

I began drawing on walls, paper, floors, on whatever surface I could find as a child. I'd look at newspapers and draw film stars. I used charcoal. This was considered inauspicious. My folks believed writing in black increased debts. (As you can see, I've come to owe a huge debt to black.) I drew as realistically as I could. I was influenced and inspired by a set of pencil drawings I found in a trunk. My mother, Himalya Bai, told me they were by Uncle Jawahar, her brother. Uncle died at the age of twenty-five; I'd never met him. But people think - and I believe - I am his reincarnation. I'm fulfilling his life. Jawahar Lal Uikey drew everyday objects and



scenes with a touching realism. I looked for these drawings on a visit to Sijhora many years ago. But Mother told me they'd been lost or destroyed when they pulled down our old house to build a new one.

When Father sought to put me in school, the principal wasn't sure I was old enough. Age was determined by a child's ability to touch his left ear by taking his right hand over his head. I understood, but I held my ear the easy way, and the principal laughed. He saw I was smart, but to be safe, changed my date of birth from 2 December 1970 to 28 October 1970, making me 'older' and thus eligible. I have two birthdays now.

When Father left me with Uncle Jangarh, I did not know what was expected of me. Jangarh then had two assistants, Daddi Singh Urveti and 'Labda' Sumer Singh Khusram, both a few years older than him. Daddi and Labda used to rag me in my

I'm fulfilling his life. I'm completing what he was expected to achieve.

a touching realism so life-like that it touches your heart



early days. "What are your roots?" they would ask. I did not understand the question then but said, "My roots are with me." Today I find them everywhere, my roots.

Daddi and Labda were happy to fill a painting started by Jangarh with dots or lines, in patterns set by the master. When it came to me, I drew patterns that looked like cracked earth, the way earth appears after it soaks up water. Jangarh was impressed.

How did Jangarh teach? I'm reminded of the stories Anand told me of how some Hindustani musicians teach. For years a master would make a disciple do all kinds of household drudgery and teach her how to grasp the perfect *sa*, *shadjam*, the primal note. If they want to indulge you, perhaps *ga*, another note. Then, just as the pupil wonders what it is she has really learnt, unbeknownst to herself she can sing many ragas.

household drudgery	boring and hard work done at home
indulge you	be generous to you
unbeknownst to herself	without her knowing
newbie	newcomer
apprentice	trainee

When a newbie arrived, the new apprentice had to work the *silbatta*, a flat grinding stone and pestle, and grind about two kilos of masala – red chillies, coriander seeds, cloves, cinnamon, chopped onion, garlic and ginger– into a consistent paste. This was the first lesson. Jangarh sat monitoring from a distance. "If you can't grind masala well, how can you hold a brush and paint?" Jangarh showered abuse on those who did not get it right. Jangarh often broke into song, asking me to sing along: our *karma* songs, *dadariya* (folk songs), even bhajans. He played the flute, tabla, maandal (a kind of drum), harmonium. He taught us to live. Art just came along.

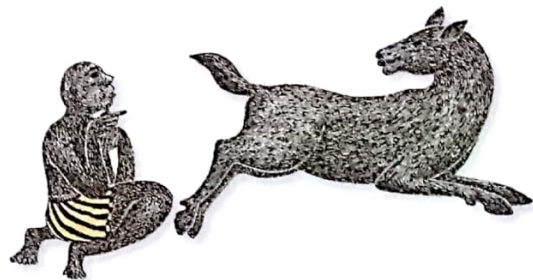
Venkat Shyam, S Anand



Read Well

A. Tick the most appropriate options.

1. Venkat was named by his
 - a. grandfather Parsadi Lal Uikey.
 - b. uncle Jawahar Lal Uikey.
 - c. uncle Jangarh Singh Shyam.
 - d. mother Himalya Bai.
2. Venkat compares *Vasudeva's* song to the *palash* flowers because
 - a. he was attracted to both.
 - b. *Vasudeva* was beautiful like the flowers.
 - c. both showed off their beauty.
 - d. *Vasudeva* and the flowers were a common sight.
3. The principal laughed when young Venkat touched his ears because he
 - a. thought the boy was being silly.
 - b. found the boy to be the right age for school.
 - c. was amused by the boy's smartness.
 - d. was happy because the boy was eager for school.
4. Jangarh was impressed with Venkat as a young boy because he
 - a. could use the *silbatta* well.
 - b. drew original patterns instead of filling in Jangarh's paintings.
 - c. drew patterns that looked like cracked earth, not dots and lines.
 - d. sang along folk songs to Jangarh's music.



(K)

(C)

(C)

(C)