

# Past Perfect, Inside Out

HEMANT CHAWLA



**A HABIT THAT MAKES YOU A DILLI WAALA:** At times, I swear while driving

**AN INTERESTING 90S PARTY TREND:** Back then embassies would host art parties. People would flock for free wine

**A DRINK YOU HAVE STOPPED HAVING:** Sugarcane juice. I would guzzle down glasses as a child on cycling trips from Gulmohar Park to Chankyapuri

The Gurgaon home of miniature artist Manisha Gera Baswani is a museum that celebrates Delhi. She is an avid collector of the city's past and her own: a silk-screen wedding card that her guru A Ramachandran made when she was to tie the knot with businessman Rahul Baswani; a bronze bust of Ustad Allaaddin Khan made using a passport size photograph of the maestro. A vintage *phulkari* shawl spun by her great-grandmother adorns one wall. 19th century glass paintings, abandoned bird nests along with works by Himmat Shah, Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Bajj, Sheila Makhijani and of course her guru are a testimony to her diverse taste in art. She moved to Gurgaon three years ago, but the duality of Delhi—tranquility and chaos—continues to fascinate her. Its past calls her, lingering in the ruins of Moghul tombs and decayed forts and finds expression in her work. It lives in works like *Flora Fauna Filligree*, *Thandi Havayan*, 007, *Balcony*, *Desert River* and many others.

Delhi's past is very different from the present, she feels. "Very few people in Green Park and Hauz Khas, where I was born and lived till three years ago, owned cars in the 1970s. The family would pile into a small car and sail forth for picnics. I would go cycling for hours in Lodhi Gardens and Chankyapuri. Our kids would never be able to experience those times." It is through her husband Rahul's eyes she sees Delhi. "We go for walks in Tughlaqabad, Lodhi and other beautiful patches of the city. I try to take the kids for concerts and art shows, but make no conscious effort to initiate them into art."