

## Restrained colour

By RANJIT HOSKOTE

Sujata Bajaj: mono-gravures  
Jehangir Art Gallery  
Till April 15

**F**USING disparate elements together, Sujata Bajaj assembles her mono-gravures in the manner of palimpsests: across them all, its strands vibrating with nervous energy, reigns the motif of the rope.

An image that gains in power over successive works, the rope becomes by turns an umbilical cord, a foetal curl, a tyrant's whip and the oppressor's noose.

As it leaps against rocky, excavated blackness, or pebbled brown beaches, or settles on tatters of fabric, it signals an energy straining to find ex-

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pression. The process has both a positive and a negative aspect, and its effects are tumultuously visible.

The imprints of *yantras* drift through a stark karst topography; Jain and other manuscripts run parallel to the stabbing offensives of daggers. Whilst the profiles of Greek gods break on *grisaille* impressions of centuries of tides, splotches of mildew blot out the ground-plans of bombed cities.

At one level, an indigenous traditional matrix is brought into conflict with a European sensibility; the work appears to be the battlefield over which the artist has fought out her internal struggles, given her Indian origin and her French training. Yet, the mono-gravures operate beyond this narrow personal genesis.

The use of colour is restrained — apart from the occasional burst of red, the warmer hues are firmly held in check by grey, agate, and black fields.

Even in this subdued tonality, a sense of churning manifests itself, a *manthana*, the inky whirlpools and avalanches of which throw up, here and there, a musical notation slashed by a bayonet, a hero grappling with the sun, or a hedge of spears.

One must note, however, a tendency towards reiteration: some images, some structural arrangements recur almost unaltered through many of the works on display — and the suddenness of a particular visual experience and its resonances, tends to flatten out over a series of such variations, as a consequence.