

PALLAVI PUNDIR

A FORETELLING "Hey Ram" is painted in Hindi on a canvas at the entrance of Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi, as an address plaque, familiarising us with the occupant inside. Once in, there is a conspicuous absence of the face associated with the words, yet his presence hangs in the

air. There is a horizontal geometric landscape of greys, whites and blacks that buries the word "Satya", and a spherical wave of colours standing on the base of "Shanti". A hue of sunset colours swarm the words on another canvas, ending with "Jahan pyaar hai,

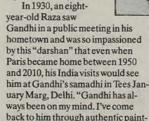
wahan ishwarhai" in Hindi. Hours later, we find ourselves in front of yet another address label, a metallic "RAZA" on the boundary wall of a house in Safdarjung Development Area. Intimation enough. SH Raza is sitting amid his paintings. He points to an incomplete one—a large canvas with outlines of geometric patterns—and mumbles lightly, "I thought I'd finish this one before you come, but couldn't."

For someone who grew up dur-

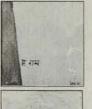
Moment of Truth

SH Raza on deconstructing Gandhi in his latest solo, his belief in a higher power and his latest preoccupation, *prakriti*

ing the pre-Independence era in the small town of Mandala in Madhya Pradesh. around a time when ideas regarding revolution and freedom were flying about, the topic of Mahatma Gandhi is an easy conversation maker. The 13 works on display from his latest series "Parikrama: Around Gandhi" at Vadehra Art Gallerycame equally naturally.



ings that have a sense of his ideas.



parailcinistory had branched out, with the formation of Bombay
Progressive Artists' Group, helmed by FN Souza and Raza, who challenged the pre-existing "revivalist nationalism".

Take the 92-year-old through "Parikrama" and his deconstruction of Gandhi in the form of his quintes-

sential geometric patterns and Hindi

texts, and he says, "I want to tell my

country what I've been doing all

(Left) SH Raza at home; his artworks Hey Ram and Shanti inspired by Gandhi

particularly of satyathese years. I've been reading on Ingraha and ahimsa which dian concepts, Gandhi, the Ramayana, and the Gita, from my childare most important to me," says Raza, who hood. I used to read books on them in started work on France. There are so many things "Parikrama" three years that I'm still discovering," he says. At ago. It was also importhe gallery, one finds a sense of timetant that around 1947. less fluidity of Gandhian ideas when the political history and presence. culminating in India's Independence, followed by Gandhi's death in 1950, a parallel history had

and presence.

Along with the exhibition, two books have been launched on the master, both published by Vadehra Art Gallery, and priced at Rs 2,000 and Rs 25,000 respectively. While A Journey of a Master is a coffee-table book with prints of Raza's works, Geysers comprises letters between Raza, fellow artists and critic friends such as Akbar Padamsee, Souza and VS Gaintonde among others, between 1948 to 1988.

tween 1948 to 1988.

Currently one of the most expensive Indian artists, Raza is busy with his latest project on the theme of prakrit (nature).