

of the Raj. And the neglect has only grown."

That's why shows such as Ahuja's, which bring back the crowds to government museums, are so important. With more than 300 antiquities sourced from 44 collections, what is the common thread running through the sculptures, paintings, masks and jewellery on display? Ahuja says that the overarching idea is the idea of India, an assimilation of contradictory traditions. "Every gallery has many points of view on one subject. And there is an overarching opposite room, which is a completely parallel opinion and even within that parallel opinion, there are many voices. It's a museum, damn it! Not a temple. Where are you leaving me room to look at history, in its many hues, in an interesting way? If we are going to be a multicultural society, we have to learn to live with our neighbour who is completely different from us. That's why when on a Sunday, when I see a group of Army jawans bringing their wives into the gallery and discussing the art on their day off, I feel a sense of having achieved my objective of curating an exhibition not meant only for the urban intelligentsia."

THE CONTRARIAN

A History graduate from Delhi's Venkateshwara College and a doctorate from London's School of Oriental and African Studies, Ahuja has also curated the works of Delhi-based sculptor Devi Prasad and written extensively about his life. How did the late artist leave such an impression on him? "I was an apprentice at his studio. I was probably his dullest student, but I spent a long time with him learning about art and life," Ahuja says. He remembers Prasad as a compassionate, down-to-earth person. "I learnt a lot of my values

towards art and labour from him. He was a Gandhian who spent his life in an eternal dialogue with Marx and Tagore," he adds.

Most times, some of the greatest treasures of India's cultural heritage stay buried in the shroud of neglect right in our backyard. The celebrated curator cites the example of the grave of a Mughal princess that was lying desecrated in the Red Fort since 1857, when the Lal Qila was sacked by the British. "It has never been put into the accession registers of the

ASI. The wreckage of the Gadar was so bad, we'll perhaps never find out who she was. But the curator was kind enough to accession that for me so that I could borrow it for the exhibition."

At a time when India is witnessing the largest urban migration in history, ever, says Ahuja, most of us are living in a *Peepi Live* bubble. "People like us are post-Nehruvian urban Indians. How much do we know about our cultural values, our ritual heritage and performance culture? That is the big question," he says.

As one is nearing the end of our conversation, one cannot but resist asking Ahuja how he reacts when journalists write that he has sexed up academics. "That's fantastic!" he says. "If am coming across as somebody who has added sex appeal to academics, I take that as a compliment. But I don't think one can tart scholarship up. I think people have forgotten how interesting visiting a museum can be. How interesting it can be to engage the mind. We've even forgotten the art of conversation. Just being with a bunch of friends since they are interesting company. That's why I have people over and cook for them and party!"

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FERTILE IMAGINATION
Hariti, figure in limestone, 4th century AD. Acquired from Guntur Museum



AKBAR'S TALISMAN
The *Tarjama-i-Sir al-makhtum*, dating back to the 1880s, commissioned by the Mughal emperor, was fuelled by his interest in astrology

THE POSITIVE SIDE of PARENTING



"Parenting is not just about raising children, it's also about raising parents."

SUDHA GUPTA, Parenting Expert and Chairperson of Mother's Pride Preschool and Presidium Senior Secondary School.

Want your child to be more independent? Here are five things you can do.

1 RESIST

the tendency to over-parent. For instance, let your child pack his school bag or clean his room.

2 CHALLENGE

him a little. Ask him to do things by himself, and praise him when he completes the task.

3 DO NOT

jump in to help if he takes time to complete a task. He may take longer to finish a chore, but will enjoy a great sense of accomplishment.



4 ACT

as if being away from home is no big deal, when he's ready for school. Be matter of fact when you say goodbye, and try not to appear upset.

5 SHOW

him that you love him. Your love and support will build the confidence he needs to strike out on his own.

To read Sudha Gupta's parenting blogs, visit <http://motherspridepreschool.com/positive-parenting.php>