity - till the sun shines, sinks, and rises again.....

Wingbeats

- Utsa Bose

It happened long ago and also yesterday. I do not remember it exactly. But I will tell you what I do remember. During my first week in Japan, I came to know about "mushi-tsukamari" or bug-catching, which, I was told, was a big thing there, and I soon bought a small net along with a glass box to keep the insects in. Tomoki, my neighbour, took me bug-catching one April afternoon, and we soon chanced upon a host of black-tailed butterflies. Their wings were purple, almost achingly beautiful. "You can pick them up with your hand too," Tomoki said, as he scooped one up, closed his fist and then transferred it into his own box. But the moment my fingers touched a pair of wings, they snapped off and the butterfly collapsed. I was left with a violet, dusty pigment on my fingers, a sight that still remains with me.

"You can't touch them," Tomoki said, "they're too brittle for that. You have to close your fist around them, without touching them, as if you're bringing them from one world to another."

But butterflies, I soon realised, were not easy to keep. They would flutter maniacally inside our glass boxes, beating their wings like little hearts, crowding near the edge of the glass, injured, perhaps, by some possibility of moving back to the world they were smuggled from.

And time went by. Soon, it was summer. The grasses were growing with pride, swaying in the wind like sentinels. The afternoons were full with the cry of cicadas, their husks

clinging to the trees, momentary mummies of nature. Nothing in the cry of cicadas, Bashō said, suggests they are going to die. But I knew. As summer would withdraw into the womb of time, they would slowly drop the ground, secure in their belief that they had done enough for the next generation which would arrive the next summer.

It was the grasshopper mating season, and the greener patches of the father's university would now be crowded by little kids with nets and glass boxes, catching as many as they could. Grasshoppers were surprisingly quiet and docile, as compared to, as I soon found, praying mantises. After one particularly large haul one summer's day, I came back home, proud of my accomplishment. But the larger grasshoppers were now turning brown, a sign, I learnt, that they were approaching the end of their life.

Eventually, only one remained, and it would chirp, sing almost incessantly. A strange soliloquy of sorts, it chirped and sang for three days until I let it out of the box, and it moved away, dark brown by now, into the leaves.

Over the years, I have found myself thinking of that butterfly, of that unexpected act of violence--had I torn off the wings myself? Or had it given them away, as soon as I had touched them? Caught between wonder and shock, my first insect in Yokohama was just that--a middle creature, suspended between life and death, between wing and body. I think of all the butterflies I tried to keep, the dull flapping of

wings against glass.

And.

I have also found myself thinking about how grasshoppers swell in numbers, about the frightening brevity of a cicada's life, and ...Insects have a strange way of humbling you--the parameters of their lives are so different, their dreams so much lighter, that their passing rarely seems like a gap, or even an absence at all. Bashō's aphorism is, perhaps, predicated on the assumption that cicadas cry despite their inevitable deaths--or better still, they are oblivious, even unconcerned about their very fate (nothing in the cry)--but I am moved to consider the opposite, that perhaps the orchestra of insects during mating season is also a cry against death. Everything in a cicada's cry suggests, perhaps, that they are going to die. And yet.

I sing not in spite of death, but because of death.

Sometimes I would find myself feeling sad at the very

prospect of how little insects lived. If I had only a week or a month to live, I'd think...

The single brownish grasshopper, sitting inside my glass box, would sing into the wind. Perhaps its song was not a denial of death, but the reinforcement of its eventuality, its inevitability. Every act an act of simultaneous acceptance and subversion, a flapping against the glass, a crackling against the wind. When insects die, we seldom feel a void--the fragility of their lives is in stark contrast to our lives of comparative surety--but this very difference, this not-being-dead enough--because-not-having-lived-enough, asks us, perhaps, "is meaning attached to a life only on the basis of how long it is lived?" Their utter alienness, not just in sight, but also in time, signal a radical possibility of rethinking moments; look at the grasshopper, look at the way it greedily consumes each moment. Sometimes, all it takes is a day to live an entire life.



Kathak and Mudras

- Piali Sengupta

Mudras is typical of any Indian dance form. The most interesting and intriguing fact remains that although the dance forms differ from state to state, the mudras are the only common factor in these dance forms, be it Kathak, Bharatnatyam or Odissi.

Now speaking of Odissi, Bharatnatyam or Kuchipudi these are temple dances but Kathak is of a different genre. It is also intriguing why Kathak with supposedly Nawabi / Islamic influence also has the same Mudras like Bharatnatyam or Odissi. The fact remains that Kathak too originated within Hindu temples as a storytelling device for portraying the epic tales from Hindu scriptures, Mahabharata and Ramayana. Poetry was combined with rhythmic movement to aid in the worshipful storytelling. However, the stories didn't stay within the temple walls for long. Nomadic Kathakars, or wandering storytellers, soon began carrying the dances throughout the India. In this way, Kathak transitioned from its secluded, devotional origins to a more accessible, multi-disciplined entertainment tradition. Moving out of the ambit of the temples, it became an established part of court culture, performed under the patronage of India's Persian kings and Muslim moghuls. This sealed Kathak's transition from colloquial entertainment to classical art form.

Behind palace walls, the emotional and graceful storytelling inherent in its Hindu roots combined with the more technical postures, rhythmic elements and mathematical influences of Islam. Thus, Kathak developed into a strong dance tradition that incorporates elements of both Hindu and Muslim cultures. It flourished further under Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow. A poet and dancer himself, out of his court came a stylization of Kathak that is today known as the Lucknow gharana. Generations of dancers Modern Kathak masters of the Lucknow tradition can still trace their lineage back to the court of Wajid Ali Shah, including the world renowned Sambhu Maharaj, Acchan Maharaj, Pandit Birju Maharaj our Guruji Nrityaacharya Pandit Parhlad Das Chitresh Das to name a few.

Nrityaacharya Prahlad Das, my Kathak Guru (a stalwart in Kathak of both Jaipur and Lucknow Gharana and disciple of

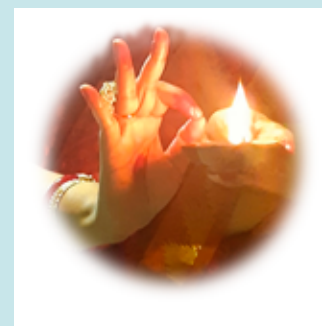
Sambhu Maharaj, uncle of Pandit Birju Maharaj) taught us the intricacies of Mudras and how the word "Mudra" is derived from Sanskrit, meaning that which dissolves duality and brings union between the Yogi and the Divine.

The Natya Shastra lists 24 Asamayukta (one hand) mudras and 13 Samayukta (joined hands) Mudras. These Mudras are formed by the hands and fingers and can depict different animal, bird forms, emotions and feelings. The Mudras are both dynamic and static as they can be made while during the dance movements as well as during a meditation. Mudras typically are forms of Natya or expressions.

Since our fingers touch our palm in different position during formation of a Mudras, the point of holding a mudra is essentially locking in the flow of energy in our energy system (the body) so we can direct it to reach a higher state of consciousness.

By working with the "Hasta" we can stimulate the energy lines in the hand. In Ayurveda, the Five Fingers represent each of the Five Elements - Thumb = Fire, Index = Air, Middle = Space, Ring = Earth and Little = Water (Source internet).

When Gurus of Kathak say 'Ta resembles the vastness or Brahma and Thei is Shakti' together they make Tat, which symbolizes the whole of creation or 'shrishri ka adhar', it goes on to say how the "Bols" or the Mudras we have in Kathak are not just sounds we make with our feet and hands but an innate bonding with the universe, wherein it is not only the balance between body and soul but a balance with every being in this universe, that brings about unity and an understanding of the larger meaning of life and creation. That is how art makes a person evolve and better oneself in the process.



Gratitude

- Joyita Basu Dutta

A warm bright patch of morning sunshine,
Casts a filigree pattern on the living room wall.
A fortuitous miracle for a room in the west -
As a gleaming reflection off a window across,
Gifts us this ray of hope on bright days.
For which my heart is full of gratitude.

I sit beside it with my steaming morning cup,
Revelling and jubilant, expressing my glee.
Just when we're joined by some songbirds -
Melodious visitors, hopping and prancing,
Elated to see new blossoms on our balcony
Mellifluous songs fill my soul with gratitude.

I tiptoe out for a tête-à-tête, a few words.
But the untrusting ones flee into the foliage.
Along the rim of the road below, bare branches
Of the endless winter just gone by, display
Their tender, luxuriant and verdant hues.
The leafy boughs fill my heart with gratitude.

The river beyond the high embankment,
Glistening, shimmering and rippling
With undulating fervour it rushes on -
I walk along the red road by the river
And am greeted by the outstretched sea.
The expanses I behold fill me with gratitude.

The morning sliver of sunshine on my wall -
Now into a mighty glorious orb transformed.
Enraptured I gaze out at the heavens above;
The beckoning ocean I discern in the horizon
And the ethereally luminous Fuji on my right.
Thank you I whisper, my heart full of gratitude.

The Yellow Canary

- Soumitra Talukder

I had always wanted to ask the angel of my spirit,
"The yellow canary" which lived in the shades of the big tree,
O Canary! However, shy you are in your beauty in coy
The melody of your voice gives away your allure.
and the mystic of your essence in delight,

Do you know that in the veiled mettle of my lenity!
You are the careless blithe of life I always longed,
For the quest of my limitless bliss.
while you soared the horizons of deliverance.
Nearer to the heavens of abode.
I get lost in the sentience of my euphoria!

Tell me O Canary! Did you ever meet the souls?
Up in the sky of infinity, sliding in and out of clouds,
Who had loved me ever for what I am, good or bad!
How I wished as I could have told them the meaning of my love,
And the value of boundless era,
Which never came back to say, adieu!

Be with me my Canary! in my pensive moods,
When I whisper you the words of my concerns?
The angst of emotions, the happiness, and the pique of ire
Which I could not hold in the passage of times.
And when the time comes for a mere song of love
I can still do it in demure just like you do.



A Second Chance!

(A tribute to my mother-in-law)

- Arjyama Choudhury

A Second Chance
At times life gives it to you
At times it doesn't
Either way its fair
Till life is there!

But what do you do when life itself is begging for a 2nd chance but it doesn't get it?
It takes away your 2nd chance along with it!
And before you realize its gone!

Hope and faith still keeps us alive
For it is the basis of its existence
But what do you when life itself is gone?
Doesn't it take away all of these along?

When you know there is no 2nd chance
Then living with it is the biggest curse
I validated with my hope and faith
Oh we just moved ahead they said; couldn't cross her fate!!!

I cried and roared; I disown you faith
You promised to give me a 2nd chance
Then why did you fade???
Faith said " Never have I promised you & nor have I affirmed
You now got to live with this, with your dreams having shattered!!!

Autumn is here and but you aren't
Taking my hopes away and never to mend
I asked faith again, I knew you would give me a 2nd chance
There came the answer " I never had any plans"!!!

"Neither did we" said hope, faith & life!
To leave you in despair and walk so far away
But we promise to make it thrive
Within you as happy and gay!!!

Maa

- Anandaroop Mukherjee



I know you held my hand,
when you brought me to this world so grand,
you amazed me with my eyes,
that started to see,
the wonders created by thee,
I crawled and you picked me up,
and helped me run so that I won't stop,
you are the soul that I share with all,
still there are times when I do fall,
and yet I know,
that you will save me,
deliver me,
since the game is made for me to see,
help me make your sacred fire,
free from desire,
help me ma fight my fear
hold your work close and dear
hold me up make me stronger,
let stale thoughts never linger,
bad press never hinder
and I know,
you will save me,
deliver me,
so that I can be as loving as thee.

Raja Rammohan Roy

- Sankhin Sen, Grade X

Raja Rammohan Roy heralded the coming of the 'Modern Age' in Indian history. The Brahma samaj, established in 1828, was not merely a religious movement, it also included in its programme matters of social and political. It brought in a New Awakening in India.

His approach to religion: Rammohan Roy was inspired by the monotheism of Islam (Unity of Godhead), the ethical teachings of Christianity and sublime doctrines of the Upanishads. He believed that every religion had set up a moral code necessary for social peace and happiness.

Social Reforms: The Brahma Samaj attacked the caste system, the practice of polygamy, child marriage and the Sati system. Raja Rammohan Roy started his anti-Sati crusade in 1818. It was in 1829 that the practice of Sati was made illegal in of denying women the right to property. These social reforms, he believed, were necessary for political advancement and happiness of people of India.

Liberty, Rights and a Free Press: Rammohan Roy recognised the blessings of British rule in India. He could also see the importance of English education in the modern world. In spite of his administration for the British, he was a staunch nationalist. He regarded liberty as a 'priceless possession' of every individual. There existed many restrictions on the publications of newspapers in those days. Rammohan Roy had started a Bengali Weekly called 'Samvad Kaumudi' in 1821. Later he started a Persian paper called Mirat-ul-Akhbar. Both the publications had a distinct nationalist and progressive character. Along with a few other eminent persons, Roy presented a Petition to the Supreme court for legal actions to be taken against Press Regulations.

Economic ideas- Rammohan Roy was sympathetic to the cause of the poor peasants. He wanted the Military Budget to be reduced, so that more funds were available for activities concerned with the health and education of the people. He sailed for England in 1830. It gave him an opportunity to appear before a Select Committee of the British Parliament. He apprised the Committee of the poor economic conditions of the people in India.

He was a great visionary, social reformer, and an educator. Brahma Samaj led to the beginning of Bengal's Renaissance period, which transformed political, social religious and educational values among the Brahmin community. He is considered to be the "Father of the Bengal Renaissance" by many historians.

My Wish

- Soham Kundu, Grade IV

I feel so shy

That a bird can fly
And can travel fast
When I can only walk

When I have to pay a lot for a plane
The bird can fly without any complain
And doesn't have to wait long at the airport
No need of PCR test, no vaccine passport

When I have to study all day
Bird will sing, chirp and fly away
And doesn't need to go to driving school
For them to travel faster, so cool!

I wish to be a bird
In my next birth
No one can stop me
Life will be full of worth.