



First-ever Exhibition of Handfans
of the Indian Subcontinent
Collected and Curated by

JATIN DAS

Crafts Museum

National Handicrafts & Handloom Museum
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6 May to 5 June, during the summer of 2004

The exhibition will thereafter travel around the country and overseas to finally find its home at the J D Centre of Art in Bhubaneshwar, Orissa. The Centre is a non-profit institution that envisages conserving and advancing the cause of visual arts and crafts.

“To Stir The Still Air,” a book on *Pankhas* by Jatin Das is being published by Mapin.

Acknowledgements: Indian Airlines & IGNCA

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Pankhā

Handfans of the Indian Subcontinent: A Collection

JATIN DAS



On Collecting *Pankha*

One summer afternoon, twenty four years ago, upon seeing a friend sitting depressed in my studio at Nizamuddin, New Delhi, I picked up a *pankha* (handfan) and with mock seriousness said, "Let me stir the still air". At this utterance, I thought this would be a suitable title for a book on the *Pankha* and it was the amazing handfan that gave me the impetus to do so.

I took up this project with spontaneity and fervour - as with most things in my life. When an idea is borne in my mind, I visualise and see the larger picture. The journey of collecting *Pankhas* that was envisioned that summer afternoon, has come a long way. It is now over two decades. Whenever I visited villages or towns, in India or abroad, one of the main items on my agenda would be to collect the traditional arts and crafts of the place and of course, scout for handfans!



Traditional crafts have survived in India because rural folks, still make and use them. When I visited the countryside, I would often ask *chowkidars*, cooks and peons for handfans. At first, they would laugh disbelievingly, but later produce beautiful handfans made by their mothers, wives and daughters. In the Indian subcontinent, handfans are made by women in their spare time and embellished for their husbands. Sometimes, I would intrude into the private spaces of village homes and discover exquisite little *Pankhas*. Every time that I picked up a fan from a home, I carried the slight guilt of depriving people of their personal belongings. Although the cost of making fans is minimal, the workmanship, effort and personal touches that go into the craft makes them worth much more than the price quoted. I would of course, pay more than the actual cost of the fans but their value cannot be measured by money.

I realised that handfans were available in the hot months, mainly in *basti* markets and *haats*, with the broomstick and basket vendors who stock fans made of bamboo, khajur and palm leaf. On the other hand, when I went to the antique dealers in Jaipur and Ahmedabad, they immediately smelt that I collect this rare craft, and the price quoted would be sky high. Despite my attempts to bargain, they realised that I would not leave without buying a rare fan. Many friends from all over the world have also sent me beautiful fans, which form part of my collection.

I am a contemporary Indian artist with a deep interest in the traditional art forms. Painting, being my only source of earning, has alone funded my efforts in making this unusual collection. I have been studying, researching and documenting arts, crafts and architecture from many parts of India, and in particular, Orissa, my home state. I feel sad when a beautiful craft of India disappears due to lack of interest, utility or outlet.

My collection of hand fans is a small attempt to rejuvenate the spirit of the living traditions of India. It is dedicated to the unknown craftswomen of India.

Jatin Das



Jatin Das is an eminent artist, who has held over fifty solo exhibitions and participated in innumerable group shows in India and abroad, such as the Paris Biennale, Venice Biennale, and Indian Triennale, in a career spanning over four decades. Notable amongst his recent work is a large 7' x 67' mural in oil at the Indian Parliament, which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Shri Vajpayee. He has installed a welded sculptor in steel at the Bhilai Steel Plant Township. He has taught and lectured on art in India and abroad and also designed postal stamps for Indian philately. He studied at the Sir J J School of Art in Mumbai and his work is in many leading government and private collections in India and abroad. He also writes poetry.

Deeply interested in the traditional art forms of India, he was a consultant for the Rural India Complex, which eventually became the Crafts Museum. A life member of the Craft Council of Delhi, he has been on the task force for the preservation of arts and crafts. He has lead efforts in rehabilitation and reconstruction of a cyclone ravaged village in Orissa.

He has donated his entire collection of arts and crafts as the seed collection to set up the JD Centre of Art (for which the government has allotted an acre of land free of premium), which is being designed by eminent architect B V Doshi, in Bhubaneshwar in Orissa, Jatin's home state.

